

The Divine Exchange of the Christian Life

Chapter 2: PREOCCUPATION with RELIGION

(Smith & George Interview, edited by Bob Clarkson)

Preoccupation with LAWS

A Christian lifestyle is not a response to laws, rules and regulations because the ability to love with God's love cannot be achieved through human struggle. God's love is activated within us only as we acknowledge our desire for Him and dependency upon Him. And that acknowledgement causes the power of Christ to dominate our lives. I asked my friend, Malcolm, to tell us about himself and about his life. I wanted to find out how he came to an understanding of these truths about the Christ himself in you.

Malcomb's Story

I was born again when I was in my early teens and right from the very beginning, I had a craving to know God. That took me to Bible school in which, although they gave me a good education in what the Bible says. But what they extracted from that the Bible was basically rules, regulations. I suppose you could sum it up, that if you are going to know God, you have to go to church at least two times a week. You also must read your Bible every day for 15 minutes, pray for 15 minutes, give out tracts and witness to others. Somehow that meant knowing God. Yet, I knew that was just an empty husk. And there was a craving inside of me like an enormous vacuum sucking into me the real life.

And it was at the graduation of the Bible school that a speaker introduced me to the concept that the heart of Christianity was Christ living in you. Although I didn't really understand what he was talking about yet,

my heart witnessed immediately that the whole Christian life **is** Jesus. I began to realize that the New Testament centered around the resurrection. It was a shock to me because he was basically saying that the whole of the Christian life was summed up in the phrase, “Jesus died for you.” Yet I realized that is not the message of the New Testament. Paul says, without the resurrection, faith only in Jesus’ death, we were doomed “to be of all men most miserable.” The confession by which I am identified as a Christian is that having believed in my heart that “God raised him from the dead.” Then I confess Him as Lord.

Of course the death of Jesus and the sufferings of Christ were a necessary part of the salvation paradigm. But in order to **live** the Christian life, we have to hear the echo of those whose voices shouted with joy, “He’s alive! He’s alive!” The resurrection of Jesus, is what makes sense of his death. If He didn’t rise again, his death is a pathetic end to a beautiful life. But now I understand His death because He’s alive. I understand the Old Testament because He’s alive. I understand how to **live** because He’s **alive**. It isn’t that Jesus simply came to give me His teachings. He didn’t come to give me principles and concepts for living. He came and **gave me Himself**. He didn’t say, this is the way or this is the truth. He said, **I am** the way, the truth and the life. He didn’t give us life. He said, “I am the life.”

Now that hit me like an explosion. When I was in my late teens, I came to see that the whole message of the New Testament was that Christ is alive and that living Christ is the message of the Gospel. The message is not something other than Him. It isn’t something that He brought. Truth is not something apart from Him. Truth is not about him. He **is** the truth. He **is** the

teaching. He **is** the message. Hebrews chapter one declares that they, the Old Testament prophets, **came with** the message. But now God has spoken to us. It says that He **is** the message. We no longer have simply a message. He **is** the message, Christ himself.

Preoccupation with RELIGION

Suddenly it dawned on me that everything else that I had been looking to as a sort of ladder into the heart of God was totally useless. In fact, it was a slander to the Gospel because Christ Himself **is** the heart of God. He said, "Come unto Me!" And I was trying to climb to Him by my Bible reading, by praying, by witnessing, by church going, by all these bondages. I had inflicted them on myself. And in so doing I was very sincere and very religious. But I had missed the heart of the matter. The heart of the matter **is a person**. It is Christ. Now I can say that in three minutes. But in actual experience, it took me a number of years to finally translate that into my faith and lifestyle. I found myself up against what I will call religion, even though it was evangelical religion. The word 'religion' in Webster's dictionary is defined as coming from two Latin words, which means to be shackled or to be bound.

And that's what I mean now when I use the term religion. It is the binding or the shackling of self to certain rules, principles and regulations by which I hope to please God. I was definitely bound. Now I have seen this truth, that Christ himself is everything. He **is** all. I had to fight against all of that bondage. So it was a number of years before I finally realized what I had always known. I realized it into my lifestyle, that is, I made it real, that Christ **is** everything. Now that put an end to my struggle. It was the absolute end of all

struggling to behave like a good Christian. If Christ **is** my life, then I don't have to struggle. The way I was raised spiritually was that you have to follow the example of Jesus' actions. Well, lots of luck with that.

I can't even follow the example of a good man. And you know, the, the hymns that we sang "... to be like Jesus, all I ask is to be like him." The imitation of Christ is an impossible pursuit. The idea that I somehow can take my human nature and cause it to become somehow like the nature of Jesus is nothing short of ridiculous. Thank God, I now see that I don't have to do that. The Christian life is **not 'trying.'** It is **'trusting.'** What a marvelous relief that I am weak because God made me that way. I am helpless. Fantastic! God made me that way. I am the dependent one. I am negative. God made me that way. He planned it. The way I was raised was that if I was a good Christian, I wouldn't feel badly. If I really had my act together, I wouldn't even feel temptation.

But now I see it clearly. When I am weak, then I am strong. That is, **Christ's life in me** is strong. God planned that I be weak. He planned it that I would be dependent. I am helpless. It's fantastic. And so when I'm tempted, I can laugh at it, in triumph, of course, I'm being tempted. My weakness is giving in to the temptation. And that's okay, because that sin is the trigger that reminds me that I have new life and my real life is Christ. Christ **is** my life. Who is Malcolm? I am in Christ and Christ is in me. That's who I am. And therefore, when the weakness is made apparent to me, I fall back on my real self.

Christ **is** me and I live, but not I, it is Christ. Now when someone tries to hurt me or does something mean, it's perfectly natural for me to feel that hurt. But

Christ in me **is unconditional love**. Christ in me **is** forgiveness and He forgives the person. It is no longer for me to react. It is Him reacting. Maybe the word respond is more accurate. And He will always respond in and with love.

Preoccupation with ESCAPE

We worked in New York City for a while with drug addicts and prostitutes. They would come in from the street and we were able to share that “Christ is life for the Christian.” The only answer to drug addiction or any kind of addiction is to realize Christ in me. There is no other permanent remedy for addiction. Unfortunately, there are many evangelicals who work with drug addicts and wean them off of drugs, but then teach them to read their Bible and pray every day as a means to stay sober. And it doesn't work. I know. I've worked with them. It actually puts even more pressure on them, which is likely to drive them even faster back to the addictive substances or behaviors.

Incidentally, even strong Christians may use ‘excessive Christian service’ as their addictive behavior. Whatever the preachers say, it doesn't work. They end up resorting to drugs again very quickly. And it is actually their feeling of guilt, shame and fear that drive them back to their only means of escape, the substances and behaviors that dull the senses or feelings. But if I can help them understand the fact that Christ in them **is** their new life, that's the end of it.

There was one man who I'll never forget because he sort of slipped in among us without hearing my initial teaching on this. His wife called me in the middle of the night. She said, “He's gone.” She figured out that he had a bad day the day before. She also assumed that he'd

gone back to have a fix. I knew where we'd find him. I went back there. Sure enough, he was there. Yet he had been truly "born again." Poor chap. He was very miserable and ashamed. He was saying, "Forget me. I've let you down. I've let Jesus down. I've let everybody down." And I replied, "First of all, what you're telling me is fantastic. It proves that you're born again. You didn't feel like this before you were born again. And so, disgust with your sin is proof that you **are** born again."

God loves you now, as much as He loved you when you were singing in the Spirit. God **loved you unconditionally** before you were born again. Why would you think now that He loves you **conditionally** after you have been born again? You know, He loves you unconditionally. He always has and He always will. Simply receive God's forgiveness with thanksgiving. Don't wallow in self pity, shame, guilt and all that other junk." I continued with an invitation to talk.

Let's receive God's forgiveness. Let's have some coffee and talk about it. My first question to him was, "What do you do when you're tempted to return to drugs? He got quite upset with me that I'd even ask such a question. He said, "What do you think I would do? I just sit there and I pray, 'Dear God, help me.'" I say, "No. No. I won't do this. Help me. No!" Then I responded, "And that's the reason! That's the problem!" I said, "Jose, you need to learn rule number one. You never say, "No!" to temptation. You say, "Yes!" to Jesus.

Christ **is** your life. You are forever the weak one. You will always feel the pull of the world. That is the trigger to say, "Jesus, you **are** my life. Take over. Live through me." Jose seemed to understand. So, what happened to him then? Well, for six months he did just

fine. No problems. After six months he had financial problems. The pressure overwhelmed him. And again, the old idea, “Let me go back to drugs for just one fix. Just one fix, you know, to lift the load a bit. And he started the old, “No! No!” thing. “No! No, I have to be a good Christian. You know, “help me to be like Jesus.”

He walked out of his house this morning and said it was over. He said, “I have to find a dealer. It's no good. I need just one fix and I'll be out of this problem.” As he was going to find drugs, the sweat was running down his face. Half of him was saying, “No, don't do it. Don't do it. I have to please God. I must be like Jesus.” Then he remembered our conversation. He stopped on the street and said, “Lord Jesus, I am weakness. But you are strength in me! You don't have any problem with drugs. Since You **are** my life, take over.”

Immediately he was okay. He was at peace. And he walked right past the dealer. That was many years ago. And to my knowledge, he's never turned to that escape method since. He found the answer. The answer to sin is releasing control of your life back to the One Who **is** your life! God never expected you to behave well. **God put the Spirit of Christ in you to live for you.** He always behaves well. Just let Him live **in** you and **for** you! (... the end of Malcomb's story)

Preoccupation with SIN

What we're saying is this, and I've made statements many times and shocked the daylights out of people. One such statement is this. “The goal of the Christian life is not to stop sinning.” We have **logical** ideas like this. ‘The goal of the Christian life is to stop sinning. If I could just stop sinning, I would be righteous.’ Oh, no, you wouldn't. If the whole world

stopped sinning tomorrow, they would not be righteous unless they were indwelt or possessed by the Righteous One. Christ Himself and He alone, **is** our righteousness. The goal is to **stop trying and start trusting**. “Walk in the Spirit, and you won't fulfill the desires of the flesh.”

We have been teaching everybody how to say no to sin, how to buckle down and to gut it out for God. And we wonder why we are plagued with sin. Yet we know that the Bible says “... a mind set on the flesh sows to the flesh.” So when I'm thinking about how to get rid of sin, what's my mind set on? It's the flesh. That's the way we sow to the flesh instead of walking in that **trust** relationship with Jesus Christ. These words may be helpful as well. Walking in the Spirit is simply walking aware that Christ is in you to live for you. Christ **is** your life! To ‘set your mind’ is to ‘shift your awareness’ away from the current pressure to the one who can handle the current pressure effortlessly.

I realize that the evangelical world is obsessed with sin. They think about it. They write about it. They preach about it. That's all you ever hear. You turn to the media, TV, Internet, radio and so forth. In religious media broadcasts you hear some preacher giving you a list of sins to avoid. Some of them I haven't even heard of. This piques our curiosity. “This might be fun!” Alternatively, the New Testament is obsessed with righteousness, obsessed with Christ.

As far as my sin is concerned, there is no more condemnation. “The blood of Jesus Christ cleanses from all sin” past, present and future. [Cleansing here means that He paid the just penalty and therefore the full consequences of my sin which releases me from the penalty now and forever!] As far as my present is

concerned, Christ **is** my life. “For me to live is Christ. I live, yet no longer, I, it is Christ who lives in me.” All my tomorrows have no bearing on me since I cannot live in tomorrow. But today, this current moment, Christ **is** my life. I just focus on watching Him live it!

Preoccupation with LOVE

Christ in me is the hope of glory. The emphasis of the New Testament is that Christ in me lives his life, which is love. You may remember that Jesus said, “I only give you one commandment. “Love one another, as I have loved you ...” (I never stop loving you!). Jesus said two things there that take it out of the realm of imitation. First of all, the word he used there for love was agape. The word agape was not used by the Greek people. It was in their dictionary. But in my research, I've only found it used two times outside of the New Testament. So it was sort of in the dictionary, but no one knew what it meant, except in a vague, weak kind of way, it meant love. Jesus took the word and introduced it as meaning ‘the love of God alone.’ In other words, the New Testament declares that God **is** agape.

So agape is about the nature of God. Who is he? It describes His essence. God **doesn't have** love. He **is** love. Jesus was that **love** in flesh then. Jesus is that **love** in Spirit now. Jesus continued to cite what is the true testimony of the believer (Christ-In), “... by this, shall all men know that you are my disciples, that you have agape one for another.” That is not human love. It is divine love. **It is love that can only be expressed by God** (and Jesus and Holy Spirit).

God's love is not intensified human love. God's love is not taking my human love and cranking it up. God's love is not prideful and showing off so I look all

pious, holy, and goody so as to be like Jesus. Jesus says that His disciples you will have another kind of love that comes from the outside. It is God's own nature in you. You will be known as Jesus' disciples because you are stamped and marked by divine love (agape). Before I understood that Jesus gave only one command, one that no human could keep, 'Love like Jesus loves', I'd always seen Jesus on such a high pedestal that He could not be touched. Therefore, everything He did was done perfectly.

It was like going to the county fair and filing past the first prize winner. I would gaze and admire Him but not touch Him. So I'd go to church on Sunday morning and sing songs about the only one who took first prize. But that was it. But at the least supper with His disciples He reveals that the whole plan of His coming is that we should be on this earth as He is. John, who was at the table, later wrote his epistle and said, "... as he is, so are we in this world? Or again, if we say we abide in him, we ought to walk even as he walked." So here I find the absolute impossibility of the Christian life. I am commanded to live a life that's impossible. Only Christ in me can and does love with divine love. Christianity is to love and live as Jesus did. Jesus lived **trusting** God **not trying** to please Him.

So then all my calls to people, to imitate Christ, to be like Him, have come to seem nothing short of ridiculous. At that moment of revelation it began to really dawn on me. The only true Christian life is that the Author, the One Who taught it, the One Who showed it, because He's alive, comes and actually lives inside of me. It all makes sense.

I can see very clearly that the resurrection was essential to enable Christ to be my life, or anyone else's

for that matter. The problem may be that we have been too focused on the cross. Thank God **for** the cross! That's what cleared the deck for this divine action we're talking about. But we have majored on the cross almost to the exclusion of the resurrected life of Christ. We have largely failed to bring it down to this question, "What was the meaning of the resurrection?" Most are clueless about this. But it provides the peace we desire when circumstances are miserable or even disastrous!

Your Testimony Is NOT Behavior

There are many, many Christians who are walking around today, who are toughing it out as you and I did, not knowing what my testimony truly is. And for certain, my testimony is not about morality, legality or ethicality. All religions other than Christianity have that as their testimony. But ours is along the line of relationship. And we've often heard it said that "Christianity differs from religion in that it is based on relationship not on works that are intentionally done in order to be 'god appeasing and god pleasing.'"

Eight years ago, I was driving down the Central Expressway in Dallas, Texas every day. I was evangelism director of the world's largest church of its denomination. I was teaching in Bible colleges, doing radio programs and writing Bible study books. I was busy and barren with tears streaming down my face, singing that song of Andre Crouch. "Lord, take me back to the days when I first knew you." I had totally lost the joy of my salvation. While I was driving to work one day, I told the Lord, "Something's got to give here. This is not what the Christian life should be like, busyness without love."

The Lord reminded me of the passage of

scripture in John 8, “If you abide in my words, you will know the truth. And the truth will set you free.” I can see now that what I had substituted is “the **word** will set you free.” But the text is, “the **truth** will set you free.” Well, who is the truth? Jesus. And here's what I said, “Lord, I don't care what any Christian organization that I was associated with taught me. I don't care what my denomination has taught me. I don't care how I learned anything, if truth sets you free, it has to be error that binds you.” And my keen mind picked up immediately that when you're driving down the freeway with tears of misery in your eyes, that you're not free at all. So truth is **not** what I had. And I wanted it desperately.

God started revealing the very truths that we're talking about now. There are many Christians in the same boat (or car as it were, lol). We are not here to criticize people. We're here to try to help people discover the truth that will set them free from guilt, shame, blame and fear! And there are people who resist this like crazy. And I think back to my former misery and I ask, “What are we afraid of in this message?” And one of the things that has become clear to me is that when people get totally free in grace, you can't manipulate, coerce or control them. You can't manipulate a man who is free in Christ. Leadership ceases to exist when control is lost.

Many Christian leaders, in regard to keeping this message from people, fear that they might lose control. And even ministries need controls. Or so they think! Webster's definition of religion is “bondage to a creed or tradition.” There are many ways to look at that. I formerly believed that as a Christian I had bound myself to the rules in the Bible. But what we call Christianity has been reduced to simply one more religion. The Christian **religion** manipulates the minds of men and

binds them.

I remember when I was a member of a particular denomination. Everything I did, everything I said, how many souls I witnessed to every week, how many hours I read my Bible was reported. I was locked in. And this was a highly respected evangelical denomination. But I realized that I had been grossly manipulated once I understood that my life **is** Christ. It is His responsibility to live it. In that moment, I was free from the bondage to any denomination or religion. I was free from the religion called Christianity. I had come to the heart of Christianity, who is Christ.

Your Testimony IS Freedom!

Now this freedom in Christ which comes from understanding that 'Christ **is** my life' does not lead us to discard daily Bible reading and daily prayer and service for God in general. Some people accuse us of implying such disregards for these Christian practices. Actually in Christ we engage in this far more often than before, but in a way that we can do them with greater enjoyment and without ceasing. But, we **are** teaching that every time a person seeks to use Bible reading and prayer as a means of coming to God, as a means of acceptance, as a means of achieving success in the Christian life, that is **religion**.

To reduce Christianity to religion is unacceptable. It's putting grace under law. Grace has no meaning apart from the law. But grace cannot be **expressed by** the law or **adherence to** the law. But once I recognize that my life **is** Christ, it is not necessary for me to have a Bible within reach. When I live in faith that my life **is** Christ, then prayer is an interaction between my heart and the heart of God at all times, not just

appointed times. And since the Holy Spirit, Who inspired all of the writers of scripture, lives in me, He brings the truth contained in the scripture to my mind, even if I have never read that particular verse.

Now, once I understand those things, then suddenly I am at liberty to read my Bible as I've never read it before. Reading the Bible becomes a spontaneous response to the Spirit. I don't have to read it. I do it whenever the Spirit draws me to it. I don't have to have my quiet time in order to be a good Christian. Actually **every 'time' in my day becomes quiet** in Christ when otherwise it would be noisy and sometimes even extremely noisy with distractions from Christ. I jump out of bed **in** Christ. I live **in** Christ. Now, I am free to come to that book no longer as a means to appease or obey God. It is no longer a mediator between my heart and God.

That book becomes cherished instruction **to** my heart. It reminds me of who I am **in** Christ. Prayer is no longer so many minutes that I spend every day. Prayer is me **living** in my relationship **in** Christ. Actually when Paul says to "Pray without ceasing," he means to be aware of the indwelling Christ at all times. Prayer, as a dialog with God, happens whenever I am aware of His presence and thinking, speaking or emoting with Him. I can do that awake or asleep. I can do that sitting, standing, walking, running or in any other posture or activity. The ultimate in prayer is to be so passionately in love with God that I am more aware and delighted to be thinking about God than to be thinking about my most significant other on earth.

Religion is NOT Relationship

The Bible claims itself to be the **Word** of God,

who **is the person** of Jesus Christ. And the Holy Spirit brings me the reality of Christ **in** me. Any person who is simply memorizing the scripture, reading the scripture, and avidly studying the scripture will eventually become exhausted. They are dead on their feet. Even if they are an evangelical Christians as I was. By the age of 21, I had memorized the whole New Testament. Now that's good. That's fine. It has held me in good stead. I don't need Strong's Exhaustive Concordance any more.

The whole message of the Bible is the **Word Himself**. And I have to get past my ritualistic, intellectual approach to God and get into a passionate love relationship with Him. In that state, even if I cannot stop to read the Bible and pray and so forth, my awareness of the presence of God and His love for me and His Holy Spirit within me, He ministers to me 'without ceasing.'

I was analyzing this the other day. In every line of educational endeavor there is we have studied books. We study history books, biology books, geography books, math books and science books. Rarely in any educational system that I know of, do we ever study a book to get to know the author. You study a book to get to know the book. This is called the informational philosophy of teaching. And we have brought that same philosophy into our seminaries where we teach our pastors how to **do** their ministry. And, on a larger scale, we have adopted this same philosophy of education into Christianity. And the object is to study the book, the Bible. And we fail to become familiar with the author altogether.

Yet the Bible actually tells us to "... search the scriptures, and the scriptures point to Me." And you can memorize the scripture and search it forward and

backwards, as did the Pharisees. Yet we, like they, miss the Living Word. We have packed our minds with information while not experiencing the transformation Paul writes about in Romans 12:1 and 2. Christianity is about transformation in relationship. Religion is about information. And, as much as I have like expository preaching in the past, I prefer to have my heart enlarged in relationship than my mind packed with information.

Jesus Christ Himself created the universe. He also took away temples. Now, wherever I am, I **am** the temple. The Holy Spirit now resides in the Holy of Holies within each believer. The body in which I live is simply a place for dwelling. My spirit, is the Holy of Holies within my body. The great and final resurrection of the dead is not about bodies. It is about spirits. Those who are joined to the Holy Spirit will live forever in God's presence. Those who have not been 'born again' with the Holy Spirit will live apart from God forever.

Jesus took away sacred geography. There are no more sacred places. He also took away all sacred times. He flagrantly disobeyed the Pharisee Sabbath laws and declared "... the Sabbath was made for men." There are no more sacred hours, sacred days, sacred weeks. Jesus' teaching was essentially this. You think that in that Book you have eternal life. But it isn't there. Eternal life **is** Me. Unless you are born again of the Spirit of Christ, you cannot have eternal life.

By the time Jesus ascended into heaven you have a company of people who have no building and no religion at all. God has come to live inside of you, when you receive His second birth, the birth of His Holy Spirit within you. You have to be quite moronic to read the New Testament and not realize that when you believe, Christ lives in you. But when you teach people to begin

to apply those concepts to a dynamic Christian life, many Christians get very upset.

When Jesus came to earth in the flesh, He chose this precise moment. He came when both the Jews and the gentiles would have to agree to the crucifixion of the Lamb of God. No other time in history did the Jews have such strong influence on government outside of Judaism. Galatians four states, "... that in the fullness of time, Jesus came." Jesus chose this moment religiously because never had the Pharisee movement been so highly developed. And of all the religions that Jesus chose to confront, it was the one religion that was based on the Word of God. He didn't bother to confront Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism or any other religion at all. He chose to confront a religion that was based originally on the Word of God.

To become a Pharisee, to become an acceptable covenant Israelite, you had to take upon yourself what was called the yoke of the law, the Torah. And then Jesus announced Himself as God. He said, "Come unto me. Take **My** yoke upon you." He was saying, in effect, I'm the new Torah. I'm the new law. I am the new Bible. If we were to translate it into modern language, "I'm the new Bible. No longer will you subject yourselves to a list of rules. Do this. Do that. Do the other. And don't do this, and don't do that and don't go there. Rather, "Come to Me. Take My yoke upon you. My yoke is easy. My burden is light ... and I will give you rest." And the word in the Greek, there is vacation. "Come to me," said Jesus, "I'll give you a vacation!"

I was raised in a home where there was no Bible, no church, but a great sense of condemnation and guilt. I didn't know why. But when I was born again in my early teens, I was raised among the Pentecostals. What I see is

this. You and I may be coming from completely different backgrounds. And yet we have come together in a total understanding of Christ. That is my greatest desire. My heart desire is to see the Christian community putting aside their little bits of religiosity and differing doctrines in order to focus on what this is all about, **Jesus**.

When we sift through all of this garbage of denominationalism and doctrine, we're going to be left with only one thing that truly matters, **Jesus**. It is our calling to the world right now. It is the great commission. The final mission Jesus stated to His disciples was NOT to bring people into our particular religious traditions, it **IS** to make disciples of Jesus everywhere. And Jesus summed up His definition of disciple as "One who loves like Jesus loves, without conditions of behavior or reservations of any kind."