

Two Levels of Canaan Living

by Bill Volkman

"I will not drive them out before you in a single year . . . I will drive them out before you little by little, until you become fruitful and take possession of the land . . . and [then] you will drive them out before you" (Exodus 23:29-31).

Even casual students of the Bible are aware of some of the parallels between the journey of the Old Testament Israelites from Egypt to the Promised Land and the experiences of New Testament Christians in their pilgrimage to spiritual rest and maturity. Many of us have gone through comparable, long wilderness journeys in our quest for peace and victory, though we may not realize it. I was almost fifty years old when I finally recognized my own life's parallel to the journey of the Israelite nation from Egypt through the wilderness to Canaan.

As an adult Sunday School teacher in a Baptist church, I frequently discussed the forty-year wandering of God's chosen people. You will remember that it took the more than a million Hebrews no more than nine months to travel from Egypt to the outskirts of the Promised Land (Canaan), but their lack of faith prevented them from going in. Of the twelve spies sent to check out the land, only Caleb and Joshua said, *"Let's go in; we can do it."* The other spies could only talk about the frightening giants they had seen.

So the Israelites had to endure thirty-nine more years of wandering in the wilderness, learning that faith says, "I can," even when circumstances seem insurmountable. As my Sunday School class discussed the unbelief of the Israelites, I would always say something sarcastic like this: "After all the miracles that God had performed in Egypt and on the trip to Canaan, I don't see how they could have been so 'dumb' as to doubt that God would help them conquer the Promised Land."

You can imagine how chagrined I was in 1975 to realize that my own lack of faith had caused me to endure not just forty, but forty-two years in the "wilderness." I had been, "dumber" than the Israelites! I had finally entered into the rest that comes when one arrives at a fixed awareness of union with the resurrected Christ, but it had taken over forty-two years of detours and misuses.

Before you laugh too loudly at the Israelites or at me for our slowness in learning to trust God, ask yourself if you know the inner rest that belongs to those who have entered the "promised land." If that's where you are, great. Then let me present a second challenge to you: Now that you are in Canaan, are you experiencing your *full* potential as an operating son of God?

If you have entered your spiritual "promised land," you have learned that the promised rest is inner, not outer. The human battles, the frustrations, the temptations and the tensions of everyday life do not suddenly end nor handily fade away. If anything, they become more common and more intense. There are enemies in this new land that must be dealt with. How are we to be *"more than conquerors"* in this new land we live in?

In Exodus 23:29-31, God promises the children of Israel that *He* will drive the enemies out of their land little by little, but He also speaks of a future day when *they* will fight with authority and *they* will drive out the enemies. *"I will drive them out . . . you will drive them out."* There are two levels of Canaan living. In the first, we are containers who merely watch God in action. In the second level, we have matured into full persons who act on God's behalf as His ambassadors. Are you a *spectator* or an *agent*? Are you waiting for God to take care of all the enemies and "mountains" in your life while you just watch, or are you handling life as a whole person? The verses from Exodus indicate to me that we should

anticipate the day when we finally “*become fruitful and take possession of the land.*” At that point, *God* will deliver the inhabitants of the land into our hand, but we will drive the enemy out before us. The day is to come when we are to “take charge” of our lives—with a wink, of course, knowing that He is our life.

Please don’t get me wrong. When I write of “taking charge” of our lives, I’m not recommending self-effort or willpower. No amount of determining, praying or fighting gives more than temporary results. I’m talking about what Richard Foster labels as “disciplined grace” in his book, *Celebration of Discipline*. Though discipline alone is useless, and though righteousness is the product of grace alone, we are not forever relegated to waiting on God to transform us. When we have not only head-knowledge, but spirit-knowledge of our union with Christ, we can practice the disciplines of the spiritual life which will put us in the position for God’s grace to flow more spontaneously through us. This is the way of *disciplined grace*, a happy union of man’s free choice and God’s unmerited favor.

The point to remember is that we are never alone; we are never left to fend for ourselves. The real us is always Christ in us as us—we operating as re-expressions of God in our special forms. We are meant to always operate from an awareness of inner union, knowing it is foolish to see God as distant from us, and doubly foolish to operate as an independent self.

In the early days of the Exodus, at the time of the Red Sea crisis, Moses received a special lesson on what it means to operate as a unique expression of God. Just days after leaving Egypt, the children of Israel were confronted with an impossible choice: attempt crossing the Red Sea ahead of them, or be killed by the Egyptian armies which were bearing down on them from behind. The people’s reaction was typical—they blamed their leader. “*Didn’t we tell you to leave us alone? It would have been better for us to remain in bondage to the Egyptians than die here in the wilderness*” (see Ex. 14:11,12).

Moses, in turn, looked to his Leader for help. He apparently cried out to God for help at the same time that he was reassuring the people: “*Don’t fear. Stand by and watch God fight for you.*”

But God wanted to do something in this situation that was more important than the miraculous deliverance of a million plus people; He wanted to illustrate to Moses, and all generations of people after him, the principle of man operating as God. So God said to Moses:

“Why are you crying out to me? Tell the sons of Israel to go forward. And as for you, lift up your staff and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it, and the sons of Israel shall go through the midst of the sea on dry land. And as for me. . . .” (Exodus 14:15-17).

God was not content to put on another show for the benefit of Moses and the Israelites. God wanted Moses to graduate to full personhood, to live as a bold expression of the One he knew face to face. For us, the challenge of full personhood, based on our inner union with the Divine, is all the more meaningful and possible (thanks to Pentecost), and our exploits should be all the more significant and miraculous.

The two phrases, “*And as for you [Moses]*” and “*As for me,*” which start verses sixteen and seventeen, make it clear that God will sovereignly and independently take care of His part in any situation. But Moses was to exercise his faith by telling the Israelites to move ahead, and by authoritatively lifting up his staff to divide the waters. Clearly the results were not because of any independent power on the part of Moses, but because of God’s power through Moses. And yet, it is not quite correct to say it was all God’s doing. The results

were the dynamic outcome of a lived-out faith in Moses based on a consciousness of God operating through him.

How does all this apply to us today? First, we can see that the promised land of inheritance and rest is not a Utopia devoid of enemies, problems and temptations. Secondly, the experiential victory— what theologians call “sanctification” is a *process*, not a one-time event. And thirdly, our transformation is little by little, initially by *God’s* sovereign action, and later, as we realize the possibilities because of our union in Christ, by *our* words and *our* actions of faith.

In the first level of Canaan living, we live in the truth of only the first part of Galatians 2:20, “*It is no longer I, but Christ . . .*” We see ourselves as containers of Life, but have not yet moved to the full personhood, fatherhood level of Christian understanding and experience referred to by the second part of Galatians 2:20, “*and the life I now live, I . . .*” At this second level of awareness, we are so fixed in our union that we are comfortable with the continuing paradox of having the Treasure in an earthen vessel. We are containers and spectators of God’s working, but we are also agents who know the power that flows from a fixed union with the Divine.

In that day we can speak words of faith on our behalf as well as for others. We now understand the mature application of Philippians 4:13, “*I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.*” When the day comes that we really *know* Him who was from the beginning, when we *know* the fruitfulness of our union, and when we know the fuller implications of a present-day possession of the land, then we will drive out the enemy. Then we will take authoritative, creative action just as Moses did.

Our experience of moving from the first level of Canaan living—as mere spectators—to the second level of full personhood will be comparable to Moses’ Red Sea experience. The time will come when the still, small voice will say to us, “Why are you crying out to *Me* about this situation? *You* do something about it. Say, in faith, ‘This mountain be removed,’ and it will be done.” As we respond to the situation with authoritative words of faith, the mountain *will* be removed.

Let’s apply all this to the specific area of overcoming “bad” habits—like smoking, over-eating and swearing. Which of us has not lived under condemnation again and again because of failed attempts to change something in our lives that we see as either sinful or unhealthy? Much to our dismay, all of our resolutions seem to prove ineffectual in the hour of temptation. Since our efforts at change and self-improvement don’t work, all we can do is cry out to God for help and wait for Him to do something miraculous in us.

The Question Box and various articles in *Union Life* periodically address this issue of changing bad habits. Here is one of our typical responses (as applied to the smoking habit):

Cease responding to life by fussing about past defeats and failures at self-improvement. Instead of resisting the temptation to smoke, accept them as temptations and replace them by affirming and knowing Christ in you as you. Don’t try to change yourself or stop smoking. Simply say, “Christ, You in me will do the stopping in Your way and time.” If then, the habit grabs you again and you smoke, don’t take condemnation, but again reaffirm that He is the real you, and that He will easily and naturally cut off the smoking in His own way and time.

(Taken from, “What about the Smoking Habit,” by Norman P Grubb in the September, 1979, issue of *Union Life*.)

Even though the above advice seems on its face to be irresponsible to some readers of our magazine, it is the only *effective* advice that can be given to those who still see themselves either as independent selves who *should* change, or as only “spectators” of God at work.

All they can do is wait for God to handle the enemy for them a little at a time, for they are still on the first level of Canaan living. Since most of our readers are at this level, our magazine generally responds to their questions about changing habits in the way indicated above.

But when the fixed awareness of our union finally takes us, we will operate as God by creative words of faith. The application of all this to the area of change in habits is obvious. No longer do we wait for God to suddenly bring about a desired change for us in His own way and time. By faith, we call into being that which does not exist.

In the awareness of our union we have come to recognize our full personhood. We know it is not just I, nor is it just Christ—it is I living as Christ. This is the fatherhood level of life—the second level of Canaan living.