

THE UPWARD CALL

*Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet;
but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead,
**I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God
IN CHRIST JESUS.***

(Philippians 3:13-14 NASB)

#03-09149

A Life Lived, Not Taught

August 19, 2009

Recently, I have been considering the question of what the Christian life is all about. What is it supposed to look like? How do we live it? How do we get there? How is Christ formed in us?

It seems that there is a plethora of teaching on living the Christian life. Thousands of Christian conferences are held each year teaching and exhorting Christians how to be holy, how to be filled with the spirit of God, how to manifest the power of God, how to be engaged in the Lord's business, how to worship, how to fight the good fight, and the list goes on, as if there were no end to it.

We know a fair amount about attending conferences. Over a 19-year period, we attended so many conferences and heard so many teaching messages that, one day (I think in 1993), I stated that if I heard another teaching message, I was going to explode. Ironically, I said this publicly as I was sharing a message. To my surprise, it was not well-received by some of the leaders that were listening, for they placed a high premium on the teaching that came forth from their pulpit and, frankly, so did most of us who sat there listening week after week. Over this period that spanned nearly two decades, I don't know how many times we heard: "Have you ever heard such teaching?" "Isn't this teaching wonderful?" "You just don't hear this teaching anyplace else."

When we look back on those years, we are thankful that there were some good things instilled in our understanding of spiritual matters and about Jesus, but these things, in themselves, did not produce change in our life. Actually, many things we heard or were taught did more to produce a religious and judgmental spirit within us. During these formative years, we began to think that we had better teaching and understanding than most other Christians outside our circle of believers. It was **religious pride**; something for which we have had to repent. Today, we realize that, although some of the teaching was good, much of it fell short or did not go far enough. It was as if we (collectively) had decided that we had arrived at all the truth. When this happens, there is no doubt in my mind that spiritual growth ceases, and we stop growing in the truth and being adjusted by it. Well, this is beyond the scope of what is on my heart for this issue, so I will leave it.

I might add that this matter is not confined to conferences but extends to innumerable books, articles, CDs, videos, and every form of media imaginable. I realize that I am part of it all, at least in some small measure, since I post my own writings for others to read. Based on my own experience, I also realize that every now and then a teaching comes along that the spirit of God uses in a significant and, sometimes, life-altering or transforming way. In this regard, over the years, I have had some powerful teachable as well as transforming moments. I continue writing, not so I can have a ministry or even a following of readers, but so others might grow. My desire is that, Lord willing, a few will have a transforming moment through the Holy Spirit as they read something I have put in print.

Now, returning to the matter of conferences; in spite of all these conferences, it seems that the "church-at-large" continues on in its present state and people continue to struggle to reach this seemingly nebulous goal of following the Lord and being like Him. The words of Jesus to **be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect** (Matthew 5:48) can resound in our minds, and yet, we end up scratching our heads, perplexed as to how to be perfect and what it actually means. Or, we could be perplexed by Peter's quote from Leviticus 19:2: **But like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior** (1 Peter 1:15).

Just today, I listened to a clip from a message on this very same question. The speaker was questioning the apparent contradiction that believers keep going to holiness conferences, and yet, they are still striving to be holy. What is the answer? Well, I am not sure that I have the whole answer, but I do believe the Lord has given me part of it.

On April 1, 2009, I was pondering some of the questions I posed at the start of this issue, and I began asking the Lord for answers. As I did, the Lord began to speak a very personal word to my heart.

I heard: **“My life is not to be taught but to be lived. Stu, you have it all wrong; living My life is being.”**

I do not believe the Lord was saying we should not study His life and the history around His life. We need to have understanding of these things, but we need to keep them in perspective. Understanding and knowledge alone do not give us life. This is why we can attend conference after conference and hear well-meaning brothers tell us what to do, or what we should be like, or how we are to get there, and never reach the goal. What is the answer? Jesus!

With these words from the Lord, it became very apparent to me that the reality is Jesus Himself. It is not in teaching, and it is not in trying to rev up ourselves with teaching in order to reach the goal of the Christian life. I am reminded of the children’s story of the little blue engine that kept saying “I think I can” as it pulled a long train up and over a mountain. This is positive thinking but not the Christian life. This is not to imply that we should not be positive in our attitude. Our being positive comes from knowing the Lord Jesus and what He has done for us and continues to do in our lives.

Before proceeding, I must inject two other thoughts. First, some might question: What about the truth that sets you free? It most certainly does, and I am a huge proponent of seeking the truth. But let us not forget that **Jesus is the Truth** as well as **the Way and the Life**. Second, others might question: Does this mean we are to be passive? Absolutely not; faith is hearing and obeying, and we must cooperate with the life within us if we are to attain to the first resurrection, the *exanastasis*. We must not forget that our goal is to be a conqueror who inherits the kingdom through sonship.

The Christian life is Jesus Himself. Simply being taught about Jesus does not lead us to life. We must live His life. His life is being. He is **I AM!**

Perhaps, these words seem too mystical or ethereal (i.e., celestial, heavenly), as if they have no practical meaning to us here in the physical realm. But, after nearly 30 years of walking with the Lord, what He spoke to me gives meaning and explanation to the experiences of life that I have had during these years, and probably even before He broke into my life in a known and obvious way to me.

Simply, we come to know and experience Jesus through our daily life on this earth, and through this process, we become like Him in holiness and perfection. Some would call this **sanctification**, and I agree; however, sanctification is not a process by which we act like the little engine and keep repeating “I think I can.” Sanctification occurs by the life within us, the very life of Christ, the seed of God that is implanted in all who are born of God, having been born from above (1 John 3:9). This seed, which is a new life, a new creation, grows within us. We don’t have to work up a sweat to cause it to grow; **God makes it grow** (1 Corinthians 3:7). How does He do it? He does it through the experiences of life; the ups and downs, the good and bad, as well as through the various, strange, and fiery trials, even the sufferings of Christ. The Christ within us lives through these many experiences and, in this way, we grow and mature. It is about being! As Paul wrote: **For to me, to live is Christ** (Philippians 1:21).

Is this too much to fully grasp? Even as I write this, I have a certain frustration that I am not expressing it fully. If Christ is in you, then this life, His life, is doing the work within you to conform you to His image. It is an active life, not a passive one. At times, we might not recognize the activity of His life within us, but He is there. Over time, we begin to know and sense that a change is taking place (or, has taken place) within us, but this is not always the case as we are going through certain experiences or trials. The fact of the matter is that, while in the midst of certain life experiences, our responses and attitudes are not very Christ-like. It is as if we are like little children kicking and screaming to get our way or like the little engine puffing away to get up the hill. But I have learned that it is not how we evaluate the matter that counts. In fact, I don’t think we can properly assess the matter, for God sees it from an entirely different perspective. He sees the seed of His Son in us, and He is producing growth in that seed that, over time, will manifest itself in increasing measure until, one day, the seed is fully matured. Of course, this full maturation occurs at the resurrection and transfiguration.

Let us be! Christ in you lives!