

His Burden Is Light

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All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise noted, are from the King James Version. Italics for emphasis are ours.

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INTRODUCTION

When a person receives Christ as his personal Savior, he receives a brand-new life filled with promises of joy unspeakable and a peace that passes understanding. Yet, many Christians are not enjoying that new life. They find it difficult to accept their perfection in Christ as the absolute truth about themselves, and their lives are characterized by a feeble spirit of helplessness and hopelessness. When confronted with the truth of their human depravity in the light of divine perfection, they try desperately to cover up with fig leaves (Genesis 3:7). They fail to recognize the continual cleansing power of the Blood that covers all their sins.

Just as we expect our children to grow physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually, God also desires His children to grow in grace (2 Peter 3:18). Many people have been wounded by personal failure, by others, or by legalism, which is perhaps the most destructive force in

the Church today. The wounds lodge deep within their subconscious and unconscious minds (Jeremiah 4:14*b*), stunting their spiritual growth.

When the Holy Spirit convicts of an area of personal sin, we are apt to react in our emotions to the truth, blaming people and circumstances. It is time that we address this dilemma with a balanced approach to what the Scriptures say about living the Christian life. The title of this booklet expresses what most Christians would like to confess but do not dare because they fear what others might think of them. The truth is, Christ's yoke is easy, and His burden is light.

My prayer is that as you read this booklet, a great weight will be lifted off your shoulders so you can finally have fun living the Christian life. As you yoke up with Jesus, you will find rest for your soul and discover that His burden is light.

Chapter One

THE PROBLEM OF LEARNED BEHAVIOR

“All the words which the LORD hath said will we do” (Exodus 24:3*b*).

“As many as desire to make a fair shew in the flesh, they constrain you to be circumcised; only lest they should suffer persecution for the cross of Christ” (Galatians 6:12).

Exodus 24:3 records the words of a sincere people who not only had a desire to keep God’s commandments but also felt that they had the power to keep them. Yet, they would soon realize that their good intentions were nothing more than a fair show in the flesh—men in their best state but without the power of God (Psalm 39:5).

Christians today enter into a similar struggle to do what is “right”—what they feel that God and others expect of them. Always occupied with a need to change, they run to every seminar they can find, hoping that *this* will finally be

the one that changes them. They listen to radio programs that are widely accepted, and though some of them are good, many of those programs are not biblically mature because they fail to communicate the transforming power of God.

These Christians are victims of “self-help” programs. Though they study, memorize, and quote Scripture, they live in what I call “learned behavior.” They are unaware of the subtle attack on their lives.

If we live in learned behavior, we try to conform to an outward pattern of behavior without experiencing the transforming power of the Word of God and the Holy Spirit in our inner-man. God did not save us so we could learn how to behave better. We may be able to learn how to behave better in our Adam nature, but that does not glorify Christ, and it does not change us inwardly. At best, we become educated to “do better”.

If you go into any Christian bookstore today, you will find plenty of self-help books—*How to...* or *Ten Steps to....* Of course, if you fail at step seven, you have to go back to step one. That, friends, is not biblical teaching. All it amounts to is trying to be spiritual. You cannot solve your problems nor change your ways sim-

ply by learning how to behave differently.

Over the years I have counseled hundreds of believers. I have walked with them, read their letters, and talked with them on the phone. I know they love God, and the best they know how they try to apply the Scriptures to their lives. But often, what they are really saying is, "I'm going to change. I am going to learn how to do it."

Self-help seminars are extremely popular in Christian circles today. But herein lies the problem. Often, the focus of the whole seminar is on improving behavior. The seminar speaker may begin by teaching the man to be a good husband, or by teaching the woman how to submit to her husband. He will ask questions such as, "Do you spend time together? Do you communicate? Do you spend enough time with your children?" Certainly these issues are important, but spending more time together is not the solution to the real problems in relationships.

At the end of the session, people will rededicate their life to Christ and make new commitments to their spouse. Sadly, these people will face great frustration in the days ahead, because they will discover that no one can change his flesh. It has never happened before, and it is not

about to happen this time. Still, Christians keep going to the altar. They know how to “put on their best face” and they are sincere about changing. They even go away thinking they have changed, but the seminar only succeeded in getting their attention on what they should do and how to behave better toward each other. It did not change their hearts.

Christians do not need another seminar to teach them how to behave better. Indeed, God can and does do a deep work through seminars. The problem is not the seminar but the approach that is taken at the seminar. Too often, instead of being transformed by the power of the Living God, too often people are being told to conform to a standard that even God doesn’t expect them to live up to.

In the home, we expect a lot from our children. We teach them how to behave properly, which is good. But they have the same old sin nature inside of them that we have carried with us for years. When they do something wrong, they hear from us in a hundred different ways how they should change. We say, “This is what you should do,” or “You won’t do that again will you?” And they answer “no,” fearing the consequences if they fail to comply.

See if the following scenarios sound familiar:

Johnny comes home from school with a note from the teacher. It seems he misbehaved again in class. So you ask him, "Why did you do that today, Johnny?"

"I don't know," he replies.

You say, "You do know it was wrong, don't you?"

"Yes."

"What are you going to do about it?"

"I'm going to change."

The truth is, Johnny is not going to change.

A teenage girl who struggles with rebellion goes to Christian youth camp. She returns home after one week, seemingly a different girl. She kisses her mother on the cheek and whispers, "Mom, will you forgive me for how I have treated you? I am so sorry." But after being back in her familiar environment for a few days, she is back to her old self. She won't pray or read her Bible. Her mother tries to talk to her, but she does not want to be bothered.

We must face the fact that we cannot teach young people how to be spiritual. Yes, we need to teach them the Word of God and impart proper spiritual and moral values. Many times, however, we do to our children the same thing

the seminar leader does to adults—we address their outward behavior while their inner-man languishes. In a sincere effort to please us, children may put on a fair show in the flesh. For a season, they become like models of perfection. Yet, though they may be acting much better, they are still not spiritual.

“I’ll Do Better”

God’s plan for us has never been that we would “do better” by striving in our flesh. The Word of God says that even if we do our best, it is altogether vanity (see Psalm 39:5b). He does not want us to do our best; He wants us to receive His best through an exchanged life in Jesus Christ. We grow in the grace of God’s eternal purpose, not because of anything we do to get better, but because we are under grace (see Romans 6:14; 2 Timothy 1:9).

Anxious to see God’s promise fulfilled, Abraham had sex with Sarah’s handmaid, Hagar, and Ishmael the “wild man” was conceived. According to Genesis 16 and 21, Abraham and Sarah had to live in the same house with Hagar. Later, after the promised son, Isaac, was born, they had to put up with Ishmael’s mocking rebellious spirit.

No one gets out of a terrible situation like that by trying to “do better” or by learning how to behave. Someone could have said to Abraham, “Don’t look at Hagar! And don’t blame Sarah, even if it was her suggestion in the first place. What you did was wrong.” But that would not do a single thing to change Abraham or the situation. He already knew that what he did was wrong. Similarly, we may “know” a lot of the things we do are wrong, and we “know” that we shouldn’t do them. But just knowing doesn’t change us.

Apastor cannot teach his people to be moral. He can give them definition from the Scriptures, but once the congregation has definition, it requires a personal response to God to make a man or woman moral, having God’s righteousness as his experience. No one should try to make it happen by striving in the flesh.

I hear Christians say, “Oh, that message really spoke to me.” But when they try to implement it, they fall flat on their face. What is the problem? They were sincerely trying to change their outward behavior based on the letter of the message they heard without receiving it in their human spirit through the transforming power of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:4-5).

The truth is, we will go crazy trying to change. If it has not worked for the last ten or twenty years, then why would it work today? We may be sincere, but in our effort to change, we are also very cunning. We quote a few Scriptures hoping that this time, by God's grace, our sincerity will be a little more sincere. Oh, we have such good feelings at first when we start performing for God! We think, "I'm doing so much better now."

But a few days later you turn on the television and see something you shouldn't see and your flesh is stimulated. Your brokenness was only the sincerity of your flesh deceiving you into thinking you could do better.

Consider a Christian who tries to get victory over jealousy. He confesses that he doesn't want to be jealous, and he tries hard in his flesh to stop being jealous. He buys a book in his local Christian bookstore on getting victory over jealousy. He talks to his best friend about his problem.

Do you think he will ever be able to *learn* not to be jealous? Of course not! And he should not even try. He should just look in the mirror, have a big laugh and say, "That's me. And that is going to be me forever, unless I do it God's

way.”

We do not have to remain the same in Adam forever. Yet, we have the potential to stay that way for the rest of our lives unless we choose the options God gives us to be changed. If we refuse God’s options, we will always struggle with man’s options.

The Option of Self-Analysis

The first option a man has in himself is self-analysis. The natural man has a propensity to look within himself to discover what is wrong. This is self-analysis. Not one verse in the Bible tells us to analyze ourselves. To be honest, most of us already know what we are like. Proverbs 18:2 says, “A fool hath no delight in understanding, but that his heart may discover itself.” But the Word of God has already told us what the human heart is like: “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?” (Jeremiah 17:9). You may have been a Christian for thirty years, but if you walk in your flesh on any given day, you will discover that “Adam”—your old sin nature—has not changed one bit in those years. In fact, he is probably worse, because he is more educated. You can analyze him all you want, but he will

not change.

If you think your sin nature has changed, then wait until someone says something to insult you and you get offended. Wait until your best friend acts weird around you with no explanation and see how it affects you. You will discover that you have not really changed at all. Adam has just learned to cover up how he feels and what he is really like. You modify your behavior for a while, but when you fail, you still feel guilty and shameful. Why? Because Adam is a condemned man (see John 3:18, 5:24).

The Option of Legalism

The second option offered to men who want to change themselves is legalism. The Word of God, however, says that legalism is a dead end: "The letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life" (2 Corinthians 3:6b). "It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing; the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit and they are life" (John 6:63).

In an effort to change and do better, many Christians find themselves under the spirit of legalism. They are trying to live the Christian life in the energy of the flesh, trying to "live up" to the letter of the Word of God. It legislates man-

made standards that others must conform to. This does away entirely with grace, unconditional love, and personal communion with God.

Legalism has done more to kill the spirit of Christianity than any movement or false doctrine. Many people mistake legalism for holiness. But legalism has nothing to do with true holiness. Legalistic Christians only pretend to be spiritual while failing to see that in their experience, they cannot even begin to live up to their own standards. Though they may be saved and sincere in their efforts, they are caught in the trap of legalism without even knowing it.

In God's eyes, a legalistic Christian is no better off than a prostitute, because neither one of them knows God. Actually, the prostitute probably has a better chance of getting to know God. At least she knows in her heart that she is doing wrong, but the legalist thinks he already knows God!

The Option of Relative Righteousness

"Wilt thou condemn me, that thou mayest be righteous?" (Job 40:8b).

"For we dare not make ourselves of the number, or compare ourselves with some that commend themselves: but they measuring them-

selves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise" (2 Corinthians 10:12).

These verses speak of relative or comparative righteousness—measuring others against our own man-made standards. All of us have done this at one time or another, even if it was in ignorance. Maybe we were frustrated with our own efforts to change or to live up to our own concepts of Christianity. In an attempt to divert our attention from our own shortcomings, we evaluated others, exalting ourselves above them. This attitude is revealed in our dealings with people in the church, at home, or on the job. We might say, "That's not how you do that!" or "What are you doing that for?" Even though that person may be doing something the wrong way, the spirit we approach them with reveals that we are living in relative righteousness.

Sometimes, an entire church will not have anything to do with another Bible-believing church because of a spirit of relative righteousness. One group thinks they are better or more spiritual than the other. From God's divine viewpoint, He sees both groups as the same. One is not better than the other. Some may have learned how to behave better than the others,

but that doesn't make them better. At the Cross, we all stand in an even place (see Psalm 26:12). Furthermore, each one stands or falls before God (Romans 14:4). The only difference in a particular group is how they operate as one new man (Ephesians 2:15).

It is impossible to have any kind of change in our lives apart from the work of the Cross today. We could cry about our failures and make a new commitment every night of the week. But that would not change us. We could live in religious austerity, separated unto ourselves with a "holier than thou" attitude. But that would not make us any better. We might be able to abstain from certain sins for a season, but the change would not be lasting. After coming to the end of ourselves, we will cry out, as so many who have gone before us, "I can't live the Christian life!" And do you know? They are right.

Chapter Two

I CAN'T LIVE
THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

"O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps" (Jeremiah 10:23).

"Who is sufficient for these things?" (2 Corinthians 2:16b).

"Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God" (2 Corinthians 3:5).

"For they do not know how to do right" (Amos 3:10a, Amplified Translation).

These verses all communicate one basic truth: We cannot live the Christian life, regardless of how much we "know" how to live it. Only God in a man can live the Christian life.

The apostle Paul had a revelation of this when he wrote, "Not I, but Christ liveth in me," in Galatians 2:20. Peter thought he could live the Christian life. He made a bold confession of it in

Luke 22:33—"Lord, I am ready to go with thee, both into prison, and to death." In Matthew 26:33, he said to Jesus, "Though all men shall be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended."

Again, in John 13:37, Peter said, "Lord, why cannot I follow thee now? I will lay down my life my life for thy sake." Yet, before the night was over, Peter denied the Lord three times. Twice he said, "I know not the man" (Matthew 26:72, 74). Why did Peter's confession change so quickly under pressure? The answer is simple. The way of a man is not in himself. The way of a man may seem right in his own eyes, but the Lord proves his heart (Proverbs 21:2).

A Revelation of Wretchedness

Peter did not yet understand the truth that was revealed to the apostle Paul in Romans 7:18. "I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not." Paul went on to say, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" (Romans 7:24). Moses felt the same way when he said to God, "Let me not see my wretchedness" (Numbers 11:15b).

All of us have sensed our own wretchedness. Paul did not say, “O wretched man that I was before I got saved.” He said, “O wretched man that I am.” Where does this sense of our own wretchedness come from? It comes from something that is innately a part of us all, something that is God’s enemy. It is the old sin nature we call “Adam.” Adam does not just *have* problems; he *is* the problem. According to Isaiah 1:5-6, Adam’s whole head is sick and his whole heart is faint. There is no soundness in him. He is filled with wounds, bruises, and putrifying sores.

Adam is incurable. Jeremiah 30:12-13 tells us that his bruises are incurable and there is no healing medicine for his condition. “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked [(sick unto death)]: who can know it?” (Jeremiah 17:9). No one knows his own heart. God says that *my* heart is deceitful—not just my neighbor’s heart. God is talking to me. Therefore, we need a pastor-teacher who speaks the truth in love. We need true friends in the Body of Christ, because sometimes we do not know when we may be off in an area, and a true friend will not compromise with truth to maintain oneness if they see us going astray in an area.

In Jeremiah 2:23, God addressed the nation of Israel, asking them, "How canst thou say, I am not polluted, I have not gone after Balaam?" None of us can deny that we are polluted, or that we have followed after other gods. Job 14:4 says, "Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? Not one." No wonder Ecclesiastes 5:2 says to let our words on earth be few! We do not know our own hearts. Deuteronomy 29:19 speaks of a man who "blesses himself in his heart, saying, I shall have peace, though I walk in the imagination of mine heart." Our hearts can deceive us into thinking everything is okay while we continue to walk in our own imaginations.

In Luke 18:9-14, Jesus spoke a parable to those who "trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others." This is the ultimate in the depravity and deception of the heart. This is the spirit behind legalism and relative righteousness. Here was a group of Pharisees who lived and spoke as if their hearts were not deceitful. They trusted in themselves. They thought that the way was in them, and they believed that they could direct their own steps.

At one time in his life, Paul felt this way too. Writing the book of Philippians from prison, he recalled his past:

“Though I might also have confidence in the flesh. If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more:

“Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee;

“Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless” (Philippians 3:4-6).

That illustrates the deception of the human heart.

But Paul’s present confession as he wrote this epistle was triumphant: “For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh” (Philippians 3:3).

God’s Indictment on the Human Race

“As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one:

“There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God.

“They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one.”

“Their throat is an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of

asps is under their lips:

“Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness:

“Their feet are swift to shed blood:

“Destruction and misery are in their ways:

“And the way of peace have they not known: There is no fear of God before their eyes.

“Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God” (Romans 3:10-19).

Because of Adam’s incurable condition, God indicted him, found him guilty, and condemned him to death. Romans 3:10-18 records God’s fourteen-fold indictment. Verse 19 records God’s verdict: “Guilty.”

This is what God says about every one of us. Need we say any more? No wonder we cannot live the Christian life. There is nothing in us—in our flesh—that can do it.

Chapter Three

I QUIT!

"I quit," This may seem like a strange confession for a Christian to make. On the contrary, it is exactly what God is waiting for us to say to Him. God is waiting to be gracious (Isaiah 30:18). He is waiting for us to give Him an opportunity to live the Christian life in us. A dear friend of mine who has gone home to be with the Lord once quoted 1 Thessalonians 5:24: "Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it"—and then he added, "God can't do it until we are done." Until we are done with what? Until we are done with trying to live the Christian life, struggling to change, preserving our life in Adam.

Jesus' disciples struggled to live the Christian life but without power. They were with Him for three years. They walked with Him, ate with Him, and saw His miracles and signs. They saw His tears. They saw the dead raised and demons

cast out. And still, there was not a single change in any one of them. In the end, they all forsook Jesus at the Cross (Matthew 26:56).

Even after Jesus was resurrected and had appeared to His disciples twice, they still could not change. Weary of his Christian life, Peter said in John 21:3, "I go a fishing." According to the Greek language used here, in essence Peter was saying, "I quit. I can't live the Christian life." And he was right. The other disciples agreed with him saying, "We also go with thee." John was one of them. Five times in the Gospel of John, he referred to himself as "the one whom Jesus loved." Yet he still followed backslidden Peter into the boat to go fishing. John was also ready to quit. The disciples were not changed until the day of Pentecost, when the resurrection power of Christ would fill them through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

Transparency

There are two ways in the Bible: Satan's way and God's way. Satan lies; God cannot lie (Titus 1:2). Satan sends an evil spirit; God sends His Holy Spirit. Satan accuses; God edifies. Satan builds up Adam; God crucifies Adam. Satan causes us to have total recall of everything we

are in Adam while blinding us to our provision so that we will eventually give up in despair; God forgives and forgets everything we have ever done in Adam and opens our eyes to a better way. Satan says, "God will never answer your prayer, because you are no good, and God knows you will never change," but God says, "Just keep believing; the answer is on the way." Satan constantly changes his approach to his attack against us so he can bring confusion; God operates in perfect integrity and immutability toward us, no matter what our state.

God has a way for us to be changed and to live a victorious Christian life. God's way begins with transparency and honesty at the Cross, not a sincere desire to do better. An honest heart is one that accepts the provisions of God's Word and then brings forth fruit with patience toward self.

I counseled a young girl one day who is like many other girls her age. She did some things she should not have done. Though she does not have a rebellious heart, she did not have the power to change herself. So instead of speaking harsh words of correction, I spoke soft words from my heart. She needed to be surrounded with the love of Jesus Christ, and I said to her,

“You will make it.”

During our counseling session, she made a very mature statement. After being honest about what happened, she said, “I hope I don’t do it again.” That confession revealed integrity and transparency. She said, “I hope I don’t do it again” not, “I won’t do it again.” People with legalistic backgrounds are more likely to say, “I will never do that again,” and then they go out and do it within twenty-four hours. They may sincerely mean what they say, but they do not have any power or strength to make it happen.

The opposite of transparency is self-preservation in the flesh. In the hundreds of hours that I have spent counseling Christians, more than anything else I have seen people trying to preserve their life in Adam. They justify themselves and defend their right to be right. They overreact to what others say about them, and they want me to know it isn’t true. My question is, *who cares?* What are we defending? Our right to live in a fallen nature filled with bruises and running sores? But once we become transparent with what God says about our condition in Adam (Romans 3:10-19, Isaiah 1:5-6, Jeremiah 17:9) and honest with what God did to Adam on the Cross (Romans 6:6, Galatians 2:20), then

what is there left to preserve? Nothing!

Every Christian stands in an even place—crucified, buried, and resurrected with Christ. Once we accept that truth, self-preservation ceases. The Finished Work means that the Cross took me out and put Christ in. It is wonderful to get up in the morning without a single thing to preserve for that day, no matter how I feel.

Stop Trying

Not one verse in the Bible tells me to try to change or be a better Christian. I could feel sorry for myself and cry a bucket of tears, but that kind of sorrow does not transform me. It just causes more shame, frustration, defeat, and guilt. In my best state, I may be able to do a little better for a season, because of self-righteousness, but that is not transformation.

The more we try to change, the more we will find ourselves going through the same thing the apostle Paul did in Romans 7:

“To will is present with me, but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do....when I would do good, evil is present with me.” (Romans 7:18b,19,21b).

Paul was saying, “I have tried to change, but

every time I do, I fall flat on my face, and Satan's government of evil is right there to condemn me."

Paul finally came to the conclusion that he was not going to try anymore, and that was the greatest revelation of his life. It was Paul who later wrote, "Faithful is he that calleth you, who will also do it" (1 Thessalonians 5:24).

When Job was going through his trial, he said, "For He performs that which He has planned for me, and of many such matters He is mindful" (Job 23:14, Amplified Translation). The prophet Isaiah wrote, "Lord, you will ordain peace for us, for You have also wrought in us and for us all our works" (Isaiah 26:12, Amplified Translation).

As we give up the weight of our own way and yoke up with Christ, we will go places we never dreamed of. He is so willing to be our strength for everything we go through. Cast your cares upon Him; His burden is light.

CONCLUSION

The secret of living the Christian life is this: never strive, never try, and never worry about your last failure. Another counseling session is not the answer if it will only put you in the frame of mind to try again or to conform to another way of behavior—only to fail again and be more frustrated. We must stop trying to conform to anything. Romans 12:2 instructs us, “Be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind....” Many think that being “conformed to the world” means going back to the barroom or into a life of immorality. But conforming to the world means going back to trying to be better, using the Scriptures to reinforce your efforts. This is the most subtle form of worldliness.

This booklet does not suggest a life of antinomianism—of professing to know God but denying Him in our works (Titus 1:16), nor does it encourage carelessness or lawlessness. We

should live with responsibility and accountability. I believe in practical holiness and in living a pure life before God. But I also have a strong conviction that trying to conform to standards and striving to “do better” will not produce holiness. That kind of sincere effort only produces sincerely frustrated, perplexed believers who are ready to quit rather than to keep trying, only to fail again.

God wants us to come to the place where we say, “I can’t change, I’m not going to try to change, and I don’t even care!” When we can say that, we are finally being honest—with God and with ourselves. We have come to our “wit’s end” (Psalm 107:27), or to the place where our human efforts are exhausted. Our confession is no longer, “I’ll do better,” but, “Faithful is He who calls me, and I know He will do it.” Now we are ready to accept God’s power to be changed. We finally believe that “with God, all things are possible.”