

## Living “As Gods” Without Denying Our Humanity

by Bill Volkman

It is common for young men and women to suffer a period of anxiety as they try to sort out what to *do* with their lives. Most people are not satisfied with just any old job or activity. They long for a sense of vocation: perhaps a career, or child-rearing, or some other consuming interest. A vocation provides a professional identity with which we feel confident to move ahead.

Of course our profession is only one aspect of our lives, and a worldly aspect at that. Far more important and life-directing is our deeper identity. What’s on the inside, past all the externals of job, age, and marital status? Who are we at bottom?

We can avoid the question by majoring on the superficial—by worrying overmuch about our looks, our profession, and so forth. But in that case we are likely to be bored, and we will certainly be boring. Unless we can manage to turn off our minds altogether, the fundamental question of our essential identity is bound to haunt us and be a source of discontent.

Who are we really? If we can answer that question, we will be ready to take on all that life has to offer. Jesus gave all of us the answer when He said quite bluntly to the Pharisees: “*You are gods.*” He said this because He knew that all humans are incarnations—either of the god of this world or the God of heaven, the spirit of error or the Spirit of Truth.

That’s why Jesus could say, in effect, to the Pharisees, “Don’t you know you are gods? Because all men have been exposed to the word of God—to the light and Spirit of Christ—you are all responsible for your actions.” Because His perfect life was an offense to them, these religious leaders were preparing to stone the only begotten Son of God. They didn’t understand that in a very real sense everyone is either a son of God or a son of Satan. No one can be both. We are either of our father, the devil, or of our Father in heaven. That is why the inner struggle of good versus evil—the two-nature, Jekyll-Hyde syndrome—is illusory, based as it is on a fallacy. We do not and cannot have two natures. In our union we partake of the *one* nature within us.

If we have been born again, we know that replacement has occurred, so that the god of this world is out and the Spirit of God is in. Who are we now? Nothing less than incarnations of the living God! Now we can live *as God*. What I’m getting at is this: it’s not only Christ *in* you but Christ *as* you.

Because of our religious training, most of us are hesitant to say that we are gods or expressions of Deity, much less to call ourselves “I AM,” even though we may recognize the union of our spirit with the Spirit of Christ. But I am convinced that without unqualified affirmations of all these statements, we will never move experientially from being begging and ineffectual “children of God” to being “gods”—we will never know ourselves to be “saviors” to our world.

When Moses was first commissioned by God to lead the Israelites out of Egypt, he objected. His first question was, “*Who am I, that I should bring the sons of Israel out of Egypt?*” (Ex. 3:11). There’s that ultimate question again: *Who am I?*

At that point—remember, the mystery of Christ within was still substantially hidden—God merely answered, “*I will be with you.*” But several chapters later we see God has something for Moses far beyond just being “with” him. God says, “*I will make thee a god to Pharaoh*” (Ex. 7:1, King James Version). Interestingly, *The New American Standard Bible* translates it this way: “*See, I make you as God to Pharaoh.*”

But Moses was still not convinced, so he said to God, “*Who shall I say sent me?*” God’s answer was, “*Tell them that I AM has sent you to them.*” I AM sounds like a strange name at first, but upon examination we see that it’s the perfect name for God. For God is unlimited All and in all—He is “being” personified. This is why we stress *being* yourself. In our union with Christ we must see ourselves as one with I AM—we must be totally convinced that we can live and operate *as Christ* to our world.

Examine some of the other greats of the Bible. Even before the mystery had been fully revealed in Jesus Christ, what set apart God’s enlightened men in the Old Testament was their recognition of their call to act *as God*.

It was Elijah—speaking as God—who boldly told wicked King Ahab, “*There shall be neither dew nor rain these years, except by my word*” (1 Kings 17:1). It was not until three years later, after all the 850 false prophets were slain, that Elijah announced to King Ahab the coming of rain. In this episode and in many others, Elijah acted *as God* to his contemporaries.

In the New Testament we see the same recognition. Certainly Jesus knew He was operating *as God*. That’s why He was always saying, “I,” “I,” “I”: “I am the light of the world.” “I am the bread of life.” “I am the vine.” Knowing union, He could say that when anyone saw Him they saw the Father, though He was obviously the Son.

Peter did not hem and haw about “being used by God”; he said, “Such as I have give I thee” (Acts 3:6, KJ). On the same basis, the Apostle John could say, “*As He is, so also are we in this world*” (1 John 4:17). Notice: it doesn’t say “as He was,” but “as He is.” We are meant to be present “Christ” to our world.

Doesn’t saying we operate *as God* and *as Christ* put too much emphasis on us and take away glory from the God who will not share His glory with another? No! We never forget that He is the Vine and that we are the branches; that He is the Living Water and that we are the containers. There is forever the paradox of two being one, and vice versa.

Though we talk of oneness, inherent in the word *union* is the concept of two becoming one. In plumbing, a *union* is a fitting that links together the ends of two pipes. In marriage, two become one flesh and, hopefully, also a unified soul and spirit. We never seek to ignore, dissolve, or bridge-over the eternal distinction between God and man, any more than we would deny the two separate pipes joined by a union, or the two individuals joined in a marriage.

But we do believe that it is high time for Christians to rise up and see themselves as fully-equipped, holy sons of God. The sin-consciousness, the self-condemnation, and the self-belittling so prevalent in evangelical circles today needs to be replaced by a new recognition of our full inheritance in Christ. We must move from living a frustrated Romans Seven existence to the liberation of Romans Eight, and then on to the out-poured life of Romans Nine to Fifteen. This only comes as we are fixed in our awareness of replacement and union.

With this recognition will come *the wink of faith*. Weak as we are in the flesh, we never forget that we are to operate *as gods*. Strong as we are in spirit, we never forget that we are only containers and expressors of God. So we ever live with a wink: a wink of knowing who we are; a wink that realizes that apart from Him we can do nothing; a wink that knows “we have this treasure in earthen vessels.” That’s why Paul could say, “*I can do all things [wink] through Him who strengthens me*” (Phil. 4:13). He knew who the real Paul was—Christ, as uniquely expressed in His Paul form.

Because of the wink of faith we are not in the least bit shaken by those who label us as pantheists. We know we are not God, or even a part of Him, in the ultimate sense. When we say we operate as God to our world, we *wink*. We know that we are only containers and expressions of Deity, even though we can also say that we are one with Deity.

But if we say we are one with Deity, doesn't this mean that we are pantheists? No. A true pantheist is one who sees God as a "thing" or as "everything." All of the unredeemed are pantheists, because they worship some "thing" as their god, be it their own fallen selves, or some earthly god or even their religion. They worship a created form rather than the One who is "All in all."

The most we can be accused of is that we are panentheists ("pan," everything—"en," in—"theist," God). We don't equate God with the forms; rather, we see God in all forms of creation. Because God is Spirit, He can only be manifested by those forms. Though we say that we are manifested forms of God, we never confuse the form with the Reality—we never confuse the earthen vessel with the Treasure within. The duality always exists.

In maturity, we see the merger into unity of every form of individuality; yet we see no loss of individuality. Each drop of water is one with the ocean of which it is part, yet it remains individual in expression. Though in union "it is no longer I who live, but Christ," yet, Galatians 2:20 goes on to say, "*but the life I now live in the flesh I ....*" Your individual humanity is not lost in the sea which is God.

In spite of the glorious fact of union and unity, He is the Eternal Positive and we the eternal negative. But that's not cause to feel disheartened! We are *meant* to be humanly weak, for it is exactly in that moment that we will express the Eternal Positive to our local world.