

The Believer and the Spirit

VIII. - The Outward Expression of the Indwelling Christ

“Now the God of peace, who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus the Great Shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of an eternal covenant, make you perfect [restore you] in every good thing unto the end that you may do His will, doing in you that which is well pleasing before Him through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen” (Hebrews 13:20,21).

There is a common expression for the subject matter of this article—“The practice of Christianity.” This phrase is common, but needs to be examined. It puts us on common ground with the believers, but tends to apply to more of a religious sect. It has some major problems with the whole phrase. In the first place, the use of the term “Christian” while introduced early in the Church, has become more of a technical label, than a designation of a living relationship to Christ in a body or family. It identifies a religious sect, more than a vital identity with Christ. By the same token, the word “practice” describes the following of rules or procedures, rather than the spontaneous reactions of the members of the family. It thus becomes something of an artificial thing or perhaps even a facade. A better phrase, though perhaps an unfamiliar one, would be “the outward expressions of the indwelling Christ.” Perhaps the major difference is the spontaneity factor. We do not produce a work of Christ within us by external practices, but rather the external practices are the product of the work of Christ within us. So then what is essential in the practice of Christianity or in the external expressions of the indwelling Christ? There is, of course, a difference in these two phrases, as we have pointed out before. The practice of Christianity can be nothing more than the following of the rules of the organization. The expressions of the indwelling Christ are spontaneous and inevitable results of Christ within. The former phrase usually entails being a good member of the organization and following its prescribed rules and practices. Of course the rules and practices are alleged to be based upon the Bible, but they are usually more the expression of traditions. They are more likely to be the requirements of being a good member of the Christian community, rather than a member of the body of Christ. Actually, it is easier to be a member of the body of Christ than to be a member of a given religious group.

So then what are the essential elements that signify the presence of Christ within or what are the basic requirements for Christians? What is really Biblical? What is merely traditional or requirements for membership in a particular group?

The central issue here, of course, is what the Spirit of Christ does for us when we receive Him? These are the things that will be the natural outward expression of the indwelling Christ. The text above indicates that the Spirit does His work in us—both in the process of restoring and working in us that which is pleasing to Him. *“That He who has begun a good work in them will perform it [bring it to consummation] until the day of Christ Jesus...”* (Philippians 1:6). The word “work” is confusing to many believers, because of its careless and rampant usage through the history of the Church, to denote good deeds, rather than a change of spirit. This is the basis of the alleged controversy between Paul and James. Paul tells the Ephesians that, *“By grace you are saved, through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not of works, lest*

anyone should boast" (Ephesians 2:8,9). James, on the other hand—"Show me your faith without works, and I will show you my faith by my works" (James 2:18). So how do we reconcile these two concepts? The answer is that Paul is referring to works as a "bartering chip" to obtain salvation. He makes this clear in Hebrews 9:14—"How much rather shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God?" And then Titus refers to these deeds as "bartering chips," in his Epistle—"But after that the grace and kindness of God our Savior appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit..." (3:5). Jesus Himself made this distinction—"This is the work of God that you believe on Him whom that One sent" (John 6:29). The use of deeds as a criterion of salvation is unreliable, since they can easily become a facade. And this is indeed, what Jesus had in mind when He called the Pharisees "whited sepulchres, full of dead men's bones" (Matthew 23:27). We would hardly expect James to have misunderstood Jesus' words, nor were James' words contradictory to Jesus'. If the "work of God" according to Jesus was belief on Him, then James would be saying that there must be some evidence of faith, at least by believing in Christ. So Jesus saw the work of God as a change of heart, while the deeds of the Pharisees left the heart full of death and functioned merely as "whitewash." The work of God, on the other hand, was an inner work that produced belief in Christ. Paul and Titus both used the word "works" as deeds, which, like the Pharisees, would do nothing for the heart. James' use of the word does not specify deeds, but indicates that where there is faith, there will also be some evidence. Jesus said that the evidence was belief in Him.

But what about our deeds? What about our service?

Once we have the Spirit of Christ within us, our service is up to Him. This is what the "gifts" are all about. The problem comes when others attempt to take charge of the service that we render and translate what should be service to Christ into service to the religious organization, ostensibly doing the work of Christ, but in reality doing the work that other prescribed. In Jesus' own words, He puts the responsibility of directing the service of His people in the hands of God—"Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest that He will send forth laborers into His harvest" (Matthew 9:38). When the Lord has a task for us to perform, He will give us both the compelling and the capacity to do it. Paul said "*The love of Christ constrains [compels] us...*" (II Corinthians 5:14). It was not love **FOR** Christ that compelled Paul, but the love of Christ **IN** him. In other words, Christ's love within reached out to others without. Paul did not have to cultivate love—a function of the flesh, but the Spirit of Christ in his own spirit reached out to others with a love that was beyond the fleshly capacity. The love that the world talks about—"What the world needs is love"—is a fabrication of the flesh and is both shallow and unreliable, since it is governed by a myriad of diverse patterns in the human brain. The love of Christ that originates in the spirit circumvents all the inadequacies of the human psyche.

Service that is compelled or urged by other Christians may not be the service that Christ has for us and therefore may not be service that is motivated by the Holy Spirit. Such service is not based upon human reason, but upon the will of God. Numbers have nothing to do with it. We do not judge what the Lord wants us to do in terms of regional surveys. The Lord may have one person or a

handful or a hundred that He wants us to affect. Or He may have services that are in the nature of prayer support or financial support or moral support. Paul uses the human body as the analogy of the diversities of service and gifts. We are inclined to think only of particular bodily functions, but, after all, there are as many possibilities as there are neurons in the body. (Numbering in the trillions). Each one has a gift, but only God really knows the ultimate nature of that gift in the individual believer. Others will try to persuade us that we have this gift or that, but only God really knows.

So then what must we do?

We must *“Rest in the Lord and wait patiently for Him”* (Psalm 37:7). When we put the matter in His hands, we will do what He wants us to do. We may even now be accomplishing the gift that the Lord has given us, and yet it may not be in keeping with the common concept of what a gift might be.

Then what, exactly, are the outward expressions of the indwelling Christ?

We will have other things to say about this, but the essential element is belief in Christ which is evidenced by the desire to identify with Him. John says—*“As many as received Him He gave them the power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name”* (John 1:12).

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