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Obeying the Light

I have felt a great burden for you guys recently and have been praying a lot for the Lord's Truth to be realized in you. There is nothing I desire more for you than to see you pressing on toward the high calling of God. Phil. 3:14. As much as I enjoy being with all of you, and having fun together and eating together, that is not why I came. I came because I want to encourage you to throw off everything that is hindering you and press on. Press on that you may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of you.

I know that you all have seen Christ and had a revelation of Christ. But what does that mean? What is the point of that? Is seeing Christ an end in itself, or is it meant to lead to more? Are you experiencing the fulness of Christ because you have seen Him?

If Light has shown in your hearts, and if He has appeared to you and shown you the deadness of the world and the division between Christ and everything else, that is just the beginning. That revelation of Him is just the beginning. It's an important beginning, an essential beginning, but it's just the beginning. It is God's invitation, an invitation to leave the world behind and live according to the reality that you've seen. It's meant to lead you to the fulness.

I have heard you all say the world is dead. The world has nothing to offer. Life is only found in Christ. I know that you know that. I have no doubt that you truly believe the world is dead and life is only found in Christ. But why aren't you experiencing the fulness of that Life? Do you ever ask yourselves that question? I'm sure you do.

Dying to something means more than just *seeing* that it's dead and that the cross put it away. It's one thing for me to say that a particular thing is dead and there's no life in it, but it's still in my life and I'm going to keep participating in it. I'll just remember that it's dead even though I still love it and need it. That's what I did for years. Through the Lord's light I came to see that the world was dead and meaningless. But did I stop engaging in all kinds of things that kept me very tied to the world? No. The Lord's challenge to me now is not just to see that something is dead, but to actually disentangle myself from it and stop doing it, stop relating to it, stop participating in it. Walk away from it. The point I'm trying to make is that knowing and seeing that the world is dead and empty is a whole lot different than actually *living* as if the world is dead and empty.

Most of us have similar Christian histories, I believe. We started off as Christians with very little understanding, doing Christian things without having much reality of Christ working in our hearts.

When we began to see more of His Light, we saw this great division between Him and everything else. We also cast off a lot of our religious practices because we saw they were based in dead works and didn't come out from His life. Many of us enjoyed a time of great freedom. But now what do we do with that freedom? Gal. 5:13, "For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not *use* liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another." And what does it mean to be a servant of Christ? "...as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart." Eph. 6:6. What about so much of the New Testament we've set aside that has to do with holiness, good works, being vessels of righteousness, doing the will of God, and being constrained by God?

The great question that arises in my heart is *how does growth happen?* Not the growth of me, but the increase of the Seed. How is Christ given full reign in my heart?

There are a few specific things that have come to my mind as areas we've lacked understanding, or maybe had wrong understandings about how God works in our souls.

Wrong ideas that hinder growth:

1. A faulty understanding of the finished work of the cross.

What did Christ accomplish at the cross? He provided a perfect, finished way for us to live in Him, free from sin. He provided a perfect new covenant, and made a new and perfect way to lose our lives and live in His. He doesn't need to add anything to it, and we certainly can't add anything to it. Does that mean we automatically live according to that provision? No. If I continue to live my life contrary to the work of the cross, what good has it done in my life? Can I just claim that the work has been finished, and then live however I want?

Phil. 3:14, "I press on that I maybe lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me." He laid hold of me at the cross. He made it all possible. He did the work. But that has to be realized in us. It has to be laid hold of. We must die daily if that work of the cross is going to be realized in us. We must continually and constantly embrace the cross, dying to ourselves that He can live. It's foolish to boast in the finished work of the cross if we are living our lives contrary to the cross. The work of the cross has not yet been finished *in you*.

2. A belief that we have two separate lives – a spiritual life and a natural life.

For a long time I think I believed that I had two separate lives. I had my spiritual life with Christ in the heavens, and then I had my natural life on earth where I went about my daily business with my earthly goals. The Lord really convicted me about that. If I have been bought at a price, then shouldn't my entire life – body, soul, and spirit – belong to the Lord and be under His reign and rule? 1 Cor. 6:19-21, "Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit *who is* in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your

body and in your spirit, which are God's.”

3. A belief that salvation is a one time act.

It's a very common belief among Christians that salvation is experienced in completion when a person accepts Christ. You “get saved” and that's it. The assumption is that it doesn't really matter how our earthly life is lived, because we're guaranteed a spot in heaven for eternity. 1 Corinthians says that the cross is the power of God for those who are *being saved*. Through the daily work of the cross we experience the fulness of our salvation, the working out of our salvation. “Work out your salvation with fear and trembling.” Phil. 2:12. The only thing that really matters is if I am letting the Lord rule and reign in my heart now, today. We cannot have confidence in what we saw a month ago, or a year ago, or ten years ago. Are you allowing His salvation to have its full work in you now? Is He reigning in your heart? Because it doesn't really matter what you have seen in the past; what matters is if He is living through you now.

I want to be clear that we don't do anything to produce God's light. His light has a life of its own, and He gives freely to anyone who will receive. I'm not talking about producing or manufacturing God's life or being the cause of it's growth in us. He causes the growth. He is the power that causes the increase. But what I'm trying to communicate today is that *we can hinder that Life in us*. We can stop it from doing the full work in us that it wants to do. I see this clearly with my kids. The Lord has really been working in their hearts in the past couple years, and I see the small measure of Light in them that is wanting to grow and increase. Now, I can't do anything to make that Light grow. But there are so many things I can do to hinder it. Remember where Jesus says, “Do not hinder the little ones from coming to me?” God is already drawing Eden to Himself, and my responsibility is to not hinder that work. As a parent, there are a million normal things I'm expected to do to give her the best natural life possible. There are decisions I have to make for them every day, like piano and violin lessons, soccer, nice clothes, friends, classes, books, college, etc. The world would say those are innocent things, good things. Is it possible that I could hinder God's life by trying to give her the best of the world? Should we just automatically do what's best for the flesh? It's the exact same with us. He is drawing us. His life wants to grow. But a lot of other things want to grow in us, too. Is there room for all of it? Or can so many seeds of the earth choke out the Seed of Christ?

The picture of a garden is so clear. What we sow, that we will reap. Gal. 6:7. We are all constantly sowing seeds, and the seeds we sow are always growing. We sow seeds with our time, our choices, our affections. Those seeds are growing and they are either producing a harvest of righteousness or a harvest of unrighteousness. There is one Seed that longs to grow and spread out and reign in your soul, but He can't do that if we continue to look to other things for life. He can't fill the whole land if it is already full of other stuff that we're not willing to let go of. God is not mocked. He is not tricked by us saying we want to know Him and want Him to grow in us, and then at the same time continuing to sow seeds in the earth. “Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap.” The choices you make in the earth *testify* of your heart's desire.

“For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body **that it may be conformed to His glorious body**, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.” Phil.3:20-21

He is wanting to transform us! To conform us to His image. To reign in our souls and truly be King. He wants to reign over all of us. Not just reign over our “spiritual lives,” but reign over spirit, soul, and body, that our entire nature would be transformed into His image. You don't have a spiritual life and a natural life! 1 The. 5:23, “Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.” We don't have things we do to serve God here on one side, and then the necessities of the world and its pull on us over here on this side. That's something I think we used to be confused about. If we allow the Lord, He will touch every aspect of our lives and conform it all into His image. He wants to reign over all of it.

I know these are strong words that can make us feel very uncomfortable, and most Christians are horribly afraid of feeling any condemnation. Look at Romans 8:1, a verse Christians love to quote - “There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus.” But we stop there and don't finish the verse. The rest of it says, “Who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.” If you're still walking according to the flesh, you should feel condemnation. You should feel the conviction of the Spirit pointing out sin and drawing you out of the world. What are we living for? If we are truly living for Christ, then let's leave everything else behind and give up all for the sake of knowing Him. Trying to know Christ *and* hold on to the world is miserable. It's frustrating and fruitless, and it's not something we can continue to do for the rest of our lives. One life will eventually give way to the other. Let us be willing to give up all now for the sake of knowing Christ.

Luk. 14:16-24 “Then He said to him, “A certain man gave a great supper and invited many, and sent his servant at supper time to say to those who were invited, ‘Come, for all things are now ready.’ But they all with one *accord* began to make excuses. The first said to him, ‘I have bought a piece of ground, and I must go and see it. I ask you to have me excused.’ And another said, ‘I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to test them. I ask you to have me excused.’ Still another said, ‘I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.’ So that servant came and reported these things to his master. Then the master of the house, being angry, said to his servant, ‘Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in here *the* poor and *the* maimed and *the* lame and *the* blind.’ And the servant said, ‘Master, it is done as you commanded, and still there is room.’ Then the master said to the servant, ‘Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel *them* to come in, that my house may be filled. For I say to you that none of those men who were invited shall taste my supper.’”

Those all seem like valid excuses, don't they? They're not just little trivial things or obviously “sinful” things. But they kept them from the Lord. He extended an invitation to those people, and they chose the other things over Him. When the Lord shines His Light in our hearts, it is an invitation *out*. An

invitation out of one realm and into another. An invitation to leave the world behind and follow Him.

As I'm writing this, I feel such an internal struggle and battle between my life and Christ's. It seems like every day something new is coming to the surface. As I have been seeking Him more, and have been more willing to go on with Him, His Light is searching out and uncovering all kinds of things in my heart. There are things I didn't realize I cared so much about until the Holy Spirit has uncovered them, and I've had this choice to die to that thing or stubbornly hold onto it.

When the Lord puts His finger on something in your heart that He wants to cut off, let it go. Give it up. It is nothing worth holding onto. He is not trying to take anything good away from you. I know that's hard to believe, and it can be very hard to trust Him in that way. But if you can begin to let Him strip you of all that is dead and darkness, you will find true life and joy and come to trust that He only gives; He doesn't take away. He doesn't take away anything *good*. If you feel His conviction of sin, don't ignore it. Don't turn away and try to cover it up. And don't try to struggle with Him over it. Just give up. You will never regret allowing the Lord to take away what is dead. If you walk in obedience to Him, you will feel the sweet reward of true Life and realize you exchanged death for Life, ashes for Beauty.

And that's how God is glorified. He's glorified through the increase of His Son. Where does that increase happen? The increase He desires is in His Body, in us. In a life laid down at the cross so that another Life can live. He's gloried when He can fully reign in our souls. He is not glorified when I continue to live *my life*, but when we lay down our lives through the continual work of the cross as His Spirit shows us the way. We become obedient unto death, even the death of the cross, so that His life can live through us.

Ps. 119:1-2 *“Blessed are the undefiled in the way,
Who walk in the law of the LORD!
Blessed are those who keep His testimonies,
Who seek Him with the whole heart!”*

Mat. 5:8 *“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.”*

1 Cor. 3:11-13 *“For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is.”*

1 Cor. 6:19-20 *“Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.”*

2 Cor. 4:7-12 “But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us. We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed—always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. For we who live are always delivered to death for Jesus’ sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So then death is working in us, but life in you.”

2 Cor. 5:15 “He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again.”

Phi. 3:7-11 “But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.”

Phi. 3:17-21 “Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern. For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame—who set their mind on earthly things. For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.”

Tit. 1:16 “They profess to know God, but in works they deny Him, being abominable, disobedient, and disqualified for every good work.”

Tit. 2:11-14 “For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works.”

Gal. 6:7 “Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap.”

Eph. 5:8-10 “For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth), finding out what

is acceptable to the Lord.”

1 The. 5:23 *“Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.”*

Ja. 4:4 *“Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.”*

1 Jn. 2:15 *“Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.”*