

## WHOLENESS IN CHRIST<sup>1</sup>

Texts: “We proclaim him by instructing and teaching all people with all wisdom so that we may present every person mature in Christ” (Colossians 1.28).<sup>2</sup>

There once was a fox, a fine furry fellow;  
But he was uptight and couldn't stay mellow.  
He saw a psychologist, a sharp Ph.D.  
The doctor said, “Foxye, you must learn to be.”

The fox couldn't handle such fuzzy advice.  
He made an appointment but didn't go twice.  
His nervousness worsened. He started to twitch.  
Sometimes he would moan. Other times he would itch.

One day in the forest he came up with a plan.  
“I'll go see a Preacher Fox. He'll understand.”  
The Preacher Fox smiled, as good preachers do,  
And told him, “With faith you can be made new.”

Foxye, he listened, even got on his knees  
And howled to the heavens a mournful, “Help, please!”  
He prayer more and harder with each passing day,  
But the Great God of Mammals still seemed far away.

“I can't make it work,” he cried to the preacher.  
“I want to be heavenly but I act like a creature.”  
The Preacher Fox smiled and said, “Though you're tryin',  
There's a part of yourself I'm afraid you're denyin'.

“I'm telling you, Foxye, your self is askew.  
Do emotions or thoughts tell you what you should do?”  
Little Foxye thought hard. This was no easy test.  
Was he uptight the most when his mind was at rest?

Did his heart guide his actions or was it his will?  
Could his life become whole again? Oh, what a thrill!  
He had almost decided and found rest for his soul.  
When he heard a loud noise and ran back to his hole.

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<sup>1</sup>Parts of this lesson may have been borrowed from a small booklet published many years ago by InterVarsity Press of Downers Grove, Illinois. I have forgotten the name of this source.

<sup>2</sup>Scripture references unless indicated otherwise are taken from NET Bible (1996, 2019).

This story about Foxie reminds us of a lot of people, maybe ourselves. Something about life seems strange to us. One person says, “I just don’t know how to live the way God wants me to live. I seem to be in constant turmoil. I try to trust God, but some part of my life always is out of whack.” Another person says, “I’m an emotional wreck. I just can’t stay on top of things. One day I’m happy. The next day I’m crying my eyes out. One day I feel like a strong Christian, and the next day I feel full of doubt. Am I losing my mind? At times I feel like I’m on a roller coaster.” Yes, our friend Foxie became religious, but even then God seemed far away. Foxie has lots of human counterparts. He was told that he needed to live by faith. It sounds so simplistic, but the need is real.

For many people, even Christians, there is a lack of unity or a lack of consistency within themselves. Psychologists call this problem emotional disequilibrium. Perhaps it should be labeled spiritual disequilibrium. It is a split within one’s self. The apostle Paul seems to have experienced this and cried out, “For I don’t understand what I am doing. For I do not do what I want—instead, I do what I hate. . . . Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?” (Romans 7.15, 24). How many times have you or have I felt pulled apart like this? We often do not feel whole, or complete, and we do not seem to be able to get things under control. People who seem to have it all together in life are very distressing. They go through life so easily while others struggle. True, most people who appear to have it all together really do not have it all together. But that does not help us personally when we are at war with ourselves, pulled in several directions at the same time.

What causes emotional or spiritual disequilibrium? What keeps us divided and in so much turmoil and pain? The most obvious hindrance to spiritual wholeness is sin. When we refuse to live God’s way, when we choose disobedience, we fracture ourselves. We may

experience pleasure, but we also experience guilt and confusion. When we sin, we are divided in our allegiance. We are trying to serve both God and Satan at the same time. Jesus teaches us that this will not work. He says, “No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other” (Matthew 6.24; cf. Luke 22.31-34). So when we sin, we are denying God’s influence and care in our lives, and this destroys spiritual wholeness.

Another hindrance to spiritual wholeness is the sin of others. We do not live in vacuums. We affect one another in good ways and in bad ways. Not only are we sinners, we also are sinned against. I may choose never to get drunk, but someday I may become the victim of an intoxicated driver. I would be shattered and robbed of wholeness, spiritual and physical, by the sin of someone else. All of us know too well from both our personal history and ongoing experience just how inhumane humans can be. Even those who try to minimize the concept of sin know that human beings can be self-centered and mean. It is hard to live as a whole person when continually hurt by others (e.g., the prophet Jeremiah).

Defects of birth or accidents during life also can hinder spiritual wholeness for many. Many have trouble accepting themselves, because they are physically or mentally disabled.<sup>3</sup> When we experience such misfortune, the question “why” is a haunting question. It is a question about pain and suffering in our fallen world. It is a difficult question to answer. On one occasion, the disciples queried Jesus about “a man who had been blind from birth” (John 9.1ff.). “Rabbi,” they asked, “who committed the sin that caused him to be born blind, this man or his parents?” Yes, it is true that disability, like death, can be traced to the influences of sin in the

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<sup>3</sup>It could be argued, though, that all of us have some measure of disability, that is, we are deficient in some capacity.

world (Romans 5.12). But the disciples looked at this problem of pain and suffering and sin in the wrong way, from the wrong perspective. Their attitudes shut out God and hindered healing and wholeness. They saw only the negative side of the problem. In his reply, Jesus told them, “Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but he was born blind so that the acts of God may be revealed through what happens to him.” The attitude of Jesus was different. It was an attitude of openness to the work of God and the expectation that God would do great things in spite of seemingly impossible odds. Jesus trusted God, his Father, to reveal his mercy and his grace in every situation and circumstance.

How does God deal with these hindrances (of personal sin, of the sin of others, of the misfortune of defect or accident) to wholeness? He makes us complete, or whole, in Christ (see Colossians 2.8ff.). He grants us peace, “the peace of God that surpasses all understanding” (Philippians 4.7). He gives us courage, “for God did not give us a Spirit of fear but of power and love and self-control” (2 Timothy 1.7). He places us in a community of fellow believers, his people, his church, where we can love and be loved, and we can nurture and be nurtured (see Colossians 3.12-17; 1 Corinthians 12.12ff.). And to the extent that we allow God to work in our lives by the redeeming love of his Son and by the help of his Holy Spirit, then to that same extent we will experience wholeness in our lives.