



LEGACY INSTITUTE

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Chiang Mai, Thailand

26 June 2008

Dear Fellow-laborers,

Dr. Herbert W. Armstrong used to teach that there are only two ways of life in this world: the way of GIVE and the way of GET. Give means caring and living one's life with concern for other people equal to concern for oneself. Get, on the other hand, is all about concern only for oneself.

I remember in an audience that Dr. Armstrong had with King Bhumibol Adulyadej of Thailand back in the 1980's when these two philosophies of life were discussed. Dr. Armstrong talked about "give" and "get", but the king said that these two ways of life should really be called "give" and "greed". The king said this because he felt that it was necessary to *get* food, clothing and shelter for self and family; but that once one had sufficient, then a person should give to others. If a person thought only about oneself and wanted to accumulate more and more physical goods and power, then this was "greed."

The Bible talks about two ways of life, and they are inherently interwoven with both *give and get*, *give and greed* and *God nature* versus *human nature*.

I am talking about being **GOD-centered** as opposed to being **SELF-centered**.

If one is self-centered, that person is the center of the entire universe. Everything that person thinks about and does has everything to do with pleasing the self or satisfying self-interest in one way or another. Even relationships are based fundamentally on whether or not that relationship satisfies a selfish desire or need. People who are self-centered do not see others as equals. Others are there only to serve that person's selfish needs in one way or another.

Marriages based on this intrinsic human dynamic never last. Divorce is justified by saying: "My husband or wife just doesn't make *ME* happy anymore", or, "I am just not happy in this marriage". Happiness is based on an evaluation about how well the *OTHER PERSON* is gratifying a selfish, personal need. This is gross self-centeredness. Unless one is willing to give up personal selfish desires for the sake of the sacred marriage institution and the well-being of the other person, it will not and cannot last.

But being God-centered is different. One's entire perspective changes! God is the center of the universe, not the selfish and self-gratifying *ego*¹. When God becomes the center of our universe, it is like scales falling off our eyes and the whole universe opens up to our awareness. We see the

¹ Sense of self, self-worth, opinion of the self.

universe through different eyes. We “see” others as equals with needs and desires *just as important to us as our own*. We see ourselves and others from God’s perspective and not our own self-centered perspective.

GOD-CENTERED ~ NOT SELF-CENTERED

Human nature is fundamentally selfish. We want our own needs satisfied. Sometimes these needs are camouflaged as giving to others. Human nature does not want to give selflessly. Many times there are emotional strings attached.

I get very suspicious when someone begins to flatter me or tell me how great I am. Little red lights start to go off in my brain. I know who I am. I know my strengths and my weaknesses. I know just how desperately small and weak I really am. So when someone starts telling me how great I am, I become wary. Usually, flattery comes with a hidden emotional price tag.

Sometimes a person’s self worth is wrapped up in whether or not that person is pleasing or helping others enough. In the counseling field, this is called co-dependency². A co-dependant person needs the appreciation or praise of someone else to feel good about *their own self*. What appears to be giving, giving, giving is done in order to get, get, get an emotional fix or temporary feeling of self-worth!

Our human natures are complex and few really understand how our human minds and hearts work. But God does – and warns us in the Bible to beware of our deceitful natures as we can actually be doing evil when we think we are doing good!

Jeremiah 17:9-10

*"The heart is deceitful above all things, And desperately wicked; Who can know it? I, the LORD, search the heart, I test the mind..."*³

Few are aware of what is going on inside themselves, let alone what is going on inside others. We can deceive our own selves and when someone is deceived – *they don’t know that they are deceived!* That all changes when we become truly God-centered. Our eyes become open to see the truth about ourselves. But can we become truly God-centered on our own? Can we somehow figure out how to change our very own natures?

Jesus told the disciples that they wouldn’t fully understand what He was trying to get across to them until a special blessing was given by the Grace of God to them. Jesus called it “The Helper” and the “Spirit of Truth”.

² “Definition of Codependency: Codependency is a condition that results in a dysfunctional relationship between the codependent and other people. A codependent is addicted to helping someone. They need to be needed. This addiction is sometimes so strong, the codependent will cause the other person to continue to be needy. This behavior is called enabling . . . A codependent often suffers from a 'Messiah Complex' where he sees problems with everyone and sees himself as the only person who can help . . . That's what codependence is . . . an addiction to being needed.” *From Codependency Test And Definition (<http://www.way2hope.org/codependency-test-definition.htm>)*

³ NKJV throughout unless otherwise noted.

John 14:15-18

"If you love Me, keep My commandments. And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever – the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you." ⁴

John 14:25-27

"These things I have spoken to you while being present with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you."

It is the Spirit of God that causes us to become *God-centered* and “see” ourselves and other things in a way we have never seen them before.

Jesus was God-centered. He was filled with this “Spirit of Truth”. His whole life on earth was conducted always with the attitude of pleasing God and doing God’s will and not His own.

John 6:38-39

“For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me.”

Jesus is our example. Even though He was God in His own right and Savior and King of all mankind; He always subordinated His own will to the will of His Father. He was GOD-centered in a way that was part of every fiber of His being. He was even willing to suffer the humiliation of the cross – NOT only as a human being – but as GOD – in order that the will of the Father was carried out!

Phil 2:5-9

“Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death- even death on a cross!” ⁵

Jesus’ whole nature – before, during and after His human existence was, is and will always be – God-centered. He emptied Himself of His God nature and DIED. Can we grasp the significance of what kind of sacrifice that truly was?! Here was a being who always existed and there never was a time (*if we can legitimately use the human idea of time with God*) that He did not exist. He had YHVH existence. That means that the power of life existed in Him and He was never dependant on any one or any thing for His existence. He was SELF-existent. All other beings below the YHVH existence were created. Their existence is dependent on God. Only the Father and Son possess YHVH existence. Jesus had to DIVEST Himself of that YHVH existence in order to die for the sins of the world. HE DIED!

⁴ Calling the Holy Spirit “he” is a mistranslation of the Greek. The correct pronoun should be “it”.

⁵ NIV

Jesus wasn't in some sort of limbo. He wasn't in Heaven or somewhere else. He wasn't in Hell preaching to demons like some teach. He was DEAD in Joseph of Arimathea's tomb! DEAD! That took GUTS! And every bit of His own will had to be subordinated to the will of the Father in order for Him to go through with it!

Matt 26:36-43

“Then Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane, and said to the disciples, ‘Sit here while I go and pray over there.’ And He took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and He began to be sorrowful and deeply distressed. Then He said to them, ‘My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch with Me.’

“He went a little farther and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, ‘O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will.’

“Then He came to the disciples and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, ‘What! Could you not watch with Me one hour? Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.’

“Again, a second time, He went away and prayed, saying, ‘O My Father, if this cup cannot pass away from Me unless I drink it, Your will be done.’ ”

Peter, James and John were clueless about the great anguish Jesus was experiencing. They fell asleep when Jesus needed their support the most! They were not yet God-centered in their understanding.

But this passage also reveals something about Jesus. He recognized His own fleshly weakness and needed to pray to His Father for the strength to go through with the ordeal ahead of Him.

When Jesus gave up His YHVH existence, he became a human being. He possessed human nature. Can we fully understand the agony of this entire experience of God as a weak and feeble human facing certain death?

God-centeredness is a very special state of being. A God-centered person does not care for His own life any more. All that matters is doing the will of the Father.

Matt 16:24-26

“Then Jesus said to His disciples, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.”

This passage of scripture reveals the end result of SELF-centeredness. Saving the SELF results in death! But in order to have life – eternal life – we must lose our SELF-centeredness and become GOD-centered.

The Holy Spirit of God is the great POWER that brings us closer and closer to the kind of God-centeredness that Jesus had as a human among us. It is by the Holy Spirit that our own human natures become bare and we learn who we really are. It is the Holy Spirit that reveals the TRUTH to us. And it is by the Holy Spirit that we change our self-centeredness and become truly God-centered.

But WHY am I talking to all of you about this?

Well, it is because I see my own human nature trying to drag me back to being totally SELF-centered once again. This happens under pressure. When we are stressed and under pressure, we tend to revert to the ways that were comfortable to us in the past. As Christians and God-centered children of the Most High, we cannot afford to let this happen. Our hearts and minds – and everything we do and say must be increasingly *God-centered!*

The Kingdom of God must be FOUGHT FOR! There must be struggle and sacrifice! There must be long prayers and tears – just like Jesus in Gethsemane. We have what the Bible calls a cloud of witnesses that have gone before us. We must not forget the struggles each of them had and the clear example of God-centeredness they demonstrated as they fought for the Kingdom.

Heb 11:13-16

“These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland. And truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return. But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them.”

God-centeredness means we leave behind that “old country” and keep the Kingdom of God, our “heavenly country”, ever focused in our hearts and minds. We cannot do this if our hearts are on our selves and not on God. Selfishness wants what feels good for the self – not what is right and good for all. And certainly NOT what is right according to the will of God!

The Apostle Paul likened our journey toward the Kingdom to a race. In long-distance races, a person’s mind must be ever focused on the finish line or the mind will give them every reason to drop out.

Heb 12:1-2

“Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”

Jesus Himself had to run the race. He also was tempted to allow human nature to hold sway (*Hebrews 4:15*). Could He have stopped His own execution? Of course He could have! He had 12 legions of angels at His beck and call! He could have defeated the Romans, taken over the world and ruled with full power from Jerusalem – *in that day!* But that was not the will of the Father.

Can each of us truly say that we are God-centered? Is God’s will paramount in everything we do? Are our hearts and minds firmly focused on the goal of that “Heavenly City”? Or do the cares and pressures of this modern world cause us to revert back to the *self-centered* existence we left behind so long ago?

The Apostle Paul kept his eyes on the goal. That is what sustained him throughout all the temptations and trials of his life. He stayed in the race. He made it to the finish line having full faith in Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit to keep him *God-centered*.

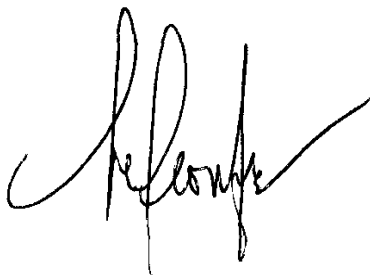
2 Tim 4:6-8

“For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.”

I struggle and I know you do too. We all must not allow our selfish human natures to cause us to drop out of the race. No matter how difficult it is to do the will of the Father, we have got to keep striving for that finish line. And it is imperative that we measure all we do against the Word of God to judge whether or not we are fully in line with His will. Keep going. Your crown is waiting and so is mine.

Fighting beside you all the way,

In Jesus’ service,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'T. Leon Sexton', with a stylized flourish extending to the right.

T. Leon Sexton

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