

The Secret of Being

by Bill Volkman

“Not that I speak from want; for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity: in any and every circumstance I HAVE LEARNED THE SECRET OF BEING filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need” (Phil. 4:11-12).

The recent suicide of Freddie Prinze shocked the professionals of television as well as millions of viewers of *Chico and the Man*. Why would someone who had everything going for him take his own life? Freddie’s peers could not understand, because they knew that in just a couple of years Freddie had risen right to the top as a recognized, accepted TV personality and comedian. His countless fans saw his death as tragic, because most could not conceive of how a person with “everything” would want to choose to lose it all by one rash decision. If you have youth, health, professional success, financial security, and devoted friends, what more would you want? Would Freddie’s less-than-successful marriage of two years alone be enough to cause a man to commit suicide?

Speculation about Freddie Prinze’s death will continue as long as he is remembered, but I rather doubt that the investigators, family and friends will ever come up with a satisfactory answer. Probably the only acceptable reason will be the current explanation: “*temporary insanity due to excessive dosage of drugs over an extended period of time.*” Freddie’s psychiatrist verified that he had been taking “uppers” and “downers” in amounts five times the recommended dosage. Apparently only drugs had been enabling him to handle temporarily his meteoric rise to TV stardom.

Freddie’s inability to cope with fame and fortune is not unique. In sports, in business, in the professions, and in every other field of endeavor, we have all seen people who have worked hard to become successful, but who have had to work even harder to stay successful. What does a golfer do for an encore after he wins a major title? What does an employee do after he becomes president of his company? What does a doctor do after he earns a reputation in his community? Getting to the top is great, but staying there is something else. The “struggle of attainment” is always exchanged for the “struggle of continued performance.”

Christians seem to get caught up in the same vicious circle in their quest for “spirituality.” Even if they find the answer (salvation), their quest does not end, because then they struggle to find the key to perfection (sanctification). Performance-oriented man has always asked, “What must I *do* to be saved?” Even when he is told, “*Only believe*” (grace) he responds, “OK, I believe, now what can I *do* to show everyone that I appreciate the gift of eternal life?” Man has a hard time understanding unconditional love and spontaneous being.

Why is it that personal inner rest and well-being seems to elude mostly everyone? Why is it that “born-again,” “Spirit-filled” Christians frequently manifest just as much inner turmoil and anxiety (and even commit suicide) as those who have made no spiritual commitment? What is the secret of contentment that so few realize? What is the key to “*the secret of being*” which Paul had learned that enabled him to be content in every circumstance?

From Paul’s familiar quotation in Philippians 4:11-12 it is obvious that the key lies in responding equally to contrasting situations and circumstances. Paul was equally content with poverty and prosperity. This was only possible because he saw God in all things.

The secret is to see prosperity *in* poverty, good *in* evil, light *in* darkness; it is to see God in both sides of any pair of opposites. "*Darkness and light are alike to You*" (Ps. 139:12). If you see either side of opposites as outside of God, you are still taking of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. People and circumstances will never be "God's perfect expression" as long as we lament that things are not better, or rejoice because a particular expression is not worse. Be anxious for nothing (no thing)! The secret of contentment is to see that all things are as God means them to be. We are to know nothing of any contrast and comparison that excludes God's Presence. God must be seen as in all. Only then have we attained a maturity that has replaced "doing" with "being."

Paul says, "*The mature ... discern good and evil*" (Heb. 5:14). This mature discernment must be distinguished from the immature "*taking of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.*" The latter always results in death, because there is a focus of condemnation and separation rather than that of acceptance and oneness. "*But from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day you eat from it you shall surely die*" (Gen. 2:17). For example, look at the deaths of every kind that have resulted through the years because of color prejudice. If we do not accept others as equal, our focus of condemnation and separation as to those of a different color is bound to manifest itself in death.

What then does Paul mean when he says that the mature discern good and evil? In the first place, the mature know that neither good nor evil will affect their union with Christ and His body. All good *and* evil is intended to be.

Do you believe that *all* things work together for good, or only those things that have the appearance of conceptual good? At some point we must see that *all* circumstances are God in perfect love action for the redemptive good of all concerned. We must come to see that though we recognize conceptual good and evil, neither good nor evil can affect that eternal spirit-fact of oneness. Because of our union with God, nothing evil can separate us from the love of God, and nothing good can bring us any closer to God. Negative appearances and feelings are no less His will than positive appearances and feelings.

In the second place, the mature discern good and evil when inner acceptance based on union replaces self-condemnation and judgment of others in negative situations. Jesus illustrates this in the episode of the woman taken in the very act of adultery (definitely an evil, wrongful, sinful act). His words were, "*Neither do I condemn you; go your way; from now on sin no more*" (John 8:11). The fact that He did not condemn her past actions does not imply that He was ignoring the evil or denying its reality in both the temporal and eternal dimensions of life. The law of "*whatsoever a man sows he reaps*" is just as applicable to a Christian as to a non-Christian. But Christ saw that evil had served a good purpose in her life.

Both good and evil appearances have a redemptive purpose in our lives. Joseph saw this, so he told his brothers, "You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good" (Gen. 50:20). To see God in all things does not mean we deny the reality of evil, wrong, sin, hell, sickness, or the negative. But in maturity we see them all with the same single eye as we do their positive counterpart.

The opportunities for daily death are not limited to negative situations of obvious evil. The secret of life-through-death is seeing ourselves as one with God in the good as well as in the evil, in success as well as in failure, in health as well as in sickness. Face the truth that positive circumstances of life can tempt us into the illusion of separation as readily as negative circumstances. Feelings of independence and separation from God seem to be quite natural during

periods of success, health, and apparent “good.” Most of us tend to experience more consciousness of His presence in negative situations, such as financial pressure, sickness and death. Can you see that good and health and victory can be imposters as much as evil and sickness and defeat?

Paul had learned the secret of life. He was content in every circumstance because he had come to the awareness that we live in a One-power universe. He saw that life was knowing the secret of “being.” He knew that Reality can elude us as readily in a circumstance of prosperity as in a circumstance of poverty.

A quotation of Rudyard Kipling that someone sent me recently was the catalyst that finally brought me to the beginnings of seeing good and evil with a single eye:

If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster and treat these two imposters the same,

...

Yours is the earth and everything that's in it.

(From Rudyard Kipling's poem, "If")

Our growth in awareness is labelled by the apostle John as little children, young men and fathers (1 John 2:12-14). Another way to label this growth of consciousness is from relative to positive to universal. As spiritual children we see everything on a relative basis - good or evil, right or wrong, health or sickness, positive or negative. As we grow in our spiritual awareness, we begin to see that because of our inheritance in Christ we have all things. But we wrongly assume that God epitomizes only the good, health, positive, and evinces prosperity and the victory. Our wrong assumption leads us to conclude that “another power” is responsible for the evil, sickness, and poverty, and that that power is the epitome of negativism and defeatism. So we mistakenly involve ourselves with the God of good against a god of evil - the God of the positive versus a god of the negative - instead of seeing the devil and evil as tools God uses.

How we praise God when appearances of victory, prosperity, healings and blessings ensue. But condemnation, regret, guilt and judgment result when the manifestations and appearances are negative. This is because negative manifestations still spell defeat to us. For example, when a cancer is healed or arrested, we sense that God's power is on us; but when the victim dies, we privately wonder who didn't have enough faith or what secret “how to” must still be learned.

Few transcend this wonderful second state of seeing God as only the Positive. But even this perspective ultimately brings frustration, because it is still a separated viewpoint. There can be no fixed inner rest until we see God *in all*, and ourselves as one with Him. Positive swallows negative, not because of positive outward manifestations and appearances of change, but because we see God in action in negative appearances as well as in positive appearances. We see God in sickness as well as in health. We capitalize Sickness, Poverty, and Evil, as well as Health, Prosperity, and Good, because we see God as not only working in all circumstances, but actually being just as much a God of the negative as of the positive; in fact, a fixed union consciousness has only taken place when we see God as the all. Only then have we learned the secret of life - God in action in all things.

The key to the transition from relative to positive, as well as from positive to universal, is simply acknowledgment - our acknowledgment of His presence in all things. Whether or not

you verbalize it to yourself or others is immaterial, though many profit greatly by their conscious articulation of the truth of God's involvement in all things.

It begins as we learn to praise Him in all situations, even those we cannot understand or rationally justify. The recent flood of PTL (Praise the Lord) books, led by the popular Merlin Carothers' books, has been a wonderful confirming witness to millions. But somehow most of us cannot initially handle the truth that God actually determines negative evil as well as positive good. We prefer to protect His character by saying He only "allows" or "permits" evil, sickness and wrong. Because our outlook is still partially dualistic, we first find it necessary to at tribute evil to another power, as we fail to understand that both "evil" and "good" are only relative terms, relative to our personal concept of what is comfortable or best for us.

What is the catalyst that finally brings us to that greater awareness and that fixes our consciousness as to His presence in all things? Adversity. Yes, adversity! Man's extremity has always been God's opportunity. As we come to see the redemptive purpose of all adversity, we are finally released to see that God determines the evil as well as the good. We finally see that God is eternally involved in universal redemptive action.

Now can you see why Paul was a spiritual giant? In weakness he was made strong, but in strength he was also made weak. He had learned the secret of being filled *and* of going hungry — of prosperity and of poverty. He knew God was in either appearance, so he could rejoice and give thanks in *all* things. His perspective had matured from relative, to positive, to universal. He was one with the Universal One in all things.