

CHIEF MINISTRIES

April 2017

I've been trying to get you, the reader, to see the absolute necessity of dependence on the flow of God's life in us if we are to truly experience life at all.

One of the most remarkable differences between the old and new covenants are the two different ways that human righteousness is handled.

In the old covenant, the most wicked man was the one who saw no greater purpose in life than his own pleasure. The idea of God simply got in the way. He was a hedonistic (self-seeking) humanist (one to whom human welfare is primary). If he knew of Jehovah it only made his wickedness worse. If in his god-less-ness he chose to consider the welfare of his loved ones or his country he would have been considered as somewhat less wicked than his contemporaries. At least his humanism was directed toward the welfare of others. If he further attempted to keep on God's good side out of the fear of God's anger, he would have been thought of as even less wicked.

But righteous? Hardly that.

A righteous man was one who acknowledged and responded to the worthiness of God. He was a worshiper. He recognized that whatever he knew of God's law was right, and should be obeyed. He therefore set out with humility to do it. *"He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God."* (Micah 6:8)

To some degree this was actually possible:

There were righteous men under the old covenant. It wasn't impossible. Do you remember what God told the Israelites? *"Then the Lord your God will make you most prosperous in all the work of your hands.....if you obey the Lord your God and keep his commands and decrees that are written in this book of the law and turn to the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul. **Now what I am commanding you today is not too difficult for you or beyond your reach.**"* (Deuteronomy 30:9-11, emphasis mine)

This type of righteousness could be well illustrated even in the life of the apostle Paul before his revolutionary encounter with Jesus. He could say of his whole life "as for legalistic righteousness, faultless." He could also say, "I have fulfilled my duty to God in all good conscience to this day." Of his actions in persecuting the Christians he could say with sincerity that he acted as one "zealous for God" and that they were things he felt "he ought to do" as expressions of his zeal. (Philippians 3:6, Acts 23:1; 22:2; 26:9)

There really is no question that Paul (Saul) had been a sincerely devout man though terribly misled by his own blind commitment to a prevalent Jewish concept: God never would, nor could become a real man. Funny that today the second largest religion in the world - soon to be the largest - is founded on that belief. Blind. Later, reflecting back on those pre-Jesus days, he acknowledged that he was “*once a blasphemer and a violent man.*” But he quickly added, “*I acted in ignorance.*” (1 Timothy 1:13)

In 1 Timothy 1:15 Paul identified himself as “*Chief*” of sinners. The worst. When I founded this ministry and God gave me the title Chief – Christ’s Heart In Every Felon – Ministries, this was the verse that came to mind. It is a good example of what we all are without Christ. But, oh, what transformation occurs when we really allow His heart (Spirit) into our lives! Paul could think of nothing worse than persecuting Jesus and His people. Even though the present tense is used. “*I am the worst,*” the focus is on the past as in 1 Corinthians 15:9. “*I am the least of the apostles....because I persecuted the church*” (emphasis mine). Probably the same thought is in Paul’s mind in Ephesians 3:8, “*I am less than the least of all God’s people.*” One might wish to press the point of Philippians 2:3 as he urged believers to “*consider others better [NASB reads – more important] than yourselves,*” meaning that every Christian’s self-image should be less than what he imagines of other people. In view of the immediate reference to the Lord Jesus and the overall emphasis on humility, would it be proper to think that Jesus too considered others as “better” than himself? No! Since the word (Greek, *huperechontas*) commonly was used to express the idea of prominence, importance, rather than moral goodness (Philippians 3:8; 1 Peter 2:13). The NASB rendering of “more important” seems to be not only appropriate to the passage, but also a proper parallel with the attitude of our Lord. Proper humility does not in itself demand that one hold to a fundamentally sinful concept of one’s own personhood. Commonly Paul presented himself to others as an example of a godly man worthy to be copied. He clearly knew of himself as a “new man” who was no longer structuring his life “in the flesh”. Can that be said of you?

Under the old covenant a “righteous” man was aware of how much he needed God’s gracious help (Paul very likely spent earnest time in the temple praying for God’s blessing before he started on his way to persecute Christians in Damascus, Galatians 1:14). It was this very kind of person (though far more open than Paul) that the life of Jesus touched again and again.

When He was a baby, it was Anna and Simeon. At the start of His ministry it was Nathaniel. After His death it was Joseph of Arimathea and Cornelius. Yet it was to this kind of people, “righteous” people, that Jesus said in anticipation of the new covenant, “*You must be born again.*” New covenant righteousness was a new proposition altogether.

The Old Testament repeatedly anticipated the radical, inward change that someday would come. Not only is this expressed in the actual statements of the New Covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Isaiah 59:21; Ezekiel 36:26-27; Isaiah 60:21; 62:12) but also in the deep agony of the prophet who realize that the day of that new covenant had not yet arrived (Isaiah 59:9-15; 64:5-7). Too often Christian communicators use old covenant descriptions of the inner nature of a believer as being proper descriptions of a new covenant believer. They either forget or misunderstand that the difference was to be so radical as to be described as the “death” of the “old man” or “old self”. The new covenant was life.

By emphasizing this, I do not want to cast a shadow on the profound work of the Holy Spirit under the old covenant in individual lives such as David (1 Samuel 10:13 or Psalms 23-27). Nevertheless regeneration appears to be a distinctly new covenant event.

At the risk of oversimplification, the differences between old covenant righteousness and new covenant righteousness could be compared to the difference between “God, be my helper,” and “God be my life.”

In the Old Testament, God’s people were characterized as His vineyard. God was the owner and protector of this vineyard, as well as the One who deserved the harvest (Isaiah 5:1-7). In anticipating the new covenant, however, Jesus told his disciples, “*I am the vine; you are the branches*” (John 15:1). The difference is a radical one indeed.

Quite mistakenly, we get the idea that God’s highest desire for human is that they do the right things - godly things. That they express concern for others, obey the law, reflect proper respect and appreciation for God. This is simply not so! God’s purpose for humans is that they become actual extensions of His life through a dependent relationship with Him. This, above all else, is new covenant righteousness. Of course such a life will express itself in righteous acts, but the foundation for those acts is dependence. Not in the sense of God helping us, but in God living through us.

This whole point becomes very important to see when we face up to the problem of sin in our lives and our concern in pleasing the Savior. If righteousness is merely a matter of avoiding bad things and performing good things instead, then “victory” may be considerably easier than we think.

Are you ready to use your imagination again? Let’s suppose that I am a young man who has become fascinated with....butterflies.

Before long I became a consummate expert. My collection knows few peers. Every waking moment of my life is utterly captivated by these amazing, colorful, infinitely varied creatures. Finally, I arrange my adventure of a lifetime - a trip far up the streaming reaches of the Amazon in search of a rare, exotic species. With scarcely a second thought I turn my back on the world’s materialism, it’s air-conditioned comfort, pretty girls, soft music, new car showrooms, shopping center sales, the love of money, my physical appearance, my health, and other people’s opinion of me. It’s easy to leave these things behind; they never really bother me much anyway.

Really? Yes, really. With full sincerity I would tell you that I have found a highly fulfilling reason to be alive. I’ve found meaning. I have neither time nor interest for so many of the things which seem to captivate other people. And so, all alone under my mosquito netting lying in a slightly damp hammock, I fall asleep like a child, dreaming of that golden winged insect somewhere upstream.

If you said that my life was all wrapped up in self, I would counter you with honest force of conviction. One of my greatest joys is to see delight play across the faces of the many people who discovered the beauty of butterflies through my display. Mine is the quiet confidence that the world is better, richer because of what I do. I might even go one step farther. Even as a non-Christian, I might insist that my efforts were bringing justifiable glory to the Creator!

You’re right, there aren’t many people around like that - unaffected by materialism, lust, or greed for glory. But even one would prove a point. Every one of us can think of some very self-less Christians we have encountered in our lifetime. Think about all the music, art, and science of benefit and joy to so many which have come from earnest, dedicated unbelieving people.

But this is hardly new covenant righteousness. Such qualities will never commend us to God. When that butterfly hunter stands before God's throne of judgment will he be able to show off his specimen trays or site his good deeds to society, or speak of the sins he did not commit? Will all his cultural, intellectual, moral, or social arts way anything at all on God's balances which determine one's eternal destiny? The answer of course, is no. They will amount to precisely nothing. Jesus said, "*I am come that you might have life, and have it more abundantly.*"

Life is what one needs in order to stand eternally before God – God-life.

By the way our butterfly hunter illustrates my premise that meaning in life is basic to human existence and inseparable from the nature and the problem of sin. A butterfly-lover's identity is certainly adequate to give meaning to a person's life. No doubt about it. And so it happens that this particular type of meaning tends to remove a person from all sorts of immoral and socially destructive sins in contrast with a young man who develops a Playboy identity. Yet even the butterfly collector, if only he could think his way through Ecclesiastes, would have to conclude, "This too is vanity - ultimate emptiness." By nature this "worthy citizen" is a child of wrath. He has missed life.

But the average person doesn't "think his way through." In fact, if he has found some socially acceptable field which challenges his capacities he may conclude that he has found where life is. He knows his identity - he is a businessman. By choice he gets up early in the morning and carefully reads his Wall Street Journal. In the evenings he's up late pouring over charts, diagrams and statistics. No 40-hour week for him! And though he may complain about his long hours, it's only a front. The business world is his life. To lose it would be to lose living. The same could be said for any dedicated musician, physician, athlete, contractor or politician.

It is also possible to say something similar about believers who have found that identity in some Christian profession. Though the product and the purpose are completely different, it is possible for even a missionary or evangelists to approach "life" precisely the same way as any hard-driving insurance salesman whose goals may be measured in terms of monthly quotas, earning gold keys or pink cars, or having one's name mentioned at the next conference.

A Biblical scholar may find fulfillment in his word studies on the same mind - flesh level as the scientist who analyzes the vocabulary of a chimpanzee. Similarly, a Christian teacher may go over his books, sharpen his notes, highlight every paragraph, underline every sentence, develop stunning illustrations, utilize modern audio-visuals and assumes that if he does these things he is fulfilling life. Truthfully, he may be scarcely touching life at all - authentic life - resurrection life. To compound the loss, many Christians will put such an individual on a spiritual pedestal.

So often we hear "victorious life" speakers say words like: "because the old man has been crucified, you don't have to listen to his commands anymore. His power has been broken. You don't have to swear or lust. Before, you couldn't help it but now....."

This may sound liberating. And there is some truth in this speaker's words. But it can also be very misleading.

For you see, a non-Christian doesn't have to swear or lust either. Each of us knows fine non-Christian people who honestly are repelled by such things. Out of the simple determined discipline of their own person they have pressed themselves into other patterns of thought and behavior. They lead community battles against pornography; they are disgusted with the way other people have degraded

themselves. For the general welfare of society we can be very thankful for such non-Christians. But this is by no means new covenant righteousness! These people are still not truly alive.

What then does a “live” human look like? Who is our ultimate example? Obviously, it is Jesus. Let’s take a longer look at Him. And as we look, please do not take offense that our focus will be upon His humanity rather than His deity.

Jesus was and is God. He was and is Jehovah. The Bible makes this unmistakably clear. There is no doubt, not even the slightest shadow. *“And the Word was God....and the Word became flesh.... Before Abraham was born, I AM... while we wait for the blessed hope - the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.”* (John 1:1; 1:14; 8:58; Titus 2:13).

We could cite many passages which clearly affirm the deity of our Lord Jesus. But have you considered how much the Bible tells us about His being a real man? Our Lord’s favorite title for Himself was *“the Son of man.”*

Out of our justifiable reaction against those who have denied our Savior’s deity, we Christians have tried to overly prove the Bible’s already invincible evidence with “proofs” of His deity which are not really proofs at all. In fact, in our zeal we may have well cast a shadow upon the priceless truth that Jesus was fully a real man.

Is this important? Immeasurably so! He is the pattern for my life. If he were not a real man then someone is playing a cruel, deceptive trick on us all.

Let’s think through His life. What does the Bible say about the manhood of Jesus?

As a child He “grew and become strong; He was filled with wisdom and the grace of God was upon Him.” As an overall summary of those early years Luke states that Jesus *“grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man”* (Luke 2:40, 52). That sounds human.

Next, we find Him in His ministry, a ministry of wonder filled words and deeds and miracles. How did Jesus explain His own remarkable behavior? Was He simply flexing His own divine muscles? Let Jesus answer: *“When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know who I am and that I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me.” “Do not believe me unless I do what my Father does. But if I do it, even though you do not believe me, believe the miracles, that you may learn and understand that the Father is in me and I in the Father.” “For I do not speak of my own accord, but the Father who sent me commanded me what to say and how to say it.... So whatever I say is just what the Father has told me to say.”* (John 8:28; 10:37-38; 12:49-50; 14:9-10)

There should be no question that in these passages, especially John 8 and 10, Jesus was claiming for Himself a uniqueness in the person as Messiah and the Son of God (as shown by the violent reactions of His listeners in 8:59 and 10:31-33). But this fact must not hide the significance of Jesus’ own explanation of both His words and His actions as being products of a dependent relationship with the Father. By this He demonstrated the manner in which true humanness is to be lived out. Even the statement, *“I and the Father are one”* must be understood as having some parallel with His later statement to His Father, *“that they may be one, just as We are One: I in them and You in Me. May they be brought to complete unity”* (John 17:22-23).

In describing the amazing miracles, Luke states, “*And the power of the Lord was present for Him to heal the sick.*” Earlier he says that Jesus return to Galilee “*in the power of the Spirit.*”

John referring to this power says, “*For the One whom God has sent speaks the words of God; to him God gives the Spirit without limit.*” (John 3:34)

A short time later on the day of Pentecost, Peter states, “*Men of Israel, listen to this: **Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through Him.***” (Acts 2:22, emphasis mine)

Many years later Paul would write “*(He) made himself nothing*” (Philippians 2:7). And the book of Hebrews says, “*But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels.... He had to be made like His brothers in every way..... Because He Himself suffered when He was tempted, He is able to help those who are being tempted.... During the days of Jesus’ life on earth, He offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the One who could save Him from death, and He was heard because of His reverent submission. Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from what He suffered.*” (Hebrews 2:9, 17, 18; 5:7-8).

When Jesus performed some supernatural act was it in demonstration of His own divine power? The answer, mysterious as it may sound, has to be “No!” Jesus manifested a totally dependent life.

Moments before He called forth Lazarus from death and the grave, Jesus lifted His eyes to heaven and prayed, “*Father, I thank You that You have heard Me. I know that You always hear Me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that You sent Me*”. (John 11:41-42).

The works of our Lord Jesus pointed to His dependence upon the Father. That dependence pointed to the authenticity of Christ’s words. Those words spoken clearly of Christ’s own personhood. We may assume that when He commissioned His disciples with the words, “*As the Father has sent Me, I am sending you,*” the dependent pattern of life that had been His was upon His mind. This very pattern empowered by their ascended Lord through the Spirit would even cause them to do “*greater works*” than Christ Himself had done. (John 20:21; 14:12).

Certainly there are mysteries in the Trinity we will never fathom, but it would seem as though God has gone to special lengths to encourage us to appreciate His Son as a real man. A Man after whom we are to pattern our lives.

Jesus was what a truly “live” human being looked like. He is the ultimate pattern. On His own He could have spoken beautiful words. But He didn’t. On His own He could have called forth the hosts of heaven to just send in a lightning bolt to His aid. He did not.

For Paul, the life of Jesus was a pattern and something more than a pattern. Much, much more. The life of Jesus was Paul’s very life. “*I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.*” (Galatians 2:20)

Yes, Paul was alive. Yet it was no longer his flesh life. It was Jesus. Jesus’ very nature. His very life expressed itself out of Paul’s innermost being through Paul’s flesh by the Spirit (John 7:38).

What is a truly “live” human? Jesus put it in the simplest words: “*You in Me and I in You.*” (John 14:20; 15:4-7; 17:21-26).

Clear. Simple. But can we begin to understand those words?

There was a day God gave birth to you (“*born of God*”, (1 John 3:9)). He is also “in you”. Your life is an extension of His own life. You live because He lives. Without life from Him you have no life. To wake up in the morning and declare to God, “Gracious Lord, for today, I have no life except as You give me life.”

Can you begin now to grasp the importance of Paul’s major prayer for the Ephesians? “*I pray that out of His glorious riches He may strengthen you with power through His Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.....that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.*” (Ephesians 3:16-17,19)

In this truth, we approach the reverse of the tragedy of Eden. We were once “in Adam.” We are no longer! That person has ceased to exist! We are in Christ! John the Baptist was the last prophet under the old covenant and concerning him Jesus said, “*among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet he who is least in the Kingdom of heaven is greater than he* (Matthew 11:11).

The new covenant indeed has come! All that remains to fulfill our eternal destiny is the completion of God’s careful faceting of His spiritual diamonds and the redemption of our bodies. “*For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with the immortality.*” (1 Corinthians 15:53)

Until that day comes we have a job to do.

As Christ was the Light of the world, so we are lights in the darkness of the world. As He was the expression of the Father’s love and holiness so we are to abide in love and manifest daily holiness.

“*As He is, so are we in this world.*” (1 John 4:17)

As He was His Father’s Ambassador, so are we “*ambassadors for Christ.*” (2 Corinthians 5:20)

It’s time my brothers and sisters in Christ.

Be Bold! Be Strong! For the Lord your God is with you!

I’m praying for you.

Chief

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Christ’s

Heart

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