

Just Be Yourself

by Norman Grubb

Nothing dogs our footsteps more in our Christian living than our constant sense of condemnation. We are such failures, we are such weaklings, we are so tip and down, we are so cowardly, we are so fruitless, and so on, and so on. We are quick to downgrade ourselves as useless, and are fond of saying that we are more of a hindrance to God than a help, so rebellious, so disobedient, and that if God uses us at all, it is in spite of us. In fact our troubles are often not the things we do or don't do, but that dragging feeling that no matter what we do somehow we are of no use, and that we always make such a mess of things. Or it is merely the heavy feeling: we don't feel bright, we don't feel loving, we don't feel spiritual; but we do feel out of touch, dull, dry, and tongue-tied.

This is why it is so vital to understand how to accept ourselves. Let us get it straight again. The major point is that it is He who accepts us, and He who chose us. If it depended alone on our choosing Him, we might continually hold back, for how could we know He would accept such as us? But He chose us—unconditionally. *"You have not chosen me, but I have chosen you."* He chooses us exactly as we are, with every facet of our humanity. We may well laugh at the strangeness of His choices, but that is no business of ours. We had better get busy choosing ourselves, since He has already chosen us. To accept Him and not accept those He accepts (that includes us!) is an insult to God.

In fact, we need a thorough spring-cleaning of the condemning, guilty ideas about our human natures which are ingrained in most of us. That is why the wide openness of today, though it shocks many because of its abuses, is actually much healthier and much nearer the truth than the hush-hush of past generations. And no book can be more baldly open than the Bible.

There is not a single reaction that we can have as humans, not a single response of our bodies, minds, emotions, and imaginations, which is intrinsically wrong. Let us drag such things to the surface and, instead of condemning the instincts or reactions, examine how their misuse can be replaced by right use. The negative approach is to say that a thing is wrong, so you should conceal it if you can. The positive is to face it and see that it is God's purpose to use that very tendency as a channel for His outgoing goodness.

Many use the word *repentance* in the sense of admitting, confessing and forsaking sin. But it merely means "change of mind." It can, therefore, also have a positive direction; it can mean that, instead of only shame and humiliation for various human tendencies and habits, we dare to accept that they can be part of God's armory in our human make-up for manifesting Him and ministering to others.

The foundation of such a positive attitude must be, first, that we recognize that we have a right to full acceptance of ourselves. We can do that when we have seen that our human nature has not been Mild is not the source of either good or evil. We cannot understand the human race until we see that we have always been the containers of a god. *"Greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world,"* as John wrote, *"and hereby we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error."* And Paul, in Romans, says that we all are slaves to a master and owner, either the sin spirit or the Holy Spirit.

In union with Christ we recognize every good thing as solely He in us: *"The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace . . ."*, *"Jesus Christ is made unto us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification . . ."* Equally, in the former union with the devil, every evil thing was the fruit of the devil, every evil thing was the fruit of the evil spirit: *"You are of your father the devil and the lusts of your father you will do"; "He that commits sin is of the devil . . . for this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil."*

Redemption, therefore, has released us from our former task-master and joined us to our new Lord. The old man has become the new man. It is the same man (human) in both relationships, but the old lord has been substituted by a new one. Realizing this, we can accept ourselves. Every single thing about our human nature is now for God-manifestation; and where we still have difficulty with aspects of our humanity, it is not for us to despise ourselves, but to inquire how these same aspects can now be harnessed for new uses.

Let us also remember that the Accuser of the brethren is a compulsive liar; one of his favorite tactics is to make us appear in our own eyes as a distorted, disgusting caricature of what we are in others' eyes. How should we respond? We always return to the fact that God has chosen us exactly as we are; if He is satisfied to do that, we can be satisfied. He has far more pleasure than sorrow over His children. And when we are told to fear the judgment seat of Christ, let us remember what Paul said in 1 Corinthians 4:5—that every man shall then have, not rebuke and punishment, but "*praise of God.*"

So replace the waves of condemnation with boldness of faith. Long ago I learned that "the voice of the stranger" depresses, downgrades, darkens; whereas "the voice of the Shepherd" is always gentle, uplifting, healing. Discern between soul and spirit. The soul, the seat of the emotions and reason, is variable and can convey variable impressions to us, lowering as much as elevating; but we live behind the outer covering of soul, where our spirit is joined to His Spirit. There the relationship is invariable. There He is in all His sufficiency, no matter how the outer storms may blow, or how much we may "feel" that we are poor representatives of Him.

That we do deviate on occasion can be understood when we remember that slaves, though slaves, always retain their fundamental freedom. (The word translated "servant" in the original text of Romans Six, in which Paul speaks of our relationship to the Master, should more properly be translated "slave"). Our humanity was the captive of the god of self-centeredness, "the spirit of error." We were his slaves, and as slaves we were his property and we did his work and obeyed his orders. But even a slave is still free by nature. Therefore, because we all have our being in God, we knew, in limited ways, what we should be and we expressed Our freedom by having some religion and doing some good works; but we were still slaves to the Spirit of error. Our life was still identified with our master's and our destiny was in his hands. We were like slave in an old Roman household, who did his master's job all day, but at night when his master was away, he would express his own indestructible freedom by slipping out and doing whatever he wanted.

But now, we freely give ourselves to our new Master—the Spirit of truth—who conquered the old one by His death and resurrection. We have exercised our freedom to become His slaves, do His work, and now we are identified with Him. Nevertheless, because we are forever free, we can and do listen at times to the enticing voice of the old master and do some of the things we used to do and should not do, expressing our freedom downward, even as in the old relationship we expressed it upward when we did something righteous. But slaves are slaves, and back we come in shame and confession to find forgiveness and to continue our life with our new Lord.

So unredeemed men sometimes do good things while still remaining unredeemed, and redeemed men do bad things, though remaining redeemed. But just as an unredeemed man cannot continually live the new life because the wrong seed is in him (as John wrote) so the redeemed man cannot live the old life—he "*cannot continually commit sin*"—because "*he is born of God and His seed remains in him.*"

In our freedom we have found the law of our being in God and we have made our fixed choice in attaching ourselves to Him. Our freedom now expresses all its potential within the limits of its new alignment. However, being always free in this mixed world of good

and evil, we can and do temporarily respond to outward enticements to the old, wrong way. But they do not reach our center, where as slaves to God, He holds us fast and pulls us back to where we belong.

This is Paul's teaching in Romans Six: we have freely exchanged the old slavery for the new. In Romans Eight, we live in the liberation of our new life; though at times, we forget our new relationship in Christ and are enticed back into some form of self-indulgence (Romans 7). When this happens we find the Law awaiting us with its perennial challenge of "*Thou shalt not ...*" to independent self. While back in our illusory independent self, we are condemned and guilty, but we are helpless to resist our self-love (since self cannot expel self) until we see our foolishness and return to where we belong.

So now as liberated humans, as true and purified humans with all our human potential, we live our normal human lives, and our living is God living in us. The Bible says that we have pure hearts, pure minds and pure souls, the word "pure" meaning "unmixed." We *were* unmixedly slaves to the god of this world—though in our freedom occasionally doing good things; and *now* we are unmixedly slaves to Christ—though in our freedom occasionally doing bad things.

Christianity is not a religion or denomination. It is not just people gathering for worship in special places at special times. It is not just a doctrine or theology or ritual. It is people being ordinary people, God living in human flesh. We rediscover a secular God in the home, the store, the office, on the roads and at the desk. God is to be found as a common person in common people. No one was more common than Jesus.

"*Is not this the carpenter?*" they asked. "*There is no beauty that we should desire Him,*" said the prophet. Yet those who had anointed eyes said, "*We behold His glory as of the only begotten Son of God, full of grace and truth.*" So God is seen in common men. This is the height to which humanity can scale.

We live our normal lives. That is the will and plan of God. We do not find the will of God, we *are* the will of God. Our acceptance of ourselves starts there. That means accepting our background, our upbringing, our years maybe of the life of a prodigal, the wounds we received in an unhappy or broken home, the lack of education, our physical disabilities and the unjust dealings and wrongs committed against us. Paul said it when he wrote: "When it pleased God who separated me from my mother's womb and called me by His grace, to reveal His Son in me." He did not say that God's hand started to be on him on the road to Damascus, but at his birth and through all the years of his self-righteousness, culminating in his leadership in the persecution of the Church. So we boldly say that, as part of an eternal destiny, all that has happened to us has been God's ways of molding us.

So we live, relaxed, being ourselves—housewife, business or professional person, white collar or blue collar worker, student or executive. All we are we put into our vocation—energy, application, creativity, and team work.

We are not afraid of using our minds and wills on the daily decisions of our lives. There are times when we can lift up our hearts in a flash of faith or inquiry; there are multitudes of occasions when we just decide and act, taking it as fact that "*we have the mind of Christ.*" We live as fully emancipated human beings, which we are, running our own affairs: we ourselves know and are conscious of a kind of envelopment of light within, the inner subconscious presence like the flowing of an underground stream.

This is the "I, yet not I" life, in its simplicity, singleness, and liberating self-activity. This is man in action, which is God in action.