

The Divine Exchange of the Christian Life
Chapter 3: PREOCCUPATION WITH EVANGELISM
(Smith & George Interview, edited by Bob Clarkson)

Preoccupation with HAPPINESS

One reason Christians feel burnout is because they feel God lied to them. They believe that He has let them down. They mostly fail to realize that God only let them down because they had an incorrect expectation of what God should do for them. There was a misrepresentation of the gospel. They were told that if they came to Jesus, they would be happy. Then when they're not happy, it's because they feel God let them down. He hasn't failed to do what His purposes and character will always do. They may have prayed and prayed and prayed, and they may have repeated verses of scripture to God, like they expected that to be a magic spell over God. And He didn't come through. They laid the currency on the table of heaven, and God didn't sell them the good seat advertised. And they didn't even realize that their currency was counterfeit. But God did. So understanding what God is and Who God is one of the most important things in our lives.

Another aspect of this problem is that ministers and teachers we have misrepresented God in leading people to the wrong definition of "happy." I say now, "God delivered me from happiness. When I came to Christ, I was saved from happiness. And of course, in the same breath, I was saved from unhappiness." The words happy and unhappy come from a basic root word in ancient English, hap. And a hap in ancient English means: luck, chance, or fate. So when the gods have laid 'haps' on my plate, they've happed things upon me in a

configuration that I like, then I'm in agreement with the haps. I am happy. I like that. But when the configuration of life is mean and disastrous, when it rains on the 4th of July and everything goes wrong, and I lose my job, then I wish these things would *un hap* and I am unhappy.

I have come now to something far grander than 'haps.' My life now is not a series of haps (events) that control me. With that world view I am no longer happy. Nor am I unhappy. I have been delivered from happiness and unhappiness. I have discovered and now possess what the Bible refers to as everlasting joy. Everlasting joy is something that belongs to God. Everlasting belongs to God. Everlasting means unending, and therefore belongs exclusively to God. He and every spirit He created is unending. The Bible says of the redeemed, "They shall come to Zion with everlasting joy upon their heads." Incidentally, we have no word for 'un joy.' We only have joy. Everlasting joy is the joy that God has in Himself. Before there was creation, before anything was, God was. Love, joy and peace are the permanent emotions of God. Actually they are His very essence!

And Proverbs eight speaks of the Trinity rejoicing. It says, of Jesus, He was ever rejoicing before the Father. I see the Holy Spirit is ever going forth in joy. God's joy is in Himself. God joys in His own love. God joys in His own wisdom. God joys in His own power, plans and purposes. Now I, in receiving Christ as the center of my life, I have been locked in to the joy that God has in Himself. What this means is that now, as far as the events of life are concerned, I have a kind of disinterestedness, that may be too strong, but I don't know a better word. My joy is now unaffected by the

positive or negative nature of every event in life. In faith, I see every circumstance in my life as ordained by God as part of His plans and purposes. In a sense, that does also make me 'happy.'

I now can understand some of the weirdest statements of the New Testament. Paul could speak of whether I die or whether I live, I'm disinterested. "For me to live **is** Christ. When he's in jail in Philippi, he can rejoice and does rejoice. When you've been beaten up, framed, thrown into the innermost part of the jail, put in the stocks, locked in position, you would not be happy with respect to the 'haps' of life. But since I now understand that God has a purpose in even this kind of miserable happening, I am happy with Him and His eternal joy!

Before I came to this knowledge, I would have been wishing it would go away. Even most of my prayers before were begging God to 'take it away' with respect to anything that made me hurt or feel miserable. Paul and Silas practiced what they preached as they expressed joy that had nothing to do with 'haps.' Joy is the fact that Christ (God in Christ) lives inside of me, I live inside of God and I can choose to abide in the joy that God has in Himself. This is the joy that stays to the end from the beginning, everlasting joy!

God's Word says, "... all things do work together for a glorious, eternal good. And that His glory is in this matter." A person who is driven by religion is sour on life. They have to be because they don't have Christ living in them. They are doomed and they don't know it. They're trying to work out their bias in the events of life. They want everything to fit in just right. They want everything to fit in just right in church, at

work, at play, in the stock market and everywhere else. When it doesn't, they get frustrated and miserable. And that unrealistic expectation was sucking the life out of them.

But I realize now that Christ **is** me. He, joy, is a person. Since Joy (Jesus) is the source of my life. So it doesn't matter what is happening. When Paul says even at a funeral, we sorrow not as others. That doesn't mean that we won't cry. We do cry, but there's triumph in our tears. Christ **is** our life. To understand that Christ is the center of my existence is the best definition of Christianity. The 'new birth' is the person of Christ being born in me and living His life in me. This delivers me from all unhappiness. It introduces me to everlasting joy. Every happening that used to make me unhappy, now makes me happy as I live it **in** Christ (God's purposes).

Preoccupation with CIRCUMSTANCES

The second part of my thesis is that we live above the circumstances. A person I was talking to recently said, "I don't see very many marriages in which the partners are happy." I said, "The purpose of marriage isn't to be happy." And that's a shock to people. Marriage is a commitment and is a joy in my life. But my mate cannot give me joy. Happiness, I believe, is an expectation of the current culture. We have to be happy. Everybody's supposed to be happy. We will do anything and pass any law just so we can all be happy. And happiness is when circumstances are going my way.

My wife reminded me in a conversation the other day that she grew up in Russia and lived in

concentration camps and was bombed and strafed and everything else that there is in war. She endured years of starvation and everything awful in war that you could imagine. She was asked, "If you could change anything, would you change it?" You would likely think that she would have changed many things because the circumstances didn't bring her joy. Her answer was quite striking, "The Lord Jesus Christ brings me joy. All of those circumstances provided pressure from the outside in order to learn the faithfulness of God which is the equalizing pressure inside. And that's to me, looking at life from a Biblical point of view. We are not under the circumstance. We're not controlled by circumstances. We're in Christ. Christ is in us. That's it.

I sit here with a little bit of sadness as I think of how many have missed out. Why are people not hearing this message? The answer is that until there is an apparent a hunger in the hearts of believers, as if suddenly they recognize a misery similar to the prodigal son, they won't change what they believe and come back to God Himself, the 'prodigal father.' Unless and until one comes to himself and says, "What am I doing sitting here struggling, failing, struggling and failing? There has to be a better way." he is immobilized in his misery.

However, just as faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God, if people hear this message, hope can spring up in their lives. Until 'whatever we have, there's something missing' hits home, change will not occur. To put it in the words of John Henry Alan, "I cannot change myself. Only God can change me. But God will not help anyone who does not know they need to change and they are also willing to let God do the changing."

I think the church has had enough of rules, regulations and denominationalism. I think they are ready to hear the essence of the gospel, 'Christ is you.' A pastor recently said that when he first heard this message, that he absolutely hated it. He said, "I just absolutely despised those who were preaching it." But it caused me to take up the Berean challenge, "... go back to the Bible and start examining the message using the Bible as a proof text. I abandoned my preconceived bias to get a fresh look." And I went back into the Bible to try to prove the teaching to be wrong. But the Bible actually confirmed what I had formerly rejected. As I studied, God proved His life to me. And my whole life has been changed."

We don't want people to listen and just change what they believe. I could be promoting an outright lie. Do not take what we're saying for granted. Go into the word of God and examine it for yourself. It is only there that you will find the living water. You will find the truth that will set you free. But we strongly recommend that unlike the pastor who hated this message, try to prove it to be true. You can almost always disprove anything you determine not to believe.

People who have come to believe that 'Christ is the life' are saying, "I have a new interest in my Bible. I'm falling in love with Jesus! I'm going back into the Bible and being blessed. And for years I was just as obstinate and narrow minded and judgmental as the elder brother of the prodigal son. It is almost embarrassing to think how long I acted like the elder brother. Like him, I was sour and disgusted with my Father, God, because of the grace and love that He expressed to others. And I also find that the condemnation that we get regarding

our new found grace does not come from the other-religions or atheists. It comes from our brothers and sisters who are threatened, angered, disgusted and appalled with such great grace and love as we have received and talk about.

Prideful Obsession Creates BURNOUT

Spiritual burnout manifests itself particularly in this area of evangelism. I'll preface what we're going to talk about with a true story. A short time ago my son was interviewing for jobs. I saw that he was really discouraged. So we went to breakfast together and spent the whole morning talking about different things. In the conversation, Bob said to me, "Dad, I always knew you loved me. I looked at him and I said, "Bob, that's true. But let me ask you another question. And I had never contemplated this before, but I asked, "Have you always felt that I accepted you?" He looked at me for a moment and said, "No." I asked him to tell me about that feeling. So he continued, "Well, Dad, I just felt like that. Maybe if I had been more active in Christian work, or I'd have been this or that, that you would accepted more." That day I understood the difference between love and acceptance.

I proceeded to tell a story, "Son, you remember when we went into full-time Christian work, and I was with an organization that was very, very active in aggressive evangelism. I remember there was a man there that used to take his son out, witnessing with him. Everybody was very impressed with both of them. It was almost like when Ananias and Sapphira tried to impress everyone in the church with their lavish financial

contribution. And I thought to myself, “Boy, if I took my son out witnessing, everybody would think I was a marvelous father too and that I was a very spiritual Christian. And so, guess what I did? I took my son out, witnessing with me.”

[My son was very young, and very shy. But I took him out with me anyway. The only motivation that I had was to achieve the praise of man. I could have cared less about anything else except people looking at me and saying, oh, what a spiritual do right! That's all I cared about. Many, many times I had shared Christ with someone looking, out of the corner of my eye while doing it, to see if anyone was watching. I'm not proud of this. I'm just telling you that was what I was like. Then I would be sitting in share meetings afterwards, lying about how many people came to Christ. I did everything else that you could imagine to impress other people. Now, it sickens me to know that I was doing that. But I was doing it.]

Getting back to my story about my son, my boy said, “Dad, that day when you took me out I began to believe that this is what Christianity is about. I have to live on the ‘impressing everyone’ level for the rest of my life.” And that's what he's been doing. Now I look back on that and see that I was trying to be so neat and so spiritual. But all I did was put fear in my son. That kept him from enjoying the life of Christ. Of course, I didn't understand the fullness of ‘life in Christ’ then either. But to have kept him from understanding ‘life in Christ’ by trying to be spiritual through witnessing is appalling to me!

Now let's spring board from this to where the church-at-large is today. I was part of a denomination

that required me every week, as a junior minister, to send a report, to headquarters no less, in which I listed every person I had witnessed to, how many tracts I had given out, how many people I had led to the Lord and so forth. It was almost like the old Indian scalp report. You know, how many scalps do you have hanging outside your tent this week? I was in an organization where we had to budget scalps and measure our spiritual maturity by the number of them. When you get right down to it, it is nothing other than prideful boasting and lying. It went with the denominational territory.

Now, when I look back on those days, especially to my very early days as a Christian, it is evident to me that all of my witnessing was to impress my Christian brothers and sisters. It wasn't about the person to whom I was witnessing. No. It was just about how many tracts can I give out? How many people can I make pray the sinner's prayer? How many can I say I've witnessed to.

Burning IN or Burning OUT

I have come to realize now that Christ has come to **be** life. I understand the essence of Christianity, this agape life that is within us, Christ Himself, that He was interested in people. If I understand the gospels correctly, if I dare to read them without my denominational glasses on, Jesus was not out to make converts. Jesus was out to love people. He loved them where they were, for who they were at that moment in which He was present He came just to love them.

It was very significant that He was called, at least on one occasion, the 'friend of publicans and sinners.' He was not their savior at that point. Many

times, it is recorded, that He just sat down and had a meal with them. And that was a scandal to religion and a great mistake by Him with respect to public opinion or political correctness. He lost many followers because of that. But He was only interested in people who need love.

This revelation about Jesus' ministry and its extreme contradiction of the religion of God's people created a tremendous change in my whole understanding of ministry. When I began to apply all that I knew of Christ living in me, and I began to apply that to ministry and specifically evangelism, my entire ministerial life was turned upside down inside out. In fact, I went through a major burnout myself in ministry.

It was a strange dichotomy I had been living in. For many years I knew that scripture declared that Christ is in me. But when it came to the way I conducted my ministry, there was another part of my head that was locked into the denominational structure. Actually, in England, was the craziest phrase that was the slogan of the ministers. It was, "Let's **burn out** for Jesus." Many certainly did. Many achieved it and were very proud of that. What a shame to have been so wrong!

"Let's **burn out** for Jesus." The whole idea was about what programs could we use to manipulate the people to Jesus? That was it, plain and simple. The most successful program was one that manipulated the most people into church. This leads to those idiotic things like "the pastor will swallow a goldfish on Sunday morning, if you get a certain number of people in Sunday school. If that isn't a manipulation of a congregation and of your neighbor, I don't know what is.

Prideful manipulation is the only way to

describe it. It has nothing to do with love. I don't love my neighbor. All I want to do is see the pastor swallow a goldfish. It has nothing to do with love whatsoever. We have resorted to salesmanship. We've gone to sales meetings to learn how to win people to Christ. We have degraded the love of Jesus. We have turned to an evil sales pitch in order to manipulate the minds of people so as to 'bring them to Christ.' All we have done is drag them into our particular flavor of the Christian religion (denomination).

How can we possibly think that they have been converted? When they backslide, they haven't really. They never slid forward into Christ. So that can't possibly slide backwards. We simply manipulate and coerce them using sales techniques. It is not evangelism. It has nothing to do with evangelism.

Evangelism is first and foremost, "I love you! And Jesus' love means loving you as you are right now, without any changes. I accept you. There are no strings attached." And so, if you're committing your own 'pet' sin, I am not judging or condemning you. I love you just the way you are. What you are doing has no bearing on my love for you. I simply love you. And because I love you, I'm going to listen to you.

Before I had this understanding that Christ **is** my life, I never listened to anybody I sat down beside. Did God help anybody I sat next to in a plane or a bus? I certainly thought so, yes. I didn't care about what they said, I just used it as an opening statement. Within five sentences, I could turn the conversation around and give them the 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, sign here denominational gospel. Thank you very much. I've got your name down here. I led you to Christ.

That is not evangelism. That's lying. It's boasting. It's manipulation. And it certainly is **not** love. I didn't love that man. I didn't care that he probably was weeping over a son that was on drugs, or that his marriage was about to end in divorce. All of that was beside the point. All I wanted to do was to get this conversation as quickly as possible to point number one of my denomination's gospel. Instead of loving the man and listening to the hurt and the cry of his heart, which might take the whole flight from New York to Los Angeles for him to spill his heart out, I just wanted to get him to pray our prayer. I was afraid that I wouldn't even get a chance to get to my first point!

Let the Holy Spirit Do All the Talking

But now I realize that as Jesus' disciple, my job was to have just loved that man for who he is. And in my former state, I never understood that. I was an evangelist. And an evangelist is a failure unless he gets the person 'saved.' It didn't matter where I was or who they are. The job was just to get them 'saved.' I didn't care about them. I didn't love them. I wasn't their friend. I was the person who pumped into them the set of scripture verses in my evangelist's tool kit. I didn't even share Christ with them. I shared certain scriptures, rapid fire, until they prayed the prayer.

I look back in horror at those days. And then to realize Christ genuinely loves this person. Christ in me wants to look at their need. He wants to weep with them as they weep. He wants to heal the hurt of their heart. He wants to love them where they are (not where they 'should be.') That changed my whole understanding of

life. I am no longer that self-righteous, other-impressing man. If this man wants to talk about the weather, then I'll respect him enough and love him enough to do so. If he wants to talk about the horrible mess he left at home, then I'll listen to it. I won't try to rapidly turn the conversation around to deliver **my** message to him. I'll just listen to him as he shares his hurt feelings with me. Then, if he will allow me, I will share my heart and the love of Christ with him. I will not use a technique or 'canned' message that was born in insurance sales conference to lead into Christ. I will depend upon the Holy Spirit to say to this man what God wants him to hear in this moment.

Unfortunately, we may count thousands, week after week, that have been led to Christ. But their faith stands in the wisdom of men. It does not stand in the power of God because they were not led to Christ in the demonstration of the Spirit of God and in His words to them.

The word demonstration was used by the Corinthian philosophers to describe when they were lecturing in the great halls of learning in Corinth. There came a point in their lecture when they were beginning to wrap it up, and they would pull together all the loose ends, and they would make it so that really you had to agree with them. They've got you now. They pinned you down. And that last part of their lecture was called in the Greek, the demonstration.

But Paul says, "When I come, I don't come as the philosophers with all their techniques and rhetoric of how to draw it together and make you believe it. I came in the demonstration, the drawing together, of the Holy Spirit." There is no formula to lead a person to Christ. It

is that I love you and I love you with the love of Christ in me. It's not a hyped up, sweet syrupy human love. This is the love of Jesus for you, and how **He's** going to win you to Christ.