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## The School of Christ pt. 2

Last week I started sharing about what I like to call the School of Christ. I'm going to continue on that topic this week. The School of Christ is my way of talking about the specific way in which the Spirit of God educates the soul with regards to its new life. And that new life is nothing other than the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

To review for just a moment, we mentioned last week that knowing Christ is the process where the soul of man becomes confronted by, acquainted with, conformed to, and constrained by the reality of Christ's indwelling life. You do not come to know Christ as an idea, or concept. In other words, you don't learn that He is kind, that He is loving, that He is powerful, and then think you know Him. Learning Christ is not your mind hearing a new thing about God, but God's mind being formed in your soul. I'm talking about a heart-revelation of the Lord Jesus Christ. It's the awakening of the soul into the reality of its salvation.

The problem with Christians is not that we lack Life, but rather that we lack the Light of Life that must be allowed to shine in the heart and teach us Christ. We don't need to learn about Christ. We need to learn Christ, and be found in Him, not having a life of our own.

In a word, you could say that the School of Christ is the means by which the Spirit of God makes disciples. But what is a disciple? Here is another word that can mean many things to many people. What did it mean to Jesus? Jesus actually gave us some pretty clear statements on his understanding of a disciple, but they are often disregarded because they are hard words. They seem too severe.

**Luk 14:26** If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple.

**Luk 14:27** And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple.

**Luk 14:33** So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple.

A disciple is one who has lost his life and gained another. One who has learned the cross and forsaken himself. A disciple is one who has forfeited one life, one realm, one kind, one creation in order to become the "presencing" of another in the earth. Discipleship is nothing less than this – the knowing and presencing of God in the earth. (I realize that word doesn't exist, but it still serves my purpose.)

So we mentioned last week that the Spirit of God, from the moment you are born again, desires to enroll you in the School of Christ. It is truly not supposed to be a decade or three after you are born again that the Spirit finally gains the liberty in

your soul to teach you the reality of new life. That is, however, often the case because religion appeals to us first and teaches us what Paul warns about in Galatians chapter three – to “begin in the Spirit, and yet seek to come to maturity in the flesh”.

But whenever you begin learning Christ, whether 30 seconds or 30 years after new birth, the Spirit takes all believers down a similar path. There is an order according to which He is able to teach the human soul. There is an order of progression, even as there is in the natural arena. Nobody starts with calculus and then works towards addition and subtraction. It doesn't matter whether curiosity would lead you to calculus first. Calculus is built upon the awareness of basic math. It's a bit like that with knowing Christ. It doesn't matter that you're interested in being a prayer-warrior or a teacher. Until you learn Christ, both are going to be works of the flesh.

And I mentioned last week that you think that it would start by the Spirit of God teaching you something you don't know about Jesus, but really the first class starts by teaching you something you don't know about knowing. You don't know how to know. Failure to know Jesus is not first a lack of information. It is first a lack of understanding as to what knowing even means. And I won't go into that again this week except to say that you must come to know by faith, not by sight. To know Him by the mind of Christ operating in your soul, and not the mind of man trying to intrude upon spiritual things.

And then I said what might have sounded like a ludicrous statement... that the order of spiritual understanding is death first, then heaven, and then earth. Death, heaven, and then earth. Or you could say judgment, understanding, and then manifestation. Both basically say the same thing. And it seems ludicrous only because the natural mind, in complete contradiction to Scripture, assumes the order to be earth, death, and then heaven.

But it is not at all difficult to prove from either the New Testament epistles or the multitude of Old Covenant testimonies, that spiritually speaking, we encounter death, then the reality of heaven, and then the heavens are made manifest in the earth.

Once you are born again, the first thing the Spirit is trying to reveal to your heart is not the importance of Scripture memorization. It's not faithful church attendance, tithing, behavior change, how to find your purpose, how to pray, or any of the things that we are often first introduced to by the church. The first thing that God seeks to make real to your soul is the reality of what you are not. Another way to say that is the word judgment. Judgment doesn't mean punishment or condemnation. Judgment speaks of a division, a cutting, a separation. Judgment is the dividing between the living and the dead.

The cross, before it ever causes you to know and abide in life, crucifies you with Christ. The cross judges you in the body of Jesus Christ, baptizes you into His death. What you were by nature is condemned by God and judged in the death of His Son. It is put away from God, separated, permanently divided from Him. And consequently, if you are to live, it cannot be you living for God, but Christ living in you. “The hour is coming and now is”, Jesus said “when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live”.

You who are by nature a child of wrath, as Paul says, first find judgment in the cross. First there is an end before there can be a beginning. First there is a putting away before there can ever be the newness of life. And without question, the first order of business in the heart for the Spirit of God is to work in you a deep and clear awareness of what you are not. Only then, can God begin to show you His Son in a way where you will not seek to take His place.

T. Austin-Sparks writes:

“We cannot produce from this nature anything acceptable to God. All that can ever come to God is in Christ alone, not in us. It never will, in this life, be in us as ours. It will always be the difference between Christ and ourselves. Though He be resident within us, He and He only is the object of the Divine good pleasure and satisfaction; and the one basic lesson you and I have to learn in this life, under the Holy Spirit’s tuition and revelation and discipline is that He is other than we are....**When you have come to your best, there is still a gulf between you and the beginnings of Christ that cannot be bridged”.**

He continues:

“Have you not learned the lesson of despair yet? Is it necessary for the Holy Spirit to make you despair again? Why not have one good despair and get it all over? Why despair every few days? Only because you are still hunting around for something, somewhere, some rag of goodness in yourself that you can present to God that will please Him, satisfy Him, and answer to His requirements. You will never find it. Settle it today.”

This is judgment. This is why you need to face death first. Death, heaven, and then earth. First you see what is put away and why. Then you can begin to be found in Him having been made alive, raised, and seated in Christ in the heavens. And only then can that reality, that salvation, that Life, can be made manifest in the earth. It will always be that order.

One of the major problems that the church has today is that we want to start with manifestation in the earth, then die, and then go to heaven. Well, that just isn’t going to happen. First of all, until you realize what it means to be crucified with Christ, the only thing you could possibly manifest in the earth is the flesh, regardless of your intentions. And if you were to try to manifest heavenly reality and relationship before you know the cross, you will become an expression of your own spiritual imagination and nothing more.

Man is only an expression in the earth of what he is conscious of being. If you want to become an expression of anything other than flesh, you must first face death.

The Spirit of God seeks to show you what you are not. That is how it begins. On that foundation He can show you something of what Christ is. Apart from that foundation everything He tries to show you will be analyzed in the darkness and mixed with flesh. First you must face the utter hopelessness of the situation.

First you come to a spiritual realization of what you are not. That’s how it begins. And I don’t mean a natural realization of what you are not. Its one thing to think little of yourself because of insecurities, failures, and faults. Its another thing

altogether to become aware, by the Spirit of God, of your otherness from Christ. People who think little of themselves for natural reasons will often spend all of their energy trying to fix or hide their problems through natural means. But somebody who has seen the otherness of Christ realizes in an overwhelming view of God's perfect object, that the cause is useless. You can never cross this gulf, or fix this problem. You must face death, and find life in Another.

That's how you learn. God gives you a glimpse of His Perfect Object. God reveals His Son, and in the Light of that Son something else can be seen. You see Him, and in His light, there you see both the truth, and you see something that doesn't belong. You see Him and you see a giant spot of darkness that has no right to be there. There you are, seen in contrast to Him, and you understand that the rejection of this darkness is a wonderful thing. You understand that starting with judgment, starting with a great and universal putting away is the only way to come to God. It is clear to your heart that an entire kind and creation fell short of the glory of God, and needed to be drowned in the flood...and only that which was raised up out of those waters in the ark of the Lord could ever live before God. Can you hear what I'm saying?

The whole earth needed to perish, and give way to Him who was raised up out from among the dead. That's what the story of Noah is all about. And here you can begin to comprehend the beginnings of grace. Because grace is far greater than God letting you live. Grace is God letting you die in His Son so that those who want to live can find in Him the resurrection and the life.

And this order begins to make sense to your soul. It is the rejection, condemnation, and judgment of an entire kind and world that fell short of the glory of God. But it is unto something. It is unto the resurrection of a Son in whom there would be a new creation, in whom you could partake of a new seed, in whom you would be accepted, adopted, and loved of God, in whom you would be made alive together, raised together and seated together in Christ in the heavens. And there's our order...death, heaven, and then earth. And that's just Ephesians chapter 2.

**Eph 2:5** even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), **6** and raised *us* up together, and made *us* sit together in the heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus,

Death, heaven, and then earth. Only when the Lord has shown you something, some view, of this death can He, from there, begin to show you a true view of the heavens. And I'm not talking about visions of angels and gold pavement and a big family reunion. I'm talking your soul being raised with Him out of the realm of death, joined to His Spirit, and living forever with Him in the Father. This is heaven. And the Spirit of God, once there is some comprehension of death to build on, will show you that heaven is not a future place to go, but a present and eternal habitation and relationship.

And this is precisely where Paul takes the church of Colossae in Colossians chapter three. Colossians 3 is nothing other than Paul telling us who have died to set our hearts to learn and behold and know the reality of the heavens. He is saying "you who have died and returned with Christ to the glory of His Father, come to know where you are.

**Col 3:1** If, then, you were raised with Christ, seek the things above, where Christ is sitting at *the* right of God; 2 mind the things above, not the things on the earth. 3 For you died, and your life has been hidden with Christ in God. 4 Whenever Christ our life is revealed, then also you will be revealed with Him in glory.

These verses are NOT addressing natural men, earthlings, admonishing them to tilt their head up and fix their eyes, their heart on what they think heaven must be like. These verse are saying to those who HAVE BEEN raised up with Christ into the heavens – “this being so, don’t look back down”. In other words, since you have been raised up with Christ and are hidden with Him in God, now awaken to, become familiar with, and constrained by where you now are...and all of the unimaginable and unstoppable implications.

What does it mean to fix our gaze on things above? Or, to fix our hearts on heaven? Like most Christians clichés, this has been said enough times to be thoroughly robbed of most meaning. But the reality behind these words is the gaze of the soul towards the heavenly reality in Christ that is being revealed by the Spirit of God. It is a turning of the heart, a beholding of Christ, your home, as He is being unveiled by the Spirit of Truth.

Consequently, it is not filling your mind with Bible verses, or imagining the throne room of God, or picturing angels crying Holy, Holy Holy. I did that sort of thing for years, and all that comes of it is a strengthening of your imaginations and preconceptions. Ideas turn into facts with repetition. What do you call a rumor that you’ve heard twice? A fact. And its worse when that rumor has to do with God. Feed your imagination long enough and questions start to give way and ideas settle into the place of spiritual fact. In other words, you can create your own sense of spiritual reality, and fix your heart on that.

I did this for years. I thought I was “seeking the things above”, but really was directing MY thoughts towards MY ideas. I was filling my mind with “heavenly” thoughts, but even my heavenly thoughts were earthly. You see, its not up to us to define what is heavenly. It will never be my thoughts about heaven, or about Christ, or about spiritual truth....and as long as it is my thoughts, this sort of endeavor will only serve to solidify my ideas and make them harder for the Lord to destroy.

There is an order to how the Spirit brings us into the truth. He shows us death, then He can show us something of the person and realm and reality of life in the heavens. And what I’m trying to say is that we must direct the gaze of our soul entirely on what God is revealing of this life “above”. If there is nothing of heavenly reality being revealed in our soul then there is nothing to turn to except our own ideas and doctrines and concepts.

For a long time, I gave myself to setting my heart to know the Lord. I would have sworn on my life that I was turning my heart to know God. I would have bet everything I had that my heart was turned towards the heavens. And yet, I didn’t know what heavenly reality was until I had seen heaven in the Person of Jesus Christ. Friends, the heavens must be revealed. The Father must reveal the universe of Christ. **And the most dangerous thing in the world is our deeply held spiritual convictions that were not birthed in the appearing of the Lord.**

First we must face our end, our death, our judgment in the Person of Christ. This is where learning begins. Then the Lord will begin to reveal the reality of your relationship with God in His Son. This is a heavenly reality and relationship. You will see that it is not an earthly thing at all. It can have expression in the earth, but that is simply because your body remains there for a time. **But God will show you that His relationship is not with the earth, but with a people in the heavens.** God will show you that, in His Son, you have come onto heavenly ground. And His desire for you is that you would be found there, abide there, behold all that he has done there, and be conformed to it in all things. Bear the aroma of it in all things.

But rather than learning where we are, we'd so often rather try to bring God where we understand ourselves to be. Rather than learn to abide in the heavens, we seek to pull Him into the realm where we find our relevance, our goals, our strengths. The place that we like, the flesh that we will not relinquish. Its like we try to haul Him back into the realm that means the most to us, completely ignoring the reality and the Scriptures that declare where our salvation has brought us. We say to ourselves, "heaven is future, earth is now, therefore God, help me make my life count". We seek to bring Him back into time, and place, and state of being, when in fact, the cross was the exodus out of all three.

We think that the order is earth, death, and then heaven..and so rather than find ourselves with Him NOW in the heavens, we try to find His purpose in the earth while we wait for heaven. We seek for God's purpose for our lives in the earth, we try to find God's activity in certain places, and we think His plans are bound up with time.

I get these things in the mail...invitations to Christian conferences, or "summits" as they are often called. And the big catch line is always something like "God's doing a new thing in 2008". Or "2008 is going to be the year of the big..." and you fill in the blank. The big movement, outpouring, empowering, glorifying, visitation, etc. Such and such is really "on God's heart this year." Do you know how outlandish that must sound in the ears of the One who created time to point to the eternal day of Christ? Do you know how irrelevant time is to God? I have a prophecy for you this morning. I don't often do this, but here goes. 2008 is going to be the year of the Great Illusion, unless you and I turn our hearts to see that what God has done for you in Christ has obliterated the relevance of time, place, and state of being in the earth, and raised you up with Him into the realm and relationship of Christ called Heaven.

**When God touches this realm, it is to invite your soul out from it.** That was His business in the incarnation. That is His business today. He touches the earth in order to bring you into the heavens. But since you and I have already been made alive with Him, raised with Him, seated with Him, let us now become heavenly creatures. Let us be vessels in which there is a truly heavenly treasure. Let us be filled with eyes that behold the glory of God on His throne. Let us move with the Lamb wherever He goes. Let us become aware of His otherness and cry Holy, Holy, Holy. Some of you will recognize in this a description of the living creatures.

Maybe I've lost some of you. Let me try to say it as plainly as I know how. God has given you salvation. And despite what you may have assumed, that salvation started with being baptized into His death. That salvation began with being crucified with Christ. You're not going to find another beginning on any page of your New Testament. Your salvation started with death, and until that death has become a matter of spiritual awareness, spiritual fact, then you will have no choice but to live contrary to the truth. You will live according to the lie.

But if your heart is willing to see it, if you are willing to bear in yourself the destruction, if you are willing to lose your life, as Jesus says so often, then you will begin to find life indeed. Is that not what Jesus said? If you will let Him show you the truth, He will first show you that you have no life but Christ. You are dead...and yet you have life. But the life that you have is not the life that you lost. The life that you have is now a heavenly life that is united to the Father. "You have died, your life is hidden with Christ in God". Its not a second chance, it's a new life, a new creation, a new relationship. It is something altogether heavenly.

So when something moves over in your heart and you are willing to see your end, He can show you His salvation. He can show you where the cross has brought you, and what it means. He can show you the relevance and power of being raised up with Him and seated with Him in heavenly places. And then, and only then, can the kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven.

I'm trying to tell you that there is an order to learning Christ. The classes in the School of Christ are arranged according to how truth builds upon truth. And again, I'm not saying that you ever graduate from each class. The classes are all everlasting. But when you have seen something of this death, then you can see something more of the heavens. When you have comprehended something of judgment, then you can be brought into a greater measure of His understanding. And so it keeps on working. And, as we'll probably talk about next time, it is only then that fruit grows outward into the earth.

The fruit that God is looking for is the fragrance of a heavenly man. The aroma of a heavenly creation. The scent of a soul defined and filled and constrained by the life of His heavenly Son. The king of heaven Himself. This is the fruit that glorifies God. The fruit of His Spirit. The fruit of His increase. The fruit of His dominion in the soul.