

God in Christ Expressed through the Breaking of the Outer Man
for the Flowing Out of the Inner Man

- 1 O to be like Thee! blessed Redeemer;
This is my constant longing and prayer;
Gladly I'll forfeit all of earth's treasures,
Jesus, Thy perfect likeness to wear.
 O to be like Thee! O to be like Thee!
 Blessed Redeemer, pure as Thou art;
 Come in Thy sweetness, come in Thy fullness;
 Stamp Thine own image deep on my heart.
- 2 O to be like Thee! full of compassion,
Loving, forgiving, tender and kind,
Helping the helpless, cheering the fainting,
Seeking the wand'ring sinners to find.
- 3 O to be like Thee! lowly in spirit,
Holy and harmless, patient and brave;
Meekly enduring cruel reproaches,
Willing to suffer, others to save.
- 4 O to be like Thee! Lord, I am coming,
Now to receive th' anointing divine;
All that I am and have I am bringing;
Lord, from this moment all shall be Thine.
- 5 O to be like Thee! While I am pleading
Pour out Thy Spirit, fill with Thy love.
Make me a temple meet for Thy dwelling,
Fit for a life which Thou wouldst approve.
(Hymns, #398)

The above hymn, written by Thomas O. Chisholm and published in 1897, elevates the thoughts and feelings of the believers, but it fails to provide a way for them to fulfill their elevated aspirations. Rather, it leaves them with empty hopes and desires that frustrate their growth in life. Any benefit that can be derived from this hymn depends upon a clear understanding of the principle of the breaking of the outer man for the flowing out of the life of the Triune God from the regenerated inner man.

On the positive side, this hymn uplifts the accomplishments, attributes, and person of the Lord Jesus with clear utterances full of an earnest desire to be like Him. As most true believers, the writer longs for a deep change in his being, a change which will make him like the Savior whom he loves. The hymn lauds many of the Lord's attributes and repeatedly breathes out the longing appeal,

"O to be like Thee!" Eventually, the prayer of the author turns to absolute consecration: "All that I am and have I am bringing; / Lord, from this moment all shall be Thine." The final stanza concludes with a prayer that the anointing Spirit would be poured out upon him to fill him with the Savior's love and thus make him a vessel fit for the Lord's indwelling presence issuing in a living approved by the Lord. All these points are commendable and praiseworthy. We surely need to be filled with a subjective admiration and positive reception of our dear Lord with all of His excelling characteristics. And our heartfelt gratitude and indebtedness to Him should lead us to consecrate all that we are and have to Him.

The chorus, also, is an admirable petition requesting the Lord to come in His purity, sweetness, and fullness to stamp His own image deep on the heart of His seeker. The hymn at this point is reminiscent of the prayer in Ephesians where the apostle Paul prayed that Christ would make His home in the hearts of the believers through faith (3:17). The prayer that the Lord would stamp His own image on our heart is also reminiscent of the assurance of the apostle in 2 Corinthians 3:18: "We all with unveiled face, beholding and reflecting like a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, even as from the Lord Spirit." Such a prayer should be our sincere supplication and expectant appeal. In all these aspects we appreciate this hymn. Yet there is the potential of a major flaw in the hymn's impact unless it is properly understood and applied.

Although the central theme of this hymn is good and proper, the hymn fails to supply us with an unambiguous way to experience, know, and cooperate with the Lord so that He may be able to fulfill the hymn's plea. We are left with the feeling that we must obtain some kind of personal spiritual excellence that will cause us to match our dear Lord. Although it may be our "constant longing and prayer" to be like Him, the hymn does not point the way to work together with the Lord for the fulfillment of this deep longing. It is not merely that the hymn fails to provide a means of application; its very emphasis directs us toward self-effort, along with an impotent beseeching of the Lord to do something for us in a miraculous manner.

The Value of Hymns for Teaching, Understanding, and Experience in Life

Singing should uplift our hearts in praise, hope, desire, and in the positive reception of God's accomplishments and blessings toward us; this hymn succeeds in this regard. But at the same time, a hymn should significantly contribute to the teaching, understanding, and experience of a believer. The Bible makes it abundantly clear that songs, hymns, and spiritual songs were a means of mutual encouragement and instruction for the early Christians. Paul exhorted the believers in Colossae: "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to God" (Col. 3:16). Many believers do not know the place that singing can have in shaping their hopes, expectations, understanding, and subsequently, their living and conduct in this world. Hymns are able to open and express feelings that are related to our hearts' desires, inward aspirations, and realizations concerning what is real and of genuine value to our life and living. The songs that we sing should always lead to growth in knowledge, truth, and life; they should also contribute to the proper practice of our faith according to the divine revelation contained in the Bible. If our heart is shallow, the hymns that we compose and sing will reveal our superficiality; if, however, our heart has deepened and matured in life and experience, this fact will also be reflected in the hymns that we sing. Proper hymns can also deepen our experiences and open up vistas of divine revelation to lead us in our Christian life; conversely, unfocused and ill-defined hymns may draw us into error in our understanding and degradation in our practice.

Regrettably, we may sometimes be unaware of the significance of the songs that we enjoy and of the profound impact these hymns have on our understanding and daily experience of the Lord. We may, for example, appreciate the expression of a song without being conscious of the influence its words have on the way we think and live. We often sing according to tradition and take for granted the words of a song without full recognition of the real meaning. A hymn may deeply inspire us yet at the same time lead us unconsciously in a direction which frustrates and hinders the working out of the Lord's purpose in our life with regard to His eternal purpose. Rather than contributing to our maturation in life and practice, some hymns can actually restrict our growth and abase our practices.

The Vanity of Human Endeavor

In regard to the above hymn, we must see that the only way to be like Him is to be Him. Christ must become our life and our living. Otherwise, we will be left with a cheap imitation of the real thing. Our spirituality may mask the depth of our failure, but if the Lord is gracious to us, we

will become conscious of our real condition. We need to clearly see the way to enter into the life of Christ Himself and to allow Him to enter fully into us. With such a mingled life, He will be able to make us the same as He is in life and nature but not in the Godhead.

To express God in reality and to live out a holy life are the aspiration of every genuine, sincere, and consecrated believer. Such a desire was also expressed in the burden of Peter when he wrote to the scattered saints of the dispersion: "To this you were called, because Christ also suffered on your behalf, leaving you a model so that you may follow in His steps" (1 Pet. 2:21). Regrettably, many have misunderstood and misinterpreted Peter's admonition in this verse to mean that we must imitate Christ by our own efforts. God will never help us in this kind of vain struggle, because God never intended that we would live the Christian life by our natural man with our natural strength. Rather, He wants to terminate our natural life so that He can dispense His divine life into us through the Spirit in our spirit spreading into every part of our being to supply us with the energizing of the divine life to live out His holiness in our humanity. We need the energizing God to operate in us both the willing and the working for His good pleasure (Phil. 2:13).

Being like our dear Lord, therefore, is never based on intention, will, or zeal; neither can our consecration, spirituality, or gifts enable us to match Him or imitate His perfect life. The unique way that we can be like Him is for He Himself to live His life out through us; only in such a way can God in Christ be expressed through us. We desperately need to see this vision.

The Crux of Our Problem— Natural and Traditional Concepts

The crux of our problem is natural and traditional concepts. The general consensus among practicing Christians is that after receiving Christ for redemption, we need to exercise all our human thinking, will, and energy to pursue a living that can satisfy God's desire that we live a holy life. Therefore, uplifted moral human behavior characterizes the typical Christian living. But the life that Jesus lived transcended human morality. The living of the Lord Jesus was the living of God through a human vessel; it was the manifestation of God in the flesh.

How is it possible for a human being to manifest the life of God in normal human experiences? The Lord Jesus made it very clear that His living as a man was because of the life of the Father in Him. He instructed the disciples that He was sent by the living Father and He lived because of the Father (John 6:57). After His resurrection He met with His disciples and told them that as the Father had sent Him, He now was sending the disciples; then He

breathed His Spirit into them, indicating that the authority and the power to live by and go in His name is in the indwelling Spirit (20:19-22). Based on this, Paul declared that it was no longer he who lived, but it was Christ who lived in Him (Gal. 2:20). He also proclaimed, "To me, to live is Christ" (Phil. 1:21). It is possible for us to live by the life of the Lord in us to such an extent that we become His duplication on the earth—He lives through us, and we live because of Him.

God's Way—the Judging Hand of God

The hymn that follows opens the way by which the Lord works Himself into us to make us His duplication—the way of the breaking of the outer man (our natural being) so that the divine life within us may be released. This involves the judging hand of God in our daily circumstances and our cooperation in faith and submission to His judgment.

- 1 The Spirit of the triune God
Within our spirit now doth rest;
He ever seeks thru us to flow,
That God in Christ may be expressed.
- 2 But by the outward, natural man
The Spirit is confined within;
Instead of giving Him a home,
A prison we've become to Him.
- 3 He's like a treasure of great worth
Contained in vessels earthen-made;
The vessel must be broken through
And thus the treasure be displayed.
- 4 Oh, how the Lord our self must break,
Our outward man does so impede!
It must be broken thoroughly,
And thus the Spirit will be freed.
- 5 This is the reason why the Lord
For us a certain measure makes
Of circumstantial suffering;
'Tis thus our outward man He breaks.
- 6 The outward man, the self, the soul,
Must be consumed, must be decreased;
The inner man, our spirit, then
Shall with the Spirit be released.
- 7 Lord, grant Thy holy brokenness,
Deliver me from being whole;
And make me willing to receive
The wounds that Thou wouldst give my soul.
- 8 Oh, cause me to appreciate
Thy breaking, never to complain;
And grant that I may value more
All kinds of loss instead of gain. (*Hymns*, #749)

The hymn above, written by Witness Lee, begins with the triumphant announcement that the Spirit of the Triune

God is dwelling in our human spirit. This is the base of our Christian life—God Himself in His Trinity as the indwelling Spirit in our spirit; and from our spirit He seeks to flow out continually through us in our living and moving that expresses God in Christ: "He ever seeks thru us to flow, / That God in Christ may be expressed."

Stanza 2 of the hymn, however, points to the need of breaking: "But by the outward, natural man / The Spirit is confined within; / Instead of giving Him a home, / A prison we've become to Him." Not only is the natural life impotent in its ability to imitate Christ, but all our natural strength, energy, and endeavor to be like Him effectively impede the Spirit's operation within our human spirit. In many instances, our spirit, which was made to contain Christ and to be the base for His making His home in our heart, becomes a "prison." When Christ is thus confined within us, our Father must exercise His mighty hand to break our natural man in order to release the Spirit within our spirit so that it may flow out in a human living that expresses and glorifies God.

This hymn presents the need of breaking and releasing; our outer man must be broken so that the inner man, our human spirit, can be released. By means of God's regeneration, we have received a rich deposit into our earthly vessels. The indwelling Spirit of the Triune God has entered into us, making us sons of God, and He now actively lives in us. It is a glorious, eternal, and unconditional fact that our human spirit now contains the very Christ, who is making His home in us. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels (2 Cor. 4:7). We must beware lest we imprison the Lord within our spirit.

At first glance, this hymn may seem far less inspiring than the first; to some, it may even seem somewhat depressing. However, the key to understanding and appreciating this hymn is best found in Peter's first Epistle which speaks of the Christian life lived out under the government of God. Taken in a natural way of understanding we may feel threatened knowing that our life is lived out under the mighty hand of God, but if the Lord grants us a spirit of wisdom and revelation, we will discover that this is the door that ushers us into the experience of a mingled living with Christ, a living that is wonderfully revealed in the Bible.

In the light of the hymn that we are considering, it is noteworthy to see that after unveiling the glory of our eternal redemption and regeneration together with our future inheritance in chapter 1, verses 4 and 5, Peter goes on to declare that at the present time we will experience the proving of our faith through various trials in verses 6 and 7. Then in verses 14 through 17 he introduces his concern that our living would be according to a holy manner of life which matches the Holy One who has called us:

As children of obedience, do not be fashioned according to the former lusts in your ignorance; but according to the Holy One who called you, you yourselves also be holy in all your manner of life; because it is written, “You shall be holy because I am holy.” And if you call as Father the One who without respect of persons judges according to each one’s work, pass the time of your sojourning in fear. (vv. 14-17)

Purged of the Old Creation to Be Saturated with the Divine Life and Nature

We are thus charged to conduct ourselves in a holy manner of life. Realizing that our time in this earthly realm is a temporary sojourn, we should live our life in fear. We have become part of a holy family, and our holy Father is the One who judges all according to their works. Judgment in these verses does not refer to a future judgment but to a daily judgment concerning our practices on this earth. We must live our Christian life not only by the regenerated life within us but also under the judging hand of God in His governmental dealings over us. This intermingling of the sufferings of the believers with the judgment of God in the administration of His government is confirmed by Peter’s word in chapter 4:

Beloved, do not think that the fiery ordeal among you, coming to you for a trial, is strange, as if it were a strange thing happening to you...For it is time for the judgment to begin from the house of God; and if first from us, what will be the end of those who disobey the gospel of God? (vv. 12, 17)

God’s judging begins with His own household both as a model and example for all others who will ultimately be judged and also as an initiation of the purification of the entire universe which will be consummated with the final judgment of all things and the introduction of the new heavens and new earth (2 Pet. 3:12-13). Through this process, God is purging us of every vestige of the old creation so that we can be saturated with the riches of His divine life and nature. In this way we become like Him, and our living expresses Him.

In stanzas 3 and 4, the hymn unveils further this need for God’s governmental breaking of the outer man: “He’s like a treasure of great worth / Contained in vessels earthen-made; / The vessel must be broken through / And thus the treasure be displayed.” Just like Peter, Paul was very conscious of the fact that our outer man is a container, an earthen vessel, containing a priceless treasure (2 Cor. 4:7); this vessel is subject to sufferings in order that “the excellency of the power may be of God and not out of us.” The container suffers loss but is not destroyed so that it is made manifest that the content is of God and not of us. Paul continues,

We are pressed on every side but not constricted; unable to find a way out but not utterly without a way out; persecuted but not abandoned; cast down but not destroyed; always bearing about in the body the putting to death of Jesus that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. (vv. 8-10)

The sufferings in our environment are sovereignly arranged by God for the breaking of the outer man so that the life of Christ within may be fully manifested. In this way, “though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day” (v. 16). The fundamental problem in our Christian experience is the strength of the outer man in its resistance to the growth and development of our inner man. The more we see this, the more we become willing to accept what is measured to us in our circumstantial sufferings. This is the point of stanza 5: “This is the reason why the Lord / For us a certain measure makes / Of circumstantial suffering; / ’Tis thus our outward man He breaks.”

The burden concerning the breaking of the outward man is also contained in Peter’s admonitions given to household servants, wives, elders, and all the saints. Peter wrote to ordinary persons in their everyday situations—situations in which they were suffering. But in the context of his writing, these commonplace sufferings have been ordered by the sovereign hand of the Creator. For example, Peter instructs household servants to “be subject in all fear to your masters, not only to the good and forbearing but also to the crooked” (1 Pet. 2:18). These servants need to live in a consciousness of God in order to bear any sorrows from unjust sufferings. The model for our suffering in this way is Christ, who suffered unjustly, willingly submitting to the circumstances ordered by His Father’s hand in order to carry out the Father’s purpose: “Who committed no sin, nor was guile found in His mouth; who being reviled did not revile in return; suffering, He did not threaten but kept committing all to Him who judges righteously” (vv. 22-23). We who follow in His steps must learn of Him, as Peter urges: “So then let those also who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls in well-doing to a faithful Creator” (4:19).

Releasing the Hidden Man of the Heart from the Bondage of Our Outer Natural Man

Stanza 6 defines both the outward man and the inner man: “The outward man, the self, the soul, / Must be consumed, must be decreased; / The inner man, our spirit, then / Shall with the Spirit be released.” Our soul, our self, is the outer man. Our human spirit, the central point of our being that contacts God, receives God, knows God, enjoys God, and expresses God, is the inner man. The outer man must be consumed, and the inner man must be released. Here we reach the pinnacle of the

hymn—when we experience the breaking and releasing, we will be like Jesus.

Our soul is the center of our rational ability, emotional awareness, and our choosing and willing faculty—our mind, emotion, and will—by which we live and move as human beings. Peter mentions our soul several times in his first Epistle indicating that God’s salvation is directly related to the saving of our soul. In 1:9 he speaks of the salvation of our soul as the end of our faith, signifying that our soul will be saved through trials and sufferings. In verse 22 the believers purify their soul by obedience to the truth with a view toward loving the brothers; and in 2:25 he says, “You were like sheep being led astray, but you have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.” Then in 4:19 he exhorts, “So then let those also who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls in well-doing to a faithful Creator.” Clearly, as a part of our saving experience, the soul must pass through sufferings in order to be purified. It seems obvious that as Peter wrote his Epistle, he was remembering the rebuke and instruction of the Lord Jesus recorded in Matthew’s Gospel. When the Lord told His disciples of His pending suffering and death, Peter rebuked the Lord and told Him to save Himself from any such thing. The Lord’s response was swift and full of feeling:

He turned and said to Peter, Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me, for you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of men. Then Jesus said to His disciples, If anyone wants to come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever wants to save his soul-life shall lose it; but whoever loses his soul-life for My sake shall find it. For what shall a man be profited if he gains the whole world, but forfeits his soul-life? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul-life?” (16:23-26)

To deny the self equals to forfeit our soul-life, our God-created, natural life. To lose the soul-life, to deny the self, and to take up the cross are in reality the same action. The cross kills the natural life. If we would follow the Lord and serve Him, the cross must be allowed to put to death all our self-direction, self-exaltation, self-determination, as well as all our good intentions, and even all our past spiritual experiences in order that Christ may be freshly lived out and expressed through us moment by moment and day by day. In this way the outer man is broken.

When our outer man is broken, the inner man, our human spirit, is able to flow out in the pure, unadulterated expression of God in Christ—this is the reality of our being like Jesus. In his first Epistle, Peter did not write much relating to our human spirit, but he has one beautiful and unique expression, “the hidden man of the heart.” He implores the wives not to adorn themselves with

outward, costly beautification but to put on “the hidden man of the heart in the incorruptible adornment of a meek and quiet spirit, which is very costly in the sight of God” (3:4) When we allow the cross to do its work in us, the manifestation of our spirit spontaneously reflects the lovely attributes of our dear Lord Jesus, issuing in a daily living as an adornment which is incorruptible and very costly in the sight of God. Being like Christ is actually Christ living His life through us as the hidden man of the heart is released from the bondage of our natural man.

Appreciating and Enjoying the God of All Grace

The final two stanzas of this hymn are the prayer of one who has been brought into agreement with the governmental hand of God in all his circumstances and situations. This may be similar to the feeling of Paul, who realized that when he was weak, he was strong. Paul was under a trial, which he characterized as “a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan, that he might buffet me, in order that I might not be exceedingly lifted up” (2 Cor. 12:7). Concerning this hardship, Paul entreated the Lord three times to remove the thorn from him, but the Lord’s response was, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is perfected in weakness” (v. 9). Accepting this, Paul responded that he would gladly boast in his weaknesses, because when he is weak, then he is powerful. In the same way, the writer of the hymn realizes the benefit of being broken and therefore asks that the Lord may give him a holy brokenness to be brought into a genuine appreciation for God’s grace upon him: “Oh, cause me to appreciate / Thy breaking, never to complain; / And grant that I may value more / All kinds of loss instead of gain.” This is the prayer of one who has seen something of the Lord’s all-sufficient grace that enables the suffering one to endure but, even more, produces an abundant gain in the growth and development in his faith.

Peter had a clear realization of the effective operation of God’s grace in the midst of our sufferings: “The God of all grace, He who has called you into His eternal glory in Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a little while, will Himself perfect, establish, strengthen, and ground you” (1 Pet. 5:10). Witness Lee points out that the operating God—the God of all grace—who is directly involved in the working out of our perfection does all these things in Christ Jesus by bringing His redeemed people into an organic union with Himself.

May we also be shepherded by the Lord’s dealings into an appreciation and enjoyment of our dear God of all grace so that we may be perfected, established, strengthened, and grounded in Him and so that we may know the reality of Jesus through a perfected organic union with Him.

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