

SELF-DENIAL (11)

When a believer begins to discover something of the awful tyranny of the self-life, or has been endlessly struggling against that tyranny, he becomes intensely concerned about the denial of self with the resultant freedom to rest and grow in Christ. Man has many ways of seeking to escape the thralldom of self; God has but one way. First then, some of these man-centered methods.

MORTIFICATION

Denying oneself certain things for a time, or even for all time, is not even close to the answer since the old nature will adjust and thrive under any conditions -- anything short of death to self. "There have been those who have thought that to get themselves out of the way it was necessary to withdraw from society; so they denied all natural human relationships and went into the desert or the mountain or the hermit's cell to fast and labor and struggle to mortify the flesh. While their motive was good it is impossible to commend their method. For it is not scriptural to believe that the old Adam nature can be conquered in that manner. It yields to nothing less than the death of the cross. It is altogether too tough to be killed by abusing the body or starving the affections." --A. W. Tozer

CONQUEST

Probably the most drawn out and exhausting effort of all is the believer's struggle to conquer and control this rebel self. More meetings, more Bible study, more prayer are all resorted to, but neither are these God's answer to this problem.

TRAINING

Here is a favorite that has been tried and found wanting down through the ages. Good Christian training and culture in the right homes, churches and schools have been relied upon to subdue the old nature and bring it into line.

REVIVALISM

Another failure has been the practice of holding special meetings once or twice a year. This involves outside leadership (a stranger to the individual problems), and the devastating revival routine (confession, new resolutions, etc.), in the hope that something will change -- but it rarely does, and then not for long.

GROWTH

So many dear Christians just keep plodding (or racing) through the deadening routine of their multitudinous church activities and duties, expecting that in time self will change for the better as they grow. But self never changes into anything but more of the same! "That which is born of the flesh is flesh" (John 3:6a). "Sometimes this self is entirely bad, as when it is angry, spiteful, unkind, unjust, untruthful, unloving, catty. In other cases a good exterior conceals an evil heart, as when we are proud of our humility, conceited about our Christian service, boastful of our orthodoxy. And an over-forwardness and obvious conceit at the sound of one's own voice spoils many a prayer meeting."

CLEANSING

Up-to-the-moment confession and consequent cleansing have also constituted a popular method. However, 1 John 1:9 has to do with sins already committed, and not with the source (self) from which they emanate. "Our sins are dealt with by the blood, we ourselves are dealt with by the cross. The blood procures our pardon, the cross procures deliverance from what we are in Adam. The blood can wash away my sins, but it cannot wash away my old man: I need the cross to crucify me -- the sinner." --W. Nee

EXPERIENCES

Today one of the prevalent attempts for something better is to go in for "the baptism of the Spirit," speaking in tongues, etc. This is by far the most dangerous and pathetic trap of all, as it is simply self, neurotically and religiously rampant. "Calvary precedes Pentecost. Death with Christ precedes the fulness of the Spirit. Power! Yes, God's children need power, but God does not give power to the old creation, nor to the uncrucified soul. Satan will give power to the 'old Adam,' but not God."

Which of us does not know something of the failure of our ways, well-intentioned as they may be? What most do not know is that this very failure is the path to learning, and entering into, God's way. "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts" (Isaiah 55:8). Now just what is God's way of self-denial? He has but one way, and it is on the basis of all His other ways: the principle of the finished work. His way for us in everything is the way He has already traveled, conquered, and completed in Christ.

THE CROSS GOD'S WAY

It was on the cross of Calvary that God, in Christ, dealt fully and finally with self, the nature from which all our sins flow. "We know that our old (unrenewed) self was nailed to the cross with Him in order that (our) body, (which is the instrument of sin), might be made ineffective and inactive for evil, that we might no longer be the slaves of sin" (Romans 6:6

Amp.). The reason there is no other way for self to be denied is that God has done the work in this way: our identification with Christ Jesus in His death and resurrection! It is done; now ours to believe.

"The 'flesh' will only yield to the cross; not to all the resolutions you may make at a conference, not to any self-effort, not to any attempted self-crucifixion; only to co-crucifixion, crucified together with Christ (Galatians 2:20). It is not by putting yourself to death, but by taking, through faith and surrender, your place of union with Christ in His death. That is the blessed barrier of safety between you and all the attractions of the flesh, and that makes the way open to do the will of God." --G. Watt

The cross of Calvary resulted in the death of the Lord Jesus, both for sin, and unto sin. In that He died unto sin, He died out of the realm of sin, and He arose into the realm of "newness of life," eternal life. And our identification with Him on Calvary took us into death; down into the tomb; up into "newness of life" (Romans 6:4). First, Romans 6:3 -- "Baptized into his death"; then, Romans 6:4 -- "buried with him"; then, Romans 6:5 -- "For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection"; also, Colossians 3:3 -- "For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God"; therefore, Romans 6:11 -- "Reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord."

Praise the Lord! it all happened at Calvary: our sins were paid for, our sinfulness was dealt with, and both by the ultimate -- DEATH. And we receive the benefits of the work of the cross simply by reckoning on, believing in, the finished work of the cross. First, through the Word, we find out what God did about our problem. Then, as we become thoroughly convinced of the fact and begin to understand it clearly, we are able to agree to 'reckon' it true. And as we exercise faith in God's fact, we begin to receive the benefits of that finished work in experience. Was it not true in the matter of our justification? Yes, and we will likewise find it to be true in the matter of our emancipation from the slavery of the self-life.

"The powerful effect of the cross with God, in heaven, in the blotting out of guilt, and our renewed union with God, is inseparable from the other effect -- the breaking down of the authority of sin over man, by the crucifixion of self. Therefore Scripture teaches us that the cross not only works out a disposition or desire to make such a sacrifice, but it really bestows the power to do so, and completes the work. This appears with wonderful clarity in Galatians. In one place the cross is spoken of as the reconciliation for guilt (3:13). But there are three more places where the cross is even more plainly spoken of as the victory over the power of sin; as the power to hold in the place of death the 'I' of the self-life; of the flesh (the outworking of self); and of the world (2:20; 5:24; 6:14). In these passages our union (identification) with Christ, the crucified One, and the conformity to Him resulting from the union, are represented as the result of the power exercised within us and upon us by the cross." -- Andrew Murray

As we learn to stand upon the finished work of Calvary, the Holy Spirit will begin to faithfully and effectively apply that finished work of the cross to the self-life, thereby holding it in the place of death -- inactive -- resulting in the "not I, but Christ" life.