



POWER OF CULTURE & MINDE RENEWAL

PRINCIPLE OF LIVING
FROM INSIDE OUT

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PORTALSGATE KINGDOM RESOURCE

Every believer is influenced to a certain degree amongst three inherent orders of existence, and much of our struggle comes from failing to precisely tell the difference. The first is the order God designed for His people, the life He created us to live and opened to us through the new birth. The second is the world we were born into, the inherited system that shaped our values, our beliefs, our ways of reasoning, our desires and our priorities long before we heard the gospel.

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The Principle of Living from the Inside Out

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Three Orders That Compete for Our Lives

Every believer is influenced, to some degree, by three distinct orders of existence. Much of our daily struggle arises because we fail to distinguish clearly among them: **God's order**, the life He designed for His people, the pattern of life He created us to live and made available through the new birth in Christ; **the world's order**, the inherited system into which we were born, which shaped our values, beliefs, reasoning, desires, and priorities ever before we heard the good news of the gospel; and **the self-life**, the order in which self sits at the center, governing the decisions and assumptions we have come to accept as the right philosophy for living.

Paul sets the second and third beside each other when he describes our condition before Christ. "And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind" (Ephesians 2:1-3). The course of this world, the prince who governs it and the lusts of our own flesh stand together as one arrangement. The last phrase reaches into the mind itself, since the desires of the flesh and of the mind ran together in us.

Many Christians have never been taught how this process works. We are told what to stop doing and what to begin, yet despite prayer, determination, and repeated effort, we often return to old patterns. We then wonder why our attempts to honor God fail. The problem is that behavior flows from the order governing us inwardly. Changing conduct without addressing its source leaves the root untouched. Therefore, believers who desire to live for God must learn to recognize which order is influencing them at any moment.

How the World System Governs Through Culture

When the New Testament speaks of the world in this sense, it means more than the people who live on the earth. God loved the people so much that He gave His Son (John 3:16). The world John tells us to refuse is a different thing, the kosmos, an ordered arrangement with its own pattern, its own values and a spirit that governs it. “Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him” (1 John 2:15). The same apostle writes that “the whole world lieth in wickedness” (1 John 5:19), a phrase that can also be read as lying in the wicked one. The system has a ruler.

Jesus called that ruler the prince of this world (John 12:31; 14:30). He has no need to appear as a king. He governs through what a society has agreed to accept as normal: its systems of economy, its politics, its habit of dividing people so that they can be ruled, and its definition of a successful life. Culture serves him well because it reaches us before we can evaluate it.

We absorb a culture the way we absorb the language of our mothers, and by the time we begin to question it, it has already shaped the questions. Wherever the standards of God meet opposition in our day, whether in public life, in the family or in the way money and power are handled, a spirit stands behind the opposition. Paul writes that we are not ignorant of his devices (2 Corinthians 2:11). That knowledge comes when we learn to ask what spirit stands behind what a culture calls normal.

The self-life joins the system to its ruler. The spirit of the world is built to move people to obey their desires, and desire followed to its end arrives at the worship of self. That worship began in the garden with the promise, “ye shall be as gods” (Genesis 3:5). Eve saw that the tree was good for food, pleasant to the eyes and desirable to make one wise (Genesis 3:6), and John later names the same three pulls as the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life (1 John 2:16). Worship of the self serves the one who first offered it, so the person who lives for self, even without knowing it, lives under the prince of this world.

The Lie of the Mixed Life

Religion offers a workable compromise between the three orders. We can serve God, keep living for ourselves and hold on to the values of the world, all within the same life. The world system supports the arrangement with its own message: there is no single way to God, truth has many sides, and every road leads to the same place. Both messages remove the standard, and a person without a standard can be persuaded of anything.

God has a structure for relating to Him, and the structure has a pattern. Christ said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me” (John 14:6). The words state the framework by which anyone approaches God, and Peter repeats it before the council: “neither is there salvation in any other” (Acts 4:12). Jesus is the pattern, the model and the standard, and everything a believer needs in order to please God is found in Him. Another way, another system or another order of life will not reach the Father, however sincere it appears.

The same principle governs how we live after we come. Jesus said that no man can serve two masters (Matthew 6:24), and James calls friendship with the world enmity with God (James 4:4). The idea that we can live for ourselves, for the world and for God at once has been sold for a long time, and many are still buying it. Its danger lies in how reasonable it sounds. It presents itself as balance, as tolerance and as wisdom about how the real world works, and those who accept it seldom feel any conflict until the fruit of their life shows what they have been serving.

The Borrowed Pattern in the Church

When Satan cannot reach a believer directly, he reaches indirectly by offering a different system that sounds godly. It arrives with Christian vocabulary and a sincere purpose, such as serving God better or reaching more people, and it carries the values of the flesh inside. He never labels it worldly. He presents it as the best way to honor God, and often as the only sensible way.

We hear the argument in many forms. To reach the world we must behave like the world; we must borrow its wisdom, adopt its methods and align ourselves with its way of thinking. The argument fails when we examine the people God sent into the world across both Testaments. Each of them carried a clear sense of identity. They knew whose they were and where they belonged, and they knew they had been sent from another order into this one. Jesus said of His disciples, “They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world” (John 17:16), and in the same prayer He asked the Father to keep them from the evil while they remained in the world (John 17:15).

Paul warns of the borrowed pattern in more than one place. “Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ” (Colossians 2:8). And “be not conformed to this world” (Romans 12:2), where the word for conformed describes taking on the outward form of a pattern, the way metal takes the shape of a mold. We can build a ministry, a family, a business or a church on a template that came from the world and never realize where the template originated.

What we set out to change has changed us. We intended to influence the world, and the world entered our environment, where it works indirectly through the ideas we now consider normal.

The result shows in how we measure ourselves. We build large structures, gather large crowds, handle large sums of money and produce a great deal of activity, and we conclude that we are changing the world. Yet the presence of God is not attracted by these things, the life of God is not expressed through them, and the world is not changing. Jesus said that what is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God (Luke 16:15).

The church in Laodicea said, “I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing,” and the Lord answered that she did not know she was wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked (Revelation 3:17). Nadab and Abihu brought strange fire before the Lord, a fire He had not commanded, and it ended in judgment (Leviticus 10:1-2). Whatever we bring into the camp that God has not authorized carries the same risk, however sincere the offering.

Daniel and the King’s Table

Babylon understood that the surest way to change a people is to change how they see themselves. It took young men from Judah and gave them new names. Daniel became Belteshazzar, and his three companions became Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego (Daniel 1:7). It assigned them a new education, a new language and a daily portion of the king’s food and wine for three years (Daniel 1:4-5). Each measure worked on identity.

“But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king’s meat, nor with the wine which he drank” (Daniel 1:8). The decision was made in his heart before it was spoken to any official. The inside settled the matter, and the outside followed. The king’s table stood for more than food. It represented the empire’s provision and the dependence that comes from eating at another lord’s table, and diet was one place among many where the empire meant to define him.

Daniel answered with a proposal. He asked for ten days of vegetables and water, after which the chief officer could compare their appearance with that of the young men who ate the king’s portion (Daniel 1:12-13). At the end of the ten days “their countenances appeared fairer and fatter in flesh than all the children which did eat the portion of the king’s meat” (Daniel 1:15). God gave the four young men knowledge and skill in all learning and wisdom (Daniel 1:17), and in every matter the king examined them on, he found them “ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers that were in all his realm” (Daniel 1:20). Their place in Babylon grew from the decision they made at the table.

Christianity today often argues that we must compromise with the world in order to win it. Daniel's account shows that the ones who stand out in a foreign system are the ones who settled who they are before the system asked. For Daniel the opportunity to stand out came through diet, and it comes in other forms to believers in every generation. Wherever we have the chance to show that God's standard produces a better life than the world's, that chance begins as a private decision in the heart.

Renewing the Mind: The Lens and the Camera

Paul gives the remedy in one sentence. "And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God" (Romans 12:2). The verse has two movements. The first refuses the pattern of the age. The second receives a transformation, and the Greek word for it, *metamorphoō*, gives us the word *metamorphosis*. The instrument of the change is the renewing of the mind, and the purpose is that we may prove, that is, discern by experience, what the will of God is.

The mind here is *nous*, the faculty by which we perceive, interpret and understand. The word for renewing means to make new in quality. Renewing the mind therefore means renewing the way we see. We can picture the mind as a lens through which everything arrives, and what we see, how clearly we see it and what we conclude from it all depend on the lens. A lens shaped by the world will show a world-shaped picture of God, of ourselves, of money, of success and of people, and the picture will look normal because it is the only one we have known.

Behind the lens sits the camera, the inner system that receives and processes what the lens delivers, the heart with its desires and its center. A person can change the lens and leave the camera as it was, and the old system will still govern what the new lens shows. The world has no quarrel with this arrangement. It will let us adopt a lens with Christian vocabulary, Christian causes and Christian language, provided the camera remains the self-life and the focus has quietly moved away from God.

God addresses the camera in His promise, "A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you" (Ezekiel 36:26), and Paul addresses both parts when he writes of being renewed "in the spirit of your mind" (Ephesians 4:23). The new birth supplies the new heart (2 Corinthians 5:17), and the renewing of the mind brings the lens into agreement with it.

Scripture shows what the enemy does with the mind. “The god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not” (2 Corinthians 4:4). Jesus described the same matter from the side of the eye: “The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!” (Matthew 6:22-23). To the church in Laodicea the Lord gave counsel to anoint the eyes with eyesalve, that she might see (Revelation 3:18).

What Do You See?

The Lord asked Jeremiah, “What seest thou?” Jeremiah answered, “I see a rod of an almond tree,” and the Lord said, “Thou hast well seen: for I will hasten my word to perform it” (Jeremiah 1:11-12). The question calls for interpretation more than description. Jeremiah named the object, and the Lord affirmed that he understood what it meant, because the almond tree, in Hebrew shaqed, points to a God who watches, shaqad, over His word. Seeing well means reading correctly what stands before us, and we need that skill urgently.

Twelve men walked through the same land and returned with different reports (Numbers 13-14). The land, the fruit and the giants were the same for all of them. Ten said, “we were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight” (Numbers 13:33). Caleb had “another spirit” (Numbers 14:24), and he said, “Let us go up at once, and possess it” (Numbers 13:30). The difference lay in the lens through which each man read the same facts, and it began with how he saw himself.

How we see ourselves decides which life we will move toward. If we see ourselves in a particular format, we will resist any order of life that does not fit it. The life God designs for us can appear unattractive to an unrenewed lens, because it feels unfamiliar and lacks the excitement the world has taught us to expect. Desire follows sight. A believer who finds the life of God dull has usually been shaped by another value system, one that leans toward the world’s belief system, and the dullness comes from the lens.

Attention and the Shaping of the Lens

A lens is formed by what it looks at. Whatever we read, listen to and watch, we reinforce, and whatever we reinforce grows stronger in us. The more we take in through the values of this world, the more firmly those values settle and the more natural they feel. A Christian can hold all the right information and still find that a different mechanism has taken shape inside, because the lens is changed by attention.

The process works subtly. Nobody announces it. We drift, indirectly and often without knowing, toward a place where we look at ourselves, at God and at the world through the world's lens. This is why the psalmist resolved, "I will set no wicked thing before mine eyes" (Psalm 101:3), and why Proverbs instructs, "Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life" (Proverbs 4:23) and shortly afterward turns to the eyes: "Let thine eyes look right on" (Proverbs 4:25). Paul directs the mind to whatever is true, honest, just, pure, lovely and of good report (Philippians 4:8).

Transformation follows beholding. "But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord" (2 Corinthians 3:18). The word for changed is *metamorphoō* again. What we look at steadily, we become like, and the direction of our attention sets the direction of our transformation. The more our focus rests on what glorifies God and pleases Him, the more our mind is renewed, and the more our beliefs, desires and intentions begin to change.

The process begins with desire. Without desire there is no change, and desire itself is cultivated by turning toward what we want to become. A believer has to want the life God designed and has to recognize that in Christ Jesus he is now a new person. His thinking, seeing and concluding are then measured by a heavenly perspective. The world has already corrupted his own view, so it cannot serve as the measure.

The Seed and the Chrysalis

Jesus compared the kingdom to a man who casts seed into the ground, sleeps and rises night and day, and the seed springs and grows up while he "knoweth not how" (Mark 4:26-27). "For the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself; first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear" (Mark 4:28). The life of the seed is inside the seed, and the farmer cannot change it. He plants, waters and removes the weeds that would choke it, and he leaves the bringing forth of life to God. Paul states the division of labor plainly: "I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase" (1 Corinthians 3:6).

Our part is to plant the word in the mind, water it with prayer and attention, and remove what would compete with it, meaning the voices and images that keep reinforcing the world's lens. God's part is the growth. We cannot hurry it or produce it by effort. A believer who understands this puts effort where it belongs, into guarding the seed.

The butterfly shows the same order. A caterpillar enters the chrysalis and the change happens inside. Its body is broken down and rebuilt into a different creature, and the process cannot be skipped or shortened from outside.

The butterfly may desire to emerge, yet it cannot emerge until the inner work is complete. The world tries to influence what happens inside by pressing on the outside, and it will keep pressing. When we keep our focus and continue doing our part, the work inside reaches its time, and the world sees a different person emerge. “And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not” (Galatians 6:9).

This is the principle of living from the inside out. The life God requires starts with what happens within us, and what the world sees grows out of that. It ranks among the harder parts of the Christian life, because it asks us to accept a process that runs on God’s time and works on the inside, where nobody can measure it. It is also the only way into the life God intends, and it tells us what to expect from ourselves: a season, patience, and a result that comes at the right moment. “His delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night. And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season” (Psalm 1:2-3).

The Decisions We Make Each Day

Four questions meet us every day, and we answer them whether we ask them or not. What are we focusing on? What is driving our purpose? What is leading our direction? What is gaining our attention? Each answer either feeds the lens the world has curated or feeds the renewing of the mind. Living from the inside out consists of answering those questions on purpose.

We can begin by identifying the borrowed patterns in our own lives: in how we define success, how we lead, how we spend, how we treat people who cannot benefit us, and how we pursue the things of God. Each pattern can be brought to Scripture and asked where it came from. Where the origin is the world, the pattern needs to be replaced, however useful it has appeared.

The next decision concerns what we take in. We can look honestly at what we read, what we listen to and what we watch in a normal week, and ask what lens each one is shaping. Some of it will need to be reduced and some removed. The space it leaves can go to the Word, to prayer and to people who see through the lens of heaven, because the lens learns from whatever occupies its attention.

Desire comes before change, so we can ask God to give us the desire, and the psalmist supplies the words: “Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law” (Psalm 119:18). We can then give the process time. The seed grows in its season, and the inner work continues while we keep watering it.

Paul places the life we are building where the world cannot see it. “Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory” (Colossians 3:2-4).