

# State of the Union Message

Brian Coatney

We all have our ministry horror stories. I thank God for going through all that I did, for if the conflict had not been with one, it would have been with another; for we carry the conflict in ourselves, and God brings people into our lives to bring out of us what is already in us. Nothing that we experience is unique. As much as cult horror stories strike others in the general public or evangelical church as bizarre, leaving them with looks on their faces like, "How could you have ever gotten into that?" the fact is that no temptation takes us but such as is common to man. Under the masks, everybody deals with people-pleasing, and cult behavior starts on the playground as children.

What I really want to discuss here, however, is the paradigm shift available when we live from the biblical foundation of ourselves as vessels that express either Christ or Satan. As Norman Grubb said, "Once a Satan-I; now a Christ-I; never an I-I." The church generally still does not see this, and so we find ourselves bombarded with exhortation to be like Christ, when we cannot ever be like Him, for He is a one of a kind and must be Himself in us.

Notice how in some ministries, one largely reads the works of the heroes of the past, which of itself can be an inspiration. A danger arises, however, when past heroes get used as evidence to confirm and approve beliefs and practices that these heroes and founding fathers would never have themselves developed into what we see presently claimed as the logical extension of their heritage.

One should look carefully at ministries using Norman Grubb, C.T. Studd, and Rees Howells. Do the generations following them carry on except for a book or tape review or a testimony about sin, or even a testimony claiming that something is not sin that the simplest Christian reading the Bible knows good and well is sin. Some ministries take people back to a sin consciousness and life of fear, and others miss the obvious warnings of scripture, setting forth as the life of the Spirit what is obvious carnality and self justification.

Also, do you see in such ministries articles about victories and conquests? Has the true root of sin been exposed and seen as swallowed up by the faith so that addictions fall away? Do you see a generation that has risen up in the freedoms of the founding fathers and done exploits? Or do you see a generation that perennially lives in a substandard way, without teachers, without works, without trophies of faith? Most of all, do you see a

generation that still worships a mentor? This means that the worshipper still worships himself really.

While struggling with all of these issues, reading Hebrews 9 & 10, I received the revelation that I had been born again. Where the sacrifice is complete, there is no more offering for sin. The Gospel is Christ plus nothing. That truly did take me off of myself. I found myself saying, "I don't want to be God," which surprised me, for it meant that I had wanted to be God. I found myself learning to praise Him.

At first this sounds just like just more of the separation that kept us from union in the first place when we struggled with life. I hear separation in church regularly, since the focus is on worshipping God and getting closer to Him, etc. But I do know union with Christ and that I am not a separated self, praising God, but a united self—a spirit joined to His Spirit as one. So I have been completed by the joining of the divine self to myself as a new self, a new creation.

Mysteriously now we enter into relationship with God whereby we forsake the idea of relationships with people. At first this sounds terrible and cold toward others. I discovered the revelation of saying, "I have only one relationship, and that is with God: I have fellowship with other people." This statement has brought curious looks of anger and revulsion, and some don't take the statement

seriously; they think, "Surely you jest." However, learning that life is only one relationship saved my life, for the Bible says that Christ is my life. Nowhere does it say that another human being is my life.

Instead of finding this to be a cold, cruel place, I found it to be the place of loving others. In 1 John, he tells us that if we love God and keep His commandments that we can know that we love others. So when in doubt and when others think me unloving (and if I find myself agonizing over this) I take this matter to the Lord only to get the word again that to love Him and obey Him is to love others.

The central place of finding how this works was in marriage. If my own wife could take that I will not have a relationship with her but only with the Lord, then I could see a model of how this works. We already had experienced a brutal civil war and marital separation for seven years. I learned to hold the stand that I have just described. When the Lord broke through in her in 1998, she was ready for only one relationship, that being with the Lord. So we've had six years now of wonderful fellowship on every level. No longer do I love her for myself but I can see her as Tandy and not as an extension of Brian.

Looking back on this stand, I realized that this is what Norman Grubb meant when he talked about detachment. Given the

chance to teach his whole message over several days, he would move to intercession. But the gateway to intercession is detachment, the giving up of "my" family, my house, my friends, my job, etc. This is the sticky point and where people remain codependent. Without clarity here, union remains about the self and loving others as extensions of ourselves rather than loving others as selves that belong to God and account to Him.

What about amends then? It seems like we should make amends for all the damage that we have done. We need to be open to this, but not force it. The Holy Spirit lets us know when and how to make an amend. I find far too much forcing on the part of those demanding amends and those trying to make them. This ends up being law bondage and more people-pleasing. My benchmark is that I am chief of sinners. That helps me not judge others about things that I have done or would surely do apart from the Lord's keeping by faith.

I can always say this, not meaning that I am not a saint now, but I recognize my sin history and that no one else is responsible for it. I one hundred per cent believe that many who demand amends all the time and the endless dredging of the past do no more than operate in the spirit of, "You did wrong to ME, ME, ME." I find in these last ten years that increasingly the Lord does not let me demand amends from others. Surely, people do need to earn trust at times. But even that will never happen without risk. I

find that the Lord demands that I focus on the healing in the person who has wronged me, without an, "I told you so" attitude.

Rees Howells illustrates this kind of life in two ways to me. Notice that in his intercessory life that he had a rich relationship with the Spirit. He knew the voice of the Lord. He was in relationship with ANOTHER. Not only was Christ formed in Rees Howells so that he was a walking Christ, but he also enjoyed active fellowship with the members of the Trinity, as Jesus in John 17 said that we would. Second, Rees Howells gave up certain rights by the Spirit's leading in his family and ministry life. In his family life, he went on with his intercessions while still honoring his parents. Nowhere do we read that he reviled them or plied them with ultimatums for fellowship. In his ministry, when people began deserting him because of his radical stand, he did not curse or revile them or try to justify himself in some carnal way.

There are many mysteries here. We are in Christ and He in us, and yet we still live in a sea of God, which is relationship with God. This union relationship leads us to lay down many rights that we feel at first we have claim to. When I read *Rees Howells Intercessor* in my early union years, the book sounded like law and separation. But after hitting bottom and knowing powerlessness, and then after learning by faith to stop looking at myself and to start looking at God, I could see that relationship with God is not separation; and letting others be without

correcting them all the time is not compromise of our faith in who we are in Christ.

Union folks often live in a fallacy that one friend of mine calls "one-sided union," meaning that the union person thinks that the end-all of union with Christ means that I am a walking Christ. The focus is then on the self as Christ operating. We must get there, but how?

I have to say that I did not find my way there by always insisting, "Christ is doing such and such by me." I found my way there by STOPPING all looking at myself and STARTING to behold God. Paul argues this point well in 2 Corinthians 3 and 4 where he says that we look into a mirror. Until I hit bottom, I thought that I look into this mirror and see myself. Well, this misses something vital that precedes that. When I look into the mirror, I at first see ONLY GOD. I forget about myself; I'm not even looking for myself. But then a miracle occurs. I do pop out. This is exactly what I found: when I quit looking for myself, I popped miraculously and to my unutterable surprise back into view, but not as a self that I had ever known or recognized.

This made me realize that I had always before, without realizing it, tried to reform the self that I was familiar with, a self of this creation really; I had tried to Christologize a self that God crucified in Christ that momentous day 2000 years ago. I had no

idea what a new self or a new creation was. How can we build toward or believe for a self that is a new creation?

First, we cannot see this self because natural eyes cannot see a supernatural self, born of the new creation. So in looking into the mirror and seeing ONLY GOD, we at first are glad to get rid of ourselves: we don't like or love the self and well we shouldn't. To keep trying to call precious a self that God crucified is folly and does not work. What happens is that the deceived union-life believer simply tries to call Christ in his or her form what is really just of the natural world and the old mental twirling of the soul.

No, we should get relief from ourselves by STOPPING the looking at ourselves and STARTING the looking at ONLY GOD. Why should we lament giving up this self? But I held on to it, as we all do, until it became death, and no other way would save me but to look one hundred per cent away from myself and one hundred per cent at God. At this point I did not even want to be Christ in my form. I did not want to be God or a form of Him. I just wanted God.

But that mirror works in mysterious ways. Since God created us to be forms of Him and to be full, all-out selves, He is the one who desires this for us with the utmost of His passion. So what He wills, we end up willing.

This takes place by a new birth. When I looked into the mirror and saw only God, I of course did want to be a self, and a right self, and a fulfilled, all-out self. But I could not will it or accomplish it to bring it about. So I let this go. But by looking only at God, I reappeared to my total surprise, and not only that, I discovered a Brian that I had never known before and I knew to be a new-birth and new-creation Brian completely of God's making and not my own. I became myself for the first time in my life. By this I do not mean that I had not been real and manifested flashes of the new creation before. But I had not known an entity, a person to know and be known and a person to say about himself, "Ah, this is the self I always longed for. I am truly myself; my skin fits."

The key for me that allows all of this to hold together is to stay away from the Romans<sup>7</sup> performance of trying to do good or not do evil. We do have fearful thoughts and wonder, "Will I fall into this or that sin? Why do I still have the same negative feelings that I always did?" If we still live by trying, then we will live in these fears. The Lord taught me to say, "I will commit any sin unless You keep me, and thank You that You are keeping me." This always gets me through as the beginning of whatever insights I need in a particular situation.

First, knowing this lets me know that I would sooner or later do any sin conceivable. The "I would never do that" pride falls away.

Second, we do get tempted by the most bizarre, hideous, angry, and immoral thoughts and feelings. Formerly, I froze up, hoping that I could stave these temptations off by shutting down. I also took great condemnation for having these temptations with all their thoughts and feelings. So what could have been a short misery on a soul/body level turned into protracted misery through the guilt and obsession. As Norman Grubb often said, "What you fight, fights you."

Knowing His keeping frees me to not live in fear of getting deceived or falling into the things we secretly have feared falling into. Those fears tell us that we will ultimately fail and not succeed: we will not get all the way through in our situations or in our lives as a whole. Left to ourselves we wouldn't. How can one fight fear?

A good start is not fighting but resting in the Lord's keeping and thanking Him. I say, "Live in relationship to the Lord," but not meaning separation. I mean that the completed self, in union, finds such a rich life of fellowship with the members of the Godhead that we ever more explore the mansions of John 14.

As we do this, the new self, the new creation, awakens in startling ways that continue to bring the self out of the deep sea of freedom—in ways that are as new every day as God's continuing creation. For you see, we are always being created by God in

every moment. The self is not a static self, but a constant miraculous creation, moment by moment, out of the deep sea of God. Therein we lose ourselves and give ourselves over in love as the mirror reveals first God and then us in God, and only then truly as the forms of Christ that we always longed to be but could not discover when we settled for the anemic calling the old "new."

It is vital to keep a clear focus on the fact of no independent self. The heart of the Gospel is that we are always vessels that contain a spirit: God did not create us to be self-operating selves. Paul makes this point irrefutably in Romans 6 when he says that we were slaves of sin, and now we are slaves of righteousness. I tell people at the jail Bible studies regularly that we start out owning our slavery, and then, settled in that, Christ says to us, "You know, really, you're my friend." But if we do not own our slavery, we cannot be friends of God.

Ephesians 2, in the opening verses, makes the two-pronged thrust of the Gospel clearly and concisely: first, we recognize that we have done sinful deeds, and second, we recognize the spirit of error as the one who incites those deeds. Evangelicals often quote the verses, "By grace are ye saved through faith," but I don't hear frequently enough the two opening points about what our sin condition was.

Without both points equally delineated, a person is left confessing the evil deeds without asking the question, "How does the spirit of error get removed from me?" This leaves a person having to work to be like Christ, seeking God's help, and maybe even moving to knowing the aid or filling of the Holy Spirit; but it does not give a person the sense of what happened on the Cross when Jesus died for us and as us.

The latter means that Jesus became who we were as sinners, not that He sinned, but that he became we as Satan indwelled vessels, so that by His death, the spirit of error would go out of the body, and the Spirit of the Lord enter in by the resurrection. This is the meaning of 2 Corinthians 5:21, Christ being made sin.

We can live no better than the Gospel we know, so we must know these things to realize that the self cannot improve. God did not make the self to improve, but to contain and express Him; that is why He became we on the Cross in our Satan-indwelled form, so that He might become we, meaning expressions and forms of Christ, as Paul means in Galatians where he says that he longs for Christ to be formed in us.

I love how Jacob Boehme puts that somewhere: "Christ must win a form in us." If we do not see this radical replacement of the deity spirit in us, we subtly still believe that self can transform self, albeit having to ask for God's help. This is a repulsive

Gospel because it undermines God's declared purpose for creating us.

The easy, but uncomfortable follow-on to this Gospel foundation is that all sin is Satan originated. I resisted this in the early years of hearing it. I had already come to see my need for Christ to live in me and live my life, but I did not want to think that the devil had lived in me as a non Christian, and I did not want to deal with any independent seeing as a Christian, for who wants to think that the devil still has a hold. This, however, is the case where sin still holds power in a Christian's life. Even Paul said that he was not conscious of anything against himself, but that he was not thereby acquitted.

The possibility of deception in our lives once we know that basically we are Christ in our forms is not an easy possibility to acknowledge. One reason is that unless the urge to try has gotten burned out of us by the misery of Romans 7, we will try to search ourselves for any independent seeing and remove it. How easy it can be to take on the work of God again upon ourselves. Norman Grubb called this the "occasional foolish visit to Romans 7"—not that we have to make such foolish visits.

Furthermore, until we have suffered enough, we will, once we do see the truth that Satan is always the author of sin in the vessel, use that truth to begin trying to control others and get them right

with God. Instead of keeping our eyes on our own "chief of sinners" acknowledgment, we will go speck plucking while still beam heavy ourselves. The root behind this is holding on to seemingly justified anger over what others have done to us or are doing to us. Yippee, now we have a theology to really go after those around us still in sin.

Some, having seen the evil of this application, run to the "only see God" in our brother as if to call something a sin is a violation of faith. This folly becomes apparent when a fellowship includes people in blatant works of the flesh, but the leaders "do not see sin." Consequently, no discipline takes place, and people are afraid to challenge any sin. Paul gives us a beautiful, though painful picture of how to deal with these situations in 1 Corinthians.

He first chastens the Corinthians for their party spirit and then for their thinking that has remained carnal, natural, and fleshy. He tells them that they do possess the mind of Christ, but that they do not know how to possess their possessions. Then Paul goes on to both affirm that they are temples of the Holy Spirit and that they do need to take action against sin. In this case, he says that even the pagans would recoil at what the Corinthians tolerate. So no fellowship can work which tolerates and even acclimates to obvious sin.

But can we discipline every lie of independent thinking and therefore Satan-empowered pattern in a fellow Christian's life? Norman, as I understood him, said that we have feet of clay. That could mean weaknesses, or it could mean these blind spots of independent seeing. We know (hopefully we do) that weakness is not sin, for Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians how he learned that God's strength is made perfect through his weakness, so that we are to embrace weakness.

Further, we need to know that temptation is not sin and that soul/body feelings are not sin, and therefore, we take no condemnation for either temptation or for our soul/body thoughts and feelings, which can make us think we are quite bizarre and unharnessed people if we do not know God's keeping in our lives.

We cannot change others. In a fellowship there will be some independent seeing, and we can recognize that and even set out boundaries where the Lord leads us. I repeatedly learn that I cannot change myself, or others. All that I can do is say my piece if led and leave others to the Spirit. So I go on and fellowship wherever possible unless obvious works of the flesh call for distancing myself as Paul did from the Corinthians.

If the possibility exists of independent seeing in others, or myself, how do I go on calling myself Christ living in my form and

trusting that His life is daily going forth in this form? This is where the Holy Spirit has to tell us if we do need to experience conviction of sin. I do not think this has to occur often. John writes in his first epistle about our foundation for acknowledging sin in our history and how that brings us to Christ's blood propitiation. He says that those who do not make this confession walk in darkness. However, he begins 1 John 2 by saying, "I write these things to you that you sin not." So John opens up the life of freedom from sin. John does not write like Paul does, but he says the same things, in his unique style.

John's key word is *abiding*. John knows and tells us so that we can know that we stop sinning by abiding in God through the unique atoning work of the Son. To not have the Son is to not have the Father, and John makes this point a lot in this short letter because the world is full of those who want to think that they abide in God but that they do not need the Son to do so.

So on we go abiding, and John takes us through the brief compendium of the three stages: children, young men, and fathers. Children know that their parents love them, and they receive correction and training at the same time that they receive constant assurance of love and forgiveness, also finding themselves included in all of family life. But children do not fight their own battles. Their parents fight their battles for them by keeping them out of the road, out of the cabinets with the

poisons, and away from edges with big drop offs. Progressively, children learn to do things by themselves under supervision.

Next comes adolescence. Mom and Dad can't always be around, and Mom and Dad do not always want to be around. The time comes for venturing out to fight the enemy and overcome him without depending on Mom and Dad to deliver the decisive blow to the enemy. Here, we internalize what our parents know and begin to operate what they know as our own so that we can rightfully call it ours. This means facing the enemy without scaffolding other than our own faith. This is a time that makes parents agonize and cringe. They groan and grab onto faith as they feel the fear over what their children will do when left alone to face the enemy. What will they go through to realize that He who is in us is greater than he who is in the world?

After success there, we move into fatherhood, where we know Him who is from the beginning. That means that we know the ways of God and can communicate them to children and young men. This also means that we know when to step in and when to stay away. This also means that we know that our business is with God alone and not with flesh. Our view of people changes from looking at them only as where they are. It changes to looking at them according to where they can be. We see a fellow Christian as Christ in his or her form and make that always our core. We see independent seeing as something that cannot work

and which God uses to bring a person to the end of self so that the person can know what it means to be a young man as John puts it.

This means that we know when to say something and when to keep our hands off. Unfortunately, a fellowship might not know when to keep hands off. And being a father means that sometimes we absorb a lot of anger from those who still have not become young men yet: they need our counsel and affirmation, but then they hurl incredible hatred at us. If we make ourselves the point, how can we be fathers?

I have been a father who did not get out of the way, and I have lived with fathers who would not get past themselves. This is grievous. When the Lord taught me one-on-one in 1994, I saw that no human person ever again would tell me what books to read, whom to fellowship or talk to, what conferences to go to, who to ostracize, etc.

The best example of this occurred one evening years ago when someone still involved in a fellowship I participated in would say, "If you do this, you're out," or, "If you don't do this you're out." I said, "I'm not trying to be in or out. That's not my focus; I do what the Lord has me to do." Since then, I listen to what others say, up to a point, considering that the LORD may be giving me a word through that person. But if the Lord in me does not confirm

that, I don't take it. Frankly, most of my guidance comes one-on-one from the Lord. Yet we do hear His voice through others. But what could John mean, "You need no man to teach you," if he doesn't mean that the real teacher is the Lord in us?

On we go. His keeping power is an awesome keeping. John says that our fellowship is with the Lord. So I continually find myself amazed at life in the Lord's house and in fellowship with the Lord. Though a form of Christ, I have the privilege to know Him and be known of Him. So relationship on that level has never been better, and then fellowship flows out of that with others. May the Lord bless you and keep you.