

WHO ARE YOU? IT'S A MATTER OF LIFE AND DEATH

Sin, guilt and the identity crisis in the world and in converts, and their resolution in Christ

Depressed believers

Many Christians are on anti-depressants. The divorce rate inside the church isn't much different from outside. When you compare this situation with the believers in the New Testament it is obvious that something has gone very wrong. In the Bible, Christians were joyful even under persecution for their faith. Here, many of us are joyless without being persecuted.

Very few Christian leaders admit that there's a problem. I think they are frightened to admit it, although you can't put a problem right until you do. How can the church recruit from the world if we show it nothing better? How to show people who Christ is? How can we assure them that he's alive today if we don't live like we mean it?

God is as strong as ever but we get in the way

God's promises are as good as 2000 years ago. I'll tell you below how those promises can be yours. Do you want revival? It starts with you. Do you want it today? It can start today.

There is a lot of talk in the churches about how we need the Holy Spirit. Of course we do. But if you are a committed Christian then you almost certainly already have the Holy Spirit! The problem is letting Him rip. We don't need more Holy Spirit. We need less of ourselves getting in the way, so we can live out what we already are.

Identity crises in our culture

This is about, most deeply, who you are. There is an identity crisis in society today. Politicians talk about 'British values' but they cannot say what these values are, because they threw older values overboard and they daren't specify new ones for fear of offending minorities who don't share them. Modern British values look like drinking too much and sleeping with strangers at weekends. Further identity crises exist within our nation, because the differing communities of the United Kingdom aren't very united today. There is an identity crisis in the church, too. We are Christians, but often we don't 'get' what it is to be a Christian.

How deep does this problem of identity run? It runs as deep as what you mean when you say "I". It can't get any deeper than that! *Who are you?* I'll tell you, based on St Paul's explanation (Romans 4-8). Knowing who you are makes all the difference, just as it did for Paul. You will need God's help as well, and that's where the Holy Spirit comes in.

Your conversion

Once, you weren't a believer. We are not born believing in God. Christian parents still have to teach the faith to their children. When we came to believe in Jesus Christ we were sorry for the things we did wrong. That's called repentance for our sins. Then we get baptised. Going under the water in baptism and coming out again symbolises three important things: the death-and-burial of your old self, the washing away of your sins, and the birth of your new self.

We need to look at all three of those things, then at the life of the new self. If you are a Christian and you are disappointed that your new self doesn't seem very different from your old self, these words are for you.

First, your old self. Who were you? The answer is that you were a sinner. That means you did bad things. I could read anybody a list of laws that they would agree people should keep, and they would find that they had broken plenty of them at some point.

That tells you something about yourself. You did those bad things because 'sinner' was not just what you did, but who you were. It was your identity. The T-shirt with 'SINNER' written on it fitted you – 'to a T.' The bad things you did were because of the bad person you were. If you want to know how sinful, people who know you best could tell you. (Don't ask them, but do ask yourself why you might not want to.) Thanks to modern media and travel, it is now easy to see that people all over the world have a lot in common, and that differences of race or nationality are much less than the things we have in common. That is a good understanding, but people don't take the logic far enough. If we are all the same, we can never say that WE are good and THEY are bad – whether we are talking about different nations, races, genders, classes or political factions. So, are humans all basically good or bad? The view taken by our culture is that people are basically good but do some bad things, rather than basically bad but doing some good things; unless you are Hitler or a paedophile or a serial killer then you are basically OK. But is that true? Human history is a tale of warfare and exploitation; it is written in mud and blood. Do you think you are better than the leaders of nations who end up on the path to war? People who loved each other far better than politicians often fall out and end up hating each other – I mean divorce. If you have a happy marriage, dare you say that you are fundamentally better than people with an unhappy one? Some persons commit worse crimes than others, but we are all the same inside – and the evidence is that we are all bad. God did not design you bad; it is because something he is not responsible for went wrong a long time ago. But it is still the way the world is at present. (Also, happy marriages are not effortless.)

Thanks be to God, you saw the horror of your situation and you wanted not to be like that any more. You came to Christ. If you came to him because you were in emotional distress and thought you would feel better by coming to him, then sticking to Christ *will* help you to feel better, but you will have to see that you need rescue from your sinfulness more than from your unhappiness. Otherwise, you are unlikely to stick with Christ through the hard times. Then you might end up not being rescued from your unhappiness *or* your sinfulness. I shall explain how they are connected.

You also came to believe that there is a God who made you, so you owe him an account of your life. You realised that you are not fit to stand before him, that although you might be fit to stand in front of your Head of State after putting on your best clothes and having a bath, God looks on the inside of you – and the things you did wrong were because you were not clean inside. The prospect of standing dirty before a holy God makes you quake in a holy fear of him. I mean fear of God himself, not fear of what he might do to you.

The world would be a dreadful place if its maker were unjust, so you should be glad that God is just. When somebody does you wrong, you long for justice and fair judgement. But the fact that you too do wrong things turns God's fairness into bad news for you. If you think you did more good than bad and that God will let you into heaven because of that, think again! If you break *any* of the laws of the land then the State will punish you if it finds out. God is the same, and he always finds out. He intends heaven to be a perfect place, untainted by sin – or even by thoughts of it, since bad acts begin as bad thoughts. It sounds wonderful, but there's a problem: if we go there while we are still imperfect then, because of our sin, we shall mess the place up. This happened to the earth and God will not let it happen again. So, how can we hope to get in? How can we clean our inside? God gives you a way to be cleansed, a way into heaven and a way of avoiding hell, despite your sins. This way is to believe in his son Jesus Christ, and then be changed by him. The first step is God forgiving the sins of the believer. God says "you're OK with me." Theologians call this *justification*. On the day of judgement you can wave your 'Jesus pass'. Making this pass available cost Jesus his life, but it is free to us. The one man who would have got to heaven anyway, because he never did anything wrong, took the rap for your sins. Tragically, many people don't want this free gift, because they would have to acknowledge the truth about themselves. They continue to be driven by denial of their sinfulness, by covering it up, by a bad conscience, instead of getting the burden of it off their backs and then walking the path of freedom with no guilt and a clear conscience.

Who you are now that you believe

As well as the washing away of your sins, your water baptism symbolises the death and burial of your old self as you go under, and the birth of your new self as you come up. You come out of the waters shining in God's eyes. Your identity changes. You take off the T-shirt that says *SINNER* and you put on the T-shirt that says *HOLY ONE*. (The Bible uses the word 'saint', but some churches keep that word back for only a few believers.) You will still sin, but that does not mean your identity is '*SINNER*'. You are now a Holy One who did some sinful things. If you think that you shifted from being an unforgiven sinner to being a forgiven sinner, stop it! The noun needs to change as well as the adjective. The noun is who you are, and if you think of yourself as a 'forgiven sinner' then you are still categorising yourself as a sinner. Even though you still commit sins, that is a category error.¹ You are now a Holy One who is liable to sin. That is a key insight of the *Freedom in Christ* course.

¹ In the era of institutional Christianity, with its confusion between the church and the world, this was not understood; see, for example, the Anglican *Book of Common Prayer* in use from the 17th century.

I said that your sins are not taken into account as a Holy One. When you sin as a believer, Paul explains that it is no longer you, but sin in you, getting the better of you. That explanation won't hold if you are caught speeding ("it wasn't me, Officer; it was sin in me"), but it holds in God's court, which is higher. The old You, the sinner who was subject to God's law, died when you converted. You should think of your life before you converted as somebody else's life. Court proceedings are dropped if the accused dies before sentencing, and Paul, who is not an allegorical or a symbolic writer, says that this has happened to the believer (Romans 7:1-6). Don't think it is *as if* it happened to you; start thinking that it really did! Stop thinking "God will let me off" and start thinking "I am not guilty." The new You still lives in your old body, so you will still be subject to man's laws while your body breathes, but in God's court you face no condemnation. That is how God draws a clear line between heaven and hell even though people's strength of faith is variable. Are you still on the path of covering up your sins, or have you confessed them and been forgiven by believing in Christ, and changed path to walk the way of clear conscience, the path of freedom?

Of course, you have not been set free so that you can sin. How can you even consider it, when Christ who paid your ransom with his own blood to free you from the penalty, Christ to whom you pledged yourself, wishes you not to?

But why do Christians still sin?

If I came out of the water as a Holy One, why do I still sin? And, although God is happy with you now, you might not be happy with yourself, and other people might not be happy with you. Next day you still snap at one of your colleagues. You had told your workmates that you were getting baptised, and now they think Christianity doesn't work and Christians are hypocrites! Or perhaps you still crave alcohol to forget bad memories (although you will only get a hangover), perhaps you still have a drive to wake up in a stranger's bed in the hope of finding love (although you will only get emotionally exploited). Not all of the things that make people feel unhappy are remembered, moreover. An unhappy childhood often leads to an unhappy adult life. These things don't go away in a flash at conversion, or at baptism.

So how can I insist that the old You died and a new You was born, if you still feel the same and often, in the short term, behave the same? Are you disappointed? Let me explain more of what happens when someone commits to Christ.

When you commit to Christ you are, spiritually speaking, in Christ. A happily married woman might say that in her husband she found all she was looking for. A communist might say that in Marx he found meaning in life. In such ways the Christian is *in Christ*. We know that Christ was crucified: he died and was buried. This means that the Christian has been crucified with Christ (Galatians 2:20), the Christian has died – and, so far as your old self is concerned, death is a terror. But Christ came back to life; he was resurrected. So the Christian gets resurrected, too. For Christ, this was a bodily death and resurrection 2000 years ago, but for us it is spiritual death and resurrection today. The spirit that you had before your conversion, the one called *SINNER*, dies, and is replaced by a new spirit called *HOLY ONE*. God literally adopts you into his family, into the father-and-son relationship that he has with Christ. No fresh start could be better. But it is only a start, because there is another difference

between what happened to you and what happened to Christ. His body was crucified and three days later he was given a new one, but you still have your old body, with your old brain. Your appetites are part of your body, in particular your brain. The strengths of connections between your brain cells, and between brain cells and nerve cells in your body, can change. Your habits, your appetites, correspond to patterns in these connections. So you still have your old appetites, many of them appetites for sin, which are self-destructive. Sin and misery are self-reinforcing. Your new spirit is a death blow to these things in you, but how is it to be worked out, to deal with them?

The Holy Spirit to the rescue

Here is where the Holy Spirit comes in. There is a battle between your flesh, which means not just your body but your brain/mind, and your new spirit. Jesus himself said that you have to hate your own soul (Luke 14:26). Again there is bad news followed by good. First, this battle won't cease while you have your present body. One day you will be given a new body having no bad appetites; Jesus got his three days after his death, but you are for now stuck with your present body. And three things draw you toward sin. They are, famously, the world, the flesh and the devil. In today's language this means the prevailing culture, your (old) self, and demons. Today's culture says that it is OK to get drunk and sleep around. Our culture has done a U-turn about these things since the war. Demons who serve Satan tempt you to do bad things, or steal something you want. There is a supernatural aspect to evil and, ever since thinkers rejected the supernatural in the 18th century, our culture has been haunted.² There is good and evil in the spiritual realms, just like on earth. Satan has hordes of invisible helpers who drip thoughts into your mind without you realising their origin. ('Occult' actually means 'hidden'.) They whisper that you want that shiny toy, you won't get caught. So the world and the devil are both telling you that sin is fine. (Evil spirits may also play a role in mental health.³) Then there is your flesh, those connections between your brain cells urging you to go on as before. Your old self is relegated to this category of 'flesh'. It is dead but it won't lie down, and it keeps trying to stifle your new self. You must learn to identify as your new self against your old.

If you are a believer then your new spirit, the spirit called *HOLY ONE*, is definitely present inside you. Don't heed the devil saying that you are not a believer merely because you have done something wrong, or telling you that you cannot be forgiven. He's bluffing, he's lying, and just knowing the truth of who you are frees you from him. Your new spirit cannot overcome the world, the flesh and the devil by itself, though. It cannot even overcome your flesh consistently. If you try to beat temptation in your own strength, using your willpower, then you will win some victories but also often lose, and you will exhaust yourself. You need a helper on the inside. That helper is the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is God, and he can beat the world, the flesh and the

² The current manifestation of the occult in our culture is the New Age movement. Alan Morrison, who wrote an outstanding book on it, *The Serpent and the Cross*, stated in a flyer that "*We are now living in a world which scoffs at the devil, demons, angels, miracles and Messiah of the Bible, yet which earnestly embraces the concepts of ETs, UFOs, spirit-guides, earth mysteries, cosmic consciousness, mind-control, magic, witchcraft, self-hypnosis, spiritism, astrology, parapsychology, and a quantum leap in human 'evolution' leading to a golden age on earth*".

³ The man whose sanity was restored when Jesus cast demons out of him into a herd of pigs, which promptly drowned themselves (Luke 8:26-39), shows that the demonic is a further facet involved in some individuals. No amount of human psychology can explain the change in behaviour of the pigs.

devil every time. He normally comes to live in believers soon after their commitment to Christ, and their baptism. That is the pattern in the Bible, and the exceptions are just that – exceptions. By relying on the Holy Spirit you have victory over the world, the flesh and the devil. You must rely continually on the Holy Spirit, because the world, the flesh and the devil are ever present. Your flesh will tempt you as long as it lives, and the devil as long as his forces have access to you. These things end only with your bodily death, followed by your resurrection. But, with the Holy Spirit, you have been given what it takes to behave like Christ in every situation.

Do not despair that the battle doesn't cease in this life, for the Spirit-filled Christian may enjoy victory right now. This is the Holy Spirit's basic role. (Miracles are exceptional, by definition.) In the Holy Spirit you fight in God's strength, so it is not exhausting. It is a walk in faith with Christ, in which you lapse into sin only if your faith slips. You will be reprogramming your brain; the connections between its cells alter as you live better. The process becomes increasingly familiar to you. Theologians call it *sanctification*, meaning being made holy. You are changed from the inside out. In this life the process is not complete, for your body is flawed because of what originally went wrong in human history. Just as a baby born to a heroin addict is addicted, your flesh is addicted to sin because of your ancestors' wrongdoing. Sin is the deepest addiction, and one day your body will die, because the wages of sin are death. Your body is in revolt, and it deserves to die and rot – literally revolting. But *you* will not die, for your new self goes on to eternal life, and will one day be given, like Christ, a new body with no bad appetites, matching your holy identity in Christ.

Meanwhile a war goes on inside you, and you will feel it. Paul said that we 'work out our salvation with fear and trembling' (Philippians 2:12). One Christian spoke of the 'dark night of the soul.' Why the battle? Because, like your conversion, it is a matter of life and death. When, by the Spirit, you stop feeding your flesh's sinful appetites and keep reprogramming your brain connections, by behaving better and becoming more holy, you subject your flesh to things that are death to it (Colossians 3:2-5). Your old inner self has died, and to match it you now put your old outer self to death.⁴ That is the biblical meaning of 'mortification' (not mediaeval things like whipping yourself; life is hard enough already). Your flesh, your outer self, is like all that lives: it doesn't want to die, and it fights for its life as desperately as an animal struggling in a trap. But it lives for sin, and it lives to sin. Just as repentance is to be preached outside the church, mortification is preached inside it. With the Holy Spirit's help, the battle against your flesh brings freedom and energy, not exhaustion and bondage.

Grace and law: There can be no formula for living by the Spirit, because obeying a formula would become part of the problem

You have a great future. But the important question for now is *how* do I resist temptation via the Holy Spirit, rather than by my own strength? It is futile to look for

⁴ In her testimony *Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert*, Rosaria Butterfield, who was an academic specialising in feminist theory and queer theory and was in a sexual relationship with another woman, and whose sexuality was changed to the biblical model, writes: "*sexual sin is not recreational sex gone overboard. Sexual sin is predatory. It won't be "healed"... Sexual sin must simply be killed. What is left of your sexuality after this annihilation is up to God. But healing, to the sexual sinner, is death: nothing more and nothing less.*"

any formula. None can exist, for as soon as God gives a formula, it becomes a rule, another divine law to keep – and that is what our flesh rebels against. Our flesh is sinful and resents good laws, which offer us a chance to rebel – why should somebody else tell me what to do? If our aim is to defeat our flesh’s rebellion against God’s rules then another rule would only make the rebellion worse. That is why Paul sometimes speaks negatively about the impact of godly laws. How can we reach a state in which we do it because we feel like it, not because God tells us to?

Even saying “take your hands off the wheel and let the Holy Spirit guide you” is a formula, a law in disguise. But *anything* that God requires you to do, the Holy Spirit can help you with. Merely knowing who you are, a Holy One, makes a difference. Conscience governs whether you live your life as a cover-up or walk freely; having a clear conscience before God is crucial, no feeling of guilt. A further difference follows by knowing that you have been given the Holy Spirit, that you can safely lean on the Spirit for help, and that you are forgiven if you fail. These are ways in which God loves you. Knowing who you are and what you can do both make a difference. By ‘knowing’ I mean more than factual knowledge; I mean believing and trusting that these things are true. As you continue to live by faith, meeting the challenges of the world in the way Jesus did, you will get to know Him better. Pray for faith, not for strength, because faith gives you Jesus’ strength. Also, you are part of a community, the church, so that experienced Christians can guide you. This is called discipleship. It takes place in small groups, not in services.⁵ You can read and hear the results – changed lives – in testimonies, online and in books.

“I”, the will and consciousness: more about identity in the Bible

Let me return to the hardest thing to grasp in all of this, that you are given a new identity when you become a believer in Jesus. What you mean when you say “I” changes. This is difficult to accept because you still *feel* the same, and that in turn is because your feelings come from your body and brain, and they aren’t changed. I said that Paul had sharp things to say about the law – and I mean good laws, God’s laws given to the ancient Israelites. These laws begin with the Ten Commandments, which believers and nonbelievers alike largely agree are good laws: Don’t commit murder or adultery, don’t lie about people, don’t get envious, and so on. But good laws bring up resentment in bad people, including in the flesh of Christians. It’s not hard to find churches where everybody is grimly determined to be good, trying too hard. These are depressing places to be. They are not the same as churches where the good just flows out of people. You don’t even need to be a Christian to see the difference. Above, I used the phrase ‘in your own strength’ to describe the wrong way by which Christians behave well. The part of you that is engaged when you do that, when you *knowingly* do God’s law, is called your will. But Christianity is about *being*, about your identity in Christ; then your holy deeds flow spontaneously from your identity as a Holy One.

The will has awareness of right and wrong. Hopefully it does good, but it is aware of the choice to do bad (and it might). God did not design us with conscious awareness of the choice to do bad, however. In God’s original design, evil would not enter man’s head at all. Murder probably doesn’t enter your head often, but there was a time when

⁵ See two fine books by Frank Viola, *Finding Organic Church* and *Reimagining Church*.

it never entered man's head at all, and nor did lesser sins. This explains why God didn't issue a list of laws, of Do's and Don'ts, at the beginning. He didn't need to. That list came later, after something had gone wrong. The tale is in Genesis 3. Our ancestors decided to know what good and evil felt like for themselves. With better information, after all, wouldn't they be better able to stick to what was good? But this was the one thing God had told them not to do, for their own sake. God knew that if they tasted evil then it would get into them. Satan knew it too, but he wanted it to happen and he put the idea into their heads. Even then they might have trusted God and said No to Satan, but instead they broke the one law that God had given them. It was an evil act. At that moment the human race became better informed about evil, but evil also got into them, changing them for the worse. Evil is our dark inheritance from them, and it is in all people today. At that moment human identity changed from *CHILD OF GOD* to *SINNER*. This was the worst thing that ever happened to the human race, worse than Hiroshima or slavery or the Holocaust. Those are part of a growing web of sin in which everyone is entangled, but it started at that point.

Consciousness is tied to the awareness of choice. You become aware of your self when you become aware of decisions to take, choices to make. "What shall I do?" and "Why did I do that?" is how "I" raises its head. (You may even use the word "I" without being aware of doing it – but not if you are considering a choice.) When making decisions, you are influenced by what you consider good and bad. Your choice was not a free one, though, because you were bad. That old "I" is bad, and it had to go. Part of us longs for it to go, actually; that is why a temporary dissolution of the self, via drugs or sexual climax or music, can become a craving. The new "I" that God installed in you when you came to Christ is *not* bad. Even if you do something bad, Paul said that it is not you – the Holy One – but sin in you, whenever you fail to lean on Christ through the Holy Spirit. You can override the Spirit at any time, for God does not compel. When you lean on Christ, you do not weigh up what is good or bad; his Holy Spirit in you does that for you, and you respond in faith. In that process you are not using your will, which is part of your flesh. (Philosophers say you have no 'free will' in the matter.) When, in the Spirit, you do Christ's work, you are not aware of any "I"; you are simply aware of what is to be done, and you do it. Conversion does *not* mean turning your will round so that you use it for God rather than for yourself. Even if you use your will to do good, you are developing it, just as a muscle develops with use. Your will is flesh, and it has to be mortified. You should have no awareness of alternatives to what God would have you do; Christians ought to have no will at all, and you can't lay down your will by an act of will. Nietzsche said that will and power were what was left when God was discarded, and evil men such as Hitler and Aleister Crowley⁶ were obsessed with the will. When God works through you, you are his tool, doing his work in his world, for His glory. Paul says you are God's slave, for slavery to God is freedom from sin. God lifts from you the impossible burden of running your life in a complex and fallen world. He knows better than you do what is good for you.

Adam and Eve lost the freedom to choose between good and evil, and now laws themselves tempt you to break them; and even if you exert your will not to, that independence is itself lack of trust in God. But Genesis 3 has still more to say about

⁶ Crowley was a 20th century occultist who founded a movement called *Thelema*, which is the Greek for will. In its rule he placed love under will, not above it.

the human condition, or in the case of believers about the flesh. When our ancestors realised they had done wrong for the first time and that God was displeased, they felt guilty and tried to hide; they covered themselves up with the only thing available (large leaves). Not only do we inherit their nature, meaning that we are born with a sense of guilt and a draw toward sin, but we try to cover up our sins and live a lie about them. Further sins we commit reinforce this mindset in a process which is the opposite of mortification. The good news is that believers in Christ need no longer carry guilt for their sins. That is the theme of *Pilgrim's Progress*, John Bunyan's allegory and the most popular Christian book after the Bible. Deeper than any guilt is your new self, the Holy One. In being made holy, you must not try to hide any part of your flesh from God. Then you can be like Jesus, never tormented by guilt.

So much for our individual identity in Christ. But we also need to grasp our corporate identity, the church, as being Christ's betrothed. There is a relationship of love given and reflected back between God the Father and God the Son; that is why God *is* love (1 John 4:8). But God the Father wants to get a bride for his Son to love, to satisfy his Son's desire to be the first mover in such a relationship. We are familiar with such relationships in human fathers and sons, because humans are made in God's image. But, just as with Adam, before God made Eve out of Adam's own body, there was nobody for God's Son. So the Son, obedient to the Father, literally died for love of a woman in order to bring her into existence from his own body. This is the church. We are members of the body of Christ, we are 'in Christ', yet we are also component parts of his bride. Paul explains this relationship in Ephesians 5:25-31.⁷ He calls it a mystery, by which Paul means something once hidden but now revealed. Western Christians typically see believers as saved individuals, but that is the human view. The divine view is corporate. Our corporate identity, the church, is the betrothed of Christ, whom He loves and cleanses. Each believer is a vital and wanted part of her.

'Healing' ministries in the church

I've said that our churches hold many Christians who are unhappy with their lives, many on anti-depressants. The church recruits from the world, and our culture today is not a happy one. If this is you, I'm not going to tell you to stop taking your anti-depressants just because you are a Christian. That would be another command, another rule, disguised as advice, and you'll have had enough of those. The apostle Paul would call it another law. I hope you will realise for yourself that you don't need them, by grasping who you are in Christ. Anti-depressants treat symptoms rather than causes. They aim to correct chemical imbalances – often the biochemical outworking of misery due to unhappy life experiences. Christ can do better for you.

Some practices inside the churches don't help, however. Often, people who come forward at church meetings for healing prayer, for drug dependence or depression or

⁷ ...as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated their own body, but they feed and care for their body, just as Christ does the church – for we are members of his body. "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh." This is a profound mystery – but I am talking about Christ and the church.

whatever else, come forward again some time later, or at another church, or to another person. Their panic attacks carry on, or they keep taking anti-depressants, or they feel the need to stay in secular support programs. In that case the healing prayer has not been effective. Unless people have been changed permanently then *they have not been healed*. A brief prayer session that does not look at the person's whole life merely treats symptoms, not causes. It is in effect saying "In the name of Jesus Christ I command you to feel happy." Rephrasing it like that shows it clearly as a category error. It can't work, because joy comes from things such as not holding grudges and not being bitter. Forgiveness of persons who have wronged you is possible only if you know God's forgiveness deeply, and for that you must grasp the depth of your own sin. The ultimate reason for unhappiness is a sense of guilt, of bad conscience; the challenge is to connect it to the unhappiness. Nonbelievers have reason to feel guilt and bad conscience and they cover it over, doing Satan's work for him. Believers have no reason to have bad conscience, but the covering is still there as a hindrance to conscience-clearing and happiness. A muddled gospel about coming to Christ to heal your pain, more than to forgive your sin, is putting the cart before the horse (although it is increasingly common today). Christian faith is about repentance for your sin, receiving God's forgiveness, and putting to death the old sinful self. By this means your pain, which is part of your old self, will be healed. No prayer in the Bible is just for someone's feelings. Christians often take the pain of others either too seriously or too lightly, the latter as in "just pray (to a believer) or convert (if not) and you'll feel fine." Modern books about Christian living under-emphasise the need to keep subjecting your old self to death.

You might, conversely, have met Christians who work within the church in what is called 'inner healing,' which means the healing of emotions of others. These Christians are genuinely dedicated to helping other believers, but Christian 'inner healing' ministry often seems limited in what it can do even though these ministries look in depth into people's lives, and include prayer. Inner healing ministries of this sort are based ultimately on the secular talking therapies – psychotherapy, counselling. Just like those therapies, inner healing ministry of this sort often works in the short term but falls short in the long term. The reason is that this is not Christian counselling, but is secular counselling done by a Christian. Some distressed believers even go to secular therapists (or, worse, New Age ones). That should not be necessary. The best secular talking therapies can help people, but they cannot clear bad conscience and guilt, which are the ultimate source of misery.⁸

The biggest lies that you tend to believe as a Christian are that you are not a Holy One and you cannot rely on the Holy Spirit. Satan drip-feeds you these lies; so too, since Eden, does your flesh. Christian life involves a progressive rejection of these lies. The best secular therapies involve renunciation of lies that your flesh says to you. Here, for instance, is a lie that childhood hurt might have created: "If I show vulnerability then people will take advantage and hurt me." Typically, people's responses to life situations act to reinforce their lies, via covering-up. The lie is to be purged by truth, toward which someone can be guided by wise questioning. A person will typically

⁸ Neil Anderson, on whose work the *Freedom in Christ* course is based, wrote in the Introduction to his book *Victory Over the Darkness* that "after one of my conferences, a friend shared with me the story of a dear Christian woman... She had lived in deep depression for several years. She survived by leaning on her friends, three counselling sessions a week and a variety of prescription drugs. During the conference this woman realized that her support system included everybody and everything but God..."

defend the lie, but whenever purging happens – which is ultimately a moral choice – then the reinforcement falls away with the lie.⁹ Truth brings freedom.

Because being made holy is a putting-to-death of the old self, not a healing of it, how badly hurt you have been is irrelevant. When you die, any wounds you had make no further difference. That is good news for hurt people. The talking therapies can do a lot for the old self, but they cannot displace it. They can remove needless guilt such as abused children feel, but they cannot remove the guilt of being a sinful human being – and existential guilt is why abused children feel guilt at what happened to them, in the face of all logic. Many churches offer life support to the old self of believers suffering emotional distress, instead of strengthening the new self and helping to kill off the old one. Of traumas that happened before conversion, the Christian should think, “That happened to someone else; it happened to my flesh, which is trying to fool me. These feelings belong to an impostor who is dead.” This is not auto-suggestion, which is trying to convince yourself of something that is not true; it is trying to convince yourself of something that *is* true! Believers should adopt God’s view of everything, including of themselves. Then they can cast all their cares on God (1 Peter 5:7).

Some Christians who have emotional sensitivity have a calling to use the better secular talking therapies in the wider world. Their expertise can also be used inside the church, to identify facets of a convert’s flesh that need putting to death. Encouragement to put one’s outer self to death, within the context of a discipling relationship, constitutes true Christian-to-Christian counselling.

Buddhists understand the importance of having no attachments to this world, which is the goal of mortification. Their tragedy is that they do not have the Holy Spirit to make it possible, nor Jesus Christ to cling to in place of the world.

Our churches today

My last point is one I’ve already touched on, about joyless Christians, people who accept the Bible but who grind out ‘doing good’ in their own strength instead of leaning on the Holy Spirit. These people *are* going to heaven, but because they scarcely lean on the Spirit they do a lot less for Christ’s kingdom than they could. Why is this common today? In our culture the church became politicised and was tied up with lawmaking for more than a thousand years. That era came to an end in the last

⁹ Sigmund Freud popularised the idea of the ‘unconscious’ part of the human mind, which influences our actions and feelings even as we are unaware of it. We mostly react to people without thinking how to, *i.e.*, without conscious thought. Freud’s successors add that if you were brought up by parents who loved you and loved each other, and if nothing very bad happened to you during your upbringing, then your unconscious is healthy. This matches the secular view that unless you are a paedophile or a serial killer then you are basically okay. But it differs from the biblical view that all are sinful, which explains why children take to macabre fairy stories: such things appeal to a covered-over darkness, down into which we have pushed our sense of guilt. That was the view of the 19th century Jewish scholar Israel Lipkin of Salantai, which Freud appears to have secularised. Certainly the works of prominent artists of the 20th century – painters, sculptors, composers, writers, poets – wallow in this nihilistic darkness. Our ancestors hid from God and covered their most personal parts in Genesis 3. Covering-over is a survival mechanism, without which nobody could bear the horror of awareness of existential guilt. The life-wrecking that some psychoactive drugs can cause may be because the cover gets weakened. But Jesus, and Adam and Eve before they fell, did not have an unconscious. As believers become more sanctified and more like Christ, theirs should dwindle.

200 years, sometimes violently as in the French and Russian revolutions, sometimes gradually as in Britain. The church changed our society in many good ways, but it got used to thinking that it was in the business of law, of telling people how to behave, with enforcement by the powers of the State. We need good laws, but the church exists on earth to minister God's grace, which helps people change for the better in ways they cannot do for themselves. St Paul set grace in contrast to law.

The era of legalistic Christianity is dying out. Viewed in the right way, this is an opportunity. Christ himself said that he had no problem with dead congregations – he closes them down. The number of congregations and churchgoers has been falling for more than a lifetime. But Christ has a problem with lukewarm churches: just read his letters to differing congregations in Revelation 2&3. There is less lukewarm Christianity in our culture nowadays, because the border between the church and the world, which had been blurred for centuries, is getting sharper again. As a result there is less to get in the way of revival whenever the church returns more deeply to Christ. We must kindle the flame. I do not expect a revival in quantity of believers across the land, because the idea of revival belonged to an earlier era, when everyone called themselves Christian. But there can be a revival in our churches in *quality* of belief. And any individual congregation may grow, of course. All we have to do is grasp who we really are, Holy Ones with consciences that can be cleared of guilt; understand that we have been given the Holy Spirit; realise that we can safely lean on him; and accept that there is no alternative. Perhaps we shall be prodded to this by persecution, which is beginning to rise today in our culture. It is easy in our affluent culture to forget how completely dependent we are on God. We should not fear persecution, for Paul told us that even trials are good for us (Romans 5:3-5).

What I've explained in this essay is not the gospel. The gospel is to be preached outside the church, to the world. This message is for inside the church, about how to live as a believer. May your life be to the glory of Jesus Christ.

Readings in Paul's letters

You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness (Ephesians 4:22-24).

We were buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead, through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin – because anyone who has died has been freed from sin... Count yourself dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires (Romans 6:3-12).

Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed [metamorphosed] by the renewing of your mind (Romans 12:2).

I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the son of God, who loves me and gave himself for me (Galatians 2:20).

You died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.... Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed (Colossians 3:2-5).

We always carry in our body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifest in our body (2 Corinthians 4:10).

Through Jesus Christ the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death.... The righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit... You... are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit (from Romans 8:2-9).