

THE NEW LIFE INDWELLING

by Watchman Nee

It is only through knowing God first as the God of Isaac that we can move on to know Him as the God of Jacob. Unless we know our inheritance as something already secured and settled in Christ and given to us by God, we have no foundation for going on. To be brought under the discipline of the Spirit, without first knowing that assurance of a work of God already done in Christ, would be a terrible thing.

At the risk of laboring the point, let me say again: all that Christ has done, and all that we have in Him, is already ours. As children of God we are already in Christ; we are one with Him. We don't hope to be; it is already done. The only question is, do we really believe God's Word when we read it?

We have been crucified and buried and raised and seated together with Christ. If His death is past, so is ours. No man can say that Christ's death is future; then how can ours be? Ours is one hundred per cent as complete and finished as His; not ninety-nine per cent! Not all the sin and weakness in the world can alter that fact; sin is another question entirely.

Before we see this, we long to die in order to escape from sinning. When, however, we see that we have already died in Christ, our outlook on both sin and death is completely changed. It is not prayerful people but praising ones who reach the way of holiness—those who see, and who seeing believe, and who believing praise.

Many of us read Romans 6. 11: 'Even so reckon ye also yourselves to be dead unto sin, but alive unto God in Christ Jesus.' Oh! we exclaim, I have tried that. I have tried to reckon myself dead to sin, but I always find I have sinned before I have had time to get the reckoning done!

But what is reckoning? Here is a five-dollar note in my wallet. I reckon I have five dollars, for the simple reason that I have it here. What use would be reckoning if I didn't have it? Reckoning means book-keeping, keeping accounts. And common sense tells us that accounts must bear a direct relation to the cash in the till.

God commands us to reckon ourselves dead because we are dead, and for no other reason. 'Our old man was crucified with him' (6. 6), and we know this. Therefore we are told to count upon it. The fact of the death comes before our reckoning on it, not the other way round. That is the difference between victory and defeat. The money is in my wallet, whether I reckon it is there or not; and I am dead with Christ, whether I reckon upon the fact or not. On the cross of Christ, God included me in Him, and so I have been crucified.

Let me repeat that. It is not that I identify myself with Christ; it is that God has included me in Him. He has already done it. This is something that can come to us with a flash of new-understanding. Just as once God opened our eyes to see our sins laid upon Christ, so again He must open our eyes to see our own selves in Christ. And this is something He delights to do. Suddenly we see with a flash of insight that all that Christ has already done has become ours. Thus union with Christ in death disposes of our whole unhappy past.

But this negative value to us of the finished work of Christ in respect of the old way of life is matched by a positive value to us of His living person in respect of the new. God comes with this further revelation to my heart, that Christ is in me. Christ is my Life, fighting for me, triumphing on my behalf, doing what He wants to do in me, and doing it now.

It is not that I have strength through Him to seek humility, meekness, holiness. He is all that in me; for He is my Life. The Christian has not a lot of odds and ends of virtues; indeed, he has no virtues; he just has Christ. The question is again, do we believe God's Word? Do we believe 1 Corinthians 1. 30?

Oh yes, we know we should have victory, so when we meet with a temptation we take great care, and we watch, and we pray. We feel it is our duty to fight against that thing, and to reject it, so we make up our minds not to do so, exerting our wills to the utmost. But that is not our victory. Christ is our victory. We do not need willpower and determination to resist the tempter. We look to Him who is our life. 'Lord, this is Your affair; I count on You. The victory is Yours, and You, not I, shall have the credit.' So often we gain a kind of victory, and everyone knows about it! We achieved it ourselves; but communion is broken and there is no peace.

Many of us live in constant fear of temptation. We know just how much we can stand, but alas, we have not discovered how much Christ can stand. 'I can stand temptation up to a point, but beyond that point, I am done for.' If two children cry, the mother can stand it, but if more than two cry together, under she goes. Yet it is not really a matter of whether two children cry, or three. It is all a question of whether I am getting the victory or Christ. If it is I, then I can stand two only. If Christ, it won't matter if twenty cry at once! To be carried through by Christ is to be left wondering afterwards how it happened!

This, too, is a matter that God delights to bring to us with a new flash of understanding. Suddenly one day we see that Christ is our life (Colossians 3. 4). That day everything is changed.

There is a day when we see ourselves in Christ. After that, nothing can make us see ourselves outside of Him. It alters everything. Then also there is a day when we see that Christ within us is our life. That too alters our whole outlook. They may be different days with an interval between, or both may come together. But we must have both; and when we do, then we begin to know Christ's fullness, and to marvel that we have been so stupid hitherto as to remain poor in God's storehouse. Ours is the God of Isaac. We are entering into God's inheritance.

It is now that we can begin to look at the difference between the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob. Isaac, as we have said,

speaks to us of God's impartation to us of Christ, whereas Jacob illustrates our disciplinary schooling by the Holy Spirit. Isaac reminds us of God's gifts made over to us absolutely, a reminder that gives us wonderful confidence and assurance. Jacob, on the other hand, draws our attention to the Spirit's inward working upon us to form Christ within, a working whose costliness draws forth rather our fear and trembling. Isaac is able to witness to victory in Christ. Jacob causes us to know our own extreme weakness and uselessness. In Isaac we boldly proclaim that sin is beneath our feet; yet in Jacob we tremblingly confess that as long as we live we may fall again. Isaac assures us that Christ's fullness is ours, so that we may confidently praise Him. Jacob recalls our attention from Christ to the Christian, to our deficient and inadequate selves.

The contrasts we have adduced above represent two experiences that run parallel throughout Scripture and are integral to our Christian life. The trouble is that we are apt to give our attention to one of the two only. There are, on the one hand, some very strong, almost extreme words in Scripture. 'God . . . always leadeth us in triumph.' 'Sin shall not have dominion over you.' 'To me to live is Christ.' 'I can do all things through Christ.' They are bold, strong, almost boastful affirmations. Yet the same people who say these things must also say: 'I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling.' 'I am chief of sinners.' (Note there the present tense in the Greek. 'We have no hope in ourselves.' 'The blood of Jesus his Son cleanseth us from all sin.' 'If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves.' 'We also are weak in him.' 'When I am weak, then am I strong.' 'Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my weaknesses.'

So we see another kind of Christian, utterly weak, sinful, trembling. We see another kind of Christian life, altogether lacking in self-confidence. These two together, Isaac with his confidence in Christ, and Jacob with his self-knowledge, are the life of the Christian.

It is because we only see one side of this that there are so many divergencies among those who preach the victorious life. We must know Christ's fullness, but we must also know our own weakness. These are things we must *see*, and these are what the God of Jacob shows us through the schooling of the Spirit, until we reach the place where we really know ourselves. In too many of us there is a departmental knowledge of God. We know the Fatherhood of God, but not the positiveness of Christ. Or we know this, but lack the brokenness of the Spirit. Some know the God of Jacob without knowing the God of Isaac; they see their own weakness, but do not know Christ's strength. No wonder they feel depressed about it! If we want a full knowledge of God we must know Him in all of these three ways, and even then we shall find that we are constantly making further progress!