

The Other Side of the Cross Part 3

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May, 2001

Thousand Oaks, CA

Whenever Reality confronts us, at least two contrary influences come to bear upon us in opposition to the encroaching Light. One is obvious, that package of bad stuff, sin, iniquity, transgression, rebellion and death. This is head-on animosity, eyeball to eyeball enmity. I had a friend as a teen-ager who was several years older than the rest of us who gathered around him as a gang of young toughs. Don took delight in being challenged by other territorial males and usually met the challenge by almost sticking his nose in the eye of his adversary and daring him to do something about it. He could be awesomely intimidating even to those who might be stronger and have better fighting skills than he. He left no doubt, put up or shut up! He and I met our match in Jesus of Nazareth who barged into our lives and began a work in our hearts that changed all that. But, different than Don's approach, is the other contrary influence that is much more subtle but equally intimidating though certain to succumb to the Spirit of Truth. I suppose we could describe it as the stubbornly penultimate; that which is almost, but not quite; that which stands on the threshold but does not really enter in; that which holds us transfixed by its appeal to our proclivity to amass an ever growing hoard of biblical knowledge, even revelation knowledge, but revelation that, by and large, is still only ABOUT Him. It is the spiritual seduction that keeps one seeking for Him who has sought us, found us, reconciled us, crucified and buried what he refuses to accept as us and has raised us up to share His glory above all the heavens. In a word, we seek and search to obtain, study and dissect to understand, reach out to get that which cannot be gotten, that which is only given and has in fact been given without measure. The lie of the enemy is that Christ is the greatest thing among all the things that can be gotten. The truth is that He refuses to be gotten, He will only be given. He is sovereignly resistant to being figured out and made to be a compilation of the sum of our revelations. Now, of course, there is the black and white version of this along with every shade of gray. With some, my description is almost totally true. With others, true in varying degrees.

The Lord gave me a mental picture years ago as I reflected on Jesus' words recorded in Jn. 5:39-40, "You search the Scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is these that bear witness of me; and you are unwilling to come to Me, that you may have life" (NAS). I was suddenly and deeply impressed with how accurately His observation described present day Christianity. Was His rebuke meant only for the Jews or did it have a very extant application to the new Jew, the Christian who, like the Jew of yesteryear has all the advantages of information relating to God but fails to really see it all fulfilled in Him among them? The soul of even the regenerated man is subject to setting up spiritual camp where orthodox descriptions of Christ abound and so relish the story that they have little ongoing intimacy with the living Hero of the story. And in many cases, lacking that true intimacy they can attribute to God the most monstrous conjurings of their imagination and provide proof-texts for such demonic strongholds. The mental picture I received as I read those verses again was a picture of a Jewish rabbi pouring over the Old Testament with all it's messianic portrayals and suddenly someone's shadow falls over his page. Without bothering to even glance up from his intense scrutiny of the text he, with irritation, says "Get out of my light, you're making it hard for me to read" and incredibly, it is Messiah casting the shadow.

Be aware, dear brother and sister in Christ, of being lured on and on into a maze of the biblical description of Christ and His saving work so that there is always something more to learn

ABOUT Him; something more to understand about the anointing, the fivefold ministry, the Body of Christ, the Melchizedek priesthood, we in Christ and Christ in us, the kingdom of God, reconciliation, etc. ad infinitum, ad nauseum. There is a knowledge that is done away in Christ (1 Cor. 13:8) and as long as we cling to that knowledge we do not enter in where there is only the knowledge which is the communion of the Holy Spirit. It has nothing to do with mental accumulation of religious facts. It is the awareness of oneness with I AM, whereby I cease to look at Him as separate from me and One to be grasped after, but live in the joy of His transcendence being my Reality. There I cannot be distracted by the call to come learn more about Him for He and I simply ARE.

Am I being disrespectful of the Bible? No. I recognize that wherever that holy book has been opened in a living way, darkness begins to give way to light, men's hearts are drawn to thoughts of God; societies begin to change, barbarism gives way to civilization; hospitals are built; orphanages founded and the true dignity and worth of humanness appears. But that which is at one stage the instrument by which we progress becomes at another stage that which holds us back because of an inordinate attachment to it. Had men in the field of aeronautics insisted on working only with the combustion engine/propeller driven airplane, determined to squeeze every last bit of horsepower and speed out of that design and that design alone, they would have severely limited air and space travel and made speeds of 500 or 600 mph the absolute frontier. It took the envisioning of jet and rocket engines to "kick it up a notch" as Harold Lovelace would say.

Otherwise we simply would have gone on frustratingly trying to eke out more speed than that technology would permit. How many more little tidbits of understanding must we unearth from the text? How many more nuances of interpretation must we get all aflutter over? We are in danger of becoming completely absorbed by the hobby of fresh revelation, addicted to the just-one-more insight syndrome. How much longer this less perfect way? Am I simply lacking in patience? You judge dear reader. In my teen years, along with cruising around with the above mentioned "put up or shut up" buddy, I was the first in our immediate locale to take up the sport of body building, probably trying to compensate for my lack of height. What fun it became to challenge first-string varsity football players who were 40 pounds heavier and 5 inches taller to a contest of arm wrestling and watch their dismay as the little guy won handily. I remember a particular obsession about that time with building enormous biceps. For a while many valued that more than overall physical symmetry and went to extremes to possess the very best of this representation of masculinity so much so that some claimed they could develop a small muscle on top of the bicep at the point where the bicep peaked. This was the ultimate triumph in upper arm development. Supposedly it could be accomplished by getting that muscle fully "pumped" and then repeatedly striking it with a ruler or anything with a hard, narrow, flat surface until the muscle on top of the muscle began to appear. Some claimed it worked. I don't know. Are you getting the picture? Do you see an analogy? When is enough, enough?

Christ sits in the regal splendor of the glory of His/our Father on the other side of the cross. The side which is for us really not the other side but this side where we sit with Him. There He is; correction, here He is, the completed God-Man, having brought us to fullness and completeness in Himself. We have been declared by the Spirit of Christ in Paul to be "...the fullness of Him who fills all in all" (Eph. 1:22,23). Hey, fellow saint, at this point how about our little Christian ditty, "The Bible says it, I believe it, that settles it." Really now? But those well versed in chapter and verse will counter that there has to be more to it than that, and hasten to point out proof texts in support of a more moderate position. Doesn't the Bible explicitly, even in the new testament, add things to be done, attitudes to be adjusted, character to be worked on, lofty goals to press toward, things needful for the finished work of Christ to be, well, yeah, finished? Surely God is waiting, in some sense, for us to get with the program.

May I remind all the biblically erudite ones that there is a principle in scripture represented by

Jesus' comment concerning the bill of divorcement permitted by the Mosaic Law. Our Lord pointed out that this was a concession to the hardness of the human heart and was not so in the beginning. The law was the pinnacle of revelation, in codified form, of the character of God and required some concession on God's part when applied to man in his weakness, but it was not so from the beginning. So it is with the pinnacle of New Testament teaching regarding the absolute, never to be repeated, never to be added to, perfection of the Father's work in Christ on our behalf. There are concessions made to us, given the intolerable intellectual strain on the natural mind, as it seeks to process the unimaginable riches that are ours in glory by Christ Jesus; as it tries to make sense out of the truth that we have been blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus.

One day I was visiting with an old, very dear friend and brother in Christ when the conversation got around to a particular emphasis in the teaching of his pastor of late. He had been admonishing the congregation to get in a place where God could bless them. Like a projectile out of the depths of my spirit, without any aforethought, the affirmation burst forth from me that He, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus (Eph. 1:3). How can it be? There are so many problems, so much obvious falling short, so much evidence to the contrary. How can it be? It is because He is and nothing else makes it so.

If such sacred things as prophecy, tongues and knowledge have no coexistence with that which is perfect, how many other "things," represented by that complex, must we release from our grasp, things that we hold on to as absolute prerequisites for spiritual fulfillment. I will seem to digress here but please stay with me. God made a powerful point in the apologetic of Stephen before his martyrdom. Talk about a man asking for it. Certainly Stephen could have been a little more diplomatic about the Jewish temple than he was. Certainly he could have developed his point with a little more finesse. But with words inspired by the Spirit of God, if ever such words have been spoken by a man, Stephen, as it were, seems to walk right into a trap set for him by his accusers, and with magnificent boldness declares what no godly Jew is predisposed to face, that "...the Most High does not dwell in houses made by human hands..." (Acts 7:48 NAS). "Blasphemy!!" They cried. "God most certainly does dwell in this house that our father David desired to build for Him and which desire his son Solomon fulfilled. And did not God confirm the holiness of this endeavor by filling the house with the cloud of His glory so that the priests could not even minister for the glory that had descended on that holy place?" This was the place that everything in their understanding said was God's abode on earth. Stephen's declaration was one mindless, intemperate, sacrilegious assertion they could not endure. He must be put to death. Absolutely no doubt in their minds that he deserved to die and they had plenty of scripture to prove it. Where am I going with this and what's my point? We are about to have our sacred, Christian equivalent of this challenged. For us, when all is said and done, where is the central place where we can meet God and know that His presence is there awaiting us, where He will surely speak to us? Where are all the sacred symbols that foreshadow, represent and speak of Him with inspired authorship? Where can we go to find the perfection of teaching found in a present day altar, laver, candlesticks, incense and Ark of the Covenant? (See Ex. 40). Why to our bibles of course. Where else? Let us go to it again and again and again until we decipher all that it has to tell us ABOUT our God.

Beloved, today Stephen would say to us, "God does not dwell in a book," not even in the Book of books. He lives in a Body, the Body of our humanity which proceeded out from God Himself, the same humanity that the Lord Jesus took upon Himself when He, in whom the fullness of the Godhead dwelt, came and tabernacled among us, Emmanuel, revealing what true Humanness is. Here, the Most High finds perfect form and expression for all that He is. Here, forgive me, but I must speak to the contemporary mind, here God has His recliner and kicks back in full rest to enjoy His family forever.

Stay tuned for future serious, seminal samplings.

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