



NEEDHAM'S
NEED



Birthright

Christian, Do You Know
Who You Are?



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BIRTHRIGHT: Christian, Do You Know Who You Are? (Multnomah Press, 1979, 293 pages.)

Dr. Needham's worthy purpose in writing this controversial book is to share who he is, and that the reader may come to know the same for himself. "I will invite you on a somewhat personal pilgrimage. The path leads out of my own frustrations as a Christian into the freedom of realizing my own birthright" (p. 18).

Our reason for critiquing a book written some 15 years ago is simply because the errors involved in this personal pilgrimage are even more detrimental to the Church than they were when first written.

SELF IMAGE -- The author's Christian life developed in a dispensational milieu, including Dallas Theological Seminary. Due to chronic failure in his life, he grew up as a Christian with an overriding determination to be something, to be somebody:

So very much I wanted to be somebody (p. 43). In order to assuage my constant guilt, I tried even harder to do the things I figured God wanted me to do. I took every college Bible course available. Every weekend, all the way through college, I worked in struggling rural Sunday Schools. Not that I wanted to. But it seemed the way to please God.

Then there were four years of seminary, four years of youth ministry, four years in the pastorate. I was committed to becoming someone for God--a youth leader, a pastor, a husband, a father, a teacher, a something. And God was gracious. Again and again He showed me mercy and honored His Word--He loved me. I knew "the answers" and I taught them well, with all the sincere emotional energy I could muster.

Yet I remember one night driving home after speaking on the subject of spiritual victory. "David," I said to myself, "what you told them tonight is true. At least according to the way you were taught. But David...it isn't working for you, is it? It isn't working at all."

I had reckoned myself "dead unto sin" dozens to times; often with a great surge of faith. I pled with God with all my heart for victory and joy. I confessed countless times. I memorized dozens of Bible verses. I claimed the fulness of the Holy Spirit in earnest faith. It was real faith. And it did not work. Then, God opened a door (pp. 45,46).

DEVIANT DOORS -- And just what door did he feel that God had opened? When one fails in the dispensational realm there are but two alternative doors--the Covenant, and the Charismatic, both of which Dr. Needham entered.

I spoke of a wonderful door. A door God opened that changed my entire perspective. Well, God had a doorman. His name is John Murray, who wrote a classic commentary on the book of Romans (p. 55).

DR. JOHN MURRAY -- The late John Murray was a giant among Covenant theologians. Born in Scotland, and educated at the Universities of Glasgow and Edinburgh, he later graduated from Princeton Theological Seminary, ultimately to become Professor of Systematic Theology there. He subsequently filled a similar position at Westminster Seminary until his retirement.

I will never forget the day I read a portion of Murray's commentary. I was so excited I literally sat on the edge of my chair. This is what I read:

"It is a mistake to think of the believer as both an old man and a new man or as having in him both the old man and the new man. That this is not Paul's concept is made apparent by the fact that the 'old man' is represented as having been crucified with Christ and the tense indicates a once-for-all definitive act after the pattern of Christ's crucifixion.

"It is not warranted to speak of the believer as having in him the old man and the new man. This kind of terminology is without warrant and is but another method of doing prejudice to the doctrine which Paul was so jealous to establish when he said, 'our old man has been crucified'" (pp. 55,56).

The first error that Dr. Needham learned from Covenant theology was that he possessed but one nature.

DR. W.H. GRIFFITH THOMAS -- *Was this man Murray an isolated renegade? With great relief I discovered that the much-loved Dr. W.H. Griffith Thomas said the same thing. Where had I been all these years, assuming that I was still in some way the "old self" that I was before I was saved? Listen to Thomas:*

"The old man ceased to exist [emphasis Needham's] at our regeneration when it was 'put off'" (p. 56).

We will comment below on this statement by Dr. Thomas.

DR. MARTYN LLOYD-JONES -- *God had another doorman, Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, to whom I will be forever indebted. By producing an entire book on just the sixth chapter of Romans, he forced me to slow down enough to discover the amazing implications of Murray's brief statement. Dr. Lloyd-Jones wrote:*

"Do not go on living as if you still were that old man, because that old man has died; do not go on living as if he were still there; put that off."

The door was now wide open. I embraced the new understanding with a joy that seemed too good to be true. According to God I was a new person--no matter what my experience shouted out. I actually--right down here where I live--was God's born one. His actual child. His masterpiece. In the deepest sense of being, I was a saint. I was somebody! (p. 57).

This...after four years at Westmont, four years at Dallas, and eight years of ministry!

DR. B.B. WARFIELD vs. DR. W.H. GRIFFITH THOMAS -- Dr. Thomas was a co-founder, along with Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer, of Dallas Theological Seminary. Both men held essentially the same doctrine re position and identification. In Dr. Needham's enthusiastic grasping of Dr. Thomas's statement that "the old man ceased to exist at our regeneration when it was 'put off,'" he failed to realize that this referred to judicial position. Thomas definitely held that the believer has two natures. Had Dr. Needham studied Dr. Thomas's teaching to any extent at all, he would have soon discovered the exact opposite of the one-naturism into which he had plunged headlong.

In 1918 Dr. B.B. Warfield, faculty member at Princeton Theological Seminary, wrote a series of polemic articles in the Princeton Theological Journal, attacking the Deeper Life movement, including Dr. Thomas, who responded to the attack in the July 1919 issue of Bibliotheca Sacra:

A careful study of Hebrews indicates that the terms "sanctification" and "perfected" describe the present judicial position of every believer by reason of the work of Christ on the Cross. Then, arising out of this, comes the more familiar thought of Sanctification as a process, the judicial position being realized in experience [emphases mine] (p. 270).

It is difficult for me to understand the criticism by Dr. Warfield of the Greek word katargeo in Romans 6:6: "that the body of sin might be done away." He says, "The attempted weakening of the phrase "that the body of sin might be done away [emphasis his] by resurrecting the etymological sense of the Greek word...is...bad."

I have always had the impression that there is a clear distinction here, and elsewhere, between katargeo and apollumi, the former being understood to mean to "render inoperative" or "inert," as distinct from "annihilation" (p. 271).

According to St. Paul, this corruption of man's heart is hostile to God and is neither subject to God's law nor can be (Rom. 8:7). For this reason the teaching is given that the Christian is to reckon himself to have died to it (Rom. 6:11), although of course, it is not dead in itself, nor will it be until the believer is delivered hereafter from the presence of sin (p. 272).

COVENANT HERITAGE -- The primary errors Dr. Needham inherited from the lugubrious legacy of his new-found Covenant mentors, Drs. Murray and Lloyd-Jones, are as follows:

- 1 - **Covenant Theology**
- 2 - **Lordship Salvation**
- 3 - **One-Naturism**
- 4 - **Pro-Charismatic**

- 1 - **COVENANT THEOLOGY** -- Dr. Needham is another of the numerous Dallas progeny who has embraced the realm of anti-dispensational Covenant theology. At the very outset he grounds the heavenly Church, via Israel's earthly New Covenant. Upon that kingdom basis there is no chance of the Christian finding

his true position, his birthright, his identity and meaning of life in the glorified Lord Jesus Christ.

You are living in the age of the new covenant. God has written the law on your heart (Jer. 31:31-34) (p. 160).

I sincerely empathize with any who, like myself, have at some particular time either formulated or accepted someone else's particular interpretation...or any of several varieties of dispensational or "transitional" arguments which are then used to support the limitation of the work of the Spirit today (pp. 203,204).

2 - **LORDSHIP SALVATION** -- The next step down for Dr. Needham is Lordship Salvation, that prostitution of grace by the legalization of both Justification and Sanctification.

Unless we share in some way the prospect of a relationship with Jesus as Savior and Lord, regeneration may not take place at all (p. 173).

A gospel devoid of repentance will lead to a salvation without Lordship. And if that is absent there is no ground for assurance that the Holy Spirit has been given (p. 179).

It is simply impossible, unless one has lost his rationality, to say "Abba! Father!" and at the same time reject the Lordship of Christ. John Stott stated it so clearly: "The bent knee is as much a part of saving faith as the open hand. Faith is commitment to Him as a whole Person, not a particular role. Faith may not choose to be committed to Him in the role of Savior and not in the role of Lord" (p. 170).

Covenant theology not only insists upon Lordship for birth, but also for growth; hence it is to that intermediate, Lordship stage that they are limited--they never get off the ground, i.e., Israel's ground. Dr. Needham has entitled Chapter Eight: "A New Master: the Lordship of Christ is Central."

DR. JOHN MacARTHUR -- In our unanswered Open Letter of a year ago to Dr. MacArthur, I mentioned the limitations of Lordship for spiritual growth--which apply likewise to Dr. Needham:

I think the primary issue, the real breakdown in your message and ministry, John, is the post-conversion application of Lordship for sanctification. One might refer to that level as the adolescent stage of the Christian life.

The Lordship principle is mainly a product of the law realm of the Synoptics. It is the period when believers try to do for the Lord; to one degree or another it is the Romans Seven struggl̄e. That is as far as they see, and they tragically think that that is the way the Christian life should be. Anything short of that is considered to be an unsaved condition; anything beyond, is antinomianism.

Ruth Paxson shared what is unknown, or unacceptable, to those in the Lordship syndrome. In her monumental Life on the Highest Plane, she set forth the scriptural sequence of spiritual progress: "From Savior, to Lord, to Life." This classic tome is "antinomiously" based upon the

position of the ascended believer (which all have), and includes the two indwelling Adams.

His beloved Bride must be shown deference, John, and treated regally as bespeaks her heavenly position. She must not be held down to an earthly level by Lordship. She needs to be escorted to her glorified position in her Bridegroom, now. Anything less than that simply contributes to her present delinquency--a dereliction mainly due to deficient, law-bound leadership (p. 3,6,9).

- 3 - **ONE NATURISM** -- The primary cause of Covenant's eradication teaching--that the Christian has but one nature, that the old man is eradicated--is their anti-positional stance. Not being centered in Pauline truth for the Christian, they do not understand, nor can they tolerate, positional truth.

ANTI-POSITION -- Dr. Needham, being positionless, considers experience to be "actual truth." He fails to realize that positional truth is the ultimate reality--far more actual than any experience of truth. True experience is the result of position!

Many Christians assume that unless something is being experienced, it must be "positional" truth rather than actual truth. If I don't feel a given truth from Scripture, I throw it into the positional bin. The Bible says I am a new creation. But I don't feel like a new creation; it must be positional (p. 58).

If one is not careful to spot its limits he will find himself parroting the standard doubletalk that a person must see himself as "positionally" dead, when in fact his old self is very much alive (p. 57).

It certainly frees me from having to believe in the well-meant "double talk" of so many popular explanations of Romans 6 which teach that victory comes only when a dead man is being controlled, or that by some mysterious exercise of faith a positional truth becomes actual, but only as long as you are believing it to be so. (I am referring here to the view that "reckoning" makes the crucifixion of the old man a reality.) (p. 237).

ERADICATION -- Having deprived themselves of positional, identification truth, the eradicationists must see everything as actual experience. Hence, for Dr. Needham, the old man of Romans Six was crucified, and therefore he is dead and gone--extinct.

The self that Paul once was, "the old self" of Romans 6, no longer has any existence (p. 165). We were once "in Adam." We are no longer! That person has ceased to exist! (p. 113).

There is not a single word anywhere implying that at death the believer is finally separated from his "old man" or "old self." Not a single word. Why? Because that happened when you were saved (p. 79).

SIN -- The eradication aberration produces insuperable problems, not the least of which is the problem of how to account for the sin in the life of the believer, who purportedly has but one divine nature. Eradicationists such as Dr. MacArthur refer to the believer's indwelling sin as "old graveclothes"; Dr. Jay Adams speaks of "old habits"; and Dr. Solomon insists upon "residual" sin.

But Covenant-victimized Dr. Needham out-eradicates all of them! As my Dad would have said, the man is "all out of reason!" He limits the Christian to one nature--the divine nature, the life of Christ. But then he divides that self into two selves--the "shallow self," and the "deeper self"--neither of them evil. But when his shallow self predominates over his deeper self in its "demand for meaning," then there is sin.

Hence the sinless self manufactures sin, if and when it gets out of line. Dr. Needham has violated the inexorable principle of cause and effect. Sins must have a sinful source. What he is saying is that the life of Christ within is capable of producing sin.

The ultimate issue becomes not identity, but meaning or purpose in life, based upon this awareness of biblical self-identity ["Christian, do you know who you are?"]. This discovery of meaning alone is the adequate foundation upon which one can confront sin and build a life of holiness (p. 61). God's intention is that every believer become literally obsessed with his own true identity--meaning--life! (p. 74).

I am not two people, but there are most certainly levels of my personhood. There is a deeper self (inner man) and my more shallow self (the flesh). Shallow self is so quickly affected by circumstances. And if shallow self is not made a "slave to righteousness" (Rom. 6:19), there's no telling what strange warts and bumps and creases you may see (p. 92).

Since there is now residing in the believer that unshakeable awareness of his own personhood and consequent meaning of life, lapses in memory lead to lapses in the flow of the Spirit and sin results (p. 164).

To whatever degree the Christian fails to fulfill his truest self as one who is "for God" and totally dependent upon God for authentic life, to that extent, the nature" he manifests by his thoughts and behavior is sinful (p. 114).

Here is the key that opens the Pandora's Box of the book:

It is true that there is an operating "principle" at work in every believer. That principle--not evil in itself--[emphasis mine] is the incessant demand for meaning. The moment that demand for meaning becomes dominant in my shallow self, my flesh, rather than in my deepest personhood--at that moment that principle is producing evil within me. When flesh determines its own meaning, it always produces sin.

Yet when that determinative search for meaning flows out of the deepest self, empowered and directed by the Holy Spirit, there is at that point nothing inside of me that is essentially evil. My flesh at that moment is a slave to righteousness. My members are yielded to God and the result is purity--holiness in both the inward and outward man (p. 81).

Before the moment of salvation, our "body of sin" (our mortal being functioning independently of God) was anything but powerless. Everything it did was self-sufficient, and that's sin.

But now--for the first time--it [the body of sin] does not need to function in that way. New management is in position to issue new directions.

Directives which move from the top down (or from the inner man out) to all the departments of my flesh. Directives in perfect harmony with my new identity.

All my machinery--all those departments--have no authority to disobey. All that is needed now is an adequate continuing supply of messages, underlined in red, informing the departments of the new company rules. Along with those messages I need enough power to enforce these rules when a given department refuses to heed them [emphases mine] (pp. 129,130).

Did you ever?!

- 4 - **PRO-CHARISMATIC** -- Covenant's lack of the dispensationally rightly-divided Word renders Dr. Needham vulnerable and susceptible to the Charismatic realm. Having gone all the way over the edge, what could deter the victim from championing brainless Charismatic claims?:

Are you absolutely confident that the logic of those interpretations [dispensational] adequately overrides those passages which without question [emphasis mine] encourage the acknowledgement of all spiritual gifts?

Is your confidence so solid that you not only would forbid their exercise by God's people in their local assemblies with the limitations of 1 Corinthians 14:23-40 and 1 Thessalonians 5:19-22, but also would ostracize those who "pray in the Spirit" in private?

Are you sure of your biblical base for redefining the gift of prophecy so as to remove from it any hint of its being a revelatory gift? (By raising this question, I am not equating the product of such a gift with the inerrant Scriptures) (pp. 203,204).

We have no scriptural right to build restraining fences around God's Spirit. [Who could, even if he wished?] Do we dare say to Him, "You may produce the fruit of the Spirit in my life, but You are not allowed to express and empower through me any spiritual gift You may desire to give me?" (p. 195).

Regardless of one's particular view concerning present-day tongues speaking, at least the concept of private praying in tongues can be understood as being a means by which one's spirit, the deepest level of his personhood, may communicate with God. The resulting edification occurs, then, apart from the management of one's mortal brain of the nature of the communication (p. 237).

FUTILE FINISH -- A book based upon Covenant Theology, Lordship Salvation, One-Naturism, and is pro-Charismatic hardly qualifies the author to teach the Christian who he is. Dr. Needham, Paul could have told you!

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