

## **Personified Principles**

*by Bill Volkman*

*"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" (John 5:39,40).*

A couple of years ago I completed the syllabus for a Christian growth seminar which I entitled *"The Designer's Blueprint For Happiness."* Based on the eight qualities of life listed in 2 Peter 1:5-7, I had developed a practical systematic theology using a multitude of Scriptural insights. The mimeographed materials that were to be given to students consisted of over three hundred pages of principles, illustrations and readings.

Only recently I saw that to try to see Scriptural principles without seeing Him who is *The Principle* is to try to see truths without seeing Him who is Truth. To try to see life without seeing Him who is life is like trying to see love without seeing Him who is love. The entire emphasis and approach of my syllabus had to be scrapped.

There is a wonderful emphasis today on the principles of Scripture. Those who are called to this emphasis (as I was for many years) are heeding the admonition to *"Teach and preach these principles"* (1 Tim. 6:2). When properly seen as witnesses to Him who is The Principle of life, principles are great. But these principles must not degenerate into a new law. Man has always gravitated toward the law, because there is always that lingering hope that in our *"separated selves"* there dwells some good thing (even though Romans 7:18 says unequivocally, *"For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh"*). The songwriter brother of the evangelist John Wesley was Charles Wesley. He bordered on union life truth when he capitalized the word "Principle" in his song, *"I want a Principle within."* But "want" is a word of separation and unbelief, instead of a word of faith. Another song needs to be written with a title that is a positive acknowledgement: *"I have a Principle within."*

Unless we come to Christ when we come to the Scriptures (or to a Bible study, a church service, a "Jesus" rally, a Seminar on principles, or any other meeting or fellowship), we will not receive life. We might receive mental comprehension, have our ears tickled, or experience a subjective "high," but we will not receive life which manifests itself in love to others.

*"Let no one act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day — things which are a mere shadow of what is to come, but the substance belongs to Christ"* (Col. 2:16,17). As mature, free spirits, we have a single eye on Him who is The Principle, and we do not have to look to human advice or even Scriptural principles for our decisions. Though some sincere people are involved in the current "shepherding" emphasis in some Charismatic circles, the failure of the leaders to adequately help the "sheep" see their full competency in Christ will retard their growth and reinforce feelings of guilt, inadequacy and incompetence. It would not be inaccurate to say that the shepherding emphasis is turning many legitimate groups into "cults."

Many of us have been challenged for years to study the Scripture because of the admonition of 2 Timothy 2:15: *"Study to show yourself approved unto God."* We interpreted this to mean that the more we studied the Scriptures, the more approved we would be of God. Once again we erroneously assumed that performance based on principles would gain God's approval. But the primary purpose of the Bible is not to underscore our need. It is to reveal the fact that

Infinite Supply is available within each individual, that we might live as the approved person that we already are in Christ.

What is your reaction when people interrupt your Bible study or devotional times? Would your spiritual temperature drop substantially if you couldn't have those times for a couple of weeks? As important as the Scriptures are, they are still just a witness to He who is inner Truth. We must have an inner consciousness of union and oneness with God when we come to the Bible, or we will not experience His life, which is love.

When we are exposed to someone who really "*knows the Word*," most of us tend to be very impressed. We wrongly assume that there is a correlation between how much one knows about Scripture and how one's life reflects Christ. If only we knew more, we too would act more "*Christ-like*." If only we read our Bible more, memorized more verses, and meditated more on the Word, we too would have more faith, more power, and more love. But all head knowledge, even knowledge of Scriptural principles, is merely wisdom of this world, which Paul classified as "*foolishness before God*" (1 Cor. 3:19).

Since I am a lawyer, it is not surprising that for years I catalogued the commandments of the principles of Scripture, just as lawyers catalogue the legal rulings of the various courts of law. Only a proverbial Philadelphia lawyer can understand some of the fine-line distinctions which courts have drawn to justify their decisions. And only a Philadelphia-type theologian can distinguish all of the principles of the Bible and apply them in a proper context. Consider the following opposites:

"*Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee*" (Mark 5:19). (Share your testimony with others).

"*And he charged them that they should tell no man*" (Mark 7:36). (Do not share your testimony with others).

"*Carry no purse, no bag, no shoes*" (Luke 10:4). (Take no provisions).

"*But now, let him, who has a purse take it along*" (Luke 22:35). (Take provisions when you go out.)

Undoubtedly, some readers will have no trouble reconciling such principles based on historical context, or on another translation of the Greek, or on dispensationalism, or on Old Testament prophecy, or on something. But most reasonable men would have difficulty.

In any event, we must learn that none of the above principles nor any others, are meant to be absolutes that are to apply to every comparable situation. The fact is that it is just as impossible to delineate the principles. Have you ever noticed how often godly men with different persuasions and contrary advice come up with a reasonable Scriptural basis to justify their approach to the same problem? Who and what are we going to listen to? Any attempt to make decisions based solely on the outer application of supposedly objective principles of Scripture is foolishness.

Man's desire to classify truth and automatically apply principles to life's questions is just another manifestation of his love for creeds and mental beliefs. I'm surprised that some enterprising Christian has not devised an IBM computer program which would "*Scripturally*

*determine the will of God*” as to any question fed into the computer. With the advent of computerized dating and mating, why not a computerized will of God?

I am convinced that God purposely introduced the contrast of seemingly conflicting principles in the Bible so that in his frustration man would turn to the inner Source for his answers. Inner knowing, not head knowledge, is the proper basis for making a decision. Both wisdom and understanding are given to man by intuition and revelation. *“If any man lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all men generously”* (Jas. 1:5). The wisdom comes in an attitude of Christ-consciousness. With such an awareness we have confidence that our decisions are His decisions.

God’s advice is, *“Be still and know that I am God”* (Psa. 46:10). Man has changed it to, *“Become something on earth by knowing more principles about God who is in heaven.”* Instead of just “being” (experiencing unified existence), we stress “becoming” (attainment). Instead of inner knowing with the heart, we stress outer knowing with the mind. Since our premises are based on a separated outlook (we are earthbound and God is in heaven), our final conclusion is also separated. Instead of coming to the truth that *“I am an expression of the unified God right now,”* we conclude that he wants us to be quiet and worship Him as an external God; with the hope that someday (presumably after the rapture) things will be different.

John 5:39,40 could well be paraphrased, *“You search the Scriptures for principles, as if in the principles you have life. Though the principles do bear witness of me, you must see through the principles to Me if you really want life.”* It is the awareness of our union with Christ and His expressions here on earth that brings life, not the mental absorption of principles. Face the truth that even Scriptural principles are foolishness unless we see through to The Principle within.