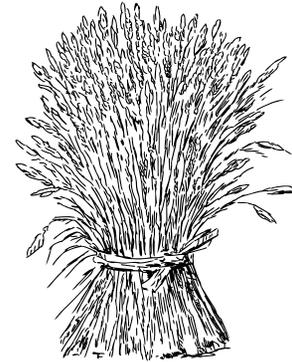


**JESUS**  
*in His*  
**FULLNESS**

**...Accept No Substitutes**



# **JESUS IN HIS FULLNESS**

**Accept No  
Substitutes!**

## The Mystery of the Incarnation

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through Him all things were made; without Him nothing was made that had been made. In Him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it... The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us. We have seen His glory, the glory of the One and only who came from the Father, full of grace and truth (John 1:1-5,14).*

*In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days He has spoken to us by His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, and through whom He made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of His being (Hebrews 1:1-3).*

*He is the image of the invisible God, the Firstborn over all creation... For God was pleased to have all His fullness dwell in Him (Colossians 1:15, 19).*

*That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has now appeared to us (1 John 1:1-2).*

*“I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me. If you knew Me, you would know the Father as well. Anyone who has seen Me has seen the Father” (John 14:6, 7,9).*

That's mystical language: “The Word was with God. The Word was God. The Word became flesh and dwelt for a while among us.” But it's really not just poetry! Jesus is the Word.

Often we use the term, “Word of God,” to refer to the scriptures, “the Bible.” But what do we mean when we call it the Word? We're claiming that the Bible, this God-breathed thing, did not come from man's conception, man's hand, or man's mind applied to philosophical or religious matters, that instead it is a recorded manifestation of the very breath of God.

Jesus Christ, however, is so much greater than that! He is the incarnate manifestation of the Word of God. If the Bible is the Word become words, Jesus is the Word become flesh. Remember that the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are one God. “The Lord thy God is one God”—not three Gods, but one. Jesus said, “No one comes to the Father but by Me.” Jesus of Nazareth is the expressed heart and Word of God Himself. He is the manifested thought of God Almighty.

I want to take this step back to help you to see that the qualities the Bible speaks about—patience, humility, holiness—are not just noble character traits that we must strive to imitate. Jesus Christ Himself is the Word of God. What we read about in the written Word is simply a description of Jesus Christ in language we can understand. “He came and dwelt for a while among us.” He lived out God's character and life. He spoke it. He taught it. He was the breath

As always, if we can help you in any way, please contact the church here at P.O. Box 68309, Indianapolis, IN 46268 USA

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of God. Again, “No man comes to the Father but by Me.” Jesus was and is the road to the Father, expressing and manifesting and personifying the character and thought and mind of God. He was the “exact representation of the Father.”

“Have you been with me so long and do not understand?” Jesus asked. “When you see me, you have seen the Father.” You can see right through the incarnate Word of God into the heart and mind of God, into the very Person of God Himself. That’s who Jesus is! And that’s why John spoke of Jesus as being “the eternal life.” That’s why John could say, “Our hands touched, our eyes saw, our ears heard the very eternal life of God.” He didn’t say that Jesus was a “really good man who told us all about God, a man who lived a perfect Christian life to show us how to live it, then gave us the Holy Spirit so we could live it, too.” Instead, John—reflecting back sixty years after he saw Jesus ascend to heaven—said that he had touched the eternal life, not just a good man.

Paul called the incarnation a “mystery”—something unfathomable by man yet revealed by God. Paul himself, the holy apostle, one of the most fruitful men ever to walk the face of the earth, admitted that it was a mystery to him. He could never have figured out how God could breathe and a baby be born. Yet God revealed that it had really happened. The very Word of God cried in a manger! The very thought, mind, heart, intent, purpose, visions—the very Spirit of the Living Godhead!

“The Lord thy God is one God.” That’s why both John and Paul could write that “Jesus created all things,” that “all things were created by Him and for Him.”

Wait. Didn’t the Father do that?

Not without Jesus. They are one!

“No man comes to the Father but by Me.”

“When you’ve seen Me, you’ve seen the Father.”

“The eternal life appeared to us.”

You need to understand this mystery of the Incarnation to understand why there are no “things” called patience, goodness, self-control, or holiness. These are not external qualities you can attain by reading your Bible a whole bunch or by praying to receive them as individual things. That’s no way to live! You’ll never be a “good Christian” by trying to add Christian qualities to your life. “Things” don’t equal Life! How do you get life out of a test tube? You don’t! You don’t put all the right ingredients in a test tube and shake it up and put a Bunsen burner under it and then have life.

It isn’t like that in the spiritual realm, either. Life is found in Him, and those qualities come from being in Him. Those “things” are merely a description of both your current standing and your eventual destiny in Him. They’re a description of the heart and mind and soul of God Almighty as manifested in Christ Jesus, the Living Word. And now *you* are living epistles, with the Word of God written indelibly on your hearts and in your minds. You are being transformed from one degree of glory to another into the very image and likeness of God.

“Unto the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.” Hallelujah! That’s why all of these “things” are really of no consequence. That’s why pursuing them as goals to be achieved leads to a series of failures and frustrations and shallowness and emptiness and fear. If Christ Jesus is not your All in All, you will feel that frustration, that hollowness, that lack of hollowness—all those desperate things. But all the “achievements” you desire are already in the Son. “Apart from Me, you can do nothing.” There is nothing else. All things are held together in Him, by Him, through Him, and to Him. All things that would ever have any value are already in Him.

That is why, when the rich young ruler called Him a “good teacher,” Jesus replied, “You don’t get it—no matter how much you know—for only God is good.” Jesus didn’t go on to explain it, but we know the mystery of the Incarnation. The rich young ruler went off frustrated that all of his good deeds were for naught. Maybe he tried to justify himself: “Well, I do good deeds. Who does this young carpenter think he is, anyway?” I’m sure he tried to prop himself up on his own self-life, until it all came collapsing again, and he remembered what Jesus had said.

But suppose you and I approach our lives in a radically different way? Let’s begin with the decision that Jesus *Himself* will be our All in All, believing that He alone is the way to the Father and that every spiritual blessing exists *in Him*.

That decision will have some revolutionary implications for our lives...

## “From Now On, You Know Me”

*Thomas said to Him, “Lord, we don’t know where you are going, so how can we know the way?” Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know Him and have seen Him” (John 14:5-7).*

### It Takes a Bunch of Children!

We look in the mirror and wonder, “Hey, do I really know God?” It’s interesting that Thomas and Philip and the others had been with Jesus so long yet were still asking these same sort of questions. They really didn’t understand exactly who Jesus was; they didn’t know who the Father was; they didn’t know how the two were connected. After all this time with Jesus, it still wasn’t clear.

But Jesus made the comment: “From now on you know God.” I’m sure they scratched their heads at that point and said, “We do? I mean, five minutes ago we didn’t. But now we do—right!” I’m certain Jesus’ words were a little frustrating for them. But it is encouraging that, while there’s a part that we play in being fertile soil and in not letting weeds take the place of God’s crop, the “work” of our knowing God seems to be God’s responsibility. The rest of John 14 records that Jesus went on to talk in great detail about the Holy Spirit’s place in the believer’s life in nurturing that relationship.

So I feel OK being dumb and having Jesus look at me and say, “You don’t know God, but now you know God.” The faith the Father is speaking from through His

Son is that He knows the end as the beginning. It's clear in His mind, and He's actually trying to pass on a confidence to us that we won't measure ourselves by how we feel or perform. There's something bigger than that going on!

If you have ears to hear, understand this: Jesus' commitment to you is more real than your current introspection.

"Now you know Me."

"We do?" Well, I can live with that. If Jesus says I know Him and His Father, then I'm not going to argue with Him. And while I may not be expressing the fullness of it, isn't it also true that "greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world"? Isn't it true that it is by faith that we can throw mountains into the sea? Doesn't Christ dwell in our hearts by faith? As a prerequisite for our experiencing what He said, we must *believe* what He said. And if He says that my knowledge of Him in His mind is real, then the only question is whether I'm willing to *believe* that my knowledge of Him is complete in Him.

If I don't believe that Jesus is the Way, I'm going to be constantly frustrated and wandering and experimenting in confusion. But if I believe Jesus is the Way, it's a pretty simple matter to escape the confusion that Satan would try to throw into my mind. As God has promised us that we can know Him—and that in His mind, we already *do*—then we must believe Him before we can live it out.

That's a real mystery. I admit it to you freely. We're wired in such a way that we tend to demand proof *before* we actually accept something as true. Jesus came to re-wire us! He has told us, "What I say is true. The Word became flesh. I am the Truth. Forget what you've heard or experienced—what I say to you is truth." It takes a bunch of children to live that way!

"Now you know Me."

"OK! I don't know what that means, but I know it's true. Now all I have to do is find out how it's true." There's no debate about whether it's true; it is true.

"Now you know Me."

"Help me to see how I know You. I didn't think that I did, but I'm obviously wrong, because You said I do. So I do!"

Actually, there are a lot of Scriptures that call us to make that kind of response. For example: "Reckon yourselves dead to sin."

"Unh, unh! I'm not dead to sin. No way! Why, just this morning..."

And in your mind you can argue with God! I don't recommend that. For one thing, you're going to be wrong every time! For another, you're never going to experience life in Christ as long as you're walking in unbelief. You're never going to be able to experience the reality of the gospel of Jesus in your life, and you will be like millions of others who have gone to their graves never experiencing Christianity, although they professed it. Why is that? Because they walked in unbelief. Just like the Hebrews, they didn't combine it with faith. They heard the words, but they didn't believe them. They let their experiences dictate how they felt and how they looked at themselves. Whether they considered themselves dead to sin depended on how they did this morning, not on what God said.

I *am* dead to sin. I am *dead* to sin. How do I know that? *Because God said so.* My experience doesn't measure up? Well, that's my problem. God said it's true, so it's true! Now I just need to believe that. The living out of that truth will *follow* belief. It won't precede faith!

You have to get that straight about Christianity. That's the point Jesus was making when He said, "I am the Way, and the Truth, and the Life." If you'll just understand that your ability to have the Way, the Truth, and the Life—the *Zoë* life, the eternal life, the power of the galaxies inside your mortal body—depends on whether you are hiding in Jesus for their fulfillment. To attempt to attain those things by your own effort is futile! You will never attain the Way, the Truth, and the Life; they are hidden in Christ to the glory of God. The only way to have them is to rest in Jesus, to find your life and your hope in Him, no matter how you feel, to "believe in the One whom the Father sent."

Stop right at Jesus as the answer to your questions.

"Am I saved?" ...	"Is Jesus saved?"
"Am I wise?" ...	"Is Jesus wise?"
"Am I holy?" ...	"Is Jesus holy?"
"Am I dead to sin?" ...	"Was Jesus dead to sin?"
"Am I happy?" ...	"Was Jesus content?"
"Can I pray?" ...	"Well, could Jesus?"

The answer to every single question is in Jesus. He is the answer. He doesn't give a big rulebook so that we can figure out the formulas and memorize the answers, and—provided we figure all the formulas right—then: Yeah! "The Victorious Christian Life" (whatever that is). Or "the perfect church." Life in Christ is not a matter of formulas, and neither is corporate life. The church consists of a bunch of people that are totally sold out—not just in a committed sense, but in the sense that Jesus is the answer to their every question about their lives. Otherwise, you can be saved, but you can't *experience* salvation in this current life. If Jesus isn't the answer to every question about who you are and what strength and abilities and talents you have, what impact you can have on another's life, how you feel about yourself—if He's not the answer, then you'll continue to live a futile, frustrated life. That's not God's will for you. Jesus came that you could have life in abundance. Frankly, as you know, not a lot of people have experienced that.

Your willingness to love the truth is the beginning of your ability to walk in the gospel, the good news of Jesus, and to "taste the powers of the coming age" in this current age. You really can experience that kind of walk! Paul did. He wrote of being "seated with Christ in the heavenly realms." Did he learn about that in theology class under Gamaliel? What Old Testament passage was he quoting? There isn't one! The truth was that Jesus had revealed to Paul his position in Christ. As a result, he was *living* a life seated with Christ, and he simply described what he was seeing. "Best way I can describe it is that it's kind of like being seated with Christ in the heavenlies. Yeah, that would be a good way to say it." He was expressing what he was experiencing. That's the way God wants us *all* to live. That

is your destiny! That's your place! That's who you are—as you are willing to accept and believe that God said so, and as you allow Him to write it on your heart.

Announce that it's true, to the world and to the accuser of the brethren and to your own face in the mirror. Proclaim that Jesus is the fulfillment of God's every requirement of you, that Jesus is the "Yes" and the "Amen" to every promise and every hope of God—past, present, and future. I don't know another way to say it—just settle this stuff in your heart! When you look in the mirror, and you've failed, and you're frustrated and tempted when the children are crying in stereo, when stuff is happening to you, make sure that you do not falter or waver from this foundational point: Whatever else may be true, Jesus is the answer. The answer has already been given. It's been spoken. The Word has become flesh. The Father's every hope and every dream have been fulfilled in you, as you believe on the One He has sent. Jesus is the Way.

"Am I going to make it?"

"Did Jesus make it?"

"I made it! I made it!" Can you believe that? Can you look into the Father's eye and say, "I made it!" Or are you busy looking at yourself, not believing what God has said and kicking in the dirt, asking, "Am I going to make it or not? I don't know. I wonder if I can?"

Don't live that way! God will love you anyway, but He doesn't want you to live a frustrated, miserable, low life. So don't! And while you are at it, "Encourage one another with these words." When you see somebody who isn't seeing things as Jesus would, who is looking at himself in a way not in line with the hope and promise of the gospel, the good news of Jesus, then encourage one another. "Go forth and multiply and fill the earth"—with the good news of Jesus. He has fulfilled Father's every requirement of you, and He is the answer to every question about your worth, your value, your potential—the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

### An Answer, Not Just a Theology!

"Do you know God?"

"Yes!"

"How do you know that you know Him?"

"Because He said so."

You have to think straight to be a Christian! You *do* know Him.

"I don't know Him." Hey, that's not an admission of immaturity, that's an admission of unbelief! Now all of a sudden, I'm responsible again. If knowing Him is a matter of maturity, and I'm not mature enough to know Him, that's out of my control. "Maturity" is way out there someplace. How would I get mature overnight? What could I mix together in a jar, add water, and shake it up to make a mature Christian? I just couldn't do that. It's too large, too out of my control. And if it's out of my control, I'm not responsible. I might do a couple of right things here and there to get on the right track, but it's such a long journey!

"I don't know how we'll ever make it. By the time I do two right things, I'll

probably do three wrong things immediately thereafter, or I'll get prideful about doing the two right things, and then it will all be over."

Well, if you view things that way, you're going to live a long, miserable, tedious kind of life. The good news is that you don't have to!

"So, do you know God?"

"Yes, I know God. And that's the only way to think!"

"Do I know God?" The answer isn't, "Hmm, let me see if I know God. Well, I don't pray enough, and I'm not holy enough, and I don't love enough, and my temper sometimes..."

Listen: I don't want your temper to get away from you. Jesus doesn't either. And you probably *don't* pray enough! But that isn't really the point. Do I know God? The answer isn't measured by my performance. What I want to ask myself when someone inquires whether I know God is, "What did God say about that?" Isn't that a different kind of answer? "What did God say? He said I *do* know Him!"

What we're trying to get at here is how to *think*, how to answer questions. How did Jesus answer Satan's accusing questions? By using God's thoughts. That's the way we need to answer, too. If Jesus had reflected on how He *felt*, I don't know what He would have said. But He determined that how He felt would be governed by what God said.

So if you ask me if I'm perfect, there may be a lot of ways to answer. But in my spirit, I'm going to say: "Well, was Jesus perfect? What do the Scriptures say about someone who's been washed in the blood of the Lamb? 'White as snow.' Bingo! There's my answer." Am I as white as snow? If I wanted to answer by my performance, by my knowledge, by assessing things as men do, I would have to say that I'm not white as snow. If I were trying to assess things the way God sees them—which is the only right answer!—I would have to say: "If it cost Jesus His blood, I guess it's so. Though my sins were as scarlet, they are now as white as snow—if I call on the name of the Lord. If He's my hope; if He's my Rock, my Refuge, my High Tower, my Salvation, my Wisdom, and my Righteousness—my Way and Truth and Life—then how could I be otherwise? I guess I'm alright! I must be white as snow."

Do I want to improve? Yes. I *do* want to improve. I'm not creating some slackardly way that could still be called Christianity. But the only way you're going to be able to live your life in faith, and actually see the victories that you've longed for from the heart from the first time you heard Jesus' name, is to begin by answering every question with Jesus. Fill in the blank with Jesus. Whatever the question is, whatever the accuser of the brethren would throw at you, whatever the wisdom of the world or your employer or your circumstances or the religious status quo would throw at you—answer every question with Jesus, and you're going to be on very safe ground.

What does God think? How does He view it? That's my answer. That's not some alibi. That's not some cutesy way to throw something new into my theology.

No, that's my *answer*. That's not my theology; that is my answer, because it's the truth! You can with your mind say, "Am I righteous? Well, my theology says He is my Righteousness"—but all along in your spirit you still feel dirty, because you haven't really accepted that He is your Righteousness.

What I'm encouraging you to do right now, if you don't already live this way, is to refuse to accept any other answer in your life. And please—encourage one another. Don't let anyone else live a half-life either, a mere existence with minimal life in it. Make sure that you encourage one another that the answer is Jesus, that your salvation is as secure as His, if you believe in the One the Father sent.

### A Prayer

Lord Jesus, we want to say some really basic, simple things to You.

We know that You're a Person, not a concept. We want to follow You, the Person, not just an historical teacher or a bunch of ideas about a way of life. Because You are risen from the dead, You're alive. Because You're alive, we can follow You, as much as John or Peter or James or any of those men did. We want to be like them. We want to leave our nets, our tax tables or whatever it may be, and follow You, not knowing exactly where we'll go, but knowing there's nowhere else *to go*. You have the words of eternal life. You have the words of depth and meaning and truth. You are the one we want to be with. We want to touch You. When questions come up, we want to touch You. When fears arise, we want to hide ourselves in You. We want to feel what You feel and believe what You said, as absolute truth and fact, regardless of past experience or the accusations of the devil or men. We want our lives to be placed foundationally, totally and absolutely, in You as a Person and in all that You did—all that You were to the Father, and all that You therefore are to us. We want Your reality to be a secure foundation in our lives, and may the answer to our every question and shortcoming be found in You.

We believe that You are the One the Father sent. We believe that with all our hearts. We believe that God raised You, Jesus, from the dead and gave You a Name above every name. We believe that You pleased Him, Jesus, in every way, and that by Your blood sprinkled on the earth and in the heavenlies there is a way to the Father. We believe that, and we'll grab ahold of that, and we'll never let any man steal our crown. Help us to see and to experience all that You intend for us, that there might be a testimony on the earth of Your blood and of Your infinite grace. **Great is Your Name!**

## The Fullness of Jesus Christ

*"No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived, what God has prepared for those who love Him"—but God has revealed it to us by His Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man's spirit within him? In the same way no one*

*knows the thoughts of God except the spirit of God. We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us" (1 Corinthians 2:9-12).*

It has never really entered into the mind of man what God has prepared for those who love Him. It is only revealed through His Spirit. How can you understand what is in the spirit of another man? You cannot do it. But God said we can receive the Spirit of God—that we might be able to know the very thoughts and heart and soul of God Almighty Himself!

That is the good news of the gospel message! It is so much more than, "when we die, we go to heaven." God is in the process of introducing His people to His Son by His Spirit and then drawing them up into Himself and His character. He is doing this not by conforming their behavior but by allowing them to be melted into Himself, becoming one in spirit with Him as a bride becomes one in flesh with her husband (Ephesians 5:31). Those who have truly been born into Him have been united with Him.

For God's people, Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. If you want to see the Father, and if you want to see the Kingdom of God, Christ must be your everything. Remember what Jesus said to Nicodemus: "If you want to see the Kingdom of God, you must be born a second time." (John 3:3) In other words, this supernatural realm of spiritual life is just a theory, a frustrating theory, to those who do not have the Spirit of Christ.

### The Way To The Kingdom

How do we get to there from here? *JESUS is the Way, the Truth, and the Life.*

Men have tried everything under the sun in order to find this thing called Christianity. But the apostle John testifies that we cannot get it by natural descent (we can't inherit it); we can't get it by a husband's will (the people that influence our lives can't bring us into it); we can't get it by human decision (it's not the sort of thing of which you can say, "I want it; therefore, I'll have it"). You must be birthed out of the womb of the Spirit of God, born of God Himself. This birth is a genuine good-news kind of miracle that only Jesus Himself can provide.

So how do we get there? Do we take "Five Steps" or observe "Four Laws"? Can we achieve it by signing a piece of paper? Is it possible to be born again just by repeating a prayer? Is saying the words, "Jesus is Lord" enough? Obviously not, since Jesus Himself said, "Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord,' but I never knew them" (Matthew 7:21-23).

We can see and enter the kingdom of God only by being born of God. And the only way to be born of God is to prostrate ourselves before the person, Jesus of Nazareth, and cry, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" All authority in heaven and earth has been given to Him. He has all authority, because He is alive! He holds the keys; if you want the key to escape death and Hades, you have to go to Him.

Don't settle for anything else. Accept no substitute! It must be Jesus! It cannot be religion. If it's religion, no matter how pure or high or lofty that religion may seem to be, you're going to be frustrated. You will find you never live up

to others, or your own, expectations. You're never going to see what they see or be what you think you should be. Every once in a while you'll fall into the temptation of believing no one else sees anything either, because you don't. If you try to attain life in the kingdom through your own self-effort, you will find lots of clutter getting in the way—your own self-life, your vanity, your personal habits, your preferences, your own feelings, emotions, hormones, or hobbies. These things will get in the way and keep you from seeing the fullness of life that is found only in Christ. And His Life is the only thing worth having in this life—the ONLY thing.

One of the unfortunate things about “religion” in the derogatory sense—not the “pure and undefiled” kind, but the kind that Jesus stood against—is that it has allowed men to lean on external things as they seek what they think would please the Father. They do not taste the “powers of the coming age.” They don't experience “peace that transcends understanding” or “joy inexpressible and full of glory” or “the power of an indestructible life” or “rivers of living water gushing from the inner man.” In reality, they do not experience these things. Yet they are led to believe that because they are part of the “right” movement or religious grouping or believe the correct doctrines, they have achieved all that is attainable. There is a sense of repetitious routine and false satisfaction, but they try to make the best of it.

The great tragedy is most of these people never come to Jesus, Who alone is the Way, the Truth, and the Life, asking for reality and “not letting go until He blesses” them.

I want to urge strongly all who read these words to open your eyes to the *whole* gospel of Jesus Christ—every good and perfect gift, every spiritual blessing in Christ Jesus. Until you yourself can say, “I'm seated with Christ in heavenly realms”—not because you know it's in the Scriptures, but because it's your experience—do not be satisfied! Don't blame anybody else if you don't experience it, but don't fall into depression and despair either. Only continue to pursue Christ with all your heart. Don't let Him go until He blesses you with a true revelation of *who He is*.

He Himself is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Seek Him until He makes that Life a reality to you. Give God no rest until He makes the habitation within your heart the praise of the earth, the city set on a hill that cannot be hidden (Isaiah 62:6-7). Until He has worked a miracle in you that transcends understanding, do not be satisfied. Keep asking Him: “Jesus, baptize me with the Holy Ghost, not just with water, not just with externals.”

He wants to change us. He wants to fill us and free us, to allow us to live in the fullest expression of life—the *Zoë* life—just as He lived it. But HE is the Way, the Truth, and that Life. You cannot do anything to bring about those changes. You can't earn them. You can't somehow prove yourself to God or to yourself or to your neighbor in order to apprehend something. Pretending won't help either.

You must go to Christ about it! He is the only Way, Truth, and Life.

## Dying To Live

You must bury your life in His in order to experience the best thing that He has for you—the real thing—Christianity in its fullest expression. Reject the mediocre things of religion and allow only Jesus Himself to be your inheritance. This kind of life goes far past the idea, “If you died tonight, would you go to heaven?” Jesus wants to give us the hundred-fold blessing of brothers, sisters, mothers, fathers, lands and possessions that He promised *in this life* to all who would forsake their lives for Him (Matthew 19:29). His desire is for you to experience all that God has for you—the abundant life, life to the full (John 10:10).

This life is found in Jesus. You have to get into Him to grasp hold of these things. Allow the Spirit to increase your expectations of what God can do! We believers have been settling for less than God's best for so many years. Many of us have concluded that there isn't much to do after conversion other than hanging on and barely surviving to the end. A few qualities may change in our lives over time, and our personalities may change in minor ways, but we do not “press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called us heavenward in Christ Jesus.”

Over the radio recently a psychologist claimed that, contrary to popular belief, Joe American or Joe Russian still has the same basic personality at age 81 that he had at age 21. The average person in 50 or 60 years changes only the slightest amount in the basic substance of who he or she is—his value system and his character qualities. We have heard so many testimonies of lives that are only marginally changed. It's easy to forget that Jesus Himself promised that we could become so radically different that our faces would shine like that of an angel, as did Christ's.

We must die to our selfish desires and learn to live daily by the Spirit of Christ.

The wisdom that is in Christ is ours; the revelation that is in Christ is ours. “We have the mind of Christ,” Paul said. Our personality and motives can be His. “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 2:5). “Reckon yourself dead to sin, but alive to Christ” (Romans 6:11). These basic qualities of a God-ordained, God-authored life have been planted inside every new believer, and God means us to explore them and fan them into flame. God really wants the Christ-life in us to grow and develop, that we would “shine like stars in the universe in the midst of a corrupt generation.”

A lack of fruitful thinking and a lack of belief have held us back. We have settled for less instead of saying, “God says that this is who I am. God says that's what a new creation is. I've given my life to Him; I've cried out to the Living God. Father, I'm going to give You no rest until I experience this new creation I've become—until You have made me the person that You called me to be and created me to be. That is who I want to be.”

The words of the song speak of a time “when all things that surround me become shadows in the light of You.” There is always an act of self-discipline

involved in this process, because the Scriptures say we can choose to grieve the Holy Spirit and quench His fire, to make Him sad. But this miracle of having everything else pale next to the vision of Jesus is something that only God can cause to occur. You can't do enough religious things or hang around enough religious people to do it. Only Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. It has to be Him. There are no substitutes. There is no other way than Jesus.

### "Son of David, Have Mercy on Me!"

The Father has left it to the Christ to save us. It's His choice. Faith prepares the way, but only Jesus *Himself* can save. Jesus said that "all authority in Heaven and on earth" had been given to Him. Jesus is the Way, and the Father has left it to Jesus to be the Way unto salvation.

That is true of salvation, but please make application to every other area of your life. *Every* spiritual blessing is in Christ. If you want to relate these thoughts to holiness or peace or having a "great prayer life" or something else, you can just fill in the blank with that blessing, because Jesus Himself *is* the Blessing. He is Salvation, but He is also Holiness and Peace and Communion with the Father.

Concerning salvation, our first response tends to be, "What must I do to be saved?" We want to receive some nugget of teaching from the Lord and then go off and do it, thinking that then we will have it. Some of you were raised in that school of thought. But God has invested and personified salvation in the Person of Jesus Christ.

When blind Bartimaeus (Mark 10:46-52) was along the side of the road, he didn't say, "Jesus, what good thing must I do to receive sight?" He said to the Person of Jesus, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" And Jesus turned and healed him there. I want to say that the same process applies to salvation. You need to have a clear grasp on this: to be saved is to have the heart of Bartimaeus and to have your own encounter with the Person of Jesus of Nazareth. Bartimaeus found himself along the side of the road, with everybody pushing him back and saying, "Ah, He doesn't have time for you. Just follow His teaching. I'll give you a handout in Braille about Him, and you'll have it." And Bartimaeus said: "No! I want *Jesus*. Son of David, have mercy on me. I want *Jesus!*"

Salvation is just like that. A saved person is not someone who has accepted a set of ideas and has therefore become a Christian. A saved person is someone who wants *Jesus*, or else! "I want Jesus, or death! I'm not going to be limited to ideas or concepts. I'm not going to be satisfied with a teaching that He passed out in a handout that I got third hand. I want Jesus!"

Salvation means a shameless insistence on the Person of Jesus. There are a lot of people in this world whom we call Christians who have never done that! They've never said, "Jesus, I want You. Son of David, have mercy on me!" I don't mean just the words or a piece of paper they've signed their name to. But I mean, in their hearts, a persistence, even a shamelessness, to burst through the crowds and say, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me! I want the real

thing. I want sight! I want to be able to see! And I'm not going to pretend I can see if I don't."

If those things are true of salvation, wouldn't they also be true of becoming a man or woman of God? Or of becoming a person of prayer? Or of being set free from the bondage of sin in your life? Or of overcoming shyness or depression or shallowness? "Son of David, have mercy on me!" Just going after the Person Who is the answer! Not a self-help list of things to do—that would only last three days anyway. You'd experience some limited, temporary success and think you finally have it. But you won't! You're going to have to meet Jesus to receive these blessings, for He Himself *is* the Blessing.

Now if you're not going to be like the blind man, if you're not going to bust through the crowd of people who are trying to push you back, if you aren't willing to approach Jesus despite the noise and confusion and fear of men and competing ideas, then you're probably not going to get your eyes healed. A lot of people have the simple reality of salvation in that God has forgiven their sins just as much as He forgave the apostle Paul or anybody else, but they never experience the life of Christ, the abundant life. It's because they don't have that attitude of Bartimaeus, that attitude of, "Jesus is my answer, and everything else will have to get out of the way. I'm not ashamed, and I won't be quiet. Son of David, have mercy on me!"

Jesus is the Way. He is the Truth. He is the Life. He *is* prayer and righteousness and love and self-sacrifice and self-discipline and kindness and holiness. Do you see? And so the attitude follows of "Jesus, I'm not going to let You go until You bless me," that Jacob kind of attitude that allows a deceiver to become an Israel of God. "I won't let go of Jesus, the Person." I want you to know that's the only way to live your life: full-faced towards Jesus, the Person, in every area of life, and believing what He says. If He says, "Your sins are forgiven," will you walk away saying, "I don't know if they are or they're not?" If He says, "Arise, take up your mat and walk," are you going to sit there and wonder? The guys who got up and walked were...well, the guys that got up and walked! It's like that for us, too. You're not ever going to walk if you're just going to lie on your mat, wondering if you're healed or not! We must take Him at His word like the ten lepers, whom Jesus told: "Go make the sacrifice Moses commanded. You're healed."

There's something about turning full-faced to Jesus that makes *reality* spring to life.

## Accept No Substitute!

*Whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them all rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the*

*righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. I want to know Christ and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in His sufferings, becoming like Him in His death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.*

*All of us who are mature should take such a view of things (Philippians 3:7-15).*

## Experiential Knowledge

Please, don't accept knowledge of facts *about* Jesus as a substitute for Jesus Himself.

Our knowledge of Jesus is experiential, not just based on learning facts. Now you *do* need to know some facts. That's why we "teach people to obey everything He commanded." There is a teaching process in Christianity. We do have to get our heads right to live in the power of Jesus. We have to think straight. Jesus did come in part to teach us. The disciples continuously called Him "Rabbi" (teacher) or "Rabboni" (master teacher). He told us to go into every nation and teach. So you do need to know what Jesus came to tell us. He came to a very confused—though dedicated—religious world. The Pharisees were serious about following God to the letter of the law. Limit yourself to so many steps on the Sabbath Day. Count the parsley leaves and give God a tenth. They were very serious, not lazy like much of the religious world today. But they were confused. So Jesus taught them about His Father and demonstrated the ways of His Father.

Yet when we talk about the knowledge of God's Son, it's not as though you can simply read a book about Him. There has to be an experiential knowledge as well. It's the difference between reading a textbook and actually doing what the textbook describes. When I was in engineering school, we could do *anything* on paper. We could design internal combustion engines and create thermodynamic systems. But you couldn't hand me a wrench and ask me to adjust my carburetor! There's a kind of knowledge that's experiential and a kind of knowledge that's textbook. Jesus wants to apprentice us in the experiential knowledge of Him. He means us to experience His life, not just regurgitate His teachings. He means us to see things the way He saw them.

A true story:

Two brothers were talking at about 3:00 in the morning. One was asking the other questions about what "church" is supposed to be. "What about this? How do you do that? What do you think the apostles meant when they said this about it? What about Ananias and Sapphira—what was really happening there? How would you apply that today?"

It had gone on like that for untold hours, day after day over the course of time. Now, at 3:00 a.m., he was still going strong. Suddenly, the second brother

just broke into tears, not thinking what he was going to cry about. The first brother took a deep breath and a step back and said, "What's the problem? I thought we were having a good discussion!"

The second brother replied: "When a scientist invents a laser or fiber optics or investigates chemical bonding in some new polymer, that's science. When he tries to create life in a test tube, that's immoral."

Do you understand? You can cross a line when you try to dissect something, and just cut and dice and slice until you think you have it. When you look at things that way, through the eyes of the mind, rather than through the Spirit, it's not just wrong—it's immoral. It's sin to approach Jesus as a textbook. It's sin to approach the church as a textbook problem. It's sin to approach a sinless life as an academic issue, a series of formulas so that if we do all these things just right, if we analyze things down to the molecular level, we'll have it. That's not just erroneous thinking—that's actually immoral. What you end up with is not what God wants.

Life is dynamic. Life is an adventure. Living in Jesus by the Spirit of God isn't a textbook issue. Although the Scriptures contain teaching on fundamental principles and foundational issues, they are a light to guide our path—they are not the path itself. Jesus is our path, our Way.

So when you read the phrase, "the knowledge of God's Son," don't think of it in terms of a textbook. It has to do with *experiencing* Jesus.

## You Don't Have to Sleep at a Road Sign

If you know Jesus Christ as a person, you know truth. If you don't know Jesus Christ as a person, you don't know truth. You might know things about truth but not know *the* Truth.

When we were in Europe, no matter what country we were in, it seemed as if there was always a sign in each little village saying, "*Zimmer*," with an arrow pointing down this street or that. *Zimmer* is the German word for "room." It's become an international word meaning, "Here's a place to stay if you want bed and breakfast." So when we drove through little villages where there was no Holiday Inn, when we saw a little sign that said *Zimmer* it meant we'd have some place to stay.

Well, the word *Zimmer* painted on a sign represents something. But the sign isn't the thing itself. If you follow the arrow towards what the sign represents, you can find an actual room. You can sleep there. You can unpack your things, and you can read there. It's four walls. It's some place to call home for a night. But the sign itself had no real value except that it helped you to find the room. You probably wouldn't have happened onto it without direction from that particular sign.

The words about truth are not themselves truth. They are a road sign. They point us in the right direction. We might not find that "room"—we might not find Jesus—were there no words in our Bible or other men that already knew Jesus. Paul asks, "How can one believe unless he's heard, and how can he hear unless someone is sent to him?" And that sent one had better proclaim the Good

News! “How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of him who proclaims good news.” People can hear and believe as a result of the Word of God. “Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the voice of God” through messengers of God.

That’s all wonderful, but some time along the way we’ve got to realize that if we hear these teachings yet never go—if we see the sign *Zimmer* and then memorize the word and try to lay down by the sign—we have nothing of value. We have to travel the direction the sign points. Words about Jesus have no value in themselves. Even the truths that Jesus taught (if we may call them “truths” for the moment) have no value to us until we actually explore those truths ourselves. Those “truths” are all in Jesus. Jesus is the Truth. If you have Jesus, you have truth. If you don’t have Jesus, you don’t have Truth, no matter how much teaching you’ve absorbed.

How many people have we heard over the years who have known facts by the ton that would externally be called “truths.” Yet the experience of interacting with them, in their life or their conversation or even hearing them speak from a pulpit, somehow failed to produce the effect that the two men on the road to Emmaus felt: “Did our hearts not burn within us as we walked along the way?” It didn’t touch pay dirt. There was no transaction in the inner man. No resonant frequency set our spirits ringing like a tuning fork. When there’s truly life present, the words are Spirit and life as Jesus said His words were.

The disciples exclaimed, “To whom else shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, life that always was and always will be. You have those kinds of words.” Well, the Pharisees and Sadducees had the Bible. They had a lot of ideas containing what we could call “truth.” But Jesus himself said, “You guys know your Bible. You quote it left and right. You teach it on the street comers and even go over land and sea to teach it, but you refuse to come to me to have life. You diligently study the Scriptures thinking that by them you have life. You study ideas and concepts to try to grab a hold of truths and do things that are true and are commanded of you, and yet there’s no life!” (See John 5.)

Now some of us have experienced the difference between mere religion and life at some point, if not at this very moment. And if you find yourself walking in religion, it’s not the end of the world. Don’t give up. I simply want to encourage you: Now that you see the signs, go! You’ve seen the *Zimmer* sign. Now go lay your head in Jesus’ lap. You, as a person, go and lay hold of Jesus, because He is the Truth. We’re after Jesus. It’s not thinking ideas about Him or merely doing things He said. It’s the real Jesus that we’re after. And if it’s not Jesus, there’s not much value—and certainly no peace—in it. It’s frustrating.

That’s not to say we won’t have challenges if we do have Jesus. But now all of a sudden He’s my Fortress, my High Tower. Those word pictures now make sense. “Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father.” Those phrases make sense to our inner man. We can hear them with our spiritual ears. We can see them with our spiritual eyes. Somehow, there’s got to be a time when we see through the images, we see far through the logos and the symbols, and we get

the heart of the matter. We won’t get distracted. We won’t lay down by the side of the road at the sign that says *Zimmer* and say we’ve arrived. It’s only a sign!

I’m asking you to dig deeper, like the pearl merchant. Look everywhere, sell everything to find Jesus in His fullness. Let Him be your Revelation. Let Him be your wisdom. Let Him be everything the Father has for you. Let Him be the I AM: “What ever you need, I am. Whatever is right and true, I am. Wherever you need to go, I am. I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life.”

### Jesus or Power?

So, we need to realize that teachings *about* Jesus are no substitute for Jesus Himself. We must also see that merely seeking the things Jesus *does* is not the same as seeking Him.

There’s a whole branch of Christianity that views God as power—power to do something, power to be a certain way, or power to engage in miraculous activities of some sort. But it’s still a self-centered sort of thing. Pursuing Christ on that basis is to be like Simon the Sorcerer, who wanted to buy the gifts. You can try to buy them with your church attendance or your doctrine or, like Simon, with money. But none of those things will buy Christ, and Christ Himself is “the sum of all spiritual things.” There is no gift outside of Him. It’s not an external thing as Simon thought, and as many people today think.

And a lot of them are frustrated.

I’m not being critical. I’m just warning you that it’s a dead end. People who pursue power rather than a Person find that out after a while. Then they get disoriented and discouraged, because they realize, “Hey, this thing didn’t work like it was supposed to. I was sure that it would work, and I still don’t want to believe anything else, but it sure looks like a dead end.” And so they’re broken-hearted, because they weren’t seeking Jesus—they were seeking other things. Remember that Jesus rebuked severely the people who saw Him multiply the loaves and the fishes and then followed Him because of it. He read them the riot act, because they were seeking the signs. They wanted to feed on the bread of physical and intellectual satisfaction rather than on the True Bread from Heaven.

As Jesus put it another time, “a wicked and adulterous generation demands a sign.” Why is that statement true? Because Jesus doesn’t do marvelous and miraculous things? Of course He does! But when you seek those things instead of seeking Him, you’re committing a form of idolatry. It’s putting another god before Him. It’s self-centered: “What can *I* get out of it?” It’s “Impress *me!* Tantalize *me!* Stupefy *me!*” Anything self-centered is not Christ.

The man Jesus called “the greatest born of woman,” John the Baptist, so far as we know never did any miraculous stuff. Would we have been as impressed with him as Jesus was? We would have—if we really loved God and listened to His voice. It wouldn’t matter to us about the missing element of the miraculous. Jesus said that men rejected God’s purpose for their lives because they rejected

John the Baptist, his teaching, and his baptism. Think of it: they rejected God's purpose for their lives! Other prophets—Moses, Elijah, Elisha—had performed miracles by the ton. But that wasn't why these men were valid testimonies before God. Today is no different. We must listen for God's voice, and we must take what God gives in whatever package He provides.

One of His promises speaks of us doing greater works than even Jesus did. Don't push that on the back burner! But you can't get there by running after signs and wonders. Jesus doesn't put up with that. He didn't then, and He won't now. That's a dead end road, and many people have been broken-hearted after thinking they were pursuing Christ. In the end they became frustrated, thinking, "Maybe Jesus isn't real. Maybe He doesn't exist." Or they have gone on trying to convince themselves—vainly. They've made themselves gullible and naive at some of the magic shows, because they just want it to be true so badly. The fact is that the whole thing has become confused! "The spirit of prophecy is the testimony of Jesus," the Scriptures say. "We want prophecy!" Well, what is prophecy? It's the *testimony of Jesus*. All spiritual things are in Christ Jesus. Every "good and precious gift" is in Him. Marvels must not be the focal point. Instead, we need to pursue Jesus, and then watch the marvelous things He does.

### Receiving God Instead of Things

*Jesus is likewise so much more than the gifts He gives.* Often what we ask for are things, objects to attain. We may ask for healing, for example, when in truth God wishes *Himself* to be our healing. He will carry us through, but He won't at times give us the healing—when He thinks we're wise enough and prepared enough in mind and heart and spirit for Him to refuse to answer our prayer. So that we can find Him instead of an answer to prayer, He will sometimes withhold an answer. God wants, more than any other thing, to give us Himself. If He continues to give us things, He'll only prolong our childhood. He'll only prolong our immaturity and selfishness and our idolatry of blessings. So there are definitely times that He expects enough out of us that He won't answer our prayer for things, because He wants us to change our thinking—and to find Him, grab hold of Him, and rest in Him as our All in All.

Please remember that the next time you think a prayer is not being answered! Just maybe He would love to answer the prayer, but it would only perpetuate our babyhood. He would much rather us be full in Christ so that we have the power and the depth and the richness to overcome. Then we can propagate the life of God. If all you are is a recipient of things, you'll not actually be able to perpetuate the life of Christ in anyone else, either. You won't have "rivers of living water gushing from you" if you're always getting a cup of water every time you're thirsty.

Cups of water don't result in gushing rivers. Unless you find yourself saturated with Christ, you will never have rivers flowing from the inner man, as Jesus promised you could. *You* could! He said, "to *all* who believe, rivers of

living water" (John 7). To *all* who believe! For those who have faith, there really is every opportunity to get more than just one drink of water at a time. Water by the cupful will never accumulate enough overflow for you to share with other people. It doesn't work that way. If you find yourself empty handed at work or in your neighborhood or even in your own bedroom at night when you're trying to pray, it may well be because you're seeking after *things* rather than finding *Christ* as the fullness of your identity, as the fullness of everything that the Father could ever possibly give.

He didn't come to give you words; He came to give you The Word. He didn't come to give you a way to live; He came to draw you up into The Way. He didn't come to solve your sin problem; He came to be unto you Sanctification.

"The fullness of the Deity dwells in bodily form in Christ Jesus," and you are "the fullness of Christ." God fills Christ, and Christ fills you. He has that intention for you, not only individually, but us corporately: the fullness of the Deity dwelling and living in and through us. Our own identity is so laid at the altar that we're not expecting or demanding. We're not living one cup of water at a time to meet our need. Again, we can't get enough gifts from God—cups of water—so that we can let the plug out and rivers will flow indefinitely. If we're seeking after mere things, we'll have a gush that looks like a river for about 30 seconds—and then we'll be bone dry. Then we'll have to ask for another 4000 cups of water to fill up our tank again so we can have another 30-second flow.

If we really want to have a non-stop, 24-hour-a-day river gushing from the inner man, it's only going to be possible if we live by faith in the Son of God who loves us and gave Himself for us, and now dwells in our hearts mightily by faith. That's the only way we can have a river—if it's His river, His Spirit! He's the only river there is. Everything else is just a little puddle that can't be sustained, but dries up in the heat of the day.

### Righteousness as Filthy Rags

Whatever you do, please don't try to make your own good deeds a substitute for Jesus. Remember that "our righteousness is as filthy rags."

So you're a quiet, gentle person? So you're a very helpful, kind person? So you're a very moral person? You're very intelligent or very fearless in proclaiming the gospel? Well, the scriptures say that it's all filthy rags, if somehow or another there's not fullness in Christ. If it's not Jesus, it's not impressive.

It's not that these things shouldn't be done; I'm not advocating that you not be generous or kind. But somehow the frustration of doing those things and still feeling empty must drive us to Christ. Even the good things we do and the lack of fulfillment in those good things can still drive us to Jesus. Just as surely as a tax collector or a prostitute's sin of commission will drive them to Christ, if we could really see the sin of *omission*—the lack of the fullness of Christ—then that, too, would drive us to Him. It's all the same—if it's not Christ, it's not life. If it's not Jesus Himself, it can't be fulfilling. No matter how good a person we

ever become or how deeply we ever sink into evil, we're still in the same boat if we're not in Christ.

If we're not finding our identity in Him and filling ourselves up in Him and drinking His living water that flows from His throne—if He's not our Bread of Life—then we're stuffing ourselves with junk food. We're going to get sick and bloated and overweight. If it's not the True Bread from heaven, it won't nourish us.

### A Spiritual Seeing

Knowing Jesus requires a spiritual seeing. "No one can say, 'Jesus is Lord,' except by the Spirit." You can say the *words*. Jesus said that many will say the words, "Lord, Lord" on the last day, but that He will answer, "I never knew you." But saying, "Jesus is Lord" by the *Spirit* is something that comes from the inner man.

By the Spirit we are able to say, "Jesus! Lord! Rabboni!" We fall on our faces before Him and say, "My Lord and my God." We can have that heart that burns within us as we see Him "high and lifted up." We have the heart that says, "All things pale when I see you, when I worship you. It's all in the background."

Spiritual seeing is not an "excitable worship experience"—if I sing louder, or if the instrumentation is better, then I forget everything else and enter a spirit of worship and praise. That's not the real thing. That's Pavlov's worship experience! To see Jesus is entirely different than being caught up in an "experience." The quiet moments can bring a tear as easily as the exciting moments. The so-called "boring" moments can bring a palpitation of the heart as easily as the fired-up moments. Because what we're looking for is *Jesus*, and when we see Him, whatever form He takes, we have Him!

Do you remember that after He rose from the dead Jesus appeared in many forms? The two men on the road to Emmaus walked along with Him. He talked with them about Moses and the prophets and the testimony in the Scriptures about Himself. They sat down to eat miles later, and as He broke the bread they recognized Him. They had been talking to Him all that time, but it wasn't until He broke the bread that they could see that it was truly Jesus. He was appearing to them in a form that was completely genuine and yet unrecognizable to the naked eye.

Later, when Jesus was cooking fish on the shore, John tells us that "no one dared ask Him who He was" because "they knew He was the Lord." What does that mean? They were sitting there eating with Him and wondering if HE was the Lord, but they didn't dare ask Him because they knew He was. It wasn't a physical recognition with the eyes, even to the disciples after He rose from the dead. They had spent three and a half years with Him but still couldn't rely on physical seeing. No matter what form He took, there was some quality of Jesus that rang out and made their hearts race and "burn within"—and they *knew* it was the Lord.

Paul could say, of the rock that provided water in the desert, "That Rock was Christ." That's the way we have to be, to see and hear and touch with our Spirits

and to hold on to *the* eternal life, even though it isn't always obvious from its external qualities.

### Simple Saints

All those other roads out there—and there's a thousand of them—are all dead ends. They're not going anywhere. They'll twist you around, cut your feet, and leave you at the end of an empty road, only having to retrace your steps with those bloody feet so that you can try a different way. As long as you keep trying things in *this* dimension, in the dimension of doing and knowing and judging things, skirting convictions, and comparing things to things and people to people—as long as you're dealing in this realm—you're going to lose.

You may be able to pin everybody else's ears back and convince yourself it's all their fault, but if they're on the Jesus road they'll have something you'll never have. Jesus healed a man who was born blind. The Pharisees wanted to argue with the man, but he said, "Hey, whatever you think; all I know is, I was born blind and now I can see. You figure it out."

Now that's the kind of simple saints and disciples that God is looking for. They don't have to have a lot of other explanations, but they have Jesus. "Unlearned and ignorant men," perhaps, but they have the real Jesus! They don't have to justify themselves. Not because they're arrogant or cocky, but because there's tremendous peace, humility, and harmony—and love, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, and self control—in Christ.

These simple saints don't have a cocky attitude of: "Hey, I signed a decision card, so get off my back. I know my theology. I'm OK. I have the right doctrine. Anything that would ever bind me is legalism." Anybody who lives in that world does not have Jesus—not the real Jesus. "Fear of God is the beginning of wisdom," and Jesus is wisdom. "He is the wisdom and revelation of God." So if there's no fear of God, no passionate desire to do the Father's will and to obey Him, then you don't love Him. You're only kidding yourself. When you have Jesus, there's that inner burning inside of your heart, "zeal for the Father's house" consuming you.

John wrote (1 John 3) that everyone who has the Spirit of God—every last person who truly has Jesus' Spirit living inside of him—"purifies himself, just as he is pure." "He cannot continue to sin." As He was manifested, Jesus Christ destroyed the sins that used to control us, and now we can't continue to live in them any longer. We don't defend them. We don't hide them and try to pretend they're not there or justify them. God Himself has made His home inside us. His *seed* lives inside us. So we don't want that stuff any more. Anyone who tries to justify a life of mediocrity does not know Him. "They've neither seen Him or known Him," and they're "a liar, John said.

That's not legalism. John wasn't a legalist. He was the apostle of love, remember? But John said that "anyone who claims to live in Him must walk as Jesus did" and that anyone who continues to live in sin—just willful, continual sin—has never seen Him or known Him, because such a life is incompatible with

the Spirit of Jesus living inside. That wasn't an accusation. That wasn't a threat or even a command. That was just a simple observation on the part of one who *knew* the Spirit of Christ. And he said, "You don't know Him at all if obeying Him doesn't mean anything to you," if it doesn't break your heart when you see that you've been selfish or foolish or stubborn or lazy or slothful or greedy.

Look at those things as signs. "Examine yourself to see whether you are in the faith." See whether the Spirit of Christ lives there, if the love of Christ compels you or constrains you to do the will of God. If not, find Jesus! It's really that simple. This isn't bad news. This is good news: There's a level of life that God promised, as you are a new creation and a member of a new tribe and race of people born in the image of Jesus and transformed into the very image of God Himself. The door's been opened for all of us to participate in it. It's a glorious promise from God.

"No longer will a man say to his neighbor, 'Know the Lord, know the Lord'" — do this, do that. But now He'll take our hearts of stone and give us hearts of flesh. He'll put His Spirit in us and cause us to keep His commands and decrees. That's a promise from hundreds of years before Christ, that there would be a new race of people in the image of the Firstborn One who would live in the very Spirit of Jesus Christ. The way they perceive things, the way they make their decisions, the joy and opportunity they see, even in crisis, is "as Jesus did." Their eyes are open to the unseen world, as when Elisha prayed for his servant: "Lord, open his eyes, so he can see that those who are for us are more than those who are against us."

Open your eyes! Look at what's really out there. Look at the hope and the promise that's in Christ Jesus. Don't try to weigh it all out on an intellectual level based on your own minuscule set of experiences. Open the eyes of your heart! Paul prayed, again and again, that God would open the eyes of our hearts, that we could see the unsearchable riches of Christ, the full administration of His riches in our lives and in those around us. All that's in Christ Jesus! It's all there, available for every single person who would come to Him and ask and keep on asking, and seek and keep on seeking, and knock and keep on knocking.

"I will be found by those who search for me with all their hearts."

"Draw near to me, and I will draw near to you."

He's calling us. He's inviting us into the highest possible revelation and relationship in this mortal life, on this mortal plane. Take Him up on it! Not many people ever have, but you can.

Accept no substitute for Jesus!

## **"Follow Me!"**

*We know that we have come to know Him if we obey His commands. The man who says, 'I know Him,' but does not do what He commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But if anyone obeys His word, God's love is truly made complete in him. This is how we know that we are in Him: Whoever claims to live in Him must walk as Jesus did (1 John 2:3-6).*

## **Walking in Agreement with Jesus**

Our primary purpose in these pages is to reground ourselves in who Jesus is. Who is this guy we're following? Is this a way of life we're following, or is this Way a person named Jesus? Believe the Good News: although all your good works and sound doctrines and religious experiences could never open a way, Jesus Himself *is* your Way.

But please make no mistake—and this is very important: Following the Way, the Person named Jesus will result in a way of life. As the Scriptures say: "How can two walk together unless they be in agreement?"

"I'll follow you wherever you go."

"Well, do you realize that foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head? Do you understand that if you're going to follow me wherever I go, there's going to be a certain quality of life that's going to accompany that decision? There's no mistaking it; you're not going to have a cushy life if you follow the Son of Man, because where I'm going, I don't have any place to lay my head. I don't necessarily have any place to call home."

The father of our faith, Abraham, was a pilgrim from start to finish. How would you like to live in a tent for 80 years? There's some difficulty involved in following faith's pioneer, Jesus. You need to have that squared away in your head, in comprehending who Jesus is and deciding: "Yes, I *do* want to follow the Lamb wherever He goes. I don't care what happens. I don't care what it costs me. It doesn't matter to me. I see this guy who walks on water, calms storms with His command, raises the dead at a spoken word, lifts His eyes to heaven like He really knows the Father, and expresses kindness and purity of thought and righteousness and love and wisdom. Man, this guy is worth knowing. He's worth hanging around. I want to be near Him. I want to do what He says. I want to follow Him. He obviously knows the score. He knows what's happening. He knows how this game works. This guy knows, and I want to follow Him. I want to be where He is."

Now it will, in the process of following Him, certainly result in a way of life that's like His. It only makes sense. As John testified: "Anyone who claims to live in Him must walk as Jesus did." I know a lot of people would have it another way, on their own terms: "I want to follow Jesus, but I don't want to walk as He walked. I have another way to follow Jesus." It's very popular, as Paul prophesied would be the case, that a great number of people and their teachers would profess a Christianity that doesn't require walking as Jesus walked. "You can follow Jesus when He's going east and you're going west." And I submit to you that the only way you can follow Jesus is so much more practical than that. You go where He goes, live like He lived, think like He thought, speak like He spoke, reason like He reasoned, pray as He prayed, love as He loved, and live in righteousness as He did.

I don't know of any other way to follow Jesus! At least I can't find one in my Bible. As you see the life of the apostles, and the life that they then passed on

to others as they “testified with great power” and “great grace was upon them all,” you can see a quality of life that directly accompanied the message of Jesus. They proclaimed Him as “high and lifted up,” Him as “King of Kings and Lord of Lords,” the “Wonderful Counselor” and “Prince of Peace,” the promised Messiah that was to come. Now what was the direct result of that message? Lives became like His. The believers were going to walk it out as He walked it out, because He knew how it worked. He understood what made the Father happy, and how relationships should work, and how to view both the material world and the unseen world. Jesus knew—and still knows—how all that stuff works.

To follow Him is to think like He thought and to walk like He walked, to hate what He hated, to love what He loved, to reject what He rejected, to be angry at what He was angry about—there is no other *Christ*-ianity.

“When a student is fully trained he becomes like his teacher.”

“I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life.”

“Come follow Me.”

Christianity is not just ideas. It is not a matter of mere externals. It is about walking simply with the Master, and then linking arms with anybody who wants to walk that way, too.

“As we behold Him, we are transformed into His likeness from one degree of glory to another.” A genuine transformation occurs as we truly look at Him and “call on the name of the Lord.” I don’t mean some sort of psychological trick of singing a worship song over and over again as a mantra and just blocking out everything and having some out-of-body experience where you don’t feel anything any more. Christianity is a wide-open-eyed, all-my-heart-soul-mind-strength experience with Jesus, His teachings, and His way of life. It is practically living those things out.

### Active and Substantial

“Knowing Christ” is not an abstract term. It is active and substantial. It’s real; it’s not imaginary. Knowing Christ is substantial. It does have a look to it. It does have visible results. Knowing Christ is active. There’s a dynamic to it; it doesn’t just sit in a static form.

A rock sitting on a ledge has potential energy. There’s power there. It may not be doing anything at this particular moment, but it has the power to crush an automobile. That takes a lot of power! The rock may not look like it’s doing anything, but it has potential energy. A few inches that way, and it can crush a BMW flatter than a pancake! There’s great, immense power there. Similarly, there’s potential energy in every step we take, because we’re drawing on Christ. We might be standing there, still as we can be, not saying a word—just watching. And yet we have as much power in us as that rock sitting on top of the cliff. There’s life within us, and potential energy that allows us to see prophetically and to hear what God is currently saying. As Paul was reflecting in 1 Corinthians 2, spiritual babes can’t do that. But those who are mature are able to hear and see

and understand. Just as surely as your Spirit knows how you feel right now—whether it’s more doubt and fear and skepticism and despair, or if it’s your eyes opened to heaven, seeing Christ Jesus as the only limit of your potential as you walk in faith—so also the Spirit of God knows His current mind and thought and feeling. And, Paul said, we have that Spirit. We can walk that way. Look it up—1 Corinthians 2. It’s part of this thing called Christianity.

There’s substance to a life in Christ, and there’s a dynamic of life involved in it. There’s a hearing process, a dynamic greater than just following principles or obeying certain laws or living a certain way or hanging around a certain people. Those externals are really not the issue. Our lives are not based on ideas we remember or goals we have that seem to be Christlike. We’re to be listening. In Jesus, we believe in a Father who is “working to this very day.” We say what we hear the Father saying and do what we see Him doing. It isn’t that the ability to hear or do rests in us; it is rather that we rest in Jesus. The active, substantial life He lived becomes our own.

“Christ in you, the hope of glory.” Just as Jesus said only what He heard His Father saying and did only what He saw His Father doing, so also is the destiny of those who follow Him.

### Loving the Light

“Go make disciples. Baptize them in the name of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit. Teach them to obey everything I have commanded you.” That’s not legalism. Jesus wasn’t a legalist in asking us to teach others to obey all His commands. That’s simply Jesus, who knows what will make this world work, saying: “Here is my way. Walk in it. Separate yourself from the world. Stop conforming to the patterns of the world. What fellowship does light have with darkness?” He showed us to walk out a life that didn’t fellowship with darkness, but rather only fellowshiped with the Father and with those who loved the light. Not with those who were perfect, but with those who loved the light.

“This is the verdict”: some love light, some don’t (John 3). *That* is the measuring rod. Not perfection. Not having perfect understanding of every issue or perfect knowledge or even perfect application in any area. But Jesus is after people who love the light. That’s who He draws to Himself. He loves everyone, but He can’t help those who refuse to come to the light. The nicest person in the world, who has all sorts of wonderful qualities but doesn’t love the light, has no hope. On the other hand, the worst bonehead in the world, who messes everything up every day of his life, but is humble and loves the light and is willing to “come into the light so that his deeds may be exposed” has full hope. He wants to walk in peace and freedom. He doesn’t care what people think; he doesn’t have fear of men. He would rather be right with God than to have people look up to him and esteem him and to count him as great and mighty and holy—which isn’t true about him anyway!

I encourage you to fix that standard in your mind. Those who love the light are those who will walk with God and fellowship with the One Who has lived in eternity and Who fellowships with His brothers and sisters in complete joy.

### Faithfulness With the Little Things

*“God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God, and He will come near to you” (James 4:6-8).*

One of the unseen-world investments that we’ve got to make is in that passage. There has to be a time when we come to grips with the fact that while the things we do, the things we think, the attitudes we have, and the words that come out of our mouths may be all said and done in the seen world, they are actually unseen-world issues. If I grumble about somebody or something to another person, it’s easy for me to think that it is just between me and them.

But it’s not!

“Submit to God.” “Resist the devil.” And in so doing, you’ll be drawing near to God, who will then draw near to you...if you flee from the devil, if you resist those attitudes, if you resist that decision or activity or spoken word or that temptation to withdraw when you know better, if you’ll resist the devil in those areas of your life that are not like Jesus. Demand of yourself: “I’m not going to let those words come out of my mouth. It’s not just between me and you. If I say something about you to someone else, or even just murmur to myself or withdraw from you, I am actually robbing myself of a chance to draw near to God.”

“Submit to God.” “Resist the devil.” You’ll be drawing near to God, who will then draw near to you. You see, we’ve robbed ourselves a lot of times. We’ve choked off the life of God. We’ve grieved the Spirit as we’ve quenched His fire. As we’ve not drawn near to Him by submitting to Him in our hearts, we’ve allowed little things that we think are just trivial to rob us—“my right to feel this way; my right as an American to express myself, my freedom of speech.” Yet in the process we’ve never asked ourselves, “What does God think about this attitude? Is that really the way Jesus would handle it?” And because we’ve violated the Spirit of God in the attitude we’ve had, the action that we’ve taken, or the words that we’ve spoken, we’ve drawn back away from God instead of drawing near to Him. If we don’t submit to Him and His ways, we’re in fact drawing away from Him and quenching His opportunity to draw near to us.

So keep in mind that the little things really do matter. The things you *can* control are the things that matter most! The big global issues are sometimes just a little out of reach. But the fact is, our futures aren’t decided by the global issues. They’re determined by the little things.

“Well, I’ll just violate my conscience. I’ll just wear these kinds of clothes, or do this kind of makeup, or do my hair just this way. In this last little bit I’ll be crossing a line into something I know in my heart—no one could decide

that for me—but I know in my heart is vanity. But I’m going to do it anyway. I have my reasons.” And when we cross those lines, whatever they be on whatever topic you want to pick, we’re grieving the Spirit of God, and we’re cheating ourselves of something that could be far more full and rich than what we’re currently experiencing.

Draw near to God! He said, “Test me and see. If you will sacrifice these things for my sake—put Me to the test—see if I don’t open the very portals of heaven and shower you. Test me.” Whatever you have now, you could have ten times more, I promise you—ten times more reality in your life, ten times greater depth in your relationship with Jesus. There are no limits! Whatever things the Holy Spirit is highlighting for you now are the things to go after. Deal with those little things that kind of light up in your conscience where you’ve said or done something in a way that wasn’t right or sharp, that wasn’t just what Jesus wanted. Perhaps you’ve cut a corner, you’ve offended a brother, you’ve said an idle word, you’ve laughed at some coarse jesting or foolish thing. These things that the Holy Spirit brings to your attention—make them right. Keep a very short record with the Holy Spirit. God will honor that. He’ll take you far beyond anything you’ve ever asked for or imagined.

### Not My Will

Jesus Himself was tempted. Jesus Himself said, “Not my will, but Yours be done.” He had a controversy with the Father! If I say to you, “I’m going to do your will instead of my will,” that means we’ve had a controversy, but that I’m yielding to your will. That’s the only thing that phrase can mean! We’ve had a difference of opinion or different choices we wanted to make, and yet I am yielding to your choice.

And so life in Jesus is not characterized by an absence of conflict. In Galatians 5, before the discussion of the fruits of the Spirit, Paul said that the flesh and the Spirit wage war against each other. There’s a battle going on between the Spirit and the flesh. As Romans 8 says, if you give your mind to the works of the flesh, you will die. If instead you give your mind to the Spirit, you will live. There’s an opportunity in front of us to have life that’s truly life.

Certainly there is a battle going on. “Resist the devil and he will flee from you.”

“Put on the full armor of God,” in order that when the attack comes, “you may stand.”

“Build on the solid rock of obeying Jesus so that when the storms come, you will stand.”

There’s a process involved of believing Jesus and standing on His truth and functioning in accordance with the life that He led and the truths that He taught. Because we love Him, we’re drawing near to Him and His ways. We want to walk together with Him, so we walk in agreement with Him rather than create our own way. Jesus is the Way, so we run to Him when there’s a controversy. We yield our will into His will whenever there’s a conflict. There will be those conflicts, but we yield into His hands.

“All things become shadows in the light of Him.” As we behold Him, we are transformed from one degree of glory to another degree of glory to another degree of glory. If we yield to Him, then His life flows within us.

### Respond to Him!

Following Jesus is not a matter of going to our prayer closets and just sitting there, gazing and meditating. Jesus wasn't like that, was He? Did He just gaze and meditate? Well, Jesus is the standard. Again: “Anyone who claims to live in Him must walk as He walked.” So the process of following Jesus isn't a matter of inactivity and letting some Spiritual Being out there act instead.

Remember that Jesus said, “I don't do anything I don't see my Father doing. I'm only doing what the Father is doing through me.” Although always at peace, Jesus was still a very busy person. He changed a lot of lives. Two thousand years later, He's still changing lives. There is no question He was and is a worker. But what Jesus did was a response to the Father moving Him. Jesus did not extract ideas and concepts and doctrines and commands from the Scriptures and then strive to do them, hoping with His fingers crossed that the Father out there somewhere would be pleased. His life wasn't like that. It was listening and responding.

Self sacrifice doesn't come from “being committed.” Self sacrifice comes from hearing the voice of God and committing ourselves into His hands. With finances... time... a phone call... an apology you don't feel like giving. When we are following Jesus, He “works in us, both to do and to will.”

### Knowing God's Will

How is it that “you may know the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God?” “Offer your body as a living sacrifice” and “stop conforming to the patterns of the world,” and you will therefore be “transformed by the renewing of your mind” so that you will know His will (Romans 12:1-2).

In order to be one with Christ and in union with His will, it requires that we stop grabbing hold of the things of the world and that we listen. And in so doing we're “transformed”—by beholding Him, by offering our bodies as living sacrifices, and by refusing to look like the world looks, or act like they act, or talk like they talk, or value what they value. If we value a CD player the way they value a CD player, we're not going to be able to discern the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God. If we value an automobile the way they do, we're not going to be able to hear God. If we value the way we look the way they value their looks, we're not going to be able to hear God. We'll rob ourselves of the ability to walk in unity with Him if we grab after the idols of this world. We learn to rest and to look on Him when the appetites of the flesh bang against us. We rest when the opinions of man oppose us, with the possibility of our world being crumbled by men's hatred or our own failure. When any of those things war against us, if we'll find our life and hope in Him, there will be peace, truth, victory, maturity, and growth.

God will “work everything for the good” if you'll love Him and stay close to His purposes. If you'll hold onto Him through anything, even through your own

failure, He'll draw you up into Himself and He'll turn everything the enemy ever meant for your harm into your good. He'll make the weaknesses of your past the strengths of your future. He'll make the very thing satan intended to destroy you into the very thing you destroy satan with, as you help other people in the world around you, draw others up in the faith, and become sensitive to things that other people would never see.

Let God be your Hope, your Rock, your Fortress, your High Tower, your Truth, your Way, your Bread, your Life, your Light. Let Him be those things to you, in the moment of your failure or temptation or your world crumbling around you. Find in Him your fulfillment, your righteousness, your revelation, your salvation—it is in no jeopardy, if He will be those things to you, if you'll hold onto Him and believe Him with all your heart, because He promised, because He's the “Yes” and the “Amen,” because He holds the keys to death and hell—then nothing can touch you! You will be “steadfast, immovable.” “Death, where is your victory? Where is your sting?”

**Can you see it? Can you get a glimpse of it? He is our Life!**

### Good vs. Evil, or Life vs. Death?

Following Jesus has always meant pursuing *life* rather than being judges of good and bad. To most of the crowd that hung around Him, Jesus was “good” when He fed the thousands, but “bad” when He demanded that they eat His flesh. From a natural point of view, they were right! Surely it's good to feed the hungry, but it's bad—in poor taste, vulgar, verging on megalomania—to demand that others live by feeding on you. And so Jesus' popularity waxed and waned as the crowds judged Him first as good, then as evil. But Jesus' true followers made choices on a different scale. When all others turned away from His hard teachings, and Jesus offered to let them go, too, Peter summed up their reaction: “To whom else shall we go? You have life!” Only those who choose on the basis of life will follow Jesus all the way through.

Just about anybody, if he knows his Bible, can distinguish between what he thinks of as good and evil—hence hundreds of different denominations and scores of cults in the United States alone. Everyone has his own sliding scale of good and evil, determined by his own personality and ambition and gift. Maybe someone builds a whole denomination around a particular issue—missions, for example—because it is one man's gift. He accentuates that gift, and a whole group of people form around it. Finally that's what they represent: missions. Another group focuses on salvation, another on the miraculous, and so on. You can go right down a list of denominations and see what a group of believers has zeroed in on and accentuated as the central feature of Christianity. The focus is on a thing Christ gives—not on Christ Himself!

But an individualistic conception of what's “good” and what's “evil” won't drive a person walking by the Spirit of God. When such a person meets other believers for the first time—not knowing a thing about their doctrine or habits—he or she doesn't inspect their pedigree to see what denomination they grew up

in, or quiz them on theology to see if they believe exactly the right things, as someone has defined “right.” The Spirit-driven believer isn’t looking for “good” or “evil,” but life or death. All the details in doctrine or practice will work out if both believers are walking in life. Too often, there’s so much fear in our hearts that if we see something that doesn’t look as “good” as it could be to us—some doctrinal issue perhaps—we begin to rail on that thing and build walls on that issue. The only real issue, however, is life and death, because every other matter we can resolve.

If we’re working out of life, we can resolve everything, every difference in doctrine or theology or eschatology. We’ll work nothing out—as 2000 years should be testimony enough—by demanding everyone has the proper thought processes and believes exactly the right doctrines and does precisely the right things about them. There can be no real agreement on that basis! When you try to eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil—this doctrine and this denomination and this theological superstructure are right and this hermeneutic is the right way to handle the Scriptures—you will die, and you’ll also cause other people to die.

Now, let me say this, though: If you function based on life, then you will desire and see and grab after life, and you will lay your life down for what you sense is the life of Christ and His aroma. Everything else will be an abomination. You cannot fellowship with what is not life, no matter how right intellectually it may seem. And you’ll discover you have a lot of enemies. In fact, I’ll give you three years, if you really live by the Tree of Life, to be killed for it. Someone who loved as much as Jesus did and proved Himself as much as He did, still only lasted 36 months before He got killed for living that way. He didn’t judge people after their hermeneutic. He didn’t judge people after their theology. He didn’t discuss much at all about those issues. About certain basics, He said, “By the way, guys, there is a resurrection. I’ll prove it to you in a little while.” He corrected the Sadducees on that point. There wasn’t a complete absence of doctrinal instruction, but it wasn’t His focus as He walked through the days of His life.

The thing Jesus was after was *life*. What was life He could draw up into correct theology. The Lord of the Sabbath was willing to walk through the definition of the Sabbath with his followers. The majority of the men who had properly dissected the Word of God in the original Hebrew, on the other hand, carefully observed the Sabbath—and died in their sins and went to Hell. It didn’t matter what they thought about the original Hebrew! They rejected life because of their desire to eat from the Tree of Knowledge. They diligently studied the Scriptures, thinking it would produce life—but it didn’t! Jesus was life. The scribes and teachers of the Law died in their sins because they rejected God’s purpose for their lives, as Jesus plainly told them.

So, if you never learn how to do anything else, learn how to differentiate between life and death. If you judge people after the knowledge of good and evil and right and wrong and true and false, on that basis you will reject some

people that are the apple of God’s eye, and you’ll embrace some people that are an abomination to God. On the other hand, if you are after the aroma of life, the sweet smell of the life of Christ, you can resolve anything as you walk along the way together, because you both have a heart for it. You each love the Word of God and the God of the Word, and together you’re going to walk out the journey, seeing the Lily of the Valley and the Rose of Sharon and the Cedars of Lebanon. You’ll just enjoy this thing called theology, growing in apprehending the depth of the riches of Christ. You’ll love that stuff. You’ll eat it up together. It will be your breakfast, lunch, dinner, and midnight snack together, an adventure of love and of life. But try doing that with somebody who eats from the Tree of Knowledge—you’ll get your eyeballs ripped out! It won’t take long, and you’ll find yourself totally unable to walk with them, no matter how right they sound on each doctrinal point.

Draw your lines that way—in the Spirit, rather than in the flesh. Draw your lines around the aroma of Christ. You’ll find yourself unable to yoke with a person that may have a list of 47,000 admirable qualities, and yet there is something missing. On the other hand, you’ll find somebody that doesn’t have 47 right things about him, and yet there’s something you smell in the way he lives his life. When he comes up against an obstacle, you see him turn a sweet, innocent, fresh face to Jesus in the simplest of ways. He bites his lip rather than grumble, and in the face of adversity, with a tear in his eye, he smiles and looks to Jesus. Hey, we can work out the theology if a person really lives in Jesus, if Jesus is his Life and his All in All.

“When Christ, who is your life, appears...”

“Those who long for His appearing...”

We can work out the eschatology of how He’s going to appear, as long as we’re all longing for that appearing, and devoted to changing things in our lives that stand between us and Him. “Everyone who has this hope (of His appearing) purifies Himself as He is pure.” We can move together along those lines with those who have the life of Christ within them.

That’s the basis for the decision of fellowship: the *Life* of Christ.

## From One Degree of Glory to Another

*“Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the miracles themselves. I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it” (John 14:11-14).*

*For those God foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those He predestined, He also called; those He called, He also justified; those He justified, He also glorified. What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can*

*be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but gave Him up for us all—how will He not also, along with Him, graciously give us all things? (Romans 8:29-32).*

*Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. (Ephesians 1:3) Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into His likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit (2 Corinthians 3:17-18).*

*When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus (Acts 4:13).*

### Faith is the Issue

Your limit as a child of God—in the true sense of supernatural life and accomplishment emanating from you, where the demons tremble when you walk into the room—is not related to your upbringing, your intelligence, your talents, or your experiences. Jesus said, “Be it done to you according to your *faith*.” How much you believe God—that is what unleashes the power of God to change the seen and the unseen world, “to say to this mountain, not doubting, ‘Be thou removed and cast into the sea.’”

Now how much does that have to do with whether you did well in a Toastmasters International competition? “If you say it just right, you can get the mountain to cry; you can get the mountain to crumble or tremble or feel convicted.” You see it doesn’t have anything to do with the externals of talent or experience or intellect. *Not in Jesus’ realm!* He went to great lengths to prove that point by taking a bunch of fishermen with no education and bringing them to a point of changing planet earth. He built the Holy City on the Twelve Apostles of the Lamb—a bunch of rejects, twelve guys who would never have made it in the business world. But He changed their very personality. He changed how they looked at life. He changed their whole realm of accomplishment and brought them to a place of great honor before the throne of God and before men, though they had none of the experience or intellect or education or talent that would have led us to believe that these were the guys who would become the pillars of this whole thing called Christianity.

There are many such miracles still waiting to happen! The shy person who would forget that was ever the case. The person who doesn’t feel he is very intelligent, yet apprehends the deep mysteries of God. He still may not know what  $E=mc^2$  means, and he doesn’t care. But the deep mysteries of God are revealed to the inner man by the Spirit—so claims Paul in 1 Corinthians 2. Christ lives in our hearts and draws us into the presence of God so he can whisper to us the secrets of God. Why? Because we’re His friends. Because we’ve laid our lives before Him and we trust Him in faith, He uses us as a vessel for His divine life and His divine wisdom. It is a matter of our becoming vessels, not of earning something.

So I want you to see that there is absolutely no limit whatsoever to what God can do—not your personality, not the way you’re wired, not your potential to achieve in the business or academic worlds. Whether you could ever accomplish anything in the natural realm is totally irrelevant. I can’t even convince you of how irrelevant it is that you have a great intellect or a great personality, or a bad intellect or a bad personality. Great leadership qualities, no leadership qualities—I can’t even begin to tell you how unimportant they are to what you can do in the Eternal Kingdom of our Living God.

Faith is the issue. Do you believe the promises of God? Do you believe *Him*? Is Christ your All in All? Or are you merely adding Christ to what you are doing? Are you using Christ to do things for you, or is Christ your All in All?

If Christ is your life, then you’re not limited by the skin you’re wearing. You’re not restricted by the neurons firing in a confined area between your ears. Your only limit is how much you trust the promises of God and believe that Jesus has fulfilled every one of them.

It’s not that God said something and hurled it down to us in a scroll. God didn’t just throw out these promises from afar and hope that we could be reasoned into believing them. He fulfilled them in His Son, Jesus. Can you see that He walked on water? Can you see that He ended His earthly walk by saying:

“I am the Way and the Truth and the Life. You can come to the Father, too, if you come through me. And you’ll do even greater works than I did, because I’m here to show you the Father and demonstrate what your identity can be in Him. I am the Way. If you’ll hide your life in Me, and if you’ll let Me be the answer to every question about who you are and what you can do, and if you’ll obey my commands—starting with this one—then everything you ask for in My Name will be done.”

Jesus doesn’t make idle promises. As He walked on water and raised the dead and gave sight to the blind and confounded the wisdom of the wise, He demonstrated the simplicity of flesh and blood, hidden in the way to the Father. Believe on the one the Father has sent, and let Jesus be your every answer.

If you have a “failure in communication” (we’ll call it) in your marriage or among your roommates, back up a bit and take a look at exactly what’s going on here. Remember who you really are as you relate to the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost. Take a step back—and grin because of who Jesus is to you. Your frustration seems so inconsequential compared to reality, doesn’t it? The urge to respond sinfully seems so powerful, but that power is a mirage compared to the One who lives in you. Reckon yourself dead to sin because you are dead to sin. If you’re in Christ Jesus you *are* dead to sin—that’s why you can reckon it so. It’s not a mind game; it’s a fact. If you want to believe mirages and ignore reality, you can, but living life that way will never satisfy you. You are *not* a slave to sin any longer. Look it up: Romans, chapter 6. You’re not a slave. You don’t have to stay a complainer or a whiner; you don’t have to be lazy or lustful. You’re free! You’re as free as Jesus.

Are you free?

Is Jesus free? He *suffered*, yes, but is He free? Yes, He is, and you're that free if you believe in Him.

A genetic change has happened in you, a transformation, like a caterpillar into a butterfly. "Metamorphosis" is the word the Holy Spirit chose to describe your translation from one kingdom to another. Something miraculous has happened—you have been born a second time. Everyone born a second time—by the blood of Jesus, by the Word of His testimony, by His refusal to love His life so much that He would shrink from death—has that same transformed quality, that new creation. You have "risen to walk a new life." You don't have to live as pagans do!

### Renewing Your Mind

*"He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. And He is the head of the body, the church; He is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything He might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in Him, and through Him to reconcile to Himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through His blood, shed on the cross" (Colossians 1:15-20).*

Do you have any doubt at all about what your spiritual potential is when you know that Person the Holy Spirit just described lives inside you? Think about this fact again, and think in really serious terms, forgetting just for a moment your past failures. Forget what *you* think your potential would be in the flesh based on what the business or the academic world has told you. If there were no business or academic world to push you down, and no unregenerate people and unbelievers around to insult you and beat you down, if all you had was the Word of God in your life, you would be a wholly different person. You would be transformed in your ability to absorb, comprehend, and walk in the fullness of these things that we are talking about.

Our experiences all the way back from our parents and our peers in grade school, all the way up to the present, have had a massive effect on the way we view life. If you were to uproot everything that has ever affected your life or formed your personality or the way you look at yourself—just uprooted every last bit of that—and all you had was the Word of God to form your opinion of yourself and who you are and where you're going and what your life is about, you would be amazed.

That's what we're doing right now!

Stop conforming to the patterns of the world and be transformed (transfigured—the same process as occurred on the mount of transfiguration). Be transfigured in the renewing of your minds. "Then you will know the good and perfect and

pleasing will of God" (Romans 12:1-2). We're right now seeking a renewing of mind. God will in fact transfigure us into the image of that man who stood on the mountain with Elijah and Moses, and whose clothing was white and glowing as the sun. That's what is happening inside you if you'll hear and receive and retain and persevere in the truths of God, and if you'll keep pitching out all the junk that's enslaved you, that's pushed you down, that's crushed you and beat you up and formed you in the image of the world. Our purpose in these few pages is to feed the Word of God into the picture, so you can suppress and push back and crush under the heel of your foot all the other things that have formed who you think you are and how you think your life is supposed to be lived, so that all that remains is to see Him in the splendor of His holiness and the word of His faithfulness. To stand there seeing *only Him* as your identity, as who you are and what your potential is: that's Christianity. Formed fully in the Father, by the Father, through the Father, for the Father, in the image of the Son of God.

"For in Him were all things created." Conformity to the One who lives in you is your destiny. This One can so totally consume you that the Life within you is just simmering and boiling—the drunkenness on the Spirit that Paul describes and the "power of the indestructible life" and the "tasting the powers of the coming age" that the Hebrews writer speaks of. That fullness of the Life of Melchizedek who had no beginning and no end, the fullness of that life inside your bones—that's the Christ that we're discussing right now. And you are in Him.

### No Condemnation in Christ!

"There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."

Why do you suppose that is true? Why do you suppose that scripture is in there? There can't be any condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because Christ is not condemned! If you're in Christ Jesus—if your life is hidden in Him—how can you experience condemnation? If you experience self-condemnation, that's only a testimony that He is not your All in All. To that degree it is still *you* adding *Him* to your existence, rather than you being *lost* in His existence. If your identity is lost in Him, you can't experience condemnation. It's impossible! It's inconceivable! Because there is no condemnation in Christ, there is no condemnation in you—if you're lost in Him. If you're not lost in Him, you'll vacillate, you'll waver, you'll be frustrated, you'll be fearful. Back and forth you'll go. Your failures will control you. Your successes will control you. You'll be bouncing around all the time. But a life hidden in Christ isn't subject to those natural laws of success and failure, of sin and victory. It only rests on the unchangeable character of Jesus Christ, "the same yesterday, today, and forever.

This is the faith "once for all delivered to the saints": that the Son of God came into the world to forgive sins and to dwell in the lives of men. This is the "mystery that was withheld for ages and generations" and is now delivered to all of us: "Christ in you, the hope of glory." No looking back, no fear. Everything

else but “Christ in you” is meant to drop away like the cocoon of a caterpillar or the skin of a snake—just something dead that’s abandoned. The Living Being of Christ moves forward, while death gets left behind. The cocoon means nothing to the butterfly’s life, does it? The butterfly doesn’t even go back and visit the cocoon; it’s not even home any more. The caterpillar is gone; the cocoon is meaningless. The snake doesn’t go back and visit the skin and say, “Well, there I was, last year.” It’s not even his life any more; he’s gone, he’s past that.

And that’s the way every day is for a new creation, one that’s truly hidden in Christ: “Was that sin? Well, I’m leaving it behind. I don’t think it’s Jesus, so it’s gone.” You see? It’s not home, it’s not who we are, it’s not even part of us. We’ve shed it. As we walk in faith, we’ve left the snakeskin behind us. It’s just there; it’s just a testimony of God’s grace. That’s all that remains when you’re walking in faith, rather than by sight or in the flesh.

Do you have to work all this stuff out? Do you have to analyze it all? Do you have to fix it all? When you receive an upward call in Christ do you respond, “Ohhh, I don’t *ever* live that way. I’ve failed a hundred times. I’ll never make it.”? As long as you persist in that mode, you’re going to be miserable! Your entire lifetime you’re going to walk in failure. Don’t stay there!

On the other hand, if you’re carefree and calloused and wear an asbestos suit so you’re not going to let anybody bring conviction to you, you’ll never grow either. It’s not faith in Jesus to say: “Hey, you can’t put that on me. I’m free in Christ. I don’t have to obey Jesus. Forget that stuff, that’s condemnation. Don’t judge me, lest ye be judged.”

So a walk of faith is not a matter of fixing yourself by human effort. It’s also not ignoring the teachings of Jesus. What I want to say to you is not on either end of that spectrum. Instead, a life in Christ means being able to say: “Conformity to Jesus of Nazareth—that’s my destiny. To obey the Father’s command is my destiny, since that’s who Jesus is.” With that heart, you can receive conviction. “Yes; I want to know that. I love truth! Because everything you tell me that’s different than the way Jesus is, it’s my destiny to change. Tell me! Bring it on! I don’t have to be ashamed. I don’t have to fear. You can’t shame me, because I’m in Christ Jesus. You can’t condemn me, because I’m in Christ Jesus. I cannot fail! My destiny is in Him. His salvation is my salvation. His holiness is my holiness.”

That doesn’t mean I don’t need to grow in the image and be perfect as He is perfect, and purify myself as he is pure. When someone brings truth into my life, it may take a minute to process it, because in my initial response I could want to be a little defensive or to justify myself. But if I can just turn that corner in my heart and hear the thing properly and walk in faith as I listen to it, I can say: “If you’re right, I want to know that, because it is my destiny to be transformed! I want nothing to stand in the way of who I can become, and I’m not going to let rationalization or justification or fear or compromise or blame-shifting or any of that stuff hold me back. I want my whole destiny.”

## Every Spiritual Blessing in Christ

“Christ in you, the hope of glory!”

Because of that blessed hope, there’s no fear. There’s no shrinking back. That’s the heart you have to approach life with, day in and day out, with that hope in your eyes. That’s why you can rejoice ever more. That’s why you can have a peace that transcends anyone’s understanding or comprehension. That’s why you can have a “joy inexpressible and full of glory.”

It’s not just because God zaps you, and all of the sudden you walk around with a smile painted on your face all the time: “I’m saved! I have a smile. I’m happy. I have joy.” That’s not why you have joy—because God zapped you. You have joy because you’re comprehending in the inner man the fullness of Christ being your All in All—and that’s something to be happy about! There’s a real reason for it: “You can’t condemn me; you can’t make me shrink back in fear. If I really am looking at Jesus and hiding my life in Him, there’s a security and a peace there that cannot be taken away! You can accuse me; you can call me every name in the book; you can beat me down; you can take away everything that would every have been called a possession. Yet I can’t be destroyed!”

As long as I see Jesus, I hold Him up with the eyes of my heart, I understand that I have a union with Him, that the two have become one... as long as I see that with the eyes of my heart (I don’t just mean with my mind, but with the eyes of my heart), there’s a peace and an inner strength, a fullness that says: “Christ is my all in all. He doesn’t just give every spiritual blessing, He *is* every spiritual blessing. And I have every spiritual blessing, because I have Him.” It’s not what He can do for me; it’s Who He is: “I AM who I AM.” He is everything. Everything I’ll ever need. Everything I’ll ever be. It’s all in Him, and it’s mine to receive. I receive it by faith.

“As far as the eye can see,” Abraham was told, “any direction you want to look—as far as you can see—that’s your land.” And that’s the same thing I’m saying to you right now. As far as you can see of who Jesus is, that’s your land! As far as you’re willing to see—if you’ll get your eyes up off your navel or off your shoelaces, get your chin up off your chest and look out to the horizon, then every direction you can see of Jesus’ character, that’s your land. And the Father is eager to give it to anyone who has faith. His eyes are going to and fro throughout the whole earth, to see someone who, when Jesus returns, will have faith.

I don’t mean talent. I don’t even mean commitment. I don’t mean holiness. I don’t mean hours of prayer. I mean believing what Jesus said is true, and refusing to let anyone or anything talk you out of it, so that not even your own failures will convince you that something Jesus said is not true.

“Well, what about this? What about that?”

“Unh, unh! I’m not going to accept that. Jesus is not a liar. ‘Let God be true and every man a liar.’ His promises are ‘Yes!’ and ‘Amen!’ Jesus is the Yes, and I add to that my Amen. So be it!”

Jesus fulfilled the promises, the Law, the prophets. Every good and perfect gift is in Jesus. Only God is good! Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God and the Son of Man, the Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, the Child that was born and given to us, Immanuel, God with us, God in us—that's the Father's answer to every question and every need. And He's ours for the taking, to receive by faith, no matter what we see—what we *think* we see—when we look in the mirror. We know that He is Who He says He is, and that by faith we possess all of Who He is.

Conformity to the image of whatever Jesus of Nazareth was and is: that's our destiny! That's who we are becoming. That's not just who we can become! That's who we are becoming, by the grace and glory of God, by the power of the Holy Ghost, that raised Jesus from the dead. *That's who we are becoming.*

Don't ever let go of that! Don't let anyone steal your crown!

### A Prayer

Lord Jesus, You are the Mighty Baptizer. And we don't want anything except You to fill our lives and our hearts. We know that nothing else is sustainable. Everything else will collapse under the weight of this world and its temptations and under the pressure of the enemies of the gospel. We know everything else will collapse other than You. And so we want to build on You! There's no other Rock. There's no other Fortress. There's no other Hope. There's no other Way.

You are our Prince, our King, our Lover. You are our Truth, and we need no other truth but You. Lord Jesus, You are our King. We exalt You as the High Priest over us all, as the Apostle, as our Master, as the Teacher, as our Friend, as our Brother. We exalt You, Lord Jesus. We love You. Thank You for coming to us.

We pray that You would open our eyes to the fullest extent imaginable, to whatever you planned before there was time, before creation itself was ever formed, before You spoke into the vast darkness and chaos and said, "Let there be light." It is our prayer that You would allow everyone who has a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith to follow You, to see the things that stand in the way and to lift their hands to You and to grab hold of You like our brother and forefather Jacob, Israel, did, and not let you go until You bring that fullest blessing that You ever intended for a single mortal. *God, let there be no ceiling except our willingness to believe You.* Amen.

With agape and prayer for your life in Jesus,