

e-ssays

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Introduction

This booklet is a compilation of short essays, most of which were originally sent out via e-mail. Hence the title, “e-ssays.” The content and source of each writing understandably varies. Some came out of prayer times, some out of Bible study or meditation. What does not vary is the message. Each piece seeks to exalt Christ, and to present Him as He has presented Himself to me. Beyond that, the only unifying feature is that each e-ssay was short enough to e-mail.

An entry from a devotional I appreciate reads, “Though our schedules are too full, there is always a moment to turn our hearts to the Lamb of God.”¹ It is in this same faith that the e-ssays are offered. I pray that you will be richly blessed by Him.

¹ “Daily Walking.” *Seeds of Life Volume I*. Denton, TX: New Creation Publications, 2005.

David and Jonathon

David and Jonathon's friendship, though not discussed in great detail, nevertheless stands out in scripture. Just after Saul and Jonathon were killed in battle, David lamented, "I grieve for you, Jonathon my brother; you were very dear to me. Your love for me was wonderful, more wonderful than that of women" (2 Sam. 1:26). Now, that is quite a statement, especially for a man. I think I can speak for most men when I say that few loves rival that of a woman's. The right one can reduce our entire self to a pile of glue going, "ga-ga," and sucking its thumb in the midst of cupidic fallout. What kind of love, then, are we talking about? For the answer, we must go back to 1 Samuel 18, and take a look at the beginning of their relationship.

1 Samuel 18:1,3, and 4 say, "...the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul...Then Jonathan made a covenant with David, because he loved him as his own soul. And Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that was upon him, and gave it to David, and his armor, and even his sword and his bow and his girdle." From these verses we can garner many things. First, that Jonathon loved David as himself. This should certainly make us instantly think of the teachings of Jesus, that we should love our neighbor as ourselves. But, digging deeper, I think Jonathon's love goes beyond that. His soul is "knit" or joined to David's. He strips himself of his robe, his armor, his sword, the symbols of his own dignity and even of his right to the throne (being King Saul's firstborn). He loves David's mind and his vision. He shares that vision and David's desires. He, though the rightful king, loves David more, and loves David's kingdom more than his own. Jonathon denies himself, loses the life he could have, and follows David. This becomes even more clear when Saul says to Jonathon in a rage, "do I not know that you have chosen the son of Jesse to your own shame, and to the shame of your mother's nakedness? For as long as the son of Jesse lives upon the earth, neither you nor your kingdom shall be established. Therefore send and fetch him to me, for he shall surely die." Then Jonathan answered Saul his father, "Why should he be put to death? What has he done?" It was truly to Jonathon's own humiliation and to the humiliation of his family that he chose David over himself. His decision also caused him incalculable loss. But Jonathon's love for David surpassed all other loves. Truly, he hated his father and mother, his sisters and brothers, and even his own life, for David's sake (Luke 14:26).

This love, this selfless love, truly embodies the love of Christ. "Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). This is the love with which He loved us, and it is the love with which we are called upon to love Him and others (1 Jn. 3:16). Maybe, especially for the ladies, we can't all identify with the strength that "love of women" has in a man. But we all have something that we love with great intensity, and perhaps the love of that thing even rivals love for God at times. This is serious, for John tells us that if we love the world or the things in the world then the love of the Father is not in us (1 Jn. 2:15). James says even more bluntly that friendship with the world is enmity with God (Jas. 4:4). But there is good news for us in all this, and there is immutable hope. What Jonathon's example clearly shows us is that, if the love of God has been shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, there is no greater love than that love, and that love will enable us to leave all other loves behind. Some of these may be dear to us indeed, and they may have a powerful grip on our hearts. We may even fear what life will be like without these things or people that we derive our security and sense of self from. What was going through Jonathon's mind as he stripped off his robe, his armor, and his sword, which symbolized all that he had and surely loved more than anything? Probably one thing: David. And for us, because God's love has been birthed in us, and because it will outstrip

every other love, we will be able to answer the call in Hebrews 12:1,2: "... let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith...." What Jesus began, He will finish. The seed that He planted in our hearts will grow strong and overcome us. Indeed, Jonathon's decision to love and follow David brought the eventual downfall of his family's entire kingdom. We read in 2 Samuel 3:1, "There was a long war between the house of Saul and the house of David; and David grew stronger and stronger, while the house of Saul became weaker and weaker." Let us, then, put strong faith in the life that God has planted in us. There is no greater love, and that love will grow stronger and stronger while anything that rivals it will grow weaker and weaker. Praise the Lord, for He indeed saves to the uttermost! (Heb. 7:35)

Finished Works

In Hebrews chapter 4 we find this statement, "...for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from His." This passage is discussing the creation of the world and the 7th day in which God rested. We see in this that all God's works have been complete from the beginning. Now what strikes me about this is that I usually think of His works as being things, the material universe, etc. I do not include myself within that; and yet, I am as much a work of God as the planet Jupiter, or pine trees, or anything else. What seems implicit in all this is that we, being among God's works, have also been finished from the foundation of the world. However, we don't see this because our point of view originates from ourselves and is based on how things look from where we're standing; that is, we look at our lives (and thus our completeness) day to day in the flesh. But God sees our lives as a completed whole in Christ.

Now, I'm not getting deterministic here; our choices still matter and are important. We have a truly "free" will. But our real choice is not so much occurring in a second by second linear way; our choice is this: we can determine our own course apart from God and create our own life, or, we can, by faith, receive a life that is God's work, created for us to live out, and freely given to us. The former is a life of anxiety and uncertainty because everything depends on us making good choices and having the will power (and good luck) to achieve our goals. This is a life maintained by our own efforts, by our works, and not by God's. The latter choice is a life of peace and stability because everything depends on God and the life he has prepared for us. This is a life maintained by His power working through us, in which we simply receive what He gives. Walking this path doesn't depend on our wisdom or inherent ability; all that is required is faith in Him and in the fact that His work is complete. "Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight" (Prov. 3:6). "He leads me in paths of righteousness, for His name's sake" (Ps. 23:3). In like manner, the writer of Hebrews says, "Now we who have believed enter that rest..." (Heb. 4:3). When we believe, we are included in God's finished work and in His rest; this then becomes manifest in our lives. Paul concurs with this view and concludes his famous passage about God's grace (in Ephesians 2) with these words, "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." Praise the Lord! I pray that we will all grow in grace and in the knowledge of Him. As we do we will enjoy more and more the rest of the complete One who calls Himself "I AM," and who calls us TO BE in Him.

Given over to Death for Jesus's Sake

"For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may be revealed in our mortal body" (2 Cor. 4:11).

It is so easy for our lives to be about something other than Christ, and this lack of focus can take such subtle forms. (Remember, the serpent was described in Gen. 3 as the most subtle, or crafty, of God's creatures!) But this verse makes it so clear—and in fact shouts it out—that my life exists for the sole purpose of being continually handed over to death *by God, and for God's purposes*. What is God's purpose? He has only one: that Christ be revealed. First and foremost, He intends that revelation to come in us who are His body. That is His purpose. I've always thought that this was well put in Ephesians 3:10, 11: "His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord."

There are so many subtle ways this purpose is undermined. Lest this cause us undue worry (for we are commanded NOT to worry!) we must always remember how in control God is, and how able He is to accomplish in us what He has purposed. Nevertheless, so often our actions betray the fact that we are seeing ourselves as our own body, and are living for that body, rather than seeing ourselves as His body, having no other purpose than to manifest Him who is crucified and risen. This is what it means to be in Christ: to participate in His death, burial, and resurrection. To be His body means to be the body of His death, burial, and resurrection. Anything else (and I'm not going to get into specifics...that could take all day!) that we see as the purpose of our lives, or that we see ourselves existing for, will bring us, intentionally or unintentionally, into conflict with God's eternal purpose of revealing Christ. These other purposes aren't limited to sins either, not at all. In fact, it is often the good things—family, careers, even ministries of God—that most successfully obscure the truth of Christ when they become the purpose of our hearts.

My desire is not to subtly resist God because of my ignorance or because I mistakenly think I exist for a reason other than being part of the body of His revelation. My desire is to lose myself, to lose my independence, to be chiseled and sculpted, and to take the place prepared for me in the wall of the house where His glory rests in full manifestation! That is all. This is my prayer for myself and for all those who long for His appearing.

The Beloved Gates of Zion

Men build cities for their own glory and they exult in their engineering feats, their designs, the strength of their ingenuity and ability. God has also built a city for His own glory, where all can exult in Him, His ingenuity, His eternal designs in Christ. "The Lord loves the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob. Glorious things are said of you, O city of God" (Ps. 87:2). He loves the city that He has chosen to bear His name. All His desire is bent upon her. We tend to think maybe God is too busy for us, that His designs are too vast to leave anything for us but the periphery of His mind. But we are His designs. As the prophet Zechariah says to her, "Whoever touches you touches the apple of His eye." The apple of the eye, literally translated, is the pupil. She is the entirety of His vision and motivation. With us, there are many things we must do and are obligated to do, yet how easy it is to set everything

aside when what we love is present. What an easy and powerful motivation love is. What then will distract God from His purpose in us, His chosen city, His chosen bride (Rev. 21:9, 10)? He has waited for this union with us since before creation; all His desire is bent on it. Like the prophecy about Jericho, He laid the foundation of His city at the cost of His firstborn Son, at the cost of His Son He set up her gates (Josh. 6:26). “The Lord loves the gates of Zion,” and spared no expense in loving Her. Jesus said if a man builds a tower, he will first determine if he can afford to finish it. Before determining if He wanted to take us for Himself as a city and a bride to the praise of His glory, God decided that He was willing to pay the enormous cost of His Son’s life that was required to build. He also determined that His Son was more than enough to bring the city of David (meaning “The city of the beloved”) to completion. Our response to this should be free from concern for ourselves and for our place in God’s plan. Knowing His love and His single minded desire for us, we can say with the woman in Song of Solomon, “I belong to my lover, and His desire is for me” (Song of Sol. 7:10). Knowing this, we can understand the security and rest Jesus means for us to enjoy when He says, “As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love” (Jn. 15:9). If we can doubt that God the father loved Jesus with a single-minded love, then we can doubt the love of Christ toward us. But just as the Father clearly loved the Son without wavering, so we can realize that the love of Christ toward us is a love so wide, so high, so long, and so deep, that to remain in His love is a sweet and easy command. “We love Him because He first loved us” (1 Jn. 4:19).

Identity and the Christian

We have all heard people make statements such as, “I am a mechanic,” or “I am a Baptist,” or “I am a grandfather,” etc. We fill in the blank many ways. All of these are statements of identity, equating ourselves with something else and thereby effecting a definition of ourselves. How should a Christian fill in the blank? This is a query I have had before the Lord. I think the way we fill it in, and the importance that we attach to that answer can be very revealing about where our treasure is, and thus, where our heart is also. For myself, I believe God has answered me in the following way.

In the Gospels, Jesus calls us to, “Deny yourself, take up your own cross daily, and follow me.” This signifies to me that the only identity God has called us to is Christ and Him crucified. I do not see any other identity offered. Not even things of God—gifts, individual callings, offices, etc.—are things we are called to adopt as identities. Whatever we were when He called us, we had to abandon in exchange for Him and His cross. We are not now, as Christians, to settle in and find something of God to grab onto and to identify with. We are to continue following Him who called us and to bear the reproach of His cross.

At this time, there is much discussion about restoring the five-fold ministry to the church. It seems people throughout the church are now adopting titles such as apostle, prophet, evangelist, etc. Many of those who haven’t already done so are trying to discover their particular gift or calling. The importance of this cannot be understated because Paul tells us in Ephesians 4 that we will not grow to maturity without the genuine operation of these ministries. But all of these things, of God though they are, are earthly tools which will pass away when Eternal fullness is come. When His house is complete, the tools will be put away, and only the communion of the redeemed in the slain Lamb will remain. It seems, however, that our flesh will always try to identify with something other than Christ, and if not other than Him, at least something in addition to Him. In its lust to distinguish itself or to cover its feelings of shame it

will even use the gifts and callings of God. If we identify with Christ, there is nothing for us—for our flesh—except death, and He alone lives in us. In any other scenario, He is crucified, He no longer lives, but I alone live in me (Gal. 2:20).

Am I therefore saying we should abolish all titles and never make statements such as, “I am a musician,” or “I am an intercessor?” No, not at all. I am saying that we need to check our hearts. If we are not content to be defined by the cross alone, then even ministries of God are tainted by our flesh and will only hinder our progress in maturing.

As a last example of this, I would like to look at Israel. Numbers chapter 2 discusses how they arranged their camp. The tabernacle, where God dwelled and where the sacrifices were carried out, sat in the center of camp. The 12 tribes of Israel camped around it, 3 on the east, 3 on the south, 3 on the west, 3 on the north. This forms the shape of an enormous cross. By this, the Holy Spirit is telling us who we are: a people called out of the world and gathered in Him through the cross of Christ. That cross defines us absolutely. In Israel, some acted as priests, some as soldiers, some as elders, some as this, some as that, but all of these individual parts had a higher identity as a people. Ultimately, they were only defined by God who dwelled in them, and by His sacrifice in their midst. Who are you? You are crucified with Christ. You no longer live but Christ lives in you and the life you now live in the flesh you live by faith in the Son of God who loved you and gave Himself for you.

Witnesses of His Glory

I was praying today and just sitting with the Lord in His amazing worthiness, knowing how much I need Him simply because He is God. Enjoying Him so much caused a desire for others to know Him to well up in me. I thought of everyone I know; I thought about the church at large; I thought about those who don't believe in Him; I thought about the campus I am studying at. Now, I'm no great evangelist; occasionally, God will really gift me to do that, but I'm not your big-time “soul-winner” or anything. But here I was, as I prayed, experiencing this deep desire for people to know Christ more deeply. I was sort of wondering what I could do, specifically on campus where I am spending a lot of time. God's answer was very intriguing to me. What He said, more or less, was this: “The best way for others to know me, is for you to know me, and to be changed into my image. Then people *will* know me, simply because they know you.” I thought this was an amazing answer, and quite a different view of spreading the knowledge of God. Christ is in us, in our hearts as well as in our mouths. Our testimony should echo Jesus's testimony to Philip, “Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14). Anyone who sees us ought also to know Christ. Whether they love Him or hate Him, they ought to know Him in us. If we are focused just on preaching, it is quite possible that we will talk a good line but make all our words empty by our actions. But if we focus on knowing Him—and I mean *really* knowing Him—then others will know Him also, whether we speak or joke or merely walk by. It is His *life* in us that makes the difference, and it is His life that will speak when it is time to speak, that will be silent when it is time to be silent, that will help when it is time to help, and that will love at all times.

I pray and trust that this is what God is doing in all of our hearts. As Christ is revealed in us, and as we see the One who died for us and was raised, we will *be* witnesses of His glory, and others will witness His glory in us.

The Drab Cloak of Love

My life is forfeit. The only thing God considers valuable is that which is of Himself. God is love. Love is what God values. "This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers." This is the only fellowship with Him: daily participating in His death and life. John says that if we love (meaning practical action), our hearts will be at rest before God and He will do whatever we ask. Self-sacrifice is the condition on God's absolute favor in prayer, for it is only then that we are in union with Him and with His will; it is only then when we are living for His purpose; it is only then He can give to us all things without restraint. John also says that it is only when we love practically, when we obey God's command to love, that we are remaining in Him, for, again, such love is God's very nature.

It is not those who call Him Lord who remain in love; it is not those who cast out demons or prophesy; it is not those who have all knowledge or give all they have to the poor or die as martyrs. It is only those who love, whose bodies are given over without reservation to Him that, through them, He might love those around them. About this, we must think very mundanely. It is the drab, moment by moment inconveniences, favors, and requests placed before us by our fellow men that are the very test of love. It is, as John says, simply seeing our brother in his day to day needs. How do we respond? Can we prefer ourselves, our own comfort, our own convenience, even in small things, and claim that God lives in us? It is in the drab cloak of the daily and the mundane that God comes to us and asks for food, for clothing, for sanctuary; it is in our very own local prisons and hospitals that God waits to be visited; it is in the drab cloak of what is, to us, so ordinary and habitual, that God lies waiting for our hard hearts to perceive what is right under our noses and needs attention, love, concern. It is in the things that, because of their very ordinariness, offend our arrogant selves, that God waits to exalt those that humble themselves out of conscience toward Him.

Help me Jesus. The Bible says you laid down your life. The sense is that you placed yourself, your life, took your hands off of it, lost it, completely gave up control of it, turned your back on it and walked away. To this we are called and must respond. Outside of this there is no fellowship with you, no eternal life. Outside of this we deceive ourselves in powerless, hollow religion. Outside of this there is no value, no purpose, no reality, no truth. I want you to possess me in truth. I want that my body should be given over to you each moment, lost to myself, given to you and others for whatever purpose—great or mundane—that you and circumstance require. Teach me your ways. Test me and know my wicked thoughts and lead me in the way everlasting.

The Unchanging Sufficiency of Christ

Today, while praying, I was enjoying the unchanging sufficiency of Christ. I was enjoying the reality of His fullness and abundance. I was not enjoying Him in relationship to any particular manifestation of His sufficiency, or for anything He had done to show His sufficiency; I was enjoying His sufficiency and abundance in itself. I was enjoying Him, as He is.

It is into God, as He is, that we have been called. We have not been called to receive blessings or power or life or salvation from God as if we were recipients who are separate from the Giver, or as if those gifts were other than the Giver. We are not to live *as we are*, receiving

care packages from God *as He is*. We have been called, and placed, in God Himself; we live and move and have our being in His fullness; we live in the Giver and He in us. Similarly, the river of the water of life is not something flowing *to* us, but the headwaters are IN US, as Revelation 22 shows. Therefore, we are one with the source, not just those who receive what trickles down to us from the source. Jesus said, “Whoever believes in me, as the scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him” (Jn. 7:38).

This is the challenge that the Spirit of God gave to me as I was praying and enjoying Him as He is: to remain in Him alone; to be as unchanging in my focus on Him, and in my dependence on Him, as He is unchanging in His abundance. To name just a few of the riches that are in Him:

“in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins” (Col. 1:14).

“in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col. 2:3)

“For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and you have been given fullness in Christ” (Col 2:9, 10).

“In Him you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature” (Col. 2:11”

“who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ” (Eph. 1:3).

“In Him was life” (Jn. 1:4).

“For no matter how many promises God has made, they are ‘YES’ in Christ” (2 Cor. 1:20).

“Therefore, you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed” (1 Cor. 1:7). We do not lack anything. If we are waiting for God to do or to say something else, we will be waiting a long time and wondering why all those crowds of people in heaven are worshiping the Lamb slain. It is so easy for us to be blinded or distracted from the reality of God as He is, in whom we are. Too often we live in spiritual poverty because our gaze is moved from Christ and is led by daily pressures, self-sufficiency, or wrong concepts. Too often we are led by blind guides who do not know Christ’s fullness themselves, who unwittingly keep others from enjoying it because of the things they have substituted for Him. Too often Christianity is a “hand to mouth” affair where we live from spiritual paycheck to paycheck—experiences, “breakthroughs,” we feel we have earned by doing good works, “praying through,” fasting, or other things that may even appear spiritual but are substitutions for the simplicity of the truth—that “of God are you in Christ” (1 Cor. 1:30). The challenge of the Spirit of God to me is simply to “know whom [you] have believed,” and to “remain in Him.”

Where the Wind Comes from and Where It Is Going

Fire, wind, and earthquake happened because of God's presence, but God was not in those (1 Kings 19:11, 12). Manifestations or experiential hallmarks of God's presence are not God. Signs follow those who believe, but signs are not God (Mark 16:17). Jesus healed many people, but healing is not Jesus. Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, but resurrection is not Jesus. Rather, Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life" (11:25). We must never confuse the effects of Jesus's presence with Jesus Himself. These things may serve as an initial point of contact with Jesus, and it may be that we know Him through certain things for a time, but ultimately, we must go beyond the ways He ministers to us, beyond supernatural manifestations, and beyond every experience to be had, and we must know Him as He is. If we do not, then we will not even really understand any ministries, supernatural manifestations, or experiences of God.

"The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going" (John 3:8). If we do not go beyond the experiential effects of God, then we are those who may hear God and feel His touch when the Spirit blows, but who do not know where He is coming from or where He is going. The center of our being is in ourselves and in this world and we know God as a sort of atmospheric disturbance—He rustles our leaves and moves things around, but as to His real nature and way of thinking we are basically ignorant. God is something we know of and regularly experience, but, like the wind, He is essentially beyond our grasp. This is seen in an exchange between Obadiah and Elijah—"I don't know where the Spirit of the LORD may carry you when I leave you. If I go and tell Ahab and he doesn't find you, he will kill me. Yet I your servant have worshiped the LORD since my youth" (1 Kings 18:12). Obadiah indeed served the Lord, but was not knowing Him by the Spirit. Elijah, however, was one who evidently knew God and moved with His Spirit. This is also summed up when Jesus says to His disciples, "No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you" (John 15:15).

Jesus said that those born of the Spirit are like the wind. They know where they are coming from and where they are going, just as John's gospel says of Jesus that He knew He had come from God and was returning to God (John 13:3). Those born of the Spirit, therefore, live and move and have their being in God. Their source is God (live), they proceed and move in God, they return (have their being) in God. Rather than living in the realm of our experience and only knowing God as He periodically moves and rustles things, God wants us to live and move and have our being in Him. In other words, rather than living in the earth and knowing the wind only by its touch and sound as it blows, God wants us to live in that place where the wind is coming from and where it is going.

Unfortunately, it is possible to experience God, to feel His touch, to hear His voice, and to know His presence, but not be of His Spirit. The scriptures are replete with examples of people like this. King Saul, for instance, was someone who prophesied on a regular basis and was seen often in the company of Samuel, a prophet and prominent man of God. Saul was anointed and ministered in his particular function as king. But, he did not keep God's word, he did not know God, and, despite all his experiences of God, remained a fearful, grasping, murderous man at heart. Those that will say to the Lord, "did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?" are sons of Saul and will receive nothing from Jesus but the sad testimony, "I never knew you; depart from me,

you workers of lawlessness" (Matt. 7:21-23). Just before Jesus explained to His disciples that friends know their master's business, He explained what that business is—"This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you" (John 15:12-14). Those in whom Christ's death and life are working, those who are participating in His cross, are those that are knowing God and who are His friends. They are those who have come from God and are returning to God and who move with the wind of His Spirit.

Christ Will Be Glorified in My Body

"[W]ith complete fearlessness I shall go on, so that now, as always, Christ will be glorified in my body, whether by my life or my death" (Phil. 1:20)

The end of God's work in us is that we serve Him with our bodies. God begins this work in the spirit, birthing us anew by His Spirit through His word. In this way we receive a new heart and a new spirit. This work continues as God renews our mind, again through His word and Spirit. In all of this, God is progressively conquering us; He begins with our spirit; He continues to subjugate our thoughts, our feelings, our affections, our perceptions; finally, His goal is that all that He is should be expressed in our mortal bodies. If God is never able to reach this stage in us, I believe that, in His mind, everything else He has done in us is for naught.

The scriptures have much to say to us along these lines. Deuteronomy 6:5 tells us, "You must love Yahweh your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength." It is not enough to love God with our heart and to withhold the rest. To use an analogy, consider marriage. The end of marriage really centers on the body, in one sense. We do not become one spirit in marriage, for we are already one in Christ. The end is not mental, for this type of fellowship can be had in all sorts of relationships and is not special to marriage. What is reserved for marriage is the subjection of the entire self to another, and this union is enacted in the physical consummation of it. I don't mean to get graphic here, but the end of marriage is that two people become *one flesh*. So what good is it to talk about loving God when we won't submit our bodies to Him? How many Christians are content with, and even enjoy, merely flirting with God—taking His many gifts, enjoying the attentions and wooing of His Spirit, and getting all swept up in the feelings of what really only amounts to spiritual infatuation? How many want the "romance" but want to go on living for themselves, using their bodies for what they please? If any of us were involved in a romantic relationship like this, wouldn't we say we were being played the fool and move on? Yet God, in His great grace, will not move on. He is intent on this total union with us. He bought it by the death of His only Son, and He will have it because He is greater than our hearts and knows everything.

"Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world" (Rom. 12:1,2). We have not really been conquered in our heart as long as we will not submit our bodies to His purpose. What we know we only think we know, and what we really know, we do. Paul tells us that, "when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey"—not to the one whom we claim with our lips. Similarly, in one of His parables, Jesus asks which son did the will of his father, the one who said he would and then did not? or the one who at first refused but then did what his father asked?

All of us are in process; God is not asking us for perfection now, or else. He is wanting us to realize what the goal is, and to not deceive ourselves in settling for something less. I believe God's work is ongoing, that over and over again He will start something in our spirit, and then renew our mind to it. However, it is all for nothing if we do not allow a full work and sacrifice our bodies to it. It is the pattern and mandate of God that what is initiated in the spirit be fulfilled in our flesh. Jesus did not just love us in spirit or in mind. No, but the scriptures say that "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us." The scriptures go on to tell us that the entire purpose of His becoming flesh was not so that He could merely be a great teacher who talked about salvation, but so that He could DO the will of His father, and sacrifice His body to BE salvation.

In the Beginning, God

We are one with **God**. Literally translated, Revelation 6:10 calls Him the "holy and true despot," or, dictator. Therefore, we are one with Him who inflexibly rules by mercy and grace; we are one with Him who is absolutely sovereign, who bows to no one, who is self-determining and self-existing. No one can say to Him, "What are you doing?" (Eccl. 8:4). And who has known His mind that they may counsel Him? (Rom. 11:34). Therefore, in everything, God is the beginning for us. "In the beginning, God" (Gen. 1:1). Now that we are His body, we do not begin with our sins and failures; we begin with "God loved the world so much that He gave His only Son" (Jn. 3:16). We do not begin with the chaos of our lives or the personal wars which threaten to tax our patience and destroy our peace; we begin with "God is our refuge and strength, an ever present help in time of need" (Ps. 46:1). We do not begin with the darkness and uncertainties of this world; we begin with "**GOD SAID**, 'Let there be light'" (Gen. 1:3). At all times, circumstances will press us with their necessities, attempting to rule and determine our course. But we are to begin with God, ruling and determining circumstances with Him. We are one with Jesus who looked right into the storm—the storm which caused His disciples to forget who He was and who they were—and said "PEACE. BE STILL." And the storm obeyed Him (Mk. 4:39). We are not to be tossed about and driven like so many cattle, not when God is in us, not when God is our very life. Psalm 46 says of us: "God is in the midst of her. She shall not be moved" (Ps. 46:5). No, for us, God is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, our light and our salvation (Rev. 21:6). Of whom or what shall we be afraid? (Ps. 27:1)

Union with Christ

WE NEED TO KNOW DEEPLY, AND CONTINUE TO KNOW THE RELATIONSHIP GOD HAS SO GRACIOUSLY GIVEN US IN CHRIST!!

This is the pearl of great price that a man sold everything he had to gain. Proverbs says, "Buy the truth, and do not sell it. Though it cost all you have, obtain it." God wants so much more for us, and has prepared so much more. I feel, however, that we are too easily satisfied. We are content to sit on the floor (in a mindset of separation) and to eat the scraps that fall from His table, as if we were the family dog. If you went to a wedding, and at the reception, the bride was sitting on the floor, or crawling under the table to chase a loose biscuit, what would you think? This is exactly the state of our Christianity sometimes. What does God think? He has saved and called a bride to the holy calling of being wed to His Son, and she, rather than sitting at the table

of **her own wedding**, is on the floor subsisting on a shadow of the true feast that is just above her head!! What does God do? He speaks tenderly to her, and gently, patiently continues to try to raise her head up so that she can see the truth of the full table He has set. This is His task with us, and He would like His desire to be our primary concern. “Seek first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness, and all other things will be added to you.” I pray that we will all know Him, and see that we ARE exalted to the right hand of His intimate love, and fellowship.

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...to know and preach nothing but Christ

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