

Christian Cliches

Conversations and Clichés

Do you ever use clichés? Do you hear them often? No doubt you can answer “Yes” to either question. But have you stopped to consider what they may mean? Christians often use clichés among themselves and even with non-Christians, but there may be a need to give thought to the meanings of these oft-repeated phrases. That is the intent of this essay. We will investigate what is behind the “Christian clichés” that tend to become so much a part of our conversations.

Let’s begin by considering a dictionary definition of the word *cliché*. A cliché is a “trite, stereotyped expression; a sentence or phrase, usually expressing a popular or common thought or idea, that has lost originality, ingenuity, and impact by long overuse.”^{1}

My ministry has put me in touch with Christians all over this country. As I engage in conversation with these Christians, invariably I will hear language about Christian things that has become “stereotyped” and has “lost impact by long overuse.” This doesn’t mean there isn’t truth contained in the clichés. Indeed, often there is truth of great importance for Christian theology and life. The problem is that frequently we use these clichés while thinking we know what we are saying. But do we? Could we explain these phrases if someone were to ask us to define them? My experience is that Christians have difficulty when asked to explain themselves.

Let’s listen to the following conversation and hear how a Christian named Tom responds to questions from a non-believer named Sam.

Tom: Hi, Sam!

Sam: Hello, Tom. Remember when you were talking to Jim yesterday?

Tom: You mean before the sales meeting?

Sam: Yeah. I hope you aren't offended, but I was listening to your conversation.

Tom: Oh, that's okay. We weren't having a private conversation. We were just sharing our beliefs.

Sam: Well, I'm curious about some of the things you discussed.

Tom: Like what?

Sam: Like when you said you have Jesus in your heart. Were you referring to the Prophet who lived so long ago? If so, how can you possibly have Him in your heart?

Tom: Well, yes, I was referring to the Jesus of long ago. But He is alive now, and He has saved me.

Sam: What do you mean, He's alive now? That's not possible.

And what do you mean when you say He saved you? These are weird ideas.

Tom: I guess they sound weird, but they really aren't. You see, Jesus rose from the dead, ascended into heaven, and His spirit lives in me.

Sam: Tom, I don't mean to be rude, but such things sound ludicrous to me. Hey, my phone's ringing and I'm expecting an important call. Maybe we can talk again later.

Sam asked some good questions. They deserved answers. But was Tom able to explain himself? He had a difficult time, didn't he? For example, the phrase, "I have Jesus in my heart" had become a cliché for Tom. He was able to converse with a fellow Christian with the assumption that they understood one another. But it was a different matter when a non-Christian expressed his curiosity about the conversation he had heard the previous day.

I have Jesus in my heart is one of several clichés we will consider. The goal of this article is to motivate Christians to give attention to our conversations and see if you find clichés lurking there.

I Have Jesus in My Heart

Why are you a Christian? How do you answer that question? In my experience many people have responded by stating that they have *Jesus in their heart*. As important as this response may be, too often it is a cliché that belies its meaning. The Christian who acknowledges the importance of thinking through

his beliefs will want to consider its implications for those who hear him. After all, the one who hears has every right to ask what such a statement might mean.

In the third chapter of Paul's Ephesian letter he prayed that his readers would "be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man; so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith . . ." (Eph. 3:16-17, NASB). Galatians 2 contains one of the most powerful expressions of the indwelling Christ in Paul's life. Paul wrote, "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me . . ." (Gal. 2:20, NASB). In his second letter to the Corinthians Paul asks, "do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?" (2 Cor. 13:5, NASB). These passages, and many more, serve to show that the New Testament affirms that Jesus indwells His followers. Thus it is important to stress that when someone says *I have Jesus in my heart* it has biblical merit. A problem arises, though, when we use this expression without attention to its profound message. When this happens we are using a cliché.

So how can we go beyond the cliché in order to describe its significance in our lives? The first point of reference centers on the fact that Christians are Trinitarian, not Unitarian. We believe God exists in three persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. This is a difficult doctrine to understand and share, but it must be upheld if one is using the Bible as the guide for beliefs. If God exists in three persons, and one of those persons is Jesus, God the Son, then we can better understand *Jesus in my heart* by observing that there is a unity between Jesus and the Holy Spirit. For example, in Romans 8 "the indwelling of the Spirit and the indwelling of Christ are the same thing." {2} This doctrine permeates the writings of Paul. He asserted "that Jesus is no mere fact in history, no towering personality of the past, but a living, present Spirit, whose nature is the very nature of God." {3} In addition, we should realize that Paul's favorite

expression revolved around the phrase “in Christ.” This phrase “(or some cognate expression, such as “in the Lord,” “in Him,” etc.) occurs 164 times in Paul.”{4} Thus we can conclude that Jesus is very much alive in the Christian’s life through the Spirit.

The second point of reference concerns the word *heart*. The Bible refers to the heart of man frequently. “The heart is the focus of mind, feeling, and will; it stands for the whole personality.”{5} Jesus is to “take up residence” in our whole personality. So when a Christian says *Jesus is in my heart* there is a literal implication. Jesus resides supernaturally in the believer through His Spirit. This is an astounding doctrine that indicates a transformed person! May our Lord lead us to continue sharing His presence in our lives by indicating that we understand truly what it means to say *I have Jesus in my heart*.

I Have Faith

Is a Christian the only person who has faith? Many Christians seem to think so. On many occasions I have played “the devil’s advocate” among Christian groups by asking them to describe and defend their beliefs. One of the most frequent responses I get is *I have faith*. When I hear this I usually retort by saying “So what? Do you think that because you are a Christian you are given sole ownership of the idea?” After this I encourage them to think about the implications of the phrase. It is much more than a cliché.

All people, Christians and non-Christians, even atheists, exercise faith. That is, each day of our lives we apply faith in simple and profound ways. For example, you may take a pill of some kind today. That requires faith that the pill will help you rather than hurt you. If you travel on an airplane, that requires faith that you will arrive safely at your intended destination. Usually you don’t even see the pilots until you have landed. These are everyday illustrations of

faith. But just what does this word mean?

A major dictionary provides us with intriguing definitions. The first entry states that faith is “confidence or trust in a person or thing.” The second entry says faith is “belief which is not based on proof.” And then in the eighth entry the dictionary declares faith is “trust in God and in His promises as made through Christ by which man is justified or saved.”{6} Obviously the eighth entry comes closest to a Christian understanding of faith. The first entry is also important to a Christian because it includes the idea of trust in a person. But it is the second entry that causes the most problem among Christians. Too many Christians use *I have faith* to mean they believe in something that is not based on proof. Unfortunately, this is when the phrase becomes a cliché.

For over 100 years, naturalism has been the dominant worldview in our culture. Among other things, this worldview bows at the altar of modern science to the extent that many believe that nothing can be true until it can be proven scientifically. Many Christians have been highly influenced by this concept. Thus they tend to say *I have faith* when they can't “prove” their beliefs in a scientific manner. This reaction is not legitimate within a Christian worldview. It is important to realize that even an atheistic scientist takes faith into the laboratory. There are facets of his own life that cannot be “proven” scientifically. If he is married, he may say he loves his wife. Can that be proven scientifically?

The key word in discussing faith is *in*, a small but crucial preposition for all people. Remember, the first dictionary definition we quoted said that faith includes the idea of “trust *in* a person or thing” (emphasis added). Hebrews 11:1, perhaps the most succinct definition of faith in the Bible, states that “faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.” When we read the rest of chapter 11 we realize that *assurance* and *conviction* are words that are alive. They refer to the reality of the living God in

the lives of those who put faith *in* His reality. God was already “proven” to them. He was to be trusted with their very lives.

The same is true for one who claims to be a Christian in our day. When we say we have faith, we should continue by declaring faith *in* the living God.

I’m Saved!

When you say *I’m saved!*, have you ever considered what someone may be thinking? People who hear you may have a number of questions. For example, they may ask why you are speaking in present tense. If you are saved now, does that mean you were actually saved at some point in the past? If so, does the present connect with the past in some way? Or they may want to know why you needed to be saved in the first place. Were you drowning and someone rescued you? Maybe they would even like to know if you are saved *for* something or someone. Proclaiming *I’m saved!* can be a strange expression if it is not explained. If someone asks for an explanation and we can’t respond, we may be guilty of using a cliché. We think we know what we mean, and our fellow Christians may think they know what is meant, but a lack of articulation implies a lack of understanding.

Salvation, of course, permeates the Bible. And innumerable volumes have been written about what the Scriptures tell us about this crucial doctrine. For our purposes the clearest emphases are centered on the person of Jesus, the Savior. When we say *I’m saved!* we imply that Jesus is at the center of salvation.

Before Jesus was born, an angel told Joseph the shocking news that Mary was carrying the center of salvation. “And she will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for it is He who will save His people from their sins” (Matt. 1:21, NASB). Take note of the last portion of this verse. It states that

Jesus will save, and that He will save *from* sins. When Jesus was an infant, Mary and Joseph took Him to the temple for the Jewish rites of redemption of the firstborn, and the purification of his mother. . . .”{7} While there, they were approached by a righteous and devout man named Simeon who took Jesus into his arms and declared to God that he was now ready to die, “For my eyes have seen Thy salvation” (Luke 2:30, NASB). Another amazing declaration! Mary and Joseph’s son was being called God’s salvation. During His earthly ministry Jesus asserted many things about Himself, including this famous proclamation: “I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture” (John 10:9, NASB). Because Jesus is the door, there is a present reality concerning salvation that applies to those who enter through the door.

Through these and numerous other verses we have a more complete picture of what *I’m saved!* entails. But there is a crucial question leaping from such passages. If sin creates the need for salvation, then what is it? To put it simply, when the Christian proclaims *I’m saved!* his hearers should understand that “. . . sin is not only an act of wrongdoing but a state of alienation from God”{8} affecting everyone (Rom. 3:23). This is a crucial concept in contemporary culture that is generally misunderstood and rejected. In addition, such alienation from God cannot be rectified by “rightdoing.” It can only be rectified through Jesus’ sacrificial payment for sin on the cross. *I’m saved* because of what Jesus did for me. In an amazing, life-changing way an event of the past brings salvation into the present. Praise God, we have been saved! Now we can live knowing salvation is in the present.

What Would Jesus Do?

What Would Jesus Do? is a question that can be seen and heard virtually everywhere in the evangelical Christian community. “The slogan has appeared on coffee mugs, lapel pins,

paperweights, and a host of other knickknacks. There are now devotionals, Bibles, books and CDs based on WWJD.”{9} With all of this exposure, does the phrase still have meaning? Or has it become a cliché without proper impact? Or does it carry the correct content in the first place? Lets consider what the expression tells us.

One of the more positive aspects of *What Would Jesus Do?* is that it can serve as a simple reminder of the Christian’s moral life. Surely each Christian has a perspective of Jesus that includes the moral perfection that permeated His earthly life. There is no greater model to emulate than Jesus. The writer of Hebrews tells us that Jesus was “tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin” (Heb. 4:15, NASB). The same writer tells us He “offered Himself without blemish to God . . .” (Heb. 9:14, NASB). Jesus was and is the only one who could make such an unblemished offering. So asking *What Would Jesus Do?*, whether audibly or inaudibly, can awaken us to our need for a moral model.

But can we always know what Jesus would do in all circumstances? Perhaps it would be more accurate to ask *What did Jesus do?* in certain circumstances. Through a study of the gospels of the New Testament we can learn exactly how Jesus acted and reacted to specific challenges He faced. For example, He was faced with “moral conflicts between obedience toward parents and God (Luke 2), Sabbath regulations and healing (Mark 2), and government and God (Matt. 22).”{10} More importantly, on the cross “he was squeezed between the demands of justice for the innocent (himself) and mercy for mankind (the guilty). This conflict was without question the greatest ever faced by man. . . .”{11} These examples usually have entered our consciousness to the point that they ring in our minds like bells tolling the truth. It is as if we would not have expected Jesus to have done or said anything other than what we know from the gospels.

Were Jesus’ disciples ever surprised, if not shocked, by what

Jesus did? Of course we know they often were stunned as they watched and heard Jesus do and say unusual things. The words *amazed* and *astonished* are found frequently in the Gospels. The story of the rich young ruler, for example, relates the disciples' reaction after hearing Jesus' teaching. He said, "How hard it will be for those who are wealthy to enter the kingdom of God!" (Mark 10:23, NASB). And the disciples were "amazed" at His words. Jesus continued by stating, "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." And they were "even more astonished" and said to Him, "Then who can be saved?" (Mark 10:23-26, NASB).

The actions and words of Jesus and the reactions of the disciples remind us of the deity of Jesus. Think of this in present time. If Jesus physically walked beside you, would you always know what He was about to do? "Jesus is unique in his identity as the incarnate Son of God, and we should not assume that we could do or should do everything he did."^{12} Thus, caution is urged when we assume we always know what Jesus *would* do while we affirm what Jesus *did* do.

Notes

1. The Random House Dictionary of the English Language, 1967.
2. Lewis B. Smedes, *Union with Christ*, revised ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1983), 114.
3. James Stewart, *A Man in Christ* (New York: Harper & Row, n.d.; reprint ed., Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1984), 154.
4. *Ibid.*, 155.
5. A. Skevington Wood, "Ephesians," in *The Expositors Bible Commentary*, vol. 11, gen. ed. Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan/Regency, 1978), 51.
6. The Random House Dictionary.
7. Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1969), 194.
8. Donald G. Bloesch, "Sin," in *Evangelical Dictionary of*

Theology, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1984).

9. Albert Hsu, "What Would Jesus Do About WWJD?", *re:generation quarterly* (Winter, 1998/99), 6.
10. Norman L. Geisler, *Christian Ethics: Options and Issues* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1989), 125.
11. Ibid.
12. Hsu, "What Would Jesus Do About "WWJD", 6.

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Worship

Jerry Solomon examines the history and purpose of worship, some contemporary hindrances to worship, and suggestions concerning renewal in corporate worship.

Definitions of Worship

During a 1954 interview A.W. Tozer, a great pastor and editor of the *Alliance Witness*, was asked what he thought would awaken the church from its complacency. This was his response: "In my opinion, the great single need of the moment is that light-hearted superficial religionists be struck down with a vision of God high and lifted up, with His train filling the temple. The holy art of worship seems to have passed away like the Shekinah glory from the tabernacle. As a result, we are left to our own devices and forced to make up the lack of spontaneous worship by bringing in countless cheap and tawdry activities to hold the attention of the church people."(1) John MacArthur, a more contemporary preacher and writer, wrote this indictment in 1993: "In the past half decade, some of

America's largest evangelical churches have employed worldly gimmicks like slapstick, vaudeville, wrestling exhibitions, and even mock striptease to spice up the Sunday meetings. No brand of horseplay, it seems, is too outrageous to be brought into the sanctuary. Burlesque is fast becoming the liturgy of the pragmatic church."(2)

These stinging analyses, whether we agree with them or not, remind us that the biblically based Christian is challenged to consider worship, along with all facets of life, in light of the culture in which he or she lives. Worship should be included in the total worldview of each individual Christian. It is a significant part of a believer's life. With this in mind, we will reflect on the meaning and history of worship, hindrances to worship, and the content of worship. And we will offer our own analyses and suggestions.

As is true with many terms used among Christians, the word "worship" can become a cliché devoid of significant content if we don't stop to consider its meaning. "Our English word means worthship,' denoting the worthiness of an individual to receive special honor in accordance with that worth."(3) The Hebrew and Greek terms found in the Bible "emphasize the act of prostration, the doing of obeisance."(4) Warren Wiersbe offers a broad definition based upon these concepts. He writes, "Worship is the believer's response of all that he is—mind, emotions, will, and body—to all that God is and says and does. This response has its mystical side in subjective experience, and its practical side in objective obedience to God's revealed truth. It is a loving response that is balanced by the fear of the Lord, and it is a deepening response as the believer comes to know God better."(5) A more narrow definition may sound like this: "Worship is pure adoration, the lifting up of the redeemed spirit toward God in contemplation of His holy perfection."(6)

Do these definitions describe worship as you experience it with your gathered church and in your daily life? If so, you

are blessed. If not, perhaps you need to evaluate the place of worship in your life. Perhaps you need to consider honestly if you have allowed yourself to become accustomed to traditions that have confused true worship. Perhaps you have approached worship with the idea it applies only on Sunday mornings. Or maybe you have never stopped to consider the importance of worship.

The History of Worship

What comes to mind when you think of worship? Is it a formal occasion? Is it a joyous occasion? Does it contain certain rituals? Are you involved? Are you praising God? Are you learning? Are you hearing from God? Are you in contemplation? Are you singing? Are you praying? Are you alone, or with other people?

Perhaps you can answer some or all of these questions in the affirmative. And you probably can add other elements to what is contained in worship in your experience. But have you ever considered what worship may have looked like when the early church gathered? Were these elements included, or did it look very different? A very brief survey of the history of worship will help us begin to evaluate the purpose and content of worship today. Our ancestors had to wrestle with what worship entails long before our time. We can and should learn from them.

The worship patterns of the Jewish synagogue served as the model for the first Christians. As Robert Webber has written, "It must be remembered that the early Christians came into worship from a different perspective from modern Christians. We accept the Old because we have been informed by the New. But they accepted the New because they had been informed by the Old."⁽⁷⁾ The promises and prophecies of the Old Testament had been fulfilled in Jesus, the Messiah. Thus Jesus set the stage for the first acts of worship among the early believers by giving new meaning to the ancient ritual of the Passover

meal. Acts 2:46 tells us that the earliest form of Christian worship was a meal—"breaking bread in their homes." (8) Believers were remembering the Last Supper just as the Jews remembered the Passover. Eventually churches became too large to accommodate these shared meals, so a single table with the elements of bread and wine became the focus. Thus "the central act of Christian worship in the history of the church has always been the Communion." (9)

By the second century worship began to look more like what most of us include in our churches. Justin Martyr, an apologist and pastor, wrote of two major parts: the liturgy of the Word and the liturgy of the Eucharist. The liturgy of the Word consisted of lessons from the Old and New Testaments, a sermon, prayers, and hymns. The liturgy of the Eucharist included a kiss of peace; offering of bread, wine, and water; prayers and thanksgiving over the bread and wine; remembrance of Christ's death, including the narrative of the institution of the Last Supper, and a command to continue in it; an Amen, said by all the people; Communion; then the reserved portions were taken by the deacons to those who were absent. (10)

It is unfortunate that by the late medieval period this twofold form of worship was overcome by pomp and ceremony that crowded out its meaning. But even the Reformers of the sixteenth century insisted on maintaining both Word and Sacrament. Their intent was to restore both elements to their primitive simplicity, and in the process the Scriptures were to be given an authoritative place. (11) Most evangelicals attempt to sustain the traditions of the Reformers. But what is the purpose of all this for the gathered church, and the individual believer?

The Purpose of Worship

Why should we worship God? Quite simply, we should worship Him because of who He is—God. In Revelation 4 and 5 we see descriptions that should provide impetus for our worship. He

“is the only God, the highest, the Lord God, the heavenly King, the almighty God and Father, the Holy One.”(12) To put it succinctly, “in worship we simply tell God the truth about Himself.”(13) Each day of our lives we tell God the truth about Himself, if we are thinking and living through the grid of a Christian worldview.

I have a good friend who is a physicist. Years ago his job included the consistent use of a sophisticated electron microscope. This impressive device allowed him to take pictures of the microscopic things he was studying. From these pictures he developed a wonderful slide presentation that served to remind us of the order and complexity that exists beyond what we can see with the naked eye. When we viewed these remarkable images, we responded in worship. Why? Because our worldview prompted us to contemplate the One who created such awesome things. We were filled with wonder. In our response we were telling God the truth about Himself. We were worshiping.

After his death friends of the great French thinker, Blaise Pascal, “found stitched into the lining of his doublet a scrap of parchment with a rough drawing of a flaming cross. Around that cross was the following poem,”(14) entitled “Fire”:

God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob,
Not of the philosophers and the learned.
Certitude. Joy. Certitude. Emotion. Sight. Joy.
Forgetfulness of the world and of all outside of God.
The world hath not known Thee, but I have known Thee.
Joy! Joy! Joy! Tears of joy.
My God, wilt Thou leave me?
Let me not be separated from Thee for ever.(15)

In this unforgettable refrain we hear the heart of a man in worship. Pascal was responding to the very personal presence of God in his life by pouring out his heart. His contemplation led to worship. Jonathan Edwards, the great American

philosopher- theologian of the eighteenth century, shared one of his experiences of worship in his *Personal Narrative*, which was published after his death.

The person of Christ appeared ineffably excellent with an excellency great enough to swallow up all thought and conception . . . which continued near as I can judge, about an hour; which kept me the greater part of the time in a flood of tears and weeping aloud.(16)

The full account of this encounter indicates that Edwards experienced worship during a time of contemplation and prayer. He sought to focus on God, and God responded in a dramatic way, just as was true for Pascal.

Such experiences don't have to be descriptive only of a few. We can apply at least two things from them. First, as with my physicist friend, our lives should include a sense of wonder. And wonder should lead to worship. As Thomas Carlyle wrote, "The man who cannot wonder, who does not habitually wonder and worship, is but a pair of spectacles behind which there is no eye."(17) Second, as with Pascal and Edwards, we need times of contemplation and prayer. Thoughts about God, and prayer to God can lead to a personal encounter with the One we worship.

Some Contemporary Hindrances to Worship

As of July 3, 1997, I will have known my wife for 30 years. During that time my love for her has become enriched through many experiences. If you were to ask me why I love her, I might respond by telling you what I receive from her. Or I might give you analyses of marriage fit for an essay. I might even attempt to persuade you to believe in marriage as I do. None of these responses would be wrong, but they would be incomplete, and they wouldn't focus on the primary subject: my wife, the object of my love. The lover would have hindered true praise of the loved one.

The same can be said frequently of us as we consider worship in our lives. If we aren't careful, we can hinder worship, both individually and corporately, by emphasizing things that may be good, but don't give us a complete picture of what worship entails. There are at least three words that can describe these hindrances: pragmatism, intellectualism, and evangelism.

Pragmatism as a hindrance to worship. First, pragmatism has led many to find ways of getting what they want, instead of what they need. This means the worship "customer" is sovereign. "The idea is a basic selling principle: you satisfy an existing desire rather than trying to persuade people to buy something they don't want."(18) Many churches are growing numerically through such strategies, but is worship taking place? It's my conviction that the answer is "No." People may be coming, but numbers are not the issue. Worship is done among regenerated Christians who are concentrating on who God is, not on what we want. Paradoxically, what we truly want, communion with God, takes place when we pursue what we truly need.

Intellectualism as a hindrance to worship. Second, intellectualism is not a substitute for worship. Coming from one who believes strongly in the importance of intellect in the Christian life, this may be surprising. But I have come to realize that worship is not a glorified Bible study. This does not mean that the preaching of Scripture is not a key ingredient of worship, but the one who is preaching is responsible to share in light of worship. As Warren Wiersbe has written, "There is much more to preaching than passing along religious information. It must reveal, not mere facts about God, but the Person of God Himself."(19) Wiersbe continues: "When preaching is an act of worship, the outline is to the text what a prism is to a shaft of sunlight: it breaks it up so that its beauty and wonder are clearly seen."(20) Such comments also apply to our private times of

Bible study. Our minds are to be used in study, but what is studied includes worship of the One who has communicated with us.

Evangelism as a hindrance to worship. Third, evangelism is not the ultimate reason for worship. Non-believers who are in attendance at a time of worship certainly can be touched by the Spirit, but worship implies the believer's response to God. A non-believer cannot worship the true and living God. Thus an "altar call" should not be the primary focus. Instead, the church should be called to focus on the One who has called them into His family. Then they take what they have heard, seen, and experienced into the surrounding world.

Let's reconsider such hindrances as we seek to worship God, who will be glorified in the process.

The Content of Worship

"I know that Thou canst do all things, And that no purpose of Thine can be thwarted" (Job 42:2). "I will give thanks to the LORD with all my heart; I will tell of all Thy wonders. I will be glad and exult in Thee; I will sing praise to Thy name, O Most High" (Ps. 9:1-2). "The heavens are telling of the glory of God; And their expanse is declaring the work of His hands" (Ps. 19:1). "Holy, Holy, Holy, is the LORD of hosts, the whole earth is full of His glory" (Isa. 6:3). "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ" (Eph. 1:3). "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (1 Peter 1:3). "Hallelujah! For the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns" (Rev. 19:6).

What do these Scriptures have in common? They are statements of worship; they are inspired statements from men to God. And for the moment it's our hope that they serve to stimulate us

to contemplate the content of worship.

One of the most pointed scriptural statements concerning worship is found in Jesus' well-known encounter with the Samaritan woman (John 4:23-24). Jesus told her:

But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers. God is spirit; and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.

Earlier (vs. 21) Jesus had told the woman that the place of worship was unimportant. One doesn't worship just on a particular mountain, in Jerusalem, or any other place. We are free to worship God anywhere. So then He told her what is important.

First, the spirit of worship is important. We are to render "such homage to God that the entire heart enters into the act." (21) Whether we are in a time of private praise and adoration, or gathered with the church in corporate proclamation, we are to respond to who God is from the spirit, from the whole of our innermost being. Second, we are to do "this in full harmony with the truth of God as revealed in his Word." (22) The concept of responding to God in spirit can give rise to confusing individual expressions if those expressions are not guided by Scripture. There must be balance between spirit and truth. One without the other is not complete. "As some see it, a humble, spiritual attitude means little. According to others, truth or doctrinal soundness is of no importance. Both are one-sided, unbalanced, and therefore wrong. Genuine worshipers worship in spirit and truth." (23)

These comments began with quotes from biblical writers who wrote their statements of worship. It's striking to note how those statements contain not only the truth of God, but the truth about God. Truth permeates their worship. But it's also striking to note the spirit with which those expressions were

shared. They are from the heart. They penetrate our lives; they are alive with true worship. As we read and hear such expressions they should encourage us to worship God in spirit and truth. And thus the content of our worship will be pleasing to Him.

Concluding Suggestions Concerning Corporate Worship Renewal

We have discussed several aspects of worship: its definition, history, purpose, hindrances, and content. To conclude we will focus on five suggestions that can be applied to corporate worship in the contemporary church.

First, consider how time is allotted when the church gathers for worship. As churches grow they tend to break into various times of worship. Thus the available time for worship is decreased. One group needs to be released from the worship center in time for another to enter. As a result, often there is a feeling of being rushed. And this feeling of being rushed is exacerbated because so much of the available time is spent with things that may be good, but are not conducive to worship. Announcements may concern good things, for example, but they take time from the true intent of the gathered church.

Second, consider how much attention is given to worship by the leadership of the church. The pastor, staff, and other leadership should demonstrate that worship has a very high priority. There should not be a question of how much energy has been given to preparation for worship on the part of the leadership.

Third, consider who is the leader of worship and why. It is my conviction that the pastor should be the one who calls the body to worship and leads it by example. Much is communicated to the congregation when the primary earthly leader implores the people to give their undivided attention to the reason for

their gathering. In addition, much is communicated when the pastor is involved in worship beyond just the delivery of a sermon, no matter how good it may be. Having served on a church staff for many years, I know some of the time implications of this suggestion. But I believe if the church makes worship the priority, the pastor should provide the leadership for it. Fourth, consider what has priority in worship. Quite simply, the question is whether or not God has priority. Or do other things tend to crowd the allotted time and distract from the true intention? For example, it may be good to let a visiting relative of a church member sing a solo, but has someone talked with this person in order to discuss the reason for any solos within the time of worship? Remember, worship is to be God-centered, not man-centered.

Fifth, consider the place of style versus substance in worship. It appears to me that the "style" of worship is not the issue as much as the substance. In other words, if the people are called to worship God with integrity and concentration on Him, the style is secondary. This applies regardless of whether the style is liturgical/traditional, contemporary, or something in between. But if the style overshadows substance, true worship may be thwarted. It is a wise church that brings both style and substance together in a manner that pleases God.

These five suggestions and the thoughts that have preceded them have been offered with the hope that you have been stimulated to consider the importance of worship in your life. The worshiping Christian in a worshiping church is a person who is continually empowered to impact the world for the glory of God. May you be among those empowered people!

Notes

1. A.W. Tozer, *Keys to the Deeper Life* (Grand Rapids, Mich.:Zondervan, 1957), 87-88.
2. John MacArthur, *Ashamed of the Gospel* (Wheaton,

Ill.:Crossway, 1993), xvii-xviii.

3. Everett F. Harrison, "Worship," in *Baker's Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Everett F. Harrison (Grand Rapids, Mich.:Baker, 1960), 560.

4. Ibid.

5. Warren Wiersbe, *Real Worship* (Nashville, Tenn.: Oliver Nelson, 1986), 27.

6. Harrison, *Baker's Dictionary of Theology*, 561.

7. Robert E. Webber, *Common Roots* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1978), 84.

8. Ibid., 83.

9. Ibid., 86.

10. Ibid., 80-81.

11. Ibid., 87-88.

12. Ibid., 85.

13. Ibid.

14. Peter Toon, *The Art of Meditating on Scripture* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1993),

15. Blaise Pascal, *Fire*, quoted in Toon, *The Art of Meditating on Scripture*, 13.

16. Jonathan Edwards, *Personal Narrative*, quoted in Toon, *The Art of Meditating on Scripture*, 13-14.

17. Thomas Carlyle, quoted in Tryon Edwards, *The New Dictionary of Thoughts* (New York: Standard, 1936), 713.

18. MacArthur, *Ashamed of the Gospel*, 49.

19. Wiersbe, *Real Worship*, 123.

20. Ibid., 124.

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False Guilt – Refusing Christ's Atonement

Kerby Anderson provides an insightful look at the important topic of false guilt. He helps us look at the sources of false guilt, its consequences and the cure in Jesus Christ. If we refuse to fully accept Christ's atonement we can be trapped in false guilt, instead we should embrace His atonement and accept what He did on the cross for us.

Introduction

Have you ever felt guilty? Of course you have, usually because you were indeed guilty. But what about those times when you have feelings of guilt even when you didn't do anything wrong? We would call this false guilt, and that is the subject of this essay.

False guilt usually comes from an overactive conscience. It's that badgering pushing voice that runs you and your self-image into the ground. It nags: "You call this acceptable? You think this is enough? Look at all you've not yet done! Look at all you have done that's not acceptable! Get going!"

You probably know the feeling. You start the day feeling like you are in a hole. You feel like you can never do enough. You have this overactive sense of duty and can never seem to rest. One person said he "felt more like a human doing than a human being." Your behavior is driven by a sense of guilt. That is what we will be talking about in these pages.

Much of the material for this discussion is taken from the book entitled *False Guilt* by Steve Shores. His goal is to help you determine if you (1) have an overactive conscience and (2) are driven by false guilt. If these are problem areas for you, he provides practical solutions so you can break the cycle of

false guilt. I recommend his book especially if you can recognize yourself in some of the material we cover in this essay.

In his book, Steve Shores poses three sets of questions, each with some explanation. An affirmative answer to any or all of these questions may indicate that you struggle with false guilt and an overactive conscience.

1. Do you ever feel like this: "Something is wrong with me. There is some stain on me, or something badly flawed that I can neither scrub out nor repair"? Does this feeling persist even though you have become a Christian?

2. Is Thanksgiving sort of a difficult time of year for you? Do you find it hard to muster up the Norman Rockwell spirit—you know... Mom and Dad and grandparents and kids all seated around mounds of food? Dad is carving the turkey with a sure and gentle expression on his face, and everyone looks so...well, so thankful? Do you find yourself, at any time of the year, dutifully thanking or praising God without much passion?

3. How big is your dance floor? What I mean is, How much freedom do you have? Do you feel confined by Christianity? To you, is it mainly a set of restrictions? Is it primarily a source of limits: don't do this, and don't do that? Does your Christianity have more to do with walls than with windows? Is it a place of narrowness or a place where light and air and liberty pour in?

Usually a person driven by false guilt is afraid of freedom because in every act of freedom is the possibility of offending someone. Offending someone is unacceptable. Other people are seen as pipelines of approval. If they're offended, the pipeline shuts down.

False guilt, along with an overactive conscience, is a hard master. As we turn now to look at the causes and the cures for false guilt, we hope to explain how to break down the

confining walls and tiresome chains that may have kept you or a loved one in bondage to false guilt.

The Source of False Guilt

Next, I would like to focus on the source of false guilt: an overactive conscience. What is an overactive conscience? How does it function? Steve Shores says, "The mission of a person's overactive conscience is to attract the expectations of others."

Imagine a light bulb glowing brightly on a warm summer's night. What do you see in your mind's eye? Bugs. Bugs of every variety are attracted to that light. The light bulb serves as a magnet for these insects. Imagine that light is an overactive conscience. The expectations of others are the "bugs" that are attracted to the "light" of an overactive conscience.

Now imagine a light bulb burning inside a screened porch. The bugs are still attracted, but they bounce off the screen. The overactive conscience has no screen. But it is more than that. The overactive conscience doesn't want a screen. The more "bugs" the better. Why? Because the whole purpose is to meet expectations in order to gain approval and fill up the emptiness of the soul. This is an overactive conscience, a light bulb with lots of bugs and no screen.

A key to understanding the overactive conscience is the word "active." Someone with false guilt has a conscience that is always on the go. False guilt makes a person restless, continually looking for a rule to be kept, a scruple to observe, an expectation to be fulfilled, or a way to be an asset to a person or a group.

The idea of being an asset is a crucial point. When I am an asset, then I am a "good" person and life works pretty well. When I fear I've let someone down, then I am a liability. My

life falls apart, and I will work hard to win my way back into the favor of others.

So an overactive conscience is like a magnet for expectations. These expectations come from oneself, parents (whether alive or not), friends, bosses, peers, God, or distorted images of God. False guilt makes the overactive conscience voracious for expectations. False guilt is always looking for people to please and rules to be kept.

An overactive conscience is also seeking to keep the “carrot” of acceptance just out of reach. This “carrot” includes self-acceptance and acceptance from others and from God. The guilt-ridden conscience continually says, “Your efforts are not good enough. You must keep trying because, even if your attempts don’t measure up, the trying itself counts as something.”

For that reason, an overactive conscience is not happy at rest. Though rest is the birthright of the Christian, relaxing is just too dangerous, i.e., relaxing might bring down my guard, and I might miss signs of rejection. Besides, acceptance is conditional, and I must continually prove my worthiness to others. I can never be a liability if I am to expect acceptance to continue. It is hard to relax because I must be ever fearful of letting someone down and must constantly work to gain acceptance.

In summary, a person with false guilt and an overactive conscience spends much of his or her life worn out. Unrelenting efforts to meet the expectations of others can have some very negative consequences.

The Consequences of False Guilt

Now I would like to focus on the consequences of false guilt. An overactive conscience can keep you in a state of constant uncertainty. You never know if you measure up. You never know if you have arrived or not. You are always on the alert.

According to Steve Shores there are a number of major consequences of false guilt.

The first consequence he calls "striving without arriving." In essence, there is no hope in the system set up by the overactive conscience. You must always try harder, but you never cross the finish line. You seem to merely go in circles. Or perhaps it would be better to say you go in a spiral, as in a downward spiral. Life is a perpetual treadmill. You work hard and strive, but you never arrive. Life is hard work and frustration with little or no satisfaction.

The second consequence is "constant vigilance." The overactive conscience produces constant self-monitoring. You are constantly asking if you are being an asset to other people and to God. You are constantly evaluating and even doubting your performance. And you never allow yourself to be a liability to the group or to any particular individual.

A third consequence is "taking the pack mule approach to life." An overactive conscience involves a lifelong ordeal in which you attempt to pass a demanding test and thus reveal your worth. The test consists of accumulating enough evidences of goodness to escape the accusation that you are worthless. For the guilt-ridden person, this test involves taking on more duties, more responsibilities, more roles. As the burdens pile higher and higher, you become a beast of burden, a "pack mule" who takes on more responsibility than is healthy or necessary.

Just as there is no forward progress (e.g., "striving without arriving"), so there is also an ever-increasing sense of burden. Each day demands a fresh validation of worthiness. There is never a time when you can honestly say, "that's enough."

Finally, the most devastating consequence of false guilt is its effect not just on individuals but the body of Christ. Christians who struggle with an overactive conscience can

produce weak, hollow, compliant believers in the church. They are long on conformity and short on passion and substance. They go to church not because they crave fellowship, but because they want to display compliance. They study God's word not so much out of a desire to grow spiritually, but because that is what good Christians are supposed to do. We do what we do in order to "fit in" or comply with the rules of Christianity.

Steve Shores says that the central question of church becomes, "Do I look and act enough like those around me to fit in and be accepted?" Instead we should be asking, "Regardless of how I look and act, am I passionately worshiping God, deeply thirsting for Him, and allowing Him to change my relationships so that I love others in a way that reflects the disruptive sacrifice of Christ?"

The Continuation of False Guilt

Next, I would like to talk about why people continue to feel false guilt even though they know they are forgiven. After all, if Christ paid the penalty for our sins, why do some Christians still have an overactive conscience and continue to feel guilt so acutely? Part of the compulsion comes from feeling the noose of false guilt tighten around our necks so that we panic and fail to think rationally about our situation.

Steve Shores uses the example of a death-row inmate who has just learned of an eleventh-hour stay of execution. He has just been pardoned, but his body and emotions don't feel like it. He has been "sitting in the electric chair, sweaty-palmed and nauseated, when the wall phone rings with the news of the reprieve." He may feel relief, but the feeling of relief is not total. He is only off the hook for awhile. He will still return to his cell.

The person with a overactive conscience lives in that death-

row cell. The reprieve comes from responding to that guilt-driven voice in his conscience. For Bill it manifested itself in a compulsive need to serve others. If he were asked to teach AWANA or to teach a Sunday school class, he would have great difficulty saying "No." He had to say "Yes" or else he would feel the noose of false guilt tighten around his neck.

Bill's comments were sad but illuminating. He said: "I felt as though not teaching the class would confirm that I am a liability. The disappointment...would inflict shame I felt as a boy. Disappointing others always meant that there would be some sort of trial to decide whether I really belonged in the family."

He went on to tell of the time he made a "C" on his report card (the rest of the grades were "A's" and "B's"). His father lectured him unmercifully. At one point, his father declared that "it was Communist to bring home such a bad grade." Bill didn't know what a Communist was or what Communism had to do with bad grades. But he did understand that if he didn't bring home good grades he was unworthy.

Bill even remembered the six agonizing weeks until the next report card. When it arrived he received five "A's" and one "B." What was his father's response? Was it delight? Was it an apology for his previous comments? Not at all. His father merely said, "That's more like it." The reprieve was halfhearted and temporary.

In essence, false guilt is a stern warden that may give a temporary reprieve but is always ready to call upon you to prove your worthiness once again. We may know that Christ died for our sins. We may know that our sins are forgiven. We may know that we have value and dignity because we are created in God's image. But we may feel unworthy and feel as if we must prove ourselves at a moment's notice.

The key, as we will see in the next section, is to embrace

Christ's atonement rather than our own. We must not only know that we are forgiven through Jesus Christ, but act upon that reality so that we live a life through grace rather than legalism.

A Cure for False Guilt

Finally, I would like to conclude by talking about Christ's atonement for us. If we are to break the chain of false guilt, then we must embrace Christ's atonement rather than our own. Although that statement may seem obvious, it is difficult for someone with an overactive conscience to truly embrace emotionally. For such a person, perfection is the means of achieving salvation. If I can be perfect, then I will no longer feel shame, and I will no longer feel guilt. This is the personal atonement that someone with false guilt often is seeking.

The Bible clearly teaches that Christ's atonement was for our sins. Sin is "any attitude, belief, or action that constitutes rebellion against or transgression of God's character." Clearly sinful man is incapable of making restitution because our best works are as filthy rags before a holy and omnipotent God (Isaiah 64:6). Our atonement must be made by someone with clean hands and a sinless life. Christ, of course, fulfilled that requirement and died in our place for our sins.

Nevertheless, someone with false guilt seeks a form of self-atonement. Why? Well, there are at least two reasons: indiscriminate shame and doubt about the character of God. The first is indiscriminate shame. We should feel guilty and we should feel shame for sinful behavior. The problem comes when we feel guilt and shame even when a sinful action or attitude is not present. Steve Shores believes that the "weeds of shame" can begin to sprout even when we have a legitimate need. We then tend to use the machete of false guilt to trim these weeds back. We say, "If I can do enough things right, I can control this and no one will know how bad and weak I am."

This performance-oriented lifestyle is a way of hacking at the weeds that grow in the soil of illegitimate shame.

The second reason for false guilt is a stubborn propensity to doubt the character of God. Many Christian psychologists and counselors have argued that the reason we may question our Heavenly Father's character is because we question our earthly father's character. And for those who have been abused or neglected by their fathers, this is an adequate explanation. But we even see in the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve doubting God and they did not even have earthly fathers. So I believe it is more accurate to say that our sin nature (not our family of origin) has a lot to do with our tendency to doubt God's character.

This is manifested by two tendencies: blaming and hiding. When we feel false guilt, we tend to want to blame others or blame ourselves. If we blame others, we manifest a critical spirit. If we blame ourselves, we feel unworthy and don't want others to see us as we are and we hide emotionally from others. The solution is for us to embrace Christ's atonement and accept what He did on the cross for us. Christ died once for all (Romans 6:10) that we might have everlasting life and freedom from guilt and the bondage to sin.

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How to Be Successful and Satisfied

How belief in Jesus Christ can help you realize your potential and help you find real satisfaction.

This article is also available in [Spanish](#). 

Success is:_____. How would you fill in the blank?

“That’s easy,” you might say. “Success is ... for an athlete, winning the Super Bowl, the World Series, or a gold medal; for an entertainer, winning an Oscar, a Grammy, or an Emmy; for a businessperson, being a top executive with one of the Fortune 500 companies; for a university student, being elected to Phi Beta Kappa or student government.” But is it always so easy to define?

Several years ago Ranier, a German friend, spent three months with me in the U. S. Once, while he was watching his first baseball game on TV, the batter hit the ball out of the park for a home run. The fans went wild! Ranier turned to me with a puzzled look and asked, “Why are they cheering? They’ve lost the ball?” To the hometown fans the batter was a great success. To someone from another culture, the home run was a mystery.

The meaning of success also varies with individuals. One dictionary defines success as “the satisfactory accomplishment of a goal sought for.” To be successful, you must achieve the goal and be satisfied with the outcome. With this definition one wonders if “success” that does not include personal satisfaction—a sense of well-being—is really true success at all.

KEYS TO SUCCESS

Several factors contribute to success. Consider a few:

1. **Positive Self-Concept.** Imagine that you wake up one morning and your roommate is waiting to tell you something. He or she says, “I’ve been wanting to tell you what an outstanding roommate you are. You’re so kind, so thoughtful; you always keep the room so neat. Just being around you motivates me to

be the most positive person I can be.”

After you recover from your cardiac arrest, you head off toward your first class of the day. Whom should you run into but your date of the previous evening, who says, “Am I ever glad I ran into you! I’d been hoping I’d get a chance to tell you again what a terrific time I had yesterday. My friends are so jealous of me. They think that I’m the luckiest person in the world to go out with someone like you, and I agree! You’re so friendly, so intelligent. You have a great sense of humor and good looks to boot! Why, when I’m with you, I feel like I’m in a dream!”

Then you float into your first class. Your professor is about to return the midterm exams you took last week, but before he distributes them he says, “I have an announcement I’d like to make. I want everyone to know what an outstanding job this student has done on this test.” He points to you in the front row and says, “You are a breath of fresh air to me as a professor. You always do your assignments on time. You often do even more than is expected of you. Why, if every student were like you, teaching would be a joy. I was even considering leaving teaching before you came along!”

Wouldn’t that help you have a great attitude about yourself? And wouldn’t it motivate you to be a better roommate, a better date, a better student? You’d say to yourself, “Why, I’m one sharp person. After all, my roommate, my date and my prof all think so ... and they’re no dummies!” You wouldn’t argue with them for a minute! [{1}](#)

Of course, some people think so highly of themselves that their egos become problems. Nevertheless, many psychologists agree with Dr. Joyce Brothers when she says, “. . . a strong, positive self- image is the best possible preparation for success in life.” [{2}](#)

2. Clearly Defined Goals. Aim at nothing and you’ll surely hit

it. Aim at a specific goal and, even if you don't hit it, chances are you'll be a lot farther along than if you'd never aimed at all.

The U. S. Space Program has produced many successes and, sadly, a few tragic failures. The successes of NASA help illustrate the importance of goal setting. Perhaps you've heard of the three electricians who were working on the Apollo spacecraft. A reporter asked each what he was doing. The first said, "I'm inserting transistors into circuits." The second answered, "I'm soldering these wires together." The third explained, "I'm helping to put a man on the moon."

Which one was more motivated and satisfied? Probably the one who saw how his activities fit into the overall goal.

Without a clear life's goal, daily duties can become drudgery. Knowing your life's goal can increase your motivation and satisfaction as you see how daily activities help accomplish that goal.

In the early 1960's, President John F. Kennedy set a goal of putting an American on the moon by the end of the decade. In 1969, Neil Armstrong took his "one small step." A specific goal helped NASA achieve a major milestone in history. Someone who desires success will set specific goals.

3. Hard Work. Any successful athlete knows that there would be no glory on the athletic field without hard work on the practice field. A true test of character is not just how well you perform in front of a crowd, but how hard you work when no one notices—in the office, in the library, in practice. President Calvin Coolidge believed "nothing in the world can take the place of persistence. Talent will not ... Genius will not ... Education will not ... Persistence, determination, and hard work make the difference." [\[3\]](#)

“A true test of character is not just how well you perform in front of a crowd, but how hard you work when no one notices.”

“What is success?” asks British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. “I think it is a mixture of having a flair for the thing that you are doing ... hard work and a certain sense of purpose... I think I had a flair for ... (my work), but natural feelings are never enough. You have got to marry those natural feelings with really hard work.” [{4}](#)

The heavyweight-boxing champion of another era, James J. Corbett, often said, “You become the champion by fighting one more round. When things are tough, you fight one more round.” [{5}](#)

Success requires hard work. Of course you can overdo it and become a workaholic. One workaholic businessman had a sign in his office that read, “Thank God It’s Monday!” We all need to balance work and recreation, but hard work is essential to success.

4. A Willingness to Take Risks. Theodore Roosevelt expressed the value of this asset in one of his most famous statements: “Far better it is to dare mighty things, to win glorious triumphs, even though checkered by failure, than to rank with those poor spirits who neither enjoy much nor suffer much because they live in the great twilight that knows neither victory nor defeat, ” [{6}](#)

Ingemar Stenmark, the great Olympic skier, says, “In order to win, you have to risk losing.” Consider this question: “What would you do if you knew you could not fail?” That question can expand your vision and enlarge your dreams. Maybe your desire is to be a great political leader, an entertainer, a top businessperson or academician, a star athlete. What would

you do if you knew you couldn't fail?

Now ask, "Am I willing to risk a few possible failures in order to achieve that goal?" Success often involves risks.

AN OBSTACLE TO SUCCESS AND SATISFACTION

A positive self-concept, clear goals, hard work, and a willingness to take risks ... all contribute to success. But there is a major obstacle to experiencing success and satisfaction in life.

In 1923 a very important meeting was held at the Edgewater Beach Hotel in Chicago. Attending this meeting were seven of the world's most successful financiers-people who had found the secret of making money.

Consider what had happened to these men 25 years later. The president of the largest independent steel company, Charles Schwab, died in bankruptcy and lived on borrowed money for five years before his death. The president of the greatest utility company, Samuel Insull, died a fugitive from justice and broke in a foreign land. The president of the New York Stock Exchange, Richard Whitney, spent time in Sing Sing Penitentiary. A member of the President's cabinet, Albert Fall, was pardoned so he could die at home. The greatest "bear" on Wall Street, Jesse Livermore, died a suicide. The head of the greatest monopoly, Ivan Krueger, died a suicide. The president of the Bank of International Settlements, Leon Fraser, died a suicide. All these had learned well, the art of success in making a living, but apparently they all struggled with learning how to live successfully. {7}

Pollster and social commentator Daniel Yankelovich quotes a \$100,000/ year full partner in a public relations firm: "I have achieved success by the definition of others but am not fulfilled. I appear successful ... I have published, lectured, exceeded my income goals, achieved ownership and a lot of

people depend on me. So, I've adequately achieved the external goals but they are empty." {8}

Dustin Hoffman is an extremely successful movie actor. His film career seems almost dazzling and includes an Oscar for his performance in "Kramer vs. Kramer." Yet consider what he says about happiness and satisfaction: "I don't know what happiness is ... life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness? I'd strike out happiness ... Walk down the street and look at the faces. When you demand happiness, aren't you asking for something unrealistic?" {9}

Success in one area does not guarantee satisfaction in life. You can reach all your goals and still not be at peace with yourself. How can you both achieve your goals and be satisfied? And even if you feel a degree of satisfaction, could there be something more?

**"You can reach all your goals,
and still not be at peace with yourself."**

SUCCESSFUL AND SATISFIED

More and more psychologists and psychiatrists are seeing the need to develop the total person physically, psychologically, and spiritually—to produce real satisfaction. Often in our struggle for success, we focus on physical and psychological development at the expense of the spiritual.

Not long ago a group of counselors spent quite a bit of time in New York City interviewing some of the nation's most successful executives. They interacted with editors of newspapers and magazines, executives with advertising agencies, banks, the TV networks, seeking to understand these leaders' ideas about success.

One question these counselors asked involved the spiritual area: "What place do faith and spiritual values have in your life?" In response, 75% conveyed that spiritual values were "important" or "very important" to both personal and professional development. Remarkably, one remarked, "If they could be strengthened, a lot of these other things would fall into place." Yet, surprisingly few of these leaders had clearly defined convictions in the spiritual area. As one radio broadcaster noted with a smile, "I am inspirable, but I can't find anyone to inspire me!" {10}

Then these executives were told about someone who could inspire them, one of history's most influential personalities, a person who stressed the importance of spiritual development as well as the physical and psychological. The life and teachings of this influential and very successful leader have made quite a positive impact on my own life, as well. Perhaps a bit of background will put my discovery in perspective.

In high school I looked for success through athletics, academics and student government. And I found it. I lettered in basketball and track ... our track team was undefeated. I ranked in the top of my class academically, was involved in student government, and was attending one of the nation's leading prep schools. John F. Kennedy and Adlai Stevenson were graduates as were playwright Edward Albee and actor Michael Douglas.

I mention these details not to boast but to draw a contrast. Success in these areas had not brought the personal satisfaction I'd wanted. I was still an introvert, sometimes afraid to introduce myself to a stranger or ask a young woman for a date. My attitudes were often inconsistent with my behavior. Outwardly I could appear very positive and loving, while inwardly I might be negative and resentful of someone I didn't like. Guilt, anxiety and a poor self-image often hindered me from taking risks or from being vulnerable in relationships.

Later, in college, I was still wrestling with these areas. Then I ran into a group of students who had something special about them, a love, joy, and enthusiasm I found very attractive. I especially appreciated the fact that they accepted me just the way I was. I didn't have to try to impress them with a list of accomplishments, though they were sharp, attractive, and successful. Even in dating I didn't feel the normal pressure to display a macho image. They seemed to like themselves and they accepted me, too.

These were Christian students and I knew that I wanted what they had. They told me they had found a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. I couldn't accept all that right away, yet I kept going back to their meetings because I was curious and because it was a good place to get a date. Especially because it was a good place to get a date!

AN OPEN DOOR

The more I spent time around them, the more I saw how their faith affected their lives and relationships. They told me that God loved me unconditionally, but that I was separated from Him by a condition of alienation called sin. They said that He had sent His unique Son, Jesus, to die on the cross to pay the penalty for my sins and rise from the grave to offer new life. When I placed my faith in Him, they explained, He would enter my life, forgive me of my sin, and begin to produce the fulfillment I'd been looking for.

Finally, through a simple, silent attitude of my heart, I said, "Jesus Christ, I need you. Thanks for dying and rising again for me. I want to accept your free gift of forgiveness. I open the door of my heart and invite you in. Give me the fulfilling life you promised." There was no thunder and lightning. Angels didn't rise in the background singing the "Hallelujah Chorus" and I didn't become perfect. But gradually, I began to see change. I had a new inner peace that didn't fluctuate with circumstances. I found a freedom from

guilt and a new purpose for living. I saw my self-image improve and felt freer to take risks, to love others less conditionally.

There are many examples of Christians who are both successful and satisfied: Roger Staubach, former quarterback for the Dallas Cowboys; Julius Erving, star professional basketball player; J. C. Penney, founder of the department store chain; Dr. Charles Malik, past president of the UN General Assembly; Mark Hatfield, U. S. Senator from Oregon; Janet Lynn, a figure skater; Jerome Hines, Amy Grant, Pat Boone and Debby Boone as entertainers: and many more. Being a Christian doesn't guarantee supreme success. Christians have their failures, too. But a relationship with God can enhance your self-concept, help clarify your goals, strengthen your determination and help you improve whatever you do. The personal satisfaction Christ provides can make a positive difference, too.

**“What a tragedy to ... climb the ladder
of success, only to reach the top
and find the ladder leaning against the wrong wall.”**

Here's how: Remember the earlier illustration about your roommate, date and professor showering praise on you? Unfortunately, that doesn't happen every day. But God thinks you are very special, so special that He sent His only Son to die in your place. When you come to know Christ personally and realize the magnitude of His love for you, you can find strength to accept yourself and greater freedom to take prudent risks. You can face rejection with the security that even if everyone else turns on you, God still loves you. Knowing He wants the best for you can increase your determination to work hard for worthwhile goals.

What about you? Does your definition of success include personal satisfaction? Have you found success? Will your success be enough to sustain you through any rough times that may lie ahead? Have you found personal satisfaction?

What a tragedy it would be to spend an entire lifetime climbing the ladder of success only to reach the top and find the ladder was leaning against the wrong wall. Are you willing to consider how Jesus Christ can make a difference in your life?

Notes

1. Illustration adapted from Zig Ziglar, *See You at the Top* (Gretna, LA: Pelican Publishing Co., 1979), p. 46.
2. Ibid., p. 49.
3. Ibid, p. 319.
4. Prince Michael of Greece, "I Am Fantastically Lucky," *Parade Magazine*, July 13, 1986, p. 4.
5. Ziglar, op. cit.
6. Hugh Sidey, "To Dare Mighty Things," *Time*, June 9, 1980, p. 15.
7. Adapted from Bill Bright, *The Uniqueness of Jesus* (San Bernardino, CA: Campus Crusade for Christ, 1968) pp. 14-15.
8. Daniel Yankelovich, *New, Rules*, p-69.
9. Gerald Clarke. "A Father Finds His Son," *Time*, December 3, 1979, p. 79.
10. Patty Burgin, "A View From the Top," *Collegiate Challenge*, 1980, p. ii.

A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the End

Hundreds of cases have been recorded of people who returned from the brink of death to report on "the other side." But are out-of-body experiences really encounters with the afterlife ... or something more deceptive?

A man is dying.

As he lies on the operating table of a large hospital, he hears his doctor pronounce him dead. A loud, harsh buzzing reverberates in his head. At the same time, he senses himself moving quickly through a long, dark tunnel. Then, suddenly, he finds he is outside of his own physical body. Like a spectator, he watches the doctor's desperate attempts to revive his corpse. Soon, he sees the spirits of relatives and friends who have already died. He encounters a "being of light." This being shows him an instant replay of his life and has him evaluate his past deeds. Finally, the man learns that his time to die has not yet come and that he must return to his body. He resists, for he has found his afterlife experience to be quite pleasant. Yet, somehow, he is reunited with his physical body and lives. [\[1\]](#)

You may be one of the many who have read this account of a near-death experience in the best-selling book, *Life After Life*, by Dr. Raymond A. Moody, Jr. Dr. Moody is a psychiatrist who pieced together this picture from the reports of numerous patients he had studied. He notes that not all dying patients have these "out-of-body experiences" (OBE's) and stresses that this is a *composite account* from some who have. Not every element appears in every experience, but the picture is fairly representative, he says.

The last few years have seen a flurry of books and articles on these OBE's as an increasing number of doctors report similar findings. My own curiosity led me to several fascinating interviews with surviving patients.

One interview was with a woman in Kansas, who developed complications after major surgery. She told me that she sensed herself rising out of her body, soaring through space and hearing heavenly voices before she returned to her body.

A man in Arizona was in a coma for five months following a severe motorcycle accident. He said that during that time he saw his deceased father, who spoke to him.

Interpreting the OBE's

How should we interpret these out-of-body experiences? Are they genuine previews of the afterlife? Hallucinations caused by traumatic events? Or something else?

Let's evaluate.

First, the people who have death-related OBE's fall into different categories. Some have been pronounced clinically dead and later are resuscitated. Others have had close calls with death, but were never really thought dead (such as survivors of automobile accidents). Still others did die—permanently—but described what they saw before they expired.

Second, the determination of the point of death is a hotly debated issue. In the past, doctors relied merely on the ceasing of the heartbeat and respiration. More recently they have used the EEG or brainwave test. Some argue that death must be *an irreversible* loss of all vital signs and functions. These would say that patients who were resuscitated did not really die because they were resuscitated. But whatever one considers the point of death, most would agree that these folks have come much closer to it than the majority of people

living today.

A number of possible explanations for the OBE's have been offered. Different ones may apply in different situations. Here are a few of the main theories:

The physiological explanations suggest that a "physical" condition may have caused some of the out-of-body experiences. For instance, cerebral anoxia (a shortage of oxygen in the brain) occurs when the heart stops. The brain can survive for a short while (usually only a few minutes) without receiving oxygen from the blood. Anoxia can produce abnormal mental states.[{2}](#) Thus, patients who recover from heart failure and report OBE's may be merely reporting details of an "altered state of consciousness," some say.[{3}](#)

The pharmacological explanations say that drugs or anesthetics may induce some of the near-death experiences. Some primitive societies use drugs to induce OBE's in their religious ceremonies.[{4}](#)

LSD and marijuana sometimes generate similar sensations. [{5}](#) Even many medically accepted drugs have produced mental states akin to those reported by the dying. Ether, a gaseous anesthetic, can cause the patient to experience "sensations like that of being drawn down a dark tunnel."[{6}](#)

The drug ketamine is an anesthetic that is injected into the veins.[{7}](#) It is used widely and produces hallucinatory reactions 10% to 15% of the time." UCLA pharmacologists Siegel and Jarvik report the reactions of two subjects who took this drug:

"I'm moving through some kind of train tunnel. There are all sorts of lights and colors, mostly in the center, far, far away; way, far away, and little people and stuff running around the walks of the tube, like little cartoon nebbishes; they're pretty close."

“Everything’s changing really fast, like pictures in a film, or television, just right in front of me. I am watching it happen right there.”[{9}](#) The tunnel, lights, people and film scenes in these accounts bear some resemblance to the OBE images.

The psychological explanations suggest that the individual’s mind may generate the unusual mental experience. Sigmund Freud, writing about the difficulty of coping with the thought of death, said it would be more comfortable in our minds to picture ourselves as detached observers.[{10}](#) Some modern psychiatrists, following this theme, theorize that the OBE is merely a defense mechanism against the anxiety of death. That is, since the thought of one’s own death is so frightening, the patient’s mind invents the OBE to make it seem as if only the body is dying while the soul or spirit lives on.

Dr. Russell Noyes, University of Iowa psychiatrist, has done extensive research into the experiences of people in life threatening situations. He says that the OBE is “an emergency mechanism . . . a reflex action, if you like.” [{11}](#)

Noyes and his associate, Roy Kletti, write, “In the face of mortal danger we find individuals becoming observers of that which is taking place, effectively removing themselves from danger.”[{12}](#)

Other psychologists wonder if the patient may be confusing his or her *interpretation* of the experience with what actually happened.[{13}](#) The conscious mind seems to need an explanation for an unusual vision; therefore, it interprets the event in familiar terms. Thus, say these psychologists, the resuscitated patient reports conversations with deceased relatives or religious figures common to his culture.

It is possible that an OBE

could be completely spiritual and yet not be from God.

Spiritual Theories

The spiritual explanations grant the existence of the spiritual realm. They view many of the OBE's as real manifestations of this realm. Dr. Moody, while admitting his inability to prove his belief, feels that the OBE's represent genuine previews of the afterlife.[{14}](#) The famous Dr. Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, well-known writer on death and dying, says she became convinced of the afterlife through her study of OBE's and related phenomena.[{15}](#)

Many have noted that the experiences in Dr. Moody's first book, *Life After Life*, seem to contradict some of the traditional Christian beliefs about the afterlife. All of the patients—Christian and non-Christian—report feelings of bliss and ecstasy with no mention of unpleasantness, hell or judgment.

However, Dr. Moody's first book was based on limited observation. Further research yielded new information that he presents in a second book, *Reflections on Life After Life*, which came out in 1977 (two years later).

He has now talked with numerous patients who refer to a "city of light" and describe scenes that are reminiscent of biblical material.[{16}](#) Some of his other patients report seeing "beings who seemed to be 'trapped' in an apparently most unfortunate state of existence."[{17}](#)

One woman who was supposedly "dead" for 15 minutes said she saw spirits who appeared confused. "They seemed to shuffle," she reports, "as someone would on a chain gang . . . not knowing where they were going. They all had the most woebegone expressions. It was quite depressing."[{18}](#)

Dr. Moody now states, “Nothing I have encountered precludes the possibility of a hell.”[{19}](#) Some have felt that the OBE’s are inconsistent with the biblical concept of a final judgment at the world’s end. No one reports standing before God and being judged for eternity. Dr. Moody responds in his second book by pointing out that “the end of the world has not yet taken place, “so there is no inconsistency.” There may well be a final judgment,” he says. “Near-death experiences in no way imply the contrary.”[{20}](#)

Life After Death?

How should one view the OBE’s and their relationship to the issue of life after death? Scientific or experimental methods are currently unable to solve the riddle (as a number of scientists will admit).[{21}](#) Not only is it difficult to provide controlled situations during medical emergencies; the scientist has no instruments to determine the *content* of events in the spiritual or mental realms.

Personal testimony alone is insufficient as a test of truth in these cases. Subjective mental experiences can be deceptive and are susceptible to influence by injury, drugs, psychological trauma, etc., as stated previously. Also, what would we conclude when the experiences differ?

Another approach involves the spiritual realm. Presumably, a qualified spiritual authority could accurately inform us about the afterlife. But with so many differing authorities on today’s spiritual scene, whom should we believe?

An increasing number of educated men and women are concluding that Jesus of Nazareth is a trustworthy spiritual leader. A major reason for this conclusion is that He successfully *predicted* His own out-of-body experience—that is, His own death and resurrection. Consider the evidence:[{22}](#)

Jesus was executed on the cross and declared dead. His body

was wrapped like a mummy and then placed in a tomb. An extremely large stone was rolled against the entrance. A unit of superior Roman soldiers was placed out front to guard against grave robbers. On the third day, the stone had been rolled away and the tomb was empty, but the grave clothes were still in place. The Roman guards came out with the feeble story that the disciples had stolen the body while they were sleeping. But how could they know who had done it if they were asleep?

Meanwhile, hundreds of people were saying they saw Jesus alive and were believing in Him because His prediction had come true. Both the Romans *and* the Jews would have loved to have produced the body to squelch the movement. No one did. The tomb remained empty and Christianity spread like wildfire. Jesus' disciples were so convinced that He had risen that they endured torture and even martyrdom for their faith.

Jesus Christ successfully predicted His own resurrection. This was not a mere resuscitation after His heart had stopped beating for a few minutes. It was a dramatic physical resurrection after several days in the grave.

Why is this incident so important? The resurrection shows that Jesus has power over death. It establishes Him as a spiritual authority. Because He remains consistent on statements we can test (such as His resurrection prediction), we seemingly have solid grounds for trusting Him on statements we *cannot* test (such as those He made about life after death).

One statement Jesus made was that all who believe in Him will have everlasting life, an eternity of joy. As one early Christian wrote: "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love Him."

Jesus also explained that God loves us and desires our happiness both now and after we die. [{24}](#) However, we all initially exist in a condition of separation or alienation

from God. This condition is called sin, and it prevents us from achieving maximum fulfillment in this life and from spending eternity with God.[{25}](#)

Jesus claimed to be the solution to our sin problem. By His death on the cross He paid the penalty for our sins so that we might be forgiven and live forever with God.[{26}](#) The Bible explains, “God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son (Jesus). He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life.”[{27}](#) If we refuse this free gift in Jesus, we are choosing to exclude ourselves from God, opting instead for an eternity of suffering. [{28}](#)

OBE Interpretation

In light of the above, how should one interpret the OBE’S? Here are some guidelines I use.

Because I have concluded that historical evidence supports both the authority of Jesus and the accuracy of the biblical documents, accept them as a standard.

If a given OBE contradicts biblical statements or principles, I do not accept it as being completely from God. If the experience does not contradict biblical statements or principles, then it *could* be from God. (I say “could” because there is always a possibility of influence from one of the other factors—body, drug or mind.)

It is also possible that a given OBE could be completely spiritual and yet not be from God.

Jesus clearly taught the existence of an evil spiritual being, Satan.

We are told that Satan “disguises himself as an angel of light,”[{30}](#) but Jesus said that he is “a liar, and the father of lies.”[{31}](#)

One of Satan’s favorite deceptions is convincing people that they can achieve eternal life by doing good. That way, they don’t see their need for receiving Christ’s pardon.

Could this be the reason that sometimes the “being of light” in the OBE’s tells the patient to go back and live a good life, but makes no mention of a commitment to Christ? (I’m not accusing everyone connected with OBE’s of deliberately being in league with the devil. Rather, I’m offering a word of caution, a suggestion to consider satanic influence as one of several possible alternatives in individual cases.)

Obviously death is a common denominator of the human race. Some seek to avoid the issue or to insulate themselves from it through possessions and pursuits, popularity or power. Many feel that whatever belief makes you comfortable is okay. Do any of these descriptions fit you?

In the spring of 1977, a nightclub near Cincinnati was packed to the brim. Suddenly, a busboy stepped onto the stage, interrupted the program and announced that the building was on fire. Perhaps because they saw no smoke, many of the guests remained seated. Maybe they thought it was a joke, a part of the program, and felt comfortable with that explanation. When they finally saw the smoke, it was too late. More than 150 people died as the nightclub burned.[{32}](#)

As you consider death, are you believing what you want to believe, or what the evidence shows is true? Jesus said, “I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me shall live, even if he dies.”[{33}](#)

I encourage you to place your faith in Jesus Christ as your Savior. Then you, too, will live, even if you die.

Notes

1. Paraphrased from Raymond A. Moody, Jr., M. D., *Life After Life*, Bantam, New York, 1976 (first published by Mockingbird Books in 1975), pp. 21, 22.
2. Stanislav Grof, M. D., and Joan Halifax-Grof, "Psychedelics and the Experience of Death," in Toynbee, Koestler, and others, *Life After Death*, McGraw-Hill, New York, 1976, p. 196.
3. Daniel Goleman, "Back from the Brink," *Psychology Today*, April, 1977, p. 59.
4. Michael Grosso, "Some Varieties of Out-of-Body Experience," *Journal of the American Society for Psychical Research*, April, 1976, pp. 185, 186.
5. Grof and Halifax Grof, pp. 193-195; Stanislav Grof, "Varieties of Transpersonal Experiences: Observations from LSD Psychotherapy," *The Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*, 4: 1, 1972, p.67; Russell Noyes, Jr., M.D., and Roy Kletti, "Depersonalization in the Face of Life-Threatening Danger: An Interpretation," *Omega: Journal of Death and Dying*, 7: 2, 1976, p. 108.
6. Raymond A. Moody, Jr., *Reflections on Life After Life*, Bantam/ Mockingbird, New York and Covington, Georgia, 1977, p. 108.
7. Moody, *Life After Life*, p. 157.
8. Louis Jolyon West, M.D., "A Clinical and Theoretical Overview of Hallucinatory Phenomena" in R. K. Siegel and L. J. West (eds.), *Hallucinations Behavior, Experience, and Theory*, John Wiley & Sons, New York, 1975, p. 292.
9. Ronald K. Siegel, Ph. D. and Murray E. Jarvik, M.D., Ph.D., "Drug-Induced Hallucinations in Animals and Man," in Siegel and West, pp. 116-118.
10. Sigmund Freud, "Thoughts for the Times on War and Death" (1915), *Collected Papers*, Vol. 4, Basic Books, 1959; quoted in Russell Noyes, Jr., M.D., "The Experience of Dying," *Psychiatry*, May 1972, p. 178.
11. Joan Kron, "The Out-of-Body Trip: What a Way to Go!" *New York Magazine*, December 27, 1976-January 3, 1977, p. 72.

12. Noyes and Kietti (1976), loc. cit.
13. Dr. Charles Tart in Robert A. Monroe, *Journeys Out of the Body*, Doubleday, Garden City, New York, 1971, pp. 6, 7.
14. Moody, *Reflections on Life After Life*, p. 111.
15. James Pearre *Chicago Tribune*, "Ghost Story: How a long dead patient talked doctor into continuing work with the dying," *San Francisco Sunday Examiner & Chronicle*, November 14, 1976, section B, p. 7.
16. Moody, *Reflections on Life After Life*, pp. 15-18.
17. Ibid, pp. 18-22.
18. Ibid., pp. 19-21.
19. Ibid., p. 36.
20. Ibid., pp. 36, 37.
21. Ibid., pp. 132-135; A. Susan Mennear, "Life After Death?" *Good Housekeeping*, September, 1976, pp. 187,188; J. B. Rhine, Ph. D., "Parapsychology and Psvchology: The Shifting Relationship Today," *The Journal of Parapsychology*, June, 1976, pp. 131-133.
22. For a more thorough documentation of resurrection evidences, see Josh McDowell, *Evidence That Demands a Verdict*, Campus Crusade for Christ International, 1972, pp. 185-273; see also pp. 15-79 for evidences for the reliability of the biblical documents.
23. 1 Corinthians 2: 9, NIV.
24. John 3: 16; John 10:10.
25. Romans 1:23; 6:23.
26. Luke 19:10; Mark 10:45; 1 Peter 2:24; John 3:16.
27. 1 John 5: 11,12.
28. John 3:36; Revelation 20:15.
29. McDowell, loc. cit.
30. 11 Corinthians 11:14.
31. John 8:44.
32. "They Didn't Believe It," *The New York Times*, May 30, 1977, p. 16; Hal Bruno, "The Fire Next Time," *Newsweek*, June 13, 1977, pp. 24, 27.
33. John 11:25.

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