



# **Bible & Life**

## **Bible Teaching Newsletter**

**BIBLICAL DOCTRINE & NEW TESTAMENT ASSEMBLY LIFE**

Vol. 24, No. 1

Jan. 1, 2017

### ***The Performance Snare***

*by David Dunlap*

When one becomes a true believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, he is born into the family of God and delivered from the domain of darkness. However, Satan does not willingly yield a believer to Christ without a hard-fought battle. Although Satan cannot snatch us out of our new position in Christ, he does all he can to blind us to the complete forgiveness that is ours in Christ.

One of the most successful tactics that Satan uses to defeat the Christian is to get him to dwell on his failures. Once a Christian begins to feel guilty about his performance in the Christian life, it is impossible to live up to the full potential he has in Christ. There is no more successful tactic for Satan than to cause a believer to condemn himself for his failures. As mature Christians look back over their lives, they can easily see how often Satan has used guilt and condemnation to defeat them and prevent them from living victoriously.

#### **What is the Performance Snare?**

What is the performance trap? First of all, we knowingly sin. The guilt for that sin soon begins to convict our conscience, and we confess that sin to God in accordance with 1 John 1:9. There we read, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us of our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness." After we confess our sin to God, we feel the guilt and burden of that sin lifted and we then continue on well in our Christian life for a while. But we soon fall into another sin or even the same sin, and the guilt and conviction for those sins flood back into our hearts. This process begins to repeat itself over and over again. This process happens to every Christian: mature, seasoned, new, and zealous. Soon we begin to fix our attention on our failures as Christians and condemn ourselves. We begin to say in our hearts, "If I am a Christian and the Holy Spirit indwells me, why can't I get victory over this sin? I am a worthless, weak, and shabby Christian." We wonder why we can't control our pride, our thought lives, and our tempers. We convince ourselves that God cannot be pleased with our lives. Soon our once-active service for God, our worship, and our witnessing become almost non-existent. Satan is especially effective in stumbling the more serious-minded Christians. In no time at all, he can get us to feel like despicable worms before God. He will convince us that we couldn't possibly expect God to hear us when we pray, and surely He wouldn't answer our prayers even if He did hear. He gets our eyes solely focused on our meager Christian lives. But then a new thought enters our minds, and we say to ourselves, "I am going to try harder in living for God."

***"A clear conscience is never based on attainment; it can only be based on the work of the Lord Jesus in the shedding of His blood...What, after all, is your basis of approach to God? Do you come to Him on the uncertain ground of your feelings, the feeling that you may have achieved something for God today? Or is your approach based on something far more secure, namely, the fact that the Blood has been shed, and that God looks on the blood and is satisfied?"***

**Watchman Nee**  
(1903-1972)

That is the key to victorious Christian living, I just haven't tried hard enough!" Nevertheless, we continue to fail and enter a state of defeated Christian living. We begin to measure our Christian lives by our performance and not by the Cross. This is the performance snare.

### **The Key to Spiritual Growth**

For every one look at our performance, we should look ten times at the cross of Christ. It is only by looking at Christ and being occupied with Him that we become stronger in living the Christian life. We may be weak, but looking at our weakness will never make us strong. No attempt to feel bad and do penance will help us to be even a little holier or a little stronger in the Christian life. God does not want us to dwell on our sins, but rather on His forgiveness. If our focus is continually on ourselves, we can't be "looking away (from all that will distract) to Jesus the author and finisher of our faith" (Hebrews 12:2 *Amplified Bible*).

Learning what Christ accomplished at the cross is the most important truth we will ever discover in our lifetimes. It should saturate your minds and hearts everyday. Counting as true the absolute forgiveness which Christ accomplished at the cross is the foundation of a dynamic Christian life. We cannot really respond to God in faith unless we know He has accepted us just as we are. Paul tells us in the letter to the Ephesians that we are "accepted in the Beloved" (Ephesians 1:6). The "Beloved" is a title of the Lord Jesus Christ. God sees us in His Son and, therefore, accepted, based on the finished work of Christ. God sees the believer wrapped up in Christ and accepts us even as He accepts the Beloved One. He will not let go of us, because we are in His Son. To fail to be accepted by God for even one second would mean that somehow the finished work of Christ was inadequate. That is just impossible.

### **Sin and the Christian's Relationship to God**

Our misconception of concerning grace is the number one reason why Christians fail in their relationship with God. Because we are aware of the many ways we fall short of what we should be as Christians, we assume that God must be displeased with our performance. The more we let God down, the more we assume His anger toward us. Ultimately, in our minds, we feel such alienation that it is virtually impossible for us to enjoy a vital relationship with Him. The tragedy is that God is not angry with us; it is just a feeling we have created in our minds. So often, we attribute to God emotions and behaviors that people frequently have towards each other. On a human level, if we let people down or offend them, this results in anger on their part. This is understandable, but we must be careful not to attribute to God what we see in men.

Scripture is our guide when it comes to our relationship with God and His response to us when we are unfaithful. When these doubts arise in our minds, our first response should be to remember our full forgiveness in the Lord Jesus Christ. Notice what the apostle Paul writes in his letter to the Colossians: "He has now reconciled you in His body, through death, in order to present you before him holy and blameless and beyond reproach" (1:22). When do you become "blameless and beyond reproach"? That happens the minute He reconciles you to the Father, and that happens the moment you believe in Christ's death for you. Let us unpack this truth a little bit more. There are several words for reconciliation in the original Greek New Testament. One is found in Matthew 5:24, *diallasso*, which means that two parties are at enmity with each other and need to be

---

***"It was the  
delight of His  
(Christ) heart to  
do the will of the  
Father. It will  
be the delight of  
our hearts to do  
the will of the  
Lord Jesus  
Christ if we  
really love  
Him."***

---

**H. A. Ironside**  
(1876-1951)

Comments on John's  
Gospel chapter 15:10

---

reconciled by removing the cause of enmity. This word is used strictly of human relationships in the Bible. There is another word, however, which is always used in connection with God and man: *apokatallasso*. This word means that only one party has enmity in his heart and needs to have the barriers separating fellowship removed, while the other party has no enmity. We see that God has no hostility towards us. He has always loved man. In fact, He became man, so that as our substitute, He could bear our judgment. In so doing, He removed every barrier that our sin had erected between Himself and us. God never needed to be reconciled; man was the one that needed it.

The Bible puts it this way: "...God was in Christ reconciling *the world to Himself*, not counting their trespasses against them...for He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Cor. 5:19,21). This doesn't sound like an even exchange; He gets our sins and we get God's righteousness. This is simply God's wonderful plan to reconcile man back into fellowship with Him. This is why God can say, if we might paraphrase, to all who receive Christ, "You are *now* holy and blameless *in my sight* (Col. 1:22). Can you think of another human being, including yourself, who views you as totally holy and blameless? From God's perspective you are *now* totally holy, blameless. He does say that you will be holy one day if you live a consistent Christian life; but you are *now* holy by virtue of the work of Christ.

### **The Power of the Cross**

Holiness is not a status which is given on a temporary basis while we try to become worthy of it. Once God puts us into union with His Son, we are clothed with His righteousness and God sees us as holy and righteous. In living out the Christian life, we may be quite imperfect, but our acceptance in God's eyes is never based on how we perform. Rather, it is based on the fact that we are in Christ. Knowing these liberating facts and counting them true moment by moment are the most important factors in living a life pleasing to God. We cannot help but respond with love and obedience to someone who loves us and accepts us.

However, Satan is dedicated to keeping us from finding out these liberating truths, and leading us to lives of discouragement and defeat. He lets us have just a little taste of true Christian living and then he moves in with his heavy artillery. He will get us to fail God and get our eyes on ourselves. Satan would love to blind us to the wonderful finished work of Christ on the cross. Satan knows that the best way to blind us is to keep our eyes on our failures and off the cross of Christ. We may not even realize it, but the number-one reason the power of God is short-circuited in our lives is that we have never truly grasped the power of the cross. The cross is the continuing basis of God accepting and forgiving us.

The importance of this truth is stressed by the Chinese evangelist Watchman Nee (1903-1972) when he wrote:

*A clear conscience is never based on attainment: it can only be based on the work of the Lord Jesus in the shedding of his blood. I may be mistaken, but I feel very strongly that some of us are thinking in terms such as these: "Today I have been a little more careful; today I have been doing a little better; this morning I have been reading the Word of God in a warmer way, so today I*

---

***"You are too much occupied in looking at yourself, and too little in beholding the Lord Jesus Christ. It is by the former that you are to be humbled; but it is by the latter that you are to be changed into the divine image."***

---

**Charles Simeon**  
(1759-1836)

---



Bible & Life Ministries, Inc.  
3116 Gulfwind Dr., Land O' Lakes, FL 34639

## January 2017

### INFORMATION

Bible and Life is published periodically and sent out free of charge, supported entirely by the free will offerings of the Lord's people. Checks should be made out to "Bible and Life Ministries, Inc."

#### Correspondence should be sent to:

BIBLE & LIFE Newsletter  
c/o David Dunlap  
3116 Gulfwind Drive  
Land O' Lakes, FL 34639  
(813) 996-1053

#### e-mail

daviddunlap@earthlink.net

#### web site

www.bibleandlife.org

#### Facebook

<http://www.facebook.com/pages/Bible-Life/139555992799868>

*can pray better!" Or again, "Today I have had a little difficulty with the family; I began the day feeling very gloomy and depressed; I am not feeling too bright now; it seems there must be something wrong; therefore, the way is not clear for me to approach God."*

*What, after all, is your basis of approach to God? Do you come to Him on the uncertain ground of your feelings, the feeling that you may have achieved something for God today? Or is your approach based on something far more secure, namely, the fact that the blood has been shed, and that God looks on the blood and is satisfied?"<sup>1</sup>*

### Conclusion

After hearing about the complete forgiveness we have in Christ, some may conclude that God does not care if we don't live for Him. Absolutely not! It is the Lord's desire that His children live godly lives and not sin. In no way are we condoning sin. The Holy Spirit will faithfully convict a believer of sin, so that he might confess his sin, and be restored to full fellowship with Christ.

However, allow me to pose an important question. Which is the better motivation for living the Christian life? Guilt or love? Both are motivations. Many like to use guilt and shame to motivate the Christian. Guilt may be effective in the short run. But soon the guilt-ridden believer is so discouraged and battered with shame that he gives up living for Christ. He says to himself, "This Christian life may work for some super-Christians but not for me." On the other hand there is the motivation of love and grace. We read, "If you love Me, keep My commandments" (Jn 14:15). Obedience to God and keeping His commandments is an outgrowth of our love for him. Living for Christ out of the motivation of love and grace is effective for living victoriously for Him in the long run.

### Endnotes

1. Watchman Nee, *The Normal Christian Life*, (Fort Washington, PA: CLC Publishers, 1971), p. 17