

Taking Back What Belongs to You

I've been robbed! That is one of the first revelations I had after I started diligently studying the Word and realized I wasn't living the life Jesus died to give me. At first it made me mad, but it was the truth I needed to hear to help me begin an amazing transformation to a life I can honestly say I now enjoy.

For many years before this, I was a Christian but I wasn't serious about my walk with God. As a result, I was miserable. I didn't have any real peace or joy, and I felt guilty most of the time. In fact, if I didn't feel "wrong," it didn't seem right.

Thankfully, God showed me through John 10:10 that I didn't have to be miserable and I could have abundant life in Christ. But I needed to change! I remember asking God to show me what I needed to do to become the person 2 Corinthians 5:17 (AMP) said I should be: "... A new creature [reborn and renewed by the Holy Spirit]; the old things [the previous moral and spiritual condition] have passed away. Behold, new things have come [because spiritual awakening brings a new life]."

Have you ever thought, "If I'm so new, why do I act like the 'old man'?" Well, becoming a "new creature" from the inside out is a process that takes time. When we accept Christ as our Savior and we're born again, we receive the nature of everything God is in seed form. 1 John 3:9 (AMP) says, "God's seed [His principle of life, the essence of His righteous character] remains [permanently] in him [who is born again—who is reborn from above—spiritually transformed, renewed, and set apart for His purpose]. ... "

Seeds have to be watered and take root before they can produce

fruit. And the fruit of having life in Christ is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Gal. 5:22-23, NLT). It's freedom to deal with challenges and overcome them by God's grace so others will see Christ in you and want what you have.

The key to experiencing this life is identifying the thief, who has come "to steal and kill and destroy" you (John 10:10, NLT).

One of the Biggest Thieves in My Life

In John 10:10, Jesus tells us we have an enemy—the devil—who wants to keep us from God. But when you read the whole chapter, you see that Jesus is talking about the system of religion, which is perpetrated by the devil. Because the last thing the devil wants you to know is how much God loves you and how you can access everything you need to take back what he's stolen from you through your relationship with Christ.

When I realized that God loves me unconditionally and that He has a plan for my life, it helped me understand that He wanted a close, intimate, personal relationship with me. I discovered that the Christian life is not about religion but relationship. Because religion is a thief that keeps us from becoming transformed into the image of Christ.

Now, when I say "religion," I'm not talking about going to church; it's important for us to go to good churches where the Word of God is taught and we can grow spiritually. I'm talking about a performance mentality that says it's what we *do* that determines whether God approves of us or is happy with us.

A religious attitude says, "If I just pray more or read the Bible more or do more good things or go to church on a regular basis ... then God will be happy with me." It gets us on a treadmill of feeling obligated to do certain things to please God.

Relationship with God is based on the truth about His love for us and tells us who we are in Christ. We learn how much God loves us and that it's because of what Jesus did for us on the cross—through the sacrifice He made—that we have what we need to be everything God created us to be.

It's good for us to pray, read the Bible, go to church and do things for others to make their lives better. But it's important for us to do these things as a response to what God has done for us, not to get Him to love us. We need to understand that salvation is God's gift to us, and we show Him our love for Him by the way we live for Him. That's relationship, not religion.

Having new life in Christ is so amazing because through it, we become the home of God. His Spirit comes to live in us and work with us, bringing restoration and wholeness to every area of our lives. Then, as we learn to follow the leadership of the Holy Spirit, we can receive everything God has for us and take back what belongs to us!

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