

~Other Speakers S-Z: Classic Christian Writings:

The question often arises how it is, with so much church attendance, Bible reading and prayer, that the Christian fails to live the life of complete victory over sin and lacks the love and joy of the Lord. One of the most important answers, undoubtedly, is that he does not know what it is to die to himself and to the world.

Yet without this, God's love and holiness cannot have their dwelling place in his heart. He has repented of some sins, but knows not what it is to turn, not only from sin, but from his old nature and self-will.

Yet this is what the Lord Jesus taught. He said to the disciples that if any man would come after Him, he must hate and lose his own life. He taught them to take up the cross. That meant they were to consider their life as sinful and under sentence of death. They must give up themselves, their own will and power, and any goodness of their own. When their Lord had died on the cross, they would learn what it was to die to themselves and the world, and to live their life in the fullness of God.

Crucified With Christ

"I have been crucified with Christ; yet I live; and yet no longer I, but Christ liveth in me" (Galatians 2:20).

The thought of fellowship with Christ in His bearing the cross has often led to the vain attempt in our own power to follow Him and bear His image. But this is impossible to man until he first learns to know something of what it means to say, "I have been crucified with Christ."

Let us try to understand this. When Adam died, all his descendants died with him and in him. In his sin in Paradise, and in the spiritual death into which he fell, I had a share; I died in him. And the power of that sin and death, in which all his descendants share, works in every child of Adam every day.

Christ came as the second Adam. In His death on the cross all who believe in Him had a share. Each one may say in truth, "I have been crucified with Christ." As the representative of His people, He took them up with Him on the cross, and me too. The life that He gives is the crucified life, in which He entered heaven and was exalted to the throne, standing as a Lamb as it had been slain. The power of His death and life work in me, and as I hold fast the truth that I have been crucified with Him, and that now I myself live no more but Christ liveth in me, I receive power to conquer sin; the life that I have received from Him is a life that has been crucified and made free from the power of sin.

We have here a deep and very precious truth. Most Christians have but little knowledge of it. That knowledge is not gained easily or speedily. It needs a great longing in very deed to be dead to all sin. It needs a strong faith, wrought by the Holy Spirit, that the union with Christ crucified--the fellowship of His cross--can day by day become our life.

The life that He lives in heaven has its strength and its glory in the fact that it is a crucified life. And the life that He imparts to the believing disciple is even so a crucified life with its victory over sin and its power of access into God's presence.

It is in very deed true that I no longer live, but Christ lives in me as the Crucified One. As faith realizes and holds fast the fact that the crucified Christ lives in me, life in the fellowship of the cross becomes a possibility and a blessed experience.

Self-denial

"Then said Jesus unto His disciples, 'If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me'" (Matthew 16:24).

Christ had for the first time definitely announced that He would have to suffer much and be killed and be raised again. "Peter rebuked Him, saying, 'Be it far from Thee, Lord; this shall never be unto Thee.'"

Christ's answer was, "Get thee behind Me, Satan." The spirit of Peter, seeking to turn Him away from the cross and its suffering, was nothing but Satan tempting Him to turn aside from the path which God had appointed as our way of salvation.

Christ then adds the words of our text, in which He uses for the second time the words "take up the cross." But with that He uses a most significant expression revealing what is implied in the cross: "If any man come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross."

When Adam sinned, he fell out of the life of heaven and of God into the life of the world and of self. Self-pleasing, self-sufficiency, self-exaltation, became the law of his life. When Jesus Christ came to restore man to his original place, "being in the form of God, He emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant, and humbled Himself even to the death of the cross." What He has done Himself He asks of all who desire to follow Him: "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself."

Instead of denying himself, Peter denied his Lord: "I know not the man." When a man learns to obey Christ's commands, He says of himself: "I know not the man." The secret of true discipleship is to bear the cross, to acknowledge the death sentence that has been passed on self, and to deny any right that self has to rule over us.

Death to self is to be the Christian's watchword. The surrender to Christ is to be so entire, the surrender for Christ's sake to live for those around us so complete, that self is never allowed to come down from the cross to which it has been crucified, but is ever kept in the place of death.

Let us listen to the voice of Jesus: "Deny self"; and ask that by the grace of the Holy Spirit, as the disciples of a Christ who denied Himself for us, we may ever live as those in whom self has been crucified with Christ, and in whom the crucified Christ now lives as Lord and Master.

He Cannot Be My Disciple

"If any man cometh unto Me, and hateth not his own life, he cannot be My disciple. Whosoever doth not bear his own cross, and come after Me, cannot be My disciple. Whosoever he be of you that renounceth not all that he hath, he cannot be My disciple" (Luke 14:26-33).

For the third time Christ speaks about bearing the cross. He gives new meaning to it when He says that a man must hate his own life and renounce all that he has. Thrice over He solemnly repeats the words that without this a man cannot be His disciple.

"If a man hate not his own life." And why does Christ make such an exacting demand the condition of discipleship? Because the sinful nature we have inherited from Adam is indeed so vile and full of sin that, if our eyes were only opened to see it in its true nature, we would flee from it as loathsome and incurably evil. "The flesh is enmity against God"; the soul that seeks to love God cannot but hate the "old man" which is corrupt through its whole being. Nothing less than this, the hating of our own life, will make us willing to bear the cross and carry within us the sentence of death on our evil nature. It is not till we hate this life with a deadly hatred that we will be ready to give up the old nature to die the death that is its due.

Christ has one word more: "He that renounceth not all that he hath," whether in property or character, "cannot be My disciple." Christ claims all. Christ undertakes to satisfy every need and to give a hundredfold more than we give up. It is when by faith we become conscious what it means to know Christ, and to love Him and to receive from Him what can in very deed enrich and satisfy our immortal spirits, that we shall count the surrender of what at first appeared so difficult, our highest privilege.

As we learn what it means that Christ is our life, we shall count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord. In the path of following Him, and ever learning to know and to love Him better, we shall willingly sacrifice all, self with its life, to make room for Him who is more than all.