

CHAPTER 4

HOW WE VIEW EXISTENCE DIVIDES US

THE GAME: I'VE GOT TO BE ME

A second worldview or philosophy that divides us is called Existentialism.

The name seems harmless enough. Like Gnosticism, it comes in all shapes and sizes. Some forms are relatively harmless while others are very destructive. A simple definition of Existentialism is that each of us must define our own existence. A dictionary definition is:

A philosophical and literary movement, variously religious and atheistic...it is based on the doctrine that existence takes precedence over essence and holds that man is totally free and responsible for his acts, and that this responsibility is the dread and anguish that encompass him.¹

This might seem like the perfect philosophy for today's youth. Many come into this world with little or no inherent identity because of choices their parents made before they were born or before they had any choice in the matter. Having the freedom to choose one's own identity and existence would seem to resolve the problems facing an ever-increasing population of throwaway children. However, it is not the positive philosophy it appears to be on the surface.

My biological parents divorced before I understood the meaning of family. I was thrust into an impersonal existence where I was passed from one family of

strangers to another. I was adopted at the age of eight. The turmoil and abuse in my adopted family added to the isolation and alienation I felt. Yet, when given the choice, I did not turn to Existentialism. My desire was for the more traditional existence of a stable family and a lifestyle consistent with what some now ridicule as the “Beaver Cleaver” existence. For me, the television families portrayed in programs such as “Leave it to Beaver” provided the positive role models I lacked in my own family.

A valid question is, “Why did I choose the route I took given so many obstacles and potholes in my path?” I believe the answer is the very reason why Existentialism is so dangerous to society. It is because no one told me that the so-called “Beaver Cleaver” lifestyle was a cruel hoax. No one made fun of the values and lifestyle I desired for my family and myself. This left me free to pursue traditional values unhindered. I did not choose to play the game, “I’ve Got to Be Me,” because it had not yet become vogue and Avant-garde.

Existentialism is merely an extension of Gnosticism. When we reject the knowledge of God, the next step is to reject existence as defined by God and to set about to define our own existence. Many have chosen to play the game. However, it is a losing game because the rules require paying too high a price and provide little return. Once played out, there are no winners.

THE RULES OF THE GAME

Existentialism is a philosophy that must be learned. Mankind did fine without it for most of human history. It has only been in the last 200 years, with the rise

of humanism and the decline of a belief in God, that this philosophy has been able to take hold. It is a philosophy man has devised to answer questions stemming from problems created if there is no God and if men are in full control of the universe. It has the appearance of coming from religious roots but a closer examination will prove the opposite to be true.

The man considered to be the father of modern existential thought was Søren Kierkegaard, a Danish philosopher, who wrote during the mid-1800's.

Existentialism has taken on many forms since its beginning. Some philosophers considered to be existentialists refused to be associated with this philosophy. However, it is generally accepted that the basic tenants of this philosophy are the absurdity of the human condition and that this absurdity produces alienation among members of society.

One definition of existentialism given is:

(Existentialism is) a philosophy that emphasizes the uniqueness and isolation of the individual experience in a hostile or indifferent universe, regards human existence as unexplainable, and stresses freedom of choice and responsibility for the consequences of one's acts.²

Kierkegaard stressed the ambiguity and absurdity of the human situation.

Concerning this we read:

The individual's response to this situation must be to live a totally committed life, and this commitment can only be understood by the individual who has made it. The individual therefore must always be prepared to defy the norms of society for the sake of the higher authority of a personally valid way of life. Kierkegaard ultimately advocated a "leap of faith" into a Christian way of life, which, although incomprehensible and full of risk, was the only commitment he believed could save the individual from despair.³

Because of the profound affect Kierkegaard's philosophy has had upon current religious thought, another view of this philosophy is in order"

EXISTENTIALISM (exerts) a major influence on modern Protestant theology. Kierkegaard described the various stages of existence as the aesthetic, the ethical, and the religious; advancing through this "existential dialectic," the individual becomes increasingly aware of his relationship to God. This awareness leads to despair as he realizes the antithesis between temporal existence and eternal truth. Reason is no help in achieving the final religious stage; a "leap of faith" is required.⁴

Another individual who influenced existential thought was Friedrich Nietzsche, a German philosopher who wrote during the latter part of the nineteenth century. Concerning him we read:

Nietzsche, who was not acquainted with the work of Kierkegaard, influenced subsequent existentialist thought through his criticism of traditional metaphysical and moral assumptions and through his espousal of tragic pessimism and the life-affirming individual will that opposes itself to the moral conformity of the majority.⁵

Martin Heidegger, another German philosopher who lived from 1889 to 1976, took existentialism a step further.

Heidegger argued that humanity finds itself in an incomprehensible, indifferent world. Human beings can never hope to understand why they are here; instead, each individual must choose a goal and follow it with passionate conviction, aware of the certainty of death and the ultimate meaninglessness of one's life.⁶

Some have interpreted Heidegger's "passionate conviction" to be a form of personal suicide. This is not necessarily physical suicide that culminates in physical death but a psychological suicide that is expressed in one's dedication to a cause no matter how narrow or extreme. We see this in modern day social activism both inside and outside the church as individuals engage in marching

and picketing and other forms of nonviolent and violent protests for or against various social causes. Through a process of cognitive deception, these individuals minimize all other points of view and maximize their own views to achieve what to them is a just balance in the world.

Winners and Losers

Existentialism is a pessimistic outlook on life. It begins with a sense of hopelessness at the human condition. Then it moves to the belief in the alienation of the individual from others and society in general. Listen to the lyrics of most secular music whether it is country western, rock and roll, blues, jazz, rap, or acid rock. The basic theme is negative. Which came first: existentialist philosophy or secular lyrics? Beyond a doubt the philosophy of existentialism came first. In fact almost the entire entertainment industry feeds on the pessimism of existentialism yet hardly ever uses the word.

A similar correlation exists between existentialism and the rise of political activism in Western culture. There was a sense in which World War I, the great depression, followed by World War II robbed society of any sense that there could ever be a lasting peace. The rise of communism in Europe, the partitioning of Eastern Europe behind the iron curtain, and the subsequent cold war drained away much of the optimism that came with the dawn of the 21st Century. Those of us old enough to remember watched as this philosophy began to permeate college and university campuses in the 1960's and 1970's. The new battlefield was the mind and soul of the youth of western culture.

Victory would go to the philosophy that could capture enough souls.

Existentialism won.

At first the “I’ve got to be me” war cry of existentialism came from liberal college and university campuses in the form of the free-speech movement. Then it was the hippie and drug culture and the sexual revolution. Focusing on the belief that the world was absurd, the gospel of existentialism was the invitation to “do your own thing.” Define your own existence. Seek your own relevance. The greatest losers in all of this were wholesome relationships and meaningful communication between social groups.

Since the allies claimed victory at the end of World War II, war was fought though never declared in Korea. With both sides stalemated at the Demilitarized Zone and with no clear victory, any sense of nationalistic pride or identity was lost. Failure to reach a peace agreement at Panmunjom left both sides in a state of perpetual war. To this day the Demilitarized Zone stands as a symbol of the failure of modern society.

Then came the quagmire called Vietnam. It possessed all the elements of the Korean conflict. Vietnam was a small country with little relevance to western civilization in the minds of many. It represented a battle line between communism and capitalism to others. Those who controlled the war did so from the comfort and security of their own communities far from the bloody battlefields. The army called upon to fight were youth already steeped in existential philosophy and taught to question the right of the Military-Industrial

Complex to control their lives and to send them off to their deaths in an undeclared war with questionable relevance to the existence they believed they had a right to define for themselves.

The passive resistance and civil disobedience of Mahatma Gandhi and others fit in well with existentialist philosophy and became its weapons of choice against the injustices of a society from whom the youth were more and more alienated. The Civil Rights movement also adopted the same weapons in its war against an unjust society.

The battle cry became “Down with the establishment—any establishment.” The attitude was “Don’t trust anyone over 30.” The rising counterculture took up many causes. With the sympathy of the media, many found personal power through this philosophy. Their very existence was defined by the political causes they espoused.

With the passing of time, this philosophy moved off the college campuses and into the public school system, into the halls of justice and government, and into every facet of life. As a generation steeped in this philosophy grew older it moved into the boardrooms of cooperate America, into the advertising industry, and into the entertainment industry. Existentialism next moved into the neighborhoods of suburban America in the form of political action groups. Finally it moved into evangelical churches through such organizations as the Moral Majority, the Right to Life organization, the Christian Coalition, and other politically oriented groups. Political protests with its civil disobedience and

passive resistance were the weapons of choice of the Existential movement, became the weapons of choice of evangelical churches against abortion and other causes deemed harmful to society.

Many may object to equating the political strategies of the religious right with that of the secular left and to identifying both as the fallout of Existentialism. Yet consider the overarching philosophy of both extremes. Both are driven by a sense that society in general has failed and that individual members and groups within society are alienated from each other. Both see the exercising of individual freedom of choice as their inalienable right and that each individual must choose a goal and follow it with passionate conviction. What earlier Existentialists identified as “angst,” or a pessimistic generalized anxiety, has become the torch that fuels the fires of both the right and left wings of the political and religious spectrum of society. Both extremes espouse a form of tragic pessimism and the life-affirming individual will that opposes itself to the moral conformity of the majority.

This does not mean that all Christians fit into the category of the far left or the right wings of the political spectrum. Those who do not fit are criticized and even ostracized by those who do fit into that spectrum. The result is that political fervor is often substituted for religious fervor, the loser being the gospel of Jesus Christ. Christianity is now commonly viewed as a sect more bent on judging the world than presenting Christ as the Savior of the world. The steady appeal of the Bible to set our minds on the things that make for peace

has been drowned out by the louder voices calling for heightened awareness of angst coupled with a sense of outrage as the great unifying and motivating force to bring about change in society, regardless of what that might be.

Along with the slow march of existentialism as it won the soul of most of a generation, an almost imperceptible transformation took place. Many of the causes espoused by one group or another were very honorable in the beginning and progress toward positive change took place. Originally, Existentialism was more of a tool for change than a lifestyle to be lived. However, gradually it became a way of life with or without a just cause to champion. When progress is made and change has taken place, many caught up in the tide of existentialism must seek another cause or define their single cause more critically to stay in business.

While not every minority person has gained as much as he or she should have, and while not every woman has broken through the glass ceiling in corporate America, and while not every snail darter was rescued from oblivion from runaway dam construction, progress has been achieved, but the victor was Existentialism. So now what is society to do with the angry, “In-your-face,” “Your wrong/I’m right,” “I’ve got to be me,” “Do your own thing,” tools for social change? The answer is that you package it, market it, and sell it to a new generation that does not have the faintest idea what it was all about in the first place.

Existentialism, like its close cousin Dialectical Materialism with its thesis, antithesis, and synthesis, was and is a philosophy of revolution. Its goal is to produce change. In the process of trying to change the world, Existentialism has not made society a better place to live. Groups with opposing views have not come together in the grand new society that was supposed to be the synthesis of the great dialectical materialism. Consider the geographical and cultural climate of Columbine High, Jefferson County, Colorado. There is no more diverse place to live in the United States than the neighborhood where this tragic drama unfolded.

Littleton, Colorado, and the greater Denver area are no different than many other metropolitan areas in the United States. However, the extremes of diversity fostered by Existentialism are more readily seen because of the ruggedness of the landscape and extremes of climate. Colorado has become the playground of existentialists. A few years ago my wife and I visited a church in Colorado that was supposed to be “conservative.” In his sermon, the pastor called the account of creation in Genesis, “The Big Bang Theory.” The birth of Jesus was the “Little Bang Theory.” I resisted the urge to walk out because I wanted to find out how far he would go. His solution for saving society was to rid ourselves of Euro-centric, male-dominated religion and return to worshipping God in the buffalo.

The problem was not that he was teaching what he believed. The problem was that he was presenting what he believed as true Christianity. He set himself

up as a teacher of a truth far different than the truth taught in the Bible. He invited others to join him in redefining existence to suit themselves.

Please understand, I am not saying that Colorado has a corner on existentialist thought. What I am saying is that Columbine High is in an area of the world where this morbid philosophy has found fertile soil. The community that tolerated this preacher's thoughts consists of many whose names we would find in the postscripts of major movies, television programs and on CDs at the top of the charts in the recording industry. Through their influence our children are caught in the crushing grip of existentialism like meat in a meat grinder. Littleton, Colorado, is an excellent example of what is happening everywhere in America today.

Whether they live in Littleton, Colorado or Peoria, American youth are the targets of this negative, destructive worldview. Whether they wear trench coats and play video games or wear shoulder pads on the football field, the "I've got to be me" game is being played with tragic results. As each succeeding generation bears the scars of existentialist thinking, society is caught in a downward spiral that increases in speed exponentially. It has become, not simply a philosophy of despair, but a philosophy of destruction. Postmodernism with its political-correctness police is merely the logical extension of Existentialism and can correctly be viewed as neoexistentialism.

Perhaps the most frustrating side of this human philosophy, regardless of the form it takes, is that it is so negative, so pointless, and so powerless. The more

men ask questions while refusing to seek answers through what God has revealed, the more hopeless man's existence seems. Think of the contradiction of this philosophy. Many children today grow up in suburban America with three cars in the garage and homes better equipped than most palaces throughout human history. They have access to more knowledge and have the freedom to explore life more than at any time since man was driven from the Garden of Eden. You would think they could find happiness in all of this. I believe that if it were not for the destructive philosophy of existentialism, they would find happiness. But existentialism poisons the mind so that the sunshine of joy cannot penetrate life.

With all the physical comforts of modern society has come a gloom that is baffling until we look closely at what society is serving up as a regular diet. A lot of attention has been focused on the video games that the shooters at Columbine High played hour after hour. There can be little doubt that these played a part in the motivation to kill as many of their classmates as they could. The thrill of killing other human beings could not have been the only motivation behind the shooting. There had to be a sense of hopelessness, of despair that things will never get better, of personal alienation more profound than words can describe. These boys were not stupid. They had to know that by killing others they were killing themselves. Their suicide was both philosophical and physical—the final solution to an absurd existence given by Existentialism.

Whether or not they ever heard the word existentialism, the behavior they carried out on that fateful day was an existential act as much as any single act could be. It was a lashing out at society in general and other people specifically as if they were the cause of the despair these two boys were feeling. Any act of this magnitude is the culmination of unhealthy and broken relationships, cognitive dissonance thinking taken to the nth degree, Gnostic laughing in your face, individual existence finally being defined as absurdity beyond absurdity. Yet their physical suicide is no more real and indicative of the existence they chose than are the countless psychological and philosophical suicides committed every day by individuals who choose to define their own existence at the expense of relationships, truth, and God's reality over which He alone has sway.

We all come to a place in our lives when it seems as if we are looking into a black hole that invites us to throw ourselves into it to be swallowed up by its darkness. Yet most of us come to our senses and realize that the black hole only exists in our minds. There is a rainbow after the storm. There is life after personal failure and disappointment. This is true, however, only if we are not staring into a dark abyss prepared for us by some warped minds who feel that the sense of vertigo while hanging over the abyss is somehow a better reality than the sunlight after the storm clouds have passed.

The greatest danger from existential thinking is that we begin to think that the reality created in our minds or prepared for us through technology is more real

than God's reality. I feel so fortunate that I was not introduced to existential thought when I was searching for my identity and existence as a youth. Had I bowed my knee to the god of existentialism, he would surely have destroyed me. The false gospel of existentialism says, "trust me." It beckons, "I will make your life real." Yet the result is total defeat and, if allowed to happen, total annihilation of existence from a human perspective. Existentialism is not the construction of existence; it is the destruction of existence—God's existence.

REFUSING TO PLAY THE GAME "I'VE GOT TO BE ME"

I remember the night I reached out to take hold of God's reality. I was attending a servicemen's retreat while in the Navy. There were several powerful speakers, men who knew how to excite the emotions. Yet mine was not an emotional experience. In fact, to be sure it was not; I separated myself from the rest of the group and went off by myself. If God was real and was offering me a choice to receive His reality, I wanted to be sure it was a transaction between Him and me and not the persuasive speeches of men or the fickleness of emotion. There were a lot of things that needed to be changed in my life and no one less than the Sovereign God of the Universe was going to be able to make these changes.

I was not looking for some way to change myself or to somehow create a new existence. If Christ did not come into my life that night, I had no existence—at least not that I wanted to live. Yet it was not the thought of suicide that was pulling me up to God. It was the hope that His reality would be better than any I

had created up to that point or that anyone else had created for me. What I believed I needed to do was grasp hold of His reality. This I did by praying a simple prayer. I waited for some time to see how I felt about that decision before telling anyone about it. I wanted to be sure it was real.

This is how I have approached most of the decisions I have made with reference to my relationship with God. I wait to see how I feel about it the next morning. Unlike those many of those foolish experiences when one wakes up with a hangover or worse, I have found that the morning brings new joy and that the decision the night before was the correct decision even if it was made in desperation. I learned this long before I read Jeremiah's words:

I have become a laughingstock to all my people, their {mocking} song all the day. He has filled me with bitterness, He has made me drunk with wormwood. He has broken my teeth with gravel; He has made me cower in the dust. My soul has been rejected from peace; I have forgotten happiness. So I say, "My strength has perished, and {so has} my hope from the LORD." Remember my affliction and my wandering, the wormwood and bitterness. Surely my soul remembers and is bowed down within me. This I recall to my mind, therefore I have hope. The LORD'S lovingkindnesss indeed never cease, for His compassions never fail. {They} are new every morning; great is your *faithfulness*. "*The LORD is my portion,*" says my soul, "*Therefore I have hope in Him.*"⁷ (Italics mine)

Many who begin the Christian life begin with the misunderstanding that they must make it work. Like the existentialist, they set out to recreate their own existence. After all, doesn't the Bible say we are to be conformed into the image of Christ?⁸ The process of being conformed to His image is not our responsibility. To believe it is our responsibility is a false view of Christianity and, like its cousin, existentialism, will lead to defeat and despair. The Gnostic,

the Existentialist, the Modernist, and the Postmodernist are all wrong and so is a Christianity that teaches or implies that we must somehow define our own existence.

John encouraged his readers toward the end of the first century of the Church with these words:

See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God; and {such} we are. For this reason, the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is. And everyone who has this hope {fixed} on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.⁹

No one has the power to create or recreate existence or reality. In Christ we receive the ability to appropriate God's reality. The process of appropriating His reality is through studying His Word while under the power of the Holy Spirit. It is the message of His word that is what transforms our lives from within. The change is often imperceptible at first. The writer of the book of Hebrews notes:

For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.¹⁰

I was blessed with good counsel at the beginning of my relationship with Jesus Christ. I was encouraged to memorize Scripture. Some of the verses suggested to me have become a part of my reality as God has allowed me to experience it.

Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word...Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.¹¹ (KJV)

Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night. And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.¹² (KJV)

Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.¹³ (KJV)

And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.¹⁴ (KJV)

Each of these verses and more became my reality as I memorized them and prayed through them. I do not mean to imply that all the storm clouds of life and all my problems disappeared immediately. I continued to struggle and, at times, continue to struggle today. However, God's Word became a beacon in the storms of life. If I strayed too far from Christ, its beams would guide me back to safety.

Years later, after college and two stints in seminary, with a master's degree and a doctor's degree both in pastoral studies and Bible and twelve years of pastoral ministry, I still fell into the trap of trying to define my own existence. This is a constant danger even for Christians. We become so zealous for the things of God that we set out to create His reality through the arm of our flesh. It is a difficult thing to distinguish between fleshly effort and Spirit control. Yet that is exactly what God's Word is supposed to do if we will simply study it.

One day I found myself reflecting on the struggles of the Christian life as I was studying the book of Ephesians. In Ephesians 4:20-24 Paul writes:

So this I say, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind, being

darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart; and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness. But you did not learn Christ in this way, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus, that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new self, which in {the likeness of} God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.¹⁵

I was feeling as if my life was the product of the futility of my mind that day. The battle for Christ seemed to be a losing one, especially in my own life and ministry. Then I noticed the strange way the last sentence was phrased in the original language. The command was to put on, through the renewing of the spirit of my mind, the new self, *“Which has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.”* (Italics mine)

The problem was that, without knowing it, I was still trying to create my own existence when all I needed to do was accept the existence God had already created for me. The tense of the Greek verb translated “has been created”¹⁶ suggests that a person who has truly been born again has been recreated already. This is done through appropriating what God through Christ has already accomplished.

The true Christian experience, new life in Christ, accomplishes what Existentialism with all its high mindedness attempts to do. It redefines one’s existence. However, the agent of the change and power to change is God’s, not ours. The existence is His existence that He provides in Christ. Through the

power of the Holy Spirit, as we study His Word, we begin to think like God thinks and so can put on His reality. As the reality of God becomes clearer and clearer through careful examination of the Bible, we discover who we are in Christ and who we are in relation to others in Christ's Body, the church. This clarity comes from accurately interpreting Scripture.

Unfortunately, many prominent church leaders today advocate an existential approach to Bible interpretation by which God's reality is obscured and the message of Scripture given a decidedly existential slant. They no longer use the nomenclature of the liberalism of the past but now couch their Existentialist philosophy in language more acceptable to Evangelical Christianity.

Sometimes the difference between the true message of Scripture and the distorted message of existentialists served up as truth is almost imperceptible. Therefore we must be diligent in our pursuit of the truth of the Bible. In the first century church, when persecution became almost unbearable, God's message was not "create your own existence." Peter makes this clear in his first epistle. As we read his letter to a persecuted church we do not find the angst of existentialism. We find joy and hope in the future both in this life and the life to come.

To find this joy and hope, those persecuted believers were encouraged to take to the true message of Scripture like a baby takes to a bottle of warm milk.¹⁷ They were reminded of who they were in Christ, "a CHOSEN RACE, a royal PRIESTHOOD, a HOLY NATION, a PEOPLE FOR {God's} OWN

POSSESSION...(who) once were NOT a PEOPLE, but now you are THE PEOPLE OF GOD; you had NOT RECEIVED MERCY, but now you have RECEIVED MERCY.¹⁸

It is ironic that so many persecuted Christians around the world are accepting the true reality of God while the church in America, wealthy beyond comprehension, is turning away from the truth to the false hope of Existentialism. What is equally ironic is that one of the strongest appeals today from Existentialists who call themselves Christians is a call to unity. Yet again, this is an attempt to create an existence rather than to appropriate the existence of God that is already present through the power of the Holy Spirit and an accurate interpretation of the Bible.

The writer of the book of Hebrews exhorts us:

Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh, and since {we have} a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled {clean} from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging {one another;} and all the more as you see the day drawing near.¹⁹

This is nothing short of a call to the existence that God has already provided for us in a local church setting. Our task is to find a local church that believes the Bible and practices what it teaches. There is no room for Existentialism in

the family of God. There is no need for it because He has made it clear what our existence is and what our responsibilities are in that existence.

What is wonderful about being a Christian is that the Bible does not lead us into a hopeless existence alienated from others. That sense of hopelessness and alienation comes from the existence of someone who is not a child of God. Existentialists are correct in one thing: people apart from God are alienated and their lives are hopeless. Paul describes this existence apart from God:

Therefore remember that formerly you, the Gentiles in the flesh, who are called "Uncircumcision" by the so-called "Circumcision," {which is} performed in the flesh by human hands--{remember} that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.²⁰

The language is Jewish in tone but the meaning is the same. Without God, life is meaningless and people are alienated from each other. In Christ, however, God provides us with an existence in relationship to Him, a life of purpose and fulfillment, and a hope both in this life and the next. In God's reality there is already unity.

But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who made both {groups into} one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, {which is} the Law of commandments {contained} in ordinances, so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, {thus} establishing peace, and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity. AND HE CAME AND PREACHED PEACE TO YOU WHO WERE FAR AWAY, AND PEACE TO THOSE WHO WERE NEAR; for through Him we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and

prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner {stone} in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.²¹

A good study to help us avoid the pitfalls of Existentialism is to follow the “one anothers” in the New Testament epistles. Dr. Gene Getz has written a delightful book titled, *Building Up One Another*.²² Using his book as a guide, you will discover both the responsibilities and the blessing of God’s reality. There is much we can learn about this existence called “in Christ.”²³ Paul’s desire was that we come to a full realization of its privileges and responsibilities. He writes:

{I pray that} the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. {These are} in accordance with the working of the strength of His might which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly {places} far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come.²⁴

Christians do not have to set about defining their own existence. God has already done this. What we need to do is appropriate God’s reality with its privileges and responsibilities along with the power of the Holy Spirit and His instructions from His guidebook—the Bible. We cannot change the tide of history as society rushes into the abyss of its own making through existentialism, but we can change the tide in our own life and in the lives of our children. We can and we must or we will suffer the same destruction as others who are blinded by this evil philosophy from Satan.

¹ *Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language*, ed., David B. Guralnik (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1980), 491.

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⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Lamentations 3:14-24.

⁸ Romans 12:2.

⁹ I John 3:1-3.

¹⁰ Hebrews 4:12.

¹¹ Psalm 119:9, 11.

¹² Psalm 1:1-3.

¹³ 2 Corinthians 5:17.

¹⁴ I John 5:11-12.

¹⁵ Ephesians 4:17-24.

¹⁶ Aorist Passive Participle.

¹⁷ 1 Peter 2:2.

¹⁸ 1 Peter 2:9-10.

¹⁹ Hebrews 10:19-25.

²⁰ Ephesians 2:11-12.

²¹ Ephesians 2:13-22.

²² Gene A. Getz, *Building Up One Another*, (Wheaton: Victor Books).

²³ Cf. the Book of Ephesians.

²⁴ Ephesians 1:18-21.