

CHRIST DWELLING IN YOU

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In Christ I'm a free son of god, living a normal human life, but dead to sin. But by myself I am helpless, a slave to my flesh which in this self-loving world forces me to live for myself.

We have been born again and baptized in the Holy Spirit; however, many of us still have a problem. We have entered into a new world of praise and worship in the liberty of the Spirit; but we quickly discover that daily living still brings with it a multitude of pressures and problems. We find ourselves, as did Paul, unable to do what we ought to do and unavoidably doing what we should not do.

I was looking from the bottom up instead of from the top down. The bottom in this case is I, myself, in my humanity. I was a slave to sin, under the curse and condemnation of the Law, and that is where I wished to remain.

Thanks God, when I was a young man, hospitalized by a football injury, I suddenly was how totally self-centered I was. Everything was for me. Something was wrong somewhere. In fact, I had seen sin in its very essence.

Soon after that a British army major, who used his lovely home to invite young people in for lawn tennis, asked me if I belonged to Christ. Had he asked me if I belonged to a church, I would have said "Yes." But because he said to "Christ as a living person," I had to say "No."

"I saw then that without Christ hell was my destiny. I recognized that it was the only place where I was fitted to go. So in my first act of genuine personal faith I asked forgiveness for my sins, and in a flash I knew those sins were gone forever. Jesus was my personal Savior, God was my Father and heaven my home.

Quite a change for a young football fanatic. But while I knew that I was a new creation in Christ, I had yet to get things into full

focus. I could only with Paul that now I delighted in the Law of God after the inward man. But I also knew from obvious experience that my renewed inner self had attached to it my outer "flesh" --my bodily desires and my soul or emotional reactions in daily life. There were resentments, attractive lusts, hates, depressions, fears, pride and all the rest.

Now, my error was that I hadn't realized that the fall of man meant separation from God. I now had my relationship to God restored by my new birth in Christ. But I still regarded myself as a distinct human being apart from Him.

I proceeded in my new way of Christian living by "looking unto Him" for help in all my tribulations and temptations. Notice the emphasis on the word "help." In other words, as a renewed human in Christ, I believed He could make me better, more patient, pure, loving, free from fear, resentment, lusts and other sins.

I expected, as a result of taking the step of sanctification by faith. I would become a holy person. My eyes remained really on myself. Why then did I not improve? Why did I still fall into sins? Why couldn't I conquer these things? Why couldn't I have peace, power, heart satisfaction? Again, I was looking from the bottom up, rather than from the top down.

It was something new to me to realize that, in spite of what we like to think, the human self never improves. Left to myself I can only be self-loving (for only in union with God who is other-love can I be an other-lover). By myself I am helpless, a slave to my flesh which is good I find not" (Rom. 7:18).

Struggle as we may, call on God for help as we may, we find no relief. We remain bound. It took Moses forty years of running from Pharaoh (instead of Pharaoh running from him). Jacob was exploited twenty years by Laban and terrified of his brother Essau before he discovered he was a prince in God's household. David spent eight years hiding in a cave before he could sit on the throne. It took Elisha eight years to find he must have the Spirit of Elijah. So it is in the life- history of every person of God, great or small, including ourselves. We must have the revelation of the New

Covenant so that we may come into focus more quickly. Why? It is a necessary part of spiritual education.

I am to be a real person through eternity and must function effectively as a Son of God. So if I am to operate and manage God's universe as co-heir with Christ, I have to learn the difference between a misused self in its false separation, and a rightly-used self in its Vine-branch union.

And that is the secret. After our conversion, like these men, we each have to learn by experience that a redeemed self, regarded independent and separate from god, is an illusion. We have to be cornered until we are so "done" in that the revelation can dawn on us. We know reconciliation. Now we must know union. We are never again separated selves.

Jesus, the perfect man, said, "I and My Father are one...Of myself I can do nothing...The Father that dwells in me, He does the works."

Spirit unites with spirit. "I live," wrote the redeemed Paul, but then corrected himself: "...yet not I, but Christ." He did not mean Christ dying for him, not Christ near him, not even Christ in as if separate from him, but Christ living his life, Christ in Paul's form. And so for each of us, Christ in Tom's form, Christ in Elizabeth's form, Christ in Norman's form.

What that means to me in my life's struggles is, first, that this inner "mystery" is a conscious inner reality to me--that I am in this eternal unity with the Trinity. That is precisely the full meaning of Pentecost and the baptism of the Spirit, in its personal effect on me and as explained by the writers of the Epistles. Christ and I have seen ourselves by grace as one, and I am inwardly conscious of it. I never have to question that fact again. I live, like Paul, "by the faith of it."

Now as this Christ-union becomes permanent in us, we live our lives from the top down instead of the bottom up. Our consciousness is no longer "I'm a poor, struggling, bewildered, defeated disciple, very much aware of my weak human self and flesh responses." No, I'm a free child of God, living a normal

human life, but dead to sin, dead to Law which has no further right to shove its demands, threats and condemnations on me.

Instead, I am in Christ's perfection, living at ease in a spontaneous compulsion of the Spirit who causes me to walk in His ways, and to fulfill His only command - to love.

And now when all these flesh-incitements assault me--fears, anger, hates lusts, pride, depressions, inabilities - I no longer say "I ought" or "I ought not," and struggle in vain. But I say, "That's my flesh talking to me, but I'm not in the flesh, I'm in the Spirit" (Rom. 8:9). All I do is transfer my consciousness of a temptation or stress to the consciousness of who I really am, Christ in me; and light swallows up darkness, spirit counteracts flesh, and Christ is magnified in my body.

So here is the answer. First, as humans we will always walk in the flesh, and always be conscious of the assaults of all forms of temptations. Did not Jesus say to His disciples, "You are those who have continued with Me in My temptations?" That is our privilege to be real participants in a real world, in order to overcome it and shine as lights in it.

But then we no longer confront our flesh battles as flesh people, as if we humans should conquer them. We admit the flesh doesn't fight our battles. But if we have had the baptism of the Spirit with the consciousness of our union with God, we say with Paul that we are not in the flesh but in the Spirit (Rom. 8:9). In this God-given consciousness it naturally comes to us to transfer our temporary recognition of the outer pull of flesh (soul and body) on us to our true recognition of who we really are. Christ the real Self in ourselves. By our believing in Him, the positive "Yea and Amen" in us, the law of faith always operates. What we believe in takes over--Spirit swallowing up flesh. And we walk on free.

If we have momentarily followed the flesh, we acknowledge it; the shed blood of Christ removes our wrongs from God's sight and ours, and our consciences are immediately cleansed. He has forgotten, so we, too, must forget.

And thus, free from ourselves, we are not only conquerors but more than conquerors, free to take on other people's needs and minister to them. This is the victory, which overcomes the world. This is our faith.