

**O for a Closer Walk with God***William Cowper (1730–1800)*

O for a closer walk with God,  
 a calm and heav'nly frame,  
 a light to shine upon the road  
 that leads me to the Lamb!

Where is the blessedness I knew  
 when first I sought the Lord?  
 Where is the soul refreshing view  
 of Jesus and His Word?

What peaceful hours I then enjoyed!  
 How sweet their mem'ry still!  
 But they have left an aching void  
 the world can never fill.

Return, O holy Dove, return,  
 sweet messenger of rest;  
 I hate the sins that made Thee mourn,  
 and drove Thee from my breast.

The dearest idol I have known,  
 whate'er that idol be,  
 help me to tear it from Thy throne  
 and worship only Thee.

So shall my walk be close with God,  
 calm and serene my frame;  
 so purer light shall mark the road  
 that leads me to the Lamb.

**ΤΩ ΧΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ***In the Nick of Time***The Normal Christian Life***Kevin T. Bauder*

Recently, I wrote about a pivotal moment that changed my Christian journey. One of the responses that I received asked this question: "I was just wondering if you'd call your 'change' a surrendering to Christ's Lordship over your whole life and letting Him live through you?" This question implies more than it overtly asks, and I'd like to respond to it.

Let me preface my remarks with an admission. I have no coherent theory of the Christian life. I've studied several, including the Reformed, Wesleyan, Keswick, Free-Grace, and Old Dallas views. Each has strengths, but none of them satisfies the biblical requirements. Each gets something right, but each also gets something wrong.

Let's start with this question: what does it mean to trust Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior? I reject the suggestion that we can trust Jesus as Savior without trusting Him as Lord (Rom 10:10–13). We have no right to trust a Jesus who is not Lord. He has no right to save us unless He has earned that authority. And He does have authority to save us. He earned it through His obedient life, substitutionary death, and bodily resurrection. So when I trusted Christ to save me, I was relying upon His authority to save.

If Christ has authority to save, then what other authority does He hold? Part of the answer is that our bodies no longer belong to us. We have been bought with a price, and we belong to Christ (1 Cor 6:19–20). Implicit in every act of saving faith is the reality that Christ now owns us.

Yet what is implicit may not always be explicitly recognized. Had the Corinthians recognized their change of ownership, then Paul would not have explained it to them. They were not acting like people whom Christ owned. They were not behaving like temples of the Holy Spirit. In fact, they were carnal—dominated by the flesh (1 Cor 3:1–4). They needed to recognize and act upon the reality of Christ's ownership.

That does not happen all at once. It is not done by a simple decision, though some decisions certainly move it forward. I trusted Christ as Savior when I was seven years old. I consciously placed my whole life at His disposal when I was eleven. That was my point of conscious yieldedness, of deliber-



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ate submission to the will of God in every area of my life. That is when I let go and let God.

Except I didn't. Nobody does. Ever. We can, so to speak, sign over the title to our lives. We can consciously recognize that Christ has a right to us and to dispose our lives. Whether we do that at our conversion or at some later point, though, it is never complete in practice. We keep our hands on the steering wheel—and we ought to. Christ's purpose (again, so to speak) is not to drive our car for us. His purpose is for us to become skilled drivers who steer our lives where He wants them to go.

This is the paradox of the Christian life. We are the ones who must work out our own salvation with fear and trembling. Yet we can do that only because God is the one who works in us both the willing and the doing of His good pleasure. We dare not detract from either side of that paradox.

In practice, our submission to Christ is always less than complete. We meet new challenges, or we meet old ones again, in which His ownership must be worked out. That is a constant struggle, and it is one in which we often fail. Because of our failures, we need to keep on confessing our sins. When we do, we receive relational forgiveness and cleansing. If we claim that we have not sinned in ways that need ongoing confession, then we call Christ a liar and His word is not in us. (1 John 1:9–10).

This is the process that leads to increasing sanctification. Through it all, Christ is living out His life in us. The Christ-life does not begin with deliberate yieldedness. The Christ-life begins when we trust Him as Savior. It begins when His Spirit baptizes us and comes to live in us (Rom 8:9; 1 Cor 12:13). The indwelling Spirit mediates the indwelling life of Christ from the moment of our conversion (Rom 8:10). The baptizing Spirit joins us to Christ so that our members become His (1 Cor 6:15–16). The indwelling life of Christ is not a separate or special experience or enablement. If we are believers, then Christ is living out His life through us all the time.

Some theories of the Christian life make me suspicious. One is the theory that God has to scare His children into perseverance. He frightens them by threatening them with loss of salvation. Of course, He can't actually deny them salvation if they have trusted Christ. He doesn't really mean it. He just wants to shake their confidence enough that they shape up.

Another is the Keswick theory that leads people to profess sinlessness in this life. No version of Keswick erects adequate safeguards against this danger. The theory scares me because I've seen how it leads people to deceive themselves. I'll give an example.

A few years ago I was cycling with a Keswick friend who claimed that, because he was resting in Christ, he no longer sinned. As we pedaled down the trail, a cyclist was veering from side to side toward us. Since I was riding

in front, I crowded as far to the right as the trail would allow. Then the approaching cyclist veered to our left and passed. I pulled over and stopped. I commented, "I never know what to do when I see something like that coming at me."

"Oh," he pronounced in other-worldly tones, "I don't even notice when women dress that way anymore."

I had to back up mentally and replay the episode in my own mind. I eventually recalled two things. First, the approaching cyclist had been female. Second, she was wearing a revealing jersey. That made sense of my friend's remarks. Then I realized the implications.

First, my friend assumed that I was commenting on the woman's clothing. Second, by denying that he noticed her revealing clothing, he was admitting that he had noticed it. Third, he was implying that if my sanctification were as advanced as his, then I wouldn't have noticed, either. So his reply tacitly admitted that he had looked, then lied about it, then accused me of having done what he had actually done. That's an interesting way to live the deeper life.

I do not claim that my understanding of the Christian life is fully coherent. But it is at least as coherent as the other views I've encountered. I don't know of a systematic theory of the Christian life that doesn't give up something the Bible teaches. I'm just glad that God sanctifies us in spite of our theories.



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This essay is by Kevin T. Bauder, Research Professor of Historical and Systematic Theology at Central Baptist Theological Seminary. Not every one of the professors, students, or alumni of Central Seminary necessarily agrees with every opinion that it expresses.

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