



Spirit-Union Soul-Rest

JAMES A. FOWLER

SPIRIT-UNION
ALLOWS FOR
SOUL-REST

JAMES A. FOWLER

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By spiritual union with the living Lord Jesus, every Christian has the provision to be at "rest" – avoiding the striving performance to achieve or overcome thoughts in the mind, feelings in the emotions, difficulties in decision-making, and urgings in one's desires. In the midst of temptations and the trials of life, Christians can experience the "rest for their souls" (Matt. 11:29) that Jesus promised.

1 Introduction

The world around us is restless hurrying and scurrying to accomplish something meaningful. They are seeking "rest" – but they are looking in all the wrong places. True "rest" can only be found in "union with Christ."

"Union with Christ" is the essence of Christianity. Christianity is not a belief-system or a morality code, but is the union presence and function of the living Lord Jesus within Christians. In a previous study¹, we charted out the "union of being" and the "union of doing" of Christ and the Christian. We are, for all practical purposes, extending that previous study in a sequel to consider how the theological theorem becomes psychological practicum. We want to explore the psychological and behavioral implications of "union with Christ."

In other words, we will be considering "the divine outworking of the divine indwelling." That is, I believe, the choice that Adam and Eve faced at the "tree of life" as recorded in Genesis 2 – a choice to allow for the divine outworking of the divinely in-breathed life of God. God had breathed into them the breath/spirit of divine life (2:7), and the "tree of life" (same Hebrew word for "life" in 2:7 and 2:9) represented the opportunity to choose the divine outworking of the divinely inbreathed life of God. We know that they chose the other tree, "the tree of the knowledge of good and evil," with disastrous consequences for themselves and the human race. Their choice did not lead to "rest," but to much work and performance – physical, religious, and otherwise.

As Christians we have a similar choice. In spiritual regeneration we have been re-genesized (2:7), and the spirit/breath of the

triune God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit, has been breathed into our spirit. “If any man does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His” (Rom. 8:9), i.e. he is not a Christian. On the other hand, “He who is joined to the Lord (Jesus Christ) is one spirit with Him” (I Cor. 6:17). As Christians, redeemed and restored to right relationship with our Creator, we have the same choice Adam and Eve had prior to the fall – the choice to allow for the divine out-working of the divine indwelling life of Jesus.

Spirit and Soul

Before we consider how “spirit-union allows for soul-rest,” we need to note how important it is to distinguish and differentiate between spirit and soul – between spiritual and psychological functions. Christian religion, down through the centuries, has often failed to make the distinction between spiritual and psychological function. What they end up with is a mish-mash of psychological spirituality or spiritualized psychology. Considering spirit and soul to be equivalent synonyms of the “inner man,” Christian religion ends up with a hodge-podge of ambiguous admonitions to “receive Jesus into your soul/spirit/heart, and all is well,” or “believe in Jesus with your soul/spirit/heart, and work like hell.” Is it any wonder that Christians do not understand grace, “the *rest* of the gospel,” and how to allow for godliness in Christian behavior? If soul and spirit are synonymous, then psychological principles should be able to resolve the problems of mankind. Sigmund Freud is our savior – God forbid! (or as J.B. Phillips worded it, “what a ghastly thought.”²) That is why so much of what is called “Christian counseling” is nothing than a veneer of Christian and biblical terminology laid over the mush of secular psychological principles. Not at all helpful for Christian living.

It is imperative that we differentiate between spiritual and psychological function, or we will never understand spiritual realities, and never participate in the practicum of Christian behavior

and “rest.” Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, saying, “Now may the God of peace sanctify you entirely; and may your *spirit* and *soul* and *body* be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is He who calls you, and He also will bring it to pass” (I Thess. 5:23,24). These are clearly differentiated functions that need to be “set apart” in order to realize God’s holy intent in our lives. These verses in I Thessalonians 5 have recently been dismissed as but Paul’s “sign-off” of his epistle, which cannot be viewed as having any doctrinal import.³ Apparently, in this view, “*all* scripture is *not* inspired, and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness” (II Tim. 3:16). Another New Testament verse to be considered is Heb. 4:12 – “the Word of God” (this is not the Bible, but the living expression and revelation of God, Jesus Christ, the Word of God who was from the beginning and IS God. Cf. Jn.1:1,14), is “living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing as far as the dividing of *soul* and *spirit*, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.” The Spirit of Christ is able to pierce into our inner being and distinguish, and cause us to discern, between our deepest spiritual intentions and the psychological thoughts that do not always coincide with our spiritual intents.

I cannot over-emphasize how important it is for Christians to understand the difference between spiritual function and psychological function. Without this distinction the Christian life will remain ambiguous. When spirit and soul and body are distinguished, this has often been called the trichotomous or tripartite understanding of man’s constitution. It is probably best to avoid such terms, for they leave a wrong impression. Trichotomous means, “cut in three,” and tripartite means “three parts.” A human individual is not cut in three parts, compartments, or partitions. A human being is a functional whole, who functions at three levels: spiritual, psychological, and physiological.⁴ To differentiate the spiritual and the psychological function of man is not an attempt to cut man into separate parts, but is a necessary distinction for understanding how God has created man to function.

2 Spirit-Union

In order to understand how “spirit-union allows for soul-rest,” we must first reiterate the foundation of spiritual union with Christ. We must take the time to review the biblical premises of “spirit-union” with Christ, and carefully define what we do, and do not, mean by “spirit-union.”

By “spirit-union” I am not referring to the objective union whereby humanity at large was represented in solidarity with the incarnation of Jesus Christ, when as the federal or representative head of the human race, the Son of God became united with mankind to redeem fallen man. The incarnational union of Christology is not the “spirit-union” I am speaking of.

“Spirit-union,” as I am using the term, is not an objective attribution of “positional” truth of “identification” with the historical Jesus when He was crucified, buried, rose again, and ascended. There is truth indeed in the fact that “when He died, we died,” that “when He was buried, we were buried,” that “when He was raised, we rose with Him,” and that “when He ascended, we ascended,” but that objective historical union, often called “positional union” or “identification union,” is not what I am referring to by the use of “spirit-union.”

Nor am I referring to an objective participation in the benefits of Christ’s redemptive work, whereby those who assent in faith to Christ’s substitutional and vicarious death for their sins are legally and juridically united with Christ in their standing and status before God in heaven. In such an attributed union with

Christ, Christians are declared righteous, as Christ's righteous action is imputed to them in forensic justification. Though theologically valid, this objective union is not the "spirit-union" I am referring to in this study.

By the term "spirit-union," I am referring to the subjective and internal union of the Spirit of Christ with the spirit of a receptive individual in spiritual regeneration. This has been called "regenerative union," "saving union," or "new-creation union." "If any person does not have the Spirit of Christ, he/she is none of His" (Rom. 8:9) – i.e. that person is not a Christian. This is the bottom-line of what constitutes Christianity. For, the one who is joined to the Lord Jesus Christ, receiving Him by faith, is "one spirit" with Him (I Cor. 6:17). That is the "spirit-union" I am referring to in this study. It is a personal, relational, and spiritual union that every genuine born-again believer participates in. If you are a Christian, you have spirit-union with the living Lord Jesus.

The internal, subjective "spirit-union" that I am speaking of is not a subjective state or condition that the Christian has to seek to attain or achieve by a litany of spiritual disciplines such as "centering prayer" or "spiritual direction," etc. "Spirit-union" is not an elevated state of consciousness or ecstasy whereby a Christian transcends earthly concerns and becomes "so heavenly-minded, they are of no earthly good." "Spirit-union" is not a metaphysical merging or commingling with God wherein a person is consubstantially and essentially deified in an organic union that constitutes the person as "no longer human."

"Spirit-union" is the spiritual condition of every Christian – every "Christ-one" who has been united with Christ, having accepted God's grace in His Son, Jesus Christ, by faith. Are you a Christian? Have you received the Spirit of Christ into your spirit? If so, then you have "spirit-union" with the Spirit of Christ, with the Spirit of God, with the Holy Spirit, i.e., with the triune God.

This does not mean that you are essentially, inherently, intrinsically Jesus Christ. That would be blasphemy. This is not an essential union of fused coalescence or absorbed equivalence. The “spirit-union” effected at regeneration is a personal, relational union, wherein the distinction of Christ and the Christian is maintained. That is why it has traditionally been referred to as a “personal relationship with Jesus Christ.” But the idea of a “personal relationship” with Jesus has often been viewed as but a contractual connection that fails to adequately explain the “spirit-union” of the Christian with the Spirit of God.

One of the more important biblical verses that refers to “spirit-union” is I Cor. 6:17, where Paul states, “the one who is joined to the Lord is one spirit (with Him).” The context of the previous verse is a quotation from Genesis 2:24, which refers to God’s intent in the marital union as a man and a woman become “one flesh” in marriage. The “one flesh” union of a husband and wife in marriage, and the “one spirit” union of Christ and the Christian are interrelational unions wherein neither party is diminished or denied in the union of the two, but there is a real integrated union.

What is Spiritual?

Since the word “spirituality” is such a buzzword in our society today, we should probably consider how this word relates to “spirit-union,” as we are using the term. Religiously, “spirituality” refers to everything from conformity to moral standards, amassing doctrinal knowledge, faithful participation in church activities, speaking in tongues, ecstatic flights of mystical fancy, and so on. On the other hand, the world around us views almost anything as “spiritual” today. Enthusiasm is “spiritual,” and so is coincidence, the unintelligible, environmentalism, evolution, drugs, music, art, running, sobriety, sensitivity, and myriad other things (even selfishness and sinfulness). What is the biblical understanding of

“spiritual”? In I Cor. 2:15, Paul wrote, “He who is spiritual appraises all things.” In the context, a “spiritual” person is contrasted to the “natural man” in the previous verse (2:14), who cannot understand the things of the Spirit of God. The “natural man” is the unregenerate person. The “spiritual person” is one who has received the Spirit of Christ and been regenerated. A few verses earlier (2:12) Paul had explained, “we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God.” A “spiritual person” is one who has experienced “spirit-union” with the Spirit of Christ in spiritual regeneration. Such a spiritual condition of “spirit-union” is not an end in itself, but the character of the Spirit of God who lives within is to be expressed in psychological and physical behavior. That is why Paul went on to write, “I could not speak to you as to (those acting as) spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to babes in Christ” (I Cor. 3:1). And to the Galatians, Paul explained that those “who are spiritual” should restore one who is caught in a trespass with gentleness (6:1). Biblical spirituality involves the presence and function of the Spirit of God, the Spirit of Christ, the Holy Spirit, the triune God in an individual. In other words, what we are calling “spirit-union” and “soul-rest.”

Spiritual Exchange

Such a spiritual condition of “spirit-union” is predicated on the spiritual exchange that must have transpired in an individual’s spirit at regeneration. We did not receive the “spirit of the world,” but the “Spirit of God,” Paul explained (I Cor. 2:12). To the Romans, Paul explained that “We have not received a spirit of slavery, but a spirit of adoption as sons” (Rom. 8:15). John explained that there is a radical difference between “the spirit of error” and “the spirit of truth” (I Jn. 4:6). In the fallen sons of disobedience there is a “spirit” that is working (Eph. 2:2), but Christians are those who have received into their spirit the Spirit of Christ (Rom. 8:9), in a “spirit-union.” A spiritual exchange has taken place.

Since we have mentioned a “spiritual exchange,” perhaps this would be the proper place to address the correlation of what we are calling “spirit-union” with the familiar designation of “the exchanged life” that is so common in Christian circles today. I think many Christians are befuddled by the terminology of “exchanged life.” They are asking questions like, “What is being exchanged for what? Where does this exchange take place? Is it a spiritual reality or a psychological reality? When does such an exchange transpire? Is it a singular point in time, or is it a progressive process? How do I facilitate this exchange? What do I have to do?” Many have discovered that there is much ambiguity in the “exchanged life” teaching. Part of the problem is due to an inadequate distinction of spirit and soul – of spiritual function and psychological function. Much of the “exchanged life” teaching focuses on the soulical or psychological, emphasizing the need to “exchange” my selfishness for Christ’s action. In the process it often degenerates into another form of “how to” performance religion, encouraging surrender, brokenness, and “more faith” in order to enact this exchanged life behavioral expression. If I were to use “exchanged life” terminology, and I cautiously try to avoid such, I would be referring to the spiritual reality of the spiritual exchange that happens at spiritual regeneration, when an individual exchanges spiritual death for spiritual life. When a person receives Jesus Christ by faith, the spiritual exchange takes place, and the Christian has “spirit-union” with the Lord. The living Lord Jesus explained to Saul on the road to Damascus that he would send him to the Gentiles to convert them “from darkness to light, and from the dominion of Satan to God” (Acts 26:18). Beyond that exchange of spirit, wherein we are no longer “deriving from the being” of the one spirit (Greek *exousia*), but deriving from the Spirit of God, there is no additional “exchange” required. Henceforth, the Christian participates in the overcoming activity of the Spirit of Christ, as the “positive swallows up the negative,” and the grace of God facilitates the behavioral expression of His own character in our behavior.

Spiritual Nature

The spiritual exchange that allows for “spirit-union” with the Spirit of Christ is also an exchange of spiritual nature. The humanistic premises of the world’s philosophies posit that man has an intrinsic “human nature,” and then go on to argue whether that nature is essentially good or evil. Biblical Christian teaching does not allow for such human essentialism, but recognizes that God created man as a derivative creature who derives his nature and character from one spirit or the other, God or Satan. Paul explained to the Ephesians that in their unregenerate state they “were by nature, children of wrath” (Eph. 2:3). The unregenerate “sons of disobedience” derive their evil expressions of selfish sinfulness from the “god of this world” (II Cor. 4:4), for the “whole world lies in the evil one” (I Jn. 5:19). But in the spiritual exchange from “Satan to God” (Acts 26:18), the Christian becomes “a partaker of the divine nature” (II Pet. 1:4), in “spirit-union” with the Trinity. The nature of a man is the nature of the spiritual personage that indwells him/her. Ours is a derived nature. But the humanistic premises of an intrinsic human nature are so pervasive in Western thinking, that evangelical Christian thinkers accept the premise and explain that the Christian has “two natures,” a so-called human nature, sin nature, Adam nature, fallen nature, flesh nature, self-nature, or old nature, as well as the divine nature of Christ. These concepts of evangelical humanism explain that the Christian has “two natures,” an “old nature” and a “new nature” (both phrases are not biblical), creating a schizophrenic duality that disallows Christians from understanding their “spirit-union” and who they are in Christ. Even some of the most popular versions of the New Testament have interpolated their interpretations of evangelical humanism into the text of scripture, mistranslating the Greek word for “flesh” (sarx) as “old nature” or “old sinful nature,” etc. It is tragic how modern evangelicalism has obscured Christian teaching, and denied the realities of “spirit-union.”

Spiritual Life

The exchange that allows for “spirit-union” with Christ is an exchange from spiritual death to eternal spiritual life. This “eternal life” that we receive in Jesus Christ is not some “thing” that we possess; rather, “eternal life” is a Person, Jesus Christ, with Whom we have spirit-union. Jesus said, “I am the resurrection and the life” (Jn. 11:25); “I am the way, the truth, and the life” (Jn. 14:6). “He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life” (I Jn. 5:12). In “spirit-union” with Christ we have “passed out of death into life” (I Jn. 3:14), for “Christ lives in us” (Gal. 2:20), and “Christ is our life” (Col. 3:4). This spirit-union of eternal life in Christ is also a partaking of immortality. Immortality is not something we are waiting to participate in after physical death. “God alone possesses immortality” (I Tim. 6:16), but He has “abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel” (II Tim. 1:10). Our spirits and souls are not essentially immortal as evangelical humanism indicates, but we derive immortality and eternal life from the presence of Jesus in “spirit-union.”

Spiritual Light

The Christian in “spirit-union” has exchanged darkness for light. The risen Lord Jesus told Saul that his mission was to “convert people from darkness to light” (Acts 26:18). To the Colossian Christians, Paul wrote, “He (Jesus) delivered us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son” (Col. 1:13). “Called out of darkness into His marvelous light” (II Pet. 2:9), Christians are “saints in light” (Col. 1:12), “sons of light” (I Thess. 5:5), and “children of light” (Eph. 5:8), for “the life was the light of men” (Jn. 1:4).

Spiritual Identity

Spirit-union is such an integral and intimate union that the identity of the Christian is based on the presence of Jesus Christ. Spirit-union is an identity-union. The deepest sense of any person's identity is in the realm of the spirit. A Christian is a Christ-one, identified by the presence of Jesus Christ Who forms the basis of his/her identity. It is of utmost importance that a Christian understand their spiritual identity, accepting and affirming "who they are in Christ" – their derived spiritual identity based on their spirit-union with Christ. If we do not know who we are, then we will never be able to behave like who we've become.

Christians are "*sons of God*" through faith in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:26). We are "*children of God*" (I Jn. 3:1,2) – no longer "*children of the devil*," but "*children of God*" (I Jn. 3:10), for "as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God" (John 1:12). Christians are "*the people of God*" (I Pet. 2:10), intended to "*rest*" (Heb. 4:9) as God's own possession (Titus 2:14). Christians constitute the new "*Israel of God*" (Gal. 6:16; cf. Rom. 9:6). We are "*members of God's household*" (Eph. 2:19), and "*citizens of heaven*" (Phil. 3:20). Every Christian is a "*priest*" (I Pet. 2:9; Rev. 1:6) with access into the Holy of Holies of God's presence (Heb. 10:19). We are "*kings*" (I Pet. 2:9), who "*reign in life through Jesus Christ*" (Rom. 5:17). Though our spiritual identity was once that of "*sinners*" (Rom. 5:19), we are now "*saints*" (Rom. 8:27; Eph. 1:18; 4:12), having a derived identity as "*holy ones*" by the presence of the "*Holy One*" (Acts 3:14; I Jn. 2:1), Jesus Christ, with Whom we have spirit-union.

Whereas we were once "*ungodly*" (Rom. 5:6), we are now identified as "*godly*" (II Pet. 2:9). Whereas we were once "*excluded from the life of God*" (Eph. 4:18) and "*separate from Christ*" (Eph. 2:12), we are now the "*chosen ones*" of God (Eph. 1:4; Col.3:12), who have been "*reconciled to God*" (Rom. 5:10,11)

and have been “accepted to the glory of God” (Rom. 15:7). Whereas we were once “unrighteous” (I Cor. 6:9), we have now been “made righteous” (Rom. 5:19), for we have been “created in righteousness” (Eph. 4:24), and have “become the righteousness of God in Christ” (II Cor. 5:21), as the “Righteous One” (Acts 7:52; 22:14), Jesus Christ, has become the basis of who we are. We have been made “holy, and blameless and beyond reproach” (Col. 1:22). Christians are even identified as “perfect” (Phil. 3:15; Heb. 12:23) in spiritual condition, because the Perfect One, Jesus Christ, dwells within their spirit in spirit-union.

Spiritual Newness

Everything has become “new” for the Christian who is in spirit-union with Christ. The prophet Ezekiel prophesied about the great renewal that would be enacted in Christ when he spoke for God, saying, “I will give you a *new heart* and put a *new spirit* within you” (Ezek. 36:26). When the Christian receives Christ in regeneration, this “new heart” and “new spirit” become a spiritual reality within. This is not a mechanical replacement whereby we receive a new heart-part, nor is it a heart transplant. Rather, in the “inner man” (II Cor. 4:16) of our spiritual and psychological function we receive the “newness of life” (Rom. 6:4) of the presence and function of Jesus Christ. Jeremiah’s comment that “the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked” (Jere. 17:9) is no longer true for a Christian. The Spirit of Christ indwells our hearts (Eph. 3:17), and this constitutes a “new heart” wherein “God has written His laws upon our hearts” (Heb. 8:10; 10:16). “If any man is in Christ, he is a *new creature*; old things have passed away and new things have come” (II Cor. 5:17). By spirit-union with Christ, everything has become new spiritually in the Christian. We are a “*new creation*” (Gal. 6:15). We are a “*new man*” (Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:10). The “old man” that we were in our unregenerate state has been crucified (Rom. 6:6) and put off (Eph. 4:22; Col. 3:9), and we are a “new man” in Christ. We are not a schizophrenic “old man” and “new

man” at the same time, as popular evangelical humanism has often suggested, but the “old man” has been exchanged for the “new man,” the completely new identity we have “in Christ.”

In Christ

Perhaps the most frequent phrase used in the New Testament to refer to our spirit-union is the little phrase, “in Christ,” and its variant forms of “in Christ Jesus,” “in Jesus Christ,” “in the Lord Jesus Christ,” and “in Him,” etc. “By His (God’s) doing you are *in Christ Jesus* (I Cor. 1:30),” Paul writes. “If any man is *in Christ*, he is a new creature” (II Cor. 5:17). Whenever we see that phrase it is quite legitimate to read it as “in union with Christ.” For example, “Consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God *in Christ Jesus* (in union with Christ Jesus)” (Rom. 6:11). And later in the same chapter, “The free gift of God is eternal life *in Christ Jesus our Lord* (in union with Christ Jesus our Lord)” (Rom. 6:23). The phrase “in the Spirit” can also refer to the spirit-union with the Spirit of Christ.

Indwelling Trinity

Spirit-union is brought into being by the presence of the entire Trinity within us. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit have come to dwell and take up residence in our spirit. When we become “partakers of the divine nature” (II Pet. 1:4), we become partakers of God the Father, “partakers of Christ” (Heb. 3:14), and “partakers of the Holy Spirit” (Heb. 6:4). Jesus explained to the disciples in the upper room discourse, “If anyone loves Me, We (My Father and I) will come and make Our abode with him” (John. 14:23). In his first epistle, John writes, “Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, *God abides in Him* and he in God (in union with God)” (I John 4:15,16). It is the apostle Paul who is so clear about Christ indwelling us. This is the mystery of the gospel, Paul

states, “*Christ in you, the hope of glory*” (Col. 1:27). “It is no longer I who live, but *Christ lives in me*” (Gal. 2:20), Paul tells the Galatians. Paul asked the Corinthians, incredulously, “Do you not recognize that *Jesus Christ is in you* – unless indeed you fail the test?” (II Cor. 13:5). Likewise the *Holy Spirit dwells in us* (II Tim. 1:14). “God gave us the Spirit in our hearts as a pledge” (II Cor. 1:22), and has “sent the Spirit into our hearts, crying, ‘Abba, Father’” (Gal. 4:6). Spirit-union is established by the presence of the entire Trinity.

Spirit Actions

Since God dwells in us in Spirit-form, the scriptures employ numerous explanations of how the spirit-union is established and functions. We must be “born of the Spirit” (John 3:5,8), Jesus told Nicodemus. We receive the “gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38), Peter explained in the first sermon of the church. We are “sealed in the Spirit” (Eph. 4:30; II Cor. 1:22); “sealed in Him (in union with Christ) with the Holy Spirit of promise” (Eph. 1:13), as God’s own possession. Every Christian is “baptized in the Spirit” (I Cor. 12:13) when our spirits are overwhelmed by the Spirit of Christ, and we become part of the one Body, the Church. Every Christian has an “anointing of the Spirit” (I Jn. 2:20,27), whereby the Spirit of God becomes our inner teacher. To the Romans, Paul explained, “All who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God” (Rom. 8:14). Notice, he does not say, “Those who are following the leading of the Spirit are sons of God.” Nor does he say, “Those who seek the leading of the Spirit are sons of God.” No, he says that every Christian, every “son of God,” has the inner leading and direction of the Spirit of God – whether, or not, they seek or follow that leading.

Inner Senses

In like manner, every Christian has an *inner vision*, whereby with “the eyes of their heart” (Eph. 1:18) they can “look at the things which are not seen, which are eternal” (II Cor. 4:18), and “behold the glory of God” (II Cor. 3:18). In spirit-union, Christians have an *inner, spiritual hearing* to “hear what the Spirit is saying” (Rev. 2:7,11). Jesus said, “My sheep hear My voice” (John 10:3,4,16,27). “If anyone has an ear, let him hear” (Rev. 13:9) and listen to what God is saying. It might even be noted that we have an *inner taste* whereby we can “taste and see that the Lord is good” (Ps. 34:8).

Inner Knowing

Those who participate in spirit-union with God often fail to appreciate and tune-in to the intuitive spiritual knowledge that the presence of God provides. Paul explained that “the natural man does not understand spiritual things, but he that is spiritual (i.e., has spirit-union) appraises all things” (I Cor. 2:14,15). This *inner knowing* is both an intuitive knowledge and an intimate relational knowledge. “We *know* (spiritual intuition) that we have come to *know* (spiritual intimacy of relationship) Him” (I John 2:3). To the Corinthians, Paul wrote, “We have received the Spirit of God, that we might *know* the things freely given to us by God” (I Cor. 2:12). We are “able to *comprehend* what is the breadth and length and height and depth (of God’s ways), and to *know* the love of Christ which surpasses (natural) knowledge” (Eph. 3:18,19). Beyond natural logic and reasoning, there is the Theo-logic whereby we can apprehend the supernatural and unseen intents of God. By natural reasoning, God and His ways are “past finding out” (Rom. 11:33), but the Christian in spirit-union with God can “*know* God’s ways” (Heb. 3:10), “*know* the grace of God” (II Cor. 8:9), “*know* that he has the anointing of the Spirit” (I John 2:20), “*know* that he has passed out of death into life” (I John 3:14), “*know* that he has eter-

nal life" (I John 5:13), and, in fact, "know all things" (Jude 1:5) that God wants him/her to know. Paul exhorted the Philippians to let their "love (God's love) abound in *real knowledge* and *spiritual discernment*" (Phil. 1:9), able to "discern good and evil" (Heb. 5:14). "The Son of God has come and given us *understanding*" (I John 5:20), John wrote. And Paul prayed that the Colossians might "be filled with the *knowledge* of His will in all spiritual *wisdom* and *understanding*" (Col. 1:9). To Timothy, he explained, "the Lord will give you *understanding* in everything" (II Tim. 2:7). God reveals things to the Christian with whom He has spirit-union. Paul told the Philippians, "Have this attitude, and if you have a different attitude, God will *reveal* it to you" (Phil. 3:15). "May God grant you a spirit of *wisdom* and *revelation* in the *knowledge* of Him" (Eph. 1:17), he prayed for the Ephesians. This spiritual revealing of God's character, God's ways, and God's direction cannot be "taught" by didactic methods; it must be "caught" in the spiritual perception and awareness of "spirit-union" with God. The Psalmist reported, "My inner man instructs me in the night" (Ps. 16:7). Much of evangelical religion is afraid of this intuitive spiritual direction, and seeks to limit revelation to the knowledge and understanding that can be drawn from study of the Bible, denying the inner instruction and direction of the Spirit of God.

Mind of Christ

What does Paul mean when he writes, "We have the *mind of Christ*" (I Cor. 2:16)? One young man with whom I spoke adamantly reacted, saying, "I don't see how a Christian can say that." I began with the basic foundation, and asked, "Are you a Christian?" He replied, "Yes." I continued, "Did Christ come into your spirit when you became a Christian?" Again he responded, "Yes." Then I asked, "Do you think that Jesus came into you without His mind? Did He leave it up in heaven?" "No," he said sheepishly. "Then you have the mind of Christ," I concluded. But the "mind of Christ" is more than just a static presence, for the "mind of Christ"

within is dynamically conveying the divine intents via spiritual revelation. That is why Paul admonishes, “Let this mind be in you, which was in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 2:5), encouraging the “renewing of the mind” (Rom. 12:2; Eph. 4:23) for the development of established attitudes in the soul.

Love of God

Every Christian, in “spirit-union” with Christ, not only has the “mind of Christ,” but he also has the “*love of God*” within his spirit. To the Romans, Paul stated, “The *love of God* has been poured out within our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us” (Rom. 5:5). “God is love” (I John 4:8,16), so when He dwells within us in spirit-union, His love is present and active within us. The “love of Christ compels us” (II Cor. 5:14), and the “love of the Spirit” (Rom. 15:30) prompts us to express God’s love for others. Whereas the unregenerate “want to do the *desires* of their father, the devil” (John 8:44), those in spirit-union with God have an inner “*desire* for goodness” (II Thess. 1:11), and a “*desire* to live godly in (union with) Christ Jesus” (II Tim. 3:12).

Will of God

Paul explained to Timothy that those who are not Christians are under “the snare of the devil, being held captive to do his will” (II Tim. 2:26). Christians, on the other hand, have the *will of God* within them. God did not come into us without His will, and He is “at work in us, both to *will* and to work for His good pleasure” (Phil. 2:13). In spirit-union, we can “understand what the *will of the Lord* is” (Eph. 5:17), and “do the *will of God* from the heart” (Eph. 6:6) by the dynamic of His grace. The “will of God” is not something exterior to the Christian that we must seek to discover and find, and then aim at it as if it were the bulls-eye of a target. No, we have the “will of God” within us, and the “will of God” is al-

ways the life and character of Jesus lived out as us and through us to the glory of God.

Every Christian has “the mind of Christ,” “the desires of God,” and “the will of God” granted to them in spirit-union. They can, and will, intuitively know what God wants to be and do in them. This is the reason why some teachers attribute mind, desires, will, and intuition to the spiritual function of man, but this must not be to the exclusion of mental, emotional and volitional capabilities in the psychological function of man also (as will be addressed later).

Lordship of Christ

It is not possible to have spirit-union without recognizing the Lordship of Jesus Christ. When we receive the Trinity into our spirit at regeneration, we receive the Lord God. Some have suggested that Jesus can be received as one’s personal Savior, and later accepted as Lord. This is impossible, for Jesus is both Savior and Lord, and to receive Him is to receive Him for all that He is. He cannot be dissected and received partially. The initial confession of the early Christians was a verbal confession that “Jesus Christ is Lord” (Rom. 10:9; Phil. 2:11) by the Holy Spirit (I Cor. 12:3). Those who think that they can agree that “Jesus is Lord,” and disallow Him to “lord it over them,” have no understanding of the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Jesus has been given “all authority in heaven and in earth” (Matt. 28:18), and when we are converted “from the authority of Satan to the authority of God” (Acts 26:18), we are agreeing to submit to the “one Lord, Jesus Christ” (I Cor. 8:6). Watchman Nee referred to the indwelling Jesus as “Resident Boss.” In spirit-union, we “sanctify Christ as Lord in our hearts” (I Peter 3:15).

Spiritual Character

When Christ comes to dwell in a Christian, He comes complete with the divine character of God, for His character cannot be detached from His Being. Paul describes the divine character as the “fruit of the Spirit” which is “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and godly control of the self” (Gal. 5:22,23). These are not merely external behavioral traits or psychological attitudes, but they are the divine character that we receive when the triune God indwells us in spirit-union. For a Christian to complain that he/she lacks “patience” or “gentleness” or any other feature of divine character, and then to seek to develop such through educational instruction or psychological procedures, is to deny all that we have received in spirit-union. The inner spiritual character that is ours by the presence of God in spirit-union is intended to be transformed into attitudes in the soul and behavioral expression in the body.

Spiritual Gifts

Even the *charismata*, the so-called “spiritual gifts,” are all ours in spirit-union. These are but the grace-expressions or the Spirit-actions of the ministry of Christ. Christ enters into us in spirit-union with all the potentiality of His ministry within His Body, the Church. The spiritual gifts are not trophies of spirituality, nor are they power-toys with which Christians perform their “ministries.” When the living Christ comes into each Christian, He comes complete with all of His abilities to minister and serve. “We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us” (Rom. 12:8), and “to each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good” (I Cor. 12:7). In spirit-union Christ within us possesses and conveys all of His intended action and ministry through us.

Complete in Christ

In spirit-union we are “complete in Christ” (Col. 2:10), lacking nothing spiritually. “All has become new” (II Cor. 5:17), and we have received everything God has to give. As one rather uneducated rural preacher expressed it, “You got all there is to get when you got Jesus. You ain’t gonna get no more, ‘cause there ain’t no more to get.” Paul advised the Corinthian Christians, “all things belong to you; whether things present or things to come, all things belong to you” (I Cor. 2:20,21). To the Ephesians, Paul exclaimed, “God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (Eph. 1:3). Peter concurred, “God has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence” (II Peter 1:3).

Jesus said, “I came that you might have life, and have it more abundantly” (John 10:10). In spirit-union with Christ we have “*abundant life*.” “He is able to do exceedingly abundantly beyond all that we could ask or think, according to the power that works within us” (Eph. 3:20). Union-life is *grace life*. “God is able to make all grace abound to you, that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed” (II Cor. 9:8). “My grace is sufficient for you” (II Cor. 12:9), God told Paul. In union with Christ we participate in the “*supplied life*,” living and ministering by “the strength which God supplies” (I Peter 4:11). “Not that we are adequate in ourselves, to consider anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy/sufficiency is from God” (II Cor. 3:5). Christ within is “the power of God” (I Cor. 1:24), and we are “strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man” (Eph. 3:16); “strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience” (Col. 1:11). “We have this treasure (Jesus Christ) in earthen vessels, that the surpassing greatness of the power may be of God, and not from ourselves” (II Cor. 4:7). That is why Paul could say, “I can do all things through Him Who strengthens me” (Phil. 4:13).

How good can it get? Can it get any better than that? Impossible!

Yet, one young lady angrily lashed out, "It's too good to be true. I don't believe it." That is her right, but she has a very inadequate view of God and His grace in Jesus Christ. Others have responded, "It sounds too subjective, too mystical. Are you sure you aren't spiritualizing? Is this some form of triumphalism or perfectionism?" Some have responded, "I heard a preacher say that these were just 'positional truths' that were true from God's position or perspective, but they couldn't be considered 'actually true,' or they would lead to passivism." No, these are actual truths of our spirit-union with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, abundantly documented in the new covenant scriptures. They are the essence of what it means to be a Christian. Until we understand who we are in Christ (our spiritual identity) and all we have in Christ (our spiritual provision or supply), we will never begin to behave like who we have become in accord with all we've been given by God's grace.

3 Soul-Rest

Our premise is, “spirit-union allows for soul-rest.” What do we mean by “rest”? The English word “rest” has two primary meanings. The first definition is that of “remainder,” referring to “the part that remains.” The second primary definition signifies “cessation and freedom from performance or activity.” It will be the latter of these two definitions that will be the emphasis of this study on “soul-rest,” for we intend to explain that the Christian can “rest” from the performance of trying to please or appease God, and can experience the freedom of ceasing from all performance activity that might attempt to gain or enact what he already has in spirit-union with Jesus Christ.

Spirit-union allows for soul-rest, and should lead to psychological function that derives from the sufficiency that the Christian has in spirit-union with Christ. Notice that the title indicates that spirit-union “allows for” (we could have said, “provides for”) soul-rest. Spirit-union does not inevitably and immediately cause and produce soul-rest. Soul-rest is not an automatic outcome of spirit-union. Soul-rest is a progressive experience of allowing the Spirit of God who dwells within the Christian to function within that Christian’s behavior. Simply stated, “soul-rest is ceasing from our performance of doing and striving to get what God has already given to us.”

The cessation of the performance activity of “works” does not imply that “soul-rest” is acquiescent inactivity or irresponsible passivity. Soul-rest is not inertia or indifference. The religious advocates of a Christian life of treadmill performance often caricature

“rest” as the passivism of reclining in the La-Z-Boy of life, doing nothing, and having no concern for what goes on. This is a most unfair caricature, for those who experience soul-rest are those who are receptive to the grace-activity of God, allowing the living Lord Jesus Christ to be the “performer” of their Christian lives as He lives His life out through them. In the “rest” of the Christian life, everything is ek Christos, derived out of the dynamic of the life of the indwelling Jesus. Christianity is Christ in action.

Survey of Christian Concepts of “Rest”

A survey of Christian thought concerning “rest” reveals that this concept has suffered from various misemphases. Many have relegated “rest” to an expectation of heavenly rest that is longed for, only to be realized in the future. This is the theme of the Puritan classic by Richard Baxter, entitled *The Saint’s Everlasting Rest: A Treatise of the Blessed State of the Saints in their Enjoyment of God in Heaven*.⁵ There is no doubt that the future heavenly experience will indeed be restful without any need for personal performance, but this is not the concept of “rest” that predominates in the new covenant scriptures. It is questionable whether any of the New Testament references to “rest” refer to heavenly rest. It is a favorite theme of Christian hymnody, however. Another form of future rest sought by many Christians is the paradisiacal repose in an expected earthly millennial kingdom, but this is a doubtful interpretation of Christian “rest.”

In a similar line of thought, many have pictured “rest” as the reclining repose of “resting on the promises of God.” In this case “resting” is similar to “reckoning” that God will faithfully keep His promises. Though not illegitimate, this is primarily an old covenant concept. Jewish eschatology always focused on the future promises, whereas Christian eschatology revels in the fact that the promises of God have been fulfilled and realized in Jesus Christ. “For as many as may be the promises of God, in Him they

are yes" (II Cor. 1:20). Rather than "resting on the promises," Christians are to "rest" in the ever-present grace of God realized in Jesus Christ.

Many Christians think of "rest" in the context of the Sabbath, the "day of rest," either Saturday or Sunday, set aside as a "day of worship." There is no doubt that the biblical concept of "rest" is connected with the Sabbath, for God rested on the seventh day of creation, ceasing from His generative action of creation (Gen. 2:2). This does not mean that God ceased from all action, passively lapsing into inaction. God always acts like the God that He is, and does what He does because He is Who He is. His Being is always in action, and His activity is always expressive of His Being. When the seventh day of the week was established as the Sabbath "day of rest" for the people of Israel (cf. Exod. 20:8), they were to rest from their labors to remember what God had done and was doing. Instead, the Jewish religion focused on the restrictions of labor, and turned the Sabbath day into a labyrinth of legalistic limitations. The "promised land of rest" (Deut. 12:9) did not provide rest (Ps. 95:11) either, for all the pictorial types of "rest" in the old covenant were designed to point to the "rest" that was only to be found in Jesus Christ. Christian rest is not connected to a particular day of the week, nor is it a geographical place in Palestine or heaven. Christian "Sabbath-rest" (Heb. 4:1-11) in the new covenant "day of salvation" (II Cor. 6:2) is the continuous opportunity to "rest" from all religious works (Heb. 4:10), by ceasing to try to perform religiously for God, and instead rest in His grace sufficiency through Jesus Christ. That rest from religious performance is the "rest" that we are responsible to diligently enter (Heb. 4:11).

When the concept of "rest" has been considered in reference to the Christian life, it has often been referred to as "the rest of faith." J. C. Metcalfe and D. M. McIntyre both have books entitled, *The Rest of Faith*.⁶ R. B. Thieme Jr. published a booklet, *The Faith-Rest Life*,⁷ regarding this to be a technique or procedure that one employs to live the Christian life, thereby changing "rest" into another form of performance. Wayne Barber has authored a book en-

titled, *The Rest of Grace*,⁸ correctly emphasizing that the Christian can “rest” in God’s grace. It is important to note that “faith” is not something the Christian must “do” to get “rest.” Faith must not be transformed into a “work” that contradicts the definition of “rest” as “ceasing from performance activity.” It is probably better to refer to “grace-rest” or “Christ-rest” than to “faith-rest.”

Dan Stone and Greg Smith have co-authored a book entitled, *The Rest of the Gospel: When the Partial Gospel Has Worn You Out*,⁹ using the double entendre of the two meanings of “rest” mentioned above. The “rest” of the gospel is the remainder, the part that many people have not heard in popular Christian teaching, and that remainder pertains to “entering God’s rest” (final chapter) by ceasing from the performance activity of religion.

The use of the term “soul-rest” in this study finds its precursor in the words of Jesus Himself. “Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you *rest*. Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart; and you shall find *rest for your souls*” (Matt. 11:28,29). The final phrase, “rest for your souls,” appears to be an allusion to the prophecy of Jeremiah (6:16). In a mid-nineteenth century book, *A Treatise on Divine Union*,¹⁰ Thomas Upham has an extended final section on “The Soul’s Rest in Union,” and it was this work that sparked my thought-processes to pursue the study of “Spirit-union allows for Soul-rest.”

Explanation of “Soul-rest”

The world of fallen humanity runs to and fro at a hectic pace, seeking “rest” on the weekends, in church services, and on vacations and holidays. The humanistic work ethic that drives men to succeed and be significant leaves little time for “rest” and quietude. When identity is determined by performance – who we are based on what we do – then contemporary society thinks those who take time to “rest” will be left on the side of the road as excess

baggage or “nobodies.” “Rest” is regarded as but a utopian goal at the end of the rainbow of success. Thinking they can generate their own future of “rest” by their self-sufficient performance, fallen man runs on the treadmill that goes nowhere.

The contemporary religion of “evangelical humanism” has nothing to offer but a difference of scenery on the treadmill. Suffering from the “Martha complex” of “do-do-do for Jesus,” Christian religion seeks to motivate people with the carrot of heavenly rest at the end of the rat-race. Proclaiming that “there is no rest for the wicked,” the alternative is alleged to be a goodness achieved by striving performance. To achieve “rest” one must work for it. Meanwhile, God seems to be saying, “Be still (cease striving), and know that I am God” (Ps. 46:10). Jesus said, “Observe the lilies of the field, how they do not toil or spin... Do not be anxious then... But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added to you” (Matt. 6:28-33). Modern Christians find it so difficult to just “be” – to live in the “isness” of the I AM of divine Being, and to allow their “doing” to be an expression of the I AM in action.

To reiterate, we note that “soul-rest” is not a super deluxe version of the Christian life. It is not a “higher life” or “deeper life” that only a few super-saints achieve. Soul-rest is not receiving something more than what every Christian receives when he becomes a Christian at regeneration. Soul-rest is not an added extra in the Christian life: Jesus Christ + (something else). In spirit-union with God, we are “complete in Christ,” and soul-rest is allowing the indwelling presence of God to experientially permeate our psychological and behavioral function. Soul-rest is God’s intended experiential out-living of the Christian life, i.e., of the Christ-life.

The God we received within our spirit is the God of rest. He is not a Being who struggles and strives to act and achieve. He is not hurried or harried, hustled or hassled. He always acts out of His own Being, as His Tri-unity functions in perfect peace and harmony. Throughout scripture He is often identified as “the God

of peace” (Rom. 15:33; 16:20; II Cor. 13:11; Phil. 4:9; I Thess. 5:23). Soul-rest is allowing the “God of peace to equip us in every good thing to do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ” (Heb. 13:20). We are to “be anxious for nothing, but (allow) the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, to guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 4:6,7). Jesus said, “Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives (temporary external absence of conflict) do I give to you” (Jn. 14:27). Instead, Jesus is the “Lord of peace who gives us peace in every circumstance” (II Thess. 3:16), for He is the inner and eternal peace, tranquility, serenity of our souls. “He Himself is our peace” (Eph. 2:14), and we are to “let the peace of Christ rule in our hearts” (Col. 3:15). Soul-rest is participation in the peaceful harmony of Triune interaction and sufficiency.

Soul-rest is what Watchman Nee called “the normal Christian life.”¹¹ It is God’s intent for Christians. Soul-rest is the process of “being saved” (I Cor. 1:18), as we participate in what W. Ian Thomas called “the saving life of Christ”¹² (Rom. 5:10). Salvation is so misunderstood in evangelical Christianity today, for it is regarded as a static transaction wherein we acquire the commodity of “eternal life” that delivers and preserves us from future consequences. A dynamic and living understanding of salvation comes in recognizing that we are “made safe” from the dysfunction of abused and misused humanity, in order to experience the dynamic presence and function of the living Savior, Jesus Christ, in our lives. This dynamic understanding avoids the contrived distinction between salvation and sanctification. Sanctification is the ongoing process of salvation whereby we allow ourselves to be “set apart” as the conduits of the manifestation of God’s Holy character in the thinking, affections, and decision-making of our psychological and physical behavior. Soul-rest is participating in the “abundant life” (John 10:10) that Jesus came to bring. It is being “filled with the Spirit” (Eph. 5:18), and “growing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ” (II Pet. 3:18). Soul-rest is getting beyond Romans 7 and into Romans 8 – beyond Christian religion and into Christian reality.

4 Soul-Rest and the Mind

Christians of the Western world, in particular, are steeped in the Aristotelian logic of attempting to explain God intellectually. With rational philosophical and theological syllogisms they seek to explain the infinite with finite reasoning, thinking that if they get everything categorized and systematized logically, they can then “rest” in their precise definitions and intellectual explanations. Seldom do they recognize that their rationalistic reasoning produces constant unrest, for “the more you know, the more you know you don’t know.” The mental machinations of scholastic theological research often ends up in the “analysis paralysis” of a cerebral logjam that makes Christian religion into “reasoned insanity.” Man will never find “rest” in the unending attempts to figure out God and His ways.

The “deep things of God” (I Cor. 2:10), the “ways of God are past finding out” (Rom. 11:33). Western man has such a difficult time with the “unknown,” the incomprehensible, the unsearchable; with dialectic that cannot be resolved with synthesis; with Divine Mystery that involves infinite reality that cannot be explained with finite reasoning. Since the time of the so-called “Enlightenment” in the eighteenth century, when human reason was deified and elevated to the highest arbiter of understanding, humanistic rationalism has reigned supreme in Western thought. God’s response has long been, “‘My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways,’ declares the Lord. ‘For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher

than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts” (Isa. 55:8,9).

God graciously allows the theologues to engage in their academic gymnastics until they run into the wall of the outer reaches of human understanding, and then seek to find rest from their rationalistic reasoning. I know from personal experience. My natural tendency was to formulate a “believe-right” religion with all the correct doctrines and Biblically accurate exegesis. My personality was suited to theological fundamentalism. As a student of biblical hermeneutics, biblical theology, systematic theology, dogmatic theology, and the philosophy of religion, I set out to get God figured out – exhaustively evaluated, fixed in formulation, and boxed up in theological categories. Then, I ran into the dead-end of human reasoning, agnostically admitting that I could not know it all, and questioning whether I could know anything – even whether God existed. That was indeed a time of unrest! But, praise God, He led me towards soul-rest in the mind through spirit-union with Jesus Christ.

Intellectual knowledge of informational content is not the way to soul-rest. Paul explained to the Corinthians, “Knowledge makes arrogant. . .If anyone supposes that he knows anything, he has not yet known as he ought to know; but if any one loves God, he is known by Him” (I Cor. 8:1-3). Better to be known by God, than to claim to know anything. Knowing all the details of scripture and theology will not provide soul-rest in the Christian life. On the other hand, the “knowing” of personal and relational intimacy with God is essential to soul-rest. Paul’s exclamation to the Philippians reveals his awareness of this kind of “knowing.” “I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of *knowing Christ Jesus my Lord*, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things,...that I may *know Him*...” (Phil. 3:8-10). The relational knowing of an intimate relationship with the living Lord Jesus is of far greater value than a Ph.D. in any subject. The informational explosion of the modern era makes so much knowledge available, but leaves man in the unrest of his inability to know it all.

There seems to be a God-given desire in man to seek for truth. But when truth is sought in propositions, proposals, and precepts it is never enough. It never leads to soul-rest. The deepest sense of Truth can only be found in a Person. Jesus said, “You shall know the *truth*, and the *truth* shall make you free” (Jn. 8:32). “The Son shall make you free, and you shall be free indeed” (Jn. 8:36). “I am the way, the *truth*, and the life” (Jn. 14:6). Truth is a Person – Jesus Christ. He is the ultimate reality.

Man seeks wisdom. “Where is the wise man”(I Cor. 1:20), who can solve all our problems, Paul asked rhetorically, and then explained that “in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God” (I Cor. 2:21). The writer of Ecclesiastes admits, “I set my mind to know wisdom,... but I realized this was striving after wind” (Eccl. 1:17), “for even at night my *mind does not rest*” (Eccl. 2:23). Also recognizing the vanity of human wisdom, Paul wrote, “Let no man deceive himself. If any man thinks he is wise in this age, let him become foolish that he may become wise. The Lord knows the reasonings of the wise, that they are useless” (I Cor. 3:18,20). Like truth, wisdom is found in a Person, for “Christ Jesus became to us the wisdom of God” (I Cor. 2:24,30). To know Jesus Christ, not just to “know about” Jesus Christ, but to know Jesus Christ in an ongoing relationship of spiritual revelation and intimacy, is to have wisdom that the world knows not of. James, the Lord’s brother, wrote, “the wisdom from above is pure, peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy” (James 3:17).

The mind of man is never going to figure out life and all its complexities. No amount of human reasoning is going to solve the problems of the world or the insecurities of our human lives. The “deep things of God” (I Cor. 2:10) are discovered not by human reason, but by divine revelation. Soul-rest is only experienced when we are willing to go beyond human logic and accept the mysteries of Theo-logic; when we concentrate on spiritual realities that are invisible and unseen, rather than on naturalistic observation. Paul noted, “We look not at the things which are seen, but at

the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal" (II Cor. 4:18). Soul-rest comes when we desire to know only what He wants us to know – all else is peripheral. Soul-rest in the mind is experienced when we are content with revelation, rather than reason.

Mental Attitudes

Every individual has developed a full set of established attitudes in his mind. We have attitudes about things, events, ideas, God, other people, ourselves, etc. How were these attitudes developed? (1) By the recommendation of parents, educators, religious instructors, and the input of society via the media and enculturation. (2) By observation and experience, whereby we reflected on what we found acceptable and suitable. (3) By the revelation of God in natural phenomena (Rom. 1:19,20), the incarnation of the Son (Lk. 10:22; Gal. 1:16), the written record of the scriptures, and the personal revelation that God gives to Christians. Personal revelation is particularly important for the development of Christian attitudes that coincide with the attitude of Christ. "Have this *attitude* in you which was in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 2:5), Paul admonished, and then in the same epistle, "Have this *attitude* (of pressing on to know Jesus), and if you have any other *attitude* God will reveal it unto you" (Phil. 3:15). As noted above, much of religion shies away from this ungovernable concept of personal revelation.

Personal revelation is the primary means of our being "transformed by the renewing of the mind" (Rom. 12:2; Eph. 4:23). This renewal of established attitudes in the mind is not a task that we strive to figure out and formulate, but is the work of the Spirit of Christ revealing Himself in the process of our discipleship as followers and learners of Christ. Where does this "transformation" take place that is accomplished by the "renewing of the mind"? Not in the spirit of man, for Paul was writing to Christians in

Rome who had already experienced the spiritual transformation of regeneration. The “renewing of the mind” allows for a “transformation” of behavior, as thoughts and attitudes consistent with “the mind of Christ” within our spirit become the springboard for mobilizing God’s character expression within Christian behavior.

A particularly important area of our established attitudes is the attitude we have concerning ourselves. Many Christians seem to have a very negative attitude about themselves. They have self-denigrating, self-deprecating, self-condemnatory attitudes that identify themselves as “worms” before God, as useless, as amounting to nothing. Paul did indicate, “If anyone thinks he is something, when he is *nothing*, he deceives himself” (Gal. 6:3), but this is just a warning against prideful self-elevation and exaltation. To the Philippians, he wrote, “With humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself” (Phil. 2:3). And to the Romans, “I say to every man among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think, but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith” (Rom. 12:3). The flip-side of “thinking more highly of ourselves than we ought to think” is “thinking less of ourselves than we ought to think.” If a Christian views himself as a worthless liability to God, then he is failing to take into account the glorious asset that has been invested in him, his spiritual identity wherein “it is no longer I who lives, but Christ lives in me” (Gal. 2:20). A positive personal concept of who we are in Christ allows us to “rest” in a confident sense of well-being that is cheerful, upbeat, and optimistic. Apart from such a consciousness of our identity in Christ there will be an attitude of inferiority that brings unrest.

On the other hand, we must beware of spiritual pride that can develop among those who understand their spiritual identity in union with Christ, and because they “have the mind of Christ” (I Cor. 2:16) have experienced the intuitive “inner knowing” of revelation. Such Christians are tempted to develop a Gnostic and elitist sense of “knowing” that looks down its nose at those they deem to be at a lower level of spiritual “knowing,” or who cannot

articulate their spiritual understanding as they do. The words of James are pertinent: "If any one thinks himself to be devoted, and yet does not bridle his tongue, but deceives his own heart, this man's devotion is worthless" (James 1:26).

"As a man thinks in his heart, so is he" (Prov. 23:7). The meaning of this proverb has been much debated. Does it mean that a man's identity is established by his thinking? Though Descartes' statement, "I think, therefore I am," posited human thought as the basis of our existence, we cannot accept the *essentialism* that suggests who we are is based on how we think. Neither should we give way to a behavioral *determinism* whereby having entertained a thought, we cry out, "Oh no, I am a murderer, a thief, a rapist." Fleeting thoughts sometimes flood our mind, but these are the solicitous thoughts of the tempter, whereupon the living Word of Christ will divide between the "thoughts and intents" of our heart (Heb. 4:12). Neither do a man's thoughts portend a *potentialism* whereby the mind is the creative source of human action. The "positive thinking" of Norman Vincent Peale, and the subsequent "possibility thinking" of Robert Schuller are based on the humanistic premise of auto-generation or self-actualization. "What you can conceive, you can achieve. Visualize and actualize. Reckon and realize." These are the fallacious mottoes of the self-potential gurus who fail to understand the derivative function of man. The proverb of Solomon most likely means that "as a man thinks or reckons within his soul, so he is in the behavioral expression of the spiritual character that indwells him." Jesus stated it more clearly, "The good man out of his good treasure brings forth what is good, and the evil man out of his evil treasure brings forth what is evil" (Matt. 12:35). The Christian has "this treasure (the indwelling Lord Jesus Christ) in earthen vessels, that the surpassing greatness of the power may be of God and not from ourselves" (II Cor. 4:7). Our thoughts become the point where behavior is put in motion and mobilized, or transformed into action. Established attitudes and thought patterns allow the Christian to behave as who he has become in Christ, allowing the character of Christ to be represented in his life. On the other hand, inconsistent thoughts al-

low for the mobilization of behavior that is a misrepresentation of the character of Christ, i.e. sinful. This interpretation of behavior *expressionism* is apparently the import of the proverb.

Soul-rest in our minds will be a result of keeping a unified perspective of our spirit-union with Christ. A “separated concept” of disunion will never allow for resting in His sufficiency, but will always provoke the pressures of performance to please God. As we appreciate and affirm that “we have the mind of Christ” (I Cor. 2:16) within our spirit, we can draw from the revelation of His Theo-logic in our thought processes. Paul’s words are so instructive: “The *mind* set on the flesh is death, but the *mind* set on the Spirit is life and peace (rest). Those who are according to the Spirit, set their *minds* on the things of the Spirit” (Rom. 8:5,6). “Set your *minds* on things above, not on the things of the earth” (Col. 3:2), Paul advised the Colossians. To the Philippians he wrote, “Whatever is true, honorable, right, lovely, of good repute, excellent, and worthy of praise, let your *minds* dwell on these things” (Phil. 4:8). But “setting our minds” on divine things is not something we “work” to maintain. “The peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, shall guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 4:7).

Isaiah declared, “The steadfast of *mind* Thou will keep in perfect peace” (Isa. 26:3). “Perfect peace” might be interpreted to be synonymous with “soul-rest.” Some, however, misinterpret “steadfastness of mind” to be the necessity of conjuring up a continual Christian consciousness in every waking thought, and they engage in an inordinate striving to “keep focused” on Jesus. In a strict surveillance of every thought, they seek to allow their minds to think only of Jesus, and to think only the thoughts of Jesus. There is no rest in that – only a relentless self-policing of one’s thought life. A healthier understanding of “steadfastness of mind” is the steadfast recognition and awareness that “we have the mind of Christ,” and that Christ is our reason, our knowledge, our doctrine, and our teaching. As we live out of that union awareness, the intents of our heart will be the expression of the character of Christ

in every circumstance. In the midst of varying situations our psychological minds will align with the mind of Christ within our spirit, and in our wills we will make the continuing faith decision that says, "Yes, Lord, I want what You want."

We do not want to imply by our statements about living beyond human reason in the reception of divine revelation, that the Christian should espouse any form of anti-intellectualism that refuses to use the mind and employ the reason that God has created us with. We just refuse to deify human logic, and instead make the faith-choices to be receptive to Theo-logic and God's action in our lives. Peter tells us to "gird our *minds* for action" (I Peter 1:13), and this will involve exploring the options and making plans. "The *mind* of man plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps" (Prov. 16:7).

Soul-rest in the mind of the Christian frees us from thinking that we must figure out and know everything. It allows us to be content with knowing only what God wants us to know. Resting in the recognition that the living Lord Jesus is "the truth" (Jn. 14:6), and has "become our wisdom" (I Cor. 1:30), we desire to "know Him" (Phil. 3:10) relationally, and allow Him to direct our thoughts by personal revelation. We do not cease from thinking, but only from thinking that our mental knowledge is the source or guide for acceptable Christian behavior; remaining available instead to the "renewing of the mind" (Rom. 12:2) that allows the character of Christ to be mobilized in our behavior.

5 Soul-Rest and the Emotions

Many Christians seem to fight a constant battle with their emotions, which they regard as the culprits that keep them stirred up and disturbed. Emotions should not be considered as agitating enemies in our souls. Our emotions are not irritants that serve to “bug us” like pesky gnats. Emotions are not separate entities or powers, and are not essentially good or evil, but can be pervaded and activated by sinful or godly character.

God created all humans with the ability to experience emotion. The English word “emotion” is derived from the Latin, *ex-movere*, which means, “to move out.” Emotions allow us to be moved, aroused, invigorated, and enlivened. To be fully human, as God intended, we need to experience sensation, affection, fervor, enthusiasm, and passion. Without emotions life would lose its luster – there would be no thrill of excitement, no flush of embarrassment, no frustration of failure, no wonder and amazement of that which is around us and beyond us. We should embrace our emotions, and allow them to provide passion in our lives.

Emotions sometimes seem to be so spontaneous and overpowering, overwhelming us suddenly and even violently. They are not demons, however, but are integrally connected to the rest of our being (psychologically and physiologically). In particular, emotions connect with our thoughts and attitudes. People usually feel what they think. For example, if a person feels inferior, it is based on established attitudes about their identity. Some seek to blame the events of life for arousing their emotions, but events do not produce emotion. We cannot say, “That situation or that per-

son made me angry.” We have to own our own anger. The situation simply allows established attitudes comprised of expectations, assumptions and perceptions, to bring forth emotional reaction. In his *Meditations*,¹³ Marcus Aurelius (2nd century AD) wrote, “If you are pained by an external thing, it is not the thing that disturbs you, but your judgment about it.”

Modern psychology is preoccupied with emotions, advocating that people “get in touch with their feelings,” and “be true to their feelings.” With the prevailing philosophical outlook moving towards “postmodernism,” there is an extremely subjective orientation that evaluates everything by the emotional effect that it has on people, and often denies objective reference. This is not unlike the older “romanticism” that was the antithetical extreme of “rationalism.” As Christians, we want to avoid both the rationalism of the mind and the romanticism of the emotions, in order to allow for the expression of the Christ-life through our thoughts and feelings.

So, how do people deal with their emotions? There seem to be three main options: (1) To believe that emotions can have power over us and control us, passively crying that we are “victims” of our emotions. (2) To believe that we have the power in ourselves to actively control our emotions by mind over feeling, denial, or the suppression, ofr “stuffing,” of our emotions. (3) To believe that God gave us the ability to experience emotions, and that the indwelling Christ can control our emotions, using them as appropriate expressive agents of His character. The third option is the only one that allows us to have soul-rest in our emotions.

The range of emotional experience is so vast and diverse that it is impossible to identify all human feelings. In the 17th century, in a thesis on the *Passions of the Soul*,¹⁴ Descartes noted that emotional passions were a mystery that science could never understand. Despite the proliferation of the social sciences in the past couple of centuries, his observation seems to stand. We will, however, attempt to consider a few of the more common emotions.

Fear

We have all experienced fear and some of its common variations such as apprehension, anxiety, and worry. What are we afraid of? These can be boiled down to (1) non-personal fears, (2) interpersonal fears, and (3) intra-personal fears.

Non-personal fears include fear of the unknown, fear of change, fear of what “might be,” and fear of the future. These may also include fear of being in want, fear of sickness, bodily harm or death, and a host of other phobias. How do we have soul-rest from these kinds of fears? Only in recognizing by faith that all unknowns are known in the sovereign omniscience of God. All change is His change; God is in all the change. All of the “might bes” are His opportunities. The future belongs to the eternal God who desires that we let Him take care of it, and instead focus on the “now” of God’s present tense “I AM,” without getting overly preoccupied with prophetic and futuristic concerns. The Psalmist understood, “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want” (Ps. 23:1), as was illustrated by God’s supernatural supply for Elisha via ravens (I Kgs. 17:4-6) and the perpetual supply of flour and oil for the widow (I Kgs. 17:8-16). Even sickness and death cannot separate us from the love of God (Rom. 8:35-39). God has everything under control, so when we are in spirit-union with Him, we can “take things in stride,” resting in His love and sufficiency.

Then there are those *interpersonal fears*: fear of disapproval, rejection, loneliness, separation and broken relationships. Fear of offending someone. Fear of what others think. Fear of our enemies. Fear of what will happen to our children or grandchildren. Soul-rest in the midst of these kinds of fears comes from understanding that we “seek not the approval of men, but of God” (Jn. 14:23), who has approved (I Thess. 2:4) and accepted us (Rom. 15:7; Eph. 1:6-KJV). If God has accepted us, we are accepted by the only One who counts! He is not going to reject us, desert us, or forsake us (Heb. 13:5). In spirit-union with the Trinity, we are never alone for we are brought into the relation of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. As

the Psalmist wrote, "I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me" (Ps. 23:4). Jesus promised, "I am with you always" (Matt. 28:20). The solution to loneliness is not "get busy; get involved," but to recognize the union relationship we have with God and His people. Those who fear offending someone often need to understand that the problem is usually with people "taking offense," rather than our "giving offense," and Jesus was not at all concerned about the Pharisees' "taking offense" at what He did. Our desire is to "please God, rather than man" (Gal. 1:10; I Thess. 2:4). It doesn't matter what others think of you or your opinions. You are free to be uniquely you, with your own thoughts and your own opinions. We must not allow the opinions of others to control us. Fears of what will happen to our loved ones are relieved when we recognize that God loves our children and grandchildren more than we do, and seeks their highest good at all times.

The third category, *intrapersonal fears*, includes the fear of failure and insignificance, the fear of inadequacy and responsibility, the fear of inferiority and impropriety. The fear of failure is always a result of thinking that we have to do something, and failing to appreciate the "supplied life" of Jesus Christ whereby we have "everything pertaining to life and godliness" (II Pet. 1:3). The fear of inadequacy is overcome by recognition that we "have all sufficiency in everything" (II Cor. 3:5). How can someone have a fear of inferiority when they know who they are in Christ? The fear of impropriety is based on "established attitudes" of what others have deemed proper and acceptable. When Christ is operative in us, the expression is always adequate, significant, and proper.

When we allow the sufficiency of Christ to swallow up the self-orientation of our fears, we will experience soul-rest. The positive swallows up the negative. John's statement is, "Perfect love casts out fear" (I John 4:18). The question is not, "What is 'perfect love'?" but "Who is 'perfect love'?" The previous verses explain that "God is love" (I John 4:8,16), and this does not mean that God has some "love" to dispense, but that He is in Himself the essence

of all divine love, whereby He acts out of His own Being, and overcomes our being with His peace and security.

Anger

We hate to admit that we have emotions of anger, so we have devised many words to redefine our anger and justify our anger. "I'm not angry, I'm just mad, annoyed, provoked, irritated, irked, hurt, fed-up, griped, sore, on edge, disgusted, upset, indignant, vexed, ticked-off, agitated, aggravated, disturbed, hot under the collar, or blowing off steam, etc." Whatever word we might use, James advises, "The anger of man does not work the righteousness of God" (James 1:20). The "anger of man" is based on selfish attitudes of self-protection and self-assertion. On the other hand, there is the "anger of God expressed in a man," that allows us to "be angry and sin not" (Eph. 4:26). There is no doubt that Jesus expressed the emotion of anger without sin when He cleansed the temple of the merchandisers (Jn. 2:13-17), and when He pronounced the woes against the Pharisees (Matt. 23:13-37). There are times when the anger of indignation must be expressed against religious charlatans who are deceiving and using people. Paul exhibited such anger toward those who were using the girl who had a spirit of divination (Acts 16:16-18).

Much of our anger, however, is the "anger of man" that stems from our patterns of selfishness, when we "take offense" that our so-called "rights" have been violated. We may become bitter and resentful of weakness in others. We may become critical, argumentative, impatient, intolerant, and complaining. We may become envious, jealous, hateful, or vengeful. And then there are those who bombastically "blow up" with a quick temper and a sharp tongue, cursing and yelling to make their point. The "anger of man" does not express the character of Christ in us. We must allow God to do what He wants to do in other people. "Vengeance is Mine, says the Lord" (Rom. 12:19). Christ is the Forgiver in us.

He is patience in us. He is meek, but not weak. Soul-rest frees us from having to react negatively to defend ourselves in any way.

We all have our own varieties of emotional insecurities. We don't have to be held hostage by these uncertainties, or retreat into "comfort zones" of safety. Our security of relationship with God is not to be found in a past "decision," or in church membership in a particular denomination, or in a particular doctrine of "eternal security" or "once saved always saved." Our security is in Christ, the solid rock (I Cor. 10:4), the sure foundation (II Tim. 2:19), where the anchor holds (Heb. 6:19). Oftentimes God means for us to live in the insecurity of not knowing what God is doing or will do next, willing to take God's "curve balls," and to trust Him as we walk on the "swinging bridge of grace."

Another set of emotions that we all experience at one time or another is discouragement, disillusionment, and despondency that may even lead to depression. These often come as a result of some kind of loss – a job, an object, physical ability, a relationship, reputation, freedom, opportunity, or the loss of a loved one in death. It's okay to be "down." Paul wrote, "We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed" (II Cor. 4:8,9). There will be times when we have "dry spells," and seem to be "hoeing dry ground" in the "valley of dry bones" (Ezek. 37:1-6). Don't let the guilt-inducing religionists send you on a "guilt trip" by their statements, "If you feel distant from God, guess who moved." It may be that God intends for you to have a "dark night of the soul," to appreciate His light. Sometimes when we experience loss, we have the emotions of sorrow and grief. These are legitimate human emotions. It was at the news of the death of His friend, Lazarus, that scripture records, "Jesus wept" (Jn. 11:35). Granted, Paul wrote, "We do not grieve as those who have no hope" (I Thess. 4:13), but that means that we do not wail and mourn, and fail to get beyond the loss because we have a selfish attitude that what happened to us is unfair.

The emotions that we experience in soul-rest are not a giddy happiness or a euphoria that “everything’s going my way.” The objective is not to get “high” on Jesus, paste on an “evangelical smile,” and walk around with a Cheshire cat grin as if we just swallowed the canary. But neither do we want to be sour-puss Christians, who look like they’ve been sucking on a dill pickle. Our countenance should reveal that we have the joy of the Lord (Jn. 15:11). Joy is far greater than happiness. Happiness is derived from the old English word *hap*, which meant “chance.” Happiness is based on the chance that “everything’s going my way.” As the happenings and happenstances happen haphazardly, perhaps you might be happy, if you have no mishaps. The desire for happiness is a selfish desire.

As we said previously, the experience of emotions is part of being human. The objective of the Christian life is not to negate our humanity or make us superhuman, but to allow the Christ-life to be lived out in our humanity, which includes our emotions. We need to embrace our emotions, and allow them to be the expressive conduits of the character of Christ. That will include the emotions of perplexity, frustration, confusion, fear, anger, discouragement, and sorrow, as well as the emotions of excitement, elation, amazement, amusement, wonder, awe, satisfaction, pleasure, jubilation, etc. Emotions allow us to have passion and vibrant expression. Granted, those passions can be tainted with evil character and become “degrading passions” (Rom. 1:26), “sinful passions” (Rom. 7:5), or “lustful passions” (I Thess. 4:5), but they can also express our passion for Jesus Christ, our passion for life, and our compassion for other people. The Greek word for passion is *pathos*, which refers to affection or suffering. Compassion is to have passion together with God in His love for others, which may involve sympathy and empathy for those who need such.

Contrary to what some of us were taught, that “those who show emotions are sissies,” and “big boys don’t cry,” God intended for us to express emotions, and even to weep. Emotional

expression is not reserved for the feminine gender. Jeremiah was known as “the weeping prophet” (Jere. 9:1,10; 13:17). Jesus wept (Jn. 11:35; Lk. 19:41; 21:62). Paul was weeping for his readers (Phil. 3:18). We are admonished to “weep with those who weep” (Rom. 12:15). There is nothing wrong with emotional passion that causes us to weep.

Though the “fruit of the Spirit” (Gal. 5:22,23), such as love, joy, and peace, are not essentially emotional feelings but the character of Christ indwelling our spirit, the expression of these character traits without emotion or passion can be cold, sterile, and impersonal. God’s love should be shown with passionate embrace. The joy of the Lord should be enjoyed emotionally. God’s peace can be a settled serenity that is beyond the comprehension of the world around us (Phil. 4:7). When our soul is at rest in the sufficiency of our spirit-union with Christ, our emotions can be utilized as passionate expressive agents for the expression of the character and “affection of Christ” (Phil. 1:8).

6 Soul-Rest and the Will

The human will within the soul, the psychological function of man, is where we choose and decide how we will act within the context of our willingness to be receptive and contingently derivative from a source beyond ourselves. There has been much debate and argument about the so-called “free-will of man.” My position? I categorically deny that man has “free-will.” Only God has free-will; i.e., the absolute freedom to will anything into being in accord with His character (Who He is), and to put that willed determination into action out of His own Being. That’s free-will, complete with the will-power to put it into action! Man does not have free-will in that sense. God created man with “freedom of choice,” and our choices are choices of willingness to derive power and character in our behavior from one spiritual source or the other – God or Satan. Martin Luther wrote a classic book, *The Bondage of the Will*.¹⁵ In that book he does not advocate the Calvinistic idea of depraved inability to choose (as many have thought), but argues against his contemporary, Erasmus, a humanist, who taught that man could will into being in his own behavior the character of righteousness or sinfulness. Such a thesis of “salvation by willed works” is at the heart of all humanistic thought. Martin Luther argued that the will of man is bound by the context in which God created man as a choosing and derivative creature, to be contingent and dependent on God. Only God can auto-generate. Only God can self-actuate. Only God can spontaneously create. Only God can be a prime-producer or mover out of His absolute divine free-will, having the will-power to bring into being that which is expressive of His own Being. Oh, what “rest” there is in recognizing that we cannot and

do not have to bring things into being with our will. We don't have to exercise so-called "will-power" that allegedly makes things happen, produces character, or generates righteousness. There is certainly no "soul-rest" in the false thinking that we have to willfully make things happen, create goodness, and hold it all together.

Many people fret in "unrest" that human life here on earth is constituted of "decisions, decisions, decisions." Without the capability of decision-making, we would be automatons or marionettes – puppets on a string. The frustration of decision-making is usually due to a desire to avoid responsibility and accountability for the decisions we make. There is no doubt that decisions have consequences, and we have to live with the consequences of our choices. Paul wrote, "He who does wrong will receive the consequences of the wrong which he has done" (Col. 3:25).

Our choices are often cast into the categories of true and false conclusions, right or wrong decisions, good or bad choices. Relativism argues that "whatever is true and right in your determination is truth and righteousness for you." Utilitarianism suggests that "it's right, if it turns out all right," for the results are the ultimate criteria. Pragmatism operates on the premise, "Whatever works and whatever pays off; that's good." Rather than determining legitimacy, accuracy, and propriety by individual and social subjectivism, there has to be some objective reference for identifying these choice-categories. Some would find their foundation in moral codes, ethical formulations, behavioral rules and regulations, or even in divine "thou shalt" and "thou shalt not." The absolutism of fundamentalism argues, "We have figured out the true, the right and the good, and all of your choices must now be made in the parameters of our determination." The determination of the propriety of our choices and decisions is best established, however, by the character of God Himself, allowing divine justice, love, and authority to be the basis of the proper course of action. The prophet Micah declares, "What does the Lord require of you

but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8).

Different Personalities and Decision-making

Different personalities have differing patterns or traits of decision-making. Some are strong-willed and tend to make quick, impulsive decisions based on expedience. Believing that change is always good, they are often confrontational and assertive, saying, "Just do it!" Others want to make decisions in the context of a committee, where they can talk out the issues and enlist others to make the decision with them. They want to avoid the individual blame when others do not like the decision they have made. Then there are those who would rather let others make decisions for them. "Whatever you want; it's fine with me." They are ambivalent and procrastinate, for they dislike change and seek the status-quo. They will passively acquiesce, seeking "peace at any cost." Another pattern of decision-making is that of those who are very idealistic and think that they must make a perfect choice every time, never making a wrong choice. They research their options meticulously and often end up in the paralysis of analysis, but they are convinced that their conclusion and choice is always right. None of these approaches is more right than another, for they all expose our self-oriented, self-assertive, and self-protective tendencies in decision-making.

Decision-making for Christians

Decision-making among Christians seems to be even more complicated. Christian religion often advocates that we need to choose to be more committed, to decide to be more dedicated, to consent to be more consecrated. There's no "rest" in that, for it is never enough. Evangelical humanism fails to understand that human commitment is just another form of "works" salvation. All we

can commit is sin, and even that is derived from the diabolic source. Our only consistent choice is to be *submitted* to God for whatever He is *committed* to be and do in us. The commitment is on God's side. James wrote, "Submit yourselves to God" (James 4:7), and thereby we can "rest" in His sufficiency.

Christian religion suggests that we must discover, know, and make decisions in accord with the "will of God." This precise "will of God" is often viewed as if it were a predetermined plotted course, and we must go orienteering with our spiritual compass to find God's plotted course for our lives. Some consider searching for the "will of God" to be somewhat like water-witching for the source of God's hidden rivers. Others approach the "will of God" as if it were a maze wherein we are like rats trying to find our way to God's goal. Still others view the search for the "will of God" to be a random process of bouncing off of the walls of life. Christians are looking for the "will of God" in all the wrong places. As previously noted, the "will of God" is within us by spirit-union, and it always has to do with the expression of the character of Christ. We have the freedom to make any choice within the context of the empowering character of God. God doesn't care whether you drive a Chevy, or a Ford, or a Toyota; but He does care whether His character is exhibited while you drive whatever you choose. God doesn't care whether you choose a white shirt or a colored shirt, a print dress or a pant-suit; but He does care whether you allow for the "fruit of the Spirit" in your behavior while you wear whatever you wear. We have great latitude and liberty in our decision-making as Christians – even in our relationship choices. Does this mean that everything is not black and white, but that there are "gray areas" of decision-making? No, behavioral expression is only expressive of godliness or sinfulness, but God's pure white character of godliness has myriad possibilities. Christians can "rest" in the freedom they have in Christ.

The contortions that many Christians go through in their decision-making are a mockery of human function. Many Christians seem to be hog-tied with an endless list of limitations and perfec-

tionistic expectations. They are “putting out fleeces” (cf. Judg. 6:36-40) to see if God will jump through the hoops and confirm their decisions. Others are “waiting on God” in indecision, failing to understand that indecision is itself a decision not to decide, and that is often a decision not to rely on Christ within. The passivism of sitting on our duff, twiddling our thumbs, and waiting for divine dynamite is not Christian decision-making. It has been said, “You can’t steer a ship unless it’s moving.” Some are paralyzed and immobilized by the fear of making a mistake, of making a wrong choice, or a less than perfect decision in accord with the hidden “will of God.” They become paranoid in their questioning, “Is this what I want to do, or is this what Jesus wants to do?” How do I decide? Such troubled restlessness is the neurotic norm of Christian religion.

On the other hand, there are Christians who put on a Pharisaical show of piety, claiming to have a “perfect God-sniffer” for their decisions, for they repeatedly say, “God told me to do this; God told me to do that.” Have you noticed that their God often appears to be fickle in His change of direction? I have concluded that those who have to broadcast God’s alleged direction in their lives are usually covering up for their own self-determined direction and decision-making.

It sounds so spiritual when a Christian says, “He chooses best who leaves the choice to Him,” or “He chooses best who chooses what He chooses.” God always chooses to express His character by the dynamic of His Son, Jesus Christ, in human behavior. That does not relieve us from decision-making. Perhaps it is better to say, “He chooses best who chooses to be receptive to the character expression of God by allowing the life of the living Christ to be lived out in his behavior.” We are choosing creatures who are responsible to make choices in life. I have a statement that I repeat every morning as I begin a new day, “I am only responsible to be and to do what God wants to be and do in me today.” This is a variation of Jesus’ statement, “Not My will, but Thine be

done" (Lk. 22:42), which does not deny the responsible choice that Jesus had to make in facing death.

So, how do we make choices in our will in accord with the "will of God" within us? I am convinced that the elusive "will of God" is only hidden or unknown to those who fail to recognize and affirm who they are in Christ and all they have been given in spirit-union with Christ. When we are secure in our identity in Christ and the sufficiency of Christ within, we face the choices of life by realistically considering the available options and alternatives, consulting with others if we consider such helpful (cf. Prov. 15:22; 20:18; Lk. 14:31), "listening under" that inner voice of God's personal revelation in spiritual discernment and obedience, and then following through with a decision of receptivity and availability to God, despite how foolish our action might seem both to our own minds and to others. We make a decision, trust our decisions, and act with confidence – willing to take responsibility for our willed decisions without blame-shifting, and willing to live with the consequences of our choices. Sure, we make some stupid, unwise choices (perhaps even selfish and sinful), and we may not like the consequences, but we are still God's children who move on to make additional choices of availability.

Christians will find soul-rest in their decision-making when they realize that their decisions are not earth-shattering, God-destabilizing, choices set in concrete. Christians need to be willing to make choices in accord with their intuition when "it just seems to be the right thing to do." Christians should feel free to "follow their dreams," for God has often given them those aspirations as "the desire of their heart" (Ps. 20:4; 21:2). We can take comfort in the words of Samuel's commissioning of Saul, "Do for yourself what the occasion requires, for God is with you" (I Sam. 10:7). In Augustine's words, "Love God and do what you will." We are free to walk through life with the confidence that the divine "Yes" is operating within us. Having made a decision, we reckon it to be of God and assume it to be right, unless God makes an obvious exposure to the contrary, which He has every right to do, and even

when He does so it does not impinge on the legitimacy or propriety of our decision. There is great “rest” in that recognition.

There are some Christians who seem to think that because they have the “mind of Christ” and the “will of God” in spirit-union, every decision they make is automatically and spontaneously God’s determination. They think that in spirit-union their will is fused with God’s will, and all their choices are direct-drive determinations of God. On the contrary, I believe that our will, in conjunction with our mind and emotions, has been patterned with old choice-channels of actions and reactions of the past. After becoming Christians our will-switch is spring-loaded to the routines of past choices. If we do not purposefully, moment-by-moment, choose and will to make a choice of faith to allow God to be operative in our behavior, then we will spontaneously revert to the old patterns. We are continuously responsible to make faith-choices to be receptive to the activity of Christ in our lives. Faith is a choice, a decision. It is not just the believing of accurate historical facts and theological doctrines. It is not a mystical devotion of attachment and reliance. Faith doesn’t DO anything; it just receives God’s character and activity. The Christian life is comprised of such faith-choices that allow for our receptivity of Christ’s activity. In such a “walk of faith” (Col. 2:6) our wills can “rest” from the pressure of performing and producing Christian behavior, and simply continue to receive the character and empowering of Christ. We do not “rest,” however, from the necessity of having to make choices.

7 Soul-Rest and the Conscience

Some consider the conscience to be an internal tormenter, a troublesome disturber of one's inner peace. It is regarded as a restrictive guilt index or a condemnatory resident judge. Those who regard the conscience as "the voice of God," and suggest, "Let your conscience be your guide," usually surmise in the midst of their failures that God's voice and direction are unrealistic and impossible, and God is extremely disappointed with their ability to listen and follow directions. There is certainly no "soul-rest" when we are suffering from the condemnation of past sins or present inadequacies and failures within our conscience.

What is the Conscience?

The conscience is not a substantive organ within our physiological constitution. It is not a separate entity, property, utility, or faculty within our psyche. It is not an intrinsic authority wielding the whip of punitive consequences, nor is it an objectified compass of superintendence and direction. When the word "conscience" is used in the New Testament, it is a translation of the Greek word *suneidesis*, which means, "to know or perceive in conjunction with." The English word "conscience" is derived from the Latin word *conscientia*, which has the same meaning. What, then, does the conscience "perceive in conjunction with"? Is it regulated by an intrinsic awareness of the universal will of God, an innate natural law acquired by natural revelation? Paul explained,

“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God has made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that all are without excuse” (Rom. 1:18-20).

Making the case for the culpability of Gentiles as well as Jews, Paul continued,

“For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, those, not having the Law, are a law to themselves, in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness, and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them” (Rom. 2:14,15).

Does our conscience “perceive in conjunction with” societal and familial norms and standards of propriety and morality? Does our conscience “perceive in conjunction with” a religiously imposed form of punishment for violating the parameters of a particular behavioral code of conduct? Yes, the conscience “perceives in conjunction with” what we have learned by natural revelation, and by familial, social, and religious recommendation, for the conscience “perceives in conjunction with” our individual “established attitudes and affections” in our mind and emotion. This individualized referent point of the conscience explains why some can have a “clear conscience” while others have a “guilty conscience” while or after engaging in the same activity. The conscience serves as a personal barometer forecasting back to the consciousness of our mind when we are contemplating the violation of what we believe to be true, or feel to be right. It seems to throw up a red flag of caution whenever we consider a volitional choice that is contrary to our established thoughts and affections. The words “conscious” and “conscience” are derived from the same Latin root, and this is

understandable when we recognize that our conscience “perceives in conjunction with” our self-conscious awareness of our conscious thoughts and feelings.

We would be consigned to perpetual psychological restlessness if the conscience was an objectified and arbitrary regulator that issued a compulsory sense of “ought,” or obligatory “must,” or divine “thou shalt/thou shalt not” of performance. When we recognize the individual and subjective basis of the function of personal conscience, then we are not hopelessly caught in the bind of an imposed standard, but have the freedom and responsibility of rebuilding established attitudes by the “renewing of the mind” (Rom. 12:2; Eph. 4:23). When we develop established attitudes that correspond with God’s attitudes as revealed in Christ, the written revelation of scriptures, and the personal revelation of the Holy Spirit, the conscience can serve as an open conduit of the certification of God’s character, all the while guarding against the thoughts introduced by the tempter to accept a temporary self-oriented attitude in the present circumstance.

What about those who do not seem to have any prick of conscience? Repetitive violation of one’s established attitudes can result in a “seared conscience” (I Tim. 4:2) that cannot locate any genuine “established attitudes” to “perceive in conjunction with.” This is also true of those who adopt an attitude of relativism that refuses to accept any attitude or opinion as better than another. Such a “seared conscience” is also evidenced in those who refuse to question or evaluate the motives of why they decide to do what they do, and what kind of character is being expressed in their behavior.

Behavior Evaluation in Conscience

The conscience functions prior to our decision to act, serving as a warning indication of decisions and actions that would be contrary to established attitudes, and then functions subsequent to

our choice and action to evaluate whether our behavior was consistent or contrary to our established attitudes. Evaluating our behavioral choices, the conscience either commends us for acting in a manner consistent with our established attitudes, or condemns us for acting in a manner contrary to our established attitudes.

When our conscience condemns us we feel guilty. But there is a difference between “feeling guilty” and “being guilty.” The Greek word for “guilt” is *enochos*, “to be caught in” the violation or trespass of a standard. A person can be objectively guilty of the trespass of God’s character, or the violation of a civil law, or of transgressing social mores, and not feel guilty subjectively because he has not developed established attitudes concerning such laws or standards, or is unaware that he has violated such. On the other hand, a person can feel guilty because he has violated his established attitudes, but those established attitudes may not be founded in legitimate understanding of divine, civil, or social standards, in which case their guilt feelings in the conscience are a form of false-guilt. Since many Christians have established attitudes that are based on the recommendations of family, society and religion, or on the expedience of personal reflection, there is an abundance of false-guilt experience in the consciences of Christians. They may feel guilty for drinking alcohol, smoking cigarettes, wearing makeup, or uttering an expletive. Because they have been encouraged to love and do good for others, they may feel guilty for not having done more for others – for their parents, for their children, or for their church. There may be guilt feelings for not attending church services every time the doors are open, for not serving on church committees, for not putting more money into the offering plate, or for not spending more time reading their Bible, praying, and evangelizing.

Various methods have been proposed for dealing with our guilt feelings. Some *chastise* themselves masochistically, thinking that such self-beating will remind them not to repeat the action. One form of this reaction is to *penalize* oneself by volunteering and working harder for charity, or giving more to the church. To *apolo-*

gize for our action may be in order if we have wronged another, but apology is not necessarily repentance or confession. The world often encourages us to *minimize* our guilty feelings; “It’s nothing, forget it.” Or we may be advised to *rationalize* that “Everybody’s doing it. You didn’t get caught, so don’t worry about it.” Encouragement to *compromise* is a method proposed by many psychological counselors, for they understand that if you lower your standards, and get a more “enlightened” attitude, you will no longer feel guilty. Sigmund Freud considered all guilt feelings to be false-guilt necessitating the compromise of falsely imposed moral standards. Christians need to *recognize* that there are both genuine guilt feelings and false guilt feelings in the conscience, and these are dependent on whether our established attitudes are based on accurate standards. Genuine guilt feelings require an admission or confession of the violation of an accepted and legitimate standard, whether a social law or God’s character. False-guilt, on the other hand, cannot be confessed to God. We cannot “agree with God” that something is wrong, if God has not deemed it to be wrong. When Christians recognize that conscience functions in conjunction with established attitudes in the mind, some of which may be left over residually from their unregenerate days, they can then *recognize* their established attitudes in conscious and cognitive “renewing of the mind” (Rom. 12:2; Eph. 4:23). They can confess and agree with God that their spirit-union with Christ has made them a “new creature” (II Cor. 5:17) that desires that the “mind of Christ” (I Cor. 2:16) be practically implemented in their mental attitudes. True repentance is realized in this process of “a change of mind that leads to a change of action,” allowing us to recognize that the source of our actions is not out of ourselves (cf. I Cor. 3:5; II Cor. 4:7), but the faith receptivity of God’s activity.

Religion thrives on false-guilt. It is the manipulative tool that religion uses to motivate people to try harder to reach the impossible standards of perceived perfect behavior, allegedly generated by human will-power. Often regarding the conscience as an independent regulator, guilt feelings are regarded as a sign that God is disappointed, disapproving, and angry at man’s failure to measure

up to His expected behavior norms. God's "frown of disapproval" in our conscience is alleged to evidence that God is holding us accountable and is acting punitively against us because of our failures. The preacher often berates the people for their sin, and the people in the pew masochistically delight in such chastisement and condemnation for failing to live up to the legalistic regulations, commending the preacher for another "good sermon" that "cut to the bone" of their consciousness. There is certainly no "rest" in this repetitive scheme of religion, striving to perform according to prescribed and perceived standards.

Christians have often been taught that their sins have been forgiven (Col. 2:13), and they have been "washed whiter than snow" (Ps. 51:7; Isa. 1:18). When Christians do not accept God's forgiveness as an established attitude, they might continue to suffer restlessness from the guilt and condemnation of past sins, saying, "I believe God has forgiven me, but I just cannot forgive myself." What audacious arrogance to think that we should hold ourselves to higher standards than God's standards, or to suggest that God was wrong or ill-advised in forgiving us. These Christians need to quit deifying themselves, accept God's forgiveness, forgive themselves as God has forgiven them, and enjoy His life and sufficiency.

Romans 7 Condemnation – Romans 8 Freedom

Even when Christians can accept God's love and forgiveness, they often commence the Christian life and complain that there is no "rest," "life is now more difficult than before I was a Christian." They find themselves in the "Romans 7 syndrome" of exclaiming, "The good that I would I do not, and the evil that I would not, that I do" (Rom. 7:19). With constant guilt feelings of inadequacy, and an inner judgment of condemnation in their conscience, they exclaim, "O, wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from this body of death?" (Rom. 7:24). This constant condemnation of con-

science is based on the religious lie that humanistic religion is founded upon, an unrelenting reinforcement of the established attitude that, "I am responsible to live the Christian life. I have to perform with the best of my self-effort to live like Jesus. I have to exhibit love, peace, joy, patience, kindness, goodness, etc. to please God. I have the free choice and will-power to implement Christian behavior." These attitudes are a diabolic religious lie that creates constant agitation and unrest in the conscience of Christians. Religion often indicates that this is the "normal Christian life," to be unsettled by inability, preoccupied with failure, striving against unfulfilled expectations, and to have a perpetually restless and guilty conscience. Not so! The hellish experience of restless religious striving is contrary to all that God intended for those identified as Christians in spirit-union with the living Lord Jesus Christ.

Christians can experience a "cleansed conscience" (Heb. 9:14) by allowing their established attitudes to be cleansed from false attitudes of having to perform religious "good works" of moral behavioral conduct in order to please God. A "clear conscience" (I Tim. 3:19) will allow the unrestricted free-flow of God's character when we have an established attitude that "the mystery of the faith" is the dynamic life of Jesus Christ (Col. 1:27; 2:2). The resultant "good conscience" (I Tim. 1:5,19; Heb. 13:18) is based on godly attitudes that recognize that goodness is derived only from God (III Jn. 11) by faithful receptivity of His activity.

The restless morass of living in the Romans 7 delusion can be overcome by developing established attitudes in accord with God's revelation in Christ. This must begin by recognizing that we are helpless, unable, and incapable of doing any good. We cannot choose to generate goodness. We cannot achieve goodness through religious exercises. We can only "rest" in the goodness of God's character, and faithfully receive the grace expression of His goodness. Our established attitudes must affirm that by our spirit-union with Christ we have a derived identity of being conjoined with the indwelling presence of the Righteous One, the Holy One, the Perfect One, the Good One, Jesus Christ. In our established attitudes

we recognize (re-cognize) and remind (re-mind) ourselves that the Christian life is a re-presentation of the life of Jesus Christ. As the risen and living Lord Jesus lives and acts in us, He cannot do anything other than Self-generatively express His character. He does not act out of character!

When we affirm our identity in Christ and the sufficiency of Christ, we can begin to experience the triumph of Romans 8. "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1). Those who are "in union with Christ Jesus," and understand their spirit-union identity, and have a settled established attitude that "I can't; only He can," are relieved of the harping condemnation of false-guilt in their conscience for an alleged failure to live the Christian life. "The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death" (Rom. 8:2). The indwelling function of the Christ-life sets us free from the religious performances of self-effort by which we are admonished to produce what only God can produce. We are set free from the obligatory compunctions of the "ought," and the restrictive restraints of the "ought not," from the mandates of the "must," and the moralism of the "must not," which always create condemnation in the conscience when we fail to meet the religious regulations.

Freedom from religious constraint allows the Christian to experience a "liberty of conscience" in the freedom to be the personal expression of the Christ-life. This is not an advocacy of libertarianism, libertinism, or license. Our freedom is always prescribed within the context of the character of Christ. Religion is always afraid of this "liberty of conscience," claiming that it leads to novelty, uniqueness, variety, non-conformity, eccentricity, and Spirit-spontaneity which cannot be controlled by man. True, the "no condemnation – liberty of conscience" allows the living Lord Jesus to be uniquely Himself in each Christian, and no religion can control Christ.

Within the freedom and liberty of conscience that is the privilege of every Christian, we do not mean to imply that the Christian will never feel guilty. Though we may avoid the condemnation of false-guilt, there will be genuine guilt feelings whenever we listen to the tempter and violate the known character of God in sin. Our response should then be to confess our sin, agreeing with God that it is misrepresentative of who we are in Christ, and immediately move on in restful freedom in Christ with a clear conscience.

8 Soul-Rest and Our Desires

Our needs, drives, and desires within the soul are God-given channels to provide ultimate fulfillment of God's intent for each individual. There is nothing wrong with these desires. They are amoral – neither good nor evil. They are not meant to hassle or harangue us, to make us miserable, or to “drive us crazy.” Every person is born with a full set of pure, clean, open channels of need, drive, and desire.

Some examples of the basic needs and desires of human beings are: the need for acceptance; the desire to love and be loved; the needs for personalization, and relationship, and social community; the need to communicate and to know; the desires for meaning and purpose, for excitement, uniqueness, and identity. In addition, there are the desires for freedom, worship, and appreciation of beauty; the need for creativity, motivation, and responsibility; the desires to work and achieve; the needs to give and to serve; and the needs for hope and destiny. This listing is not exhaustive, but only representative of the basic needs and desires that are part of our created humanness.

Human desires have often been misunderstood. The tenth commandment, for example, states, “You shall not *covet* ... anything that belongs to your neighbor” (Exod. 20:17). The word for “covet” is translated into Greek with the word “desire” (*epithumeo*). Paul found the tenth commandment the most difficult (Rom. 7:7-13), for it forbade even the desiring of anything that did not rightfully belong to him, or anything that was not God's desire for him. In older English usage the words for “desire” were often

translated as “lust,” a term that developed sexual connotations, and served to give the entire consideration of human desires a negative cast.

Within the New Testament the Greek words translated “desire” are *epithumeo*, meaning “to urge upon” (cf. Matt. 13:17; Lk. 22:15; Phil. 1:23), *epipotheo*, meaning “to yearn upon” (cf. II Cor. 5:2; Phil. 1:8; I Pet. 2:2), and *hedone*, meaning “pleasure” (cf. Lk. 8:14; Titus 3:3; James 4:1). Our desires are the behavioral conduits that God designed in order to provide the yearning and urging for the fulfillment of human life. God intended the yearnings and urgings of our desires to be pleurably fulfilled by the fullness of His character. Satan, on the other hand, tempts us to satisfy these yearnings and urgings of our desires in God-forbidden ways of selfishness and sinfulness.

Whereas God lovingly desires to “supply our every need” (Phil. 4:19) and “fulfill our every desire” (cf. Ps. 37:4; 145:16,19) in correspondence with His desires, the tempter is always prompting us to indulge our desires in selfish ways or to deny that we have certain desires – the extremisms of indulgence or denial. The devil’s world system is full of epithumiologists, specialists in psychological and physiological desire fulfillment, who entice us to selfish satisfaction of our desires. These advertisers, promoters, politicians, and preachers suggest that every selfish want is a desired need, and set themselves up as false saviors for every perceived problem.

There is no soul-rest when we are selfishly striving to fulfill our desire for provision with the acquisition and accumulation of material things, which become idols. When our God-given desire for dominion (cf. Gen. 1:28) is being indulged in a selfish quest for political, social, or economic power, we can never be satisfied, for we are competing against God’s sovereign power. The desire for loving relationships often seeks satisfaction by “searching for love in all the wrong places,” and engaging in casual sexual experiences that only bring dissatisfaction and broken hearts. Attempts to find

our identity in personal abilities, accumulations, or associations will never bring settled fulfillment to our spiritual need for identity and “knowing who we are.” The desire to appreciate beauty can never be sufficiently fulfilled through the creations of men, or the sexual images of pornography. When our desire for knowledge is bloated (cf. I Cor. 8:1) with exhaustive searches for correct and accurate information, we are still left with the inadequacy of our finite understanding. Even the desire for a greater “spirituality” and knowledge of God, sought through spiritual disciplines and so-called “spiritual gifts,” can leave an individual with a restless dissatisfaction.

The Desires of the “Flesh”

The New Testament writers, especially Paul and Peter, connect our desires with the word “flesh.” Paul refers to “the flesh and its desires” (Rom. 13:14; Gal. 5:24) and “the desires of the flesh” (Gal. 5:16; Eph. 2:3), whereas Peter advises Christians to “abstain from fleshly desires” (I Pet. 2:11). Since the Greek word for “flesh” (*sarx*) originally referred to the muscles or meat of the bodies of animals and men, there has been a persistent tendency to identify “flesh” as the physicality of natural and earthly physical bodies. Popular terminology refers to “flesh and bones,” “flesh and blood,” and “mortal flesh,” for example. To understand Paul and Peter’s usage of the word “flesh” in the New Testament, however, we must note that three centuries earlier the Greek philosopher, Epicurus, began to use the Greek word *sarx* to refer to the “seat of man’s desires” fulfilled in the sensation or pleasure of hedonism. So, the common usage of the word in the first century A.D. went beyond the corporeality of physical bodies and the descendancy of natural heritage, and was used in association with behavioral desires. Without falling prey to the later Gnostic tendencies to create a dualistic antithesis between physicality and spirituality, Paul does establish an either/or antithesis of “the de-

sires of the flesh” and “the desires of the Spirit” (Gal. 5:16,17) in conflict within the behavior of the Christian.

This new covenant usage of the word “flesh” recognizes that the God-given desires of mankind have been repetitively subjected to the urgings and yearnings of “the prince of the power of the air working in the sons of disobedience” (Eph. 2:2), creating individualized patterns of selfish and sinful tendencies or propensities to act and react. In other words, our desires have been warped, bent, twisted, or kinked into unique idiosyncratic patterns of selfish indulgence or denial. Accepting the humanistic lie of Satan, we naturally develop a pattern of behavioral desires wherein we believe that by the independent generation of self-effort we can perform, achieve, and accomplish the self-satisfaction of our basic desires in self-righteousness. This fallacious humanistic understanding of independent self-ability and self-potential to fulfill our own desires is obviously antithetical to the Christian gospel of the Christ-fulfillment of our desires by the grace of God.

Understanding this conjunction of “flesh” with our desires, and recognizing that everyone during their unregeneracy has developed particular patterns of selfish desires, allows us to avoid many of the common misconceptions of the “flesh” so prevalent in popular Christian teaching. This theological and behavioral understanding of “flesh” disallows it to be equated with the physicality of our body or features of our human creatureliness. “Flesh” is not something we are born with; it is not innate or nascent. “Flesh” is not an inherent or intrinsic evil, or generative source of evil, within man. “Flesh” is not a substantive or partitive “hunk of evil” or “dirty old man” within. Nor is “flesh” to be equated with spiritual depravity, or to be identified with an alleged “old nature,” “Adam nature,” sin nature, self-nature, or human nature. The “old man” or “old self” (cf. Rom. 6:6; Eph. 4:22; Col. 3:9) is not synonymous with the “flesh.” Although Christians are “dead to the flesh” (Gal. 5:24) and “no longer in the flesh” (Rom. 7:5; 8:8,9), having been disconnected from the vortex of self-orientation as “slaves of sin” (Rom. 6:17) by the spiritual exchange (Acts 26:18) of regeneration,

the patterns of the “flesh” are not eradicated at regeneration in perfectionism, nor in a second-blessing experience of “entire sanctification.” Christians continue to have the patterns of selfishness and sinfulness within the desires of their soul.

These “flesh” patterns of self-orientation and self-reliance in the warp of our desires cannot be religiously reformed and made better. They cannot be subdued or restrained by willed suppression, denial, or cover-up, for this would be the self-contradiction of attempting to overcome selfishness and self-reliance by self-effort. This exposes the absurd masochistic attempts of some Christians to “die to self” or “crucify the self” in their efforts to counter the “flesh.”

Since there is so much “self-talk” in contemporary Christian vernacular, we will be well served to note that “self” is a relatively recent word in the English language, having evolved as a truncated form of the word “selfishness.” The word “self,” as used in contemporary English, has five primary meanings: [1] personal identity (cf. Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:10), [2] personal individuality (cf. I Tim. 4:7), [3] personal embodiment (cf. Matt. 4:6; 8:4), [4] personal potential (cf. II Cor. 3:5; Rom. 14:7), and [5] personal interest, i.e., selfishness (cf. Rom. 15:3; II Cor. 5:15; Phil. 2:3,4,21). Christians certainly do not want to die to their personal identity as “new creatures” (II Cor. 5:17) in Christ, nor to their personal individuality that distinguishes them from another. To seek to die to personal embodiment is suicide. It is impossible to die to personal potential, for that is but the lie of humanism. Yet, this absurdity of trying to kill the non-entity of a “straw man” is what much religious teaching is advocating. The only legitimate sense of dying to and “denying yourself” (cf. Lk. 9:23) is the endeavor of allowing for the termination of selfish behavioral expressions. This denial of selfishness is not a denial that *disavows* reality (popular psychology), or the self-denial that would “*dismiss the now*” for an ethereal *nirvana* (Eastern philosophy), but is the choice of faith to *disallow* selfish expression.

To disallow and overcome the selfish expressions of the “desires of the flesh” is not a battle that the Christian must fight. There is no soul-rest in constant attempts to fight against the “flesh” (or the devil), or in repetitive endeavors to overcome the obsessive preoccupations, the compulsive patterns, the addictive tendencies, the life-dominating indulgences, the enslaved fixations, or the habituated “hang-ups” of our selfishly patterned desires. What Paul refers to as the “flesh,” modern pop-psychology terms “addictions,” the older psychology identified as “neuroses” or “psycho-ses,” and some charismatic Christians label as “demons.” Oftentimes at least one of our desires has developed a deep rut of habituated selfish behavioral obsession, which some Christian teachers have called “besetting sin” (cf. Heb. 12:1) or a “stronghold of sin” (cf. Ps. 89:40; Jere. 48:18,41) that seems to defeat us again and again. All of these patterns of selfishness in the desires of our soul can only be overcome by the power of the Spirit of God. That is why Paul explained, “the *Spirit* sets its desires against the flesh” (Gal. 5:17). “The battle is the Lord’s” (I Sam. 17:47). The Christian can rest in the admission that “I cannot overcome these patterned desires; only God can win the victory in my life, and manifest His character by the power of His Spirit.”

Christ our Desire

Our focus, as Christians, should *not* be on the identification and evaluation of our needs and desires. This results in a mind-set that regards God and the Lord Jesus Christ as “needs-providers” or “desire-fulfillers.” All of our God-given desires and needs are fulfilled in the context of “Christ as our life,” and our focus should be Christocentric, directed at the living Lord Jesus, with a singularity of a clear and “single eye” (Matt. 6:22) that seeks Him above all else, and desires only what He desires in our lives. Paul’s statement, “My God shall supply all your needs” (Phil. 4:19), can certainly be generalized to recognize that all our needs and desires

are fulfilled in Christ, and we lack nothing necessary before God when Christ has become our “all in all.”

All of the basic needs and desires of mankind are spiritually fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Our need for love is fulfilled in the realization that “God demonstrated His love for us” (Rom. 5:8), and Jesus “loved us and gave Himself for us” (Gal. 2:20). Our need for acceptance is fulfilled for we are “acceptable to God through Christ Jesus” (I Pet. 2:5), and “accepted in the Beloved” (Eph. 1:6-KJV). The need for belonging is satisfied as we “belong to Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:29; 5:24) within the “people of God” (Titus 2:14; I Pet. 2:9). Our desire for security finds fulfillment in God’s promise to “never desert or forsake us” (Heb. 13:5). As the “Spirit teaches us all things” (Jn 14:26; I Jn. 2:27), our desire for knowledge is satisfied. Our desire for identity is completed in becoming “new creatures” (II Cor. 5:17) that are “sons of God” (Rom. 8:17; 9:6; Gal. 3:26). The need for approval is satisfied as we are “holy, blameless, and beyond reproach” (Col. 1:22). Freedom is experienced as “Christ sets us free” (Gal. 5:1,13). Achievement is realized as “we overwhelmingly conquer through Him” (Rom. 8:37); and our need to work is fulfilled in “the good works which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them” (Eph. 2:10). The need to serve is satisfied in “the work of ministry” (Eph. 4:12) through which we “serve one another” (Gal. 5:13). Hope and destiny are fulfilled as “the God of hope fills us with all joy and peace,” countering all dysfunctionality, hopelessness, and restlessness.

Christians can rest in the single focus of allowing Christ to be their ultimate desire, and desiring that all their God-given desires find their satisfaction in the sufficiency of Jesus Christ. God can “fulfill our every desire for goodness” (II Thess. 1:11), as we “desire to live godly in Christ Jesus” (II Tim. 3:12). Though we have twisted “desires of the flesh,” we experience soul-rest only by ceasing to fight the selfish bent of fleshly desires, and allowing the Spirit of Christ to “set His desires against the flesh” (Gal. 5:17).

9 Soul-Rest and Temptation

Some Christians seem to think they would be able to achieve soul-rest if only they could avoid temptation. Henry Drummond is quoted as saying, “The greatest of all temptation is to want to be without any.” To be exempt from temptation would only foster apathy and indifference. Created as choosing creatures, we are meant to be tempted. It is in the midst of temptation that we are afforded real alternative options in order to respond with the decision-making of faith. Christians should count it a privilege to be tempted, for the antichrist solicitations and seductions of Satan are always directed at Jesus Christ. The temptation of Christians serves as an affirmation of our spirit-union with Christ. This is why the most pointed temptation for Christians is the temptation to question our spiritual identity, and to doubt that we really are who we are in Christ. Satan is the “accuser of the brethren” (Rev. 12:10). Particularly in our thought life, he accuses us, saying, “Your behavior certainly doesn’t look righteous, or holy, or perfect.” If we fail to reckon on the fact that we are righteous, holy, and perfect in spirit-union with Christ only on the basis of His Being, and not on the basis of our doing, we will be tempted to find our identity in our performance rather than in Christ. There is never any soul-rest in that religious endeavor.

Having lost on the first front, and having retreated into exile when we were receptive to the spiritual exchange of regeneration in the acceptance of Jesus Christ as Lord of our lives, Satan redoubles his efforts to tempt us to misrepresent the character of the triune God Who now dwells within us as Christians. From without

he launches his “flaming missiles” (Eph. 6:16) or “fiery darts” (KJV) over the wall, attempting to energize the expression of his selfish and sinful character in our behavior. Though not all-knowing, the Evil One does know the particular patterns of propensity and tendency that have been developed in the desires of our “flesh.” He is the one who led us down those paths of desires that turned into selfish ruts. He is the one who commissioned the building of those bunkers of self-indulgence. He knows where our weaknesses are, for he prompted the development of those personally warped patterns in our desires. It is via those twisted patterns of our desires that the tempter now attempts to seduce us to “act out of character” and misrepresent our identity in Christ. Though he does not have the power to reinvade the control room of our spirit and cause us to revert back to being an “old man,” he is able to solicit us to revert to the “old ways” of the selfish behavior of our past.

Tempted to Act and React

From his inception, the devil has been an egocentric “*I*” specialist. “*I will ascend to heaven. I will be like the Most High God*” (Isa. 14:13,14). As the necessary negative of God’s positive character, the “ruler of this world” (Jn. 12:31; 14:30; 16:11), the “spirit of this world” (I Cor. 2:12), the “god of this age” (II Cor. 4:4), foists his character of selfishness upon derivative mankind. His self-oriented “personal interest agenda” is employed in tempting Christians to act with personal aspiration, personal gratification, and personal reputation. We are tempted to act by possessing for ourselves, pleasing ourselves, and promoting ourselves. The apostle John explains, “All that is in the world, the desires of the flesh, and the desires of the eyes, and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world” (I John 2:16).

Temptation to react is equally freighted with selfishness. In response to the circumstances of life or the actions of other people,

we are tempted to react with fight, fright, or flight. Satan seeks to inflame our emotions with anger, hostility and rage as he tempts us to react with resentment, blame, and retaliation. As an alternative, he may prompt us to react with fear, anxiety, or paranoia, or to take flight in withdrawal, retreat, avoidance, or escapism. It is often when our self-indulgent actions are thwarted, that the second wave of temptation to react to people and situations with self-protection and self-preservation follows immediately.

Identifying the Enemy

Christians have often misidentified the enemy of their souls. Though we are tempted to act and react with selfish motivations, we must avoid the conclusion that we are our own worst enemies, or that a distinct entity of “self” is seeking to undermine God’s action in our lives. Drawing such a fallacious conclusion, Christian religion has often pictured man with (or as) his own inner devil, causing the Christian to be auto-tempted or self-tempted by this alleged diabolic “self” or “dirty old man” within. This tragic misrepresentation of the completeness of our identity as a “new man” in Christ creates a dualism that projects man to be a Christ-one and a devil simultaneously. Impossible!

Who, then, is the enemy who is tempting us? James explicitly states, “Let no one say when he is tempted, ‘I am being tempted by God’; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt any one” (James 1:13). Though God does “test” us, as He tested Abraham (Heb. 11:17), and as Jesus tested Philip (John 6:6), He does not “tempt” us with the evil intent of causing the expression of evil character. The same Greek word, *peirazo*, is used in the New Testament for both “tempt” and “test,” and this has created some confusion, but the meaning can only be determined by the contextual intent of the solicitation and the character that is being elicited. God does not tempt us with evil intent.

Are we tempted by circumstances or events that we encounter? Does the attractive person of the opposite sex tempt us? Does the lemon meringue pie in the display case tempt us? No, these are just objects or persons in the world around us, and they have no personified capability to draw us or seduce us to evil. Christians are “in the world, but not of the world” (John 17:11,14,16), and neither the objects of our environment or the corrupted “world system” with its perverted values has the power to tempt us to evil.

Many would suggest that we are tempted by the “flesh” patterns within our soul. This cannot be. Jesus was “tempted in all ways as we are” (Heb. 4:15), and He did not have those developed “flesh” patterns of selfishness and sinfulness. Neither did Adam have such “flesh” patterning when he was tempted in the garden (Gen. 3). But Adam and Jesus did have basic human desires, so can we surmise that we are tempted by our desires? The words of James are often used as documentation of this thesis that we are tempted by our desires, “Each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own desire” (James 1:14). A better translation might be, “Each one is tempted under (Greek preposition *hupo*) his own desire, being drawn out and lured (or baited).” Who (or what) is doing the tempting? Not our desires, for they are just the location where the tempter goes fishing, seeking to hook us with his lures of selfishness.

The subject of the verb “tempt” is always the “tempter” (cf. Matt. 4:1; Mk. 1:13; Lk. 4:2; I Cor. 7:5; I Thess. 3:5). Throughout the New Testament the subject of the action of temptation is always Satan, or religionists serving as his agents to solicit and seduce for his evil intent. Some might object that this seems to make the devil an omnipresent tempter. No, only God is everywhere present, but since Satan is “the spirit of this world” (I Cor. 2:12) and “the prince of the power of the air” (Eph. 2:2), he cannot be localized in the singularity of space and time, as are human creatures. Satan is a spirit-being not limited by the same confines as humans, and can thus tempt people around the world at any time.

So, to answer the question posed above, “Who is the enemy who is tempting us?”, the only legitimate answer is, “The devil.” Jesus identified the devil as the enemy (Matt. 13:25,28,39) who attempts to sabotage the work of God. The one who tempts us is always the diabolic tempter.

James continues his argument by explaining, “When desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death” (James 1:15). Switching metaphors from one verse to the next, James moves from the fishing metaphor to the conception/birth metaphor. In the seductive process of temptation the seed of selfishness is available to be fertilized with the egg of intent in the will, and if we allow that connection to be made, the sin-decision gives birth to a sin-expression. The choice to be receptive to such fertilization allows for a gestation period that might be measured in microseconds. The consequent birth of a sin-expression does not bring forth life, but death – the “dead works” of sinfulness that can never express the life and character of Jesus Christ. The sin-decision that gives birth to a sin-expression may never be “acted out” in bodily behavior, but Jesus said, “every one who looks on a woman to lust for her has committed adultery with her already in his heart” (Matt. 5:28). Such a sin-decision that reasons, “I would if I could; I’m willing,” has already conceived and given birth to an internalized sin-expression.

Temptation and Sin

It must be noted that temptation is not sin. Despite those who would say that the experience of temptation is indicative of not having sufficient faith, it is not wrong to be tempted and does not evidence a lack of faith. Temptation evidences that we are still alive as a human choosing-creature. Those who cannot differentiate temptation from sin often experience the false-guilt of thought-association, concluding, “Well, I’ve thought the thought, therefore I might as well do the act.” Definitely not. Temporary thoughts are

introduced to our minds in temptation, but sin only occurs when we choose to entertain those thoughts or act upon them.

When we abide in soul-rest we need not be threatened or shaken by temptation. We expect to be tempted, recognizing that in every situation where Satan “tempts” with evil intent, God is using the same situation to “test” with the divine intent that gives us the opportunity to demonstrate that His is the life that wins. In every temptation there is an occasion to prove that “Greater is He who is in us, than he who is in the world” (I John 4:4).

Settled in the sufficiency of our spirit-union with the living Christ, the Christian can have soul-rest that is not shocked, surprised or immobilized even when we do succumb to the solicitation of the devil’s temptation and choose to sin. We all “blow it.” There are deep-seated patterns of sin that we fall into time and time again. We can be honest with God, confessing, “Leave it up to me, and I will do it every time. But Lord, the deepest desire of my heart is to glorify You, and I do want to avoid such misrepresentation of your character. I do not have the strength in myself to overcome such, but You do. I can’t; but You can! I want you to do so by Your grace.” That is the cry of faith, when we are receptive to His activity. We must not try to hide or gloss over our sin-expressions in religious piety or increased ecclesiastical activity. When there are evident inconsistencies and misrepresentations of the character of Christ in our lives, we can remain settled in the awareness and affirmation that “Christ is our life” (Col. 3:4).

Christian religion has often fostered an undue sin-consciousness among Christians. Instead of focusing on Christ, they advocate a navel-gazing self-introspection that leads to obsessive confession of sin. Believing in the false-identity of “I’m just a sinner saved by grace, whose heart is deceitful and desperately wicked” (Jere. 17:9), they wallow in a confessionalism that moans and groans, crying, “Oh God, You won’t believe what *I did now!*” God must roll His eyes and think, “What do you expect when you do not allow Me to act in you?” When we sin as Christians, and we

all do, we should simply agree with God, i.e., confess, that we have misrepresented His character and our spiritual identity; thank Him for the reminder, and move on in grace! We should not focus on sin, but on Jesus Christ. Though sin is contrary to God's character, He is not shocked by our sin, nor is He angry with us for our sin. God is always FOR us! The soul-rest that is built on our spirit-union with Christ can accept failure as the stepping-stone to spiritual success, can accept weakness as the prelude to His strength, can accept doubt as the precursor of faith, and can accept death as the springboard of life.

The foregoing comments are not meant to minimize or diminish sin, but are intended to maximize and elevate Jesus Christ in Christian awareness. The provision and sufficiency of the indwelling Spirit of Christ means that we do not *have* to sin. Sin is not necessary or inevitable in the Christian life. This is not to say that we *cannot* sin, but that we can, if we so choose, *not sin*. We are not saying that it is *not possible* for Christians to sin, but that it is *possible* for Christians *not* to sin as they faithfully allow the living Lord Jesus to live out His life in their behavior. We are not advocating perfectionism, but we are promoting the perfect and plentiful provision of the Person of Jesus Christ living out His life as us and through us.

When a Christian is inordinately concerned about the power of the devil, the presence of demons, or the perversion of the world system, that person's restlessness exposes his improper fear of temptation and focus on sin. Frankly, I seldom spend much time thinking about the devil, even though I know he is tempting me every day. I want to "fix my eyes on Jesus" (Heb. 12:2), recognizing that the Victor lives in me, and that I can rest in the awareness that I am a "safe son."

A Christian is "kept by the power of God" (I Peter 1:5), being "strengthened and protected from the evil one" (II Thess. 3:3). "The evil one cannot touch" (I Jn. 5:18) the inner identity and real spiritual being of a child of God. When the Christian is tempted

the living Lord Jesus “comes to the aid of those who are tempted” (Heb. 2:18), and “knows how to rescue the godly from temptation” (II Pet. 2:9). “God is faithful and will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able (in Christ), but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, that you may be able to endure it” (I Cor. 10:13).

10 Soul-Rest and the Trials of Life

Though temptation does not come from the objects and circumstances of our environment, there is an opportunistic link between the trials of life and the spiritual solicitations of Satan's temptations to evil expression of his character, and God's testings to elicit godly expression of His character. This is particularly apparent when we examine the Greek words used in the New Testament. We have previously noted that the Greek verb *peirazo* is translated both "tempt" and "test," depending on the source and objective of the solicitation. The noun form of the same word, *peirasmos*, can also be translated "temptation" to identify the evil action of the tempter (Lk. 4:13; I Tim. 6:9), or "testing" in reference to God's action (I Pet. 4:12), as well as "trial" which refers to the circumstances and situations of life without any particular reference to good or evil intent (James 1:2,12; I Pet. 1:6)). The Greek root word, *peiro*, meant, "to pierce in order to examine or prove." Socrates stated, "The unexamined life is not worth living." The circumstances or trials of life do indeed "pierce our status quo," and by these we are tested and examined to prove whether we will respond by faithful receptivity to God's activity in expressing His character in our behavior, or whether we will misrepresent our spiritual identity as Christ-ones in responding to Satan's temptation to manifest his selfish and evil character. It is interesting that in Modern Greek usage the word *peirasmos* simply refers to the "experience" of life.

“Stuff Happens”

There is a fallacy in some religious teaching that “Christians should not have problems,” and if they do it is a sign that they lack faith, or that they are not working or praying enough. They falsely conclude that hardships indicate that God is withholding His blessings or punishing an individual, and they encourage such persons to pray for deliverance from such demonic assault. While some explain the adversities of life as “the devil is after me,” others attribute the same circumstances to God’s sovereignty, saying, “God has done this to me, or allowed this to happen to me.” The source and causation of life’s trials has long been debated, and the various positions taken depend on one’s theology and theodicy. Some forms of Eastern religion regard the situations of life as “just an illusion” to be disregarded or denied. Humanistic naturalism, on the other hand, resigns itself to the explanation, “Stuff happens,” and attributes the unpleasant ordeals of life to “bad luck,” “bad karma,” or “the fickle finger of fate.” The pessimistic and aphoristic adage commonly applied is, “It’s Murphy’s Law – if anything can go wrong, it will.” Claiming to be “victims of the circumstances,” many seek to blame others for the difficulties they encounter.

The following sequence of statements shows the range of religious explanations for the circumstances of life:

Confucius says, “Stuff happens.” The Taoist says, “Listen to the sound of stuff happening.” The Buddhist says, “Stuff happens again and again. How do I escape all this stuff?” The Muslim says, “Stuff happens. It is the will of Allah.” The Jew says, “Why does stuff always happen to us?”

What, then, is the Christian explanation for the “stuff that happens,” in the events and situations of life? Believing in God’s providential sustaining of His created order, the Christian cannot accept the Deistic detachment of a world that just plays out in evolutionary indeterminism, nor the monistic merging of good and

evil into one principle. Christians recognize the fall of man into sin (Gen. 3) and the “world system” of evil that prevails among mankind as orchestrated by “the ruler of this world” (Jn. 12:31; 14:30; 16:11), the “god of this age” (II Cor. 4:4). We are “in the world, but not of the world” (Jn. 17: 11,14,16), and must expect that we will experience problems and be personally rejected by fallen and selfish persons. God did not promise a red carpet walk into Fantasyland. He did not promise us “smooth sailing on calm seas of life.” Jesus said, “In this world you have tribulation” (Jn. 16:33). Peter advised his readers, “You have been distressed by trials” (I Pet. 1:6); “. . .do not be surprised, as though some strange thing were happening to you” (I Pet. 4:12). Since the Greek word *peirasmos* can be translated both “temptation” and “trial,” Paul’s statement can be translated, “No trial has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, Who will not allow you to be tested beyond what you are able, but with the trial (or testing) will provide the way of escape also, that you may be able to endure it” (I Cor. 10:13). Christians should be realistic in their expectation of aggravations, inconveniences, tragedies, and crises in this fallen world that we live in. Christianity is not an escapist community serving a “no problem” God who has made us immune from the trials of life. Soul-rest is not an exemption or escape *from* the circumstances of life in this world, but is a rest of the soul *in the midst* of the problems of life. Since “trials are common to man” (I Cor. 10:13), the non-Christian has trials that reveal his own insufficiency, and the Christian has the same kinds of trials that reveal his own insufficiency, but the Christian also has the sufficiency of the One who has come to be his life in spirit-union. “Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves, but our sufficiency is of God” (II Cor. 3:5). Christians can view the situations of life as God’s opportunities to manifest His sufficiency within the situation. The extent to which the circumstances of life are orchestrated by the sovereign God has long been debated among Christians, but we must beware of attributing sinful actions such as rape, assault, and murder to God, for although God, as Creator and sustainer, is the essential cause of all

things, He is not the blameworthy cause of evil which is contrary to His character.

Forms of Trials

Our trials present themselves in three different forms: (1) Non-personal trials. (2) Inter-personal trials. (3) Intra-personal trials.

Non-personal trials are situations that do not necessarily involve other people: Our car breaks down, our house burns up, the wrench slips, the stock market crashes, we catch a virus. Birth defects, like that of the man born blind (John 9:3), could be regarded as non-personal trials, as well as physical ailments, like that of Paul's "thorn in the flesh" (II Cor. 12:7), or even the death of a loved one, like Lazarus (John 11:14). Since the experiences of life are not always unpleasant, non-personal situations could also include getting a raise, the stock market going up, and a doctor's report indicating good health.

Interaction with other persons is the context of *inter-personal trials*. In the context of husband and wife relationships, parent and child relationships, employer and employee relationships, neighbors, friends, and club members there are many situations that we confront. People have different personalities that think and feel differently, act and react differently, and these can cause frictions and misunderstandings. Laban's treachery with Jacob (Gen. 29:21-30) and Joseph being sold into slavery by his brothers (Gen. 37:18-28) are a couple of biblical examples of inter-personal situations. Pleasant inter-personal situations might include being nominated for a promotion, making new acquaintances, or developing a friendship.

Intra-personal experiences are those that arise from within, subjectively. They are often associated with temptation in our thoughts or emotions, or with the "flesh" patterns of selfishness

and sinfulness in our desires. Obsessive and addictive impulses present themselves to our conscious minds. We may begin to engage in fantasy dreams of pleasing ourselves, possessing for ourselves, or promoting ourselves. On the positive side, mental awareness, emotional concern, and spiritual revelation, may also qualify as intra-personal experiences.

Purpose of Trials

Only as we come to some conclusion of the source of the situations of life in the context of God's sovereignty can we begin to understand the purpose of life's experiences and respond to them in soul-rest. If God is in sovereign control of all things in the universe He has created, and has a particular love for those who are His people, why do we have to experience adversity, suffering, accidents, or catastrophes? But wait! Would it not be just as legitimate to ask, why do we have to experience the caring concern of a friend, the purr of a kitten, the splendor of a sunset, or the intimacy of a family? We must beware of focusing on trials and experiences only in the context of what we regard to be the unpleasant circumstances of life. "God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose" (Rom. 8:28).

God does not place tall hurdles on the track of life to make life difficult or to trip us up. "God is love" (I Jn. 4:8,16), and seeks our highest good. The circumstances of life should not be viewed as obstacles, but as opportunities. G.K. Chesterton wrote, "An inconvenience is only an adventure wrongly considered. An adventure is an inconvenience rightly considered." Our perspective of the purpose of the situations of life will greatly affect our orientation and response to what happens. In the words of Epictetus, "Men are disturbed, not by things, but by the view which they take of them." Or as Montaigne said, "A man is hurt not so much by what happens, as by his opinion of what happens."

Religious explanations of the purpose of the experiences of life are often self-centered. A common explanation is that the trials of life make us better, stronger, more mature, or more spiritual. An abundance of analogies are employed to illustrate such an explanation. I have heard people explain, "God uses trials to temper your metal." "You are a 'diamond in the rough' and God wants to chip, and shape, and polish you into a well-cut diamond." "Just as the Vikings made strong ships out of trees that were weathered and twisted by the storms, so God makes us strong by tough trials." "Just as Stradivarius made his violins out of trees bent and twisted by the winds, so God seeks to make perfect instruments out of us." God has no intent to make us better or stronger, but only to allow for a more adequate manifestation of the life and character of Jesus Christ in our behavior. Many have stated that the trials of life build and develop character in us and serve to perfect us. We are already spiritually "perfect" by the presence of the Perfect One, Jesus Christ, in our spirit, and God's desire is to see His own perfect character manifested experientially in our behavior. Others have explained, "God is trying to teach you, or to prepare you for a ministry." "God trusts you so much that He is allowing you to 'suffer for Jesus,' and will thereby produce perseverance in you." In most of these explanations there has been too much focus on us, and not enough focus on God and His purposes.

God's purpose is always to allow His own all-glorious character to be manifested within His creation unto His own glory. We were "created for His glory" (Isa. 43:7), and He "does not give His glory to another" (Isa. 42:8; 48:11). The circumstances of life are God's "attention-getters" to expose and reveal to us the next opportunity to manifest His glorious character. What a privilege, then, to be tested, examined, and proven to be those who overcome by His life and character, allowing the situations of life to serve God's disciplinary purposes of demonstrating that we are His disciples and followers. It was in this context of purpose that Joseph could say, "You meant it for evil, but God meant it for good" (Gen. 50:20). After all of Job's trials, he could say, "I know

that Thou canst do all things, and that no purpose of Thine can be thwarted" (Job. 42:2). Explaining the purpose of the man born blind, Jesus said, "It was in order that the works of God might be displayed in him" (John 9:3).

With our finite understanding we may not understand what God is doing or the particulars of why God is doing what He is doing. The general purpose of His own glory should be enough to cause us to continue to trust Him and rest assured that "His ways are always right" (Hosea 14:9). "Since the Lord is directing our steps, why try to understand everything that happens along the way?" (Prov. 20:24 LB). Paul explained, "The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us" (Rom. 8:18).

Response to the Trials of Life

Believing in God's sovereignty and recognizing His purpose of manifesting His glorious character, Christians can respond to the situations of life with a soul-rest that is inexplicable to those in the world around us. We are not to respond with the escapism of attempted deliverance, or the asceticism of withdrawal from the world. Nor are we to react with the fatalism of acquiescence, the stoicism of painful endurance, or the survivalism of trying to cope with the struggles of life. The world may try to "grin and bear it" with encouraging mottoes such as, "Don't worry; be happy," while some religion advises that we should just "Praise the Lord anyway!" but these are just techniques of avoidance which attempt to overlook the problems. Christians, on the other hand, can see with the clear vision of faith that God is providentially at work in all circumstances. Like Paul, we can "be content in whatever circumstances we find ourselves" (Phil. 4:11).

Only as the Christian accepts all circumstances as God's providential opportunities and is secure in God's provision in the midst of all situations can he respond to all things with gratitude

and thanksgiving. Paul exhorted the Thessalonian Christians, saying, “In everything give thanks” (I Thess. 5:18), and encouraged the Ephesians to “give thanks for all things” (Eph. 5:20). The Greek word for “giving thanks” is *eucharisteo*, meaning “good grace.” As Christians “give thanks,” they recognize the “good grace” of God in all circumstances. Only from this perspective does James’ admonition make sense, when he admonishes his readers, “Count it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials” (James 1:2). He is not saying, “Be happy when bad things befall you,” but is advising the Christian brethren that “the testing of their faith” produces the endurance that “perseveres under trial” (James 1:11) as they recognize the sufficient grace of God in every experience. Peter, likewise, encourages his readers to “rejoice, even though you have been distressed by various trials, ...rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory” (I Peter 1:6,8). This “joy inexpressible” in the midst of trials is the privilege of every Christian who knows that “we are more than conquerors through Him Who loves us” (Rom. 8:37), and “overcomes” (Rev. 2:7; 3:21) all things by the strength of Christ, the Overcomer.

The Christian life is certainly not problem-free. We can expect, even welcome, circumstances that unexpectedly “pierce our status quo” and by which we are examined concerning whether we will respond with the dependence of faith. When we encounter these “speed bumps” that threaten to “upset our apple cart,” we may have initial perplexity (II Cor. 4:8), distress (Lk. 12:50), or a “troubled soul” (Jn. 12:27; 13:21), but then we recognize the sufficiency of Christ within our spirit and respond with the faith that allows Him to bring rest to our souls. Christ in us is panic-proof. He does not get frantic and over-react to the trials of life by going into hysteria or having a nervous breakdown. In the midst of turmoil Christ brings peace and rest to our souls as the oil of the Holy Spirit is poured on the troubled waters of life.

9 Soul-Rest and Practical Christian Living

It is a common tendency among Christians to ask, “How do I *achieve* this soul-rest?” “What must I *do* to enter that rest?” Geared, as we are, to religious “how to” formulas and “self-help” procedures, we seek “Twelve Steps to Rest.” This only leads to the unrest of self-effort in religious performance activity. The definition of “rest,” you may recall, is ceasing from our performance of doing and striving to get what God has already given to us.

As ironic as this may appear, soul-rest often involves a repudiation of religion. In fact, the entire ecclesiastical system of Christian religion, with its constant inculcations to commitment, church attendance, involvement and tithing, is often one of the greatest trials that Christians face. It is imperative that we distinguish between what is called “Christian religion” and the living reality of Christianity. The English word “religion” is derived from the Latin *religio*, meaning, “to bind up” or “tie back.” Many religious people seem to take delight in the masochism of being beaten and bound by overbearing preachers, but Jesus did not come to bind us up in rules and regulations or tie us down in rituals and duties of devotion. Jesus said, “You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (Jn. 8:32), for Truth is personified in the Son (Jn. 8:36) who is “the Truth” (Jn. 14:6). Jesus did not say, “I came that you might have religion, and practice it more faithfully,” but rather, “I came that you might have life, and have it more abundantly” (Jn. 10:10).

The abundant freedom of the Truth-Reality of Jesus Christ as our life sets us free from thinking that we must engage in the

moral and ethical performance of behavior modification in “dos” and “don’ts” or “thou shalt” and “thou shalt not” that are alleged to please God. We no longer have to defend those rigid rules and regulations of religion that are proposed as the strict and inflexible means of achieving holiness. Even the regularity of a “quiet time” of Bible reading and prayer, or any other of the spiritual disciplines, are not an end in themselves that will bring soul-rest, even though they may serve as means by which the Spirit of Christ can bring “revelation” to our spirit and minds. Many Christians long to be freed from the religious pressures to engage in witnessing and evangelism under the false premise of a “great commission” that is interpreted to mean, “Go ye, means you!” Or to be relieved from the false-guilt of not becoming a missionary based on the false pretense that “the need is the call.” Or to be released from the burden of the false incentive that they are “saved to serve” in full-time Christian ministry. Paul explained, “God is not served with human hands, as though He needed anything” (Acts 17:25). When we experience soul-rest in the sufficiency of Jesus Christ we recognize that “ministry” is just the overflow of Christ functioning in us, as us, and through us. There need never be any ministry “burn-out” when we live in soul-rest.

Evangelical humanism has brainwashed many genuine Christians into thinking that their effort and performance is the basis of Christian living. Incentives to more commitment and increased “works” never leads to soul-rest, but only to frustration, uncertainty, insecurity, and doubt. Instead of the Avis Rent-a-Car theology that touts, “We try harder,” Christians need a theology of grace that explains the dynamic indwelling of the living Lord Jesus and how He wants to be the Christian life in and through us. Such soul-rest will set us free from the performance striving of religious “works” that are alleged to make us acceptable to God. We can quit trying to change ourselves, internally and externally, into an aligned conformity that will please God, and begin trusting that “He Who began a good work in us will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus” (Phil. 1:6).

Living by Grace through Faith

Much of Christian teaching recognizes God's grace as the threshold factor of salvation, but fails to understand that divine grace is the total dynamic of Christian living. They see God's grace in redemption, but not in sanctification. Without the awareness and experience of God's grace whereby He continually acts in accord with His character, without any "help" on our part, Christians can never participate in soul-rest. The Christian life is lived only by the grace of God. None of us can "pull it off" or "make it happen." The Christian life is impossible, unless the life of Jesus Christ is lived out in us by the grace of God.

Some have objected that this sounds like passivism, quietism, or acquiescence. Not at all! We are not denying that there is Christian responsibility. Our responsibility as Christians is to continue to respond by faith to God's grace action. That was our initial responsibility when "by grace you were saved through faith, not of yourselves for it was the gift of God, and not a result of works lest anyone should boast" (Eph. 2:8,9). Paul also wrote, "As you received Christ Jesus," by grace through faith, "so walk in Him. . . established in your faith" (Col. 2:6,7). Our responsibility is a response-ability to God's ability. We are responsible for faithful availability to His ability. Perhaps the best definition is, "Faith is our receptivity to His activity." There is no passivism or inaction in such Christian faith, for by its very definition it involves the activity of God's grace. That is why James declares, "Faith apart from the outworking of God's activity is useless and dead" (James 2:17,20,26). By faith we choose to open ourselves up as conduits of the grace activity of God in Christ to allow for the free flow of His divine action through us. "Led by the Spirit" (Rom. 8:14), we effortlessly "go with the flow" in the current of God's grace. Our faith is in His faithfulness (cf. Phil. 1:6).

Jesus told His disciples, "Apart from Me, you can do nothing" (John 15:5). How much did we "do" to be redeemed or to become a Christian? Nothing, for "it is not of works lest anyone

should boast" (Eph. 2:9). How much must we "do" to remain a Christian or live as a Christian? Nothing, for all the "doing" is but an expression of God's grace as He seeks to manifest His character in Christian behavior. We are not expected to "work for Jesus" as some religionists have intimated, but it is our privilege to participate in the "good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:10). "God is at work in us, both to will and to work for His good pleasure" (Phil. 2:13), and that is how we "work out our salvation" (Phil. 2:12). Understanding the grace dynamic of the Christian life, Paul could thus say, "I can *do* all things through Him who strengthens me" (Phil. 4:13), for it is He Who "works in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ" (Heb. 13:21). "Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God" (II Cor. 3:5).

It should be evident now why soul-rest has often been referred to as "grace rest" or "faith rest," for it is faithful receptivity to the grace activity of God. The Christian life is not what we *do*, but what we allow the living Lord Jesus to *do* through us. Christians experience soul-rest when they submit to being "clay in the Potter's hands" (Jere. 18:6) and cease trying to control their own lives. "All authority is given to Me in heaven and in earth" (Matt. 28:19), Jesus said, and it is He Who wants to function as the living Lord in our lives. Accepting the Lordship of the living Jesus by faith is the only way to have soul-rest.

Living Out of Spirit-union

From the settled reality of spirit-union with Christ, Christians can experientially have communion with God – a genuine spiritual intimacy of interactive relationship. Christian writers of yesteryear used to call this "intercourse with God." There is no greater soul-rest than to know that we are connected in union and communion with God. What peace and fulfillment is ours in

knowing that we can “draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith” and “enter the holy place” (Heb. 10:19,22) and worship at the altar/throne of God’s presence at any time and in every place. The entirety of our lives is then the worship of expressing the worth-ship of God’s character. In the midst of this genuine spiritual worship we serve as priests in the company of the “priesthood of all believers,” representing God to man and man to God. Thus serving as priests, we visibly express the invisible reality of God and function as the personified sacrament of God.

Soul-rest relies on the “finished work” of Jesus Christ. When Jesus exclaimed, “It is finished,” from the cross, He knew that redemption was accomplished and He had set in motion the restoration of humanity by the available presence and function of His own life in man. We rest in the dynamic of His continuing “finished work” of manifesting His life in us.

The Spirit of Christ (Rom. 8:9) is the “Spirit of liberty” (II Cor. 3:18), and “it was for freedom that Christ set us free” (Gal. 5:1,13). The freedom of the Christian is not only a freedom *from* sin, law, and death, but also a freedom *to* be and do all that God wants to be and do in us. Religious bondage always produces restlessness, but our freedom in Christ allows for soul-rest. We are free to celebrate and enjoy life. By His abundance of “party parables” Jesus often portrayed the Christian life as a celebratory opportunity.

Soul-rest is participation in the kingdom of God. Jesus explained, “The kingdom of God is within you” (Lk. 17:21). The kingdom is not only a realm that we expect in a future earthly millennium or in heaven some day. When the living Christ reigns in us as Lord, we “reign in life through Christ Jesus” (Rom. 5:17), and experience the royal rest of the kingdom. Since the “kingdom of God” and the “kingdom of heaven” are synonyms, Christians are participating in heaven right now, for heaven is the presence of God. Future heavenly existence is simply the continuum of the life that we now have in Jesus Christ. We should not conceive of heaven as receiving something more than we now have in Jesus,

but as the perpetuity of His eternal life. If the future experience of heaven is regarded as a “rest,” then we should be developing an appreciation of that “rest” in the present. Avoiding the mercenary and materialistic concept of receiving rewards in heaven, we should learn to “rest” in the appreciation of the sufficiency of Jesus right now. Soul-rest is a present heavenly experience.

Living as Who We Are

Knowing our spiritual identity, who we are in spirit-union with Christ, allows us to experience the soul-rest freedom to be ourselves. We are each unique and novel expressions of the life of Jesus Christ. We do not have to conform to others’ expectations of what they think a Christian ought to be or to do. With a “positive personal concept” of who we are in Christ, we can “be real” and avoid the hypocritical masks of trying to *be* what we are not and *do* what others expect of us in religious role-playing. Avoiding the self-protective barriers of self-consciousness and self-reputation, and comfortable with who we are, we can spontaneously express Christ as us. We can be open and transparent, not embarrassed to share feelings of tenderness, compassion, joy or sorrow. We can be vulnerable to engage in emotional intimacy with others. In our unique expression of the life of Jesus Christ, it is permissible to be different, to “take a stand” and “stand alone,” to “march to the beat of the distinctive drummer that Christ wants to be in us.” Unfazed by what others think, we have the soul-rest to be bold, courageous, uninhibited, confrontational, or whatever Christ wants to be in us. Such behavioral expressions will, however, always manifest the character of Christ, the “fruit of the Spirit” (Gal. 5:22,23), for Christ always “acts in character.”

Living in soul-rest allows for a Christ-consistent spontaneity that might even be expressed as “doing what comes naturally.” Since we are “partakers of the divine nature” (II Pet. 1:4), when we live out of that nature of Christ within, we live in the realm of the

Spirit-natural (almost an oxymoron) wherein it seems natural to manifest His character of holiness, righteousness, goodness, etc. In fact, it can become so natural that the Christian has no recollection of being loving or humble, no awareness of sufferings or trials for they are regarded as opportunities, and no consciousness of temptation for it rolls off “like water off of a duck’s back.” Ceasing to analyze every detail of what he is doing, the Christian can live so spontaneously that he feels like he is not “doing” anything, as he lives by the Life of Another.

Living for Others

Jesus lives in us and as us, not so we can become spiritually bloated and proud of our spirituality, but always for the purpose of being poured out for others. Paul wrote, “The love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us” (Rom. 5:5). When the love of God is poured *into* our hearts, it is always for the purpose of being poured *out* for others. Love can’t be stored as a deposit within; it is always actively seeking the highest good of others. The antithesis of love is self-orientation, in direct opposition to the other-orientation of God’s love.

To live and love like Jesus is not something Christians have to try to accomplish. Many Christians have been told that the Christian life is trying to “live like Jesus” and “love like Jesus.” They soon realize they are incapable of such. Soul-rest is experienced when we realize that Jesus lives in us and loves through us. As we are receptive by faith to the expression of His life, He pours out His character of compassion, patience, and forgiveness toward others.

The living Lord Jesus gives us a heart for humanity. We recognize that fallen humanity is abused and misused by Satan, their hearts being “veiled” and “blinded” (II Cor. 4:3,4) to God’s intent. As they search for meaning, and purpose, and worth, and rest,

their selfish pursuits are often expressed in sinfulness. The love of Jesus within us cries, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Lk. 23:34).

Christ in us cannot help but love others, and continues to serve as a sacrificial intercessor willing to lay down His life for others. Soul-rest is the acceptance of such self-abandonment for the sake of others. In accord with Paul's sentiment, we "become all things to all men, that we may be all means save some" (I Cor. 9:22). We become "slaves to all, that we might win the more" (I Cor. 9:19). This was the basis of Martin Luther's comment, "A Christian is a most free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is a most dutiful servant, subject to all."¹⁶ There is great soul-rest is the recognition that we serve not ourselves, but others.

11 Conclusion

Many Christians have failed to discover God's "rest" in the incessant activity of religion. Though soul-rest is the birthright of every Christian, many, like Esau, have sold their birthright for a mess of pottage, i.e., the psychologized explanations of contemporary Christian religion. Genuine soul-rest is only to be found in spirit-union with the Son of God, and the faithful recognition of the grace sufficiency of His life. Augustine prayed, "My heart, O Lord, does not rest, until it rests in Thee." When we "abide" and "rest" in spirit-union with Christ, He brings rest to our souls.

Isaiah prophesied that when Christ came "His rest shall be glorious" (Isa. 11:10). Historically, this was made available when Jesus came saying, "I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28). Experientially, we "find rest for our souls" (Matt. 11:29) when we "enter His rest by resting from all our works" (Heb. 4:10), and simply appreciate all that God has done and is doing by His grace. What a glorious privilege to participate in God's rest (Gen. 2:2,3).

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