

Enjoy Being Yourself

by Dan Stone

The religion I preached for twelve or thirteen years told people what they ought to become. Everybody else told me I “gotta become,” so that’s what I taught others.

Do you know what that kind of religion is like? It’s like a bunch of us who all bought new shoes which were too tight for us. We paid so much for them, we thought we had to smile. But all the time we were smiling, our feet were killing us.

A group of six or seven of us who know “Christ in us” as our hope of glory were together recently, and it was wonderful to have this dimension of truth in common. I find in my own life that I don’t *need* to be with people who really know this mystery, whereas once it was very necessary for me; but I enjoy that kind of sharing and look forward to more of it.

You see, I’m tired of people telling me what I “ought” to do. I want to be with people who already know who they are, so that we can just rejoice in God and know that we are complete in Christ - that we are already holy, already unreprouvable, already blameless. When we know this, we can have fellowship in the “I Am” and drop the “I gotta become.”

During the years of my ministry when Christianity was a matter of trying to “become,” I really did try to smile, because Jesus was supposed to be so good. But it was painful. I came to the place where I began to think that God wasn’t a God of love. He was a tyrant. Do you know why I thought He was a tyrant? Because every time I got a little close to Him, He seemed to pull back a little bit. I’d get near, and He’d draw back and say, “Now you’ve got to work a little harder to get this next step.” And about the time I’d get there, He’d point to the next step and say, “Now you gotta work a little harder if you want to get there.” And I could never get to Him. I could never reach Him.

I’d scratch my head sometimes and say, “Well my goodness, we’re worshipping a God of love, so why can’t you ever get to Him?” I always longed to hear that “*Well done, good and faithful servant*”; but I never did hear it. While I sat in the pew at church I heard: “You’re no good. You ought to confess your sins. You ought to try harder.” Oh, I sure did want to hear that “*Well done, good and faithful servant*.” But it looked as though the cheese was always just out of my grasp.

If there’s a theme verse in my life, I guess it’s Galatians 2:20. Recently my first experience with this verse came back to my mind. I remembered that when I got saved as a young man, this was one of the first verses to hit me. I was a pagan in those days. I had no biblical background - didn’t know anything about the Bible. I walked into church one Sunday morning, not caring one thing about God, and walked out in love with Him.

The first thing I did was to buy a new Bible. My mother gave me a Bible when I was about eleven because I joined the church, but this was the first one I bought. Buying new Bibles became a habit in my years as a struggling Christian. Every time I had a new experience with God, I bought a new Bible. I’ve got about thirty of them! But when I got saved I thought I ought to have a new Bible because I had made a new start.

I was working for my father at that time and it was a boring job. He had what we called a “job printing shop.” We did hand bills, letterheads, envelopes, and all kinds of jobs of that nature; and I was supposed to be learning the business. But all I did was stand in the back and watch a press go “clickety click, clickety click, clickety click.” As long as it went “clickety click,” I didn’t have a thing to do but be bored. But if it threw a piece of paper out, or something else went wrong, Then I had to do five minutes work. But

I'd start it up again and watch it go "clickety click." So I read the Bible, and I came across Galatians 2:20. This was just after I became a Christian. In those days I didn't know anything about the Spirit of God within a person being the Teacher. I may have read it, but I didn't know it. So the only thing I knew was to depend on outside sources, mainly people in whom I had confidence. Well, I really loved this man who had become my pastor, and he always had time for me. So I went to see him because I had read Paul's statement that "*I don't live, but Christ lives in me.*" I didn't understand that, so I decided to ask my pastor about it. Whatever his answer was, it didn't quicken me.

The next time I came across the verse was when I had been called to preach. I was at one of the Baptist colleges, because in those days I was a Baptist. (I'm nothing now - just a Christian). The one who had a real influence on me at that time was the Bible professor. Somehow or another Galatians 2:20 came up and I went to him. But again, his answer didn't quicken within me. Later I was at Louisville Baptist Theological Seminary, and while studying New Testament Galatians 2:20 once again struck me. I went to another person whom I loved and trusted, and I asked, "Is that real?" But still there was nothing quickening in his answer.

In 1973 I was outwardly and inwardly "bothered." I praise God for that time. That's the way He got my attention. I didn't have my life together either outwardly or inwardly, and He used that to reach me. It was during this period that I met a man who knew Galatians 2:20 as a living reality. What he had to say had a quickening effect. It became real to me. I saw it for the first time as a possibility, now Paul isn't talking about an ideal situation," I said to myself. "He isn't talking about something I'm going to get when I die.

There are so many things that popular teaching, such as I gave for all those years, pushes on into the future. People talk about, "Oh when I get to that place in the sky, I'll have peace!" What are you going to need it for? "When I get to that place in the sky, I'll have faith!" Again, what are you going to need it for? When You need it is *now*. I found that it was now I was in a desperate situation, didn't you? This is when we need faith, peace, and all of the other fruit of the Spirit.

As I listened to this man unfolding the mystery of "*Christ in You, the hope of glory,*" it was so clear that it was real to him. "*That's what the gospel is all about,*" he said. As a Baptist minister, all that had really grabbed me up to this point was the fact that Christ died for me, and I could trust Jesus for the forgiveness of my sins. That was all I could preach. I had to have three sermons a week, and this was my whole message. I don't mean that I couldn't construct a special sermon for Mother's Day, or a sermon on tithing, or on other topics; but regardless of what my subject was, I'd always get around to the only thing that had so far really grabbed me, which was the blood side of the cross. I really only knew the first five chapters of the book of Romans, and my message was capsulized in Romans 3:25 -justification as a gift of His grace, which is redemption.

Of course, this message left me in a quandary. I was still as self-centered now that I was a saved person as I was when I was a lost person. I was terribly sin-conscious. "Is that the right thing to do, or is this the right thing to do?" "Should I have said this, or should I have said that?" "Lord, forgive me for this, and forgive me for that." And I would repeat the process over and over again, trying to make the right decision, making the wrong one, and then asking forgiveness for my sins.

Every morning I would say something like: "Now, Lord, I want to be a good Christian today, and I don't want to miss a chance to witness if it comes along. I want my language to be clean, my thoughts to be pure, and to live a good life" Then when night came I'd say, "Lord, forgive me for not doing it." If I could get today into the past, I could get it forgiven because the blood had cleansed my sins. But this kept me on a treadmill, and the attention

was always on me. How am I doing? Am I succeeding? Am I failing? Am I really imitating Christ? Is He really my Lord? Am I in His will?

Then I discovered that we don't really get on in the Lord until we can just forget ourselves. Because as long as we are preoccupied with ourselves we really see ourselves as a liability to God. As long as you still have the attention on yourself, imagining that there's still something that needs to be done for your soul, you see yourself as God's liability. "Oh, I can't really do that, because I haven't conquered this yet." "I can't do this because I don't have enough love." "I can't do this because I don't have enough faith." The attention isn't on God in all of this, it's on you! And I think we would all agree that this kind of living doesn't measure up to the biographies of the great believers of God in the Bible. It isn't until I got hold of the reality of Galatians 2:20 that I could take old Dan, put him on the shelf, and forget him. Only then could I begin to say, "I'm not God's liability - I'm God's asset."

I'm not bragging, but the truth is God has got to have Dan! Why? To reach Dan's world. You can't reach my world, and I can't reach your world. God has to have me to reach the world that I come in contact with. So I'm His asset. He has to have a vessel, and He needs the kind of vessel that sees himself as O.K.

I'm fifty-three, and I finally decided when I was fifty years old that if it had taken fifty years for God to get me this way I was going to quit trying to change myself. So I went to my shelves and threw all of those "how to" books away. Because if I don't end up like me, how is God going to reach my world?

If I end up acting like you, then I've lost contact with the world God wants me to reach. He wants my warts - the things that look like my failures -so that His strength can come through. He doesn't want me to try to copy you, and He doesn't want you to try to copy me. He wants you to be you, and He wants you to be satisfied with yourself. Because through you as His asset, His vessel, He is going to touch the world you are in contact with.

Now you don't have to be a missionary for God to do that. My wife Barbara and I thought that we might be called to be missionaries, because Baptists think that way. I was so glad when I passed thirty-five years of age, because I knew that you can't be called as a missionary then! But we are all ministers, in all our different walks of life, and that's the way God means it to be.

Why do I stress that we need to get the attention off ourselves? Because there is so much emphasis on the self in our churches. Crucifying the self, for instance. I don't try to crucify the self; I just try to enjoy the uniqueness of myself! I'm through with crucifying myself. Do you know why? Because I've already died. I died in Christ, didn't you? I've already been buried, haven't you? I've already been raised. And I get excited like Paul and say as he did in Ephesians 2:6 that I've already ascended! Haven't you? We're living the ascended life. So we are acceptable to God.

We are all like fruit trees. All fruit trees aren't apple trees. Some are orange trees, some grapefruit, even lemons and limes. Now I've noticed that everyone doesn't run up and grab an apple when fruit is served to a group. Some like oranges, and some like grapefruit. But if all of the apple trees were trying to be like grapefruit trees, what would people do with all those apples? We are all meant to be just what we are. God isn't trying to change

The key is recognizing that God has actually put His nature into us. I think one of the difficulties people have in believing that Christ already lives in them as a present reality lies in the difficulty they had believing that Satan ever lived in them. Most of us at one time thought of Satan as "out there," so that he just had an influence on us. We really

thought we were independent people, but that Satan could have an influence on us and God could also have an influence on us. But we never really knew that from the time of our birth - from the dawn of the human race, when our first parents took the wrong fruit -we were born with Satan in us. You don't find many people who believe that Mr. Sin, Mr. Phony God, Mr. False Way, Mr. Self indwelt them before their conversion. No, we weren't merely under the influence of evil: Jesus rightly said that we were of our father the devil and fulfilled his lusts from within (John 8:44).

I didn't like to hear that at first, because there were some days of my misspent youth when I wasn't quite so bad. But then it dawned on me that whether I was good or bad, everything I did was from unbelief. Everything was based on self. Finally I saw the folly of the "good and evil" game. You can be just as good as you want to be, but if you're indwelt by the wrong god you are lost! The "good and evil" game still amounts to evil.

In 2 Corinthians 10:16-17 Paul says that we share in not only the blood of Christ, but also the body. We received the benefits of the blood as the necessary sacrifice for sins. But it is the participation in the body that takes care of Mr. Sin - Satan - within us. Paul witnesses to the effect of the body of Christ in his own life, in Galatians 2:20. He teaches it plainly in Romans 6. Paul saw in the death of Christ a spiritual truth that transcends time. He saw that though he wasn't there bodily, he was in Christ on the cross. Whatever Jesus experienced on that cross, he experienced it as Paul (indeed, 2 Corinthians 5 makes it for the whole human race). So he said in 2 Corinthians 5:21 that God made Jesus to be sin. He looked at Him and said, "He is really the sinful human race. I make Him the embodiment of all who are in sin." As a sinner, I was in that body; and what that body experienced, I experienced. So I have already died.

If you are not a Christian, then you are a spirit in prison. If you are a Christian, you are the spirit of a just man made perfect. Spirit is who we really are; it is where we live. Now if I died in Christ, I was also buried, because He was buried. Jesus' opponents went to Pontius Pilate and said, "He's dead, but we hear a rumor that they plan to steal His body and claim He was raised from the dead. Put a seal on that tomb if you will, and guard the tomb, because we're absolutely convinced that He's dead and we want to be sure He stays in there."

But just as surely as Jesus was dead, and I in Him, God raised Him from the dead the third day and I rose with Him. That's why Paul says to walk in newness of life. But this isn't Christ *and* me, or Christ with me. A lot of people get excited about what I preach about "Christ in you, the hope of glory," and they run up to me after a meeting and say, "I've heard that before - I know what you are talking about. I've read Andrew Murray," or something similar. No, no, no! We're not talking about Christ and me, and we're not talking about Christ with me.

We're talking about Christ having replaced Mr. Sin in us so that He now lives His holy, blameless, unreprouvable, perfect life through us. This is a replaced life. It's not Christ and me, or Christ with me, but Christ is me. Not that Christ is Dan, you understand, because I'm just the vessel to contain Him. But He is evidencing His love life, His concerned life, His jealousy for the world - my world - through me. How? As me. What I'm interested in, He's interested in. Where I go to speak, He speaks. Where He takes me, He's there. What I'm doing, He's doing. And the only way He has of doing that in my world is as me.

This is what Paul saw. He said that he filled up the suffering of Christ in his body. He was an extension of Christ. It wasn't Paul living. It looked like Paul - people called him Paul. But it was Christ, the hidden One, living out His concerned life for the world as Paul.

When this dawned on me, I saw the reality of spirit. When God told me I had died, I stopped disagreeing with Him. When God said that He had buried me, I agreed with Him. And when He said that He raised me, I said, "Yep, You raised me." I saw that I was already walking in the heavenlies. I was already participating in the kingdom life.

You have been born again, haven't you? Well then, you can understand the kingdom. The kingdom is spirit, and the realm of the kingdom is within. Christ is the head of that kingdom, and we are the means by which that kingly person manifests His self. Paul described us as ambassadors for the King.

I see myself in so many biblical characters. Take the harlot at the well. She asked where to worship - in Samaria, or in Jerusalem. Which is the right outer place? Which is the right religion? What is the right thing to do? "Well, I'll tell you," Jesus said to her. "The day is coming when you won't worship here, and you won't worship down there. You'll worship *in here*. Because God is not in this place and He's not in that place. He is spirit." This account in John 4 really helped me to get the spotlight off the outer me.

I began to see that God is a world lover. If the God of the new covenant really dwells in me, He will love the world through me. But until that light breaks in on us through the Holy Spirit we still want Him to be a "me" lover. So we run to services looking for blessings. We still say, "Bless me, bless me." But when you see the truth of Christ as your life, the blessing days are over. You are no longer a body-fusser, trying to save your outer skin. They'll say, "Heal Thyself, Physician," to you too. But your glory will be in seeing your life poured out, if necessary to the last drop. Poured out for others. Because that's the world-lover in you. He's not a "me" lover. He loves you because He's got you; He loved you through some other human instrument. But now He's got you, and as He lives in you, you forget about yourself.

From this point on you don't live from need, from shortage, trying to get a blessing. You have total sufficiency in you. There's no shortage in Him. You don't have any more spiritual needs. You've drunk the water and you've eaten the bread. If you have the living water and the living bread within you, you don't get hungry or thirsty anymore. You quit saying, "Lord, give me, give me, give me." It's unbelief! God is your sufficiency, and He lives in you to pour out His life through you for others. This is John 7:37-39. Out of your innermost being flow rivers of living water. To you? No. No wonder some of your prayers aren't answered! God is tired of body-fussers. He's interested in the world - your world, which only you can touch. Now you are broken bread and poured out wine, to be eaten and drunk by others.

When it dawns on you that you truly are the temple of the Holy Spirit, and that He lives and walks in you, you begin to see all life from God's point of view. You are no longer hung up on good and evil as absolutes. You begin to see that the human situation, or what some call the "facts" of life, is nothing but God's necessary prerequisite for His Self-revelation. So you are always looking for God in every situation. As Jesus said, if your eye is single your whole body is full of light. You are full of light because you see only One person operating in all of life's situations. But as long as you are asking, "Is this good? Is this bad?" you are in darkness. To call it God if it looks good, and to say it isn't God if it looks bad, is darkness.

God has met me three times in my life with great truths, and I was in hell all three times! He had to get me into hell before He could show me something about Himself. It's the aggravating situations in life that get our attention. But they are not absolutes. They are merely God's calling-card.

I don't know of one single occasion when Jesus got up off His straw pallet in the morning, stretched, and said, "Oh, I feel so good today, I think I'll do a dozen miracles." But

sometimes that's the way we act. We're going to get up today to do something for someone. He may not ask us to do it, but we're going out to do good deeds. Jesus never did that. He never went out to do a single good deed. The situation of need drew forth the action. If there had never been a need, there would never have been a miracle. There had to be a negative to draw forth the positive. There has to be evil so that we can see God's love for us.

We live in a world full of opposites. But we don't see it like that anymore. We see this world with a single eye. We see only the One person operating in it, the sovereign God. And all situations - particularly the stress ones, the negative ones, the horrible ones - are God's calling-card. "It looks like this," we say, "but wait a minute, because God is coming." And we become people of faith by saying that God is here. He is going to bring forth the supply.

That's what Jesus did, just brought forth the supply. And thank God He isn't here in bodily form today, because He'd have to go to a twenty-four-hour prayer meeting to be able to do it! No, He just said to the sick person, "Let him be well." Or when the crowd was hungry, "Let's sit them down. We're going to feed them." Someone came one day begging, "Oh, Master my servant is sick." Jesus' answer was simply that He'd be glad to come. No sweat. I think He'd be most uncomfortable in most of the prayer meetings we have. If He were the first to leave, I'd be right behind Him! Because He just knew that when the need came forth, the supply was there. It wasn't His supply. "Oh, Me, I can't do anything. I do what I see the Father do." And He was very casual: "Let there be." The same words used by the Word to create the universe.

John in his first letter, the second chapter, called this the "father" level in the Christian life. It's the ascended life. In this level we live as troops in the outer trenches. We are the people who can see what God is doing in the world, and we are privileged to be faith people.

Now I want to say a few words about faith, because I hear a whole lot about having to work up faith. I don't ever try to work up faith. Faith jumps out of me. When God wants me to see something He brings it to my attention. I don't go around trying to take somebody else's burden. Don't come and tell me that so-and-so is sick. If God wanted me to know, He'd tell me Himself. If He told you, it's a pretty good sign He wants you to do something about it. He shows me my mountains, and He'll show you your mountains. And you take a stand on what He shows you. You are not going to hope it's done. It is done. His life jumps out from you. You don't work up faith. It might take you some time to get hold of His thoughts so that you can speak His thoughts, into being, but you don't have to work up faith. God is the One who exists to meet that need, and He is going to explode out of you. "Rivers of living water!"

This means that you will say, "I just don't see that problem there. Yes, it's there - but I see God. God is healing that situation. He is bringing that thing together. He has a job there, and it's already done."

Several years ago when we were first beginning to learn this truth, our son was about twenty-two and he wasn't walking with the Lord. He had a lot of problems, so we just said, "Lord, get on with what You are going to do in His life." Do you know the next thing He did? He put him in jail. Now in the old days I would have said, "Lord, we didn't pray right, because if we had prayed right You would have him down here in the sawdust on his knees." We had told God to get on with His business, but now he was in jail!

Well, women are so wonderful because they get direct messages from God. Sometimes I think God has forgotten my address. I have to walk in blind faith! That night my wife was in bed and God said to her, "Don't call my sanctuary a jail" So we said that what

was happening was perfect, and that our son was right where he had to be. We affirmed that God had already got him. Now, about five years have gone by.

But a few months ago my wife called him on the telephone because we had sold our house and bought another. The house needed painting. This time he stayed on the phone, and he asked questions about us. "I want to paint the house for you," he said. He's been down two times already - almost a 450-mile roundtrip - to paint the house. Before, he lived within three miles of us and didn't come but three times in the whole year. He doesn't yet know that God has got him, and there really are no religious overtones to his visiting. But we were excited for five years when we didn't have one single shred of evidence visible, and now God has given us this little touch of confirmation. We didn't have five years of hand-wringing; we had five years of praising God, watching Him do what He said He had already done.

We need to rediscover the authority of the word. "Thus saith the Lord!" "It is finished!" We tend to be action people, but the Scriptures point us to the authority of the word, and the action comes along at God's good pleasure. So many of us have said that God hasn't done anything until we see the action. But when we see spiritual reality, that puts us on top of situations, and it's an exciting life. So God in me rises up and says, "You say about your son, It is finished!" And that is reality, because spirit is reality, even if he dies never having come home.

We operate as He does in this world. We tell the mountains God has put in our life to be moved. We read in Mark 11:22-24 that faith in God means we do not doubt in our heart. Our emotions may give us a little trouble at times, as can appearances. But at our center is God, and when He in us says it is finished, *it's done*.

This is the life of the intercessor. There are times when God commissions us, as His agents. He puts a mountain before us - a need. Mordecai came to Esther and spoke the word of faith: "We're going to be saved." He asked Esther if she was going to be the intercessor in the situation. When she had God's thoughts, she said she would do it. So she went in and approached a king who hadn't called for her in thirty days. If she walked into his presence without his extending his scepter, she would lose her life, even though she was a queen. But God had commissioned her, and she became an intercessor for her people. It wasn't a religious situation; it was a real-life crisis.

Jesus said that unless a corn of wheat falls into the ground and dies, life cannot come forth. When God commissions you as an intercessor, there is a cost. But when you have counted the cost, you move into the joy of the Lord, the joy set before you in doing it. You see that He is wanting a change in a home, in a community, in a particular situation. Everything else now becomes secondary. Your family, your home, your lands - everything goes into this commission. You pour out your life in the death that has to occur, but you gain what God is after.

The second chapter of Hebrews tells us that Jesus gave His life that He might bring many sons to glory. God wants sons who know what life is all about and who know that the real joy of living is seeing His life being poured through them to reach the world - their world. And that becomes the consuming passion. "The zeal of Your house has eaten me up."

I enjoy my commission of traveling on the road to share this message. People wonder how I can travel as much as I do, but I can't do anything else. This is the joy of the Lord for me. And it's a complete life; there's nothing missing in it. I no longer pitch problems to God. I can give His all to those problems. "*Christ in you, the hope of glory.*" Yes, glory now, just as they saw the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. God intends for others to see the glory of Christ in us. Don't you look for it. It isn't yours to see. It's for someone else to see, and those God means to see it as they cross your path will see it. Those who

are hurting are going to see Him - the sinners, the harlots, and the publicans. To the rest, He looked like Beelzebub. But to those who were desperate, the light of God was on His face. You know Christ is pouring His life through you, so take it by faith that it's so and others will see Him. And they'll be drawn to the One who is in you, thinking they have been drawn to you. But you know it isn't you, it's Him.

Don't change yourself, or they couldn't be drawn to you. Don't call yourself a liability, because you are God's beautiful asset. And don't be so concerned about sin-consciousness; instead be consumed with godliness. "Set your mind on the things above, where Christ is, seated on the right hand of God; for you are dead, and your life is hidden with God in Christ." Get on with the glory of life, because Paul said that He has not only justified you, He has glorified you.