

Yieldedness

I suspect that most of us, maybe nearly all of us, don't really understand Christianity. In this long-overdue lesson, I will try to make clear what the essence is of following Christ, of living the Christian life, of being saved. And I'll say right up front, it's not believing something about Christ. It's vastly deeper than that, yet plain enough for everyone to grasp it.

I'll start—of all places!—with the prophet Ezekiel. (Why not? Almost everything in the New Testament is based on what's already been revealed in the Old.) Ezekiel wrote from Babylon, to which he had been taken in the earlier, 597 B.C., deportation. He wrote to fellow exiles as well as to those still in Judea. His book is in three parts after the first 3 chapters, which are his call to proclaim God's word. Chapters 4 to 24 are a collection of 4 messages that he gave concerning Judah's condemnation for wickedness, especially for idolatry. Then in 586 B.C., Judah fell, the same time that Ezekiel's wife died, a metaphor in the book for Nebuchadnezzar's total destruction of Judah. Jerusalem, the Temple—everything—was wiped out. Chapters 25 to 32 are a series of oracles against the Gentile nations surrounding Judea, and then Chapters 33 to the end are prophecies of consolation thru future restoration.

Ezekiel opens with a horrendous warning: "Judah is a rebellious house," they are "obstinate," they worship "detestable idols," and they "defiled the sanctuary." They have "adulterous hearts" that turned away from the Lord so they can "lust after idols." So, Ezekiel proclaimed: **"Disaster! An unheard-of disaster is coming. The end has come! It has roused itself against you. It has come! Doom has come upon you, you who dwell in the land . . . I am about to pour out my wrath on you . . . and they will know that I am the Lord"** (Chapters 6 and 7). And then in Chapter 8 the Lord gave Ezekiel a vision, a ghastly vision of what horrors were going on in the Temple. In Chapter 9, Ezekiel saw the Shekinah glory lift from above the cherubim and move to the threshold of the Temple. In Chapter 10, that is repeated but then the glory of the Lord departed from the threshold. And in Chapter 11, the glory departed from Jerusalem. With that, the vision ended. So, what's this all about?

The people showed contempt for God. So God removed His presence from His people. He was no longer there among His people to bless them or to protect them. It didn't matter how stout the walls of Jerusalem were, nor how powerful Judah's army was, with the Lord no longer in their midst, they were unable to resist Nebuchadnezzar. In the book of James we read, **"Draw near to God and He will draw near to you"** (4:8). What the tragic history of the Nation of Israel demonstrates too vividly is that the opposite is also true: Abandon God, and He will abandon you (see 2 Chronicles 24:20). And if God abandons you, mercy vanishes. Blessing vanishes. Empowerment vanishes. The relationship is ruptured.

Now, OK, we are not Judah. We are in an altogether different era, in a different dispensation with different privileges. Yet, the principles of a personal relationship with the living, Creator God are no different. "Draw near to God and He will draw near to you." Ignore God and He will ignore you. We dare not claim to be followers of Jesus and be indifferent to Him. Neglecting His teachings and/or ignoring His commands is dishonoring at least; it's more like rebellion. If we love Jesus, which is the mark of a true follower, we will obey Him. Why? Because. . . we love Him! If we fear Jesus, we will obey Him. Why? Because He will judge us. If we're committed to Jesus and loyal to Him, we will obey Him. Obedience is inseparable from biblical faith. Salvation is not a free gift. It comes with responsibilities. It's a gift that establishes a relationship that demands a response of a life committed wholly to Him, whatever sacrifices that may entail. Salvation is the gift of a life, Christ's life, and the goal of that life is Christ-likeness.

A follower of Jesus is radically different from the Israelites of ancient Judea in this one, key respect: We have been gifted with the indwelling Holy Spirit. Israelites not only wouldn't obey their Lord, they couldn't. They will in the future, when the enabling Holy Spirit is given them, but the entire Old Testament reveals that without the empowering Holy Spirit, we can do nothing that pleases God. All we can do is sin. In this present era, the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Christ indwells us to empower us to obey, to serve, to love, to fear, to be committed. The Spirit enables our transformation into Christ-likeness. The Spirit enables us to bear fruit for the Lord. The

Spirit enables us to fulfill His Great Commission. But that's only if we yield to the Spirit! (See Galatians 5:16 and Romans 6:11ff.)

We don't have to yield to the Spirit. We can resist the Spirit (Acts 7:51). We can grieve the Spirit (Ephesians 4:30). We can quench the Spirit (1 Thessalonians 5:19). And if so, without the empowering Spirit, we're just like the Jews of the time of Ezekiel, defenseless against control by the sin nature, the compelling attractions of the world, and vulnerable to the hate-filled demons who seek our destruction.

We aren't told what Adam in the Garden was thinking when he disobeyed God. What matters is, he decided for himself what was the right thing to do. He rejected his creaturely obligation to yield to God's superior wisdom, omniscience and goodness, and so to obey Him. We today, in grotesque pride, expressing hubris and autonomy, want to decide for ourselves what the right thing to do is, what the right way to think is, what the right way to live is. God is not amused! That attitude means we don't really love God, we don't care about being with Him, and we don't care to be like Him.

We must—*must*—be yielded to the Holy Spirit. The Spirit doesn't automatically take over our lives. Nor does He teach us what we need to know about the Christian life or spiritual matters. Nor does He cause us to live out the Christian life. He enables these things. And to do that we must know the Word of God, because it's the Word of God that the Spirit uses. So yieldedness is deliberately imbibing and desiring to live out God's Word, to obey what we know from His Word to be God's will. "Yielding to the Spirit" isn't something abstract, spiritual, other-worldly. It's knowing and obeying the Word, in the expectation that doing that is pleasing to God, and so He will by His Spirit empower it.

What if we don't "yield"? What if we don't care? What if we instead simply count on our belief in Christ as Savior and our attendance at Sunday morning church worship services to fulfill whatever is necessary to be in heaven? The answer to this refusal to yield to God's will couldn't be more ominous: Scripture does not say! It is silent on this. Beware whenever Scripture is silent about something, because when we find out it'll be too late to change course. The Word of God as we have it is sufficient for our salvation and our sanctification. And the author of Hebrews deliberately, repeatedly warns us to go on to maturity, or else. We *must* be yielded to the Holy Spirit.

We are naturally selfish. All humans are. We view the world and others thru the lens of *self*. Our values, ideals, beliefs, and desires are all self-oriented. To be a follower of Christ is radical beyond comprehension in that we are called upon to deny ourselves. And, even more demanding: "take up your cross and follow Me."

Christianity is not a veneer of religion we place upon our innately selfish persons. Christianity is not a religion; it's a Person, the Person of Jesus. And He calls us to be just like Him and to do as He did. Even to making great personal sacrifices out of love, as He did. And He enables it if—*if*—we're so willing.

The Holy Spirit joins to our spirit to create a new creation, a new humanity. The Spirit unites us to Christ. That's a love gift of God thanks to the great, cosmic work of the incarnate Son, His atoning death, His resurrection and ascension. That's a privilege too wonderful to comprehend. It means, essentially, that God joins His life to ours and we become participants in the divine nature (2 Peter 1:4). It enables us to be like the Son. It enables us to do what the Son came to do, namely to reveal God to a dreadfully lost world in the expectation many will be saved. It enables us to be godly. And it enables us to enjoy blessing, peace and joy in the coming Kingdom. It doesn't get better than this. But it all depends on submitting our will, our thoughts and our desires to those of the Spirit of Christ, to what God has revealed in His Word. This is real, something we all can do if we want to.

Dear reader: Let's never presume upon God's grace. Instead, let's humbly trust Jesus who loves us and desires to dwell with us and to see Himself formed in us. That happens by voluntarily, actively causing the Word of God to be expressed in us. That's how we relinquish control to God's Spirit. And so we enjoy the blessing of *koinonia*, fellowship with the living God. The alternative is . . . unthinkable.