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Commendation and Condemnation: Evil Twins

We're accustomed to praising people or blaming them, seeing people as just people and ourselves as just ourselves: we're all about being human. Christians celebrate the incarnation of Christ, and this is right, for the mystery is that Christ, equal with God in eternity, became flesh and blood. Where would we be if He hadn't? So we have every good reason to celebrate our humanity, since the Son of God Himself took on humanity and even now reigns as a glorified, ascended man.

I think it is good, however, to examine just how Jesus said that His humanity worked. A rich, young ruler came to Jesus and addressed Him as "Good Master," to which Jesus replied, "Why callest thou me good? None is good, save one, that is, God" (Luke 18:19). Jesus had picked up the self righteousness of the ruler, who projected it therefore onto Jesus, as if men are just men who do good things. Nothing could have struck Jesus as more heretical, for He emphasized in talking about Himself that He lived from His Father abiding in Him and did only the works He saw His Father doing.

The reason for this is that Jesus knew that God created humanity in the first place to contain and express the indwelling life of God. I like to say that God created us powerless! Unfortunately, many consider powerlessness the province of a percentage of society given to addiction. If one is an addict, one must come to understand powerlessness as the first step toward recovery. Although this is true, the larger picture is that God created all of humanity powerless even before the Fall of Adam and Eve, and in heaven, we will be powerless for eternity. Powerlessness is not a principle that applies only to addicts; it applies to every human for all time. Jesus knew this, and so He lived as powerless in His humanity, depending every moment on the life of His father in Him to will and work.

We do, however, need to look at powerlessness both as it applies to those in sin and to those living free from sin before the Fall (and then later to those living free from sin under the New Covenant because of Christ's keeping power). As I said, God created us to be powerless, so Adam's sin did not change God's plan. Sin only meant that our powerlessness put us under the dominion of Satan, whereas before the Fall, we lived by God's glorious power; for before Adam and Eve fell, they lived as vessels containing and expressing the power of God. They were filled with and radiated God's glory, and God did not give them life; He was their life. They lived as branches of His tree; they lived as the conjugal, human other to His divine life; they lived as the human temples of His Spirit; they lived as the embodiment of His headship. Nothing could be plainer than that all power was vested in God and that He created Humanity to join with it in a glorious union of the human and divine. Never would the creature be God, and never would God be a creature, but we would know ourselves as conscious, sentient beings expressing a life not our own.

So powerlessness began before the Fall and certainly continued after the Fall: the only change in that came from the fact of God's glory departing from man and Satan's power entering into man, enslaving man. Vitaly, we need to know that sin is not primarily a deed, and sin is not primarily a nature or principle deriving from ourselves: sin is fundamentally a person whose nature is self-for-self because as the highest of the angels, he, Lucifer, led a rebellion and wanted to be like God. Satan, therefore, is one who lives in human vessels too, when fallen, and we're all born fallen as Romans 5 tells us. This is why Jesus had to be born of a virgin so that He would not be born just another minion of Satan, already indwelled by the spirit of error from birth (Eph. 2:1-3).

Here, therefore is the point: Paul reveals to us in Romans 6 that we are either slaves of sin or slaves of righteousness, but always slaves. I like to say that God gives us a multiple choice question with two answers to choose from. Either we choose to be slaves of sin or slaves of righteousness. Not liking these answers, we politic for a third option, "I want to be my own boss." Over and

over we have tried to pencil in this third option, when the Scriptures never offer it. The "be my own boss" option really comes from the devil, who continues in this deception himself that such is possible.

This brings us to the point about powerlessness in a sin condition, for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God, and therefore to talk about addiction as something that a minority of people worse off than others falls into is ludicrous. We were all slaves of sin as unbelievers, and as believers, where we have not lived from the Spirit, Mr. Sin has held our members in bondage. The great deception in society comes from viewing only some people as addicts, whereas we are all hopelessly enslaved by sin when not walking in the Spirit.

This has everything to do with why Jesus asked the ruler, "Why callest thou me good?" Jesus knew that to commend or condemn people for their deeds, as if people originate their own deeds, misses completely the very fabric of our humanity: God created us to contain and express Him, and in the Fall, Satan took over the indwelling rights of our humanity, so that we began to do his lusts (John 8:44; 2 Tim. 2:26). God's plan to save us, therefore, had to include expelling the false indweller and restoring His glorious presence in us.

God knew, though, that we could never see how He did this without first encountering the law, for the deception that we do our own good or evil runs so deeply in us that He had to first get us to the point of admitting that we broke His laws. So He gave us laws.

Before looking at the law, let's ask what the law is all about. God Himself does not live by law. One member of the Trinity never says to another, "What shall We do? Let's pull a law book off the shelf and see what We should be doing." This is ridiculous to think. God's nature is self-for-others: He has made the eternal choice to be love. God is love. Therefore, He doesn't live by law but by His nature. We, on the other hand, as creatures, and fallen ones, were born with the deception from the indwelling spirit of

error that we can do our own good or do our own evil. We either commend or condemn ourselves and view others likewise, commending those we esteem and condemning those that we disapprove of. We don't come into the world thinking that we break God's laws and need a savior to keep us from going into eternity, separated from God. Though the Bible warns of this destiny for the unbelieving, and asserts that many take this path, these warnings go disregarded as hysteria and unworthy of a loving God, despite the unmistakable, plain word of the Scriptures.

God's first order then was to convince us that we have not and cannot keep His laws: we cannot generate a life like His by imitation. Thankfully, many do come to see, through the Bible and the Spirit, that they have sinned and need a savior. They accept Christ's atonement and know that their sins are forgiven. This is unspeakably wonderful.

What would you say, though, if I said that being a forgiven sinner is not enough? If we only know life as forgiven sinners, we express thanks that our past is forgiven and heaven awaits us in the future. But we're left to try to be like Christ in the present, with a never-ending sin consciousness that leaves us always feeling like we never measure up as the dirty saints we think we are. We falsely take Romans 7 as Paul's testimony of what our life must be until we receive new bodies in the resurrection.

Paul's point is quite different from this! After establishing justification by faith in the early chapters of Romans, Paul moves to how God removed the spirit of error from us and came to dwell in us again. I have given detailed exposition of this many places elsewhere, and so I will only briefly say here that God made Christ Jesus to be our old man-the human self with Satan in it as boss over us in our unredeemed state. This does not mean that Jesus ever sinned; it means that on the Cross, God made Him to be sin (2 Cor. 5:21). Further, God put us into the body of Christ (Romans 6 and Galatians 2:20) so that we were crucified, buried, and raised with Christ. So the completion of the

Gospel simply put is this: we are the human containers, and by the Cross, Satan goes out, and Christ comes in.

The fact that Christ is in the heart of the Christian is not new news. Every Christian knows that "Jesus is in my heart." The newness of the Gospel, when we see it, is that God put us in a union with Christ whereby the two are one and we stop living by asking for God to help us as if we are living independent lives and need some help now and then. My friend, Sylvia Pearce, puts this extremely well in her chart presentation that details in picture form, with commentary, how we falsely see ourselves at each stage up to the point where we truly do see our union with Christ. In her pictures she shows how we start out at birth seeing ourselves as just ourselves. Then as Christians we see Christ in us but only as a wee, little influence on our otherwise big, big view of ourselves as humans who get on with some help from Christ.

The Gospel, however, is all about a total Christ in a total human, as my old mentor, Norman Grubb, used to say. We don't live by help but by "Christ who is our life" (Col. 3:4). This puts our humanity back into the focus that God intended, but notice how different the focus is from where we started as deceived human beings, commending or condemning the human self as the originator of good or evil. Yes, we do good or evil in a secondary sense, for we live by faith, and so we end up agreeing on a master, either sin or righteousness, which means either the spirit of error or the Holy Spirit.

I recently read a letter from a dear brother who commended a fellow Christian for many good works and by implication took shame for his own deficient works. What he wrote amounted to seeing good people and bad people, or good people and not so good people. The emphasis smacked of works, works, works, either good or bad that we do. This saddened me to read, but I have had my own deceived history of seeing myself and others that way. That is why I have lived for years now by what I call my "Keeper's Creed." I say when tempted, "God, You and I know that

I will do that sin unless You keep me, and thank You that You are keeping me!"

As you can see, powerlessness is the principle we lived by when not Christians. It is also the principle we live by as Christians. Adam and Eve lived by it both before the Fall and after it. Christians will live powerless in heaven for eternity with God as their power. Without the complete unveiling of the deception that leaves a person calling self and others good or bad, one can only go on either commending or condemning, and both are evil twins.

Renewal or Reform?

For all of the talk about "born again," what understanding do we have about this radical sounding phrase? Jesus told Nicodemus that he must be born again, and the same holds for people today. Born again means far more than being a forgiven sinner, for as wonderful as that estate is, the mind doesn't change, and new actions do not follow if we only reckon ourselves the same old person, just forgiven.

Don't get me wrong; knowing that we need forgiveness and a savior is the door into the kingdom of God, for thereby we accept that we have all broken God's law and that no amount of reform, resolution, or good intention on our parts will get us into the kingdom of God. We do need a savior, and we cannot save ourselves by any works whatsoever that we do; only the blood of a savior come from heaven, only the blood of God come in the flesh can save us.

God has quite a task to get us to see that we have broken His law. He has to put the law before us repeatedly until we agree with Him that we have broken it and need His forgiveness. God Himself, however, does not live by law but by His nature, which is love. He never consults a book off His shelf to know what He should do. Rather, He lives by the nature he eternally chooses to be, which is self-for-others. When He gives us His law, He simply mirrors to us in an external way, what to Him is internal. The law that God gives us describes the divine nature but does not describe any nature or actions that we can generate on our own. Therefore, we cannot be like Him because He is the only one of His kind and always will be. This is what we must find out.

Why then does God have to give us His law? In Paradise something went wrong that affected every one born of our first parents, Adam and Eve. Created as branches of His one eternal tree, the devil deceived Eve into thinking that she could be her own tree and not need to live as a branch of God's tree. After Eve

fell, Adam saw what happened, and he made the conscious choice to follow Eve in her path. The result was that they became branches of Satan, expressing Satan's self-for-self nature. The law, therefore, is what God uses to show us that we come into this world expressing the opposite of who God is.

The fact that Satan got into our first parents and took over, expressing his nature by them, might make Satan sound like an equal rival of God, but nothing could be more erroneous. Satan is a creature too-from the highest angelic realm-but nonetheless still a creature, for all his power. Not only that, Satan keeps us from knowing that he runs the lives of the unredeemed because he wants people to think that they are just their human selves-independent human selves who do their own good or their own evil. This fact is well hidden, and we do not generally learn it until after we have gone a long way on the more surface level of looking at deeds to see if they conform to God's law or break God's law.

Therefore, God had to start first with the external matter of getting us to see that we have broken His law and that only He can provide forgiveness. No amount of reform on our part can change what we have done, and we find that no amount of reform on our part can alter our works to make them change into an upward curve that brings God's acceptance. We only get somewhere when we agree that we have sinned and when we confess our sins. Then, as John says, God is "faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

God does not forgive our sins only because we confess them but because Christ died for them. God looks at what Christ did on the Cross and reckons it to us, offering us Christ's own righteousness as our justification. He offers this as a promise to us, and when we confess, that means that we agree with God, and we come under the New Covenant, which goes back to Abraham. Abraham believed God's promises and so we read, "And he believed in the Lord; and He counted it to him for righteousness" (Gen. 15:6).

Here is where the difficulty comes in living the Christian life: many know that God reckons Christ's righteousness to us as ours, but they see it as a positional righteousness instead of righteousness flowing out of the life of Christ in us. Instead of the living person of God being Himself in us, they see righteousness as a book-keeping entry credited to us but not actual in our experience. Nothing could be further from God's intent, for He desires with all His passion not only to forgive our sins and credit righteousness to us, but to expel the enemy out of us and restore His presence and total life in us so that we don't have to go around every day with a sin consciousness saying, "We sin every day."

Of course we can still sin as Christians-thankfully for which forgiveness is ample, as John says: "and if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" (1 John 2:1). However, God's plan for us is far more than to continue on as forgiven sinners. It is not enough to know ourselves as forgiven sinners, for which reason John says, "My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not" (2:1). John tells us exactly what the other Bible writers also say, that we can live in victory over sin!

Therefore, we do not have to repeatedly fall into the same sins, with no hope of deliverance that lasts. We do not have to try to be like Christ, and we cannot do that anyway. Mistakenly, many in ignorance try to repay God out of gratitude for His forgiveness by trying to be like Christ. But if we could keep God's law, why did we agree with God in the first place that we needed a savior? The truth is this: we need a savior for our living as much as we need a savior for forgiveness. What sense does it make to realize that we have broken God's law and need Christ to forgive us, only to turn around and try to keep His law now that we are His children?

Reform did not bring forgiveness, and reform does not bring Christian living. Bill Bright used to say, "Only Christ can live the Christian life." The simplicity and completeness of that statement flew past my efforts and trying until I was forty-four years old.

God's purpose all along was that He live His life in us as vessels, containers, and branches, and He planned this as His purpose even before the Fall. So the way He created us to function is not a byproduct of the Fall, but the very way we're made, regardless of whether we live as slaves of sin or slaves of righteousness: we're not self-operating selves!

If reform must fail, what is the renewal? The renewal comes from seeing what "born again" means in contrast to reform. Reform means taking the old and trying to fix it or improve it without it dying. Renewal means that we died and were born entirely new creations in Christ. Nothing about the old man gets fixed up or improved; instead the old man died on the Cross in Christ's death: "I am crucified with Christ" (Gal. 2:20). This is the fundamental of the Gospel-we DIED.

I remember reading Romans 6 and Galatians 2:20 while a student in college. At the time I thought, "I couldn't have died 2000 years ago; Christ lived way back then, and I live now." I didn't see that eternity means "no time," so to God, I died in Christ. When I read the scriptures as a college student, I read with my brain apart from revelation, seeing myself as just my human self in the present moment we call time.

So who died? When I read these scriptures in college, I didn't even see yet who the old man is-the self we were as non Christians, which is empowered from within by the spirit of error (Eph. 2:1-3). I only knew myself as someone who did right deeds or wrong deeds, thinking myself to be the originator of both. I did know that I had accepted Christ as my savior since God's law had convinced me enough that I would perish eternally without Christ's forgiveness. I didn't yet know who the old man is, much less that he died.

How did we die? God put us into Christ's death, burial, and resurrection. Seeing this death comes by revelation because though we read the words of Scripture, we still persist long into the Christian life seeing ourselves as the same people we were before we became Christians: we see ourselves as forgiven

sinner and live with what the Bible calls "consciousness of sins" (Hebrews 10:2 NASV). God, however, calls us to see the completion that He accomplished on the Cross when He put to death the old man and raised a new man in Christ: "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature; old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (2 Cor. 5:17).

This means that as a Christian, I am an entirely new creation. Though my body looks the same, and though my personality is the same, God has birthed me out of death into a new being, united spirit-to-Spirit with God through Christ. This living union did not exist when I was the old man. The old man could never get transformed into the new man. For me to be united spirit-to-Spirit with God, the old man had to die, and I had to be born a new creation, which means union with Christ.

The limitations of my humanity, though, never do change; I'm still powerless to produce my own good. But in this union with Christ, whereby we are made one spirit (1 Cor. 6:17), Christ takes on all responsibility to produce all of the qualities He requires. Christ Himself is the Christian life, and I get carried along by faith, enjoying His life as my life.

If I died with Him and was buried and raised with Him, why did I continue in sin for so long as a Christian? Paul's "Know ye not?" of Romans 6:3, begins to answer that question: one cannot live from what he does not know. Christians who do not know that Christ is their life continue to sin because Satan, now kicked out, grabs their members from without. Satan can never be lord of the castle again; he can never re-enter us and be the boss. The best that he can do is to manipulate our members, and he does this by his chief deception, which is to keep us unaware that we are only containers and branches. When we don't know that we are only branches and containers, we still live in the false notion that we act as independent beings with God's help.

This is a point worth summarizing: when we accept Christ and belong to Him, we have been crucified with Christ, and in that death, the enemy got expelled from us. In Christ's burial and

resurrection, we rose as new creations, now united to Him spirit-to-Spirit, so our inner castle is secure. In Romans 6, Paul calls this being "dead to sin." Walking in faith regarding this, causes the flow of Christ's life out into our earthly members, as we discern the difference between the old impulses of our thoughts and feelings, and Christ's new mind in our members-whereby He quickens our earthly members and produces a new humanity in these earthen vessels, making them alive with glory even in this groaning, travailing world. Renewal means that we see who we now are by this new birth and take that, out of the obedience of faith, as our identity and life source.

Knowing that we are "dead to sin" necessitates seeing also that we are "dead to law," for sin gets its power through the law. Romans 7 is our primer on law, for if we are still trying to be like Christ, we will only get discouraged when we fall back into sin. We will think, "I know that I died; I am dead to sin, but why do I still sin?" The reason comes from trying, which means that we still live by law. Paul tells us in Romans 7 his own history of trying, his passionate first person narrative about his past experience of trying to keep the law, only to find that trying kept him doing what he didn't want to do and falling short of what he did want to do. I cannot detail this here and have given full exposition of it in my other writings, which I hope you will read so that you will understand the depth of what Paul says in Romans 6 and Romans 7, his twin emphases on "dead to sin" and "dead to law."

Let me say here that trying still means that we live under a bit of law as if we can keep the law. This always leads to sin again because the faulty view underneath is that I am a self that can and should keep the law. Renewal means that the mind of Christ in us shows us the complete incompatibility between saying that we died to sin and yet continuing to try to be like Christ. I may seem to harp away on those who try to be like Christ, and I certainly am chief of sinners here, but once you see the faulty logic here, according to God's revelation, you will know that dead men don't keep God's law or even try to.

Renewal means that we see that as new creations, we live by faith in Christ's life in us producing all the luscious fruit of the Spirit, the delightful flow of God's life in us that means that He is all that He commands us to be. We don't even live by law any more because we live by His nature, and the Bible becomes to us the beautiful description of His nature, and therefore, His nature expressed as us.

This brings us back to the matter that it is not enough to know that we are forgiven sinners. God intends for us to live as new people, in union with Him. What then about the "consciousness of sin" (Hebrews 10:2)? We don't have to live with it. Let's look at God's complete provision for us: He completely forgave us, He removed Satan from inside us by the Cross, and He came to live in us and do all that He is and commands. Why then do we have to say that we still sin every day?

Certainly it is possible to sin every day, and who can deny that such is the experience of hosts of Christians. But who are we to say that there are sins that we cannot be kept from? Who is to say how much victory is possible? I can hear the screams already; some in frantic concern don't want any to wave a wand over themselves or others and proclaim a state of sinless perfection. What this usually means is the baptizing of carnal responses as if they are the life of Christ in us. Plenty of this false notion exists, and I recall well how desperately I wanted to think that certain flesh impulses were the life of the Spirit in me.

Of course we want to hang onto our natural impulses and think that they are Christ in us. After all, to eat, to work, to be attracted-these are all part of our humanity, and we have taken needless guilt for them because of the sin consciousness hanging on in us before the renewal of our minds. Natural impulses from our humanity need not cause guilt, and neither do they need to lead us to call them the life of the Spirit. The point of the Spirit's life is that it is Spirit life. As the Spirit quickens our mortal bodies, we know no longer to take condemnation for being human; but we also do not live by natural impulses as if they are the Spirit.

Hebrews 4:12 tells us that the Holy Spirit acts like a sword to reveal to us the difference between our souls and our spirits. Our souls consist of our thoughts and feelings-our natural desires, which are always for comfort and never for the Cross. Why would our earthly parts desire denial of gratification? They wouldn't; only a mind set on the Spirit finds life coming out of death on a soul or body level so that Spirit life can flow forth.

Our natural impulses of themselves are just that; they are not an identity. Our union with Christ is our identity, in which, as we walk in the flow of His Spirit, we major on Spirit life instead of natural desires that He sends to the Cross. Of course, we often do get to enjoy many of life's pleasures, moments in which Spirit and soul rejoice together. Often too, the Spirit leads us to extreme discomfort and some level of death in our earthly members. We tend, until renewed of mind, to think that the Christian life is therefore hard. I often say, "It's not hard to walk in the Spirit; it's easy: it's excruciating at times, but not hard."

Now let's go back one more time to this matter of whether we sin every day, or whether we have to sin every day. Is that the best we can hope for? Surely the Bible argues against trusting for keeping from some sins but not others. Why would God complete a plan for our forgiveness and for our new lives that leaves us in the mindset that we always fail on some level? Can we fail? Of course we can, but we do not have to. You can have the victory on whatever level you live in faith for; everything is available. Again, this does not mean a proclamation of instant perfection. Yet, if perfection is a person-the person of Christ-we can walk in Christ all that we wish to. All the perfection in the universe, Christ Himself, is available to us every moment. I don't accept settling for less.

Spirit, Soul, and Body

To answer the question, "Who are we?" we also need to look at the distinctions between spirit, soul, and body. Good Bible minds debate whether man is bipartite or tripartite, some thinking that spirit and soul both refer to the immaterial part of man, some seeing them as distinct. Others distinguish them but see them like circles that overlap.¹

Although linguistically, some overlap at first appears reasonable, the focus of the New Testament moves away from soul as our center, to spirit as our center. This is because the New Covenant supersedes the Old Covenant. The Old Covenant was a covenant of separation from God with an emphasis on the here and now before an indeterminate Sheol after a person died. The Old Covenant celebrated life in the body with regard to health, sex, food, property, wealth, government, international supremacy, while at the same time making the body unclean because of disease, death, bodily emissions, and certain animals unclean to eat or offer as sacrifice.

The New Covenant, in contrast, centers on none of this, but reveals us as spirit beings in union with God through Jesus Christ, who has prepared the real kingdom for us in eternity. We enjoy whatever temporal blessings God gives us now but know that present earthly life is guaranteed to be filled with devastating losses that we see as opportunities for glory, sacrifice, and praise. We know that our bodies are mortal, thus still attached to the Fall, but we accept God's word that the former uncleanness of the body, accented in the Old Covenant, gives way in the New Covenant to what the writer of Hebrews calls "bodies washed with pure water" (10:22).

We also find great differences in the way that we worship under the two covenants. Under the Old Covenant, the Lord dwelled away from His people, in the tabernacle or temple, above the ark in the Holy of Holies. Because of the law's condemnation,

intimacy with the Spirit of God seemed foreboding; only pioneers of faith found it. The writer of Hebrews refers to the Old Covenant as a "blazing fire" and "darkness and gloom and whirlwind" and "the blast of a trumpet and the sound of words which sound was such that those who heard begged that no further word should be spoken to them" (12:18-19 NASV). Familiarity with the Spirit of God such as that known by Noah, Abraham, David, and the prophets was the exception and the hint of a mystery that only Christ would later unveil .

The New Testament writers clarify these mysteries: man is God's temple, and He conforms us to the image of Christ by forming Christ in us (Gal. 4:19). Coupled with the affirmation of our union with God-spirit to Spirit, the word spirit overtakes the word soul in significance. A part of man corresponding to the Spirit of God comes into focus, and in the New Testament the two become one spirit (1 Cor. 6:17). Soul begins to convey more the idea of our earthly components of emotions and thoughts (the kind of feelings and logic based on body chemistry). In contrast, spirit directs itself God-ward as the vehicle of knowing, willing, and desiring-as opposed to the reflexive needs and emotional-physical complex of the body. This does not make the body unimportant, but recognizes the priority of spirit as the basis for interpreting earthly life. One cannot attain the things of the Spirit through the emotions and thoughts, but one can rule and use emotions and thoughts by living in the "mind set on the Spirit" (Rom. 8:6 NASV).

The New Testament warns us, however, against rejecting the body as unimportant, for God desires to live in our bodies as His temples and vessels. So life in the body does not mean the asceticism of "taste not; touch not; handle not" (Col. 2:21). Paul makes the point that Christ's indwelling life manifested through our bodies is what pleases God and manifests His self-for-others nature to others by us.

The agony of Abraham and Sarah over her barrenness illustrates this point. God had given Abraham the promise of an heir despite Sarah's barrenness, but as time went by, Abraham's age also

became a factor even if the Lord healed Sarah's barrenness. Soul and body could not produce God's promise by natural means, so God would have to cause Isaac's birth to take place in a supernatural way, apart from any ability in the flesh. This becomes Paul's metaphor in Galatians for the new birth in Christ and the Spirit's fruit by us as we walk by faith. Just as Abraham and Sarah could only conceive by the miracle-working power of the Holy Spirit, we too can only conceive our desires by the miracle of the Spirit in us.

We all want to see things happen in our lives; we want results. Waiting and repeated trying to produce these results, without success, heats up the fires between soul and spirit. It's not that soul/body is wrong-far from it-we are fearfully and wonderfully made; but soul and body represent what Abraham and Sarah saw and felt, along with their reasoning about them; whereas, spirit represents the promise of what God says He will do in us despite the appearances of soul and body. This tension leads to the choice to try things again the natural way or the choice to believe in a life of miracles.

Now we can see the body in perspective. Just as the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ brought deity and humanity together, our union with Christ means great significance for the body. The power of the resurrection in us brings spiritual meaning into physical life, making holy what before was unholy. Instead of the many Old Testament commandments about bodily uncleanness, we now have, as the writer of Hebrews says, "bodies washed with clean water." We freely accept our human selves without suspicion or the desire to escape from the body and its emotions. God loves to live in earthen containers, as us, in our ordinary, daily lives.

But doesn't ordinary life also offer plenty of opportunities for daily dying as we discern between soul and spirit? We all experience plenty of times on a feeling level when we feel threatened or hurt, or on a body level we think that we cannot live without food, sex, or some kind of comfort. Hebrews 4:12 speaks of this dividing: "For the word of God is quick, and

powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." This means that the Spirit knows how to cut beneath our fears and affirm in us our real intentions, showing us how to walk by faith when our outer world is falling apart.

Let's look more closely at this dividing work of the Holy Spirit that Hebrews 4:12 talks about. Some interpret the verse to mean that the writer mentions three pairs of synonyms-making soul and spirit the same, joints and marrow the same, and thoughts and intents the same. This interpretation sounds confusing and vague, leaving us to wonder what the word of God divides. The more natural reading of the passage connects soul, joints, and thoughts as a contrast to spirit, marrow, and intents. The context of the passage as a whole confirms this. Hebrews 4 tells us that the Israelites failed to enter God's rest in the wilderness because they majored on food, water, and escape from conflict, allowing lack on a soul and body level to turn them to unbelief. They insisted on physical provision and security at the expense of stepping into the unseen world of faith.

The application to us is obvious: though the body is important and God's temple, we don't go around as body-fussers, but as see-throughers in the spirit. We live from the spirit of rest instead of the turmoil we feel on a soul/body level. There is no need to take condemnation for our negative thoughts and feelings, and we even use them as the opportunity to live in God's rest during our times of physical and emotional hardship.

Sometimes those hardships come about from how others treat us. Intentionally or unintentionally, people always do things that irritate us, go against our will, and deny us what we want, even tempting us to think that we don't love them. If we reason according to soul, we will think that we really do resent others. If we reason according to God's fixed nature of love in us, we will say, "I feel like I hate that person, but Christ loves that person perfectly by me."

Only the Spirit Himself can do this dividing. In conflict and turmoil, our best option is to slow down. We don't have to let our souls and bodies drive us on with their imperatives. Waiting on that still, small voice, we can say, "Lord, I'll end up deceived if You don't guide me, but thank You that You are guiding me." He sorts everything out as we wait and trust in Him. When contentment fails on a soul/body level, we count it all joy to affirm again that He is life-"When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory" (Col. 3:4 NASV).

This kind of faith leaves God free in us to meet our emotional and physical needs through people and things, but it also leaves Him free to meet our needs without people and things. It is He either way. Abraham and Sarah represent the walk of faith; they let go of their soul/body contradictions and believed the impossible. So do we!

Endnote:

1. Let's look at some lexical evidence for the terms soul and spirit. The word soul comes from the Hebrew word *yuchv* that transliterates to the Greek word *psuche*, and means "the breath of life," "the vital force which animates the body," "life," and "the seat of the feelings, desires, affections, aversions (our heart, soul, etc.)."

The KJV New Testament Lexicon at Crosswalk.com includes as its second definition of the Greek word *pneuma* this entry: "the spirit, i.e. the vital principal by which the body is animated," and two amplifications: "a. the rational spirit, the power by which the human being feels, thinks and decides" and "b. the soul." A subsequent entry for *pneuma* reads this way: "a spirit, i.e. a simple essence, devoid of all or at least all grosser matter, and

possessed of the power of knowing, desiring, deciding, and acting."

What About Temptation?

We live tempted, and God means us to, so it helps to understand what temptation is and how to get through it. Lack of clarity here brings unnecessary, nagging guilt or even torment and anguish. James tells us that God cannot be tempted with evil and does not tempt anyone (1:13). God does, however, have a convenient agent to do the tempting, and if God did not mean for the devil to do his job in this present age, he could not do it.

God pointed out Job's righteousness to the devil; some might say God even incited him, and God certainly turned the devil loose on Job, with specific decrees of limitation. We see the same with Jesus: Mark's Gospel says, "And immediately the spirit driveth him into the wilderness" (1:12) where Satan tempted Him for forty days. The writer of Hebrews, stressing Jesus' likeness to us in all things excepting sin, stresses that Jesus experienced all the temptations that we do (4:15). So we have plenty of company when it comes to temptation, even the Son of God.

Sometimes God even knows that we will fail at first if we are still living out of our own supposed strength and not settled in Galatians 2:20 living. Jesus turned to Peter at the Last Supper and said, "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded permission to sift you as wheat; but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers" (Luke 22:31-32 NASV). God exposes us to opposites because He knows that true faith is a tested faith; love must undergo the test. In this case, Jesus knew Peter would fail in his initial temptation, but then repent and use his experience to help others.

A little wisdom goes a long way in dealing with temptation, but that wisdom may take a while to learn. Paul says, "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" (Rom. 12:3). I remember taking swimming lessons in grade school. For several days the instructor led us through different strokes to practice in the shallow end of the pool. One day he said, "Everyone ready to dive off the board on the deep end go on down and line up." Almost everyone scurried off to the deep end. I felt sick because I knew I still could not swim or even tread water, but I also felt embarrassed by what I thought others would think, so I got in line behind the board on the deep end. When I jumped in, I immediately floundered, trying to keep bobbing high enough to gasp for air. Mercifully, the instructor pulled me out and had a word for my foolishness.

Sometimes we torture ourselves with desire longer than we need to, even though we don't sin. I remember a temptation once that went on for months. I wanted something I could not lawfully have, but, figuratively speaking, kept my nose pressed to the glass of the store window looking and looking, all the while thinking, "Gee, I wish there were some way to have that." One day I accepted the verdict I already knew. By faith I quit torturing myself and walked away from the store window.

But even when we do go too far, we throw off the devil's condemnation. If the Holy Spirit convicts us of sin, we confess and move on with 1 John 1:9. Beware, though, of just confessing negative thoughts and feelings, hoping they will go away, because often they don't, and it's not our fault any more than coughing in smog is our fault if we can't help being in a smog zone.

We live with more ease, also, when we stop condemning ourselves for our God-made, strong appetites. The tempter certainly will solicit us through the same avenues that God means to use for His purposes. James tells us not to dread this, but to "consider it all joy" (1:2). Every kind of temptation is common to man (1 Cor. 10:13)-common like the cold we might say. Nothing in the way of temptation should shock us or lead us to condemnation. God made us with strong appetites for His right use, and those appetites are just as alive when the tempter seeks them for wrong use.

Trying to get rid of human desires proves ineffective: in fact it will finally make you feel rebellious and likely think, "God, why did You make me this way?" "Why am I human?" Here again, God means for us to go through temptations. My friend Dan Stone likes to say, "Do you know when you won't experience temptation? When people look over at you and say, 'Don't he look natural?'" Lust that pulls is not sin; lust that conceives by the will-"I will do it"-that is sin.

The answer to temptation is not a strong self-will and new resolution. That takes us back to self-keeping. Faith is as simple as Paul's word that we consider ourselves dead to various passions and lusts since we died to them in Christ. Faith, therefore, says, "I am dead to that." Often I start laughing when I realize, "Oh, it's only lust," or, "It's only the devil trying to make me think I want my own way."

Sometimes our thoughts and feelings shock us. "How could that cross my mind?" or, "How could I feel that strong of a lust?" Fear not; we might experience any imaginable thought or feeling, and we walk through easily in faith unless we tangle ourselves in condemnation. But the real secret James tells us is, "Every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed" (1:14). The emphasis is not on bodily appetites, but lust that demands its own way. The real temptation is not the soul or body avenue of the temptation, but the temptation to self-will that conceives by saying, "I will take that for myself, regardless."

Temptation is also a matter of, "Will I wear down or will I eventually give in?" Temptation is about endurance as much as anything else. That's why the only thing that works is the moment-by-moment faith that we no longer live, but Christ lives in us and is keeping us. God's greatest purpose with us in temptation is not about the temptation, but His keeping of us.

Acceptance of temptation goes a long way toward serenity. We live tempted. Not to recognize this means that we still long for a "La-La life" not offered in the Scriptures. Faith considers temptations and trials all joy and as everyday occurrences,

understanding that God encourages us on to endurance as He provides an escape hatch, custom-made for every situation. The ultimate escape hatch I've discovered is the one that says, "Lord, I will commit any sin unless You keep me, and thank You that You are keeping me!"

A Short Treatise on Biblical Circumcision

Circumcision seems like a curious rite to perform, especially since in our day, the reason for circumcision relates mainly to health considerations. In the Bible, however, circumcision relates to God's covenant with His people, both in the Old and New Testaments. So we need to see what these covenants mean and how circumcision ultimately does not mean the cutting away of the male's foreskin; in fact, in the New Covenant, circumcision means, instead, the work of Christ's Cross in our hearts, a work that cuts away the body of sins, thereby releasing us to live in the power of Christ's resurrection in us without fear.

The first Biblical record of circumcision is Genesis 17, where God reaffirms to Abraham that Abraham will "be the father of a multitude of nations" (17:4; all citations from the NASV). Abraham is now ninety-nine years old, yet God gives him circumcision as the sign of the covenant, and also, vitally, tells Abraham that Sarah will bear the promised son. Abraham "fell on his face and laughed" (v 17), and who wouldn't? The work of God in the Bible, in every way, is so ridiculously impossible to the flesh that it makes us laugh; and so heaven is full of laughter-and earth too for those who see the ways of God. What flesh can't do, God easily does by His own power; in fact, His plan for us was always that He be the power in powerless vessels that He made to contain Himself. What we call miracles, God always intended as our normal way of life.

Let's look, though, at what it means to cut away the foreskin from the male organ. The fact that males start out covered with a foreskin of flesh represents Adam's fall, in Eden, into trusting the flesh. Originally, the glory of God covered Adam, not a layer of flesh. Adam's fall in the garden plunged us into darkness and the dominion of Satan, so that we began to trust only in what the flesh can do in its own supposed power-instead of what God can do by man in the union of His Spirit with our humanity.

Salvation, therefore, has to mean not only the forgiveness of sins, but a restoration, by miracle, to a new creation—one that returns us to our original intended purpose of union with God. Many, including non-Christian sects, believe in union with the divine, but only Christianity offers the valid means of return to our original union, since the premise of the Bible is that we cannot obtain salvation by any works of our own—by any act of flesh. This is why God's Son had to die on a Cross for us and as us. This is what it took to put us into His body and to put Himself into our bodies again. God reunites us with Himself through the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, restoring our union. There is no such thing as just believing union with God and entering into it apart from Christ's work on the Cross. Furthermore, all we have to do is believe Christ's work in order to know union with the divine. This belief is not a work but simply receiving by faith what He did.

Abraham saw glimpses of these truths; certainly he saw the elementary point at hand that God meant circumcision as a sign, a sign that Isaac's birth would take place supernaturally and not by the normal conjugal means of a man ninety-nine and a woman not far behind him in age. God supernaturally intervened in Isaac's conception; and the rite of circumcision, passed on as the sign of the covenant, told everyone who cared to think about the matter, that each member of the covenant people only came into the world because of a supernatural conception that started the covenant line of Abraham and Sarah, leading to the nation of Israel.

The sense of the miraculous is not automatic, however. The mere fact of circumcision does not produce a heart of faith. Jeremiah quotes the Lord: "I will punish all who are circumcised and yet uncircumcised" (9:25). An outer act cannot produce a condition of the heart. God did say that the uncircumcised male would be cut off from his people, but God knew as well that this obedience did not guarantee the inner obedience of faith. Paul restates this truth: "For indeed circumcision is of value, if you practice the Law; but if you are a transgressor of the Law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision" (Rom. 2:25). He continues in the

following verse, "If therefore the uncircumcised man keeps the requirements of the Law, will not his uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision?" (2:26). This leads to the conclusion, "Circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter" (2:29).

We see from this that circumcision is not something that God eliminated, but instead, the New Covenant redefines circumcision in Spirit terms. Circumcision ceases to be the cutting away of the male's foreskin; now it is the "removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ" (Col. 2:11). Also from this, we see that circumcision applies not only to males but to females as well, "For we are the true circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh" (Phil. 3:3).

Gentiles in the church grasped this radical new understanding of circumcision more easily than many of the Jewish believers. For Jews, the thought of not circumcising a male Jewish baby brought terrified feelings, for the Old Covenant threatened the cutting off from one's people for the uncircumcised. This thought was so deeply implanted that only a new, radical thought could lead one to dispense with physical circumcision.

Paul gives us the radical understanding necessary to dispense with physical circumcision as a necessary sign of God's covenant. Our circumcision is "the removal of the body of the flesh"? (Col. 2:11) because he goes on to say, "having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead" (2:12). These two verses are a miniature Romans 6, for in Romans 6, Paul lays out the body death of Christ, meaning that we were united in Christ's death, burial, and resurrection. God unzipped Christ and put us into His body on the Cross. This is why Paul says in Galatians 2:20, "I have been crucified with Christ." We were in Him in His death.

But not only did God put us into Christ on the Cross, He made Christ to be who we were as lost people. Ephesians 2 tells us (as

well as John 8:44 and 2 Tim. 2:26) that the spirit of error dwelled in us from birth as a result of the Fall. We come into the world as slaves of the enemy who indwells us. God's plan of salvation had to take Satan out of us so that Christ could come into us. Therefore, God made Christ on the Cross to "be sin" (2 Cor. 5:21). This does not mean that Christ sinned but that on the Cross, He became sin, meaning that His body became our old man, the man indwelled with the spirit of error.

Uniting to Christ's death makes us dead to sin, for death to sin means that God took the sin spirit out of us as our indweller and boss. When Christ's body died (as ours), the sin spirit went out, and the empty body went into the grave. This body is dead to sin, but it is also dead to righteousness: a dead body can't sin, but neither can it do anything righteous. It is simply a dead body.

For the body to become an instrument of righteousness, it must rise from the dead with God's Spirit in it. As you can see, all of this follows Paul's discourse in Romans 6 and Galatians 2, which Paul neatly summarizes in his Colossians 2:11-12 capsule about circumcision.

This is the radical insight needed to give the trembling Jewish Christian the courage to let go of physical circumcision as necessary. The early church, however, did not arrive at this insight easily, as we see from Paul's account of his early years as a Christian. In Galatians, Paul tells how after one fourteen-year interval, he took Barnabus and Titus to Jerusalem. Paul only went "because of a revelation" (2:2). Some did pressure Titus, a Gentile convert, to get circumcised; but by this time, enough of the leaders recognized God's work in the Gentiles to head off a general demand that the Gentiles get circumcised in compliance with the Law of Moses.

Acts 15 records the controversy that the Jerusalem Council faced over the issue of circumcision in the early church (which was made up of both Jews and Gentiles). Under great pressure from the Pharisees to mandate physical circumcision for the Gentile Christians, Peter told how at an earlier time (the story is told in

Acts 10), God led him to preach the Gospel to certain Gentile believers at the house of Cornelius, with the result that God gave these Gentiles the Holy Spirit, "and He made no distinction between us and them, cleansing their hearts by faith" (Acts 15:9).

The meaning of all this lies in Romans 6, Colossians 2:11-12, and Galatians 2:20 (with amplification from Ephesians 2:1-3 and 2 Cor. 5:21). The crux is this: circumcision for us took place on the Cross. There, we died with Christ, were buried with Christ, and were raised with Christ. Dying with Christ means that our old man (who we were as non-Christians) got crucified. Our old man was the body of sin, which was our Satan-indwelled body; and we were slaves of this indweller. Burial with Christ means that we are now dead to sin, since crucifixion with Christ cut us off from our old indweller, and the spirit of error had to leave our bodies. How wonderful that as Christians, Satan is no longer our indweller and master: through the resurrection, our bodies are now the temples of the Holy Spirit, and we are in union with Christ. We are the new seed of God, the new race, in whom is birthed the fruit of the Spirit.

We, as new creations in Christ, fulfill the promise to Abraham, a promise not only of physical descendants of Abraham, but a promise of the seed of Christ. In fact, Paul says, "Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed," and that seed was "Christ" (Gal. 3:16). How could Christ be Abraham's seed? Somehow, when Abraham and Sarah were not able to sire a child, God worked in a way that circumvented the flesh. The sign of circumcision, whereby Abraham cut away his foreskin, pictured the fact that God's supernatural life entered into the procreation process, meaning Isaac's birth, but even more into our new birth, as new creations, from the seed that is Christ. God was looking ahead to how He would birth Christ in us as humans. This was His plan all along.

He always wanted to produce Christ, the seed, in us so that we could live as incarnations of Him. So His plan went far beyond the supernatural birth of Isaac and a nation of descendants then born the natural way from Isaac and circumcised in the fleshly

foreskin. God's plan meant the supernatural birth of His Son in us, whereby we become a race of new creations in Him, expressing His being in our human forms. This is life divine and eternal.

How to Keep from Breaking the Sabbath

The church has discussed through the ages which day is the Sabbath and how to keep it holy. For a Christian, is Saturday really the Sabbath, or is it Sunday? What constitutes work on the Sabbath also invites definition. However, maybe this kind of analysis misses the point. Look at the argument from the book of Hebrews, where the writer says that Joshua did not give the people rest, meaning that Christ, as the Joshua of the New Covenant, must give us rest. The writer warns against failing to enter into this rest.

The implications in the Old Testament of Joshua's inability to give the people rest, does not mean that he failed in his assigned mission. God meant that Joshua lead Israel in battle, conquer a land, govern according to the Law of Moses, and that the people experience prosperity and peace with a specific land and theocratic constitution. Even today, God may assign a Gospel people a land and just and merciful laws, all with a view to their prosperity, peace, and opportunity. None of these, however, brings rest to the soul; for land, laws, and prosperity do not wash away sin or give the rest of the Holy Spirit or guarantee an understanding of Christ in us.

The rest indicated by the writer of Hebrews is a rest in the Spirit whereby we do not look to human work, the work of man's hands, for the source of rest, but we look to the Spirit of rest. The argument is simple: God finished His work of creating the world, according to Genesis, and He ceased from that work, because He completed it. All that remained was to enjoy it. In the same way, God completed the work of His new creation when Christ rose from the dead, after His death and burial. Nothing remained to do except that we enter into that rest from our own works of trying to be righteous.

In both instances-the physical creation in Genesis and the work of salvation for mankind-God was the sole worker, with the view

that man simply enjoy God's work and worship Him only. We did not take part in creating the physical world, and we do not take part in creating the spiritual world of salvation-the work necessitated by man's fall. To see this means that we ask ourselves, "What are we doing?" If God is the only legitimate worker, why are we working? Also, if He worked, but finished His work, why are we not ceasing from our works? The reason for not ceasing brings us to the meaning of sin: sin means trying to do what only God can do and what God has already done.

Most Christians know better than to work for their entrance into heaven. They know that the blood of Christ alone forgives sin and that justification by faith means that we receive Christ's righteousness as a free gift simply by faith. Yet the deception often carries over that we must try to be like Christ. The book of Galatians challenges the reader on this point, for it makes plain that we begin in the Spirit, continue in the Spirit, and finish in the Spirit. Never do human works enter in as the way to live. The only works of value are those of the Spirit in us as we walk by faith. This is too easy. What-we don't work? Already, some are rushing to the book of James to underscore that faith without works is dead. Yes, but do you also know that works without faith, meaning works not produced by the Spirit, are no more than dead, human works, no matter how good they look. Worse than that, they have bewitching as their source and are set on fire from hell.

The context of Hebrews tells us that the recipients of the letter experienced pressure to return to works as the way into heaven and as the way to live. Works means a return to law and the self's efforts to keep the law. This means a retreat from Christ because if we can keep the law, then Christ died for no reason.

A retreat from Christ means a return to what the self thinks it can do to improve itself and work for God. Faith is then not needed, for human toil becomes the measure of good. This is not rest. We even sense this when we work under such deception. So the writer chides us to stop working. This sounds dangerous; what will we do? We fear the emptiness of nothing and the prospect

that we might stop working only to find that we're a number of assignments behind and should have kept at our task.

The writer of Hebrews is not cold-hearted; he says that Christ sympathizes with our weaknesses when we are faced with temptation, since He too was tempted. He means us to live from rest in what He has done and is doing by the Spirit in us and not by what we are tempted to do when we do not think that things are going the way they should. Jesus Himself looked worse and more incongruous to His world than we realize. His approach to life-union with His Father-whereby He waited upon His Father and only did the works His Father did in Him-threw the world into a mad rage. So Jesus perfectly understands our discomfort and suffering when we do not conform to the militant expectations of works according to law.

That is why the writer mentions the exhortation to enter into Christ's priesthood, the priesthood of Melchizedek, which is not based on law-keeping, but on the New Covenant, whereby we recognize by faith that God has written the law upon our hearts. God promised the day of this New Covenant through Jeremiah, and through Christ, has brought this about for those in whom Christ lives. This means that like Moses, we experience the glory of God face-to-face. Moses enjoyed this kind of fellowship up on the mountain, while those under law fearfully only saw the quaking and consuming fire. Yet Moses experienced glory and light. Clearly, the Lord did not deal with Moses the way that He dealt with His people still consigned under the Law. So Moses is our picture of the new man in glory.

This all has great meaning for the Sabbath, for the Sabbath rest in Hebrews is the rest of ceasing to live as if we can do any work of our own. Rest means that Christ does all the work. That's the death of us, but the rebirth of us as well. When I got too tired to try anymore, I knew that life, to continue, would require continual miracle. I was ready for someone else to live my life. Oddly, when I came to that, I popped back into view as a self I had never seen or known before. Life had formerly meant trying to be like a self that I pictured in my mind as the self I thought that I

should be. But this picture was a lie and satanic in origin. Trying to be like this presupposed-self also took enormous work and led to exhaustion. Satan is behind all this, authoring the lie and producing the dead works.

When Christ does all the work, we discover our real selves, the new creation. We suffer and labor in faith, but we do not work works that we try to produce ourselves (really, satanic in origin). We experience death; but this death is not works. Also, it leads to a continual stream of resurrection in us. The new self is the miracle-self. The new self does not try to create either physically or spiritually but waits on the Lord to see how He will create in us. We do nothing but believe. Failure now can only mean a reversion to Romans 7 trying, and soon, that tedium of works comes back. When God does the living, we experience outer discomfort, but underneath we know our rest.

The Sabbath therefore, is all the time. Oddly, many go to church and still do their own works, so although they observe a certain day and set it aside to worship, they, unknown to themselves, still break the Sabbath because they still see themselves as working to be like Christ. Those who do not work in this way, but live from Christ Himself by faith, enjoy the Sabbath rest seven days a week.

The Lie of Loneliness

Loneliness drives much of human behavior. When I was in high school, in the days before the Internet and hundreds of television channels, the telephone brought a little comfort, but after a few hours of sitting around, I needed company, even if that only meant going to someone else's house and sitting around bored with that person-wondering together what everyone else was doing. In the 1960s, the boulevard offered very little, but driving around Jerry's Drive-In Restaurant once or twice an hour after ten o'clock provided some connection with who was with whom. Dating offered some relief, but that still meant going home alone. What would ever fill that inner longing?

Genesis records that God saw Adam's loneliness and created Eve as his companion. Did she meet his need? The Bible does not offer much hope that romance and marriage satisfy loneliness. When Jesus shocked his disciples with the standard for marriage-that a man not put away his wife except for fornication-His disciples answered, "If the case of the man be so with his wife, it is not good to marry" (Matt. 19:10). As a young man I found the disciples' view a cynical one, still myself infatuated with the hopes I grew up on in fairy tales, television, and movies. The disciples operated from the familiar legislation of Moses that allowed husbands to put away their wives because of displeasure with them, leaving them open to find a new wife. On and on the succession might go, and so it is today. Lose one, find another; get rid of one, get on a high with another.

Many conservative Christians think that the answer lies in finding the right mate, the one of God's leading, and that this will terminate loneliness. I have to say that this was not my experience, though I prize scriptures such as Proverbs 31 and Proverbs 18:22, "Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing, and obtaineth favor of the Lord." Then there is Proverbs 19:14, "A prudent wife is from the Lord." Add to that the overwhelming

celebration of the Song of Solomon, and the case appears fixed for marriage as the answer to loneliness.

Jesus' disciples knew, however, that things are not so simple, and they had dispensed with the ideal; they had discarded the Hollywood parade of living by endless relationships. If Adam and Eve had everything together in Paradise, why did they look elsewhere for meaning? Surely Pascal was right when he said that there is a God-shaped vacuum in every heart, and only God can fill it.

I found this true. After an exciting courtship and start to my marriage, surprise hit me early when low-level depression crept in. I hungered for a spirituality that I had started out on and then forgotten during the energized time of my courtship. My wife and I searched the Bible and began to look for the answers in it. This helped a lot, but our pursuit of happiness by trying to keep God's law only made us increasingly aware of our inability to keep those laws. One day, reading I John 5:3-"and his commandments are not grievous (burdensome)"-I blurted out, "That's a lie." I was caught. By my mouth I professed that I believed God's Word to be inerrant; but in my spontaneous heart cry, I found myself struggling to really believe the Scripture.

God has His way of boxing us in. Jesus' disciples had caught this, and noted psychiatrist M. Scott Peck in his best seller *The Road Less Traveled* voices it in our day with the riveting three-word sentence that begins his book: "Life is difficult." What is the answer? At first I was not prepared to hear it, still confirmed for years in my own efforts to live the Christian life, until finally, after bottoming out, I could really hear the truth that the Christian life is not we living it, but Christ living it in us.

I had not wanted to accept that God created us to contain and re-express His nature of self-giving love as opposed to Satan's nature of self-for-self love that enslaved us as non-Christians and still kept us in bondage in our days of carnality as Christians. Finally I could see Christ in me! Praise His name. At that moment, loneliness disappeared forever except for occasional moments of

temptation and maybe an occasional foolish visit to the old badlands of loneliness. But I have to confidently say that in the last nine years, loneliness has not troubled me.

God tested this knowing through almost five years of marital separation after an initial two years of separation. The initial two years I lived crazy, but then when I saw my completeness in Christ, I knew I had reached home. The Lord popped a saying into my mind one day, "Christ plus nothing." I lived on that through years of solitude, but not years of loneliness.

I would often tell people who said, "You need a life," something that surprised them: "I don't believe in loneliness anymore." And then I would tell them why. I also stopped using the word relationship except with reference to God, saying, "I have only one relationship-with God, but I have fellowship with others." That got me plenty of curious or upset looks along the way. But this is scriptural, for Col. 3:4 says that Christ is our life; He is our very life. He doesn't give us life; He is our life

Do I have a good marriage? Yes. But the secret came in desiring for my wife to have only one relationship for herself-with the same One I had come to know. As she stepped into this, she and I met in Him, and out of our union with Him, we united in a life of expressing the life of Christ in us. At times, I think, "What would I do without her?" Then the Lord makes me know again that He alone is my life, as He is the life of every believer. Our true marriage is to God, and in that marriage, loneliness can find no place.

This is the simple truth of Christianity for any open to discover it. Loneliness can drive you there if you let it. Those living by the law will do as Moses allowed for those hardened of heart. Those questing all the way will find an inner dance, even in their deepest suffering that completely satisfies.

The Dysfunctional Family

My mother-in-law, Mimi, called me about a letter she received from an inmate, now in another facility, who attended our jail Bible study here for a couple of years. In his letter, he talks about his involvement with a therapy type book on getting in touch with anger. He is experiencing anger toward his earthly father, now dead, but an alcoholic while he was a child. Mimi asked me what I thought on this point, and I could only answer from my experience, which included rage toward my own father until I reached the age of forty-five.

I lived constantly angry at my earthly father until he abandoned our family when I was eleven, never to come back as we slowly discovered. In fact, he completely disappeared for one stretch of fifteen years until a younger brother located him through a genealogy book.

During the early years of my father's absence, I felt mostly relief over his departure, but then relief changed to a growing pain inside as I observed my school peers in regular families. This occurred in the 1960's, before the soon-to-come wave of acceptable divorce and blended families. Pain later turned to anger and rage, so that by my adult Christian years, I faced the need to forgive him, which I did by faith, though my persistent affirmation of forgiveness did not get to the center of my distress.

My own sins finally brought me to a miraculous place where I did experience God's complete forgiveness toward my father, no longer holding him responsible for my own choices in life. No lingering resentment remained or lack of resolution. I was little prepared for the shock of the total answer for getting on with life after this forgiveness.

The Lord showed me that I need never attribute anything in life ever again to the actions of my family in the past, because He had taken me out of that family, placing me in a new family, the

family in which God is my Father and in which no dysfunction exists. I had inherited a new blood line-that of Christ, and now received everything that comes from Him.

Some may protest at this that we need therapy; we need to get in touch with the hurts of the past. This is true where denial still exists, and one lives in repression. But to continue overly long in dredging up memory after memory may really represent a refusal to leave the devil's anger. This hinders us from settling into the reality of our new bloodline in Christ.

Because of this new bloodline, no longer do we trace any effect upon us from the first Adam; we take all family input instead from the last Adam. When I saw this, instantly, every bit of blame toward my parents and family departed in the light of His grace.

Does such a view minimize our earthly families and our ties to them? No. We still acknowledge our earthly families and our responsibilities to them for provision and support. We do not look to them, however, to meet our real needs, for now the Holy Spirit supplies all of our needs based on our union in Jesus' death, burial and resurrection.

As Paul says in Galatians 2:20, "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." In other words, by identifying with Christ's death, burial, and resurrection-seeing these as really we joined to Him, we find ourselves taken out of the first Adam and his family line, and placed into the blood and body line of Christ.

Are you still trying to dig through endless memories and rehearse them over and over again, feeding anger that you can let go of once you see the truth of who you are united to Christ? Perhaps you are doing this in ignorance, not knowing the futility of guilt and blame, and not knowing the truth that as a Christian, you no longer do anything you do because of your dysfunctional family.

Enjoy the grace of God in your new, heavenly family and let go of the past. If you need to bring the past to light to consciously place it all in Christ, then by all means do so, but no longer as a victim of dysfunction-no longer as one held in bondage and acting helplessly as a consequence of the dysfunctional family. "And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father" (Gal. 4:6).

Brief Notes on the Epistle of 2 John

The thirteen-verse letter of 2 John to an elect lady and her children can almost escape notice as an after thought, considering the depth and obvious weight of John's other writings. Here he writes some noble lady, who is full of wisdom and rich in maternal understanding. For John, love and truth exist together inseparably as one, and his elect lady knows full well that very thing. Truth means a person and the nature of that person; and the point for us as created beings means nothing short of that person and nature dwelling in us in a union that John says will continue forever.

As such, John identifies these persons as God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, the Father's son. John's meaning here is that in eternity, the Father begot Christ as deity out of deity, one from Himself, and therefore deity as well, who existed fully as deity, before the creation of angels or man. Pretenders to union with God maintain that Jesus was an ordinary man, a carpenter, who became Jesus the Christ, showing the way for any other human to do the same, as if by metaphysics, one can attain god-hood, which is to say, anyone can progress along an evolutionary path to deity, without the atoning sacrifice and body death of a savior who is both God and man.

John did not have to elaborate like this to the elect lady, for she, as a woman of great wisdom, knew full well what John meant. So John can write using compact, but poetic phrasing, like "in truth and love," knowing that she will understand him. Knowing her as one grounded in true union, he blesses her with grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Jesus Christ the Son.

Now John begins to comment on the children of this mother in faith: "I rejoiced greatly that I found of thy children walking in the truth, as we have received a commandment from the Father" (KJV). The NASV handles the enigmatic wording this way: "I was very glad to find some of your children walking in the truth, just

as we have received commandment to do from the father." As one can see, the translation possibilities hang on what John means: does he mean that some of the elect lady's children walk in the truth; or does he mean that he has met some of her children and finds them walking in the truth? In the first case, he implies, without pointing a finger, that indeed some of her children walk in the truth, knowing full well that no mother can guarantee the fidelity of all her children, despite the best of instruction. In the latter case, he merely means that he met some out of her congregation and thinks, "My, her children mirror well what she has poured into them."

John then takes on a sensitive point, stressful in all ages, and not new to any present, politically correct generation: we are to love one another, and that love manifests itself in walking after the commandment. The "obedience of faith" and love go together inseparably, so that one may not say, "I love God in my heart but do not walk in His way." Neither does love say, "I love my brother but do not judge him by taking a stand-that he actually should live as he talks." So-called new ideas always appear, as if to say that love just nurtures along the sinner in his sin-without any expectation or boundary that sets forth a view toward desiring repentance. Worse, that direction leads into such folly as false faith that says, "I do not see the sin," or "There is no sin."

Paul addresses these issues as well with the Corinthians, telling them that he does not mean that they should disassociate from sinners in the world, for they do not even claim to be Christians: rather, he means that they should address discipline to those in the house of God. So, incongruous as it might look, a Christian might associate with sinners, but at the same time reject the fellowship of those claiming to be Christians yet living in sin-sin that is obvious to the most simple of Christians. Neither Paul nor John means this kind of discipline for the self-life that hangs on in a Christian as grave clothes: the Biblical writers intend discipline for flagrant sin that stands out clearly like the sun in the sky.

John immediately goes on to point out what we find true in every generation, that deceivers enter into union fellowship-those "who confess not that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh." John calls this both deception and antichrist. What does "Jesus Christ is come in the flesh" mean? First, it means, as John implied earlier, that Christ, the Son of the Father from eternity, came in human flesh and lived as a man. He was both of the eternal world, from which He came, and He existed fully as a man in this world, with flesh and blood-so that He lived God's very life in manifest form as a human.

Jesus Christ, therefore, was not an ordinary man who, by spiritual development, turned Himself into a god and showed us how to do the same. This implies in absolute manner also that no reconciliation with God occurs but by the atonement of Christ-as both God and man-for sin, which John writes about in detail elsewhere.

Second, "Jesus Christ is come in the flesh" leads back to John's earlier statement, "which dwelleth in us." In other words, Christ came in the flesh, so that by His unique sacrifice, He could come dwell in our flesh-in order to manifest Himself by our abiding in Him, which simply means coming to an end of resistance to His life that He expresses both by both word and deed, once we receive Him into ourselves in a new birth.

John then says, "Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward." This can mean two things. First, John encourages the elect lady to continue her stand against deceivers, so that her children will have the better opportunity of continuing on in the faith, without taking a road into deception-wherein so-called "love" gets perverted by the demand for tolerance, of even the most flagrant and obvious sins committed by those professing union with God. John soberly writes, "Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God."

We do well to note that, as in John's day, the name of Christ gets used and applied to more people and deeds than probably any

name in history. What person wants to be outside the pale of the name "Christ"? So the name "Christ" can easily get taken over by the kind of deceivers that John mentions. The deception of the deceivers can even work its way into the body of Christ, as a leaven that promotes love in ways that a Christian could have never imagined in his or her early days as a Christian, when the obviousness of truth and sin lay as simply straightforward as ABC.

I would like here to say what kind of deception I think John has in mind and clearly implies in all his writings. First, I think that John means the error that says that Christ is already in every man, but he does not know it and needs only to wake up to who he already is. This kind of teaching, even if it posits the deity of Christ and His unique atonement to reconcile God and man, supposes every person saved apart from the Biblical mandate that Paul gives in 2 Corinthians 5-where he says that though God is reconciled to mankind through Christ's sacrifice, one must accordingly choose and reconcile toward God. The folly of ignoring this leads to pronouncing people Christians before they really are, when in fact they may never become Christians. Yet equally true, the Holy Spirit can lead us to a word of faith about certain ones-that they will be saved. But one cannot be saved before being saved.

Second, John makes clear in his first epistle that before one is a child of God, one is a child of the devil. One need not read too far in that first epistle to be hit stunningly with that notion. The identity of the non-Christian stands in no doubt: we were all enslaved and owned by the devil, and those who receive Christ and abide in Him enter the new birth and son-ship. To me, one of the most frightening things about the church is the probable number of those thinking that they are Christians on the basis of mental assent of some kind. I would like to raise this question: "Is it realistic to automatically assume that one is indeed a Christian, when sin patterns continue for long periods of time with no desperation over them?" Paul describes the Romans 7 waking up to the law, sin, and the misery of wanting out of bondage, without finding it until crying out, "Who will deliver me?" But here sin is

called sin, and the heart of the testifier wrenchingly longs for true holiness in his members.

We often think of James as the practical writer, but do not John and Paul both say the same thing? He who knows, knows how to do by faith; and he who does not do, does not know. John writes to the elect lady, his good and noble friend, that she need not, truly should not, let the viper doctrine of "Everyone is already Christ in the flesh" into her home to teach her people. Such people will not clearly teach who Jesus Christ is; they will not teach what sin really is and how to repent of it; and they will assert that everyone in the world is already Christ without knowing it. Allowing such teaching into the church makes one a partaker of the evil.

John ends his letter briefly with the expression that he has many things to talk over with his dear friend, but he looks forward to doing so face-to-face. You, as reader of my brief notes (many times longer than the short letter itself) might think that I have superimposed onto John what he does not really say. However, I think that John wrote a short letter, laden with obvious implication, to a lady reader who knew full well the fuller exposition of what he meant. By no means do I think she read his short letter with surprise and scratched her head, puzzled over its basic meaning, which meaning I have set forth here as I believe he clearly meant.

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