

DAVID HEISLER

U N I O N
E X P L O R E D

V O L U M E - 2

UNION EXPLORED

VOLUME 2

STUDIES OF UNION WITH CHRIST

BOOK TWO

DAVID HEISLER

(C)2023 DAVID HEISLER

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.

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 afore-mentioned 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 Gods 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

THE ANNA APPROACH

More and more, for my own understanding of things, I take the “Anna” approach -- I refer to “Anna” as in “Mister God this is Anna”. See how Anna broke things down to their simplest parts and ideas.

P.19 of “Mister God this is Anna”:

The local parson talked with Anna, then age 5 or 6:

The Parson said to Anna, “Do you believe in God?”

“Yes”

“Do you know what God is?”

“He’s God!”

“Do you go to church?”

“No.”

“Why not?”

“Because I know it all!”

“What do you know?”

“I know to love Mister God and to love people and cats and dogs and spiders and flowers and trees ... with all of me.”

Do we really need more theology or doctrine?

End of Study on The Anna Approach

3

THE FACE OF JESUS

We all have some image of the face of Jesus – in other words – an image of what He actually looks like. When I was 18, and just saved, he looked to me as an older man, perhaps 33 years old. Now, Jesus looks like a younger man perhaps 33 years old.

The reality is that He looks as He needs to look at the moment – even if His looks are not impressive.

“... he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him.” [Isaiah 53.2]

And what did Jesus say about this?

“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. 25.38-40]

How does He look to you? You can find His face everywhere and in everyone and in every situation. Just open your eyes.

The End of Study on The Face of Jesus

4

THE FLOW OF THE UNIVERSE

The universe always flows “out from the middle”. God is the middle and the universe is inside Him. Sometimes we think of Him sitting somewhere “out there” and the universe, His creation, disconnected from Him. Not so.

Also, we get the impression we do something for Him. In reality He lives His life through us.

God is love and therefore He is God for others. That is basic truth and is how things “flow”.

Everything is reconciled to Him through the blood of His cross. [Col. 1:19-21]

He now lives, “flows” His love, His life in us, through us, as us. [Gal. 2:20]

Our focus is now not on us, but rather on the ministry of reconciliation [2 Cor. 5:18] – the outflowing of His love each to his individual world.

That’s the Truth, as Jesus is the Truth [John 14.6], living His life through us.

End of Study on The Flow of the Universe

5

SLEEPING JESUS

Sometimes we think that Jesus is sleeping and we have to wake Him up.

“And when they had sent away the multitude, they took him even as he was in the ship. And there were also with him other little ships. And there arose a great storm of wind, and the waves beat into the ship, so that it was now full. And he was in the hinder part of the ship, asleep on a pillow: and they awake him, and say unto him, Master, carest thou not that we perish? And he arose, and rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, Peace, be still. And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm. And he said unto them, Why are ye so fearful? how is it that ye have no faith? And they feared exceedingly, and said one to another, What manner of man is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?” [Mark 4.36-41]

And so, let’s say He is sleeping – so what? Everything is under control. We always think we have to pray – real “hard” and then we can get “old sleepy head” to wake up and do His job. What a joke!

We have to wake up to the reality that when He said

“it is finished” [John 19.30]

He meant what He said. He wasn’t kidding.

Why don’t we all just rest in the back of the boat and watch history

[His-story] unfold perfectly before our eyes. Of course we're in it up to our ears as His agents of love.

End of Study on Sleeping Jesus

6

THAT MOMENT OF FAITH

We all have one. Sometimes that's all we have. That's all we need. Just that one moment because it lasts a lifetime. What am I talking about?

Each and every believer can think back at a moment in their life where Jesus made Himself real. He tore open the veil and revealed Himself to you and me. Can you pinpoint that moment in your memory. Some can. I can. My moment was the evening of December 16, 1971. If you know me, you know my story. And if indeed you know me, you've heard my story many times as I love to tell. My moment of faith is not yours and yours is not mine. We are different Jesus reveals Himself as He sees fit.

Some can not pinpoint a moment but simply say it was a growing experience that culminated with the "knowing" of the eternal Jesus Christ. So, some can not say a particular date, but just know that the revelation happened.

For some the moment is subtle. For some it cataclysmic, as mine was. Perhaps it's somewhere in the middle. But, you must know that you had your moment. Some call it an epiphany. I like that word, epiphany. Epiphany means "manifestation" and is usually used when describing the manifestation of Jesus Christ in your life.

Some will chase Jesus until they catch Him. Believe He runs at times, but will never hide and you will catch Him. For some Jesus is the One doing the running and you will try and run away. But I guarantee you will not succeed. When Jesus is after you He will get you. You are His to begin

with and He will catch you. Jesus said in His prayer John 18.9 “Of them which thou gavest me have I lost none”.

End of Study on That Moment of Faith

7

TODAY IN PARADISE

“And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with me in paradise.” [Luke 23.43]

This is a very memorable verse and scene. Jesus was crucified along with two “malefactors”, Dismas and Gestas. [“malefactor” is defined as one who commits a crime]. The term “paradise” is used only three times in the King James version and one time in the Gospels. Typically when this verse is analyzed the emphasis is on the word “paradise” and what exactly that place is. Is “paradise” just another word for “heaven”? Probably, but that is really not the point. The emphasis of this verse should not be “paradise”, but rather “today”.

“Today” is the key. Whatever “paradise” is or wherever it is, heaven or another place – that is not the issue. The emphasis is that, on that very day, Jesus said to Dismas that he would be with Him in Paradise. Isn’t that very odd and confusing? Why do I say that? Haven’t we been taught that Jesus would be “in the earth” until the third day [Sunday] and that He wasn’t going anywhere that day – right? How could the Dismas be with Jesus that very day in paradise and how does that affect us?

The best way for me to go to Part II on this is to share a response from a good friend. Despite his statement to the contrary, he “articulates” perfectly.

“How could the malefactor be with Jesus (innocent, broken, torn,

crucified, slain while bearing the total sin of the whole world) that very day in paradise and how does that affect us?"

Joyful hahahaha.... Love this David. My wife and I sat here and went over this... great question for sure. Our consensus is that anywhere bright sunshine, or, darkest gloom surrounded by fearful possibility, any place with the Son of God is Paradise, (location not important, "if I make my bed in Hell You are there with me..") no matter where our physical bodies may be, no matter our own personal share of this sin He's bearing, our Spirit is joined to Him always, by the merest confession (acceptance, agreement,.. you know the contractual terms so much better) we are joined to Him, even joined with Father, as Jesus prayed would be so for us, One eternal Spirit, and as our neighbor (recent "convert" says excitedly... "Listen, we will bust through the gates of hell to get you out, we won't forsake you there..." I don't know what else to say right now... that articulate ability or gift isn't fully mine.. sometimes our lips are sealed.... but I think I see where you are taking us in this ... and I am there with you no matter the location or series of human words that struggle (in my case) to speak God's language of redemption and total union. He has taken me, a malefactor, to be with Him. That's how it "He" affects us. In this weakness He speaks His Love and joy perfectly for that other who hasn't yet met Him, ahh, "Paradise ,,, come on in with Me" and it is so. As our friend Boyd would say, "Glory." Amen."

Okay, so what is "today"? Today is now – RIGHT NOW! And NOW is ETERNITY. Why is it eternity? – because it's all we have and Jesus said "today" – He didn't say tomorrow. And He is the Alpha and the Omega – He is the beginning and the end – so He must be RIGHT NOW. Today is paradise for all of us – happy or sad – rich or poor – heaven or hell – health or sickness – no matter – He has us where He wants us – our situation perfectly ordained and designed as we express the eternal, loving and saving life within.

Now let's get back to the malefactors, Dismas and Gestas . We have Jesus crucified with the two malefactors. While I believe this is a true description of the historical crucifixion scene - this is also a true description of us. Which malefactor are we? Clearly we choose to be one or the other, Dismas or Gestas. Remember the definition of malefactor – "one who commits a crime". Well that is all of us, right? We have all committed the crime and crimes for which Jesus was crucified. Now, both of the malefactors expressed faith in Jesus. The one accepted the fact that he had done some wrong in his life and deserved his fate. He simply asked Jesus to remember him. He didn't say any required "magic" words. He didn't ask to

be forgiven. He didn't even say he believed in Jesus. But, clearly he expressed faith and Jesus promised to honor his request.

Okay, let's review this scene again:

“And one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on him, saying, If thou be Christ, save thyself and us. But the other answering rebuked him, saying, Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss. And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom. And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with me in paradise. [Luke 23.39-43]

Both malefactors, Dismas and Gestas, are us. The one believed that Jesus could take them off their crosses and make everything “okay” – “come on Jesus – do something for me!” And, we see that type of attitude in Christianity, don't we? “What can I get out of this deal?” “The TV preacher says I will get ten bucks back for every one I send him – you just gotta love Christianity!” Toward this man, Jesus was silent.

Dismas asked Jesus for one thing only – just to be with Him. And really, isn't that good enough? It should be because, being with Him as He lives His life in us, as us and through us, is indeed everything. There is no other way to be.

“I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.” [Gal. 2.20]

And, it is no coincidence that Dismas and Gestas were the first living examples of being “crucified with Christ”, and, we know for certain, as to Dismas, with him in paradise.

Our co-crucifixion, believe it or not, receive it or not, understand it or not, is the most important and perhaps only reality that exists. The Savior's crucifixion is an eternal fact, revealed at a moment in history. As Jesus Christ, is the

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

Indeed the crucifixion is the foundation of the world. Do you get that? First is the crucifixion, then the world. First is the reconciliation, then the

separation needing reconciliation. The crucifixion is an eternal fact, existing before there even was a world to be saved and reconciled.

“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]

So, there is no doubt that Dimas is with Jesus in paradise. In that moment of faith, where Dismas acknowledges Who Jesus is, he is at the same moment crucified with Jesus. And, as Dismas, we also are crucified with Christ and where He is, we are.

In choosing to be with Jesus – today in paradise – it is this moment – it is not even later today – it is now. Jesus did not say, “First let me finish my crucifixion and then you can be with me in paradise this afternoon.” The reality is that, just as Dismas and Gestas, we are with Jesus in His crucifixion and His death. [see Gal.2.20]

So, we may recognize that the true beginning of our paradise experience starts with our death. Crucifixion is death. Yet we are still alive, as He is alive. Just as He loved us, we love others. Just as He gave Himself for us, we give ourselves for others.

We made one choice – that to be with Him. The rest we did not choose – it simply is our truth. We don’t create this reality – we simply recognize and walk in it.

So, go enjoy your paradise – with tears and laughter –with pain and joy – with whatever or wherever you are – because in your very human situation, you are the crystal clear expression of the One that first loved you.

End of Study on Today in Paradise

8

THE I AM POSITION

I first heard my good friend Boyd use that phrase – “The I Am Position”. I don’t know if he coined the phrase – perhaps he “borrowed” it as I borrow it from him. “I am” is a very bold and curious statement. “I am” seems to say everything and nothing. Sometimes to be “everything” you must get rid of “everything” - strip away the layers of nonsense and misunderstanding. “Everything” is sort of naked – “here I am – no pretense – no intent to impress – no lies – just me – the utter truth of who I am.”

I guess that’s why He says His name is “I AM”. He has no one to impress. There is no pretense or lies. He is not covered with layers of nonsense – misunderstanding – deceit – or anything – He just is. He does however, have characteristics, as humans would define characteristics. He is not invisible. He is certainly recognizable. One can intuitively sense Him - at work, doing something or simply sense His presence and reality when “all hell” is breaking out around us. But no matter, He is just purely Who “He is”.

The real question for us is – do we share this position? Can we boldly say with Him – “I am, also”? Do we have that right? Better yet, do we have that responsibility to agree with Him? Jesus said it. Nearly got Him stoned on the spot. Well, I think we must recognize that we share the “I am position”.

The best way for me to go to Part II on this is to share a response from a good friend. Despite his statement to the contrary, he “articulates” perfectly.

"How could the malefactor be with Jesus (innocent, broken, torn, crucified, slain while bearing the total sin of the whole world) that very day in paradise and how does that affect us?"

"Joyful hahahaha.... Love this David. My wife and I sat here and went over this... great question for sure. Our consensus is that anywhere bright sunshine, or, darkest gloom surrounded by fearful possibility, any place with the Son of God is Paradise, (location not important, "if I make my bed in Hell You are there with me.") no matter where our physical bodies may be, no matter our own personal share of this sin He's bearing, our Spirit is joined to Him always, by the merest confession (acceptance, agreement,.. you know the contractual terms so much better) we are joined to Him, even joined with Father, as Jesus prayed would be so for us, One eternal Spirit, and as our neighbor (recent "convert" says excitedly.. "Listen, we will bust through the gates of hell to get you out, we won't forsake you there..." I don't know what else to say right now,.... that articulate ability or gift isn't fully mine.. sometimes our lips are sealed.... but I think I see where you are taking us in this ... and I am there with you no matter the location or series of human words that struggle (in my case) to speak God's language of redemption and total union. He has taken me, a malefactor, to be with Him. That's how it "He" affects us. In this weakness He speaks His Love and joy perfectly for that other who hasn't yet met Him, ahh, "Paradise ,,, come on in with Me" and it is so. As our friend Boyd would say, "Glory." Amen.""

DAVID — is this the right place for part II you had two Part twos.

Moses is handed the "impossible" job of freeing the Hebrew people from slavery and oppression in Egypt. He had to defy Pharaoh. Pharaoh ruled Egypt as a "god". He convinced the Egyptian people, and even himself, that he was a deity. Pharaoh took orders from no one. Moses was not raised as an Israelite. He was raised as the son of Pharaoh's daughter – not a Hebrew. Given that background it seems reasonable that Moses wanted some authority as he approached both Pharaoh and the Hebrew people. So Moses asks God to identify himself and the following conversation occurred:

"And Moses said unto God, Behold, when I come unto the children of Israel, and shall say unto them, The God of your fathers hath sent me unto you; and they shall say to me, What is his name? what shall I say unto them? And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus

shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you.”
[Exodus 3.13-14]

The Pharisees asked Jesus by what authority he stated that

“If a man keep my saying, he shall never taste of death.” [John 8.52]

His eventual answer was

“Before Abraham was, I am.” [John 8.58]

So much authority in “just” a name. Or is it “just” a name? And how do we fit in?

I am so “impressed” lately with those trying to “impress”. Actually we can stop doing that now. Really, it seems that everyone wants you to know, either, how smart they are, or, how rich they are or, how many toys they own, or whatever. And we all do that to some extent – right? The “I am” position releases you from that. Understanding your personal “I am” position, basically, clears you to just be yourself – like Him – just “be”. “I am” really means just “be”. No reason to impress. No reason to improve.

Of course we share the “I am” position. How do I know that? We are as He is

“... because as he is, so are we in this world.” [I John 4.17]

So, in all boldness we can say “I am”.

Why is this so important? Because, as He defines himself we can do the same. He could define himself as big, strong, mighty whatever – but He doesn’t. Certainly He’s the smartest, most powerful and richest. But He doesn’t focus on that. Instead He states He is

“meek and lowly in heart.” [Matt. 11.29]

Why doesn’t He remind us of all His great attributes? Because His focus is not on Himself – His focus is on others. We are now totally free to think of ourselves as He thinks of Himself – or rather ignores Himself and thinks of others.

It is hard to think that He made a choice. “Choice” is such a human word, based upon temporal circumstances. “Choice” means that at a certain point in history someone decided to do something based upon

alternatives. Well, we don't think of Him in such terms. We think that eternally He is Whoever He is and there is no choice involved.

But, again, humanly speaking it seems as though He did have alternatives. Let's just say He did. Well, what were His choices? He could have chosen to be alone. No earth, no people, no dogs, no cats, no fish and no birds. Well, that didn't happen. He could have chosen that His creation would serve Him. Well that didn't happen either. Well, what's left? Apparently, if He made any choice at all, He chose to serve and, in fact, die for His creation – that His creation might have real life.

Well, He made the rules. Life comes from death and someone's got to die.

“Verily, verily, I say unto you, 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]

So He died for us – before there ever was us.

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

So, what does all this tell us Who “I am” is? Well, John tells us.

“God is love”. [I John 4.8]

And, what does this say about us?

So, apparently, if choice existed - He chose to be a lover of others. Mind-shattering! That choice seems so contrary to “normal” human thinking.

“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD.” [Isaiah 55.8]

Of course there's always going to be an argument at this juncture – “yeah, well if He's so loving why does He allow pain and suffering?” Well, my first thought is walk away from that argument because it's not going anywhere profitable. And, really, there is no satisfactory human answer to that question anyway.

But, regarding “normal” human thinking – our minds do get renewed.

“And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind ...” [Romans 12.2]

“And be renewed in the spirit of your mind” [Eph. 4.23]

“...but we have the mind of Christ.” [I Cor. 2.16]

And His thoughts do become our thoughts – His ways do become our ways.

So then, why the pain and suffering? Perhaps, as Him in and for our world – we become stirred into action. We become as Him – the lover of others. We address and comfort and change the pain and suffering of others – we become Him to them. This is our high calling in Christ. This is our life.

This is the I Am position. I Am not for me. I Am for you. You Are for me.

End of Study on The I Am Position

9

THE NOW OF CHRISTIANITY

I almost entitled this the “future of Christianity” – but, when you have an eternal perspective, as we do, in reality, there is no future and there is no past – there is only “now”. So you ask don’t you believe in eternal life? Isn’t eternal life in the future? No, it is now! Right now! But aren’t things going to be different? I don’t know. Who cares? We have this moment and He lives as us in this moment – so how else would you define eternity? I’m not saying that one should not prepare for tomorrow. I do all the time. But I don’t say or think that “someday I’ll be – whatever, a better person, a better Christian, a better anyone that really matters.” I am now, right now, exactly and precisely the one I am created to be. Many years ago a young man said to me that he wanted to come to the point in life where he was no longer tempted to sin. I suggested that he try arsenic. What if you are tempted to sin? So what? What if you do sin [unintentionally cause hurt or pain]? It is the perfect opportunity to go to the one that you have wronged and make it right. That creates relationships and is a good thing.

This topic might be controversial. Controversy is good as it stirs people up and causes thought and challenge to often long-held opinions and views that might need revamping and rethinking. I will [try to] tear down the “strongholds”.

”For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds.” [2 Cor. 10.4]

And what exactly was Paul talking about when referring to “strongholds” that needed tearing down? Well, let’s look at the next verse -

“Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ...” [2 Cor. 10.5]

I am convinced that Paul was not talking about strong holds of sin or evil. Why? Because sin and evil were destroyed by the Savior’s shed blood on the cross. It is religion - Paul talked about the strong holds of religion that snare and enslave people into a way of life rather than Life Himself. Religion will always be the high thing that exalts itself “against the knowledge of God”. Religion is contrary to God. The “obedience of Christ” is not morals, ethics and values - religion. The “obedience” is the acceptance and incorporation of the very truth of Christ – that He died that we may have Life – His Life – Him - and be His very person and expression in our love-starved world. The religious life of ethics, morals, values, rituals, observances, self-improvement, and on and on – must be torn down.

Just as Judaism, the church was ordained and created by God. However the church will never be a building much less a system of teaching people “how to live”. The church is us – people - as we encourage one another to understand, to the very deepest core of our being, that Christ is formed in us, every one [see Gal. 4.19].

Christianity is to us as Judaism was to Jesus. The institution, created by God, was worthy of due respect as those who are ordained to serve it, but, we must take the hypocrisies and misinformation of the religion to task just as Jesus boldly did in His day.

“Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men.” [I Cor. 1.25]

I had a good laugh the other day I thought how foolish – a man dies on the cross and everything becomes right with the universe –

“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.” [Colossians 1.20]

That thought just struck me as so outrageously simple and foolish – yet, since age 18, I stake my life and all I know or believe on the fact that His blood gave me life, eternally. And I laughed hard. We cannot change, alter or in any fashion improve upon total and complete reconciliation to Him. But, here’s my point, as a religion, we try hard.

Let me repeat:

“We cannot change, alter or in any fashion improve upon total and complete reconciliation to Him. But, here’s my point, as a religion, we try hard.”

We start our Christian life with the phrase, “come into my heart Lord Jesus” – and He does, but we may not believe that fact – not at first. Why do I say that? Why else would we spend, in some cases, years and years trying to perfect that truth? Did He come into your heart or not? Did only a small part of Him come in? Does He up and leave when He feels like it? Does He leave when you go to bed at night and in the morning you are therefore required to wake Him up in your quiet time and ask that He “fill you anew” that day, only to repeat the process tomorrow? Is He that fickle? Or are we that foolish?

The answer should be clear. We are fickle. We are foolish, at times. We are the ones that may not understand that He has joined His Spirit to our spirit in a permanent, fixed, eternal love relationship. He’s not going anywhere. We think that He must be sensed with “feelings” – so we try to work it up. And, conversely, failure to work it up means He’s not there. That’s silly, right?

“Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.” [I John 3.2]

“... now we are the sons of God ...”

“... now we are the sons of God ...”

How shall we “become” the sons/daughters of God when we are “now” the sons of God? We won’t. There are not better or worse sons of God. There just “are” sons of God. So I leave this topic with this thought. We might consider the programs and paths that we choose to “improve” our Christianity as, either a distraction or perhaps a waste of time. We might

further consider that “we are now the sons of God” for the very world in which we are placed. In that regard we might change our focus from ourselves to the world full of broken hearts, needing the love of the Savior.

End of Study on The Now of Christianity

IO

THE HUMANITY OF JESUS CHRIST

At the moment of His birth Jesus said to Himself, “I remember a moment ago, I was playing cards with the angels and now look at me – I’m a little baby. Look at my little baby hands. I wonder if I’m a cute baby. “Would someone please hand me a mirror.” Of course that’s ridiculous. But I have also heard people say, “Look what He gave up to come down here ...” Folks actually talk like that as if He had some memory or consciousness of His life before His birth. We don’t and He did not.

Most believers will say that they believe in and understand the divinity of Jesus Christ – that He was the Son of God. However, do we know and understand the humanity of Jesus Christ? Do we have to believe that he was a human being as well as God? Or do we even consider the possibility of His humanity? But, here’s the point. You must understand His humanity to understand your own. I needed to grasp and relate to what made Him a human being, just as us, to understand myself and my experience. Understanding His divinity is easy – if you believe in Him at all. Understanding His humanity and how that affects you and the world you live in is a different story and not so easy.

Is this important? It means everything to us and the world we live in, because,

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

Jesus Christ was a human being. The true understanding of that fact, unfortunately, is lost on many. That takes nothing away from His divinity.

“But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men.” [Philippians 2:7]

We often have more of an academic understanding rather than an intuitive or heart understanding of the humanity of Jesus. Although the verse says that He took on the “form” of a servant that does not mean that Jesus was not really a human. He did not “fake” being a human. It was not a game for Him. The “likeness of men” does not mean “sort of like” a man – or that He simply “looked like a man” but inside he was all God and not man. That’s nonsense. He was a human being – really, really, not “like” or “looked like” a man.

Why is this so crucial to understand? Because, by the very same token, we are not to be “like” or “look like” anything or anyone. We are to be ourselves - absolutely, 100%. - and not just a “self”, but a redeemed self – a self that knows that we are His expression– but ourselves, none-the-less. We are not to fake it in any fashion.

“For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.” [Hebrews 4:15]

This verse does not mean, only, that He was “tempted” to sin - it really means what it says – “touched with the feeling of our infirmities”. Why? Because He was a human being. He was “touched” in the very same way we are and for the very same reason.

“We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak ...”
[Romans 15:1]

It means nothing if Jesus had a human body but, had an eternal consciousness – memory of life - before his birth. He was not born with a consciousness or memory of eternity. He really didn’t remember playing cards or, for that matter shooting hoops or playing touch football with the angels. His humanity had to be much deeper than his human body - his soul had to be human. And what is a soul anyway? Soul is the union of spirit and body. And it is our soul that makes us human. And Jesus had a human soul.

“And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground [body], and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life [spirit]; and man became a living soul.” [Gen 2.7]

Search the New Testament and you will find the story of Jesus - what He did and what He said - but little of His psychological make-up- in other words, little of what made Him human – with a few very notable exceptions. And, maybe the reason why some do not believe in Him is that they cannot see or understand His humanity. Some don’t “connect” to Him or to us for the reason that they don’t see or understand His humanity or ours. Often we don’t present His humanity or our own for that matter.

Okay, so what is, for me, the most significant “notable exception” – the most important verse that reveals the humanity of the Savior? It is the shortest verse in bible, as Jesus and others stood at the tomb of Lazarus.

“Jesus wept”. John 11.35

Jesus did not live on a level where He was only “playing at being human”. At the tomb of Lazarus we have Jesus, King of the Kings, Lord of Lords, Prince of Peace, Almighty God, weeping, not just crying - weeping. Very strange in that He knew that in two minutes He would bring Lazarus back to life. But what does He do? He is overwhelmed, personally, by His own sorrow and grief.

Some say that Jesus wept vicariously for the others around Him that were grieving – I do not agree. His sorrow and grief were His personally. And why?

Jesus had to be a human to die for humans. Jesus understood and identified with the pain and suffering of every person. Sometimes we are oblivious, but Jesus was focused and immersed in His humanity and human need and suffering of those around Him.

“He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not.” [Isaiah 53.3]

Why didn’t Isaiah describe or prophesy Jesus as a man “full of the joy of the Lord?” Why - because Jesus was a human being, and like us, wasn’t “full of joy”.

When in Christianity we focus on “Christianity for me” – we are mistaken. If I were to believe much of what I hear, I would assume all

Christians were blessed, healthy and never sick, wealthy and joyful all the time. In such faulty thinking in Christianity only “good” things would happen to us, we would never die or be sick, we would have all the material possessions that we could ever want or dream of and all that nonsense would make us “happy-happy” all the time. “Gimme a break!” – how boring. And, further, listening to what I hear from those in Christianity, who claim to be experts, is that if we don’t enjoy such a “perfect” life, if all these attributes are not true about us, we are doing something wrong. What a lie from hell. Yet some stumble at that point.

“Our humanity is God’s asset. If we are meant to function on the human level, which is how God made us, we can’t deny our humanity. We don’t like things we think and feel, so we want to reject our humanness. But our humanity has to be part of God’s plan; otherwise how can we express Him? He has designed us to express Him through our humanity. So denial of our humanity isn’t the answer.” [Dan Stone]

“He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not.” [Isaiah 53.3]

Jesus’ personal human experience brought him to the very depth of what it means to be human. Jesus was a “man of sorrows and acquainted with grief”. The use of the term “acquainted” is biblical understatement. He was drenched with grief. We don’t know exactly why, but it had to be personal and not vicarious. Sometimes I imagine His grief may have started with the death of Joseph. We know that He expressed His grief at the death of Lazarus. The depth and reality of Jesus’ humanity and whatever was his pain and sorrow – is also the depth of our humanity -

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

Did Jesus ever struggle with his humanity, perhaps not fully comprehending how his suffering as a human would give life to others? Of course He did. And, by the same token we give life to others, not always understanding the process. But, we can accept the fact our lives are not “for us”, but rather for others.

“And he went a little farther, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will,

but as thou wilt.” [Matt. 26.39]

“And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” [Matt. 27.46]

Even though at times he seemed fully understanding and accepting the reality of His sacrificial death, yet, with the moment at hand He was still so human He posed the question “if there might be another way?” Then, with death only seconds away the reality of separation was tough to deal with.

“For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin...” [2 Cor. 5.21]

“He is ... a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief...” [Isaiah 53.3]

We don’t know what exactly was His personal sorrow and grief. But whatever, it cut to the core of His being as he was truly 100% human as we are. Somehow, through the pain of His humanity, He grasped His destiny as God’s Son, Messiah and Savior of all the creation. And, He had to know his own personal pain because

“Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows...” [Isa. 53.4]

He had to be human to both understand and die for humans, for the purpose of

“... 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]

And,

“... all things *are* of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation ...” [2 Cor. 5.18]

And, of course that is the key. The

“ministry of reconciliation” that not has not only been given to us, but, has been entrusted to us, and, “... yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!” [1 Cor. 9:16]

So, what is the purpose of our problems, our “sorrow and grief”? Is it about us? Is it our punishment for something? Is it because we did something wrong? In the first instance it would seem that everything is about me. But is that where we end?

Indeed “He bears our sorrows and carries our grief”. Sorrow and grief touch everyone. It is the most basic and most painful human experience. In the same way that He had to know the pain of His humanity, to the very core of His human being, so do we.

“Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake...” [Col. 1.24]

Paul understood, but not at first. When first dealing with his problem he just wanted it removed.

“For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. [2 Cor. 12.8]

Eventually, he said,

“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. 12.9]

“Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake...” [Col. 1.24]

You and I are Him in our world. We share the same quality of life as Him and purpose in life when bearing the sorrow and carrying the grief of others. At the moment you realize that whatever gives you pain is, ultimately not “about you” but about you for others - that you now, as Him, carry the sorrow and bear the grief of others - then you realize that you are truly Him in your world. You don't have to go out of your way looking for it – it will find you. No reason to look in – only look out.

“What this tells us is that we can stop seeing ourselves as a liability. We can cease thinking that something more needs to happen to us spiritually before we can be an asset to God. If we keep focusing on ourselves externally, we'll keep thinking, “He can't use me yet.” If we focus on Christ living in us, we can put ourselves on the shelf as a liability and begin to see ourselves as an asset.” [Dan Stone]

End of Study on The Humanity of Jesus Christ

II

THE MANIFESTATION OF THE SONS OF GOD

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

We get the impression, when reading this verse, that Paul is referring to some future event. Maybe he is. I’ve heard people talk about this verse in reference to the physical return of Jesus. They refer to some mystical, magical moment as we fly away into the clouds to meet Him. All the while the rest of the world sadly says, “there goes the sons and daughters of God.” I don’t think that’s what this verse means.

The reality is that the creation, the world as we know it, right now, sincerely, seriously and eagerly anticipates that the sons and daughters of God will clearly show themselves. That’s what Paul means. He’s not referring to a future event or even tomorrow. All that we know, and all that there is, wants to see the sons of God just be themselves.

Who are we and what does that mean? Because of our intuitive and intimate knowing of the Lover of the universe, and ourselves as His human expression, we are the ones that the world wants to see. Why is that? Because, of the very nature of who we are, we bring hope to those in despair, unconditional love to the lonely, peace to those in turmoil and justice to the forsaken and we are

“...ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you ...” [1 Peter 3.15]

End of Study on The Manifestation of the Sons of God

I2

THE NEW RACE

So, who are we? The death, burial and resurrection of the Savior produced, on this earth a new race. And the church can deny that and the world can ignore it and even laugh at us. But, we cannot deny that reality. We are who Adam was intended to be. We are living beings – with the breath of His life, carrying the seed of God and each and every one a unique and perfect expression of the Christ.

And we are in fact the 7000 that have not bowed the knee to the Baal of religion.

“Lord, they have killed thy prophets, and digged down thine altars; and I am left alone, and they seek my life. But what saith the answer of God unto him? I have reserved to myself seven thousand men, who have not bowed the knee to the image of Baal.” [Romans 11.3-4]

This *verse* refers to a moment when Elijah thought he was all alone. The answer he received was in fact there were many like him. “Baal” refers to any of a number of pagan “god-like” images, made by humans, thought to be gods over rain, thunder, fertility, agriculture and the like. In the time of Elijah some Jews supplemented their religion with this idol worship. But, we do not. We are Christians, but Christianity is not an idol and we do not worship religion.

We are the new race – the race of Christ on the earth.

End of Study on The New Race

I3

WHAT A DIFFERENCE A DAY MAKES

“What a difference a day makes. Twenty-four little hours.”

How about, for the next 24 hours we all drop, stop and exit all we think, know and assume about Christianity and simply focus, meditate, concentrate and repeat the simple words of Jesus.

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

Maybe, just maybe, tomorrow will be different. Maybe we will begin to see Life – Christianity as a Person we express instead of a religion we adhere to.

Part Two is up to you. Where is part two?

I4

WHAT CHILD IS THIS?

Try singing this to yourself without tears.

*“What child is this, who, laid to rest
On Mary’s lap, is sleeping?
Whom angels greet with anthems sweet,
While shepherds watch are keeping?
This, this is Christ the King,
Whom shepherds guard and angels sing:
Haste, haste to bring him laud,
The Babe, the Son of Mary!
So bring Him incense, gold, and myrrh,
Come peasant king to own Him,
The King of kings, salvation brings,
Let loving hearts enthrone Him.
Raise, raise the song on high,
The Virgin sings her lullaby:
Joy, joy, for Christ is born,
The Babe, the Son of Mary!”*

Some dear friends reminded me of one more verse: [get another tissue]

*“Why lies He in such mean estate
Where ox and ass are feeding
Good Christian fear, for sinners here*

*The silent word is pleading
Nails, spear shall pierce Him through
The Cross be borne, for me, for you
Hail Hail the Word made flesh
The Babe the Son of Mary”*

End of Study of What Child is This?

I5

WHEN YOU ARE A LOVER

When you are a lover you see more love more clearly. You see love in the details – in those throw-away moments. You see love when others don't. When you are a lover you recognize Him everywhere and in all.

End of Study on When You Are A Lover

I6

WHAT GREAT THINGS JESUS HAS DONE

Sometimes we think that we all just really need to hang around in our little Jesus club meeting [maybe the “church”]. But Jesus often has other ideas and plans for us.

“And when he was come into the ship, he that had been possessed with the devil prayed him that he might be with him. Howbeit Jesus suffered him not, but saith unto him, Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had compassion on thee. And he departed, and began to publish in Decapolis how great things Jesus had done for him: and all men did marvel.” [Mark 5.18-20]

This unnamed man that Jesus healed wanted to just “hang around with Jesus”. He wanted to live in the “church” so to speak. He was really digging the time of sitting at Jesus feet. And, actually, that’s cool for a season – but it’s not what we are really about.

Jesus said, “Get out of here”. Jesus said, “Go tell people” And so this man did. And so it’s time for us also to go “... publish in [you name your hometown] what great things Jesus has done for [you] ...”

Go. Tell. Love. Care.

End of Study on What Great Things Jesus Has Done

I7

WHAT IF...

What if your redemption, reconciliation and union, purchased by the blood of the Savior, is so complete that there was really nothing for you to “do”, nothing for you to achieve and nothing for you to improve.

Perhaps you could just be yourself, always. What if it's true? You could just relax knowing all is well.

Why not give it a try? Why do you have to lose? Maybe just some misconceptions. What do you have to gain? Maybe the normal life that He planned for you.

End of Study on What if ...

18

WITHIN YOU

We're always looking for something. I remember a few years ago I was traveling with Boyd and John and Fred and we were sitting around with some folks and Fred said, to the effect, "I've found the meaning of life". Now, realize that we were with a group of believers – they knew the score. But, this thought, that there was a "meaning in life" that they had missed, provoked a great deal of interest. All ears were wide open, jaws dropped and everyone waited for what Fred would say next. So, Fred said, "Yes, the meaning of life – METAMUCIL". Well, of course he was kidding. But what I got out of this episode was that we are still looking for that "thing", or the book we must read, or the Bible study or church we must join or the video we must watch or the preacher we must hear that will either make everything right or the magic word, or the key to life. And, at times, we still feel inadequate that something is missing.

Well, the religious leaders of Jesus' day asked the same question. They wanted to know the "meaning of life". They wanted a sign. They wanted to know the "key to life".

"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]

Well I think we've established that the "meaning of life" is not

Metamucil. But, what is “it” and why are we always looking? The reason we look and do not trust what we have is because humans naturally do that. We look “out”. We look for improvement. We look for assurance and reassurance. We look for signs and confirmation. And, you know we get some of that stuff, but it ends. It must end. Because what we seek, namely the Kingdom, is not “Lo here! or, lo there!”. It’s not out there anywhere.

The Kingdom, the entire Kingdom, is within each and every one of us. But we don’t trust that. We don’t want to accept that. That’s why we look for morality and all the other outward signs – learning, knowing, and doing. Ultimately, the point Jesus was making was just “being” and nothing more. Why can’t we trust that? Is it too easy? Is it too hard to give up our misconceptions of true Christianity?

I like to think that sometimes we have to come to the point of nothing. There is “nothing” that will happen to me, for me, or in me that is not already done and complete, in total and eternal fullness. Sometimes we are like the tin man seeking a heart – when, in reality, we are already His love agents in the world. We are because He says we are. We are because Jesus was crucified and rose again. We are because that is how we really operate. We are because the Kingdom of God is within us – you and me.

So what would happen if you woke up one morning and said “I’m done” “I’m done with Christianity as religion”. “I’m done with self-improvement – it’s not working very well anyway.” “I’m done with doubting the truth of the eternal, complete, and perfect work of the Savior’s death on the cross – and within me.”

Let’s say today is that day. Just get out of bed and say, “Since the Kingdom of God is within me, I am a perfect and complete human being.” I didn’t say you necessarily had to believe it or feel it – just say it. Remember, “in the beginning was the Word”. So, we always start with the “word” and go from there.

At that point we can start looking “out” again. But now it’s a different looking out now. We are no longer “looking outward” to improve or to obtain something we don’t already have. No, at this point we look out as we express Him. Rather than concentration on our perceived shortcomings and needs we now see a world of persons in pain and lost, needing the Savior. .

And who is the life and expression of the Savior in your world? Just look in the mirror.

The word is the beginning. And I mean the “Word”. God spoke the “word” and created. Jesus is the Word and became flesh. He is the agent in creation as “All things were made by him; and without him was not

anything made that was made.” [John 1.3] So, everything starts with the Word.

“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. [Heb. 11.1] So, when I say that you speak the “word”, whether OR NOT you “believe or feel” of course that is faith in action. It is the evidence of calling what is already true in Spirit, which you may not be able to see with your eyes, as a right now reality in the three dimensional world.

God spoke the Word, “let there be” and creation was brought from “not seen” Spirit into three dimensions. Jesus as “the lamb slain from the foundation of the world” was not seen. But He lived the Life and brought the eternal reality of redemption, through death, into the here and now. The promise, given to Abraham, was a “thing not seen”. The prophets and King David spoke openly in faith about Jesus, to them a “thing not seen”.

So, when I say you first take the reality of

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

You will first say it long before you know it. But in the saying and living accordingly, you will bring that reality from “not seen” to the here and now. So, say what is true, right now.

End of study on Within You

I9

WORSHIP SERVICE

I drove past a “church” yesterday and I noticed the sign said “Worship Service Sundays at 9am and 11am”. Does that strike you as funny or odd? It does me. And the other day someone said something about “going to church” to worship. Honestly, I’m not sure what any of this means. Is worship singing or raising hands or praying or speaking in tongues? And, “how would one know when ‘worship’ is going to happen and where?”

Fortunately, Jesus answered both of these questions. One day a woman asked Him if the worship service would be held at the Methodist Church or at the Southern Baptist Church. Actually, she said,

“Our fathers worshipped in this mountain; and ye say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship.” [John 4.20]

Jesus had this interesting way of answering your true question, not necessarily what you asked. The woman was still thinking that “worship” is a thing you do, done in a particular place and one place might be better than another. Jesus wanted to get her off the “place” thing as quickly as He could. And how many times have we heard some well-meaning person of authority in a church say something like, “we pray that thou wilt meet us in this place, blah, blah, blah ... “? Well, how did Jesus answer the woman’s real question?

“God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.” [John 4.20]

The Samaritan woman at the well may have just been showing off her religiosity by inquiring about the “correct” place to hold a worship service. In any event, Jesus answered the question of her heart.

“God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.” [John 4.20]

Jesus’ answer regarding an appropriate “place” of worship is in one’s spirit. Now, your spirit goes wherever you do, so if you happen to be in a building, maybe a church building, at 9 am on Sunday morning, well worship might happen. As a matter of fact it will, it must, because your spirit always worships and communes with its Creator. I don’t think there’s much you need to do to make that happen or much you can do to prevent that from happening. Some will tell you that you must do something to worship – sing, dance, pay tithes, witness, speak in tongues or whatever. Some may say you must do nothing, as in sit silently and clear your mind. Well, neither is correct as Jesus said worship occurs in one’s spirit without other requirements, ending that dispute.

I think Jesus’ reference to worship in “spirit and truth” is the reality that we are joined to Him, spirit to Spirit as one Spirit [I Cor. 6.17]. There’s really not much to do at that point, other than understand and recognize. You might want to say, “It can’t be that easy – you have to do something”. Well, have it your way, knock yourself out. I’m not going to.

We’ve taken a remark made by Paul and run with it for two thousand years in every direction possible. “And what church do you go to?”

“Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.” [Heb. 10.25]

To quote one of my best buddies, “Yikes 30,000 plus denominations and billions of \$\$\$ of buildings and business systems all on one verse ...” Of course we should “assemble” together, but we have used this one verse as license and permission to create denominations, build institutions, buildings, all at odds with each other, unable to get along and disagreeing on every point.

And what happens when we get into the building at one of those

“appointed” times”? They “worship in song”, “worship in prayer”, “worship in the sermon” and, the one I like the best, “worship in tithes and offerings”. But, ultimately, you will not find Him in any particular place, anymore than you will find Him in all places at all times. God does not live in buildings and is not constrained to places, times or denominations.

“Howbeit the most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands; as saith the prophet ...” [Acts 7.48]

He will not “fill this place with His Spirit”. He will fill people with His Spirit because He lives in people.

“In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.” [Eph. 2.22]

Accordingly, “worship” is a fact and not an action. And, indeed, a fact that is true without your help.

End of Study on Worship Service

20

YOU SAY “WHO”

You say “Who” lives His life as you?

None of us escape the finger pointing, either done by others or by ourselves. No one does. What does that mean? Well, when you boldly agree with Paul and say, as he did, speaking of his union,

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

“It is Christ that lives in me” [Gal.2.20]

“Christ, who is our [my] life” – [Col. 3.4]

– then the finger pointing begins.

What finger pointing? You know – “oh really, the way you act?” Or, you do it to yourself, “oh really, the things you think” –or- “the things you do”.

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

We are talking about guilt and insecurity. Guilt, a form of fear, is an ancient emotion that accuses even when there is no reason. We are all prone to insecurity also. Let’s face it, we are asked to believe something that initially we can’t quite see or grasp – namely, that the King of the Universe

has chosen each and every one of us as His place to both live and love our world. That really is a tough one – but it is true.

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

“It is Christ that lives in me” [Gal.2.20]

“Christ, who is our [my] life” – [Col. 3.4]

Do we know for sure that Paul grasped the reality of what he said – his union with the Father and the Son - when he first said the above? I don't know that. I don't think it's important that he did at that very moment. He may have made a statement of faith, not truly understanding what he said. I'm sure he got it eventually, but Paul was a human, no different than any one of us, with doubt, fear and misunderstanding.

Consider what Jesus did when He lost his cool in the temple. “And found in the temple those that sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the changers of money sitting. And when he had made a scourge of small cords, he drove them all out of the temple, and the sheep, and the oxen; and poured out the changers' money, and overthrew the tables...” [John 2.14-15]

In today's world Jesus committed the felonies of battery and “making terrorist threats”. Do you think He ever had the thought, “that's wasn't very ‘Christ-like’”. Do you think he questioned his Union with the Father? I'm not sure it crossed His mind at all, but may have felt some “guilt”. Do you think others said, “He said He does what He sees the Father doing – really, what a liar”. Of course they said that.

Now the truth is the truth. That fact cannot be changed, namely – He lives His life as us. But that doesn't stop the lies and you know who the liar is [satan].

The liar will always do his job. That's what he was created to do. And he'll do his job through others or through your own mind at times. That's not a matter of right or wrong – it is just a fact – the liar lies. I think we can put him in his place when we stop assigning a “good” or “bad” evaluation to his job.

“But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.” [II Cor. 11.13]

God created the liar. All things were created in love by the Lover. So let's

look at this finger pointing routine from the perspective of how it actually benefits us. And I'll get to that.

Most don't understand the proper benefit. For many the guilt and insecurity drives them deeper and deeper into "religious" Christianity – that's what Paul warned about when he talked about "corrupted from the simplicity".

When folks listen to the accusations – "you're really not a very good Christian" – or whatever – the self-improvement program –

"corruption from the simplicity" [II Cor. 11.13]

- goes into full swing. Many then spend their entire life "trying" to be the person "God wants them to be". This is the purest form of lie ever told not to mention a total waste of time.

Why? First – God created you to be exactly who you are – no one else. Many think it appropriate to deny our personality and our unique character. When, in fact it is by and through our unique personalities that the Son of God chooses to live in and express Himself as the Savior of our present-day world.

Second, which should be obvious, is that at the precise moment in history Jesus Christ shed His blood and died to complete the eternal plan of reconciliation. The liar may say you can improve on that – should we believe him?

Okay, so what is the proper benefit of the "guilt and insecurity"? First – let's talk about what folks commonly do with "guilt and insecurity". They dive headfirst or remain forever in "self-improvement" Christianity. You note that I did not say "Christianity" – I said "self-improvement Christianity". There is a difference.

The proper benefit of the "guilt and insecurity" is that you are driven further and further into the truth [reality] of who you are. You develop, through practice, the ability to stare the liar in the face and say – "I am Him in my form" and mean it – and tell the liar to go to hell [go home – he won't]. And further, "I don't care what you or others, or, even at times, what I think of myself – because I know who I am." Some call that an "exercise of faith".

At this point some may say to you, as they said to Paul – essentially, "oh so you're saying that I can do whatever I want [sin] and get away with it?"

"What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?"
[Romans 6.1]

The point will never be – “go and hurt others” [sin]. When you know who you are [Christ as you] – is “sin” really what you want to do? Do you really want to “hurt others”? Of course not! See how Paul answered that question –

“God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?”
[Romans 6.2]

Death is a permanent end to a life – or rather, as we know – the start of a new life. There is no “half-dead” or “mostly dead” or “99% dead” – dead is dead. But, truthfully, new life is new life. And our new life is Christ as us.

So we know that guilt and insecurity have their purpose. But let’s take a moment and define guilt and demystify this age old problem faced by the believer.

From a legal perspective the process is as follows. First there is an accusation – you did some wrongdoing. Second, you are judged by the trier of fact [the judge or the jury] to determine whether you have actually done that of which you are accused. If you are determined not guilty, then the process is over. If you are convicted, then there will be a penalty for your conviction.

Guilt can also be defined from an emotional or psychological perspective. This is harder to define because your emotions are not trustworthy - they lie. But, by the blood of the Savior, there is no basis for guilt, other than the lie. There is no penalty –

“... though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow ...” [Isaiah 1.18]

“... that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus” [Phil. 3.12]

What does that mean? It means possess what you already own! He took you – now you take Him! You take Him as you – that is His intent that

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

Why is guilt and insecurity not relevant – because nothing depends on you – “And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness ... but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith.” Phil. 3.9

So, the bottom line - here's the truth – we're not guilty of anything – neither from a legal perspective nor from an emotional perspective.

“...but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.” [1 Cor. 6.11]

So – go be Him as you – love your world – save those in your world and tell those negative thoughts to go to hell – that's where they came from and that's where they belong.

End of Study on You Say “Who”

21

GOD'S VOICE

Does God have a voice – absolutely. Does He talk to people – I'm sure He does. Does he talk to me? That's a good question and I prefer not to answer that question directly at this point in the topic. Does He talk to you? Is it important to have conversations with God? I'm not sure. You may wonder why I don't have some better answers, at least for myself. Maybe I don't want better answers. Maybe I like to wonder if He is or is not talking to me. Maybe I've had some bad experiences with mistaking something else for God's voice. You may know what I'm talking about.

Jesus said that His sheep would know His voice [John 10.27]. I believe that. Anyway we do know His voice, no doubt, but maybe it's just a little more complicated than talking to someone on the phone or face to face and that's why I'm hedging a bit at this point. That makes "God conversations" a bit more interesting, and there are times when He speaks in a way we might never expect.

We all know someone, maybe many that can say, with full certainty that God talks to them – usually on every subject and all the time.

In my formative Christian years I knew a mature Christian woman who seemed to "hear" God's voice all the time. Let's call her Louise. [I say "Louise" because I really don't know anyone by that name] Anyway, Louise and God talked all the time. I think I saw her as a mature Christian and hoped that such "God" conversations would be in my future.

Honestly, they never really happened for me. Not in the same manner as Louise.

The Louise and God conversations usually went something like this: “God, I want such and such [whatever it was Louise wanted].” There would usually be some lesson to be learned, about whatever, and then, eventually Louise got what she wanted. Louise always credited the “getting” to God giving – usually because she had been good and learned her “lesson”.

I don’t really question that Louise and God talked. I don’t question that God spoke quite audibly and clearly to Louise. I must admit I wanted to be like Louise and often went to her for advice, on various subjects, because I thought that if anyone could get the straight answer from God it would be Louise.

I want to relay a story from one of my best friends, fellow Hebrew Christian and Marine Corps Sergeant. As Sarge said, “When I was 8 years old my mother and I took a trip back east to see the family. It was the first time I saw my grandmother and while visiting her apartment in Brooklyn I was shown a table and two chairs. She said that “this one is where I sit and that one is where GOD sits and we talk almost every day”. My dad said that she had been conversing with GOD for as long as he could remember. She was a very good Yiddasha Lady.”

When you talk to God, you are really talking with someone inside. But, I must admit that I often look up. Maybe I look at the clouds. And while we may know the conversation is internal, it’s good to know that as big as God may seem, He is still small enough and personal enough to sit in a chair next to you and perhaps have a morning cup of coffee.

This was truly a beautiful story that Sarge shared with me and I’m grateful. I think it’s a great thing when we can be personal with Him and someday actually see Him face to face. Moses did, why not us? Even though we might not actually see Him now, we can still express exactly what we think and feel, knowing He is listening, and then listen to His response, as no doubt grandma did on a daily basis.

The issue is not the method by which you may have a conversation with God or exactly how you hear His voice. It doesn’t matter. So if you offer him a chair next to you, I suppose He will take it. If you look for his face in the clouds, I suppose you will find Him. If you are walking down the street wanting Him to walk with you, I’m sure He will.

Ultimately where we’re going with this conversation is that the One we speak with has taken up permanent residence within you and me. So the real conversation is internal. But, it may not always start that way or seem that way. And, that’s not the point. The point is that the conversation is happening and we come to know Him communicating with us internally.

Initially, as for Moses, the conversation started with God speaking to Moses through a bush that burned, but was not consumed.

“And when the LORD saw that he turned aside to see, God called unto him out of the midst of the bush, and said, Moses, Moses. And he said, Here am I.” [Exodus 3.4]

Later, the conversation was far more intimate.

“And the LORD spake unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend.” [Exodus 33.11]

God speaks to all of us in the way that we can best understand at the moment. He is sensitive that way. So for Moses, first, with the burning bush, the conversation was unmistakable and well-defined. And no two people are going to have the same exact experience. So, you can take a walk in the woods if you want, but don't expect to find a burning bush and God talking to you with an audible voice through it.

Later, when God spoke to Moses “face to face”, we really don't know exactly what that meant, but it was obviously a very intimate and personal conversation. The biggest misconception about the method that God chose to speak to Moses, or how He chooses to speak with you and me, is that it is as one separate person speaks to another completely different person. In other words, the misconception is that it is us, purportedly, having a conversation with someone outside of ourselves. And, it may seem that we are completely different and separate persons, but we are not.

That last statement may sound strange at first. You may want to say, “Well, isn't God someone other than me?” Good question. Elijah had a different type of experience and we'll look at that next.

Now consider the story of Elijah and his experience with God's voice.

“And he said, Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the LORD. And, behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the LORD; but the LORD was not in the wind: and after the wind an earthquake; but the LORD was not in the earthquake: And after the earthquake a fire; but the LORD was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice.” [I Kings 19.11-12]

Where Elijah would consider the most likely place to find God's voice,

the wind, the earthquake and the fire, in something powerful and overwhelming, His voice was not to be found. The “God conversation” did not take place as Elijah thought it would – that God would speak some great powerful words to Him in an unmistakable manner, bringing him to his knees in fear. God’s voice was still and small, not powerful, but nonetheless, perhaps not unmistakable at the moment either.

Sure, God doesn’t always speak with a “still small voice”. But, in this instance for Elijah and for us, at times, this is the way He communicates. Do you get the picture of what “still” means? Have you ever seen still water? Of course you have. Truly still water has absolutely no motion – no motion is non-existent.

Considering the story of Elijah, think about how you would communicate with someone whose voice is so small that you might not hear it. And then there is a time for us to stop talking.

“Be still and know that I am God ...” [Psalm 46.10]

And Jesus tells us that God will not always talk to us in a conventional manner.

“But when they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak: for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak. For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you.
[Matt. 10.19-20]

Now Jesus is taking us to another level of understanding about the “God conversation” when He said, “... speaketh in you ...” How is “in you” different than “to you” or “with you”? Well, the answer may be subtle or may be earth-shattering, that’s all according to your perspective. And, it is both subtle and earth-shattering. Why? We do have our conversation with God, at times, as if He is a separate entity. On its face it appeared that Moses had them at times.

“And the LORD spake unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend.” [Exodus 33.11]

But if you examine the “unto his friend” part it is likely that Moses did not consider God a separate entity. Moses had that intimacy with God that was likely unknown in his day. Such was Moses’ intimacy with God that the conversation was likely inside Moses, not outside. That is true intimacy.

How does a friend really speak to another friend? Recently a good friend relayed a story to me about how her relationship had grown with her husband to the point where one could finish the other's sentences. In fact, outward conversation was not always necessary as each "knew" intuitively what the other was thinking anyway. Well, isn't that a perfect example of one speaking "inside" the other? Or, as another friend says, "When you think about it, who says we're not conversing with God when we talk to ourselves and even answer ourselves?" I think these are examples of the friend "unto his friend" conversations that Moses had with God. Moses knew God's thoughts. Isn't that really what we seek?

Well, what if what we seek is ours already? And, Jesus said it would be so.

"My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me ..." [John 10.27]

But then Jesus also says,

"... and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice." [John 10.4]

So, not only do we hear His voice, but we know His voice. You see the subtle difference? It is one thing to hear a voice, another to know the One that speaks.

And, King David, the writer of the Psalms describes Moses' intimate, inside conversation with God. "He made known his ways unto Moses, his acts unto the children of Israel." [Psalm 103.7] There is a difference.

What does it mean that Moses knew God's "ways"? It meant that Moses not only knew what God did but Moses also knew why God did what He did. Israel, in general, only knew the "what", in other words, the result, but not the reason. There is a crucial difference between knowing what happened versus why it happened. Tying this into the rest of this topic, this is the difference between "speaking to" and "speaking in".

There comes a time when we must stop looking for an external God with an external voice. We need to learn to trust and live in our Union – not "outside" voice – only Him speaking in you, in me, in us – not to us.

Of course He's talking all the time - in you. Just thinking that God talks "with you" or "to you" presumes you are separate and indeed you are not. There is no separation only holy union.

I actually do look forward to seeing Him face to face. Of course, as you do, I hope I have a lot of years before that happens, but it will happen. I

have a lot questions for Him. Maybe we'll talk then. But, then again, when that moment happens, just the reality of my own personal resurrection and eternity and being in the presence of my Creator, will probably dissolve my questions permanently and, maybe we'll really have nothing to talk about for a long time. We'll see.

End of Study on God's Voice

22

THE CARNAL MIND

I could title this the “mind of Christ”, but I like to explore and unravel misconceptions. We might all “admit” or “speak in faith” that we have the mind of Christ. But too many would shake their heads and sheepishly volunteer that, really, they are carnally minded.

“Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.” [Rom. 8.7]

Whatever the “carnal mind” is we know that it is hostile or in conflict with God. That’s what “enmity” means.

Christians are called “carnal” by one another or even refer in that manner to themselves. It’s always troubled me to hear such labeling of others or even oneself. You can never be totally sure what the “labeler” is referring to, but you can be assured that in some fashion either behavior or thought processes are being called into question as not “Christian” enough or good enough.

So what is a carnal mind? The common thought is that is the mind of a “marginal” Christian. I have no definition of “marginal” Christian and I don’t think there is such a person. What if the “carnal mind” is a delusion? Maybe it never really existed in light of this: “... but we have the mind of Christ.” [I Cor. 2.16]

We have these emotionally charged, loaded up expressions in Christianity that generally only serve to make people feel bad about

themselves. As generally taught and referred to in church settings, the “carnal mind” is when a Christian has sinful thoughts or is otherwise in some sort of disobedience. I disagree.

“Carnal” is simply defined as “having to do with your body”. That is neither good nor bad. For example if you are hungry and want something to eat you may at the moment be “carnally minded”. But we use this kind of terminology to finger-point at others or even ourselves. And, this is the problem with any religion. When religion becomes a self-improvement plan it no longer has anything to do with reality, or God for that matter.

I’ve said this at other times and it bears repeating. The organized “religion”, any one of them, not just Christianity, must have a following of people who consider themselves on a self-improvement plan and need the help of the organization to become “good enough”. The professional religion needs that following to earn money, keep itself going and pay the professionals who run the organization. Accordingly, they take expressions as “carnal mind” out of context and use these expressions and misguided concepts as leverage to keep the flock “in line” and paying their dues [tithes].

The reality is that whatever negative definition you ascribe to “carnal mind” it doesn’t apply to you at all. We don’t have carnal minds, and are not defined by that terminology at all. We have the “mind of Christ”. [I Cor. 2.16] So, anything else must be a delusion.

How do I know or understand that I have the “mind of Christ”. You first have to accept that’s it true.

“And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind ...”. [Romans 12.2]

“Renewing your mind” is not a program to do or something to achieve. It is simply a truth to believe. We live by faith, no other way. [Romans 1.17]

And, how do I do this?

“Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus ...”. [Philippians 2.5]

You understand what it means to “let something happen”? It means don’t stand in the way – in fact, don’t do anything.

The “carnal mind” is not a mind that thinks sinful thoughts. The “carnal mind” describes one that does not understand that they have the

mind of Christ. That mind is still blaming, finger-pointing and finding fault. That is precisely why it is in opposition to God. He has redeemed us and given us the mind of Christ. The “carnal mind” won’t accept that and wants to set up its own rules. Not that there is another set of rules, but some try and thereby deny the complete, total and absolutely perfect work of the Savior’s Cross.

So, we’ve established that we don’t have carnal minds and indeed we have the mind of Christ. Having said that, I’m painfully aware of the age old complaints and criticism. “But you have evil thoughts, don’t you?”. “Are you saying you’re perfect?” To that I will say I’m a human being. I have all manner of thoughts all day long and so do you. And, I boldly say, Jesus had all manner of thoughts all day long. That simply is a product of our humanity. It doesn’t mean there is something wrong. In fact the reality that we are human is something right, not wrong and we need not apologized for it.

As I write this I confess I had two situations yesterday in which I got angry. One I apologized for and one I didn’t. I did not apologize for my humanity. I only apologized to allow the other person to realize that I took responsibility for my action. Jesus never apologized for this humanity.

“And when he had made a scourge of small cords, he drove them all out of the temple, and the sheep, and the oxen; and poured out the changers’ money, and overthrew the tables ...” [John 2.15]

Jesus never said He was sorry for losing His temper.

I will end this topic with a paraphrase from something NPG said, “Don’t waste your time trying to gather up all the darkness and throw it out. Just turn on the light – darkness always leaves in the presence of light – it has to.”

End of Study on The Carnal Mind

23

DID GOD MAKE A CHOICE?

I think of “choice” as a temporal word defining something that happens in time and space. I don’t really think of it as an eternal word. Having said that, I am aware of many references in the Old Testament of God “choosing” Israel. Jesus also refers to “choosing” His disciples. Here, however, I am not talking about that type of choice. I am thinking about whether God chose, in some way, to be Who He is – to define His character and nature, and thereby limit Himself. Since He can do what he wants, I guess He could have made such a choice.

We know that He has chosen not to be a liar – in fact, He can’t lie. [Titus 1.2] Since He’s God I guess the only way He can be prevented from lying is if He made the choice to limit Himself. So, in that vein, it is possible that He had three other choices also, that would be considered “limiting” Who He is or what He does.

One choice God could have made was to be alone. The second was to create everything to serve Him. The third, and the one He obviously did choose, was to create and serve His creation – and, in fact die for His creation. If that does not define love, then love has no definition.

God defines love – “God is love”. [I John 4.8]

Accordingly, “love” is not an action, but rather a Person. The Person Who chose to define Himself as Love. He operates His universe in love, regardless of often contrary appearance. Yet, we often experience so much

sorrow and grief in life. I will remind you that Jesus did too – as He is described as a

“man of sorrows and acquainted with grief”. [Isaiah 53.3]

But we must replace appearance with the reality, seeing with renewed eyes that He only loves and nothing else. Reality is deeper than feeling, where He has mixed His Spirit with ours.

So I pose the question again - how does the fact that “God is love” affect us? Because, He Indeed limited Himself to Be nothing but the original Lover. We are affected in every way.

If you are reading this then you know, with certainty, that He chose you to be his love agent – His person of love in this world. You were born again. You were born of His Spirit. You will not obtain Love as if it is an object to be owned or a learned action. You are the son or daughter of God. He gave you new life. You carry his Love DNA. You cannot help but be a lover.

You can trust that this is so and in that fact you are a lover as He is the Lover.

End of Study on Did God Make A Choice

24

FAITH

In Christianity “faith” is a very popular topic for conversation, seminars, sermons and personal devotion. But what is faith? Who has faith? Do I have enough? What happens if I don’t have enough? Will I get in trouble if I don’t have enough? Where does faith come from? Does anyone own faith? Where or how can I get more if I need it? Is it like a muscle, so if I exercise it gets bigger and stronger? If I have enough can I really do almost anything – throw mountains into the ocean and the like? Jesus said I would, right?

A good discussion on the subject of faith can be profitable or perhaps confusing and polarizing. We should break it down, remove some of the mystery and take away some of the confusion and feelings of inadequacy that we may have about faith.

Jesus mentions that the only “amount” of faith that any person would need is equal to that of a mustard seed. A mustard seed is a very small round seed, coming in various colors and is usually about 1 or 2 mm in diameter. So, it’s fairly small. Is it the smallest of all seeds? Probably not. But that’s not the point. Jesus referred to a very small seed that produced a big tree or plant – i.e., something small can create or give life to something big.

This is perplexing. It seems that Jesus says that we don’t really need much faith at all – almost a non-existent amount – and if not non-existent, then as small as it gets – like the size of a tiny mustard seed. Why does He say that? Shouldn’t we have lots and lots of faith? Shouldn’t we learn to grow in faith? Shouldn’t we exercise and build our faith?

The seed is the faith. The plant or the tree created by the seed is the life, but it is not the faith. The faith will only, ever, be the seed. The seed never does get bigger. It never does get stronger. It never increases in any way. In fact the seed must die to produce life. How odd is that? Very odd, indeed.

Doesn't this discussion of faith fly in the face of so much teaching that we receive? I suppose. Folk think that a mustard seed amount is good for one mountain, but for bigger or multiple mountains much more faith is needed. If Jesus meant that He would have said that. Jesus used the biggest example of the most faith a person needed – a mustard seed moving a mountain.

We need to look at exactly what is faith. You could define faith as stepping out on a limb. Or, as an old missionary used to say, sitting in a chair, not sure if it would hold you up or if you would crash to the floor.

I like the chair example of faith, because I once had a chair break when I sat down. Since then every time I sit on a chair I exercise a bit of faith. But, the chair example of faith is not the best example because you can see the chair and so, therefore, your faith is in a tangible object. How about if your eyes are closed? Suppose you are blind-folded and told to sit. You really wouldn't know if there was a chair behind you or not. Your faith would not be in the chair would it? If you can't see the chair then, if you chose to sit, where would you be applying your faith? Your faith would have to be in the one who told you to sit, right?

Who tells us to sit? And, what exactly is "faith"? Faith is clearly defined.

"Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." [Hebrews 11.1] And, Who tells us to sit? That should be obvious.

"Now the just shall live by faith".

[Hebrews 10:38] and "...the just shall live by his faith." [Habakkuk 2:4]

The above verses regarding faith are not something to be achieved. It's just true of all believers. These verses do not say, "if such and such, then you will live by faith". It is simply stated that you do, in fact, live by faith

As we discuss faith our emphasis should be on the One drawing you to express faith – not on any object or desired result of your faith. But the result is important also. Jesus said that with a mustard seed of faith you would pick up a mountain and throw it into the sea. Faith indeed has a practical purpose in our lives.

When discussing faith or really any topic of interest, we must always ground ourselves in the basics. First, we don't have an independent life. We are "crucified with Christ" [Gal. 2.20] Now, undeniably, crucifixion is

death. This reality and truth must be indelibly written in our hearts and minds. It is the foundational truth upon which we build all we trust about our personal realities. We are crucified with Him – nevertheless we live – yet it is not we that live, but Him that lives in us. [Gal. 2.20]

But, we do not stay crucified. Just as it is true we were in fact “crucified with Him”, we are also with Him in His resurrection. [Rom. 6.5] And, we

“are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead”. [Col. 2.12]

At one time we considered that we had an “independent” life. Even after salvation many think that now they are on a Christian “self-improvement” program. We think that even our faith is something we own or that comes from us. We need to think that through.

The question I pose is if in fact as both dead and risen with Christ do we still have an “independent” life. It might appear that way, but clearly our co-crucifixion with the Savior produced death in us. [Gal. 2.20] But only for a moment. His death was sacrificial, and we joined Him in His death And, we also join Him in His life. [Rom. 6.8-10] In joining Him in His life we now become, as Jesus said, branches of the vine. [John 15.5] He is the vine and we are the branches. This is a great illustration of how branches only express the life of the Vine. Branches do not and can not exist on their own. They must have a life source.

Dead folk don’t have faith. Dead people don’t have anything – or at least nothing of an independent nature. But we are really, truly alive – with Him as our life. It’s that simple. That is why, as we discuss any topic really, especially this one about faith, we must read to the end of the verse

“and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God ...” [Gal. 2.20]

So, Whose faith do you live by? Not yours.

So if we don’t own faith and can’t grow more, are there times when we think or feel that we have none at all? Maybe. That thought brings me to the point of this discussion.

So, in our earlier discussion about faith – how much do we possess? – can we obtain more? – can we exercise what we have and grow more? – is really not relevant. The reality is we have no faith at all. We have His faith – but it is not ours. We don’t own faith – He does. So, does He have enough faith? Does He need more faith? Does He need to grow or improve His

faith? When you “see” that what faith you do have is not yours, and in fact belongs to Another, these questions become silly and unnecessary.

We have established the fact that whatever faith we may seem to possess at any time is not ours – in fact we live by His faith.

“...and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God ...” [Gal. 2.20].

When you “see” that what faith you do have is not your, and, in fact belongs to another. that thought alone sure takes the heat off you and me doesn't it? It eliminates a lot of other problems also. No more finger-pointing at others or ourselves. No more inadequacy or falling short. Once we concentrate on the thing we call faith and the perceived results we should achieve with our faith, we have taken our eyes off Him. Christianity then becomes a religion to be performed and a “way of life”. We're on the wrong road there. The reality is that our very lives are the expression of Him and He applies His faith as He needs to through our very human vessels.

So if we don't own faith and can't grow more, are there times when we think or feel that we have none at all? Maybe. And there is some confusion. Jesus does talk about an “amount” of faith. He uses terms as “little faith”, “great faith” and “no faith”. So, we might ask ourselves the question, “how much faith do I possess?” Or, we might ask, “can I obtain more faith?” Or, even perhaps, “if I exercise what I have will my faith grow?”

While these questions are interesting, such thinking is in the abstract. Remember what Jesus said. A mustard seed size of faith tosses a mountain into the sea. What is your mountain and do you have enough faith to throw it into the sea? We established the fact that whatever faith we may seem to possess at any time is not ours – in fact we live by His faith. [Gal. 2.20] We can trust Him to give us His faith when He places that mountain in front of us.

The real question is not “how much” but do we go forward with what faith we perceive we have? Do we boldly speak into existence that, which at the moment, only exists in spirit? Do we stare down our mountains and with a word of faith send them soaring into the sea?

So, let's not be so concerned with the amount of faith we think we have and rather concentrate on exercising whatever faith we have.

I raised an issue regarding what if we find ourselves in a place where we seem to have no faith – or at least feel that way. Well it happens. And when it does we want to get down on ourselves and try to figure out what's

“wrong”. Well, maybe nothing is wrong. Maybe there are those moments in life when all we seem to have is Him and all we know is Him. Maybe there are moments when nothing makes sense anymore – except Him. Well, while these are moments when we feel that we “need something” because there is “something” missing in our “Christian walk” – but perhaps maybe not. Perhaps He has us just exactly where He wants us. No faith – no nothing – just Him. These are not necessarily happy moments – in fact they can be miserable moments – but they are what they are and they are really divine and ordained and centering.

So, in our earlier discussion about faith – how much do we possess? – can we obtain more? – can we exercise what we have and grow more? – is really not relevant. The reality is we have no faith at all. We have His faith – but it is not ours. We don’t own faith – He does. So, does He have enough faith? Does He need more faith? Does He need to grow or improve His faith? When you “see” that what faith you do have is not yours, and in fact belongs to Another, these questions become silly and unnecessary.

We have established the fact that whatever faith we may seem to possess at any time is not ours – in fact we live by His faith.

“...and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God ...” [Gal. 2.20].

So if we don’t own faith and can’t grow more, are there times when we think or feel that we have none at all? Maybe. That thought brings me to the point of this discussion.

So it’s really His faith all along. Even that mustard seed that you and I expressed at the moment of our salvation, with really His.

“No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him ...” [John 6.44]

But, undoubtedly, at the moment of our salvation and many times since, we have expressed that faith. We have pulled the cork on that mighty river of eternal life and love that lives within us.

As a dear friend points out,

“if we believe not, yet he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself.” [2 Tim. 2.13]

Faith is not an entity that we own. And, there may be times when we

don't seem to have any at all. Sometimes it's just Him. We often confuse faith with feelings. It's nice to have feelings – good feelings. It's good when we feel faithful and strong. But these moments may not last. What will last is the reality of the intimate and eternal life we share in Him. And I think in order to center and cement that reality there must be moments when He is all we have. We may have no faith whatsoever. We may have no direction. Things, people and relationships may not make sense. Life may feel out of whack. We may be full of questions with no apparent answers.

But these moments are life – real life. They may be unpleasant, but unpleasant feelings are temporal and not eternal.

Once we are centered in the reality of our life as lived in Union with Him then we just move forward, regardless of feelings, knowing intuitively that we express Him, only and always – and to hell with appearances. That is true life.

So, when you find yourself in those moments of, perhaps, no faith or no feeling and the reality of Him is all you have – enjoy yourself. Really, what are your options?

What about “Doubting” Thomas? What about his faith or lack of faith? You know the story. After His resurrection Jesus appeared to His disciples, but Thomas, one of the disciples, was not present. When the others told Thomas he refused to believe unless he had his own personal experience with the Risen Jesus.

“The other disciples therefore said unto him, We have seen the Lord. But he [Thomas] said unto them, Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe.” [John 20.25]

Was there something wrong or lacking in Thomas' faith? No. For Thomas his faith did not depend on the experience of others. He wanted his own personal experience with Jesus. The others got their personal experience and the peace that only Jesus can give. Thomas did not get his peace. And, Jesus gave Thomas what he asked for. “And after eight days again his disciples were within, and Thomas with them: *then* came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace *be* unto you. Then saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust *it* into my side: and be not faithless, but believing. And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God. Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast

believed: blessed *are* they that have not seen, and *yet* have believed.” [John 20.26-29]

The story of Doubting Thomas is here for a reason. Everything in the “Book” is there for a reason. “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for????

The lesson from Thomas is that Jesus will take you where you are at, in terms of your exercise of faith. Thomas’ faith was dependent upon a personal encounter with Jesus. He was not present when Jesus appeared to the other disciples. The others had no room to quarrel with Thomas as they saw Jesus with their own eyes and touched Him with their own hands. And, Jesus gave them His peace and assurance that what He had told them all along was in fact true. Thomas did not have that peace and assurance yet. He wanted it.

“... Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust *it* into my side ...”

Jesus met Thomas where he was and without criticism. However, Jesus did encourage Thomas to exercise and stretch his faith. “... and be not faithless, but believing ...” Jesus then turns His attention to us, those who would come after but did not experience Jesus face to face as the Disciples had. “... blessed *are* they that have not seen, and *yet* have believed.”

Faith is not about a thing or an accomplishment, but is about our focus on Him, the One that lives His life in and through us, as us. Yes, faith will accomplish great things, no doubt. Mountains will be moved. Miracles will happen. The lame will walk. The blind will see. And, so much more will be the result of our faith. In fact our entire life is about moving from faith to faith, every step of the way. This is how we live. Our faith life sees through to the loving Creator, Who only loves us, and nothing else. And, we do not live by external appearance, but the eternal reality of Him as the Life that lives through us.

“The just [righteous] shall live by faith.” [Rom. 1.17 Gal. 3.11, Habakkuk 2.4]

But our focus must be on Him and not the accomplishment that faith produces.

“... looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith ... [Heb. 12.2]

And faith is given to each and every person, “For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith.”

Faith is so often confused with a feeling. Faith in the Person of Jesus Christ is not a feeling. Faith is the reality of seeing Him as He lives His life in and through you. And you are Him to your personal world to love and care for those He places in your path. Make no mistake, there are no coincidences or random encounters. You will better understand faith when you step out in full confidence that it is He expressing Himself in your unique person. Bypass the feelings, they are meaningless. Go straight to the reality – Him as you, you as Him. See Him in all things and all that is alive.

Now that we have the right perspective, the faith we have is of the Son of God and ultimately our faith is in the Son of God, now it’s time to step out and live by faith.

If I know anything in life, or any two things, one is that Jesus always spoke the truth because, as the Truth, He could do nothing but speak the truth. The other thing I know is that every prayer Jesus prayed was and is both heard and answered by the Father. In fact I stake my life on the following statements.

“And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it.” [John 14.13 & 14]

“If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.” [John 15.7]

“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.” [Matt. 18.19]

As a Son or Daughter of God and Brother or Sister of Jesus are you bold enough to “live by faith” and take Jesus at His word, and live accordingly?

When living by faith, and make no mistake, God says we do, our focus is now on Him. We then realize that Christianity is not a religion to be performed or a “way of life”. The reality is that our very lives are the expression of Him and He applies His faith as He desires through our human vessels. As His expression by faith we see life past our human senses and into His Spirit, just as Abraham,

“... before him whom he believed, even God, who quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things which be not as though they were.” [Rom 4.17]

As with Abraham, our faith calls into being that which we can not humanly sense, but which exists in the Spirit. Even our salvation was dependent on Him,

“No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him ...” [John 6.44] And, “if we believe not, yet he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself.” [2 Tim. 2.13]

Do not confuse faith with feelings. It's good when we feel faithful and strong. But these moments will not last. What will last is the reality of the intimate and eternal life we share with Him. In order to center and cement that reality there must be moments when all we have is Him and no feelings whatsoever. We may have no faith whatsoever. We may have no direction. Things, people and relationships may not make sense. Life may feel out of whack. We may be full of questions with no apparent answers. But this confusion will not last either.

Once we are centered in the reality of our life as lived in Union with Him then we just move forward, regardless of feelings. There is no need to think about faith in terms of how much do we have, do we need more or how do we get more. He lives his faith life through us and we know intuitively that we express Him, only and always – and to hell with appearances or feelings to the contrary. That is true life.

End of Study on Faith

25

WHAT GREAT THINGS JESUS HAS DONE

Sometimes we think that we all just really need to hang around in our little Jesus club meeting [maybe the “church”]. But Jesus often has other ideas and plans for us.

“And when he was come into the ship, he that had been possessed with the devil prayed him that he might be with him. Howbeit Jesus suffered him not, but saith unto him, Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had compassion on thee. And he departed, and began to publish in Decapolis how great things Jesus had done for him: and all men did marvel.” Mark 5.18-20

This unnamed man that Jesus healed wanted to just “hang around with Jesus”. He wanted to live in the “church” so to speak. He was really digging the time of sitting at Jesus’ feet. And, actually, that’s cool for a season – but it’s not what we are really about.

Jesus said, “Get out of here”. Jesus said, “Go tell people” And so this man did. And so it’s time for us also to go “... publish in [you name your hometown] what great things Jesus has done for [you] ...”

Go.

Tell.

Love.

Care.

End of Study on What Great Things Jesus Has Done

26

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 what” 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.

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

27

FREE INDEED

“If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.” [John 8.34-38]

Everyone loves that verse – “free indeed”. Everyone wants to be free – no doubt. But not everyone has the same interpretation of the meaning of this verse.

On one end of Christianity this verse is interpreted by many as “you are now free not to sin, so you better not do it anymore or something much worse will happen to you.” On the other end of Christianity this verse is interpreted by others as “I can now do whatever I want to do, just leave me alone.” Neither interpretation is actually correct or, for that matter necessarily incorrect. You could take either road to get to what Jesus is actually talking about. The one road is a life of law, restrictions, rules, regulations and, probably a lot of frustration. The other road is a life of license and, in some ways, generally just missing the point.

As for me I started on the legalistic road and, when frustration set in, took a quantum leap to the “do whatever you want road”. But, really what is the “freedom” that Jesus is talking about? Is there a definition that we have not considered yet?

“If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.” [John 8.38]

So, what is the freedom Jesus is talking about? Is it simply freedom not to sin and live a moral life by a set of rules – probably found in the Bible? Or is it just freedom to do whatever you want and live however you choose?

Well, probably, ultimately freedom is freedom and you may elect or select any definition you want. You can live by a written set of rules or an internal set of rules. Or you can try to live totally spontaneously. The reality is that these definitions don't work because it's not possible to truly live in any of these ways. But, it is important to try – for a time. And I say “try” because so much of life is understood by trying and seeing the error or futility in trying to do something that is not possible.

Human beings are not capable of living by a set of rules – although many try and some even do a very good job of it. But, ultimately there will be failure. We were no more capable of following the Ten Commandments or the other 600 plus laws of Moses before salvation than after. But, the “law” – any law – has its purpose.

“Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster.” [Gal. 3.24-25]

“O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you? This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?” [Gal. 3.1-3]

Apparently, despite the fact that the Galatians came to faith in Jesus, they desired to live their lives as if Christianity were a set of rules and laws, which they were perfectly “free” to do. Paul called them “foolish” and they were.

Upon our faith in Jesus, He doesn't, in some mystical, magical way, empower us to go back to the law – any law – and rank and file Christianity is full of “rules for living”. That is not what Jesus has in mind, but, He will allow us to indulge all our efforts in “lawful”, rules based living, mistaking that for Christianity, until we realize that “way of life” is not the freedom of true faith in Jesus. Christianity as a “way of life” is not freedom. Freedom is grasping the fact that you are His unique expression in your world,

On the other hand is “freedom” living spontaneously, doing whatever and whenever? If you insult or anger me am I free to bop you in the nose? I suppose I am and suffer the consequences, but is that “freedom” in Jesus?

It's clear that freedom does not mean total spontaneity either and therefore no one gets bopped. We are not going to react and respond and do whatever we "feel" all the time.

Simply stated, to be "free indeed" is freedom to be yourself. That is what Jesus meant. Of course that leaves us with one more definition, right? Who is "yourself" that you are free to be? I'm going to make a bold and perhaps controversial statement. But here goes. Simply stated, "yourself" is the Christ in your world. You are not Jesus Christ. He will always be the vine and we will always be the branches. [John 15.5] However, have you ever seen a vine and its branches? At a certain point you really don't know where one ends and the other begins. But, really Jesus was talking conceptually. He really is not a vine and we are really not branches. He is a Person as we are persons. We are a union – an eternal union. There is no separation whatsoever. We are One. As Jesus prayed,

"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]

I would count on Jesus' prayer being answered.

It's really all in your focus. Are you focused on a life of rules to try and improve your perfect union? Really, that's a joke. Are you focused on a life for self? You can if you want to. Or is your focus on the eternal truth that you are really Him in your world?

We're free to be ourselves. We're free to be Him. We're free to be the Savior of our personal world. We're free from law. We're free from religion. We're free from the expectations of others and even the ones with which we burden ourselves.

We're free to care and love others. We're free from being selfish. We're free to invest our time and effort in our work and in our play. We're free to attend a church or not. We're free to tell that person next to us that God loves them, or we're free to just be the lover.

Does this mean we may carry other's burdens? At times we will. Does this mean we will befriend the unfriendly? We probably will. Does this mean we may consider the needs of another above our own? I think so. Does this mean we will love the ones that don't love us? Yes. Does this mean we will love, expecting nothing in return? Always. Does this mean we may be misunderstood? Yes we will, often. Does this mean we will lay down our lives for our friends? You are free to do that also.

So, go be free indeed!

End of Study on Free Indeed

28

HOW DO YOU DEAL WITH SIN?

Once you “get” your union – know who you are – Him as you – you never really see your life as a self-improvement program again. There might be some old “grave clothes” to occasionally shake off, but other than that things are really different. And the difference is refreshing, freeing and real. You can really, be yourself, perhaps for the first time in a long time. You are “yourself” with a wink of course – the “wink” being you know and will always know you are not “just yourself”, but Him as you, with whatever personality He gave you and intended you to have.

Now, of course you want to share this new life with others, especially those you perceive to be bogged down in their “religion”. We are certainly called to do that and we should, but often it’s not easy. Inevitably people will ask, “How do you deal with sin?” Or, some may ask, “Are you saying you never sin?”

I can’t say exactly why people want to go to that line of thought immediately, but they do. Perhaps there is so much emphasis on Christianity simply being a program to help you sin less that those asking the question simply don’t know better. I’ve truly found only one possible answer to this question – John the Baptist had it right.

John the Baptist’s answer:

“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]

Given John's statement, our answer follows: "I don't deal with sin. I have no method to deal with sin. I have no reason to deal with sin. Jesus took sin away. What part of sin remains after He took it away?" Now, that might sound like a "smart" answer, but the truth is the truth. Sin is gone. Disbelief may remain, but sin is gone.

On that point many want to add statements such as, "Yes, Jesus took sin away, but you can take it back." -or- "That's true, but you have to do your part – you must be vigilant, stay in the word, pray, so 'no' when tempted by the devil." It always bothers me when requirements are added to His simple truths. And, remember how Jesus took "away the sin of the world". He gave His life. He shed His blood on the cross. There is nothing you or I or anyone can add or take away from the perfect and complete work of the cross – His death, His blood – that's that – both simple and foolish.

"But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God." [I Cor. 1.23-24]

So, John the Baptist prophesied that his cousin Jesus would "take away the sin of the world". And he was right, Jesus did exactly that. And then the back-up question many ask is, "So, are you saying you don't sin?" Well, another John answered that question. This is the John "lying on Jesus' breast". [John 13.25]

"Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God." [I John 3.9]

Try quoting that verse and see how people react. And there are many erroneous explanations as to "exactly" what John means when he says that we "doth not commit sin – cannot sin". And all those explanations are something less than we "doth not commit sin – cannot sin". Many in Christianity try their best to find loopholes and backdoors with the emphasis, always, on making sure that this verse is not true. Well, the heck with that nonsense. The verse is true and I take it at face value. We who are born of God – all of us – do not sin and, in fact, cannot sin. Is this true? Is it really true? Well, I think we have a choice in how we accept truth. We can either look at ourselves, and whatever we think to be our shortcomings, and

interpret scripture accordingly. Or, and I think correctly, take scripture as truth and go with it regardless of appearances.

Before I go on with this topic I will stop for a moment and share two responses I got from good friends – one is a golfing buddy. It is so interesting that the one comment leads directly to the next. These two friends actually know each other and I wonder if they can guess? One commented on how, in light of our discussion, I interpret the following verses:

“If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.” [1 John 1:8-10]

My answer is that the entire first chapter of I John is written to those who don't yet believe, in an effort to get them “on board”. I say that particularly because of what John says in the same chapter, verses 2, 3 & 4 - “For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us, That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full.”

I pose the question, “Do we prepare to live or do we live?” The answer is obvious, but we do prepare some. There is nothing wrong with a period of time where Christianity is a religion and “dealing with sin” is of paramount importance. But, we don't want to keep moving in that direction.

“Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God.” [Hebrews 6.1]

What is “perfection”? Simply stated “perfection” will never be, and can never be, in action and thought – it will only ever be in personhood – Him as me – and most important is the knowing of my true personhood. That is perfection.

I'll conclude this topic with one more quote from another friend: “By the time John wrote this the “church” was already moving away from the truth

and substituting behavioral litmus tests, replacing the abiding in, resting in, faith in, living in, the Father and the Son. They had received the anointing, Christ the anointed, but were moving towards self-improvement just as we see it throughout Christianity today. What strikes me is that the fellowship John was trying to establish or re-establish in my view is broken when believers replace life with self-effort. Paul in Galatians goes so far as to say that Christ is of no avail to Christians who move into self-effort, denying the efficaciousness and sufficiency of God's move exclusively through the cross and re-birth."

That says it all.

End of Study on How do you Deal with Sin?

29

IN THE MIDST

What does it mean to be “in the midst”? When I think of the phrase I mostly think about Jesus’ statement,

“For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.” [Matt. 18.20]

And, I also think of the crucifixion

“Where they crucified him, and two others with him, on either side one, and Jesus in the midst.” [John 19.18]

Another reference is to how we are sent,

“... as sheep in the midst of wolves ...” [Matt. 10.16]

I personally think of “in the midst” as right in the middle of the action – strategically placed for a purpose. Jesus, as a child, when his parents searched for Him, found Him “... in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors ...” [Luke 2.46] Or, Jesus would take a “... child, and set him in the midst of them: and when he had taken him in his arms, he said unto them ...” [Mark 9.36] Or, Jesus would direct the person that He intended to heal to “... Rise up, and stand forth in the midst.” [Luke 6.8] Or, finally, when

appearing after His crucifixion, "... Jesus himself stood in the midst of them, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you." [Luke 24.36]

In the midst is where it's at. It's the place to be. But, why? Are we, right now in the midst? What are you in the midst of? We are all in the midst of something, somewhere, always. And, we are strategically placed for a certain purpose. There is nothing random or coincidental. And, for that matter your placement is not about you or for your benefit.

The question is how do we perceive our purpose or function in the personal midst in which we find ourselves. We can get this notion that in order to be a good "Christian" or religious person, that we must either congregate away from "worldly" people and things or so busy ourselves with our "religious" activities. You know what I'm talking about - Sunday morning, Sunday night, Wednesday night, Royal Rangers, choir practice, bible studies - finish the list for me please. While there is nothing wrong with any of these, however, if the purpose of all these activities are for "keeping" us out of "trouble" and far from the pollution of the "world", then we may need to rethink a bit here.

And if so, well, guess what, just the opposite should be true. We need to take a hard look at the place we are in the "midst" of and, not ignore it or try to find a way out. We must resolve to dig in our heels in our personal worlds, in our personal midst. Why? Because "God so loved the world". [John 3.16]

"For God so loved the world." [John 3.16] That is the most quoted verse from the Bible, yet do we understand the importance of both the statement and commitment? There are no qualifiers to His love for the world. The verse is not, "God so loved those who love Him." Nor, is it, "God so loved those who obey His commandments and laws." No, He just loves. He's so much easier in that regard than we are. We love those who love us. We hate those who hate us. He just loves all.

So much for the clarity of the statement. What about the commitment? "... that He gave His only begotten Son." He gave Him. He gave Him to die. And, now what has He done? He has placed everyone one of us "in the midst" of the world that He so loves. Maybe we should so love the world also - you know the people, the animals and all of nature.

And, certainly, we should not fear involvement in the world. As a matter of fact we should be up to our elbows in involvement in the "world" and its people and things. Because involvement with people, who need to see and understand the regular, normal, everyday love of God - that they will only see through us - is so much more important than our "religious" activity. And what was Jesus' opinion?

So what was Jesus' opinion? It is clear to me that He wanted us "in the midst", in the middle of the action and immersed in the world that His Father so loved. And, that we not hide out, in fear of involvement, behind any "religious" institutions.

"I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world ..." [John 17.15]

In fact He clearly stated our purpose in the world. "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." [Matthew 5.14-16]

There is a certain element in Christianity that considers that we must, at all times and in all ways, be isolated to avoid "pollution" in "the world" or adverse influence from the devil that might cause us to do things untoward. Well, let's break out of that misunderstanding and folly. Just look around. Take note of the world that you have been strategically placed in the "midst" of. See and understand your place and purpose.

Let your light shine in your world! Go, be in the midst, go now!

End of Study on In The Midst

30

STAGES OF REVELATION/UNDERSTANDING

John correctly identified three stages of revelation or understanding that all believers pass through. John describes “Children – Young Men/Women – Fathers”. You are always the same person, but you will see or understand yourself differently depending on where you are in this progression of understanding based on revelation. We will all pass through Children and Young Men/Women on our way to understanding our Fatherhood.

“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. I have written unto you, fathers, because ye have known him that is from the beginning. 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]

And “pass through” is the key. We will not stay in Children or Young Men/Women forever. The first two “phases” are not permanent, although it is all you may know at the moment.

Stages are “pass-through” phases of how you see yourself. Now, “how you see yourself” is not necessarily really real, but when it’s real to you it affects all you do and how you think of yourself. You could be 6’4” and

think that you're short – and if you play in the NBA you might be - but that's your perception – which is very important to you.

The “child” knows his sins are forgiven and all is right in the world. The child went from perhaps believing in God, but not knowing God - to knowing Him. I remember that time. I remember my days as a Jewish youth firmly believing in God - willing to fight, seriously, anyone that said there “is no God”. I remember lying on my bed looking up at the ceiling thinking “I know you're out there somewhere.” I believed but I did not know.

In a flash on December 16, 1971 I knew Him. Then, we all go rather quickly to “young man”. Christianity becomes a self-improvement religion. We become, in our mind, strong. We memorize scripture. We overcome the devil. We know the “Word of God” – Jesus lives in us but we still see Him as separate from us. The reality is that most of Christianity is stuck in “young man”. The “young man” phase is necessary but it must end. The organized church will fight that forever. Why?

John describes some as “children” and indeed that is how they perceive themselves. In fact God has revealed to that person that in fact they are a child of God and God is their father. It's a good time and Christianity can be very simple. I remember in my child days saying to my college English professor that it was easy to love others as God loved me. Well, she set the record straight, informing me that, no, it was not easy to love others and that, in fact, it was a chore and very hard to “be” a Christian.

I think it was that very moment I started my headlong skid into “young man”. I was becoming convinced that a true follower of Jesus would find the “following” a difficult task and impossible to achieve, but one must try. And boy, did I try.

And, of course the organized church gets involved at that point. The church, every one of them, just think of your favorite, loves the young men and women Christians. But the “church” is not a building. If one defines church as God's “dwelling place” – then each and every one of us is “church”, the place where God lives.

“... He is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; [Acts. 17.24].

I know Jesus said that

“For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.” [Matt. 18.20]

But, remember Jesus is in our midst, individually – His Spirit joined to ours – all the time, eternally.

But, there is such an institution – the “church”. They come in scores of denominations, with many are sure that the others are just dead wrong in their doctrine and beliefs about most things, running the risk of hell and damnation. What an odd situation. I am not anti-church. Churches do, in fact, accomplish many fine and positive things for many people, often in spite of themselves. But, I will criticize what needs to be criticized.

The organized church must make money to exist. That’s very simple. So, therefore the “church” just loves the young men and women Christians. Why you ask? Because, someone’s got to pay for that building, and the staff, and the electric bill, and, and, and ... There is no better way to keep people involved than for Christians to be stuck as “young men and women”. They perceive that they “need” the institution for their “growth” and “maturity” as Christians. And, the “church” provides a very important element for them. What?

The church provides a long walk down the necessary, but, the wrong road of Christianity – the “religious” road. I say necessary, because just as John recognizes that there is a stage of Christian understanding called “young men/women”, there must be place for that stage to happen. There must be place to think that “being strong and overcoming the wicked one” is what Christianity is all about.

We all must pass through Children and Young Man/Woman to understand our Fatherhood reality in Christ. The roads of Children and Young Man/Woman are really not wrong roads, unless you stay on them too long. There is nothing wrong with a baby eating baby food, but it is wrong for a 12 year old to eat baby food.

“[A]s newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby.” [I Peter 2.2]

But we must move on.

“But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age ...” [Heb. 5.14]

The Child stage is quick. Young Man/Woman can take a lifetime and many never progress to a full understanding of their Fatherhood. And, you may go down the wrong road for a very long time until you are utterly frustrated with Christianity as a self-improvement religion. Sometimes we just need to stumble around in the dark for a period of time, bumping into

things and stubbing our toes before we realize the light switch was always available.

“Church” for the most part is not a bad place. Churches feed the hungry, donate to the poor and pay folk’s rent. Churches bring the lost into the kingdom by convincing them of their need for the Savior. And there is nothing wrong with the “young man/woman” phase. You will learn much about your faith and plenty of scripture.

The “young man/woman” phase is not to make you a better Christian. But, it is imperative that you “go through” a period where you have the mistaken idea that Christianity is a self-improvement program. And the point is that you must go down this road until you see and understand – by His revelation – at the end of your rope, that Christianity is not a religion and certainly not a self-improvement program.

Ultimately “young man” phase is to show you and ground you into the reality that Christianity is not a religion to be practiced or learned. Christianity’s purpose is not to show you or teach you how to be a better person or a better Christian or even more “Christ-like”. That’s right. We do not, eventually, become “like Christ”, although we try. That’s a hard statement, but stay with me. There is a huge difference between imitation and the Christ living in you, as you.

Christianity’s purpose is not to “help” you sin less. But, often, we must become so frustrated with these erroneous ways of thinking that we come, literally to the end of our self. At that point we are ready for the next revelation/understanding of who exactly we are and were created to be.

We were born again into the kingdom so that He might live His very life through our lives. That’s right – your life, with your personality and quirks, only it’s really Him – only it’s really you. That revelation usually only happens when our self-imposed self-improvement program so thoroughly wears us down with the religion. Basically we’ve just “had it”. We’re tired of lying to ourselves. We’re not going to be who we think we must become – better Christians.

It is at this point – “young man/woman” phase – with the is understanding of Christianity as a religion simply does not work. We may even be ready to pitch the whole thing. Then, and perhaps only then, are we ready for the revelation of “fatherhood”. Remember we started this discussion with the fact that John described three phases of revelation causing understanding.

The reality is that, in the words of John, we are all “fathers”. My use of “fathers” just mirrors what John said and is really gender neutral. In fact we are “fathers” from day one. We do not and really can not understand

that in the beginning. Compare this to the moment you were conceived. At least genetically speaking you were complete in every way. You just did know it yet.

One friend describes the John's three phases as follows: "For what it's worth, my prepositions for understanding thus far are: Christ for me – children - Christ in me – young men - Christ through me – fathers"

While John describes "Children", "Young People" and "Fathers", the reality is that we are all "fathers". We will not know that at first. In the beginning we do not see ourselves as such, but you will. It may take some effort to distance yourself from Christianity as "self-improvement" program to seeing yourself for who you really are, the one He intended you to be. Fathers/Mothers live their life for others. You may not even think about how you do that, but you do. You cease your efforts and just live.

And, you always were a "father" – you just don't know it at first. It's like Dorothy in the "Wizard of Oz" – she had the ruby red slippers all the time – she just didn't understand their significance. And, initially we don't the significance of who we are either – and at first it's not possible. There must be a process of knowing and understanding – all by revelation.

So, now we know Him – stripped down from all the religion in His purest form – and we know Him as us. I'll be honest with you. I don't know a God, out in space somewhere, sitting on a throne wearing soft white clothes. But I know you, and Him as you and I know myself and Him as me.

End of Study on Stages of Revelation/Understanding

31

49 YEARS ON THIS SIDE OF THE CROSS

MY TESTIMONY BY DAVID HEISLER

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 a correct 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 conversations were the aforementioned “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, the Person as myself, yet the Creator and King, Who defines Himself as Love,

“God is love” [1John 4.8]

and 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 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 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 mirror.

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."

Well, He had been hounding me for some time. He was right there. Jesus was standing behind me and He put His arms around me. I did not see Him. But He was there and the experience was real. 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 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. As I said 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". 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 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 Gods 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. Now, in the words of Forrest Gump, “that’s all I have to say about that.”

End of Study on 49 Years on this Side of the Cross

32

THE GOOD CONFESSAION

I hereby make my good confession that I am pure and crystal clear David Heisler expression of Jesus Christ. He lives His life in me, through me and to my world. He expresses Himself in my person and personality through my character and characteristics, and my seeming flaws. What I and others may see as my problems, which are many, He sees as His opportunity to be His unique Self as me. I make no excuses for who I am, how I feel, how I think or how I express myself. I say this even when I often don't feel it. That is my good confession.

If you are reading this, it is because you either know these truths to be your own or you have been introduced to the truth of the eternal reality that He has chosen you, exactly who you are, to be His unique and holy expression and now you want to own this truth for yourself.

It doesn't hurt to confess the truth of your eternal union with Him, His spirit seamlessly joined to yours, by His eternal and unchangeable choice, long before you ever made the choice to recognize and accept this truth. In fact His choice to live in and through His creation was made at the foundation of the creation; therefore, you have nothing to do with it.

Except, of course, to believe, receive and live.

End of Study on THE GOOD CONFESSAION

33

SELF-IMPROVEMENT

I was asked the question why I don't seem to advocate "self-improvement". And, I understand that if someone is poised to commit a heinous crime or has other such proclivities to hurt others, wouldn't I want them to "improve themselves" and not do whatever they are likely to do? Well, the answer is yes – I don't want anyone to hurt another. As a matter of fact I would like all to live in peace, harmony and love. Fat chance, but that would be nice. The problem is that that is really not what I am talking about when I say a person does not need to, and really cannot, improve their self.

The starting point is a definition of "self" of which we discuss the possibility of "improvement". What is a "self"? Is God a "self"? Of course He is. And we are a "self" also. However, I prefer to think in terms of personhood. God is a person. He is a very big person. I am a person. I can say these things because we think, react, create, feel, care, love, hate, and, seemingly we can improve these attributes. Probably, the fact that a person can "improve" is what separates us from the rest of the creation. An animal can build shelter, hunt and care for its young. But, I don't care how many generations of the species exist, there will never be improvement. Humans on the other hand are constantly "improving", on an individual basis and on a species basis. But, the fact that we have cars, cell phones, the internet and other advances in science and medicine does not mean that we are improving or becoming better persons.

There is a difference between improving your lifestyle versus improving

your personhood or self. That's why I say that people are different than animals. Animals cannot improve their lifestyle, but people can. But, lifestyle improvement is not the same as self-improvement.

The basic fallacy or faulty premise underlying the notion of "self-improvement" is that we are all independent beings and only marginally related to each other. The faulty notion of relationship could be based upon friendship, kinship, common belief system or really, any number of scenarios. And, at least initially, we view our "relationship" with God in a similar manner – that we are independent. We consider our "relationship" with God or Jesus as if it is something that we create by some method. We go deeply down the misconception road when we develop the mindset of getting "closer" to God through some process, commonly considered as "self improvement" as often urged in church.

So, when we see life and living beings as essentially separate and independent it is easy to embrace the concept that self or personhood is improvable.

My answer at this point is that none of us are really separate at all. Independence Either from each other or God is merely an illusion.

There are questions that must first be addressed. Thoughts that we are independent or separate beings, is a faulty premise. Self-improvement is not either necessary, or perhaps even possible. Basically, things are not always as they appear.

What did God have to work with when he created all that exists? You might say He didn't need anything. That makes sense in that He is God after all and therefore what does He need in order to do whatever He chooses? Perhaps nothing, or, perhaps nothing other than Himself. But, He's not a magician. So, what did He have to work with to make all that He created? Well, maybe He just had Himself. Actually, He just had Himself and in reality that is all He had and, in fact that is all He needed.

"I am the LORD, and there is none else ..." {Isaiah 45.5} This is an interesting verse, for as much as what it does not say as for what it does say. At first glance it seems to say "there is none other god". But it doesn't say that at all. And, I don't think the verse means that either. This is a statement of pure, crystal-clear reality. When it comes right down to basics, He alone is the only Person in the universe. He said it, not me.

So who are we? What is everything else?

God had Himself and only Himself when He created all that He did. God did not create "something" from "nothing". He created everything and everyone from Himself. This is comparable to two humans creating a third. Our children are not from "nothing". They are from us. We create in

our image as and because He created in His own image. This is crucial to understand as we discuss “self-improvement”.

So humanity, and truly every being which possess the “breath of life”, are created, not just by, but ultimately and originally from Him. Adam had the “breath of life” which made him a “living soul”. [Gen 2.7] Also every creature which boarded Noah’s Ark, two by two, also had the “breath of life”. [Gen. 7.15] Thoughts of separation are melting away and there is more.

“For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: And he is before all things, and by him all things consist.” [Col. 1.16-17] The above reference to “him” refers to the Son and it is clear that nothing in the creation, as far as how they were created, can, in truth, claim separation from Him in any sense. It should start to become clear that in the absence of separation, “self-improvement” might just be a misconception.

I am tying together the illusion of separation with the illusion of self-improvement. These are the steps we must take to understand our true “self” and the expression of our true self.

You may want to stop me at this point and ask the question, “how about sin?” or “how about unbelievers?” First, if you are reading this you are probably a “believer”. And, I don’t like or much care for speculation about things that do not matter. But, let’s say you are unsure. Then perhaps you are a prodigal son or daughter. [Luke 15.11-32] Well, just come home. Let’s not complicate things. If you read the story of the prodigal son you will see that the prodigal wanted to make long explanations and excuses to his father and the father was too busy rejoicing about his son’s return for any of that. So, again, if you’re a prodigal, come home, waste no more precious eternal time. If you want to talk about sin we can do that also. If you need to be forgiven for something, get on with it. Ask for forgiveness, receive it and stop doubting.

But really, was the prodigal son ever separated from his home and his father and brother for that matter? It wasn’t permanent in any event. And I would add it wasn’t real. It seemed real to the prodigal when he became hungry. But then he realized that he could return at any point.

The illusion of separation is the fuel that drives the mistaken notion, pervasive in organized Christianity, of the need for “self-improvement. Was the prodigal ever really separated from his father and family? Perhaps temporarily - but not eternally. By his own account he lived worse than the swine, which at least had husks of corn to eat. But was he ever not the son

of his father? No. It was only his perception that he was poor and needy. But that was quickly remedied by his return home.

We need to put this “separation” issue to sleep before we can adequately tackle the “self-improvement” issue. Is separation from God real? Well, we are all created by God. But not just by His Hands using some unrelated cosmic material. Just as He created Eve from Adam’s rib, the “rib” meaning being very close to Adam’s heart, He created us from His very being and in His Heart. Further, we are created in His image. But, the question remains, what does all this look like? How do we define this? We have the answer when we look to the Son. “For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: And he is before all things, and by him all things consist.” [Col. 1.16-17] – did you get that? - “By Him all things consist” ...

“Consist” has a very simple definition. It means what something, or someone is “made up of” or what something or someone “contains”. And remember, what did He have to create all that He did? Well, you could say He had anything that He wanted. But, He chose to use Himself to create all and that is why “all things consist” of Him. Mistakenly we imagine that when creation happened; things just “magically” appeared from nothing. Genesis does not say that and the above verse disputes that theory. He used Himself to create all things, including all people. So, the notion that we are separate from Him, or each other for that matter, is both wrong and impossible.

“I am the LORD, and there is none else ...” [Isaiah 45.5] I quoted that verse before and it means what it says. There is nothing but Him and that which consists of Him. And you might say if we consist of Him we are simply an extension or expression of Him. But, of course things and people are not always what they seem or appear.

There is therefore nothing, whatsoever that is not made of Him and from Him and nothing that does not contain Him. Now, we can stand in disbelief or rebellion, but our misconception does not change the reality and truth. So, we are not ever talking about “self-improvement”. We will not improve our being, our person or our self as we contain and consist of the very Creator of the Universe. And not just the Creator, but the Creator-Son.

Why is that so important that I make that distinction? It is because it is by the Son that all creation is reconciled to the Creator. It is the Son that poured out His life for each and every one of us, individually. It is the Son that spared not His own Life. And we are made of Him and contain Him.

“And we are made of Him and contain Him.”

You’re not going to improve on that. This is not “self-improvement”. This reality cannot be improved. But, it can be realized. And that is what we are talking about here. Realize Who you are made of and Who you contain.

We now see that who we are, as persons, are not capable of improvement. Really, consider that if improvement of personhood were possible, then right standing before God could be achieved. “Achievement” of “right standing”, of course, is utter nonsense and impossible.

Now, certain things can be improved. If I do push-ups every day I will inevitably improve my technique. But that is not what we are talking about here. So, we won’t indulge that conversation.

Why does this conversation of “self-improvement” come up at all? It does because often we mistake our life and faith for religion, which it is most definitely not. “Religion” by its very definition is all about “self-improvement”. Thankfully we have no religion. But, we do have Jesus, the Son. By His one eternal, timeless and utterly selfless act of crucifixion reconciled the entire creation to God. . “... through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.” [Col. 1.20]

I’ll take reconciliation any day over self-improvement. Consider that for yourself. And what is reconciliation? It is embracing your reality – as Him in you, as you, for and to your individual world – which is the way to go. So, get going and stop trying to improve perfection.

End of Study on Self-Improvement

34

TEMPTATION TO DO GOOD CHRISTIAN ETHICS, MORALS & VALUES

“Temptation” is a popular topic in Christianity. We’ve all heard some really good teachings about how to “deal” with temptation. Well, this won’t be one of those “really good” lessons - sorry. This will not be anything you might expect.

Starting with a basic truth, everything that is – everything that exists, all creation in fact, will operate as it was designed, by the Designer – without question and regardless of any appearance to the contrary. And the creation was designed as a conduit for the love of the Creator to flow from the center – Him - to every nook and cranny of the universe – eventually.

Another basic truth, regarding temptation, is that temptation is never about making me a better Christian or a better person - in other words – temptation is not designed to form in me better ethics, morals and values. The purpose of temptation is to ground me and settle me into who I am -- not at all to make me who I am. Do you get the difference? Temptation is always about His life flowing through me to others. When you are grounded and settled into who you are, then you truly are the savior and intercessor of your world.

The topic of “temptation” crystallized when I attended two Wednesday night church meetings on the topic of “Christian ethics, morals and values”. A fireman spoke. He regularly teaches “ethics, morals and values” to other firemen and policemen. At the conclusion of the first meeting I said privately to the fireman, “I’m a lawyer, I really don’t have any ethics, morals or values”. He thought that was funny. He laughed. I didn’t laugh.

Then, I corrected myself and said, “I mean I’m a Christian, I have no ethics, morals or values.” Well, he did not think that was funny and stopped laughing. I went on and said “I have Jesus living His life in me, as me”. I suggested further that a Christian focusing on and living a life of “ethics, morals and values” was exactly what happened in the FIRST and MOST BASIC TEMPTATION – MISTAKE – SIN, of mankind – that is, the choosing of religion over life, and it happened in the Garden of Eden.

This discussion of temptation actually goes back to the Garden of Eden. There were probably many trees in the Garden, perhaps one of each kind, but regarding only one God said “... Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: 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.” [Genesis 2.16-7] Well, in the form of a serpent, satan successfully “tempted” Adam and Eve to eat of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Adam was warned that it was a death sentence, yet he ate its fruit regardless.

There were two named trees in the Garden, the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil and also the Tree of Life. Realize, this was the Garden of Eden, the “mother of all gardens”, so there was probably one of every imaginable tree. But, these two are the only ones identified by name. Many are confused on this point. Some say the “the tree of knowledge”. That is a subtle error from the father of lies.

The only prohibition that God gave was not to eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. And the consequence, which God clearly stated to Adam if he ate, was death. That’s right death. Now, clearly Adam lived after he and Eve ate and were summarily ejected from the Garden. So what was his death? His death was that Adam chose religion – “way of life” - “ethics, morals and values” over Life Himself. That’s not to say that he never came around again and realized his error, but we don’t know that as there is no record of that happening.

So what about the other named tree, the Tree of Life. “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] There was initially no prohibition against eating the fruit from the Tree of Life. And, Adam could have chosen to eat from the Tree of Life.

The Tree of Life was “in the midst” of the Garden. “In the midst” simply means “in the middle”. In other words, the Tree of Life was right before Adam’s eyes all the time. Adam was not prohibited from eating its fruit, but he did not. Instead he looked away to the one tree that he was not

to touch, the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, and ate of it. And, remember, you are what you eat.

So, what does all this mean? Well, what is the knowledge of “good and evil”? It is ethics, morals and values. It is religion. Every religion preaches “way of life”. Did Paul say we preach religion? He did not. “But we preach Christ crucified to the Jews a stumblingblock, and to the Greeks foolishness; But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God; and the wisdom of God.” [1Cor. 1.23-24] We preach the crucified Christ – the Tree of Life. We do not preach religion, good and evil or ethics, morals and values – knowledge of good and evil.

Adam and Eve were “tempted” to choose religion -- doing good and avoiding evil - and that is exactly what they did. That choice will always result in failure – death. It is not a physical death and perhaps not an eternal death. But it is a mindset, a way of thinking that, at least temporarily, gets you ejected from the Garden.

Living a life of struggle between “good and evil”, “ethics, morals & values”, is the first and still number one temptation, mistake and, really, sin. A friend reminds me that those who sought to crucify Jesus accused Him of violating their moral code. There was no fear in the Garden until Adam got “religion”. His relations with God were normal, casual and without fear. Religion brings fear, distrust and confusion.

“This trying to do good becomes a believer’s chief sin, in place of trying to do evil, the sin of the unbeliever”. [Norman Grubb, GOD UNLIMITED p. 106]

So, I said to the fireman, “Think about what you are teaching”. At that moment, after talking to the fireman, I realized two things. First, I will discuss here, I realized just how subtle Satan is, especially on the subject of temptation. “Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made.” (Gen. 3.1) He has thoroughly convinced the world and, more important, the church, that his influence is to tempt people, especially Christians, to do evil -- murder, steal, hate, look at internet pornography, etc. -- and he does these also. But, his greater influence on the church is to tempt Christians to live a life of “ethics, morals and values” – a religious life – a life of “doing good and avoiding evil” -- THE TEMPTATION TO DO GOOD IS THE MOST SUBTLE AND POWERFUL NEGATIVE INFLUENCE IN CHRISTIANITY.

So what is wrong with focusing on ethics, morals and values as the fireman suggested? Should we live the opposite way? Should we be unethical, immoral and valueless? Well, first, let’s get the “should” out of our vocabulary altogether. Further, both sides of the coin miss the point

and are not worthy of consideration. When we focus on living an ethical life and condemning ourselves and others when we fall short, we take our focus off of our true life. A life lived merely for self-improvement is simply a waste of life and counter-productive to the kingdom. Now, I'm not saying, "Let us do evil, that good may come" -- which is exactly what Paul was falsely accused of saying. (Rom. 3.8)

The subtle negative influence, which is preached from the pulpit and which bombards us continually, is to eat of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. This is even in light of the fact that the Tree of Life is right there. The Tree of Life is Jesus. Satan has convinced the world to believe that he is just a clown, wears a red suit, has horns, a tail and carries a pitchfork. And he has convinced the church that Christianity is a self-improvement program, with "ethics, morals and values" from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. He is that subtle and almost impossible to detect. "Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light" [II Cor. 11.14] Fortunately, I'm blowing his cover.

The second thing I realized, after speaking to the fireman, is my frustration with the church. This subtle temptation of satan, to eat of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, means the focus of Christianity, as preached and taught, is that, once you are saved, Christianity is a "self-improvement program" -- doing good and avoiding evil.

So following that logic, temptation is about me trying to improve my "walk with God" -- when it is already a perfect union, because of the shed blood of the Savior. My union and your cannot be improved. But the reality of one's union with God must be grasped and understand, fully, God warned not to become religious – remember what he said would happen?

"And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: 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. 2.16,17]

But, what did the deceiver say?

"For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil." Gen.3.5
In other words, death.

Living a life by the "ethics, morals and values" of doing good and avoiding evil is death. That's not me – that's the Boss speaking. But why? Because that's "way of life" and not life – it's religion and not the Christ in you as you. "Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth and the life ..." [John 14.6] Christianity is not a "way of life" lived by a certain code of

“ethics, morals and values” derived from the “knowledge of good and evil”. Life is the Eternal Person – the Christ living in you , as you. But we are tempted otherwise. We are continually tempted to “live a certain way”, rather than simply recognizing the “Way” – Him, living His Life through us.

Temptation always produces “opportunity”. “Original temptation” actually gave “original opportunity” for Adam and Eve -- of which they did not avail themselves. They could have told satan to “pound sand” and decided to eat from the Tree of Life – Jesus was there, really – they could have become grounded and settled into their union with the Savior - instead they chose religion – the “knowledge of good and evil”.

In reality Genesis 3 is our experience. We are all presented with the same choice as Adam and Eve – Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil – or- Tree of Life – one producing death and the other life.

“And the LORD God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil: and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever...” [Gen. 3.22-23] Well, that was the reason for the eviction from the Garden. Compare that statement with what Jesus said about Himself. “I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever...” [John 6.51]

Jesus, present as the Tree of Life in the Garden, is and was always available. The Life that Jesus gives is eternal – but eternity is NOW. Our experience in the Garden can be a moment or a series of moments – but either way, there is a choice that we make.

Indeed, we want to find “life” in the regiment of morality, doing good and avoiding evil. Some get the idea that “way of life” is the purpose of our redemption. “For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God.” [Romans 10.3]

Judaism of Paul's time had established a religion – a way of life – based upon “ethics, morals and values” derived from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. In fact, “religion” by its definition will always be based upon performance.

Religion is “way of life”. Our calling is not to “way of life”, rather to Life. Life – true Life, the only Life is the Person of the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of God, as revealed to Adam and Eve, originally in the Tree of Life.

So, even today, seemingly, we can stand before both trees, the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil and the Tree of Life. But standing and

considering is not what we want to do. We must choose. We want to be permanently fixed in one – the Tree of Life.

We are “tempted” to be religious. We are “tempted” to consider our lives as this struggle between “good and evil”. The reality is that upon the moment of faith in Jesus Christ, we are permanently and eternally fixed, a part of and an expression of the Tree of Life. But we don’t know that. We think, just as Adam and Eve, that there is still this choice and mistake that our lives are all about “good and evil”. And so we tend to see ourselves in this constant battle of choice. That battle is what I refer to as temptation.

Temptation does happen and choices are presented. And, we can view this experience negatively or positively - appearance or reality - “Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment.” [John 7:24]

From the appearance side, temptation can be explained as something happening “to me”. It is “about me”. For the confused Christian, it is part of my Christian self-improvement program, maybe, because I have done something wrong, or maybe God is teaching me a lesson. On the other hand, from the reality side, when, knowing that we are fixed in union with the Tree of Life, other-lovers of humanity, -- we know temptation is not happening “to me”. Temptation must operate in accordance with basic truth -- love flows out. Therefore, ultimately, temptation is not “about me” -- it must be about His life and love being expressed by me and through me to others.

Humans need “mind renewal”, not the “mind control” of organized religion. “And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.” [Romans 12:2]

The “conforming” [mistaken] view mentioned by Paul is that Christianity [religion] is a self-improvement program.

“For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders...” [Matthew 23.4]

We need mind renewal because we got off-track, choosing religion over life. Adam and Eve made that choice just as we have by eating from the “religious” tree. The religion road is okay for a time. But it will frustrate and when you get to the end of that road you will want a course correction. But regardless of what point of the religious road you’re on, the Tree of Life is available.

And the Tree of Life is not an example of how to live, or as One that strengthens.

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

Branches have no independent life. Branches don’t improve or imitate

the vine. The sap [life] of the vine flows through the branches. You cannot get any stonger. That's real simple. That's easy. That's normal.

In fact all of creation [except humans] just live a normal and casual life before their Creator – not “trying to be” someone or something they are not. Birds are birds, fish are fish, trees are trees, dogs are dogs – the list goes on. Adam and Eve were that way - normal and casual - before religion entered history. They were naked before Him. The point of being naked is so significant in that there were not even clothes between Him and them. We need to get back to that casual and normal life where we no longer seek to improve the perfect fact of the crucifixion, which really did accomplish the reconciliation of all. Our normal life is the flow and expression of Him – not trying to make that happen through some arbitrary set of “good and evil” rules.

The mind must be renewed to the fact of our union – we are Him in the world – we are not “like Him”. We don't improve our “self”, we express Him through ourselves.

Incidentally, in the same church where the fireman spoke, there is a sign prominently displayed expressing the church's slogan, which says, to the effect, that the purpose of the church is to make “Christ-like” disciples. What babble! What religious nonsense!

So, we are tempted all the time. Temptation comes in the form of religion. The religious life demands ethics, morals and values. It is the lifestyle of doing good and avoid evil for the purpose of self-improvement. Reject that temptation and turn to the Tree of Life. Use the temptation to live a certain Christian “lifestyle” as an opportunity to reckon yourself grounded and settled into the reality of Him living His life in us, through us and as us, individually. And, by the way, all “reckon” means is to be of the opinion that something is true. The life of faith always starts with a good and true reckoning.

Therefore, whatever the temptation, it is simply an intermediate step in the flow of Him as love to others by and through us.

End of Study on Temptation to do Good

35

NOW WE ARE THE SONS OF GOD

1 JOHN 3.2

I am waiting to become a better Christian. I am waiting until I have memorized more bible verses. I am waiting until I learn how to pray more effectively. I am waiting until I act more like Jesus. I am waiting until I am more Christ-like. I am waiting until I feel more spiritual – more connected to God. I’ll have better “quiet time” – I’ll get with God more often – every day. I’ll go to church every Sunday.

Ah baloney! Let’s get one thing clear – NOW YOU ARE THE SON/DAUGHTER OF GOD [1 John 3.2] NOW RIGHT NOW - you’re not going to get closer to Him. You’re not going to hunt Him down once a day for a quiet time. Memorizing more verses will not make you more Christ-like. Until you understand what “praying without ceasing” means your prayer will never be more effective.

Truth is you’re not going to become a better Christian – you already are a perfect Christian. Memorizing verses is not the answer when the very living Word of God has taken complete and permanent residence in the very center of your being. You will never be more Christ-like [what a cheap imitation] – you already are Christ in your personal world – to each and every one that crosses your path. You may never “feel” spiritual and may never feel “connected” to God – in fact you may experience complete lack of feeling – so what.

The operative word is “NOW”. “Now” is a very interesting word and used appropriately by John, who said “now” we are the Sons of God. He doesn’t say we will be – he says we are now.

As Christians we can speak with great certainty about “eternity” and what life will be like in the “by and by”. Some can speak with great certainty about the “tribulation” or other eschatological events. We can say that in eternity everything will be okay, right? But, can we speak with great certainty about the “now”? We should.

So, what is “now” and why is it so important that John says we are the Sons of God NOW and not at any other time. “Now” must be the most important time there is. I can say that with great certainty. Why? Because NOW is ETERNITY. How can I say that so boldly? Well, consider who is alive NOW. I am. You are. But, most important God is. You can say, as humans, we are constrained by time and space so therefore “this” is not eternity. Well, maybe we should think about that.

Jesus was not so constrained as us. The difference is that we choose to constrain ourselves and Jesus did not so choose. What do I mean? Jesus always saw the ETERNITY of NOW. He did not say He “will be” the Son of God. He knew He was “NOW THE SON OF GOD”. In fact, He saw eternity all the time. He “saw” health and wholeness when others “saw” and see only disease and problems.

Am I saying we should go around “trying” to heal people like Jesus? No, unless that is your gift and calling – it is not mine. Healing physical disease was a very small and insignificant aspect of Jesus’ ministry. He healed broken hearts. He saved lives. He restored lives. He gave abundant life. He sent forth, as Himself. He did it. He does it. All is done in the NOW.

So, let’s dig in our heals. Let’s live in the eternity of now. Let’s live as sons and daughters of God NOW. Because we are.

End of Study on Now We Are The Sons Of God

36

HEALING THE BROKENHEARTED

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, ...” [Luke 4.18]

Jesus, at the start of His public life, reads the above quote from Isaiah 61:1, in the Synagogue in Nazareth, His hometown. He had just completed His temptation in the wilderness and had not yet chosen His disciples. The congregation in His hometown of Nazareth took great offense that He had quoted from Isaiah and attributed the quote to Himself. Then His former neighbors tried to kill Him for his bold statement and assertion that Isaiah prophesied of Him. He slipped away, as the time of His death was not ripe.

We know absolutely nothing, factually, about Jesus’ life from age 12 to age 30. You may wonder what He may have known about being brokenhearted, if anything. While I might not know the details, I am certain He knew everything about being brokenhearted. How do I know that?

“I am weary of my crying: my throat is dried: mine eyes fail while I wait for my God.” [Psalm 69.3]

How do I know that this verse, while written by David, talks about Jesus? Because of verse 9.

“For the zeal of thine house hath eaten me up” [Psalm 69.9]

His disciples quoted this verse when He cleared the temple in John 2.

I’m not sure what happened to Jesus during the 18 years that are not recorded, age 12 through 30. I have my thoughts. But in Psalm 69 King David, the author of the Psalms, describes Jesus as, basically, crying His eyes out. Why is this so important? It is important, because He must be one of us. I say that, not just in a flesh and blood sense, but that His life had to bring Him all the pain, suffering and broken heartedness that we experience. Anything less and He was just playing at life. Anything less and it was just a ruse – just a big joke. Anything less and He was just going through the motions – get it done and over and get back to my soft chaise lounge in heaven.

It was the pure and simple reality of His humanity that cemented for Him the “knowing” of His purpose -

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, ...” [Luke 4.18]

Jesus knew and understood His purpose, as described above. Unfortunately formal, organized Christianity can often see its purpose quite differently. What we hear constantly is “change, be different and follow these rules ...” To the contrary, people are not commodities to be “dealt with, overhauled or pigeonholed”.

Jesus had those 18 years, 12-30, to experience all the highs and lows of life. And I’m sure He did. Did He fall in love? Did He laugh and sing and have fun with His friends? Did He experience the death of loved ones, most likely Joseph? Was He accomplished in His trade? Did He bear the stigma for the fact that His mother was not married at the time of her pregnancy and His birth?

“They that hate me without a cause” [Psalm 69.4]

Did He make mistakes?

“O God, thou knowest my foolishness; and my sins are not hid from thee.”
[Psalm 69.5]

Jesus, as the Son of God, was so absolutely human in every way, a paradox difficult to fathom, but absolutely true. We don't know when He knew for certain that He was the Jewish Messiah, the Savior. Maybe not until His baptism by His cousin John.

“And there came a voice from heaven, saying, Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” [Mark 1.11]

We don't know who heard that voice – perhaps it was just internal and only Jesus heard in His heart. Maybe His confirmation came at the conclusion of His temptation in the wilderness. Maybe His confirmation was never complete and He always had doubt. “Doubt” might explain why He struggled so at Gethsemane. I am certain He knew His humanity in the highest highs and lowest lows.

So how does all this affect us? How does this affect our brokenhearted world?

I don't know what broke Jesus' heart - maybe many things. Having a broken heart is not a sign of weakness; rather it is proof of being a true and complete human being. I suppose that, as us, until He got perspective, He had a hard time dealing with His heartbreaking moments. Perhaps, as us, He never really fully dealt with the moments that broke His heart. But I do know that He had to have those moments and periods of time. He can't know and understand you and me unless he was a true and complete human being. And more important, He could not “heal the brokenhearted” unless He knew the reality of being brokenhearted Himself.

So, how does all this apply to us? In every way.

So, when our hearts break – we will react and respond normally as true and complete humans. We will be sad. We may weep. We may even look up in heaven with disdain. But then what? Because we know – because we understand – because we experience – we will, as Him, get our perspective and actively and lovingly, with compassion and patience “heal the brokenhearted” as Him. And who are the “brokenhearted”? After you're done looking in the mirror, just look around. It's anyone and everyone. And the way to the Savior for those who don't know Him yet, is by our compassion, understanding and love.

End of Study on Healing the Brokenhearted

37

HUMAN NATURE

We use this phrase often – “human nature” – but I’m not sure we adequately define it. What is “human nature”? Is it simply the way we react and respond to the world, or to our own emotional or psychological state? Or is it something deeper? Are we limited or constrained by our “human nature”? Are we at odds with it and are forced to fight against it? Or, do we even have a nature at all?

Some say we have no independent nature and are simply containers or conduits of the nature of another. Some say we have two natures at work in us at the same time.

This is confusing. But, this is important.

This question can never be adequately answered because you can’t see your nature the way you can see other parts that make you human – your nose for instance [although many can see no further]. You can only “see” expressions or products of your nature – assuming you have one. You can see and feel and experience different things that give you some indication of “nature” – but you will never actually see the thing [your nature] itself.

Why is this important – nature – none, one or two? Well, we spend a lot of time talking about our nature and trying to change it – or deal with it – or explain it away – or, perhaps, just trying to ignore it – but you will never really ignore it.

I know a discussion of “human nature” is controversial. I knew it would be and hesitated for some time to start this discussion – but off we go.

Since, as I said in part one, “nature” cannot be seen with eyes; to some

extent, we will never really know the answer to this question – no nature – one nature – or – two natures. But this is not math. This question cannot be answered or proven like two plus two equals four. Thankfully that is not the point. The point is that each and every one of us must answer this question sufficiently for ourselves. Because, unless and until we get our answer, personally – then we spin in circles and fight fights that waste our time and the resources of the Kingdom.

In a very real sense, we must wrestle and prevail as Jacob when he wrestled all night and prevailed against some unknown man. [Gen. 32.24-25] As I understand the literal truth of this odd story, Jacob had a question – he wrestled with his question until he got his answer. I suggest he wrestled with his identity in Christ – although, of course, he did not use that terminology. There are times in life when we must wrestle with our own identity in Christ until we prevail and get our answers – and we do and we will.

Answering this question about nature – your nature is a question that we must wrestle with until our answer comes.

No “nature” – one “nature” – two “natures” – which one? Of course, the biggest problem is that in the Bible you can find support for any position you like – on any subject.

Let’s start with a definition – “nature”. Basically “nature” is how a thing, or in this case a person, operates – known usually by observing characteristics, qualities, and temperament. But, of course, there’s more. Presumably, every living being has a nature. And, it’s important that that is so. Without a “nature” life would be absolutely unpredictable and it would be almost impossible to function.

I think we got past the first question – yes we do have a “nature”. For the most part people and things behave in a fairly predictable manner – according to their “nature”. Consider if every day you woke up and were unsure how you or others would react and respond in everyday situations. Of course that doesn’t happen. Things and people act and react and live very predictably - according to their “nature”.

But, before we decide how many natures we have operating at the same time, first we should decide where our nature comes from. That shouldn’t be so tough to figure out. As they say “the apple doesn’t fall far from the tree”. Who’s our tree? Who planted our seed? Where did He get the seed from?

Well, He is our tree. He both is our seed and He planted our seed. We are created in His likeness and in His image [Gen. 1.26] – and more so in Christ. Is our nature “independent” or “dependent”? I’m not sure how

anything or anyone can be truly “independent” of Him. He created all life and is the source of all life.

“All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.” [John 1.3]

Back to why it is so important that this question of “nature” be laid to rest. My personal position is that I am one unified person. An old missionary [NPG are his initials] once said, to the effect – “when you see someone, you don’t say I see a ‘body’ – you say I see a “person”. So I say – I’m just a person. I don’t say I’m a body, soul, and spirit. I don’t say I’m a person with one nature fighting against another nature. I’m just a person. I am a redeemed and reconciled person. I am saved and justified – but a person, none-the-less.

So long as we are unsure of our person or our nature our focus is inward and that is not profitable for the Kingdom. We must put this question to rest and cease the self-examination and look outward -

“Say not ye, There are yet four months, and then cometh harvest? behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest.” John 4.35

Did Jesus wrestle with the question of His human nature? Of course He did. There is no human issue that He did not address, confront and resolve for Himself. His nature was certainly one of those issues. But once He came to the point where He could say –

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

– this issue was resolved for Him.
What did He pray for us?

“And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: “[John 17.22]

There should be no doubt that Jesus’ prayer was fulfilled.

“...ye might be partakers of the divine nature ... ”[2 Peter 1.4]

Now, we can talk about humans as containers or expressers – and so we

are. But that type of terminology is conceptual and used as a teaching tool, and is by no means the end of the discussion.

But we have this treasure in earthen vessels ...”[2 Cor. 4.7]

But, we are not really “earthen vessels” – we are really persons.

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

But again, we are not really “branches” - we are really persons. The concept is over – the teaching tool no longer needed - when the understanding is gained in your heart – that understanding that we are more than what we may appear – we are the very human expression of Him – with His divine nature.

It is clear that at the request of Jesus, we are one with Him, the Father, and with each other - sharing the divine nature. To say those facts is a good start. This is comparable to anything learned or acquired in life - when the understanding goes from your head to your heart – when you become the words you speak – when you wake up one day and can say with full assurance “I am Him in my world” – the vessel has now become the treasure and the branch has now become the vine. You are Him.

Curiously, you stop asking yourself about your “nature”. You now understand that you are now much more than your nature. You are the complete and total person you were created to be. You can stop the introspection and self-improvement program and look out to your needy and heartbroken world and be the healer and the lover you were created to be.

For me these thoughts make the question of one nature or two fade away. It’s not really important to me. I think what fuels the debate of “two natures” – “dog versus dog” is what happens when you feel tempted or really take a fall into something that you later consider to be “wrong”. It happens. Do you think that Jesus ever had those thoughts – “Could I have been more loving or more understanding today? Did I just sin when I cleared out the temple with a whip and overturned the tables?”

“And found in the temple those that sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the changers of money sitting: And when he had made a scourge of small cords, he drove them all out of the temple, and the sheep, and the oxen; and poured out the changers’ money, and overthrew the tables...” [John 2.14-15]

In today's world, Jesus would have been sentenced to at least two years in state prison for the assault and battery. He actually got crucified – but the point is that today the police would have arrested Him immediately and taken Him to jail. The much bigger question is – do you think Jesus considered “that is just my ‘old Adamic’ nature rising up and I have to get it under control?” I doubt it. Certainly, at this point in His life, He saw Himself as a unified Person expressing only Divine Nature as His true Self. Does this mean that He was irresponsible for His actions? Am I advocating irresponsibility or violence? My answer is absolutely “no” on both counts.

The fact that Jesus expressed His anger was not because he has two natures at war within Him and the “lower” nature took over. He expressed His anger because He was angry, period. Anger is a legitimate emotion given us by God. That's not so strange, is it? But if we express anger or otherwise do something “sinful” we assume that that is our “flesh” or our “old Adamic nature” or our “old man” – or anything, really, to deny the fact of the truth of our Divine Nature.

Now, what about the old “Adamic/Sinful Nature”? Is there such a thing? Does it apply to us? Can a person have two natures operating at the same time? There is much said, to the effect, that Christians have two natures but the rest of the world does not. The theory that a person can have two natures at one time has deep roots in Christianity. Having deep roots doesn't necessarily make it so.

Remember your “nature” is your operating system. It is the life that you express. We know for certain that we have the Divine Nature.

“... ye might be partakers of the divine nature ...” [2 Peter 1.4]

“Partake” means to “share or participate”.

The question remains – is the rest of the world unified, one-nature beings and just Christians who are a hybrid of good and evil, fighting a daily battle to do good and avoid evil?

Jesus never defined anyone in those terms – ever. He did however have very harsh words for those He considered hypocrites.

“Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do.”
[John 8.44]

But, what did Jesus say about the rest of us?

So, how did Jesus deal with the question of nature? With the

hypocrites, His words were harsh and to the point. He angered those who later murdered Him. He stated,

“Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do.”
[John 8.44]

Now, it could be interpreted that the statement “of your father the devil” means that they are “containers” of sinful nature. He didn’t actually use that terminology. None-the-less he was definitely making a point to both the Pharisees and those within earshot – what they do and say is wrong, evil and not to be followed.

He never spoke of the rank and file in such negative terms. But what did Jesus have to say, virtually, to all others, most definitely including you and me? He said,

“Ye are the salt of the earth...” [Matt. 5.13]

And right after He said,

“Ye are the light of the world.” [Matt. 5.14]

We have no way of knowing if Jesus personally knew all the people of which He made these blanket statements. We have no way of knowing if each and every one of them had read the Four Spiritual Laws. [I’m kidding – Rev. Bright was not born yet] We don’t know if each and every one of them prayed the “sinner’s prayer”. [Assuming it had been invented yet – probably not]. We don’t know if each and everyone had “received Jesus as their personal Lord and Savior”. [Assuming such terminology was used back then – probably not] So what was Jesus talking about when he called you and me salt and light?

So what did Jesus mean when he called us “salt of the earth” and “light of the world”? Was He talking about our nature? Contrast that with what Paul talked about in Romans Seven. Is Paul contradicting Jesus by saying that we are “really” the “salt and pepper” of the earth? Is Paul saying we are the “light and dark” of the world? I think we can rest assured that Paul is not contradicting Jesus and not talking about our nature.

In the early church, Paul’s time, just as today, there is pervasive and persuasive influence that what was started with faith should now be completed with law – rules, regulations, and “way of life”.

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

But, Paul is not talking about our nature. We are unified persons expressing the divine nature in us. Paul is talking about the experience that we all go through that brings us back to the Savior’s Cross.

Generally speaking, we all commence our life of faith with a moment of faith in Him. What we don’t know, at that time, is how complete that moment of salvation – redemption – reconciliation really is. In absolute reality, in that moment of our own personal history, we experience the truth of

“I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.” [Galatians 2.20]

Jesus was not distracted by theoretical theology. Who knows how many natures we really have – none – one – two – Jesus wasn’t too concerned about that. – so – neither should we. Theoretical theology can turn into really bad doctrine, which can waste your time and waste the precious resources of the Kingdom. It’s not about your nature – it’s about your person. Your person was crucified with Christ – never-the-less your person lives – yet it is not you that live – it is Christ that lives in you, as you. Initially, Galatians 2.20 is head knowledge – as anything important to know in life starts off in your head. But, when the knowledge of who you are gets into your heart that understanding becomes you – you really are alive – it really is you that is the Christ living in you, as you, for your personal world.

At this point, the discussion of your nature fades away as the reality of your personhood sinks in. You now see that trying to get control of your imaginary natures is a waste of your time. It is a subtle distraction from the liar. End that discussion and the wild goose chase of trying to control your nature.

Jesus said we are “salt” and we are “light”. Jesus doesn’t lie. So stop looking inward – you are “perfect and complete” [Eph. 4.12] Just be yourself - “salt” and “light” – that’s who you are. Season your world with love, kindness, understanding, forgiveness, and compassion. Be the light of Him in darkness. Go – Be.

End of Study on Human Nature

AFTERWORD

In the First volume of *Union Explored*, we explore such titles as “Just Ask,” “Negatives,” and “The Gift of Depression.”

