

benefited by it. In the same way the fact that we have died with Christ and have been raised with Him will do us no good whatsoever unless we through faith and obedience enter into the reality of it. It is not enough spiritually speaking to simply claim our “position in Christ.” That “position “ must become our experience. If we do not enter into this good land which God has given us and possess it then even though it is ours in theory, we will not obtain it. We must by faith in the resurrection power of Jesus Christ, yield ourselves daily unto His death so that He can raise us up in newness of life.

Yes this is truly good news! The fact that we are finished and that the old nature can be totally eliminated speaks of complete freedom. The cross of Jesus Christ and all that it entails is a liberating, exciting, eternal message. We small, insignificant human beings can be “filled with all the fullness of God (Eph 3:19).

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The cross of Jesus Christ the fact that He died upon it and rose again from the dead is the central theme of the whole New Testament. This singular deed forms the basis upon which the whole of Christianity rests. A proper understanding of the work of the cross is essential to our Christian faith. Why is this so important? Why aren't other, more “positive” things such as spiritual gifts or blessings and personal happiness the focal point of the New Testament? Why is it that this cross, this Roman instrument of torture and death, is elevated to such a prominent position in God's plan? Is this really “good news?”

In order to discover the answer to these questions, we must first look at the book of Genesis where we read about the fall of man. When Adam fell, his God-created, perfect human nature was corrupted. His rebellion against God Most High, affected him completely. Eating of the wrong tree did not simply cause him to begin to sin occasionally. Instead its effect reached to the very core of his being. The life-source within him was damaged and polluted. Adam's entire nature became sinful.

Men today sin, not because they slip up once in a while and do something wrong, but because it is their nature to do so. What comes out of them is simply an expression of what is within them. Although the full expression of this sinfulness is kept somewhat in check by governments, pressure from others and the human conscience, at various times in history this sin-principle has been unrestrained. Perhaps the story of Sodom and Gomorrha and the more recent example of the Nazi “holocaust” will adequately illustrate this point.

While men like to cover themselves up with a facade of “niceness” pretending that they are really quite good and only occasionally do evil, the truth is that the fall of man affected him totally. God’s judgment upon this corruption of man’s own nature was death. God never intended for His world to be filled with beings who at the very centre of their hearts were sinful. And so His pronounced sentence came upon them (Gen 2:17). Such creatures could not be allowed to live. They surely must die.

But as we all know, God did not leave mankind in this condition forever. His love for men, who were created in His own image and likeness, caused Him to set in motion a plan. In the course of time, He sent His only Son to die upon a cross, shedding His blood to cleanse us from our sins. Through the offering of His blood Jesus Christ removed our sins and restored our relationship with the Father. In God’s sight, the blood of Jesus was sufficient to make atonement for us. We have been brought back into communion with God.

However, God was not content for men just to continue on in sin requiring His constant forgiveness. His plan is not only to forgive us but also to change us so that we no longer practice sin. Since the original “Adam” life of man by its very nature produces sin, God had to find a remedy. So the work of Christ did not stop simply with the restoration of a relationship. He also brought us a new life. Jesus has brought God’s own life to man! He has placed at the centre of our being, within our human spirit, another life which is pure, holy and sinless. He has given us this new life to replace the old one. The old, sinful, corrupt life can now be replaced with a new, holy, sinless nature. Praise the Lord, Christians have been made “partakers of the divine nature” (I Pet 1:4)!

Unfortunately many people walk only so far with Jesus. Although they may continue to be “good church members” and lead outwardly moral lives, inwardly they are resisting the Holy Spirit. They have gotten to some point which they refuse to yield to God and there they stay. In reality such people have stopped following the Lord. These believers are in a very dangerous spiritual position. The hardening of a man’s heart toward God can be so slow it is almost imperceptible. But in the end the result is destruction. Nothing of the old life will be able to endure in the presence of God. Our old, Adamic nature cannot inherit eternity.

While some believe and teach that the part of our being which is not transformed in this life will be changed instantly when Jesus comes, this is not the case. Although our bodies will be changed “in the twinkling of an eye, (I Cor 15:52) the replacement of our soul-life with God’s is something which must take place today. “Now is the day of salvation (II Cor 6:2). When this life is over, anything within us which is still natural will be destroyed. Only that which has been yielded to God and changed can possibly remain. Jesus’ words are unmistakable: “Whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it” (Lk 9:24). Woe unto us if we neglect “so great a salvation” (Heb 2:3).

A COMMON MISUNDERSTANDING

Now I would like to take a little space here to address a common misunderstanding. Sometimes in the New Testament these truths concerning the cross are stated as if they had already happened. In one sense of course they have because when Christ died His work was completed. He said: “It is finished “ (Jn 19:30). However, this has occasionally caused confusion in believers’ minds. Many do not realize that this crucifixion must be made real to them. Some mistakenly think if they simply “believe” that they are already changed completely, they then are. Others imagine that since they have been forgiven, everything is now O.K., not realizing that this was just the beginning and that God still has important work to do in them.

The truth is that unless we enter into the experience of these things they will do us absolutely no good. Jesus Christ died for the sins of the whole world but only those who through faith enter into Him are

are insecure about being in new surroundings and so will never go anywhere else in the world with the glorious gospel.

However, if we are to be God's completely, not only must the mountains and hills be brought down under His control, but the valleys must be elevated. We must be willing to step out in faith in areas where we are fearful and insecure so that we can see the power of God working in our lives. Paul said that when he was weak, then he was strong (II Cor 12:10). It is often in our weakness that God will use us mightily to display His own strength.

How then can we recognize these mountains and valleys? How can we see our old "soul-life" for what it really is? The answer is that this can only happen through the illumination of the Holy Spirit. As we walk with Jesus Christ day by day He will shine His light into us. In this light we can see ourselves the way He sees us. Many times pressure will be brought to bear on our lives. Failures, difficult situations, any number of things might be used by God to point out to us where our lives are still natural and unholy. When gold or silver is being purified, intense heat is applied to drive the impurities to the surface where they can be seen and skimmed off. This is a good description of how God works in our lives. He often allows us to be tested, to be put under pressure so that what is deep within our hearts can be rooted out and exposed for what it is. Then we can willingly co-operate with the application of the death and resurrection of Jesus to our lives.

A ROCK OF OFFENSE

It must be fully understood from the onset that the cross of Jesus Christ often causes offense. It is a point of stumbling for many. To yield unto death areas of our lives which we love and appreciate may be difficult in the extreme. What we are by nature, which may on the surface seem so good, is in reality a hindrance to God's best. However, in the heat of our situations this truth may be difficult to see. While there may be obvious problems in all of our lives which we are only too happy to be rid of, it is not uncommon to find that God wishes to slay something which we count precious. We must be ready for this. Our faith must rest in God that He is able to raise up from the dead something much better than we have given to Him.

ONLY ONE PROBLEM

Man was made by God as a finite creature. His capacity for life is limited. Therefore as you can imagine, here believers encounter a real problem. We now have two "lives" within us. We have an old life which we inherited from Adam and also a new life from God. Naturally, we cannot be filled with both of these lives at the same time. In order for one to predominate, the other must go! How then are we to get rid of this old, sinful life? Thankfully, Jesus Christ has provided this way for us also. We read in the New Testament that when He died on the cross we died with Him. We "have been crucified with Christ" (Gal 2:20). In some spiritual way which is difficult to understand, when He died on the cross, we died with Him. Not only this, but when He resurrected gloriously from the grave, we were raised up with Him in "newness of life" (Rm 6:4).

In order for us to be filled with new life, the old life must die. The only way to get rid of it is for it to be killed. It won't just evaporate or disappear. There simply is no other solution. God's original judgment, His sentence upon Adam, must still be carried out. Jesus did not come so that the self-life could escape its doom. He came to provide a "new and living way" (Heb 10:20). Yes, there is a way out from the old life, but not apart from death. Our hope is in the resurrection from the grave. We believe that if we die with Him then we will also be raised up with Him from the dead. In Christ we do not avoid death completely, we pass through it. Although He has delivered us from ultimate death on the final day of judgment, there is a death through which we must pass today which is very real.

Every Christian should understand that all the old life which we inherited from Adam must be placed upon the cross. Every aspect of the old nature must be eliminated. God's purpose is not to spare the "good parts and only get rid of the bad. No, the "old man is to be crucified completely. In order for this to happen we must deny ourselves and pick up our cross (Lk 9:23). Our privilege is to "put to death the deeds of the body by His Spirit" (Rm 8:13). As we do this, God will begin raising up within us His new life. We will begin enjoying something wholly new and different from anything we ever knew before. When we yield ourselves to the cross we will begin experiencing the glorious resurrection of Jesus.

The complete work putting to death the old and raising up something new will not happen all at once. It is a continuing process. The cross is to be our daily portion. The Apostle Paul said: "I die daily " (I Cor 15:31). He stated that he was "always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also might be manifested "(II Cor 4:10). This crucifixion/resurrection experience should continue until the life-source within us is renewed completely and our nature is altered totally. Then we will truly be able to say with Paul: "It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me" (Gal 2:20).

This process is referred to in the Bible as "transformation" or "sanctification." It is the changing of one nature into another. Interestingly, the Greek word used in the New Testament which is translated "transformed in Romans 12:2 is METAMORPHOO. It is from this origin that we get our word "metamorphosis which describes the life alteration of a caterpillar as it changes into a butterfly. In the scriptures transformation speaks of our lives, which previously were selfish and corruptible, being made eternal and holy.

The work which Jesus Christ did on the cross was complete. It is utterly sufficient to change us into His image from one degree of glory to another (II Cor 3:18). No part of our life has been labeled "too difficult to change." God has opened the way for us to be made new completely. However this experience does require some of our own co-operation. God is not going to force us into anything. We must be willing to die to self to deny ourselves, to pick up our cross and to follow Him. No doubt "self " (the old nature) will resist this crucifixion. Many times everything within us will cry out that this is too much, this is too hard, this can't be God's way, this can't be "real Christianity." The love of of self is the enemy of the cross and therefore the enemy of Christ. To recognize it for what it is and to condemn it with the same judgment which God has passed upon it is the only way we will be able to walk in true newness of life and resurrection power.

MOUNTAINS AND VALLEYS

When John the Baptist came, he came preaching the message that we should prepare the way of the Lord and make His paths straight. He

proclaimed that every hill and mountain should be brought down and that the valleys would be filled up to make a highway for the King (Lk 3:4-6). This passage has a very real application to us in our own experience. The "self-life," the old Adamic nature, has its areas of strength its mountains, its hills strong points in which it is very easy for us to live. This might apply to our intellect, ambitions, desires, will power, natural abilities or any facet of our personality. It is the strength of these faculties that God wants to break so that they can be under His control. Very often there are capabilities within us which He cannot use advantageously because in them the self-life predominates. Also in us there are weaknesses, valleys of depression, insecurity, inability or fear. These are places God wants to fill. All aspects of our old nature, the strengths and the weaknesses, must be transformed.

Some believers have trouble recognizing the areas in their lives which are simply natural strengths supported with Bible verses. Therefore when you are around such a believer you do not primarily notice the flavour of Jesus Christ but rather have the impression of that person's natural personality. Perhaps someone is often witnessing to others but instead of relying on the power of God to convict of sin, uses the force of his own personality to persuade people that Christianity is correct. Many of these converts will not stand the test of time. Others use their anger or praise to manipulate people mistaking it for spiritual authority. Still others have a strong will and while they imagine that they are "standing up for God's way are in reality hindering Him. All these items and many others like them must be brought to the cross and denied so that God can be preeminent in everything.

It is also possible for Christians who have recognized their strengths and have learned to rely upon God in these areas, to not fully realize their weaknesses. They may be unwilling to press forward into regions of fear or insecurity. These things also may be hidden behind a cloak of spirituality. Perhaps they "don't think God is leading them in that way. Or they don't "feel like doing a particular thing." For example, some may be fearful of meeting other people and so do not like to go out witnessing. Or perhaps they do not enjoy sticky situations and so avoid getting involved in anything which might prove to be upsetting. Possibly some