

**"Exchanged Life" Theology**  
**A Critique of *Handbook to Happiness* (Revised Edition), by Charles Solomon**

Charles Solomon's approach to counseling is one that seems initially to promise a truly biblical methodology. Specifically, his counseling method promises to be grounded in "the truth of freedom through union with Christ in His death and resurrection" (8). He claims the cross, and the power of God's Spirit, to be central to his approach:

"Spiritotherapy is a word coined by Dr. Solomon to identify an approach to counseling that makes the believer's relationship to the cross of Christ central to its method and goal. The Holy Spirit is the therapist who renews the mind and transforms the life in accord with Romans 12:2." (11)

Solomon does correctly remind us of the important concept of our *union with Christ*. Certainly that is an essential concept in the area of sanctification, one that we'll want to look at very closely in this paper. Unfortunately, Solomon emerges as yet another integrationist promising an approach that is accurate in its combination of psychology and theology. Such attempts at integration are fundamentally flawed, and this one is no exception. In addition to borrowing key ideas from the godless systems of modern psychology, Solomon reveals an underlying theology that is lacking in biblical truth.

**Solomon's background** is the key to understanding the development of his methodology, particularly his focus on *rejection*. As he describes his own early experiences:

"I grew up with more than my share of inferiority feelings along with an ability to hide these feelings from others.... During my childhood, I had been programmed by circumstances for my mind to go one way and my emotions another." (14)

Solomon describes his early adult years as "a time of inner conflict." Even though he "sold out completely to the Lord Jesus Christ" at age twenty-seven, he continued to struggle with depression and anxiety. He was near the point of suicide at age thirty-five, when Galatians 2:20 struck him (15). After this point of new beginning, he found that:

"Beyond the first step of being 'filled with the Spirit,' I had to learn to continue the process of allowing the Holy Spirit to have control of my life." (16)

At this time, Solomon began an extensive amount of reading, including a focus on the Pauline epistles. After seeing God set him free from his own emotional disturbance, he decided to enter the field of counseling, enrolling in a master's program that "was not noted for the spiritual content" (16).

**Integration.** Although he expresses a strong desire to be thoroughly biblical, Solomon freely admits to his *integration* of psychology and theology. When he began the design of a counseling program that "would integrate the spiritual and psychological dimensions of man," he even claims that:

"Atheists, agnostics, and Jewish professors proved to be more helpful to me than some Christians, who would try to force me into a system that omitted or de-emphasized the effect that our relationship to the cross of Christ is to have on our lives." (16-17)

He often found it necessary to respond to Christians who failed to appreciate his unique approach:

"It was necessary to prove to critics of this method that a viable integration of counseling and the Word of God done in the power of the Holy Spirit was sufficient to meet the deepest needs of man." (8)

God's Spirit and Word are indeed *sufficient*. The problem, however, lies in the "integration of counseling" with God's fully sufficient resources.

Solomon admits to important similarities between his counseling and the "reality therapy" of William Glasser, who considered bizarre behavior an ineffective attempt to meet one's own needs, which should be met through another person (121). Spirituotherapy is approximated by substituting the Lord Jesus Christ for "another person" in Glasser's therapy (122). Although the substitution may indeed be critical, the differences between any such human system and God's truth are far deeper and more extensive than Solomon allows.

**Criticisms of psychotherapy.** Discernment of Solomon's writings is particularly critical in view of the fact that he offers scathing criticisms of modern psychotherapy at points. Such criticism tends to hide the reality of his integration.

Near the beginning, Solomon proposes the use of biblical terminology rather than terms based on a psychological model, because "otherwise, we come up with some vague generalities that will not support a true integration of psychology and theology" (26). He rightly rejects the term "mental illness" because it implies that "the problem is in the mind" (120) and because it encourages people to disclaim responsibility for their actions (121). However, Solomon uses terms such as "neurotic" and, more importantly, he borrows *ideas* from psychological systems. Note, again, his express intention to *integrate*. What appears to be a unique biblical approach is ultimately exposed as yet another integration. Believing God's Word and Spirit to be sufficient for man's problems of living, *integration* is exactly what we wish to avoid.

Solomon rightly notes that:

"In psychotherapy, of whatever persuasion, self is strengthened to cope with those problems. Herein lies the basic problem with psychotherapy." (46)

The problem of self-centeredness is thus never handled in a godly manner, and in fact becomes even worse. Indeed, we can agree that this is one of the key objections to psychotherapy. Later, Solomon discusses the futility of counseling, even when the counselor is a Christian, because it normally involves strengthening of the flesh rather than "conviction of the flesh" (97). Nevertheless, he believes that a number of Christian psychologists "do much to alleviate the suffering of emotionally disturbed people, returning many of them to a fuller life" (119). However, he acknowledges that their approach is deceptive because it strengthens *self* rather than fostering dependence on God.

Furthermore, psychologists assume that changes in thinking and behavior actually change the person. Solomon only partially agrees:

"It is one thing to help a person understand the dynamics of his thoughts, emotions, and behavior, but it is entirely another thing to use psychological principles exclusively to attempt psychological and behavioral change." (119)

Solomon is not entirely consistent. He is evidently willing to make use of psychological categories for the understanding of human nature, while claiming to utilize fully biblical solutions for the problems that are uncovered. What we need is a biblical

understanding of man's problems and solutions grounded solely in God's truth and power.

Another criticism to be noted is Solomon's awareness of Freud's hostility to God, and the fact that his counterfeit approach has undermined morality in this century (118). This recognition is good, but it obscures Solomon's reliance on the impact of early childhood experiences, particularly rejection. On this issue his teachings are similar to Freud. In fact, Solomon believes that many--even most--psychological problems do not have a spiritual origin, but rather result from early childhood or major traumas (123). Psychology, he says, may be helpful in the understanding of behavior that follows (123). Nevertheless, psychotherapy is often counterproductive in that it only provides relief for symptoms (123). What Solomon advocates is not a human therapist to do the work of transformation, but the Holy Spirit, "the Master Therapist" (123). What we have here is a dangerous mixture of psychological and biblical categories.

Solomon also notes the fact that many seminaries maintain an orthodox theology but, inconsistently, adopt an antithetical approach to human nature in their counseling (119). This situation definitely does need to be addressed. As we will see in this paper, sound theology is essential to helping people with their problems.

The therapeutic relationship is yet another issue where Solomon rightly sees problems. He states that "the counselor must provide the example by casting himself completely upon the Lord even in the matter of salary" (124). Conventional therapy maintains "the professional facade of the therapist-client relationship," yet psychiatrists have the highest rate of suicide for any profession (124). Certainly, the "professional" relationship is anything but biblical in nature, and the charging of fees for ministry is an unbiblical practice.

Referrals outside the local church are yet another matter where valid problems are identified. Solomon believes that about ninety percent of all Christians do not experience the "abundant life" because:

"They do not understand how deep psychological problems can be resolved by letting the Lord Jesus Christ manifest his life in them, instead of resorting to human therapy." (124)

Meanwhile, believers are referred outside the church to "professionals." We must agree that believers should not be sent

outside the church for counseling! However, many today bring psychological explanations and solutions *into* the church. Unfortunately, Solomon must be counted among them.

**What "spirituotherapy" is not.** Solomon responds to several criticisms and misunderstandings of his counseling. Although he does this at the very end of his book, we need to consider these at the outset. Contrary to what some have said, Solomon states that he does *not* teach the annihilation of the personality, sinless perfection, or the believer's atonement for his own sins (116). He also denies teaching "that rejection is the reason we must go to the cross" (116). Another accusation Solomon denies is that he teaches passivity (117).

Although the above are not the specific problems with Solomon's teachings, and we want to accept his word for what he does not teach, there are problems. Rejection does not replace sin, but Solomon's emphasis on its influence does not match Scripture. Passivity is indeed not taught, but we will encounter an "aggressive yielding" that comes close, in some ways, to a works-oriented approach. The believer does not atone for his own sins, but Solomon's view of the necessity of suffering tends to at least blur the completed work of Christ in some sense. Sinless perfection is not taught, but Solomon does propose a *second experience*, distinct from salvation, that is necessary for the "abundant life." The individual personality is not annihilated, but Solomon does not clearly articulate the biblical view of what it means to be "in Christ" in His death and resurrection. These are among the problems we will examine.

**The "experience of the cross" compared to various modern approaches.** Here is the central concept for Solomon's counseling. He believes that "the experience of the cross is an ongoing process," that "we are all in the process of *becoming* in experience who we *already* are in Christ by position" (17). However, according to Solomon, all of the modern approaches to Christian counseling omit the message of the cross:

"The message of the cross, with its emphasis on death to the power of sin, is not a popular message today." (115)

It is unpopular with both secular and Christian approaches. Solomon describes various secular approaches as "the cross *decried*," including psychoanalytic, cognitive, behavioral, insight-oriented, and transpersonal (chart on p. 126). Christian psychological approaches (analytic, cognitive, gestalt, rational/emotive, behavioral, insight, eclectic) are termed "the

cross *denied*" (126). In Christian *theological* approaches, the cross is either *implied* or *applied* (126). The former emphasizes obedience to scriptural principles, "*doing* in order to *be*," while the latter focuses on the transforming work of the Holy Spirit in renewing the mind, "*being* in order to *do*" (126). This is where Solomon places his own counseling method. Our task in this paper is to examine it thoroughly, particularly in terms of the underlying theology.

## **Solomon's View of Man**

It is important, as we begin, to consider Solomon's basic view of the nature of man. This is critical to understanding and evaluating his counseling approach.

**Trichotomy.** Solomon's view of man is *trichotomous*, resting primarily on 1 Thessalonians 5:23 and Hebrews 4:12. He teaches that "other references also seem to support the assertion that man has a spirit that functions as a separate entity" (25). For example, he states that in 1 Corinthians 6:17, "obviously, this speaks of a union of the spirit as opposed to a union of the soul" (26). When Jesus dismissed His *spirit*, according to Solomon, this was "an act of the *soul*" (26, emphasis added). He goes on to say that the dichotomous view "does not allow for a spirit in man," and it is this spirit that distinguishes man from the animals (26).

Basically, Solomon teaches that:

1. Man *is* a spirit.
2. Man *has* a soul.
3. Man *lives in* a body (26).

This can hardly be overemphasized, as Solomon warns readers that:

"It is vital that this entire book be read with this understanding, since some statements could be misconstrued if applied to any other than a trichotomous (tripartite) view of man." (26)

This requires close analysis. Although I would hesitate to accuse Solomon of the dualism that is present in Gnosticism, where matter is viewed as evil and only the "spiritual" is "real," this comes perilously close. We ought to state that man *is* body as well as soul/spirit. The body is an integral aspect of man. The believer is promised a glorified, resurrected *physical body* (1 Corinthians 15), not an eternal existence

floating in the heavens as pure spirit. The separation of body and soul is the wages of *sin* (Romans 6:23). The spirit is not imprisoned in the body, as in pagan dualism.

Further explanation, using two diagrams (27, 29) indicates the functions that Solomon proposes for the three parts of man:

1. Man's *soul* (mind, emotions, will) relates to other *people*.
2. Man's *spirit* relates to *God*.
3. Man's *body* relates to the *environment*.

All of this raises a string of critical questions. How would Solomon handle the command to love the Lord your God with all your heart, *soul*, mind, and strength (Deuteronomy 6:5, Matthew 22:37)? Is God unconcerned with body and soul, in view of our promised resurrection bodies (1 Corinthians 15)? If the soul, which includes the *mind*, relates to man and not to God, how is the revelation of Scripture to be received and studied? Is the body totally *unrelated* to others, for example, in the sexual union between man and wife? Is the spirit not a part of the relationships between believers in the body of Christ (Ephesians 4:3-4)? Scripture does not support the sharp division of man proposed by Solomon. Man is much more a *unity*.

Solomon correctly states that Adam was created in God's image, that he was innocent and able to communicate with God prior to the fall. He says that:

"Though the spirit of Adam is not mentioned specifically, we read, 'The Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life (or lives), and man became a living soul' (Genesis 2:7)." (27)

We should view this as the impartation of the *Holy Spirit*. At the fall, man lost the indwelling Spirit of *God*. Notice here, too, the use of the word *soul*. Sometimes, "soul" is used to describe a living, animated being, either man or animal. Yet at other times, it describes the immaterial aspect of man in contrast to the body (Matthew 6:25; 10:28). In some texts, the term "spirit" describes the immaterial aspect of man in a similar manner (1 Corinthians 7:34; 2 Corinthians 7:1). In these four texts, "body and soul" or "body and spirit" are used to describe *the complete person*, either the completeness of eternal destruction (in Matthew) or the completeness of sanctification (in Corinthians). If an integral component were omitted, the description would be incomplete. Thus, the terms soul and spirit

are used in varied and complex ways throughout the Scriptures. There is not the neat division that Solomon proposes. Furthermore, some Scriptures explicitly refer to the *inner man* in contrast to the *outer man*, the body. In 2 Corinthians 4:16-5:10, the *outer man* is decaying while the *inner man* is being renewed. In Ephesians 3:16, the *inner man* is strengthened. This clear duality is the more frequent occurrence in Scripture, rather than the spurious trichotomy advanced by Solomon.

In addition, Solomon does not provide us an exegesis of either Hebrews 4:12 or 1 Thessalonians 5:23 to support his thesis of trichotomy. Neither text proposes to actually teach trichotomy. Rather, in each one terms are piled up in order to convey the notion of the whole person. Paul assures the Thessalonians that God will sanctify the believer *completely*, in his *whole* being. The writer to the Hebrews emphasizes the active, penetrating power of God's Word, which is able to expose the innermost thoughts and intentions of the *entire* inner man. Such piling up of terms occurs elsewhere in Scripture and should not be taken as definitive of the "parts" of man. When the terms heart, soul, mind, and strength are placed together in the command of Deuteronomy 6:5, it is obvious that the *whole* person is meant. Otherwise, we would be forced into a four-part division of man that makes little sense (or even a six-part division, if body and spirit were added!).

Furthermore, the verse in Hebrews 4 uses a Greek verb, *merizo*, which means to divide *within* a thing, *not* to divide between that thing and something else. Joints and marrow are not adjacent so as to require a sharp sword *between* them. Rather, these represent the most inaccessible parts of our physical being. The piercing sword of God's Word is so powerful as to penetrate the innermost recesses of the *inner man*, the thoughts and intentions of the heart. That sword does not divide the inner man into two distinct parts, but rather divides *within* the whole.<sup>1</sup>

The implications here can hardly be overstated. When the inner man is divided, the psychologist lays claim to the *soul* while leaving the *spirit* to the care of the pastor. The sufficiency of God's Word and Spirit for the *entire* inner man is

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<sup>1</sup> There is much more that could and should be said! I am indebted here to John Murray for his chapter on trichotomy in *Collected Writings of John Murray, Volume II* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1977), p. 23-33; also to Jay E. Adams, *A Theology of Christian Counseling* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979), p. 110-116.



undermined. Not only is trichotomy unbiblical; it leads to thoroughly unbiblical practices in helping people change.

**Sin.** Solomon's teachings about sin, while not entirely unbiblical, are lacking.

First of all, Solomon notes that spiritual death, *rather than* physical death, resulted when Adam sinned: "Their souls continued to function psychologically" (28). Spiritual death indeed resulted, but it is *also* true that physical death resulted from the fall. It may not have been immediate, but it did happen (Romans 5:12ff). Solomon may not have intended to specifically deny that physical death is the result of sin, but that is the implication of what he says. To deny that result is to discount the gravity of sin and its consequences.

Self-centeredness is a key result of the fall in Solomon's teaching. He says that Adam and Eve, after the Fall, began to function in a different sphere, with their spirits functioning "toward Satan instead of God" (30).

"Man after the Fall was *flesh*, meaning that from that point on he lived a self-centered life. Adam positionally became *flesh* or self-centered and each of us is born into the world with the same dilemma (Romans 5:12)." (29)

Solomon notes that he will be using the terms "flesh" and "self" interchangeably throughout the book "when referring to the control center of a believer living out of his own resources" (29). Note, however, that his use does not coincide with the scriptural use of the term "flesh." *Sometimes*, "flesh" has sinful connotations in the Bible, but not always. It is helpful to know how Solomon will use particular words, but unfortunately, it is rather confusing when he redefines a word used so frequently in Scripture.

Man is indeed self-centered, but this description is not adequate to describe the full impact of sin. Sin separated man from God. It involves the transgression of God's commands, the exchange of the worship of God for the worship of created things. Sin is a moral evil involving both guilt and pollution. Solomon does not deny the reality of sin, but he lacks clarity.

This lack of clarity emerges when Solomon equates *self* with *soul* (mind, will, emotions), which "in and of itself, is neutral" (37). However, there is no such neutrality. Adam was created good and upright, morally excellent (Genesis 1:31). Since the

fall, sin pollutes the mind, will, and emotions. At no point in time is the inner man ever morally neutral.

Solomon's weakness in the arena of sin also shows itself when he presents man as more a victim than a sinner:

"As long as self is in control, the functions of the soul will operate in direct correspondence to the historical events that have characterized our maturation, and these may be worsened by the ways we have attempted to meet our own needs." (39)

Such a statement obscures personal responsibility for sinful actions, which appear to be dependent on "historical events."

Inferiority, insecurity, inadequacy, and guilt are all *feelings* that Solomon discusses as problems arising from within man's soul (39-41). The first three retain the focus on self that Solomon claims to avoid in his "exchanged life" theology. Furthermore, biblically defined *guilt* is not a feeling! The discussion veers even further away from biblical definitions when "imaginary guilt" is distinguished from "real guilt" (sin). This, according to Solomon, "feels exactly the same as real guilt" but "may spring from a lack of love and acceptance" (41). He contends that repeated confession fails to solve the problem and it may persist throughout one's life (41). God's Word is the standard by which guilt is determined. There is no need to resort to a psychological category, "imaginary guilt," based on *feeling* rather than *fact*. The whole issue of sin and guilt is seriously confused by the introduction of this unbiblical subdivision.

In spite of these weaknesses, Solomon does correctly affirm that:

"We were in Adam positionally when he sinned. This is what made us sinners from birth." (48)

Indeed, it is true that "all sinned" (Romans 5:12) when Adam sinned, because he is our covenant representative. In the same way, believers are "in Christ." His righteousness is imputed to the Christian, just as Adam's sin is imputed to the entire race (Romans 5:12-21). Solomon is not crystal clear about the notion of imputation, but he does affirm that Adam's sin impacted all human beings. He affirms that we sin *because* we are sinners, born with a sin nature (48).

**Rejection.** Solomon's weak view of sin is particularly evident when he brings in the notion of *rejection*. This is perhaps the cornerstone of his approach to counseling. He places a huge emphasis on the impact of rejection, defined as "the absence of meaningful love," in his counseling (18). This needs close examination, because it is so similar to much of the victim theology we find in contemporary "Christian" psychotherapy. Solomon notes that many of his counselees had been openly rejected by their parents, while others, having experienced a more subtle rejection, had "just as much emotional damage" but were "unaware of the source" (18). Solomon doesn't hesitate to use the psychological term "inferiority complex" in describing one of the results of rejection (18).

Rejection, according to Solomon, may include parental death or divorce, or even time spent in an incubator prior to the development of conscious memories (19):

"One woman with whom I spoke, who had been in an incubator for the first three months of her life, could not accept the fact that her parents loved her at all until she was twenty-three years old. Obviously, she was not lying there in the incubator thinking that her parents hated her; but the void that was built into her emotions over the time spent in the incubator prevented her from *receiving* her parents' love, which was there in abundance. She received love but *perceived* or felt rejection." (19)

This has an unmistakable Freudian ring to it, despite Solomon's recognition of Freud's atheism. Such determinism blurs responsibility for personal sin.

The results of rejection, according to Solomon, include "the impaired ability to give and receive love" (18), in addition to the rejection of *self*:

"A person who suffers from rejection will often reject himself in some facet of his personality." (20)

He may also reject and blame others (20). Blame-shifting and failure to love others are real problems addressed in Scripture, but rejection of *self* is never asserted as a biblical issue. On the contrary, man naturally loves and cherishes his own flesh (Ephesians 5:29). If self-rejection were truly the underlying problem for so many people, God would have addressed that problem in His sufficient Word.

Solomon's answer to rejection is *acceptance*, but "human acceptance...will not heal the damaged emotions after rejection has done its dirty work" (20). Only acceptance in Christ will do the job. This sounds good. It even sounds biblical, because God *does* accept the believer "in Christ," on the basis of His completed work on the cross. God reconciles man to Himself, removing His enmity toward sinful man.

However, it is *God's wrath* that is propitiated (Romans 3:25; 1 John 2:2, 4:10). It is *God's* anger toward man's sin that is removed, not man's anger toward *himself*. Psychological explanations shift the focus away from God, His righteousness and His justice. Rather than being reconciled to a holy God, man is reconciled to *self*. That is the focal point of psychology, even where man's reconciliation to God is acknowledged.

In this fallen world, all of us experience rejection. Indeed, some people are grievously sinned against, being rejected even by their own parents and families. There is no intent here to minimize the hurt that is experienced. However, focusing on the rejection of other fallen human beings, *as the driving force behind adult behavior*, diverts us from the biblical doctrine of sin and the glory of our reconciliation to God in Christ.

**Identity.** Here is another key to unlocking Solomon's counseling methods.

"Many believers live with an identity that has been assigned to them, either positive or negative, depending on the extent of rejection, or with an identity they have built for themselves." (21)

However, "our true identity is based on who we are in Christ" (21) The solution involves:

"...exchanging the identity based on our personal history and the influence of indwelling sin for our perfect identity in Christ." (21)

Again, Solomon sounds biblical because he bases his answer on the Lord rather than on worldly, temporal solutions. He cites Ephesians 1:17-20, where God's resurrection power operates in the believer:

"Each of us must define our identity and look at it squarely to understand that which we must lose if we are to live out our true identity in the Lord Jesus Christ." (23)

Solomon believes that identity, either assigned by others or created by self, has a powerful impact on our decisions and relationships with others (25). He sees it as one of the major forces driving sinful behavior:

"While it is important to understand the psychological and interpersonal conflict that might be troubling us, it is much more important to get behind them and deal with the real issue--the identity out of which we are living that tends to perpetuate the self-defeating thoughts, feelings, and behaviors." (93)

"Loss of identity can be totally demoralizing, depressing, and can even result in psychotic episodes." (100)

Solomon sees the solution to this disaster in an exchange of identities:

"Losing identity with nothing to replace it can cause massive damage to the self concept and few can tolerate it. However, God does not ask us just to lose our identity but to exchange it for one that will work both for time and eternity." (101)

Solomon cites John 12:24-25 for support, along with Matthew 16:25, stating that in these texts: "I do not believe it is doing violence to Scripture to substitute the word *identity* for *life*" (101).

In John 12:24, Jesus refers to His own approaching death on the cross, for our sins. In the next verse, believers are exhorted to be willing to lose their lives (souls) for the cause of Christ, having been promised eternal life with the Lord. The focus is on serving and glorifying God, not on having a personal identity to guard one's self-concept or to prevent "psychosis." Solomon appears to be focused on biblical truth about commitment to Christ, but in a subtle manner he remains centered on *self*.

### **Solomon's View of Salvation**

Solomon's weakened view of sin, not surprisingly, is accompanied by an unbiblically high view of man's ability and "free will," particularly in the crucial area of salvation.

God's role in salvation (and sanctification) is presented as generally *passive*, waiting for man to make the first move:

"He meets those who are willing to meet him. His promise is that he will draw near to us if we draw near to him (James 4:8). However, he doesn't promise to chase us down!" (80)

This is not what Jesus says in John 6:44. There He informs us that no man is able to come to Him unless God the Father *draws him*. Faith is represented in Scripture as *God's gift*, not of ourselves in any manner (Ephesians 2:7-9). God is sovereign and active in salvation. He initiates it and He completes it.

Solomon explains salvation, "being born again," as entering into a personal relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ. He says that:

"...before we trust the Lord Jesus Christ in a personal surrender, the Holy Spirit must convince us that we are *born sinners*.... When we are ready to admit that we are ungodly and to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, then we will be justified and counted righteous in God's sight...upon the basis of his infallible Word, he saves us when we believe and call upon him." (30)

These statements cover three key aspects of salvation: repentance, faith, and justification. Faith and repentance are twin graces in the application of our redemption, and they are followed simultaneously by our justification. God declares the sinner to be righteous, to be justified, at the time of faith. Solomon would no doubt agree on this point.

However, the unregenerate man is *dead* in his sins and trespasses (Ephesians 2:1, 5; Colossians 2:13), unwilling and *unable* to obey God's commands (Romans 8:7), *unable* to understand the things of God (1 Corinthians 2:14), yet nevertheless without excuse for his sin and unbelief (Romans 1:20). This spiritually dead person must be brought to life, *not by the will of man but by the will of God* (John 1:12-13), in order to have the ability to exercise saving faith. He must be *born again* by the efficacious, sovereign power of the Holy Spirit (John 3:3-8; Titus 3:5). Scripture describes regeneration in terms of new birth as well as resurrection. No man is able to beget himself, nor is any man able to resurrect himself. Although Solomon may not explicitly state that man resurrects or regenerates himself, he believes that man is able to exercise saving faith *before* the Holy Spirit does His work of regeneration. Solomon's view of initial saving faith is thus contrary to Scripture, and his view of sanctification is essentially similar:

"In response to our act of faith in appropriating Christ as Savior, the Holy Spirit regenerated us in our spirit; in response to our appropriation of Christ as our life, the Holy spirit renews us in our minds (Romans 12:2)." (52)

This is wrong. Regeneration must occur *first*. Regeneration is *causally prior* to faith. A man must be born again, "from above," *before* he is able to see the kingdom of God (John 3:3,5).

Solomon's view of sanctification places a great emphasis on *total surrender*, as an act of the believer's free will:

"When a believer comes to our offices for counseling, he is shown that any further progress in his spiritual maturity and subsequent deliverance from enslaving emotional symptoms is contingent upon his *total surrender*.... Our surrender is, basically, our permission for our Father to take us to the cross." (81)

Since when does the sovereign Lord require man's "permission" to do anything at all? Yes, man is responsible and he is active in either his obedience or disobedience. Man's will is enslaved to sin in his unregenerate state, but it is not annihilated. Yet he is entirely dependent on God's sovereign grace for deliverance from the power and penalty of sin. There is mystery as we consider the relationship between God's sovereignty and man's responsibility. We must admit that mystery, not attempting to go beyond the limits of Scripture. We must not negate man's accountability as we affirm God's sovereign control. Nor must we exalt man's "free will" such that God becomes impotent.

The experience of "total surrender," on the roadway to sanctification, is to occur by faith, by reckoning or counting it to be so, as indicated in Romans 6:11:

"Reckoning, or counting upon the fact of crucifixion and resurrection with Christ is an act of volitional choice or an invoking of the will to appropriate that which God's Word states to be true of us in Christ. This is an act or decision of faith identical in all respects to that of trusting Christ as Savior." (51)

Note, again, the implication here that salvation, as well as sanctification, rests on man's "free will" rather than God's sovereign grace and election. Solomon may not propose a second "act of grace," but he does propose a second act of "free will."

He does not even affirm the initial salvation experience as fully an act of *grace*, because it depends on man rather than God.

Solomon rests his claims on the "exchanged life," on getting *self* out of the way so that God will have control of the believer's life. However, when man's will and initiative are exalted in a manner not affirmed by Scripture, this becomes an impossible task. *Self* ultimately remains in the driver's seat in Solomon's scenario, because it is *self* taking the lead in both salvation and sanctification. It is a wearisome load!

**Assurance, acceptance, security.** Solomon believes that assurance is to be based on the facts of Scripture rather than our feelings (31). He says that a person may indeed be saved, but not assured of his salvation. Unfortunately, he employs psychological terminology to describe this lack of assurance:

"The person who is sometimes labeled *neurotic* most often wants to feel something rather than believe it." (31)

Emphasis is placed on the distinction between intellectual understanding of the facts (of Scripture) and an individual's emotional state:

"There is a profound difference between doubting one's salvation (mental) and feeling unsaved (emotional)." (31)

Solomon believes that emotions most commonly account for the lack of assurance, and that *an appeal to biblical facts fails to clear the confusion* (32). He does note the Bible's teaching that we can have assurance (1 John 5:13). However, his attitude reflects a weak view of the power of God's living Word (consider Hebrews 4:12!). Solomon claims to be biblical but denies the sufficiency of the Scripture.

Solomon also speaks about security, because "our relationship with Him is unbreakable--eternal" (32). He believes that assurance and security are intimately related, and that without them the believer is not unlikely to mature. We can agree that true believers do persevere, that they cannot lose their salvation. However, this truth needs additional biblical support. John writes his first epistle so that the Christian might *know* that he has eternal life (1 John 5:13). Peter assures his readers that their eternal inheritance is guarded and preserved by the power of God, who has *caused* them to be born again (1 Peter 1:3-5).



Acceptance is another key factor in the Christian life, one that Solomon binds to his teachings about the power of rejection:

"Some accept the Lord Jesus Christ as personal Savior and Lord and then spend the rest of their lives trying to get him to accept them." (33)

Solomon points out correctly that God's acceptance is based on Christ's completed work, not our human efforts:

"Acceptance by God and identification with Christ in death, burial, and resurrection are much like opposite sides of a coin." (33)

The believer is accepted by God *in Christ*. However, Solomon bases the common experience of *feeling* unaccepted by God on rejection from parents and others:

"If they are not fit for other people to accept, why should God accept them?" (33)

Because of sin, people do sometimes seek the approval of man rather than God. However, Solomon imposes a psychological theory of rejection onto the pages of Scripture. The Bible never teaches that "feeling" accepted by God ever depends on the acceptance (or the lack thereof) a person has experienced from other humans.

### **Solomon's View of Sanctification**

Now that we have considered Solomon's doctrine of man, and his perspective on salvation, we come to the crucial matter of *sanctification*. This is where the efforts of counseling are primarily directed.

**Facts and feelings.** Sin impacts the entire inner man (in addition to the body)--will, intellect, desires, emotions. The gracious sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit renews the believer in all of these areas, so that he might be conformed to the image of Christ, recreated in righteousness, holiness, and truth (Romans 8:29; Ephesians 4:22-24; Colossians 3:10).

Emotions are *one* aspect of the inner man, but in most modern psychological approaches, they are highlighted excessively. As we consider what Solomon has to say about the emotional aspect of man, it is evident that he has bought into some of the

speculations of modern psychotherapy, although he does hold to the possibility of godly change.

Worry, doubt, and fear are discussed in conjunction with "imaginary guilt," and all are attributed to the failure to trust Christ (42). Solomon sees frustration and hostility as the fruit that often results from these. He believes that ventilation "is workable in the therapeutic climate, but not everyone has a safe situation in which to dump their hostility" (42). It is unfortunate that such "catharsis" is affirmed as acceptable in any setting, since it is not a biblically valid manner of handling anger. We can see the subtle (or not so subtle!) intrusion of psychotherapy here, as well as in Solomon's belief that "hostility kept inward becomes depression" (45). Depression may be coupled with anger, but it may also relate to unconfessed sin (Psalm 38) or to the many sorrowful circumstances of living in a fallen world (Job).

Solomon notes that emotions and facts may disagree:

"A person who *feels* inferior, insecure, inadequate, and unacceptable is continuously faced with a set of emotions that are at variance with the facts of reality. Therefore, he must distort the facts to agree with his feelings (commonly known as a neurosis) or employ some defense mechanism to permit him to cope with an untenable situation." (85)

Earlier, Solomon stated his intention to use *biblical* terms, but here he lapses into the psychological categories of "neurosis" and "defense mechanism" (per Freud). Furthermore, the *fact* about man is that indeed, he is inferior, inadequate and such--in fact, he is *unrighteous*. Only in *Christ* is man righteous, by *imputation*. Only in *His* strength does man have power (John 15:5; Philippians 4:13). Although Solomon affirms the centrality of Christ's work and power, he is terribly concerned with man's *feeling* of adequacy and acceptability.

Solomon does say that it is God's job to change our emotions as He renews our minds, that our own efforts to change our emotions are futile:

"As we consistently *will* to place our confidence in our infallible 'instruments,' the Word of God, our feelings will increasingly come in line with the facts." (86)

Again man's *will* is exalted as the key. Godly emotions, such as joy and peace, are represented in Scripture as characteristics of the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23). Those belonging to Jesus Christ *have* crucified the desires and passions of the flesh (Galatians 5:24).

Meanwhile, Solomon cites emotions as the culprit preventing victorious Christian living:

"Emotions may play a major part in resisting our ability to lay hold of our victory in Christ by faith." (99)

However, victory is not impossible:

"It is possible...to bypass damaged emotions and experience a renewing of the mind, which will in time result in the healing of emotions. What you *know* will eventually change the way you *feel*." (99)

The gracious Spirit of God does indeed work to renew the entire inner man, emotions included. However, the psychological model of "damaged" emotions and "healing" of emotions is one that clouds the vital issue of *sin*. Such terminology represents man as a victim of others, rather than as morally responsible for his emotional state. We are all sinned against, but all too often our emotional responses are also sinful in nature.

**Salvation plus...** Salvation, according to Solomon's teaching, is only *one* major milestone along the believer's path to glory. Solomon denies that he is referring to a "second work of grace" or to entering a state of sinless perfection (50). Rather, he explains that:

"We are talking about entering into something experientially that is already ours positionally--the life of Christ." (50)

Although denying a "second work of grace," Solomon clearly proposes "total surrender" as a separately identifiable *second experience* that almost always occurs at some point *after* salvation (diagram on p. 95). In fact, it doesn't stop there. Solomon identifies a *third* experience, that of identification with the cross of Christ. Solomon teaches that "total surrender" and identification with Christ are not necessarily simultaneous. In fact, surrender may be followed by a worsening of the person's condition, because God is reducing him to nothing so that Christ may be everything (82). The time frame between "surrender" and "identification" may vary:

"If he is totally yielded, the length of time it takes for him to experience the cross is determined by the sovereignty of God. We can delay his work in our lives by hardening ourselves against his chastening (Hebrews 12:11)." (82)

For now, we will focus our discussion on the second of these three experiences, inquiring whether Scripture in fact affirms "total surrender" as an event separate and distinct from salvation. If so, this means that a true believer may affirm Christ as Savior *but not as Lord*, and that a believer might *not* be identified with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection. Can this be?

Solomon clearly states his belief that salvation, assurance, security, and acceptance are *not enough*, that *total commitment* must be added (34). He sees the filling or control by the Holy Spirit as occurring (normally) sometime *after* salvation (73). This is contrary to Romans 8:9; anyone who lacks the Holy Spirit does not belong to Christ. Solomon insists that Christ "can be *in* the life without being the *center* of the life" (36). He describes the many other things that can replace Christ as the center of one's life, summarizing them all under the term "self" or "flesh" (37). (*Idols* would be more accurate.) According to Solomon, it is the rare believer who initially accepts Christ as *both* Savior and Lord:

"Total surrender is essential to total usefulness. Occasionally, a person accepts the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior and makes him Lord of his life at the beginning."  
(34)

Solomon thus separates Lordship from the initial salvation experience, as if Christ could be Savior but *not* Lord. This has very serious implications for the sanctification of the believer! The whole issue of "Lordship salvation" has been the subject of much recent discussion. There are those who lean toward legalism, implying that works are necessary to salvation, and those who err on the side of antinomianism, presuming upon God's grace. Neither of these extremes is biblical. Christ indeed is Lord over every believer. Scripture does not teach that some separate, second experience must occur for the Savior to also become Lord. We do live in a time of tension, "already--not yet." Christ has *already* defeated the powers of evil on the cross and assured victory over sin to the believer. However, we do not see the final, complete consummation of that victory in the present time. We continue to struggle with sin, but we have

the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit such that we grow in godliness. We have been transferred, definitively, out of the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of God's beloved Son (Colossians 1:13). In this kingdom where we now hold citizenship, Christ is Lord. We have definitely switched sides in the ongoing battle with spiritual powers of wickedness in the heavenly realms (Ephesians 6).

It is revealing to take a close look at Solomon's *wilderness analogy*, where he compares the believer's experience to that of Israel's exodus out of Egypt into Canaan.

First, Solomon sees a correspondence between Egypt and "the slavery of sin into which each of us was born" (67). At this initial point:

"The work of the Holy Spirit during the time in Egypt is to convict of sin. A thorough conviction of sin is essential before we will admit our need for the Savior." (72-73)

We have already looked at salvation, and we have noted that regeneration must precede repentance and faith.

At the second stage of Solomon's proposed journey:

"The Red Sea is typical of our deliverance from sin and bondage through trusting the Lord Jesus Christ." (68)

Next, the wilderness was a place of wandering for 40 years. Solomon notes that because of unbelief and disobedience, few Israelites entered Canaan. In the same way, he claims, few Christians enter the "victorious life" (68). The Jordan River, sandwiched between the wilderness and Canaan, is seen as a picture of our identification with Christ (68).

Solomon believes that many Christians remain in the "wilderness," being "carnal Christians." The "carnal" Christian is not necessarily one "living in open scandalous sin," but rather one who "has never experienced the cross" and thus "still has self in the ascendancy" (71). Explaining further, Solomon attributes the failure to live abundantly to the Christian's *unbelief*:

"Many Christians forget that salvation is a miracle and do not expect God to continue his work of grace in their hearts. Therefore, they do not enter into the victorious or abundant life because of unbelief." (72)

This abundant life is what Solomon equates with Canaan in his wilderness analogy (67). He refutes hymns that teach a correspondence of the Jordan River with death, and Canaan with heaven. Because of this theology, he claims, "many Christians long for the victory of heaven while never expecting any victory in this present life" (68). However, the text of Hebrews 4 appears to clearly correlate Canaan with heaven, comparing it to God's Sabbath, a time of rest. Also, the Israelites who failed to enter Canaan were *unbelievers*, a category radically opposed to the weak Christians pictured by Solomon in his analogy. Christians are, by definition, *believers*.

Solomon teaches that Christ is our judge in Egypt, our Savior in the wilderness, and our Lord only when we yield to Him totally (73). Again, this separates Christ's role as Savior and Lord, as if the one could occur without the other. Solomon does correctly state that God's grace operates through the entire process, and that we are not worthy of salvation from either sin or self (76).

Finally, this second experience, "total surrender," is by no means a completed once-for-all act:

"...even though it [surrender] is total in scope, it must be carried out in practice, item by item. In other words, we have surrendered the whole package; but he must now deal with everything in the package." (83)

In fact, Solomon pictures it as a rather fierce struggle:

"It is almost as if we are being literally carried to the cross, and we grasp for everything we pass on the way." (84)

In evaluating all of this, we must affirm that the Scripture does assure the believer of growth in righteous living and power over sin (Romans 6:1-14; Galatians 5:16-24; and many others). At the same time, sin continues to be a reality and a struggle during this life. There is victory, but again, it is an "already--not yet" scenario. The Christian can anticipate continued growth in this life, but even more, he can look forward to a complete, eternal rest from the struggle with sin. Solomon may not anticipate sinless perfection in this life, but the victory he does affirm tends to overshadow the coming eternal glory (Romans 8:18).

**Being vs. doing.** Pagan psychologist Abraham Maslow emphasized "being" over "becoming" or doing. Popular recovery "guru" John Bradshaw has a similar disdain for any sort of "doing," counseling his listeners to love themselves for just "being."

Solomon is far more biblical than these two, yet we encounter a similar concern, perhaps borrowed from pagan sources. He compares his own counseling with similar theological approaches that focus more on the believer's obedience. He sees *bibliotherapy* under the heading of *law*, while *spirituotherapy* he categorizes under *grace*:

"Those in the Law group would teach that one must *do* in order to *be*, while those in the grace category would teach that we must *be* in order to *do*. Though the Word of God is foundational to both, in the case of the Law approaches, scriptural principles are applied by counselor and counselee without the cross having become a reality. Change may take place in the life, but *exchange* has not." (127)

Bibliotherapy, according to Solomon, "strengthens the flesh because the cross is *implied* rather than *applied*" (127). We will return to this theme in a moment.

The being/doing dichotomy is most evident when Solomon discusses the meaning of "spiritual maturity," often vaguely defined in terms of refraining from sinful actions as well as involvement in Christian service (57). However, he says that "frequently this has little or no spiritual significance in that there is relatively little permanent change in life-style" (57). Solomon distinguishes between spiritual *position*, or standing, and *condition*, or state (61). Our *position* as Christians is one of perfection, being *justified* in God's eyes. The spiritual *condition*, however, is far different, perhaps even pathetic. In some believers there is little discernible growth (61).

Solomon believes that the believer who really matures into "spiritual adulthood" is one who "is interested primarily in his growth rather than in his service--in *being* rather than *doing*" (62). He proposes age forty as the average age "at which a Christian enters into an abiding, abundant life of identification with Christ," at least in America (63).

This being/doing dichotomy is found often in psychological literature. It can be traced to Maslow and his need hierarchy. Scripture does not dissect "being" and "doing." Rather, being

conformed to the image of Christ is highly correlated with active obedience to His commands. "Being"--*in Christ*--is accompanied by "doing"--*Christ's commands*. Jesus taught that those who love Him will keep His commandments (John 14:15).

It is vitally important to accurately distinguish justification and sanctification, two distinct yet inseparable aspects of the Spirit's work in the application of our redemption. When *justification* is confused with sanctification, we have the error of the Roman Catholic Church, a works-righteousness or legalism. When *sanctification* is confused with justification, various errors result. One such error is the belief that a Christian can attain sinless perfection during this life. Solomon has no problem with making the distinction. In fact, his problem is in making *far too much* of the difference. Although distinct, these graces are *inseparable*. The one God justifies, He also conforms to the image of His Son and glorifies (Romans 8:28-30). In his sharp separation between salvation and "total surrender," Solomon misses the inseparability of justification and sanctification.

Perhaps Solomon might be reminded that God's law remains the standard of conduct for the believer's life, even though obedience to it is not the legal ground for our justification. True saving faith produces good works that demonstrate it is genuine (James 2:14-26). God's commands have not been discarded. On the contrary, the believer has been set free from the dominion of sin so that he *can* obey (Romans 6:6,14). Perhaps the cross is "implied" in so-called bibliotherapy because the *Christian*, by definition, has already been identified with the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (Romans 6:3ff). Based on what *is already true*, believers are given exhortations (Romans 6:12-13).

**The blood and the cross.** Solomon's being/doing division continues in his distinction between the *blood* of Christ and the *cross* of Christ. He states that certain blessings are ascribed to each of these aspects of redemption. He says that, from his experience, "the blood deals with what we *do* while the cross deals with what we *are*" (109). He believes that his own writing has not dealt sufficiently with the work of the blood of Christ.

Solomon proposes three aspects to the work of Christ's blood, based on the three-part tabernacle of ancient Israel. He correlates the outer court with the penalty or guilt of sin, the holy place with the blood as the basis for forgiveness of sins, and the holy of holies with "trusting in the blood to overcome the power of sin" in our lives (110). It was through His blood



that He was raised to new life (Hebrews 13:10-21), and through His blood that He entered the most holy place to obtain our redemption (Hebrews 9:12). Certainly, Christ's completed work of atonement is sufficient for the penalty and power of sin. Solomon affirms that Christ has done everything necessary to cover our sins (111). Here on earth, He is our life (Colossians 3:3) and our mediator (Hebrews 8:6, 9:15).

According to Solomon, appropriating the blood of Christ here on earth is to "deal continuously with the defilement of sin" (112). This is the cleansing referenced in 1 John 1:7 (112). But sin may interfere:

"If we yield to sin, we walk according to the flesh, and the power of the blood of Christ is circumvented or short-circuited." (113)

Solomon says that we yield either to the power of the blood or the power of sin. Thus he correlates the *blood* of Christ specifically with our *sanctification*.

Solomon deals separately with the cross. Based on Hebrews 10:19, Solomon states that our birthright is to enter the holiest place, but this "is contingent upon our flesh having been dealt with by the cross of Christ" (111-112). He says that the "veil," which prevents us from intimate fellowship, is the flesh or self:

"Though the veil was rent from top to bottom in the temple, and the way for unhindered and unbroken fellowship with him was made possible, we yet have a veil of our own making, the flesh, which must continuously be dealt with by the cross and the blood of Christ." (112)

This imagery creates some problems and unnecessary obstacles. In Hebrews 10:20, the veil is explicitly identified as *His flesh*, not our own. It is because *His flesh* was torn apart on the cross that we are able to enjoy fellowship with God. The Scripture does not correlate *man's flesh* with the *veil* in Hebrews. To do so is to confuse the whole issue. All of us continue to struggle with sin, to one degree or another, throughout our lives. Yet the way to God is open nevertheless. It is open because of Christ's completed work, because *His flesh* was torn apart, not because we repeatedly tear a veil of our own making. Sometimes, sin does interrupt the intimacy of fellowship between the believer, now God's adopted child, and his heavenly Father. However, the Christian never returns to the separation that existed prior to his salvation.

Solomon spells out his being/doing dichotomy when he states that:

"It is the cross of Christ that deals with what we are (or, better, were). But it is the blood that deals with what we do, and what causes us to do it--the power of indwelling sin." (112)

Although Solomon makes some biblical statements about Christ's work of atonement, this sort of dichotomy distorts the biblical message. Christ shed His blood on the cross. The cross and blood are *inseparable*. Solomon states that Christ's blood deals with the pollution, the defilement, of sin, and indeed it does (1 John 1:7). However, that same blood also deals with the *guilt* of sin, as a public display of propitiation (Romans 3:25). The blood, shed on the cross, is necessary for both the guilt of sin (justification) and the pollution of sin (sanctification). Not only that, but we dare not omit the *resurrection* of Christ (Romans 5:10).

A more biblical distinction can be seen in considering the active and passive obedience of Christ. In His passive obedience, on the cross, Christ dealt with our sin, its guilt and pollution. He removed the penalty and power of sin. In His active obedience, living a sinless life, His righteousness is imputed to our account (Romans 5:18-19).

**Self.** Solomon views *self*, or the *flesh*, as the major culprit in the believer's sanctification:

"It is because *self* is at the center of the life that all of this [emotional] conflict has developed and continues to grow," and "self in control of the life is repugnant to God." (46)

He lists fantasy, paranoia, and obsessions as possible responses to internal emotional conflict, stating that these "are mental symptoms of a deeper problem--self at the center of life" (44). Solomon centers the answer in the believer's relationship to the cross:

"Self--the flesh--is...the object of his [God's] abhorrence, and he yearns to rid us of its control and dominion through the *cross of Christ*." (85)

Solomon speaks of a *spiritual surgery* analogous to surgery on the body. Symptoms precede the operation and pain accompanies it. Great anxiety usually immediately precedes the time when a person comes to the "end of self" and totally surrenders to God (89). The "patient" is helpless as preparations are being made (86-87). This surgery may be fairly quick, or it may take a long time:

"The divine Surgeon's purpose is not merely to take away the pain and restore us to our former way of life, in which self has dominated, but to enable us to enjoy the reign of the Christ-life instead of the self-life." (88)

Surgery is followed by a time of convalescence, rarely a smooth process, and delight in telling others about the successful operation (88).

In connection with the problem of *self*, Solomon considers man's activity in the Christian life. He indicates that God, not the believer, must take control:

"If God is to take control, we must lose control. And, so long as we are in control, we are really out of control. The willingness to lose control of all our circumstances is prerequisite to our finding our identity in the Lord Jesus Christ." (100)

It is good to recognize God's sovereignty, His providential control and ordering of all our circumstances. It is important to *trust* Him. Again, however, all of this is not directed toward "finding our identity."

Solomon identifies "self-effort" as our basic problem, whether before or after the "total surrender" experience. He believes that even prayer, Bible study, and church participation "accomplish little for us if we are trying to find victory through *trying* instead of *dying*" (97). He says that "God won't honor our attempts to strengthen the flesh" (97). Self-help programs are one example he cites (and rightly so) of fleshly efforts that accomplish very little over the long haul (97).

However, the experience of identification with Christ is not viewed by Solomon as a once-for-all event, but rather "it must be a 'daily' or 'always' reckoning upon our deliverance to the cross" (64). He views the Christian life as far from passive. In fact, it is an "aggressive yielding" of our will (54). Certainly, the believer continues to be active in his obedience through life. However, this "aggressive yielding" borders on

another type of works-righteousness. There is indeed some mystery concerning how God works within the believer, and how His sovereign power correlates with our active responsibility. However, we can say that we work and act *because* God is at work within us "to will and to do His good pleasure" (Philippians 1:12-13).

The concept of *reckoning* is an important consideration in looking at the believer's activity in sanctification. Solomon states that if we "reckon or account it to be so, the Holy Spirit will make it real in our experience" (80). However, we "reckon" it to be so *because it already is so*. This is how Paul presents theological truth (as in Romans 6). Solomon proposes second ("surrender") and third ("identification") experiences in the life of the Christian, yet Scripture affirms that *it is already so*. The believer already *is* united with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection. The "old man" already *has been* crucified with Christ. Such truth is the basis for exhortations in the Pauline epistles, not a new and different experience that is true only for a few special believers. The *fact* of the believer's union with Christ should give hope, not send the Christian out seeking an extraordinary experience.

The efforts of believers often revolve around keeping God's commandments. Solomon teaches that the Christian life is:

"...not a set of rules that we keep...that is legalism. It is the law that gives sin its power and spurs many believers on to overt or covert rebellion." (53)

However, the law of God has more than one purpose. The law defines sin and brings conviction. The law shows us our inability to earn salvation and drives us to Christ and His perfect righteousness. Our own efforts to keep divine law are never the legal ground for our justification. This is what Paul means when he says that we are "not under law" but rather "under grace" (Romans 6:14-15). No one enters heaven by keeping the law, as Solomon would heartily agree. However, God's law remains the standard of conduct for believers. Paul repeatedly affirms the law as good and holy (Romans 7:12).

Solomon does remind us that we are called to die to self and to live for Christ and His kingdom. He reminds us that our efforts are never sufficient to earn the free gift to eternal life graciously granted to us in Christ. However, there are some theological problems in his analysis of the believer's activity

in sanctification and the continuing role of God's law in Christian life.

**Maintaining victory.** Solomon devotes one of his chapters to the maintenance of victory after having appropriated our death and resurrection with Christ (103ff). Sometimes "downers" do occur:

"The believer's experience at this point will be in direct correspondence to the manner in which his flesh has been programmed in his developmental years and in his previous Christian walk." (103)

There may be a loss of power or the person may become entangled in a particular sin (103). The thesis of this chapter is that:

"The flesh (self) can never be improved--even after the cross has become a reality in the life of the believer." (104)

The beginning of a "downer" is the most deceptive. Solomon cites pride (failing to abide in Christ moment by moment) as one example (106). It might also be a significant rejection (one of Solomon's main themes), leading to loss of self-esteem, frustration, hostility, and finally, depression (107).

Note here the entanglement of psychological theories with biblical themes. The emphasis on rejection, the concern about "loss of self-esteem," and the power of "programming" during "development years" are all borrowed from the polluted streams of psychotherapy. If Solomon were fully consistent with his thesis of the "exchanged" life, the "loss of self-esteem" would hardly be a concern. Rejection, too, would not occupy such a prime position, as the believer can expect rejection and persecution for his faith (John 15:18-20; 1 Peter 4:12-19).

Clearly, Solomon sees our sanctification as an ongoing process:

"As we move along through life here on Earth, it is a continuous process of denying ourselves, taking up the cross daily, taking our place by faith in the heavenlies, confessing known sin, being cleansed from all unrighteousness, and having our conscience purged from dead works." (113)

Indeed, there is a progressive aspect to our sanctification, which will be complete only when we enter into eternal glory. Numerous Scriptures testify to this ongoing process: Romans 6; Ephesians 4:22-24; Romans 8:13; Romans 12:2; Colossians 3:5; 2 Corinthians 3:18, 7:1; 1 Thessalonians 3:12-13, 4:10; 1 Peter 2:2; 2 Peter 1:3-11, 3:18.

There is also, however, a *definitive* aspect to the believer's sanctification. In his expectation of second and third experiences distinct from salvation, Solomon seems to miss this point. The believer has been definitively sanctified or *set apart* (1 Corinthians 6:11; Acts 20:32, 26:18; Hebrews 10:10, 10:14, 13:12). He has been *purified* by the work of the Holy Spirit (Titus 2:14; 2 Peter 1:9; Acts 15:9; Ephesians 5:26). He has been made alive together with Christ and *raised up* with Him (Ephesians 2:1-7; Romans 6:1-14; Colossians 3:3). These are accomplished facts, and on the basis of such truth, the believer progresses in his sanctification, being conformed to the image of Christ. Solomon might view these passages as being concerned with the believer's *position* in Christ, as distinguished from his *experience*. Again, however, the believer's justification (his *position* in Christ) cannot be separated from his sanctification. He has been definitively set up by God *for* the Spirit's sanctifying work.

**Suffering.** There is no doubt that the believer can expect to anticipate trials and tribulations throughout his earthly life. Jesus promised it would be so (John 16:33), and numerous New Testament passages attest to this fact of life. Citing Romans 6:11, Solomon correctly notes that:

"Laying down our lives is not really optional--it is a command." (101)

Solomon wants to place suffering in the proper perspective. Otherwise, it usually brings resentment, hostility, and bitterness. According to Solomon, suffering is intended by God to bring the believer to the end of self, so that he will trust God to accomplish His purposes. The case is cited of a woman who had spent many years going to psychologists, psychiatrists, ministers, and other counselors, without relief (88-89). Suffering can, of course--and should--lead the believer to a deeper reliance on the Lord, and we can agree with Solomon that suffering is used to accomplish God's good purposes. It is a means of teaching and discipline (Hebrews 12:4-13). It strengthens and refines the believer's faith (1 Peter 1:6-7). It transforms the Christian, conforming him to the image of Christ

(1 Peter 2:21-25; Romans 8:28-30). However, there is even more to the purpose of suffering. God uses our suffering as a testimony to *His glory* (1 Peter 4:12-19). The believer's faithful endurance is used by God as a testimony to the world, drawing others to the Savior.

According to Solomon, the believer's experience of suffering is one that closely parallels the suffering of Christ:

"The cross in the life of the believer involves brokenness and suffering, just as it did for our Lord." (17)

Comparing the believer's experience to Christ on the cross, Solomon says that:

"Just so, he [God] cannot--he *must not*--ease the burden until his gracious work is finished in our experience.... In our spiritual journey, the suffering of the crucifixion precedes the power of the resurrection." (90)

We can hardly overstate Solomon's emphasis on the cross as *the believer's experience*:

"Even though the atonement for sin was vicarious in that Christ shed his blood for our sins and, in so doing, gave us his life, his cross must become the *experienced cross* before his victory and power can be ours." (90)

However, this "third experience," following salvation and "total surrender," is not marked by ease:

"As we approach the cross, we must be brought to the utter end of our own resources." (91)

Solomon says that suicidal feelings are common at this point (91). The rewards are great and the change is permanent, but *self* may interfere at a later point, resulting in a loss of joy:

"When the process of this crucifixion experience is consummated, the result is spiritual resurrection life.... Although the stage of growth is never lost, the victory or joy of it may be, as *self* returns to the ascendancy in the life." (92)

However, these times of defeat can be valuable learning experiences if we view them this way (93).

The Christian life does inevitably involve suffering. However, there is a need for clarification here in that Christ has suffered on our behalf and made the final sacrifice for our sins. We need not--*must not*--attempt to *repeat* His suffering and sacrifice. Solomon denies teaching that the believer atones for his own sin, but he does confuse the issue in the way he views suffering. The *reality* of suffering is evident from the Scriptures, and God uses it to accomplish His purposes. The *necessity* of suffering, as perhaps *the way* in which God works in the believer's life, is Solomon's emphasis. Even though Solomon promotes an "exchanged" life in which self is dethroned, his focal point is still *self* rather than *God's glory*. The use of human suffering for *God's glory* is a scriptural emphasis that overshadows its use *only* to transform the believer. The transformation of the believer is accomplished *in order that God may be glorified*.

## **Union With Christ**

Solomon's work does remind us of the biblical emphasis on our union with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection. Many New Testament passages state that the believer is "in Christ."

Solomon introduces confusion when he distinguishes *salvation* from *identification* by stating that one is objective, the other subjective:

"Salvation is more of an *objective* work--something that is done for us. Identification is more *subjective* in nature--something that is done in us. In salvation Christ is our substitute; in identification he is our representative."  
(76)

Christ's work of redemption on the cross is *objective, for us*. The application of His redemptive work is *subjective, in us*; this is the Holy Spirit's work, involving regeneration, faith, repentance, justification, sanctification, perseverance, and ultimately glorification. Christ is *both* our substitute *and* our representative in the *objective* aspect of His redemptive work. He is our penal *substitute*, bearing the penalty of sin that we deserve. He is also our covenant *representative*, such that His righteousness is imputed to us in the same manner in which Adam's sin was imputed to us. Our identification with Him in death, burial, and resurrection occurs because He is our representative. The Holy Spirit's work *in us* is indeed subjective, applying the completed work of Christ to our lives.



Solomon contrasts working *for* God with God working *through* us:

"God does not want us to work *for* him, to witness *for* him, to live *for* him. He wants to get *self* out of the way so he can work through us." (38)

However, compare this statement with 2 Corinthians 5:15, where God says that we are now to live *for* Him who died for us. The point here is that rather than living our lives to please self, we live our lives now to please and glorify Jesus Christ. God does work through us to accomplish His purposes, yet He does so while we are living *for* Him. There is no dichotomy in the Scripture between living or working *for* God versus God working *through* us. What may occur, at times, is doing things that are externally righteous, but with ungodly motives--such as exalting self in the eyes of men.

Meanwhile, Solomon wants to assure the reader that when Christ lives in and through him, his personal needs will be met:

"When Christ is at the center of the life, he can meet all the needs as he has free rein to live out his life in us. Of course, Christ does not feel insecure, inadequate, guilty, or have worries, doubts, or fears." (46)

God does graciously meet the true needs of the believer. However, this statement seems to *absorb* the believer in Christ in a manner so as to nearly annihilate his individual needs and desires. There is a true, biblical union with Christ that is grounded in His *representation* of His people on the cross.

**Time and eternity.** Solomon introduces some confusion into the matter of *when* the believer is identified with Christ. He emphasizes the *eternal* life that the believer enjoys in union with the Lord:

"We are taken out of the old Adam life and put into Christ by the Spirit of God. Once we are *in* Christ, we are in an eternal existence, a life that is not based on time.... The truth is that once we have entered into the life of the Lord Jesus Christ, we have entered into *eternal life*, a life that spans the past as well as the future...we were in him *at the cross*. We were in him not only when he was crucified, but when he was buried and when he was raised from the dead and when he ascended into heaven." (49)

However, while Solomon emphasizes this eternal aspect to our union with Christ, he also attributes salvation to an act of man's free will, placing regeneration *after* faith. There is a serious inconsistency here! The eternal aspect makes sense in the light of *election*, God's choosing of the believer "in Christ" before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:4). Solomon mentions this text to support the eternal nature of our relationship with Christ (50). However, if salvation truly depended on man's "free will," the eternal aspect of our union with Christ could not be affirmed.

Nevertheless, Solomon sees an awareness of identification with Christ as occurring at a specific point in time:

"We must realize that this identification awareness is an event that actually takes place at a point in time and experience." (53)

Solomon's view of time and eternity confuses the issue. There is a real transition in history from wrath to grace. According to Ephesians 2:11-12, there was a time when we were *without God in the world*, without Christ. It isn't simply a matter of "not yet knowing" that we're in Christ (neo-orthodoxy teaches this error). The believer is effectually called *in Christ* at a point in time, initiating actual salvation, yet that calling takes place as the result of an antecedent union with Christ, according to God's purpose (Ephesians 1:4; 1 Corinthians 1:9; 1 Timothy 1:9). There is an eternal aspect to the union, because God has chosen us in Christ before the foundation of the earth (Ephesians 1:4), but there is also an event at a point *in time* where the believer is transferred from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of God's Son (Colossians 1:13), being called into union with Christ and given the gift of faith. The believer was truly "in Christ" at the time of His death, burial, and resurrection because He *represented* all of His in these events of redemptive history.

**Biblical union with Christ.** Having highlighted the key errors in Solomon's perspective, we will conclude with a detailed review of what Scripture actually *does* say about this important doctrine, which binds together all of the aspects of God's work of salvation.<sup>2</sup> No doubt Solomon would concur with much of this

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<sup>2</sup> For this section, I am deeply indebted to Dr. Robert Strimple, Professor of Systematic Theology at Westminster Theological Seminary, Escondido, CA. Most of what is said here follows my notes from his Holy Spirit course in the fall of 1995.

material, but it is presented here in summary form for clarification of the full range of biblical teaching.

The phrase "in Christ" occurs more than 150 times in the New Testament. We were "in Christ" when God chose us before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:4). We were also "in Christ" in His death and resurrection, such that His objective, once-for-all work has efficacious power in our lives (Romans 6:1-7:6; Ephesians 2:4-6; Colossians 2:11-13, 2:20, 3:1-4; Galatians 2:19-20; 1 Peter 4:1-2; 2 Corinthians 5:14-15). Only when salvation is effectively applied to us do we partake of the benefits of being united with Christ. In Ephesians 2, Paul notes that there was a time when we were *without* Christ in our experience (not merely our subjective understanding, contrary to neo-orthodoxy). There's a mystery here, in view of our eternal election in Christ. Our calling, at a specific point in time, is grounded in our antecedent, eternal election in Him (2 Timothy 1:9; 1 Corinthians 1:9). We are regenerated "in Christ" (Ephesians 2:10), such that each of us is a "new creation...created in Christ Jesus." We have our redemption "in Him" (Ephesians 1:6-7; Colossians 1:14). Our justification is in Christ, such that there is no condemnation for those in Him (Romans 8:1), and so that we might become righteousness in Him (2 Corinthians 5:21). Our perseverance is in Christ (Romans 6:4; 1 Corinthians 1:4-9, 6:15-17). Being in Christ enables and ensures that perseverance (John 15). Even in physical death we are not separated from Him. Our death is described as being "in Christ" (1 Thessalonians 4:14-16; Revelation 14:13). Resurrection and glorification of the believer are "in Christ" (1 Corinthians 15:22; Romans 8:16-17); in Him believers are made alive.

The nature of our union with Christ is mysterious, yet Scripture has much to tell us about the nature of that union. It is our union with a *Person*, not a *principle* or impersonal force, contrary to Hinduism, mysticism, and New Age theologies that merge God and man (Colossians 1:26-27; Ephesians 5:22; 1 Peter 1:18; 2 Timothy 2:12). It is a spiritual union, because the Holy Spirit is the bond by which Christ effectually unites us to Himself (Romans 8:9-11; 1 Corinthians 12:13; 2 Corinthians 3:17-18, 13:14; 1 John 3:24, 4:13). The instrumental bond of the union is faith (Matthew 9:29; Romans 1:17; Galatians 2:20), which is itself the gift of God's Spirit, the result of our union with Christ. By faith we are saved, by faith we abide, by faith we bear fruit. The union is legal and covenantal in nature, as Christ is our representative and His righteousness is imputed to our account (Romans 5:12-21). It is, further, an eschatological union with the last Adam (1 Corinthians 15:49-49; 2 Corinthians

6:2, 5:17; Ephesians 2:15, 4:24; Colossians 3:10). Because of our eschatological union with Christ, we will participate in the new humanity of whom Christ is the head. Full consummation awaits us in the future, yet even now we are delivered from this present evil age. Meanwhile, our union with Christ is vital and life-giving, compared to vine and branches, head and body (John 1:16, 5:26-27, 14:19, 15 [the chapter]; Ephesians 1:22-23, 3:19, 4:12-13; 1 Corinthians 3:21; Colossians 1:19, 2:9). It isn't a rugged individualism, but rather we are members of the whole body of Christ (Ephesians 4:25, 5:30; 1 Corinthians 12). Our union is signified and sealed by the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper, so it is a sacramental union (Romans 6:3-5; Galatians 3:27; Colossians 2:12; 1 Corinthians 10:16-17). It is an indissoluble union that no one can break (John 10:27-30; Romans 8:35-39).

## **Conclusion and Summary**

Solomon's work focuses on the important issue of our union with Christ. A biblical understanding of this concept is essential to comprehending the nature of our salvation and sanctification. However, it is important to look carefully at what the Bible actually says and to correct the flaws in Solomon's analysis. Flaws exist not only in his understanding of our union with Christ, but in his doctrine of the nature of man, and in his proposal that some "second" or even "third" experience is needed to live the victorious Christian life. In addition, careful examination is needed to identify the psychological concepts (particularly rejection) that Solomon introduces and mixes in with biblical teaching. His method sounds promising, and his intentions seem sincere, yet his counseling must be exposed as yet another unbiblical integration of God's truth with man's "wisdom."

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