

On Being a Christian

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My childhood interest in God intensified with *Egermeier's Bible Story Book*, which my mother gave me to read at age nine or so. The Old Testament stories fascinated me, but what alarmed me came from learning that I would perish if I did not believe that God sent Jesus to die for my sins. That got me believing because I did not want to go to hell. Modern minds often dismiss such fear as not worthy motivation for conversion, but I suppose the modern mind is too advanced for me. I adhere to warning signs on the highways, poison bottles, and dangerous equipment.

A factory I once worked at considered it a fantastic achievement to log one million hours without a lost time injury. Common sense people recognize danger and flee, but the overly educated mind thinks it unsophisticated that God would look at doomed humans and warn them to avoid eternity separated from Him. I hope I never get that educated. I think I've always stopped just short of being that smart.

My early Christian years concerned themselves with knowing that God forgave my sins. I didn't worry too much about what sin was since I seldom read the Bible, spending my time just being myself and carrying out my desires the best I could. During high

school, I read the Campus Crusade for Christ tracts "The Four Spiritual Laws" and "Have You Made the Wonderful Discovery of the Spirit filled life?" I grasped the former clearly, but the latter did not appeal to me, since when I looked at the description of the carnal Christian, I knew that's what I wanted to continue as. The idea of Christ on the throne of my life repelled me since that would dethrone ego on the throne. Blatantly I knew that I still wanted ego on the throne. Why should I have changed? Life was still fun.

Early college years included some discipleship from a few older students in the Campus Crusade ministry. Johnny Yates, one of them, was a true big brother and shepherd. He visited me, took me to Bible studies, and included me in his life in a way that I have always remembered. When he graduated, I didn't stay interested but aimlessly spent two more years before hearing about "the Baptism of the Holy Spirit" through my sister and Mimi Anderson, whose daughter later caught my attention and still does after thirty-four years. Who doesn't love the anointed experiences of the Holy Spirit? Part of the fruit that came from those experiences included a new hunger for the Bible and a holy life. When I returned to Chapel Hill for my senior year, my long time dorm crew expressed shock at the change from the carnal person they had known.

My zeal lasted a long time, but experiences can diminish, and they don't succeed at the roots of what God means us to discover about ourselves and about Him. As my experiences waned, I chose carnality again, finding myself in a mild depression by age twenty-two. The excitement of graduation, commissioning in the Navy, marriage, and travel could only go so far before the charm of youthful expectations dropped off, now replaced by work and responsibility. Normal pressures accomplished God's purpose in them; I picked up the Bible again and read in 1 Corinthians about how no one can know the things of God apart from the Holy Spirit's revealing of them. Intellect cannot penetrate them.

The excitement of the Holy Spirit's touch brought a different urge this time; I wanted perfection, so I reasoned that since the Holy Spirit wrote the Bible, that I could memorize the New Testament and attain perfection. I'm the only one who took myself seriously on this, not discerning the wry looks of those I shared my project with. For one thing, I arbitrarily left off the Old Testament. Mostly, others realized the ridiculous aspiration I expressed, but they humored me. I did memorize a third of the New Testament over three and a half years but learned that the mind has a sieve-like quality. Besides, I kept failing in the same ways. I abandoned the memorizing for Christian books, seminars, principles, and anything else that might relieve me of gripping the steering wheel of my car in such frustration at the cry of Romans Seven: "For the

good that I wish, I do not do; but I practice the very evil that I do not wish" (7:19 NAB).

Mimi, now my mother-in-law and good friend in the Lord, kept giving me Norman Grubb books or tapes on birthdays and other special events. Norman sounded to me like the most impractical, philosophical person in the world. Basically, he talked about Galatians 2:20—being crucified with Christ and Christ living in us—what Paul calls the mystery of the Gospel (Colossians 1:27). Norman's books and talks infuriated me because they sounded like we don't do anything on our own but just let Christ live in us and as us. Anything not based on my work I found repulsive except of course Jesus' blood washing away my sins so that I can go to heaven. I certainly did not want anyone else living my life, not even God. I wanted His help, but I wanted to do the doing. So when Norman would say things like, "The self cannot improve" or "Self improvement is the big lie," I thought him ridiculous. He also said things like, "We are only receivers." This sounded incredibly boring.

Life wears on continually, to the wear of those trying to live it, and so in my late 30's, I started to soften up. The Bible's word about Christ living in me sounded good now, but I still thought more highly of myself than Christ. For a while, I tried just calling most of what I did Christ in me, but I couldn't reconcile what plainly looked like darkness as being the life of Christ in me.

Mostly I talked about a message that I didn't know but wanted to master and teach. I noticed too an aspect in Norman's teaching that I had not focused on: before we were Christians, Satan lived in us. Scripture proofs of our union with Satan as lost people had been lost on me the listener. These proofs from the Bible disturbed me because I did not want to think of my non-Christian self as anything more than an independent-self doing right or wrong deeds. The thought of former slavery to the indwelling spirit of error (Ephesians 2:1-3) appalled me and sent me into agony.

The scriptures, plus failure as a Christian to be the Christian that the Bible calls us to be, began to convince me. My consciousness was much more that of a failing self than a believing, succeeding self. I began to hear about the lie of independent self and Satan as its author. Fear, condemnation, self-flagellation, and renewed trying kept me miserable, and the more I tried to control things like anger or lust, the more they sprouted forth. I could see that the Bible says that for Christians, Satan no longer lives in us as our in-dweller, but he sure stole my joy on a regular basis. God means this to happen to a Christian who tries to keep the Law by self-effort. The Bible calls this a sin consciousness (Hebrews 10:2 NASB). The world, meaning the unsaved, lives in this sin consciousness as a way of life even if they do not believe in God or sin. A sin consciousness operates based on self-performance: "I did this," or "I did that," all the while thinking of the "I" as

independent. Therefore, we see the frenzy and comparison, the lustful exaltation or depression, that come from basing our worth on looks, intellect, money, power, and every kind of thrill.

The Bible tells us that our worth derives solely from God as our creator and in-dweller. He made us, and as the one who indwells the Christian, His purpose for us is this: "But the one who joins himself to the Lord is one Spirit with Him" (1 Cor. 6:17). God intends for the human spirit to live in a union, whereby the Spirit of God and the spirit of the human unite as one—God still being God and the creation still the creation—but the two now as a one, so that a human lives as an entirely new creation—God living as you and me. Adam lost this in the Fall, and when Adam sinned, we sinned (Romans 5). The spirit of error, Satan, entered us and enslaved us. Most non-Christians do not know this, however, because Satan's big deception lies in keeping himself hidden so that we do not, when non-Christians, get alarmed, but rather continue living, thinking that we are just ourselves.

Those who come to Christ generally do so because they get disturbed that life does not work; they read the Bible and see the revelation that sin damns us without a savior. We come to the blood of Christ. But what about the failing-self as a Christian? Why does 2 Corinthians Five's word describing us as "new creatures" seem inert? Our failing selves seem more real to us. The reason comes from the sin consciousness hanging on in us

through deception after we're Christians. We think, "Since Jesus forgave my sins, I should try to be like Him." There's that supposed independent self still trying to do good and trying not to do evil.

In order to clarify this deception, think about the difference between sins and sin. Have you noticed that Romans One through Four talks about sins (plural), but that in Romans Five, the focus switches to sin (singular)? Think of sins as products and sin as the producer. Every real Christian knows that the precious blood of Christ washes away sins. Why, however, do most Christians still have a consciousness weighed heavily with guilt, fear, and torment—always thinking, "I should have done more," or, "No matter how much I do, it never seems enough."

This constant sense of failure and not being right, is the continuation of the sin consciousness in the Christian who does not understand how God dealt with the sin producer. If we think that we are the sin-producer at root, we still remain in a needless deception that keeps us dragging and taking condemnation. The Bible says that sin is a person; therefore, sin consciousness is the consciousness of the spirit of error. The effect on a Christian is this: even though the typical Christian knows that Jesus lives in his or her heart, the Christian still thinks, "I'm not as good as I should be; I'm no good." Or conversely, the Christian thinks, "I am a good Christian," banking on books read, good deeds

attempted, devotions read, money given, charity accomplished. This pride, however, fails to buffer the nagging, endless sense of imperfection and low self-image. The cycle of guilt and compensatory performance leads to exhausted efforts to gain a moment's peace and serenity. Romans Seven gets read as if it's the life we're destined to while here on earth in this flesh: "Look, even the Apostle Paul experienced this condition as his Christian life!"

Really, Paul did not experience Romans Seven as his normal Christian life. He tells us his early biography using a device called the dramatic present, for the sake of vivid reliving, so that we will follow him on into Romans Eight where life for us by faith turns into the mind set on the Spirit, which is life and peace amidst the ongoing clamor of the groaning, mortal world.

This leads to the question, "How does a Christian get rid of the sin consciousness?" Getting rid of the sin consciousness frees us to live with energy and vision, unhindered by falling down into guilt and fear that drain away the life of the Spirit in us. We do not get rid of the sin consciousness; God already did. Hebrews Nine and Ten tell us that under the Old Covenant, the priests kept up with the same ineffectual sacrifices yearly, and the continuation of the sacrificial system only proved that the sacrifices could not remove the consciousness of sin. Christ's one time sacrifice did do away with the consciousness of sin.

This means that the believer can enter into the very consciousness of Christ and live from that. No works on our part bring this about; God has brought it about. We enter into the experience by faith.

The legal basis for this is the body death of Christ, described by Paul in Romans Six, Galatians 2:20, and 2 Corinthians 5:21. God **crucified** the sin producer. Jesus became who we were as lost people, meaning that he became the “old man.” The “old man” is who we were as non-Christians—the human vessel indwelt by the spirit of error. Christ became the old man, the first Adam; and so when he died, the spirit of error went out of his body. Christ hung on the Cross, as us, and we in Him in his death, burial, and resurrection. He became the old Adam, with us in Him, so that we died in Him and now live raised and ascended in Him, joined to His body.

This is why 2 Corinthians 5:17 calls us “new creatures.” We have the same hair color, eyes, personality, and other human faculties, but we weren’t essentially those things before, and so we are not essentially those things now. The essential self is spirit, and as such, we died in Christ and rose as new creations. No wonder Jesus told Nicodemus that we must be born again. This brings alive what Norman Grubb meant when he said that the self cannot improve. Works cannot reform or transform the old man

into the new man. The new man comes out of the miracle of the resurrection—God's work not ours.

How does this get rid of the sin consciousness for us? We get clarity that we never had a nature of our own, meaning that we ourselves never were the sin producer or the righteousness producer. God created us as vessels to express an indwelling life. In our unsaved condition, we served as slaves to the spirit of sin in us. We thought that we were the problem, but we weren't. Paul makes this plain when he sees the flip side of Galatians 2:20: "So now, no longer am I the one doing it, but sin which indwells me" (Romans 7:17). Sin was never Paul, just as righteousness is not we as Christians. The sin nature is the spirit of error, and the new nature of the Christian is really Christ Himself.

This is why Paul says in Romans Six that we are dead to sin. Notice that he does not say that a Christian cannot sin, but that a Christian IS dead to sin, meaning that Satan is out, and Christ is in! We are no longer slaves to sin. Sin does not indwell us as owner. An experience is only as good as the fact that it bases itself on, and since most Christians do not know that they are dead to sin or why that is, they still live sin conscious as if they are sin producers. God took the sin producer out in the body death of Christ. Not to know that means continuing in a lie.

The twin to "Dead to Sin" is "Dead to the Law," for we know that the power of sin is in the law. Christians who still try to keep the law only strengthen the operation of sin in their members even though God plainly declares in every way that we cannot keep the Law on our own. Trying to keep the Law on our own, or even with God's help, means that we still see self as the responsible agent in our speaking and doing. "Dead to Sin" and "Dead to the Law" mean that we finally see that we enter into the truth that, "it is no longer I who live" part of Galatians 2:20. How does one get there?

I don't know any way to get there but to believe the facts of Galatians 2:20. What softens us up to believe the facts is our trying and failing until we get too tired to try any more. I always feared that if I quit trying, sin would swallow me up for sure. So I kept my fingers strained white in my supposed grip on things. Eventually, I got too tired to grip. Trying took me to the bottom, which is another story. I did hit a horrendous bottom, too tired to try any more. After enough of that, I was glad for someone else would live my life. Bill Bright often said, "Only Christ can live the Christian life." Norman said the same thing. Now I was ready for Another to live my life. So I gave up trying and took to believing.

Life without effort seemed strange at first, but truly wonderful it has proved. Any time I find myself slipping back to trying, I know that the results will be sin. Plenty of temptation comes at us, but

now we can see that God means us to experience temptation. He doesn't mean for us to go with it, but we would without His keeping. That's why I always say, "God I will do any sin if You don't keep me, and thank you that You are keeping me. Entry to experience is by faith. It's not sufficient to know that God can keep us. That's vital to know, but faith appropriates. Faith says that a thing is.

This means life without sin consciousness. Oh, the devil tempts us to the tired old, "I should be more, do more." Faith walks in the Spirit. I think most Christians like talking about their failing selves; they get to hold onto the sin consciousness that way. It's looks easier to talk about what the self should do, than to just easily walk along in faith and do it. I regularly say, "Walking in the Spirit is easy; it's excruciating at times, but walking in the Spirit is easy." Once you reconcile these two apparent non-coexisters, you get a life of ease in the Spirit while the soul and body feel the pains of mortal flesh and the harangues of the devil. The joy of the non-sin-conscious life is this: one goes along in faith, trusting that the will of God is not hard to know and that Christ is guiding and performing that which needs performing.

What about deceivers? They are there. What if faith doesn't work? It does work.

