

A DECISION MADE FOR GOD,
THROUGH CHRIST, IS NOT, IN
ITSELF, A DECISION TO ALSO RISE
OUT OF THE TENACIOUS BONDS OF
THE EARTH. REDEMPTION IS NOT
SANCTIFICATION; JUSTIFICATION IS
NOT HOLINESS.

Rising Toward the Bright Sweetness



*A Love Affair with
the Familiar*



The entrance of Jesus into a life has several immediate effects: permanent residency of the Holy Spirit; adoption into the family of God, with a new Father (God the Father), and brother (Jesus Christ); membership into the church universal, the Body of Christ; and acquisition of a new eternal home (heaven). These things and more occur immediately and automatically when we accept Jesus as savior.

Other aspects of life in Christ, however, are not automatic, nor are they immediate.

So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.

Philippians 2:12-13

In the moment of our rebirth, God justifies us and, in one sense (as in “set apart”), sanctifies us. But in a second sense, sanctification is an ongoing, maturing process that gradually—sometimes painfully—changes us into the likeness of our Savior. It is a holy occupation that is conducted while in the flesh, thus is imperfect, and grossly inefficient. The journey of sanctification is, ultimately, a very human process.

Playing Church

Most believers have only a pale vision of the rich, deeply colored tapestry that God has planned for their life. Many Christians are either ignorant of the existence of the higher life—or have consciously decided to avoid it. Man and woman have so filled their built-in longing with other things, there is little room left for the one for whom it was created. As the landlord of his person, man has filled the rooms of his life with the accoutrements of a lower plane: corporate ambition, physical pleasure, acquisition of wealth, and the warm glow of human relationships. But in those who already know Christ, that longing can also be filled with an insidious roomer known as “religion.”

If anyone thinks himself to be religious, and yet does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this man's religion is worthless. Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.

James 1:26-27

Religion removed from its pristine state, as practiced by believers the world over, has degenerated into the activity of “playing church.” We so busy ourselves with the activity that is expected of a Christian, that we have separated ourselves from the Spiritual engine meant to drive it. Here is a partial list of real weekly activities taken from the newsletter of a modestly large evangelical church:

Monday - EFL & Citizenship classes
Monday - Deacon Board meeting
Tuesday - EFL & Citizenship classes
Tuesday - Spanish Class
Tuesday - G & H Circle
Wednesday - New Bible Study in Spanish
Wednesday - Supper
Sunday - Sanctity of Human Life
Sunday - Growing Kids God's Way
Sunday - Deaconess meeting

Add to this all the other committee meetings, all the various choir and ensemble practices, play rehearsals, nursery and greeter assignments, visitation, and, oh yes, worship. Soon the local church presents a rosy, contented, self-satisfied picture of busy activity “for the Lord”—but, curiously, the Lord Himself is nowhere to be found.

The fault lies—as is so often the case—not with the activities themselves, or even their calendar-stuffing number, but with the pervasive philosophy they can represent, that busyness equals nearness to God. It is appropriate for the leadership in a church to create opportunities for the saints to use their gifts in service to the Lord. The one gifted with financial expertise should be involved in balancing the church's checkbook; the one gifted to help children grow into adults should indeed be involved with the youth group. But service is not synonymous with holy communion, and potluck dinners are not synonymous with worship.

The Higher Life

The plain truth is that man has always had a love affair with the familiar, the comfortable, the seen. God then comes in and says, *“I want you to have a relationship with Me—but it will be based not on flesh, but on spirit. I want you to love Me—but you may not look upon Me. It will be a love affair of faith, not sight.”* And His demands make us uneasy, for we are people of the earth, people of flesh, and many of us are uncomfortable with even our *own* spirit—much less His.

So we cling to what we know: doing, rather than being. It is far easier to join a committee, or serve coffee at the social, than to have an intimate relationship with an invisible God. And, as a result, our faith becomes root-bound—not rooted and grounded in the love of Christ, but rooted into the familiar soil from which we came, and thus firmly anchored in the plane He is inviting us to leave. The higher life begins with understanding that a foot in the door is not the same as dwelling inside; buying a ticket for entrance through the Pearly Gates is not the same as living a life comfortable with what is inside.



The work of God is not finished in the heart and life of the new believer when the first act of inward adjustment has given him a sense of cleansing and forgiveness, peace and rest for the first time in his life!

The Spirit would go on from there to bring the total life into harmony with that blissful “center.” This is wrought in the believer by the Word of God and prayer and discipline and suffering. It could be done by a short course in things spiritual if we were more pliable, less self-willed and stubborn; but it usually takes some time before we learn the hard lessons of faith and obedience sufficiently well to permit the work to be done in us with anything near to perfection.

A.W. Tozer

(Next week: *Adaptation Over Immutability*)