

# CHIEF

## MINISTRIES

November 2016

One of the greatest hazards Christians face when they attempt to communicate the truth of the Bible is to assume that people (including themselves) know the meaning of the popular religious terms they employ. This difficulty can be readily seen in our discussions concerning the “spiritual life”.

Perhaps we all think and know what a speaker means when he says, “You must deal with self; it must be put to death! Self must not remain on the throne of your life!” Yet without blinking an eye we nod our agreement when the same speaker, a little bit later, goes on to assert that “most Christians have a very poor self-image!”

Wait a minute. If we really tried to stop to correlate these statements, we would be forced to conclude that a victorious Christian is one who has a good image of his own non-self!

Even though we find this reasoning difficult to grasp, we listen politely, sing our three songs, and go on our way. To question the speaker would seem....unspiritual. So, we store the information in a vast, untidy file in the back of our minds. It's just more talk on the spiritual life. And since it's easy to forget what we don't understand, the whole thing doesn't bother us too much. But other things do. Unspoken inner things. Restless feelings of guilt. Frustration with the quality of our lives and surroundings. Sometimes even frightening moments, perhaps, when a thought flashes like a faraway object in the sun.....a stab of longing....a pleading inner whisper that seems both distant and near at the same moment.....

Perhaps, just perhaps, might there be a deeper level of life in Christ that God had in mind for me all along? Could there be a fullness, a warmth, a joy that belongs to me and yet somehow - I'm missing it?

If we are missing it, this is no small thing. Out of all eternity of our existence as God's children, these tiny few years here on earth have a destiny that can never be repeated. The Bible tells us, *in the stench of a sick and rotting world we are perfume bottles for the fragrance of Christ (2 Corinthians 2:15). In the gathering darkness we shine as stars (Philippians 2:15)*

If only we could grasp the awesome implications of these few years! As if the mounting pain of guilt and failure wasn't enough, we are tormented by the thoughts we may just keep on “missing it”.

Quite honestly, how much of our lives have been exactly that?

Oh, we know the doctrines. We memorize the steps of this or that. From time to time we may get swept along in the enthusiasm of some program or Christian venue as though we had been to a motivational speaking sales conference. We come away with excitement in our product, confidence in our techniques and admiration for our organizations leadership (sometimes). But the power - the revolutionary power of life in the Spirit - where is that? Where is the fullness of God?

Then there are the times when the question becomes far more than bothersome. It becomes nothing short of terrifying. Cold sweat runs and our mouth are dry when we're jolted by the news that the pastor's wife ran off and had an affair with one of the most “godly” men in the church. Or practicing homosexuals are allowed to be in ministry at the church, or next week's Sunday school will be taught by the local imam (Muslim leader). And who or what will be next?

These questions have returned to plague me - and I'm sure, many of you - year after year. The roads are well-worn with our hopeful footsteps. We've all tried the seven-step plan to full assurance, the five-steps to total maturity. We've enlisted in all the classes we can take, subscribe to all the "free" newsletters, magazines, Bible studies we can get our hands on. We tune into that dynamic preacher/speaker. We memorized the pious technique of "accepting it by faith even though it doesn't make any sense". And we are getting tired. Tired enough and radical enough to question it all! We ask, "Is that what the Bible really says?"

How much more can I take from a mail-order doctorate speaker or teacher to the flock that knows every Christian cliché or teaches the doctrines of men that they've learned by memorizing half-truths given by people who have come up with lessons by reading what they believe in the Bible instead of believing what they read. Something's got a change.

Deep in our beings, many of us believe that there are some concepts clearly taught in Scripture that are so revolutionary, so startling, that if we really took them as they are, it would upset many of the apple-carts of conservative evangelicalism. Assuming the power of the Holy Spirit is equal to the concepts, the implications seem staggering.

And yet we find ourselves walled in somehow.

We find certain biblical words, phrases and descriptions attached with superglue to almost sacred definitions...and carefully worded limitations. Terms such as "old man," "new man," "holiness" and "sin" evoke automatic memorized explanations. Phrases such as 'crucified with Christ' or 'risen with Christ' elicit the same sort of most holy, sacred definitions.

There are those who most readily say, "Oh, that's positional truth", whenever literalism might press us to acknowledge that the power of the Holy Spirit is so little-known in so many people's experience. There are those who will actually despise you for your joy in Christ. I've heard people look down at me and say "oh", "that is not for the church today."

Out of this heap of dogmatic - (expressing opinions as facts) theologians made within the confines of the prison system, I must admit they are remarkably inventive and certainly sincere. They sit and highlight their Bibles to no end using all of the available study helps, usually those put forward by theological institutions that have been pushing their own doctrines for ages. And rather than give the "whole counsel of God" they continue to spout half-truths to all who will listen, which is mainly a captive audience just wanting to get out of their living area for a while.

Shouldn't we begin to wonder how the early church made it? How could they have possibly turned the world upside down without "MacArthur or Schofield study Bibles or a nifty three-ring binder?"

It is my earnest conviction that we have dreadfully complicated what Christianity is all about. I'm not saying these supplemental materials are without value. God has indeed used them in wonderful ways in many lives. But I do wonder what complex, interlocking, systematic theologies were bouncing around in Peter's mind on the day of Pentecost and in those fresh, exciting years that followed. Were the epistles only meaningful after the theologians had opportunity to tear them apart and glue them back together again?

Due to differences in time, culture and language, we have both needed and greatly profited from the dedicated men who have labored in the task of translating (in the broadest sense) the Scriptures for us. But we have amassed such a vast library of "how to do it" books that there is sheer quantity and complexity have placed them beyond the reach of the spiritually sensitive person.

Witness the recent production of the bestsellers on everything from the juicy details of the Great Tribulation (to be sucked up by Christians who suppose they won't be on earth when it happens anyway) to equally juicy details of how to put sparkle back into your marriage and sex life.

And what is the result?

We have today the most sexually educated, prophecy oriented generations of Christians in the history of the world. Certainly, the Bible does speak of these issues, but is this really the ultimate of what God intends for us? Is this the essence? When we stand before Christ's judgment throne will even one - just one - of His questions relate to my speculations on the number 666 or the scope of my sexual experiences?

For all their lack of slick materials and theological vocabulary the early Christians above all else knew something of the majesty of a miracle working God. They also knew that because of a miracle they were alive from the dead, no longer "in the flesh," but rather aliens in this world. Ambassadors from another home. And this was enough! Obviously, there was much, much more to know that would embellish the basics, but the essence - the all-important essence - was already there.

Because of the New Covenant these men and women were alive as no humans had ever been alive before! They were a new species; they were not of this world. And they knew it. With spiritual gifts never assumed to be temporary, the early church found itself with spirit taught men of wisdom and compassion who both understood the Scriptures and heard the voice of God. With their own personal identity and life course locked in, they saw a world that needed desperately to see Jesus in the flesh - their flesh. And they went out to live. But that was a long time ago.

Through the gracious Holy Spirit doors of discovery can open for you to discover Spirit-Filled living. Life!

This concept of identity, so fundamental and yet so mysterious, was well known within the leadership of the early church. Their words were clear words, their analogies striking and simple. They spoke without hesitation, unencumbered by the creative complexities theologians have dreamed up over the centuries. Our theological systems were originally built as a sort of scaffolding around the truth of God. Not to support it, and certainly not to build it, but rather in order to get up close to it and observe its marvelous structure. The reason for all our theological differences and divisions today is the scaffolding (doctrines, denominations) has replaced the building (God himself) as the point of focus.

If you have received the Savior, you simply are not the same person you were before. When you were "in the flesh" (Romans 8:9), life and meaning for you had to be found right there - and there alone. Your brain, your emotions your senses, your creativity, your glands, your world, your environments, your relationships - this was life. It could be found nowhere else.

But if you have been born again, this is not so anymore, whether you know it or not!

You may weigh the same, look the same, feel the same, but you are not the same!

Jesus could look a man or woman straight in the eyes and say, "I have come that you might have life. You may think you are alive, but you aren't." What? Weren't they doing everything "live" people were doing...eating, walking, loving, dreaming, planning, working? Yes, and yet, the Bible says, "in Him was life!"

You might say, "I know I have a new nature - He has clothed me with righteousness". Isaiah 61:10 could lead one to conclude that "*new nature*" was like a robe God gives us to cover over the "*old man*", the sinful person that I am underneath. And then you could think the "*putting on*" in passages in Colossians 3 to go along with the idea that the positive qualities a Christian is "to wear", are a covering to hide the scars and blemishes of the "real me." This "idea" finds no support in the Scripture.

First of all, in Isaiah's overall description of the prospects of the age of the new covenant, his focus is on a change in essential personhood. In Isaiah 60:12, God's people in that day will be called both "righteous" and the "work of my hands" (Ephesians 2:10). They also will be described as "oaks of righteousness" and "the holy people" (Isaiah 61:3 and 62:12). Precisely the same analogy is used of God Himself in 59:17 where God is seen as putting on "righteousness as a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation upon his head" (Ephesians 6:11-17). Certainly, what God puts on is harmonious with the person underneath. Note that Isaiah depicts this against the black contrast of Isaiah 64:6, "all our righteous acts are like filthy rags," as he views himself and his people under the old covenant. Colossians 3:12 follows with another positive parallel by referring to new covenant saints as "God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved." Finally, this clothing analogy is used in Revelation 19:8 and expressing the clothing of the Saints as "fine linen, bright and clean" certainly not something to cover the sinner but as descriptive of "the righteous acts of the saints." Hallelujah! The Christian life is no costume party, it's no disguise! Indeed, it is possible for saints to lose perspective concerning themselves and their attempt to dress themselves with counterfeit close to match their false concept of life. This is exactly what the Christians in Laodicea were doing, and like the child in the story, "the Emperor's new clothes," God found it necessary to bring them back to reality and describe them as they were, "naked" (Revelation 3:17-18).

What you have isn't the point. It's who you are that's the issue.

By saying: "Oh, I'm just a sinner saved by grace. I'm just a sinner indwelt by the Holy Spirit - that's watering it down. That's casting an un-deserved shadow on the greatest miracle God has ever performed concerning you. Don't do it!

(Even as I am writing this, anticipating this present moment right now as you are reading. I struggle with the fact that I am writing to your mind. It will handle these words and sentences in different ways depending on your IQ, and your ability to read and to think logically. But your mind is only an access into your deeper self. And since the IQ tests are meaningless to your truest personhood, I must consider two things. First I must communicate in such a way that no one will conclude that the smarter one is, the greater his capacity for true spirituality. And second, both you and I must be trusting in that most miraculous ministry of the Holy Spirit who alone is in a position "to bear witness with our spirit." True spirituality ultimately has to do with "the eyes of the heart" and with information "which possesses knowledge." How far more fundamentally is this true as we read the unique, divinely inspired Scriptures! Praise God! "The anointing which you have received from Him abides in you, and you have no need for anyone to teach you; but as His anointing teaches you about all things, and is true and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you abide in Him [1 John 2:27])

Let's take a closer look at this by taking Romans 7 as our focal point. In this chapter Paul is describing the struggle of a person with sin from an old covenant legalism perspective. It is completely illogical to hold that Romans 7:14-25 is describing the typical experience of a believer who is looking at life through the truth of Romans 6 and 8. The apostle in this section is not primarily concerned to 'give his experience'; he has not set out to tell us something about himself. He is telling us and setting out before us his view of the law - the nature of the law, what it was not meant to do, or the limits of the law. In view of this practical holiness emphasis in these chapters, the exclamation which closes this section. "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (v25) is to be understood as a venting of his own feelings that through mercy of God, the experience just described (v14-24) was no longer his.

The sense of the spiritual was so fundamental to the apostle Paul that he states twice (and infers several more times) that when sin occurs, "it is no longer I myself who did it, but it is sin living in me" (Romans 7:17-20). Though he acknowledges personal responsibility, he denies that sinning is part of his essential, deepest nature. This is important for us to see.

John goes so far as to say, "Dear children, do not let anyone lead you astray. He who does what is right is righteous, just as he is righteous.... No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning because he has been born of God" (1 John 3:7-9). Do we really have any right to tamper with these words? Can I really conclude that God isn't speaking about me, but rather some new nature which I possess?

We humans try so hard to be more understandable, more systematic, more related to life as we see it. Yet so often we accomplish precisely the opposite. We press it all out of shape.

Apparently when writers or teachers make the statement “sins power has been broken,” they are really saying this: Romans 6 teaches us we don’t have to give into those sinful desires because the power is gone. Before we were saved we couldn’t say “no!” but now we can. From this, some Christians falsely assume that some particular sin is conquered because they have found the strength not to do it. But is this unique to Christians? Of course not. All around us we see examples of non-Christians who have broken the power of swearing, stealing or being immoral. It is quite obvious by the fact that they no longer engage in these things. They are either very disciplined people or they have become involved in other activities (perhaps quite wholesome) which have replaced those previous ones.

How easy it is to forget that sin is not simply what we do or don’t do; sin relates to our independence from or dependence upon life from God! As Jesus said, “*Without Me, you can do nothing.*”

We’ve all met Christians (we’ve met ourselves) who have had to admit that the power of sin in their lives seem to be more intense after they received Christ. In many cases they are really saying, “it isn’t just the ‘doing’ of sinful things which bothers me, it’s the ‘wishing’.”

It was hardly by chance that Paul selected the sin of coveting in Romans 7:8. It’s the most secret of all sins. It can exist when by all measurements I am enjoying “the broken power” of my “old sin nature”. For you see true victory over sin is only a reality when not only am I not doing the sin but 1) I honestly do not desire what my flesh finds tantalizing, and 2) in place of that desire there is also positive life flowing from God, manifested in holy living. This is why spiritual power is so crucial (Ephesians 3:14-16)

But this power must be linked to an awareness of who you are in Christ! I really believe that the major reason this revolutionary truth never hits home is due to the fact that many Bible teachers automatically assume that all biblical truths fall into either of two big bins.

They call the first bin positional truth. God sees something as true because He sees us through the filter of the death and resurrection of Jesus. But if one is not careful to spot the limits of statements like “this is my position in Christ”, he will find himself parroting the standard doubletalk that a person must see himself as “positionally” dead when in fact his old self is very much alive.

The other bin, experiential truth, is simply anything that is truth that I am consciously aware of in the process of living. Therefore, as I read my Bible it is my task to decide whether the truth I am reading is to be understood as being either “positional” or “experiential”.

But I am convinced there is a third classification which deserves the title actual truth, it involves facts which certainly are not positional and they may or may not be experiential.

Let’s suppose a young girl possesses a very beautiful singing voice. Because her parents are fearful she will become proud, they keep telling her that she has a terrible voice - nobody would want to listen to it. Assuming that her parents must be correct, she carefully avoids singing where anyone might possibly hear her. Years go by. Silent years. Then one Sunday in a worship service she become so caught up in a melody that she forgets herself. With an overflowing heart she sings out - strong and clear - in full voice. Immediately the people around her cease their singing in order to hear this lovely, haunting voice.

“My!”, They exclaim after the song, “you have a wonderful voice!” “Oh no,” she stammers, embarrassed, “I - I know I have a terrible voice. Please forgive me. I’m sorry I bothered you with it. I’ll try to be more quiet.” “No! Really your voice is beautiful - exquisite. Please sing more!”

This is what I mean by “actual truth” all through those songless years, this girl actually had a beautiful voice - that was real truth. But it wasn’t experiential. And it certainly wasn’t positional (that is, a recording of someone else’s voice but with her name put on the label).

Many Christians assume that unless something is being experienced, it must be “positional” truth rather than actual truth. If I don’t feel a given truth from Scripture, I threw it into the positional bin. The Bible says I’m a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17), but I don’t feel like one; it must be positional.

Stretch your imagination with mine as I help you understand actual truth.

Let’s imagine you are a bird who, by some strange series of events, was hatched into a family of rabbits. Your entire world was a rabbit’s world. You learn to eat rabbit’s food, you shared the warmth and security of a rabbit’s burrow, you played rabbit games. You considered yourself a rabbit. What reason was there for you to assume anything else? The rabbits gave you full acceptance as one of their own. Somehow your difference in appearance didn’t bother them. So why should it bother you? It was as though they really didn’t see any difference. This was home, this was life. Yes, there were those times, like when the dog chased to you, that for an instant, just an instant, you flap those strange appendages on your sides and almost thought you could fly. But then you caught yourself. That was stupid; rabbits don’t fly. Sure, you hopped a bit differently than the others - but you got around as well as any of them. No, there really was no question as to your identity. You were a rabbit indeed!

Then one day someone came by and said to you, “By the way, did you know that you are a bird? A real bird? A bird who was built to fly?”

“What? A bird! Ridiculous. I know who I am - I’m a rabbit!

But this someone was very persistent. You couldn’t hop away from him. Day after day he was there to remind you, to taunt you with a new identity. Not that the idea lacked fascination. But it was so.....so cross-grain to everything you’d been taught. And, you’d been comfortable being a rabbit.

Persistence finally won, however, and this someone begin to teach you to exercise those strange flappers (wings, he called them). He spun all sorts of stories, tantalizing stories about birds. Birds in flight....soaring high above trees.....with dogs below.

Gradually, you found yourself wondering, could it really be? Perhaps a rabbit could be carried aloft by a bird - a big bird or - or perhaps one could hop so high and so far it would almost seem like flying. But to really BE a bird....?

Then at last the momentous day arrived and that someone lead you high up to a bluff overlooking the rabbit world far below. This was the moment. You hopped right to the edge. With a most courageous shout your companion cried, Now! You ARE A BIRD! Jump! Fly!

And you jumped. Flapped. You fell for a moment that seemed forever. And then you flew! You soared. Higher and higher! With the sound of wind swishing through your feathers you cried, “I am a bird, I am a bird! I can fly!”

A silly story? Of course it is. But please - don’t miss the point. How many sincere Christians have willingly accepted and adjusted to a fake personal identity during their life as believers? Their concept of themselves was that really they were just like anyone else in the world. Just human. And fundamentally sinful. Therefore, to be a dedicated Christian was to say “No” to one’s essential nature in order to say “Yes” to a God who was contrary to that nature. To say “No” to what one really wanted in order to say “Yes” to what God wanted.

“Fly? Oh no. I can’t fly. It’s not my nature to fly. But I willingly submit to be carried on the wings of the Holy Spirit.”

With massive relief it was so good to know that when God looked their way they were always hidden behind Jesus (remember the filter?). They were saved from the unspeakable embarrassment of being identified as rabbits and not birds after all. It was the Holy Spirit that was the “bird”, not themselves. But if that were so, how would they ever go to heaven. Well, somehow, God will simply and eternally remove at last all individual “selves” and heaven will be a whole lot of Jesus!

Christian, are you listening, thinking? What does the Bible say? Who Do You Think You Are?? Is the Spirit right now bearing witness with your spirit that you are a born one of God? Do you hear His convincing voice?

Contrary to popular teaching being born again is more than having something taken away (sins forgiven) or having something added to you (a new nature with the assistance of the Holy Spirit); it is becoming someone you had never been before. This new identity is not on the flesh level, but the spirit level - one’s deepest self. This miracle is more than a judicial act of God. It’s an act so real that it is right to say that a Christian’s essential nature is righteous rather than sinful. This discovery of meaning alone is the adequate foundation upon which one can confront sin and build a life of holiness. So build!

It’s time to **S.O.A.R.**

be **Sold Ot And Radical**

***Chief***

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***Christ’s***

***Heart***

***In***

***Every***

***Felon***