

# **Who I am and Where I Come From**

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by

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## **Who I am and Where I Come From**

### **My Personal History**

It's been an interesting journey so far. I was raised in a strict, forced religious home with the usual accompanying flavor of condemnation laced through most of our experiences and relationships. The very early years were carefree but at age six trauma and almost tragedy struck my mom in the form of cancer. She lived until I was thirty one but the stress of dealing with that never departed from us. I think we all found the structure and belief system of our religious environment to be inadequate in the pressures we faced. There are a lot of good memories and good influences as well but the stresses of trying to hold things together within the fleshly, legalistic system we were in seem to stand out!

The effects on me personally led to confusion and inability to accept who God had made me to be. The search for truth and peace led to a number of short-lived excursions into various social groups and their incumbent devices for personal fulfillment and survival. God now uses this variety of experience to give me identity with a broad spectrum of people to relate to them for ministry. But in those late high school and early college days it was simply a desperate search for acceptance.

I had become a Christian, I now realize, in early high school. However, without any real training and trying to live by a faulty understanding of my relationship with God, it didn't work, and I quickly gave up and rejected what had failed me, living life and pursuing peace as I thought best. My approach was based on prevailing, popular forces and thinking from whatever peer group I was involved with at the time. These various forays into and out of differently focused groups usually lasted about a year at a time.

My search for life and love turned more philosophical than social toward the end as I began to see the probable outcome of continuing a destructive lifestyle. Also, I think I had simply vented all the rebellion and frustration I needed to and was getting tired! At any rate, I began to think more about life and not just react to it.

God was patient with me and guarded me through all this. Since salvation at a church camp, I wanted to do right and be close to God, even though others could not tell and I, myself, probably could or would not have articulated it. God could tell and worked to bring me to Himself.

“By You I have been sustained from birth;  
 .....  
 My praise is continually of You.” Ps. 71:6

As I now seek the Lord and consciously “do theology”, I must be careful of three things. I must recognize the pros and cons of the religious system I grew up in. I must remember my personal struggles and balance my quest for deeper personal answers with the broader context of a world filled with many other people of every variety. And I must forgive and respect my parents to bring resolution and peace to my relationship with them. Every good way and aspiration and trait God used them to give me must be retained while I move forward in obedience and faith in and love for my Heavenly Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

This period ended with me hoping to move on to a better understanding of my relationship with God, one that would be palatable, real and functional.

## **My Spiritual History**

Now God met me during my sophomore year in college. As I began to think more about my life and my hopes as well as the direction I was going, I began to read the Bible as part

of my search. The pieces began to fall in place one by one with the gentle, but clear motivation of my then current lifestyle and the dead end that was approaching. Bible prophecy (it was Hal Lindsay's hey-day!) played a role in helping me see the day to day relevancy the Bible could have. Some special people also helped. But coming to know and believe the truths of freedom and salvation by grace through faith alone made the biggest difference to me. I decided to surrender my life to Christ and live for Him as fully as I could. It didn't seem that anything else really mattered. It still doesn't.

This began a second phase in my spiritual journey and, needless to say, has greatly impacted the way I look at the Lord and theological issues. God in His sovereignty linked me with the association of churches I'm still with today. A loyalty, I'm sure, partially bred into me as a trait by the church I grew up in. Nevertheless, I believed I had found my niche. It was a new movement, at the time, and we were all young and "on fire;" This was great, for a while, but eventually led to some excesses without more mature believers to teach is restraint and enforce it upon us (if we would even have allowed this!). These excesses fed right into my past legalistic training and I was too young and immature to know the limits and disciplines of new found freedom. At any rate, this led to burn out for me and many personal problems, even thoughts of suicide, finally. Some Christian, I thought!

As years of struggle went by , I began to learn in experience what I would always have said verbally (not words but power counts- I Cor. 4:20). I began to learn to rely on Christ in me to do His work and not on my own strength. This, of course, makes all the difference in leading a life filled with service and joy and not just service! My struggles with personal growth and maturity issues has and probably will continue to strongly influence what I think is important and priority in theology and Christianity.

A second strong influence on my thinking is the emphasis we in our association have seen in the Scriptures on outreach and evangelism. We would express a common evangelical view of believing that the Great Commission and other scriptures teach that the mission or job of the church is to reach the world with the good news of Christ. We, however, practice this in an almost missionary way, even in our North American churches. We must balance this with concern for discipleship and personal growth and development to be balanced and healthy . Others probably should be concerned with balance in the other direction. At any rate, this “on mission” focus affects the way I look at theology. Our approach is, of necessity, very practical, with many new believers to train and develop. However, I have appreciated, and more so, now, the need for thoughtful underpinnings for our faith and teaching. There needs to be background and setting for our experiential teaching and practice for these to become as substantive and powerful as possible. Historical perspective and theological depth and accuracy are important elements in having lives that are well grounded and able to be used to influence people in the real world around us.

Other doctrinal and experiential perspectives developed in the context of my spiritual surroundings, including the people, views of truth, and methodology or traditions will all affect the way I think about theology or knowing Christ in the future.

### **My Probable Future**

This future is the concern of the third and final section of this self examination. Having already spent some twenty eight years seriously concerned with spiritual things, a lot of thinking has already been done about how I believe God is directing my life and wanting me to serve Him and the people around me. I’m still learning and I want to stay open to the Holy Spirit

and His direction as the future unfolds but I'm comfortable with who I am and where I stand to day on the basics of what I believe is God's will for us all in general and myself in particular. Some words and phrases come to mind that will describe my understanding of God and His direction for my life. These words and what they mean will definitely and unapologetically, by God's grace, affect how I view, learn and apply theology the rest of my life.

The first guiding principle is to do the work we've been left here to do. Jesus only "began to do and teach". The job has yet to be finished. In this way we will bring glory to our Father, as our Lord did, "having accomplished the work . . ."<sup>1</sup> Our job is to "make disciples of all nations" It was "for this purpose also I labor",<sup>2</sup> according to Paul. There is much that goes into this task, admittedly, not all of which looks directly like, nor is, evangelism. Personal growth, church structure, learning truth, emptying waste baskets, fixing the car, and developing strategy all need to be done. But it must all add up to reaching the world if we want to have "glorified You on the earth"<sup>3</sup> and made the most of our lives. Purpose affects everything, including the way we do theology.

In the course of doing the above, other words and phrases that come to mind are loving for Christ and His approval alone, focus on people, emphasize God's experiential power and working, simplicity, and sincerity.

Living for Christ and Him alone is our only hope of staying somewhat on mission with our lives. If we try to please others we will be constantly distracted by the unending and futile task of defending ourselves and altering our lifestyle to be more like men instead of more like God. "He only is my rock and my salvation."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> John 17:4

<sup>2</sup> Col 1:29

<sup>3</sup> John 17:4

<sup>4</sup> Ps 62:6

We must focus on people. I said this instead of “love people” to try to give some thoughtfulness to an overused and abused word. Love is our only commandment<sup>5</sup> and I want to obey it as best I can. Philippians 1:9, 10 says that love gives purpose and direction to knowledge. This is especially needed when considering more important theological issues. It’s too easy, it seems to me, to get caught up in the intellectual and scholastic aspects of theology and forget the point of it all, to produce people who love and care for one another. “If I . . . but do not have love, I am nothing.”<sup>6</sup>

This brings us to the third set of words that I would like to characterize the way I do theology, “emphasize God’s power and working.” I’m thinking of this in contrast to my power and working! I very urgently want to know more of what it’s like to see God at work in ways that are clearly His, not mine or not human. To know the “joy of Your salvation”.<sup>7</sup> This means I cannot do theology in a mechanical, external, human way. It must be flushed with spiritual insight and wisdom, enveloped in the “fellowship of the Holy Spirit”.<sup>8</sup>

In keeping with this, simplicity is required. It’s indispensable if we want to know the truth I think of theology as the pursuit of the truth on various issues. Jesus said, “I praise You, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You hid these things from the wise and intelligent and revealed them to babes.”<sup>9</sup> We like, as humans, to make things complicated, complex, and difficult. That way we get more glory if something important is done or discovered since it took more of my effort to do or discover it. I don’t mean that truth is on the surface, lying around where everyone can easily find it. No, “you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me

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<sup>5</sup> John 15:12

<sup>6</sup> 1 Cor 13:2

<sup>7</sup> Ps 51:12

<sup>8</sup> 2 Cor 13:14

<sup>9</sup> Luke 10:21

with all your heart.”<sup>10</sup> The truth is hidden and it’s costly, but it’s simple in the end. “So advanced, it’s simple!”

And, finally, for where I’m coming from, we must be sincere, honest. That’s an element of the next step true Christianity must take. I, personally, have felt the need for too long to please people and be someone other than who I am. As love and unity grow in the church, I hope we can all feel more free to relax and be who we are in Christ. The cross, really, must mean that we are free to live and do theology in peace and without fear. We must be real to find the truth.

I hope theology in one way or another will characterize the rest of my life. My personal history, my spiritual history and the convictions God has developed in my heart for the future all effect the way I look at God, the way I do theology. May the Lord by His Spirit give me grace to see Him through these windows as clearly and in as balanced a way as possible. I look forward to seeing Him in person and finding out how I did.

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<sup>10</sup> Jer 29:13