

## **Be Yourself** *by Richard Zenith*

“Be yourself” is a central aspect in the whole concept of what I would like to call “unity life” (rather than “union life”). When we realize our unity with Christ, we begin to see ourselves as forms of Christ, as other-lovers. Then we simply live and be ourselves, for it is not ourselves but Christ in us.

But the phrase “be yourself” is also a central aspect of today’s generally godless humanism and psychology. For all the problems of tenseness, guilt, feelings of inferiority, indecisiveness, pressures, and so on down the line, the world’s philosophy has frequently sounded the cry: “Be yourself”. And so when I sound the same cry to my Christian friends who are uptight with themselves and dissatisfied with their lives, there is a natural reaction against what seems to be a worldly philosophy that excludes the need of Christ. “No!” they say. “What does ‘being yourself’ have to do with Christ? I don’t want to be myself; I want to be like Christ.”

“Be yourself” may be a philosophy of many who deny Christ, as well as a philosophy that is impossible to follow without faith in Jesus Christ! In order to be myself I must first discover *who* my real self is, and this I cannot do without Christ.

Most people have a totally wrong idea of Who their real self is. A person looks at his personality, his likes and dislikes, his moods and feelings, his physical appearance — and he says: “*This is me*”. But is it? While all these characteristics may be unique to that person, they are nonetheless very changeable characteristics. A person’s personality and physical appearance never stop developing as he grows older. Likes and dislikes and feelings change from day to day. I know a woman who is; now eighty-seven and quite senile. I remember ten years ago when this friend had a strong and definite personality; but I have watched it deteriorate to the point where it is almost Impossible to hold a coherent conversation with her. All her outer characteristics have faded away. Who is my friend? What is her true self?

Someone will say: “*What about your talents? Don’t they remain the same?*” No, talents do not remain the same either, though I will admit that there is a greater sense of permanency about our talents than our personality. But talents are only a means to expressing my real self; talents in themselves cannot define who I am. I have a musical talent, but I can’t “be myself” by “*being* musical”. Now I may practice and perform music, but that is only an *action*, an *expression* of Who I am. If by “be yourself” a humanist means “develop your talents, follow your heart, go after your goals”, then It is no longer a philosophy of being but a philosophy of *doing*. “*Go out and do something to become someone*”. But to strive to change myself is a direct contradiction of being who I am. To be myself requires that I am already perfectly satisfied with myself.

Personality, talents, past experiences, and feelings are all outer characteristics and cannot define who we are as persons. “Be yourself” Is a popular phrase, but the truth is that man does not really know who he is. That is why everyone is so busy conforming to standards. Everyone needs something to hold onto; everyone is seeking some way to assert himself and to give himself an identity. The standard of many is the typical American dream — a wife, two kids, a nice house, hard work and \$20,000 a year. Others conform to a standard which rejected the American dream — ragged jeans, pot-smoking, “take it easy”. Everyone has to have an image so that he can say, “This is me”.

For three years as a believer in Jesus Christ, I was conforming to the standards of what a “good Christian” is supposed to be, but I had not discovered who I am. I read ten to twenty chapters of the Bible each day; I prayed for at least one hour a day; I went out street witnessing twice a week; and I attended several fellowships. All this activity did bear some fruit. I led a number of people to Christ and disciplined them as well. However, after these three years, I began to realize that something was still very wrong, that all my activities were merely an outer display which had not been motivated by other-love. I began to see that my outer man (personality, feelings, and so forth) was not the real me, but only the container of my true self, the inner man.

Every single action that a man performs is motivated by love — either self-love or other-love. As a result of the Fall, the spirit of man is a spirit of self-love. Take any area of life, and you will see that self-love is the reigning force. It is quite apparent that most Americans live by the golden rule — “*do unto others as you would have them do unto you*”. It’s a great system. I give you a compliment so that you’ll give me one back. I put up with your idiosyncrasies so that you’ll put up with mine. I send you a birthday card with hope that you’ll send me one. The golden rule makes life more pleasant and, besides, it gives us a feeling of doing the right thing — all from a very selfish motivation.

To be sure there is a human love which can be very passionate and lead a person to great sacrifice for another, yet human love is so vacillating. People “love” each other so intensely that they spend all their time together, think nothing of hopping right into bed because it’s a “meaningful relationship”, and yet after six months they no longer are speaking to each other. Is this love? Human love is very possessive (*my* girlfriend) and, as a result, very jealous; it tends to care more about the friendship than the friend.

Made in the image of God, man has the inner witness of conscience which says that he *ought* to love others, and yet man seldom admits that he loves only himself. He works for charity, has good manners, smiles, and says polite things — not so much to convince others but to convince himself that he loves. One of man’s favorite games is “Playing the Martyr”. Someone says something or does something which he finds irritating. He feels that this person is treating him unfairly or discourteously. But will he say anything? No! He’ll play the martyr and let himself be walked on, while inside he will seethe with an anger that multiplies as he meditates on what a horrible injustice the other person has committed. He smiles politely; in his heart he is killing the person.

So man’s life is a paradox between an outward appearance that he loves others and the inward truth that he loves only himself. Though this paradox leads to temporary frustration and despair, here’s the wonderful fact: all of this is part of God’s perfect plan! Paul wrote in Romans 8:20, “*For the creation was subjected to futility*”. Though we lack the *power* to love, God gives us the knowledge that we *ought* to love. Thus we find ourselves in a place of need, which causes us to seek the answer. This, in turn, leads us to Christ, in whom we become “*children of God*”, with an inheritance of glorious freedom. We are free at last to be ourselves!

For when we meet Jesus Christ, a glorious thing happens. In Christ, self-seeking love is replaced by the spirit of self-giving love. “*God’s love has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us*”. Now it is no longer we loving, but Christ loving through and in us, for He is one spirit with us (1 Cor. 6:7). Christ is our love, our patience, our goodness, our peace, and our faith. We no longer labor according to our own strength but according to the power which works within us (Col. 1:29), and Christ is that power. Christ is the Son, we are sons. He is the Light, we are lights. He is the Lover, we are lovers. For as He

is, so also are we in this world (1 John 4:17). We are seated in Christ at the right hand of God (Eph. 2:4-6), blessed with every spiritual blessing (Eph. 1:3), for He has called us spirits of righteous men made perfect (Heb. 12:23). Could we desire to be any other place than in this glorious Oneness with our Lord?

All of this I received in Christ, yet for three years I was blind and had no familiarity with these riches of the glory of His inheritance and greatness of His power toward us who believe (Eph. 1:18-19). Many are living in Satan's illusion that God has nothing to do with them and that they make all their own decisions with God having no part. Others of us have believed God and are no longer blind. We see that we *are* in Him and that He has always been working in our lives, bringing us to Himself. We came to a point where we realized the futility of our own efforts to put meaning and fulfillment into our lives, and we accepted Christ's forgiveness and salvation which He accomplished 2000 years ago.

But just as there are those who do not accept His finished redemption, there are those Christians who do not accept His finished sanctification. Satan had me believing in the ghost of my old self. I was striving to conform my outward actions to, the perfect man which Christ described in the Sermon on the Mount, but the old-man ghost would not leave me alone. Of course I could not get anywhere in my fight, for the fight was already won, the old man was already dead. Still I kept fighting.

How perfect again are His ways. Just as God brought about frustration in my life to cause me to seek and find Christ, so again as a Christian He used frustration to show me the futility of all my own efforts, When I had my fill of trying, I finally let go. I let go of my arrogance which presumed that I could become like Jesus. I saw that I was only a vessel and that I would never be anything more.

The light began to dawn, I am forever the nothing. I am he who is not, Christ is He who is; I am the eternal negative, He the eternal positive. But then there is this glorious fact of unity. He is the vine and I am the branch, though it is one tree. The Holy Spirit is inseparably joined to my spirit, so I can not only say that He loves through me, but I can also truly say that *I love*. I had believed that Christ would live my life *if I cooperated* with Him. "No! No! No!" said the Lord. "Get the idea out of your mind that you can ever do anything to help or cooperate with Me. I, who am for others, have *replaced* your self-centered old man". Finally I heard Him. Now I stand on the fact of our unity not that I become Christ, but that He comes to be me, to live His life through me. Standing on this fact, I do nothing but live. I don't try to be loving. I just be myself, for now I know who I am, I know that I am love because I am a form of Christ.

Some honest Christian will say, "Oh really? Well, you certainly don't seem very loving at times. It all sounds good on paper, but what about living it?" But I pay no attention to the outer. I live by the Spirit. When I find myself apparently hating someone, I say to the Lord: "I feel very hateful toward so-and-so because of this-and-this, but I know that You are limitless Love and I know that You are the real me". So be Yourself through me, and He does come through! I find myself loving. You ask: "But what If you still find yourself hating a person?" I don't worry about it! It's God's business, not mine. I will believe truth and let God take care of the outward manifestation.

After fifteen years of being a self-loving person, I have naturally developed very negative outward reactions and feelings (hates, envies, fears and so forth), and they will never change. The outer man is decaying (2 Cor. 4:16); but God is not concerned about it, because we are spirit people (Heb. 12:9). Instead, I praise God for all my negative reactions. They are a

friendly reminder to me that I am only a vessel — Christ is the living water. If I had only positive reactions, if I never got angry or felt unloving or depressed, then I could not relate to other people. I could not empathize with any of their depressions or problems. Because I experience all the common human frustrations and get angry and upset, other people see that I am no different than they are. But then they see God's strength through my weakness; they see that love coming through — a love with no strings attached, and they say, "Oh Richard has problems just as we do. But look at this love coming through. Richard's nothing, so where is this love coming from? Could this be God?" So, people are drawn to Love, and God is glorified.

What is the outcome? In Christ we are free — free from our outer feelings, free from past condemnations, free from all the "I should's" in life, free from all the standards of society and religion, free from the slavery of self-love. We have entered the glory of the children of God. We have reached the top and yet there is no top, for we travel from glory to glory, until at last we shall see Him face to face. We are perfect! Perfect in our spirits which are nothing but love, and perfect in our outer negatives, because we no longer live in the outer negatives. We live in the spirit. We are free — not to sin, but to be love, for that is who we are. Sin is no longer an issue. We occasionally slip (or even blow out), but we need not bother ourselves about it, for He uses even our slip-ups to accomplish good. Be yourself and you will not be able to contain the flood. The Living Water will break through the dam of unbelief, and all life that you touch will be drenched with Love unmeasured.