

LEARNING TO BE REAL

By Chris Simpson

Every true follower of Jesus Christ engages in spiritual warfare, whether they know it or not. Unfortunately, because of widespread ignorance of the realities of this spiritual battle, many believers suffer repeated defeats in their lives and are often overcome by the powers of darkness. The Lord spoke through the prophet and said, “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge...” (Hosea 4:6)

This sad state of affairs need not exist. The Lord is eager for His people to learn of the things of the spirit so that they can be successful warriors, defeating and undoing the devastating works of the evil one in every sphere. When believers don't stand and resist the works of the enemy, then he is free to roam about as a roaring lion, devouring whoever he would. (see 1 Peter 5:8)

One of the major devices of the evil one, in his never-ending war against the souls of men, is to entrap them into a state of unreality. Unreality is a condition of not responding in a ‘real’ way to life and to the things going on. Everyone knows at least someone like this. They never seem to really comprehend or catch on to the basic things involved in social interaction, or to the common things of daily life. It seems that there's always a sort of fog around their mind, and they respond to situations in an exaggerated or abnormally subdued manner. Someone once described this state as the tendency of walking into spiritual walls – not very acute when it comes to the basic things of the spirit. The Apostle Paul speaks of such in his epistle to the Corinthians when he says that the things of the spirit are foolishness to the natural man. He goes on to say that the Corinthians, who were believers, were acting like babes when it came to comprehending and living out the things of the spirit.

When a believer is in a state of spiritual unreality, it's very easy for them to fall prey to another, similar type bondage: that of becoming phony or ‘religious’. When the enemy succeeds in ensnaring someone into the deceptions of religious spirits, then he's gone far towards his goal of immobilizing the believer from ever bearing any genuine fruit in his life.

A typical scenario of the enemy's devices in this area is as follows: After luring someone into sin, the enemy also seeks to deceive them to the point where they don't know that they're in sin. That is, where they're self-deceived about the sin that they're in through self-justification, rationalization, pride, etc. The enemy, however,

doesn't stop at this point. If the believer continues to gullibly follow the beguilements of the tempter, he'll find himself believing that he has a "ministry" to others in the very area where he remains ensnared. If you'll stop and think about it, this is a very common problem with folks. We all know people who are blind to their own glaring faults, and yet at the same time seem to have "gifted discernment" concerning the faults of others. (See Matthew 7:1-5) This level of deception brings in religious spirits of the most grievous sort, making it very hard for a believer to be open to the truth that could set them free.

To be free, one must first be willing to hear the truth and then to act on it. However, one of the chief traits evident in those bound with religious spirits is that they will not, and often cannot, hear correction concerning their deceived state. Feeling like they've 'arrived,' such a believer has entered a deadly realm where, while their intentions may be good as they go about 'ministering' to others, the fruit of such ministry is only more deception, more pride and more religious bondage.

What does it mean to be "real?" "How can I know when I'm moving in reality, and when I'm not moving in reality?" What needs to happen for me to become more "real?" These, and other questions, hopefully will be answered in the words that follow. First, we'll look at three of the reasons that people choose, consciously or unconsciously, to walk in unreality.

1) First characteristic of unreality: HIDING BEHIND MASKS

Jesus once branded the Pharisees as hypocrites in their attempts to appear outwardly righteous to men while within they were full of deception and iniquity. He said they were like white tombs that were beautiful to behold from without, but within were full of dead men's bones. (Matthew 23:27-28)

Nearly everyone experiences times when there's a lot going on inside of them: emotional trauma, mental confusion, feelings of disorientation, etc. Most people, however, are fearful and unable to outwardly express these conditions of the soul, carefully concealing the true nature of their feelings behind masks and fronts. This can be seen as one examines the different ways people relate in the context of different situations. For instance, the way one relates at the job may be significantly different than the way he responds to others at home with his family. The co-worker who is timid at work may be an angry man who kicks his poor dog at home. Or, the manner of relating to one's friends at church may be significantly different than the way one feels and responds with their natural family. Whether

the reason is fear of rejection, long submerged and undealt with hurts, or just uncertainty of how to 'be yourself', the wearing of 'masks' is a common way to relate.

Wearing masks can be defined as choosing a way of relating that is not an honest reflection of what's going on inside. There are varied and numerous types of masks worn: the "I'm fine" mask, worn when one would just as soon not have to 'get into it' with anybody; the 'super-spiritual' mask that often hides an extremely insecure, or guilty personality; the 'sugary-sweet' mask that almost always covers deep hurt and anger and many more. The Psalmist tells us that everyone walks about in a false image and experiences much unfounded fear. (Psalm 39/6).

The alternative to hiding behind various masks is learning to be who you are, wherever you are. Adam and Eve, before their shameful fall, experienced an openness and clarity in their relationship that men have been striving for ever since. In their innocence, even the physical exposure of their nakedness caused them no shame. However, one of the first acts after sinning was to 'cover up.' It is often the root of shame in our lives that tempts us to cover up, hide, and relate in an unreal way.

Another reason people choose masks is because of the roots of self-dislike, self-hate, etc., picked up in the 'growing up' years, caused by the rejection of those who should have been accepting and loving. Not liking yourself or who you are as created by God can be an intolerable state. One way to cope with such a bad self-image is to enter into deception about yourself, thinking that you really are something or someone you're not. This chosen delusion can be helpful in interrelating with others, as it at least provides some foundation of good feeling about yourself. However, the facade eventually wears thin in relationships, and the honest-hearted person begins to realize that such a chosen way of relating is only serving to drive him deeper into loneliness and despair. Living a life hiding behind different fronts and masks, assuredly falling far short of the abundant life promised by our Savior.

2) The second characteristic of unreality: WORRYING ABOUT WHAT OTHERS THINK

In a scripture passage found in the gospel Mark, there's an interesting revelation concerning the power of Jesus to liberate men from the 'fear of man', or worrying about what others think, a common and crippling malady. (see Mark 8/22-26) The blind man, after Jesus' first touch, saw every man as "trees walking." Only after the Master's second touch was he able to see every man clearly. Many are bound in

the trap of having favoritism for one man over another. Seeing and fearing men of great stature (as trees walking) can keep one from freely speaking and being about the things of the Lord's kingdom. In the epistle of James we are clearly admonished to avoid having "respect of persons" and becoming "partial in ourselves" for certain people, which accordingly results in the exclusion of others. (James 2/1-4) As we grow in knowledge and love of the Master and experience His 'second touch' in open-ing our eyes more clearly to the realities within and around us, we begin to realize that all men have truly fallen short of God's glory and stature and are in desperate need of the Savior.

King Solomon tells us in the Proverbs that the fear of man brings a snare. Few things are as crippling to our witness for the Lord Jesus as the fear of what others will think about us. This particular fear is usually rooted in a prideful attitude of wanting to be seen and perceived by others in a certain way. In desperately trying to uphold an 'image' before others our tongues are tied in fear; and we speak not the right things at the right time, but rather speak words that will maintain and enhance a carefully groomed image. If this manner of relating is not brought into correction, further bondages of fear will grip the soul, held fast by deeper levels of chosen deception, hypocrisy and blindness. In addition, in an ongoing relationship where timidity and control dominate, psychic and spiritual soul ties of bondage can be formed which require specifically directed warfare to break.

3) The third characteristic of unreality: STUFFING FEELINGS

The Old Testament tells of a man who 'stuffed' his true feelings of anger towards another person, and the result was outright vengeance and murder.

(2 Samuel 13/22-29) Solomon tells us in the Proverbs that when one lays up deceit within him and covers it with 'fair' words, his stuffed feelings will be evident to those with discernment. (Proverbs 26/24-26)

One of the first things to remember in discussing feelings is that they are not in themselves 'right' or 'wrong'. Many times someone will feel a certain emotion and immediately compound that feeling with guilt or condemnation for feeling that way. Feelings tend to come and go constantly within our lives constantly, and there's often nothing we can do to prevent varied emotional responses to different situations. Recognizing this fact will help us from coming under the power of these feelings, thus retaining the ability to respond rationally to the circumstances of life.

Paul told the Ephesians to "Be angry, and do not sin."(Eph. 4/26) There's nothing intrinsically wrong with the emotion of anger; rather, the sin is manifest when one responds from the anger to get his way, be vengeful, etc. When one feels the emotion of anger coming on, the apostle's encouragement is to be angry. In other words, own and acknowledge the emotion: don't stuff it. The same advice could be given for just about any feeling that comes along. Rather than shying away from what's going on inside, thinking "how could I feel this way?" (a prideful attitude; no one is above feeling any emotion - we're all fallen sinners), be honest with yourself concerning the feeling, and then release it to the Lord in prayer and share the feelings with others if that seems necessary.

Fear of rejection from others, often rooted in past experiences of feeling unloved, when one's life was open and vulnerable, is usually one of the major obstacles in sharing what one is experiencing inside. Only the patient love of the Lord Jesus, manifest through caring fellowship, will re-establish the trust necessary for one to freely open his life and escape from the lifelong habit of stuffing his feelings.

While we may never get to the place in our life where we're 'on top' of our feelings all the time, there is a walk available in the Lord's Spirit that can enable us to experience much victory from being overcome by our emotions. Simple and sensible choices of obedience to the Lord and loving responses to those around us will result in a life governed by the peace of God, not the torrents of human feelings.

Let's now consider two keys in 'learning how to be real':

1) ASK GOD TO MANIFEST AND CONSUME

The prophet Daniel wrote that only God knows what is in the darkness of our souls, and it is only He who can reveal these things to us. (Daniel 2/22) This being true, it therefore follows that only God can set us free from the hidden things in our lives and the deeply rooted areas of sin. However, God does not automatically begin this process of healing and deliverance; He awaits our earnest request that He do so. (Jas. 4/2)

In asking God to 'manifest and consume' the darkness within, we're really doing what's necessary to release the cleansing power of the Spirit of God within our lives. As different ungodly attitudes, sins and responses begin to surface in our

day-to-day world, it is then our responsibility to confess these things to the Lord and resist their hold on our souls. God then faithfully consumes the strongholds within from the roots up. (Mark 11/20) A good prayer to pray is as follows:

"Lord, please manifest to my consciousness, and consume with your holy fire, all of the hidden patterns of fear and withdrawal that cause me to walk in unreality. I ask you to continue this cleansing work in my life in spite of any requests I may make within the fire for you to stop. I trust that you have only my best intentions in mind and that you will not subject me to more than I can bear."

2) BE VULNERABLE WITH OTHERS

James tells us in his epistle to confess our faults one with another, and pray one for another in order that we may be healed. (Jas. 5/16) This is the place where the 'rubber hits the road' in our lives. While confessing, sharing, and being intimate with God is vital to our healing, it is also vital that we establish honest, open relationships with others. Man is, by his very nature, a deceitful creature and therefore requires practical fellowship with others to keep him real. Sometimes it may be quite easy to speak to God concerning an issue or a sin, but quite a different matter to share the same thing with a brother. However, there are few things as refreshing as being able to open up and release pent up feelings, guilt and sin to an understanding, and forgiving friend.

Solomon said in the Proverbs that, "safety is found in the multitude of counselors." We're more likely to find the truth of a situation when we 'bounce off' one another what we're feeling, or what we think the Lord is saying. The Lord Himself is not just in our personal relationship with Him, but also in our fellowship with each other. It's in this committed and vulnerable fellowship with one another that we best learn how to be real.