

DAVID HEISLER

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STUDIES OF UNION WITH CHRIST

BOOK ONE

DAVID HEISLER

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FOREWORD

BY DEAN CHICQUETTE

As he describes it, David Heilser's journey to faith is a testament to the personal and transformative power of encountering Jesus within. His story highlights the importance of open hearts and faith and the impact of individuals living out their beliefs. David's experience of asking Jesus to prove Himself is a powerful example of a personal act of faith, demonstrating that trust in God is an individual journey and each person's unique experience.

Here are a few key takeaways from David's book:

1. **The Role of Open Hearts:** David's experience emphasizes that it's important to have an open heart, even if it's just a crack, to let Jesus in. Jesus is always present, waiting patiently for us to turn to Him.

2. **Faith as a Personal Journey:** Faith is a deeply personal journey, and each person's experience will differ. It's not about seeking a particular feeling but about opening one's heart to the possibility of a transformative encounter.

3. **Desires of the Heart:** David's discussion of "the desires of your heart" points to the idea that God places desires within us that align with His desire to trust Him. Even when they don't always lead to the success we expect, pursuing these desires is part of God's living out His plan for our lives.

4. **Ordered Steps:** Understanding that the Lord orders our steps can provide comfort and direction. It means that even when things don't go as planned, a divine plan guides our journey.

5. **Chasing Dreams with Faith:** David's book encourages you to follow your dreams, believing that if God has placed a desire in your heart, He will order your steps to fulfill it.

Ultimately, David's book illustrates that faith is a profoundly personal journey, and encountering Jesus can happen in unexpected and transformative ways. It's a reminder that faith is not just about religion but about a personal relationship with the Divine. Our union is true; when we settle that, life becomes Father's adventure in and through our living.

INTRODUCTION

I will let the First Chapter, “My Life,” be my introduction. This work is about you discovering your union with Christ, not about me.

David Heisler

I

MY LIFE

ON THIS SIDE OF THE CROSS - MY TESTIMONY

I'm a Jewish guy, born in New York City and raised in Stamford, Connecticut. Jews, if they believe in a Messiah [Christ] at all, will generally say that he has not arrived. Most won't talk about "Messiah". There is some notion, in the Old Testament, that when the Messiah arrives there will be "peace on Earth" and since there is not peace now, then, ipso facto, there is no Messiah, yet.

In Jewish tradition there are different beliefs as to exactly who or what the Messiah is. There is certainly no consensus that He is the Son of God. As a kid, at times, I attended synagogue, but I never did my bar mitzvah at age 13 as my friends and cousins. I did not take the study of Hebrew seriously so my family decided not to spend the money on the bar mitzvah. Bar Mitzvahs can be very expensive.

Nonetheless, I always believed in God. To me it was fighting words if someone said that God did not exist. I never thought that life or anything for that matter could exist without God. Nothing made sense if there was no God. I remember lying in my bed at night, looking up at the ceiling and thinking, "I know You're out there, somewhere, but I don't know You." I was speaking to and about God. I believed in Him, but didn't know Him. Believe me, there is a difference between acknowledging existence and knowing.

In 1971 I enrolled at Texas Christian University in Fort Worth, Texas – it’s a long story how a Jewish kid from New York and Connecticut got to TCU – a story for another time. I wanted to play football at TCU and, eventually, maybe for the Dallas Cowboys. I dream big. It seemed as soon as I arrived on campus I immediately started meeting people who wanted to talk to me about Jesus. This “Jesus talk” was shocking. I was a Jewish kid that grew up in a largely Italian-Catholic, African-American neighborhood. Back home no one tried to “convert” me. No one asked me if I was “saved”.

All the Jesus talk in Fort Worth was a different language to me. And, I never really considered “eternal” questions before. And, yes, I did hear a bit of “fire and brimstone”, but that neither persuaded me or truly concerned me. I never, and don’t now, consider God to be concerned with correct theology, only an open heart. But, for the first time in my life I was confronted with the Jesus people. Previously I was convinced that Jesus was not the promised Messiah. But my new Texas friends said, to the contrary, that he was the Messiah. Now, not all these aforementioned conversations were “fire and brimstone”, and at first this talk seemed amusing, but later disturbing and I eventually tried unsuccessfully to avoid it. But, I did not stop thinking, as the foundations of everything I knew and believed and thought about God were being shaken to the core. I guess He was up to something.

In my mind I really can’t picture Who God Is. But Jesus says,

“Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Shew us the Father?” [John 14.9]

So, I’m thinking, Who is this Person Who so arranges my life that I get to Fort Worth, Texas at the precise moment in history? How can He take a personal interest in me and everyone? My human mind cannot really fathom or understand such a Person. But I can see Jesus, a Person, as I am a person, yet the Creator and King, Who defines Himself as Love.

“God is love” [1 John 4.8]

...and He knows exactly how many hairs are on my head.

“But there shall not an hair of your head perish.” [Luke 21.18]

He knows everything about all the billions of us and is active in every life.

Over the course of my first semester in college I got mononucleosis and stayed in the TCU infirmary for two weeks. I met the head nurse Helen Williamson and I had previously met one of her four sons, Nathan, as he was also a freshman at TCU.

College life was not as I had hoped. My football career was in shambles with a torn up right knee needing surgery. I missed home and family. I felt very alone at times. The Jesus people were getting to me. I wanted to go home. So I decided that at the end of the semester I would go back to Stamford, Connecticut and enroll in a local college.

December 16, 1971 was to be my last day in Fort Worth. I wanted to go home to Connecticut. There is nothing random in the universe. The Designer Himself tells His-story as He sees fit. With that in mind, for some reason, on that day, I wandered into the TCU Health Center. The head nurse, Helen Williamson spotted me immediately and asked me into her office.

WE SAT AND SHE ASKED ME POINT BLANK,

“are you happy David?”

I SAID

“no”.

SHE ASKED,

“do you know what you need?”

I SAID

“no”.

SHE SAID,

“you need Jesus”.

I SAID,

“no I don’t.”

SHE SAID,

“why don’t you come over my house for dinner tonight and meet my family”.

I SAID,

“If you make fried chicken and brownies you got a deal.”

SHE SAID,

“yes”

AND I ACCEPTED THE INVITATION TO DINNER.

After the fried chicken and brownies Rocky Freeman, a Jewish evangelist showed up. Rocky and I talked and argued for about two hours about God, Judaism, salvation and his opinion that I needed Jesus. I was not convinced by the time dinner was over. However, over the course of my conversation with Rocky I happened to get a glimpse of the Williamson boys who were trying to listen in to our conversation. Three of the four boys still lived at home: Nate, Rod and Clay. When I saw them they giggled and were quite playful with each other. That scene, which I will never forget, was what convinced me that there was something different about this family and that there was something, or really, Someone, behind all this Jesus talk I had heard for months.

So, all these months of listening to the spoken word regarding Jesus and the often repeated claim of my need for salvation was important but not what eventually convinced me. By December 16, 1971 I knew all the words and scriptures. But none of that cinched the deal. I had to see Him. I had to see Him in action and I did. I saw him in the faces of Nate, Rod and Clay Williamson. I saw the living word. That night I saw the most loving and caring family I have ever seen – Helen, her husband, Charles, and Nate, Rod and Clay. Now, don’t get me wrong, I grew up in a family that loved each other also, but there was something different in the quality of love expressed in the Williamson family.

At the conclusion of the evening I thanked Helen for dinner and then Nate gave me a ride back to my dorm room. Later Nate told me that he tried his best to say whatever he could to polish off the night’s discussion. I didn’t hear a word. I just thought and thought about how

Someone or something had made this family so warm and loving toward each other.

I knew when I got in my room that I would do something. What? I wasn't sure. I couldn't get out of the car fast enough and ran into my dorm room and right to the little mirror above the sink.

The night was December 16, 1971 and the ride back to Tom Brown Dormitory at TCU was surreal. I didn't, and really couldn't, hear one word Nate said. Jesus has been called the "Hound of Heaven," and I know why. If He's after you, He'll get you, eventually. I think of so many people who spoke a word of faith to me along the way. They couldn't close the deal. Did they feel frustrated or, perhaps, a failure? I don't know. But the lesson on that is clear. Just speak a word of faith regardless. Encourage people. You may never see their "moment of faith". The Williamson family didn't know for many months what happened to me next.

I got out of the car. I don't know if I said anything to Nate. I ran into my dorm room. My roommate was gone. I walked to the sink. I looked into the mirror and said, "Jesus Christ, if you're the Son of God, I give you the opportunity to prove it to me right now."

My life was about to change eternally.

Well, He had been hounding me for some time. He was right there. Actually, He's always right there. If you turn, in faith, and look, He will make Himself real to you.

I stood in front of the mirror above the dorm sink and said,

"Jesus Christ, if you're the Son of God, I give you the opportunity to prove it to me right now."

Jesus was standing behind me and He put His arms around me. I did not see His face. But He was there and the experience was real. Even that small exercise of faith – a mustard seed - was all I needed to do. I do not even know where those words came from. He gave me the words, but I had to say them. And then He got me. He got me good. He got me forever and a day.

At my age 18 He seemed to be a mature, older man at age 33. Now, He seems to be a young man. Regardless, that was the most real

moment of my life. My eyes swell with tears every time I think about it. I have not doubted Him since then. That was December 16, 1971. From that moment forward I have known Him in a personal way - Jesus embraced me and came into my heart.

So, what exactly did happen on that night, December 16, 1971? It was my moment of faith. He is the Hound of Heaven. He is after, really, everyone, no doubt. In Revelation He says,

“Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.” [Rev. 3.20]

There are many ways to describe how He approaches each and every one. But He does. He can be subtle. Or He can pound on the door. But the situation always requires us to do something - an act of faith. The words that I used,

“Jesus Christ, if You are the Son of God, I give You the opportunity to prove it to me right now”

...was my personal act of faith. I really have no idea where those words came from. Maybe He gave them to me, but I had to voice them. I had to take action. And I did and He did.

Once I opened my heart, He provided the proof of His existence. That’s the key. You must open your heart, even a just crack. The assurance will come. For me, it was immediate. For others it may take time. Probably, no two experiences are alike. I have had any number of people say to me that they “tried” exactly what I did, saying what I said, and it “didn’t work”. I’m not shocked by that. My experience is mine and yours is yours. But, He is the same and when the door of your heart is open, He will come in. And, either at that moment, or another moment that He chooses, you will know Him.

I would define my experiences as traumatic. What I mean by that is they seem to happen all of a sudden. Now, to be clear, my initial experience with Jesus was probably years if not an eternity in the

making, but when it happened it was sudden and immediately life changing. So, I don't mean "traumatic" in a bad way.

Many want their "experience" to be now. They want their answer immediately. The difference is that I did not choose an immediate response from Him. He simply chose to give it in that way. I sought Him. I expressed a mustard seed amount of faith. Jesus uses the example of "mustard seed" as being very small. So my expression of faith was very small, but, evidently, large enough. I did not seek an experience. I did not expect to feel anything, yet I felt everything. I did not know what would happen. Yet He met me at my small amount of faith and I got my assurance immediately. Perhaps I obtained the assurance because I did not seek an assurance. I only sought Him.

So, if at this moment you want to open the door to your heart, by all means do it. Speak a word of faith, out loud or to yourself. It doesn't matter if another human being knows or if a room full of people know. It does not matter where you are. You can be in a church building, in your car or in front of your dormitory mirror as I was. Don't expect any experience, only expect that He will keep his promise.

So, what exactly is His promise?

"Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me." [Rev. 3.20]

That's the first step. He will come into your heart. He will take up residence in you. Will you feel something? Will you "know" something? Eventually, yes. I did immediately, but, that's me and it's not you. Just don't say "it didn't work" because you do not feel anything. He will do what He said. And you will know.

Opening your heart to the Savior is the most important and fundamental moment of your life.

"Today if you hear His voice, harden not your heart ..." [Psalm 95.7]

Every person, if quiet for a moment, will hear His voice. Will it be an

audible voice, maybe, but probably not. The clearest voice I ever heard was in the faces of the Williamson kids. I envision Jesus standing behind every person, waiting patiently. If you will just stop for a moment and turn your head that may be enough faith to clinch the deal. You must have your own experience. If your heart is open He will do the rest.

The next day, December 17, 1971, I went back to Connecticut. I shared a ride with a few others. I could see Jesus, in my mind's eye, the entire trip. My life would never be the same. I actually now knew the One that loved me and gave His life for me.

I spent the spring and summer of 1972 in Connecticut. I attended the University of Bridgeport one semester. It was difficult explaining to my Jewish family about my faith in Jesus. Some were happy that I had "something". Others were quite angry with me for "betraying" my roots.

I was sent to see the Rabbi. We had a long discussion. My point in the talk was that I could both be Jewish and believe in Jesus. His very firm, and not so nice objection was that I had to choose, either Jesus or Judaism. I do vividly remember walking out of that meeting into the dark street saying to myself, "If I have to choose, I choose Jesus."

The reality is that He chose me far more than I ever chose him.

"Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee ..." [Jeremiah 1.5]

I did return to Texas Christian University in the fall of '72. I reunited with the Williamson family. I even lived in their home for a period of time. And, in those first few years, I ran the gamut of Christian experience. I was baptized and confirmed Roman Catholic, baptized Southern Baptist, did the Bill Gothard seminar and got the Holy Ghost. None of which was an end in itself, rather just steps along the way.

Jesus neither established a religion nor destroyed a religion. He shed His blood and died on His cross to reconcile the creation to the Creator, His Father and our Father.

“And, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, *I say*, whether *they be* things in earth, or things in heaven.” [Col. 1.20]

If one finds comfort and fellowship in a denomination or a church, by all means continue there.

I don't know if everyone having a “traumatic” or sudden conversion experience thinks that maybe they will be the next Billy Graham, but at first I did. After graduating from TCU I enrolled in Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth. That lasted one semester. “Professional” ministry was not for me. Sometimes in life it is frustration and discontent that moves us from one place to another. And, I know God is the great Frustrator, causing the movement for His purposes. That's when I started teaching school and coaching football, which I did for ten years.

There are two verses that have largely guided my life. "He shall give you the desires of your heart" and "the steps of a good man are ordered".

We all have to ask the question, "what shall I do?". The corollary is, if you don't choose, life will choose for you. I have always preferred to at least try and make my own choices.

So let's discuss the "desires of your heart".

“Delight thyself also in the LORD; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart.” [Psalm 34.4]

This verse is mostly misunderstood. The common thought is you conjure up a desire, sit on God's lap as if He were Santa Claus and maybe you get your little red wagon under the Christmas tree. Not so. Actually, this verse means quite and exactly the opposite. You do not tell Him what you want. He puts the desire into your heart first. He tells you what you want because that is what He wants. In other words He "gives" you the desire that you find in your heart. See the difference? See the origination of the desire? Then, you chase it down. You make it happen.

You step out, as the Son or Daughter of God, and be like Him. In other words, you co-create with Him. We are His agents in this world.

I've always chased the desires of my heart. Things have not always turned out as I wanted and I have not always had the success I desired but I always had direction - the next thing to do, the next step to take. You are given the authority to step out and make it happen. Create the life and world that He gives you the desire to create.

So, while you are chasing the desires of your heart, the question becomes, "How do I know I'm doing the right thing?" It's quite normal to second guess yourself and not always have full assurance that what you want is what He wants. But, you have to move forward and consider this second verse.

"The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD". [Psalm 37.23]

Now, who is and who is not a "good man" or woman, for that matter, is the subject for another day. Suffice to say that Jesus took issue when someone called Him a good Man.

"And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God." [Mark 10.18]

At the moment I think it is enough to say that our "goodness", if any, is not from us, but rather from Him living in us. But we will discuss that later. The point is that my steps are "ordered" and so are yours.

So what does this mean? It means that we can stop second guessing ourselves and stop questioning our motives. He orders our steps. He puts the desires in our heart. He makes the arrangements. He guides. He course corrects when necessary. No reason to doubt. Just move forward, essentially doing what you want, assuming He wanted, whatever, long before you did.

End of Study on My Life

2

EVER LEARNING

All my “Christian” life, since 1971, I have heard people talking about “learning”. And, generally speaking, “learning” is a good thing. I always say, “You learn something new every day”. Sometimes, you learn something that you knew a long time ago, but just forgot. That’s a sign of getting older, I think, but that’s a story for another day. The question is if you can “learn” to be a Christian? Can you learn to be a better Christian? Once a female friend told me she was going on a retreat to teach other women how to pray properly. I was amused by that statement, but, none-the-less, I wished her the best.

In Timothy II, Paul is railing on all sorts of folk that he didn’t appreciate much. And he makes this interesting statement.

“Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.”

[2 Tim. 3.7]

What does Paul mean in regard to the “knowledge of the truth”? Apparently, “the truth” - is not learned, at least not learned in the same sense that one learns the alphabet or the times tables or perhaps, even, how to pray properly.

But, what is the “truth” we strive to “ever learn”? Well many things

in life are true, or, at least appear to be true. There are certain true rules of nature. We know gravity is true, but, we also know it is relative. There is no gravity in Space. There is less gravity on the Moon but there would be more gravity on a planet bigger than Earth. Math is true no matter where in the Universe you are, right? One plus one will always equal two, right? Well, maybe not, when considering the follow two verses:

“And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh.” [Matt. 19.15]

“I and my Father are one.” [John 10.30]

So, here we have two examples of math not working – i.e. one plus one equaling one. So what we are left with regarding Paul’s statement to Timothy,

“the knowledge of the truth.” [2 Tim. 3.7]

Is all truth therefore relative? To some it appears that way. Speaking metaphorically, if you have no anchor your boat is always floating and therefore all truth appears relative, as, in the words of Pilate:

“...what is truth ...” [John 18.38]

Pilate posed the question, “what is truth?” And, here is the bigger context of that conversation that Pilate had with Jesus:

“Pilate therefore said unto him, ‘Art thou a king then?’ Jesus answered, ‘Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice.’ Pilate saith unto him, ‘What is truth?’” [John 18.37-38]

Jesus made a most definitive statement regarding the purpose of His Life. His purpose was to “bear witness unto the truth”. And how does Pilate respond? He wants to know “what is truth?” as if “truth” is an object. How do we respond? Do we also say “what is truth?” as if it an

object? What is Jesus bearing witness to? Is truth a thing or something contained in things? Can truth be relative? I think we've seen science and math contain truth, but can be relative. If you drop your pencil it will fall to the ground, but if you are in space it will float. In fact there is probably some truth in everything. You may find some truth even in a lie. But that still begs the question. What is truth?

“Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.” [John 14.6]

While elements or parts of “truth” may be found in all things and people, truth is not a “thing” at all. Truth in its basic, purest and original form is a Person. Truth is the Person of the Universe. Truth is the King of Kings, the Lord of Lords, the Prince of Peace, and the Savior of the Universe – Jesus Christ. He is Truth. Him, as “truth” has no exceptions and He is true no matter what.

That is why Paul says “ever learning” will never bring about “knowledge of the truth”. You can’t “learn” Him. You can learn about Him, as a person in history but that is not the “coming to the knowledge of the truth” that Paul is referring to.

Jesus does make a statement that could be interpreted as “one must learn how to be like Him”

“Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.” [Matt. 11.29]

However, Jesus does not say, “imitate me” or “I am a good example to strive to be like”. He says, “learn of Me”. He doesn’t say “learn about Me.” He says “learn of Me.” What are we to learn “of Him”?

“Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.” [Matt. 11.29]

So, I posed the question, what did Jesus mean when He said “learn of me”? And, how is that different than “learn from me” or “learn to be like me”. Jesus knew the eternal secret. He knew the mystery. He knew

the true reality. And what did He know? He knew that He, Himself was the only Truth and the only Reality. In that sense, Truth is the only Reality and Reality is the only Truth – and it's all embodied in Him. Truth and Reality are not “things” to be learned or possessed. Truth and Reality are the Person of Jesus.

Jesus, as the Truth cannot be learned. That is why Paul says “ever learning” will not produce “knowledge of the truth”. What we attempt in organized and official Christianity is to reduce life to a series of lessons to be learned. And we are very good at teaching each other such lessons. We teach each other all manner of ethics, morals and values. We teach each other how to tithe and how to pray. We urge each to memorize scripture as a method of incorporating “godliness” into our lives. We require of each other regular, if not perfect, attendance at our meetings. And we consider that all this is what Christianity is all about. Well, is it?

So, what is the eternal secret, the mystery that Jesus knew? He knew the replaced life – not the improved life. “Ever learning” or “ever improving” will never get anyone to the “knowledge of the truth” – personal, intuitive understanding of the replaced/union life.

Jesus did not “learn” that He was the Messiah. He did not learn that he lived His Life in Union with the Father. But, He certainly knew these truths. You ask how did He know if He did not learn? Isn't that exactly the question posed of Jesus?

“And the Jews marvelled, saying, How knoweth this man letters, having never learned?” [John 7.15]

Jesus learned many things about the scripture and Jewish history. But can you see the fine line of difference between learning about things and really, truly, eternally knowing who you are? In one fashion or another I have studied the Bible for over 50 years. But that study never, ever revealed to me my personhood. Yes, Jesus studied, unknown to the Pharisees, but that was independent of His knowledge of His personhood. Abraham knew his personhood, yet he lived 400 years before Moses starting writing what would become the Bible. Moses, also, knew his personhood long before he started to write the Bible. So,

“knowing letters” or whatever we think will achieve “knowledge of the truth” is incorrect. So what’s the answer?

We can’t learn the “truth” of our true personhood, which is Spirit-Union with our Creator – our spirit joined to His Spirit in seamless union. But He sure will let you try. And try we do! We busy ourselves trying to create a lifestyle – maybe a “Christian” lifestyle, complete with all manner of ethics, morals and values. But, “lifestyle” is not our true self. The Reality or Truth is that from the moment we first believed we have been in Spirit-Union with our Creator. It is a perfect Union that cannot be improved. But it can be known, intuitively, by revelation. In fact, you can only know your Spirit-Union intuitively.

You can’t “work up” intuition, but you can be still and sensitive to the small and still voice within. He is most patient with His creation. We can pick up that self-improvement, religious ball and run with it all day long or for a life-time. Hopefully all that running wears you out and the Reality of your Spirit-Union starts to set it.

Jesus knew His Spirit-Union, but I promise you He didn’t learn it. He didn’t make it happen by living a “good life”, or a moral or ethical life.

“And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God.” [Mark 10.18]

Yet, despite the fact that He refused to be called a “good” person, He could boldly declare His Union -

“I and my Father are one.” [John 10.30]

Now, is that also our reality?

Jesus would not describe Himself as a “good person”, yet claims Oneness with God. Oneness is therefore independent of lifestyle. And, Jesus prayed for us, as follows:

“And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to thee. Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are.” [John 17.11]

I can say with all boldness that each and every prayer that Jesus spoke has been answered as requested and without condition. This Reality – Oneness, or as some say, “Union” with our Creator and each other – is the Truth that Paul says “ever learning” will never produce. Why not? It already exists! It exists and existed long before you will ever understand it and is not dependent on any action on your part. The Truth of our individual Oneness with God is Reality long before any of us tried to “achieve” it by “ever learning”, or by the usual methods we employ in our “religious” quest – studying, praying, tithing, singing, worship, etcetera, ad infinitum.

Jesus experienced the Truth of His Oneness with the Father. We don’t know which day it “hit Him”. No one is born with such understanding, so, neither was Jesus. We don’t know if He knew His Oneness prior to His baptism or His temptation. Maybe I’ll ask Him on the other side. But, that is the key – when does it “hit you” – “when do you know”?

Perhaps the question to ask at this point is how we are One with our Creator? It was achieved on our behalf, on the Cross.

“And, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven” [Col.1.20]

You can’t “ever learn” the fact of reconciliation into existence. It already exists and is complete. And, reconciliation was purchased at a great price. We are reconciled to our original oneness/union with our Creator. In fact our reconciliation is so complete that we, literally, join Him in His crucifixion.

“I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me ...” [Gal. 2.20]

As so what is the truth or mystery that we can never learn, only experience.

“I am the vine, ye are the branches ...” [John 15.5]

As the vine lives his life through its branches, He lives His life through us.

“Even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints: ...which is Christ in you ...” [Colossians 1.26-27]

The Creator of the Universe living His life in me and you and we expressing that Life through our unique personalities is the Truth that cannot be “ever learned”. And, it is true, regardless, or in spite of our effort to “achieve”. So we can stop trying to learn this reality into existence, just recognize the truth and live it and enjoy living our truth.

End of Study on Ever Learning

3

HAVE I BEEN SO LONG WITH YOU

“If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also: and from henceforth ye know him, and have seen him. Philip saith unto him, Lord, show us the Father, and it sufficeth us. Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Show us the Father?” [John 14.7-9]

This is a very curious statement Philip makes to Jesus. It is as though he really doesn't know Jesus or Who He really is. There is such a great similarity between the process of “knowing” as experienced by the disciples and our own experience – and yet, just as Philip needed to answer this question for himself – we must answer for ourselves. Because, when we can look at Jesus and “see” the Father – we can look in the mirror and see the same.

“Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Show us the Father?” [John 14.9]

Philip's position was not so unlike ours. All along Philip thought

Jesus was talking about a new form of Judaism with ultra-high morals and healing sick folk. Today we add wealth and prosperity if we send our money to the televangelist.

Jesus was likely a bit frustrated with Philip. Jesus, in essence is saying to him, “I’m not Jesus the carpenter doing good, religious deeds and showing people how to live. I am Jesus in spirit-union with the Father.” Jesus goes on to say:

“Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? the words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works.” [John 14.10]

So, how do we see ourselves? Are we carpenters or electricians or plumbers or lawyers or doctors or schoolteachers or whatever we do, doing good, religious deeds and showing people how to live? Or, are we in spirit-union with the Father?

The reality is that we are not just a bunch of disconnected “religious” folk out doing “Christian” stuff for whatever we perceive to be our righteous purpose. We are people, just as Jesus, in spirit-union with the Father. And we can say, as Jesus,

“the words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works.” [John 14.10]

How can I so boldly say that this is true? I can because Jesus prayed that it would be so and all His prayers are answered – every one.

“And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to thee. Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are.” [John 17.11]

The “one-ness” Jesus is talking about is spirit-union with the Father. Jesus goes on to talk about us - the ones who would believe through the disciple’s word.

“That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.” [John 17.21]

We can really miss the “one-ness” point. Intellectually we get oneness with each other – but we work at it. Our concept of oneness is that we think we must come to the point of total agreement on all issues. We become cookie-cutters of each other. We grow mega-churches with one authority figure and everyone taking notes and learning how to live. We think that is the oneness Jesus is talking about. That’s not even close.

Jesus did not refer to a soulish mental agreement amongst believers. Please don’t get me wrong – that might happen at times – but that’s not the point. Your spirit oneness with the Father is an accomplished fact purchased by the shed blood of the Lamb of God. You can’t change that fact - you can only recognize that reality for yourself.

You are, in fact, a seamless expression of the One that created you. Look at the rest of the creation. Everything you see is a perfect expression of the source of its life – its Creator. A tree creates a tree. A fish creates a fish. A bird creates a bird. GOD CREATES HIS SONS AND DAUGHTERS. Trees do not become better trees. Fish do not become better fish. Birds do not become better birds. Christians do not become better Christians. Upon the moment of our salvation we were washed in His blood, reconciled to our Creator and One with Him.

“But he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit”. [1Cor.6.17]

That is spirit-oneness with the Creator. That is who we are. Jesus, as a human, knew this reality.

Getting back to Philip’s original question to Jesus, Philip asked Jesus to “show us the Father”.

Philip in his immature understanding thought that Jesus and the Father are two different and distinct Persons. Jesus corrected Philip and said, we are the same Person.

“[H]e that hath seen me hath seen the Father”.

We want to add, “yeah, but, it’s not that simple. We still have to do our part, right?” “Don’t we have to improve? Maybe we can become good Christians.” Are you a “good” Christian? Jesus wasn’t and reprimanded those that said He was.

“Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God ...” [Matt. 19.17]

Jesus was not on a “self-improvement” plan. It was simple for Him. He did not live with the mistaken belief that “someday” He would be the Person God wanted Him to be. And, He certainly didn’t try to get closer to God. He simply saw Himself as an expression of the Life within Himself, and a perfect expression without His effort.

And really, how are we going to improve, “if you’ve seen Me, you’ve see Him.”?

Do you independently do the works of God? Jesus didn’t. Are you an independent servant of God? Jesus wasn’t.

“Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? the words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works.” [John 14.10]

Jesus neither claimed “good servanthood”, nor that He was the One that accomplished anything. We like to think that we “do” the works of God and that we are good servants of God and maybe He helps us. Jesus assigned His words and His actions to the Father that lived in Him – He saw Himself simply as an expression of Him. We might try thinking in those terms also – sure takes the burden off us.

And, we might be bold enough to say, “If you’ve seen me, you’ve seen the Father.” Are we permitted to say what Jesus said? Yes.

“As He is so are we in this world”. [1 John 4.17]

Jesus knew Himself as the expression of the Life that was in Him.

This is Union – Spirit One-ness. This is true of me. This is true of you.

HAVE I BEEN SO LONG WITH YOU – A RESPONSE

A dear friend writes: “You’ve hit a chord! What are the full ramifications of the word ‘knowing’”.....

The fact that ‘they’ did not really know who he was is huge. The Christian church today knows the history of Jesus but do they really know Who He is?

I think he knew all those around him for three years did not really know him. To know him one must be mixed with him, and that is no more knowing the history of him than trying to be mixed with your own flesh brother.

Humanity can only be mixed with His Spirit. That is why he left and sent Himself in his 3rd form; i.e. the Holy Spirit.”

End of Study on Have I Been So Long With You

4

GET OUT OF THE BOAT

The question arises – how do I go from “trying” to be Christ-like, a poor imitation at best, essentially failing at Christianity and arrive at a full and permanent and fixed understanding of my union with Christ. How do we get to a consciousness of the very fact that we are His expression? At some point Simon Peter came to grasp his union. His first baby step in that direction is outlined below:

“But the ship was now in the midst of the sea, tossed with waves: for the wind was contrary. And in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went unto them, walking on the sea. And when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, it is a spirit; and they cried out for fear. But straightway Jesus spake unto them, saying, Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid. And Peter answered him and said, Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water. And he said, Come. And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water, to go to Jesus. But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me. And immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand, and caught him, and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?”
[Matthew 14.24-31]

He always pushes and pulls out of our comfort zone, but gently at times. Jesus did not even ask Peter to get out of the boat and walk on the water. Jesus simply acknowledged Peter.

“And Peter answered him and said, Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water. And he said, Come” [Matt. 14.29-29]

Peter stepped out and got a lesson in faith. But, of course, the story could not end there and I think Jesus knew that Peter would doubt. Doubt is always an element of faith. I don't think you can have faith or even know or understand faith unless you embrace your doubt. You always know one thing by knowing the opposite.

“But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me. And immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand, and caught him, and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?” [Matt. 14.30-31]

We've all heard sermons and lectures on this passage. It's usually negative. It's usually a lesson on our lack of faith, using Peter as an example. Yes, Jesus does say that Peter had little faith and basically scolded him for doubting, but I don't think that that is the point of the story.

The point is what Jesus said – “Come [walk on water]”

Jesus didn't start the conversation with the disciples in the boat. He was basically just trying to catch up, and since He had no other boat, He simply walked on the water. Things might have been different had the disciples been asleep. But, as usual there are no coincidences, only perfect intent.

So, we have the disciples in the boat. That is what is considered “normal” Christianity – “going for a ride”. Of course it's not normal at all. It's simply safe and dry and basically no one gets hurt. Peter is a most interesting man. Jesus identified Himself,

“Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid.”

But, nonetheless, Peter had to confirm,

“Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water. And he said,
Come”

It would appear to be a viable option to elect to stay in the boat – keep your Christianity safe – take no chances. The only one that got scolded was Peter and he was the only one to give really “normal” Christianity a try – walking on water. Normal Christianity, or normal life for the matter, would seem to be, us, as just regular flesh and blood human beings – and yet defying nature and normal – living life as only divinity could – walking on water. But it starts with a step of faith as illustrated here, getting out of the boat.

Does Jesus still beckon us to “come”? Of course He does. I wonder why only Peter, and none of the other disciples, had the idea that if Jesus walked on water they could also. Peter was probably worthy of a lot of criticism for things that he said and did, but no one could ever question his heart and his love for Jesus.

Peter had an historical, physical Jesus to call him from the safety of his boat, the safety of our version of “no risk” Christianity. We don’t. But, in a sense we have one better. We have the eternal, internal Jesus, whose spirit is joined to our spirit, creating One. So, He calls us from within. In that sense it is still our choice. We can live a life of “safe Christianity” - life “in the boat”, perhaps with sheparding and covering and mentors and those we look up to. Our boats can be filled with “Christian” activities, church meetings, prayer groups, bible studies, choir practice – whatever “floats” your boat. Or, perhaps we can step out onto the water and walk away from the boat.

What does this mean for you? I can’t say. For me, it is simply moment by moment, day by day, with the look of a normal life, but I know and you know different. We are now Him in our personal and unique water walk. In that, we listen and understand those in need of a touch from the Savior. We see the tear in the eye of those who are hurting, unnoticeable from the boat. And truly we move on from being “Peter” to assuming our true personhood as Him, as we now pull up those who are sinking.

So, go take a water walk today.

End of Study on Get Out of the Boat

5

DYING TO SELF

This phrase is used frequently in more conservative Christianity and less so in more liberal churches. There is no such thing as “dying to self”. It is not an important Christian doctrine. If anything, the way it is taught and discussed, it is false doctrine, very misleading and must be exposed – and, I’m not the first to take this phrase to task. “Dying to self” originates with the misreading of certain verses, such as the following:

“Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.” Matt. 16.24-25

This verse could be twisted and strained to produce a thought that Jesus said one must “die to self”, but I don’t see it. The internet has entire websites devoted to “dying to self”. I borrow the following quote from one:

“If our goal is to be in God’s will all the time then we need to go through some processes to purge ourselves of pride, self-will, selfishness, self-esteem, and all the other things that cause us to think about ourselves first and God second. Those processes will lead us through a

journey that will involve humility, strengthening our faith, and will ultimately result in holiness.” Nonsense.

Despite the fact that there is no such thing as “dying to self”, it so extremely important to think that there is. That’s right – it is an important path to take, despite the fact that it is a wrong path. You must grab this idea and run with it until it just about kills you. Why do I say that? Certain misconceptions and misunderstandings about who we are as redeemed persons must bring us to the brink of despair before, by revelation, we get clarity and true understanding. So it is with “dying to self”. In order to know the falsity of this commonly used “Christian” phrase you must try to produce the result of “death to self” in your own life. It won’t happen, but it is in the trying and failure that produces the frustration which leads to true understanding.

In my early days of Christianity, at age 18, I joined a Southern Baptist Church in Fort Worth, Texas. The pastor and the members of this church were some of the most loving and concerned people I have ever known. Some are still my friends more than 50 years later. I also attended Bill Gothard’s Seminar on “Basic Youth Conflicts”. Also, I attended every different kind of “Christian” thing that was available and listened to all manner of “advice” from those I considered authority figures. Well, somewhere in this mixture of experience I picked up the idea that I must “die to self” in order to “live for Jesus”. “Dying to self” is one of the worst lies of Christianity and it snagged me for several years.

I interpreted “dying to self”, basically, as whatever I wanted, He didn’t. It was a ridiculous and never ending opposite’s game because I considered myself, still, a sinner and everything about me had to change. If I wanted long hair He wanted me to have short hair. If I wanted chicken He wanted me to have hamburger. It seemed that all my natural and normal instincts were evil and must be changed.

We’re getting a glimpse at the fallacy of this way of thinking. And, yes, I suppose, at one time, all my instincts may have been evil. But something happened. The Savior took up permanent residence in me. That is significant because He shed His blood and died to create a new race of human beings – and He succeeded perfectly. But, as a young man I really didn’t understand that yet. I knew I was saved and would

spend my eternity with Him but really didn't understand the complete work of salvation that had already occurred within me – a work I take no credit for, but simply walk in.

Now back to the history. As a young college student all I wanted to do was play football - American football. I was not a great football player but I had a lot of heart and determination. As a matter of fact that is all I wanted to do. Well, you guessed it – I assumed that since that is what I wanted to do, it must be wrong. I must die to that desire as I die to self in order to “live for Jesus”. So I quit football – for a while.

My early years in Christianity were a potpourri. I was raised a liberal New York City Jew. So, Fort Worth, Texas Christianity was a very different world. At age 18 I was baptized and confirmed a Roman Catholic. Then I joined a Southern Baptist Church and was immediately baptized again. Then I got in with the charismatics, “got the Holy Ghost” complete with my own “prayer language”. It was as though I was putting together a big jigsaw puzzle. But, the common thread was still, that, despite the fact that I was a redeemed person and certainly knew Jesus Christ personally, that there was still something wrong with me and I needed daily changing and dying to self.

One of the many strands of my early Christianity was when I was introduced to

“I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me ...” [Galatians 2.20]

Now, intellectually I could see that there was an obvious contradiction between the doctrine of “dying to self” and the scriptural truth of my co-crucifixion with Christ. I mean, crucifixion is death – really it is. And, the bible doesn't lie, right? So, I'm dead – already – and it's not really even me living – it is Him that lives in me. That's what it says, right? Well, intellectually I could see that. And, slowly I could see that the truth of Gal. 2.20 stands in direct, 180 degree contradiction to “dying to self”. In other words, both cannot be true – either my self is already dead and now He lives in me, or, my self needs to die. One of these thoughts is truth and the other not.

The revelation of our co-crucifixion does arrive and that light

exposes the false doctrine of “dying to self”. Whatever “self” needed to die has been crucified and there is no need to waste time and resources of the Kingdom to achieve what only Jesus could achieve by His crucifixion.

“Delight thyself also in the LORD: and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart.” [Psalm 37.4]

Said another way, God puts desires into our hearts to give us direction. Those desires are not “self” that needs to die, but rather life that must be lived. When I finally, initially at least intellectually, embraced the fact that God is the originator of the desires in my heart, the light turned on and my life flipped 180 degrees. I began to grasp the truth of what I was denying all along – my desires are His desires and direction for my life. I am a redeemed person.

- I have the “mind of Christ” [I Cor. 2.16].
- “Christ lives in me” [Gal. 2.20].

I’m talking about union - the revelation of the eternal reality that He is not an “outside” God, but One Who has taken up permanent residence – Him as us, us as Him. Even if you do not yet “get union”, live as if you do. That’s faith. I declared that if something was in my heart, then He, as my life, put it there and I must act on it. So, I basically said “to hell with the religion” and all my misconceptions – “dying to self” - and just live exactly the way I wanted to. So, at age 25, I started the process of getting into “football” condition. Football for me was the desire He put in my heart.

Football is nothing in and of itself. It was His way of getting me out of religion and into real life. But football was a pretty good “nothing” for me. I played until I was 33 years old. Not bad for a guy with limited talent but a lot of heart. And, more important, it freed me up in many areas of life that needed to be lived and not falsely “died to”.

In 1980 I decided to trust my gut. I decided to stop seeing myself as a wrong person – no self to “die out to”. I took the head knowledge of my co-crucifixion and that my life is “hid with Christ in God” and

decided to act on it. I stopped thinking of Him and me and starting thinking of Him as me and me as Him.

So, at age 26, in 1980, after about a year of running countless miles, sprinting up and down the football field, and lifting tons of weights I announced to my world that I would play minor league football in Racine, Wisconsin. And we moved and I did. It was the process and act of stepping out – “faith” – trusting and insisting that He lives His life as me that brought the revelation of union.

At that moment I did not yet really grasp exactly what it was to live in union with my Creator. But I had to live as if I knew, step out and declare that the hopes and goals that I desired were from Him and not some relic of my self that needed death.

During that first summer in Wisconsin, I was running wind sprints one afternoon along the side of Lake Michigan. I was thinking about the whole “dying to self” thing and I just stopped on a dime. I said, “I am dead”. It hit me – a ton of bricks - not intellectually – but heart reality. The revelation finally came. I knew in a flash the reality of my co-crucifixion with Christ. I was dead. I also knew in that same flash, that He only lives His life in me and through me. And, most important, that “me” was really me, with my desires and my personality, playing football or whatever. What I had said a million times – “I am Christ as me” – finally went from my head to my heart.

And I played football, off and on, minor league, semi-pro and sandlot, until I was 33. I was never a great or even a good football player but I did it with sheer will-power and effort – things that previously I felt had to “die” in the “death to self” misconception.

This is not a history lesson. You can read the books all day long and even speak the truth. But you must step out and live the life. In reality you are completely renewed – head to toe – inside out. You are a saint, not a sinner, regardless of contrary feelings.

Think about your normal daily life. You could be a homemaker or a scientist. You could be a waitress, plumber, carpenter, martial arts instructor, peace officer or a doctor. Humanly speaking, what you do eventually becomes you. That process does not happen by just thinking about it and reading books about it. It happens when you step out and do it. It happens when you refuse to believe the negative thoughts that

always haunt you. Settling into your reality happens when you start the doing of it regardless of feelings or doubt. And, again, speaking of normal human things and professions, at some point it hits you that you are what you do and, you are who you profess to be.

Here we talk about eternal reality, of who we are as persons in the universe. And we have good authority to say, with Paul,

“For me to live is Christ” [Philippians 1.21].

A good friend points out to me that something Jesus said could be considered in support of the incorrect theory of “dying to self”.

“Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.” [Matt. 16.24]

This statement is found in Matthew, Mark and Luke. In Luke the verse adds one word, “daily”.

“And he said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.” [Luke 9.23]

Is Jesus saying we must die to self?

“And he said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.” [Luke 9.23]

So, what is Jesus talking about here? Is He saying that one must “die to self” on a daily basis? No. I say that because there are no contradictions in eternal truth in the Bible, although, at times, there may appear to be. What Jesus means is that, on a daily basis, we may have to deny the thought that we have an independent self, or that we are two selves, one basically fighting against the other – a good self and a bad self – a “new man” and an “old man” – Him and me, at odds with each other. I once heard a preacher say that within each are two dogs and whichever you feed the most eventually, wins in the end. And, it is precisely that kind of talk from the pulpit that causes many to see

themselves as some odd mixture of two different people at the same time and a reason to “die to self”.

Religion would have you think that denying yourself is a process of change where you set yourself on a path of morals, ethics and values and become more “Christ-like”. The reality is that the only necessary change has already occurred and that is a result of the crucifixion and resurrection of the Savior and your responding faith in Him.

The Crucifixion and Resurrection produced a new race of redeemed and reconciled persons - us. The remaining process is knowing and understanding that He lives His life in me and you. And, if you do not get it yet, boldly live in faith as if you do.

What is your cross that Jesus tells you to take up daily? And Jesus does not say to go get a cross. To each is given a cross. When we get past the falsehood of “death to self” we begin to see and understand that our lives are for others. Take up your cross - the life given to you. And, you can choose to take up and embrace or ignore and avoid. And you don’t have to go one step out of the way of your normal, everyday life to take up and embrace your cross as branches of the true vine – the delivery system of the mighty Mississippi of His love [as Capon would say]. If you think you can stick your finger in and dam the flow, be my guest and give it a try. But why? On a daily basis we encounter every imaginable need in others that we “take up”. We comfort those in pain. We understand those who are misunderstood. We love the unlovable. Sometimes, as we bear our crosses, we are the ones in pain, or misunderstood or unloved. Why? Sometimes we simply must know the pain of others by our own experience.

And the cross itself is our ever present reminder that we have passed through that death, with no old self to die to, only His life to live. And, finally, this is not an age thing. Age has nothing to do with this reality. Remember Moses was 80 years old when he “understood”. And, back then, 80 was really 80, not like today when 80 is the new 70.

End of Study on Dying to Self

6

HE GAVE HIS LIFE FOR ME

“But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” [Romans 5.8]

I do not know if we understand the principal of death creating life. But we should. “Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.” [John 12.24] Jesus just pointed out the obvious. He spoke of His own impending sacrificial death. He spoke also of us. Jesus’ death in recorded history was simply the revelation of the eternal act of Him dying to complete and restore His creation.

“...the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.” [Rev. 13.8]

And now the entire creation is reconciled to the Father because of the Son’s death.

“And, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven.” [Col. 1.20]

“For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the

death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life.” [Rom. 5.10]

So we accept the fact that Jesus died for us and in fact had to die for our salvation and reconciliation. But not only did He die, but, He gave His life also? What does that mean and what is the distinction between “dying for” and “giving One’s life”?

So, I say not only did He die for me, but He gave His Life for me. The difference is subtle, but indeed exists.

We understand death. It is part of life and the end of life, at least the death of the body. We know Life is eternal, but nonetheless, death comes to all or at least most of us and we understand and deal with it. Jesus’ death was sacrificial and eternal. It came at the end of a relatively short life – 33 years. His death reconciled the entire creation to the Creator. These are simple principals that many know and believe. But have you ever considered that He not only died for you, but He also gave up His Life for you. The first time I had that thought it knocked me over.

We are all so busy creating our lives the way we want. We chase our goals and ambitions. We work so hard to make our lives as comfortable for us and our loved ones as possible. And I’m not saying we shouldn’t. But we certainly are not giving our lives, at least not voluntarily. I’m not saying we should. In fact we should live exactly as we want. I’ve discussed that concept in other places and will not dwell on it now. But, we do not give up our lives, at least not consciously, for anyone or anything. We may prefer others, especially our children. We may make decisions that benefit our loved ones over our own desires, but we do not give up our lives. He did.

Jesus could have been anyone or done anything He wanted. In fact the devil tempted Him, offering Jesus

“all the kingdoms of the world”. [Luke 4.5-7]

Giving His life is far more than simply dying. He could have lived any way He wanted but, instead, chose to give up all that to live His purpose – to die and reconcile the creation to the Creator.

I hope you catch the difference between one “dying for another” and “One giving His Life for another”? And, as a human He didn’t even know me. I was born 2000 years after He gave His Life for me. Not only did He die for me, but He gave His Life for me. If you know Him, you know what I’m talking about. I cannot tell you how I know that He loved me and indeed loves me now, but I know He does.

Such love. We can’t repay. He doesn’t ask for repayment. But, I must warn you though, He wants His Life back. That’s right He wants His life back and He’ll get it back. He’ll get it back as you and He’ll get it back as me. And we really have no control over that. We are created now to be the sons and daughters of God. We are His expression in our individual and personal worlds – we are His life – right now. But we can’t do anything to make that true, except one thing. We can acknowledge that it is true. We can, by faith, acknowledge that we are now the sons and daughters of God. He lives His Life now as you and me. He does. Really, He does. How cool is that! How true is that!

End of Study on He Gave His Life for Me

7

CARNAL VERSUS SPIRITUAL

“For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace.” Romans 8.6

This is a great verse that is used and misused quite often. The verse is true, but must be understood in truth. This topic is all about how one sees herself. Do you think you’re a “sinner saved by grace?” That phrase is not used in the Bible, although used quite often in church pulpits and other “Christian” places. Or are you a “person saved by grace?” Or, are you now a saint? Now the term “saint” is used many, many times in the New Testament to describe and define the Christian. But, we are never described or defined as “sinners”.

This is how we misunderstand the meaning of “carnally minded”. So, what happens is that this verse is interpreted as, basically either a warning to the Christian or as a method to condemn others or ourselves. In other words, are we Christian people thinking “carnal” thoughts – being “carnally minded”? Well, what if that is not what this verse means at all. It says “to be carnally minded is death ...” Well, we’re not in death at all – we’re in life. Perhaps this verse is not about thinking “sinful thoughts” but rather thinking that you are a “sinful person”. Maybe, to be “carnally minded” means that you don’t understand who you are.

“For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace.” Romans 8.6

The reason people go immediately to the conclusion that this verse is referring to having “sinful” thoughts, or the like, is that in Christianity we are so conditioned to think we are in a performance based religion. Maybe it is our old Boy Scout training that causes us to keep thinking about earning merit badges and we get confused and apply that way of thinking to Christianity. Our life and faith is not about earning anything.

“Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?” [Gal 3.3]

We get that, right? We know all the verses about grace and eternal life being free gifts. Why are they free? Grace and eternal life are free because they cannot be earned by any human being. We are incapable.

Whatever we have from Him is imputed to us. Impute basically means to create a fact or a reality that did not previously exist.

“Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works ...” [Rom. 4.6]

“And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God.” [James 3.23]

It’s really all in your perception of who you are. We’re not talking about behavior or thoughts, or thinking that your life is all about self-improvement. “Self-improvement” is to be “carnally minded”. Focus on behavior or thoughts will always result in death. Who we are as persons is much deeper than that.

Jesus tells us who we are. There should be no questioning what He said. He said He is the vine and we are His branches. As He is the spirit vine we are His spirit branches. To understand and accept that truth is to be “spiritually minded” and that is truly “life and peace”. Ultimately we must renew our mind to see the eternal truth that we are spirit

beings, his branches into the world and pure expressions of Him. When you have that perception of yourself you own life and peace.

There is really nothing that we should be interpreting in scripture, or otherwise, that would leave us with the conclusion that we are engaged in a self-improvement or performance based religion – or really that we are in a “religion” at all. We’re in Life – as He is the Life.

To think we are defined by what we do or what we think is, of course, death. That is what is meant by “carnally minded”. To know that we are defined by who we are – Him as us, us as Him - is to be “spiritually minded” and, of course, is life.

End of Study on Carnal versus Spiritual

8

HUMILITY

There is humility and there is something else that people confuse with humility - false humility. There is a humbleness that is befitting a son of God and a humbleness that has no place in the Kingdom. It is easy to be confused on this point. Jesus was a humble man. Jesus was a humble Son of God, yet bold and told it “like it is”.

This is all about how one sees oneself. “Seeing oneself” is a common theme I write about. You are, right now, exactly who you are intended to be. But, there’s a catch. You must see yourself for who you really are. That’s where humility or false humility enters the discussion.

Each person lives on a line. You may see yourself either on that line, or above-the-line or even below-the-line. The “line” is who you are. Either above or below is really not you and is untrue – a false way of seeing yourself. Jesus lived on His line. When He said He was the Son of God the hypocrites said He exalted Himself and then wanted to kill Him. In other words, people said that He claimed to live above His line. But He was simply being honest. For Him to have denied the truth that He was the Son of God would have been a lie. He would never devalue Himself and claim that He lived below His line. Some thought of false humility would never have led Him to say that He was any less than the Son of God.

When saying He was the Son of God, Jesus was actually humble in His honest expression of Himself, even though others considered Him boastful and exalting of Himself. Actually, it was worse. He was accused of blasphemy and some wanted to kill Him, on the spot. At one point He actually said that, not only was He the Son of God, but One with God.

“I and my Father are one.” [John 10.30]

Jesus goes on to quote King David with a little known verse,

“I have said, Ye are gods; and all of you are children of the most High.”
[Psalm 82.6]

And then Jesus says,

“Is it not written in your law, I said, Ye are gods? If he called them gods, unto whom the word of God came, and the scripture cannot be broken; Say ye of him, whom the Father hath sanctified, and sent into the world, Thou blasphemest; because I said, I am the Son of God?”
[John 10.34-36]

There are two things going on here. First, Jesus is not boastful, prideful, exaggerating or exalting Himself. He is telling the truth, period. The other thing is that He is saying that the “children of God” are “gods” themselves. You will note that the scripture uses a little “g”. And, of course, we will never be “God” in the sense that He is the Creator – but – we are His children, created in His image and, now because of the eternal work of the Savior’s Cross, permanently and totally reconciled to Him and expressions of Him.

“And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.” [Philippians 2.8]

Of course, Jesus was humble. And we are just like him, because

“as He is so are we in this world.” [1 John 4.17].

And so, to whatever extent he is humble, so are we.

Here is where I think we got off-track on this issue. We are taught to say things such as, “I’m a sinner saved by grace”. If asked to explain this statement one might say, “I’m being humble”. One might also say, “well, it’s the truth, I am a sinner saved by grace”. I would respond and say that person is confused on both points because neither statement is correct.

Let’s back up and examine the statement made about Jesus - He humbled Himself and became a man. However, if Jesus was humble at all it was true humility and not false humility. Jesus never claimed to be less the Man he was, however, for good reason, He often did not answer people directly. But He never denied or devalued His true identity.

Now, how do we fit in? How can we be truly humble and not devalue our personhood?

Both Jesus and the New Testament writers clearly identify who we are and in various ways. Jesus says we are “children” of God, “gods” ourselves, His “brethren”, His “friends” and “branches” of Him, the true Vine. . He goes on to say, remarkably, that we would do greater things than Him.

“Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father.” [John 14.12]

New Testament writers go on to call us the “beloved” and “saints”.

So how do many of us describe ourselves and each other? We say we are “sinners saved by grace” or with some other demeaning or derogatory terminology. Really? Is that even close to the truth? People claim, when saying such negative comments about themselves, that they are being “humble”, or worse, that they are being “honest” when making such statements. Well, that is total nonsense. Nowhere in scripture are we referred to as “sinners saved by grace”. We might be “saints saved by grace”, but never “sinners”.

This is exactly what I mean by “false humility”. Humility does not include falsehood and demeaning methods of thinking of ourselves.

So, we need to stop this false humility nonsense. But, I must warn you. What do you think will happen the first time you confront one your church buddies with the reality that you are not a “sinner saved by grace”? He will [hopefully not literally] pick up a rock to stone you for blasphemy. Yeah, it’s going to get nasty. So what.

What is true humility? First, it’s starts with an admission of the truth. “I am a saint.” But that’s not humble yet. It is just the beginning. True humility will be the further admission that I have not earned my position as His chosen vessel, rather, He chose me. The final statement of humility will be the admission that, despite what we’ve heard and been taught, we will not improve our position or personhood through self-effort. We will never “achieve” a “closer walk” or become a better Christian.

True humility may say, “I’ll look into His eyes and eventually see myself”. That’s humble because I haven’t achieved anything. I’ve just seen myself for myself. It’s not exaltation because it’s true.

So, let’s not think in terms of humility. Let’s think in terms of reality.

Go be true.

End of Study on Humility

9

IF I MAKE MY BED IN HELL

“If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there.” [Psalm 139.8]

The consensus about this verse is that God is omnipresent [in all places at all times] – so, wherever you “happen” to be – He is there. That makes sense. But, there’s more. In reality – we really never “happen” to be anywhere – we are where He places us – for His purpose.

This verse is about choice. Not many choose hell. Jesus did, as He

“preached to the spirits in prison” [hell]. [1 Peter 3:19]

Mother Teresa chose hell (the streets of Calcutta). Being in hell or not is really not our choice - rather, the choice is, when I find myself in hell, will I make my bed or not make my bed.

If you can escape hell – do it, but for most, there will be times in life when you find yourself “in hell”. Describe your “hell” your way. But, it’s not “all about me” – “my problems” –it never is. Jesus chose hell to bring life – His very self – to those He found there. When He chooses to put you in hell – you are Him in your hell – to those you find there. Just look around. You are the conduit of His life.

So, we are back at the “choice”. So, the choice is that you can either fight it – or – you can make your bed. In other words, get comfortable, accept your hell and realize this is not about “you”, but rather about you “as Him to your world – in hell”.

End of Study on If I Make My Bed in Hell

IO

IF YOU'VE SEEN ME

When asked by Andrew to “show us the Father”, Jesus answers, “Have you been so long with me If you’re seen me, you’ve seen the Father. Why ask”

At that point the Disciples really did not know Who Jesus was. They may have considered Him a great teacher or rabbi. He might have been a very religious Man or Someone Who simply had a kind heart toward others. But, Jesus never claimed any of that. In fact He denied that He was a good man, saying, “only the Father is good”.

Jesus was simply saying that He was the total and perfect expression of the Father. There was no difference between what the Disciples saw and God the Father. In fact, Jesus claimed to be the very same Person.

End of Study on If You’ve Seen Me

II

JESUS CHRIST, LORD AND SAVIOR

In some ways Christianity is no different than any other “volunteer organization”. This may sound harsh, but, here goes. In the volunteer organizations that I have known, church or otherwise, there can be an undertone of “putting others down to elevate yourself”. It is usually a combination of a control thing and also to feel better about your perceived shortcomings. The “controlling” person can look at the other person and think, “at least I’m not that bad”. This happens in organized Christianity all the time.

Why is this so? It is because there is such a prevalent theme in Christianity that we are to perform, and perform well, and, of course, God expects it and is disappointed when we don’t. We love to point fingers at each other and even at ourselves. Sometimes just putting ourselves “down” makes us feel better because, aren’t we just “sinners saved by grace” anyway. I’m kidding as that is one of the biggest lies of history, but the topic for another day.

A few years ago I heard a Messianic Jewish Christian, as I am, speak at a church. He was well-intentioned in his presentation, and, of course, he had to give an alter call at the end. I didn’t mind the alter call, just what he said, to wit, “You may have made Jesus your savior [Christ], but

have you made him your lord?” Well, that got my attention. Is that even possible? Is it possible to “make” Jesus anything at all?

The point that the Jewish Christian preacher was making was that, in his opinion, there were some in attendance who had “made” Jesus their savior – to go to heaven or avoid hell, but not all had “made” him their lord. In other words, in his opinion, some, perhaps most, were not “living as they should” – were not doing what Jesus “told them to do”. I can recognize that finger-pointing routine from a mile away. And, usually, it is to cover one’s own perceived short-comings – making others feel inadequate to feel better about yourself. This is church game “one-upsmanship” at its finest.

Well, my preacher friend was wrong on two counts. His focus on “morality” has no place in Christianity. That is external behavior control which, essentially overlooks and denies the reality that He lives His life in us, as us, without any help from a code of ethics or morals. But that is not what got my attention.

What got my attention was the statement and thought that you or I will “make” Jesus anyone or anything. We will never, ever make Him anyone or anything. He already is Lord and Savior [Christ], without our help. And Who made Him Lord and Savior?

“Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made the same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ”.

[Acts 2.36]

So, this concept of making Jesus “your lord” and not just “your savior” is just another erroneous method featured in mainstream Christianity of sneaking performance based religious principles into our consciousness as a “wolf in lamb’s clothing”. And it just sounds so good too.

And there are entire denominations and churches built entirely upon this premise. But, let’s look at this verse again:

“Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made the same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ”.

[Acts 2.36]

Peter made this statement on the day of Pentecost. See the response from those in the upper room:

“Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?” [Acts 2.37]

And what did Peter say? “You can receive Him as your Savior, that’s the easy part, but you must also strive to make Him your Lord.” Yeah, right. What did Peter say?

So, did Peter tell everyone to “make Jesus both their lord and savior”? No.

“Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.” [Acts 2.38]

I like this simple definition of “repent” – “to change one’s mind”. And, what about baptism? I was sprinkled as a Roman Catholic at age 18 and dunked as a Southern Baptist at age 19. I pretty well have that covered. Is water baptism a requirement to receive the “gift of the Holy Spirit”? Probably not since the Holy Spirit seemed to be running wild, in a holy sense, in the upper room without anyone being baptized in the traditional sense. I also like the simple definition of “baptize” – “to be immersed”. And so we are immersed in Him – with or without water.

Note also that Peter did not say “get yourself baptized”. No, he said “be” baptized” – “be” – just “be” baptized – let Him immerse you in Himself. Seems as though that is His job, not mine.

So, repent. Change your mind. Christianity cannot be achieved and we will never make Jesus Lord and Savior. He is already Lord and Savior, always, from eternity – no beginning, no end. So, “be” immersed in that reality and truth. And we are already immersed, baptized and dunked fully in Him.

End of Study on Jesus Christ, Lord and Savior

I2

JUST ASK

I often speak of Him living His Life as us.

“As He is, so are we in this world.” [1 John 4.17]

That might involve sacrifice or pain. It might involve loving those that do not love us. It might involve taking up our crosses daily. [Matthew 10.38] But it always involves knowing that we are Him in this world.

But we must never forget that we are sons and daughters of the Most High. We are allowed and in fact encouraged to ask for what we want also. Jesus said,

“ask and it will be given you ...” [Matthew 7.7]

And,

“If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?” [Matthew 7.11]

Don't get me wrong, I'm not asking for a Ferrari. Actually, not asking for myself, but rather for another. But I'm asking and I'm expecting exactly what I request. And, I'm asking with another.

“Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven.” [Matthew 18:19-20]

Jesus said this is what happens when two agree in their request.

Is this personal, sure. I want health and healing for one I love. You can agree with me and I'll agree with you. I stand before my Father and yours and say, with all boldness, “your Son, my Savior, Brother and Friend, gave me permission to ask for what I want and if even one other agrees with me, you must grant my request.” So I ask, in Jesus' Holy Name and I intend to receive.

End of Study on Just Ask

13

LOSING ONE'S SELF

There's much said about the believer being a “container” and that we have this

“treasure in earthen vessels”. [2 Cor. 4.7]

I would never dispute that point as it is a fundamental truth of who we are, both as believers and as human beings. Every human “contains” – we contain life – and, do not be mistaken, there is only One Life. God alone gives life – in fact He gives Himself, as the “animation” in all. Some will say we “contain” either in union or rebellion – and there is truth in that concept, but that is not my subject here. Simply said, humans are not independent islands among many islands. A close corollary is,

“...he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it.” [Matt. 10.39]

Early in my Christianity I grasped the concept of “containerhood”. I was also quite aware of Jesus’ direction to “lose my life”. The misunderstanding that resulted was that in losing my “self” I sort of

became a nothing and thereby had to deny everything that made me “me”. I truly hope that not everyone has to go through that nonsense, but if you have, you know exactly what I am talking about and if you’re in the middle of it, maybe this will shine some light.

The only “life” that we will ever lose is the life lived in the mistaken belief that we are independent at all. We are not now, never have been and never will be independent selves. And that is precisely what Jesus urges us to deny.

The self we lose, or deny, is simply the misunderstanding that we were ever a truly independent being. We lose the identity of independence. However, we should never lose the identity of our personhood – what makes us exactly the person we were created to be. So, the self we deny is not our personality – not the aspects and characteristics that make each a completely unique person – exactly as He is The Person. Each person is created with a unique personality - likes, dislikes, drives, goals, interests and ambitions. These aspects of personhood are exactly who we are created and intended to be and we must not deny our personality.

I cannot speak in universal terms for every human being. Actually, I probably could, but not here. But if you are reading this you are probably of the Christian faith – in some fashion or another; however you define your faith. So you know that you have the treasure [Him] in your “earthen vessel”. [2 Cor. 4.7] Now this eternal reality must be embraced – by each, personally and fully. But once embraced it becomes the foundation of the person you are right now – you forget about it and just live. A foundation holds one up. No structure can stand without a proper foundation. But once the foundation is laid, it assumes its role as permanent truth and reality and easily fades from view. The foundation simply does its job – holding up – with no help from us.

So, we are all containers. But to think of yourself as a container, as a cup is a container of coffee, can be quite misleading. The “coffee cup” concept, like many concepts, is merely a teaching tool but very misleading unless you understand that a cup is an inanimate object, whereas a human is not. A cup, or as the Bible says, “earthen vessel” is

not alive and has no personality or being, apart from the liquid in which it contains.

I must comment on the use of concepts as teaching tools a bit further. Teachers both in and out of the bible use concepts to help the learner wrap their understanding around often difficult to grasp eternal truths. But, once you “get it” you must drop the concept because at that point the concept has done its job and will no longer help as you move toward further intuitive knowing and understanding of the reality.

So, as we move toward acceptance and true knowing of the reality that we each contain deity we must leave the “earthen vessel” concept behind. That’s the problem when you “lose yourself”. You think, as I did years ago, that you are just an inanimate object – no personality – no uniqueness – just a container of Him, but no real method of expression. Why no expression? Because you deny the very personality He created you to be and have. That is why so often in Christianity we see the “cookie-cutter Christian” living as he has been taught, following the “rules of Christianity”.

But we do come full circle. What I mean is that we do, at some point, lose our selves. But we get our selves back. As one of my best friends, who happens to live in Redding, would point out, there will be a time of settling and grounding.

So, what is the “settling and grounding” all about? Humans just naturally think of themselves as independent beings – I’m here, you’re there, God is up there somewhere. And we go from that misunderstanding to the next – now that I’m a believer, I must become better, more “Christ-like”. That’s why we so easily and readily, regardless of how difficult it may appear, embrace the rules, regulations, sheparding and other processes on the road to “self-improvement” Christianity.

That concept of “self-improvement” is going to end for all of us – either in this life or the next. I’m not joking as some will never get it, until explained, face-to-face by Jesus, Himself, on the other side. But, as one of my best and long-time friends from Fort Worth would point out, thankfully, many come to the end of their rope and give up the “self-improvement” plan. You will lose your false-image that you are an independent self in need of “self-improvement”.

But, "...he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it." [Matt. 10.39]

And you will find it now!

Remember, concepts are just teaching tools and not reality. The coffee cup/earthen vessel concept is just a concept because the cup will never become the coffee it contains and the coffee never becomes the cup. While we may have this "treasure [Him] in earthen vessels [us]", we are not simply containers. While the cup never becomes the coffee and vice versa, He will become us and we will become Him, as His expression, in our very earthly world. We have moved on from the mistaken concept of independent self and now gain the true prospective of our real self.

Now, you are free to be and live exactly as you desire and how you choose.

"Delight thyself also in the LORD; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart." [Psalm 37.4]

A familiar verse, many think means that if you do the "delighting" part then you get the "gift" part – your desire. "Do your homework and you get ice cream." That's not it. That's totally wrong. The first question here is what are the "desires" of your heart? Now, whatever they are for you, He gives them to you. He puts them there. They are not gifts, they are desires. "Desires" are what make you – you. Your desires give your life direction – a path to follow. Your desires are your personality and your character. Whatever they are for you, He put them there. You are not to lose that. You are only to lose the illusion that you are separate from Him and that there is something wrong with your desires. You are a redeemed person - a person in union with the Creator.

But this all begs the question – if I live exactly as I choose, can't I choose evil? Can't I choose to be selfish and live for myself? Maybe.

Okay, so, could I "choose" selfish and evil? I want to say it's possible, but I'd rather say it's not probable. Why? That's the grounding and the settling part. It's the "knowing who you really are" part. We are not independent selves. We are unique as to our personality but not independent. As great and powerful as the Creator is, He has chosen to

express Himself through His creation, not apart from or in spite of it. When you are grounded and settled into knowing that you are His expression through your unique person, then it's not probable that you will "choose" to be what you are not.

You may think that because I say the Creator has chosen to show and express Himself through His creation that that somehow limits Him. It doesn't at all. He can run His universe any way He wants. And He has chosen to operate through what He has made. And we as persons are His highest expression. As one of my dear friends would say, it "makes my heart glad to know I have a God given personality that He lives in and He is a Person."

He has chosen to express Himself in you and in me, through you and through me and most important, as you and as me.

"But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace, To reveal his Son in me ..." [Gal.1.15-16]

"A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit". [Matt. 7.18]

I would like to add, "a tree who knows who he is..." For me, that is how it all makes sense.

"But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace, To reveal his Son in me ..." [Gal.1.15-16]

How is anyone going to "know" who they are? The only way is by revelation. And He will reveal His Son in you and in me. At first reading one might say, "...reveal His Son to me ..." But that's not what it says. The word is "in me". The Son is in you.

"For me to live is Christ ..." [Phil. 1.21]

He's not only living in you, but living as you.

So, again, what "self" do you actually lose? The self that thinks it is independent. The self that thinks it must attain goodness or "Christ-like-ness". The "self" comes into proper perspective when it knows that "for me to live is Christ living in me – as me."

The Son revealed in the sons and daughters.

End of Study on Losing One's Self

I4

THE MEANING OF UNION

What is meant by “union”? “Union” expresses a “right now” reality for all who believe in Jesus. Now, is belief in the historical person, Jesus of Nazareth, required for “union” reality? That is a good question for another day. It should be clear though that the Jesus we know is truly not the Man, Jesus, who lived some 2000 years ago. We do believe in Him and we know somewhat, historically, about Him. But the One we know in our hearts and in our spirits is the eternal Jesus – the eternal Christ – the eternal Messiah. At this point you may be confused or even troubled that I make this distinction. Read on.

If you are reading this you have “union” or are “in union” with God. All those who believe are really and truly in union with their Creator. The much more important question is if we know this reality, this union. And, we may not know it - yet.

I am talking about moving into the “inner knowing” of union. This discussion must start with how you perceive yourself at this moment. This “moment” is the only one you have. I’m not sure if there really is another moment other than the one we experience presently. Jesus is certainly the Alpha and the Omega – the beginning and end, but we only know this one moment at a time. We must find Him and our union, oneness with our Creator, in this moment.

There are certain realities in life for the believer. So, when I say that all believers are in union with their Creator; that is a reality. And, reality is not changed or altered by your opinion of what is real. But the day to day living in this reality is affected by your perception of reality and, in turn, your perception of yourself.

There are three very distinct perceptions of who or what you know and believe yourself to be. The best scriptural reference I know, and, refer to often, regarding personal perception, is found in I John 2.12-13:

“I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for his name’s sake. I write unto you, fathers, because ye have known him that is from the beginning. I write unto you, young men, because ye have overcome the wicked one. I write unto you, little children, because ye have known the Father.”

John refers to three categories of perception, Children, Young Men and Fathers. These are not three categories of personhood, only of perception and understanding at the moment. There are not three categories of believers. In fact we are all Fathers – we just don’t all know it. But when we do - we know our “union”. You always are in union with God, but you might not be fully aware of it at this moment. But, there are eternal reasons and meaning for each category.

John says,

“Children, Young Men and Fathers”. [1 John 2.12-13]

The category you find yourself in is merely your perception of yourself. Of course we all have all sorts of perceptions and thoughts, but these are the basic three – Children, Young Men and Fathers – and it’s intent is to be gender neutral.

“Children” see or perceive themselves in a childlike relationship with God.

“I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for his name’s sake.” [I John 2.12]

That person is probably new to the faith and may have had a dramatic conversion experience. God, who was far off, is now near and He is kind and loving and basically, “Daddy”. It’s a sweet time for those who really need a Daddy. The Child is basically a “taker” and not a “giver” and, in basic, early immature perception, not much help in the furtherance of the Kingdom. This is not a criticism, only a factual statement of where we all began.

In the Child stage “forgiveness of sin” is big – for many - really big. I say that because there are many that come to faith in Jesus with a checkered past. Their life gets a complete makeover upon faith in Jesus. So, knowing the burden and the penalty of sin is lifted and that you have eternal life because of the vicarious death of the Savior, life is wonderful and changing, perhaps rapidly.

So, we said that “Child” is the start in how you perceive yourself in this new life of faith and knowing God. And, just as a human child, the reality is that you’re not going to stay a “Child” forever. Some try, but inevitably all will move on.

And, just as a human child, you are totally on the receiving end, dependent on others. And, as it should be, the Child is full of awe and wonder. The Child has many questions and no end of the more “experienced” willing to give advice and guidance. Everyone wants to make sure the Child gets started on the right foot.

Most, new to Christianity, approach it as one would approach anything new – get with the program - find out what you can - associate with others. Advice is freely given by those further down the road.

Up until salvation God is seen as far off. He appears to be a separate entity from me. We seem to exist in the same universe, but He is “up” in heaven and I am “down” here on earth. But, after salvation - we now know Him, personally, intuitively, and before we did not. But basically He still appears to be “outside” or “separate” from us. Christianity is now seen as a thing to be learned, a program to do, Bible verses to memorize, quiet times to have, church to join and bible studies to attend. It can all get very complicated very quickly. It did for me.

I became a believer in Jesus at 18 years of age. I was born and raised Jewish and then, a few months after my moment of faith in Jesus, got baptized and confirmed in the Roman Catholic Church at Sacred Heart

University in Bridgeport, Connecticut. Next, I was baptized Southern Baptist at James Avenue Baptist Church in Fort Worth, Texas. Next, I learned about communal living at the Episcopal Church of the Redeemer in Houston, Texas. I attended Bill Gothard's Institute in Basic Youth Conflicts. And finally, I got the "Holy Ghost" complete with my own prayer language. All this occurred before my 20th birthday. Not bad for a Jewish kid from New York.

I was a mess. What happened? What happened to the simplicity of "Daddy"...my sins are forgiven... and I'm going to heaven? Well, what happened was my Child stage of Christianity was over and I commenced life as a Young Man.

"I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one." [I John 2.14]

While my life history may be different than yours, we all have similar feelings, emotions and psychology regarding our progression from Children to Young Men and on to Fatherhood. Before jumping into the "Young Man" discussion, it is crucial to understand what Christian "growth" means and to review some basics.

Let's discuss "Christian" growth. First, consider a human embryo. Upon conception that human has the genetic potential for all he or she will ever be. While the human will grow from a microscopic size to a full grown person – the fertilized egg, genetically speaking, is a complete human being. That embryo will never become more of a human being or a better human being. In the very same sense the "child" Christian – while new in the faith – is a complete Christian. In fact, better still, a complete person. The Child will never become more of a Christian or a better person. The Child will never be closer to God or have more of Him. The Child is a 100% complete Christian at salvation.

Now, you would never ever say that because a human being is young or small, that somehow they are not a complete person. Physical growth does not affect the reality of who a human, or a person, is. The confusing point is that, as Christians, we equate Christian growth with getting closer to God by learning more about Him or living a more

ethical or moral existence – doing what “Jesus would do” – becoming more “Christ-like”. This is primarily because in the “Child” and “Young Man” stages, God is still perceived as external or a separate Being – which is a misconception – as He is neither external nor separate.

In reality God chose to deem the entire creation lost - not some more than others – just all lost. All need forgiveness – all need a Savior. What He did at that point did not depend upon a human – with the exception of One – Jesus Christ. The crucifixion is the one and final sacrifice needed to bring the entire creation to redemption.

“...though the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things ...[Col. 1.20]

And, the crucifixion is not just a historical event, but rather eternal.

So, when a person avails their self to the free gift of redemption, a very common prayer used by many, upon their first exercise of faith is, “Come into my heart, Lord Jesus”. Well, guess what? That is actually and precisely what happens. Why would anyone doubt that? His Spirit is now joined to your spirit. His Heart and your heart are one. An eternal, Holy Union of God to man is created upon that exercise of faith. It does not get “better” or “more”. It simply is. We should be crystal clear on that point. It really, really doesn’t get any better. Union is not a relationship that can be measured. It simply is. The only relevant question remaining, and what we are really talking about here is, “do I know it?” Do I know my union? And the reality is that a Child or Young Man really cannot know their union. The union is real however, but it simply is not for the Child or Young Man to fathom – not at the moment.

So basically, in a flash, at the moment of faith, you go from lost to found – sinner to saint. Jesus really, really comes into your heart and you are now born again as a new creation in Christ. There are no better or worse sinners. By the same token there are no better or worse saints. You either are or you are not. And, of course if you are reading this – “you are”. So, if there actually is such a thing as “Christian growth”, it is and can only be in the human understanding of who you already are, not in the reality of who you are.

So, Christian growth is all about understanding, not about becoming. At the moment of salvation His Spirit formed a union with your spirit. Despite the eternal truth that you are in Spirit to spirit union with the King of Kings, you may not know that. The eyes of a Child or a Young Man can still perceive Him as being distant and a distinct Being.

We now enter the Young Man stage. Remember, this is how you think and perceive yourself. John describes the Young Man:

“...I write unto you, young men, because ye have overcome the wicked one.... I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one.” [I John 2.12-14]

I want to mention my thought on the use of gender terminology in the Bible. First, gender designation is not relevant. Young “men” are also young “women”. “Fathers” are also “mothers”. God, while normally referred to as Father, is also Mother. In that regard there could be no human or animal mothers, with all the characteristics normally ascribed to mothers, unless those characteristics came from God and were in fact part of the expression of His Person. Having said that, however, I will use the Biblical terminology of “Man” and “Father”. It should be understood that I also mean “Woman” and “Mother”.

“...I write unto you, young men, because ye have overcome the wicked one.... I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one.” [I John 2.12-14]

Require

We all leave the “Child” stage and move into “Young Man”. Here the emphasis is strength, knowledge of the written word, and power to overcome evil. Young Man is a necessary stage, but it is just that – a “stage”, not a place to remain. In this stage we all make the designed mistake and error of seeing oneself as a participant in a self-

improvement program called Christianity. God designed this stage of understanding in preparation for Fatherhood.

The Young Man stage is designed to thoroughly allow each and every one of us to come to the end of our selves. It can be a frustrating stage where the Christian equates growth with gaining knowledge and becoming powerful. And this is necessary and important, but that will not be obvious at first. For a time you must think it is all “about you” – you are strong – you know the bible – you know how to fight satan – you – you – you. But this stage must end, and it will, at the end of your rope. You’ve done that once – come to the end of your rope when you invited Jesus into your heart. You stopped rationalizing, theorizing and avoiding the truth. You fell on your face before the King of Kings and embraced the truth of Who He Is and finally acknowledged His great love for you. You did exercise that mustard seed of faith and commenced your relationship with the King of the Universe.

Now, as a Young Man you will come to the end of your rope again. The Young Man will attempt to perfect his Christianity – not knowing it is already perfect. The Young Man will work very hard at Christianity and may spend many years doing just that. So, what is the “plan”? The Young Man approaches Christianity as a religion – a self-improvement religion. He busies himself memorizing scripture, which is a good thing really, fighting the devil and being proud of how strong he thinks he is. The Young Man will pray “God fill this place with your Spirit” – or – “God give me the strength, or wisdom or faith or whatever – God give me something so I can do [whatever]”. The Young Man still sees God as external – separate from himself. He thinks he must wake God up to the problems of the world. God is somewhere else; perhaps sleeping, and must be entreated to “do such and such a thing”. “Strength” is seen as a thing to be acquired – that God will give you “strength” if you ask Him properly.

“[Y]e are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one.” [I John 2.12-14]

This is not a directive to accomplish, only a statement of fact. This is how the Young Man sees himself, the next understanding, not the last.

This is a necessary stage and God allows the Young Man to go on his merry way with his misconception that his strength comes from within himself and that he can develop more by, perhaps, reading and memorizing more scripture and prayer and commitment and morality and whatever else he thinks will make him a better Christian. The Young Man will, eventually fall flat on his face and say “it’s not working”. Actually, there is no guarantee that he will. But hopefully he will. The reason I say “hopefully” is that there are some that never do, but go on through life seeing God as an external being and their life-long purpose to improve their Christianity. But, thankfully for many, the Young Man will be frustrated with his inability to move forward, as he thinks he should, into Christian maturity. He is now ripe for the next step – Fatherhood.

When I was young all I wanted to do was play football. So I did all the things I thought I needed to do to be a better football player. I saw it as a progression from “not a good football player” to someday, maybe, if I worked hard enough, to a “great football player”.

In error, based on what I knew about life at that time, I approached Christianity the same way that I approached football. I wanted to go from being a beginner, a novice Christian, to being a great Christian. So I did everything I thought I should do, and believe me, there were many well-intentioned people, willing to pile on all the requirements.

I got a bible. I got another bible. I got a better bible. I got a concordance. I joined a church. I joined another church. I joined a better church. I read the bible. I listened to sermons. I took notes. I went to bible studies. I taught bible studies. I memorized scripture. I witnessed and actually won people to Christ.

The great misconception of Christianity is that it is about “me”. However, the great truth of Christianity is that “me” is done - dead. But, “me” is alive. Actually, “it is Christ that lives in me”.

“I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me...” [Gal. 2.20]

“For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God.” [Col. 3.3]

When I was twenty-six years old I played minor league football in

Wisconsin. One summer day in 1980 I was running wind sprints along Lake Michigan. I have been telling myself for seven years that I was in Union with my Creator, however, only understanding that truth on an intellectual level. Well, in mid-stride, I stopped on a dime. I said, "I'm dead". Not only did I agree with Paul, but I understood. In a flash I understood on a heart level what I had been saying on an intellectual level since I was nineteen years old.

"For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God." [Col. 3.3]

Very soon thereafter I also understood the following.

"I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me..." [Gal. 2.20]

The Young Man stage ends with the heart knowing of the truth that a "dead" person is unable to improve one's self. How is it possible to go from a "not so good Christian" to a "great Christian"? What part of "dead" is going to become a better, more devoted Christian? What part of "dead" can live an ethics – morals – values based life? No part, whatsoever! The understanding – revelation – epiphany of Fatherhood – and of true Christianity for that matter, begins when a person understands that their life is over and that it is Christ that lives His life as you. Now, I will discuss this later, but this does not mean you live a "dead" life? By no means! Your life will be full and vibrant with true Life – Him as you and you as Him.

There are many fine religions in the world. When I say that I mean that if you are looking for an ethical or moral lifestyle and you want to make that lifestyle your religion, you have some good choices. Christianity, however, is not a religion. But, when it is approached as religion, as the Young Man does, Christianity fails. You will fail at Christianity and Christianity will fail you, that is, if you approach it as a lifestyle of ethics and morality.

"Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life..." [John 14.6]

So, “Life” is not a thing to be possessed, earned or created. Life is a Person – a Person that lives His life as us. It is quite humbling to grasp that He actually chooses to live His life in me and you, as me and you. But, upon recognition of the failure of Christianity as religion, and realization that Life is a Person, you commence the process of

“Christ ...[being] formed in you”. [Gal. 4.19]

Christ, Himself, living in and as us is not a religion. Jesus did not found a religion. Christianity is the living Christ, living in and as us.

Certain things in life must be learned by failure. And, certain things in life can only be known by first knowing the opposite. Christianity is no exception. You will probably never grasp the truth of your Union and that He lives in you until you become frustrated and feeling a failure when Christianity is approached as a self-improvement program.

Recall, John tells us that there are three stages of understanding or perception of our identity in Christ – Children, Young Men and Fathers. [I John 2.12-13] In the first two stages we perceive ourselves as independent beings – I’m here and God is there. As “independent beings” we go through all manner of exercises and programs as we attempt to work at and perfect our Christianity. Some use terminology such as our “walk with God”. Even that seemingly harmless phrase is so totally misleading. We don’t walk with Him. He walks in us. There is a difference. It’s all in how you see yourself. In Fatherhood we see and understand the difference between “walking with God” and “God walking in us”. But first, you must be thoroughly grounded in your attempt to live and see yourself as an independent being, perfecting your version of Christianity before you move on to Fatherhood.

Having started Christianity at a relatively advanced age [18] the whole deal came flying at me very quickly. At age 19, about 13 months after my salvation, I heard my first message of “union” - Fatherhood. I had the privilege [coincidence?] of accepting an invitation from a friend to hear an old missionary speak at All Saints Episcopal Church in Fort Worth, Texas. At that point, in my short Christian existence, I really had heard every different take on “real” Christianity but this old missionary’s message was different.

On that day in January 1973, at age 19, I really don't recall exactly what that old missionary, NPG, said, but I knew he was on to something. That's understatement, as he was probably on to something from before my father was born. He encouraged me to see myself as God's asset not His liability. And so, for the next seven and one-half years I said, to myself, over and over that I, David Heisler, am the David Heisler form and expression of the Christ. And, that is exactly what John meant when he said "Father". And that is true. But, for those seven and one-half years I really didn't "get it". It was initially only a concept to me – a concept I whole-heartedly accepted and wanted to know – but only a concept, none-the-less.

So, why should we know our union? Because "Christ must be formed in you" [Gal. 4.19] – and the "forming" is the "knowing" – intuitively, permanently, unquestionably. And, the reality is the forming has already happened and now must be grasped. You must own your possession. You must step out and know and be who you are.

As a Father you now know that He lives His life, not just in you, but as you. You drop the Child and Young Man notions of self-improvement and attaining or obtaining a better Christianity. You stop running down those dead ends.

Why is that so important? Why must we know this?

We must all take our best shot at grasping, understanding and living in the full expression of who we really are. Human beings are the highest form of created beings; higher than angels. With all due respect to the angels, and believe me I don't want to anger one of those great warriors, but they know nothing of faith as we do. They see God face to face. As humans, locked in time and space, we simply don't see Him that way. Moses might have. But, we, for the most part, operate in a realm of faith and intuition, but not always by sight.

"The just shall live by faith." [Habakkuk 2.4 and Romans 1.17]

We are sons and daughters of God.

"Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ." [Gal. 4.7]

This is a strong affirmation of our personhood. As I said earlier, we are God's assets in this world. And, indeed His best assets. So we must settle once and for all the question of who we really are.

And "who we are" is plain. We are Fathers, gender neutral – men and women. Fathers know their identity. Fathers know and are settled in the reality that He lives His life in us and as us. And Who is He that lives His Life in and through us? In the Old Testament He tells us His name – "I am". Jesus also said "I am". But that sort of begs the question – "I am who – I am what?" Well, He answers that question also ...

So Who is the One that lives His Life in, through and as us? He says His name is

"I AM". [Exodus 3.14]

John describes Him as the embodiment of "Love".

"God is love". [1 John 4.8]

So it is that Love Himself lives His Life as us. So, who we really are, as Him, is becoming very clear. And we must be thoroughly grounded in this reality.

So, one thing we know is that love is not an emotion; although love can be felt. It is not a thing to be obtained. More properly Love is a Person -The Person. You will never be the originator of love nor own it or get more as if it were a thing to be obtained – but you will be an expression of The Person Who is Love.

Why is this important? Because - Love exists for others. Love has no other purpose. Consider the following. If God made a choice – and that is hard to imagine because "choice" is really a temporal word – a word for time and space. But, let's say, He sat down one day and made a choice. Well, His choices are obvious. He could be alone – or - He could have created all that exists to serve Him – or - and the choice He obviously made, was that He could serve and, in fact, die for His creation. Well, if that's not the best definition of love – I don't know how to define love. And guess what that says about us?

The Child sees his "Christian" life as how it benefits him; "My sins

are forgiven”, “I’m going to Heaven”. The Young Man also sees his “Christian” life as how it benefits him; “I am strong” – “I know the bible” – “I can whip the devil”. Or worse – the Young Man can get into doing this or that to obtain “blessings” or “wealth” or “health” or whatever. The Young Man can be very self-centered.

The Father is different. He knows the difference between the improved life and the replaced life. The difference should be clear. The Child or Young Man does not understand that he is in fact dead – crucified with Christ.

“I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live ; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me ...” [Gal. 2.20]

He doesn’t understand that one that is dead cannot in any way improve.

“For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God.” [Col. 3.3]

So the Child or Young Man may go many years, perhaps the rest of his life trying to improve or be better at his Christianity. The Father knows the truth. By revelation and intuition the Father knows that just as surely as he has been crucified with Christ, he has now been replaced in his spirit by God’s Spirit. The replacement is not partial nor is it temporal. The replacement is permanent and complete with no lack and no room for improvement.

The Father knows that his life is not about him or for him. The Father knows he lives his life for others. He is Christ in his world. He is the lover in his world. But, the Father has rested his efforts, as God on the 7th day when His work was done. [Gen. 2.2-3]. The work of creating who we are is done and now we just live. We did not achieve and cannot improve the eternal fact of union and fatherhood and now know we are Christ in our world. The Father does not try to “live his life for others”. He just lives with the knowledge and assurance that his life is, in fact, for others. He lives with a wink, as the old missionary would say. That “wink” is the same wink Jesus gave to Philip, when He said, “...he that hath seen me hath seen the Father ...” [John 14.9] Jesus didn’t try to be

anyone or anything. He just lived, day by day, and spoke the truth. He knew that his life would be the “ransom for many”. [Matt. 20.28] And, He knew He could not make it so. He could only live and yield to the truth.

John says an amazing truth about the Fathers.

“I write unto you, fathers, because ye have known him that is from the beginning.” [I John 2.13]

Think about that. You and I know Him, the One “from the beginning”. This is not an external knowing. This is an internal, intuitive and intimate knowing. This is Union. You already have Union – His Spirit joined eternally and unchangeably to your spirit. And what does that mean? It means you are already a Father and you can stop trying to be anyone or anything.

So – we are now the expression of Him who is Love. And, we are in fact Love ourselves. We were not created to be a race of immature Children and Young Men. There is no eternal purpose in being self-centered – “getting the blessings” like kids in a candy store. We are Fathers, not immature Children or Young Men. These are bold words, but we must speak them and ultimately know our Fatherhood, intimately, intuitively and without doubt.

The truth is that we are mature. We do know who we are. We are safe. We are His expression. He is the Lover. We are lovers. He is the Creator. We are creators. He gave His Life. We shall give our lives. This is truly Christianity. This is our destiny from before our birth. “Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, *and* I ordained thee ...” [Jeremiah 1.5]

We must settle this question of our identity at Fathers in Christ. The conscious understanding of Fatherhood is what Paul described to be

“renewed in the spirit of your mind ...” [Ephesians 4.23]

“...be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind ...” [Romans 12.2]

Understanding that, as a Father, you exist for others is very different and very much bigger than your original thoughts about Christianity.

Look again at how John describes Fathers:

“I write unto you, fathers, because ye have known him that is from the beginning.” [I John 2.13]

There is such clarity in that vantage point – knowing Him – the One from the beginning. All the nonsense of religious Christianity drops away at that point. Get it? It is not religion – it is knowing Him.

“And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.” [John 17.3]

That statement is beyond human grasp – except by intuition.

So how do you get it? How do you “know” your union? How do you know “Him from the beginning”? Well, for one, you are in union with your Creator and therefore a Father. That fact is eternally true. Appearances and feelings are irrelevant as to eternal truth.

“For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things”. [1 John 3.20]

How you feel, even in your heart, may not be relevant, unless your feelings align with eternal truth. So do not worry if you don’t “feel” it.

But, He will give confirmation of reality – eventually. That old missionary talked about expressing faith like committing yourself to a chair. Have you ever seen someone sit in a chair and the chair broke. I have. It’s very funny if it’s not you. It does happen. Sometimes chairs break. He does not break. So, just take your seat and relax in Him.

You must fall backwards into Him like you would fall backwards into a chair. The only difference is that He will never, ever fail you and, most important, is that at some point you will realize that it is not you that hold Him, but He that holds you. You will realize that you do not hold Christianity together by anything you do – praying, reading,

singing, fellowshiping, tithing – or any of the other “so-called” Christian activities. All is dependent upon Him, period.

At some point it will simply occur to you that – what you have said a thousand or ten thousand times that, “He lives His life as me”, is true. It may hit you like a ton of eternal bricks. And there will be confirmation. You will know your Union as a Father, brother of Jesus and a co-creator.

But, as sure as the sun will rise in the east – the reality and truth is that you were crucified with Christ – and – now the life you live, is Him living, as you. And the great part, it really is you. You, with all your interests, desires and all that concerns you, is exactly who you were created to be. So follow your passions and stop second guessing your motives.

Further, it is not your job to give the confirmation – it is His. So, basically just forget about it – let Him be Himself in you, as you. And, so, in the words of Forrest Gump, “that’s all I have to say about that [for now]”

End of Study on The Meaning of Union

15

THE MOCKERY OF MORALITY

By and large Christianity has been reduced to a moral code or simply a set of rules to “live by”. While, on the one hand that is quite unfortunate, on the other it is divinely appointed so that we may see the futility of such a lifestyle. Futility in things of the Spirit often lead to a personal collapse and then, eventually to the truth of our eternal Spirit Union with Him. So, in a sense, sometimes we have to take the wrong road, experience it, know it and finally reject it.

Across the spectrum, churches that I have personally experienced, liberal and conservative Christianity, the “morality of Christianity” is present. We are either urged to live by a set of rules or condemned for not.

I used to attend a Saturday morning men’s meeting, of 20 or so, at a particular church. On one morning a man in his 30’s was given the podium. He was bemoaning something about his marriage. I whispered to a mature gentleman to my left that “God used my divorce for His purpose”. Whoa! Did that get a response! And not a nice one either. The “gentle man” turned to me and firmly, almost to the point of anger, attempted to “straighten my wagon”. He said, “God hates divorce.” I must admit, in one of the very few moments in life I did not know how

to respond. I was familiar with the verse that he was referring to, but I really needed to go home and look it up. And I did.

So, who's mocking morality? Maybe we all should really, because, what is our morality anyway?

“But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags ...” [Isaiah 64.6]

That's right, the morality we impose on ourselves and others are filthy rags. All of it. Sometimes we want to categorize “pre-salvation” immorality [sin] separate as distinct from “post-salvation” attempts at morality. Well, it's all the same – filthy rags, every bit.

Oh, but the games we play on ourselves and others! Divorce is one of the bigger morality games in Christendom. Let me be perfectly clear that this series is not about divorce. I only use divorce as an example. People are told, by those in authority, that they run the risk of losing their salvation if they divorce. And so, I return to the authoritarian statement made by my friend at the men's meeting – “God hates divorce”. So, I went home and looked it up.

“Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously against the wife of his youth. For the LORD, the God of Israel, saith that he hateth putting away ... therefore take heed to your spirit, that ye deal not treacherously.” [Malachi 2.15-16]

God seems to hate “putting away”. Is “putting away” the same thing as “divorce”?

This topic is really not about divorce. I use divorce only as an example of “God in the box” mentality and the fact so many want to reduce Christianity to a set of rules. “Putting away”, as described by Malachi, is not divorce as many mistakenly call it. “Putting away” was a practice that could be used by any man, and not just in biblical times, whereby he could basically kick his wife “to the curb”. If he wanted a new wife or perhaps just a girlfriend, he could essentially disown his wife, throw her out penniless and without her children. That is purely

an example of one human being thinking, and acting as if, they are a better or a more important human being than another. And God should hate that mentality. I do and I'm sure you do also. But, that's not divorce.

We go about "establishing our own righteousness" [Rom 10.3]

and make a blanket claim that God "hates divorce" and, by analogy, those who are divorced. The "religion of Christianity" always erroneously tries to exclude some perceived sin from the cleansing and atoning blood of the Savior. "Putting away" is any time one person considers them self better than another. But we categorize constantly – "you're divorced", "you're gay", "you're Catholic" or "whatever". It's all "putting away". My "friend" was "putting me away" into my well-deserved "box", in danger of hell-fire, because I am divorced. And this self-defined morality is constant in Christianity and so many are ostracized and, at times, clearly communicated that they are not welcome into the "fellowship".

God mocks morality. "Putting away" is a hateful thing and has no place in the Kingdom. And man-made morality always leads to someone "putting away" someone else. In Christianity we want to put everyone, including God, into our arbitrary morality box with rules and regulations and damnation for violations. Well, God does not honor our arbitrary morality. Yes, as I said to the gentleman seated to my left, "God caused my divorce – for His purposes". God didn't allow it or make best use of it – He planned it and caused it to happen. Even though it was a terrible time for me, I know why it happened, and if you know me personally, you know why also.

Now, let's look at an example of one of my ancestors, King David. David had a harem of wives and girlfriends. He never divorced them, so he is okay on that. But he did something much worse than divorce. He had a man murdered to steal his wife.

"And it came to pass in the morning, that David wrote a letter to Joab, and sent it by the hand of Uriah. And he wrote in the letter, saying, Set

ye Uriah in the forefront of the hottest battle, and retire ye from him, that he may be smitten, and die.” [2 Sam. 11.14-15]

And Uriah, in the army of Israel, was slain in battle, exactly as intended by David. Why did David, a man whose heart was perfect with God do this? Because, David had an affair with Uriah’s wife, Bathsheba, and she was carrying David’s child.

So, David gets Bathsheba pregnant and has her husband, Uriah sent to the front line to be killed in the war – in other words, murdered. So what should be our “moral” reaction to such sinful behavior? And God was not happy about the murder.

“But the thing that David had done displeased the LORD” [2 Sam. 11.27]

Yet, David is described as a man whose heart was

“perfect with the Lord his God”. [I Kings 15.3]

Confusing? In modern Christianity we would expect David would be getting on line to go to hell and no good thing would come of any of this. Wrong.

The second child born to Bathsheba by David is King Solomon. And, according to Matthew, King Solomon is a direct ancestor of Jesus Christ.

“David the king begat Solomon of her that had been the wife of Urias ... And Jacob begat Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ.” [Matt. 1.6 - 16]

Doesn’t it just make you want to jump up on your morality soapbox and say, “Come on God, you could have done better than that!” And He could have, if He wasn’t busy mocking our morality. Why was Bathsheba the one to bear Solomon? David had any number of other wives. And, Solomon spent 46 years of his life building God’s temple.

And, Solomon is in direct lineage to Jesus' step-father Joseph. I guess you could say God "allowed" all this – but really – is all this just a coincidence?

Is the whole story of David and Bathsheba an accident or coincidence? King Solomon and Jesus are products of this relationship. Clearly, by modern standards, this whole situation was immoral and sinful. Did God simply allow this and in retrospect make the best of a bad situation? Or rather, did God mock our morality and intend and cause this "immoral" relationship? If not, then why couldn't Solomon and Jesus have been the children of one of David's legitimate wives? No, this is not some cosmic accident or coincidence. Rather, its outcome is a prime example of God's mockery of morality.

Consider also the very birth of Jesus. Our faith allows us to accept the fact that Mary was a virgin and that she was made to bear a child by the Spirit of God. But what we don't consider is what this looked like at that time in history. In today's world the fact of an unwed teenage mother is not so unusual. But consider the difference in Mary's world. What do you think people really thought of this 15 year old girl, pregnant but not married? In reality very few people knew the truth. "Are you pregnant Mary?" "Yes, God made me pregnant." I'm sure that went over well! Joseph considered to "put her away", until convinced by the angel otherwise. Probably Mary was labeled a "tramp" and she lived with that her entire adult life. Do you think anyone, other than very close family, believed the truth? Maybe no one did. And consider Jesus. He was probably considered by many "illegitimate". What a great way for the Son of God to start His life.

So, Jesus probably bore the stigma of "illegitimacy" His entire life. No wonder He was not honored in His hometown. And just as with King David, why did God "allow" such an immoral appearance to stigmatize the birth and life of His Son? Why couldn't Mary have married Joseph, remained a virgin and then become pregnant by the Spirit? At least it would have looked better to the moralists of her day.

The answer is clear. God doesn't live by our arbitrary rules of morality. And clearly He doesn't "make the best of a bad situation". He intends! He directs!

At this point you may want to accuse me of exactly what Paul was accused of.

“And not rather, [as we be slanderously reported, and as some affirm that we say,] Let us do evil, that good may come? whose damnation is just.” [Rom. 3.8]

Well, that’s not it at all.

It all goes back to the Garden of Eden. God planted two trees - The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil and the Tree of Life. God had one prohibition – “don’t eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil”. “Good and Evil” is another way of saying “morality”. However, no prohibition was placed upon the Tree of Life. The Tree of Life is Jesus.

God not only mocks morality, He prohibits us from indulging in morality. And, it even gets worse. The “life of morality” is the death sentence.

“But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.” [Gen. 2.17]

The prohibited tree – Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil - is religion with all its rules, regulations, morality, finger-pointing, accusations, and damnation for violations.

Do you think God mocks all the nonsense of morality for no reason? He mocks for a purpose. There is no life in morality or “religious living”. It’s not even, “there’s no good life”. There is no life at all. There is death only. So where do we find life? Or rather where do we find Life?

“Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.” [John 14.6]

“And out of the ground made the LORD God to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food; the tree of life also in the

midst of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil.”
[Gen. 2.9]

And Who is the Tree of Life?

“Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.” [John 14.6]

Everything is personal. There is no reality in the abstract. Certainly “Life” is not a thing nor is it a tree, at least not a tree in the common sense of the word. The Tree of Life is Jesus. Jesus is Life. Let’s be clear. There is no Life apart from Him. He made all things. [John 1.3] And, “in Him was life” [John 1.4].

Clearly humanity was given the choice from Day One, in the Garden of Eden. The choice was clear. Adam, or really us, could choose either Life, as represented by the Tree of Life or morality as represented by the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. I am not particularly moved or concerned that humanity, in Adam, in the first instance, chose morality and, in the long run its logical conclusion, namely religion. And, as far as I can tell, we will all, all humans that is, initially choose religion or some form of morality as expressed in “good and evil”.

And we will be firmly planted and rooted in that misconception until we see, grasp and understand our Union with Him.

So, as we have seen from the examples of King David and Bathsheba right through the birth of Jesus, God is not nearly concerned about outward appearances of morality as sometimes we are. And, what did Jesus say about Himself?

“The Son of man came eating and drinking, and they say, Behold a man gluttonous, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners.”
[Matt. 11.19]

Jesus admits that He is accused of drinking to excess, overeating and associating with unsavory characters. And, curiously, He never defends Himself or says that He is unjustly accused. He doesn’t seem to care

about the accusations. He doesn't seem to be concerned about the "way it looks". He's not concerned about the opinion of the moralists of His day.

Jesus is only concerned about the truth about Himself.

"Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." [John 14.6]

So, there you have it. It's not morality. Not at all. It's Him. It's the Tree of Life. It's not the "way of life". It's not about moral living. It never was.

Do you see the significance of what Jesus is saying and what John is saying about Him? You will only get to the Father by Him. You will not get to the Father by any other method or person. You will not get to the Father by morality – rules to live by – way of life – doing good and avoiding evil. Once you get to Him, morality has no significance.

I think the point is clear. This life is not about morality, at least not in the common sense of the word. Nor is this a "way of life" or a set of rules to live by. In fact, as we have seen, He may choose to break all the common rules of morality. So, what's it all about?

"I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing." [John 15.5]

The example Jesus used of vine and branches is union. And, it is a concept, as we are really not branches of a vine. But it is a good concept because often it is difficult to say or see where the vine ends and the branches begin. So, vine and branches live in union with each other. And, in a real sense they need each other. The branch cannot live apart from the vine as the vine provides the life for the branch. But the vine has no expression without the branch. The vine needs the branch as much as the branch needs the vine.

This concept allows us to picture and understand Union Life. When you internalize your union with Him you see life so much deeper

than a set of morals. It is Life to life. He is the Originator and we the expression. And, just as the line blurs with vine and branches so it blurs with us and Him. In time we don't see ourselves as separate from Him or just the expression of Another. We come to realize our full inheritance and life as sons and daughters. And, accordingly, we just live.

End of Study on The Mockery of Morality

I6

MORE THAN CONQUERORS

“Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.” Romans 8.37

“Conquer” means to “overcome or take control”.

We love verses like this. They challenge us to be better, more responsible Christians. They push us into more Christian service. This verse is emotional and makes us feel good. It is a rallying point to organize ourselves, others, pick a goal and accomplish it. And, I’m not criticizing any of that. If even one person comes to Jesus, as a result, then, much good is accomplished.

In my formative years in Christianity I often heard this verse in conjunction with some action that I should be doing or some “sin” I should be avoiding. In any event it was always about some aspect of self-improvement or being a better Christian. I mean isn’t that what the verse says? I am to be a “conqueror” and, not just any “conqueror”, but a “conqueror through Him”.

I guess this all begs the question. What are we conquering? Are we conquering sin? Are we conquering the world? Are we conquering ourselves?

And, there’s all sorts of organizations that take on this banner –

“Conquerors through Christ” – just Google that phrase. And, when you peel away the organization and the executive salaries I suppose they’re doing something positive for the Kingdom, so that is a good thing. But, for our purposes, let’s examine what this verse is all about.

There is a larger context in Romans Eight. Paul is talking about one’s personal, intimate understanding of who they are in Christ, because, that’s what it’s all about. In fact, that’s all I talk about. Our “religion” is so invested in religious activity and it is, almost in spite of Christianity, that we discover our true identity in Christ. At times Christianity has so turned us inside out with piles of nonsense, until we finally get some perspective, and have to ask ourselves the question – “who am I really?”

So it would seem that Paul’s readers in Romans Eight needed some course correction. Apparently, even after their salvation and, at least fundamental knowledge of their inheritance as sons and daughters of God and brothers and sisters of Jesus, the Romans are still wondering who they really are – their true identity. And, almost comically they are asking the age-old question, “Once saved always saved?”

The Romans are unsure, not confident and not safe yet.

I don’t think this verse has anything to do with the “outwardly” conquering of anything whatsoever. This verse is all about conquering our inward fears, immaturity and self-doubt. This verse is all about knowing our eternal permanence as a true branch of the true vine. Let’s look at the context.

Paul starts with: “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?” He proceeds to name everyone and everything imaginable that might try, but can’t do it. “... tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ... neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord..” [Romans 8.35-37]

Did Paul leave anyone or anything out? I doubt it. The Romans were unsure of their permanent and eternal position in Christ, still concerned that they can or will somehow be separated from Christ. The Romans didn’t yet understand that He has taken permanent residence

in them. They, much less, had a clue that they are His expression. They are worried about their salvation, whether it can be lost. They have no clue that their lives are not their own anymore.

“Conquering” must initially be internal. We often get that backwards. We busy ourselves with all manner of “external conquering” commonly called “Christian service” – doing this and doing that. We can often act the part quite well. And there is nothing wrong with Christian service, however you interpret it, so long as you are not hurting others. But, there are extremes that we should avoid. And, often the frustration of the “doing” the “Christian” stuff eventually causes us to look inside and ask the question, “who am I really?”

I think the Romans were actually there – wanting inner peace and knowledge of their personhood. So, Paul, very strongly encourages them that they are safe and eternally in Him. He states, without a doubt, that nothing or no one will separate them from Him. Paul gives the words of encouragement to enable the Romans to “more than conquer” their inner doubts and allow them to move on in Him.

So, where does this leave us? Well, when we are safe sons and daughters and we know, without reasonable doubt, who we are in Him, then we can go out and “conquer” the world. Why not? When you know that you are His love agent, never to be separated from Him and never to be anyone but an agent of perfect and eternal love, then you are safe to go and be and conquer whatever you want. So, I encourage you. Know yourself. Know yourself as Him in your world. Go, be more than a conqueror in your world with Love.

End of Study on More than Conquerors

I7

MOSES – ELIAS – JESUS

The big three – law, prophecy and grace – we should do it all, right? Maybe.

“And after six days Jesus taketh Peter, James, and John his brother, and bringeth them up into an high mountain apart, And was transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light. And, behold, there appeared unto them Moses and Elias talking with him. Then answered Peter, and said unto Jesus, Lord, it is good for us to be here: if thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias.” [Matt. 17.1-4]

Three tabernacles – Moses [law], Elias [Elijah – prophecy] and Jesus [grace] - that’s what Peter wanted, so that should be right - right? Isn’t that what we do in Christianity? We have created a religion that mixes law, prophecy and grace? That’s what we should do, right?

“While he yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them: and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in

whom I am well pleased; hear ye him. And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their face, and were sore afraid.” [Matt. 17.5-6]

No, Christianity is not some combination “religion” – a hybrid of law – prophecy – grace. It’s just grace – it’s just Jesus.

End of Study on Moses – Elias – Jesus

18

MY YOKE IS EASY

Somehow we've taken our simple faith and terribly complicated it. Even worse, Christianity has become onerous and burdensome – so much to do, memorize, attend meetings, pay tithes and terrible consequences for failure. Not to mention the burden we put on others.

“For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers.” [Matthew 23.4]

None of the above was on Jesus' mind when he said the following:

“Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” [Matthew 11.28-30]

End of Study on My Yoke is Easy

I9

JESUS CHRIST, LORD AND SAVIOR

In some ways Christianity is no different than any other “volunteer organization”. This may sound harsh, but, here goes. In the volunteer organizations that I have known, church or otherwise, there can be an undertone of “putting others down to elevate yourself”. It is usually a combination of a control thing and also to feel better about your perceived shortcomings. The “controlling” person can look at the other person and think, “at least I’m not that bad”. This happens in organized Christianity all the time.

Why is this so? It is because there is such a prevalent theme in Christianity that we are to perform, and perform well, and, of course, God expects it and is disappointed when we don’t. We love to point fingers at each other and even at ourselves. Sometimes just putting ourselves “down” makes us feel better because, aren’t we just “sinners saved by grace” anyway. I’m kidding as that is one of the biggest lies of history, but the topic for another day.

A few years ago I heard a Messianic Jewish Christian, as I am, speak at a church. He was well-intentioned in his presentation, and, of course, he had to give an alter call at the end. I didn’t mind the alter call, just what he said, to wit, “You may have made Jesus your savior [Christ], but

have you made him your lord?” Well, that got my attention. Is that even possible? Is it possible to “make” Jesus anything at all?

The point that the Jewish Christian preacher was making was that, in his opinion, there were some in attendance who had “made” Jesus their savior – to go to heaven or avoid hell, but not all had “made” him their lord. In other words, in his opinion, some, perhaps most, were not “living as they should” – were not doing what Jesus “told them to do”. I can recognize that finger-pointing routine from a mile away. And, usually, it is to cover one’s own perceived short-comings – making others feel inadequate to feel better about yourself. This is church game “one-upsmanship” at its finest.

Well, my preacher friend was wrong on two counts. His focus on “morality” has no place in Christianity. That is external behavior control which, essentially overlooks and denies the reality that He lives His life in us, as us, without any help from a code of ethics or morals. But that is not what got my attention.

What got my attention was the statement and thought that you or I will “make” Jesus anyone or anything. We will never, ever make Him anyone or anything. He already is Lord and Savior [Christ], without our help. And Who made Him Lord and Savior?

“Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made the same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ”.
[Acts 2.36]

So, this concept of making Jesus “your lord” and not just “your savior” is just another erroneous method featured in mainstream Christianity of sneaking performance based religious principles into our consciousness as a “wolf in lamb’s clothing”. And it just sounds so good too.

And there are entire denominations and churches built entirely upon this premise. But, let’s look at this verse again:

“Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made the same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ”.
[Acts 2.36]

Peter made this statement on the day of Pentecost. See the response from those in the upper room:

“Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?” [Acts 2.37]

And what did Peter say? “You can receive Him as your Savior, that’s the easy part, but you must also strive to make Him your Lord.” Yeah, right. What did Peter say?

So, did Peter tell everyone to “make Jesus both their lord and savior”? No. “Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.” [Acts 2.38]

I like this simple definition of “repent” – “to change one’s mind”. And, what about baptism? I was sprinkled as a Roman Catholic at age 18 and dunked as a Southern Baptist at age 19. I pretty well have that covered. Is water baptism a requirement to receive the “gift of the Holy Spirit”? Probably not since the Holy Spirit seemed to be running wild, in a holy sense, in the upper room without anyone being baptized in the traditional sense. I also like the simple definition of “baptize” – “to be immersed”. And so we are immersed in Him – with or without water.

Note also that Peter did not say “get yourself baptized”. No, he said “be” baptized” – “be” – just “be” baptized – let Him immerse you in Himself. Seems as though that is His job, not mine.

So, repent. Change your mind. Christianity cannot be achieved and we will never make Jesus Lord and Savior. He is already Lord and Savior, always, from eternity – no beginning, no end. So, “be” immersed in that reality and truth. And we are already immersed, baptized and dunked fully in Him.

End of Study on Jesus Christ, Lord and Savior

20

LOSING ONE'S SELF

There's much said about the believer being a “container” and that we have this

“treasure in earthen vessels”. [2 Cor. 4.7]

I would never dispute that point as it is a fundamental truth of who we are, both as believers and as human beings. Every human “contains” – we contain life – and, do not be mistaken, there is only One Life. God alone gives life – in fact He gives Himself, as the “animation” in all. Some will say we “contain” either in union or rebellion – and there is truth in that concept, but that is not my subject here. Simply said, humans are not independent islands among many islands. A close corollary is,

“... he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it.” [Matt. 10.39]

Early in my Christianity I grasped the concept of “containerhood”. I was also quite aware of Jesus’ direction to “lose my life”. The misunderstanding that resulted was that in losing my “self” I sort of became a nothing and thereby had to deny everything that made me

“me”. I truly hope that not everyone has to go through that nonsense, but if you have, you know exactly what I am talking about and if you're in the middle of it, maybe this will shine some light.

The only “life” that we will ever lose is the life lived in the mistaken belief that we are independent at all. We are not now, never have been and never will be independent selves. And that is precisely what Jesus urges us to deny.

The self we lose, or deny, is simply the misunderstanding that we were ever a truly independent being. We lose the identity of independence. However, we should never lose the identity of our personhood – what makes us exactly the person we were created to be. So, the self we deny is not our personality – not the aspects and characteristics that make each a completely unique person – exactly as He is The Person. Each person is created with a unique personality - likes, dislikes, drives, goals, interests and ambitions. These aspects of personhood are exactly who we are created and intended to be and we must not deny our personality.

I cannot speak in universal terms for every human being. Actually, I probably could, but not here. But if you are reading this you are probably of the Christian faith – in some fashion or another; however you define your faith. So you know that you have the treasure [Him] in your “earthen vessel”. [2 Cor. 4.7] Now this eternal reality must be embraced – by each, personally and fully. But once embraced it becomes the foundation of the person you are right now – you forget about it and just live. A foundation holds one up. No structure can stand without a proper foundation. But once the foundation is laid, it assumes its role as permanent truth and reality and easily fades from view. The foundation simply does its job – holding up – with no help from us.

So, we are all containers. But to think of yourself as a container, as a cup is a container of coffee, can be quite misleading. The “coffee cup” concept, like many concepts, is merely a teaching tool but very misleading unless you understand that a cup is an inanimate object, whereas a human is not. A cup, or as the Bible says, “earthen vessel” is not alive and has no personality or being, apart from the liquid in which it contains.

I must comment on the use of concepts as teaching tools a bit further. Teachers both in and out of the bible use concepts to help the learner wrap their understanding around often difficult to grasp eternal truths. But, once you “get it” you must drop the concept because at that point the concept has done its job and will no longer help as you move toward further intuitive knowing and understanding of the reality.

So, as we move toward acceptance and true knowing of the reality that we each contain deity we must leave the “earthen vessel” concept behind. That’s the problem when you “lose yourself”. You think, as I did years ago, that you are just an inanimate object – no personality – no uniqueness – just a container of Him, but no real method of expression. Why no expression? Because you deny the very personality He created you to be and have. That is why so often in Christianity we see the “cookie-cutter Christian” living as he has been taught, following the “rules of Christianity”.

But we do come full circle. What I mean is that we do, at some point, lose our selves. But we get our selves back. As one of my best friends, who happens to live in Redding, would point out, there will be a time of settling and grounding.

So, what is the “settling and grounding” all about? Humans just naturally think of themselves as independent beings – I’m here, you’re there, God is up there somewhere. And we go from that misunderstanding to the next – now that I’m a believer, I must become better, more “Christ-like”. That’s why we so easily and readily, regardless of how difficult it may appear, embrace the rules, regulations, sheparding and other processes on the road to “self-improvement” Christianity.

That concept of “self-improvement” is going to end for all of us – either in this life or the next. I’m not joking as some will never get it, until explained, face-to-face by Jesus, Himself, on the other side. But, as one of my best and long-time friends from Fort Worth would point out, thankfully, many come to the end of their rope and give up the “self-improvement” plan. You will lose your false-image that you are an independent self in need of “self-improvement”. But, “... he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it.” [Matt. 10.39] And you will find it now!

Remember, concepts are just teaching tools and not reality. The

coffee cup/earthen vessel concept is just a concept because the cup will never become the coffee it contains and the coffee never becomes the cup. While we may have this “treasure [Him] in earthen vessels [us]”, we are not simply containers. While the cup never becomes the coffee and vice versa, He will become us and we will become Him, as His expression, in our very earthly world. We have moved on from the mistaken concept of independent self and now gain the true prospective of our real self.

Now, you are free to be and live exactly as you desire and how you choose. “Delight thyself also in the LORD; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart.” [Psalm 37.4] A familiar verse, many think means that if you do the “delighting” part then you get the “gift” part – your desire. “Do your homework and you get ice cream.” That’s not it. That’s totally wrong. The first question here is what are the “desires” of your heart? Now, whatever they are for you, He gives them to you. He puts them there. They are not gifts, they are desires. “Desires” are what make you – you. Your desires give your life direction – a path to follow. Your desires are your personality and your character. Whatever they are for you, He put them there. You are not to lose that. You are only to lose the illusion that you are separate from Him and that there is something wrong with your desires. You are a redeemed person - a person in union with the Creator.

But this all begs the question – if I live exactly as I choose, can’t I choose evil? Can’t I choose to be selfish and live for myself? Maybe.

Okay, so, could I “choose” selfish and evil? I want to say it’s possible, but I’d rather say it’s not probable. Why? That’s the grounding and the settling part. It’s the “knowing who you really are” part. We are not independent selves. We are unique as to our personality but not independent. As great and powerful as the Creator is, He has chosen to express Himself through His creation, not apart from or in spite of it. When you are grounded and settled into knowing that you are His expression through your unique person, then it’s not probable that you will “choose” to be what you are not.

You may think that because I say the Creator has chosen to show and express Himself through His creation that that somehow limits Him. It doesn’t at all. He can run His universe any way He wants. And

He has chosen to operate through what He has made. And we as persons are His highest expression. As one of my dear friends would say, it “makes my heart glad to know I have a God given personality that He lives in and He is a Person.”

He has chosen to express Himself in you and in me, through you and through me and most important, as you and as me.

“But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother’s womb, and called me by his grace, To reveal his Son in me ...” [Gal.1.15-16]

“A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit”. [Matt. 7.18]

I would like to add, “a tree who knows who he is...” For me, that is how it all makes sense.

“But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother’s womb, and called me by his grace, To reveal his Son in me ...” [Gal.1.15-16]

How is anyone going to “know” who they are? The only way is by revelation. And He will reveal His Son in you and in me. At first reading one might say, “... reveal His Son to me ...” But that’s not what it says. The word is “in me”. The Son is in you.

“For me to live is Christ ...” [Phil. 1.21]

He’s not only living in you, but living as you.

So, again, what “self” do you actually lose? The self that thinks it is independent. The self that thinks it must attain goodness or “Christ-like-ness”. The “self” comes into proper perspective when it knows that “for me to live is Christ living in me – as me.”

The Son revealed in the sons and daughters.

End of Study on Losing One’s Self

21

THE POWER

Why do I say “power” as if it is singular? Aren’t there many powers? Aren’t there good powers and evil powers? I doubt it. Aren’t we – the good guys [Jesus, us and the angels] – at war with the bad guys [satan and his demons]? Isn’t it a toss-up who wins? If we don’t fight we lose, right? Sounds like nonsense right? Unfortunately, on Sunday morning it sounds real.

Is power a “thing” or a Person? Does anyone control “power”? Can anyone control “power”? I think there is much confusion about what exactly “power” is and who controls it. The church is largely confused on this point and so are many who “attend” church.

Before we actually talk about “power” let’s discuss why there is so much confusion about this and really, about so many topics of such great interest.

There is one created being whose has a specific job to confuse and lie – satan. We are first introduced to satan in the Garden - he appears as a serpent. He is described as

“... the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made.” Gen 3.1

The term “subtil” is used to describe the serpent [satan] in Genesis. “Subtil” or “subtle” means elusive or difficult to detect or grasp – and so he is. As a matter of fact you will almost never recognize his work - he’s that good. And, I might add, Who do you think gave him that ability? Actually, most things and events that he authors seem just the opposite of how we think about satan -

“And no marvel; for satan himself is transformed into an angel of light.”

2 Cor. 11.14

So – what influence does satan have on our understanding of power? – much indeed and that influence is subtle to the point of being undetected. He encourages us to think and believe there is more than one power in the universe and that these powers fight each other with some uncertainty as to which side will win.

The reality is that there are not two [or more] competing “powers” in the universe, although there are those who “need” you to believe that. Later, we will discuss who they are. But the truth is there is only One power in the universe. Anything or everything that appears to be a “power” is an expression of Him. We assign “good and bad” connotations, but those labels are arbitrary and incorrectly based upon a misconception that there is a duality of power.

The fact that only One Power exists in the Universe is abundantly clear as Moses is addressing Israel. He is warning and reminding them that when they obtain success in the future not to forget that the only “power” they possess is what which is given to them and it does not originate with them.

“But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth [or anything for that matter], that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day.”

[Deut. 8.18]

“Power” appears in many forms and expressions, as “light” is a form or expression of electricity, but it is not the electricity itself. So, in the Bible “power” is described in so many of its forms, but, the origin is the

Person and not the thing we “see” as expressing the Power. And, Who is that Person?

“But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God.” 1Cor. 1.24

The above quote is a primary statement of truth. Jesus does not have the power of God – rather He is the power of God. He is the “electricity” expressed as “light”.

Why is this discussion so important? Because, there is so much misinformation and outright lies about competing “power”. We have been

“tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine...”
[Eph. 4.14]

We have not been

“rightly dividing the word of truth”. [2 Tim. 2.15]

We must take a mature approach to our faith, otherwise

“the heir, as long as he is a child, differeth nothing from a servant, though he be lord of all” [Galatians 4.1]

Of course the discussion creates problems at this point because how do we now explain what “appears” to be terribly destructive evil powers? First, satan is a created being. He has no independent life or power in himself. No created being in the universe has independent life. What satan has is what he is given, just as the rest of the creation – no more – no less.

“Jesus answered, Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above...” John 19.11

Who was Jesus really talking to? What is Pilate or was it satan? Or

both? Or, was He speaking for our benefit, so we would know, for certain, with full assurance, that His crucifixion was neither a random act, nor satan “winning” in some fashion?

“Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan came also among them.”
[Job 1.6]

So, satan was among the “sons of God”. Does that make him a son? I don’t know. I do know he is created and not a creator. So, is satan an independent operator? Does he need permission to do what he does? Is he part of the big, overall plan for things? Does he fit into history or create history?

“And the LORD said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil?” [Job 1.8]

Whose idea was it to train-wreck Job’s life? God or satan? It appears to be God’s idea. But why? We’ll get to that later. But, we know God put the thought in satan’s mind. Satan was the agent of apparent evil and destruction in Job’s life. But, we can’t give him credit for the decision to do it. That creates an apparent blurring of the line between “good and evil”. Is that important? Can we deal with that?

“And the LORD said unto Satan, Behold, all that he hath is in thy power; only upon himself put not forth thine hand.” [Job 1.12]

Do you see satan needed permission to work over Job? God gave satan the idea and then set the boundaries – telling satan what he was allowed to do and what he was not allowed to do. Apparently, he also needed permission to work over Peter.

“And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat.” [Luke 22.31]

Satan is different than us in that he has seen God and, apparently has rejected Him in a way that no human ever has. I say that because he has actually seen God face to face – no question whatsoever that he has seen God and despite that fact – rejected Him. No human has ever seen God face to face, as Satan has, and made the same knowing and intelligent rejection.

Some liars are so good at what they do that they convince themselves that what they say is true, though it be false. Well, Satan/Lucifer is such a good liar that he thinks he is telling the truth – in fact he has convinced himself. What are Satan's lies that we so readily accept as true? First, he thinks and says that he is God's rival and therefore a legitimate threat to the kingdom. He says that he is omnipresent, which means "in all places, at all times". He claims to pose a threat to us and our salvation. As a result we think that he has independent power and that we must fight him.

Okay, so who is this created being to whom we ascribe independent power?

"How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations! For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High. Yet thou shalt be brought down to hell, to the sides of the pit." [Isaiah 14.12-15]

He is terribly misguided and not independent at all.

But he does have great purpose in our lives. Consider that Jesus was not ready for his public ministry until he had faced the devil and put him in his place. And so shall we. But, what was Lucifer's necessary purpose in Jesus' life just prior to Jesus' public ministry? Jesus had to settle, in His mind and in His heart, Who He was and His purpose. If Jesus ever had a thought that He would be an earthly king or great military leader those thoughts had to be dealt with. Further, Jesus had to know that His ability to heal the sick was something He did for others –

He was not going to be a great magician working tricks for His own benefit.

We must get out of this incorrect thinking that the devil is some threat to God. God has no threat. He has no rival. There is no independent power source in the universe. The devil could not touch Jesus any more than he could touch Job. He did not have God's permission to do that and certainly does not have God's permission to touch any of us either. But, satan does have his God-given authority. His purpose and authority is to tempt, lie and confuse.

Realize that despite the temptations in the wilderness, satan posed no threat to Jesus.

“Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil.” [Matt. 4.1]

So, Who's idea was it to be tempted by the devil? It was the Spirit of God that set up the temptation. But why? Was it to see if Jesus would give in and become one of the devil's boys? That's laughable. Jesus always knew that the devil posed no threat to Him and had absolutely no control over Him.

“Hereafter I will not talk much with you: for the prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me.” [John 14:30]

So, what was the temptation all about? Why did Jesus have to go through a physically, emotionally and psychologically miserable time? It is the same reason why we go often go through a miserable time. And, we'll discuss ...

If you indentify with Jesus, and you do if you are reading this, you will also go through a miserable time or times in your life. Mother Teresa spent the last 30 years of her life in what she called “darkness”. But, we have to get this straight, if satan is God's agent in bringing you through this, and it might be, he is not some independent power attempting to influence your life.

Jesus knew this truth. He knew that, if anything, the devil was God's agent, by means of His temptation, to force Jesus to consider His

true identity and become settled in that identity – namely, the Savior and Lover of the world. That happened for Jesus with much pain and suffering. The same may be true for us also. And His temptation lasted His entire life. Yes, He could have avoided His crucifixion.

“Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then shall the scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be?” [Matt. 26.53-4]

I digress for a moment, but one legion is 6000, so 72,000 angels stood ready, with their hands on their swords, ready to save Jesus. It would have been a bloody mess I can assure you. But the angels had to stand down while the scripture was fulfilled and the Man they loved was murdered before their very eyes.

And, I can imagine the heavenly sight of Should we consider satan’s purpose to be different in our lives? Of course not. He has his purpose. He’s just a liar. We must hone our skills at lie detection and settle and confirm our true identity.

Our true identity is Christ as us.

“For to me to live *is* Christ ...” [Philippians 1.21]

We are co-saviors and lovers of our world. We must be lied to and tempted for the purpose of settling us into our singleness of purpose. The lies and the temptations are for our benefit – just as they were to Jesus – to settle us into our true identity and maturity.

So, God’s agent [satan] offers a religious approach to Christianity. He offers self-improvement. “Self-improvement” is a lie. If there was ever anything wrong with our “selves” the blood of His cross washed those problems eternally away. We are redeemed and reconciled by the sacrificial death of the Savior. There is nothing left to improve.

Christianity has allowed – permitted, satan to have great influence in the day in, day out, normal life of Christianity. Just consider the amount of time spent in the pulpit, Sunday after Sunday, where we are warned about the “power” of satan. His purported power and influence are extolled constantly for our consideration. Let me be perfectly clear –

this is not Christianity. This is not of Him. This exaltation of satan is of satan and not of God. We must sharpen our understanding and clarify our approach.

Lucifer's other approach is that Christianity is for "my" benefit. "If I do so and so I get the blessings – wealth – health – whatever, you name it". This is satan speaking these silly and immature words. In reality, Christianity is not "for me". Christianity – real life – is the reality of Him as me and me as Him resulting in my life for others. Satan wants us totally engaged and consumed with ourselves, always looking inward for self-improvement, producing some self-benefit. And, so long as we are convinced that he is a "separate power" and independent operator we remain immature children, never grasping our true selves as expressions of the Christ in our world, as we are consumed with him, fighting him and believing his lies about our true identity.

We are almost at the point of dealing with the appearance of evil power in the world. Just as Jesus could have called 12 legions of angels, he could have come down from the cross if He chose.

"Save thyself, and come down from the cross." [Mark 15.30]

as He was mocked. His temptation never really ended. The devil tempted Him, to be Someone that He was not, until His human death. But don't confuse His temptation, or your own, as evidence that there is an independent evil source of power. God has no rival. Never did, never will. If anything the devil is God's agent, used by God to ground both Jesus and us into our true identity - Savior and Lover of the world.

So, I think we see satan is not in independent source of power, just a liar. We must hone our skills at lie detection and settle and confirm our true identity, just as Jesus did His. And, our true identity is "Christ as us".

"For to me to live *is* Christ ..." [Philippians 1.21]

We are co-saviors and lovers of our world. We must be lied to and tempted, and reject what is not true, for the purpose of settling us into our singleness of purpose. The lies and the temptations are for our

benefit – just as they were to Jesus – to settle us into our true identity and maturity.

And, Satan will lie about what Christianity is all about.

The reason why satan seems to be an independent power is that we buy into his lies. He says Christianity is a self-improvement religion. “Self-improvement” is a lie right out of hell. If there was ever anything wrong with our “selves” or needing improvement, the blood of His cross paid for the redemption and washed those problems eternally away. We are redeemed and reconciled by the sacrificial death of the Savior. There is nothing left to improve, except perhaps for our understanding of that truth.

Christianity has allowed – permitted, satan to have great influence in the day in, day out, normal life of Christianity. Just consider the amount of time spent in the pulpit, Sunday after Sunday, where we are warned about the “power” of satan. His purported power and influence are extolled constantly for our consideration. Let me be perfectly clear – this is not Christianity. This is not of Him. This exaltation of satan is of satan and not of God. We must sharpen our understanding and clarify our approach.

Lucifer’s other approach is that Christianity is for “my” benefit. “If I do so and so I get the blessings – wealth – health – whatever, you name it”. In other words, the liar says Christianity will give you independent power. This is satan speaking these silly and immature words. In reality, Christianity is not “for me”. Christianity – real life – is the reality of Him as me and me as Him resulting in my life for others.

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Okay, how do we deal with the appearance of evil? That’s a tough one. And, I say “appearance” because we like to categorize, perhaps incorrectly, everything into “good and evil”. Just turn on the news. Innocents die and suffer needlessly every day. The world “seems” to be going to hell. We have our own personal hells. We suffer. We get

sick. Our loved ones suffer – lose their jobs – die - homes get foreclosed.

Isaiah [inspired] makes some very basic statements about reality:

“I am the LORD, and there is none else, there is no God beside me: I girded thee, though thou hast not known me: That they may know from the rising of the sun, and from the west, that there is none beside me. I am the LORD, and there is none else.” [Isa. 45.5-6]

I don't think these verses leave any question that there is but One God - One Power in the universe. What is tougher to deal with is the next verse - a very curious statement also made by Isaiah:

“I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the LORD do all these things.” [Isa. 45.7]

I say the statement is “curious” because of the “create evil” part. Some say “create the possibility of evil”. I won't. I do have a problem with God creating evil, so I default to my framework - He has His purpose in everything. We do not live in the “Garden”. Who would really want a life like that anyway? We would remain immature babies if life was wonderful and easy all the time.

Consider the evil scenario of older brothers selling their younger brother into slavery. Then, lying to their father saying the brother is dead. For all intents and purposes that brother was dead, never to be seen again. Consider if Joseph was your child.

Joseph was sold into slavery by his brothers and then the brothers told their father, Jacob that Joseph was dead. Evil? It sure looks that way. Did the devil orchestrate that one? Did the “evil” power prevail? Let's see how Joseph handled it.

You know the story of Joseph. He went from slavery to being Pharaoh's number one man. And, when the famine came many years later he was ultimately reunited with his brothers. At first the brothers did not recognize Joseph, but he knew exactly who they were. Upon revealing his true identity the brothers feared for their lives.

At some point in his life Joseph settled in his mind that the

“apparent” evil was from God. And now, finally, he clearly saw the purpose. Joseph said to his fearing brothers,

“Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you to preserve life.” [Gen. 45.5]

What did Joseph mean? Several things, probably – but most important – God had purpose in what appeared to be evil. From Joseph’s perspective, it would appear that he knew the true underlying reality of his brothers selling him into slavery – an apparently evil act – was, indeed, not God’s afterthought, but His well-conceived, purposeful act.

Our basics are correct. There is only one God and He is the only power in the universe. However, there are times we must look an apparently evil situation in the eye and, say with faith, “I don’t understand, but, I will accept this from You.”

“Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father.” [Matt. 10.29] Even a bird does not fall from the air that He does not purpose. Therefore what situation is random or not intentional? Nothing, probably.

How did Joseph get the correct perspective that, regardless of the intent of his brothers or the appearance of evil, that it was God that purposed the events of his life?

More on that in Part XIII So, I posed the question of how it was possible for Joseph to get the correct perspective that, regardless of the intent of his brothers or the appearance of evil, that it was God that purposed the events of his life.

Well, for one, Joseph was no more or less human than the rest of us. So, without a doubt he didn’t get it immediately. Initially, probably, all he could see was the evil and a world controlled by the devil – with the “forces of good and evil” fighting it out. All of which is incorrect, but sometimes our perspective, no matter how incorrect, can cloud and color everything we see, think or do.

And we don’t know exactly when Joseph “got it” and to what extent his statement to his brothers was simply a statement of faith. In fact,

even when he made his great statement to his brothers, he may have still been struggling with acceptance. But, for our purposes, the most important fact is that he made the correct statement, “God did send me before you to preserve life.” At minimum, speaking the word of faith is the correct start. Jesus, the One “Who made all things”, is described as the

“Word of God”. [John 1.3]

Accordingly, therefore all creation, including the creation of the right perspective on things, starts with a “word” – or, really the Word.

Sometimes in the face of “apparently” overwhelming evil our only first step is to agree with Joseph and say, “God did this”. The explanation may or may not come later.

By the same token, if you have the ability to change the apparent evil – do something - that is Him in action, moving you into action. When you can affect the change – do it – as Him doing it. Never stand by silently, inactively, when others need you. That is why you are there, precisely at that moment.

We have all faced a situation, or two, or a hundred, when it appears as though evil has won. It is that point where reality through faith must take over. There are moments when we look in the mirror, speaking to Him, and the only thing we can say is, “I don’t know what You’re up to – I don’t like it – I don’t understand – but I accept this from You at the moment”.

We can, and often must, default to our basics. There is only one God and He is the only power in the universe. Some call this the “seeing through” approach and I like that phrase. Can we look apparent evil in the eye and see through to Him – even if we don’t know why?

Yes we can. Yes we will.

At minimum, speaking the word of faith is the correct start. Jesus, the One “Who made all things”, is described as the “Word of God”. [John 1.3] Accordingly, therefore all creation, including the creation of the right perspective on things, starts with a “word” – or, really the Word. And, sometimes in the face of “apparently” overwhelming evil our only first step is to agree with Joseph and say, “God did this” and

“God did this through me for the love of others”. The explanation may or may not come later.

By the same token, if you have the ability to change the apparent evil – do something - that is Him in action, moving you into action. When you can affect the change – do it – as Him doing it. Never stand by silently, inactively, when others need you. That is why you are there, precisely at that moment. We have all faced a situation, or two, or a hundred, when it appears as though evil has won. It is that point where reality through faith must take over. There are moments when we look in the mirror, speaking to Him, and the only thing we can say is, “I don’t know what You’re up to – I don’t like it – I don’t understand – but I accept this from You at the moment”.

We can, and often must, default to our basics. There is only one God and He is the only Power in the universe. Some call this the “seeing through” approach and I like that phrase. Can we look apparent evil in the eye and see through to Him – even if we don’t know why? Yes we can. Yes we will.

End of Study on The Power

22

HE SAVED OTHERS

“He saved others; himself he cannot save...” [Matt. 27.42]

This is how the chief priests mocked Jesus as He was crucified. Was it true? Could He save Himself? Could He take Himself off the cross if He wanted to? Or, better yet, could He have saved Himself from His entire sacrificial life that He lived and just have been a normal person, with a family, a career and maybe even a nice retirement plan? Maybe. But are we sure? And, what difference does it make? And, the real question, is this verse true of us also? Is it prophetic? It was spoken by a high priest. Didn't the high priest also, albeit unwittingly, truthfully prophesy of Jesus' death?

“Nor consider that it is expedient for us, that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not. And this spake he not of himself: but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus should die for that nation;” [John 11.50-51]

When we read this verse we think, well Jesus could have “saved” Himself if He wanted to, right? Certainly He had the power to jump off the cross, or, as He said to His disciples at Gethsemane that He could

have “twelve legions of angels” come to His rescue? Was the cross different and, maybe too late? I wonder if He could have saved Himself. I wonder if He could have lived a normal life. I wonder if we can.

“He saved others; himself he cannot save...” [Matt. 27.42]

I posed a very fundamental question as to whether Jesus could have taken Himself off the cross – save Himself, avoid the cross. That thought is just symbolic of what this verse is talking about. This question is more basic and to the core of His life in general. He could not save Himself. He could not live for Himself. He had the single mind of what His life was all about. He healed, He ministered, He taught and He did what many considered miracles. But none of that was what His life was about. He didn’t live to please anyone. He didn’t live as an example of how to live.

He lived to die. I don’t mean He died at the end of His life as we all do and will. No, He lived for the purpose of His death. He knew that.

“Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.” [Matt. 20.28]

And, again,

“Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.” [I Tim. 2.6]

And, what is a “ransom”? “Obtain the release of a prisoner by making a payment demanded.” And, what was that payment and who is the prisoner?

Jesus is the

“Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.” [Rev. 13.8]

So Jesus, in knowing His true identity, could really do nothing to change the events and the eventuality of His sacrificial death. But, it still begs the question, “could He save Himself”. Yes, He could, but didn’t.

Here is where the truth and reality of free will and election collide. But He definitely chose to fulfill His destiny.

Now, returning to the fact that He Himself is our ransom. You will recall this conversation arose over the question posed by the “mother of Zebedees children” that her sons may sit

“the one on the right hand, and the other on the left” in Jesus’ kingdom. [Matt. 20.20-21]

This was a very tall request and here is the rest of that passage.

“But Jesus answered and said, Ye know not what ye ask. Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?” [Matt. 20.22]

So, for Jesus, from the beginning, it was a foregone conclusion that He would “drink the cup” – that He would give His life. His life – His blood was the ransom that freed the prisoners.

“And, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven.” [Col. 1.20]

Sometimes we think that Jesus’ life of preaching, teaching and healing is the key to understanding Him. In a sense that was all incidental to the true meaning and purpose of His life. Now, no doubt, He could had to express love and live accordingly. But, the purpose of His life was to give His Life to redeem the creation. If that was all He ever did, in total obscurity, that would have been enough. We want to think, sometimes, that His death was just a tragic ending to an otherwise happy story. I am thinking about how we all felt when Titanic hit the iceberg and sank – a tragic end of a love story.

But, let’s be clear on this, the crucifixion was neither tragic nor the end of anything. However the crucifixion was His purpose, above and beyond any other thing that He did or said. His purpose, indeed the purpose of His Life, was to die on the cross.

“For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil.” [I John 3.8]

And, how did He do that – by His death.

So, He could not save Himself. He could only save others. Now, the real question is how that fact affects us? The reality is that we can't save ourselves either. Our lives are not about ourselves – we exist only to be His love agents in this love starved world.

We are His love agents because He is the original Lover.'

“But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light;” [I Pet. 2.9]

And, we may not “apparently” get anything out of this deal. The “deal” being Christianity; love for Jesus, love for others, and faith. What “apparently” did Jesus get out of His death – nothing. I say “apparently” because in reality He got everything that mattered in all of time and for all of creation. He, as the ransom, got the entire creation redeemed. But, on the face of it, without faith, His crucifixion appeared to be a total and absolute disaster and a wasted life. Nothing could be further from the truth.

But, since we, as Him and Him as us, can only save others, what do we really get out of this deal? The shed blood of the Savior effected the eternal reconciliation of the creation. But, we get to see and experience it unfold before our very eyes on a daily basis. Probably in our lifetime we will not necessarily “see” reconciliation on a world-wide level, even though it is already reality. But, if we open our eyes and our hearts we will see it moment by moment in everything and everyone.

This is faith. This is His life. This is our life.

“HE SAVED OTHERS” – A RESPONSE

Here are two responses I got from dear friends:

“Love is its own reward, isn't it . . .?”

“..... And in the seeing and unfolding of reconciliation in each and

every person we share the exquisite joy He experienced before and after the cross "Who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross." Really, it's a continual and deep everlasting joy as He continues to die daily in us to redeem others. It's total love of the Father being deeply satisfied within us. What a privilege!!! Earthly joys pale in comparison but some are maybe a microcosm of His joy, e.g., take the old westerns when the villain is redeemed Collectively we all rejoice in our hearts temporarily but that's tied to emotion which is great but fleeting. Closer to the Father's joy is when we've invested our own death in an unredeemed person and we see that moment in his eyes when it dawns on him that he is loved and worth dying for. We cannot help but rejoice for and with him. The painful fracture has been repaired and wholeness has been restored."

End of Study on He Saved Others

23

JESUS, FRIEND OF SINNERS

Agreeing with the Pharisees, Jesus admits that He is the

“... friend of publicans and sinners...” [Matt 11.29]

The term “friend” had a very special meaning for Jesus. He does not use that term very often. He does call Lazarus His friend. [John 11.11] Also, He makes it clear at His last supper that His disciples are His friends,

“Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you.” [John 15.15]

Jesus uses the term “friend” sparingly. So, it is a very special thing to be called a friend by Jesus.

Publicans were tax collectors for Rome – not a popular role in Israel in Jesus’ day. The position of “publican” was lucrative and politically influential. They were native Jews working for Rome and often taking advantage of other Jews. But Jesus was their friend.

To a Pharisee, a “sinner” was probably anyone that did not agree

with and support the Pharisees. But, it might have been worse. The Pharisees were such hypocrites that they might have considered anyone who simply was not a Pharisee to be a sinner.

The bottom line is that there were those who were highly critical of the ones Jesus befriended.

So, who are the “sinners” Jesus befriends? Everyone. But, we’re really not as we are saints - a discussion for another day. The Pharisees like to categorize and exclude. I’m not. Pharisees considered those not up to their standards “sinners”. Jesus made a point of calling outsiders or “sinners” His friends. The key of course is that His attitude is no different today than two thousand years ago. We need to open our eyes. His eyes are eternally open and full of love and compassion.

Pharisees strictly observed rites and ceremonies and considered themselves superior to the other Jews, but did not necessarily hold any particular religious office in Judaism. Pharisees were politically and socially connected and probably wealthy. They were powerful, influential in the religion and in politics, opinionated and extremely critical of Jesus. And Jesus had His own opinion of them. He considered them hypocrites and often referred to them in conjunction with the lawyers and scribes.

“And when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto his disciples, Why eateth your Master with publicans and sinners? But when Jesus heard that, he said unto them, They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. But go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.” [Matt 9.11 – 13]

“...for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.” [Matt 9.13]

I think Jesus is sarcastic with the Pharisees. The Pharisees knew the scriptures and the law, which is just fine until it produces an “us-them” mentality.

The Pharisees were very critical of the fact that Jesus befriended those that the Pharisees considered “sinners”. I digress for a moment. At

various times I have “belonged” to a “church”. It seems odd even making that statement – “church membership”. The last time I considered actually joining a church I went to the new member’s class. I actually had been attending the church off and on for a couple of years and enjoyed the music very much. I always brought a book to read during the sermon. So, I had an idea that if I went to the new member’s class there might be some opportunity for discussion and I might be able to “sneak” in some Galatians 2.20 – union-type discussion. Well, that was not to be. The preacher “ran” the class, handed out a list of about ten items of “what we believe”. He asked if I had a problem with any of them and I said, “I have a problem with all of it”. End of discussion. I did not join that church. An example of the “us-them” mentality of “religion” – “believe what we believe, exactly as we believe, or you are not one of us.”

The point of mentioning my near miss in considering church membership a few years ago is just the concept of “membership”. When we are members of one church we are not members of another. Then we have cliques and groups. Those really on the outside are considered “sinners”. At least that is the opinion of the Pharisees. And Pharisees don’t understand how a “holy man” could associate with “sinners”.

“But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” [Rom. 5.8]

Jesus did not have an “us-them” mentality. Many years ago I was a member of another church. There was a program to virtually cover every single waking hour. Church services on Sunday morning and Sunday night - church service on Wednesday night - choir practice on Friday night - Monday night was visiting potential members – Royal Rangers – bible study on Saturday night – and on and on and on.

But why keep the congregation busy every waking hour with “church” activities? The reason was clear – so there was no time to associate with “sinners” – the friends of Jesus - and become polluted and perhaps fall into sin yourself. What non-sense.

No, church is not about hiding out from the world – or “keeping” ourselves from sinning. Church should not so “invade” our lives and

steal all our time that we have no time left to “dine with sinners” – whoever they are, as Jesus did.

“Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.” [Matt. 5.14-16]

No doubt Jesus spent a lot of time in synagogues [churches] and the temple – but it was not to escape anything or anyone – He had His purpose. But He spent much time with His “friends” [the sinners] – dining and talking and whatever. That is where I would suggest our real life lies. Christianity is not about hiding out in the church to “keep oneself” away from all temptations and “sinners”. Church has its purpose, but not to create as “us-them” mentality - there is no such reality as “us-them”.

“The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.” [John 1.29]

So, of course, the real question is who are the “sinners”, if sin is already taken away?

“The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.” [John 1.29]

Sin is gone - out of the equation. Don't be fooled by appearance and lies from hell telling you that “sin is the problem”. To say sin is the problem you must deny the fact of what John the Baptist said – Jesus either took away the sin of the world or He didn't. I'd say He did. As a matter of fact, I'll confidently stake my life on that fact. To anyone who follows Jesus – it's fightin' words to deny the truth of his “finished”, complete and successful life – the redemptive offering of His shed blood and sacrificial death.

As a matter of fact, sin was never the problem because before there

ever was sin or “sinners” the

“Lamb [was] slain from the foundation of the world.” [Rev. 13.8]

If there’s a problem – and there’s always got to be a problem – it’s unbelief – but it’s not sin. Really you say – “unbelief” – right, unbelief in the perfect, eternal and finished work of the Savior who

“will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.” [I Tim. 2.4]

So I get back to my original point – when Jesus said He was the

“... friend of publicans and sinners...” [Matt 11.29]

in a sense He was being sarcastic with the Pharisees. Jesus never saw an “us-them” scenario. When Jesus said that the

“... whole need not a physician, but they that are sick...” [Matt 9.12],

He was speaking of and to the Pharisees. The hypocrites are the “sick” – “sick” to the extent that they categorize and ostracize those who they consider outside of their faith and refer to them as “sinners”.

Now, I said there was a problem – right – the problem is unbelief not sin. When “sin” is emphasized as the “problem” we judge others, we judge ourselves and we create classes of human beings. “Unbelief” is failure to embrace the full and final redemptive work of the Savior and failure to respond to His voice as He speaks to you.

“While it is said, To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation” [Heb. 3.15]

And He will speak to all ...

“And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations...” [Matt. 24.14]

So, what do we have so far? Jesus admits He is the

“... friend of publicans and sinners...” [Matt 11.29]

– with the hypocrites looking on, in today’s language, He actually said, “fine, I do love those you hate – I do love those you ostracize – I do love those you think you’re better than.”

So how do we deal with this very subject in modern “Christianity”? We make comments as, “hate the sin, but love the sinner”. I don’t care how misinformed or well-intentioned that statement might be – it is still judgmental, prejudicial and sets up an ‘us-them’ attitude. So, how are we taught to balance out that thought – we say a worse statement - “I’m a sinner saved by grace”. If you believe that statement then the blood of His cross gets flushed right down the commode of your mind.

If we are in a “spiritual warfare” at all it is to slice, dice and excise this nonsense from our vocabulary, our minds and our hearts.

One time I listened to a very learned and intelligent, Jewish-Christian [as I am], medical doctor, give a two-part lecture on “end times”. I interpreted his thoughts as “stand-up” comedy, considering the clear direction of Jesus not to “go there”-

“But of that day and hour knoweth no man, ... but my Father only.”

[Matt. 24.36]

When the good doctor finished making his end time predictions [Jesus is really here now in you and me], he then “instructed” his large audience to “close your eyes and bow your heads” – which I will not do at the command of any human being – and, after giving me a “I told you to do something, boy” look, he then further instructed us “in prayer” that we are, in fact, “sinners saved by grace”. At that last comment I gave him his “look” right back to him. I tried to talk after his brilliant oration, but he wasn’t interested.

Saying and believing things as “we are all just sinners saved by grace” is not the answer and is incorrect. No writer of the New Testament refers to his readers as the “sinners saved by grace” in such and such a place. Every New Testament writer refers to his readers as the “saints”

that are in such and such a place. Why is that so? Have things changed since Paul wrote his letters to Rome, Corinth, Galatia, Ephesus, etcetera, etcetera? Has sin been paid for by the precious blood of the Savior once and for all? Has the blood run out? I speak as a “fool”.

So, the Pharisees are not more correct calling what they considered “outsiders” to be “sinners” than we are, when we call ourselves “sinners saved by grace”. If there is a difference at all, it is that not all have yet responded to His persistent and loving call to enter Life.

Jesus boldly got “in the faces” of the Pharisees on the “us-them” issue. The Pharisees wanted Jesus to fit their mold. They wanted Him to be “politically correct”. They wanted Him to religiously follow the rules. They wanted Him to side with the authority, hate “outsiders” and hate non-conforming and irreligious Jews. Jesus said no! I say no! You say no! We all say, “I will love those you hate” – “I will dine with them” – “I will befriend them” – “I will be myself with them” – “I will just let His eternal light of love and compassion shine brightly in their midst”. In fact when said that Jesus befriended sinners that is misleading. They were not sinners. He had already eliminated sin. Jesus actually befriended saints.

“Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.” [Matt 25.37-40]

Or, perhaps little Anna said it better than all - “I know to love Mister God and to love people and cats and dogs and spiders and flowers and trees ... with all of me.” [Mister God this is Anna]

Go be a friend.

End of Study on Jesus, Friend of Sinners

24

NEGATIVES

WHEN APPARENTLY BAD THINGS HAPPEN.

Negatives, or apparently bad things happening to otherwise “good people”, become as an old friend - they are always there for you, you can trust them to never leave you or abandon you. And, remember that “appearance” is not always “reality”. Most important, however, negatives keep you centered on who you are - knowing Him as you and you as Him in, what appears to be, a very negative world.

I think this is exactly what Jesus meant when He said,

“These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.” [John 16.33]

Peace, therefore, can’t be a feeling – either good or bad – “peace” must be a “knowing” – Him as me, me as Him in a negative world – a Life for others – without effort, just acceptance and walking...

Once you see the intentional pattern of life for others, you will never again see the randomness of negatives.

End of Study on Negatives

25

NEITHER DID HIS BRETHREN BELIEVE

“His brethren therefore said unto him, Depart hence, and go into Judaea, that thy disciples also may see the works that thou doest. For there is no man that doeth any thing in secret, and he himself seeketh to be known openly. If thou do these things, shew thyself to the world. For neither did his brethren believe in him.” [John 7.3-5]

Apparently these are Jesus’ natural brothers, or perhaps just His kin, “telling” Him how to make Himself known to the world. They’re telling Him to “get out there – make a show of what you do!” So, that’s what we do sometimes in Christianity, right? Aren’t we supposed to “get out there and make Jesus known”? Aren’t we supposed to “confess with thy mouth”? At times, yes.

But, what does John, the writer of this gospel, say about these folk, that know Jesus and what He has done – presumably some miracles and healings? He says that, while they may know Jesus – as a person, as a friend, as a relative or even as a brother – they don’t believe in Him. That seems so odd doesn’t it?

I would say whoever these “brethren” are - that they may know about Jesus, but they don’t know Him. And there is a difference between knowing “about” and knowing.

Apparently these “well-intentioned” folk, His brethren, knew Jesus, but didn’t believe in Him. They saw the things that He accomplished but, did not understand His purpose or Who He really was. Their focus was on an “outer” Jesus. They did not understand that He is an “inner” Jesus – an eternal and immortal Life that lives within the believer. They saw Him as a religious leader promoting a belief system or a way of life. They did not yet know that He, Himself, is the Life that lives within the believer.

I say “did not yet know” because that is how we all approach and understand Jesus – at least at first. He may appear as a religious symbol or leader. He does “things” that we feel we must start doing and, often, failure to do is taken by the believer as failure of faith. We are told and taught that “true” faith in Jesus produces health and wealth, and, if you don’t have both you’re not “doing” your Christianity properly, which produces guilt and self-condemnation.

But – aren’t “signs and wonders” supposed to follow us? Sometimes. But the greatest “signs and wonders” are internal. These are a heart at peace with God – a lost soul who found the loving arms of the Savior - hope, right now, for us and those we love and an outpouring of love and concern for our lost and hopeless world. These are indeed “signs and wonders”, but they are inner and not outer.

As He is an inner Christ – we are inner people. What does that mean? This is fundamental stuff, but that doesn’t make it necessarily easy to grasp. What separates you and me from rocks or any other inanimate objects? That’s easy, right? The fact that we have life makes us animate and not rocks. But “life” is not some subdivided thing wherein you have your life and I have mine. No. Jesus said “I am the life”. Now that statement by Jesus was made moments before He gave dead Lazarus his life back. Jesus could put life back into Lazarus only because He gave him life in the first place. And, in fact, Jesus, the Christ, is the life in Lazarus and in you and in me.

When Jesus says today, as He said two thousand years ago – that He “is the life” – well, that’s basic truth – as basic and simple as it gets. But, that by no means makes it easy to grasp. But we must. Because until the time when we grasp the fundamental point that the Life that Lives in us is in fact the Christ, then we are no different than Jesus’ brothers who

saw Him as a religious leader, doing miracles and healings and “showing people how to live”. Remember, John says that they did not believe in Him.

When you understand, in your heart, that Jesus is the life that lives in you – He is your life – then you understand His message and Christianity makes sense. Because without that fundamental inner knowing, Christianity is just another religion.

So, am I saying that Christianity has no outer form? Of course not. All inner reality will have outer manifestation.

“For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God.” [Romans 8.19]

Oh yes, the entire creation is waiting for us – the sons and daughters of God to show ourselves and take our rightful place in the Now Kingdom of God on this earth. In that regard, the Kingdom of God is not some “pie in the sky in the by and by”.

“Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth, as in heaven, so in earth ...” [Luke 11.2]

We get the impression, sometimes, that Jesus is sort of “begging” or “fervently praying” for God to get off his “you know what” and do something. He is not. He is speaking into time and space what already exists in reality. He is telling us to get off our “you know whats” and realize that the reality of the Kingdom is NOW! And “what” or “who” is the Kingdom of God?

So, “what” or “who” is the Kingdom of God?

We want to think it is a place – a place we go to, maybe when we die. If it is a place – and I’m not saying it is – but let’s say it’s a place that goes with us. In other words, wherever we go, the Kingdom goes with us.

Well, how is that possible? Maybe the Kingdom is not a “place” as we define places.

Those that did not believe wanted Jesus to tell them exactly about the date and location of the Kingdom of God.

“And when he was demanded of the Pharisees, when the kingdom of God should come, he answered them and said, The kingdom of God cometh not with observation: Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you.” [Luke 17.20, 21]

I think it’s safe to say that wherever you are at the moment – the Kingdom is really right there – in you.

It’s safe to say that the Kingdom of God is not a place, rather a Person and you both contain the Kingdom and, wherever you are, the Kingdom of God is there.

“And when he was demanded of the Pharisees, when the kingdom of God should come, he answered them and said, the kingdom of God cometh not with observation: Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you.” [Luke 17.20, 21]

We both acknowledge this truth and often minimize it. We want to say things like – “I’m a small part of the Kingdom because my gift is [whatever – fill in the blank].” Or, even more to the point, there are others more important than me.

Getting back to the original point, Jesus’ brothers did not know Him, at least initially and all they could see was what He did, as in healing and miracles, yet did not understand Who He really was. And, against the advice of His brothers, Jesus would not promote the outer manifestations of His Person. His Person, His Kingdom is within every believer. Where you go is where He is. What you do is what He does. We were with Him in death [Gal.2.20] and we are with Him in Life [2 Tim. 2.11 & Rom. 6.8]

“And I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it. And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof.” [Rev. 21.22, 23]

End of Study on Neither Did His Brethren Believe

26

NOTHING IN ME

“Hereafter I will not talk much with you: for the prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me.” [John 14.30]

We give the devil way too much credit. I don't like to give him any airtime at all, but occasionally I must. He is a deceiver, nothing more, nothing less. Yet in the pulpit, every Sunday morning, he is attributed super powers, equal to God and is portrayed as a rival to God. We are taught that he is to be feared and that he is the source of all our problems – you name them – everything from terrorism to being overweight. We are taught to be aware of him and fight him at every turn.

I'm not saying all churches and preachers spend all their time glorifying the devil, but too many do. The result is that his purpose and authority are blown out of proportion.

Look again at what Jesus said, “... hath nothing in me”. So, one thing we know for sure is that whoever he is or whatever he may say or do will never be inside of us – always outside. Consider the significance of that for a moment. He will never be inside of us. His influence may be subtle and, at times, undetectable, but never inside. And who is this

being that we are taught to fear as God's rival? He is a creature - created by God. Therefore, he is not divine. But, certainly, God purposed him.

All created beings operate within certain possibilities, as they are designed by their Creator. A creature may be in rebellion, but only to a degree. For instance, it is not within my design to be able to fly. I may say "I will rebel against my Creator and flap my arms and take flight" – but it won't happen, because it can't. The devil is no exception. He may be in rebellion, or at least think he is, but he will never, ever operate in any fashion outside of his design possibilities.

We give much credit to how crafty and influential he may be, but the reality is that the devil is a damn fool. Consider the fact that, as Jesus said,

"No man hath seen God at any time ..." [John 1.18]

Notwithstanding the fact that we have not seen Him with our eyes, God is real to us. But, in comparison, the devil has seen God with his eyes.

"Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan came also among them."
[Job 1.6]

So, despite the fact that satan has seen God, knows Him and yet what is his attitude?

"I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High." [Isaiah 14.14]

Despite knowing God and seeing His power, this nit-wit thinks that he can be equal to God. I'm sorry, but it does occur to me that the devil is not very intelligent at all. Of course, the sad part is that, unfortunately, often, we are led to believe, in Christianity, that he is God's equal.

So why does the devil have so much influence in Christianity? The answer is that he is a deceiver and many swallow his deception "hook, line and sinker". Accordingly, he does what he is allowed to do – no

more no less – he deceives – and, if nothing else, as part of our maturational process, we must learn to discern what is real and what is a lie. Often we don't. Why not? The reason we have a hard time recognizing lies is because the perceived authorities in Christianity can't tell the difference themselves.

Plainly said, satan operates within the permission he is given. Consider the story of Job. The devil is given much credit for bringing Job down. Yet, in the first instance it was God and not the devil that had the idea to test Job.

“And the LORD said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil?” [Job 1.8].

Then, after some further conversation God issues limited authority to satan.

“And the LORD said unto Satan, Behold, all that he hath is in thy power; only upon himself put not forth thine hand. “ [Job 1.12]

Guess what? Satan did what he was told and no more. So much for him being an independent operator!

There is no different conclusion when satan operates within his authority regarding the crucifixion, and our lives for that matter.

Jesus makes it clear that it was the

“prince of this world” [satan] [John 14.30]

that came for him the night He was betrayed and crucified. Later that night Pilate thought that his authority came from Rome -

“Then saith Pilate unto him, Speakest thou not unto me? knowest thou not that I have power to crucify thee, and have power to release thee?” [John 19.10]

Jesus quickly corrected him.

“Jesus answered, Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above ...” [John 19.11]

This is the key to the deception – the “big lie” – that it is satan behind the scenes, independently working all sorts of evil and getting away with it. That’s a lie. The fact is that he’s not doing anything independently and he’s not getting away with anything. We must put this into perspective – the only thing satan does is convince Christians to waste their time and effort fighting against him. Really, if he truly was an independent power in the universe – a rival to God, do you really think you could fight him at all? But that is not how the universe operates. And, whatever “power” he has was given to him, in fact ordained by God.

“For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God” [Rom. 13.11].

Further, there is but one power in the universe and it is found in Him –

“Christ the power of God”. [1 Cor. 1.24]

What got me going on this topic was a comment I heard, which is quite common in Christianity, that, somehow the devil is an independent operator, off on his own with no accountability to his creator.

In Jesus’ temptation in the wilderness satan was, again, carrying out his God-appointed task.

“Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil.” [Matt. 4.1]

It could not be clearer that Jesus’ temptation, carried out by the devil, was absolutely and perfectly intended by God and certainly not the devil’s idea. And what was the divine purpose in all this? Jesus was at His life’s crossroad. He needed to make some decisions and be

grounded in exactly Who He was and His purpose. But before any temptation-

“he had fasted forty days and forty nights”. [Matt. 4.2]

The next time you see your family doctor ask the doctor what forty days of fasting will do to someone. The person fasting will be as close to death as possible. So, at His weakest moment, as intended by the Father, Jesus made the decisions regarding His identity and His purpose with help of the “tempter”.

So, in that perspective – who is this man in the red suit, horns on his head and carrying a pitchfork? He would seem to be God’s little helper.

And of course the man in the red suit tells us, just as the wizard told Dorothy; ignore the little man behind the curtain. But, now we see behind the curtain. Is he omnipresent [in all places at all times]? No. He is a spirit, but he’s not God. He can’t talk to you and me at the same time. He can’t be trying to influence you and me at the same time.

“And the LORD said unto Satan, Whence comest thou? Then Satan answered the LORD, and said, From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it.” [Job 1.7]

If he was omnipresent why was he walking around the earth? Couldn’t he do his observation from some spiritual vantage point? I guess he is quite limited.

As Jesus in the wilderness, we are all being pushed to the maturity gained by making decisions and choices regarding our identity and purpose. And, according to his purpose, the devil can be very helpful. But, never forget, he has nothing in me or you. He cannot control you, own you or possess you. His influence is external. And, just as with Jesus, his purpose is not to get you to sin – his purpose is to get you to deny your personhood and identity. And, as we see him as “God’s little helper” in that process, we affirm and confirm our true identity as His unique human expression as the Christ in each of our personal worlds.

End of Study on Nothing in Me

27

THE GIFT OF DEPRESSION

“Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep.”

[Romans 12.15]

I wonder how we can do that? How is it possible to put ourselves in the position of others, seeing life through their eyes and then, accordingly, rejoicing or weeping with them?

We can easily consider “rejoicing” as a gift. But “weeping”, maybe not. Now “weeping” is not necessarily the same thing as depression, but depression does most certainly cause one to weep. Depression has been called the “mask of sorrow”. Maybe, to be there “with them that weep”, you must first “be there” yourself.

Now, who would consider depression as a gift? I happen to and so maybe I’m different. But, somehow, it doesn’t sound right to consider depression as a gift. Far more consider depression a curse or a mental illness which may or may not be curable. Many of those with loved ones and friends who are depressed consider it a nearly impossible task to deal with.

The “church” often, either, simply does not accept depression as part of normal Christianity, or considers it something you get because

you lack faith. Depression is regarded as something that “must” be cured or even exorcised.

Many in the church believe their experience of depression is based upon lacking faith or that they are still “sinful” or otherwise not a “strong” Christian. An overwhelming number of people, including children, “take something” to “deal” with depression. This is an important and significant issue in today’s world. Many are depressed, both in and out of the church and we cannot ignore this issue, both for ourselves and others.

You may consider yourself one of the “depressed”. I would never advocate anyone ignoring their doctor’s advice regarding prescribed medication. Many are challenged to “have faith only and throw the pills away”. Such talk is irresponsible and dangerous. I never advocate throwing away medicine or glasses or whatever is prescribed by a doctor or other caregiver. Faith is never perfected in foolishness. A wise friend once told me that, just as it is true that God heals, seemingly with very little help, He often does it through natural substances or even man-made chemical substances “created” in the laboratory. He heals the way He chooses, many times through generally accepted modern medical practices. It can be foolish to ignore the educated wisdom of the physician that God has specifically placed in your life to be the conduit of health and restoration. So following medical advice is an individual choice and I express no further opinion.

My only concern is how one sees oneself as a person and as a Christian. Knowing, understanding and accepting the person that God created you to be is the key to being free to express Him. This is true regardless of depression or other problems that we, often erroneously think, plague us and need fixing. I encourage each and every one to know both their union with God through Christ and the fact that they are His very, daily, eternal and permanent expression in this world. One’s feelings of self-worth, because of depression and the like, have a very strong and significant affect on how each and every one sees oneself and, accordingly expresses oneself. Depression may color one’s entire view of their personhood and life mission.

In order to understand this subject we must grasp the reality that there are so many lies that we are confronted with and must deal with.

However, there is only one liar and one father of lies - satan. [John 8.44] And we know all about him. As, I have discussed at other times and in other places, his power is derived from God and he is powerless unless and until he is commissioned by God for His eternal purpose.

“Jesus answered, Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above ...” [John 19.11]

Having said that it is important to see that with feelings of depression, as with everything else we face in life, there may come a lie with that package.

It is important to become familiar with how the liar operates, because, once you do, you see the pattern. The “lie” influences us to view our perceived problems, shortcomings and, in this case, perhaps depression as something happening to me and “all about me”, ultimately because there is something “wrong” or lacking with me. And, accordingly, I must fix whatever it is. If I can’t fix it then I’m lacking faith and can never be an asset to the Kingdom.

Let’s just stop thinking like that. There is nothing wrong or lacking in any of us. Plainly said, the thought that I am in some way “lacking” is a lie from hell – from the father of lies. What if we train our minds and our senses to see and understand the lie? What if we stop seeing ourselves as God’s liability because we think we have a problem? What if we turn a flip on this whole way of thinking? Why not?

Paul’s experience was similar. We don’t know exactly what his problem was, but a case can be made that there was something wrong with his eyes or his vision.

“Where is then the blessedness ye spake of? for I bear you record, that, if it had been possible, ye would have plucked out your own eyes, and have given them to me.” [Gal. 4.15]

But, whatever was Paul’s problem, his eyes or his vision, he certainly tried hard to get rid of it.

“For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ’s sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.” [2 Corinthians 12:8-10]

But, guess Who didn’t think this “apparent” problem was a problem at all? In fact, Paul’s “apparent” problem may, in fact, have been his greatest strength.

I am not saying Paul was depressed. I am saying that I think he had some problem with his eyes. And he may have been depressed as a result. Having a problem with your eyes can be terribly depressing. I know this personally. Depression often has a trigger based upon another problem, but that is not always the case. But, the bottom line with Paul is that whatever he considered his problem, Paul didn’t want it. Paul, himself, healed many – but couldn’t heal himself.

“For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.” [2 Cor. 12.8-9]

I do not know what process Paul went through to arrive at his conclusion and his acceptance of his perceived problem or shortcoming. But I do know that in that aspect of his life he flipped his thinking from being God’s liability because of a problem to seeing himself as God’s asset because of his problem.

You see Paul’s revelation and conclusion? What he once considered a problem or deficiency was, in reality, the very conduit of the life and power of Christ lived in and through him. What a revelation of eternal truth! What freedom Paul could now experience with his former problem! Paul was becoming free to cease and desist the process of self-improvement. He turned the “mind flip” that I suggested we all try. The

“mind renewal flip” that leads to the simple and normal life of union in Him, regardless of any appearance of insufficiency on our part. What a life!

So, I challenged you to “flip” your way of thinking. Hopefully you’ve been thinking about doing that. The liar has one purpose. He is an enabler and agent for the Saint - you and me - to strengthen and confirm our true identity as God’s agent and asset in the world. And how does he do that? He gets you to start your thought process with the negative – “there is something wrong with me” or “I don’t have enough faith” or, whatever, you get the idea. Growth happens when you learn, in conflict with the liar and his lie, that you accept yourself, exactly as created and now see yourself as He sees you – an asset because you are a son or daughter of the Most High.

And, that fact is that He chose us as His assets and agents and created us exactly as we are, even with our apparent problems and shortcomings.

Just as Paul, I challenge you to “flip” your way of thinking. It is normal to start your thinking with, “there is something wrong with me” or “I don’t have enough faith” or, whatever.. See yourself as God’s asset, regardless of your perceived problems. Accept yourself, exactly as you are created and see yourself as He sees you – an asset because you are a son or daughter of the Most High.

You see Paul’s revelation and conclusion? What he once considered a problem or deficiency was, in reality, the very conduit of the life of Christ lived in and through him. What a revelation of eternal truth! What freedom Paul could now experience with his former problem! Paul was now free to cease and desist the process of self-improvement. He turned the “mind renewal flip” that leads to the simple and normal life of union in Him, regardless of any appearance of insufficiency on our part. What a life!

“Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you.” [John 15.16]

Given the reality of the above how can we ever, ever consider ourselves to be a liability? There is no way. We must be His assets and agents because He says so. So all the lies about depression and the like causing us to be a liability are false. So, why do we have these seemingly negative experiences? The answer is that we must learn to distinguish a lie from the truth and thereby become safe and trustworthy sons and daughters of God, as He intended.

So, just as Paul, who first considered his “eye” problem to be a negative and a problem, something to get rid of, we also must see ourselves as God’s agent and asset in the world, regardless of what we formerly considered our “problems”. We can begin to embrace everything we experience and all that we are, as intended by God, with no mistake. We can view every formerly considered negative and problem, depression or whatever, as who we are created to be and rely on the truth that God only intends us good, regardless of appearance. And why is this so?

But what about our “apparent” liabilities and problems, like depression? Whatever it is, for you and me, and however it is caused it must be a gift. And we can embrace it as a gift.

This can be a tough one. Especially something like depression that is so difficult for one to deal with. And, in our free will, we can reject the thought that it is a gift. In fact, I think, at least initially, there really is no other way to view depression. It is hard to accept pain, regardless of the source. And, depression is very painful. Depression can have a single trigger or multiple. Or, depression may have no cognizable trigger at all. It may simply happen one day or over the course of time. When there is an identifiable trigger there is usually massive emotional and psychological pain. Depression can be temporary. Temporary depression can be based upon a situation that resolves favorably and the depression can dissipate. Depression can be considered major with pain that simply never fully goes away. It also can be based upon a chemical imbalance that simply produces depression without any particular event or experience. Whatever the case, initially there is the question, “why me – why is this happening to me?” “Why is any [fill in the blank – bad thing] happening to me?” Well, there is a reason, a divine reason.

Let’s put all the pieces together. We’ve all got “problems”. Paul had

his “problem” that he could not rid himself of. We don’t know if his problem eventually “depressed” him, but I suspect that depression was entirely possible, although perhaps not permanent. But, we do know that he eventually he embraced his “weakness”, stopped seeing himself as a liability to God, but rather as God’s asset regardless of his own perceived problem and shortcoming. He stated with certainty

“... I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.” [2 Cor. 12.8-9]

I think we have all experienced depression, some more than others. Some experience depression only related to a circumstance that passes and some on a daily, seemingly unrelenting pattern. But we surely know that God intends us good, only, always and regardless of appearance. And we also know and are assured that, regardless of apparent weaknesses we are His agents in this world.

So, with the assurance that we are His expression and, in fact Him in our world, we can now we view our “problem” as the key to understanding how we may be the lover of others, as He is. And, just as Paul, if we don’t like our circumstance we can ask for a change.

The answer may come – “My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness.” At that point we can truly embrace our “weakness”, see it as a gift and realize we are exactly as intended – no change required.

But why? We must fit into our world, a place of abundant sorrow, grief, illness and other problems of every kind. We will be one with those we must love. How can we be Him and love those with problems and weaknesses unless we know our own and indeed own our own? How can we have empathy without experience? It’s not possible to know another’s pain, grief, sorrow, problem or whatever troubles them without knowing our own. So, we are free to accept ourselves, with whatever we perceive to be weakness or problem – view it as a gift and go about the business of being and expressing Him in our world.

So, as I mentioned, we can always ask God to change our problem or our circumstance. Paul did. And if the change does not come, as

expected or believed, we must accept that. There is nothing wrong with you. Paul asked three times and did not get. But why?

You can ask for whatever you want. But you won't always get the answer you want. I say sarcastically, "big deal". Paul, a man of great faith, knowledge and wisdom asked for God to take away his problem. He asked for what he wanted and I assure you he asked and prayed appropriately. He just didn't get what he wanted. That probably depressed him. The answer Paul got is well known. "My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness." At that point we can truly embrace our "weakness", see it as a gift and realize we are exactly as intended – no change required.

And, how can I say boldly, with such certainty, that we must know our own apparent problems before we can know another's? I can, because He did.

"He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief ..." [Isaiah 53.3]

This is from Isaiah's prophetic passage about the Savior. Jesus, a man presumably quite convinced of His life's purpose and Oneness with His Father, and yet He experienced "sorrow and grief". How can that be? I don't know, no one knows, but it is true. Did He also experience depression to go along with His sorrow and grief?

"Then saith he unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death ..." [Matt. 26.38]

Perhaps He did. So, we all have apparent problems, Even Jesus. But, what is the purpose in all this?

How can depression or sorrow or grief or, you name your problem, be a "gift"? Because, just as God intended for Jesus to be a Man of "sorrows and grief" and for Paul to have his eye problems, you were created to be exactly as you are, with all your problems, and that is your gift. Your life, your circumstance, your problems are all your gifts.

“Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning. Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.” [James 1.17-18]

Once we get into perspective that we are fully redeemed persons and exactly as He created us, then we can finally get the focus off ourselves.

But why do we arrive in such seemingly flawed packages? Because we are Him in our personal world. Accordingly, must fit into our world, a place of abundant sorrow, grief, illness and other problems of every kind. We are not “above it”. We are “up to our elbows” in every situation which calls for Him, as us, through us, to reveal Himself in love, care and concern. We will be one with those we must love. How can we love those with problems and weaknesses unless we know our own? How can we have empathy without experience? It’s not possible to know another’s pain, grief, sorrow, problem or whatever troubles them without knowing our own. So, we are free to accept ourselves, with whatever we perceive to be weakness or problem – view it as a gift and go about the business of being and expressing Him in our world.

End of Study on The Gift of Depression

AFTERWORD

In the second volume of *Union Explored*, we explore such titles as “The Anna Approach,” “The Carnal Mind,” and “Human Nature.”

