

Testimony of Joe Cornelius

I have come to a place that I felt compelled to share the impact God has had on my life through GFI. How grateful I am that God would choose to reveal His Truth to me in such a way. At 33 years of age, the truth in Colossians 3:3 brought me to my floor in my room one night and then to my feet! What a wonderful thing is this “death” (Rom. 6:6)!

It seems to me that there are three different positions people can be in. First being those who are asleep in the world. Next, those who are asleep, but dreaming as if they are awake; and then, those who are really awake. How could I have known who I am? And even more, how can I really begin to know who He is, if I’m asleep?

Through the Wheel and Line, it was made clear to me that I was already dead. That my past, and future, were already accepted in Christ. Acceptance was not based upon my own behavior no matter how good or bad. He is wonderful. He is my comfort, my guide, my necessity. He is everything to me, as to where He once seemed distant and unobtainable.

In times past, I was a drunk and drug addict, among other things. I grew up mostly alone, self taught on most everything. My one dog was my only consistent friend, yet I had wonderful, loving parents. Confession of faith was made at 7 years of age. My family went to church every Sunday and Wednesday, and I was raised as best they knew how. For years, I looked around the church and tried to measure up to the suits, ties, wonderful prayers of men, seemingly wonderful lives; everyone enjoyed living from prosperity, their knowledge, wealth, the messages I heard on Sunday. It felt good to get a good hard sermon on Sunday so that I could be able to work hard on myself trying to make myself better. Those hard sermons that beat me over the head were the best so that I had something to work on. If I didn’t have those, then God wasn’t talking to me. I don’t think I was instructed that I was “dead.” Never was I taught the truth of God’s plan and the Gospel. If so, God had not yet brought me to a place to where I could hear it. I was taught “do this, don’t do that” lessons. I quickly learned I could gain *no acceptance from the church* because of sin and lack of being able to conform to be like them, and *no acceptance from the world* because of Christ in my life.

At 15 years of age, I found acceptance in friends and a bottle, for they seemed to accept me no matter what my behavior or condition. Grades and school dropped accordingly, all the while trying to live up to the unspoken, unachievable standard that the church seemed to surround me with at services.

I thought that a true Christian should look and act like those I saw on Sunday. I was a mess, yet refused to conform to that stereotype. After 21, my family rejected me, and I them. I began to cover up a lot of my separation pain in **drugs**. It seemed hopeless. Quickly, thievery for **drugs** led me to several stints in jail, where I was able to clean up for some short while. The more I tried to belong, the worse I became. All the while, crying out to God “please change me! You can do anything! **Just make me not want drugs and misery!**” All to no apparent avail.

After stints in jail and traveling to quit doing drugs, I always came back to myself and more misery. After some time, I was beyond despair. I was sent to a halfway house and psychologist. Placed on medication for depression, ADD, and monitored by a support system, I managed to gain some steady “clean time” and began to live like the rest of the world. All the while believing in God, hitting my knees on routine occasion, begging for help, but no relationship.

Once again I looked to the modern Church for answers. The resentment I felt for the modern traditional, legalistic format and method in churches was still intense for lack of answers, due to lack of power that I could see. I began to conform to the world’s image of a Christian. Soon, I got involved, I was revived by the Sunday sermon, and Wednesday would get me through barely till Saturday, begging for God’s help the whole way.

After this pattern for some time, the “pre” drug patterns of my life began to appear again. Depression would come, a message from the preacher would again revive me. Having stopped taking medication for a couple of years, I began to seek medication again so as not to **return to a life of covering up my symptoms with drugs and drinking**. It seemed there were no concrete answers in church. Only pray more, read more, study more was what I heard. I read the Bible daily, but could not see where the modern church fit into the book of Acts. The church of old didn’t seem like the church today--seemingly no real lasting power, little real change in life. No miracles. Only prayers for the physical symptoms we all deal with and very little prayers for life changing problems. So I quit going to church for some time. I began to take items from a source near to me so as to make ends meet financially. Thieving was how I had learned to get my physical needs met. God brought Ephesians 4:28 to my attention. I quit taking things for money.

Again, quitting my medication, I started back to church where one of the first few days I went, Thorngrove Baptist Church had set up a condensed version of the conference, where Dr. Charles Solomon was the speaker. The date was June 17th. From this moment on, I began a more real experience than I had ever had.

I didn't realize at the time what this really all meant, but God led me to search out answers. The Wheel and Line presentation of the gospel was so clear to me; all the major questions I had seemed to be coming together, as I began to explore the difference between soul and spirit. It was then, God brought Ephesians 4:28 to my memory, that only in Christ could needs of all kinds be met. A drug addict thief steals to get his needs met. Trusting in my flesh is futile, whereas conversely, Christ is everything, and the answer to everything. *The truth of the cross was taught in Ephesians as well as Galatians 2:20!* Doubting assurance was removed. God had shown me the truth of Ephesians, being "accepted in the Beloved" meant that I was accepted in Christ; and it had nothing to do with my behavior, neither past nor future! What relief! It wasn't about me!

After sometime, God led me to return for the conference held in Pigeon Forge, TN. Again, the conference clarified more truth for me. It was a week later, reading God's Word, in my home at night that I read the words in Colossians 3:3: "For you died." PAST TENSE! It nailed me like a baseball bat to the head. I was already dead! Not some other chore to obtain, person to make happy or person to strive to be like. It was already true! I was dead, a long time ago! Not only those words, but, reading on, the words in verse 4: "for Christ, our life" also threw me to my knees, so that God revealed to me that Christ is life. Not a part time hobby, nor something that I must strive to achieve. He is life. I think I ran back and forth to every room in my home. What wonderful news, that the Creator of the universe chose to be in me and give me His Spirit, to even reveal a glimmer of the Truth He has accomplished, out of all the beings and creations He has made. What wonderful truth.

From that moment on, I could not lie against, nor deny, the truth that I now know! Nothing is the same now; Scripture is now all new; I cannot seem to stop reading and learning of this indwelling. I suppose I am "ruined" now for life! Now, work is not burdensome; no longer am I bent on pleasing man; insecurity in things has left me. I simply lean on Him daily for my substance in being in this world, trusting Him to raise my daughter, trusting Him for everything in both worlds.

What a marvelous relationship that God has chosen to undertake with me. May He be glorified in whatever way He sees fit. As God applies the truth of Galatians 2:20 more to my daily life, there seems to be an unmovable joy that I have never known, nor thought possible. Before the GFI conference I was beginning to think there could be no assurance. Now, sin comes, is quickly confessed, and is gone. The love of Christ now moves me more to know Him.

I am so thankful to Him that He saw fit to reveal this truth to me. Oh, what circumstances that brought the timing to be just perfect for my butt to be in a pew to hear the Truth that God has given you. Even as I write this letter, this same day, June 17th some years later, my heart cannot express what firmness I know is now in me. 2 Timothy 1:12 has been in my mind for days: "I know Whom I have believed, and am persuaded that HE is able to keep..." How magnificent is God. How awesome is He that all the life of Christ Jesus, His Son, could be translated to us, without cause; who but God could share His Spirit with me...and throughout time and distance interweave all the timing and circumstances for that cause?! How Awesome is that!

Joe Cornelius

P.S. Thank you, Dr. Solomon, for being available. Thank you for coming to Thorngrove Baptist Church that June 17th day, so that my life would be forever changed. Thank God for His life in you, that His life could be shown and revealed to me, through you, so that even now, He may be through any, and all ways, glorified in both my life and death. How awesome is God and Christ Jesus!

Thanks to all GFI staff for all the help they have given me: Cathy in her kindness, Mrs. Sue in her love, John W. in his wisdom, and John N. in his help.