

DISCIPLESHIP (13)

A disciple is one who first maintains the fellowship of the cross, which results in fellowship with his Lord: discipleship. "The atonement of the cross and the fellowship of the cross must be equally preached as the condition of true discipleship." "Christ is the answer, but the cross is needed to clear the way for Him."

In spiritual progress, our Lord never pushes. He is our File Leader (Hebrews 12:2), and He leads us step by step. We struggle and fail (self-effort), which sets up a yearning for the answer to this depressing failure. In time, we see the scriptural facts of deliverance in the cross (identification), and that in turn produces the required hunger to enter into that freedom, freedom for fellowship with the answer -- our Risen Lord Jesus.

"Nothing can set us apart for God, nothing can make us holy, except as the cross is working in us, because the cross alone can keep the hindrances to holiness in the place of death." --G. Watt. "Back of all successful work for the lost is an inward spiritual impulse; and back of the impulse is the Holy Spirit who reproduces Christ in us; and the brand mark of it all is the cross, the living experience of which must both enter and control the life before we are fit for service." --J. E. Conant.

Nowhere was our Lord Jesus more explicit and firm than when He mentioned discipleship. "And he said unto them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me." "And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple" (Luke 9:23, 14:27). His reason for this is simple: Self cannot and will not follow Him, but taking up one's cross results in death to self, and newness of life in Christ Jesus.

A disciple is one who is free from the old, and free for the new. In other words, scriptural words: "dead unto sin, but alive unto God" (Romans 6:11). And for this the Lord Jesus clearly states that each must take up his cross. Here is the ultimatum, so not to the how.

But first, how not to take up one's cross. "Christians need to understand that bearing the cross does not in the first place refer to the trials which we call crosses, but to the daily giving up of life, of dying to self, which must mark us as much as it did the Lord Jesus, which we need in times of prosperity almost more than adversity, and without which the fulness of the blessing of the cross cannot be disclosed to us." --A. Murray

"May we cease to confuse the words 'a cross' with 'the cross.' Sometimes believers in self-pity bemoan themselves, and say, 'I have taken, or must take up my cross, and follow Jesus.' Would that we would lose sight of our 'cross' in His cross, then His cross becomes our cross; His death, our death; His grave, our grave; His resurrection, our resurrection; His risen life, our newness of life." No. taking up our cross does not mean the stoical bearing of some

heavy burden, hardship, illness, distasteful situation or relationship. Enduring anything of this nature is not bearing one's cross. Taking up the cross may or may not involve such things, but things do not constitute our cross.

The believer's cross is the cross of Calvary, the cross upon which he was crucified with Christ (Galatians 2:20). There the eternal emancipation proclamation was signed with the blood of the Lamb, and sealed by the Spirit of God. Every believer is thereby freed from all bondage, but every believer is not aware of this liberating truth.

Sad to say, the only believers who are interested in freedom are those who have come to the place of hating instead of hugging their chains. "It is true that the intellect is stumbled by the cross; yet the antagonism to the cross is mainly moral, both in the sinner and in the saint, for its message is only welcomed by those who desire freedom from the bondage of their sins, and who hunger and thirst after the experiential righteousness of God." Yes, the need must be intense, as Norman Douty says: "The Divine way (via the cross) for spiritual emancipation is just as offensive to the child of God as the Divine way for salvation is to the lost."

When the believer begins to really see the cross for what it is -- a place of death -- he is inclined to hesitate about choosing such fellowship. Our Lord Jesus understands this well, but there is no other way, since that is the manner in which He finished the work on our behalf. So He simply allows our needs to continue their relentless pressure until we finally bend to His inevitable.

We will be ready to take up our cross when self becomes intolerable to us, when we begin to "hate our life" -- "...and hate not his own life, cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:26). The deep burden of self and hunger to be like Him cause the function of the cross -- crucifixion, to become attractive. The long devastating years of abject bondage make freedom in the Lord Jesus priceless -- the cost becomes as nothing to us! We begin to share, think of it, the attitude of our Lord Jesus, and of Paul. "For the joy that was set before Him," the Lord Jesus "patiently endured the cross" (Hebrews 12:2 Wey.). The attitude of the Apostle Paul became: "But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Galatians 6:14). "Let this mind [attitude] be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 2:5).

Yes, we begin to glory in the cross, our very own freedom from all that enslaves, from all that would keep us from fellowship with our Risen Lord. So we begin to take up our cross, our liberation, our personal finished work held in trust for us so long and patiently by the Holy Spirit. Talk about your trust funds!

And here is how we take up and bear our cross: Finally prepared by our needs, aware that our bondage was broken in Christ on Calvary, we definitely begin to rely upon that finished work -- we appropriate. Our attitude becomes: I gladly and willingly take, by faith in the facts,

my finished work of emancipation that was established at Calvary; I reckon myself to be dead indeed unto sin, and alive unto God in Christ. This is taking up one's cross. As we learn to do this, we begin to find these facts true in experience. The Holy Spirit brings that finished work of death and applies it to all of the old nature, which is thus held in the place of death -- the death of Calvary. If and when we turn from the facts and begin to rely upon anything or anyone else, including ourselves, self is released from the cross -- active and enslaving as ever. Through this process we are patiently taught to walk by faith, to maintain our attitude of reliance upon the finished work of the cross.

Adolph Saphir wrote, "The narrow path, commencing with the cross-- 'Ye have died with Christ' -- ending with the glory of the Lord Jesus, is the path on which the Lord draws near and walks with His disciples."

"'Christ liveth in me.' The Lord within lives as the sole source of life. The old 'I' has no contribution he can make to Christian life and service; he can never be harnessed to the purposes of God. Death is his decreed portion. There cannot be two masters in our lives. If the old 'I' is in active possession of us then Christ cannot be. But if we gladly take hold of the great fact of redemption -- 'I have been crucified with Christ' -- then Christ by His Spirit takes up the exercise of the function of life within us, and leads us as His bond-slaves (disciples), in the train of His triumph."