

EVANGELISM AND WITNESSING

AS A LIFESTYLE

By Paul Penno Jr.

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You take your temperature when you think you have a fever; can you take a self-test to see if you are living under the Old Covenant, or under the New? At Mt. Sinai, ancient Israel voluntarily enslaved themselves under Old Covenant darkness that shadowed their history thereafter until finally they destroyed their nation and crucified their Messiah, the world's Redeemer.

What's the difference between the two lifestyles today?

(1) New Covenant living is believing the promises of God, rejoicing in the salvation already achieved for you, saying Thank You to God for saving you from the second death by the sacrifice of Christ's blood. It's realizing consciously that the bread you ate today is stamped with the cross of Christ, that every breath you draw is a gift of His much more abounding grace, that you're infinitely and eternally in debt to Him. It's reading Ephesians 1 and believing that you have been adopted into the family of God, thanks to something the Savior already did and not what you have ever done. It's joyously, willingly, happily, surrendering yourself to follow Him in service today, counting not your life dear unto yourself, gladly consecrating yourself to listen obediently to everything the Holy Spirit says to you—all because your little selfish heart is stretched outside to “comprehend with all saints

what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height, and to know the *AGAPE*—love of Christ, which passeth knowledge,” the love that drove Him as far as hell to save you from hell. Yes, it's total obedience motivated by His abounding grace.

(2) Old Covenant living is constantly trying to do everything right, motivated by fear of the judgment, concerned because Christ has not already done all of this for you but is waiting for you first to do something that would make it possible for Him to do all this for you.

There we did it! Someone in the family was sick, we lost sleep, we had God-given duties to perform, we have a family to support, we have a long commute (we're trying to live in the country—isn't that good? But it means hours on the freeway), we are so pressed with responsibilities night and day, that we fall asleep at night exhausted. So now we haven't read our Bible and prayed as we should. We haven't maintained our relationship with the Lord. We have broken our part of the “contract” we have with Him.

Now it's up to us to re-build our “relationship” with the Lord. But under the New Covenant God's law is written in the heart, not on stone. Not only does He (a) initiate this blessed relationship with Himself (John 3:16, remember!) but (b) He “so loves” us that He seeks to maintain this relationship. In His personal absence Christ sends the Holy Spirit whose first work is to “convict ... of sin,” then “of righteousness,” and then “of judgment, because the prince of this world is condemned” (John 16:7-12).

The Good Shepherd still seeks His “lost sheep” (Luke 15:3-7). This is the work of the Holy Spirit: “Your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, This is the way, walk in it, whenever you turn to the right hand or whenever you turn to the left” (Isa. 30:21). The Lord of the Old Covenant is like your credit card company—miss a payment or be late, and the penalty begins. But the Good Shepherd of the New Covenant loves you so much that when you start to light up a cigarette the Holy Spirit tells you, “No! Don’t do this!” If you’re a glutton, when you go to the refrigerator at the wrong time He says, “No! Don’t do this!” If you’re an alcoholic and you begin to take a drink, He tells you “No! Don’t take it!” He is constantly seeking to write that holy law in your heart.

You can beat Him off, you can refuse, you can be stubborn; but what are you doing? You are crucifying Christ afresh.

Now is the Day of Atonement, the time for New Covenant living. “Be reconciled to God” (2 Cor. 5:20). And thank Him that He hasn’t forsaken you.

We have a choice: we can live under the old covenant (the still popular way as it has been for millennia), or under the new. And if we choose to live under the new covenant, all will go well with us; right?

If we are driving, all the lights will turn green for us; the boss will give us a raise; our spouse will smile sweetly at us; our investments will prosper. Right?

Jesus surely lived under the new covenant, but He also died under it; from His boyhood He met constant opposition and turmoil that led Him

eventually to the cross. No, new covenant living is not a picnic.

As a student in the “school of Christ” you are under serious, loving discipline (Heb. 12:5-10). Some setbacks and disappointments may be good for you in the long run. But the Lord tempers our trials, giving each of us the benefit of infinite wisdom. To each of us is given the “measure of faith” that makes life where His providence has placed us a thing of quiet, steady joy.

Even Jesus in His incarnation endured discipline. We read that “He [learned] obedience by the things which He suffered” (5:8). You will someday thank the Lord Jesus for permitting certain disappointments to come to you; your present happiness can be greatly enhanced by anticipating this through your confidence in His faithfulness. The joy of the future can become yours in the present through faith.

The first message Jesus gave to the assembled disciples after His resurrection was, “Peace be unto you” (John 20:19). This is no vain compliment; peace of heart is what you long for and He gives it to you today. “My peace I give to you,” and that is in the midst of tribulation (see 14:27). The peace comes with your believing the new covenant promises, all seven of them in Genesis 12:2, 3.

You may have to pray the prayer of Mark 9:24: “Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief.” A wise writer assures us that we can never perish while we pray that prayer. Every little prayer you pray, making that choice, makes you stronger in the Lord.

There is no checklist where you tick off “works” item by item which you think you have performed. That can lead to spiritual pride, or equally, to despair, because it’s the essence of Old Covenant living. It’s deceptive because it appears on the surface to produce results—outward “obedience to the law.”

But New Covenant living is a constant choice to believe the Lord’s promises. It’s a constant renewal of the distraught father’s prayer who prayed because of his demon-tormented son, “Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!” (Mark 9:24). You can never perish while you pray that prayer! Even if you live to be 100, you’ll still be praying it, but you’ll be having victories constantly.

Paul says we are not to climb up to heaven to get righteousness, but the Lord Jesus descended from heaven to give it to us: “The righteousness of faith speaks in this way, ‘Do not say in your heart, “Who will ascend into heaven?”’ (that is, to bring Christ down from above), . . . but what does it say? ‘The word is near you, even in your mouth and in your heart’ (that is, the word of faith which we preach)” (Rom. 10:6-8). Instead of waiting for you to climb up into Heaven, the Holy Spirit is coming down to where you are. The Good Shepherd looks for and finds His lost sheep.

New Covenant living is the kind of life that Abraham lived. We don’t read that he ever made any promises to God, but he chose to believe God’s promises to him. They were these:

(1) “I will make of you a great nation.” In other words, you will have fulfillment,—super. You will be somebody (all this is Genesis 12:2, 3).

(2) “I will bless you,” which means simply, make you happy,

(3) “And make your name great.” You’ll become all you really want to become, in Him.

(4) “You shall be a blessing” everywhere you go. In other words, you’ll always be making other people happy. It’s life to the full!

(5) “I will bless those who bless you.” God will reward people who help you.

(6) “I will curse him who curses you.” This has to be, as part of the blessing on you. You are under the Lord’s special protection.

(7) “In you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” That’s Christ, of course; but you are “in Christ” now, so you share in that joy.

Responding to these promises is beyond the level of mere emotion; all true obedience is based on the principle of simply believing these promises, that they are made to you. Ask the Lord to hold you by the hand as you follow Him step by step; He does!

The Lord takes a special delight in His people who trust Him in the face of discouraging circumstances. To trust Him before others, before the world, is itself a form of missionary work, because people are “reading” your Christian experience before they read your tracts and books.

Jehoshaphat leading unarmed Israel by faith, with hymns of praise to God, to face a huge opposing army—this is a grand example of trusting the Lord in the face of apparently hopeless opposition (2

Chron. 20:15-22). If King Saul, even though he had sinned grievously against the Lord, had led Israel likewise to face the Philistines in humble, honest, confessing faith, the Lord would not have abandoned him (the sad story of his unbelief is in 1 Sam. 31). The Lord loves repentant sinners!

Your battle of faith is as precious to the Lord as was Jehoshaphat's; his story is written "for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come" (1 Cor. 10:11). The writing of the Bible is already finished, but your story of trusting the Lord can still encourage others and give you the joy of witnessing for the Lord.

Could you be as important a person in God's great universe as Job was? You may say, "I don't want Job's job! Give me an easier witness assignment!" But you may already have that important witnessing assignment. Both Job and Jesus chose to be loyal to God, to hold on to their faith when there seemed to be no hope whatever; and that was wonderful. They both honored God. But there must be another development in the great controversy between Christ and Satan before the end can come. There must be a people, a corporate body of "saints," who before the world and the universe demonstrate that they "keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus" (Rev. 14:12). The same chapter identifies them as "144,000" who "follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth" (vss. 1-5). They are a distinct group who are new on the stage of the world in view of the universe who have been watching this grand drama unfold, because they "sing as it were a new song [that] no man could

learn but the 144,000" (vs. 3). That means that they will have a new experience, because no one in the Bible sings a song carelessly or thoughtlessly; each is sung out of deep experience. And if they sing a new experience then they must have a new comprehension of what it cost "the Lamb" to save them. They have identified with Him experientially more closely and deeply than any other corporate body of God's people through all time. Revelation says that they will grow up to a maturity that qualifies them for a unique place in the plan of salvation: "the Lamb's wife." These people must not come from only one culture or language or society; they are expressly said to be from "every nation, and kindred, and tongue" every tribe on earth. Each must demonstrate that the grace of Christ has been "sufficient" for one from the most sinful, depraved culture on earth, who believes, to "overcome even as [Christ] overcame." If only "143,999" overcome, the line will be broken. That last one must hold the line. He/she is tremendously important. That one is YOU.

Too busy to pray and study the Bible? Driven by work, by duty, family to support, classes to attend and study for, fall into bed exhausted each night—then you suddenly remember, "I've neglected God! Haven't prayed for . . . (you fill in the blanks, days, weeks, whatever); in fact, I haven't seen my Bible for . . . (you fill in the blanks); I can't even find it, where did I leave it? I just don't have time to keep up my devotional life."

And then some preacher comes along and puts another burden on you, "If you want to be saved,

you must (1) pray, (2) study, (3) witness . . . You MUST!" And so you try.

But prayer seems empty, Bible study a bore, and witnessing—forget it; what can YOU witness to anyone! Like Joseph and Mary who forgot Jesus and left the little Boy in Jerusalem while busy—like they started home (Lk. 2:43-45), it'll take you now "many days to find Him again," says even your favorite author. Maybe it's too late now to find Him. God and His people have moved on and you are way behind. Can you ever catch up?

Right now is a critical time for you. You've come to a crisis: are you going to re-establish an Old Covenant way of thinking and resolve to work harder at your devotional life? If so, it'll be successful—yes, for a few days or weeks at least. Camp meeting, the

revival meetings, woke you up. "Never again will I neglect (1) prayer, (2) Bible study, (3) witnessing . . . until well, I hope I don't get 'busy' again."

Let's understand the New Covenant: overwhelmed by your frustration and sense of failure, BELIEVE: (1) The Savior has not forgotten you; (2) He is seeking you, not waiting for you to seek Him; (3) believe His promise He made to your "father," Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3; Rom 4:16; he got busy, too!); (4) the Father is doing the same thing to you that He did to Jesus—knocking on your door "morning by morning, wakening [your] ear to hear as the learned" (Isa. 50:4). He actually loves you; now don't be "rebellious" (see vs. 5).

Paul says to Timothy, "From a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make

thee wise" (2 Tim. 3:15). Do the holy scriptures say anything about children?

Proverbs 20:11 suggests that "even a child" will be held responsible for "his work" being "right."

The little Hebrew girl kidnapped by the Syrians made herself world famous by witnessing to her faith in God (2 Kings 5:2-4). She didn't allow the Syrians to brainwash her into paganism.

David as a lad confronted Goliath in the name of the Lord God of Israel. But even the Israelite king and army weren't sure who they were. The Philistines had brainwashed them.

Joseph as a kidnapped teenager refused to let Egypt brainwash him (Gen. 39:7-13).

Jesus as a lad of 12 confronted the intelligentsia of Israel (Luke 2:46, 47). All His life, Satan tried to brainwash Him into denying His identity, up to His last moments when they taunted Him, "If Thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross" (Matt. 27:40).

Is it possible for a child in a childish way to take up his cross and follow Jesus? We know this for sure: he'll be tested when he goes to school, even to Sabbath School. Will he yield to peer pressure? Not if he has learned in the holy scriptures and believes them.

All the wonderful promises that Jesus made before His death must and will be fulfilled. But there is one GREAT promise that has not yet been fulfilled, and many Christians think it never will be. They are wrong! He will not fail.

That great promise is in John 16:13: "When He, the Spirit of truth, is come, He will guide you into all

truth.” We usually think of the Holy Spirit as giving us happy feelings or of giving great power in witnessing and producing baptisms; we think that understanding “all truth” is of lesser importance. But over 200 times the Bible speaks of the importance of truth. In ordinary life, law courts, juries, judges, seek constantly to know the truth. Jesus says that it is so important that “the truth shall make you free” (8:32).

In His same promise that the Holy Spirit will guide us “into all truth” Jesus promised, “He will show you things to come.” The wording is very similar to the opening of the Book of Revelation, “the revelation . . . of things which must shortly come to pass” (1:1). The Book of Revelation was the fulfillment of Jesus’ promise! And yet Christian people go in all different directions in understanding what Revelation is saying!

Likewise, there is confusion in understanding Daniel’s prophecies; yet God commanded the angel, “Gabriel, make this man to understand the vision,” and later the angel said to him, “I will show thee the truth” (8:16; 11:2). Paul spoke of his message as “the truth of the gospel” (Gal. 2:5). There is as much division in understanding that as there is in understanding Daniel and the Revelation!

What can bring about a unity and clarity of understanding these important truths? Surely when that great fourth angel of Revelation 18:1-4 begins to “lighten the earth with glory,” the message that calls every sincere person “out of Babylon” will be a message of pure, unadulterated truth. We pray daily for the baptism of the Holy Spirit. An excellent place

to begin finding the answer to that prayer is in honest, sincere, and humble listening to the Bible to permit it to tell us what the truth is in all these controverted areas. Jesus did not promise, “The Holy Spirit will TRY to lead you into all truth,” or “He wishes He could lead you into all truth.” No, He said He WILL do so. As surely as I write and you read this, so surely is the Holy Spirit right now “leading” us into the truth that will bind us together in loving harmony of belief. Let’s listen to Him!

Have you ever thought of Abraham as a lonely man? You remember, he is “the father of all them that believe” (Rom. 4:11), and therefore your “father” in the faith. If Abraham was a lonely man, and yet God was with him, there is encouragement there that the Lord can be with you even if you serve Him as a lonely person.

In Isaiah 51:2 the Lord says, “I called [Abraham] alone,” or as the Hebrew says, “I called him when he was but one, and blessed him, and increased him.” Thus it appears that Abram (his name at first) was the only person in the world who worshipped the true God truly—when God called him. We know that his father Terah worshipped idols (Joshua 24:2) while living in a community that worshipped the moon (Ur of the Chaldees). Maybe we should revise that, and say that Abram was the only person of his generation who worshipped the true God, because Shem was still living, somewhere. But being hundreds of years old, maybe Shem was no longer able to do the kind of witnessing work that God was calling Abram (later named Abraham) to do.

Evidently from a very early age, Abram knew that it was wrong to worship the moon, and probably tried to persuade his brother Haran and his father Terah to recognize the one true God who created the moon (with some success it seems, for Terah's family always had some knowledge of the truth). But how do you remain faithful to God when you are all alone? And how do you worship an invisible God when everybody around you wants some idol or heavenly body to be His presence, to represent Him? Get acquainted with your "father" Abraham!

Today, you may be alone (or as the Hebrew says, "but one") in your family or your village, or your school, or (God forbid!) even in your church (if that's true, your church needs you as a witness for Him!). Well, God specifically says, "Look unto Abraham, your father, and unto Sarah that bare you" (Isa. 51:2). Let your faith demonstrate that you are indeed a child of Abraham. He "believed in the Lord" (Gen. 15:6). Now, you do the same. Then you won't remain alone ("but one") for Isaiah says that "[God] increased him." Evidently it's impossible to REMAIN alone.

We hear and read at length about the need for us to develop and maintain a "relationship" with Jesus. The problem is that many people don't know how to do that. They feel frustrated that their (a) reading the Bible, (b) their prayers, and (c) their "witnessing" don't get anywhere. They wonder frankly, HOW do you build or maintain a "relationship" that's one-sided? "Jesus doesn't say anything to us!" And their Bible study turns out to be boring. Some get discouraged and stop trying.

What they need is Good News that is better than they have thought it is. Here are three brief points of how good that Good News is: (1) Jesus isn't waiting for you to initiate or even "maintain" a "relationship" with him. He Himself has taken the initiative to build it: "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you," He says ever so plainly in John 15:16. What He is wondering about is how He can build a one-sided relationship with YOU! He has made all the advances; your job is to respond—which is what it means "to believe." He did all the loving and the giving FIRST (take another look at John 3:16).

(2) He seeks to maintain the relationship through the daily, even hourly prompting of the Holy Spirit: "Thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left" (Isa. 30:21). "The Father . . . will give you another Helper, who will stay with you forever. He is the Spirit, who reveals the truth about God" (John 14:16, 17, GNB). Yes, that's true; believe it. He WILL stay with you unless YOU take the initiative to drive Him off. Yes, the ball is in your court.

(3) Please read Isaiah 50:4, 5. Get it? The elusive "relationship" is on, unless YOU choose to be "rebellious."

Acts 9:36 (NKJV) 36 At Joppa there was a certain disciple named Tabitha, which is translated Dorcas. This woman was full of good works and charitable deeds which she did.

John 13:35 (NKJV) 35 By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.

2 Corinthians 3:2-3 (NKJV) 2 You are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read by all men; 3 clearly you are an epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh, that is, of the heart.

Matthew 9:36-38 (NKJV) 36 But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd. 37 Then He said to His disciples, "The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. 38 Therefore pray the Lord ...

1 Corinthians 9:20-22 (NKJV) 20 and to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the law, as under the law, that I might win those who are under the law; 21 to those who are without law, as without law (not being without law toward God, but under law toward ...

Mark 5: (NKJV) 5 Then they came to the other side of the sea, to the country of the Gadarenes. 2 And when He had come out of the boat, immediately there met Him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit, 3 who had his dwelling ...

Luke 14:12-14 (NKJV) 12 Then He also said to him who invited Him, "When you give a dinner or a supper, do not ask your friends, your brothers, your relatives, nor rich neighbors, lest they also invite you back, and you be repaid. 13 But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, ...

John 17:11-19 (NKJV) 11 Now I am no longer in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one as

We are. 12 While I was with them in the world, I kept them in Your name.