

# **Self-Esteem**

**W. J. Prost**

The substance of this article was originally given as four talks to young people at Lassen Pines, California, in August, 1991. Because the material has been considerably edited and revised, the original format has not been retained, but the subject matter has been broken down into a number of smaller units.

Printed in U.S.A.  
1993

## Preface

---

The subject of “self-esteem” is very current in the world today, especially in North America. Less than twenty years ago, the subject was scarcely mentioned. Now we are bombarded with the term on every hand, and even very young children are being taught courses on self-esteem in schools. The lack of it is supposed to be the underlying reason for almost every wrong in man, and the restoration of one’s self-esteem is supposed to be a cure for almost any shortcoming.

Some time ago, while waiting for an appointment, I picked up an issue of *Reader’s Digest* in the reception room. An article entitled “Words That Work Miracles” caught my eye, and I would like to quote to you two paragraphs from that article.

We each have a mental picture of ourselves, a self-image. To find life reasonably satisfying, that self-image must be one we can live with, one we can like. When we are proud of our self-image, we feel confident, and free to be ourselves. We function at our best. When we are ashamed of our self-image, we attempt to hide it rather than express it. We become hostile and hard to get along with.

A miracle happens to the person whose self-esteem has been raised. He suddenly likes other people better. He is kinder and more cooperative with those around him. Praise is the polish that helps keep his self-image bright and sparkling.

This quotation represents current thinking in the world, and also among many Christians. While there are ideas in those words that are very true, there are also things that are wrong.

Part of the problem of dealing with the subject lies in the fact that to date there is no real agreement on what the term “self-esteem” means. Various definitions have been proposed, but even in educated circles there is no general agreement. It is obvious that the term means different things to different people.

As with every moral and spiritual subject, Christians must turn away from man’s wisdom, and look into the Word of God. Peter tells us that “His [God’s] divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness.” 2 Peter 1:3. Paul told the Corinthians that “the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God.” 1 Corinthians 3:19. With the Lord’s

help I would like to look into the Word of God, where we find the answer to everything that concerns our walk as Christians in this world. Man's wisdom cannot add anything to the Word of God.

The subject is a difficult one, and I am much aware of my lack of complete understanding of it. Man is a complex being, and some of the considerations relative to this subject have to be experienced rather than fully explained. Also, 1 Corinthians 13:12 says, "Now we see through a glass, darkly," and here the word "darkly" has the thought of something which is obscure, or an enigma. While the Word of God gives us perfect light for every step of our path, it does not always satisfy our curiosity, nor answer all our questions. Let us bear this in mind when there are aspects of this subject which may be beyond our understanding.

There are many subjects brought before us in the Word of God which are beyond human understanding. The human mind can go only so far, and then we realize that we are in the realm of the infinite. Usually such subjects consist of two truths which must be kept in balance, yet cannot be totally reconciled by the human mind. I believe that human dignity in creation and man's depravity as a result of the fall are two such truths. The natural man tries to reduce these truths to a level which he can understand, and in so doing always falls into error on one side or the other. Sad to say, even true believers sometimes do this in trying to impose a man-made structure on truth that God has given to us in His Word. The right response for us is humbly to adore the One who has chosen to reveal these things to us, while realizing that our finite minds cannot totally comprehend the infinite. We can appreciate these truths, and balance them in our lives, but only by walking in communion with the One who has chosen to reveal them to us.

To give some structure to our subject, I would like to consider man in three positions or states. First, man in creation before the fall; second, man as a fallen creature; and third, man in Christ. Other considerations will be developed relative to these three positions as we go along.

## *Man in Creation*

---

In Genesis 1, we have the wonderful story of creation, culminating in the creation of man on the sixth day. Verse 26 reads,

“And God said, Let us make man in Our image, after Our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.” The word “image” here has the thought of representative, so that man was to be God’s representative in the earth. “Likeness” has the sense of moral likeness, in that man was in direct relationship to God and was given affections relative to the rest of creation that were in keeping with his being head over it.

At the end of the sixth day, we read, “And God saw every thing that He had made, and, behold, it was very good.” Genesis 1:31. In this context, we need to recognize in man the handiwork of God, and the fact that God says it was “very good.” The elevation of man above the rest of creation is most pronounced, and he was given qualities which specially fitted him for such an exalted position in God’s creation. While man has lost much of the “likeness” of God through the fall, he still is God’s representative on the earth. There is still a dignity attached to man through his position in creation, even if he has fallen.

Part of man’s dignity and position as head of creation includes the various abilities which God has given him, and which have not been granted to the lower creation. One individual, for example, may have tremendous ability in mathematics. No doubt this is given of God, and would have been present even if man had not sinned. Another may have an ability in music, or perhaps in working with his hands, both of which man would have had without the fall. It is right and fitting that these abilities should be recognized, both by the individual who has them, and by others. In this sense, the term “self-esteem” is not all wrong, but perhaps the term “self-image” or “self-evaluation” is better. To say that I am worthless with regard to what God has made me or to depreciate my God-given abilities is to find fault with the handiwork of God and casts an aspersion on Him.

Again, this points out the difficulty in the term “self-esteem,” for it does not mean the same thing to everyone. I feel that the term is a poor one, for it turns our thoughts back on ourselves. As we will see later, God wants to turn our thoughts to an Object outside of ourselves—the Lord Jesus Christ. But, if the term is used in connection with man in creation, it may not convey a totally wrong thought.

Paul had something of this thought before Him in writing to the Philippians, when he said, "Look not every man on his own things [qualities], but every man also on the things [qualities] of others." Philippians 2:4. We are apt to be very conscious of our own qualities, while not recognizing those which others may possess. On the other hand, some do not recognize even their own qualities which God has given them.

In Matthew 25:14-30, we find the parable of the talents. It brings before us God's sovereignty in giving different abilities to various individuals. (In the parable of the pounds in Luke 19 we find the balance to this, where man's responsibility is brought before us.) While the talents may include spiritual gifts, I believe they also bring before us our natural, God-given abilities, for the use of which every man will be held responsible. Revelation 4:11 says, "O Lord . . . Thou hast created all things, and for Thy pleasure they are and were created." This is why we were created and given the abilities which we have. The man with only one talent clearly represents a soul who went into a lost eternity, yet God held him responsible for not using for profit what had been committed to him. He had not used his energy and ability for God's pleasure.

In summary, then, we see that God has created man for His pleasure, and given him a dignity as head of creation. Also, He has given us specific abilities, which had nothing to do with the fall and which we are responsible to recognize and use for Him. In this sense, we are to have the image of ourselves which God has of us. Not to do so is to slight God Himself, and to have wrong thoughts of God. To use the term "self-esteem" to describe this is not totally wrong, but I suggest that there is better language which we can use to convey this thought. This brings us to our next consideration.

## *Love and Understanding*

---

We have all been created with certain abilities which are God-given and with a basic need for love and understanding. Yet, most of us know or have heard of individuals who have been told, perhaps from their earliest years, that they were not worth anything, that they could never do anything right, that they had nothing to offer. It happens frequently in the world at large, and, sad to say, all too often among believers. Such an attitude is clearly contrary to the Word of God, as we have

seen. We know that the lives of such individuals often end in disaster, unless the damage can be corrected.

In 1 John we read, “Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not, knoweth not God; for God is love.” 1 John 4:7,8. The need to be loved and understood is part of each one of us. When an individual does not get love and understanding, it causes difficulties in his life. Sometimes these difficulties become overwhelming, so that the need for love becomes more important than life itself.

In the summer of 1980, a woman by the name of Judith Bucknell was murdered in Miami. Her murder might have been just another statistic except for her diary. Apparently she was young, attractive and successful, but her diary remains a monument to the awful loneliness that she experienced. “Who is going to love Judy Bucknell?” she wrote. “I feel so old. Unloved. Unwanted. Abandoned. Used up. I want to cry and sleep forever.” She was outwardly happy, had a good job, stylish clothes, a nice apartment—all the trappings of the “good life.” Yet she wrote, “I’m alone and I want to share something with somebody.” The ache in her heart could not be satisfied with material things or superficial relationships, because real love and understanding were lacking.

No doubt this thought is expressed in Psalm 63:3, which reads, “Because Thy loving-kindness is better than life, my lips shall praise Thee.” The psalmist had learned that loving-kindness was more important to him than life, and he had found it in the Lord Himself. If we reduce most of our personal problems to a common denominator, it is probably love and understanding that are the missing ingredients. Sometimes the need to be loved and understood is equated with the need for self-esteem, but again the term is a poor one. The term “self-image” is more accurate, but also tends to get us thinking about ourselves.

A young child, while growing up, needs to realize that God has given him abilities which are not connected with the fall. For example, perhaps a child displays an ability with his hands, and can work well with tools. Wise and loving parents will notice this and encourage the ability. Perhaps they will buy him tools, and provide an environment where his ability can develop. They will praise his efforts, even if initially his work is somewhat rough. Another child may have an ability in music; good parents will recognize this, and encourage it

within proper channels. All of this is good and right, and is found in the Word of God.

Proverbs 22:6 JND reads, "Train up the child according to the tenor of his way, and when he is old he will not depart from it." To carry this out we must recognize that each child is different, and that we cannot treat each one the same. It involves knowing "the child," and recognizing the tenor of "his" way. Parents should love all their children alike, but to treat them as if they were all the same is a mistake, and contrary to the wisdom of the Word of God.

Praise is an important part of this encouragement, and often we forget how much this means to a child. I have known parents who never praised their children for fear of making them proud. We must remember that young children, like Samuel, may not yet know the Lord. They view their world through the eyes of those who mean the most to them, usually their parents, and sometimes other adults such as close relatives or teachers. Most of us can remember how great an influence these people had on us during our formative years.

Thus we can see that we have all been created with a basic need for love and understanding, and that it is right that this be provided in any sphere where influence and authority exist. Where love and understanding are lacking, there is always difficulty, and often disaster.

Some will immediately ask, "What about those who are not given this all-important ingredient in their lives? Are they doomed to the difficulty and disaster to which we have referred?" Before we answer this question, we must consider man as a fallen creature.

## *Man as a Fallen Creature*

---

We have seen that man was created in the image and likeness of God, ignorant of evil, and that God could pronounce His work "very good." However, this beautiful state of things lasted only a very short time, and man brought sin into this world by disobeying the one command God had given him. Sin entered God's creation and spoiled everything that He had made. All of creation has suffered as the result of the fall of man, its head, but man as the highest being has perhaps felt the effect of this more than the rest of creation.

It is important for each of us to realize that we were born



into this world with sinful, fallen natures as the result of the introduction of sin into this world. David was referring to this fact when he said, "In sin did my mother conceive me." Psalm 51:5. Also, Romans 5:12 reads, "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned."

How does the solemn truth of man's fall relate to our subject? Back in the last century, a young man approached an older Christian who had walked with the Lord for many years. The younger man asked him whether he had any advice for a young man who was just starting out in the Christian life. His answer was short and to the point, for he said, "Learn well four words: 'The flesh profiteth nothing.'" This quotation from John 6:63 presents very succinctly a most important truth. Sin, having entered this world, has affected every part of our being.

This effect of sin on all parts of our lives is illustrated by what happened to a brother in Christ who operates a dairy farm and had a very nice herd of cows. He bought his feed from a large firm which also made pesticides. Somehow some of the pesticide got mixed in with the cattle feed at the factory, and this mixture was sold in a bag simply labelled as cattle feed. It was a powerful poison, and eventually his whole dairy herd had to be killed and buried. What was even more distressing was that simply getting rid of the contaminated feed was not enough. It had affected the offspring of the cows who had not died, and had contaminated the barn and many things in the barn. There was scarcely anything that had not been affected by that poison, and it took him a long time to get everything back to normal. Sin in this world is like that. It is not isolated to certain things, as perhaps we would like to think. No, it has touched everything, every part of our being.

We know we all have sinned and have a sinful nature, but do we realize that sin has reached into every part of us, as natural individuals?

Many of you are aware that there are different personality types, and in a general way we can all be fitted into one (or a combination) of these different types. For example, some people are hard workers, well disciplined, and good organizers. These are the people who can manage anything, and who generally accomplish a lot in this world. No doubt this ability was given to them of God, and it is fair to say that they would have had this ability even if man had not fallen. But these people usually have a negative side to them, for they are often arro-

gant and intolerant of others. They may be sarcastic, and often do not work well with others. They may rise to the top in the business world and be in managerial positions, but are sometimes not liked by their subordinates.

On the other hand, there are those who are far more open and friendly, and are what we would call “people persons.” They are intuitive, can sense other people’s feelings, and react appropriately. They usually have many friends, and are well liked by others. Again, this is a God-given trait, and would have been part of them without the fall. On the negative side, these people often have a problem with self-discipline, and find it difficult to discipline others. They find it more difficult to keep an appointment on time, to manage their affairs in an orderly way, and to take responsibility seriously.

What we see in the personalities of men, including ourselves, is partly what God in His wisdom created, and partly what sin has brought in. We see beauty in nature, and recognize God’s handiwork, but then we see the ruin that sin has brought in. The natural man, without the wisdom of the Word of God, cannot put these two things together. He finds the world a hopeless jumble of good and evil. Only the Word of God can give us to see how these things can coexist in the world.

These negative aspects of our personalities are part of the effect of the fall of man. When it has to do with ourselves, how often we make excuses by saying, “That’s the way I’m made!” The implication is that you will have to accept me the way I am, because that is the way the Lord made me. This is not according to the Word of God. We are “fearfully and wonderfully made” (Psalm 139:14), and this includes our mental as well as physical makeup. However, the effects of sin are all too evident in us, mentally as well as physically. We should recognize our God-given abilities, but never attribute to God’s hand the things that sin has brought into this world.

Sin has not ruined all of creation equally. While all of creation has felt the awful effects of sin, God has kept this world from the full effect of the fall of man. Remember the rich young ruler who came to the Lord Jesus, wanting to know what he should do to inherit eternal life. When he told the Lord that he had kept all the commandments from his youth, it is recorded that “Jesus beholding him loved him.” Mark 10:21. This is not the same thought as the love of God for this world, as expressed in John 3:16. It is true that the Lord’s love goes out to all in this world, but this verse in Mark 10 rather shows the

love that the Lord Jesus felt for a beautiful character, one who had a real desire to do what was right. We sometimes meet those who are naturally of a very becoming disposition, just as we meet those who are very much the opposite. Here the Lord loved this young man because of what he was naturally. But the subsequent conversation with him brought out what was really in his heart.

When the Lord told him plainly what he lacked, his true state before God was revealed. He thought he could gain eternal life by keeping the law, but the Lord's words showed that he was failing in the very essence of the law. When the Lord Jesus was asked what was the first commandment in the law, He replied,

“The first of all the commandments is, Hear O, Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord: and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment. And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these.” Mark 12:29-31.

Had the young ruler loved God with all his heart, soul, mind and strength, he would have been glad to follow the Lord Jesus. Had he loved his neighbor as himself, he would have been glad to give away his goods to the poor.

It is a humbling thing to realize that often God does not choose the nicest personalities, but rather those who seem to have been more seriously affected by sin. Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 1:27,28, “But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are.” We are attracted to those like the rich young ruler who have naturally more beautiful personalities, but often they have no interest in the gospel. Then, perhaps we find the Lord saving those whom we naturally would despise. All of this has the effect of fulfilling 1 Corinthians 1:29, which states, “That no flesh should glory in His presence.” God's grace is magnified in bringing the worst ones in this world to Christ and in displaying them with Him for all eternity as trophies of His grace.

This brings us to another most important point. What about

those aspects of our personalities that are not wrong, those abilities that are God-given? Can we not have some pride in them, and in that sense esteem ourselves? We may admit that we are sinners, yet feel that there are good things about us that we can develop.

We have to realize that even those abilities which God has given us are affected by sin, because our sinful nature, no doubt under Satan's control, uses those abilities in a wrong way. While the abilities themselves are not wrong, a wrong use can be made of them.

Suppose an individual has an ability in mathematics. As we have seen, there is nothing wrong with that ability, and no doubt it was given of God. But Satan, using sin as a lever, wants to take that ability and use it to a wrong end. Thus men have used their abilities in physics and mathematics to build bombs which now have the capacity to destroy the world. Another may have an ability in music, while some who may not have the ability to produce music have the ear to appreciate it. No doubt this too is part of God's goodness to man. Again, the devil uses music to occupy men's minds with pleasure, and to keep them from thinking about eternal matters. It is solemn that the first mention of music in the Bible is in connection with the family of Cain. Cain went out from the presence of the Lord, built a city and proceeded to surround himself with everything that he thought would make him happy, but left God out. It was one of Cain's descendants (Jubal) who was the "father of all such as handle the harp and organ." Genesis 4:21. This does not mean that there is anything wrong with music, but underscores the fact that sin usurps even our God-given abilities, and causes us to use them for a wrong purpose.

Let us go one step further. Suppose our God-given abilities are used in a right way. Are we then doing what is pleasing to God? Are we then able to take some credit to ourselves? No, for even in doing what is right, as fallen creatures without Christ, the motive will always be wrong. Pride will come in, even if my ability is used for a good purpose. This brings us to our next consideration.

## *Self-Esteem and Pride*

---

We have seen that when man was created, God could say of his work that it was "very good." Thus man was good, in the sense that he was ignorant of evil, and having a moral likeness to

God. This does not mean that he was holy, or even righteous, for both of these imply a knowledge of, and an abhorrence of, sin. There was a moral beauty in man in innocence, and to that extent there was a moral likeness to God, but in no sense was he equal to God.

I am aware that many of you are being taught courses in self-esteem, both in school and in the working world. In many cases, some of the New Age philosophy is being mixed in with it. For those not familiar with it, the whole thrust of so-called New Age philosophy is occupation with ourselves, even to the point of saying that we are all gods, and that the very essence of God is within every one of us. We are told to think highly of ourselves because we are, in fact, really gods. This is the solemn end of much of the current thinking about self-esteem. When man, and not God, becomes the reference point, man ends up by deifying himself.

When man was created, all was beautiful because it was the work of God. Man had done nothing to produce the good with which he was surrounded, and in his state of innocence and moral goodness there was no pride. He could no doubt recognize the qualities and abilities that God had given him, but in unhindered communion with God there was as yet no pride in himself. With the introduction of sin, pride has come in, and the Word of God shows us clearly that it is one of the worst sins. "A proud look" heads the list of things that the Lord hates (Proverbs 6:17), and later the same book tells us that "every one that is proud in heart is an abomination to the Lord." Proverbs 16:5. Then in the New Testament we read that "the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world." 1 John 2:16. Many other verses from the Word of God show us that pride is a most serious sin.

The basic, wrong thought that colors most of the current thinking about self-esteem is that a proper self-esteem requires pride and pride itself is good. Our earlier quotation from *Reader's Digest* spoke of being "proud of our self-image" in order to be "confident, and free to be ourselves." The spirit of pride has pervaded so much of our world today that it enters into almost every phase of life, perhaps without our realizing it. We must understand in the light of God's Word that every form of pride is wrong, and a sin against God.

In order to understand the subject of self-esteem properly, we must realize that pride is the wrong response to success. We tend to be proud of our natural abilities, but we must see

that these are all given of God. We are apt to be proud even of our sinful ways, perhaps thinking that there is still some good to be had from them.

Often we defend our sinful, fallen nature and its acts, instead of condemning them! If someone tells me I have a quick temper, I will probably deny it, or find some fault with the one who tells me, so as to deflect the attempt to reach my conscience. If someone tells me that I exaggerate, and do not tell the truth, I will vigorously deny it, and perhaps tell others that the one who spoke to me is a slanderer and a gossip. It is a well-known ploy in the world, when we are accused of something, to attempt to dig up as much “dirt” about our accuser as possible, in order to avoid facing what may be true. We are seldom willing to admit that we are wrong, even to ourselves. It hurts our pride too much. I believe that the greatest hindrance to progress in our Christian lives is our unwillingness to admit how bad sin in us really is, while the first step to happiness is to realize the ruin sin has brought in, and thus have no confidence in ourselves.

Going one step further, we are even more likely to take pride in what grace has worked in us. The Corinthians were guilty of this, and Paul told them, “For who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?” 1 Corinthians 4:7.

We speak of those with “low self-esteem,” and others who have “high self-esteem.” Often they are really opposite sides of the same coin, that coin being pride. The one with “low self-esteem” is depressed and upset because his self-image is not what he thinks it should be. He really has very high self-esteem—it is just that the reality does not match his ideals. He does not accept the way God has made him. (We are speaking now about his God-given abilities, not about sin.) How many times have some of us looked in the mirror, and heartily wished that we were taller, that we had a different color of hair, that we were smarter, or perhaps that we had other qualities that the Lord had not given us! How many times have I watched others participate in athletic activities, and wished I had some of their ability! As life went on, I found out that many of those who were so good in athletic activities wished that they could do better in academic circles, where perhaps some of us felt a little more comfortable. We always seem to want what we do not have. Sad to say, Satan works on us

through our sinful natures to make us unhappy with what God has given us, and to consume us with thoughts about talents He has not given us.

The one with “high self-esteem” thinks that he is up at a certain point, when he is not there at all. He has an unrealistic self-image, while others usually have a much more realistic appraisal of him! You know the kind of person—one who is always talking about himself, and what he can do. We find him insufferable, and do not want to be around him.

But you may say, “I am content with myself. I am right in the middle—I have neither high nor low self-esteem.” That is what the article in *Reader’s Digest* is trying to tell us—that we are to realize what our self-image is, and be proud of it. That too is wrong, for pride, as we have seen, is always condemned in the Word of God. While we are to recognize our God-given abilities, we must realize that we will never be happy if we are occupied with ourselves, for pride will always come in. People today say that there is an epidemic of low self-esteem in our society. Let us be honest and admit that there is an epidemic of pride. It is the result of the focus being on man instead of on God.

The wisdom of this world says that we have to build up an individual’s self-esteem. We are told that we must take individuals and show them that they have good qualities, that they are valuable people, that they have abilities which they can develop, and that they can have pride in themselves. We must show them that they are useful members of society, that they have a job to do in this world, and an important contribution to make. That is good as far as it goes, for many do not realize their natural abilities due to a lack of proper encouragement, love and understanding. But if this approach causes me to focus on myself, I will always be occupied with myself, either in a positive or a negative way. Pride will always tend to come in, if I am the object of my own heart.

Before I gave up my medical practice, I used to do a lot of surgery. I might have allowed my surgical ability to be my source of self-esteem—that is what the world tells us to do. While any ability I had was God-given, and thus to be recognized and used, it would have been wrong for it to be a source of pride. A colleague of mine, who used to give a lot of anesthetics for me, found out that I owned a chain saw, and used it frequently to cut wood for our fireplace. He told me that I was a fool—that one slip with that chain saw could ruin one or both

of my hands, and end my career. This was true, and if my self-esteem rested on my ability as a surgeon, then the loss of my hands would indeed not only finish my career as a surgeon, but finish my self-esteem too.

Everything we have in this world, whether health, ability, possessions, or anything else, is so fragile and can be lost so easily. Are we going to build on things that are temporary, and lost so easily? Many are doing just that, and that is why so much emphasis is being placed on self-esteem. But the problem is not going away. Rather it seems to be getting worse. This is simply because the whole concept of self-esteem tends to be based on what sinful man is, and on things which not only can never satisfy, but can be lost very easily.

What about the danger of giving a compliment, and having it lift the individual up in pride? Some parents seldom give their children any praise, for fear of making them proud of themselves. We have all had those in authority over us who never spoke to us unless it was to tell us that we had done something wrong. Children in that kind of a home or people who work for such supervisors do not find it a good atmosphere in which to grow up, or in which to work. Is it wrong then for a man to tell his wife she is beautiful, or his daughter that her new dress looks nice? Is it dangerous to notice someone's new suit, or tell him that he has done a good job?

There is a point of paramount importance here. We have seen that we all need love and understanding. When we say to someone, "I really like your hair; it looks very becoming," or, "You've done a wonderful job—I doubt if anyone could have done it better," what is the message we are conveying? I suggest that the individual addressed goes away feeling good, because he has pleased someone whom he wanted to please. Children look to their parents for love and approval, and when their parents praise them, they are conscious that they have pleased those who mean the most to them. There is nothing wrong with this, and we have examples of it in Scripture. Paul praised the Corinthians when he said, "Ye come behind in no gift." 1 Corinthians 1:7. In the second epistle, where he takes up the question of Christian giving, he tells them that he had boasted of them to those in Macedonia "that Achaia was ready a year ago." 2 Corinthians 9:2. No doubt this was an encouragement to them, because they had pleased their spiritual father. The Lord Himself encourages us now and then in the



Christian walk by allowing others to tell us that what we have done for them has had a beneficial effect.

Perhaps the most beautiful example of the right use of compliments occurs in the Song of Solomon. There the bride has no high thoughts of herself, but then rejoices in the estimate that the bridegroom has of her. He showers her with his love and all that he sees in her, while she in response has only love for him, and speaks of him. His joy is in her, and he expresses it fully, but all this only makes him more lovely to her, and thus she speaks only of him. Her only complaint is that she does not have a larger capacity to enjoy him. All of this is a wonderful example of the proper use of compliments, and the right reaction to them.

Satan, using our sinful nature, would corrupt all this. He takes that compliment or bit of encouragement and suggests to us, "What a wonderful person you must be, to be so beautiful!" or, "What an outstanding person you must be, to be able to do a job like that!" Then the flame of pride begins to burn, and all is spoiled, because pride is sin. To please someone in a right way is not wrong, but to be proud about it is our fallen nature turning it into sin.

Sometimes there may be a fine line between the two, but that line is always there. There is danger both in paying too many compliments and in giving no praise at all. I have known those who never paid a compliment because they were afraid it might turn into pride in the one to whom it was addressed. The result was that the individual involved got to thinking, "I can't do anything right, because whenever I attempt anything, all I get is criticism." That is not God's way, for God's way is to encourage us. Feedback is necessary so that we know when we are doing right, and when we are doing wrong. On the other hand, it is equally true that God wants to turn the focus off myself, so that I will be occupied with pleasing Him. When we do anything to please the Lord, it is only because what He has given us is coming out in our lives. I enjoyed a comment made to me by an older sister in Christ some years ago—"A little praise to lift you up, but not enough to puff you up." She expressed very well what the Word of God teaches.

Someone recently handed me a leaflet from *Care Lines* for the month of August, 1991, and the message ties in very much with our subject. The verse quoted was, "Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think anything as of ourselves; but our

sufficiency is of God.” 2 Corinthians 3:5. Then the comment was as follows:

Self confidence in the respect that I can do anything because I am good is not a scriptural thought. God-confidence, because Christ gives me just what I need to use for Him and His glory, is the way our confidence should be. It's not in ourselves, but in God. He is the Source that gives the gift and the power to get things done; we are not. Jesus is the One who died to purge away our sin; we did not. Christ rose from the dead the third day; we did not. Let us be certain that others see that our confidence is really confidence in God, and that I, as a person, have no confidence in myself.

Pride is always spoken of in a negative way in the Word of God, and is always condemned; confidence is almost always mentioned as a positive thing, because it is confidence in God that is in view. But more of this later!

## *Misused Verses*

---

It is often necessary to unlearn wrong ideas before we can learn things in the right way. Many wrong concepts about self-esteem are being taught today, sometimes even in a scriptural context. Before we begin to discuss more positive thoughts about our subject, it is necessary to mention two verses that have been misused even by believers to give wrong thoughts about self-esteem.

Ephesians 5:28 says, “So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself.” This verse has been taken by some to mean that you cannot love your wife (or anyone else) properly unless you love yourself. This is not the meaning of the verse. What is brought before us here is simply the precious truth that when a man and a woman are married, God sees them as one flesh. For a man to love his wife should be as natural as loving himself. Does God have to command us to love ourselves? No, we do that without prompting. We all look after ourselves quite well naturally, and God is simply saying here that if you love your wife, you love yourself, for you **are** one flesh, and if you destroy your wife by any means—criticism, unfaithfulness, or whatever, you are destroying yourself. It is emphatically not the scriptural authority for self-love.

Also, Matthew 22:39—“Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself”—has been taken as the scriptural authority for self-love. Again, the love of one’s self is taken for granted, and the law told man to love his neighbor as himself. There is no command to love one’s self. Such a thought is not found in the Word of God.

Then Philippians 2:3 states, “Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves.” I have heard some say that it is all right to esteem yourself, as long as you esteem others better than yourself. Carried to its logical conclusion, this interpretation would result in the worst cases of low self-esteem, for ultimately we would have to judge that everyone else was better in every way than ourselves. Again, I do not believe that this is the meaning of the verse. The thought is that all of us, no matter what our natural abilities, our spiritual gifts, or our faithfulness to the Lord, can always look at another believer and see a quality, a gift or a desirable character trait which we do not have. Also, we can look at ourselves, and see a besetting sin which we know the other does not have. If we are walking with the Lord, we will see the good in others, while recognizing our own failures. We will have no difficulty in esteeming others better than ourselves, for we will look for the best in others. If we think about ourselves, it will be rather to judge our failures than to be puffed up with what we are, or what we have done. This verse is definitely not the scriptural authority for self-esteem as the term is currently interpreted. We should be occupied with Christ and others, but not with ourselves.

## *Christ—His Love and Understanding*

---

Up to this point we have dwelt largely on the negative side of self-esteem, pointing out how the presence of sin has spoiled everything in God’s creation. We have seen that even those things which are God-given are used to a wrong end, and that pride is apt to come in and spoil even right feelings. What then is the answer to it all? Is there a way to have all these considerations in a right perspective? I believe that there is. As with every other question in life, we must bring Christ in. In Him, through His Word, we find the answer to everything. As someone once said to me, “The answer to everything for the believer is found at the cross.”

In our remarks on “Love and Understanding,” we pointed out that to be loved and understood were essential to every human being, and that the denial of these caused serious difficulties, and sometimes disaster. What about those who are not given these all-important factors in their lives? We know all too well that sin has ruined even this aspect of our lives in many cases. Perhaps some of us have come from Christian homes where love was given in a large measure, and even in homes where Christ is not known love is often present. But we know that it is sadly lacking in some homes, making it very difficult for children who grow up in that environment. They tend to look at everything through the eyes of what they have experienced.

I have talked to some who found it difficult to believe that God loved them, because they had known so little love in their lives. They looked to those such as their parents for love and understanding, and when it was not given to them, they found it hard to believe that anyone else loved them. Others had been told all their lives that they were worthless and no good, and thus found it difficult to believe that anyone could care for them, or that they had any ability to do anything. Still others had lived much of their lives under the shadow of a terrible experience, perhaps in their childhood years, and had been unable to recover from it.

We have seen that man’s wisdom has an answer to this problem, by trying to reassure the individual of his self-worth, his ability and his importance in this world. This approach may have some merit in making the individual aware of his God-given abilities. However, it does not go far enough, for the logical end result is only pride on the one hand or disappointment on the other.

As my wife and I were enjoying the drive down the west coast of the U.S.A. last summer, I turned to her and said, “You know, a basic need of every human being is love and understanding.” She answered, “What happens if you don’t get it? What happens if you grow up in a harsh environment?” Some who are reading this may come from homes like that, and (shall I say it?) some of you may come from assemblies where there seems to be little love and understanding. You may honestly try to do something, and get only criticism for it, either at home or elsewhere. Have you had the experience of trying to help and been told to get out of the way, because you can’t

do it right? Perhaps you begin to wonder just where you do fit in, and what you should be doing.

We have already referred to Psalm 63:3, which says, "Because Thy loving-kindness is better than life, my lips shall praise Thee." Verse 1 states, "O God, Thou art my God; early will I seek Thee: my soul thirsteth for Thee, my flesh longeth for Thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is." God provides love and understanding to those who have not had it, not because of what we are, but because of what He is! It is **His** loving-kindness that we need more than any other, and He will give it even if no one else will!

"Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider Him that endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds." Hebrews 12:2,3.

God has given us an example, and that is the Lord Jesus Christ. Here the emphasis is on the practical walk of the believer, and the Lord Jesus is presented as an example for us. There was One, our Lord Jesus Christ, who (I say it reverently) was content with the approval of only One. Psalm 88:18 says, "Lover and friend hast Thou put far from Me, and Mine acquaintance into darkness." Psalm 69 is one of the Messianic Psalms, which speaks about the Lord prophetically. Verse 20 states, "Reproach hath broken My heart; and I am full of heaviness; and I looked for some to take pity, but there was none; and for comforters, but I found none."

Do you and I sometimes say, "No one understands; no one seems to love me and care for me?" I believe that sometimes the Lord Jesus brings you and me to the point in our lives where He asks whether we are willing to go on, if we have only **His** approval and **His** love. What was the joy that was set before Him in Hebrews 12:2? I believe that it was the joy of doing the Father's will, and He is an example for us. God took away every possible comforter at the cross. Why? In part, it was to show us that our blessed Saviour was able to go through all of that without one human prop. Are we willing to do that? Are you willing to say, "Lord, Thy love and approval are enough?" I am not responsible for the lack of love and understanding that I may have experienced as a child, but God does hold me

responsible as a mature individual for my reaction to those experiences, because He has given me everything to enable me to overcome them.

I realize that this is harder for some than for others. Some people are naturally tougher, and can weather criticism more easily. Some can seem to survive the lack of love and understanding, while others are totally devastated. May each one of us learn to say, "Lord, help me to learn by living in the light of Thy love and understanding." We will never be thoroughly happy in our Christian life until we can say, "I will be content if I am enjoying only the Lord's love in my heart, and have the sense in my soul that I am doing His will."

When we have reached the point of needing only His approval, His love, His understanding, a wonderful thing happens. We find that the Lord never leaves us totally without fellowship, love, care and encouragement. No, He knows that we need the help and encouragement of one another, and will never leave us all alone.

There have been times in my life when I have been brought to the point of saying, "Lord, Thy love is enough." I don't mean that I have ever experienced total rejection from everyone from whom I expected love and understanding, but there have been times in my life when I felt that the problem I was experiencing could hardly be shared with anyone else. Perhaps you have felt that way. It is wonderful under those circumstances to feel the Lord almost putting His hand on your shoulder, and telling you to go ahead, that He understands, that He loves you and cares. But in every one of those situations, God has sent someone along to give me a boost, a word of encouragement, a "shot in the arm" as we say. Sometimes it was only a kind word, but it was just what I needed. The Lord knows how much we need that lift and He will give it, just at the right time. Then we are occupied with Him, realizing that the encouragement, while coming from our fellow Christians, ultimately comes from Him. We look to Him, not at others, or even ourselves. In considering Him, and all that He endured, we are occupied with His perfection, and realize that He will make up to us what sin may have deprived us of.

## *"A Man in Christ"*

---

We have considered man in creation, and man as a fallen creature. Now let us consider man in Christ. We have already seen

that sin was brought into this world by man's disobedience and that it has affected every part of our being. Because sin entered this world, each of us has a sinful, fallen nature. We have seen that sin takes even our God-given abilities and uses them in a wrong way. In the last section we have said that the answer to everything for the believer is found at the cross. In order to understand this statement fully we must consider the truth found in Romans, chapters 6, 7 and 8.

In the book of Romans up to verse 12 of chapter 5 we have the matter of **sins** taken up. The absolute guilt of the whole world is established, and then the finished work of Christ is presented as the only remedy. Then, from Romans 5:12 to the end of chapter 8, the question of **sin** in its root and principle is brought before us. We must be clear on the sin problem if we are to see the scriptural answer to the question of self-esteem.

It is important to see that when God saves us, He does not forgive our sinful, fallen nature, nor does He take it away. The Lord Jesus said to Nicodemus, "Ye must be born again." John 3:7. When we come as guilty sinners, God forgives our **sins** and gives us a new life in Christ. Now the believer has two natures: one which is hopelessly sinful and cannot please God, and a new nature which is truly life in Christ and cannot sin. Having these two natures in us causes the conflict in our lives.

The old, sinful nature never improves as long as we live. It is always with us, and is just as bad after I have been saved for twenty years as it was before I was saved. God wants me to display the new life and its nature in my Christian walk, but how often the old nature tries to assert itself! That is why Christians sin, and occupation with myself and pride are part of those sins.

In Romans 5, we get the truth that the blood of Christ has put my **sins** away. In Romans 6, we get the further truth that, in the death of Christ, God saw the death of our "old man." "Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin." Romans 6:6. Now the command is to "reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord." Romans 6:11. Before the death of Christ, man was never told to reckon himself (that is, the old man) to be dead. Rather, he was placed under law, until Christ came. "The law has been our tutor up to Christ." Galatians 3:24 JND. Now Christ has died, and is risen again. The believer as identified with

Christ can say that he too has died to sin, and thus sin has no more dominion over him. Now God sees us, not as fallen sinners, but as those who have new life in Christ. We are to allow the new life and nature to characterize our Christian walk, and we are to recognize that we have died to sin.

The act of baptism brings this new position before us. By undergoing baptism, the believer confesses his identification with the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. No longer is he identified with a sinful world that has rejected the Lord Jesus, but is now part of the family of God. He has died to sin. No longer is he to go on with his former ways of sin; he is now to walk in “newness of life.” Romans 6:5. Sin in me—my old, sinful nature—has no more rights over me. “If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.” 2 Corinthians 5:17.

This conflict between the old and new natures is brought before us in a practical way in Romans 7. Here the man is truly born again and has a new life, but has not yet experienced deliverance from sin. Like so many of us, the man in Romans 7 found that while he had a new life and wanted to do what was right, he had no power to do so. How many of us have sincerely wanted to live the Christian life, yet constantly found that we sinned in spite of ourselves? How many of us have found, in the words of Romans 7:15 JND, “For that which I do, I do not own: for not what I will, this I do; but what I hate, this I practise.”

What is the reason that we are unable to get the victory? We find the answer in verse 18. We must come to the scriptural conclusion that “in me, (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing.” So often we are willing to admit that we have sinned, but are not willing to admit that there is nothing in us that has any merit towards God. We are unwilling to recognize that there is absolutely nothing in us in the flesh that God can accept—all has been ruined by sin. More than this, we must also come to the sad conclusion the Apostle comes to in verse 24, when he says, “O wretched man that I am!” Not only is the old nature within us incurably bad, but our condition is wretched beyond belief. This is a painful thing to realize, but essential if we are to know deliverance from sin. It is only when this is realized in our souls that we cease to have any confidence in our old, sinful nature, and turn to Christ. That is why the last part of verse 24 and verse 25 says, “**Who** shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through



Jesus Christ our Lord.” Deliverance comes, not through being occupied with ourselves and trying to improve ourselves, but rather with looking outside of ourselves, at Christ. Then we find immediate deliverance, because we are occupied with what Christ is, instead of what we are.

Often we shrink back in horror when we see how awful our sinful nature really is. We do not want to admit it, so we defend our old, sinful nature, or make excuses for it, rather than admitting that it is as bad as it appears to be. The pathway of deliverance is to admit fully what God has already told us in His Word, that “the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked.” Jeremiah 17:9. Let our sinful nature be as bad as God says it is—God has condemned it at the cross, and in the death of Christ I have died to sin. “God sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh.” Romans 8:3.

Romans 8 brings before us the blessed position of the believer who has been delivered from sin. Not only are my sins washed away, but I have been delivered from the law (or principle) of sin and death. No longer am I before God as a ruined sinner, but I stand “in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1), and “walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.” Romans 8:4. Instead of trying to improve the sinful nature, I simply turn away from it, recognizing that before God, I am “in Christ,” and have a new life in Him.

In years gone by more people burned wood and coal to heat their homes, and men known as chimney sweeps were very common. As you may know, with the burning of wood and coal a substance called creosote builds up in chimneys and, if it is not cleaned out periodically, it eventually results in a chimney fire. These chimney sweeps used to go around and clean out chimneys for their living. Sometimes the chimneys were large enough for boys and men to get right inside them to do the cleaning, and you can imagine how filthy they became. They were covered from head to toe with soot. You would see the men going from house to house, black all over, with their brooms and other tools over their shoulders.

Now let me ask you the question, “Which would get you more dirty, hugging a chimney sweep, or fighting with him?” If you think for a moment, you will agree that it would not make much difference—you would get hopelessly dirty either way.

If we think of the chimney sweep as our old, sinful nature, the application is obvious. The devil does not care whether we

embrace sin, or continually fight with it, because we become defiled either way. We must give the chimney sweep a wide berth—keep well away from him. That is what the Word of God tells us to do when our sinful nature tries to act—I am simply to turn away from it, and allow the Spirit of God to bring Christ before me. Every true believer is indwelt with the Spirit of God, and the Spirit of God is the power of the new life. We will speak more of this later.

The Apostle Paul spoke of himself as “a man in Christ.” 2 Corinthians 12:2. No longer was he the man he had been before he was saved, although his sinful nature remained with him, and was just as bad as before. But before God he recognized that he was “in Christ,” and that God looked on him as “a man in Christ.” No longer did he try to improve his sinful nature, for that had been condemned at the cross, and he had died to sin. As “a man in Christ” he viewed himself as God viewed him, and practically took the position that he was dead to sin. Then he sought to live in the good of that position.

## *“Christ Liveth in Me”*

---

We have seen that true Christian position is that of being dead, buried and risen with Christ. As far as sin is concerned, God has condemned it at the cross. In the death of Christ, God saw the crucifixion of my old man, and the cross was the end of all that I was as a sinful creature of Adam’s race. Now I am entitled to take that position practically, and reckon myself to be “dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.” Romans 6:11. With this blessed truth in mind, we can go on to see the true, scriptural answer to self-esteem.

The title of this section is from a verse in Galatians: “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.” Galatians 2:20.

The wisdom of this world, as we have already seen, says that we must develop our good qualities, and realize what our potential is. We must realize that we are valuable people, and have a contribution to make. We are told that we must have faith in ourselves. We have already commented that there is some merit in getting us to recognize our God-given abilities,

but unless the factor of sin is brought in and dealt with, such teaching will never solve the problem of self-esteem.

Occupation with ourselves will always end in either pride or disappointment. All has been tainted by sin, and we will either be puffed up because of what we are, or depressed because of what we are not. Doubtless in some cases such teaching will develop a quality or ability in an individual, so that people will say that it works. However, such an approach can never take us beyond the realm of ourselves. The basis for it is so fragile, and can be lost so easily. The one who is occupied with himself is never truly happy.

What we need is to let Galatians 2:20 get a grip on our souls. We need to realize what it is to be “crucified with Christ.” The “I” here is what I was before I was saved, the “I” that I was as a child of Adam, and a member of a sinful, fallen race. Having a new life in Christ, I am entitled to say that the old “I” is not really who I am anymore. Before God, I am “in Christ,” and I am to let the new life Christ has given me be the “I” from now on. Since this is really life in Christ, I can truly say, “Christ liveth in me.”

God tested man throughout the Old Testament, and all His testing only proved the utter ruin of man in his fallen condition. Now God has finished with the “first man,” and is beginning again with His Man, the Lord Jesus Christ. The marvelous truth is that when the first man (Adam, and ultimately ourselves) failed in everything God committed to him, God brought forth His Man, the Lord Jesus Christ. Christ was faithful in every area where the first man had failed, and all God’s purposes are going to be fulfilled in a man, His own beloved Son. This is the meaning of Psalm 8:4-5, which says, “What is man, that Thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that Thou visitest him? For Thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honor.” In wondrous grace God has chosen to associate you and me with Him, and has given us new life in Him! Instead of expecting something from man, God is putting something into him. God’s answer is not self-esteem, but “Christ-esteem”!

I read a story some time ago, which I think illustrates the point very well. There was a young woman who had had a very difficult upbringing. Some of you can relate to this. She had been told by her parents and others that she could not do anything right, and as a result had serious problems when she got into early adulthood. To a casual observer she seemed to have

a lot going for her. She was attractive, had quite a bit of natural ability, and was a true Christian, but she just could not seem to get over the idea that she was worthless. She went to psychiatrists and all sorts of self-help groups, but nothing seemed to change. Finally she came to a Christian man who was prepared to listen to her story and try to help. She told him her situation, how that she could never seem to do anything right, and ended by saying, "I just feel so worthless all the time."

After listening carefully for a long time, he looked at her and said softly and gently, "Maybe you are worthless." He was referring, of course, to her sinful nature, not to her God-given abilities. You can imagine her reaction. She looked up at him with anger in her eyes, and said, "No one has ever spoken to me like that before! My psychiatrist always tells me that I am a valuable person, that I need to believe in myself, that..." Then he interrupted her by asking, "And has it worked?" "No," she said, "but I am not ready to give up on myself yet!"

We must be ready to give up on ourselves as to our sinful nature, if Christ is to live in us. We had to come to the end of ourselves in order to be saved, and we have to realize the total ruin of the "old man" if we are to walk as Christians in the right way. As long as we focus on ourselves, things will never be right. God wants our new life in Christ to be practically expressed in us.

Perhaps we say, "Oh, I've tried, but it's no use. I just can't seem to do it." Then we are like the man in Romans 7, who was trying to do it in his own strength. There will always be a struggle, and we will always lose until we lay hold of what Christ has done for us at the cross. Just as we had faith that the blood of Christ was sufficient to put away our sins, so we must have faith that our "old man" was crucified with Christ. In both cases faith counts on God's estimate of the finished work of Christ. Faith believes what, in God's sight, is an already accomplished fact—that in the death of Christ, I died to sin. Then I have power to act on Romans 6:9, and reckon myself as dead practically. Then I take God's view of me, that the real "I" is now the new man, the new life I possess in Christ.

If I have a new life in Christ, is it possible that I can fail in something that God gives the new "me" to do? No, for all the resources of God are available to the one walking in the path of obedience, and allowing the new life in Christ to express itself. This seems elementary, and yet is an astounding fact. The

new life, which always acts to please God, cannot fail in anything it does.

Yet the challenge of allowing the new life to display itself in our lives is probably the biggest single difficulty every Christian has. Like the young woman to whom I referred, we are not ready to give up on ourselves and recognize that our sinful nature can do nothing to please God. We want to be more like Christ. We talk about it, perhaps we sing about it, but the bottom line is that we like ourselves too much. It is not self-love that we need, for that will only occupy me with what I am by nature. The antidote is to be occupied with Christ, and enjoying His love in our hearts. Then I will be occupied with what **He** is, and not with what **I** am.

We see an example of learning to look away from self and to the Lord in the life of Gideon. The Lord had delivered the children of Israel into the hand of the Midianites because of their sin. When the angel of the Lord approached Gideon and told him that the Lord was going to use him to deliver Israel, his response was, "Oh my Lord, wherewith shall I save Israel? behold, my family is poor in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house." Judges 6:15. But he was willing to be obedient, and the Lord led him on gently. When he still could not be persuaded to go ahead, the Lord graciously answered when he put out the fleece on two separate occasions. Then, to show that it must be done in His strength, the Lord reduced his army to only three hundred men. Finally, he told Gideon to go down to the camp of the Midianites, and there he overheard a conversation inside one of the tents that convinced him that the Lord was going to give him the victory. Gideon got the victory, but in such a way that the Lord got all the glory. Gideon had nothing in which to boast, for it was clearly the hand of the Lord. He exemplified the scripture, "When I am weak, then am I strong." 2 Corinthians 12:10.

After the victory, when the men of Ephraim were upset with him because they felt he had not given them the place of honor, Gideon's right attitude was displayed in his answer to them. Instead of pride displaying itself, grace gave them credit for what they had done, while Gideon took the low place. The bad feeling was defused because Gideon wanted no credit for himself, but was glad to give it to others. Later when the men of Israel wanted Gideon to be the ruler over them, he refused, saying that the Lord should rule over them.

Contrast this with Jephthah some years later, who evidently had a real problem with pride. He refused to lead the people in battle against the children of Ammon unless they promised to make him head over them if he delivered them. Then, when the same men of Ephraim became upset again, Jephthah answered them roughly, and a civil war ensued in which forty-two thousand were killed. The world would say that both Jephthah and the men of Ephraim had low self-esteem, but pride is the right word here.

“Oh,” you say, “but if I didn’t have some pride in myself, I wouldn’t bother about my appearance, about doing a good job at my work, about looking after my home, etc.” My late father-in-law once told me that as a young man he had asked his father that same question. His father’s answer was, “Son, if you remember that every time you step out the door and walk down the street, every time you go to work, every time you interact with others in any way, you are a child of God, and that everything you do and say reflects on the One to whom you belong, it will take care of all those things such as your appearance, work, etc., but without giving you any room for pride. If you remember that you have been sent into the world to please the Lord, you will do all those things in a right way, but with an Object outside of yourself.”

## *Occupation With Christ*

---

True Christianity makes everything of Christ, and nothing of self, and here lies the root of every problem in the Christian life. Why are there (and I say it with shame) so many divisions among Christians today? Why did the Church not stay together as it was at the beginning? It is because man wanted to have a place, instead of allowing Christ to be everything. Every false teaching, without any exception whatsoever, gives some glory to man, and takes away from the glory of Christ.

If you and I are occupied with Christ, and our thoughts are taken right away from ourselves, it will have an amazing effect on us. People will look at us and say (not that this is our wish, but it will happen), “They seem to be at peace with themselves. They have no problem with self-esteem.” We will have a moral dignity about us which others may call self-esteem, but it is not self-esteem, it is “Christ-esteem.” Why? Because the believer who is occupied with Christ has neither high nor

low thoughts of self, but rather has been taken right out of himself. The essence of true Christianity is not to have either high or low thoughts of self, but rather not to be thinking about self at all. What should we do when thoughts of self begin to fill our minds? I suggest that we put them right out of our minds. We can truthfully say that those thoughts come from self, and that self is not the correct “I” to reign in our lives anymore. I do not owe self anything—it no longer has any rights. I recognize that it is an attack of Satan, attempting to use self to make me sin. I simply turn away from it, for I am now “in Christ,” and He is to reign in me.

When I took driver education, one of the things they stressed was to aim high in steering. They told us not to look at the front of the car, or at the road immediately in front of us, but rather to have our eyes several hundred feet down the road. Then the car would go in a straight line, take the curves more smoothly, and make for more even driving. The same principle applies in the Christian life. The believer who has his eye on himself will have an “up and down” course, and will not be able to walk an even path. The one who is occupied with Christ and is not concerned about himself will walk a steady path, because his sights are outside of himself. We will deal with some practical points about this in the next section.

We may rest assured on the authority of the Word of God that there is more in Christ to encourage our hearts than there is in ourselves to discourage us. Do we look at ourselves and feel discouraged and depressed? Do we think about how we have failed, the wrong we have done, the qualities we do not have, and so on? Satan will occupy us with ourselves in this way, and worldly wisdom will tell us that we have to believe in ourselves, that we have to think positively, and tell ourselves that we can do it. The point to realize is that Satan wants to occupy us with self, and does not care whether it is in a positive or a negative way. It all amounts to the same thing, and robs us of our joy in Christ. Only the Spirit of God can fill our hearts with the things of Christ, and take us right out of ourselves.

Again the question comes up, “Are we not to recognize the abilities that God has given us, and use them?” Yes indeed, and we find this brought out in Romans 12:3, “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.” Does this verse imply that it is all right to think highly of ourselves, but not too high? No, that is not the meaning of this passage. Rather the thought is that I am to recognize the abilities God has given me, and the work He has given me to do, and I am to do it. We must remember that this verse is in Romans chapter 12, and we have to go through chapters 6, 7 and 8 to get there. When we have understood true Christian position as being dead, buried and risen with Christ, then our talents are brought in, to be used for the glory of God. We are to recognize what God has given us to do, and not to think more highly of ourselves than we ought to think—not to want to do something for which we are not fitted. Even as Christians, pride is apt to come in, and we may want to do something which God has not given us to do. This exhortation guards against that. Just as every member of the human body has a function, so every member of the body of Christ has a function.

I recognize that some of these considerations are difficult to explain in a totally harmonious way, and we stated at the beginning of this article that some of these things have to be experienced rather than explained. While there is nothing in the Bible contrary to sound reason, there are many things that are beyond reason, because it is a book of God and deals with subjects beyond human understanding. For example, the Bible teaches both the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of man. The mind of man cannot reconcile these things completely, but it is only the foolishness of man’s narrow mind that denies one of them in order to emphasize the other. In the same way it is difficult for the natural man to reconcile the recognition of his natural abilities with his total depravity as the result of sin.

To the spiritual mind these seeming contradictions present no difficulty, for “the spiritual discerns all things.” 1 Corinthians 2:15 JND. It becomes only another wonderful dimension of the Word God has given to us. In natural things, we must learn the definitions of things before learning the things themselves, while in spiritual things we must often learn the things themselves in communion with the Lord before being able to define them.

Our subject contains some of these things, one of which is illustrated in the life of the Apostle Paul. Paul could speak of himself as the chief of sinners (1 Timothy 1:15), and could



also say that he was “less than the least of all saints.” Ephesians 3:8. These words were not merely high-sounding rhetoric, for Paul recognized clearly how sinful his natural “self” was. He never forgot that he had persecuted the Church of God before he was saved. On the other hand, he had no difficulty recognizing what grace had worked in his soul, so that he could say of himself, “By the grace of God I am what I am.” 1 Corinthians 15:10. As a servant of Christ, he could say, “I suppose I was not a whit behind the very chiefest apostles” (2 Corinthians 11:5), and, “I labored more abundantly than they all” (1 Corinthians 15:10), but then adding, “Yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.” 1 Corinthians 15:10. Pride was not connected with it, although the tendency was there, for God sent him a “thorn in the flesh” lest he should be “exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations.” 2 Corinthians 12:7. When the objections of some in Corinth forced him to speak of what he had suffered for Christ, he could say, “I speak it not after the Lord, but as it were foolishly.” 2 Corinthians 11:17. It gave him no pleasure to speak of himself. We ought to be content to be anything or nothing so long as Christ is glorified, and this was Paul’s aim. May it be our aim!

Out of my bondage, sorrow, and night:

Jesus, I come, Jesus, I come;

Into Thy freedom, gladness, and light:

Jesus, I come to Thee.

Out of my sickness into Thy health;

Out of my want and into Thy wealth;

Out of my sin and into Thyself:

Jesus, I come to Thee.

Out of my shameful failure and loss:

Jesus, I come, Jesus, I come;

Into the glorious gain of Thy cross:

Jesus, I come to Thee.

Out of earth’s sorrows into Thy balm;

Out of life’s storms and into Thy calm;

Out of distress to jubilant psalm:

Jesus, I come to Thee.

William T. Sleeper

## *Practical Effects in our Lives*

---

Some of you are probably wondering whether it is really possible to carry all this out practically in our lives, or whether these are all just nice theoretical ideas. Can we hope to live these things out, or were they only for exalted Christians like the Apostle Paul? Do not think for a moment that others have not had the same difficulties. If you knew the agony that others have been through in attempting to put these things into practice, you would realize that it is not easy for self (1 Peter 4:1). Someone has said, "Truth is simple; it is we who are complicated." If you see other Christians who seem to have put these things into practice, it is only because they have come to grips with them in the Lord's presence. Sometimes it has cost many tears. An old poem expresses it well:

Full many a rapturous minstrel  
Amid those courts of light  
Will say of his sweetest music  
"I learned it in the night!"  
And many a rolling anthem  
That fills the Father's home  
Sobbed out its first rehearsal  
In the shade of a darkened room.

While these things do not come easily, it should not cause us to give up, as perhaps we are apt to do. If we believe the Word of God, that in the death of Christ we too have died to sin, then there is power now for us, by faith, to reckon ourselves to be dead unto sin. We can count on God to be as good as His Word. What we need are willing hearts, for the Bible was written for willing hearts. If there is a true desire in our hearts to be more like Christ, then God will work it in us.

The substance of this pamphlet was originally given in some talks to young people at Lassen Pines, California. In those situations, sometimes we experience such joy in Christ and such happiness in our hearts that we feel that we could never be discouraged again. Then we come down from that "mountain-top" experience only to find that it was not the real world, and that both the world around us and our sinful nature are still the same. Sometimes the problems seem even a little worse, as Satan makes us the object of a special attack because we have

been enjoying the Lord so much. Is there an answer to this dilemma?

## *The Spirit of God*

---

Let us remember that God never gives us instruction in His Word that is impossible to carry out. No, God has set the believer in the most blessed position of being “in Christ,” and now tells him to live up to the position in which he has been placed. God gives us all the instruction we need for this in His Word, and gives us the power to do it. That power is the Spirit of God.

Only the Spirit of God can minister Christ to our souls and take us right out of ourselves. Romans 8 brings this before us: “For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace.” Romans 8:5,6.

We may well ask what it means to be “spiritually minded.” If we are truly saved, we have life in Christ. It is the more abundant life about which the Lord Jesus spoke in John 10:10, and is meant to be lived in the power of the Spirit of God. This is very much neglected among Christians today, for instead of being led by the Spirit, we try to live the new life in our own strength.

Recently I read a book written by a Christian on the subject of knowing the will of God. His whole thrust was that we had to use our own judgment within the framework of the Word of God, and that as long as what we wanted to do was not contrary to the Word of God, we could feel free to use our own best judgment in making a decision. This is totally contrary to what is taught in the New Testament, for we are to live, not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.

In John 14:16, the Lord Jesus refers to the Holy Spirit as the “Comforter,” and tells us that He will send Him to abide with us forever. Perhaps “comforter” is the best word we have in English, but it does not adequately convey the thought contained in the original Greek word “paraclete.” This word is also translated “advocate” in 1 John 2:1, and means “one who takes charge of and looks after all your affairs.” Do we realize that we have a Person of the Godhead dwelling within us to look after us in every possible way? Yes, He is here to do that, but do

we let Him lead and guide as we should? Or do we trust our own thoughts, our own strength, and grieve Him by allowing sin in our lives?

We do not have to ask or prompt the Spirit of God to guide us. Rather we have to be careful to remove the hindrances to His working. When we are in a good state of soul, and have no unjudged sin on our conscience, then the Spirit of God occupies us with Christ, and brings joy to our hearts. When we have sinned, then the Spirit of God must occupy us with that sin until we confess it and experience God's forgiveness (1 John 1:9).

We see then that the Spirit of God is the power of the new life we have in Christ, but that sin which is allowed our lives grieves the Spirit (Ephesians 4:30), and prevents Him from carrying out His true work. We are responsible to deal with the hindrances to His work, and this is the subject of our next section.

## *Self-Judgment*

---

We have seen that we are to reckon ourselves to be "dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord." Romans 6:11. When we have seen our true Christian position as being dead, buried and risen with Christ, then we can never be satisfied with anything less than this for ourselves. By faith we accept what the death of Christ has done for us and accept the fact that we are dead and risen with Him. But how easily we fall back into our old ways! We must go to 2 Corinthians 4 to find how this tendency is to be overcome.

2 Corinthians 4:10 reads, "Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body." This is a step farther than reckoning ourselves to be dead to sin. We may take this blessed position before God, and it is right to do so, but then we find that our old, sinful nature does not take kindly to being put in the place of death. We find that Satan does not leave us alone just because we view ourselves as God sees us, as dead and risen with Christ. The more we want to live for Christ, the more the sinful nature will rear its head. More than this, every new truth that the Spirit of God reveals to us will find its corresponding rejection in some part of our sinful nature.

When I was younger, I used to look at older ones who seemed to be walking with the Lord, and it seemed that the sinful nature became "burned out" after a while. As I got older I real-

ized how untrue this was. It was rather that those who seemed to be walking with the Lord had learned in their measure not to have any confidence in that sinful nature. They had learned the truth of this verse, that it is a daily, hourly, moment-by-moment exercise of self-judgment to keep the sinful nature in the place of death.

There is a very special significance to the way this verse is worded. Notice that it does **not** say, “Always bearing about in the body the fact that I am dead to sin.” No, we are to bear about in our bodies “the dying of the Lord Jesus.” It is the practical reality of applying the death sentence to the desires of our natural bodies. The Lord Jesus appeals to our hearts, and reminds us that it cost Him His life in order that our “old man” might be “crucified with Him.”

We will never be able to walk properly as Christians unless we are continually brought back to the cross. It is not enough for us to know in an intellectual way that God sees our old man as crucified with Christ, and that we are dead to sin. It is not enough for us to know in our minds that God wants us to be occupied with Christ, and not with ourselves. We will continually fail unless our hearts are touched by the fact that it cost our Saviour His life so that we might be able to reckon ourselves as “dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God.” We will never be able to separate from this world in a right way unless we remember that it was this world that put our Saviour on the cross. God appeals to our hearts rather than our intellects, for it is only when our hearts are right that we can live the Christian life properly.

It is not the one who **knows** the most who makes the best Christian, but the one who **loves** the most. I would encourage you to read the Word of God and also the good, written ministry that is available, because they bring Christ before you. But knowledge itself will not keep you—the Person of Christ must be precious to you. Sometimes we see a simple believer who knows relatively little about the Scriptures, but who seems to be closer to the Lord than we are and seems to have more joy in his soul. Perhaps we have been brought up in a Christian home, and have heard these things from our earliest years. We may have been saved for many years, and know so much more. Why do we not have that joy? It is because that simple believer is enjoying what he does know of Christ, while we have allowed some hindrance to come in.

Perhaps you say, “How do I get that love in my heart for the Lord? I want to love Him more!” A brother now with the Lord used to remind us constantly, “Never try to love the Lord any more than you do! Just think of how much He loves you!” If we have been taken back to the cross and are occupied with the Lord’s love for us, then our love will flow back to Him, and we will find that these things will become clearer to us.

I can hear some of you saying, “But you don’t know the difficulties and problems in my life. You don’t know the home I come from, the job situation that I have to face every day. You don’t know the loneliness and the temptations that I have to cope with. It is easy to talk about these things, but it is hard to put them into practice!”

To answer this objection, let us read Jeremiah 2:13: “For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water.” A fountain is a continual source of water, while a cistern is only a place to store water that has been put into it. A cistern is a good thing, but if there is a crack in it all the water runs out, and it is useless. We should ask ourselves which we are going to have, the fountain or the broken cistern? We may find ourselves looking at this world and saying that we have to have companionship. If we cannot get Christian companionship, then perhaps we look for worldly companionship. Others may look at material things, or a career, thinking that it will satisfy them. Some who are older may focus on their families, or travel, or a hobby. While there is nothing inherently wrong in some of these things, we have to realize that they are all broken cisterns. The truth must get hold of my soul that only Christ can satisfy my heart.

What about service for the Lord? I may say to myself that I will go out and preach the gospel—perhaps that will satisfy my heart. I may want to go to some foreign field and serve the Lord. Or I may make the local assembly my focus, and turn all my energies towards making it a happy place, because I want to see it grow, and see my brethren encouraged. Will any of these things make me happy? No, they will not. “But,” some may say, “are not all of those things good things to do? Does not the Lord tell us to preach the gospel, and to encourage other believers?” Yes, but they fall short of the highest motive God has set before us. In all of these things, our sights are too low. If I set out to preach the gospel and perhaps do not see much

blessing, I will tend to become discouraged. If I set out to make my family my focus, I may well neglect what is due to the Lord.

What is the answer to it all? The Word of God teaches us to have our sights above it all, on Christ Himself. When He is before us, we do not depend on anything down here for our happiness. He is unchanging, and when our hearts are occupied with Him, there is a steadiness, a calmness, a peace that nothing can shake. If our joy depends on anything down here, even the best things, then our state of soul will go up and down depending on how things are going down here. God wants to lift us above it all.

Will being occupied with Christ make us neglect our responsibilities down here? No, for the thought that we want to please Him in all things makes us want to do everything for Him and in the best possible way. We will not neglect our work, our family, the local assembly or even ourselves. But they will not be our object—rather we will want to do everything for Christ.

One of the biggest problems among Christians today is that we are using the failures of others in the body of Christ as an excuse for our own failures. We are making our joy dependent on the behavior of others and our ability to live as Christians dependent on how others walk.

I say with complete conviction that our joy in Christ should not depend on anyone else. If it does, then we have allowed something to come between us and the Lord, and He loves us too much to let us be truly happy under such circumstances. Our happiness may last for a while, but then the Lord will test us, perhaps by removing that one on whom our happiness depends, or permitting some trial to come into our lives. Then it becomes clear that others and other things are really our object, and not Christ.

I knew a brother who moved away from the assembly where he was because things were difficult there. He thought that if he took his family to another place things would be better and his family would be happier in the Lord. It did not work, because neither our brethren nor the assembly should be the source of our joy. If we cannot overcome in the situation where we are, we will not be able to overcome anywhere. This applies to a family situation, a work problem, the local assembly, or any other situation. Christ is able to give the grace for any circumstance in which He places us. My brethren may be a real encouragement, and a happy assembly is a great blessing, but

both are helpful only to the extent that they bring Christ before me.

Of course, the Lord may sometimes lead us to change our circumstances, and in doing so may remove us from a difficult situation. Then we can be thankful for the removal of the trial, and take it from the Lord. But only the Lord can guide us in such cases, and we should be much before Him, lest we make the move for our own reasons, and not because it is His mind.

I should make it clear that I am not speaking about a situation where the Lord would not have us. Sometimes we ask the Lord for His help in a situation where His only will for us is that we should not be there at all. In such a case, we must leave that situation whatever the cost, as, for example, a job where one is unequally yoked with an unbeliever. We cannot overcome where we are in direct disobedience to the Word of God. But in a situation where the Lord has placed us, we should submit to what He has allowed and learn the lesson He is teaching us. Our next subject is very helpful in this connection.

## *“Delivered Unto Death”*

---

We have spoken about the importance of “always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus,” but the verse immediately following it takes us one step further. 2 Corinthians 4:11 states, “For we which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus’ sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh.” We may have felt the need to bear about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, and even have carried it out to some extent, really wanting to deal with what is not pleasing to the Lord. If we always did it perfectly, verse 11 would not need to be there. But the Lord sees things in our lives that we do not see—perhaps things we do not think are too bad, perhaps an attitude to which we have long become accustomed, or some hidden motive that we do not realize is having such an effect on our lives. Then we are “delivered unto death”—a strong statement. What does it mean? It means that the Lord allows circumstances in our lives to bring before us that hidden motive, that sin that we do not see, or at least do not think is too serious. It is the mercy of God that He does this, for then we are able to see more clearly what is hindering our full enjoyment of Christ, and get



rid of it. But how often we rebel against the Lord's dealings with us, and do not learn the lesson! We look at the circumstances themselves, or perhaps at the individuals involved in them, and refuse to let the Lord show us that He has allowed the difficulty.

We must remember that there are never any second causes with God. When we have accepted the trial from the Lord, and Him alone, then we can go to Him in the spirit of Hebrews 12:11, exercised by the chastisement and finding that it yields "the peaceable fruit of righteousness." If others are involved and have acted wrongly toward us, we can leave that with the Lord; He will deal with them. May God give us the grace to accept all our circumstances from Him, and then to go to Him, asking Him why He has allowed them. If we do this, then He can show us things in our hearts that need to be dealt with. Then the life of Jesus will be more and more exhibited in us, instead of the old, sinful nature. If this is God's purpose in the trial, does it not make it all worthwhile?

We should never allow ourselves the luxury of feeling sorry for ourselves. We all like to do that sometimes. We have heard of people who have what is called a "pity party." A number of people (sometimes only two!) get together and take turns going over the wrongs they have suffered from others, the way they have been misused, the way people have taken advantage of them, and so on. There is a subtle satisfaction in recounting all those wrongs, and then having someone else say, "Oh, how awful—you poor thing!" I have been guilty of doing it myself, and had to realize before the Lord that it was nothing but sin. It was allowing my sinful nature to act. God has given us the example of One who always felt for others in every situation, even when He was experiencing the greatest suffering. When we are occupied with Christ, God will give us the grace to feel sympathy even for those who are doing us the greatest harm.

To illustrate how the Lord Jesus wants us to live, I would like to refer to an incident in His life.

"Then came to Him the mother of Zebedee's children with her sons, worshipping Him, and desiring a certain thing of Him. And He said unto her, What wilt thou? She saith unto Him, Grant that these my two sons may sit, the one on Thy right hand, and the other on the left, in Thy kingdom. But Jesus answered and said, Ye know not what ye ask. Are ye able to drink of

the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? They say unto Him, We are able. And He saith unto them, Ye shall drink indeed of My cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with: but to sit on My right hand, and on My left, is not Mine to give, but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared of My Father. And when the ten heard it, they were moved with indignation against the two brethren. But Jesus called them unto Him, and said, Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; and whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many." Matthew 20:20-28.

Here the Lord showed His disciples that Christianity is not characterized by what it finds, but by what it brings. Our blessed Saviour came not to be served, but to serve, and He has left an example for us. Are you in a difficult situation at home or at work? God will give you the grace to meet that situation, first of all to give you peace about it in your own soul, and then to help you show some of the love and grace of Christ to others. Are you in a difficult situation in your local assembly? The Lord can use you to be a help. A consistent godly walk will never go unnoticed.

When the Lord was in the garden of Gethsemane (I speak reverently) He might have thought only about Himself. Rather than this, His thoughts were for His disciples, and He said to them, "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation." Matthew 26:41. When the soldiers came to take Him, He said, "If therefore ye seek Me, let these go their way." John 18:8. When Peter subsequently denied Him, the Lord turned and looked on him, no doubt with love and compassion. When men were nailing Him to the cross, He said, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." Luke 23:34. When the thief beside Him, who shortly before had been railing on Him, said, "Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom," He said, "Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with Me in paradise." Luke 23:42,43. When He saw His mother stand-

ing by the cross, as the eldest son in the family He took the responsibility of arranging for her care, and committed her to John. In everything His thoughts were for others, and not for Himself. Surely you and I bow in humble adoration at such grace, realizing that we will never attain to it while we are down here. As we have remarked earlier, God is beginning that work in us down here, and if Christ is filling our hearts, then we can ask for the grace to react to situations as He did. If I focus on the wrong others are doing, I will go wrong myself. If my eye is on the Lord, while others may be guilty of wrong actions, I can have right reactions.

If someone else is doing something right, I can feel **with** them and be a help and an encouragement to them. But if they are going wrong, I can feel **for** them. I can go to the Lord for the grace to be a help to them, even if I am suffering from the wrong they are doing. This is always difficult to do, and sometimes there are situations where, humanly speaking, it would seem downright impossible. There are situations where the wrong is so great and the emotional damage so severe that it seems impossible to have the grace to feel for the wrongdoer. I would in no way minimize the seriousness of some of these wrongs. But then we are brought back to the cross, and are reminded of Hebrews 12:3: "Consider **HIM** that endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds." None have ever gone through such sorrows as our blessed Saviour, and He went alone. What kept Him (and again I speak reverently) was the joy that was set before Him, and in this He has left us an example. I trust I say it with feeling, that while the difference between one situation and another may be one of degree, the principle remains the same. One situation may require more grace than another, but "He giveth more grace." James 4:6. To say that there is a situation that may arise in our lives where He could not give the grace to act according to His Word is to deny His all-sufficiency.

I remember speaking to a girl who came from a very difficult home, where her father had not treated her very well. After listening to her for some time, I could surely sympathize in the hurt she was feeling. She had every reason to be bitter and resentful about what she had experienced. When I had gotten to know her a little better, and we had talked about the remedy for those feelings, I said to her, "Can you get above your own hurt and feel sympathy for your father, who is probably hurt-

ing too, and needs help?” She had never thought of that before. Worldly wisdom would say that we have to express that anger, that we have to confront the wrongdoer, that we have to make them feel how much we have been hurt. But the wisdom of God shows us that we can take our hurt to the Lord and have it all out with Him alone. (And it is important to deal with that hurt—blanking it out and pretending that nothing happened is **not** the answer.) Sometimes a trusted friend and confidant can be a great help in sorting out for us the many conflicting emotions at such a time. But if such an individual is not available, let us remember that the Lord Jesus went through the agony of the cross in the garden of Gethsemane alone with His Father. That is where the sweat fell from His brow, and where He asked His Father if the cup might pass from Him. Then, before the world, His thoughts could be for others.

It is not wrong to express the hurt, and perhaps to give vent to the feelings that well up in our hearts—no, it is a most necessary thing in dealing with some of these awful experiences. Nor is it wrong to confront the wrongdoer, to make him aware of how much we have been hurt. If done in the right way and under the right circumstances, it may be most helpful in resolving the matter. But let us remember that the Lord understands better than any other. Then He will give us the grace, first to be at peace in ourselves, and then to have right feelings towards the wrongdoer.

## *Joy and Peace*

---

If we are walking with the Lord, we will find that we can have love and care for others, and forget about ourselves. We do not need to be concerned about ourselves, and what will make us happy. We should put the Lord Jesus first in our lives, and make it our object to please Him. Then we should look around at others and ask the Lord how we can be a help to them. If we do these things in that order, we will find that the Lord will look after our happiness without our thinking about it. But if we follow the Lord in order to be happy, we will probably not be, because that is another wrong motive—it is another broken cistern. Sometimes we have times of special joy, as, for example, time spent with other Christians away from the world. As I mentioned earlier, we may enjoy the Lord so much under those circumstances that we feel that we could never be un-

happy again. Perhaps we say, "I want to hold on to this. I want to be this happy all the time!" What we should be saying is, "I want to follow Christ. I want to live for Him, and to be more like Him. I want to please Him more, for His sake." Then our motive is right, for we are occupied with Him, and not with ourselves. To please the Lord Jesus is the highest motive the Word of God sets before us.

Times of special joy are like the thrill we get when we put the gas pedal to the floor and jump into passing gear. We enjoy the thrill of power that comes with that, but we should never think of driving fifty miles in passing gear. The car is not built to operate like that, and the transmission will revert back to a higher gear after we have reached a certain speed. In the same way, rapids or falls in a river may make pretty scenery and be necessary to restore oxygen to the water, but they do not constitute the most productive part of the river. Fish do not generally live in rapids, and rivers full of rapids are not good for navigation. It is the quiet peaceful part of the river that is the most useful, and it is the steady running of the car in a normal gear that is the most helpful in getting us from one point to another.

While the Lord may give us times of special joy, I would attach more significance to peace than to joy. Peace for the believer has a twofold meaning. In John 14:27, the Lord Jesus said to His disciples, "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you." I believe that the first peace is that which we get in Romans 5:1, the peace that comes from knowing all our sins forgiven, and that we have nothing to fear from the judgment of God. But the second mention of peace is what the Lord called "My peace," and this was the peace that He had in doing the Father's will, and in knowing that His Father was ordering every circumstance for Him as the perfect, dependent Man. We have had that peace given to us, and we can enjoy it too, to the extent that there is nothing between our souls and the Lord, that He is our object, and that we are seeking to please Him.

We should always walk in peace, although we may not always walk in joy. The Lord was the Man of sorrows, yet He was always walking in that peace which He called "My peace." Sorrow is a necessary part of the Christian life, and we should not expect it to be otherwise. We are following a rejected Christ in a world that is still against Him. But He has passed through it too, and has left us His peace as a legacy.

The happiest Christians are those who are not even thinking about themselves, but whose hearts are filled with Christ, seeking to please Him, and then occupied with the good and blessing of others. But again, do not do it to be happy—do it to please the Lord! Think of His happiness, not your own. You will find that it will put a glow on your face, a spring in your step, and you will have that confidence with which we should walk as Christians. Moses was not aware that his face shone, but others saw it. In walking with the Lord there will be a moral dignity about us that others will see, and they will take knowledge of us, that we have been with Jesus.

When we survey the wondrous cross  
On which the Lord of glory died,  
Our richest gain we count but loss,  
And pour contempt on all our pride.

Forbid it, Lord, that we should boast,  
Save in the death of Christ, our God;  
All the vain things that charm us most,  
We'd sacrifice them to His blood.

There from His head, His hands, His feet,  
Sorrow and love flowed mingled down;  
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet,  
Or thorns compose so rich a crown?

Were the whole realm of nature ours,  
That were an offering far too small;  
Love that transcends our highest powers,  
Demands our soul, our life, our all.

Isaac Watts



*The essence of true Christianity is not to have either high or low thoughts of self, but rather not to be thinking about self at all. “For to me to live is Christ.”*

**B&P** Bibles & Publications  
5706 Monkland, Montréal, Québec H4A 1E6

**BIBLE TRUTH PUBLISHERS**

59 Industrial Road, P. O. Box 649  
Addison, Illinois 60101 U.S.A.

BTP #6934