

Rivers of Living Waters



The Grace Book vol 2

*Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said,
'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'
(John 7:38)*

This book is a collection of articles from saints the Father has given the privilege of having a profound revelation about His grace and the mystery – Christ in us.

May you be richly blessed while you explore your new identity in Christ and God's heart for you on these pages.

Authors:

Fred Pruitt
Steve McVey
Paul Anderson-Walsh
Darin Hufford
Debbie Seagroves
Kenneth Kropf
William Law
Francois Du Toit
Andre Rabe
Dan Stone
Nancy Gilmore
David Heisler
Lennart Svensson

Phillip Owen Morris
Kokichi Kurosaki
Norman Grubb
James M Campbell
Matthew Campbell
Bertie Brits
Mike Daniel
David Borum
Joel Brueseke
Rich Novek
A.B. Simpson
Daniel Yordy
Jessica Robertson

A.T. Pierson
Jamie Weeks
Alan Hiu
Christopher Dennison
James A Fowler
Cayce Talbott
John Owen
Ole Henrik Skjelstad
Aron Cooper
DeeDee Winter
John Collings
Walter C. Lanyon
Madame Guyon

Artwork:

Living Waters

Jean Rittenberg

<http://www.jeansartgodsheart.com>

Editor: Ole Henrik Skjelstad

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Peter Pan Syndrome

Paul Anderson-Walsh

I have a sense of urgency in my spirit. I'm disturbed by the fact that too many Christians do not seem to grow-up. It's something that has troubled me for a long time and one of the main things that forced me to get out of the church-planting business. Christians don't grow up in church, they grow old, they grow cynical, they grow more demanding, they grow religious, but they don't grow-up.

I want to suggest that the reason for this is that so many of us who have been in the church suffer from Peter Pan Syndrome.

There are some who have argued [with some persuasiveness] that if one is to grow in Christ, it is necessary to leave the church. Adam Jameson's book "The Churchless Faith" is a very provocative and challenging piece of research, and his findings compelling... I think that when we speak in terms of church as we currently know it and do it then that is exactly right... but my view is that a "churchless faith" is a regrettable and altogether understandable response to the core problem: a faithless church. Therein lies the key to all things - rediscovering the Christian faith, which is not faith in our faith in Christ but the faith of Christ in the Christian.

Peter Pan was a boy with magical powers who refused to grow up and so spent his never-ending childhood adventuring on the small island of Neverland as the leader of his gang the Lost Boys.

Peter's refusal to grow up was born out of a deep-seated feeling that he would not be accepted by the adult world and as a defense he rejected what he perceived to be rejecting him - Sound familiar?

Adults represented for Peter the ongoing threat of the emotional pain of rejection. Peter was fearful and insecure with feelings of inadequacy. That fear of failure manifested itself whenever he interacted with others that he perceived to be more capable and in control than he was.

Peter Pan syndrome is an overwhelming fear of failure interacting with those perceived to be more adequate.

So many beautiful believers are just like Peter, racked with fear and riddled with a sense of inadequacy. They (we) fear that we'll never be good enough, never measure up.

So rather than move out and move on into the adventure of faith we cut ourselves off from the outside world and live in the First Church of Neverland doing mortal combat with the mythical Captain Hook of the Law.

However, the moment that we apprehend the child truths of our faith, that there is no condemnation etc, etc we ought to be free but we're not because whilst we know that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ we have no concept of what it means to be in Christ.

As long as we suffer from sin-and-self-consciousness we will continue to view God as someone separate from us.

So long as we perceive Him as someone who lives up there (in heaven) rather than the indwelling Christ who lives inside of each and every one of us we'll suffer from Peter Pan syndrome.

So long as we see him as separate we'll forever be susceptible to Peter Pan syndrome. How but the moment we're rid of it we'll discover that Captain Hook was far from the truth when he told Peter that "Death is the only adventure you have left." On the contrary, to die before you die is the key to really living.

Freedom Fighters – Stand Strong

Steve McVey

We're done with it. The worn out, tired, legalistic approach to the Christian life that many of us have known for most of our lives has been tried in the balance and found wanting. Some of those legalistic habits have become a part of the doctrine of the modern church by simple osmosis.

Particular practices have been so embedded in the culture of the contemporary church world that it has become almost impossible for many to know what is a legitimate part of the church and what is manmade tradition that has been added on along the way. When something is done long enough and has been sanctioned by the religious powers-that-be again and again, those things reach a place of privilege where it almost seems blasphemous to question them, but they must be questioned if the grace revolution is to succeed.

Over time it isn't unusual for sacred cows to disguise themselves as sacred doctrines and to question them risks accusation and attack from those who find great comfort in the familiar and don't want the predictable world in which they are well vested to be knocked off kilter by the silly nuisance of truth. The truth is that sacred cows aren't sacred doctrines, but are idols. Grace revolutionaries are those who are willing to pull the mask off these sacred cows, exposing their hideous faces to the light of biblical truth. We don't do it out of malice, but because we love our God, His Word and His church. They don't die quietly, but they must die if the grace of God is to have free reign in His church again.

Change is coming to God's church. It must and it is. The growing grace revolution will gain momentum as we each come to grip with our own understanding of God's grace and see it be clarified and fortified by the Spirit of Grace Himself.

My goal isn't to tear down, but to build up. I have no desire to be negative, but what are we to do when the threat of graceless discipleship sentences multitudes of Christians to a lifelong struggle accompanied by the constant self-condemnation inevitably joined to that struggle? Religion causes people to keep working to reach a destination they don't know they've already been miraculously transported to by grace.

Don't tell me I sound unloving. That used to work on me, but I'm past that now. I've seen too many massacred saints loved by Jesus and yet martyred by legalism. My love for them trumps my admitted displeasure at being criticized and misunderstood. So you can keep it to yourself. We grace revolutionaries are done with trying to play nice with the Pharisees. Lives are in the balance and we don't have time or interest in those silly games anymore.

I don't want to be known for the things I'm against, but for the things I am for, but . . . A person who loves flowers will hate weeds. A person who loves health will hate disease. A person who loves grace will hate the things that take its place. That's not unloving. That is love in action. Grace isn't a sickly-sweet expression on our face and a lilt in our voice and a wimpified attitude that turns us into religious pushovers. Our Jesus turned tables over in the temple and then used a whip to drive out those who desecrated God's house. So don't let anybody lay some false sense of guilt on you because you have the gall to show holy boldness. Religion will remind you to "stay in your place" but grace

will turn you loose on the world.

The very nature of revolution is the uprooting and overthrowing of existing ruling powers in order to establish a new authority. That's what must happen in the modern church world if we are to continue to make an impact on the world with the gospel. Legalism must be uprooted and supplanted with the message of pure grace. We're not going to do the goose-step march of the godzis anymore. Like it or not, we are going to walk in grace and all the freedom encompassed in that walk.

There has been an undercurrent of change that has been rising to the surface in the hearts and minds of many Christians lately. A generation of believers is emerging who believe that the performance based, let's-just-rededicate-ourselves-and-try-harder, approach to the Christian life has had its day in the sun and its time has ended. We believe the chance of injecting life into the dead corpse of legalistic religion is a hopeless cause and believe that God's answer is to restore grace to the center stage of His true church. We're here and want to be clear: we aren't going away.

Here we stand and we can do no other.

The Teeth and the Tablets... God's Purpose For the Law

Cayce Talbott

Most of you might remember this...

When you were just kids you might remember either your dentist or your school passing out packs of chewable tablets that were designed to teach you how to brush your teeth better. The tablets came in a pack of two, and after you brushed your teeth you would chew the two tablets up until they dissolved in your mouth. Then when you smiled in the mirror you would see dozens of little red spots on your teeth that would show you all the spots that you missed when brushing them.

The residue from the two little tablets would cling to any stains or plaque that were on your teeth that you missed while brushing, therefore revealing all of the stains on them that your naked eye could not see. Just when you thought that your teeth were now clean and white by your own efforts, you chew on the tablets and find out that they're still dirty in spite of all of your own efforts. No matter how hard you brushed, the tablets would always reveal some stains that you couldn't reach on your own. The whole experience was designed to encourage you to visit your local dentist at least twice a year to have them professionally cleaned.

In the very same way God gave mankind two tablets in which He wrote the Law onto as a way to reveal all of the stains in your life. The Law was never designed to clean you up or wash away the stain of sin in your life, but rather to simply reveal it to you. The Law openly reveals that, in spite of your own efforts, you cannot get rid of the stain of sin on your own because they are out of your reach. Just like going to a qualified dentist to clean your teeth for you, the Law shows us that in order to be clean we must go to the only qualified being in existence who can remove our stains of sin... The Lord Jesus Christ.

Just like tablets for your teeth were never designed to make them clean and white again, but only reveal to you the stains that are there... so also are the tablets of the Law that can only reveal your iniquity to you, but fail to have the ability to remove your iniquity from you. It is only by the Grace of God through putting your Faith in Jesus Christ can you be clean. The Law was Never designed for you to be able to keep it, but rather to show you your need for Grace. Once you are clean the Old Covenant Law serves no more purpose and has become obsolete to the believer because Jesus Himself did with the Law what no man could ever do... He fulfilled it! (Heb 8:13)

"For Sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are NOT under Law but under GRACE."

-Romans 6:14

Prosperity

Bertie Brits

Prosperity is not measured by how much you possess but by how little you need. Let me repeat myself. Prosperity is not measured by how much you possess but by how little you need.

I have seen people that has millions having greater financial need that others living in tin houses. God can provide for us in all areas of life but not even GOD can meet the need of GREED or discontentment.

We need to realise that it IS NOT A SIN TO HAVE WORLDY WEALTH and that prosperity is defined in an attitude of the heart called contentment. From the platform of contentment the best financial decisions are made. From a platform of contentment the greatest generosity flows.

The quality of life possessed by a poor content person is much higher than that of a discontent rich person.

THE WORD OF PAUL

Php 4:11 Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.

1Ti 6:5 Perverse disputing of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness: from such withdraw thyself.

The Big Lie and the Big Truth

David Heisler

Organized Christianity – high church, low Church, Pentecostal, charismatic, evangelical – whatever – the Big Lie is pervasive.

Satan is the author of lies – and the father of lies. But he is not an independent operator. Check Job 1.6.

Let me sum up the Big Lie as told by the evil one, “Christianity is a self-improvement plan.”

The reality is that “as He is so are we in this world”. There is no room for self-improvement only realization of your person as an expression of Him.

The corollary to the Big Lie is that Satan spends all his time creating evil in the world – which we must fight.

The reality is that Satan spends little time creating evil (check Isaiah 45.7) and most of his time getting Christians to waste their time on self-improvement so they never get to the “work of the kingdom”.

So what is the “work of the kingdom”? However you define it for yourself it will start with rest. Rest in the truth of the reality that He lives his life in you, as you, to your world. No self-improvement, only self-expression.

You are the Savior of your world. That is the Big Truth. Don’t be afraid of that. Renew your mind to that reality. Go be -

The Church That Christ Built

Darin Hufford

I am coming to the conclusion that the Church that Christ is building is something quite different than what we have been taught.

I can recall studying the "5 fold ministry" while in Bible college. At the time we were taught that those five ingredients are what make up the Church. Where Apostles, Prophets, Evangelists, Pastors and Teachers are functioning together; there is Church.

Rather than understand that particular verse to mean that these things will exist in the Body of Christ worldwide, we have foolishly interpreted it to mean they must exist "underneath one roof". I've even seen Churches advertise that they have the "5 fold ministry" in an effort to draw a larger congregation. There are articles and books written on whether or not these five things are working in today's Churches. When we build a new Church great time and attention is put into making sure that all the necessary ingredients are present when the doors open. The theory is that if we have an Apostle, a Prophet, an Evangelist, a Pastor and a teacher all within our congregation, we will have everything we need to "do Church". It's very much like opening your own McDonalds or Jack in the Box. Once everyone is in place, it's time for business. You need an owner, a manager, an assistant manager, a fleet of workers and you're good to go.

About two years ago I started taking a close look at my life and the lives of people around me. Everyone I know has their own personal circle of friends they hang out with. It may consist of family members, people from work, school, internet or their neighborhood. Every person I know has their "Inner Circle". It usually consists of between 5 to 10 people. They have other friends as well, but those people wouldn't be considered "Inner Circle" friends.

To be an "Inner Circle" friend, there just has to be something that causes a mutual connection between the two of you. There is no recipe for it, and one can never predict when it's going to happen. You can't force it, plan it, cultivate it or even command it to take place; it literally blooms totally on its own. I have found that only certain people can "jell" together on a level of deepness that is not necessarily shared with others. It's almost as though they were made specifically with the other person in mind. In a realm only known to God Himself, these people fit together like pieces of a puzzle. In fact, I believe that they were brought together by the Holy Spirit. Only He sees the inner structure of each individual soul and then finds another soul to connect snug and tight. It's unexplainable and cannot be manufactured or re-created by human hands in a million years.

I have an "Inner Circle" of about 10 people. These are folks that I'm super close with. Our connection didn't happen in an effort to fulfill some Christian obligation to meet together and perform relationship once a week. We all connect because we fit. We knew it the moment we first met. I have many other friends that I absolutely adore and love spending time with. I'd even die for them. They mean the world to me; however they are not in my "Inner Circle."

My four year old daughter brought out a "Hello Kitty" 100 piece jigsaw puzzle the other day and asked me to help her put it together. The box said that it was for ages 6 and up so I knew it wasn't

going to come together without my help. As we were laying out the pieces and turning them all picture side up, my daughter started screaming with excitement. She had found two pieces that fit perfectly. The problem was that though they fit, they didn't go. The picture didn't come together. As I took a closer look at all the puzzle pieces I was surprised to find that many of them were the exact same shape. This is confusing for a four year old girl. All she is thinking about is getting the pieces to fit. She is too young to understand that there is a bigger picture being formed when all the pieces are in their proper place.

When mankind sets out to "build a Church" we are very much like my 4 year old daughter. We think that "fitting pieces together" is what it's all about. It's ironic that man would even set out to build Church when Christ Himself said "I will build my Church". Only He has the blueprints and the final picture. The most we can do to build a Church is snap two pieces together that fit, but have nothing to do with each other when it come to the big picture. That is exactly what I see happening in the Institutional churches across America. They try and try with all their might to dictate and orchestrate relationship on their terms, and they do it all in the Name of Jesus. It's no wonder the Body of Christ today resembles a Mr. Potato Head that was put together by a deaf, dumb, and blind 4 year old. There's an arm sticking out of the eye socket, the lips are where the ears go and the eyes are on top of the head. It's a mess.

If a "men's accountability group" is meeting every Tuesday night at 7:00, YOU NEED TO BE THERE!!!!!! We are told that every man needs to come and connect with all the other men because they need that accountability. The problem is that the pieces don't go together just because they say so. A room full of men does not equal pieces that fit. Even if they are all Christian men who know the Lord well! You can manipulate and obligate these men to "go together" all you want, but it won't work. We have been taught if we are Christians, we should all fit together with that "Inner Circle" type of intimacy. WRONG!!! Jerry and Todd may both love the Lord and be brothers in His Name, but neither of them were made to be put together. YES they are a part of the same picture, but they were never intended to connect with an "Inner Circle" connection.

The sad thing is that Jerry is told over and over by his group leader or his Pastor that he needs to connect with Todd out of Christian love. So Jerry tries with all his heart to make that connection. He secretly beats himself up and feels condemned because it's just not happening. He starts to feel rebellious, and eventually wonders if he has the Love of God in him at all. Each week he reluctantly shows up to the men's meeting and makes small talk while glancing at his watch and wishing he was somewhere else. All the while, his leader keeps complaining to the group because he doesn't see the men connecting and talking as deeply as he thinks they should. (This is the story of almost every men's meeting in America) Perhaps the most disturbing thing I've seen in institutional settings is when people do find authentic connection with certain individuals in their Church and it is excused and labeled as a "click." People are made to feel like they are doing something wrong when these real connections happen and many times the leadership does whatever they can to dissolve any "Christian clicks" that have formed in their congregation. How sad.

I honestly think we try to "build the Church" because when push comes to shove; we really don't believe there is a Jesus Christ at all. We can't see Him with our eyes and we can't hear Him with our ears, so it makes it pretty difficult to just sit back and let Him build the Church. We jump in and do it

because we don't believe in Him. Think about it. I am also convinced that this is why we start "Discipleship Groups" in our Churches. We honestly don't believe there is a Jesus. We feel that it's our job to disciple young Christians instead of just turning them over to Christ. I thought He wanted us to make "Disciples of Christ"? Why then are we intent on making people our disciples? Where in the Bible does it say that WE are supposed to disciple people? We do this because we don't believe there IS a Jesus.

If I disciple Jim and Jim discipled Tony and Tony discipled Greg and Greg discipled Brian; who discipled me? Who discipled the guy who discipled me?? Eventually won't it lead to Christ? Can't we just go directly to Him or do we really need another mediator? (More on this subject at another time)

So where is the Church that Christ is building???

It's your "Inner Circle" of friends. He is the one who brought you together. Not only do you "fit" with these people but you "go together" with them. You fit together in the big picture!!! Your close friends ARE the Church that Christ built. If you look within your "Inner Circle" you will find diverse personalities. One has the personality of an Apostle, one is a Prophet, one is an Evangelist, one is a Pastor and one is a Teacher. Everyone I know has the 5 fold ministry built into their "Inner Circle" of friends!

We spend hours trying to pour our hearts into fitting pieces together that have nothing to do with the original blueprints. We focus our time and attention on building the synthetic church while we neglect the actual Church that He has already built into our lives. I hear people say to me that they need to "go to Church" because they need to find Christian people to connect with. My advice to them is that they spend their time deepening the connections they already have in their life. I believe that everything we need exists within our "Inner Circle" of friends. All we need to do is press in even deeper to those people that God has built into our lives. Those are the relationships that came from Heaven. Those are the relationships we need to spend our time and focus on. Those relationships ARE the Church that Christ built!

Ministry of the Ravens

Aron Cooper

Years ago, I heard a sermon by Iverna Tompkins, and while I've forgotten much of her message, there was one part of her sermon that has stuck with me to this day.

Iverna was talking about Elijah hiding in the wilderness, and how God commanded two ravens "to bring bread and meat to him in both the morning and the evening." (1Kg 17:4-6). She then explained how ravens had been declared "unclean" in Deuteronomy 14, and yet, these "unclean" birds were being used by God to sustain His child in the wilderness.

Then, Iverna said that in the coming days, God was going to be raising up "ravens" to deliver the Word of God to His people, as those who might be considered unclean, and who would have no right in the natural to handle the Word of God, would be given the awesome responsibility of feeding His children.

Perhaps this word stuck with me over the years because I felt like she was speaking this word over me. While I had been walking with the Lord for a few years by then, I had still experienced more of "the world" than any of my church friends. Accordingly, there were times when I still felt unclean...a feeling that, prior to hearing this message, had been difficult to reconcile with the calling that I felt was on my life to deliver His Word.

However, in the years since hearing that word, my belief system has changed drastically from that early "faith + works" understanding of Christianity, that emphasized my own performance, to a grace oriented understanding of my relationship with Him. Like many of you, God has taken me on a wonderful journey through which He has helped me to see His covenantal faithfulness and the limitless grace that flows from it. Accordingly, I finally realized that my focus should never have been on my own sinful nature but, rather, on His loving response to it.

So, as you might imagine, I was a bit unsettled when Iverna's word about the ravens returned to my memory recently. For while her words still rang true to me, I found myself wondering how I could be a raven when God has already declared me to be clean. While I may not yet have the best answer to this question, here is what a short time of reflection has led me to believe.

First, while I still believe that I heard a word for myself in that message, I believe there was also a word to that congregation, telling them that *those whom they would see as unclean* would be used by God. And today, to many who reside in the traditional church setting, I am (along with many of you) viewed as unclean as my behavior and my beliefs place me, at times, outside of the traditional church (both literally and figuratively).

Second, over the last several years, I believe that God began revealing to me (and many others) that a number of His children are being led out of the traditional church setting and into the wilderness. While it would take more space than I have here to fully unpack that message, let me briefly explain that in the Old Testament, God often led His children (like Elijah) out into the desert, where He would strip away their concepts of religious performance by revealing Himself, and His covenantal faithfulness, to them. In fact, as God's self-revelation in the wilderness is so frequently repeated in Scripture, I came to see it as a biblical pattern for revival and restoration.

Accordingly, as I believe that God is once again drawing His children out into the wilderness, I've begun to recognize the need for ravens to minister to those children of the desert. It was this last realization that brought me back full circle to understanding the application of Iverna's message for myself, as I now see myself as one who is called to carry the word of God to His children in the wilderness.

This realization has also prompted me to share this message specifically with those of you in the grace community. For, if God is calling His children into the wilderness, then does it not make sense that the ravens He would send out to His children will be those whose message remains free of the leaven of works? That is not to say that our message is free from error, but, if this is a season in which He is truly revealing His covenantal nature, then, it would seem that the ministry of the ravens is to deliver His Word, unencumbered by even a passing reference to religious performance. If God is truly revealing His faithfulness, then there no longer remains any room for a message that suggests the need for our own.

Accordingly, while at first blush we in the grace community would seem to be disqualified from a ministry that is symbolized by an unclean scavenger, it may just be that our awareness that we have not been cleansed by our own actions, but solely by our union with Him, is exactly what prepares us for this service.

So -- You Should Be Better, eh?

Fred Pruitt

Someone wrote, "I yell at my kids. How can I call that Christ? Isn't God's kingdom gradually growing in us, so that we become more and more like Christ?"

Reply ----

So, I see you're back at the "I should be better" Tree. Well, that's ok, we all visit there from time to time (some of us every day), and it is always a temptation -- the common temptation to us all -- since that was the temptation in the garden.

This idea that you are offering that Christ is being "worked into areas of soul and body little by little," or like concrete being spread out in a form sounds to me like the standard teaching of the church, whether Catholic or Protestant, and would be correct, if the reason Jesus came and endured the Cross and resurrected, had been to improve our behavior and make us better parents, husbands, citizens, ball players, businessmen, witnesses, teachers, etc.

When I first came to Christ, after I got into a church, everything centered around self-improvement and behavior. Or, in other words, self-attention. Fixing me, making me be a better me, and fixing you -- making you a better you. (They go hand in hand. If my behavior is deficient but I could improve it, then pretty much the same goes for everybody else -- THEIR behavior is deficient and THEY could improve theirs, too!)

I was taught that pretty much as a child -- Jesus is good, so we should be good like Jesus -- and it continued as an adult and into my life in Christ. Everybody in church, including the pastor, thought the same thing so I fit in. Everything in church was geared to finding out the secret of HOW to be better. That's why all the seminars, the retreats, the lectures, the Sunday School classes -- all to improve "me" and make me "act" better -- so that I am a good Christian, a good witness, a good citizen, a good father, a good provider, a good husband, a good whatever.

We were even taught that Christ would help us, or that through Christ, we could do "all things." So, Christ was there to help us with two things. In my generation we were tired of the old "over in the bye and bye Christ," whose help was there mainly for death so that we wouldn't go to hell. We wanted a "now" Christ, who helped us with our daily problems, including yelling at the kids or having a better marriage and finding a good job. So that's what a lot of the teaching became. How this Christ could make us and our world better. He was there to help us in everything. That message fills stadiums even today and those that teach it rake in the millions.

I was also taught that when Christ comes into us, he comes into our heart, but there are rooms in us that he gets to one-by-one, and often we have to willingly and consciously invite him into those rooms, since there are still a lot of dirty rooms in us and he's around to clean them up -- IF we invite him and IF we let him. Kind of like your model of being worked into areas of soul and body little by little.

Each of us when we first come into union awareness with Christ, a revelation by the Spirit that He and I are one, also bring this old consciousness of "I should be better" in with us. Oh, there is often a honeymoon period, which is perhaps what you have experienced, when we are able to forget that for a while, but after some time the problems of life come roaring back in and we are confronted, again, with this "self" which we are, and from our old vantage point (from the old "I should be better" consciousness), then we do what we have always done and been trained to do from birth, to "try" to be better -- so we make the assumption that our oneness with Christ is now, finally, the thing that will do it -- THIS will make me a better person. THIS will solve my problems. Finally, this is the way we hold our mouth, this is the secret, finally finally finally, this is IT -- I AM GOING TO BE CHRISTLIKE (and my world is going to conform to what I want it to be)!!!! Hallelujah! We have finally found the ultimate "Method" to "become." Hallelujah!!!!

Only we find ourselves shocked that after this light from heaven has revealed Who we really are -- He in us as you and me -- humanly we may find ourselves little different. Habits often remain the same. Behavior often remains the same. Things we had trouble with all our lives we often still have trouble with. Lots of things seem to remain the same. It's like coming down off the mount of Transfiguration, and being confronted right off with a demon we cannot cast out.

Shouldn't we be different somehow? After all, wasn't it our frustration with ourselves and our behavior that drove us further into finding out about Him in us?

One of the things being worked into our living consciousness, is that God is God, and there are no other gods before Him. What we have done all our lives is have nothing but other gods before Him. And as long as we have a "I should be better" consciousness, that is another god which is not God, but which we have before us anyway. God will share His glory with no one or no thing -- that is why the stripping away of the flesh. We think the stripping away of the flesh is, once again, behavior, or attitudes or motives, but it is not. It is the consciousness that we are "something" or "should be" something. THAT is the flesh that is being stripped away.

The way the Spirit does this stripping away is by calling us into a life of faith, which starts and in some sense always remains in, "calling things which BE NOT as though they are." If there is no "be not," then what need of faith? If Isaac had been immediately born the moment God promised Abram a son, then Abram would not have walked in faith (believing in something that did not exist) to later become Abraham. There was a time before the actual receiving of the Promise when it does not appear and the circumstances cry out the impossibility of the appearance of the Promise.

You have believed that Christ has come into you to live in you and walk in you, to be your guide, to be your life, to be everything in you as far as "you" reach. There is no part of "you" that He does not dwell in. But that is not readily apparent to eyes of flesh. We only appear as in Him to the eyes of faith and the Spirit.

Therefore, unless the Spirit convicts you of sin, we trust that Christ is in us in perfection. That is the Tree of Life. Stick to that Tree. The other tree will always be with you, and will always call out. "I should be better" will always be a temptation. It is a very reasonable sounding voice, and the world and most of the church will agree with it 100%, but it is a bite of the fruit.

But we cannot be better. Jesus asks, "*Which of you, by taking thought, can add one cubit to his stature?*" I say, "Which of you, by taking thought (or going to seminars, or by Bible study, prayer, meditation, scripture recitations, repetition, praising, practicing, or willing, etc.) can improve your behavior?"

Hasn't life taught you that you wake up today just as you were yesterday? The best you can do are some cosmetic changes here and there, but the essential "you" does not change. What were problems when we were 15 are still problems when we are 55. I don't mean to sound gloomy. I don't mean that we don't overcome this or that habit, or may have over the years changed this or that behavior. I just mean that is not where the answer lies.

God only honors faith. Hebrews 11:6. If you can add to faith, what would it be? Faith says God will do it, and that I cannot. That is the essence of faith.

So we continue to confess Christ in us and nothing else. We have passed from darkness to light, from death to life. This is a fact. It is real and true. The outer will always go up and down and back and forth as long as we are in this body. But we live inwardly from the Spirit truth of who we are, and know that the outer is passing away, and the answer is not there, and will never be there, and never was intended, since the Fall, to be there. The "outer" will only be restored when this outer is put off, and we have put on immortality. So we don't seek a temporal answer to temporal situations. We seek and live eternal life, which we see by faith in every opposite appearance that raises its head and says, "See, this CANNOT be Christ." We say, "It IS Christ," because the devil has no place in us anymore.

The issues about the kingdom growing up in us, are all about the new reality, the new man, which is not the temporal outer man. The kingdom of God is not gradually improving the outer man. It is passing away, and perishing day by day. The Spirit "quickens" the outer man, and uses it to express Christ in this temporal world, but not in a way that is readily apparent. Only the eyes of faith can see it by the Spirit. What is being worked in us is not a better earth, but a new earth, not yet seen, and a new heaven, still to be seen.

But I suppose the question still remains -- what about my daily life? What about my kids and what about my behavior toward them? I would say, don't focus on moment by moment acts, deeds, thoughts, etc., but instead see things from the perspective of God who works all things together perfectly for good. He sees you as the perfection your kids need to bring them to Christ. You are only temporarily their father. Their Father is God, and He knows how to give good things to His children. When He entrusted them to your nurture and care, He already knew everything you would do and think toward them. And from the foundation of eternity He has seen them through His Son and the Lamb slain. And you are perfectly fitted in that vision. You are not your own, but were bought with a price. Not whenever it was that you call the day you got saved or came to know the Lord, but from eternity He knew you and ordained good works for you to walk in. Now trust God that He has come into you to CAUSE YOU to walk in His good works that He has already set up and foreseen -- as perfect and in the Cross -- and perfect for your children, so that they would also learn not to trust in the arm of the flesh or in things seen, but to learn to trust only in the Spirit of God and His work, and in things unseen.

It's the toughest thing we do, I think, but we can walk in confidence that as He miraculously revealed Himself to and then IN me, He will do the same in His own time and way with our children since they are His. We receive everything at the Father's hand, even what looks like to us messes we have made. They couldn't be, had He not purposed them from eternity. So we boldly say they are His messes, and we walk in His victory even in them.

The Greek word translated adoption in the KJV is "huiosthesia"

Phillip Owen Morris

There are two points I would like to make with this message. 1) the believer is not adopted, he is made a child of God through the new nature. And 2) we must interpret Scripture with Scripture if we are going to come to God's truth. Let me address the first point first.

The Greek word translated adoption in the KJV is "huiosthesia". It is composed of two words meaning "son" and "to place". So the literal meaning is "to place as a son". While adoption does place one as a son, it does not adequately describe the position of the believer who becomes a child of God.

We read in Romans 8:14-16, "For as many as are led by the spirit of God (please see the note in the CB which suggests that it is the new nature being referred to here), they are the sons of God. For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the spirit of adoption (i.e. "being placed in position as a son"), whereby we cry 'Abba Father'. The Spirit Himself (see note in the CB) beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God".

Let's consider the phrase, "The Spirit Himself beareth witness with our spirit". What does Paul mean by "our spirit"? It is obviously not our natural spirit, it is our new nature, the gift from the Holy Spirit. In other words, the Holy Spirit bears witness with our new nature that we are the children of God. Our new nature is spirit, God is spirit, so we become children of God through the spirit.

The word "adoption" does not accurately describe the process by which a believer becomes a child of God. While in human terms, one cannot be born into a family other than his own, in the spiritual realm the believer is indeed born again into God's family when he receives the new nature from the Holy Spirit.

So my first point is that the believer receives a new nature which places him as a son of God. The believer is not adopted as a son, he is a son.

Many go to the Greek adoption laws that were in effect during the writing of the NT to explain how the believer becomes a child of God. These Roman laws show that the adopted son had all the legal rights of a son born into a family. So unlike Roman law concerning adoption, God's law is not that we are adopted, but we are made God's sons by the new nature. In other words, an adopted person may have all the legal rights and privileges of a son who is naturally born, but the adopted person does not have the nature, i.e. so to speak the flesh and blood of his adopted parents. But the believer is not adopted, he is made a child of God through the spirit, the new nature

My second point then is that the knowledge of Roman law (which is not given in the Bible) does not accurately portray the position of the child of God, and if we do not understand that position, we lose out on a great blessing, i.e. the knowledge that we are not adopted, we are children of God because he has given us a new nature that allows us to become His "natural" children.

What do you think?

From Must to Trust¹

Steve McVey

Aspects of Spirit filled living which flow naturally from the lifestyle of one walking in grace become a millstone around the neck of one ensnared by legalism. I have often used Bible study and prayer as examples because they tend to be primary targets of legalism. It takes what God intended to bring us real pleasure and turns it into nothing more than a religious performance.

We aren't doing God any favors by reading the Bible, praying, or anything else we may do in an effort to please Him. It goes without saying that each are an integral part of authentic faith, but once these grace gifts have been baptized into the stagnant waters of dead religion, they lose all life. They no longer have legitimate meaning, neither to the believer nor God.

Bible study no longer is a joy, it's a job. Prayer is no longer a romantic conversation. It becomes a "quiet time" which we must observe like the misbehaving child who is sent to his room for a "time out."

Driven religious fervor becomes a one night stand repeated over and over and over again. There may be a shallow gratification in one night stands, but nobody would ever mistake it for genuine intimacy. God offers us much more than that. He wants us to experience Him and all of His gifts as a natural part of the soothing rhythms of grace. However, to know that kind of intimacy, we must stop our religious hyperventilating, calm down, stop and smell the roses. God doesn't need for you to break the three minute mile for Him. He just wants you to enjoy Him, knowing that everything else in your life will flow out of that.

Jesus didn't come to help us be religious superstars. Far from it, He came to deliver us from empty religion, even orthodox, time honored religion. Jesus came to bring us into intimacy with God through Himself. In His earthly days, as in our day, those most offended by Him have been the religionists who have built their reputation around keeping their golden idols polished to a brighter shine than anybody else in town.

The idols are their own particular rules of the road that must be observed as we speed down the highway they call "Christian living." Their display case is filled with the specific idols which most easily fit their own personality and temperament and they judge everybody else by whether or not they live up to their own personal standards. People are incidental. What matters is how you are behaving.

Even Jesus wasn't a good churchman by the standards of the religionists of His day. He didn't live up to what they thought He ought to be. To them, He had no convictions. He appeared to compromise the purity and integrity of their values by doing things like healing people on the Sabbath, by eating with the crooks (Publicans) and party-animals (sinners) of His day. He was a friend of the hookers and homeless. He didn't separate Himself far enough from the riffraff, as every good churchman knew one should do. Consequently, He lost His testimony with the Pharisees, an incidental matter which

¹ Steve McVey: A Divine Invitation

didn't seem to bother him at all. Jesus cared more about relationships than reputation. He still does.

A legitimate Christian lifestyle gently flows like water along a riverbank, refreshing all who happen to stumble upon our banks. It isn't a flash flood of activity that honors God. He doesn't lead us that way, but instead He has chosen to make "[us] lie down in green pastures. He leads [us] beside the still waters [where] He restores [our] soul" (Psalm 23).

God loves you so much that He wants to deliver you from the misery of the musts into the triumph of trust. You have nothing to prove by a frantic pace. It isn't possible to hear the still, small voice whisper when you are running at breakneck speed. God invites you to stop and rest.

The Treasure

Ole Henrik Skjelstad

“We have this treasure (Christ) in earthen vessels (human bodies), that the surpassing greatness of the power may be of God and not from ourselves; ...that the life of Jesus may be manifested in our body, ...manifested in our mortal flesh” (2 Cor. 4:7,10,11)

The new creation is filled with a treasure which is active and divine in its nature. Since its principal characteristic is love this presence flows through the new man with a power which overcomes death and guarantees an overflow of life in the vessel. A torrent is created that will make its influence known in everything in its vicinity. Those who are midst in this river of life know that the power is not of themselves. Every desire of imitation is quenched when the living water manifests its invisibility in human flesh. Garden life is again restored in its simplicity and perfection in a beloved creature who finds that this is the eternity embedded in its heart. Christ as us is a blossoming flowerbed of diversity. The inner law of life far surpasses any outer law of death. Human notions such as motivation and examples, which stir the flesh, are declared obsolete when the real thing manifests itself – the very manifestation of Christ in us as us.

God Is Love

Andre Rabe

If I speak the languages of men and of angels, but do not have love, I am a sounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so that I can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. (1 Cor 13)

These words reveal something about the God of love, namely: It is not His infinite knowledge or intellect, referred to as His omniscience, that is His most essential characteristic. Neither is it His limitless power, known as His omnipotence, that makes Him who He is. Love is at the core of who God is!

Love desires to give ... love is not focused on itself, but desires the benefit of others. Love is not needy, lack-conscious or aware of what it does not have. Love is an expression of abundance; the overflow of joy and satisfaction. Love is not obsessed with its own importance ... it does not need the recognition of others. There is no inferiority in love ... it is not dependent on affirmation, because love's attention is not on itself but on its target. All God is for man and all He does for man, is out of His own free grace. He does not owe us anything, neither do we have any claim upon this free grace, yet in utter freedom, without any obligation He desires to give it, because that is who He is. His love, His free grace is not some quality or property of His character that can be placed alongside other properties. This is essentially who He is. All other qualities proceeds from this central reality: God is love.

James, the Brother of Jesus

Francois Du Toit

Man's lost and found identity

From the first and the last verse of chapter one it appears that James sets this teaching up against the sense of a lost identity: the twelve scattered tribes, the widows and the orphans.

This would be the greatest and most challenging test or temptation anyone can face: "to forget what manner of man you are." (1:24, Deut.32:18.)

As a flesh and blood brother of Jesus, James had to discover a greater identity to that of his physical conception. Beyond the desire of a natural parent, mankind shares a common origin, the *boulomai*, the affectionate desire and deliberate resolve of God, the Father of lights, with whom there is no distortion or hidden agenda, He conceived us by the unveiled logic of God, (truth, *alethea*, from *a + lanthano*, not hidden) "He brought us forth by the Word of truth."

Man began in God.

The truth about man's genesis is that he is God's personal invention. We are *anouthen*, from above. We are perfect and complete and lacking in nothing. (1:4) God's Sabbath is the celebration of our perfection, both by design and redemption. "Every good and perfect gift comes from above, from the Father of lights with whom there is no variableness, and no shadow due to change, He brought us forth by the Word of truth."

Born from above

"No one ascended into heaven, who did not also descend from heaven, even the son of man." John 3:13. John sees the same genesis.

When he writes his gospel he is already more than 90 years old. Unlike Luke and Matthew he skips the genealogies of Joseph and returns to the Logos/Word that was from the beginning, before Adam was. The original blueprint thought of God. The Word that was always directed towards God, (The Word was *with* God, *pros*, a Greek preposition of direction, its predicted destiny is always to return to where it comes from, (Is.55:10,11,) "Like the rain and the snow that comes down from heaven and returns not thither but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, so shall my Word be that goes forth from my mouth (the eye of the fountain) it shall not return to me void, it shall accomplish my purpose and prosper in my resolve!" Jesus returned with the full harvest, the salvation of the human race.)

The Word is God; the Word equals God in essence, that same Word incarnated; the Word became flesh and dwelt within us; God finding accurate expression of Himself, His image and likeness revealed in human form. Genesis 1:26 lives again, man standing tall in the stature of the invisible God, "if you have seen me, you have seen the Father!" Christ in whom all the fullness of Deity dwells; and man realizing and returning to his own completeness only in Him. (Col.2:9,10.)

“Unless a man is born from above, *‘anouthen’*, he cannot see the Kingdom of God.” The kingdom of God (the reign of God’s image and likeness, His character) is made visible again on earth as it is in heaven; tangible in human form. John 3:3. Nicodemus discovers that his attraction to Jesus was founded upon the fact that man is more than the fruit of his mother’s womb. That which is born of the flesh is flesh. Man’s natural features and identity reveals a glimpse of his parents’, but there is another womb that man comes from, the womb of the spirit; man’s birth is not merely by the desire of an earthly parent, (John 1:13) but by the desire of God. Man comes from above. “I knew you before I formed you in your mother’s womb.” (Jer.1:5.) If man did not come from above, then the heavenly realm would offer no appeal or attraction to him. In our make-up we are the god-kind with an appetite for more than what bread and the senses could satisfy us with. We are designed to hunger for the Logos that comes from above. From a dimension where the original thought remains preserved and intact without contamination, the Logos that comes from His mouth, the unveiled mirror reflection of our authentic design.

Paul celebrates the same theme in Galatians 1:15, “God separated me from my mother’s womb and revealed His son in me in order that I may declare Him in the nations! He understood what Jesus said to Peter, “flesh and blood cannot reveal to you who the son of man is, but my Father who is in heaven, blessed are you Simon son of Jonah, I give you a new name that reveals your original identity, you are rock, (petros, hewn out of the rock, petra, Is.51:1, Deut.32:3,4,18.) This revelation is the rock foundation that I will build my identity upon, (my image and likeness) and the strong gates of hades, (Greek, *ha + ideis*, not to see) that trapped man into the walled city of the senses will not prevail against the voice that surnames and summons man again. (Mat.16:13,17.) (Church, *eklesia*, from *ek*, denoting source or origin and *klesia* from *kaleo*, to surname or identify by name.) Therefore Paul did not immediately consult with flesh and blood. He deliberately avoided the opportunity to get to know Jesus from a human point of view by visiting the eleven disciples who were still alive and living in Jerusalem. They could have informed him first hand about the life, ministry, parables and miracles of Jesus. (2Cor.5:16.) But Paul does not make mention in any of his writings even of a single parable Jesus told or miracle He performed, because his mandate and revelation was not to reveal Christ in history, but Christ in man. Three years later only he returned briefly to Jerusalem specifically to visit Peter and James, the Lord’s brother. (Gal.1:18,19.) One is not surprised to discover that the first believers ever to be called Christians were the Greeks in Antioch who sat under Paul’s ministry.

What James, John and Paul had in common was an understanding that Jesus came to reveal and redeem man’s original authentic spirit identity.

As Us in Our Uniqueness

DeeDee Winter

This is a response to someone who wrote to me that they felt they could not forgive those who had hurt them...and it expanded to a question on what 'proper' Christian behavior is...

The *only way through* many things we do and see on a daily basis is to affirm by faith "There **You** were, Lord" and "Here **You** are, Lord" and He will give us the assurance of peace. Forgiveness first starts as an act of the will. Feelings and reconciliation follow.....*in His time*. State by faith that you DO forgive...you DO love... those who have hurt you and those who you feel have wronged you. It is a very simple thing, but will 'cost' us everything as we say what appears foolish and contrary to how we feel. Temptation is strong, and God means it to be! Jesus sweat blood in His temptation in the Garden before His Cross. Reaffirm that FACT (I DO forgive them) each time you are tempted to believe or feel otherwise. God **will** bring the victory!

There is a wonderful 'rule of thumb' by which I measure all of life....The greater the negative; the greater the positive! The negative is like a sling shot. The further it is pulled back (the more intense the negative becomes) the farther the rock is propelled forward when it is released! It is an amazing tool to have as I see life 'happen' to people, and to me, and I always ponder in my heart the greater good God has coming! The harder 'it' is, the greater the potential there is for glory!

One word of caution about "proper Christian behavior" ...don't set up a false standard for yourself and others. Religion says you don't do this and you do that...but we live in the freedom of the Spirit. Christians tend to have such a false image of who and how the human Jesus was, that we set up this same **external** standard of behavior for ourselves and others...and then gather Scriptures around these **false standards** to support them! Immediately the one that comes to my mind is about our bodies being temples of the Holy Spirit.....therefore we should not smoke or drink or over eat...or...or...or! And it sounds so reasonable when presented to us...just as reasonable as Eve's temptation sounded to her! All sound very reasonable, but there may be a higher calling for our temples...."Present your bodies a living sacrifice" Ro 12:1 "We have been bought with a price" and we do not belong to ourselves, but to Christ to spend and be spent.

As the Spirit settles us into the truth of Gal 2:20 "I have been crucified with Christ: nevertheless, I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me, and the life I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God who gave Himself for me" ...this great and marvelous reality that we are dead and Christ is now living our life...we discover more and more nuances of ourselves as He interacts with our worlds in the everyday places we go and the everyday things we do. In freedom we find that Christ eats, smokes and drinks as us....in order to get us out among those who need us. As us He goes dancing, and goes gambling, and goes everywhere among the people! The issue we fight is thinking we shouldn't (usually according to something we have been told and taken it as true) and then we try not to....and trying is the sin of Romans 7. Until we are settled about Christ being our life we still try to "perform" the Christian life...rather than just Being Him in **every aspect** of life as He leads.

When I **first** came into a living relationship with Christ through the baptism of the Holy Spirit, long before I knew union, I experienced something that redirected my life almost as much as the Baptism. I was trying to figure out where I fit into the everyday world in this phenomenal new existence. Gary and I had committed to go out with friends to see Jerry Lee Lewis at a local club. I was stricken as to how I could go there and yet I knew I could not refuse to go out with my husband and our close friends. It was a real crisis of cultures for me...the secular verses Christian. We went and as 'fate' would have it got a table right next to the stage. Jerry Lee came on and everyone was standing, singing and cheering listening to him perform.

I stood there with my elbow on the stage three feet from him in absolute awe watching him perform and then watching the crowd with their hands in the air singing and screaming in wild approval of his music. I would look at him and look at them....and look at him and look at them, over and over, mesmerized because these folks looked JUST LIKE the 10,000 I had seen a few days earlier at a Charismatic service! By 'appearances' they were one and the same!

I must have been a sight because he looked down at me smiling and **growled** in his very best Jerry Lee Lewis growl, "**Smile honey, if nobody else loves you, Jesus does!**" I knew that God was saying to me that it was **His** PERFECT and CHOSEN place for me to be! I have never forgotten it, although at the time, in my infancy, I did not fully understand how VITAL this touch from Him would guide the rest of my life!

There is nothing greater that we can give Christians than freedom in the truth that Christ **IS** their life and we can trust and stand on His promise... "I will *cause* them to walk in My ways". If there is any adjustment needed, we put the onus on Him....for He is the one to change behavior, not us! Each one of us is so totally unique in our being...like the countless numbers of snowflakes with no two ever the same...that we never need 'look' like anyone but ourselves.

My daughter, Kim, has a great motto... "Be **your** best self...everybody else is already taken." This applies even to the human Jesus. We are not meant to "be like" Him (the sin of the Garden of Eden)...but to contain and express Him....*as us* in **our** uniqueness!

Avon Calling

David Borum

Certain things characterized my life during the summer days of the 1970's. My bell bottoms proudly carried a large red plastic comb in my back pocket and baseball cards would adorn the spokes of my Schwinn bicycle. Who knew that some of those cards would now be worth over \$200? I certainly can't leave out the fact that my tummy would habitually be full of Bit O'Honey and Abba Zabba. After a hard day of playing street baseball and riding bikes my brothers and I would seat ourselves directly in front of our Zenith television set. Back in those days you sat as close to the tv as possible. To change the set to any of the three channels you had to manually turn the knob. Remotes were still in the science fiction category. No kids were willing to miss, I Dream of Jeanie, The Brady Bunch or Gilligan's Island. It was usually during one of those shows that my mom would receive a special visitor at least a couple times a month. The doorbell would ring and a voice would announce itself from the other side; "AVON CALLING!"

In the summer of 2009 the boot cut is the closest thing I would possess to bell bottoms. I haven't owned a comb for over 20 years. My baseball cards are sitting in a shoe box in a closet somewhere in this vast universe and I couldn't even tell you if they make Bit O'Honey anymore. As far as my bike is concerned; that was traded in long ago. My mode of transportation these days is a sea foam green Mazda 6. One particularly beautiful day in 2009 my Mazda 6 would be taking me west through The Rockies. Off to my left I stared at the scenic views of the many small ski towns of Colorado. I got to see Breckenridge, Aspen, Vail and then...AVON. My mind races back to an earlier time in life where things were carefree and troubles seemed like a plight reserved for adults. Instantly I recall Marsha, Marsha, Marsha getting her nose broken by one of the Brady brother's errant attempts at emulating Joe Namath. Gilligan is carelessly turning around carrying a long wooden plank that meets with the Captain's midsection. This would cause him to let out the very first "DOH!" at least a decade before Homer Simpson would be credited for it's fame. Thirty minutes later poor Jeanie would get stuck in her bottle again for the umpteenth time. All the while my mom sits at our kitchen table across from an eager fresh-faced Avon lady.

I have seen few places in this world that rival the beauty that is Avon, Colorado. I first notice the lush green mountains. It had been an unusually wet spring and it had kept everything much greener than usual. These mountains are interspersed with rustic lodges, golf course fairways and ski lifts. Wedged between these mountains is a taller mountain laced with snow. At the bottom of all of this is a placid lake reflecting the bright blue sky on it's calm waters. Just a couple miles after passing this scenic wonderland I see a trailer park. The surroundings are flat and it seems like the grass has turned brown. The houses are in a state of disrepair and I couldn't help but wonder about the stark contrast between this and the beauty that I witnessed only a few minutes earlier.

Paul writes to the Colossians, "Therefore, if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are of the earth. For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God." (Col. 3:1-3) Paul sends an appeal to this church to not get caught up in all of the "thou shalt nots", and admonishes them to put away those sins that once defined them. Sandwiched between those two concerns is Paul's heart message for these believers. Remember who you are and where you dwell.

It's taken all of us years to develop ways to try make life work. Long gone are those Bit O'Honey days where we lived in the moment. Our thoughts have now turned to how we can best avoid rejection and be the recipients of someone's acceptance. Is this still how life is to be for those in Christ? If so, then we are on the same path as the Colossians, a path that leads us to the rundown trailer park existence. Where is this abundant life I always hear about, you ask? You look outside your window and see Avon. Oh how you wish you could break out in a Julie Andrews moment and ascend one of those nearby mountains, singing, "The hills are alive with the sound of music". The question is; where do you see yourself? Do you see yourself as having died with Christ and raised in Him to new life? If so, then get to skippin'! No matter what your current circumstances happen to be, if you are seated with Christ you have the best seat in the house. Once again, remember who you are and where you dwell...Ding dong. What's that I hear? Avon is calling!

Lost

Andre Rabe

One of the words often used to describe this condition of man, is the word 'lost'. Man was no longer in the possession of his owner. However, there is a beautiful promise hidden in this word, for if something is 'lost' it also implies that it belongs! A thief never becomes the rightful owner of what is stolen. The kingdom of darkness never became our natural home – it is always a kingdom in which we are lost, we never belong. The problem is that the longer one lingers in a foreign land, the less one remembers of where you came from and with time, the foreign becomes familiar. At the head of this dark kingdom resides the father of lies. All he ever gave birth to are lies – the rest of what he controls is stolen property. No matter how comfortable and familiar the stolen property becomes in his kingdom – he will never be their Creator, never their rightful owner. Although the father of lies took possession of all that was given to Adam, the rightful owner was still the Lord of heaven and earth for “the earth is the Lord’s, and all its fullness, the world and those who dwell therein.”

Jesus once spoke about a lost coin and the determination of the owner to find it. The lost coin never lost its value ... and the owner knows this. Although man began to forget his origin, our Maker never forgot His own. He always knew our value, despite our location or condition. Part of His plan to rescue us from the kingdom of darkness, was to remind us, to bring us back into a consciousness of our beginning in Him. From a human point of view, “... you forget the LORD your Maker, Who stretched out the heavens And laid the foundations of the earth”, but from God’s point of view, “...can a woman forget her nursing child, And not have compassion on the son of her womb? Surely they may forget, Yet I will not forget you”

The Red Letters – Of Death and Condemnation!

Joel Brueseke

As you know, a "Red Letter" edition of a Bible is an edition in which the words of Jesus are printed in the color red (representing His blood). Fascinating words, are they not, those words in red? They're the very words of *Christ*, right? And so it's all about how to live the *Christian* life then, right? After all, He's the Messiah! And whatever words the Messiah spoke, we just do it and we're on the right path, right? Not so fast.

Let's back up just a bit and look at something else. Actually, let's look "ahead" to Paul's writings, which of course were written years after Jesus' death and resurrection. He says some interesting things that have helped me to see a lot clearer when it comes to some of the words of Jesus. Regarding God's law, Paul called it "the ministry of death" and "the ministry of condemnation" (see 2 Cor 3:7-11). Paul talked much about the purpose of the law. It was a "tutor" to lead TO Christ, but once faith has come, the tutor's (law's) job is done and we are no longer under it (Gal 3:24-25). And the key verse that turned my thinking upside down in such a way in which I can never go back is Romans 3:19, "Now we know that *whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world become guilty* before God."

The law was meant from the beginning to be the *ministry of death and condemnation*. It was not meant as a source of life, but of death. It was not meant as a way to live a godly and holy life, but rather through it *we died* and were then made alive together with Christ (Gal 2:19-20). Its purpose was to speak to those who were under it, *stopping their mouths* and making them guilty! All of this is important, but I want to focus on that one phrase, "*that every mouth may be stopped.*"

Now that we know what the law's purpose was, we can look back and see how Jesus used the law when speaking to people. He was very clever and skillful with His use of the law. In His encounter with the rich young ruler (Luke 18:18-23), the man asked Him, "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" Now, we know through Paul's straightforward words that we cannot obtain eternal life through keeping the law, right? But yet Jesus answered the man, "You know the commandments, 'Do not commit adultery,' 'Do not murder,' 'Do not steal,' 'Do not bear false witness,' 'Honor your father and your mother.'" Huh? And what about this - Another time "a certain lawyer" asked Jesus the same question (Luke 10:25-37). Again, two commandments came up. "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind," and "Love your neighbor as yourself." Jesus replied to the man, "You have answered rightly; do this and you will live." Again, I say, "Huh?" Paul said in Gal 3:21 that there is NO LAW that can give life!

But if we put all of this together I think we get the bigger picture. The law was meant to make everyone guilty and it was meant to stop mouths! Jesus used the law perfectly with these two men, and He used it perfectly and skillfully elsewhere as well. Follow the "certain lawyer" story all the way, and the man sought to "justify himself" by probing Jesus a little bit further about the meaning of those laws, and Jesus told him the parable of the Good Samaritan. We've often looked at this parable as a "Christian teaching," but look, it was spoken as an answer to this man who was seeking to justify himself! It was a mouth-stopping parable! "My neighbor" is *everyone*, including my worst enemies.

Keep all of this in mind when reading the "Red Letters" (the words of Jesus). Very often it's not a "Christian teaching" that He's giving, but rather it's the ministry of death and condemnation! But you say, "Joel, Jesus didn't come to condemn, but to save!!!" And you're correct! The thing is, often it takes a mouth-stopping, guilt producing word to bring people to the end of themselves and their self-reliance, and their trust in their own works, and that acts as a *tutor* that leads *to* faith and salvation!

Event Christians

Rich Novek

One of the wonderful things about seeing our Life IN Him AS Him is there is no more time! God has translated us from the kingdom of darkness, which is the kingdom of time, with all its limitations, into the KINGDOM of His Dear Son. If..... GOD IS, than let me ask you, what does that IS-ness have to do with time?

Event Christians can only live and thrive in time, so they can only live in separation and division. What are event Christians? They are God's people who are always looking to a future event. Events such as the "next big revival", or "the rapture" or the ""the second coming!" It is a very deceptive form of living because it has its focus in tomorrow, always tomorrow! The people in the church who are always looking forward to the "next thing", and in doing so, miss out on True Life in the Now! In the book of Acts we read the statement, Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? Why are you looking FOR Christ as though he is separated from you and He is limited by time? Look what Jesus said as an example, how concerned was He about tomorrow? I'll tell you how concerned. He said, are you ready for this, "Take not a thought for tomorrow!" What? He couldn't have meant that, let's look again. Yep, that's what it says, take not a thought for tomorrow, WOW. I guess that means we can burn about 98% of the stuff in Christian book stores, can't we?

We don't take a thought because a river doesn't think it simply flows, and out of us flows God, out of our (belly) center, the flowing Rivers of LIVING WATER, in that place of Resting in His Love!

Event Christian's continue to regurgitate the elementary teachings, and seem to have a real tough time moving into maturity. They walk in the infant stage of "God for me." I will probably offend some folks by saying this, but I think the philosophy of the rapture is the most immature and self-centered concept that ever hit the church! It's the Great Escape all over again! Think about it, all the Christians gone in one fell swoop, and the rest of humanity can go to hell! I don't buy it. That isn't the God that revealed Himself to me when I was ready to take my life a few years back as a believing and spirit filled Christian, or the God who UNCONDITIONALLY loves me in spite of my sometimes ill behavior, or the God who was pleased to reveal his Son IN me!" Neither is it the God who is limited by events in time!

Event Christians are always looking forward to some-thing, and in so doing miss the revelation of the Eternal One living in them TODAY. Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts! God is only speaking in the Today. In fact, look at Hebrews 4:7, Today is in capital letters, as if God is saying this is important, because it is. In time there are certain days, there is Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, etc. They are all in capital letters too, because they represent a specific day. But in Christ all of those days are swallowed up in the "Today" of who we are in Him! We were not created to live in the tomorrow of COMING EVENTS, but only to live in the Today of God! Because God is only in the Today in you! Isaiah 30:21 says, "and when you turn to the right hand, and when you turn to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, "This is the way. Walk in it." What is this Way Isaiah is talking about? He (Christ) is the Way, and the Way only lives in the Day!

One of the reasons I believe the church lives for the next event, whether it be the next fund raising,

or the next missionary trip, the next special speaker, or what I have stated earlier, is because for whatever reason, they have forsaken the FOUNTAIN of Living Waters and made (with their own hands) cisterns, broken cisterns that hold no water! Event Christians have a tough time moving into maturity, because they believe the coming events they are looking forward to is all there is! The church has forsaken the message of the cross, because the cross is meant to be an offense. The church does not want to offend, so they have to pretend! Paul said the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing. Many of the "those who are perishing" are the Event Christians who don't know WHO or WHOSE they are. They do not understand what Jesus was talking about in Mathew 6:25-34 is not only possible, it is the only Life in Him there can be!

Event Christianity is part of the process God uses in "destroying speculation and every lofty thing that sets itself up against the knowledge of God." We needed to experience division and separation in every way, in order to see God only. Event Christians walk in that separated life like no other. Not only is their focus separated because of the events they are waiting for, but that way of life reinforces the whole "God up there" way of looking at their relationship with Christ! By seeing the God "down the road" in some far off land called the "coming event", they remain fragmented and separated in their seeing Christ as the All in All! Jesus said if your eye is SINGLE, it is FULL of LIGHT, but if it is EVIL (seeing more than God) it is FULL of darkness, and if that light (the light you call "the God up there") in you be darkness, then how great is that darkness?

It's all good though, because this way of seeing God brings them to a place of hopelessness and despair because the God they long for in the Now is not who they are able to see looking down the road. I was an Event Christian, and God used all of that separation and division of seeing him "far off" and looking to the next "thing", as the vehicle to bring me to the cross! Not the historical old rugged cross Jesus died on, but the personal cross, the "dying to everything" which I called life, so that where He is (NOW) I am also!

It Just Came To Me

Darin Hufford

In the many years that I've been preaching this message, I have gathered and filed hundreds of individual "precious moments" in my heart. Moments where someone's eyes were opened and freedom came flooding in like a spiritual blood transfusion. Each and every time I witness this, I find myself desiring to see it again and again. In fact, I'll admit that it's become an addiction of sorts in my life. It's the very thing I look for every place I go. Witnessing this miracle flicker to life in the eyes of a person steeped in religiosity does something to my heart that I have never been able to adequately describe. When I see this, every part of my soul swirls with a spiritual satisfaction that is unlike anything I've experienced before.

As much as an addiction as this has become in my life, I have also learned that I cannot control it. I cannot decide when it happens in one single person. This is the part that frustrates me to no end. I've analyzed why it worked this time but not that time. Why did "this woman" get it while "that guy" just sat there with a blank look on his face? I've never been able to harness this revelation and give it away as I see fit. I've found that it happens by the Spirit of God and ONLY by Him.

I've seen the difference between a person who receives this revelation from God at just the right time and a person who was convinced of it from man. It's an ugly difference. I'm not even sure that the two can even be compared. I've never seen this flickering passion in the eyes of someone who was convinced of this truth by man. Revelation is not a convincing; it's a knowing. A knowing can only be put there by the Spirit of God.

I have learned the art of waiting for people to come to a thing on their own. There is simply no other way to go about this. I've found that you literally have to keep your list of principles to yourself and your theological mouth shut. The authentic "precious moment" that I've become addicted to is a very unique and special thing. Being able to witness it happening takes a great deal of patience and an endless amount of hands-off-ness. The sad fact is that we almost never get to see it because someone almost always loses patience and tries to step in and take control. The moment that happens, it's all over. Over the years I have become more and more convinced that the Christian walk is completely about what you "come to" personally.

Christianity has spent almost all of its time and energy pushing their beliefs on the world. We've done it through peer pressure, fear, manipulation, hype, emotionalism, motivational speaking, and plain brute force. Because of this, we've given birth to a generation of religious Frankensteins who've been sewn and stapled together on an assembly line and injected with a cocktail of "beliefs" that they were never given the opportunity to "come to" on their own. Not allowing people to come to things on their own is perhaps the biggest reason why people are spiritually crippled today. It's like opening up a cocoon and "helping" a caterpillar get out rather than allowing it time to develop and break free in its own time. The only things that Christians can truly say they own are the things they have personally "come to." Everything else is just memorized words.

I honestly don't think that the average Christian today can separate their "injected beliefs" from what they've personally discovered about God in their journey. In fact, I've found that with many

people, their list of personal discoveries is so influenced by their injected beliefs that they can't even be sure if their interpretation of what they've discovered is accurate or not. Sadly, many more Christians do not have personal discoveries about God because they've stopped searching altogether. Their injected beliefs have put them under the illusion that they've already arrived. Their religion has convinced them that because they possess those beliefs, they have discovered all there is to discover about Him. In other words, they think that those beliefs are the very thing they were supposed to discover.

Because the injected beliefs we are given are also reinforced with a fear of rejection by others, people do not allow themselves to acknowledge personal discoveries that do not pay homage to, or bring validation to the injected beliefs of their religion. In an effort to find acceptance, I find that people tend to censor and recast whatever square discoveries they do find about God to make them fit into the approved round hole of injected beliefs.

The problem with injected beliefs is that they compromise our ability to view anything from a fresh, unprejudiced perspective. For instance, most Christians have been taught that the bible is "the Word of God." The bible does not even make this claim about itself; yet amazingly, because we've been taught this for so long, we automatically see any bible passage that includes the term "word" in it, as referring to the bible. It doesn't matter that when that particular passage was written there wasn't even a "bible" put together yet, so it couldn't possibly be referring to the bible we know today. We've been trained to think like dogs who respond the same to sounds and phrases without having any real idea what they mean. Most Christian interpretations of bible passages are 100% dictated by the injected beliefs of their particular denomination.

I honestly believe that Christians today have very little within themselves that they actually own. You cannot own a thing until you "come to" it yourself. It doesn't belong to you until you find it, and you don't find it until it has been given to you from above. Standing on an injected belief that you haven't discovered within yourself doesn't make you "faithful" in my opinion; it makes you stupid. If you give that intimate part of yourself away that easily without actually coming to it on your own, you've become nothing more than a religious slut. There's nothing admirable or redeeming in believing something because your church believes it or because it's written in the bible.

I preached the "Love Message" all around the world for almost 8 years before I finally received the revelation that it applied to me as well. It was true. It was right. I fought for it and stood before thousands of people proclaiming it and proving it with scripture. Yet when I went home at the end of the day, I did not take that message with me. It wasn't mine to take. It was nothing more than a principle that I had stolen from someone else who rightfully owned it. When all was said and done it was identity theft, pure and simple. The message I was proclaiming wasn't mine to give away, and I can tell you that with few exceptions, almost no one who listened to me in those days was moved or transformed by what I had to say. My words literally fell to the ground the moment they left my lips.

Years later, when the message that God loved me was finally given to me from the Holy Spirit, everything changed in an instant. I went from being a message delivery boy to actually becoming the message. I went from having to speak it out to people to just having to be present.

It was very much like having a medical scientist come to your home town and give a detailed teaching on the Swine Flu. He may know everything there is to know about the flu, but not one person in the room will get the flu from hearing his teaching. He, himself, won't even get the flu. He can study it, look at pictures of the strand under a microscope, make a list of all the symptoms caused by the flu, and even diagnose it in others; but, he doesn't "Own it" until he actually gets the flu. Amazingly, a three-year-old girl who has the Swine flu has more intimate knowledge of that virus than an aged and studied professor who has spent a lifetime researching it. This fact is not only true with the revelation of God's love, but I have found that it applies in some fashion to every single principle and "belief" that we claim to hold as Christians.

We can force people to subscribe and pay homage to a list of beliefs that we hold to in the Christian world, but it means nothing until they come to those beliefs on their own. It amazes me how stressed out we Christians get over whether or not a person accurately recites the approved list of doctrinal beliefs. We seem more concerned over people saying the right thing than we are over people actually coming to the right thing.

We bully people into saying "God is faithful" and care very little if that person has actually found God to be faithful in their lifetime. Just speak the words. Say you believe it and we'll all get along. It matters more to us that a person SAYS "Christ is all" than it does if they personally observe Christ to be all. We force people to confess that Scripture is God-breathed, and care very little if they've come to realize the truth of that in their personal journey. Something is desperately wrong with a generation when we revere lip service over personal revelation and experience.

The reason why this matters is because we have created a world where no one can be honest with where they are at any given moment. The result of this religious mindset is that we now have an entire generation of Christians who can't tell the difference between what they "hold to" and what they've "come to." I believe that at the very moment we adopted this mindset, Christianity went from being a relationship to being a religion. It literally morphed into a lifeless set of ordinances the very second we esteemed memorization over revelation. Because we didn't have the patience or the faith to allow people to walk with God and come to things on their own in the midst of that walk, we have murdered the essence of Christianity.

A person with an experience is never at the mercy of a person with a belief. I recently encountered a person who doesn't believe in speaking in tongues. He didn't believe it because he studied the scriptures diligently, and he didn't feel that there were any passages that flat out said speaking in tongues was for people today. He wanted to debate me on this. He was frustrated with me because I wasn't open to entering into a debate with a person who can't find a scripture to support something that I personally witness on a regular basis. An astonishing number of Christians today think exactly like this man.

This is why Christians today are so spiritually frail. We go through life thinking that Christianity is about what we SAY and "hold to" rather than what we actually SEE and have "come to."

Something Further on "Different"

Fred Pruitt

I recently sent out a piece titled, **The Entirely Different**, that contained the following paragraph:

"But there comes a time when you enter into rest, because the "rest" is God Himself, and then out of that rest we live out of, or our lives are coming out from, God, rather than something separate like hearing what God 'expects of us' and then we (as if we are separate) going out and trying to apply or do it. This is entirely different. We have discovered the invisible but always flowing spring of the Spirit within us, so that whatever we need is provided when we need it. Need understanding for something? -- there it comes! Need this or that? -- there it comes!! Now that doesn't mean there might not be a little turmoil or a little sweat involved, but by whatever human process that might ensue, it is all out of the life of the Spirit which is out of a life of rest in God. That's what Jesus was describing when He said His life 'came down from heaven.' It is a given life, flowing in grace, effortlessly, every moment of every day."

Now here are a few thoughts further in The Entirely Different:

When I re-read the paragraph above after a day or so, it jumped out at me that I still wanted to close the gap some more. Ultimately this is a gap that words cannot close. One has to actually see it in himself for the gap to close. But that is God's business, because mine is to continually keep closing the gap between separation and oneness in our consciousness.

Maybe my words should always be prefaced with a sentence like, "It is something like this." Because "it" cannot be pigeonholed that way. So to describe "it" is in some sense not looking at it right in the face, but as it were a little askew or from one side or another.

I like how John Bunting always prefaces his medical explanations of things for us non-medical folks, with a similar disclaimer -- "Ok, picture your intestines like this (he uses his hands to demonstrate), but, you have to understand, it's not REALLY like this, but this is a good way to understand it." And then he launches into a semi-technical explanation of whatever it is, and we listeners all nodding our heads at the technical part with unpronounceable words rolling out of John like a native tongue and we feign understanding to some degree.

But that's that. This is this. And "this," when using words, can only be communicated by parables and pictures and the plainest simplicities.

Now here is something of what jumped out at me above. When mention is made of "needing something."

I wanted to further say that, while I am most certainly talking about practical tangible things which show up when you need them, and also things like understanding and wisdom, but mostly what I wanted to stress and with this underline this point, is that what is really "coming out of God as a gift" is ourselves. This is where the rest rests.

This is the underlined point. We are the rest. That is why we can walk in it. The rest has become us. Perhaps previously we were seeking to enter the rest, as if it was someplace outside of us, something we didn't have or did not partake of except in too brief snatches, or a different room we had only put a toe or shoe in before.

But the "result" from entering or having the rest enter us is that, like truth, like light, like salt, like the person of Christ, we ARE this rest. (As we walk in truth because we ARE truth.) We don't seek it, look for it, pine for it, wish for it (as well as the other things mentioned above), we realize we walk as rest walks. We talk as rest talks.

It requires no analysis of behavior. It is what it is in all situations and events. To be technical, it is HE walking in us as ourselves walking. It is us, thinking, acting, doing, meditating, praying, watching TV, going fishing, doing nothing, staring at the ceiling, taking a bath, using the bathroom, playing with the grandkids, opening letters from friends, opening mail with window envelopes stamped, "Past Due!," and yet in all that it is He, but not so's we'd notice. We live and it is He. We think, decide and act, and it is He. We don't think but just act and it is He. We do neither and it is He. But it is just us. No tricks, no mirrors, no smoke, no subterfuge, no emperor without clothes who we say has clothes, just us living as funny looking us and it is the glory and light of God in blue jeans and sweatshirts on the couch on Saturday afternoon.

Christ is the spoken Word, Logos, Sign, Outraying, Manifestation, of the Father. He came to us. The flow is outward from Him. Even our turning inwardly toward Christ is only His Spirit encircling Himself, loving Himself as us loving Him after He has loved us. There is no end.

So the real rest is not emotional peace or self-assurance, not increased knowledge or depth knowledge of scripture, but the outflow of God the Father through Jesus Christ the Son by the Holy Spirit as an unending river of Living Water that branches out through particularly me and particularly you. The river encompasses the entirety of our humanity. Yes, it is a divine river, because everything seen in its true light shines. But it is for our sake a human river, of life begetting life, through love loving in humans loving humans.

The Lord God has plenty of angels. Now this is a time for Him to reap His humanity He has begotten in us.

Ask, Believing You Already Have Received

Daniel Yordy

One of the key commandments of the New Covenant is "Ask!" But asking is only half, it is no good to ask, unless we also believe that we already have received.

Ask - all that God speaks - ask and keep on asking, but ask in faith, believing that you have already received all that you ask for.

If I have asked God to fill my heart with His love, then in obedience to the commandment of the Lord Jesus Christ, I must believe that God has fully given me that which I have asked for. I do not groan and cry in unbelief. I know that the love of God abounds in my heart. How do I know? Because I asked according to what God speaks (Romans 5:5).

If I ask God to conform me to the image of His dear Son, then I believe that I have already received what I ask for. If I ask God to fulfill His perfection in Me, according to His command, then I believe that I have already received all that I ask for.

I can ask anything God speaks and God has already fulfilled it in me. I believe it. Why do I believe it? Because Jesus commanded me to believe it, and I obey His command.

Jesus' command to us to ask was a big deal to Him. You can hear the urgency in His voice in John 16: 23-24 as He closes out that which is most important in His heart for His disciples to grasp and to know.

Yet how many Christians pull away from this command because it is too overwhelming to obey? Paying tithes is easy; anyone can do that. Asking God to fulfill in me all that He speaks and then believing that He has already done so - that's too big of a requirement for many people.

"Until we all come to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." Is this the will of God? If it is, can I ask God to fulfill it in my life now? And if I ask God to fulfill it in my life now, can I believe that He has, that I have already received what I ask for? And to hold that confidence firm no matter what I "see" in the mirror when I get up in the morning?

That is the true test of obedience - that first look in the mirror in the morning. Do I see Christ? Or do I choose to "see" something else?

Ask, and keep on asking. Seek, and keep on seeking. Knock, and keep on knocking. But always, always, always, believe that you have already received what you ask for, what you seek for, what you knock for.

God fulfills it in you.

Throwing Away The Key

Jamie Weeks

"And you call yourself a Christian?"

Let's be honest, OK? I'm willing to bet you've heard this phrase or something similar if you're preaching grace. It's the arrow aimed at your heart (conscience) by someone who has either been offended by your teaching or, *WORSE*, actually witnessed you missing the mark.

"**NO!!!**", you're screaming, right? "**MISS THE MARK?!? MISS THE MARK?!?**"

Horrors, I know.

Because, yes, if you hadn't realized it, I'm here to tell you, grace walkers miss the mark. Well, I don't know about you, but I do.

I lose my patience. I get angry. I become stubborn. I take a well-aimed shot with words. I blow it. I lose it. I miss it. I flesh out. I miss the mark of my new nature.

And, generally, I'm able to restore and be restored in love. Grace teaches us that, doesn't it?

But, sometimes... sometimes, someone witnesses maybe not even a stumble but a complete and utter wipe-out and while we're still flat on our back wondering what in the world just happened a face appears over us and utters those condemning words.

"And you call yourself a Christian?"

"If that's grace, I don't want any part of it."

"You write about grace? You sure don't live it."

And, if you're me, and you are at a particularly low moment, you might just find yourself thinking, "Well, sh*t, I sure don't, do I?"

And I hear Him laugh. Yes, laugh, as He gathers me up and into His arms and begins to wipe away the grit and tear stains from my face and whisper His love to me.

You see, I really am just an old raggedy- muffin in my appearance sometimes. I stepped down off the gilt and jewel-encrusted music box I used to perform on and let Him wash all my stage make-up away years ago.

And sometimes I miss a step and stumble.

And the accuser of the brethren often is there to remind me that I've been weighed, measured, and found wanting.

But these days, I don't wind myself back-up and live the life of a religious automaton.

I don't try to live the religious lie of self-righteousness.

I've given up on winning men's approval.

These days, I wait for My Beloved to laugh and gather me in and remind me of who I am because of who He is in me.

I'm not a prostitute when I miss the mark, no matter what the world screams. A prostitute is the one who willingly climbs back into the box of Law, which no matter how perfect and good, never produces authentic life. It only keeps a mirror of perfection before us that we can attempt to imitate but never reproduce.

So, yeah, sometimes I try to lead the dance and overstep and flail around ungraciously.

Sometimes, I do.

But grace has never been about my imperfect interpretation of His life in my flesh, it is about His perfect reproduction of His life in my Spirit. It is about what my earthen box holds not my earthen box's appearance. That's why it's grace. It's about *HIM*, not *ME*. It's about Him dancing His dance through me, in union with me, instead of my attempts to fake it to impress Him or y'all with some music box performance.

So, yeah, I do call myself a Christian.

But it's by His grace, not my efforts.

Not since I really knew my True Love's first kiss.

Not since I stepped down from that box and threw away the key.

*"You cannot see
How much I long to be free
Turning around on this music box
That's wound by a key."*

What is our Center?²

Kokichi Kurosaki

One might think that with the Bible as the center of Christianity, the unity of Christians could be easily realized. Unfortunately, this has not proved to be true. This inability of Scripture to unify the Lord's people proves that the LETTER of the Bible cannot really replace the living Christ as the center of our faith. The Bible speaks to us of the Life and work of God, and since "life" is greater than its manifestation, it cannot be expressed completely in any logical or theological form. Therefore, the Bible itself cannot escape being understood in many different ways. Thus we see how, in the wisdom of God, it is impossible to make the Scriptures the end or final authority in themselves, for they only express God's authority TO THOSE WHO LIVE IN FELLOWSHIP WITH THE SPIRIT.

Let us pause to remember. In rejecting the authority of the Roman Church, the reformers turned to the Scriptures as the authority for their faith and actions. In the fierce conflict of the early days of the Reformation, it was natural that they should seek the security of some objective standard to meet the seemingly unlimited politico-ecclesiastical power of Rome. Therefore the position of the Bible as the God-inspired testimony of the apostles' personal faith in Christ gradually changed and became the source of Protestant "dogma" and the criterion of acceptable faith. REPLACING THE ROMAN POPE, THE BIBLE BECAME THE CENTER OF THE PROTESTANT CHURCHES.

And so on the one hand there are the so-called fundamentalists who, accepting the Bible as the "infallible Word of God," believe there is no mistake in the whole Bible, not even in one phrase or manner of wording. To them it is, in the most literal sense, the Word of God from cover to cover, and their faith is utterly dependent on its literal infallibility.

On the other hand there are liberals who try to compromise Biblical truth with science. Denying the spiritual in favor of the rational, or adopting the results of the higher and lower criticism, they reject the inspiration of the whole Bible.

There are yet others, though, who take the whole Bible to be the Word of God as do the fundamentalists, but in a little different way. They believe that the Spirit acts in the words of the historical records to reveal the LIVING Word. They recognize the Bible as the record of God's revelation of Himself throughout history, climaxing in Christ--an inspired record resulting from the activity of the Spirit in the individuals who wrote it. There is only one center of Christianity, and this center is spiritual fellowship with God through Christ--LIFE UNION WITH GOD IN CHRIST. When there is this koinonia--fellowship--there is the Body of Christ, the Ekklesia. The Ekklesia exists where there is this life-union with God through Christ. Only this union with God in Christ can be the CENTER of Christianity.

² Kokichi Kurosaki: One Body in Christ, <http://awildernessvoice.com/OneBodyInChrist.html>

On the Steps With Jesus

Jessica Robertson

On Saturday, Sage and I spent the afternoon together. Zoe had gone shopping with her friend and was going to spend the night at her house. Zeke loved the idea that we were going to be out of the house and he opted to stay at home and play Wii. You know, he may just become a video game developer some day. Sage and I had a few things we had to accomplish. First, we needed to get some milk, bread, and yogurt to supply us until our next big grocery run. Second, we wanted to pick up *New Moon* and watch it because it was fresh out on DVD. My girls and I read all the books and enjoy the movies. Third, we just wanted to hang out and spend a little time together because we could.

We were heading west down Summit Road toward Kent, when Sage brought up an interesting topic. I have been sitting here racking my brain about how we got on the topic...I think it was just "relational" and "location" in its nature. I think her curiosity was leading her to question about where God is....where Christ is. She knows that she has a new heart. I think we all struggle in our journey with His way of relating to us...and where he is physically in the moment.

Where was Christ? Is He down here or up there? Is He some big eye in the sky, peering down upon us? I told her about a time when I was in the counseling office with my counselor, Tim, and a counselor in training, Mary, when we were living down in GA. I was having the same exact struggle as a 30 year old woman in the middle of my most traumatic season of life. If He loved me soooooo much, where in the world was He at? The sun was pouring into the office window and the room was gaining in warmth and intensity. Tim and Mary were in prayer along side of me and I was asking God to reveal Himself to me. I asked Him to show me where He had been in my life. I was 7 years old when I asked Jesus to come live in my heart...a.k.a....take my heart and replace it with a new one. I spent the majority of my life completely unaware of His presence. So I sat there in the silence and warmth of the office waiting for Him to show me...and I don't think we were going to leave that place until He did. I had a memory. When I was a kid, I would sometimes be woken up by the sound of my parents in one of their "debates"....more or less, an argument...much like any argument between married couples...with a good amount of verbal assaults hurled toward one another. I methodically pulled the covers off of my body and slid out of bed, walked out of my bedroom, and slowly tip toed down the steps. I have always known where to step and not make a sound....the creeks and cracks of the floor have to be memorized so you can properly sneak in and out at all times of night growing up. About half way down (or up, depending on which way you are heading), the wall breaks and the banister starts. I sat there so I could hear them. I was speaking this out loud as the memory unfolded. Tim asked me, "Do you see Him?"...in my mind I imagined looking down the steps and through the banister....and then I felt Him beside me. I looked over to my right and He was sitting on the steps with me. I smiled...At this point in the retelling of the story, Sage chimes in with, "what did He look like?"...that...I can't really tell you. It's as if you can see a figure and recognize it for what it is...In my mind at the time, He was a gentleman...He was glowing~ no not like EDWARD in the sun (Twilight reference for any of you out there that love the story and will inevitably think of Edward when I mention the word "glowing"...even though I would like to believe that my new body will glow when I get it...what?)...glowing in that the steps were not lit very well...but He was visibly present. When I looked at Him, he smiled back...and before I knew it, we were both shaking our heads back and forth...in unison...He knew I was sad; He was agreeing with me. The memory began to fade and I was

left with a very palpable starting point of all the times He was present with me....He showed Himself to me...outside of me...but in my mind I knew His Spirit...was within.

So as Sage was wrapping her brain around that idea, she motioned to the gap in seating between us. She was sitting on Zeke's booster seat in the front passenger side of the van so we could actually make eye contact with one another. She said, "So my Jesus and your Jesus...or my Spirit and your Spirit are sitting here in the gap?" I said, "well...He may choose to show you that He is there...just to make His presence more concrete, but the reality is, He is within...in every place, in every moment..." She started giggling and said, "So when we go to the movies, Jesus gets in for free with me" ...Yep, Sage...He sure does...

God's Blessings Cover Everyone

Lennart Svensson

God's blessings cover everyone? Yes, even the non-believers! There is a short story in the Bible which is seldom told. The end of the story is well known. Do you remember when David dances wildly into Jerusalem and his wife gets angry. Back up a moment and look at the previous verses in 1 Kings 6: 1-11.

Here is the story in modern day shorthand:

- The Ark of the Covenant has been captured and held in a foreign land.
- King David goes to fetch the Ark without asking the Lord
- While bringing the Ark back a man name Uzzah put his hand out to steady the Ark. He touches it and God kills him.
- David gets real angry and deposits the Ark at a Gittite's home, named Obed-Edom.

Let's look at the Ark while it was in captivity. These were heathen people not under the covenant. They had taken the Ark because they thought it had power to help them win wars. They did not believe in God and so they were not under the Mosaic Law. The Ark did nothing for them, neither did it kill them. I would imagine that a number of inquisitive folks had a real good look and touch.

Then David goes to fetch it and one person touches it by accident. Old Uzzah did not see another day. He died right on the spot. He was a man under the Mosaic law and God had said "do not touch the Ark!" No second chances. 100% obedience or death.

Now we see another heathen custodian of the Ark. Obed-Edom the Gittite. David leaves the Ark with him and not only does God not kill him, He blesses him together with his entire household. I would imagine there were some children and inquisitive people around there as well. There are no recorded deaths, only blessings. Once again these heathen were not under the Mosaic Law.

If you read on you will notice that Obed was so blessed and so impressed by this God that blesses, he followed the Ark to Jerusalem and we see his name popping up in all sorts of places in later accounts.

Obedience to the law or freedom and grace? Not much of a choice is there?

The Mask

Alan Hiu

When Moses came down from Mount Sinai with two tablets of stone, his face was radiance with God's glory. This radiance was not from the law but from the preaching of Jesus that he had received from God through God showing him the tabernacles, the different type of feasts and offerings...

Due to the dispensation that Moses was in, the law he dispensed caused the radiance of God's glory to fade away. Moses had to put on a veil over his face to keep the Israelites from gazing at it while the radiance faded away. Under Law, the radiance from the glory of God slowly faded away...

2 Corinthians 3:13 ~ *We are not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face to keep the Israelites from gazing at it while the radiance was fading away.*

This same scenario still happens to Christian in this 21st century. Nobody was saved by beholding the Ten Commandments but by the preaching of Jesus. We are all saved by the Lord because somebody somehow preached the Good News of what Jesus had done for us. Our faces were immediately full of the radiance of God's glory when we believe the Gospel. We, in this grace dispensation, the radiance of this glory is supposed to be an ever increasing glory. But the sad thing is this, majority of us lost this radiance of God's glory as we were brought back to behold Moses and believe in the abiding of Law!

Like Moses, instead of putting on a veil, we at our time and dispensation, put on a mask, a mask of self righteousness! We fear our fellow Christian will know that the radiance if this glory is fading away. We start to live like a Christian forgetting that we are already a Christian. We start to DO thing that we think will make us righteous and forgetting that we are made righteous by the Blood of Jesus. We are concern over our action as consciousness of sins dwell in our midst. We have forgotten that sin is already a settled issue when Jesus died on the cross. We start to look at people's fault and condemning people in the name of God... Oh we, we, we... and I, I, I... how sad...?

I began to understand Moses' feeling the moment he first saw his people worshipping the golden calf. He was furious as he noticed that he had strike the first prize of [You shall have no other gods before me]. When he was up in the mountain, he had revelation on the Ten Commandments and he understood the consequences of sin. He was in fear and was helpless. He destroyed the tablets and the golden calf (the evidence of sin) hoping that nothing had happened. The Bible says these two tablets was the work of God. Nobody can do away with God's work but God. That is why Jesus had to come into this world to become Man and fulfilled the demands of the Law on our behalf and nailed these tablets together with Him on the Cross!

Matthew 5:17 ~ *Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill.*

It was the Grace of God that took down my mask, the mask of self righteousness. I realized that I am already a New Creation and my righteousness is not depending on what I have to do. The Holy Spirit in me can teach me all things. I just have to live my life beholding Jesus. If anyone come and teaches

me on how to live a Christian life, he or she is just being religious because only Jesus can live a Christian life! We need to point people to Jesus not Moses, so that the Holy Spirit can move in their midst as He is known as the Spirit of Truth. He moves where the truth is!

1 John 2:27 ~ *But the anointing which you have received from Him abides in you, and you do not need that anyone teach you; but as the same anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is true, and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you will abide in Him.*

When we behold the commandments, Moses will have to put on a mask on our face and we are actually climbing up the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. This mask of self righteousness only leads us to Do good and avoid DOING evil. Please let the Grace of God touches you and let Jesus take down your mask and you can start climbing up the Tree of Life...

John 1:17 ~ *For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.*

Christian life is all about Jesus and the Grace of God not Moses and the two tablets... Let go of you mask and remain in His REST because the only fight remain in our Christian life is to fight to remain in His REST!

Oh... this verse is so profound! We've to fight to remain in His REST means we are already in His REST! So relax....!

The Conviction of The Holy Spirit

Darin Hufford

I grew up hearing that infamous announcement at the end of a gruelingly long sermon; "The Spirit of God is in this place tonight." The lights were dimmed and the music was playing softly in the background as the sounds of people weeping and crying out to God filled the front of the building. As a kid, this usually meant that I had about 20 minutes remaining before we could leave and I could be reunited with the G.I. Joes my parents made me leave in the car.

Truthfully, I dreaded this moment at the end of all our Sunday evening services, because the spirit of the room was so depressing and sad. I found myself wishing I were a million miles away. Almost always the Pastor would tell us, "People are literally weeping and crying because the conviction of the Holy Spirit is on them tonight," as if we couldn't hear it for ourselves from anywhere in the building. It was as though we had set apart a special time in each service for everyone to be riddled with guilt and shame for their inadequacies and personal failures. It seemed that any time the Holy Spirit would show up, He would bring such conviction that everyone present was keenly aware of their every sin and shortcoming. This was always perplexing because I was told, "There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ," and yet the moment the Holy Spirit entered the room, He heaped condemnation and guilt on everyone there. Either He was working against the work of Christ or we were understanding something drastically wrong.

As a child, I learned to hate it when the Holy Spirit decided to pay our Church a visit. I loathed the feeling in the room. He reminded me of my best friend's mother. She always followed him around and told him every time he did something wrong. I hated going over to Jesse's house. We felt his mother's eyes on us all the time. She was always trying to make us feel guilty. If we didn't feel guilty, she had a way of making us feel guilty for not feeling guilty. She was exhausting. The Holy Spirit for me was that part of God that we had to be friends with because He came with the God-package. If He wasn't attached to God however, I knew I wouldn't even be friends with Him.

I've always held to one basic principle when it comes to God. If you wouldn't be friends with a person like that; you won't be friends with a God like that.

If you had a friend who followed you around 24 hours a day and pointed out every single sin you committed, you would avoid being around that person like the plague. The Christian mindset today concerning the Holy Spirit is similar. We have convinced ourselves that His job is to "convict" us of all our sins. We think He sits inside us and monitors every move we make and every move we are about to make. If we are considering doing something sinful, we imagine the Holy Spirit inside, saying, "Don't do it, that's bad, no no no." Then we wonder why the average Christian feels a bit uneasy when the Pastor announces, "The Holy Spirit is in this building tonight."

The Holy Spirit is made to look like a worried, super-sensitive and manipulative mother. He is "grieved" at the drop of a hat. It takes almost nothing for Him to burst out crying, running to the bedroom to lock Himself in because of something we said or did. That gets old after a while. I generally try to avoid people like that because it's a daunting task to be around them. I must have grieved Him a thousand times a day. I got to the point where every prayer I prayed started with me apologizing to the Holy Spirit for the countless times I've hurt His feelings. I felt like an out-of-control

abusive husband. After years of this, it was just easier not to pray, because I felt condemned and uncomfortable about the prospects of encountering the Holy Spirit all over again.

It wasn't until years later that I really began to study what the Scriptures say about the Holy Spirit. I began to take a serious look at everything I had been taught and I started comparing it to what is actually true. I also compared the modern-day Christian perspective on the Holy Spirit with my personal experience of knowing Him. At almost every point, I found that what we were told in Church about Him is not in the least bit true. This is what happens when our knowledge of God's Spirit is based on teachings and sayings rather than actual personal experience. I found that people would fight to the death for something they had memorized but when push came to shove; they had never personally experienced a single thing that they claim to believe. They only believe it because someone they respect told it to them. Their belief system is only as strong as the person who passed it on to them. This is the case with almost all of the teachings on the Holy Spirit.

Ironically, after reading this, people will comment by quoting Scripture concerning the Holy Spirit in an effort to prove me wrong, but rarely will you have anyone comment based on what they personally know. That's the problem with modern-day Christianity. It's not about knowing for yourself. It's about reading and memorizing.

I have found that the Holy Spirit does NOT convict us of our sins. He also doesn't whisper "no, no, no" just before we're about to sin.

That statement alone, if you get it and understand it, can change your entire Christian life forever! The problem is that EVERYTHING we have been taught concerning the Holy Spirit completely contradicts that statement. Sadly, most people will quit reading here and now because they'll assume they are being led astray by a heretic. What is even more upsetting is that most of us will actually fight for all we are worth to maintain a hideous picture of God's Spirit within our hearts rather than open ourselves to the possibility that He is something quite different and much more compelling than what we've been sold. We do this with the Heart of God, as well. I sit in amazement as I watch an entire generation of people go into an absolute rage over the grace and love message. They'll fight for all they are worth to prove that God is mean and scary and not loving and gentle. When I suggest to people that God would never, ever leave them, I am flabbergasted at their perverted responses. Rather than take that security and draw closer to His Heart, they'll purposefully conjure up terrible and wicked scenarios in their minds in an effort to find an exception in which God would ultimately leave them. I believe that this is precisely why Jesus called His generation a "Perverted" one.

The Holy Spirit does not convict Christians of their sins

He does convict the world of sin so they will know they need a Savior. Once we come to the Savior, however, He no longer convicts us of sin. He convicts us of righteousness.

When you are about to do something wrong, or just after you've done something wrong, and you hear that little voice from within you telling you how wrong what you just did was, that wasn't the Holy Spirit. THAT WAS YOU! It was your heart. Remember, God wrote His laws upon our hearts. Your heart knows right from wrong because of that. That voice inside you IS YOU! Think about it for a moment. Why would God write the law on our hearts and then also have the Holy Spirit stand beside us and convict us every time we did something wrong? The truth is, we don't need the Holy Spirit to convict us because we convict ourselves because we know the truth.

This is HUGELY IMPORTANT! Every time I ask people what their basic feelings are about the Holy Spirit, they almost always tell me that they are uneasy with Him. I've stood before audiences of several thousand people and I've asked them to close their eyes and raise their hands if they feel intimidation when the subject of the Holy Spirit is brought up, and believe it or not, almost every hand in the building goes up every single time I do this. We feel this way because we have been blaming the Holy Spirit for behavior that is completely contrary to His nature. If you understand that He's not the one breathing down your back, pointing out your every sin to you, you can actually open your heart to getting to know Him.

He is not interested in pointing out your sin to you. It's not even how He thinks. He only faces righteous things, so righteousness is all He points you towards. I was watching "Super Nanny" one day and there was this father who was following his child around saying, "No, no no Billy.....don't do that, Billy.....stop it, Billy.....put that down, Billy" over and over. Finally Super Nanny sat him down and explained that when we do this to our children, they have a 30 to 40 percent higher chance of having an inferiority complex when they become adults. She went on to explain a better way to handle Billy when he was about to do something wrong. She taught this man to divert his son's attention by holding up a toy from across the room so Billy would choose to play with the toy rather than the electrical outlet.

This is exactly what the Holy Spirit does in our lives. He convicts us of righteousness! He inspires us to do good and righteous things. He shows us the better way in life and encourages us to take it. He absolutely does not follow you around nagging and nitpicking your every move. The Holy Spirit is not about getting you to stop sinning. He's about moving you towards righteousness. When you understand this about His personality, He suddenly becomes likable again. I believe that Christians today suffer from a severe spiritual inferiority complex. This is true because we believe God's Spirit has followed us around like Billy's father and pointed out every wrong thing we've done in our lives. This is so sad because nothing could be further from the truth.

We come from a generation of Christianity that has taught us that the Holy Spirit always looks at the dark side of everything in our lives. This is defamation of character! It's the opposite of truth. God's Spirit always looks at the bright side of your life. In the end, you will ultimately focus your attention on the exact place you believe God is focusing His attention. If you believe it's sin, then that's where you'll always be focused. If you believe it's righteousness, your focus will be on good things. My children can either learn what NOT to do, or they can be encouraged with what good they can do. I choose the latter and so does the Spirit of God.

License

Dan Stone

Does the union life emphasis upon "spirit as ultimate reality" encourage license? Directly or indirectly this question is asked of me more than any other.

My first response is the same as Paul's: "Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? May it never be!" (Rom. 6:15). My second response is that I prefer to label as "growing pains" that which others call license. Some might prefer to say that what looks like license is God's unique way of working His truth into our inner consciousness. At any rate, this subject certainly needs further clarification, for to many observers union life teaching appears at times to encourage license.

When people first hear union life or spirit teaching, they tend to express the only point of view available to them. Because they are entrenched in a dualistic outlook, they just naturally translate what they hear as an encouragement to sin. Society trains us to be objective persons (see-aters) who distrust the unseen, the spiritual, or the metaphysical. We are the products of the educational system in which we grew up. Unfortunately, that system has taught us to judge by outer appearances, even though Jesus expressly warned against it. "Judge not according to appearance, but judge righteous judgment" (Jn. 7:24).

In addition, society has dictated certain standards of conduct for each peer group. These standards are enforced by a reward system which we might call the law of rewards. Each peer group extends or withholds favors to its members based upon their conduct. The system is totally based upon performance, on outer actions. Since the system is the dispenser of approval and rewards, persons governed by that system are led to believe that the system is inherently sacred. From such a belief these persons naturally but erroneously conclude that spiritual maturity, begun in grace, can somehow be completed in works. Of course, union life teaching intrudes as an unwelcomed contradiction to the law of rewards.

Another error emerging from our compliance with the law of rewards is the ridiculous notion that we can somehow repay God for His redemptive work. We are led down the path of "commitment to Christ," of "consecrated self," and of a myriad other designations for the same dead-end. We become enmeshed in the Romans seven syndrome of attempting to do good, but we seldom attain the desired inner consciousness of satisfaction. Our attempts to discipline ourselves or refrain from

doing "wrong" end with equally disappointing results. The only way our frustration can ever be appeased is by comparing our meager actions with someone else's failure; or by excusing our failure in the light of another's grosser wrong. We find comfort in measuring ourselves by our intentions and others by their actions. That approach gives us an outside possibility of overcoming the Romans seven syndrome.

To those who hear union life teaching and know they have heard truth, the "eyes of the heart" (Eph. 1:18) have been enlightened. They have taken the Spirit's bait. They differ now in their inner consciousness, for they are becoming "see-through-ers" rather than "see-at-ers."

Though the Spirit is beginning His work in the inner man, the new see-through-er does not yet live from a fixed inner consciousness. He vacillates between a new awareness of his fixed union with God and an old consciousness of separation from God. But in the process his perspective on life is moving from the level of what is visible to the level of the invisible, which is spirit.

During this period of vacillation, some spectators will inevitably conclude that the believer has fallen into license if his conduct fails to conform to the acceptable pattern of the peer group. This license may take the form of smoking, social drinking, swearing, using make-up, being divorced, an unacceptable sexual practice, or a hundred other activities. The spectators are even more appalled when the believer now takes these deviations not as gross license, but as God's intended path for him!

What is happening? The believer is moving into a fixed inner consciousness by personally experiencing and acknowledging the Spirit's work in his humanity. I am the first to admit that many who hear union life teaching initially interpret it as a green light for increased permissiveness. Some people need to experience a total overthrow of their old standards. But in time they will put aside promiscuous activities, for they will realize that those outer crutches offer nothing more than a new bondage.

This process will appear as license to those who only perceive reality on the performance level. However, what is needed at this juncture is not condemnation, but a patient awareness that God is at work producing a fixed inner consciousness in each believer.

As the inner consciousness becomes his fixed consciousness, the see-through-er discovers in himself the full identity of the One he contains - his "not I but Christ" spirit. Colossians 2:9,10 says, "For in

Him [Christ] all the fullness of deity dwells in bodily form, and in Him you have come to fullness of life." Since all the fullness of deity dwells in Christ, and Christ dwells in the believer, the fullness of deity (at least qualitatively) dwells in each believer.

Union life trusts the Spirit to woo and illumine each individual to the awareness of his true position in Christ. We know that God uses alternatives in this matter-life to cause us to know Him, to act, or to do whatever He desires from us at the moment. God means us to have the results of our actions. But these results have the purpose of leading us into a fixed inner consciousness of oneness. Admittedly, some actions appear to plunge the person into further fires of purification. However, these experiences are personal and private, and we dare not judge by unrighteous judgment what God is doing in another's life. To do so is to tread on holy ground.

We must see that life's actions are designed to purge a person from dualistic living - from separate seeing, from separated choices. These fires of purification drive him to see all outer conduct as the work of the Spirit.

The home-base for the see-through-er is the awareness of his own life as an expression of God, the other-lover. This position knows no reward system for good conduct. This path results in a death for us, and in life for others. "So death works in us and life in you" (II Cor. 4:12). Paul also calls it a weakness (II Cor. 12:5, 9, 10). No one seeks this type of "death"; it is thrust upon him. It is the life for which God has been preparing him. It is summed up in the statement, "a body have you prepared for me" (Heb. 10:15). Temporary excursions into what objective persons call license is but a chapter in the preparation for throne living.

Again, the principle is not life unto life, but death unto life for others. "Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone, but if it dies, it bears much fruit" (Jn.12:24). Life for others comes spontaneously as the container (the person) becomes fixed in his real reason for being. Jesus said, "He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it" (Matt. 10:39).

Remember my earlier statement, "The work of the Holy Spirit for each person is private and personal." The work of the Spirit is to transfer one's perspective from temporary appearances to spirit-reality. He is transferring us into the fixed inner consciousness that the spirit realm is the realm of ultimate reality. As a form of Christ, the see-through-er exists for others. The see-through-er has moved from seeing temporary, outer appearances as reality to seeing permanent, inner spirit-reality.

We need not be side-tracked by the seeming inconsistency of outer conduct, for in the spirit realm God has produced the finished product. Outer conduct is never the yardstick for Holy Spirit persons whose inner consciousness is fixed on the permanent reality. Jesus' own outer conduct was a puzzle to the religious community of His day. Most of them rejected Him. Union life persons know themselves to be available to God for His purposes, even in the apparent inconsistencies.

Union life does not encourage license. However, it does see through the temporary outer events of our lives to the inner working of the Holy Spirit. This teaching accepts as the work of the Spirit what some may call license. It speaks the word of faith: "For it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His own good pleasure"(Phil. 2:13).

What Do You Mean? Christ IN You?

Nancy Gilmore

Paul made an astounding statement when he said that "he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit ". This union of our spirit with the Spirit of God is the fulfillment of Jesus' prayer in John 17, "that they may be one, just as We are one; I in them, and Thou in Me, that they may be perfected in unity." The great secret of living that was given to Paul by special revelation is the fact of "Christ in you, the hope of glory". This was his special emphasis. But what does it mean for Christ to be in us? Most of us start out by conceiving of God as an old patriarch who lives way off in the skies. Later, when we come into a personal relationship with the Father through Jesus Christ, we learn that instead of living a long distance from us, God lives in us through His Son. Yet we still tend to think of Him as separate from us, even though "in" us.

Paul, however, came to see the glorious truth that for Christ to be in us is for us to be joined as one with Him. There is no separation between us: we have become one spirit, just as He and His Father were one when He walked this earth as Jesus of Nazareth.

Continually Paul spoke of believers as being in Christ. He was referring to this spiritual union. To be "in" Christ is to be joined as one with Him, so that His life is our life.

Using the example of a sponge filled with water to the point that it can absorb nothing else aids me in understanding how two are one. You don't necessarily see the water, but it's there. Yet if the sponge is squeezed, the water appears. The water and the sponge are one, but the one does not dissipate the other. And through our life's experience, as we are "squeezed", the Holy Spirit flows out. From our innermost being, our spirit, come rivers of living water.

An illustration I like even better is to think of our human spirit as jello in powdered form. The Spirit of God is the hot water that is added to the jello to make it what it is intended to be. The jello is of no real value until the water is joined to it. The powdered jello absorbs the water to the extent that it becomes so much a part of it that you can't tell one from the other. The water is the "fulfillment" of the jello, enabling it to be what it was meant to be. So too with our union with Christ. It looks like me, but it is really Him; even as the jello looks like jello but is really water expressed as jello.

The flavors of the jello might represent our individuality. Grape is Nancy, peach is Marj, cherry is Jody, orange is Jenny, and strawberry is Mary Ann. We're all the same, and yet we're all different. Many flavors, but the same filling. Each of us is one spirit with the Lord, yet expressed in different ways. And of course we're all in different molds, different bodies, with our various shapes and sizes and unique characteristics.

When Paul spoke of Christ as being "in" us, he meant that when we live it is really Christ living. For Him to live was Christ! He was simply the particular flavor of jello in which Christ chose to express Himself - Christ in Paul form.

Jesus was a unique expression of the Father. And He prayed that we might be unique expressions of Him! "That they may be one, just as We are one; I in them, and Thou in Me, that they may be perfected in unity." His name was Immanuel, "God with us." For Him to live was God; so too for us to

live is Christ. He lives as us, expressing Himself through us just as the Father expressed Himself through Him. This is the meaning of "Christ in you, the hope of glory."

An Address to the Clergy³

William Law

[Addr-23] The necessity of a continual inspiration of the Spirit of God, both to begin the first, and continue every step of a divine life in man, is a truth to which every life in nature, as well as all scripture, bears full witness. A natural life, a bestial life, a diabolical life, can subsist no longer, than whilst they are immediately and continually under the working power of that root or source, from which they sprung. Thus it is with the divine life in man, it can never be in him, but as a growth of life in and from God. Hence it is, that resisting the Spirit, quenching the Spirit, grieving the Spirit, is that alone which gives birth and growth to every evil that reigns in the world, and leaves men, and churches, not only an easy, but a necessary prey to the devil, the world, and the flesh. And nothing but obedience to the Spirit, trusting to the Spirit, walking in the Spirit, praying with and for its continual inspiration, can possibly keep either men, or churches, from being sinners, or idolators, in all that they do. For everything in the life, or religion of man, that has not the Spirit of God for its mover, director, and end, be it what it will, is but earthly, sensual, or devilish. The truth and perfection of the gospel state could not show itself, till it became solely a ministration of the Spirit, or a kingdom in which the Holy Spirit of God had the doing of all that was done in it. The apostles, whilst Christ was with them in the flesh, were instructed in heavenly truths from his mouth, and enabled to work miracles in his Name, yet not qualified to know and teach the mysteries of his kingdom. After his resurrection, he conversed with them forty days, speaking to them of things pertaining to the kingdom of God; nay though he breathed on them, and said, "receive ye the Holy Ghost," &c., yet this also would not do, they were still unable to preach, or bear witness to the truth, as it is in Jesus. And the reason is, there was still a higher dispensation to come, which stood in such an opening of the divine life in their hearts, as could not be effected from an outward instruction of Christ himself. For though he had sufficiently told his disciples the necessity of being born again of the Spirit, yet he left them unborn of it, till he came again in the power of the Spirit. He breathed on them, and said, "Receive ye the Holy Ghost," yet that which was said and done was not the thing itself, but only a type or outward signification of what they should receive, when he, being glorified, should come again in the fullness and power of the Spirit, breaking open the deadness and darkness of their hearts with light and life from heaven, which light did, and alone could, open and verify in their souls, all that he had said and promised to them whilst he was with them in the flesh. All this is expressly declared by Christ himself, saying unto them, "I tell you the truth, it is expedient for you that I go away"; therefore Christ taught them to believe the want, and joyfully to expect the coming of a higher and more blessed state, than that of his bodily presence with them. For he adds, "if I go not away, the comforter will not come"; therefore the comfort and blessing of Christ to his followers could not be had, till something more was done to them, and they were brought into a higher state than they could be by his verbal instruction of them. "But if I go away," says he, "I will send him unto you, and when the comforter, the Spirit of truth is come, he will guide you into all truth; he shall glorify me" (that is, shall set up my kingdom in its glory, in the power of the Spirit) "for he shall receive of mine, and shall show it unto you: I said of mine, because all things that the Father hath are mine," John xvi.

³ William Law: An Address to the Clergy <http://www.ccel.org/l/law/address/addr01.htm>

[Addr-24] Now when Christ had told them of the necessity of an higher state than that they were in, and the necessity of such a comforting illuminating guide, as they could not have till his outward teaching in human language was changed into the inspiration, and operation of his Spirit in their souls, he commands them, not to begin to bear witness of him to the world, from what they did and could in an human way know of him, his birth his life, doctrines, death, sufferings, resurrection, &c., but to tarry at Jerusalem, till they were endued with power from on high; saying unto them, "Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you. And then shall ye bear witness unto me, both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and unto the utmost part of the earth."

[Addr-25] Here are two most important and fundamental truths fully demonstrated, First, that the truth and perfection of the gospel state could not take place, till Christ was glorified, and his kingdom among men made wholly and solely a continual immediate ministration of the Spirit: everything before this was but subservient for a time, and preparatory to this last dispensation, which could not have been the last, had it not carried man above types, figures and shadows, into the real possession and enjoyment of that which is the spirit and truth of a divine life. For the end is not come till it has found the beginning; that is, the last dispensation of God to fallen man cannot be come, till putting an end to the "bondage of weak and beggarly elements," Gal. iv.9, it brings man to that dwelling in God, and God in him, which he had at the beginning.

[Addr-26] Secondly, that as the apostles could not, so no man, from their time to the end of the world, can have any true and real knowledge of the spiritual blessings of Christ's redemption, or have a divine call, capacity, or fitness to preach, and bear witness of them to the world, but solely by that same divine Spirit opening all the mysteries of a redeeming Christ in their inward parts, as it did in the apostles, evangelists, and first ministers of the gospel.

[Addr-27] For why could not the apostles, who had been eye witnesses to all the whole process of Christ, why could they not with their human apprehension declare and testify the truth of such things, till they "were baptized with fire, and born again of the Spirit"? It is because the truth of such things, or the mysteries of Christ's process, as knowable by man, are nothing else in themselves, but those very things which are done by this heavenly fire and Spirit of God in our souls. Therefore to know the mysteries of Christ's redemption, and to know the redeeming work of God in our own souls, is the same thing; the one cannot be before, or without the other. Therefore every man, be he who he will, however able in all kinds of human literature, must be an entire stranger to all the mysteries of gospel redemption, and can only talk about them as of any other tale he has been told, till they are brought forth, verified, fulfilled, and witnessed to by that, which is found, felt and enjoyed of the whole process of Christ in his soul. For as redemption is in its whole nature an inward spiritual work, that works only in the altering, changing, and regenerating the life of the soul, so it must be true, that nothing but the inward state of the soul can bear true witness to the redeeming power of Christ. For as it wholly consists in altering that which is the most radical in the soul, bringing forth a new spiritual death, and a new spiritual life, it must be true, that no one can know or believe the mysteries of Christ's redeeming power, by historically knowing, or rationally consenting to that which is said of him and them in written or spoken words, but only and solely by an inward experimental finding, and feeling the operation of them, in that new death, and new life, both of which must be effected in the soul of man, or Christ is not, cannot be found, and known by the soul as its salvation. It must also be equally true, that the redeemed state of the soul, being in itself

nothing else but the resurrection of a divine and holy life in it, must as necessarily from first to last be the sole work of the breathing creating Spirit of God, as the first holy created state of the soul was. And all this, because the mysteries of Christ's redeeming power, which work and bring forth the renewed state of the soul, are not creaturely, finite, outward things, that may be found and enjoyed by verbal descriptions, or formed ideas of them, but are a birth and life, and spiritual operation, which as solely belongs to God alone, as his creating power. For nothing can redeem, but that same power which created the soul. Nothing can bring forth a good thought in it, but that which brought forth the power of thinking. And of every tendency towards goodness, be it ever so small, that same may be truly affirmed of it, which St. Paul affirmed of his highest state, "yet not I, but Christ that liveth in me."

If Any Man Be In Christ

Fred Pruitt

‘Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold all things are become new. And all things are of God.’

This is the most amazing proclamation in the New Testament. One of the most quoted, perhaps the least believed. Because this word from Paul is not written in the future tense, waiting for a later glory. This is present tense. There is no mistaking the meaning of the words, for they are not written hiddenly. There is no code here. It means what it says. It can only be seen in faith, because such a total completeness is invisible to us and the literal nature of these words pushes them beyond the bounds of our reason.

It is simply saying we are new creatures, creations, in the Resurrection. Old things are indeed passed away with finality. (Dead is dead. Dead and gone. Who wants to dwell on the dead? We look to the Living!)

What was former is gone. The Usurper, pretender to the throne has been put out, and the rightful king has returned to take his throne. The new king has brought his peace with him, so that by his command and by his power the land is now at peace.

We find ourselves arising anew from what we thought was the ash heap of our death into new life, new vision, new hope, with faith welling up from within, from beyond our weakness. We step into a completely new country, where all things are of God. That’s what it simply says, doesn’t it? *‘And all things are of God.’*

‘God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation;

To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation.’

We are witnesses to a miracle, a Life which the rational mind cannot comprehend or hold within its grasp. This is the Life which overtook us and made us His when we knew no better. When we were looking another way. The miracle that we have seen is that God comes to us in Love out of nowhere. It was not what we expected, and beyond any hope we ever entertained.

It breaks our mind because love is not something we expect. Before we knew we were loved, the first great break-in of God into our lives is by overwhelming, “I-cannot-believe-it” love. Like Candid Camera came “when you least expect it,” even so does He. God simply wells up inside us and our lips cannot help but to praise Him for the abundant lavishment of His Gift of Christ in all of us, and in everything, everywhere. In this miracle we see that we are joined with Him, and that as He walks in the world so do we.

Then we see that walking in Him we are now agents, catalysts, of the reconciliation that God extends to all who will receive it, because we have seen in ourselves the true miracle of grace, the

unthinkable gift of God, to be revealed in each of us as our very selves, in that He and we are one. And then this gift is available to the world, as Christ's gift of Himself as you and me, to now be a living word of reconciliation.

The Masks We Wear and Other Scary Stuff

Jamie Weeks

There is a rough spot on the edge of my stainless steel kitchen sink that reminds me of who I am and who I used to think I was. I like to rub my finger over that spot because that person I used to be seems like a distant dream. Why? Because that spot was caused by me throwing a bowl in a fit of rage when I fell off the end of my rope.

You see, I used to live my life like a rain cloud, gathering and storing up all my "un-Christian" emotions until inevitably the cloud would BURST!!! And I would rain on anyone in my path!

On the bowl breaking day, I remember calling our church and talking to our Christian counselor. I told her I just couldn't take it anymore and, of course, she quickly scheduled me an appointment. During my session, I told her how I always thought that if I did the right thing that God would bless me, and my life would take on the rosy glow of the Christians in those blue Bible story books that you see in doctors' offices. Well, I WAS DOING MY PART, what the crap was God doing??? God had become the ultimate Indian -giver; He promised something that I was not seeing, abundant Life.

The answer I received was a good and fair answer. "Filter everything through God's Word."

Unfortunately, when we view God's Word as the ULTIMATE HOW-TO BOOK things get a little tricky.

I needed SOMEONE to tell me that I WAS NEVER MEANT TO LIVE THE CHRISTIAN LIFE!!! That I couldn't live it and that God never intended for me to. That Jesus had become my Life and He was just waiting for me to let him live His life in and through me! I needed to hear about GRACE!! Not Grace, the doctrine, Grace, the Man, Who had become my LIFE when I believed.

In a religious system that prides itself on phrases like "The Moral Majority" (excuse me while I puke), the emphasis is put on our morality, our performance, our "right living." We become masters of playing the Pharisee Masquerade; we put on our "precious Jesus faces" in front of the world and slowly wither on the inside under the crushing weight of "religious expectation." No wonder Christians have just as many suicides, divorces, etc. as the world. What really changed when we believed besides our future address? And how the heck does that help me NOW??

Truth: The Moral Majority look no different than the immoral minority to God, if they haven't believed. And they are going to be sorely disappointed when they realize their self-righteousness didn't impress God a lick!

Truth: God couldn't care less about my performance; He is only interested in Jesus' performance on the cross.

Truth: There are a lot of Christians who see Jesus as a "juke -box" Savior; put your "quarter" in and He'll play your favorite song. (What happens when the needle gets hung? They just don't make Saviors like they used to, I guess.)

Truth: I don't need to wear my "religious mask" before God. I am the RIGHTEOUSNESS OF CHRIST because of one Man's obedience, not mine.

Truth: I am better than I know because Grace said so and He is the final authority.

As Christians we have been told too many horror stories about God as we sat around our religious campfires. We have attended too many church masquerades where God forbid you come without your mask. And we have treated our life like a perpetual Halloween hoping for treats not tricks as we begged on God's doorstep.

One final Truth: Jesus is God's best and final Gift. His death for us and as us has brought us into reconciliation with God. All the sin in the world was done away with at the cross: past, present, and future. Life became the issue. Life: Jesus' Life in exchange for our death and our pseudo-life of effort.

Throw your mask down; God saw beneath it anyway. He doesn't want our best; He wants us to ACCEPT HIS.

With God it's all treats, no tricks.

New Pair o' Dimes

Fred Pruitt

Our calling is not to re-create the first century church. I quit looking for the "perfect" church, where they do everything according to the Bible, a long time ago. Been there, done that, dead end.

We are a new church, always part of and an expression of the eternal church, but right here, right now, we are the church that is now -- the Body of Christ in the 21st Century. Without forgetting what went before, we are called to name how it will be in our time. By the Spirit in us, we bring it into being.

Since we walk in this world walking as He is walking, we have limitless freedom, the unbounded freedom of the infinite love of God. This is freedom driven by other-love, which therefore has purpose and power to build, uphold and expand all over in light and joy.

And in that sense, anything goes. Whatsoever is for the purpose of upholding, building up, giving life and defeated death, is legitimate in the kingdom of God. *"Love worketh no ill to his neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law."*

This can be frightening to some folks, because love is intangible and undefined. Yet every one of the stories of Old Testament men and women of God culminating in Jesus, collectively, are the same building example of Love expanding through human history. The stories are less principles to live by, as it has been taught by so many for so long, than they are examples of Love being lived out of the undefined Freedom of God. When we start making principles on how they lived their lives and then attempt to order our lives by those principles, we invent love by formula, which is a contradiction in terms. Love by formula is no more than the hamburger joint telling us from the TV how they love to see us smile -- yes, as long as we are plunking down money on their counter!

Peter wanted to know exactly how many times he had to forgive his brother. Maybe he was thinking of somebody in particular when he asked the question. But Jesus' answer shows love not only fulfills the law (by forgiving exactly as many times as the law requires) but exceeds the law, in that love has no limit. The law must of necessity have a prescribed limit because the law cannot be intangible and undefined.

What the law cannot be without, love cannot be with. Which is why love remains undefined. As well as freedom remains undefined -- they go hand in hand. Love and Freedom are out of the deepest mysterious depths of the Godhead. Everybody can understand the law -- tit for tat. It makes sense.

Love disregards tit for tat and takes no notice of it. Love can only love. That does not make sense. Because love loving something which does not love it back is no benefit to the love. Still, that is what love does. And this love is God's response to our existence. To love where He is not loved. To reveal Himself to those who have not asked. To shine light in darkness.

When we were yet enemies

This is the life we have inherited, and is now that life that flows out of us. A life that returns blessing however it is received; a life that waters the countryside all around; a life that gives shelter and shade from the heat of the day.

Love Bears All Things⁴

Paul Anderson-Walsh

Agapē Bears All Things

Surely it would be remarkable to boast that agapē bears all things if we mean that agapē “endures” all things or to put it in a more contemporary language, “agapē puts up with all our nonsense.” I remember when I first began to engage with the Calvinist teaching of the “perseverance of the saints”, I could not help wondering if the real miracle was not that the saints persevered with God but that God persevered with the saints. Of course, the blunt truth is that God perseveres with us regardless of our fidelity but that is not what is on view here. There is a much deeper truth.

The Greek equivalent word for the verb “bear” is “stego” which means “to thatch or to cover”. The idea conveyed is that “stego” seeks to preserve an object by covering and shielding it from harm, and protecting it from anything which threatens it.

While not an exact parallel, the imagery of “thatching” and “covering” evokes memories of Noah and his Ark. Indeed, that story captures the very heart of this most magnificent characteristic of agapē. Genesis 6:14-8:1 recount the story of Noah’s Ark and record Noah’s graduation from the school of faith to the life of faith. The Lord instructed him to make a boat and in so doing, provided him with meticulous specifications. Noah was told to “pitch” the boat inside and out [Gen. 6:14] and it is this word, “pitch” which demands our attention. What is being crafted for us in this account of Noah is typological. The event is pointing towards the Cross, illustrating in the natural realm what will happen in the spiritual realm. “To pitch” means “to cover, purge, make atonement or make reconciliation”. It is derived from the Hebrew word “kaphar” which is “to cover over or to atone for one’s sin; to propitiate”. Now, here is the really exciting part. You will recall that it was Noah’s family who went into the Ark and there, they found shelter from the storm and safe passage to dry land (the new earth, if you will). In the same way today, we, the believers, are placed into Christ [Col. 3:3] in whom we find shelter from the storms; we are brought safely to the New Jerusalem and preserved from the impending judgment. Thus, the Ark is a type of Jesus. The purpose of the pitch was to make the Ark watertight. Indeed, we will see later in this book that our salvation is watertight. However, you may ask, “How could Noah and his precious cargo know that they were safe inside the Ark?” The answer is delightfully simple. They were safe because the Lord shut them in, sealing the outside of the Ark Himself.

“And they that went in, went in male and female of all flesh, as God had commanded him: and the Lord shut him in.”

Genesis 7:16

We have here another aspect of agapē. Just as the Lord God closed the door and shut Noah and the cargo in, we see that He has shut us safely in too. It is He who does the sealing. No water will breach the Ark and nothing will come in as importantly as nothing will fall out. God designed the Ark to an exact specification. He knew in advance the pressures which the Ark would have to withstand and He

⁴ Paul Anderson Walsh: *Until Christ Is Formed*, Book 1; Safe and Sound

knows the pressures which we will have to withstand in the seas of this present life. Agapē has budgeted for the tempests and you can be assured that agapē bears all things.

Q: What difference would it make to your life if you believe that God has already covered you for every eventuality which the storms and floods of life will throw up at you and that when the enemy comes in like a flood, He will raise a standard against it?

Christians and the Bible

Darin Hufford

Just about everywhere I go when I am traveling, I always ask the same set of questions to the audience I am preaching to. I ask them, "How many of you feel like you probably don't read your Bible as much as you should". With every congregation, regardless of the denomination, almost every hand in the building goes up. Then I ask, "How many of you feel self conscious about your knowledge of the Scriptures". Again, every hand in the building is raised. Then I ask them, "How many of you feel condemned in your spirit every time the subject of Bible reading comes up". All the hands go up again.

I ask these questions because after years of feeling like this in my personal walk, I began to suspect that I wasn't alone. As I speak with people from all over the world about this subject I have become more and more convinced that the Christian teachings about the Bible are quite possibly the main cause of condemnation and oppression in the body of Christ today. I don't believe that I have ever met another Christian brother or sister who is not under some sort of religious bondage when the issue of Bible reading is brought up.

The following article will either challenge you and set you free, or infuriate you and cause you to shut down. Some people who read this will copy it and send it to everyone they know, and others won't make it half way through the first page before tearing it up and burning it. Some will call me a hero while others will call me a heretic. All I ask is that while you read this; sincerely THINK ABOUT IT. Don't just shut down out of religious obligation to not listen to anything that doesn't sound like what you have been taught all your life.

I will separate this into three parts because it's unusually long. My hope was that this would be a blog that people would copy and email to all their friends and family members. If you copy the link and past it to an email, you can send this too literally thousands of people who NEED to read this. Help me get this message out to the world!

Disclaimer

Before we get started I would like to plainly state that I firmly believe that the Bible is inspired by the Spirit of God. I don't question it's authenticity for one moment. I have read the Bible from Genesis to Revelation at least 10 times, and in no less than 5 translations. I've spent hundreds of hours in Bible college classes and thousands more, studying on my own time. I've read commentaries on almost every book of the Bible and have personally taught on every single book in the Old Testament and New Testament. I've studied Greek and I've studied the Hebrew. For many years of my life I spent an average of about 7 hours a day doing nothing but reading and studying this wonderful book. I even would purposefully fall asleep listening to the Bible on tape so I could completely memorize entire books. I say all that to say this: I respect the Bible and I hold it close to my heart. There is no other book in the world like it. The content in the Bible is absolutely life changing.

What I am about to say in this article is on behalf of PEOPLE. Though I love the Bible and all it has to offer; I love people even more, and nothing grieves my heart more than to watch people being hurt

or condemned by what has been taught them concerning the Bible. This goes out to everyone who just needs a break from the constant guilt they feel for not being as faithful to the Bible as they've been taught they should. I write this to the person who is riddled with insecurity every time a conversation comes up about particular stories or passages they feel they should know, but don't. This is for the one who has basically given up on hearing the voice of God in your life because you can't understand the Shakespearian dialect or the theological principals of the original Greek or Hebrew. More than anything I want to bring a breath of fresh air to those of you who feel like you're a million miles behind other Christians because you haven't spent the time that they have reading your Bible.

The Great Exchange

At the end of Gideon's "deliverance career" the Israelites wanted to make him their king. Gideon refused, and said that instead of becoming their king he would like them to each bring him a gold ear ring from the plunder. Everyone brought a portion of gold and Gideon melted it down and made a "golden Ephod". The Ephod was the vest that the priests put on when they entered the holy of holies. In the pocket of the Ephod were the lots, which were used when they "caste lots" in order to determine God's will in a certain situation. When the priest entered the temple wearing the golden Ephod, he could actually hear the voice of God audibly. You might remember one time when King David told the priests to "bring him the golden Ephod". David put it on and went into the temple to ask God whether or not he should attack the Amalekites. David heard the audible voice of God tell him to attack.

The story of Gideon goes on to say that after the golden Ephod was made, "all of Israel prostituted themselves by worshiping the Ephod". Think of this for a moment. They actually worshiped the way in which to determine God's will over worshiping God Himself. The story later goes on to say that it became a snare to Gideon and his family.

So what does this have to do with the Bible? One of the things we are taught about the Bible is that it is the way in which to determine the will of God. Just as the Israelites prostituted themselves after the golden Ephod, I believe that modern day Christianity is doing the exact same thing with the Bible. We have prostituted ourselves after the Bible and there is no doubt in my mind that it has become a thorn and a snare to almost every Christian in America. In fact I think many Christians have actually traded God for the Bible. Many others have even come to the point where they think God IS the Bible. I truly believe that the Bible has become the golden Ephod of our time.

Who's Your Daddy?

It's interesting to me that we actually call the Bible "The Word of God". The Bible doesn't make that claim about itself. In the book of John it says: "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God", but then it goes on to say, "The Word became flesh". The Bible outright tells us that JESUS is the Word. Not the Bible. There wasn't even a Bible put together when this passage was written. When we teach people that the Bible is "The Word" we are flat out exchanging Christ for the Bible.

I want you to imagine what goes through the mind of Christ when he sees Churches that call themselves "**Bible Churches**". Think about that for a moment. Don't you think it's funny that we would choose such a title. The ironic and comical thing is that when we hear the term "Bible Church" we feel safe and comfortable, but when we hear "Church of Christ" we usually associate that with a cult? Don't get me wrong, I don't really believe that every church that uses the term "Bible Church" is really out to worship the Bible over Christ, but at the very least I think it's an interesting and telling choice of wording.

Christ Himself said "I will build **MY** Church" and today we have "Bible Churches" in every city of America. The name alone gives our intentions and true feelings away. We are no different in this generation from the Pharisees in Jesus' day. They had a very similar view of their Old Testament scriptures. Jesus confronted them and said, "*You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life*" (John 5:39-40). The Pharisees were making the same trade that millions of Christians have made today. Another point about this passage is that Jesus clearly makes a distinction between "studying the Scriptures" and "coming to Him".

Most Christians believe with all their hearts that a person is not even saved unless they "believe in the Bible". Churches advertise themselves as being a, "Bible believing Church". Toss that around in your head for awhile and truly think about it. Where in the Bible does it say that we have to "believe in the Bible" in order to be saved? It does say to believe in Christ, but for some reason we have raised belief in the Bible to the same spiritual level as believing in Christ Himself. In the New Testament times the Christians met together to study God, and today when we meet together in someone's home it's for a Bible study. If the Bible isn't brought out and studied at some point in the evening the entire event is looked upon as an unspiritual waste of time.

I understand that most of us have never stopped to think about these things, but if you step back and take an honest look at the landscape of our religion, I think you'll be surprised at how right I am. The American Christian system has wholeheartedly exchanged God for the Bible! This is precisely why so many sincere hearted people go into a full-fledged panic attack the moment anyone suggests that there might be errors or discrepancies in the Bible. Most Christians will outright tell you that to even entertain such a thought is blasphemy. Because we have made the "God exchange" we have to insist that the Bible now takes on the attributes of God Himself. This is why it is imperative that everyone believe the Bible is infallible. It is equally grieving to my heart when I hear people say things like, "If there is even one thing wrong in the Bible, our entire faith is worthless". Their entire existence as a Christian stands on the belief that there are no errors in Scripture. If they were to be shown a true discrepancy in Scripture that could not be explained away, it would literally cause their entire religion to come caving in on them. I've heard people openly admit, "If you can't believe it all, you can't believe any of it". Their entire faith stands on Scripture instead of Christ. Make no mistake about it, there has been an exchange of monumental proportions!

This is why so many Christians judge the strength and status of their Christian walk by how much time they spend reading their Bible. It seems to be a constant thorn in the side of every single Christian I know. They always feel guilty for not studying it every day of their life. They just know that God is upset with them for not reading it more. The cycle goes on and on until it becomes a

permanent snare in their walk. The looming shadow of performance based Christianity is always there to put them in their place the moment they feel a shred of confidence, contentment or joy. What's worse is that every one of us are set up for emanate failure. We are constantly pressured to "be in the Word" but we are never told how much is enough. No matter how much time we spend studying it; it's never enough. If we read it one hour, we could have read it two. If we read it eight hours, we could have read it nine. No matter what we do, we're always left feeling like we fell short. It's almost like it was set up that way in order to prevent growth of any kind in our lives and keep us down.

Let me be the first to say that I am sick of it!

I am quite honestly sick of all the manipulation and oppression that has been put on people in the name of religion. I'm sick of all the half truths and outright lies that have been made up about the Bible in order to force people to submit and serve their local Church. I'm sick of the guilt and condemnation that so many people live with because they can't keep up with the rigorous demands of an impossible system. And most of all, I'm sick of the empty (and quite frankly the unbiblical) promises concerning what the Bible's purpose is in our lives. Most of the things we are taught about the Bible are found nowhere in the Bible; they come from a religious spirit that seeks to whittle people down to a spiritual nub in an effort to gain control over their minds. Without a doubt, this wonderful book has been used to cuff the spirits of millions of sincere hearted people who honestly want to connect with God's Heart.

The Irony of "Bible believing Churches"

The thing that perplexes me more than anything else concerning this subject is the fact that Churches who hold up the Bible as their ultimate guide in life, almost never follow a single thing in it. Every time I hear a Pastor thunder the words, "we do everything according to the Word of God in this Church" I am always puzzled as to exactly what he's talking about. In fact, I've struggled to find just one thing that we practice in modern day institutional churches that coincides with Scripture.

Where in the Bible did they have "Worship Services" led by a "Worship Leader"? Perhaps you might find a few places in the Old Testament where something similar might have occurred, however in the New Testament it simply never happened. Almost every church in America promotes "Corporate Worship" as though it's a Scriptural principal that we all must adhere to. This is simply not found in the New Testament Church.

Every mention of Worship in the New Testament was in reference to it being a private intimate matter between each individual believer and God. Paul said to "sing and make music in your hearts". Ironically, even worship leaders know that this is true. They will almost always tell everyone in the room to "forget about everyone around them and get alone with God" before the service even starts. They know this, however they insist that everyone meet together to do it.

Where in the Bible do we find "Youth Leaders" who are specifically paid to lead the younger people in the church? For that matter, where in the New Testament did they EVER separate families the moment they walked through the door of a church? The fact that we do this in modern day

institutions is absolutely flabbergasting! This practice entirely defeats the purpose and picture of what Church is all about. Ironically the same Pastor, who signs the paycheck of the Youth Leader and Child Care Workers, also preaches that "The Family is the most intimate form of Church". Separating those families before church begins is not only unbiblical, but it's down right destructive.

Did the New Testament Church have a stage? Of course they didn't. The Church experience in the Bible times was not a spectator sport. It was about participation, interaction and fellowship. Today, fellowship is that block of five minutes you might get to say hello or goodbye in the foyer once the show is over. Church in the New Testament was never a play. There was no stage with lights, video and sound systems. It has become so much of a "show mentality" that when we now start a new ministry within the church we call it a "Program". That alone should cause us to stop and think about what we're doing.

The things we promote and encourage are also nowhere to be found in the Bible. When did the New Testament Christians do "Outreaches"? When was "Group Prayer" or "Prayer Chains" preached in New Testament times? What about "Tithing"? Did Paul tell the people to pay 10% of their income to the Church? NEVER! We have built an entire religion around the infamous "Sinners Prayer" that we try with all our might to get people to recite, however there is no "Sinners Prayer" anywhere in Scripture. Believe it or not, the word "Trinity" isn't there either. Most, if not all Christian churches today won't even acknowledge your salvation unless you believe in that one. Many churches have "Alter Calls" at the end of their service where they push and push everyone to come to the alter and meet God about their problem. You guessed it; it's not in the Bible! What New Testament church had a "Board" that the Pastor had to answer to? Where was "Associate Pastor", "Marriage Pastor", "Prayer Pastor", or any other of our new concepts of "Pastor" found in the Bible? Did the Pastors in the Bible preach a sermon every week? NO! In fact, the people met every day, not every week, and when they did meet, THEY brought songs to sing, and THEY spoke the word of the Lord to each other. Though I could go on and on, I'll finish this section with the big one: At what point did Sunday become "God's Day"? If anything, the Sabbath day was Saturday.

I am not saying that any of these things are wrong. In fact, I personally don't have a problem with most of them. I don't think God does either. My point is this: DON'T SAY YOU DO EVERYTHING BY THE BIBLE!!!! Very little of what we do in modern day Church has anything at all to do with the Bible. Why should it? The New Testament Church didn't even have a Bible.

Acknowledging the Purpose of Scripture

Several months ago I took my wife and kids to Disneyland. Just before we left the house I used "Map Quest" to get directions. After typing in my home address and the address of Disneyland I was printing out step by step directions that even a monkey could follow. Together my wife and I followed the map to a "T" and in just six hours we were standing at the entrance of Disneyland with four ecstatic little girls.

Now I want you to read this next part slowly and think about it.

If you were to come looking for my family inside of Disneyland about an hour after we entered the

park, what are the chances you would find us all sitting on a bench by the Dumbo ride, studying the map? This is exactly what the Christian world looks like today. It's a day at Disneyland where thousands of people have filled the park. However, all the rides are empty, there are no lines at the restaurants, no one is paying attention to the characters walking around and the light parade goes unnoticed. Why? Because everyone is sitting around in clusters studying the map and going over how they got there.

The purpose of the Bible is to lead us to Christ. LOVE IN THE FLESH. For some reason however, we have gotten the idea that once we have found Christ, we must continue to study the map. To take it a step further, we have even taught people that their entire relationship with Christ is now lived out through reading the Bible! If this were true, you would think that in all of Jesus' teachings and preachings, He would have at least ONCE stopped midway in one of His sermons and said, "Oh and by the way, in about forty years from now a bunch of guys are going to write letters back and forth to each other and in about three hundred and fifty years from now those letters are going to be bound in a book, and if you don't read it everyday of your life YOU WILL NEVER KNOW GOD".

Why didn't the Apostle Paul tell the Churches he wrote letters to that they had to read and re-read and study and meditate on those letters over and over for the rest of their lives in order to grow in the Lord? If our daily Bible reading were as important as we have been told it is today; why wasn't it mentioned even once by one of the authors in the New Testament? Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Peter, Jude, James, Paul, never once told us that we had to make the reading of their letters a daily religious ritual. You would think that someone would have written about it if it was really as important as we teach today.

What did all those Christians after Paul's time do to have a relationship with God? After Christ returned to heaven there was almost fifteen hundred years of Christians who didn't have a Bible in their home. How in the world did they keep their heads above water without a Bible to study every day? Why would God send His only Son into the world to live a perfect life, die for our sins and be raised to life again almost fifteen hundred years before the printing press was invented if the Bible was the route we humans were to take to have relationship with God? How is that a better covenant than what Moses had? God spoke with Moses face to face and now, after Jesus was crucified, we have to relate to Him through a book. Does that sound right to you?

It's interesting to me that we tell people that the way they get close to God is by reading their Bible regularly. The Pharisees not only did this, but they went on to memorize large portions of Scripture and even wore articles of clothing to remind them daily of what they had read. However, when God stood right in front of them in the flesh, they didn't recognize Him from Adam. Jesus later told the people that the two most important commandments were to "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind and soul" and He said "the second commandment is like the first.....Love your neighbor as yourself". Then he said, "All of the law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments". He was literally saying that if you love, you will BECOME the Bible! You can put it down and walk away from it forever because LOVE is the embodiment of the entire Bible. Once again: the purpose of the Bible is to lead us to Christ. Who is Christ? Love in the flesh!

I do not need a "post it note" on my refrigerator reminding me not to murder my wife and kids.

Why? Because I love them and that law is so far beneath me, it doesn't even apply to me. The law is for people who don't love. When you know Christ, you know love and when you know love you are no longer a spreader of the message; YOU BECOME THE MESSAGE.

The Consequences of the Trade

Our teachings about the Bible and its purpose in our lives have basically made us a generation of dead people. Since we don't believe we can hear God on our own without the Bible, we find ourselves searching the Scriptures to find out whether something is right or wrong and we don't even stop to look into our own heart and ask ourselves.

I honestly believe that out of this zombie and lifeless belief system, we have no other option but to blindly stumble throughout life clinging to our WWJD bracelet in hopes that we can survive yet another day. It's a very depressing time we live in when we have to stop everything and analyze what Jesus would do in this situation or that before we act. It's fake. It's scripted and from the head. Even Charles Manson can do that. Do you think that Satan worshipers need to wear a WWSD bracelet so they'll know how to act in certain situations? Of course not! If you cut a Satan worshiper off on the freeway, he doesn't need to ponder how Satan would react. He literally BECOMES Satan right there in the middle of the freeway! Yet we have Christians today who only know ABOUT Jesus because they read about Him in a book. He's a character in the Bible that they've been told to do their best to study and mimic.

When tragedy or hardship comes into their life they have no other choice but to "STAND ON SCRIPTURE" and hope for the best. Because there is no real relationship established beyond what they read in the book, they can only quote the book to the Author in hopes that He will recognize the passage and honor what He said. I personally know hundreds of Christians who spend their entire life standing on this Scripture or that in an effort to get what they want. It's all they have. There is nothing beyond the words they read in the book. Their relationship is not with God; it's with their Bible.

This teaching about the Bible ultimately causes people to retreat from relationship with God. If you think it through you'll find that a personal relationship with Him isn't even needed anymore. In fact, if some people could have their way, they would just have God pack up and leave Heaven altogether. The Bible is basically "Auto Pilot" for Heaven. God doesn't even have to think anymore. If it's in the Bible He has no choice but to do it. And He has covered everything in the Bible so Heaven should pretty much run itself from this point on. And we wonder why people today have no real intimacy with the Father. Listening to many Christians witnessing in today's age is perhaps the most grueling experience I can think of. So often it seems that their entire witness is based on what they have read in a book. Just because you read about a crime in the paper, doesn't mean that you can go to court during the trial and be a witness. Sadly, that's what our religion has produced in recent years. A bunch of well-read people who haven't really witnessed a thing.

Know Your Bible People!

I had a friend several years ago who was browsing through a book store when he noticed a young

lady thumbing through one of my books on relationships. As he walked by her he leaned in and said, "Get that book, it will change your life". She smiled and thanked him for the tip. About three months later, this lady showed up to my church. She has read the book and found out that I was teaching locally, so she thought she would come to my group. She was excited to see my friend who had told her about the book, and immediately approached him and thanked him for telling her to buy it. He was terrified and embarrassed because he had not yet read the book himself. He didn't have the guts to tell her, so he just decided to act as if he had read it. After the service she wanted to stay and talk about relationships with my friend. Instead of just coming clean, he decided to just let himself go talk about relationships from his heart. He was surprised that she didn't seem to catch on that he hadn't read the book, so immediately after service he ran to the bookstore and bought a copy for himself. When he got home and started reading it he was absolutely amazed to find that during his conversation with this young lady, he had actually quoted entire sentence structures of my book, word for word without even knowing it! How could he do that?

HE KNEW THE AUTHOR!

Once you know the Author of the Bible, you have the Word living inside your heart! We have basically taught an entire generation of people that they have received a deaf, dumb and blind God. He's like a computer. When you get him home, you have to load Windows and a hundred other programs on Him before He's of any use. That's ridiculous! When you receive God's Spirit into your heart, you not only get Him, but you get all His Words as well.

The Truth Within You

Think about it. Have you ever had something in the Bible literally explode off the pages and blow your mind? The reason that happened is because it exploded from WITHIN you! It was already living inside you. That's why your heart almost leaps out of your chest when you come across a truth in Scripture.

Sadly we subscribe to a religion that pretty much encourages people to have a relationship with their Bible over God Himself. It's like there is something within all of us that would rather spend time with an inanimate object than with a living being. This is why so many people don't have a problem making the trade. Real intimacy is intimidating to us.

Could you imagine a wife on her wedding night coming out of the bathroom dressed in a beautiful negligee ready to present herself to her husband for the first time and he is sitting on the edge of the bed reading a letter she wrote to him ten years ago? She says, "Honey here I am, come over here", and he doesn't even look up because he's having relationship with the letter. That is exactly what I see in modern day Christianity! We have access to the real God and we insist on reading the letter over and over instead of actually connecting with Him.

Our teachings have turned the Bible into a spiritual walkie-talkie between us and God. We say things like, "The main way God speaks to us is through the Bible". When I became a Christian I was personally told that when I pray; it's me talking to God, and when I read my Bible; it's God talking to me. For the most part we have all been taught that unless we are reading the Bible we will never hear from God.

This raises a whole series of questions for me. First of all I would like to know where the Bible even says that. It's interesting that Scripture doesn't even make that claim about itself, yet we preach it like it's an age old truth that God Himself set up thousands of years ago. Most of us have heard it so many times that we don't even stop to question whether or not it's true. We have learned to just accept it as truth and do our best to keep up.

I am not suggesting that God can't speak to us through the Bible. He can speak to us anyway He chooses to. I'm just debating the mindset that believes that this is the PURPOSE of Scripture, and the main way He chooses to talk to us.

I heard one Pastor teach that God won't even tell us something if it's already written in the Bible because we can read it for ourselves. Hummmm.....What if you're illiterate? What if you're illiterate AND deaf, so you can't even listen to the Bible on tape? What if you're a prisoner of war without a Bible? What if you're a child and haven't learned to read yet? What if you're an elderly person and can't see the words? I know this sounds amusing, but if you really think about what we have been taught, it's absolutely comical.

Many people who are reading this are likely to say to themselves, "What about King David who said that he meditated on the Word night and day"?

First of all, when David meditated on the Word, he was meditating on THE LAW. The first five books of the Old Testament, otherwise known as the Pentateuch. Believe it or not; the Bible as we know it today does not refer to itself as "The Word of God". Any place where the term "The Word" is spoken about in Scripture, it's referring to THE LAW. That's what David meditated on night and day. He had to because David was not like you and me. He didn't have the Holy Spirit living inside of him. In our time, "The Word became Flesh" and now dwells among us. JESUS is the Word, not the Bible. If you have Jesus living in your Heart; you have the Word living in your heart. David's "Word" was only a shadow of what was to come. Imagine if all you were given was a shadow of something. You would have no choice but to study it from every possible angle in hopes that you might find out what was casting that shadow.

We have been given the very One who casts that shadow! Why in the world would we ever be tempted to study the shadow when the one who casts the shadow is standing right before us? Our teachings on the Bible have turned us into shadow chasers who refuse to acknowledge the Shadow Maker.

Although David had to meditate on the Word night and day, and he clearly had a deep love and respect for it, it's interesting that when David needed to hear from God, he didn't turn to the Scriptures. He walked directly into the Temple and confronted God himself. In fact, I have not found a single place in all of Scripture where anyone turned to Scripture in order to hear from God.

I think that understanding the purpose and value of a thing is extremely important. If I bought you a new car, and you thought that a car was to be used as a house, it wouldn't take more than a few days for your car to start stinking to high heavens. Until you understand that cars are made for transportation, you will never truly experience its blessings. The same is true with the Bible. We have made declarations about it that have nothing to do with its real purpose and value. This false

understanding of what the Bible is for has caused us to become a spiritually retarded generation. Christian chat rooms and forums are filled every day of the week with people machine-gunning Scriptures back and forth in heated debate. Some of us can't even talk normal anymore because our vocabulary is filled with King James' quotations. Authors can't even make a spiritual point without having to "back it up" with Scripture. It's pretty sad when Christians who are filled with the Holy Spirit have to have a Scripture verse to back up a spiritual principal that even a child can understand. Unfortunately in today's Christian world we have been taught to think in Bible verses. We've become as soulless as computers.

The Deadly Blow

The nail in the coffin to all of this dysfunction and chaos comes the moment we swallow the equally devastating and destructive teaching that says, "Don't trust your heart". It comes from that Bible verse where Jeremiah says "the heart is deceitful above all things....." So now, in addition to teaching us that we can't make one spiritual move without the Bible, we're also taught that we are supposed to shut ourselves down from our heart and refrain from any future consultations with it. This is preached all over America and it's a lie from the pit of Hell! I honestly believe that these two teachings together are a recipe for spiritual death.

Those who preach that we are not supposed to trust our heart have effectively sealed the fate of their listeners. Make no mistake about it; this is an extremely dark teaching that has nothing to do with the truth of God. To even entertain such an appalling idea is like swallowing a cyanide tablet into your soul. I believe that this terrible mentality is what has ultimately turned the Christian religion into a spiritual veal farm. The moment you buy into this absurdity you can NEVER know the Heart of God. All future possibilities of intimacy with Him are annihilated completely. It seals the separation between man and God and ultimately catapults us back to Old Testament times.

Come now, let us reason together. If we are not supposed to ever trust our hearts, how in the world can we ever know Him? Think about it for a moment. When you became a Christian; where did you ask Jesus to live? Your heart of course! What good would it be for the Spirit of Christ to live in your heart if you aren't allowed to "go there"? How could we ever forgive someone from our heart if we can't trust it? Why would God write His laws on the hearts of men if they were not allowed to consult that part of their being? Why would the Bible tell us to "sing and make music in our hearts" if they were not to be trusted? We couldn't even fulfill the commandment that Jesus said was most important, "Love the Lord you God with all your heart, mind and soul". Jesus also said that "the Kingdom of Heaven is within you", and there is no doubt that He was speaking about our hearts. The irony of this is that this popular teaching tells us that we must rely only on the Bible and not on our hearts. If we can't trust our hearts, how will we ever be able to read and interpret the Bible properly? Wouldn't our deceptive hearts mess everything up and interpret it all wrong? The entire idea is so outlandish and absurd that it's not even worth discussing.

Trust me in this, the only part of us that is eternal and connected to God, is OUR HEARTS! It is a conspiracy from Satan himself to try and get every Christian person to deny themselves access and completely stop trusting their hearts. The very birth and life of a believer is lived out through the heart. This is why the Bible says "if you confess with your mouth AND BELIEVE IN YOUR HEART that

Jesus Christ is Lord, you will be saved". The next time someone quotes that "The heart is deceitful verse" in an effort to get you to think from your head, you just remind them that when you believed in God's one and only Son, your heart was resurrected with Christ and you are a new creation.

These two teachings about the Bible and the heart of man completely rely on one another to survive. You MUST be heartless in order to buy the things you have been taught about the Bible and if you deny your heart; you definitely need the Bible in order to survive. A good friend of mine told someone he was ministering to, "The very pipeline through which God intended to touch the world and reveal Himself to mankind is the very pipeline you have shut down to keep you from sinning". If you abandon your heart because you think only bad things come from it, keep in mind that you are also closing the door to things like, Love, Compassion, Relationship, Spirituality and a thousand other things you were created for.

Reasons to Read

I believe that there are many wonderful reasons to read the Bible without having to add to them in an effort to manipulate or control people. One of the greatest things that happens when you read it, is that it helps to connect your heart with your head. If the Word is living in the heart of a Christian; reading the Bible can cause the mind and the heart to become one. In other words, it will remind you of what already exists in your heart. Getting your head in line with your heart (for some people) is a full time job. When you read with your mind the words that exist in your heart, you become more and more aware of heart things, and you gain experience at being able to determine the difference.

I also think that knowing the history of our faith is extremely important. Understanding how it all happened and why you needed to be saved in the first place is absolutely essential. Scripture also gives us hundreds of accounts of different people's interactions with God from the beginning of time. It explains so much about our nature and what we are inclined to do on our own. The Bible really prepares us in many ways for life. It's full of heroes that inspire and motivate us. It's like watching a Rocky movie. When you come out of the theater, you're ready to conquer the world. Let's face it; we all need examples to rouse us into action.

Let's face it, there are also times in our lives when we just don't love. Even though the author of love Himself is living in our hearts; sometimes we purposefully decide to not go there. When we do this, the Bible is great because it sets us straight. The bottom line is, some of us go through moments in our life where we just need things written out in black and white. I can tell you that I'm so glad I've studied the Scriptures as much as I have. It's given me parameters in which to open my heart and live my life. On my off days when I'm not consulting my heart about a matter, I'm glad I have the black and white word-for-word passage that sets my momentarily blind self straight.

Many of us have a worldly view of what love is. Scripture is wonderful in this sense. It clearly draws a distinction between man's idea of love and the truth. When you read about the truth of what love is, you'll find little explosions taking place in your heart, and your head will immediately come into alignment with it. I think the Bible is great at teaching each and every one of us how to locate and find treasures within our heart. It's also a great corrective tool for us when we're just off our rocker and thinking purely human thoughts. It's great to know that in those moments, we have a safety net

that's set in place to catch us and gently guide us back on the right path.

In a lot of ways, I look at the Bible as the teacher's manual. I think we are all supposed to do the work on our own, but it's great to know that when we come upon a problem or issue where we can't find the answer within us; we have the answers written down somewhere. I don't however believe that we are supposed to live our life carrying the teacher's manual around and just getting the answers without even searching our heart first.

I'll be completely honest with you. I understand why most Christians haven't read the Bible all the way through. We have made it a law. It's natural for humans to do the exact opposite of anything that becomes law. The moment we turned the Bible into something we HAD to read, we lost interest. With that in mind, I would like to say that I am still a bit mystified to find that there are millions of self proclaiming Christians who still haven't "read the book". I get why that happens, but it's still mind blowing to me. In the back of my mind I think that the reason why so many Christians don't seem to have the desire to read the Bible is because they were tricked into Christianity in the first place. I think many of us were shoved into it by manipulative fear tactics or religious emotionalism. I'll have to write about that in another blog.

I think because of the fact that we have made it such a SPIRITUAL thing, people start reading and then begin to wonder why they aren't getting the spiritual goose bumps they were told about so they quit. Perhaps they felt like they're doing something wrong. My advice is this: read it anyway. Just sit down and read it from beginning to end. Read it like you would any other book. Don't expect a spiritual experience. It may or may not happen. Just read it from beginning to end. If you are a Christian, read the book about Christ. If for no other reason at all; read it to say that you have. I think every Christian should read the Bible all the way through at least once. With so many crazy preachers out there, doesn't it make sense to have read the book so that you'll know for yourself whether or not what they are saying is right? Why put your life in someone else's hands? Wouldn't it be nice to know for sure if someone was pulling your leg or misquoting Scripture to get you to do something?

Here is a great verse that pretty much says it all in terms of why you should read your bible.

2 Timothy 3:14 NIV

14But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, 15and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. 16All Scripture is God breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, 17so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

Defiled Food

Steve McVey

In the first chapter of Malachi, God's prophet reprimands the priests for presenting "defiled food" on the altar in His house. What is this defiled food? It is the blind, crippled and diseased animals they allow the people to bring before God in an attempt to gain His acceptance. Only one thing will satisfy our Father when it comes to the basis of His acceptance of us and that is a perfect sacrifice, one without spot or blemish.

The people of Israel had missed that point because the priests had failed to tell them. They were bringing deformed, diseased offerings to God when they possessed the only sacrifice God wanted. We live in a similar day. Through Malachi, God told His people, "Cursed is the cheat who has an acceptable male in his flock and vows to give it, but then sacrifices a blemished animal to the Lord."

The only Sacrifice God has ever required to cause us to be accepted by Him is Jesus. We have Jesus, but still often bring our own crippled, religious efforts, determination and activity to Him in an attempt to gain His favor (grace). The good news of the gospel is that we don't have to offer our lame attempts to please Him. He is pleased with us because of Jesus and His finished work. We cheat ourselves and place ourselves under the curse of the Law when we fail to recognize that His sacrifice is enough. All we need to do now is to worship the God who fully accepts us.

The Central Secret of Union

Norman P. Grubb

The central secret of all history is the union of the creature and the Creator. Not just the Creator. Certainly not just the creature. But the union. We've found the whole meaning of life in time and eternity when we've found that.

It's probably beyond apprehension by the finite mind, as well as beyond description. But if our minds cannot completely compass this infinite glory, thank God our hearts can experience it.

And yet, if we think around it, to some extent our minds can compass this great fact of union. We know, for instance, that this is what eternal life is all about. There is only *one* eternal life, that of God. But God is three, dwelling in each other, which is union. So original life is not one person, or still less one thing; it's three living in each other and proceeding out from each other in their several offices.

Original life, then, is union. But not just union: *unity*. That which proceeds from union, in a balance which is so hard for us to apprehend, is a unity which still leaves us a separate person. There is such an intimate union that there is never again a sense of division between myself and the living God. We've become one person, for "he that is joined to the Lord is one spirit." Not two, but one. And yet within that mystery there is a unity that allows us to retain our individuality. That's where a major difficulty comes.

The first point that we need to get clearly in mind is the union that we've become one person. We've got so used to the curse of the fall, which is separation, that it's a long time before we fully realize the fact of our union with God. And who of us does entirely attain to a continuous recognition of this union?

The great cry of the hearts of the saints of the ages was union. They expressed it in a certain terminology (which is impressive to some of us), describing the way to union as purgation, illumination, and finally union — three phases which to some extent resemble the little children, young men and fathers of John's first letter. It doesn't exactly correspond, but it's somewhere near.

If you read the lives of saints you always find that when they came to union they experienced liberation. As soon as they grasped union, out came a great humanity, a great love, a great power, a great service. They had found the liberating secret.

It is when a crisis comes to you and me — a sudden sorrow, a sudden disaster — that we realize how separatist we are in our thinking.

The usual thing we say when a crisis hits us is, "God permitted it." That means that God is up there and we are underneath. But God isn't up there at all! He is within. I never lift my eyes one single time to heaven to try to find Him up there, do you? I don't waste my breath, my sight, or anything else. Why should I waste my time trying to get a Person to come down when He lives within me? I can see Him where He is, in a common bit of human flesh redeemed in His precious blood, packed full of the Holy Spirit.

This makes my whole attitude to life different. Once I recognize that God is joined as one with me, I no longer try to find Him or get Him to come and rescue me.

A crisis comes to me. No, no — it doesn't! It comes to *us*. Not to me, but *tous*. And I'm a mighty little part in the *us*, while He's a mighty big part.

It comes to Him. And if it comes to Him, He doesn't just permit it, He means it to come. Well, if He means it to come, He's going to turn it out for His own purposes. So what is my attitude? "Come on Lord, handle it now. Praise the Lord, it's perfect! Carry it out now — I'll watch *You*." And it's a great watching life. We sit on the side lines and clap when the goals are kicked.

We're caught out ninety nine times out of a hundred. We say, "Why did God allow that? He's up there, and poor me down here." No, I'm not. I'm in the heavenly places, if I could but recognize it. But I'm caught out almost every time. I'm so familiar with the separated outlook, I can hardly look upon life from the union point of view.

That is where my shocks and my sorrows come. I look at life from separation. I begin wondering: was it God? was it the devil? was it this? was it that? Instead of seeing that it happened to *us*, and that He meant it to be. When I see that, it changes everything.

"We speak that we do know," said Jesus. "We testify that we have seen." By *we* He meant the Father also. "I've got a shared life," He was saying. Well, if Jesus had a shared life, we have a shared life. A united life. Christ in us, we in Him. I can't say this moment that my mind can compass it. I've spent years trying to compass it — perhaps I haven't sufficient light yet. But thank God, I know that I know it — or rather, know Him.

Friends, the cross is not the objective. *Union* is the objective. The cross is the gateway. It's not the end. The *Christ* is the end, and He is joined to me forever and I joined to Him forever.

There are astounding statements in Scripture.

I was struck when I was reading in Colossians 3 about our relationship with Christ — the fact that we are ascended with Him, and so on. It speaks there about the "new man." It says there is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither bond nor free, neither Barbarian, Greek nor Scythian. Then it says, "Christ is all, and in all."

If Christ is *all* in me, and *all in* you — what's left? Pretty extreme, isn't it! Even in eternity, when the Son Himself becomes subject to the Father and hands everything over to Him that He may be all in all, is there anything *more* we can have of God then than we have now if Christ is "all, and in all"? We are *complete* in Him!

I like to emphasize the Bible as an extreme book. It entitles us to live an extreme life and preach an extreme message. Praise His name! It certainly is extreme. If we wrote what Paul did, that Christ is all in each one of us, they'd say we were pantheists. But God said it!

Now if a common, horrible little piece of clay like me can say “Christ is all in me,” it doesn’t leave me with much to bother about myself. I just say, “All right God, carry on then.” He is in everything that happens in my life; He is totally involved.

If a disease comes to me, it comes to Him as well as to me. It’s *His* business then. Oh, the burdens go off! You’ll find all our burdens are upon us because we have this separate instinct instead of the united instinct. Every sorrow we carry, every burden we bear, every tear of self-pity we shed (and there’s an awful lot of self-pity in our tears), comes out of separation instead of union.

Every weakness we feel comes out of separation. Oh, I share them with you. No one feels more weak than I do when I’ve got to speak! I have such an easy life, I’m always glad God has given me one cross to bear, which is the hatred and horror of speaking. Yes, I feel weak — but it’s all nonsense. Weak? Of course I’m weak; but there’s somebody inside me who isn’t.

What we are after is a fixed life, a natural life. By God’s grace I learn to live naturally in a continuous Christ-consciousness, so that it’s natural to me to live this way. It’s Fixed in me. The Word of God abides *in* me, not comes into me from outside. It may have started by coming to me, but now it abides in me.

The psalmist once wrote, “Oh, God, my heart is fixed, my heart is fixed, I will sing and give praise.” That’s the point we are aiming at. As Paul expressed it: “That Christ may dwell in your heart,” not visit it occasionally. He has taken up a permanent residence. That was Paul’s prayer for the Ephesians.

It wasn’t the first prayer he prayed for them. It was further along the way, perhaps even his deepest prayer. He prayed the highest things he could pray in Ephesians because he talked the highest language. He put a unique emphasis on the fact of Christ dwelling in their hearts by faith. He didn’t really mention the cross here. Not that he belittled the cross, because the only way into this is by the cross. But sometimes we can even give the cross the wrong place. It’s the *Christ* of the cross who must have the center place.

Now you would call Galatians more of an objective rather than a subjective letter. It’s defending the Christian faith from the outer assaults of the circumcisers and legalists. That’s the general message of this mighty letter. But I was very struck with how Paul every now and then, right in the midst of this great apologetic of how God rescued us through justification by faith in our Lord Jesus Christ alone, flashed in a word of his own testimony and went clean out of the objective into the subjective.

There is a striking instance in chapter one (verses 14-16). He is giving us insights into his conversion. Perhaps it was written 15 or 20 years after his regeneration on the road to Damascus.

He writes: “It pleased God, who separated me from my mother’s womb, and called me by His grace, to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the heathen.”

I remember how I was caught out in such a simple way when I did a translation of the New Testament in my early days. It was into an easy language of Africa.] found that I had translated “to reveal His Son *to* me,” instead of “in.” It isn’t to reveal His Son *to* me, but *in* me.

But what struck me — and we all have different insights strike us, so that we can preach sermons to each other — is the fact that regeneration is a first revelation of an *indwelling* Person.

Right at the beginning, although it may have taken him some years to compass it, we see this central secret of union in Paul's life. A union which is also a unity, just as God is a union which is a unity. This is what real life, eternal life, is. And we live it flow!

The realization of the indwelling Christ — the central secret of union — is the only basis for life - which has total meaning. Christ "all, and in all" — I in Him, and He in me. What a glorious way to live!

The God of *Hesed*

Aron Cooper

Israel and the Early Church

When God delivered the nation of Israel from the Egyptians, they instantly had a sense of community as their national existence and identity were formed by their common experience of God and His covenantal act of deliverance. And yet, while their initial common bond was one of deliverance, their community would later grow into a nation where the institution of religion was the prevailing influence on individual, community, and national life. Though their identity as “God’s Chosen” would continue to be based upon that initial act of deliverance from Egypt, their religious focus shifted from celebrating His covenantal acts, to working to maintain their place within the Covenant. In other words, though God had brought them into a covenantal relationship, the Israelites felt that it was their responsibility to remain in it.

In much the same way, we originally find our way into the Christian community via the delivering acts of Jesus’ crucifixion and resurrection. However, like the Israelites, while we start out as a group of individuals that are bound together by our salvation experience, in time, we also find our way into a religious culture that emphasizes self reliance and performance. This article is an attempt to take a quick look back at that newly delivered community of Hebrews to see if we, can learn from their mistakes, and avoid the pitfalls of religious performance.

Revelation and Rejection at Sinai

In the third month after the children of Israel had gone out of the land of Egypt, on the same day, they came to the Wilderness of Sinai. (Ex. 19:1).

Shortly after their miraculous deliverance, the Israelites reach the place where God first revealed Himself in the burning bush: “And God spoke all these words, saying: “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods before Me.” (Ex. 20:1-3). By stating “I am your God” before He imposed His laws, God was telling Israel that they are already in relationship with Him. In other words, *they were to realize that the question of their acceptance before God was already settled*. These laws were never intended to be the conditions for entering into a covenant relationship; rather they were merely the guidelines for an ongoing relationship.

God did not meet the Israelites at Sinai in order to hand out a new method for salvation. Rather, He was declaring to a people who had already been saved that He was already bound to them in a covenant relationship, and that their deliverance from Egypt was proof of this existing covenantal relationship. The laws that followed were simply intended to cover the nature and extent of the boundaries and duties inherent to that relationship. In this context then, the covenantal faithfulness of God is intended to be the springboard for the Hebrews’ own faithfulness. Israel was not to obey God *in order to* earn favour, or deliverance, but was to obey *because of* the favour already shown in God’s act of deliverance.

God was declaring, here in the wilderness, that He was *already* their God, and they were *already* His people. He was revealing that this relationship, and consequently His covenantal commitment to them, had existed while they were still in bondage in Egypt. He was proclaiming that, before they even knew Him, He had been their faithful Lord. So in effect, He was demonstrating that the basis of their relationship would be His faithfulness, not theirs.

Soon after God relates His law to the Israelites, Moses returns to Mount Sinai in order to receive additional instruction. During his extended absence, the people asked for his brother Aaron to fashion an idol. Aaron did as they wished, fashioned a golden calf, and announced: "This is your god, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt!" (Ex. 32:4). This golden calf was most likely intended to be a representation of the Canaanite god Baal, who was considered a fertility god as well as the god of the storm. In Canaanite mythology, Baal's chief opponent was Yam, god of the sea. The Hebrews had probably been exposed to Baal worship while still in Egypt, as during the eighteenth century BC the Hyksos, a Semitic people who worshipped the Canaanite gods, gained control of Egypt.

So the Hebrews, having been exposed to the worship of a Canaanite storm god who conquers the god of the sea, are then delivered from Egypt by a God who controls the sea and parts it for them, and then appears to them on Sinai as a storm. It is easy to understand how Aaron and the rest of the people could confuse the two deities. And yet, while there may have been some aspect of confusion at work, we must also recognize this as an act of deliberate disobedience on the part of the Israelites.

Within days of God telling them to not make any idols or any gods of silver or gold, the Israelites fashion a golden calf to be their god. In order to commit this sin, Israel had to choose to follow tradition instead of revelation. They had heard the audible voice of God speaking to them, telling them that they were meant to worship at a simple earthen altar, rather than before carved or moulded images. And yet they chose to disregard this direct revelation, and instead worshiped in a manner they were more familiar with. Instead of entering into fellowship with God, and gaining an understanding of His nature and character, they chose to trust in what they already knew. Their knowledge convinced them that they had been delivered by a Canaanite god who, like other gods, would be faithful only as long as they were. So they made an idol to represent him, and began to worship him.

Though God tells Moses of His desire to consume the people for this wickedness, Moses quickly reminds Him of His covenantal commitment to these people. (Ex 32:11-14). Moses' appeal to God as the Covenant Keeper also stemmed from personal revelation. Previously, when he was on Mount Sinai, Moses had asked God to reveal His glory. God had agreed, and said that He would proclaim His name, and reveal a greater portion of His glory. In other words, the revelation of His glory was not restricted to just the visible revelation of how He appeared, or the tangible experience of what He imparted. Rather, the very name of God, the revelation of His identity, was itself a greater revelation of His glory.

Now the LORD descended in the cloud and stood with him there and proclaimed the name of the LORD. And the LORD passed before him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and *abounding in goodness* and truth. (Ex 34:6).

In this passage, the word “goodness” is a translation of the Hebrew word *hesed*, which is more accurately translated “covenantal faithfulness.” And so we see that for God, *hesed*, or *covenantal faithfulness*, is at the very core of His identity. In fact, not only is it part of His identity, but here we see Him make it known that it is quality that He abounds in.

Later—when the Israelites again reject His revelation, refuse to enter into the Promised Land, and in so doing reject God—he again appeals to God on the basis of His identity as Covenant Keeper.

And now, I pray, let the power of my Lord be great; just as You have spoken, saying,
‘The LORD is longsuffering and *abundant in mercy* . . . (Num 14:17-18).

Moses appeals to God using His own words of self-description and self-revelation. Though *hesed* has been translated as *mercy* in this passage, we must keep in mind its original covenantal implications. Moses is not merely asking God to show mercy as we understand it, rather He is appealing to God’s abundance of covenantal faithfulness, and again God agrees to be faithful to the people who keep rejecting Him. Fortunately for the Israelites, and for us, His covenantal promises are not to be thwarted by the sins of man, as they are guaranteed by His own nature.

Faithfulness in the wilderness

This faithfulness is demonstrated over the next forty years, even as God leads the Israelites through the desert as a consequence for not immediately entering into the Promised Land. The record of this journey is summed up in the opening chapters of Deuteronomy, as is a second declaration of the Law, made to a new generation of Hebrews as they prepare to enter the Promised Land that their parents had missed out on.

And yet, though forty years had passed, the covenantal basis behind the Law remained the same. Thus, the retelling of God’s acts of faithfulness is not merely history; rather it is again to be understood as the proof of an ongoing covenantal relationship. Just as on Mt. Sinai forty years earlier, these acts of His faithfulness are again told as a prelude to the restating of the Law, so that this generation of Israelites will understand that their relationship with God is still based upon His faithfulness, not theirs.

And just in case they missed this point, Moses summarizes the entire concept for them.

And you shall remember that the LORD your God *led you all the way these forty years in the wilderness* . . . and fed you with manna which you did not know nor did your fathers know, that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the LORD. Your garments did not wear out on you, nor did your foot swell these forty years . . . *Therefore* you shall keep the commandments of the LORD your God. (Deut 8:2-4,6).

This passage presents, in a condensed form, the idea that God's covenantal commitment to them should continue to be the inspiration behind the obedience of the Hebrews. Again the main point is that they were not to keep the commandments *in order to* earn God's faithfulness, but rather *because of* it.

A the same time this passage also makes clear what the Hebrews are to be obedient to: the revelation of God. God states that the miracle of the manna was not done simply to be a motivation in the lives of His people, but also to make them know that "man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the LORD." In other words, this manna—which was something that neither the Hebrews nor the generation before them knew—was a daily lesson in trusting fresh revelation over established tradition.

Traditionally, a person would have to plant a grain crop, harvest it, and then use it to make bread. During the planting of these crops, prayers and sacrifices would be offered up to the agrarian gods of the field, such as Baal, as the food supply depended on their favour. In other words, the traditional way to success meant labouring in the field, and religious service to the local gods. That tradition is now turned on its head, as God requires virtually no labour from the people, other than the gathering up of the manna from the ground. Additionally, this provision of food had no religious prerequisites tied to it. All that was required of the Hebrews was that they obey His directives on when to gather the manna, and when to store it.

As they did this for forty years they became more dependent on the revelation of God. Specifically, in this instance, they learned to believe God's instruction for gathering and storing the manna. But on a larger scale, they also learned to trust in the revelation of God's character. As He fed them in this manner for forty years, and as He protected them from their enemies for forty years, and as their clothes did not wear out during those forty years, they learned that His commitment to them was true.

Their parents had learned that Baal was not their true god, and that to worship according to their traditional methods was to reject revelation, and in so doing, reject God. Now, this next generation was in the desert where reliance on traditional methods of sustenance was not even an option. There were no crops to be gathered out here in the wilderness. To rely on tradition would not only indicate a rejection of God, but it would also have meant certain death. And so they learned to rely on God. They learned to trust in His miraculous ways as they followed His thunderous voice. And this reliance on revelation not only sustained them for forty years, but also prepared their hearts for entry into the Promised Land.

God had brought them out of Egypt, and into the desert, to reveal the existence of their covenantal relationship. He ratified that covenant with them at Sinai, and continued to be faithful to it even when their actions contradicted His spoken instructions to them. Not only did their deliverance from Egypt testify as to His commitment to His people, but His continued provision in the face of outright rejection also demonstrated that this covenant was still based on His faithfulness, not theirs.

In the end, the desert was the place where God revealed His glory: manifesting on Mt. Sinai as a storm, with His voice thundering from the heavens. That glory was also demonstrated by the self-revelation of His identity as the God of *Hesed*. When Moses had already seen the burning bush,

and had already visited the storm on Sinai, he asked God to reveal more of His glory. God agreed and, as part of that greater revelation, told Moses that He was the LORD, and that He abounded in *hesed*. This *covenantal faithfulness* was not only revealed to Moses through those words, but was demonstrated repeatedly to the rest of the nation, as God remained faithful to His people throughout their time in the desert.

In the wilderness, they finally learned to trust in that revealed identity. They learned to follow the revelation that He was giving them, rather than the traditions that they had brought with them. They followed God, and His revelation, for forty years through the desert, until they were ready to follow Him into the Promised Land.

Elijah – a prophet in the desert

At Sinai, the Israelites had mistakenly identified Baal, a Canaanite god, as the one who had delivered them from Egypt. Yet while this deity was apparently similar to God in the minds of the Israelites, the worship of Yahweh and Baal were fundamentally different. *Baal was looked to for what he would do in the future, while Yahweh was to be exalted for what He had already accomplished.* (Deut. 5:6). In fact, this covenantal act of deliverance from Egypt was to be the foundation for God's command that He alone be worshipped. (Deut. 5:7-9).

Yet, while His covenantal faithfulness to them was supposed to inspire their fidelity, this idea was not clearly understood, or embraced, by the Israelites. Centuries later, when Jeroboam was king over Israel, he “made two calves of gold, and said to the people, ‘Here are your gods, O Israel, which brought you up from the land of Egypt!’” (1 Kg. 12:28). Reminiscent of Sinai, we again see the worship of Baal, in the form of a golden calf, being substituted or confused with the worship of God, as Baal is again credited for the nation's deliverance from Egypt.

It is during this setting of religious compromise that the prophet Elijah bursts onto the scene.

And Elijah the Tishbite, of the inhabitants of Gilead, said to Ahab, “As the LORD God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years except at my word.” (1Kg. 17:1).

Immediately after giving this word to Ahab, Elijah is commanded by God to hide in the wilderness. (1 Kg. 17:3). Once there, Elijah is fed—both morning and evening—by ravens that God has commanded to bring bread and meat to him in. (1 Kg. 17:4-6).

Though Elijah gives no reason for God to withhold the rain, it is clearly a direct challenge to the authority and ability of Baal. As the god of agriculture who controlled the storms, Baal was expected to be able to bring rainfall and fertility when he was asked to do so. The only limitation to this power would come during the summer when, in Canaanite mythology, Baal would battle with Mot, the god of the summer drought. During the dry seasons in which Baal descended into the underworld to fight with Mot, his worshippers would mourn his “death”. These “mourning rites mainly consisted of limping dances round the altar with laments and invocations of Baal . . . gradually increasing to orgiastic fury, in which the priests lacerated themselves with knives and lancets.”⁵ Yet

⁵ FLEMMING F. HVIDBERG, *WEeping AND LAUGHTER IN THE OLD TESTAMENT* 108 (1962).

this drought lasted far longer than only one summer as God withheld the rain for three years in order to demonstrate that Baal's death was not merely a seasonal occurrence.

In addition to the corporate revelation that God's actions were intended to bring to Israel, God's provision for Elijah delivered a more personal revelation. While Baal was failing to provide rain or produce for Israel, God was miraculously supplying food for Elijah. While all of Israel suffered the effects of the drought, Elijah lived as the Israelites of old: surviving in the wilderness as he trusted in, and relied upon, the sustaining hand of God.

And it came to pass after many days that the word of the LORD came to Elijah, in the third year, saying, "Go, present yourself to Ahab, and I will send rain on the earth." (1Kg 18:1).

Elijah, again obeying the word of the LORD, leaves for Samaria, and meets with Ahab. He tells Ahab to gather all of Israel and bring them to Mount Carmel, along with the prophets of Baal. Once everyone is assembled, Elijah tells the people of Israel: "If the LORD is God follow Him; but if Baal, follow him." (1Kg 18:21). He then challenges the prophets of Baal to a contest, in order to demonstrate that he is serving the true God.

Both sides are to prepare a sacrifice by cutting up a bull and laying it upon wood, but neither side is to light the fire. Elijah further dictates: "Then you call on the name of your gods, and I will call on the name of the LORD; and the God who answers by fire, He is God." (1Kg 18:24). The prophets of Baal agree to the contest, and soon we see them going through their mourning rituals to raise Baal from the "dead" so that he might come and consume the sacrifice.

[They] leaped about the altar...cried aloud, and cut themselves, *as was their custom*, with knives and lances, until the blood gushed out on them...but there was no voice; no one answered, no one paid attention. (1Kg 18:26-29).

Here again we see the danger of religious tradition. For centuries, the worshippers of Baal had gone through these "mourning rites" near the end of each summer drought in order to "resurrect" their god. The changing seasons always insured the "proof" of his return in the form of rain, but in their minds it was their actions that brought him back to life. And that is what religion always does: it looks at results, and then tries to trace those results back to some action by man, so that a process can be put into place to guarantee those results again in the future.

In other words, *religion first tries to determine what actions will please God, and then teaches that one must perform these actions in order to be rewarded by God.* The problem with that is that God is already unconditionally committed to us, so when religion comes in preaching "conditionality," it always ends up presenting the opposite of God's truth. Religion put the worshippers of Baal into a position of believing that they had to pierce *themselves* in order to resurrect their god. Of course, on specific level, this is a complete reversal of the amazing truth that God allowed Himself to be pierced on the cross in order to resurrect and restore humanity. However,

on the more general level, it is also a complete corruption of the call to grace, the call to trust in His works and not our own.

Our relationship with Him

So how do we avoid the confusion that so often overtook the Israelites and keep ourselves from fashioning and worshipping a god that requires our efforts *in order to* earn his blessings? To begin with, *we must not allow ourselves to mistake the God that has saved us for the god we have been taught about.* Admittedly, they look very similar, just as Baal—a storm god who battled the sea—was easily mistaken for the God who had parted the sea and appeared as a storm. Yet the difference between the two should be easy to see: the false god always demands worship in order to earn his favour while the One True God’s love for us stems from His own covenantal nature.

Accordingly, we must, as Moses did, have that greater revelation of God’s covenantal nature. God’s ultimate goal is for man to be in intimate, covenantal fellowship with Him. Salvation is only our first experience of that faithfulness, and provides our first glimpse into the unfathomable depths of His love for us. However, though it be just a glimpse, we must learn to trust that His love will continue to spring from His own faithfulness rather than our faithful performance. And, as our union with Him is based upon His covenantal faithfulness, our relationship to Him should be anchored in the knowledge that despite any weaknesses and failures, He will not abandon us. *Any message that weakens this truth of His unconditional commitment to His people is not the Gospel.*

It is this understanding—that He will never forsake us—that should be the sole motivator for our response to Him. Just as God provided the law after revealing the ongoing relationship with His people, it is only after we have come understand His unconditional commitment to us that we can begin to accept that the only demand laid upon the people of God is to hear and obey the voice of God. Whether through worship or obedience, our response to Him must always be *because of* our understanding of Him. And so we are left with a choice: we can either listen to the voice of religious performance, or we can choose to pursue religious abandonment. We can worship the god of religion, or we can worship the God of Covenantal Faithfulness.

Grasshopper Syndrome⁶

Paul Anderson-Walsh

“Faith is to believe what you do not yet see;
the reward of this faith is to see what you believe.”

~ St Augustine of Hippo (354 – 430AD)

As I study the lives of the characters in the Scriptures time and again, I’m reminded that dying before we die is the secret of learning how to live and that it is failure and hopelessness that starts the engine.

Psychologists and counsellors often talk about a process they call reframing or recasting. The crucial point is that each of us needs to see ourselves as God sees us. In the next two chapters, I’ll show you both sides of the self-image and self-esteem dilemma. Choose your poison.

The Problem of Self-Image and Self-Esteem	
Thinking too much of others and too little of ourselves.	Thinking too much of ourselves and not enough of others.

There are some extraordinary stories in the Scriptures which speak to both the over-realising and the under-realising of self. When we observe Israel in their transition phase from their enslavement in Egypt to their possession of their inheritance, we see the extent to which the period of four hundred years in Egypt has taken its toll and served to numb Israel’s aspirations and dull their vision.

In Israel’s tortured pilgrimage from Egypt to the Promised Land, they arrive at a place called Kadesh Barnea which would prove to be a place of unbelief for them. Israel eventually possess sufficient faith to believe in the blood of the Passover Lamb. They have what it took to get them out of Egypt but they do not have what is needed to get them into the Promised Land. In many respects, this predicament is typical of modern day believers who have faith (they’re saved by grace alone) but do not have the faith to live by grace alone. Consequently, both Israel then and the “church” now have failed to enter into His rest.

When God speaks to Israel, He doesn’t send them up into the land to assess whether it’s the right place for them to settle. They know that it’s the right place. They go up in order to see if they can possess it and this they do in spite of the fact that God has given them categorical assurances that this is their land; a land which He has possessed for them. However, despite the Pharisees’ protestations, “We are offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone. How is it that you say, ‘You will become free?’” [John 8:33], the Jewish people have indeed been slaves for some four hundred years. Indeed, the very men who have stood wavering in the face of victory are not

⁶ Paul Anderson-Walsh: The Apprentice

free men. They are freed slaves whose mentality is still very much incarcerated. They have lived under dreadful oppression of the Pharaoh of Egypt who has acceded to power after the death of Joseph. Slaves do not often rise up; they're downtrodden and their spirits are crushed.

I'll always remember an experiment which my biology teacher conducted in her laboratory. She took a jumping flea and placed it in a jam jar. She proceeded to pierce holes in the lid which she had screwed on tight. Then, she told us that in three weeks' time, she would've trained this flea and she left the jar on the windowsill. She marked a date in her diary and told us that she would complete the lesson on the said date. I observed the flea in the first few days. It would leap up, hit its head on the lid and fall to the bottom of the jar. After three weeks, when we had all forgotten about the flea, she presented the jar to us and enquired if we had remembered her little experiment. She then removed the jar and asked, "How many of you think that this little fellow will be in the jar tomorrow if I leave the lid off?" Nobody did think so; we all thought it would be gone at the first sign of daylight. My teacher smiled, "It will stay in this jar forever." And true enough, the flea was still in the jar the next day.

You see, all that banging of its head had taught it to live within certain limits. It would still jump but we had set the parameters for it. At that time, I had no idea that what we had just been given was a psychology lesson. Each and everyone of us has hit our heads on the lid of life so many times that we've learned not to be too ambitious. We have, in short, become slaves. So, when we hear about possibilities which exist outside the jar, we're unconvinced.

Nobody could say that the children of Israel didn't know about the power of God; of course they did because they had participated in the miracles and not just read about them like you and I. Yet, in spite of all that, negative reports are brought back by the spies from the reconnaissance mission to the Promise Land [Num. 13:27-29] –

"And they told [Moses], 'We came to the land to which you sent us. It flows with milk and honey, and this is its fruit. However, the people who dwell in the land are strong, and the cities are fortified and very large. And besides, we saw the descendants of Anak there. The Amalekites dwell in the land of the Negeb. The Hittites, the Jebusites, and the Amorites dwell in the hill country. And the Canaanites dwell by the sea, and along the Jordan.'"

Note that this is the land which God has already said is Israel's inheritance. It's simply a matter of taking by faith what's already theirs by right. But listen to the voice of doubt –

"It does flow with milk and honey! Here is its fruit. But –

- The people who live there are strong and powerful;
- The cities are fortified and very large;
- We even saw the descendants of Anak there."

Of the twelve spies who have gone up to spy out the land, only one, Caleb, believes. Now, what's remarkable is that Joshua is one of the twelve spies but he too is as unconvinced as the other ten. This is an easy thing to overlook because most of us just assume that Joshua is the great man of faith but Joshua doesn't take his stand until the following day after what would have been his dark night

of the soul. On that day when the spies return, Caleb stands alone. I'm so grateful for the Caleb's whom the Lord has brought to me and who have walked with me through the years. I readily confess to you that there have been times when "giants" have prevented me from taking possession of that which God has possessed for me. Caleb is in a minority of one as he petitions the people that they should "go up at once" and take possession of the land for they can certainly do it. But the eleven prevailed as the men who had gone up with him said, "We are not able to go up against the people, for they are stronger than we are." [Num. 13:31].

And so, the eleven spies spread among the Israelites a bad report about the land they've explored [Num. 13:32-33]. They say –

“- The land we explored devours those living in it;

- All the people we saw there are of great size;

- There, we saw the Nephilim (the descendants of Anak, who came from the Nephilim);

- We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes and we looked the same to them.”

Have you ever suffered from the Grasshopper Syndrome? A very close friend of mine used to play for Tottenham Hotspur Football Club in the 1980's. I'll always remember his telling me the story of when they used to play against the mighty Liverpool Football Club. Tottenham had not beaten Liverpool at their ground for around eighty years. One of the reasons was that when the players gathered in the tunnel, the last thing they saw before running out onto the pitch was a large imposing, nay, forbidding sign which simply read, "This Is Anfield". My friend recalled that when an opposing player read it, the thought which went through his mind was, "We were like grasshoppers" The game was already lost before it had begun.

That night, after the spies had returned, would prove to be Joshua's graduation ceremony. The entire congregation raises a loud cry and the people weep that night. And then, fear bears its frightful fruit [Num. 14:2-4] –

“All the people of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron. The whole congregation said to them, 'Would that we had died in the land of Egypt! Or would that we had died in this wilderness! Why is the Lord bringing us into this land, to fall by the sword? Our wives and our little ones will become a prey. Would it not be better for us to go back to Egypt?' And they said to one another, 'Let us choose a leader and go back to Egypt.'”

Many of us have considered the very same thing, "Let's go back to Egypt; to hell with it ...!" These dear people have failed to inherit what is rightfully theirs because of how they see themselves and not how God sees them. They've been emotionally hijacked and in their blind panic, they put more faith in the way they feel about themselves than in the truth about themselves. There'll be many times in our lives when we'll have to make a decision as to whether we'll believe what the devil, other people and our emotions have to say about us or to believe what God and His word say about us.

In the Teenage Phase, we're no longer children tossed to and fro by our emotions. We stand on facts. Solid facts. Always remember that emotions don't have any intellectual capacities; they simply

respond to what we're feeling and thinking. They're not initiators. They're merely responders. So, if you want to change how you feel, change what you think and, here's the key, if you want to change what you think, you'll have to change what you believe and nowhere is this more apparent than in the matter of what we believe about God and ourselves.

I, for one, need no persuading as to just how powerful our emotions are. I had been ruled by them for so long. Yet, the stupidity of it was brought home to me when Hayley and I first got married. We had taken a holiday to Florida and visited the Universal Studios. As we wandered around the theme park, we came across something called "*Hitchcock Presents*". We were invited to watch an excerpt of Alfred Hitchcock's film, "*The Birds*", in 3-D. Hayley squealed with delight at the prospect. I had never seen a 3-D film and was a bit cool on the idea, not least of which because it involved wearing a pair of glasses which looked rather silly. Hayley was insistent and said that I would be so scared that it would be hilarious. (Now, you've had some insights into how sick I was and so, you should be able to follow along.) With my testosterone levels hitting the Richter scale, I had no choice but to join the queue. Hayley was chuckling as, obviously, she was relishing the thought of my impending appointment with fear. This, of course, did nothing for me other than to ensure that I would draw down on all my resources and really self-talk my way through the whole unpleasant business. So, as we shuffled lemming-like towards the front of the queue, I kept tight-lipped and kept repeating to myself, "There's nothing to be scared of; this is just a film." I guess I did that a hundred times or more by the time we took our seats. The curtains were pulled back and there we were, glasses and all. No problem; the credits rolled as did my chant of "there's nothing to be scared of; this is just a film." Hayley squeezed my arm in anticipation. "There's nothing to be scared of; this is just a film." A couple of minutes in and we're still in good shape. "There's nothing to be scared of; this is just a film." Then, in a completely unprovoked incident, one of the birds came to rest on a telegraph pole wire. With murder in its eyes, it shot a piercing glance at *me*! I could see what it was thinking – "Kill" – but I was ready. "There's nothing to be scared of; this is just a film." Then, it swooped down and attacked me! Ohmygosh! I dived under the seat and screamed. What I didn't scream was "there's nothing to be scared of; this is just a film"; not at all because my intellect had been overridden by my emotions. Hayley laughed herself so much that after the film, she had need of the ladies' restroom. I was left to contemplate another life lesson learned.

Meanwhile, back in Kadesh, the situation is mutinous. Israel is going to attempt to overthrow Moses and Aaron. But they will not exert their authority; instead, they fall on their faces in an act of intercession, prostrate before the people. The scene is tense. The next move will be critical.

"And Joshua the son of Nun and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, who were among those who had spied out the land, tore their clothes and said to all the congregation of the people of Israel, 'The land, which we passed through to spy it out, is an exceedingly good land. If the Lord delights in us, He will bring us into this land and give it to us, a land that flows with milk and honey. Only do not rebel against the Lord. And do not fear the people of the land, for they are bread for us. Their protection is removed from them, and the Lord is with us; do not fear them.'"

[Num. 14:6-9]

Yet, such is the toxicity of fear that rather than appease the congregation, Joshua's word of admonishment incites them still further. "Then all the congregation said to stone them with stones. *But* the glory of the Lord appeared at the tent of meeting to all the people of Israel." **[Num. 14:10]**. If

we're to graduate from the Apprenticeship Phase, like our Master, we'll have to become men and women of grief acquainted with sorrow. It is hardly an edifying thing to offer you but there it is. If you've been called to any form of true Christian service, "it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in Him but also suffer for His sake" [Phil. 1:29].

I had lunch with a young man this week who was quizzing me on the teaching at The Grace Project. He was pleasant, eager for Christ and anxious to be used by God. In fact, he had come to see me because he was considering going into fulltime Christian service. I told him plainly that in his current position, he couldn't possibly understand the gospel of grace. I could see that he was politely offended by me. "Why do you say that?" he asked.

"It's simply because I know that you've neither failed nor suffered enough," I said.

"Theology only becomes rich when it has survived the onslaught of pain. And sound theology leads us through pain to a fuller experience of Christ, and therefore of hope and love and joy."

~ Larry Crabb

God will never consider a man or a woman for active service until they've failed. God will never use them mightily until He has broken their will and crushed their spirit of self-sufficiency. As somebody once said, if God promised His servants an unbroken run of prosperity, there'd be many counterfeit Christians and don't be surprised at the famine; it's permitted to root you deeper, just as a whirlwind makes a tree grapple deeper into the roots of the soil.

The Tower of Babel

Ole Henrik Skjelstad

One of the greatest, most scandalous and dangerous lies which is preached in the church is that we must become more like Jesus. That was the lie which ruined Eve and Adam's relationship with God. All because Eve believed the lie that she needed to become more like God. Notice that after the fall it wasn't God who withdrew from those two. It was Eve and Adam who hid themselves from God. Shame had entered paradise. This rather persistent feeling renders us with a feeling of nakedness, of not belonging and it alienates us from recognizing our Heavenly Father's love.

Shame is the means by which the prince of the power of the air controls and conditions his doomed kingdom. It is this feeling of disgrace that shame promotes which inhibits every man from being a true image of the Godhead. Shame cripples, ruins and it causes man to hide from God. Jesus never exhorted anyone to be like Him, because that would be to contradict and thwart His royal mission.

He came to expose the lie, atone for its consequences and provide liberty for the captives. The fall had rendered man spiritually blind. Man firmly believed that He had to improve himself so he began comparing himself with the creation. He found that he was superior to everything else in it, except his fellow man. The next step was thus to compare and contrast himself with his peers so that he could be the foremost among them.

Man began erecting his own righteousness, the tower of Babel. It was a bold and ambitious project which only outcome would be to entrench man in his delusion and reinforce the hold of the lie. So, God did what He does in every person's life. He destroyed the tower and scattered man's righteousness to the extent that it was completely leveled. This is the story of every man.

Shame's twin brother condemnation has caused too many believers to bow their head with a urgent sense of falling short, simply because someone has passed on an idea of a standard which resembles the tower of Babel, that is, the original lie presented in different words. We are rendered feeling useless, of no value and a hindrance to God, because of our imagined shortcomings. We don't feel loving, we don't feel spiritual, and compared to others we seemingly do not have the brilliant gifts which they are endowed with.

Accepting ourselves is vital if we are to recognize ourselves as perfect images of Christ in our form. It was God who chose us. It was solely His initiative to gather us as a family of many sons. He chose us exactly as we are with every human facet we have. If He has accepted us we can accept ourselves. Not doing so is in fact an insult against His sober judgment.

Chasing our own righteousness is the basic sin which prevents us from becoming what we were created to be; ourselves. As a substitute we become a distorted version of ourselves. When we aren't ourselves we are nothing. There is only one truth and only one righteousness which restore our true being; His.

Before the fall Eve and Adam perfectly expressed themselves. The day they ate of the fruit they became expressions of sin, and God plainly told them that their lives from now on would be a

perpetual struggle to be something they never could be in their own powers. Originally they were furnished with faith faculties to be faith people. A life outside God was destined to be a life of appearances.

Only spirit people can discern spiritually and make righteous judgments. Thus the new creation is a partaker of divine nature. Such a person doesn't judge in accordance with outward realities. He sees behind outer success, prestige, influence and affluence. That person clearly sees the emptiness in the hearts of those who are wise in this world. As a result a faith person does not pursue those things. He isn't easily deceived by worldly things. What motivates him is the love of God which is outpoured into His heart. His passion is Christ, and nothing this world has to offer holds any appeal to him.

Faith involves the competence of seeing beyond appearances and accepting God's truth about us as the final truth. If He says we are love, because He is love, that is a fact despite our circumstances or what we imagine we behold with our earthly eyes. The day we acknowledge that we in Christ are everything we are meant to be in this temporal realm we are set completely free to express ourselves without shame or any other crippling emotion.

I AM the Resurrection

Fred Pruitt

Then Martha, as soon as she heard that Jesus was coming, went and met him: but Mary sat still in the house.

Then said Martha unto Jesus, Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died.

But I know, that even now, whatsoever thou wilt ask of God, God will give it thee.

Jesus saith unto her, Thy brother shall rise again.

Martha saith unto him, I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day.

Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live:

And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this? (John 11:20-25)

As we have been riding around the United States visiting people in their homes the past few weeks, we have noticed there is a common temptation constantly confronting the people of God. The Lord has given us a message of completion and perfection in Him to proclaim, as Jesus did, the "acceptable year of the Lord." In other words, it is as if the Lord is saying by us, "Do not delay in your believing. Do not delay in your sight, to wait for another day to see with the single eye of faith. Today is the day to believe. Your perfection is in Me in the here and now. Do not wait for another day to believe that truth that I have proclaimed."

Everywhere we go we make these bold claims, that in the Cross of Christ He has in His death accomplished the death of our old selves, the self inhabited and deceived by the spirit of error, the self that wrongly believes and imagines itself to be separate unto itself, responsible to do or be what is supposed to be, to be good or evil, wise or unwise, strong or weak. That false self that satanically imagines its own independence and self-responsibility has died in the Cross in totality, as dead as dead can be, and the scriptures over and over testify through Jesus' words, Paul's words, and by many other witnesses, that the old has passed and we are not of it anymore.

And then further, in no uncertain terms, we find ourselves proclaiming that in His resurrection by the Spirit of the Father, Jesus was raised from the depths of death and hell to ascend, "up on high," bringing with him the captives of sin that He has freed (Eph 4:8), and taking them TOGETHER WITH HIM into the bosom of the Father, where He has sat down eternally on the right hand of the Father, and we together with Him (Eph 2:6).

This is a present and living fact in us all, especially in the consciousness of those who believe, since it was forever accomplished by the Creator and Sustainer of the Universe, Who is above all, through all, and in all.

Likewise we have also been given to proclaim, by the power of the Holy Spirit, the further understanding that we are not now and never have been only ourselves alone functioning by ourselves. In our fallen state we were inhabited and inwardly motivated by the selfish spirit of error, the father (originator) of lies, so that as Jesus said, we did "the lusts of our father the devil," (and there are none among us to whom this does not apply). In contrast to that former reality in which we lived, we must boldly proclaim that now that we are born again in Christ, that spirit of error who is

the author of our former false independent identity, has been completely removed from our inner selves by the death of Jesus' broken body on the Cross, so that now in His resurrection we are, in this very moment, inhabited and inwardly motivated (led, moved, caused) by the Holy Spirit of God. It is by the Divine Spirit in our innermost selves that we are brought into oneness with God -- Father, Son, Holy Spirit -- even as Jesus was one with the Father and the Spirit. It cannot be any other way but that Jesus prayer in John 17:11, 21,22, in which He prayed to the Father that we would live in the same, "My Father and I are one" living truth in which He lived and stated throughout the Gospel of John, would be that exact and same living truth in us. (And we have to ask, would the Father fail to answer Jesus' last prayer on earth for us? Certainly not!) Jesus prayed to the Father that we would be one with Him as He is One with His Father, the SAME ONENESS, and we MUST believe the Father has answered Jesus' prayer -- in us!

Jesus said, "When you see me you see the Father." And we MUST proclaim the same, not because of any accomplishment, piety or holiness of our own, but only because of and through the eternal and absolutely certain accomplishment of Jesus Christ in bringing many sons unto glory (Heb 2:10), so that we are compelled by the Spirit of Truth to boldly say the same thing that He said, "When you see me you see Christ."

This is a very bold and seemingly absurd proclamation for merely human beings to make. But we are not mere human beings, but human beings who have been filled with and joined to the very person of God in our spirits, Divine Spirit person joined to human spirit person as one Divine/human person (1 Cor 6:17). And in that truth we now, in this moment, live spontaneously out of the reality that He and we are truly One! *"As He is, so are we in this world"* (1 John 4:17).

Of course, there is no doubt such a bold confession will meet with resistance, ridicule, and much opposition, both by our own limited human reason and by many who we encounter in the world, but nonetheless this truth is as much a present and living fact, as it is a fact that in His Cross we have died with Him and in His Resurrection we have risen with Him. If one is true then so is the other.

However, what we are all confronted with on a daily and even a moment by moment basis, is the constant pull and temptation into the sin of unbelief, which is a failure or even a refusal to enter into the fullness which is ours in the now, by a continual hypnosis to outer appearances and behaviors, coming out of a continual independent self-focus. We find many agreeing with the words of the truth, delighted by them and heartily agreeing, in principle, that they are so, but many failing to take that final leap by faith into, by believing and confessing that, "IT IS SO IN ME. MY LIVING IN THE WORLD IS CHRIST LIVING!" This temptation toward this sin of unbelief is evidenced by statement after statement everywhere we go of the following kinds of confessions of unbelief:

Statements of Unbelief

"I know Christ is in me, but I have to die to self."

"I know this is true, but a lot of me is still in God's way."

"I'm in union with Christ, but it hasn't yet started to work in me."

"God's biggest problem is me."

"That sounds good, but I'm not that spiritual a person."

"I see what you say, but we have to remember that this is a process."

"I wish I could make that work, but I sin every day."

"I know that's true in my spirit, but my flesh and my soul still have a long way to go."

"I've still got lots of obstacles to discover and overcome before I could say Christ is manifesting Himself fully in me."

Which brings me to the scripture passage I mentioned above, regarding the death of Lazarus and Jesus appearing on the scene "late." Lazarus' sister, Martha, comes running to Jesus as soon as she knows He has come.

"Oh Lord," she says, "if you had been here my brother would not have died. But I know even now you have whatever you ask the Father."

Doesn't Martha represent us all when we have been in this situation? Something we consider awful is happening, about to happen, or has happened, and we come to God knowing that He can do anything, if only He would!

Then somehow we hear the message Martha heard from Jesus, "Your brother will rise again."

It does not usually even enter our minds that God's word to us of such an impossible happening could actually occur, right now, in this present moment, so we do exactly as Martha did -- we put it off into some nebulous future. "Oh, I know my brother will rise again on the last day."

We all know that, and it didn't really take anything special for Martha to be able to say that. We all know God is going to make everything alright one day, that He works all things together for good, and if we can do nothing else, we can always find some degree of rest and comfort in that.

But Jesus has another thing He is getting across here. Jesus is telling Martha that her brother is going to rise **THAT VERY DAY**, and to believe for something in the present moment is a completely different ballgame.

Before I go on, let's step back a bit and consider the real purpose Jesus has in mind.

We must understand that when Jesus performed the miracles He did, though they were certainly out of compassion of the moment and were the love of God in action toward specific persons for specific needs, still from our viewpoint, the miracles are never the point. Jesus is always demonstrating, as He did with all His life lived in the earth, some particular aspect of God or reality He wants us to see which is beyond the miracle itself. The gospels tell us that He told parables in order to give a picture of the kingdom of God, and the miracles are the same -- the acts themselves are parables, pictures, of something beyond the actual physical miracles.

Our focus is almost always on the miracles, and our reactions run the gamut, from wishing we were there "in Bible days," so that we could see the same miracles the people did back then, to wishing or

praying that we would perform the same types of miraculous deeds, in order to do "greater works," as Jesus promised.

But the "greater works" are not greater miracles in the physical realm than Jesus did. We would have a hard time competing and one-upping Jesus in things like raising people from the dead, or one-upping Moses parting the Red Sea or making water come out of a rock. If we view it that way, maybe "greater works" might be raising 100 dead people, or perhaps parting the Atlantic Ocean! But this isn't what God has in mind.

Jesus, and even Moses, demonstrated miraculous works in order to show the more important inward spiritual reality. In other words, the changing of the arrangement of molecules and life-spans in this temporal world so that we have miraculous results (which still are only temporal and will pass away) is not and never has been the purpose. The miracles and healings of Jesus are ALWAYS pointing to the Spirit truth behind the miracle or healing itself.

And it is the same with this raising of Lazarus from the dead.

Martha comes to Jesus, but she really does not believe the real truth Jesus has come to demonstrate and declare. She knows Jesus can do anything, just like we know God can do anything. But she really doesn't believe that, because she doesn't really believe that the resurrection of Lazarus occurs now, in this present moment. She even further demonstrates that she doesn't really believe such a miracle can happen NOW, when she points out to Jesus that Lazarus has been dead long enough to stink! In her mind, Jesus could have, in the non-existent past, prevented Lazarus from dying in the first place, or, in a non-existent future, she can believe that Lazarus will rise again in the last day.

But not today.

Jesus, however, had set up the whole thing so that they could see just that -- that TODAY Lazarus will rise from the dead.

Let us remember, though, that the miracle is not about the miracle, but is more about us and the truth God is showing us.

When Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead against all human laws, all human reason, all human ability, an utter impossibility for those people right then in their present moment, He was doing far more than just raising Lazarus from the dead back into this temporal life, no doubt to suffer death again later. He was demonstrating for us that the resurrection He has promised us, in the Spirit, is NOW. "He who believes shall not taste of death!" Shall not even taste it! Lazarus wasn't even really dead, but only sleeping, as He had told the disciples.

When He says, "I AM the resurrection," Jesus is not talking only about the future. There will come a day when we will resurrect from physical death and experience the promise of our full inheritance, when we will no longer be clothed upon by mortality, but will be clothed upon by immortality (2 Cor 5:2-4), and what Paul calls our "vile bodies" (Phil 3:21) will become something we cannot possibly imagine or even speculate about. But even now, RIGHT NOW, there is a full resurrection in our

spirits, a completeness and a rest in Christ to enter TODAY. We do not inwardly taste of death, today and forever!

We have inherited, as a gift, a completed work, to which we need add nothing! In the past we have been taught and even imagined ourselves that there is something we need to add to or work in order to complete in ourselves the salvation of Christ, but that is at best a mistake and at worst an insidious lie of the enemy. Adam and Eve, though not fully conscious of who they were, were complete and perfect in the garden, lacking nothing. The devil came along and told them they were incomplete and needed something more -- that they needed to eat of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil (self-improvement), in order to become "wise as gods." It was an outright lie because he audaciously implied that God had lied to them when He told them that the day that they ate of that tree that they would die. *"Ye shall NOT surely die,"* the serpent said to Eve.

But Jesus came to restore what was lost. He did EVERYTHING necessary for each one of us to experience and walk in that restoration and reconciliation. Therefore there is nothing whatsoever left for us to do except to receive it with thanksgiving and praise from the Lord through faith. We do this by believing the work GOD has done, and that He has done it perfectly and totally in removing the enemy from us and renewing us within with His own Spirit of Truth and Love.

Still the enemy comes to us and says it is not so, and to agree with him and to say God has not completed His work in us, is to agree with Satan himself. That is what all those statements of unbelief above are doing -- agreeing with the lie of Satan. Through the Cross and Resurrection, we are NOW, this moment, complete and one with Christ. Any confession that is less than that is simply failing to believe God, to take Him at His word. Hebrews says, "Today is the day of salvation."

Of course that is not who we are. We are not of those "who fall back into perdition [through unbelief], but who believe to the saving of the soul." (Heb 10:39)

Therefore let us then agree wholeheartedly with God the Father, that it is now, and every moment of every day true, that we were crucified with Him, and that it is no longer we who live, but that it is now and every moment of every day, Christ who lives in us (Gal 2:20). It is Christ NOW who is manifesting in our mortal flesh. If we must say it against appearances, do we believe God or appearances? Abraham "considered not his own body near death," but trusted God to perform His Promise to Abraham. So therefore, let us agree wholeheartedly that it is God, right now and every moment of every day, who works in us to "WILL and to DO of HIS good pleasure." (Phil 2:13). Let us stand up and declare, "For me to live IS Christ!"

Hallelujah! Amen.

Perfect Day

Kenneth Kropf

Such a perfect day, this eternal day
here by the river of Life,
the eternal song of Love,
flowing to eternity.

This crystal sky so pure
meadows bathed in verdant light.
the wind whispering words of truth
delight wraps me in its playful dance.

intertwined in love, music fills the air
i close my eyes...

wherever my imagination wanders,
it says 'it is well with my soul'.

Warmth, peace and comfort draw near.
Sensing now, you are here.

Myrrh, aloe, cassia.

You touch me... tentatively
Your hands, so humble.

It's a perfect day.
This eternal day.

i feel your palms against my skin

my heart explodes, again
with a knowing...

It's your scarred hands
spelling my name
that makes this perfect paradise
so beautiful.

Christ Within⁷

James M Campbell

If Christ be within, there He must be sought, there is He to be found. Alas, that His presence, while not denied should so often be unrealized. Many Christians seem hardly to be aware that a Royal Guest has taken up His abode within their hearts. Their consciousness of His indwelling is at best fitful and dim. Their assurance of salvation is overcast with clouds because it lacks the important element of full assurance or faith in the Divine Indwelling Presence. They resemble a beleaguered castle from which the regular water supply has been cut off. The soldiers are suffering and dying of thirst, not aware that deep in the recesses of the fortress, cut out of the solid rock, there is a hidden well whose waters fail not. What a thrill of joy the discovery of that well would bring to the remnant of that forlorn garrison!

The knowledge of that secret spring would be to them life from the dead; and its water would be in very truth the water of life. A like change would come over many a drooping heart were the discovery to be made that spiritual supplies are not to be fetched from afar; that infinite resources have been placed within easy reach; that deep within the living sanctuary of the soul there is an unfailing fountain which renders every one who avails himself of it perfectly independent of outward circumstances and surroundings. No haunting fear of future thirst-pangs can ever come to him who knows that the water which Christ has given him has "become in him a well of water springing up unto eternal life."

⁷ James M Campbell: *The Indwelling Christ*, New York: Fleming H. Revell Company. 1895.

Wisdom Disparity

Mike Daniel

Worldly wisdom vs. Godly wisdom...
What's the difference?

Understanding cause and effect is the nature of worldly wisdom. Learning consequences, weighing cost, discerning outcomes is all evidence of strong worldly wisdom. Understanding these formulas for life help us make wise decisions.

The Bible prescribes worldly wisdom for making many of life's decisions: determining finances before building a tower, comparing troops before going to war, even weighing the cost of becoming a disciple, and understanding the laws of the harvest, finances, and friendship. Scripture is filled with wonderful examples of good, well-reasoned, cause-and-effect formulas for good decision making.

But when we try to bring "cause-and-effect" theology to work in our favor with God, we discover something that at first is very disconcerting:

Our formulas don't work with God.

We try to do what Scripture requires, but we never seem to garner greater favor from God. We submit our requests to Him faithfully, and rarely hear back regarding those things requested. We "get our life straightened out", yet don't see Him increase blessing at every turn.

"Wait!" you may say, "I HAVE been blessed, and I DO receive favor, and I DO hear from God, and I KNOW He's worked in my life!"

Good... Me too!

Yet, it never seems to be in response to my praying, or behaving, or changing. In fact, it's often the exact opposite. When I STOP praying for something and relinquish my desire to Him, He often brings about what I USED to ask for! When I give up behaving, He often brings about a change of heart. When I see Him working it's rarely where I WANT Him working! Of course, there are some positive, worldly effects associated with all these endeavors. Better behavior may keep me out of trouble, and veracious prayer may make me more mindful of God, and certainly making good changes in my lifestyle can have wonderful impact in my circumstances - thus worldly wisdom certainly works! But God is not responding to my formulaic expectations.

Scripture deals with this, too. Jonah, couldn't change God's mind about Nineveh (or his part there). Abraham couldn't make any of his own plans for God. Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Elijah, Job, Paul, Peter, and even Jesus all couldn't get what they wanted from God.

...Because God does not operate with us in the formulaic paradigm of worldly wisdom.

God operates in a purely relational paradigm.

I have struggled with God over my finances, my relationships, my career, my family, travel, health, talents, pain, opportunities, hopes, sin, perspective, spiritual gifts, and more. Yet, nothing I do seems to bring about greater divine empowerment. Because I am consequential and God is relational, we are too often working toward very different goals. I will never undermine God's sovereign goal for my life. My goal for me is always me. His goal for me is always Him. He wants Himself for me.

When I desire financial security, He is wanting more of Himself for me. When I am trying to be a better person, He is wanting more of Himself for me. When I want a better marriage, a better job, a better house, even better health, God's goal for me is none of these. He wants a deeper dependence, a richer relationship, and a more authentic experience of Himself for me.

This conflict may seem insurmountable. But God graciously gives us the solution in His Word. The answer to all I need in this life just happens to be Him, as well. He says to seek Him when we're thirsty. To seek His kingdom (not ours) and His righteousness (not ours), and all that we need will be provided.

Ironically, I seek what I need when God wants to be my pursuit. He doesn't desire just to be my Provider. He wants to be my Provision. He doesn't just want to give me security, He wants to be my Fortress. He doesn't want to make me better, He wants to be my Righteousness.

He doesn't want to give me a better life. He wants to be my Life.

So, what is the difference between worldly wisdom and godly wisdom? Worldly wisdom is discerning cause & effect...

Godly wisdom is living in, through, and from our relationship with Christ as our Life.

As we depend upon Him - and abide in Him - as our Source, we experience by grace all He has for us. And He moves us into a deeper realization of our Life, who is Christ.

John's Encounter of Jesus!

Francois DuToit

LIFE DAWNED

Sixty years after he last saw Jesus in the flesh, John, now in his nineties, reflects on the mystery that was revealed which transformed his life from an illiterate fisherman to a saint. He spent most of the latter part of his life (about 30 years) living in Asia Minor and more specifically at Ephesus, much of Paul's emphasis in teaching therefore reflects in John's writing. This he did either from Ephesus or from the Isle of Pathmos where he spent a few years in exile. (Compare Col.1:15-17, John 1:1-3,16-17, 1Jn 5:20, "He has given us understanding to know Him who is true and we are in Him who is true!") None of the other disciples better captured the conclusion of the mission of Christ than what John did in John 14:20, "In that day you will know that I am in the Father and you in Me!!!! and I in you!!!"

He has no desire to outwit the others in giving an even more accurate historic account of Christ! The life that was manifest within his sacred gaze and now tangible embrace is a fellowship of the highest order! He must write, he must extend this reality to the next generations! "I am writing this to complete your joy!" 1 Jhn.1:4

Unlike Mathew and Luke who wrote 30 years prior to John, he did not bother to locate Jesus in the setting of His natural lineage.

Before history was ever recorded the Word was!

Man pre-existed in the Logic of God! He understands that the Word was both the eternal source and destiny of all things and that nothing could ever reduce or confine the Word to an isolated island or experience, neither could the Word be trapped in human doctrine or tradition. No inferior translation or interpretation could reduce God's original intent.

The authentic integrity of God's thought would forever be preserved and celebrated in the incarnation; human life would be the uninterrupted future of the Word.

Notice how often John uses the word, *ginomai*, meaning birth or origin in the first chapter: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was towards God, and the Word was God. All things came into being (Gr.*ginomai*, from *genos*, to give birth to) through Him; and nothing has any authentic existence outside of their origin (Gr.*ginomai*) in Him. In Him was life and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness could not comprehend it.

(Greek: *kata+lambano*, to seize upon, to grasp) The true light that enlightens every man has come into the world. The world was made (Gr.*ginomai*) through Him, yet the world knew Him not; He came to His own, and His own received Him not. (Gr.*para+lambano*, to grasp, associate with) But to everyone who by faith, comprehends Him to be their true origin, (Gr.*lambano*, comprehend, grasp, identify with) in them He confirms the integrity of their son-ship, (Gr.*didomi*, in this case to give something to someone that already belongs to them, thus to return) the fact that they already are His own, born from above, they have their beginning and their being in Him!' (Gr.*eksousia*, integrity,

legality, authority, legal grounds.) Jesus has come to reveal man's true sonship; He vindicated our origin and design. 'And the Word became (Gr.*ginomai*) flesh and now tabernacles in us!' John 1:1-14. "We are not preaching a new doctrine, but the word that was from the beginning; yet it is new in that what is true in Him is equally true in us!" 1 John 2:7+8. In Him we discover that we are not here by chance or accident, or by the desire of an earthly parent, neither are we the product of a mere physical conception; we exist by the expression of God's desire to reveal Himself in the flesh. His eternal, invisible Word, His Spirit-thought, became (Gr.*ginomai*, be born) flesh. James says: 'Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth...if any man hears this word, he sees the face of his birth as in a mirror.' Jm.1:17,18,23. To know even as we have always been known!

God never compromised His original thought. The word became flesh and has taken up residence (tabernacled) in us, and we gazed with wonder and amazement upon the mystery of our inclusion in Him; (*theaomai* to gaze upon, to perceive) We saw His glory (Greek, *doxa*, the display of His opinion), the glory as of the original, authentic begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.' (The original mind, or opinion of God, preserved and now revealed in Christ. He is both the 'only begotten', *monogenes*, as in the authentic original mould, as well as the first born from the dead. Col.1:18, 1Pet.1:3) He is the revelation of our completeness. 'And of His fullness have we all received, grace against grace.' (Gr.*garin anti garitos*, grace undeserved) 'For the law was given through Moses, grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. He who is in the bosom of the Father, the only (original, authentic) begotten of the Father, He is our guide who accurately declares and interprets the invisible God within us.' Jn.1:1-5, 9-14,16-18. "The Word that was from the beginning, what initial reports concerning Him have reached our ears, what we indeed bore witness to with our own eyes to the point that we became irresistibly attracted to Him; what it was that met our gaze and the touch of our hands, yes, life dawned! (Gr.*psallo*, to touch the string of a musical instrument, thus resonance) The same life that was with the Father from the beginning, now dawned on us! The infinite life of the Father became visible before our eyes in a human person! This life now finds expression in a fellowship union with the Father and the son that is without limit or interruption. In all these years since the ascension of Jesus, John continues to enjoy unhindered friendship with God and desires to extend this same fellowship through his writing to every believer, "so that joy may be yours in full measure."

1 John 1:1,2,4.

Long before the first line of scripture

was penned on papyrus scroll,

the Word, unwritten,

existed as the mind of God.

Before the books were gathered

collated as sacred text,

the Word, intangible; invisible,

was planning, was ordering

the ages that were to come.

This Word predates the Bible,

this Word predates creation,

this Word is alive and active

and speaking still today. (Andre Rabe)

Man comes from above. "I knew you before I formed you in your mother's womb." (Jer.1:5.) If man did not come from above, then the heavenly realm would offer no appeal or attraction to him. In our make-up we are the god-kind with an appetite for more than what bread and the senses could satisfy us with. Jhn3:13 *anouthen*, we are born from above Jn3:3

Man began in God, we are not the invention of our parents!

Our original life was redeemed in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, when in the economy of God the human race was represented; "one died for all, therefore all have died!" 2 Cor.5:14; we died in His death and we were raised to newness of life in His resurrection! Hos.6:2, Eph.2:5, 1 Pet 1:3

Chapter 1 - Before time was recorded, the Word was.

1:1 God's eternal utterance originates echoes and concludes in Him

1:2 When it all began the Word was there face to face with God.

1:3 Everything's existence is sourced in Him; He remains the exclusive reference to their genesis. There is nothing original, except the Word!

1:4 His life is the light that defines our lives.

1:5 The darkness (that trapped humanity in ignorance) was pierced and could not comprehend or diminish this light. Isa.9:2-4, Isa.60:1-3, Eph.3:18.

1:6 Then there was this man John (Jesus' cousin) commissioned by God;

1:7 his mission was to draw attention to the light of their lives so that what they witnessed in Him would cause them to believe (in their original life redeemed again).

1:8 His ministry was not to distract from the light, as if he himself was the light but rather to point out the light Source.

1:9 The authentic light of life that illuminates everyman was about to dawn in the world! (In human form)

1:10 Although He was no stranger to the world, he always was there and is Himself the author of all things, but somehow no one took any notice.

1:11 It was not as though He arrived on a foreign planet, He came to His own, yet His own did not recognize Him. (Ps.24:1)

1:12 But to everyone who realises their association in Him, convinced that He is their original life, in them He confirms that we are His offspring. (Eph.3:18, empowered to comprehend; the same Greek words are used here, thus, "to comprehend the legality of our sonship.")

1:13 These are they who discover their genesis in God beyond their natural conception! Man began in God. We are not the invention of our parents!

1:14 Suddenly the invisible eternal Word takes on visible form! The Incarnation! In Him, in us!

The most accurate tangible display of God's eternal thought finds expression in human life! The Word became a human being; we are his address; He resides in us! He captivates our gaze! The glory we see there is not a religious replica; He is the authentic *monogenes* (begotten only by the Father and not by the flesh; In Him we recognise our true beginning)

The Glory (that Adam lost,) returns! In fullness! Only Grace can communicate truth in such complete context!

1:15 John the Baptist raised his voice to announce emphatically that Jesus was what his ministry and prophetic message was all about. He declared that Jesus, though younger than him, ranks above him and was "born" before him, since He always was!

1:16 He is the source of our completeness. Grace against grace! (Grace prevailed against the tide of darkness due to Adam's fall.)

1:17 Against the stark backdrop of the law; with Moses representing the condemned state of mankind, Jesus Christ unveils grace and truth!

1:18 Until this moment God remained invisible to man; now the authentic begotten son, (*monogenes*) the blueprint of man's design who represents the innermost being of God, the son who is in the bosom of the father, brings Him into full view! He is the official authority qualified to announce Him! (*ek*, preposition denoting source, and *hegeomai*, official authority)

1:23 I echo Isaiah! The same voice, the same urgency! I articulate the prophetic voice, crying in the wilderness, "At once! Level the highway of the Lord!" (His appearance is apparent, without delay!")

Notes

John 1:1 The Logos is the source, everything commences in Him; the Logos goes full circle and always returns to its origin, GOD. (Greek preposition, *pros*. "The Word that proceeded from his mouth, just like the rain returns not thither, before it has saturated the earth, making it bring forth and sprout..." Isa.55.)

When all things began the Word already was; what God was, the Word was! (NEB)

1:2 The beginning would not distract the destiny of the Word, it would always only conclude in God; nothing that was witnessed in the Word distracted from what God was.

1:3 There is nothing original, except the Word!

1:4 In His life man discovers the light of life.

1:9 In Him as the blueprint of our lives there is more than enough light to displace the darkness in every human life...the true light that enlightens everyman!

1:12 (Gr.*lambano*, comprehend, grasp, identify with, Gr.*didomi*, in this case to give something to someone that already belongs to them, thus to return, the fact that they already are His own, born from above, they have their beginning and their being in Him is now confirmed in their realising it! Gr.*eksousia*, integrity, legality, authority, legal grounds.) Mankind has forgotten the Rock that has begotten them, Deut. 32:18. *Msg. "He made to be their true selves, their child-of-God selves."*

1:14 In Him we discover that we are not here by chance or accident, or by the desire of an earthly parent, neither are we the product of a mere physical conception; we exist by the expression of God's desire to reveal Himself in the flesh. His eternal, invisible Word, His Spirit-thought, became (Gr.*ginomai*, be born) flesh.

(*theaomai* to gaze upon, to perceive) We saw His glory (Greek, *doxa*, from *dokeo*, opinion, intent), the glory as of the original, authentic begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.' (The original mind, or opinion of God, preserved and now revealed in Christ. He is both the 'only begotten', *monogenes*, as in the authentic original mould, as well as the first born from the dead. Col.1:18, 1Pet.1:3) He is the revelation of our completeness. 'And of His fullness have we all received, grace against grace.' (Gr.*garin anti garitos*, grace undeserved) 'For the law was given through Moses, grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. He who is in the bosom of the Father, the only (original, authentic) begotten of the Father, He is our guide who accurately declares and interprets the invisible God within us.'

Interesting that the revelation of the incarnation in v 14 doesn't follow v 2 or 3, but v 12 and 13!
Gen.1:26 redeemed!

1:16 His fullness is the source of all that grace communicates as our portion, against all the odds!

Fake It Till You Make It?

Joel Brueseke

Have you ever heard (or used) the phrase, "fake it till you make it," in regards to the living out of the Christian life? Although I've heard the actual phrase used only a handful of times, I've seen the Christian lifestyle that's represented by the phrase in action all throughout my Christian life. And it's sad, because it's nothing more than a fleshly attempt at living the Christian life.

One of the times I heard the phrase used in a sermon, the pastor was talking about the various family qualities and values that we are to live out as Christians. Loving our spouses, loving our kids, "one anothering" each another, and so on. When we find ourselves falling short in our love relationships with each other, what should we do? According to this pastor, we just "fake it till we make it." I was very disheartened to hear that. If we're having a hard time loving and showing appreciation to our spouse, for example, we just fake it till we make it. We go through the motions until we find ourselves genuinely loving our spouse.

I'm sorry, but this totally misses the point of Christianity! It sure may *appear* right to some, since it's an appeal to us to do *good* things. But all it really is is a *fleshly* attempt to do these things. The flesh, no matter how good and wonderful it *appears*, will never, ever, *EVER* produce what the Spirit can and does produce in us!

Another time I heard the phrase was in a small group setting. We were talking about the gifts of the Spirit, and "how" to walk in them. (shudder) One person suggested the "fake it till you make it" method. ((double-shudder)) For example, if it's the gift of tongues that's in question, just start muttering some words and eventually it will come. Or whatever the gift, just go through the motions enough, and eventually it will become real.

I'm all for "growing" in our gifts, and in the living out of the Christian life. But not through FAKING it! See, there is absolutely nothing fake about love. If we feel we have to *fake* love in order to grow in love, then we'll never come to a true living out of a love-life.

I can see why the "fake it till you make it" mentality is so prevalent in the church today (even if the phrase itself isn't used a whole lot). The focus in the church today is *behavior modification*. Sermons, seminars, meetings, exhortations, articles, radio and TV programs, and so on and so on... all focus on getting us to change our behavior from one way ("bad") to another way ("good"). Do I want to stop doing bad and start doing good? Of course! But you can teach me all you want about what is bad behavior and what is good behavior (what I should stop doing and what I should start doing), and yet you will give me no power whatsoever to change my behavior!

Christ in us - and His grace - is *the* power to live a godly life. There is nothing fake about Christ in us! But when the constant focus is behavior modification, people will take their eyes off of the One who IS the way, the truth and the life and will always be attempting to change themselves. This constant focus on behavior modification, leaves people with, well, a constant focus on behavior modification! They are deceived into thinking that by focusing on *good behavior* they're focusing on *Christ*. But since they're not really looking to Christ and His life that miraculously and abundantly indwells us,

but rather are focusing on *change*, then all that's really left is a life of faking it till they make it.

The living out of true love and true godly behavior doesn't come from *attempting* or *faking* love or godly behavior. True love and true godly behavior comes over a period of time as we look to *Christ*, who is in us, to live His life in us, and it comes as we grow in God's unconditional love.

Why Identity Matters

Jamie Weeks

So, the dust has settled from my recent brush with a hissy fit...

And how does God see me today?

Why, THE SAME WAY HE ALWAYS SEES ME! Loved, accepted, without spot or wrinkle, without blemish, altogether lovely. In Christ!!

News flash: God doesn't fall off His throne in shock when I don't meet your expectations. What? God's expectations? Jesus already fulfilled those.

Here's the deal. If you are a Christian and you think who you are is based on what you do or don't do, good or bad, you don't have a clue what Jesus did at the cross. Sorry, that's just a fact. Jesus didn't save *you* at the cross; He joined Himself to you so that through belief you could become crucified with Him and receive His life. You died at the cross! And that old you didn't resurrect on Easter Sunday regardless of what you believe, how you act, or what someone's told you. God is calling the shots here, not you. Truth is what He says, not what you think or feel.

You can talk about Papa's love 'til you are blue in the face but if you don't come to Papa through the Son, you are not going to get too far. The Way is as narrow as His name: Jesus, and as wide as the cross. His Grace is limitless and knows no bounds but relationship isn't acknowledging that God loves you. God loves and reconciled *everyone*. Relationship is repenting, changing your mind about your dead condition, and accepting the gift of a New Life IN CHRIST. Relationship means I have died and become a New Creation, not the old and improved creation; this relationship is based on His Work not ours.

Jesus isn't the paper wrapper and God the yummy burger inside. Jesus is *now your Life*. He is how you experience relationship with God. There is no relationship or Life outside the Son. You are seated with Christ in the heavenlies and it's His life that you are now living, not your own. It's His Spirit that indwells you and animates you. God isn't interested in you doing anything with Him or for Him; He is quite happy to do all He wants done *through* you.

And that is why we, as Christians, are not what we do. We don't have to seek acceptance, approval, love, affirmation, IDENTITY from our pitiful, self-generated efforts. We are not our jobs, our accomplishments, our emotions, our marital or social status, or our "church" affiliation. We are not defined by ephemeral circumstances. We are the Bride of Christ. We are joint heirs with Jesus. We are branches of the Vine. We don't pick ourselves up out of our clay and set our own feet on the Rock; He does! He leads, guides, teaches, corrects, grows, keeps and blesses us because we are His garden, His Beloved. And He accomplishes all of this in us by keeping our focus on Him and what He has *already* accomplished.

Our identity is based on birth, not performance. Poor performance doesn't change our standing nor

does great performance. All performance (flesh) is stinky to God.

Thus the perfect beauty of the Law. The Law says, "PERFORM" and we are supposed to say, "I CAN'T!" And the Law says, "Get a Life" and we are supposed to say, "Yes!" And all our striving can stop because we CANNOT IMPROVE ON THE LIFE OF CHRIST!!!!

So, beloved, I gotta ask, do you know, really know, who you are in Christ? Because He says you're *His*, you can *rest in Him*. That is why identity matters.

True Assessment

Ole Henrik Skjelstad

From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God. (2 Cor 5:16-18)

Despite the fact that we are declared as new creations in the scriptures we rarely feel that way. It seems to us that we still are the same old person doing the same old things thinking the same thoughts we always have.

This is all a question of appearances, isn't it? The new creation is new through and through. It can't be regarded or judged according to the flesh. It belongs to a different realm. It is a spiritual being manifested in soul and body. What a wonderful gift it is when we are imparted to see beyond appearances and behold our true self in faith. The self which is one spirit with its Father. The self He has beheld from before the foundation of the universe.

What a beautiful picture of ourselves we see when our consciousnesses are renewed to the true image of our being. The image He holds up as a mirror. This is the image we are transformed into beholding with our spiritual eyes as we go from glory to glory. We see beyond appearances in our own life and we begin to see the beauty in others as well, because finally we have arrived to the place where we accept and love ourselves with the same acceptance and love our Father has toward us in all His dealings with us.

In a process of the renewal of our minds we have put off everything which pertains to that old self, which really wasn't a self. It was just a distorted version composed of lies. In this process we rediscover ourselves and find to our surprise that we are just as He is. In the same manner as we have found peace with Him we have found peace with ourselves.

This desire to change, to better ourselves has dissolved into nothing, because it was nothing. We are everything God says we are. We have given up that old self and its distorted view of its being and found our new life. In the realm of appearances it might look the same, but it isn't. We perhaps continue to do the things we always have done. We work, we watch TV, we eat and we sleep. This is life! This is the perfect version of ourselves.

He was just a simple carpenter from Nazareth, but He was God's son! What everything boils down to is this; who is your father? What spirit are you of? He has cleansed us once and for all, and thus, for the pure everything is pure. It is all of grace! What an incredible mystery this is; He united to us living as us in a world seemingly full of paradoxes to the unskilled eye. We are one, yet two.

What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him. (1 Cor 2:19)

Window Panes

Christopher Dennison

Some believe that obedience and good works are necessary to make us more godly. But they have the cart before the horse. We are obedient and do good works BECAUSE we are godly, not in order to be more godly.

The truth is that we are like crystal-clear window panes that are still more or less dirty from the filth of the world. We are perfect by nature, created especially for the purpose of allowing the Sun to shine through us, but something outside of us still blocks the Light. There is nothing that anyone can do to me, or that I can do to myself, that will improve upon my ability to let Jesus shine; God has created me super-transparent, crystal clear, and unblemished. I am without blot or shadow, without stain or darkness. But I still have a dirty film that pretty much blocks out my new nature and belies my new creation.

Each time we allow Christ to line up our thoughts and actions with his own, a little more dirt is wiped off the window, and a little more Light shines through. It is not that obedience and good works make us more godly; they simply reveal the godliness that is already ours by virtue of the new birth.

As transparent window panes, we are NOT being made more and more transparent with each good deed, we are as transparent as we will ever be. But our natural transparency is hidden beneath the layer of dirt that we carry over from our old lives. As more dirt is removed, more of who I REALLY am comes to light. As more sin is removed, more Jesus shines through!

So let's apply the water of the Word by faith. Let us that ARE clean allow ourselves to be made clean, that Christ may shine more and more each day.

On Growing Up

Jamie Weeks

So, my baby, Savannah, turned 14 this week-end. Eh. I can't like it. I remember when she was born as if it was *yesterday*. Seriously. I remember she was born on Tuesday, came home on Thursday, and by Saturday, the two of us were out shopping!! Well, she had to have something to wear for the upcoming Super Bowl! I mean, *GEE!* what's a girl to do? She had to learn those two important words *sometime*, didn't she? And I figured sooner was better than later. Oh! The words? *CHARGE IT*, of course. :)

Although all of my babies were small, Savannah was truly my tiny tot and still is today. Even though she inherited Devon's beautiful hand-me-downs, as a newborn she needed preemie size lest she be swallowed by excess fabric! *Help! Where's Savannah? Oh, THERE she is!*

Unfortunately, she is less than thrilled by her small stature these days. Whether it's a dress for an upcoming school dance or "professional" wear for an FBLA competition, we struggle to find size and age appropriate clothing. Forget the women's department. Uh uh. Double 00?!? *Nope! Trust me, we've tried!!* How about Juniors? Not even a 0 will do.

That leaves little Savannah skulking through the children's departments of Nordstrom and Belk and ducking furtively into dressing rooms lest she be seen by a peer! *Heaven's above!!*

We finally, miraculously, managed to find some black dress slacks and "a little black dress" recently for a couple of school functions. Obviously, most children don't find themselves in need of "interview" wear and we exhausted all options and very nearly my patience by the time we were done. We started with the 16's. Ummmm, Savannah and a friend could have worn them *at the same time!* We ended up with the choice of a size 8 skirt or size 12 slacks (which were, of course, at another store). The dress wasn't much easier, either, people. *ACK!* By then I felt like getting down down on my knees and rejoicing that we had found anything! *Hallelujah!* 14 year olds who weigh around 80 pounds soaking wet can't be choosy, we learned.

And as we left, I couldn't help but notice Savannah covetously eyeing the Junior racks...

Growing up is so darned hard, isn't it? And yet we know it happens. In fits and spurts with moments of breathtaking maturity mixed in sloppily with adolescent awkwardness. Slower than our children wish and far faster than we can imagine, our children grow up. In God's good time.

Which is why I am often amazed that we as believers have so little faith in our loving Father when it comes to our growth. Instead of trusting *in God* to grow and mature us, we look to our own wisdom, knowledge, and devices. Instead of realizing there is *no shame* in immaturity, only a lack of revelation, we are quick to judge and condemn ourselves and others when our performance is less than some unrealistic mark. Because the mark is usually, unfortunately, adherence to the Law. And, truthfully, even when we understand that Christ's nature is the "mark", *WE STILL FAIL TO REALIZE*

THAT HE ALREADY MET THE MARK FOR US AND IN US and removed that burden from us. We cannot and never were intended to live the Christian life. It's impossible. Only Christ can and only Christ will when we allow Him to by resisting the ongoing temptation to *DO IT OURSELVES!!* We have the backwards notion that we, through our actions, grow ourselves into mature Christians. When instead, God has birthed us *COMPLETE, MATURE, AND SANCTIFIED*, which we will see the evidence of when we, by faith, *REST* in this spiritual truth. What is true of us spiritually will become true of us experientially as we renew our minds to *TRUTH*.

We do not mature *spiritually*. We mature in our *understanding of our spiritual identity* as we begin to trust in Jesus' finished work. As a result of our yielding to the Life that indwells us as New Creations, evidence of our Union life becomes tangible as the Fruit of the Spirit. There is no effort or labor on our part that produces maturity. It is the process of growing into the understanding of the fact that we hold the fullness of God in Christ regardless of our outward appearance. What appears to be true of us experientially does *NOT* determine what is true of us spiritually but what is true of us spiritually will determine our experience if we allow it to. In other words, do we trust God or ourselves to grow us in grace?

Growing ourselves is hard to do because God *NEVER* intended us to!

We can, as we encourage our own children, rest in the truth that God grows us in His good time.

Redefining Death

Rich Novek

Death, nobody wants any part of it. Death brought to its fullness stinks, rotting things stink. The church wants nothing to do with death either, that is unless it's in reference to Jesus death. You see, when most people look at Jesus death, they see two things; one, it's not their death (thank God), and two, that He died for them. The church's message of the crucifixion is a message of someone else paying the price, someone else dying! It's a wonderful message, but only the beginning.....

Death is non-life, death is the absolute negative of what we call life. We don't like negative things either. Negative things don't make us feel happy, they make us feel sad or angry. They stir something up in us we just don't like. If you are a negative person, you have some kind of a "problem" in our society. I have been negative, and still am negative, people have told me my whole life that it's wrong to be negative. I have been told more times that I can count or care to remember I have a bad attitude, that is a negative. People don't like negatives. Come on, you have too! Let's be real here, not religious!

We like everything alive and we like everything positive.

The problem is when you have a positive and a positive they repel each other, so it's not realistic to think everything is going to be positive all the time. After all, we wouldn't have electricity or cars, or any of the other countless things we enjoy that operate by the LAW of electricity, if it wasn't for the negative. Negative has gotten a bad rap, but without it we would have something to really be negative about! Just look around you and look at all the wonderful things negative produces, including that screen your reading this from.

Of course a negative and negative do the same thing as a positive and a positive, they repel each other.

Ok Rich, what the heck are you talking about, we know this, this is basic stuff!

Exactly! Bingo! It isn't rocket science, that is for sure.

Yet in our relationship to God we miss it when we don't think the same way. There has to be a positive, no, there has to be an ABSOLUTE positive! And there has to be an ABSOLUTE negative!

Me calling my life my own is living as a false positive, God is the real positive, they naturally (or supernaturally) repel each other!

I am God's absolute negative!

God has chosen me to be the ABSOLUTE negative in my relationship with him, that is how He created me! What that means is I am the non-power, the non-love, the non-grace, the non-all. He specifically designed me to be the vacuum in my relationship with Him because nothing can exist in a vacuum! Paul said I am the LEAST of the apostles, John the Baptist said, I must DECREASE, and Jesus Himself

declared I can do NOTHING, except what it is I see my Father doing! Gideon was the LEAST in his family, of the tribe which was also the LEAST! David was in the sheep fold when the prophet came to anoint him,,,,, "Is this all of your sons, he asked?" no the YOUNGEST is outside, he wasn't even valuable enough in Jessies eyes to be a consideration! And the list goes on, Rahab was a prostitute, as was Mary Magdalene. Mathew turned on his own people to collect taxes for Rome, how do you think he was viewed! Do you think it was positively?

I AM the absolute negative, HE IS the absolute positive, when that relationship is as it should be POWER is released! Just like that light in your computer room. No negative, no power!

What God has revealed to me, and it took me 30 years to receive it. Negative is not bad... it is GOD! Positive is not Good... it is GOD! The negative things I call, perform that negative work, creating a vacuum, and since nothing exists in a vacuum, GOD MUST rush in to fill that empty place with Himself! That is called POWER! But that Power in Him came with a price as will yours.....and mine! You see, God only wants one thing from us, only one.....EVERYTHING! In order for you to be the ABSOLUTE NEGATIVE He is going to roll in death on everything you call life; every relationship, every material thing, every position, every hope, every dream, every family member, every friend, EVERYTHING! It all has to become the absolute negative, it all has to die! Jesus died, became SIN, the absolute Negative, that We might become the righteousness of God in Him, the absolute Positive! He was raised in POWER and sits at the right hand of God as God! Do we think we can escape any less of a treatment? Do we think we can still take something of the flesh into His Presence?

Except a corn of wheat fall to the ground and DIE, it abides alone! Dying is a necessary step before death. Dying means a gradual giving up of life! We have died, and our lives are hidden with Christ in God. After death. comes the burial, when a seed goes into the ground it is then covered up, it is hidden. While hidden, it is exposed to pressure, moisture, heat, and other elements that cause it to literally fall apart. It takes on a brand new identity, the independant seed with it's hard unyielding shell, becomes something OTHER THAN it's previous form. When it SPRINGS FORTH it is thrilled with the new thing it has become, but there are still challenges awaiting it, even in it's new Form!

The negative in our life is as wonderful a part of God's plan as the positive, because absolute negative always creates the necessary void or vaccuum that God must fill with Himself. Why? Because he has ordained that nothing can exist in nothing (a vaccuum). Dying and death in the form of the trials and so called negative behaviors we express during those times are the SLINGSHOT God uses to propell us further into the LIGHT. They are the LIFT that cause us to take flight, they are what is contained in the empty container that He fills to overflowing! But, this only happens as we redefine death and begin to see it as the only gateway there is to LIFE, the ABUNDANT LIFE! Psalm 66:10 says it perfectly, look at the process, look at the end result:

Psalm 66:10-12 (Amplified Bible)

10For You, O God, have proved us; You have tried us as silver is tried, refined, and purified.

11You brought us into the net (the prison fortress, the dungeon); You laid a heavy burden upon our loins.

12You caused men to ride over our heads [when we were prostrate]; we went through fire and through water, but You brought us out into a broad, moist place [to abundance and refreshment and the open air].

This is the only TRUE Christianity that exists, like I said, if you want all God has for you in this life, then do what I did, pray the same prayer that was prescribed to me by a dear brother to pray, and which I did from 1983-1986, and a prayer God will be thrilled to answer!

"Lord, bring me to the end of myself, and give me a revelation of Who I AM in Christ, and Who Christ is in me!" For the past 24 years he has been answering that prayer! He answered me and brought everything to death that I called life! He then planted me in death, and raised me up in NEWNESS of life, that where He is I am also, hallelujah!

That is what must happen, no options, if you want the All in All to be ALL! It is embracing the cross, kissing the stake, and calling the things that are not as though they are. It's letting death roll in like a millstone and crush every previous, religious and otherwise, perception of God, it's being in that place of total abandonment, total brokenness, cursing at God, and then cursing the day you were born, only to feel HIS UNCONDITIONAL LOVE flood your soul in that same place where all there was minutes before was death! And then sitting back and marvelling at the fact he didn't punish you for what you just did! It's being REAL, not RELIGIOUS! It's allowing Him to Form you into a vessel of His choosing, and yielding to His Life in you!

And then it's Him in your form being poured out for others, and seeing His power that you now understand, because through your own dying, death has been redefined in a way that never could have happened, had you not given Him permission to strip you of everything! He redefined death to you in your dying to everything! And now death has been raised up as ALL JOY, BOASTING IN WEAKNESS, COUNTING EVERYTHING LOSS! It's NOW bearing about in your body His death, that His life might be made manifest in and through you! It's death in us, but LIFE in you! It's no longer giving a devil or devils any time or place, but seeing He is EVERYTHING, including the darkness, that he asked you to surrender, and so much more! It's calling the negatives in your life, no matter what they are, the most awesome thing there could be, knowing they are the keys that bring you into the deepest recesses of His Heart! The ONE place you long to be more than any other!

Redefining death! Now there is a concept. A concept birthed in the heart of God and expressed through His Son..... and Sons? God is longing that there be someone that would step into this Life in Him! Redefining death in all of it's forms, creating that vaccum, being filled to overflowing and eventually calling what you once called death the only way to real LIFE! "Calling the things that are not as though they are!"

I Can Do Nothing

Matthew Campbell

Human love is not what God had in mind for us as Christians. Agape is what God delights in, and it MUST be supernatural. Our resolve to love, no matter how sincere, cannot bring about God's kind of love. Surely you have recognized this being a Christian for any length of time. Your dedications never last, your commitments waver and the only thing you are consistent in is inconsistency.

I have made decisions to love, even while understanding Christ is my life and that only He can love through me. I knew all the theology, yet I still tried to MAKE Christ live through me, and I was doing it from a desire to get God to be happy with me. Suffice to say I failed. The very person I had been trying to love, I grew to resent. I grew bitter and I despised even hearing this person call my home.

I knew something was wrong. I was not suppose to be this exhausted and this angry towards someone who had never done me any wrong. I had tried to love with Christ's kind of love and I had failed.

I cannot 'make' Christ live through me. I cannot use the reality of Christ in me as a way to perform to get God to like me or accept me. I can't earn a love that was out to get me before I even came into being.

You know what I learned? I learned I can do nothing of my own accord; nothing of my own initiative. I can only wait on the Lord with humility, realizing that it is GOD at work in me, to will and to do according to HIS good pleasure. Even the good works that are mine were prepared beforehand. I can boast of nothing, and I can accomplish no good at all by human will or exertion.

Want to know something else? He loves me. Nothing will ever change that.

Leah could not make her husband Jacob love her any more by bearing more children for him, and Rachel could not make Jacob love her any less because she didn't bear him any children. Agape is unconditional and seeks not it's own.

From now on, If God desires anything to be done in my life, I will let Him initiate it. I will not try to love with my human love that resembles those bowls of plastic fruit that your grandmother has in her house. Rather, I will remain content in Christ and will bear true fruit that comes from the life of the Vine flowing through me, the branch.

God's Grace Activity⁸

James A Fowler

The tragic misrepresentation of contemporary evangelicalism is their preoccupation with religious attempts to deal with sin and express righteousness by human self-effort. Their acceptance of the humanistic premise of an "independent self" that is allegedly capable of self-generating character in Christian behavior is a wholesale repudiation of God's grace.

When grace is mentioned in modern evangelical teaching it is often defined by the acrostic, "God's Redemption At Christ's Expense." Grace was indeed "realized through Jesus Christ" (John 1:17), and His incarnation and redemptive death serve to reveal God's grace, but grace must not be limited to the historical foundation of the Christian faith. Going a step further, many recognize the personal experience of God's grace in spiritual regeneration, "for by grace you have been saved through faith" (Eph. 2:8). Someone has called this "the threshold factor" of God's grace in the Christian life. But when Christ, the groom, carries another member of His bride, the church, across the threshold of initial regeneration, He does not "get them in the door" and then declare, "Now, straighten up and live like a Christian. Consider what I would do (WWJD) and live in accordance with My example." As Paul exclaims, "May it never be!" Grace has a much broader and more dynamic meaning than is often projected in the teaching of the contemporary church. Grace is the totality of God's action in total consistency with His own Being and character. The Christian life cannot be lived by any human exertion, but only and entirely by God's grace. This forestalls any concept of an "infused grace" that acts as a divine assistance or a "power booster" to provide whatever the believer lacks to accomplish what God expects.

The activity of Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior, by the power of His Spirit, is the singular dynamic of Christianity. All manifestation of righteousness, holiness and godliness require the presence and function of Jesus Christ, whose very life and character supersede, conquer and overcome all unrighteousness. This is how the prophet Ezekiel verbalized God's intents, "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances" (Ezek. 36:26,27). Speaking through Zechariah, God promised, "Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit, says the Lord of hosts" (Zech. 4:6). They foresaw the grace that was to be "realized in Jesus Christ" (John 1:17).

⁸ James A Fowler: Christ In Work At You <http://www.christinyou.net/pages/christatworkinyou.htm>

When the risen Lord Jesus Christ comes to live in the Christian, we have the divine "treasure in earthen vessels, that the surpassing greatness of the power may be of God, and not of ourselves" (II Cor. 4:7) - there goes the humanistic thesis of self-potential! "God is at work in us, both to will and to work for His good pleasure" (Phil. 2:13). We are "strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man" (Eph. 3:16). The words of Jesus are clear: "Apart from Me, you can do nothing" (John 15:5).

Only the divine Savior can deal with the sinful and selfish patterns of our behavior. "By the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body" (Rom. 8:13), Paul advised the Romans. "The Spirit sets its desires against the flesh" (Gal. 5:17) are the words he used to encourage the Galatians. Years later the apostle John wrote, "Greater is He who is in you, than he who is in the world" (I John 4:4). As we explained previously, the divine positive swallows up the sinful negatives. Since the "God who is love" (I John 4:8,16) has come to live in the Christian, "the love that controls us" (II Cor. 5:14) counters and overcomes the selfishness that is the opposite of all love.

God does not ask anything of us that He is not willing and prepared to do through us. He is the dynamic of His own demands, the content of His own commands, the expedient of His own expectations, and the means of His own mandates. "This is the grace in which we stand" (Rom. 5:2) in Christ. "God is able to make all grace abound to you, that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed" (II Cor. 9:8). "He equips us in every good thing to do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ" (Heb. 13:21). We have "all power for the attaining of steadfastness and patience (Col. 1:11), and "He will bring it to pass" (I Thess. 5:24).

That God does all that needs doing in our Christian lives is a truth that for some sounds "too good to be true." Worldly wisdom has cautioned us to beware of anything that sounds "too good to be true." Indeed, we should, but in this case the singularity of the good news of the gospel declaring that all the redemptive and restorative work of God is freely given by God's grace in Jesus Christ is the ultimate truth. At the same time, be advised, that to accept God's grace will cost you everything. God's grace is not the "cheap grace" of a "free ride," but the "costly grace" that cost Jesus His life and will cost you yours as well. Only those who are willing to "lose their lives for His sake, will find His saving life" (Matt. 10:39; 16:25; Mk. 8:35; Lk. 9:24) as their eternal gain.

We often only learn to appreciate the dynamic of God's grace in the Christian life when we are brought to the "end of ourselves." When "our sin has found us out." When we have failed and are

defeated. When we are brought to our knees by our own inability and weakness. Paul was in the midst of such a situation when God advised him, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness," and Paul responded, "Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may dwell in me" (II Cor. 12:9). We often have to experience what St. John of the Cross called the "dark night of the soul" wherein we cannot see our way through the dilemma we are dealing with, and we despair even that God's grace will be sufficient. We are "left in the dark" to "walk by faith, and not by sight" (II Cor. 5:7) until God's Light shines forth providing the life, energy, and action of His grace. Many Christians do not make it through the dark night of weakness wherein grace is revealed, for they are tempted to "take the easy way out" that bypasses the pain of what seems like estrangement. Thomas Merton explains how some exit the process for a way more exciting:

"Paradoxically, then, though Christ Himself accomplishes the work of our sanctification, the more He does so the more it tends to cost us. The further we advance the more He tends to take away our own strength and deprives us of our human and natural resources, so that in the end we find ourselves in complete poverty and darkness. This is the situation that we find most terrible, and it is against that we rebel. For the strange, sanctifying mystery of Christ's death in us, we substitute the more familiar and comforting routine of our own activity: we abandon His will and take refuge in the more trivial, but more 'satisfying' procedures which interest us and enable us to be interesting in the eyes of others. We think that in this way we can find peace, and make our lives fruitful; but we delude ourselves, and our activity turns out to be spiritually sterile. Insofar as we rely on our own anxious efforts, we are of this world."

Divine grace does indeed run counter to all enlightenment understanding and humanistic reasoning. It makes no sense to our American work ethic, our pragmatic concerns for productivity, and our capitalistic premise that "you get what you pay for." The mentality of the world will always regard grace as an escapist pattern of indolent inertia and sloth for those who disdain work and prefer to be "on the dole" in God's kingdom. The contemporary religion of "evangelical humanism" has the same point of view, suspicious that the gospel of grace leads only to passivism and acquiescence that will never serve to build an active church organization. Only the Christian who has submitted himself to God's grace will see it for what it is - the divine dynamic of Christ's life that alone can overcome sin and manifest God's character.

A Bruised Reed

Ole Henrik Skjelstad

A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out. In faithfulness he will bring forth justice. (Isa 42:3)

God's principal concern is always human beings – the pinnacle of His creation. His idea was to gather a family of sons under His wings. To make them true sons and be partakers of His heart and His nature, which main characteristic is self-giving love for others, He had to let them go their own ways so they could develop a consciousness which could compare and contrast between the negatives and positives in this world (Luk 15:11-32).

He Himself descended to this temporal realm to partake in the human project which was finished at the cross (John 19:30). His firstborn of many sons was made perfect through what He suffered so that He could be a high priest who is not unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin (Hebr 4:15). God in His humility walked with man on this cursed earth, so He himself could share the burden concerning the progress of man. He in fact chose of His own free will to carry the entirety of what He began when we created beings with a consciousness. His objective was that they could reach their completion in Him so that they in Him could experience that death works in them to life for others (2 Cor 4:12), that is, His sons promoted to priests.

In His heart we find unsearchable love and compassion for His beings. There is not a thing He will not do to see them return to His heavenly lap. He would rather die than see any of them perish. So that's what He did. When His love has led them to a position where their fire of self-love is quenched and everything which is left is an ember of the eternity He has put in every human's heart He very gently begins to blow on the ember until it bursts in to a flame nourished by His life. He never ceases to give or breathe His life unto His family, because that is who He is. Souls almost crushed by life's many travails He with affection and tenderness bandages with His love. He would never condemn, preach to or lay heavy burdens upon a bruised reed. The heaviest burden of them all, the law, He fulfilled Himself so that every Human could experience His love which has no boundaries. This is His justice!

The God of Jacob⁹

A.B. Simpson

"Fear not, thou worm Jacob." (Isaiah 41:14.) "I the Lord am your Savior and your Redeemer, the mighty One of Jacob." (Isaiah 49:26.)

What a combination! Thou worm Jacob, the Mighty One of Jacob! A worm united to Omnipotence! What so weak and worthless as a worm! What so mighty as the Mighty One of Jacob! This tells the story -- not Jacob, but Jacob's God; not man, but the all-sufficient God displacing man and substituting His own infinite fullness.

We have seen a little of the resources of God in the story of Elijah and Elisha and in the life of Paul. But someone might say that all this might well occur in lives so lofty and sublime, but can I, a weak and worthless man, reach such heights of victory and glory?

Therefore we turn now to the life of a weak and worthless man that we may show that God uses such men to make them the peculiar illustrations of His own grace and sufficiency. The one lesson of Jacob's life is sovereign grace. We have already seen that this was one lesson of Paul's life and that his deepest thought and highest testimony was "Not I, but Christ lives in me."

If ever there was a man that deserved to be called a worm, it was the supplanting son of Isaac. And yet this was the man whom God selected from among all the patriarchs to be head of Israel's tribes and the real founder of the covenant people to whom was committed the oracles of God. Therefore Jacob is more especially fitted to set forth the grace of God than any other of the Bible characters. Let us look at the lessons which his life illustrates with respect to the resources of our God.

We see in Jacob's life the God who can choose and use unworthy and unattractive lives and characters. Had we been choosing on natural principles between the two sons of Isaac we may have preferred the big-hearted, impulsive Esau. His father did prefer him and tried his best to hold for him the tribal blessing and divine birthright. There was little naturally in Jacob that was attractive. He represented that class of the human race, happily by no means all, who have become the embodiment of the hard, keen, grasping man, the man who seems to have become crystallized into a financial machine and bargain counter. Jacob was intensely selfish and deceitful, disposed to take advantage of another's misfortune. There is no type of human nature that, by the common consent of mankind, is more detestable than the hard, cold, heartless miser. He is lower even than the groveling sensualist in the scale of humanity. And yet God chose this man in order to prove that there is no class of humanity so hard, so hopeless, as not to be within reach of sovereign grace, indeed, that God loves a hard case and that "where sin abounded, grace did much more abound." If there is a soul reading these lines who is discouraged about himself, remember Jacob, and then remember Jacob's God, the One that could choose a worm and make him a prince with God and with

⁹ A.B. Simpson: But God <http://www.swartzentover.com/cotor/E-Books/holiness/Simpson/ButGod/But%20God.pdf>

men; the One who is still saying, "God has chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God has chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty."

And then the God of Jacob is a God that can discern elements of good and possibilities of the highest things in the most unlikely lives. Back of Jacob's meanness there was something that had in it inherently the elements of power and blessing, and back of Esau's apparent nobility there was something earthborn and incapable of the highest things. Not without reason has God said of these two men, "Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated." What was it in Jacob that God loved and that became a point of contact with His grace? It was that element which we might call the spiritual. It was the peculiar insight into the higher things which discerns and chooses the best. It is a kind of intuition, a spiritual instinct, the germ in fact, of the higher nature. It enabled Jacob to discover, to appreciate, and to desire intensely all that was meant in the divine birthright, while on the other hand the lack of it led Esau to despise this. All he cared for was the gratification of his natural and grosser appetites. He was a splendid animal; that was all. When he was hungry, he wanted food, and he cared not how he got it. He had not the power to comprehend or prize the higher blessing which was his by natural right. In the hour of his extremity we find him exclaiming, "Behold, I am at the point to die: and what profit shall this birthright do to me?" That was the very time when it should have meant most to him, for it secured to him the favor of his covenant God, a part among the covenant people, and the high honor of standing in the front of that line that was to lead up to the promised seed, the coming Messiah. While it had the highest natural dignities and privileges connected with it, it was preeminently spiritual in its meaning and value. And yet Esau, realizing none of these things, recklessly and blindly threw it away for a mess of pottage. The sacred writer crystallizes into a single sentence the meaning of the act, "Thus Esau despised his birthright."

Now what God loved in Jacob was the quality that appreciated, desired and chose the higher things. God loved him for it and God came to meet him and gave him what he desired. "They have their reward," is the awful sentence of Christ on humanity. Men and women generally get what they want. If they are after earthly things they will probably find them. If they "seek . . . first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness" "they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness . . . shall be filled."

It is often true that the worst and the best are closely akin in human nature. The most discouraged and sinful man is often so because the devil has seen his folly and has perverted the bud into a thorn. God sees everything through the crust of evil, and He comes to meet and satisfy the yet undimmed jewel of some deep and earnest longing for better things. It is comforting to know that we have a God who is not looking for the evil in us but for the good that is trying to find some point of contact with better things, looking in every human soul for some place where the chain of mercy can fasten and lift us to the skies. Dear friend, if you are far away from God and conscious of utter unworthiness, there is one question we would ask you, would you have God's love for your heart? Would you choose His will if it were offered to you? Would you part with everything to have the best and highest things? Then you have that which God loved in Jacob and that which will feel after God until it finds Him.

In the third instance, we see in Jacob's God one who can reveal Himself to a soul that is utterly ignorant of Him. When Jacob went out from his father's house and his mother's arms he had indeed set his heart on the highest things so far as he knew them and won by a very unworthy transaction

the covenant, but as yet he knew nothing of God in his own experience. We see this in his confession in Bethel's cave, "Surely the Lord is in this place; and I knew it not." We see also the lack of all filial love and confidence. "How dreadful is this place!" It was a raw, unenlightened, natural heart shrinking from the presence of God, knowing nothing of trust and love. But to that poor, dark, lonely heart God came and made Himself known by that vision of divine light and revelation, which became, not only to him, but to all coming generations, a ladder reaching to heaven from the lowest, loneliest spot. Well do I remember the day that I rode along the bridle path that leads to the ruins of ancient Bethel, stopping from time to time at the numerous caves along the road and wondering in which of them Jacob lay down with a stone for his pillow on the first night of his absence from his home. My guide pointed across the valley, and he said, "This is the cave where Jacob slept, because yonder you can see on the rock hillside the great ledges of stone rising one above the other like mighty steps, and in the dim moonlight, you know, it seemed to Jacob like a ladder that reached to heaven." You see my guide was an accomplished higher critic. He thought he could explain the Bible without any supernatural element. I told him I knew better. The ladder Jacob saw was not even that bold ledge of ascending rocks, but it was that invisible stair which your faith and mine has often seen since, reaching from our helplessness to His high heaven and bringing down the angels of God with messages of help and blessing. That was the time when Jacob first met with God.

There comes such an hour in every redeemed life. You had known about Him, you had chosen Him, you had set your heart upon Him, but He had never yet become a real fact in your experience. But one night of loneliness, one hour of deep trouble, some crisis when you were forced to pray, you found God and He became revealed to you henceforth the greatest fact in your life, the One with whom you have to do, your covenant God and Friend, saying to you as He did to Jacob, "Behold, I am with you, and will keep you in all places wheresoever you go . . . for I will not leave you, until I have done that which I have spoken to you of." It is yours to choose Him. It is His to make Himself known, and it is His eternal promise: "Then shall we know if we follow on to know the Lord."

In the fourth place, the God of Jacob is one that follows His children even through years of imperfection and wandering while they are often far from Him. For Jacob went forth from that Bethel vision a new man and a man of God but still full of the old selfish, supplanting spirit. And so we see him following his own devices, fighting his own battles, intriguing with Laban and trying to match his cunning with equal cunning. We see him bargaining for a wife and losing in the first transaction. We see him later getting the better of his uncle, and finally, through deep strategy leaving the land of his temporary adoption possessed of boundless riches; and yet he was the same old Jacob in many ways. He had not forsaken God. He had prayed often. He had asked God to prosper him in his business contrivances and schemes. But still it was Jacob, the worm Jacob, the selfish, supplanting man. But God did not leave him all these years. He followed him, loved him, blessed him, prospered him, and in due time called him back to better things.

And so, dear child of God, He has followed you even amid your wanderings. He has not wanted you where you were; but He has not left you alone. As He went with Israel through the wilderness, so He has gone with you on the weary round. In all your affliction He has been afflicted, and the Angel of His Presence has saved you and has led you all your days. Thus God still loves His imperfect children. He does not forsake them in their mistakes and follies, but He is still a God of infinite longsuffering, boundless patience and tender, fatherly pity. This should not encourage us to live short of our

highest privileges, but it should lead us by grateful love to follow Him more closely and choose His highest will.

Then, we see in Jacob's God one who at last knew how to bring the pressure that led Jacob to the crisis of his life. The time had come for a new and deeper experience, so God led him back toward his ancient home. It is the old Jacob coming back. He is enlarged with flocks and herds and a great household, but we see Jacob all through his wise forethought, his infinite contriving to protect his family and his flocks, and when he finds his incensed brother Esau coming to meet him with an armed band, he exhausts all the resources of his skill and invention to forestall him or defend himself from him. He divides his family and his flocks into little bands so that if one is stricken the other will escape. At last he realizes how vain it all is, and he is thrown absolutely and helplessly upon the mercy and power of God. The way narrows to a lone path where only two can walk, God and Jacob. There just across the brook Jabbok and under the solemn stars of the Orient, Jacob came face to face with the crisis of his life. He must either go down or go higher. It is either God or ruin. And so the religious instinct turns heavenward. Jacob prays as he has never prayed before.

But there is another conflict. God is wrestling with Jacob more than Jacob is wrestling with God. We are told significantly that "there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day." It was the Son of Man. It was the Angel of the Covenant. It was God in human form pressing down and pressing out the old Jacob life, and before the morning broke God had prevailed and Jacob fell with his thigh dislocated. But as he fell, he fell into the arms of God and there he clung and wrestled too until the blessing came, and the new life was born and he arose from the earthly to the heavenly, the human to the divine, the natural to the supernatural, and as he went forth that morning he was a weak and broken man, but God was there instead and the heavenly voice proclaimed, "Your name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince have you power with God and with men, and have prevailed."

Beloved, this must ever be a typical scene in every transformed life. There comes a crisis hour to each of us if God has called us to the highest and best. When all our resources fail, when we face either ruin or something higher than we ever dreamed, when we must have infinite help from God and yet before we can have it we must let something go; we must surrender completely, we must cease from our own wisdom, strength and righteousness and become crucified with Christ and alive in Him. God knows how to lead us up to this crisis and He knows how to lead us through. Beloved, is He leading you thus? Is this the meaning of your deep trial, of your difficult surroundings, of that impossible situation, or that trying place through which you cannot go without Him and yet you have not enough of Him to give you victory? Oh, turn to Jacob's God. Cast yourself helplessly at His feet. Die to your strength and wisdom and in His loving arms and rise like Jacob into His strength and all-sufficiency. There is no way out of your hard and narrow place but at the top. You must get deliverance by rising higher and coming into a new experience with God. Oh, may it bring you into all that is meant by the revelation of the Mighty One of Jacob.

In the sixth place we see in Jacob's God the God who knows how to finish His work by the slow discipline of suffering. That experience at Jabbok was the real crisis; but the completion of the work required the years that followed. There are some things which God can only do through time. There are processes of grace that need to be carried through long years of discipline. There is a slow fire

which dissolves and consumes as no fierce furnace heat can ever do in a moment of time. There is One that sits as a Refiner and Purifier of silver through the long years, finishing His work until He can see His image in the molten metal. This is the God of Jacob. And so, through the forty years that followed, He led Jacob through the longest, slowest, hardest trials. And how keen the pain! How sensitive the spirit that He touched!

So He comes to you, beloved, in the place that hurts you most. Often it is our heart's deepest affections. Rachel died; his family pride was wounded in the dishonor of his daughter; Joseph, Rachel's son, was torn from his presence amid scenes and associations of unspeakable horror. The years dragged out their slow length with that haunting shadow of suspense and agony, until at last he cried, "All these things are against me." But all the while Jacob was being burned up and God burned in. And when at last we meet him in the calm sunset of his life, we hear the rash, self-confident man saying something he could not have learned otherwise, "I have waited for Your salvation, O Lord." And we see the sorrow at last turned into joy. We see the shadows pass away and the rainbow arch surmount their frowning masses. We hear the evening song of a victorious life, "The God which fed me all my life long . . . the Angel which redeemed me from all evil." We see even Joseph given back and all the sorrow turned into joy while its blessed spiritual lesson remains forevermore in the transformed life of the venerable patriarch and the established saint. Thus the God of Jacob knows how to try us and how to deliver us out of trial. "Think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you," but, "that the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perishes, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ."

The seventh point we will consider is that the God of Jacob is a God that loves to use the instrument that He has thus prepared. It was not Abraham the mighty believer, it was not Isaac, the meek and gentle son; but it was Jacob, the transformed supplanter, that God chose to be the head of Israel's tribes and the founder of the chosen people, who, on his dying bed, pronounced the prophetic blessing upon his seed which all the ages since then have been fulfilling. To this day the nation bears the name of Israel and the seed of Jacob.

And so God will take our lives when He has prepared them in proportion to what they have cost Him. The degree of power that comes out of an element is measured by the degree that goes into it. The mighty power that ran the steamer and the train came out of yonder coal mine, but all that power was put in the coal mine ages ago, when God burned up by fiery heat of primeval times the vast forest of vegetation that covered the world and turned them into coal. It first came down from heaven into the mines of earth and then went out from the mines of earth in another form of the same power.

And so after God has pressed into a life by long and hard processes of trial and discipline the influences of His grace and the power of His transforming Spirit, then He loves to take out of that life the same power and expend it upon others. Power never can be lost, and so if we receive of God's fullness we can no more help giving it out than the sun can stop shining. And so the God of Jacob, if we will let Him have us, hold us, fill us, will surely use us, and whether it be as the silent salt that penetrates the air with its wholesome savor, or the glorious light that more positively radiates over earth and sky, we shall become forces for good and instruments for the glory of God and the blessing

of our fellow man, and all flesh shall know "that I, the Lord, am your Savior and Redeemer, the mighty One of Jacob."

Behold And Become

Andre Rabe

There is nothing that has the ability to transform our lives as much as how we hear and what we behold. What we hear determines what we see and we become what we behold. Beholding truth makes us true.

“That which was from the beginning, that which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes; that which we have gazed upon, and our hands handled, concerning the word of life” (1 John 1:1)

Can you see how the tangible experience of God’s presence starts with what we hear. There is a natural progression from hearing to seeing to gazing to touching.

What we hear

The Word John speaks about is not the latest fashionable ‘revelation’, but rather that which was from the beginning. In Christ, God’s original thought was preserved since the beginning. The destiny of this Word was always to become flesh. This Word cannot be contained in books ... not even sacred books. Paul said it this way: *We, of course, have plenty of wisdom to pass on to you once you get your feet on firm spiritual ground, but it’s not popular wisdom, the fashionable wisdom of high-priced experts that will be out-of-date in a year or so. God’s wisdom is something mysterious that goes deep into the interior of his purposes. You don’t find it lying around on the surface. It’s not the latest message, but more like the oldest—what God determined as the way to bring out his best in us, long before we ever arrived on the scene. (1 Cor 2:6-9 MSG)*

Would you agree that the Word that was in the beginning, that was with God and that was God, was not a book but a person? The truths contained within the scriptures point towards The Truth, which is a person, not a book! In Jesus’ days there were many who highly revered the scriptures, yet completely missed its message. Jesus said to the religious scholars of His day: *“You have your heads in your Bibles constantly because you think you’ll find eternal life there. But you miss the forest for the trees. These Scriptures are all about me! And here I am, standing right before you, and you aren’t willing to receive from me the life you say you want. (John 5:39,40 MSG)* How often still do we hear messages, backed by many scriptural references, filled with formulas and principles yet oblivious to the person – Christ in you. He still desires to find expression, not only in a doctrine or a teaching, however eloquent they may be, but in a person – in you.

This Word is original not invented last week. This Word is eternal, not seasonal. Even before time as we know it, God made up His mind about us. *“... He chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world ...” (Eph 1:4).* Before we did anything to impress or disappoint Him, He knew us, chose us and uniquely identified us in Christ. Christ came to show us what God originally saw in us, that cause Him to take such interest in us.

How we hear

Jesus said: *Take care then how you hear, for to the one who has, more will be given, and from the one who has not, even what he thinks that he has will be taken away. (Luke 8:18)* There is a way of hearing that will enrich you greatly and there is a way of hearing that will rob you.

Prior to this statement Jesus told the parable of the sower to illustrate some of the different ways of hearing. He likens the Word of God to seed ... seed that is received (heard) in different ways and consequently produces different levels of fruitfulness. I want to liken the progression of hearing, seeing, gazing and touching that I mentioned above to this parable of the sower.

As the sower goes out to sow, some seed falls along the way on a path – it produces no fruit. For me this speaks of casual, careless ‘hearing’. The path is not ready for nor receptive to the seed. I would say that this is a person that never really heard the message.

Then there is the seed that falls among the rocks. There is a bit of good soil there and so the seed does sprout, but because there is no depth it withers quickly. Often, in the excitement of hearing this gospel, the first response is: what shall I do; how do I apply it? People want to move directly from first hearing this good news to trying to change everything around them. However, it is vital to hear in such a way that what you hear starts changing what you see. Otherwise the excitement might be short lived because as soon as you ‘see’ a contradiction the whole experience withers. This person is at the hearing stage, but has not heard enough to start seeing.

In each of these illustrations there is a progression in the intensity of ‘hearing’ and a consequent progression in the fruit it produces. The next example is a person who hears and having some depth, they allow the word to sink in, to change the way they see. Because of this, the seed sprouts and begins to bear fruit. Yet they allow other seed, other words to have an equal place in their lives. This Word is not yet the ultimate word in their lives, it has not captured their exclusive attention yet. Consequently, the seed is not as fruitful as it could be.

“As for that in the good soil, they are those who, hearing the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patience.” This is the person who hears and embraces what they hear. This is a way of hearing that captures the person’s heart. Embrace this word until you find yourself inescapably embraced by it. The soil does not have to make the seed grow – the seed sprouts and grows of its own accord. The soil simply needs to provide an environment for the seed to remain. Jesus once said: “If you abide in me and my words abide in you, you will bear much fruit”. ‘Abide’ does not take much effort. It speaks more of rest than activity.

What we have seen and gazed upon

As we heed this word, as we give our ears, our attention, we’ll begin to see. “*which we have seen with our eyes; that which we have gazed upon*”. John uses two variations of the word ‘see’. The first is ‘horao’.

Strong’s define it as: Properly to stare at, that is, by implication to discern clearly; by extension to attend to.

The second word is ‘theaomai’ and it is a more intensive form of the first word, meaning: A prolonged form of a primary verb; to look closely at, that is, by implication to perceive.

Again the progression is evident. Look until you see beyond the obvious. Look beyond the surface

and allow the true meaning of this word to captivate your attention. Continue to gaze and soon you'll find this word becoming a tangible reality.

There is no method, technique or process that has a greater ability to transform our lives than simply gazing into this mystery, seeing in it the face of our birth, allowing our attention to be captivated by it. Let me be clear. when I speak of being transformed, I do not mean becoming something that you are not. This transformation is a restoration to the original.

And all of us, as with unveiled face, continued to behold as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are constantly being transformed into His very own image in ever increasing splendor and from one degree of glory to another (2Cor3:18)

But friends, that's exactly who we are: children of God. And that's only the beginning. Who knows how we'll end up! What we know is that when Christ is openly revealed, we'll see him—and in seeing him, become like him. (1 John 3:2-3)

Can you see in these how 'transformation' is linked to 'beholding'? Once we start seeing the truth of God's opinion of us and excitement fills our hearts, the first response should simply be one of adoration – let's see more; let's look more deeply, let us gaze upon Him. Such adoration will awaken the appropriate response.

Doers of the word, not just hearers

"But be doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. Because if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man looking at his own face in a mirror; for he looks at himself, goes away, and right away forgets what kind of man he was. But the one who looks intently into the perfect law of freedom and perseveres in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer who acts—this person will be blessed in what he does."

The word 'doer' is so much richer than many translations bring across. It's the same word from which we get 'poet'.

'poietes'

A performer; specifically a "poet": – doer, poet.

It speaks of inspired, passionate expression. When this word is declared as it should be, you'll hear much more than 'do's and don'ts', you'll see the face your origin as in a mirror. The secret to accurate 'doing' of this word is in accurate 'seeing'. It is the one who looks intently and continues to look, that finds inspired expression – expression birthed from what he sees.

With that in mind I enjoyed the following translation:

Look and continue to look,
the perfect, complete, and eternal freedom.
Listen; listen intensely;
listen in such a way that it bursts forth in inspired expression.
Allow what you hear to awaken the poet in you;
allow what you see to awaken the artist in you.

Then act; act in the full conviction of what you have seen and heard,
and you will find delight and affirmation in your action.
James 1:25 (translated by Andre Rabe)

We Gather Together

Debbie Seagroves

Many times God begins the lessons He wants to teach me by asking me a question. This is actually a good teaching tool used in the classroom by many teachers. It should come as no surprise that this teaching tool was "invented" by God. I don't kid myself into thinking that He asks me questions because He needs or wants me to enlighten Him as to the answer. It is just a good way for Him to get my mind tuned into what He wants to teach me. In the early days I might have thrown out a few answers I thought sounded good. However, after years of experience I now simply turn it around and address the question right back to Him so that He can enlighten me as to what the answer is.

A few months ago God asked me this question. "Debbie, why do you think that I wrote in the scripture to not forsake the assembling together of the saints?" (Heb 10:25) I replied, "I don't have a clue why, Lord. Why did You write that?"

He responded, "The purpose for coming together with other believers is threefold:

1) for cooperate worship. And remember, the only worship I accept is that which is done in spirit and in truth." (John 4:24)

Another quirk of mine is that when I want to know something about God I will do a detailed "word search". When I say detailed I mean that I look up the word in Strong's Concordance and study that word from the first time it shows up in scripture to the last time it shows up. Even though I have computer programs to help with this, I am old school and like to use my Strong's Concordance. I find it interesting to see how much space a word takes up on a page. Quite some time ago I did a word search on the word "worship" and was blown away with the very first reference I came across. The very first time worship appears in the scripture is in Genesis 22:5. This is when Abraham was being tested by God by being told to take his son to a mountain and kill him as a sacrifice to God. Gen. 22:5 says, "Abraham said to his young men, 'Stay here with the donkey, and I and the lad will go over there, and we will worship and return to you.'" (NAS) (I hope you see the relevance of this as it pertains to us understanding worship. This is another blog for another day.) There is power in believers coming together for cooperate worship. I probably should have used the word "corporate" there, however I like the idea of cooperating more that incorporating. "Where two or three are gathered together..."

2) "for the edification of believers." The best scripture that I know to help us understand what edification means found in 1 Thess. 5:11. It says, "Therefore encourage one another and build up one another..." (NAS)

3) "for the equipping of the believers." Equipping for what? Equipping them to live life, to experience the life they have been given to the fullest as God intended. John 10:10 "...I [Jesus] came that they may have life, and have it abundantly." (NAS)

Immediately upon God showing me this truth, scriptures came to mind (many more than listed above) that confirmed it to be of Him. Further confirmation came when I made a phone call to share

this with a fellow believer and that believer was just getting ready to pick up the phone to share with me what God had showed him concerning believers gathering together. We listed the three reasons word for word in unison.

Oh wow, check out that last word, unison. Uni = one. Son = Jesus. A quick check with dictionary.com produced this result. "5. a process in which all elements behave in the same way at the same time; simultaneous or synchronous parallel action: to march in unison." How cool is that? Add to it the fact that the number five means grace. Awesome!

So, why does God have for His children to gather together? To worship together. This is simply spirit fellowship that can be done in many different forms. Nowhere did God say it had to be a certain day of the week at a certain time in a certain order beginning with music and ending with a certain person preaching at the group with an offering taken up somewhere in between. Not to say that worship can't or doesn't happen in this form, however we will miss out on so much worship if we limit it to those times. Fellowship of believers that is taking place in spirit and in truth cannot help but to edify, to encourage and to build up. And when believers are gracefully encouraging and building one another up, the equipping to live life to the fullest is a natural result of experiencing God's grace. Tell me that won't attract the world to Jesus.

Living by Religious Rules

Steve McVey

One glaring problem with trying to live by religious rules is deciding whose set of rules you intend to follow. The Baptists? The Pentecostals or Charismatics? The Methodists? Presbyterians? Catholics? Which denomination or group will you fall in line with in deciding what you're going to do and not do? There are *many* varying opinions in the modern church concerning what constitutes godly living. What is acceptable to one group of Christians is completely offensive to another. Again, if you are going to try to build your lifestyle around religious rules, *whose rules are you going to follow?* *"I will live by what the Bible says," one may smugly answer. However, it should be acknowledged that all who seek to live by legalistic standards claim the Bible as their source of authority.*

I was speaking on the dangers of legalism in a church when someone approached me and said, "Steve, I want to give you something. This is what every new member receives at the church where I regularly attend. I think you'll find it interesting." I looked at the brochure she handed me and read the title: "Truth About Standards: Biblical Standards For Christians". The contents of this brochure list fifty-one rules the Christian is to live by in order to "keep our banner of victory waving high." Below are the last nine of the fifty-one standards this group believes are important to godly living:

43. Biblical reason not to participate in worldly amusements, such as ball games, rodeos, circuses, racetracks, bowling alleys, skating rinks, theaters, video game rooms, etc.
44. Biblical reason not to go dancing, mixed bathing, etc.
45. Biblical reason for men to cut their hair short.
46. Biblical reason for women not to cut their hair but to let it grow long.
47. Biblical reason not to dye your hair.
48. Biblical reason not to wear clothing that pertaineth to the opposite sex.
49. Biblical reason to wear decent, modest clothes with modest styles; moderate prices and colors; decent dress lengths, sleeve lengths, and neck lines.
50. Biblical reason not to wear jewelry.
51. Biblical reason not to wear makeup.

Most evangelical Christians would consider this kind of list to be absurd — the idea that God is against ball games and rodeos? That He cares what color a lady's dress may be? It is important to realize that this list of religious rules isn't absurd to those who embrace it. They list numerous verses to prove the validity of each of their points.

Having seen this particular group's blueprint for living, I ask you this question: What is *yours*? "Oh," one may say, "I would never build my life around such a foolish list of rules. I simply try to do what the Bible *clearly* says." That is exactly what these people would say if questioned about their rules. The truth of the matter is that in the eyes of God, the legalism in our lives looks just as absurd to God as theirs for one simple reason. Our lifestyle is not to be built on rules! Life is not about finding and keeping the *right* set of rules. Our life exists in our union with Jesus Christ. Out of that, everything is to flow.

Jesus didn't come to help us keep religious rules. He came to deliver us from that system altogether.

The old man who was married to law was put to death with Him at the cross so that we have no relationship to it anymore. The law is alive, but the “old you” who was married to it is not. “You also were made to die to the Law through the body of Christ, that you might be joined to another, to him who was raised from the dead, that we might bear fruit for God” (Romans 7:4). Because of our co-crucifixion with Jesus Christ, we have absolutely no relationship to the law at all. None (See Romans 3:28; 6:14; 7:6; 8:3-4; 10:4; Galatians 3:21; 3:13,21; 5:18; 1 Timothy 1:9). Our commitment is to Christ alone.

What God has Joined

Aron Cooper

Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said, "The two will become one flesh." But he who unites himself with the Lord is one with him in spirit. (1 Cor 6:16-17).

While the second half of the above text is often used to point to reality of our union with Christ, perhaps part of the mystery of that union is better explained in the first half of the passage. These words are, of course, part of a larger passage in which Paul speaks against sexual immorality; certainly an unexpected place to introduce the concept of our union with the Lord. But, just as strange is that fact that Paul, in making his point, draws upon language that is typically reserved for scriptural discourse on marriage.

We first see the origins of this "becoming one" concept in the opening pages of the book of Genesis.

The man said, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman,' for she was taken out of man." *For this reason* a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh. (Gen. 2:22-24).

In this passage we see that the reason for a man to be united with a wife and becoming one flesh with her is based upon the fact that "she was taken out of man." In other words, for a man and a woman, "being one" is a restoration of the original state. Or to put it even more simply, the concept of their union may be better described as *reunion*. Later, Jesus takes this language and uses it as the foundation for His discussion of divorce.

But at the beginning of creation God 'made them male and female. For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate. (Mark 10:9).

Taken together, the passages seem to indicate a creative process in which Creation itself was but the first stage.¹⁰ God creates man, and then from man creates woman (thus making them male and female). Yet, because the woman is part of the man, they must be rejoined as one, and that joining is accomplished by God. In other words, it seems as if the rejoining of man and the woman is actually the final stage of their creation. And yet, as incredible as this mysterious process is, it pales in comparison when compared with the greater reality that it is meant to represent.

Throughout the Bible we encounter the idea of marriage as a metaphor for God's relationship with His people. Accordingly, in an effort to tie our relationship with Him back to the

¹⁰ While I haven't examined the passage in the original Hebrew, I find it interesting that Jesus says that the creation of male and female happened "at the beginning of creation," while through our understanding of the Genesis account, we typically understand this even as happening at the end of creation. Accordingly, while it is a topic that might be need to be more fully addressed at another time, I believe that there may be room to examine the idea that creation was not a one-time event but is in fact an ongoing process.

language of Genesis, some have asserted that the Church—like Eve from Adam—poured from the Lord’s side when, while hanging on the cross, He was pierced by a soldier’s spear. Of course, we need not rely on such creative interpretations of Scripture to find our origins in Him, as the Bible repeatedly makes it clear that all things have been made through Him. (John 1:3; Rom 11:36). Accordingly, as we have proceeded from Him, it appears that our union with Him in the spirit is more accurately understood as our reunion with Him.

And while there is no reason to try and add any significance to this reunion—as the idea of reuniting with our Creator is abundantly and overwhelmingly significant on its own—there remains an opportunity to explore the reality of this spiritual union. For me, one of the most important truths about this union is that God is fully aware of the unfaithfulness that we exhibit prior to our reunion with Him. “Husbands, love your wives, *just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.*” (Eph 5:25-27).

This thought is also repeated in the book of Hosea, when the Lord instructs Hosea to “take to yourself an adulterous wife and children of unfaithfulness, because the land is guilty of the vilest adultery in departing from the LORD.” (Hos 1:2). In Hosea, God makes it clear that His love continues despite the continued unfaithfulness of Israel.

The LORD said to me, "Go, show your love to your wife again, though she is loved by another and is an adulteress. Love her as the LORD loves the Israelites, though they turn to other gods and love the sacred raisin cakes."
(Hos 3:1).

And, as if that wasn’t enough, God makes it clear that one day, despite Israel’s unfaithfulness, He will *in His faithfulness*, be joined to her in marriage.

“Therefore I am now going to allure her; I will lead her into the desert and speak tenderly to her . . . In that day,” declares the LORD, “you will call me ‘my husband’; you will no longer call me ‘my master’ . . . I will betroth you to me forever; I will betroth you in righteousness and justice, in love and compassion. I will betroth you in faithfulness, and you will acknowledge the LORD.” (Hos 2:14-19).

In light of the revelation shown to Hosea, I turn back one last time to 1 Corinthians 16 only to find that this verse, when combined with verse 17, presents a picture that, not only looks back to the imagery of Genesis, but also embraces the reality of new covenant. For as Hosea reveals, we are the prostitute that God has chosen to join with, despite our unfaithfulness. He has given Himself up for us, not because we are holy, but to cleanse us and make us holy. And, though our unfaithfulness continues, His commitment to us is unwavering as it is based on His faithfulness. And ultimately, that commitment leads to a reunion, where we become one with Him. “And, what God has joined, let man not separate.”

When the Rubber Meets the Road

Jamie Weeks

I remember seeing the plume of dust as the pick-up approached the intersection and thinking, "It'll stop."

I remember Devon saying, "Mommy, he's not stopping."

I remember bracing for the impact and drifting to the roadside praying he would miss us.

I remember the sickening crunch and the hideous screams as we began to flip, and how the light changed as we rolled.

I remember realizing my children must be dead and that I never considered I would die so young.

I remember thinking of people I would see in heaven as the roof crushed in around me.

I remember hearing someone screaming, "Oh, God, Oh, God," and I still don't know if it was me.

And with that last final jarring stop, I remember thinking, I don't want to live without my babies.

But we did live. In fact, against tremendous odds, we walked away from a crushed Suburban, that rolled 5 times, with assorted cuts and bruises, and nary a scratch on me. The children received between them only a badly broken finger and assorted scars to show for it.

And I walked away wondering how could my good God let that horrible thing happen to my family. Sure, we survived, but post traumatic stress disorder took it's toll. Fear is a powerful adversary. Devon had to have physical therapy and we thought she would never ride her horse, play the piano, or the flute again. A great fear gripped and almost paralyzed her. She was in the eighth grade.

Reagan became obsessed with dying. Why wouldn't he? We had said good-bye to several relatives and his grandfather in the last 3 months and one of Devon's classmates had died the day before. Reagan was in the third grade.

Savannah simply screamed every time a car engine started and had to nap under the teacher's desk at school. She was in kindergarten.

And I slowly slipped into depression.

I was a good Christian. I was just beginning to understand Grace. But most importantly, I did all the right things. Why hadn't God kept His end of the bargain? Even though we survived, why had God even allowed the accident to happen in the first place?

Where is God when bad things happen to good people?

You see, I thought it was all about me. Oh sure, I was righteous because of Jesus and the cross, but when the rubber hit the road I still thought I called the shots. I thought that my strong faith, that my

sound doctrine, that my Emergency Jesus would wave His magic wand and make everything the way I thought it should be. I truly believed that MY FAITH MOVED GOD TO ACT HOW I THOUGHT HE SHOULD. I believed that something I did would cause God to act on my behalf. And if He didn't, well then the fault was mine ,wasn't it? I mistakenly thought I was in control.

What God has shown me: I am NEVER in control. HE IS ALWAYS IN CONTROL. I can't pray long enough, pray hard enough, believe enough, "do" anything enough to keep God in my little God box.

And with that horrible, wonderful realization came eventual peace. Because I came to the conclusion that God isn't waiting on me to move on my behalf. He moved on my behalf at the cross. And that is MORE THAN ENOUGH. More than enough for when I see Him and when I don't. My perception of God doesn't dictate to God, but my perception can and does dictate to my circumstance. So instead of me dictating to God my perception of reality; I am learning to let God's reality dictate to my circumstance. God's reality is what Christ accomplished on the cross. God's reality is dictated from the heavenlies. God's reality is MORE THAN I COULD THINK TO ASK OR IMAGINE. God's reality is eternal and his ways are higher than my ways. And God's ways are better than my ways whether I believe that or not.

There is a reason God's peace surpasses all understanding; we don't understand it. That means whether my circumstance changes or not, that God will be my peace, my shelter, my joy, my provision, my comfort, my strong tower, my every need. And He will be these things because that is His very Nature not because I somehow conjured Him up.

Do I believe in walking in divine health? Yes. Do I believe God will meet my needs? Yes. Do I believe in a big, miraculous God? Absolutely!

I, also, believe that God is God regardless of my feelings, actions, state of health, lack of faith, or any other "lack" I have or see. I believe that God is so big that He is BIGGER THAN MY CIRCUMSTANCE. I believe that in the midst of the storm, if the storm doesn't subside, that I can walk on the waves if my eyes are on Him and that He will keep me.

I don't take a little bit of Jesus and add to my life any more. I don't filter Jesus through my circumstance.

I take my life and hand it to Jesus. I filter my circumstance through Jesus' finished work on the cross. Every feeling, every fear, every good circumstance and every bad. Every heartbreak, every problem, every joy, and every victory.

And when I can't even pray, I throw myself on Him and realize He is ALWAYS HOLDING ME; ALWAYS KEEPING ME; HE IS EVERY BREATH THAT I TAKE!

Sometimes, in the blink of an eye we come face to face with eternity. And with that loss of control we can choose to forever try to regain the upper hand on God or we can rest knowing He will be forever enough when the rubber meets the road.

Christ Revealed the Mind of God¹¹

A.T. Pierson

There is but one explanation: The world was visited by the Son of God. He told of heavenly things. He revealed the mind of God on subjects hitherto unveiled. What He had heard in a celestial school -- the University of God -- what no scholar or philosopher of earth had even imagined -- He testified, and some received His testimony and set to their seal, experimentally, that God is true. And so it comes to pass that the Bible -- because it is what it claims to be, God's Word, conveying God's thought -- gives us absolutely new ideas of the way of salvation, of the sinless sin bearer, of the risen Lord of life; and announces the simple terms whereby He becomes to the believer, the sphere of a new life -- his Justifier, Reconciler, Saviour.

Let us tarry at the threshold of our study of this theme, to praise Him who in the Gospel of Christ has brought to light, life and immortality; who has made the cross of Calvary a tree of life, and the sepulcher in the garden a doorway of life, and the faith of a little child the condition of life, to every penitent and believing sinner. Toplady says; "When Christ entered into Jerusalem the people spread garments in the way: when He enters into our hearts, we pull off our own righteousness, and not only lay it under Christ's feet but even trample upon it ourselves."

Let a quotation from another writer, referring to Isaiah 53:5, enforce this same lesson:

Let every poor sinner, and let every preacher to sinners *put the great truth where God puts it*, in the very center and midst, as the most vital and important of all truths. How simple this verse which expresses it! It states facts, facts to which the prophet looked wonderingly forward, facts on which we look gratefully backward. He, the mighty and the holy One, He was wounded, bruised, chastised! He was treated thus, not because *He deserved it*, but for *our sakes*, because *we* deserved it. His punishment is our peace. His stripes are our healing. His death our life. O greatest of all facts! Well mayest Thou have the central place in prophecy, the central place in our hearts! This is the Gospel. To *believe* this is to be saved; He has borne the stripes and punishment due to each believer, who will, therefore, have *none* to bear. To believe this is to be happy, for it is to see a substitute in our place of doom and death, setting us free! To believe this is to be holy, for faith in such facts must make us *love* the One that suffered in our stead, and *hate* the sin that brought sore stripes on Him. Brother, canst thou make it singular, and say, "He was wounded for *my* transgressions; He was bruised for *my* iniquities, the chastisement of *my* peace was upon Him, and with His stripes I am healed?"

The 20th of January 1896, marked the centenary of John Howard, the philanthropist, who went on his famous "circumnavigation of charity" to let light into the dungeons of the world's prisons. His was a life of singular self-sacrifice for others. Beginning amid the cottages of Cardington, and undertaking reforms among his own tenantry, his work grew wider until from the jails and prisons of Britain it embraced the cells of the imprisoned everywhere. In Bedford jail, where Bunyan had spent twelve years a century before, Howard found men and women, who were felons, living in a common day room, their night-rooms being two dungeons "down steps." There was only a single courtyard for

¹¹ A.T. Pierson: In Christ Jesus <http://www.curtaintorn.com/inchristjesus/>

debtors and criminals, there was no apartment for the jailer, and the sanitary conditions bred fatal jail fever, which proved destructive also outside prison walls. Howard's whole soul was so moved that he "emptied himself" of all that mortals prize, to go on his wide mission of love, and become a servant of servants to the lowest and vilest classes.

The inscription on his monument is eloquently suggestive: *Vixit propter alios salvos fecit.*

This was, indeed, the victory whereby he overcame. He lived for others, and he gave his life for their uplifting and salvation. He was so indifferent to fame that he forbade a project to build him a memorial. And, as Dean Milman says, "the first statue admitted to St. Paul's was not that of a statesman, warrior, or even of a sovereign; it was that of John Howard, the pilgrim, not to gorgeous shrines of saints and martyrs, not even to holy lands, but to the loathsome depths of darkness of the prisons of what called itself the civilized world."

Let us not forget where Howard learned his life lesson of philanthropy: it was from *One* of whom it was said, in taunt sublimely true: "He saved others; himself he cannot save" (Mark 15:31).

The Son of God and Son of Man gave Himself a ransom for many. It was by His death, burial, and resurrection that He made possible a *sphere of life* for you and me. Life for us was purchased by death for Him. And this first of New Testament epistles is the revelation of the first conditions of our salvation. His cross abolished our judgment; His burial abolished for us the fear of death and the grave; and His resurrection became to us alike the hope and the pledge of life, both for soul and body.

It is plain that to be in Christ justified, is far more than pardon or even reconciliation; it includes being *counted as just, and put upon the same standing as Christ, before God.*

A Lost Sinner...to a Helpless Saint...to Wholeness!

DeeDee Winter

His first misery's a "lost sinner." His second misery was a "helpless saint"...and so may you all have a fairly good misery, if you haven't had one, because you won't come to the end of independent self until you've been a well beaten up self.

Norman Grubb, from *The Meaning of Life*

I recently had a call of distress from a young woman who was broken over her behavior that she had desperately tried to stop. As I listened to her it was apparent that she was square in the middle of her own personal Romans 7. I answered her by writing her of the way the Holy Spirit had taken me. It is "off the graph" of acceptable Christian behavior in many circles. When I found myself spontaneously responding as you will read in the following account, I had to dig deeper for answers....which many years ago led me to complete *rest* in Christ's expression AS me.

Dear _____,

The Spirit goes to great lengths to settle us that He is our life...our TOTAL life...He is the lover; He is the dancer; He is the writer; He is the mother; He is the drinker; He is the carpenter; He is the smoker; He is the salesman; He is the cusser....which is *my* story.

When I only knew the Lord as a church-going person, but with no *real* relationship with Him, I cussed...because it was cool and I was going to be the coolest of the cool. This was in the 60's so you get the picture! I seemed to be spinning out of control in every direction when Jesus 'found' me through the Baptism of the Holy Spirit. My first 'evidence' of having Christ in my life was that with absolutely no plan or forethought I stopped cussing and began speaking in tongues. What a surprise as I did not ask for the cussing to be gone or for the tongues to come.

I spent the next six years doing what I call "tap dancing for God triple time" in trying SO hard to live this new Christian life that one day I cried out, "I don't even know if I have salvation or not, but if this isn't it, You are going to have to show me what is!" I promptly forgot it and six weeks later He revealed my union with Him through three Scriptures which turned my life 'right side up'. Well, guess what? My tongues were gone and the cussing was back with never one thought in my mind in that direction! I settled into coming to know Christ as my life and rested in being *spontaneously* myself/Himself...with all my peculiarities!

This continued, until one day I passed an accident where a young boy had been hit by a car. As I drove by, much to my surprise, I began to pray in tongues...for the first time in three years...and I *knew* he would be fine! What I saw then in an even greater way was that the Spirit would spontaneously be Himself in me in whatever way He pleased. I was no more in control of my mouth than I was of my life.

Neither cussing nor speaking in tongues were the issue. The issue was trying....*trying not* to cuss OR *trying to* speak in tongues. Trying, stemming from should and ought, is the sin of Romans 7! In the realization that Someone HAS delivered us from this body of sin and death, we 'land' in the freedom of Romans 8:1... "Now there is NO CONDEMNATION for those in Christ Jesus..." I have lived in the freedom of being fully my unique self since the early 1980's...taking no pride or condemnation for His words by me.

Each of us have been given a God-created perfect personality with its unique strengths and weaknesses. Then He spends many years, through our life circumstances and through others, training us to fully BE ourselves. It takes a deep and thorough work of the Holy Spirit for us to agree with Christ Jesus... "Don't call unholy what I have called holy."

We have been bought with a price. God created us and called us "fearfully and wonderfully made." He has spent many years training into us all He wanted to through our many life experiences in order that He could live His life out through us...as drinkers, as cussers, as lovers, as smokers, as church goers, as non-church goers, as whatever He needs to be to reach our worlds for Himself...and all without a trace of sin!

Trust the One who "*causes* you to walk in His ways"!

It's A Done Deal

Debbie Seagroves

Recently I have been involved in a discussion with several people. The topic of conversation was why some Christian's lives seem to be a roller coaster ride like experience, up and down and up and down with great struggles while other Christians have a very stable, consistent experience with very little struggle.

In pondering the question I thought back over my Christian life experience. The first 25 years of my Christian life would fit into the first category described above, while the past 15 years would fit in the second category. So, what was it that moved me into a stable, consistent Christian life with very little struggle?

Was it because circumstances and situations changed drastically and there were no major events to upset the balance in the past few years? No, that's certainly not the answer. In just the past year alone I have faced my father still battling the effects of staph infection, my father battling cancer, the death of my mother-in-law, my mother facing cancer, family conflicts, conflicts with religious leaders, and that's just to name a few and only covers the past 12 months. It's definitely not because circumstances and situations have been great.

Was it because I became stronger and more experienced at standing firm thus better able to handle the bumps and pot holes in life's road? No, that's not the answer either. Self will power and self motivation has never been strengths of mine and never will be. I don't do very well with anything in my life that requires me to consistently do something, like taking daily medications for example. Eddie even bought me one of those pill boxes recently so only once a week do I have to divvy out the pills into the seven little compartments to make it easier to take my meds daily. However, on Sunday night of this week I stood looking at a pill box that still had pills in 3 out of 7 compartments. Heavy sigh. And I'm not even going to go into my success (or lack thereof) with a daily workout regimen. I think you get the point.

Was it because I have been involved in consistent church activities, spiritual retreats, weekly Bible study, etcetera that has kept me spiritually grounded? That is definitely not the case. As a matter of fact, I know a lot of people who think our family has become heathens because we do not regularly attend a local fellowship. If attending church, spiritual retreats, and Bible studies are the answer to being a strong, stable Christian then I would be in trouble.

So, what is the answer to the question as to how I have managed to have a consistent, stable, with very little struggle life experience over the past 15 years? The answer is this. Fifteen years ago God brought me to the end of self dependency. He brought me to the place where I quit doing my life to the best of my ability. I quit doing life all together. I realized the truth that God never intended for me to do my life, but that He intended to do my life for me and through me.

The words of the chorus to one of my most favorite hymns go like this. "And I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded, that He is able, to keep that which I committed, unto Him against that day." I realized that my salvation, my life was fully done by Jesus Christ's death and resurrection and

that I had been living a lie for the past 25 years since the day of accepting Jesus as my life, thinking that it was somehow my responsibility “to keep that which I committed” to the best of my ability instead of trusting God to “keep that which I committed” to the best of His ability.

Having done the best I could do to keep my commitment to God I ended up miserable, sick to death of the roller coaster life I was living, so I turned in my resignation. I told God, “I am done! I quit! I am finished! I cannot do this life anymore, so from now on, if my life is to continue You are just going to have to do it.” In all honesty, I think when I said that I thought that my life on earth was getting ready to come to an end because I didn’t really know that God would “do my life for me.”

Very quickly I saw the truth that my salvation, my life had already been done 100% by Jesus Christ. Not only had it been done by Jesus Christ, it had been kept safe and secure by God regardless of what I had done or what I had not done. And if this is true concerning my salvation, then it is also true concerning every area of my life because at the moment I accepted Jesus as my Savior He became my life. Just as my salvation was done by Jesus and had been being kept by God ever since I had accepted Him as my Savior, my full surrender was also done by and kept by Him when I recognized Him as my Lord. Colossians 2:6 “As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him.”

In having this discussion over the past couple of weeks, with several different people, there are a couple of responses that really stand out in my mind. One lady said, “The secret to my life and what gets me through is that each morning as soon as I open my eyes I pray these words, ‘Jesus come into my heart right now and save me, and go with me throughout this day.’” Another explained that her secret was to choose afresh each morning, before even getting out of bed and setting one foot on the floor, to surrender her day to God. She went on to say that if she did not do that her day would be all downhill.

For me, the secret (which is not a secret at all because it is found all throughout God’s Word) is for me to realize, to choose to believe, (which I did 15 years ago) and then to continually recognize that the choice has already been made. It is a done deal, a deal which is secure in God’s ability to keep it. “For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate” me from my salvation, from my surrender “which is in Christ Jesus” my Lord.

If I oversleep and have to jump out of the bed in the morning, hitting the floor running or at times that I may get caught up in a hectic schedule, it’s okay. The choice has already been made that my day, my life is fully surrendered and God is keeping it secure even when I am not even conscious of the fact. If I receive a phone call delivering bad news, it doesn’t overwhelm me. God quickly reminds me, “My child, you have already chosen to let Me carry this for you and I have already begun to carry it long before you even knew it existed. It’s not yours to bear.” If a situation arises that I find myself in the midst of a life storm, God reminds me that I have already chosen to trust this storm to Him and that He is my very peace even as I am being slammed hard by the wind, the waves, and the debris that the storm brings.

There are times that I falter, that my mind questions, that I fear, that I try to do, that I forget...but

these times don't turn into periods of spiritual struggle because God will remind me that the choice to believe, to trust, to commit, to surrender has already been made and therefore I don't have to go through the struggle to choose over and over again. I can relax in the confidence that God is keeping it all intact unto Him against that day.

The Less Distinct Way¹²

Madame Guyon

(Madame Guyon contrasts the upwardly mobile "successful" Christian with those called to the inward path. . .)

Those who are led in this Way, though conducted by a blind abandonment, yet experience a savory knowledge. They never walk by the light of the intellect, like the former, who receive distinct lights to guide them, and who, having a clear view of the road, never enter those impenetrable passes of the hidden Will which are reserved for the latter. The former proceed upon the evidence furnished by their illuminations, assisted by their reason, and they do well; but the latter are destined to pursue blindly an unknown course, which, nevertheless, appears perfectly natural to them, although they seem obliged to feel their way. They go, however, with more certainty than the others, who are subject to be misled in their intellectual illuminations; but these are guided by a supreme Will which conducts them howsoever it will. And further, all the more immediate operations are performed in the Centre of the Soul, that is, in the Three Powers reduced to the Unity of the Will, where they are all absorbed, insensibly following the path prescribed for them by that Touch to which we have before referred.

These latter are they who pursue the Way of Faith and absolute Abandonment. They have neither relish nor liberty for any other path; all else constrains and embarrasses them. They dwell in greater aridities than the others, for as there is nothing distinct to which their minds are attached, their thoughts often wander and have nothing to fix them; nevertheless, there is a delicate something in the depth of the Will, which serves to nourish them, and which is, as it were, the condensed Essence of what the others experience in the intellect and in ardor of purpose.

You will ask me, then, if these Souls are urged on by no violent influence, but walk in blindness, do they do the will of God? They do, more truly, although they have no distinct assurance of it; His Will is engraved in indelible characters on their very inmost recesses, so that they perform with a cold and languid, but firm and inviolable, abandonment, what the others accomplish by the drawings of an exquisite delight.

Thus they go on under the influence of this divine touch, from one degree to another, by a faith more or less sensibly savory, and experience constant alternations of aridity and enjoyment of the presence of God, but ever finding that the enjoyment becomes continually deeper and less perceptible, and thus more delicate and interior. They discover, too, that in the midst of their aridity, and without any distinct illumination, they are not the less enlightened; for this state is luminous in itself, though dark to the Soul that dwells in it. And so true is this, that they find themselves more acquainted with the truth; I mean that truth implanted in their interior, and which causes everything to yield to the Will of God. This divine Will becomes more familiar to them, and they are enabled, in their insipid way, to penetrate a thousand Mysteries that never could have been discovered by the light of reason and knowledge.

¹² Jeanne Guyon: The Way to God

Asking God for Forgiveness

Steve McVey

It is no longer necessary for you to ask for forgiveness for your sins. In fact, it insults the finished work of Jesus on the cross when we do ask. It implies that the matter isn't finished although Jesus clearly said that "it is finished." Doesn't the New Testament teach that we are to still ask for God's forgiveness? This is where it becomes important to "rightly divide the word."

When did the new covenant of grace begin in the Bible? Many would say it started at the beginning of Matthew, yet the covenant did not actually start until the death of Jesus. The covenant of grace was the last will and testament of Jesus Christ. The age of grace could not become operative until Jesus died. The writer of Hebrews said:

For where a covenant is, there must of necessity be the death of the one who made it. For a covenant is valid only when men are dead, for it is never in force while the one who made it lives (Hebrews 9:16-17).

Both Scripture and common knowledge demonstrate that a will does not become functional until the one who made it dies. Given that fact, which covenant was in operation during the whole lifetime of Jesus? Of course it was the covenant of law. Jesus lived under the Old Testament. (The words "testament and "covenant" mean the same thing.)

Remember that the purpose of law is to raise the awareness of sin among those who embrace it. (See Romans 5:20) Living under the covenant of law, the words of Jesus often reflected that covenant. Such is the case when he discussed the matter of forgiveness. In Matthew 6:12, when responding to his disciples' inquiry about how to pray, concerning forgiveness he said, "And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors." He elaborates on forgiveness under the law system in verses 14-15 by saying, "For if you forgive men for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men, then your Father will not forgive you your transgressions." This was the law in action — if you want God to do something for you, then you must first do something to cause Him to act in your behalf. Under law, if there is even one person whom you have not forgiven, then you can't be fully forgiven yourself. If you aren't fully forgiven, you have no hope of heaven.

When asked about forgiveness, Jesus answered according to the law. Yet in His personal relationships, he always acted in grace. An example of His approach is illustrated by the woman in John 8 who was caught in the act of adultery. When the scribes and Pharisees pointed out that the law of Moses commanded that adulterers be stoned, Jesus didn't dispute the law. He simply suggested that their application of the law include themselves. After His challenge that the sinless one among them cast the first stone, the crowd dispersed until no one was left except the woman who had been caught.

Having acknowledged the validity of the law at that moment, he went on to demonstrate gracious forgiveness toward the woman by asking, "'Woman, where are they? Did no one condemn you? And she answered, 'No one, Lord.' And Jesus said, 'Neither do I condemn you; go your way. From now on

sin no more.” This incident is so typical of the Lord Jesus during His earthly ministry. He utilized the law to raise the awareness of sin and then demonstrated grace by His own behavior.

Under the covenant of law, one was not totally forgiven but must receive ongoing forgiveness in order to remain in a guilt free state. Yet at the cross, God poured out all His forgiveness toward those who are His. We don't need to ask anymore! Paul described total forgiveness in Colossians 2:13-14.

And when you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us and which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.

Because of His finished work at the cross you have been acquitted for the sins of a lifetime! If you believe that your sins are still being forgiven one at a time as you ask for forgiveness, a troubling question must be answered. What happens if you die with just one sin in your life which you haven't thought to ask Him to forgive? The truth of Scripture is that before we were ever born, God saw our lives and identified every sin that we would commit. The “certificate of debt” is a list of the sins of our lifetime. Jesus carried those sins to the cross with Him and God canceled the debt. Every sin of our lifetime has been forgiven — past, present, and future! The empty tomb put a smile on the face of God which has never gone away.

Are you still living as if you were under the Old Testament by constantly asking for God's forgiveness? Those days are over and finished! Rejoice in the truth that you are totally forgiven. The old covenant is forever gone. The writer of Hebrews said:

For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion sought for a second. For finding fault with them, He says, “Behold, days are coming, says the lord, When I will effect a new covenant, With the house of Israel and with the house of Judah; Not like the covenant which I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand To lead them out of the land of egypt; for they did not continue in my covenant, and I did not care for them, says the lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel, After those days, says the Lord: I will put My laws into their minds, And I will write them upon their hearts. And I will be their God, And they shall be my people. And they shall not teach everyone his fellow citizen, and everyone his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ For all shall know me, From the least to the greatest of them. For I will be merciful to their iniquities, And I will remember their sins no more (Hebrews 8:7-12).

The day described in this passage is the day in which we live! When grace rules, we will see God as One who has forgiven us for every sin of our lifetime! The cross of Jesus was God's final word about our sins. So let's stop acting like it wasn't by continuing to ask Him to do something He's already done - forgive us.

Christ Is My Life; I Have No Other Life

Daniel Yordy

Part of the revelation that Christ is my life; I have no other life is a complete end to trying to distinguish between Christ and me. Yes, the Lord Jesus is who He is, but He is my life; I have no other life. The part of me that is dead, vanished 2000 years ago. I do not recognize or relate to that. I am alive. I no more concern myself about the "dead" part than I concern myself about the bones of my natural father.

If I suffer, it is Christ suffering in me for His wondrous purposes and if Christ suffers, I share that in my own personal experiences.

The revelation of Christ is 100% personal, if it is not personal, it is not Christ. Paul talked about himself more than any other topic, all through his letters. But Paul understood that Christ was in him.

It is Christ in ME that is the hope of glory and Christ through ME that reconciles the world to Himself. This is not an exaltation of self in any way, but the vanishing of "self." I cannot "get out of the way" so that Christ can be seen. The moment I am out of the way, He also is out of the way, for He is in me.

Every part of my personal life is Christ revealing Himself in this world through me. And every part of ME, He carries inside of Himself at all times.

The whole exercise of distinguishing between Christ and me is the exercise of religion. This, this, and this is me, while that, that, and that is Christ. From this false distinction comes every measure of religious performance that takes us right back into the tree of knowledge.

Christ is my life; I have NO OTHER life. Nor am I "dead," except to all notion that I am a self separate from God, no, I AM ALIVE unto God.

Arguments to Prove the Satisfaction of Christ¹³

John Owen

I. If Christ so took our sins, and had them by God so laid and imposed on him, as that he underwent the punishment due unto them in our stead, then he made satisfaction to the justice of God for them, that the sinners might go free; but Christ so took and bare our sins, and had them so laid upon him, as that he underwent the punishment due unto them, and that in our stead: therefore, he made satisfaction to the justice of God for them. The consequent of the proposition is apparent, and was before proved. Of the assumption there be three parts, severally to be confirmed:— First, That Christ took and bare our sins, God laying them on him. Secondly, That he so took them as to undergo the punishment due unto them. Thirdly, That he did this in our stead.

For the first, that he took and bare our sins, ye have it, John i. 29, ἀρῶν, ³³³³ Aufert, sustulit, tulit. etc., — “Who taketh away the sin of the world;” 1 Pet. ii. 24, ἑαυτοῦ ἑνὸς σώματος, — “Who his own self bare our sins in his own body;” Isa. liii. 11, יִקַּבֵּל לְהוֹיֵא, — “He shall bear their iniquities;” and verse 12, אֶשְׂרָף, — “He bare the sin of many.” That God also laid or imposed our sins on him is no less apparent: Isa. liii. 6, “The LORD, יְהוָה, made to meet on him the iniquity of us all;” 2 Cor. v. 21, ἑμαυτὸν ἵνα ἵπτασθαι, — “He hath made him to be sin for us.”

The second branch is, that in thus doing our Saviour underwent the punishment due to the sins which he bare, which were laid upon him; which may be thus made manifest:— Death and the curse of the law contain the whole of the punishment due to sin, Gen. ii. 17, תָּמוּת מוֹת, “Dying thou shalt die,” is that which was threatened. Death was that which entered by sin, Rom. v. 12: which word in these places is comprehensive of all misery due to our transgressions; which also is held out in the curse of the law, Deut. xxvii. 26, “Cursed be he that confirmeth not all the words of this law to do them.” That all evils of punishment whatsoever are comprised in these is unquestionably evident. Now, Jesus Christ in bearing our sins underwent both these: for “by the grace of God he tasted death,” Heb. ii. 9; by death delivering from death, verse 14. He was not “spared, but given up to death for us all,” Rom. viii. 32. So also the curse of the law: Gal. iii. 13, γενόμενος κατάρα, — he “was made a curse for us;” and ἠκαταράσθη, “cursed.” And this by the way of undergoing the punishment that was in death and curse: for by these “it pleased the LORD to bruise him, and put him to grief,” Isa. liii. 10; yea, οὐκ ἠφέσθη, “he spared him not,” Rom. viii. 32, but “condemned sin in his flesh,” verse 3. It remaineth only to show that he did this in our stead, and the whole argument is confirmed.

Now, this also our Saviour himself maketh apparent, Matt. xx. 28. He came δοῦναι τὸν ψυχῶν ἀπολύτρωτον, — “to give himself a ransom for many.” The word δόντες always supposeth a commutation, and change of one person or thing instead of another, as shall be afterward declared: so Matt. ii. 22; so 1 Tim. ii. 6; 1 Pet. iii. 18, “He suffered for us, the just for the unjust;” and Ps. lxxix. 4, “I restored” (or paid) “that which I took not away,” — namely, our debt, so far as that thereby we are discharged, as Rom. viii. 34, where it is asserted, upon this very ground, that he died in our stead. And so the several parts of this first argument are confirmed.

¹³ John Owen: Death of Death in the Death of Christ <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/owen/deathofdeath.toc.html>

II. If Jesus Christ paid into his Father's hands a valuable price and ransom for our sins, as our surety, so discharging the debt that we lay under, that we might go free, then did he bear the punishment due to our sins, and make satisfaction to the justice of God for them (for to pay such a ransom is to make such satisfaction); but Jesus Christ paid such a price and ransom, as our surety, into his Father's hands, etc.: *ergo*, —

There be four things to be proved in the assumption, or second proposition:— First, That Christ paid such a price and ransom. Secondly, That he paid it into the hands of his Father. Thirdly, That he did it as our surety. Fourthly, That we might go free. All which we shall prove in order:—

First, For the first, our Saviour himself affirms it, Matt. xx. 28. He “came to give his life $\lambda\alpha\tau\rho\nu$,” a ransom or price of redemption “for many,” Mark x. 45; which the apostle terms $\nu\tau\lambda\alpha\tau\rho\nu$, 1 Tim. ii. 6, a ransom to be accepted in the stead of others: whence we are said to have deliverance $\delta\iota\tau\epsilon\lambda\alpha\tau\rho\sigma\epsilon\omega\varsigma$, “by the ransom-paying of Christ Jesus,” Rom. iii. 24. “He bought us with a price,” 1 Cor. vi. 20; which price was his own blood, Acts xx. 28; compared to and exalted above silver and gold in this work of redemption, 1 Pet. i. 18. So that this first part is most clear and evident.

Secondly, He paid this price into the hands of his Father. A price must be paid to somebody in the case of deliverance from captivity by it; it must be paid to the judge or jailer, — that is, to God or the devil. To say the latter were the highest blasphemy; Satan was to be conquered, not satisfied. For the former, the Scripture is clear: It was his “wrath” that was on us, John iii. 36. It was he that had “shut us all up under sin,” Gal. iii. 22. He is the great king to whom the debt is owing, Matt. xviii. 23–34. He is the only “law-giver, who is able to save and to destroy,” James iv. 12. Nay, the ways whereby this ransom-paying is in the Scripture expressed abundantly enforce the payment of it into the hands of his Father; for his death and blood-shedding is said to be $\pi\rho\sigma\phi\omicron\rho\alpha$ and $\theta\upsilon\sigma\alpha$, “an oblation and sacrifice,” Eph. v. 2; and his soul to be $\nu\psi\chi\eta$, a sacrifice or “offering for sin,” Isa. liii. 10. Now, certainly offerings and sacrifices are to be directed unto God alone.

Thirdly, That he did this as surety, we are assured, Heb. vii. 22. He was made $\beta\epsilon\tau\tau\epsilon\rho\sigma\tau\epsilon\rho\varsigma$, a “surety of a better testament;” and, in performance of the duty which lay upon him as such, “he paid that which he took not away,” Ps. lxix. 4. All which could not possibly have any other end but that we might go free.

III. To make an atonement for sin, and to reconcile God unto the sinners, is in effect to make satisfaction unto the justice of God for sin, and all that we understand thereby; but Jesus Christ, by his death and oblation, did make an atonement for sin, and reconcile God unto sinners: *ergo*, —

The first proposition is in itself evident; the assumption is confirmed, Rom. iii. 24, 25. We are justified freely by the ransom-paying, that is in Christ, whom God hath set forth to be $\beta\alpha\sigma\iota\lambda\epsilon\iota\sigma\tau\epsilon\rho\iota\omicron\nu$, a propitiation, an atonement, a mercy-seat, a covering of iniquity; and that, $\epsilon\pi\alpha\gamma\gamma\epsilon\lambda\iota\sigma\tau\epsilon\rho\varsigma$ $\delta\iota\kappa\alpha\iota\omicron\sigma\tau\epsilon\rho\eta\varsigma$, for the manifestation of his justice, declared in the going forth and accomplishment thereof. So likewise Heb. ii. 17, he is said to be a “merciful high priest, $\epsilon\pi\alpha\gamma\gamma\epsilon\lambda\iota\sigma\tau\epsilon\rho\varsigma$ $\beta\alpha\sigma\iota\lambda\epsilon\iota\sigma\tau\epsilon\rho\iota\omicron\nu$ $\mu\alpha\rho\tau\iota\alpha\varsigma$ $\tau\omicron\lambda\alpha\omicron$,” — “to make reconciliation for the sins of the people,” to reconcile God unto the people: the meaning of the words being, $\beta\alpha\sigma\iota\lambda\epsilon\iota\sigma\tau\epsilon\rho\iota\omicron\nu$ $\theta\epsilon\omicron\nu$ $\pi\epsilon\rho$ $\tau\omicron\nu$ $\mu\alpha\rho\tau\iota\omicron\nu$ $\tau\omicron\lambda\alpha\omicron$, — to reconcile God, who was offended with the sins of the people; which reconciliation we are said to “receive,” Rom. v. 11 (the word $\kappa\alpha\tau\alpha\lambda\lambda\alpha\gamma\mu\epsilon\tau\alpha$ there, in our common translation rendered

“atonement,” is in other places in the same rendered “reconciliation,” being, indeed, the only word used for it in the New Testament.) And all this is said to be accomplished, δι’ ἑνὸς δικαιοσύνης, — by one righteousness or satisfaction; that is of Christ, (the words will not bear that sense wherein they are usually rendered, “By the righteousness of one,” for then must it have been δι’ δικαιοσύνης τοῦ ἑνός.) And hereby were we delivered from that from which it was impossible we should be otherwise delivered, Rom. viii. 3.

IV. That wherein the exercise of the priestly office of Jesus Christ whilst he was on earth doth consist, cannot be rejected nor denied without damnable error; but the exercise of the priestly office of Jesus Christ whilst he was upon the earth consisted in this, to bear the punishment due to our sins, to make atonement with God, by undergoing his wrath, and reconciling him to sinners upon the satisfaction made to his justice: therefore cannot these things be denied without damnable error.

That in the things before recounted the exercise of Christ’s priestly office did consist is most apparent, — first, From all the types and sacrifices whereby it was prefigured, their chief end being propitiation and atonement; secondly, From the very nature of the sacerdotal office, appointed for sacrificing, Christ having nothing to offer but his own blood, through the eternal Spirit; and, thirdly, From divers, yea, innumerable texts of Scripture affirming the same. It would be too long a work to prosecute these things severally and at large, and therefore I will content myself with one or two places wherein all those testimonies are comprised; as Heb. ix. 13, 14, “If the blood of bulls and of goats,” etc., “how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God?” etc. Here the death of Christ is compared to, exalted above, and in the antitype answereth, the sacrifices of expiation which were made by the blood of bulls and goats; and so must, at least spiritually, effect what they did carnally accomplish and typically prefigure, — namely, deliverance from the guilt of sin by expiation and atonement: for as in them the life and blood of the sacrifice was accepted in the stead of the offerer, who was to die for the breach of the law, according to the rigour of it, so in this of Christ was his blood accepted as an atonement and propitiation for us, himself being priest, altar, and sacrifice. So, Heb. x. 10–12, he is said expressly, in the room of all the old, insufficient, carnal sacrifices, which could not make the comers thereunto perfect, to offer up his own body a sacrifice for sins, for the remission and pardon of sins through that offering of himself; as it is verse 19. And in the performance also do we affirm that our Saviour underwent the wrath of God which was due unto us. This, because it is by some questioned, I shall briefly confirm, and that with these following reasons:—

First, The punishment due to sin is the wrath of God: Rom. i. 18, “The wrath of God is revealed against all ungodliness;” chap. ii. 5, “The day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God;” Eph. ii. 3, “Children of wrath;” John iii. 36. But Jesus Christ underwent the punishment due to sin: 2 Cor. v. 21, “Made sin for us;” Isa. liii. 6, “Iniquity was laid upon him;” 1 Pet. ii. 24, “He bare our sins in his own body on the tree.” Therefore he underwent the wrath of God.

Secondly, The curse of the law is the wrath of God taken passively, Deut. xxix. 20, 21. But Jesus Christ underwent the curse of the law: Gal. iii. 13, “Made a curse for us,” the curse that they lie under who are out of Christ, who are “of the works of the law,” verse 10. Therefore he underwent the wrath of God.

Thirdly, The death that sinners are to undergo is the wrath of God. Jesus Christ did taste of that death which sinners for themselves were to undergo; for he died as “our surety,” Heb. vii. 22, and in our stead, Matt. xx. 28. Hence his fear, Heb. v. 7; agony, Luke xxii. 44; astonishment and amazement, Mark xiv. 33; dereliction, Matt. xxvii. 46; sorrow, heaviness, and inexpressible pressures, chap. xxvi. 37–39.

V. That doctrine cannot be true nor agreeable to the gospel which strikes at the root of gospel faith, and plucks away the foundation of all that strong consolation which God is so abundantly willing we should receive; but such is that of denying the satisfaction made by Christ, his answering the justice and undergoing the wrath of his Father. It makes the poor soul to be like Noah’s dove in its distress, not knowing where to rest the soles of her feet. When a soul is ²⁸⁴turned out of its self-righteousness, and begins to look abroad, and view the heaven and earth for a resting-place, and perceives an ocean, a flood, an inundation of wrath, to cover all the world, the wrath of God revealing itself from heaven against all ungodliness, so that it can obtain no rest nor abiding, — heaven it cannot reach by its own flight, and to hell it is unwilling to fall; — if now the Lord Jesus Christ do not appear as an ark in the midst of the waters, upon whom the floods have fallen, and yet has got above them all for a refuge, alas! what shall it do? When the flood fell there were many mountains glorious in the eye, far higher than the ark; but yet those mountains were all drowned, whilst the ark still kept on the top of the waters. Many appearing hills and mountains of self-righteousness and general mercy, at the first view, seem to the soul much higher than Jesus Christ, but when the flood of wrath once comes and spreads itself, all those mountains are quickly covered; only the ark, the Lord Jesus Christ though the flood fall on him also, yet he gets above it quite, and gives safety to them that rest upon him.

Let me now ask any of those poor souls who ever have been wandering and tossed with the fear of the wrath to come, whether ever they found a resting-place until they came to this:— God spared not his only Son, but gave him up to death for us all; that he made him to be sin for us; that he put all the sins of all the elect into that cup which he was to drink of; that the wrath and flood which they feared did fall upon Jesus Christ (though now, as the ark, he be above it, so that if they could get into him they should be safe). The storm hath been his, and the safety shall be theirs. As all the waters which would have fallen upon them that were in the ark fell upon the ark, they being dry and safe, so all the wrath that should have fallen upon them fell on Christ; which alone causeth their souls to dwell in safety? Hath not, I say, this been your bottom, your foundation, your resting-place? If not (for the substance of it), I fear you have but rotten bottoms. Now, what would you say if a man should come and pull this ark from under you, and give you an old rotten post to swim upon in the flood of wrath? It is too late to tell you no wrath is due unto you; the word of truth and your own consciences have given you other information. You know the “wages of sin is death,” in whomsoever it be; he must die in whomsoever it is found. So that truly the soul may well say, “Bereave me of the satisfaction of Christ, and I am bereaved. If he fulfilled not justice, I must; if he underwent not wrath, I must to eternity. O rob me not of my only pearl!” Denying the satisfaction of Christ destroys the foundation of faith and comfort.

No Containment Policy

Fred Pruitt

There is a Zen saying I've always remembered from my former days: "If you meet the Buddha on the road, kill him!" What does that mean? It means there is no Buddha on the road – therefore it could only be a projection of your false ego's perception -- and by slaying the false Buddha you realize the only Buddha is you. In Christian terms, it means Christ is not "lo here, or lo there," i.e. some visible sign or person you can see and touch, but "within YOU."

What we have to offer is not a theological system that we can give someone, in five sessions, point by point, so that he or she can go home and apply the system and in fifteen weeks cause guaranteed life-changing results or your money back. Christ cannot be bottled and sold on the Internet, or in a weekend seminar.

The only "thing" we "offer" is Christ Himself as the only sufficiency for all things, including the foundation of and manifestation of our very selves. The "you" that is "you" is He!

It is, as my friend Bette Ketcham says, "He climbed up into me and became one Me with Him." This is the most distinct and certain shift in consciousness there can be, because it is His own mind, heart and self pouring out of the Godhead in love and grace filling this earthly vessel -- body, soul and spirit -- with Himself, thereby becoming "one" with us in completeness.

Everybody has to cross the threshold alone. We are caught up of the Spirit of Jesus who for a time leads us into the desert, until the day we realize, "Arise, shine, thy light is come," and that "I live, yet not I, but He lives, and now I live as He living."

Though a thousand witnesses would share that with us, still it isn't ours until the Spirit rises up in us at His appointed time and says it in us, and we know that He does.

How do we communicate this?

I would think if we would emulate anything of those who have gone before us, it would be to let the Spirit be free in each person in love. We give our part, which is our portion of the Living Christ, as we are given it. There is no defining in any way whatsoever how that will be. Let others give their part whatever it is. God will mesh it all together for the good of all.

How is it we can ever shift from "head knowledge" to just living? Think of driving a car? When we were first learning we were attentive to and nervous about everything, but once we are seasoned we just drive for the most part and give it little conscious thought. We listen to the radio, talk to someone, and think about something going on at work, all the while watching traffic and watching for the next turnoff. Driving a car runs pretty much on automatic.

The real underlying kernel of all this is this simple thing: Jesus didn't come into the earth to establish the Christian religion, the Catholic Church, or the Protestant Reformation. He came to be the total Life in us. And life is just lived, moment-by-moment, in all its reality, tragedy, joys and sadnesses, as

real events. We are not in a laboratory, where each step is analyzed and categorized, described and noted; so that when the “experiment” is finished we get the results we were looking for. Life is a very non-lab situation, in which the experiments are not controlled, and often chaos seems to be the rule. But in everything the Master Weaver, with each tiny little thread, is fashioning a Tapestry that tells an eternal story of love and redemption in which we see each of our lives perfectly threaded with all the others and all the others perfectly threaded with ours.

I AM the book. You are the book. The best I can do in communicating that to others is to tell each that we are our own Book, which is, of course, Christ Jesus in us. When I say we each are the book, I am meaning that in each of our worlds, in our personal universe, God speaks the truth of Himself every day in everything that is -- the physical universe as well as the intangible one. In our consciousness, every single day and every single moment, God is testifying of Himself in everything that is. Everything speaks of Him. When we drive our car to work, everything on the way is God speaking and speaks of God.

This is why I cannot make Him to be a systematic theology. He Who made Heaven and Earth cannot be contained in a temple made with hands. Every moment He is new and I am new, and am myself flowing out of His mystery within me. That sounds very religious and mystical but it just means that when I order the Tuesday Special with extra sauce at Cowboy Bob’s BBQ Ranch, I am in the heart of God and doing His will.

He IS Himself and fundamentally He IS inscrutable Mystery. We know Him only insofar as He reveals Himself, since we have no means of reaching Him, and we know Him only in and by His Eternal Son, the Lamb, by Whom He reveals Himself as He really is, which is Eternal Love.

The further-on depth of this Eternal Mystery is that finally the mystery of His Eternal Godhead and Son is revealed and manifest in you and me. The “revelation” of God as the Son of His Love is revealed in completion in you and in me, as ourselves.

We can only find Him in ourselves. If we do not find Him there we cannot find Him anywhere. Even when we think He is up there or over there, we are finding Him where He is – in the depth of our own selves, where He, and we in Him, just are.

His Joyful Pride

Ole Henrik Skjelstad

There is a cry in every human heart to hear the words: I am proud of you! Those words are in many ways the ultimate confirmation of our being. There are people who are so hungry to hear that they are an object of pride that they are willing to go to extremities. Neglect and deprivation have left many with a sense of worthlessness and meaninglessness.

We find as we behold the world that we are all unique. This craving for acceptance is something profounder than receiving ovations for what we do. We long to hear that someone will boast of and find pleasure in our unique existence, a recognition which supersedes our actions. However, it might seem to us that those who receive most attention in this world do so because of their accomplishments. Hence we make huge efforts to conform in an attempt to resemble our idols hoping some rain will fall upon us as well. As an effect we occur as false versions of our true personhood.

Due to the lie we compare and contrast our life with others and adapt to the prevalent culture, or we make an attempt to stand out by opposing it. There are days when the pain almost smoothers us and we find that activity and noise alleviate our ache. We are willing to go to great lengths to avoid rejection, and each moment we make another adaption our inner being becomes more entangled. To our surprise we discover that this cry in our heart doesn't diminish as we get older and supposedly more mature.

Every religious system that gives preference to works and appearances to mere being perpetuates the lie, and causes people to continue in bondage. Faith is the opposite of works. God has thus made faith prevalent in the new dispensation, because faith is an image of our innermost being where we are united in one spirit with the Godhead.

Our Father in heaven has through the image of his son experienced the same earthly afflictions as we encounter. He knows firsthand our emotions and soreness. Hence He is perfectly able to identify with his children in their quest for love. His desire to embrace and acknowledge His offspring is beyond words, and he displayed His eternal love and pride through the cross.

His sacrifice shouts out; I want you! It is a cry that qualifies our being as immensely significant to the creator of the universe. This goes far beyond our actions, because they are not impressive to Him who said: "I am." To be is the foundation for His pride in us. Therefore He perpetually meets every son with: "Well done, my child! Everything was against you, but despite your adversities you found your true being in my Son." His pride in us is displayed in a joy He cannot contain. He dances fervently and shouts out His joy every moment of our being. He pride in us causes Him to spin around under the influence of violent emotions (Zep 3:17).

Let's Party

Steve McVey

Our God loves a party. Contrary to the religious mindset that sometimes causes people to think that sobermindedness looks eerily like outright misery, faith and fun are not in opposition to one another. Even under the old covenant, God made provision for the people to celebrate.

And you shall eat in the presence of the Lord your God at the place where He chooses to establish His name, the tithe of all your grain, your new wine, your oil, and the first-born of your herd and your flock, in order that you may learn to fear the Lord your God always. And you may spend the money for whatever your heart desires, for oxen, or sheep, or wine, or strong drink, or whatever your heart desires; and there you shall eat in the presence of the Lord your God and rejoice, you and your household (Deuteronomy 14:23,26).

Contrary to the opinion of some, God loves fun! In eternity past the three Persons of the trinity all enjoyed intimacy with each other. It was a private party among the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit - a great circle-dance of holy hilarity. There, before the foundation of time, God determined to host a universal party. It was to be a party in honor of His Son, Jesus. He would create man for the purpose of sharing His life with him, thus bringing him into the eternal party taking place in the heavenlies. The good news of the gospel is that you're included in that party. Christianity is nothing less than a party celebrating Jesus Christ.

The father of the prodigal said, "But we had to be merry and rejoice, for this brother of yours was dead and has begun to live . . ." (Luke 15:32). When a dead person comes to life, that's a reason to throw a party. The Bible teaches in Ephesians 2:1 that there was a time when "you were dead in your trespasses and sins", but now we have been made alive by Jesus Christ. This is a reason to celebrate.

The activity of the early church revolved around what the Bible calls "fellowship." The Greek word is *koinonia*. Don't let that churchy sounding word intimidate you. Fellowship doesn't mean we try to put a righteous expression on our faces and talk about the Bible using King James English. It wouldn't be inappropriate to use the word "party" as a contemporary paraphrase of the word.

Many contemporary parties celebrate life. A birthday party celebrates the years one has lived. Anniversary parties celebrate a couple's life together. A graduation party celebrates the start of a new life for the graduate. Parties are focused on and full of life. Doesn't that description describe New Testament Christianity? It's essence is a celebration of divine life. You were dead, but in Christ Jesus have been made alive! It's appropriate to "shout joyfully to the Lord" and to "serve the Lord with gladness" (Psalm 100:1-2). In other words, it's time for the church to rise up and have a party! Where grace rules our lives, celebration is the order of the day.

The growth of the early church in Acts is inseparably linked to the fact that these early Christians continuously integrated celebration as a part of their daily lifestyle. They were consumed with an explosive joy which could not be squelched. Their lifestyle was an ongoing celebration of Jesus.

Acts 2:46 says, And day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from

house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart.

The early church was obsessed with an uninhibited, exhilarating, enthusiasm about Jesus Christ. They were so excited about Him that on the day of Pentecost, when those outside the church saw them, they stood in absolute “amazement and great perplexity, saying to one another, ‘What does this mean?’ But others were mocking and saying, ‘They are full of sweet wine’” (Acts 2:12-13).

They were drunk alright, but not on wine. They were totally intoxicated with the life of Christ being expressed through them by the Holy Spirit. They were experiencing exactly what Paul meant when he said, “And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit” (Ephesians 5:18). These Christians partied “under the influence” of God’s Holy Spirit all of the time! They celebrated the life of Jesus in everything they did. They laughed, they played, they loved, and they partied. Not a bad way to spend a lifetime.

Law Keeper? Law Breaker?

Joel Brueseke

As a Christian, do you keep God's law? Do you break His law?

The answer to both is "no!"

I've heard this illustrated in various ways in the past by people such as Steve McVey, and I was also recently listening to an "Eagle's Nest" program with Frank Friedman and a guest in which they were also talking about this. I thought about quoting from both of these sources verbatim, but it might be simpler if I just put it into my own words.

As a Christian, do I keep God's law (am I a law-keeper)? You might see me walking righteously - not stealing, not committing adultery, honoring my parents, loving my neighbor as myself, etc, and you might say, "See, you're keeping God's laws!" To which I'd say, "No, I'm not!" I'm not looking to God's law as the source of my righteous living at all. Rather, what you see is an expression of the Life of Christ in me. I'm not following the law; I'm not keeping the law. What you see is me walking according to the Spirit of Christ who lives in me and who is my life.

As a Christian, do I break God's law (am I a law-breaker)? You might see me doing unrighteous things - stealing, committing adultery (Matthew 5:28, anyone?), not honoring my parents, not loving my neighbor as myself, etc, and you might say, "See, you're breaking God's laws!" To which I'd say, "No, I'm not!" What you see is an expression of my flesh acting out in independence, rather than *me* walking according to my true identity in Christ and my union with Him.

In Christ I'm not a law-keeper and I'm not a law-breaker. I have *died* to the law. The only way I could "live to God" in the first place was to *die* to the law! How can I 'keep' or 'break' what I've died to? In fact that old written code was "wiped out." It was *against* me (no matter how well I kept it or how badly I broke it), and God took it out of the way, removing it completely. He *nailed it to the cross*. My life is no longer defined by law keeping or law breaking. My life is now defined by the *Life of Christ* in me, and nothing else! How has this become one of the church's best-kept *secrets*???

And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. (Col 2:13-14 NKJV)

For I through the law died to the law that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me. I do not set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain." (Gal 2:19-21 NKJV)

All Things New¹⁴

Fred Pruitt

If, “Behold I make all things new,” and, “new heavens and a new earth,” are true, then there is nothing that escapes the transformation. “Heavens” and “earth” cover everything.

There comes a moment when we die altogether to this world, and it does not come without a struggle.

When we wake from the sleep of death, it is a wholly new world.

Death has been changed to life. A divine dam has burst, and everything that before had the smell of a pigsty, has been washed clean in the torrent that came down from the Mountain.

What moments before had looked ugly or degraded, cruel, unfair, or unjust we now see in true light – it is all tinged with gold and shining with hidden glory.

The new heavens and the new earth have been eternally cleansed -- which means always -- they always exist in innocence and cleanliness.

The new heavens and new earth permeate all futures and all pasts. Do we understand this? *“For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.”*

Surely this means, and perhaps you have seen it for yourself, that Christ is Eternal, and most specifically “eternal” in us. Our God does not live in our definition of time. And yet the “time” we live in is more “real” than we can possibly imagine. “Time” is an expression of the Living God Who exists “before” Time, and Whose Being and Person give birth to and flow through Time.

The “Son of man,” which is Christ residing in us as we living, comes as a flash of lightning which lights up the entire sky at once -- *“from the east to the west”* -- instantaneously Christ has flooded the whole of the universe with the coming of Himself -- in us. Whatever may happen to a “physical earth” and heaven, the real coming of Christ is within us!

If Christ does not come “within” us, then whatever He does to this “outer” earth is of no concern of ours. If He comes with ten million angels and flashing lights and mighty signs and wonders, we won't recognize Him.

He must die and rise within each of us. That is, it cannot be just a concept we learn, but a reality we know as our own living truth.

When He does, then you are you, but it is He living in your “you” as “you.”

¹⁴ Fred Pruitt: Hearts of Flesh

Which makes you totally in your eternal freedom to be completely yourself.

If Christ has set you free -- who is it that seeks to bind you?

"If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed."

Because it is God Who justifieth.

Period.

"Behold, I make all things new."

You can't make this happen, but do you believe God can, and has made it happen in YOU?

Faith is just nodding your head or giving the "OK" sign, or simply saying, "Yes."

The Purpose of Life¹⁵

Walter Lanyon

I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me, and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and delivered Himself up for me (Gal. 2:20).

The broad majority of believers know only the forgiveness of sins, made possible by Jesus' death on the cross in our stead. This is the first stage of life in Christ, described in detail in Romans chapters one through three.

For this, we come *to* the cross.

Some come through to know that when Jesus died, they died with Him. They see themselves as a new creation, with the old man dead and buried. And they begin to experience freedom from condemnation and the victory of the resurrection life of Christ, as Paul depicted it in Romans chapters four through eight.

For this, we see, ourselves *on* the cross.

Still fewer get to the ascended life where they truly function in the fourth dimension, the heavenly realm. This is a life which sees through external situations to the God who "works all things after the counsel of His will", such as Paul wrote of in Romans chapters nine through sixteen.

In this stage we *take up* the cross.

To the cross, on the cross, taking up the cross - crucifixion, resurrection, ascension - are three steps in our recognition of the One who indwells us as a result of our new birth. John in his first epistle spoke of them in terms of children, young men, and fathers (1 Jn. 2:12-14).

Children are dependent. They need to be cared for. They need to be reassured and comforted. Perhaps all they know is that they have been forgiven.

Youths are beginning to lose their need for dependence on others. They are at the stage of exerting their independence. They have begun to flex their muscles and are ready for the fray. They are keen to try their hand at overcoming.

Fathers have matured to the point that they "know" they are in union with God, and are experiencing a fully-formed Christ within. The dependence of childhood and the wavering of youth has passed. They are fixed in the fact that Christ is their replaced life.

Paul's desire was that all might grow up "to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fulness of Christ." He wanted all to press on to this point of maturity; and when he

¹⁵ Walter Lanyon: Mystery of the Gospel, <http://www.metrocast.net/~tdgthy/Mystery%20ORD.htm>

saw the Galatians had not yet become fixed, he wrote to them as "My children, with whom I am again in labor *until Christ is formed in you ...*"

This is the point at which we have attained to "the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God" - that fixed consciousness of Him as our "all", from which we can no longer be swayed (Eph. 4:11-16). Faith has become its own evidence, so that we pass beyond reckoning into knowing. We know we are one with Him - this is the unity of the faith.

A Sea of Glass

Ole Henrik Skjelstad

“Truly I say to you, there are some of those who are standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom.” (Matt 16:28)

It can't be made plainer than this. The Son of Man came in His kingdom while the disciples still were walking this earth. On the day of Pentecost Christ established His kingdom of Heaven in man. Not in tents made of man, but in holy dwellings erected by God.

“Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.” (Matt 13:43)

This is now! Our usual excuse is: “I don't feel like I am shining”. Personally, I am an expert on exclamations like that. Abraham took it a step further. He threw himself to the ground laughing when God told Him how He judged Abraham and what eternal repercussions Abraham's life would have. However, who are we to argue with God and His righteous judgments? He is the doer, so if He has whispered to you that you are going to be an intercessor who is willing to lose everything for the sake of others, and you don't exactly feel that way, well, it is going to happen anyway. Abraham saw Moriah afar off. So do we.

Our emotions fluctuate. I shouldn't be too difficult to agree on that. Hence the author of the epistle to the Hebrews finds it important to accentuate: “For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.” (Hebr 4:12)

The Proverbs puts it like this: “...above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life” (4:23). Even though our emotions and soul life are manifestations of Christ, those expressions are not our true identity. Our true identity is like a sea of glass mixed with fire (Rev 15:2), that is, our spirit joined one spirit with His. The sea of glass is our inner spirit tranquility which is mixed with pure love which burns with an eternal flame, which seemingly is a paradox, but not in the Kingdom of the ascended Christ.

To make us completely safe in our new identity, which of course is us shining like the sun, the living and active Christ, who is the word of God, assists us in discerning between our soul life (appearances) and our spirit life (faith). By faith we see through appearances and acknowledge our new too good to be true self in Him.

The Measure of a Man

John Collings

True manhood is not a test of what we have or can accomplish. It is not a matter of wealth or accumulated possessions, or how well we can make it on our own. It is not how much we have learned, or how much we know. It is not how strong or how disciplined we have become.

True manhood is obtained by the ways in which we contribute to those around us, our families, our co-workers, our employees, our fellowship. How we give to those who cannot give back is a greater measure of our manhood than how we perform for those who will reward us.

Your maturity will become evident when you do not need to be first, when you do not require of others. When you need people, not for what you will receive from them, but for the way you are able to give to them from the gifts you possess, then, you have obtained True Manhood.

I began writing this for my son, then realized that it was for me, then understood that it was for my father. I have been understanding, and even teaching about fellowship, and about grace, and still revelation comes from many directions.

Fellowship: That all that is really important in our lives is about giving, and our interaction with those around us. In the purest sense, knowing the Father, and what gives him joy or sorrow. It is understanding his motives and purposes, and it is being his vessel, acting as his agent in this world.

Grace: That regardless of how the Father is known and understood, regardless of how he is treated or received, he manifests his Love to all his children by orchestrating their lives to the purpose of knowing him (having fellowship with him).

My first thought is that all that my son is, he is by the seeds that I have planted in him. He is by what I have given him. My son stands on my shoulders. He is who he is by the grace of his father. And so are we all.

Haven't We Left Sin Behind?¹⁶

Fred Pruitt

Someone recently asked me if I thought Abraham had sinned with Hagar. My first reply was, "Why are you asking sin questions?"

Though we preach and teach continuously that in Christ's death and resurrection we have no more to do with sin and sins, ("God forbid," as Paul said, that we should "sin that grace may abound"), and that now we live, tempted always with the possibility of sin, in the land of righteousness and grace only, still the question pops up over and over.

But haven't we left that behind? If a bit in one form or another here and there crops up, no big deal; we recognize, confess the truth, repent (change our mind), and go on.

I was thinking today about car repair. Last week I replaced the starter in my car. It had been giving me trouble for a while, making a real nuisance of itself. But eventually my sinning car was forcibly taken to the shop and had its starter replaced. That was last week. Today I was driving somewhere and I remembered all the inconvenience and hassle of having a bum starter last week, and then I realized how it was absolutely gone now from my consciousness since the car was behaving "as if it had never had a starter problem." Though I do remember last week and before when the inconveniences occurred, still they have disappeared from my current consciousness now that the problem is solved. I no longer have a "bad-starter consciousness."

Now our "problem" was sin and a continual consciousness of sin, and we know the origin of sin, which means that our former "sin problem" did not even originate in ourselves, though it is "in ourselves" that the solution has to be born.

Now the solution, as we know, is that in the cross, Sin, the Devil, has been cast out of us and we ourselves have now become the Holy of Holies in our innermost selves. In our center are the Mercy Seat and Aaron's Rod that Buds and the Bread from Heaven and the Holy Presence.

This is all that is in our center now, but in order for it to be "birthed" in our inner consciousness, so that heaven and earth come into alignment together in our inner awareness, we come progressively to realize that we are "beloved sons, in whom [God is] well pleased," and that sin does not enter God's mind, and what we are all progressively realizing and experiencing is the peace of God, Who finds no fault in us and has no condemnation toward us.

Instead of continual disapproval and constant correction because we never measure up, in this new kingdom, God is in us as continual comfort, joy, peace, thanksgiving, praise, wonder, awe, life, blessing, abundance, truth, reality, and love. God is not in the business of condemning us, punishing us, thinking ill of us, but only of uplifting and blessing us and being in us the outgoing power to heal the nations (other folks) in and as the odd you and me. If there is any correction and upbraiding from the Father, it is in order that we might come to the end of what we think is our separate selves, our

¹⁶ Fred Pruitt: Hearts of Flesh

supposed “own” righteousness, strength and holiness.

We must first learn to the uttermost that we are nothing in ourselves and God is All in all, and that He finds us pleasing to Him because He has made us to be expressions of Himself. He has said that in our day, *“I will dwell in them and walk in them and be their God.”*

Here we are speaking of something much more than some separate anthropomorphic “Being” way off in the sky to whom we all owe allegiance, as if he is some sort of political king. Instead He IS every breath we breathe, every vision we see, every thought we think, and every motivation of our true inner heart. *“In Him we live and move and have our being.”*

When we once catch that and realize we didn't make ourselves, had absolutely nothing to do with “making ourselves,” -- *“It is He who hath made us, and not we ourselves”* -- that He is completely the potter and we completely the clay, in that undoing we have lost our “own” life. And in that “death” we retain no sort of ability to choose, to will, to think, to know the difference between truth and lie, since we have nothing to bring to the table, nothing to offer to get the prize. Even our own life if we could give it would not even approach the value of the Gift, but then we find that it is ours “without money and without price,” and from then on we have nothing more to do with sin or with sin questions. It (sin) is not a matter anymore between the Lord and us, and can be as forgotten as my last week's faulty starter. The starter is fixed now, the car starts -- who wants to think about how it was last week or to anticipate every moment of the day how my starter might go out again?

I just don't worry about sin! Fahgeddaboutit!!!! God has said to anyone who will hear, “Thou art my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased.” When you hear that word within you, you arise from the water of baptism, maybe take a side-route into the desert for awhile, but come back in the power of the Spirit to “go about doing good and healing all who are oppressed of the devil, for God is with [you.]” You haven't got time nor an inclination to sin, because you are too busy doing the Father's will.

This is where we find we “always do his will.” How can that be, since it does not seem like that? Because we have learned to see the invisible and to know that is the real, and to trust God in what is Real, and to leave all to him, reserving nothing at all to do, to be, to think, to say, for ourselves. And then you find that you actually, truly do His will, you work His works, you think His thoughts, you speak His words. Not by one thing whatsoever you do humanly, but because He lives in you and does the works, all of them, from A-Z, alpha to omega, start to bottom, totally. (What would anyone reserve for himself?)

And even if we do slip and sin, it works something positive. Everything, good or evil, right or wrong, gentle and loving or hateful and violent, works the work of God to the good of those who love Him and are the called according to His purpose.

“In the world ye shall have tribulation, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.” Now, that might not seem to be such good news, if Jesus has “overcome the world,” but He still lives way off up in heaven in some blissful beatific state. It IS good news if He has come to live in us and take over the dying in us to make it His dying, and to take over the living in us by being the life that is manifested

out of our mortal flesh. When Jesus was way off up in heaven in my consciousness, it didn't seem to help me that much if Jesus had overcome the world, but if in the midst of my "tribulations," He has overcome the world in ME, which I now know to be the Truth, then that is good news, great news, the best news indeed!

No more sin. The sacrifice once offered has taken away a consciousness of sins once for all. We no longer live in it. It's gone. As far as the east is from the west. (Heb 10, Rom 6, etc.)

There is simply nothing more to say, except to encourage us all to rise up, to drop the graveclothes of shame, condemnation, self-disparagement (all of which are out of the "pride of self"), and to affirm the truth, "God is mighty in ME!" and "rivers of living water" are flowing out of our bellies!

Just say it.

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