

The Problem
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The Problem

Last week I shared some things that I hope started us off in a good direction. I asked the simple question – what is Christianity. And we saw that Christianity is nothing more or less than the life of Christ in you, His body. Christianity is not a religion. It is not doctrines and beliefs and ways to live and act and serve God. Christianity is Christ living in you.

In Ephesians chapter 2 Paul says it this way.

***Eph 2:21** in whom [in Christ] the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, 22 in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.*

So when we're talking about Christianity, we're talking about the life of God given to souls. We're talking about a life that is given to you, a life that is formed in you, and a life that is glorified in you. People have made Christianity many other things. But God has only ever had one view. Christianity is the Life of His Son.

But then we talked about what Life actually is. It's easy to agree with the statement that Christianity is life, but still have no idea what that means or why it is significant. So we spent some time talking about how Life is something that we do not have and we do not know naturally. Life, in fact, is something that is utterly foreign to us. We have biological life. We have existence. But Life is something that is exclusive to God. Life is something that we only gain by being born from above. And it is something that we only know when we are shown what Life is by the Spirit of Truth.

Life is the actual nature and character and substance and activity and reality of God. It is God's Life. And it involves His mind and His understanding and His view, and way, and righteousness, and will. To have Life is to participate in God Himself. In the words of Peter, it is to "become a partaker in the divine nature". And to know Life is to begin to experience God's revelation of Himself through the Spirit He has given. And apart from this, no matter what so-called Christian thing we do, no matter what Christian thing we say or learn or teach, apart from it having Life as its source and reality and substance, it is nothing. For this reason, Jesus said "apart from me you can do nothing".

In other words, apart from Me being the Life and reality that is behind all that you see and know and do, then it's just YOU seeing, and knowing, and doing whatever is right in your eyes. And doing what was right in our own eyes was precisely the reason for old covenant Israel's constant contrariness to God. You'll find that this is precisely what God defines as the problem with Israel in Deuteronomy and Judges and the prophets. Doing what is right in our own eyes is just a nicer way of saying "refusing what is real in God's eyes".

We are members of **His** body. He is the head, He is the mind, He is the will. Apart from Him you can do nothing. More clearly put, apart from Him you can do a lot of things that amount to nothing. Nothing of Christ's will is accomplished without Christ's mind working in Christ's body.

People often think that sounds a bit extreme. But nobody would think it is extreme if they were talking about their own body. Imagine for a minute that you are paralyzed from the neck down. You are a quadriplegic. And let's say that I walk over to you and you look a little frustrated. So I ask you what's wrong and you say, "nothing in my body is responding to my mind. Nothing that I am and nothing that I want and nothing that I think has expression through my body". So I simply say to you. "Hey...what do you want? Do you want me to get you a Coke? Do you want me to move your leg in a certain direction? I'd be happy to bend your arm if you think that would be good." But you say to me...."I appreciate the sentiment, but honestly nothing you do would be good if it doesn't come from my mind, my life. You moving something for me is never an expression of me. Even if you dedicated yourself exclusively to doing things for me, it would still never be me. It would still never be my will, my mind, my life."

I don't think anybody here would think differently about their body. So why do we think that God is content to watch us move and "serve" His body through our mind, our life, our good spiritual ideas, our ministry vision, our nature? We only think this way because we don't really know another way to think. We only operate from our own life because we have not allowed the Spirit of God to reveal in us the life of Christ.

So again, Christianity is Christ. It is Christ living in you. And that living, that life, is exclusively Christ's. And that life is formed in you when that life is revealed in you. In other words, that life begins to have expression in you and through you **ONLY** when the Spirit of Truth is given the liberty to teach you that life. **Otherwise, our ignorance and darkness becomes the limit of our experience. Our blindness to the reality of His indwelling life will correspond directly with our failure to know and abide in His life.** We can be born of the Spirit, and still walk in the flesh. Unless the Spirit is permitted to teach us the Life that is in us, we can have met the One who is the Truth, but still be walking by the Lie.

And every Christian, right at this point, says "well, why isn't the Spirit doing that? If He wants to reveal Christ in me, then by all means, just do it!". But here is another way that we demonstrate our ignorance. Here is another place where we have so many misconceptions, presuppositions, and such dangerous ignorance. This is where we demonstrate that we don't understand the nature of the problem.

So that's what I want to talk about tonight. I want to talk about the nature of our problem. I cannot stress this enough, **if we do not understand the nature of our situation, the nature of our nature, the nature of our problem, then there is no chance that we will ever come to understand the reality of God's solution.** How big of a Christ do you think you need? Do you need some sins forgiven? Do you need a ticket to a better place? How big is your comprehension of your need? That question will determine how far your heart wants to heart wants to see the unsearchable riches of Christ.

Here's the bad news: the problem is worse than you think. The problem is worse than you can think...because your thinking is part of the problem.

Here's the good news: the solution is also beyond what you can think. It is far greater, far fuller, far more complete and perfect than anything that man can imagine.

But if we don't face what we are at the beginning of this, if we don't look it right in the face, then we simply won't get very far at all. If we don't completely abandon any idea of saving ourselves, or using *our* mind, adjusting *our* nature....in other words, if we don't agree with God in regards to the complete and total and permanent rejection of the adamic man, then somewhere along the way in this journey we will turn back. I have seen that happen many times. I have seen that happen with people that I care very much about. And there is nothing sadder.

God has utterly rejected and judged the adamic man. These words are easy to agree with when they are just words. But there is an unlimited number of ways why we refuse to let the Lord show us what this means. We think we want to know the truth. But truth begins here. **Truth begins with seeing what we are not.** We must see what the natural man is, and how contrary to God we are by nature. We must, as Jesus says, come to hate our own lives in order to gain His.

I'm not talking about low self-esteem. I'm not talking about self-condemnation. I'm talking about a God-given realization of what Adam is, and a deep recognition and agreement with the fact that the cross must be an end to what we are by nature, and the gift of another Life that is altogether other than what we are, what we do, how we think, and what we want.

Some of you have listened to or read some of my teaching about the Lie. I'm talking about the lie that Adam and Eve believed in the Garden. I am not going to start working through all of that material tonight. We may do that at some point in the future. But I do want to at least present a very general summary of what happened in the Garden of Eden because that is where our problem had its beginnings.

We all know that Adam and Even ate from the wrong tree. We all know that they transgressed a clear command, the **ONLY** real prohibition that God gave them. But why did they do it? What was their temptation. Was it simply a mistake? Was it that the fruit looked particularly different than the fruit of other trees? No, that is not the case. What was it then? Why did they take it? They took it because Satan offered them a lie. They took it because they **wanted** to believe something, they chose to believe something. I don't believe that the heart of the problem was that they took and ate from the tree. I believe that the heart of the problem is that they believed a lie that made them **want** to take and eat from the tree.

So what did they believe? What was this lie? This questions came to my mind one day – what kind of lie was this? What kind of lie could have such an incredible impact. I mean, this obviously wasn't a mere intellectual assent to something false. Adam and Even didn't just fall for a trick here. It's not that kind of a lie. We can see that something in their very constitution immediately changed upon believing this lie. Suddenly Adam and Even were entirely self-aware, self-consumed, and self-condemned.

Suddenly Adam was aware of himself, his lack, his nakedness, his need, his shame. All of the sudden the perspective and peace that he had known were lost, and all things of this creation were seen and known and understood and experienced, not according to God's perspective, but entirely with respect to self-interest. By

consenting to this lie, man's relationship with all things found its identity in the awareness of self and the all consuming obsession of self-preservation.

Paul describes this in the beginning of his letter to the Romans. Man exchanged the truth of God for a lie and became the center of their own story. We exchanged the knowledge of God for our own darkened understanding. And right away he hid, and he blamed, and he feared, and very quickly he killed. And we read that the earth was filled with violence and bloodshed.

Gen 6:5 Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man *was* great in the earth, and *that* every intent of the thoughts of his heart *was* only evil continually. 6 And the LORD was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart. 7 So the LORD said, "I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth, both man and beast, creeping thing and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them."

Gen 6:11 The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence. 12 So God looked upon the earth, and indeed it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted their way on the earth. 13 And God said to Noah, "The end of all flesh has come before Me, for the earth is filled with violence through them; and behold, I will destroy them with the earth."

So here we see the effect of the lie and God's opinion of the Adamic man. But what exactly did they believe? What is the lie? We can see that it has to do with the fundamental, foundational, deepest presuppositions of the human heart. It has to do with what we think we are, who we are, what God is, who God is. And it can be summarized like this. **The lie is an entire perspective or view of reality where man understands himself to have purpose, value, potential, wisdom, destiny, and life apart from God.** This is the heart of the lie. This is what makes Adam tick. This is what Satan offered the first man and his wife. You can be like God. You can know good and evil. You can have your eyes opened. You can be wise. Did God really say?...you can know better.

But we have to understand that this is bigger than a belief. It's deeper than a wrong idea. It is a worldview where man became the center of his own universe. Man became his own lens through which he saw all things, measured all things, valued all things, appreciated all things. All things are relevant to the extent that I am bettered by them. All things are true to the extent that I want them to be real. All things are good to the measure that I gain from them. I believe that, independent of God, I have relevance, potential, purpose.

What I'm saying is that the lie is so much more than a concept that we think. **It is the darkness of the fallen adamic mind that is eaten alive by self-awareness and felt need. It is not just one of our thoughts, it is the foundation for all of our thinking. It's the starting point of all that we perceive...a world where man is center stage. A world where man has purpose, value, life, wisdom, and destiny independent of God's eternal purpose. A darkened world-view where man has actually imagined a purpose, a life, a goal that has nothing to do with truth.**

Sometimes, in the vanity of our imaginations, we will try to include God in OUR purposes. This is a good definition of religion - man's attempt to make God the Lord of our own desires. But in fact, what we want, what we do, and what we are is

naturally no longer submitted to or related to God at all. We are, as Paul says, "children of wrath by nature". We have become, as Jesus says, "sons of the devil". We are, again in the words of Paul, "without God and without hope in the world". We are, he says, those who "conduct themselves in the lust of the flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind". Our mind is said to be "enmity with God". Our will is hopelessly bent towards self and away from good. Our heart, Jeremiah says is "deceitful beyond all things, who can understand it". Our righteousness, Isaiah says, is "filthy rags".

Consider the words of the Psalmist, Psa 62:9 "Surely men of low degree *are* a vapor, Men of high degree *are* a lie; If they are weighed on the scales, They *are* altogether *lighter* than vapor." And the words of Isaiah, Isa 40:15 "Behold, the nations *are* as a drop in a bucket, And are counted as the small dust on the scales; Look, He lifts up the isles as a very little thing. 16 And Lebanon *is* not sufficient to burn, Nor its beasts sufficient for a burnt offering. 17 All nations before Him *are* as nothing, And they are counted by Him less than nothing and worthless."

I am not saying these things and quoting these verses to fill you with despair and hopelessness. And yet, in a way, I suppose I am. There is a kind of despair that is good for the soul. A despair that is according to truth. It is the despair that realizes that our problem now is beyond estimation. Our problem is not that we lie, or even that we have believed a lie. **Our problem is that we have become the lie that we believed. We don't struggle with darkness. We are the darkness that we struggle with.** And we will go nowhere in our understanding or in our experience of salvation if we have not first settled this issue.

The problem isn't something that we have. The problem is something that we have become. The lie isn't something that we must now stop believing. It's too late for that. The lie is someone who must stop living. We will spend a lot of time talking about how this works in us, and why Jesus said that knowing the Truth is how we are made free. But let me now just state these things plainly. You cannot find an end to our problem until you put off the man who is the problem. Our problem has only one end – the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ.

We're going to find that everything about salvation, and everything about our journey to know and experience salvation, is entirely concerned with the cross. It must be this way because the cross is the instrument by which God takes away one man and brings forth the increase of another. And that is the nature of the journey we are on. That is what we are needing to happen in our soul. We have been brought into Christ, born of His Spirit, translated out of one kind and into another. **And yet we need to know the continual displacement of the adamic nature that works in us through blindness, and the revealing of the Life of Jesus Christ who works in us through Light, through faith, through the renewing of the spirit of our mind.**

The Scriptures are filled with this reality. The Old Testament declares it in countless types and shadows. The New Testament proclaims it as the present reality for those who have been born of God's Spirit. Paul writes, "I have been crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live, yet not I, but Christ lives in me" (Gal 2:20). He never once mentions anything about striving to transform the old man. Rather, he speaks of the crucifixion of that man—"Knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with" (Rom 6:6) and the formation in the soul of Someone entirely new. And so he writes to the Galatians, "My children,

with whom I am again in labor until Christ is formed in you" (Gal 4:19), and desires "...that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God" (Eph 3:19).

For this reason we are called "a new creation; the old things have passed away; behold, the new has come" (2 Cor 5:17) and told to "put on the new man" (Eph 4:22). This has nothing to do with a person dedicating themselves to acting like Jesus. This is the actual life of God glorified in and expressed through the body of Christ. Again Paul writes, "For we who live are constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus' sake so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh" (2Cor 4:11). Flesh can never grow to be spiritual. There is nothing spiritual about you apart from the Spirit Himself. Jesus says, "It is the Spirit who lives life; the flesh profits nothing" (Joh 6:63). Paul says of himself, "For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh" (Rom 7:18).

And yet, he says, that Spirit-given realization of the finished work of the cross, we can know (Rom 6:6) and see/understand (Rom 6:11) the old man dead and come to abide in and live by the life of Jesus Christ. "I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing" (Joh 15:5). In the new covenant, "the one who joins himself to the Lord is one spirit" (1Co 6:17). Therefore, "if we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit" (Gal 5:25).

These things are foundational. I realize that. They are foundational, and yet they are unfamiliar to us. They are not unfamiliar as words. We all know the words. But they are unfamiliar as realities. I'm not just trying to quote a bunch of verses to you tonight. **But I am trying to show you that all of the verses in the Bible describe the same problem and the same solution. One man is the problem. Another man is the solution. And facing our death at the cross, and gaining His life through resurrection, is the only plan that God has ever had for humanity.**

This is what it means to know the Lord and be conformed to His image. Christianity without this experience of the cross is nothing. Christianity without an authentic putting off of what we are by nature and a partaking of and experiencing and abiding in the Life of God is just a religion like any other. It is religion that has good words and good friends and good songs and good morals. It is a religion in which all of us have, in the past, found things to love and things to do and things to join. But apart from an inward experience of the cross, it is religion that is just as dead and lifeless as all the rest. Unless we are conformed to His death through the revelation of His indwelling life, we don't even begin to address the problem.

I suppose most of you have already seen something of what I am trying to present to you tonight. We are the problem. The problem is not something separate from us, or something attached to us. The problem has to do with the deepest and realest aspects of what you have called your life. Therefore, Christianity will never patch you up and put you back in the game. Christianity will give to you, reveal in you, form in you, and glorify in you, the Son of God who is your salvation.