

# **Life Provisions of the Christian Message and Understanding Grasping the Full Contribution of God and Our Faith**

The Bible and the understandings of life which come from it, from living with it, and from God's ongoing disclosures:

## **WHERE DO I COME FROM AND WHAT AM I?**

Birthed from the genetic strains of my family

Developing in the contexts and in the experiences of my life

God has given me a soul which learns and develops and retains all that I am, even beyond death.

## **WHO AM I?**

We are given a name and we have a history, all of which helps to define and identify us.

But like our name is a precious representation of who we are, God also identifies us to ourselves as sons and daughters and thus having identity from him. This identity is secure and powerful beyond all else that we are. It establishes identity beyond context and culture and beyond time.

## **WHO AM I WITH?**

Life is enabled not just by our resources which may take a long time to develop, but by crucial relationships. Some psychologists (e.g. Donald Winnecott) speaks of the role of the mother as providing the child with the safe place in which it can explore life, develop, and make mistakes.

All of the terminology about God from a Christian perspective is relational. God is Abba, Father, in an intimate sense. The Holy Spirit intimately powers life and helps the person to meet the challenges of life. Moravians in the 18<sup>th</sup> century called the Holy Spirit "Mother" for it cared for people and the church like a mother. Jesus is viewed as Companion, not only in the Gospels but in the faith of the early church. We get to know what our Companion is like by exploring the Gospels, keeping in mind that the Gospels were shaped contextually just as Jesus engages us personally and contextually. By studying the Gospels we learn how to live and converse and seek guidance from him.

Of course, we are also with a community which resources our life, but we must remember that this community is shaped primarily by God and not by its own dynamics.

## **CHANGING SELF-PERCEPTION**

The experiences, successes, and failures of life, the people who define us, all present us with a perception of ourselves deeply engrained in our thought and memory. Some self-perceptions become a powerful and helpful structure which enables action and thought. Sometimes this perception is not adequate and may be harmful. God has provided a way of freeing us from our self-perception. The NT writers speak of how God does this in baptism, where we die to old life and self and rise to new life and self. They also describe this by speaking of taking off the old life and putting on Christ, just as they put off an old garment and put on a new one signifying putting on Christ. Christ and what Christ brings then becomes the primary determinant of our self perception. This is not merely a matter of changing how we think about ourselves but changing how we think of the reality within us. With this change in self perception our inner realities also change. For example, the gift of God's love brings love into being within us. All that constitutes our inner life now belongs to God and we can count on God to help us deal with the problematic realities of the inner life. We still have our life story and the story which comes from our parents, but Jesus' story is now joined to ours and at every Baptism and Communion we remind ourselves of this. In the Communion service we are reminded of the covenant in Jesus blood and in this covenant we pledge ourselves anew to him as he pledges himself to us.. By this promise to each other we are formed and influenced.

Paul speaks of the way being in Christ changes our self perception. We cannot get free of the limits of the ways we see ourselves unless something happens that powerfully affects us. Paul, for example, believed that when we are united with Christ we die with him and that brings to an end all of life that determines our selfunderstanding. For example, In Gal. 2:19 Paul speaks of dying with Christ to the Law so that he might live to God. There is a sense that when Christ is fully received that all of the constituents of life pass away, for the Jew symbolized by the Law. Thus the determinants of Jewish culture no longer determined the Jew who was converted to Christ and Christianity. In Col. 2 Paul indicates that for the Roman all the powers of the cosmos are overcome in the cross and no longer determine him. THE IMPORTANCE OF ALL THIS IS THAT THE ULTIMATE DETERMINENTS OF LIFE BECOME GOD'S GIFTS, NOT OUR LIMITS AND OUR FAILURES.

#### GRASPING MISSION IN LIFE

Such passages as I Cor. 12 and Romans 12 which speak of spiritual gifts speak of them as that which enables various ministries and missions for the members of the church, each person having a gift from God's Spirit which enables them for something. Thus each person's life has MEANING in which God participats.

#### LIVING BEYOND AGING AND DEATH

The decline of aging and the reality of death are faced in the Bible. But there is a deep faith that God has a spiritual world for us when we leave this one and nothing of the limits of life can determine or overcome us. This is not only relevant when aging, but is an important aspect of life as we face its risks. Companioned by God, nothing can overcome us or rob us of who we have come to be.

Arthur Freeman