

# *It Is Written*

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## More Important Than Myself

By Greg Litmer

If I can learn to truly regard others "as more important" than myself (Philippians 2:3), then I will have to take a giant step toward living day by day as a faithful child of God. I struggle with this concept in some aspects and don't struggle with it in others. How can I view the person who has nothing and lives off of the government as more important than myself? How can I consider a person who does not match my intellectual abilities and talents as more important than myself? I can do it by looking at Jesus, that's how.

How do I compare to Jesus? Like a drop of water in the bottom of an otherwise empty 50-gallon drum. I am nothing, and the Lord died for me. One person wrote that the person who is able to think this way is "the one who is so conscious of his dependence on God, and of his own imperfections and nothingness, that his own gifts only remind him that others must have gifts also, while his sense of his own utter nothingness suggests to him that these gifts may well be superior to his own, and higher in nature and degree."

Thinking this way, it becomes possible for me to "not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others." Paul's point is that the feelings, interests, and needs of our brethren are to be put before and above our own. That does not mean ignoring our own needs, but to subordinate them to the needs of others. In Romans 12:10 Paul put it this way: "Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor."

Just think of how this understanding would affect our conduct in very practical ways. All of the sick would be visited and cared for just because we would be thinking about them. No one's burdens would have to be borne alone -- because brothers and sisters would always be there with arms extended to help pick them up. We would all be present at every service that our health allowed because we would be concerned about considering one another, to "provoke unto love and good works" (Hebrews 10:24). Arguments concerning non-doctrinal issues would be laid aside; they would cease because the brethren involved in them would be most concerned about the others. Even when I have been sinned against, if I understand Paul's teaching in Philippians 2, then I am going to be most concerned about the spiritual welfare of the other person. That changes my entire attitude.

When I live my life recognizing that I am to follow the example of Jesus and to see others as more important than myself, I will engage in personal evangelism even when it is inconvenient or makes me feel uncomfortable. I will be moral and conduct myself as a child of God should every minute of every day because I want to give the best possible example that I can to everyone with whom I come into contact. Christianity is not about me -- that proved to be a hard lesson for me to learn. It is about the other person.

## If the Holy Spirit Operated Directly on Mankind ...

By Douglas Hoff

Many people's concept of Christianity includes some mysterious work of the Holy Spirit to change one's life. The Bible does teach the Spirit operates upon man to create faith, convict of sin, and convert the soul. Does he operate directly on man or does he work through the Word of God?

The Bible states that the sword of the Spirit is the Word of God (Ephesians 6:17). This Word is "quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and the joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart" (Hebrews 4:12).

These two verses show that the Spirit operates not directly upon man but through the agency of the Word of God. It is much like the man who went to cut down a tree. Did he cut down the tree or did the saw? Obviously, the man did, but he exerted an influence on the tree through his tool.

Suppose the Holy Spirit did operate directly upon mankind apart from the Word of God. What would be the results? God does not want anyone to be lost (II Peter 3:9); He is also no respecter of persons (Acts 10:34). Therefore, the Spirit would act uniformly on everyone. Since the Holy Spirit is part of the Godhead, He is all-powerful. So it should be the case that everyone would be saved. There can be no other outcome when an irresistible force operates directly upon a very moveable object such as man! But Jesus said, "Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 7:21). This accounts for the fact that not everyone will be saved, though God is no respecter of persons. Not everyone chooses to do the Will of God.

If the Spirit operated directly on mankind apart from the Word of God, the New Testament would not be needed to convert people from their sinful lives. Conversion would depend entirely on the work of the Holy Spirit. If someone was not converted, the blame would lie at the feet of God. Who would dare charge God with a failure to accomplish his will? The truth was stated long ago: "So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it" (Isaiah 55:11). Preaching God's Word will harden some and soften others. The sun will melt wax but harden clay. Different effects are the result of the differing natures of other materials. So it is with mankind. some will choose to believe and obey, while others choose not to believe and thus disobey leading to their damnation.

If the Spirit operated directly why even bother preaching? here is a curious thing. Those who advocate a direct operation of the Holy Spirit preach it! should not the Spirit have revealed His message directly to each person? Jesus told His apostles, "ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:8). Without a knowledge of God's Word, one cannot have faith in Jesus Christ since faith comes by hearing the word of God (Romans 10:17). The Bible nowhere states that faith comes by some mysterious operation of the Holy Spirit.

## The Fundamentals

By Allen Smith

It's impossible to accomplish some things in life until we have mastered the fundamentals. Any sports coach will tell you that a great team has to first be grounded in the fundamentals. Teachers will tell you the same thing about successful students – and the same thing is true about Christians. The fundamentals – the "first principles" – are not always the most enjoyable part, but they are the most essential part of what we need to learn. If we don't, we may very well be characterized by these words – "For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil." (Hebrews 5:12-14).

May we be well-grounded in the fundamentals so we can grow up to enjoy the "solid food" found in God's word.