

THE RELATIONSHIP

“For to me to live is Christ and to die is gain.”
Phil. 1:21

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NO ONE WHO HAS EVER HAD AN AUTHENTIC ENCOUNTER WITH JESUS

CHRIST CAN EVER BE THE SAME AGAIN. This truth has been verified across seven decades in my life- and it all started when I knelt at an altar at the age of five and invited Jesus to come into my heart.

My first thoughts about Jesus were warm and wonderful, compelling and wooing, drawing and beckoning me toward the One who is altogether lovely. **HE SPOKE TO ME!** It was not an audible voice. It was a gentle urging, an inner light showing the way, a sweet, tender profound nudging within to do the right. It’s what we call “Prevenient Grace.” It drew me into life’s most profound encounter. I marvel when I think of it – a five year old child entering into a personal, vital, living relationship with the Creator, Redeemer God of the universe.

By inviting Jesus into my heart and life, I moved instantly from an estranged relationship with Jesus caused by our common sinful condition as members of the human race, into a glorious saving relationship with God in Jesus Christ. Call it “New Birth.” It marked the entrance point / the beginning of a new kind of life. I fell in love – not with a merely lovely thought, not some vague abstraction about a mysterious god – I fell in love with Jesus – the Person!

Being almost 70 years this side of that decision, I can tell you with deep conviction – **JESUS KNOWS HOW TO DEAL WITH CHILDREN.**

He took me tenderly by the hand and simply said, “Follow me.” I began following in my fumbling, faltering, youthful way, sometimes very close, sometimes at distance, and yes, sometimes – ever so briefly – I was lured aside by our subtle sinister enemy. But

He was always there, reaching out with His tender hand. “It’s okay – just come closer and keep following.” And I did!

Then one day in the springtime of my 15th year He came near and spoke clearly. “You have been walking with me all your life. It has been an enjoyable relationship. But now, we are ready to take our relationship to a deeper level.

Even though you are living with me in a saving relationship, the disposition toward sin and self-rule yet remains within you. This disposition wars against my Spirit within you; it seeks to be in control but I want to be in control of your life. The quality of our continuing relationship hinges on your decision”.

I said, “But Jesus, you know I love you as Saviour, I am willing to do anything.” And that’s when He said, “What about the basketball. I want the basketball.” I’ve already told you about that.

When I willingly relinquished the basketball, little did I realize that I had made the most critically important decision of my life – a decision that is essential to “The Relationship.”

Jesus became the ruling disposition, the dominating concentration, the focus center of my life.

The old self-rule life was cleansed and I was filled with the very Spirit of the Living Jesus Himself . To be filled with the Spirit of Jesus is to have His disposition. And now authentic Christlike living becomes a glorious possibility. I testify that this was a definite experience in my life. Call it “Entire Sanctification.”

It was a passage that took me to new depths of greater joy and more fulfillment in “The Relationship.” I had moved from conflicted leadership of my life to acknowledgment of Christ’s oversight of every aspect of my life. This deeper relationship can be called, “Life under the Lordship of Jesus.”

Now I could say with new meaning more than ever before, “To me to live is Christ.”

Now **a few reflections and observations about “The Relationship.”**

1. The years have taught me that “The Relationship” is of ultimate importance, not the experiences.

The experiences may be viewed as passages required of fully devoted followers of Jesus. I concur with our traditional understanding of sanctification as being both an instantaneous experience and a gradual process. It is my sense of our history that in our earlier years, we emphasized the experience to the neglect of the process.

Eventually we became aware of this, overcorrected, and the pendulum swung to the other extreme and for years we emphasized process to the neglect of the experience.

Now is the time to strike a healthy, biblical balance and acknowledge that both are essential to “The Relationship.”

2. I have come to believe that “The Relationship” is all about Jesus – a living in Him, living for Him, and living like Him through his indwelling Spirit. It means to worship, love, think, talk, and live Jesus. For me personally I have reached the conclusion that the most profound and helpful of the several terms used in defining scriptural holiness is Christlikeness. It is obviously a term with far-reaching theological implications but is also our most winsome and engaging term - profound but simple - and one which resonates with post-moderns. It is ultimately our best definition of what holiness in a human being should be.

3. “The Relationship” is not about perfectionism – an issue with which many of us have wrestled. Jesus spoke to me “Relax! You are never going to be perfect. I am the only Perfect One in ‘The Relationship.’ Keep your eyes on me. Keep following. I will work on perfecting you.” That has been my faith and commitment across the years:

I am a person God is making,
Like a statue God is shaping;
God is moulding me, correcting,
God’s intent on my perfecting.

4. “The Relationship” is not about legalism. As a young man aspiring to live holy, I had to work through the debilitating notion that to be holy essentially meant living by a list of prohibitions.

While it is true that we all need the collective wisdom and guidance of the church in living holy lives, (the Covenant of Christian Conduct) living by rules per se is inadequate.

Jesus spoke to me: “Like me, you must learn to resist evil if you are going to be holy but evil is sometimes subtle and not always immediately recognizable. This means that decision-making about right and wrong can be difficult, so follow me and I will teach you daily, helping you learn to make value judgments between good and evil, good and half good and good and great. My goal is to help you make great moral decisions. And always remember that ‘The Relationship’ is based on grace, not performance of religious rules.

Let me remind you that the more that you get involved in doing good to others the less you will be distracted by the temptations to sin.

So go out into your world and be my power and presence among your friends and family, the disadvantaged and marginalized. Love the lost, broken and hopeless. Always be motivated by love, guided by justice and act with compassion.”

5. “The Relationship” is not about sinless perfection. John Wesley rejected this language and urged others to refrain from its use. Regardless, the concept held me captive for many years. A single out act of sin brought defeat. “The Relationship” degenerated into a kind of spiritual game where if you land on the wrong square you are required to go back to the beginning and start all over again.

In my frustration, Jesus spoke to me: “I want to liberate you from this false thinking that is keeping you on a spiritual roller-coaster. My word in I John 2:1, 2 can be your guide: “I write this to you so that you will not sin but if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense – Jesus Christ the righteous one. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins. . .”

- a. We are **not** to sin. It's like U. S. Airways Flight #1549 going down in the Hudson River in New York City. It's not on the schedule.

- b. But **if** we sin. This is the "if" of possibility, not probability. Sin may occur in the life of the saved and sanctified believer. What do we do? We do not allow a single act of sin to destroy "The Relationship". To lose a battle does not mean that we have lost the war.

- c. We "have One who speaks to the Father in our defense." The moment we are convicted of our sin by the Spirit we turn immediately to God, confess, forsake, and renounce the sin, receive forgiveness, learn from our sin so that it does not recur, then pick up right where we are and move on in "The Relationship". We do not have to go back to square one and start all over again.

Herein is the liberating truth that helps keep "The Relationship" intact: Holiness in humankind is not sinless perfection.

6. "The Relationship" has to be faithfully cultivated every day. Jesus said, "Take up your cross daily (Luke 9:23). Paul said, "I die daily" (I Cor. 15:31)
Being filled with the Spirit of Jesus is not a one-time happening – Eph. 5:18 "Be being filled with the Spirit" moment – by – moment.

7. "The Relationship" is intensely personal but it is too difficult to do alone. We really do need each other. Christlikeness of heart and life is best accomplished within community. Thus, participation in the Church is essential to growth in Christlikeness.

8. "The Relationship" is built on trust and I have learned that Jesus can always be trusted. When the inner witness of the Spirit is clear and strong, I rejoice; when the spiritual

tide is out and the witness seems absent, I have learned to rest in the authority of His Word.

“Feelings come and feelings go
And feelings are deceiving,
My warrant is the Word of God,
Naught else is worth believing.

Though all my heart should be condemned
For want of some sweet token
I know One greater than my heart
Whose Word cannot be broken.

So I’ll trust in God’s unchanging Word
‘Til soul and body sever
For though all earth shall pass away
His Word shall not be broken.

Jesus can be trusted always, in every context of life.

9. What is the “gain”? Eternal life! Reunions! New heavens! New earth! New body! And the best of all – JESUS!

For to me to live is Christ – here and now!

But in ever-deepening measure – beyond my capabilities to even imagine – He will be my life for all eternity. What a thought / hope!

Do you ever think about the moment when you will see him for the first time?

“Just think of stepping on shore and finding it heaven, of touching a hand and finding it God’s of breathing new air and finding it celestial of waking up in glory and finding it home.

“Oh, that will be glory for me. . .”

This is the practical, livable holiness in which I believe wholeheartedly.

It is all about Jesus, the One from whom I have come, the One to which I will one day go and be with forever, and the One with whom I live in vital relationship now.

“TO ME TO LIVE IS CHRIST AND TO DIE IS GAIN”.