

License

by Dan Stone

Does the union life emphasis upon “spirit as ultimate reality” encourage license? Directly or indirectly this question is asked of me more than any other.

My first response is the same as Paul’s: “*Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? May it never be!*” (Rom. 6:15). My second response is that I prefer to label as “growing pains” that which others call license. Some might prefer to say that what looks like license is God’s unique way of working His truth into our inner consciousness. At any rate, this subject certainly needs further clarification, for to many observers union life teaching appears at times to encourage license.

When people first hear union life or spirit teaching, they tend to express the only point of view available to them. Because they are entrenched in a dualistic outlook, they just naturally translate what they hear as an encouragement to sin. Society trains us to be objective persons (see-at-ers) who distrust the unseen, the spiritual, or the metaphysical. We are the products of the educational system in which we grew up. Unfortunately, that system has taught us to judge by outer appearances, even though Jesus expressly warned against it. “*Judge not according to appearance, but judge righteous judgment*” (John 7:24).

In addition, society has dictated certain standards of conduct for each peer group. These standards are enforced by a reward system which we might call the law of rewards. Each peer group extends or withholds favors to its members based upon their conduct. The system is totally based upon performance, on outer actions. Since the system is the dispenser of approval and rewards, persons governed by that system are led to believe that the system is inherently sacred. From such a belief these persons naturally but erroneously conclude that spiritual maturity, begun in grace, can somehow be completed in works. Of course, union life teaching intrudes as an unwelcomed contradiction to the law of rewards.

Another error emerging from our compliance with the law of rewards is the ridiculous notion that we can somehow repay God for His redemptive work. We are led down the path of “*commitment to Christ,*” of “*consecrated self,*” and of a myriad other designations for the same dead-end. We become enmeshed in the Romans seven syndrome of attempting to do good, but we seldom attain the desired inner consciousness of satisfaction. Our attempts to discipline ourselves or refrain from doing “wrong” end with equally disappointing results. The only way our frustration can ever be appeased is by comparing our meager actions with someone else’s failure; or by excusing our failure in the light of another’s grosser wrong. We find comfort in measuring ourselves by our intentions and others by their actions. That approach gives us an outside possibility of overcoming the Romans seven syndrome.

To those who hear union life teaching and know they have heard truth, the “*eyes of the heart*” (Eph. 1:18) have been enlightened. They have taken the Spirit’s bait. They differ now in their inner consciousness, for they are becoming “see-throughers” rather than “see-at-ers.”

Though the Spirit is beginning His work in the inner man, the new see-through-er does not yet live from a fixed inner consciousness. He vacillates between a new awareness of his fixed union with God and an old consciousness of separation from God. But in the process his perspective on life is moving from the level of what is visible to the level of the invisible, which is spirit.

During this period of vacillation, some spectators will inevitably conclude that the believer has fallen into license if his conduct fails to conform to the acceptable pattern of the peer group. This license may take the form of smoking, social drinking, swearing, using make-up, being divorced, an unacceptable sexual practice, or a hundred other activities. The spectators are even more appalled when the believer now takes these deviations not as gross license, but as God's intended path for him!

What is happening? The believer is moving into a fixed inner consciousness by personally experiencing and acknowledging the Spirit's work in his humanity. I am the first to admit that many who hear union life teaching initially interpret it as a green light for increased permissiveness. Some people need to experience a total overthrow of their old standards. But in time they will put aside promiscuous activities, for they will realize that those outer crutches offer nothing more than a new bondage.

This process will appear as license to those who only perceive reality on the performance level. However, what is needed at this juncture is not condemnation, but a patient awareness that God is at work producing a fixed inner consciousness in each believer.

As the inner consciousness becomes his fixed consciousness, the see-through-er discovers in himself the full identity of the One he contains - his "*not I but Christ*" spirit. Colossians 2:9,10 says, "*For in Him [Christ] all the fullness of deity dwells in bodily form, and in Him you have come to fullness of life.*" Since all the fullness of deity dwells in Christ, and Christ dwells in the believer, the fullness of deity (at least qualitatively) dwells in each believer.

Union life trusts the Spirit to woo and illumine each individual to the awareness of his true position in Christ. We know that God uses alternatives in this matter-life to cause us to know Him, to act, or to do whatever He desires from us at the moment. God means us to have the results of our actions. But these results have the purpose of leading us into a fixed inner consciousness of oneness. Admittedly, some actions appear to plunge the person into further fires of purification. However, these experiences are personal and private, and we dare not judge by unrighteous judgment what God is doing in another's life. To do so is to tread on holy ground.

We must see that life's actions are designed to purge a person from dualistic living - from separate seeing, from separated choices. These fires of purification drive him to see all outer conduct as the work of the Spirit.

The home-base for the see-through-er is the awareness of his own life as an expression of God, the other-lover. This position knows no reward system for good conduct. This path results in a death for us, and in life for others. "*So death works in us and life in you*" (2 Cor. 4:12). Paul also calls it a weakness (2 Cor. 12:5,9,10). No one seeks this type of "death"; it is thrust upon him. It is the life for which God has been preparing him. It is summed up in the statement, "*a body have you prepared for me*" (Heb. 10:15). Temporary excursions into what objective persons call license is but a chapter in the preparation for throne living.

Again, the principle is not life unto life, but death unto life for others. "*Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone, but if it dies, it bears much fruit*" (John 12:24). Life for others comes spontaneously as the container (the person) becomes fixed in his real reason for being. Jesus said, "*He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it*" (Matt. 10:39).

Remember my earlier statement, "*The work of the Holy Spirit for each person is private and personal.*" The work of the Spirit is to transfer one's perspective from temporary appearances to spirit-reality. He is transferring us into the fixed inner consciousness that the spirit realm is the realm of ultimate reality. As a form of Christ, the see-through-er

exists for others. The see-through-er has moved from seeing temporary, outer appearances as reality to seeing permanent, inner spirit-reality.

We need not be side-tracked by the seeming inconsistency of outer conduct, for in the spirit realm God has produced the finished product. Outer conduct is never the yardstick for Holy Spirit persons whose inner consciousness is fixed on the permanent reality. Jesus' own outer conduct was a puzzle to the religious community of His day. Most of them rejected Him. Union life persons know themselves to be available to God for His purposes, even in the apparent inconsistencies.

Union life does not encourage license. However, it does see through the temporary outer events of our lives to the inner working of the Holy Spirit. This teaching accepts as the work of the Spirit what some may call license. It speaks the word of faith: "*For it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His own good pleasure*" (Phil. 2:13).