

HOW THE CROSS CASTS OUT OUR HUMAN FEAR

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Creatures that God has made don't find it hard to be themselves. We marvel at the strength of the lion, the grace of the gazelle, the flight of the eagle, but do not praise them for their respective feats because they are just doing what they were made to do.

The eagle knows within himself no conflict between the desire to be an earthbound creature and the urge to be an eagle. He is satisfied to be what he was made to be. We humans likewise find it comparatively easy to do what we were gifted to do, and impossible to do what we feel we were not gifted to do.

One often wonders if it wasn't easy for Jesus to bear His cross. Wasn't He the Son of God? As such wasn't it natural and easy for Him to do His Father's will?

If so, His sacrifice has little meaning for us, because we most definitely do not find it easy to do what is right, and certainly not to bear a cross. As well might an eagle tell an earth-bound animal, "Follow me," as for Christ to tell *me* to take up my cross and follow him!

Any poor animal would be frustrated trying to soar over the clouds, whereas the eagle would find it the easiest thing he has ever done. Yes, Christ is the Son of God who "delights" to do His Father's will. We are often tempted to think it seems a piece of

effrontery for Him to tell us, "Take My yoke upon you. . . . For My yoke is easy and My burden is light" (Matthew 11:29, 30). We are as much different from Him, we suppose, as a horse is different from an eagle. What is easy to the eagle is impossible to a different creature.

This problem troubled me for years until I discovered a truth in the Gospels that seemed like the opening of another window into the depths of the heart of Christ.

DID CHRIST HAVE AN INWARD STRUGGLE?

If He found it easy to bear His cross and follow His Father's will, He must have had only one will, that is, the will of His Father, as an eagle has only one will, that is, the will to be what he was created to be. The eagle knows no conflict wishing to be something else than a flying bird.

A certain prophecy had led me to think Jesus had only one will. Speaking prophetically of Christ, the psalm records His own words: "Then I said, 'Behold, I come; in the scroll of the book it is written of me. I *delight* to do Your will, O my God, and Your law is within my heart'" (Psalm 40:7, 8). So important is this matter of Jesus' "will" that the writer of the book of Hebrews adds that it is "by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all" (Hebrews 10:10). The "will of Jesus" is page one news in Bible teaching.

Now it began to look to me as though Jesus was a kind of automaton, a human machine that "delighted" in doing what everybody else in the world, or at least I and most people I knew, found it

impossible to do. There was my “Eagle,” flying in the clouds and enjoying it, while I stumbled around below saying to myself, “He says, ‘Follow Me’; and I can’t!”

BUT I HAD NOT READ FAR ENOUGH.

When Jesus came, Scripture says that the Father sent Him “in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin *in* the flesh” (Romans 8:3). Evidently the “Eagle” became what I am, an earthbound creature, gave up His wings! If Christ came “in the likeness of sinful flesh,” that is, *my* flesh, He must have had as much of a conflict in that flesh as I do in mine; and it would have been no more easy for Him to do His Father’s will than it is for me. It was in *my* human flesh that He “condemned sin,” not in sinless flesh. It would be pretty silly for an eagle to condemn a cow for not being able to fly. The animal could well retort, “What do *you* know about my real condition?”

I found that Jesus acknowledged openly that He had as much of a conflict in His soul as I have in mine. True, He was infinitely different than I am because He never gave in to a selfish will whereas I have. But as Son of man, He faced the problem of two wills; and it was not without a terrible struggle that He surrendered His own will to follow His Father’s will.

Although the psalm said of Him, “I delight to do My Father’s will,” note what it cost Him: “My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even to death. . . . O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will” (Matthew 26:38, 39). Here was a frightful conflict.

Jesus had a will of His own that was naturally opposed to bearing the cross, just as I have a will of my own that is likewise opposed. He said openly, “*Not* as I will.” What He did is as clear as sunlight: He denied His own will. Further, it is plain that it was impossible for Him to follow His Father’s will unless He first denied His own will, because the two wills were in direct conflict. *They formed a cross.*

TALK ABOUT CONFLICT!

I began to feel ashamed of myself for ever imagining that Jesus had none.

But then, I thought, conflict means different things to different people. Some love it because they find it easy. This denying His own will that Jesus did—perhaps it was easy for Him. I found it hard to deny my own will, but perhaps I was mistakenly projecting onto Jesus my own experience.

Then I remembered what Luke says about Jesus’ struggle: “And being in *agony*, He prayed more earnestly. Then his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground” (Luke 22:44). I then felt even more ashamed of myself for imagining that the conflict was easy for Him!

NOT ONLY IN GETHSEMANE DO WE FIND RECORD OF HIS STRUGGLE.

It had continued all through His life. “I can of Myself do nothing. . . . I do not seek My own will *but* the will of the Father who sent Me” (John 5:30). “I have come down from heaven, *not* to do My own will, *but* the will of Him who sent Me” (John 6:38). In other words, He came down from heaven to fight our battle in our place, with our flesh and nature, to endure the conflict we must endure, and to

surrender His will where we have sinfully, selfishly, followed our will.

His “follow Me” therefore makes sense because He “condemned sin” (that is, self-will) in *our* flesh. Never did it get the upper hand for a moment; but the struggle was terrible, far more severe than our own. And in so doing He made a profound difference in human living on this planet.

I was completely wrong when I thought that Christ was a kind of automaton. He was a free man, left to choose for Himself which way He would choose to go. In fact, love cannot exist without freedom. A doll may have a tape recorder in it which says, “I love you,” but no one cares what it says.

But still another problem arose. Wasn't Christ a kind of spiritual “genius”? His love was wonderful—no question. And His voluntary surrender of Himself throughout life and at the cross is amazing. But still the question persisted, “Isn't it about as impossible for me to follow Christ's way as it is to follow the mathematical genius of an Einstein?” I never was very good at mathematics in school. If God told me that in order for me to get to heaven, I must also invent the mathematics for an atom bomb as Einstein did, I'd throw up my hands in despair, although I might wish very much I could do it.

I can marvel at what Einstein did, and I can also marvel at what Christ did. But there my following seems to end.

BUT I DISCOVERED ONE IMPORTANT DIFFERENCE.

Einstein's genius for math was not like Christ's genius for love. Einstein never offered to teach me

anything, never made any promise that if I could follow him, “Look to me, and you'll be inventing all kinds of nuclear marvels.” (This illustration of the atom bomb is something completely backward to what I want to say. If you can imagine something the exact opposite, something fully as powerful but fraught with corresponding good for the world, you'll have what I want. Think of a dynamic love that turns our modern world upside down and reverses all the human selfishness that plagues us—that's it.)

But Christ did promise me that I could receive in my heart the same love He had! He would teach me His “genius” for it so that I could become, not a little Einstein working scientific wizardry, but something infinitely more wonderful—a “representative” of Christ serving in His loving ministry to my fellowmen.

Not that Christ ever promised me that I could really *duplicate* Him, but the world would at least imagine I did. I could be close to Him in unselfish service. That is what they thought of the disciples at Antioch like when they called them (for the first time) “Christians” (which meant—like Christ, close to Him).

AND THEN I FOUND THE SCRIPTURE THAT BRIDGED THE LAST GAP.

Philippians 2:5-8 (RSV) spoke of the steps of sacrifice Christ took in leaving His exalted place in heaven, seven of them:

- (1) Counting His equality with God nothing to be “grasped.
- (2) “Emptying Himself.”

(3) Taking upon Him the “form of a servant” (slave, in the Greek).

(4) Stepping lower than angels (who are all servants) in that He was made “in the likeness of men.”

(5) Choosing to be born not as a king in a royal palace or as a child of wealth, but “being found in appearance as a man. . . . humbled Himself” (NKJV), and accepted the rude, toilsome life of a peasant, working with His hands for a living.

(6) Becoming at the end “obedient unto death.”

That last step made me pause. As I thought about it, I began to realize that no suicide is “obedient unto death.” What he/she wants is sleep and unconsciousness, not the terror of the second death. *But Christ was obedient unto the curse of being hanged on the tree.* Galatians 3:13. It was “tasting” eternal condemnation, drinking, in an infinite sense, the poison of that soul-destroying “curse,” salivating it, absorbing it, for “everyone.” Infinite bitterness! As our God-man, He could endure human pain and agony to an infinite degree, a degree that no human has ever been able to “taste?”

But then what bridged the gap for me was the command which preceded this recital of Christ’s sacrifice: “*Let* this [same] mind be in you” (Philippians 2:5). We can never repeat His sacrifice, but we can learn to appreciate it.

In other words, if I would just *let* the Holy Spirit write that mind of Christ in me, His will would become my will just as His Father’s will became His will for Him. Thereafter, to put it in simple words,

what Jesus was to His neighbors I would be to mind. And moreover, I would “delight” in it. No more moaning about what great sacrifices I was making.

But there was that last step:

(7) As we have seen, that “death of the cross” involved for Jesus the surrender of His eternal security.

It is encouraging that such self-emptying love *is* a possibility for sinful man through Christ. Christ *can* dwell in human hearts by faith, and we *can* learn to serve Him from love and not from selfish motives. But has anyone ever done so?

THERE WERE TWO PEOPLE WHO KNEW SOMETHING OF THAT LOVE.

* One was Moses. Israel had “committed a great sin” in that they had made and worshipped a golden calf. The Lord proposed to Moses that he step aside. “Let Me alone,” He said, “that I may destroy them and blot out their name from under heaven; and I will make of you a nation mightier and greater than they” (Deuteronomy 9:14). To take the place of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as the progenitor of the “chosen people”! What a great honor! This proposal would guarantee Moses’ salvation and his everlasting honor.

Naturally it was a severe temptation to him. So far as Israel was concerned, he could reason that he had no obligation toward them, for they had sinned and deserved to perish. But Moses did something totally contrary to our natural human nature.

He proposed that someone else’s name be blotted out from under heaven—his own, if Israel could not be forgiven: “If You will forgive their sin—but if not, I

pray, blot me out of Your book which You have written” (Exodus 32:32). Moses’ love was stronger than his desire for personal security in heaven, or for eternal life and honor. Can you imagine?

- Another man who knew that same self-emptying love was Paul: “I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen [relatives] according to the flesh, who are Israelites” (Romans 9:3, 4).

So long as our predominant motive for following Christ is our own desire for personal security, we will fail of receiving the “mind of Christ” and thus come short of bearing the cross. Christ was no “opportunist;” neither was Moses or Paul. Neither are His people who “follow the Lamb wherever He goes.”

THE “OLD MAN” HAS ONE LAST STAND HE TAKES.

The last bastion he hold is covetousness of reward and its natural bulwark—fear of personal loss. It is of course severely anti-cross.

There was present in the first sin of man a desire for equality with God, to be as God, to possess natural immortality. Our first parents knew no fear until they cherished that desire. That same fear will underlie the last sin of man; and the cross is the only way to exchange it for love. But what we call love is not love if fear is its foundation. Self-interest is not the basis of genuine love, which is *agape*. The search for one’s own security is the reverse of genuine love. This is evident from what John says, “There is no fear in love [*agape*]; but perfect love [*agape*] casts out fear, because fear involves

torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love” (1 John 4:18).

John is discussing our basic problem of anxiety. We are all born with it. Its “torment” is expressed in many ways, including diseases of the body that have their source in this underlying bedrock of anxiety.

Holistic medicine recognizes that migraine headaches, colitis, ulcers, asthma, and many other diseases can have their source here.

When Christ, “the Sun of Righteousness,” arises in the heart, there is “healing in His wings” (Malachi 4:2). The healing comes with the casting out of fear and anxiety.

BUT HOW IS FEAR “CAST OUT”?

Through the crucifixion of the “old man” the self who is “crucified with Christ.” Anxiety is the fear in which the self is nourished. Although fear is something open that we can see, like a railroad train bearing down upon us, anxiety is a fear that is beneath the surface, a dread we cannot tangibly recognize and identify in the open, because the real identity of the “old man” is never full and complete.

How does love cast out fear?

SEEING THE LOVE OF CHRIST REVEALED AT THE CROSS DOES IT.

We have seen that the bridge that spans the last chasm between us and full fellowship with Christ is the surrender of the will in precisely the same way that Christ, in our flesh, surrendered His will. “By that will [God’s] we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.”

Therefore we have “boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh” (Hebrews 10:10, 19, 20). As He surrendered His will to the Father, He fulfilled that love. As we surrender our will to Him, that same love is forthwith fulfilled in us. The way to boldness is through His flesh. Anxiety is basically what the Bible calls the “fear of death.” What we have called “death” the Bible calls “sleep.” Few fear that. Our “fear of death” is that of the *second* death, a fear of the nakedness, aloneness, forsakenness, the horror of great darkness, that comes when one is forever separated from the life and light of God and His great universe of joy. This buried anxiety touches every aspect of our waking life and even intrudes upon us in our dreams. We have seen that only as we sense the dimensions of Christ’s sacrifice on the cross can we possibly come to grips with that problem of naked anxiety.

YOU ARE CAPABLE OF RESPONDING TO CHRIST’S LOVE.

If someone gave you a precious gift, your most natural response would be to say a fervent thank you. And, further, according to the value of the gift, your most natural response would be a desire to demonstrate your gratitude to the friend for what he did. This capacity for glad, thankful response is built into your human nature, a part of the package that is you. It is almost instinctive. Dozens of times a day we will catch ourselves saying thank you for kindnesses done, and as often will we find ourselves watching for opportunities to respond.

This simple, unaffected, uncomplicated response of our humanity is all that God has ever asked from anyone. Christ gave Himself for us on the cross. If we don’t see it, or can’t sense how there was any real gift or sacrifice involved, there will naturally be no response of loving sacrifice on our part, only the self-centered desire for our own personal security which leaves fear still intact. Such a halfhearted, lukewarm response is inevitable from anyone’s heart when Satan succeeds in obscuring the reality of what Christ gave for us. But when we see what happened at Calvary, something does begin to move us. “Through death [the second death]” Christ destroyed “him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and” thus released “those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage” (Hebrews 2:14, 15). Truly,

None of the ransomed ever knew
How deep were the waters crossed,
Nor how dark was the night that the Lord passed
through Ere He found His sheep that was lost.

BUT WE DO KNOW A LITTLE SOMETHING ABOUT IT!

Our search is begun. As Satan seeks more and more to ensnare us in the allurements of self-seeking, sensual or material, we shall find something wonderful happening. As “sin abounds;” the stronger grace of Christ will “much more abound.” As we remember the cross, Satan will be defeated continually. Many people all around the world will respond exactly as Paul did:

“We are *ruled by* the love of Christ, now that we recognize that one Man died for everyone, which

means that they all share in His death. He died for all, so that those who live should no longer live for them selves, but only for Him who died and was raised to life for their sake”)2 Corinthians 5:14, 15, TEV).

It simply becomes almost impossible for anyone who sees it to live any longer unto himself? Talk about power. This must be what Paul meant when he said, “The message of the cross . . . is the power of God” (1 Corinthians 1:18).

Power for what? To change that most changeless thing—a self-centered human mind. The old patterns of thought are changed, and love *rules*.

I hope no one will misunderstand me as I say this, it actually becomes easy to follow Christ! Jesus promised that it would be when He said, “My yoke is easy and My burden is light”)Matthew 11:30). The cross supplies the missing element.

Now we can see what Paul meant when he said, “God forbid that I should glory, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.” And now that we, too, have had a glimpse of what he saw in his day, our hearts cry out with all our being, “Yes, Paul, we’re with you! We kneel, too, at the feet of the Crucified One and confess Him Lord of our lives, King of our love, eternal Sovereign of our hearts.”

Where’er I go, I’ll tell the story
Of the cross;
In nothing else my soul shall glory,
Save the cross.
And this my constant theme shall be,
Through time and in eternity,
That Jesus tasted death for me

On the cross.

Anon.