

CRUCIFIED WITH CHRIST?¹

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A dear Christian woman was stricken with blindness. While she lay on her bed trying to sense the meaning of her tragic plight, her well-intentioned pastor called to comfort her.

“Dear one, God has laid His cross upon you!” he said.

How would you feel if someone told you that a misfortune that came to you uninvited was your cross? Would you be tempted to feel resentful toward God for thus interfering with your plans for your life?

No one in his right mind would voluntarily choose the sorrows and heartaches common to humanity which we have so often thought to be our cross. The cross which the Savior bids us bear must be taken up as a freewill choice, just as much so as He took up His cross willingly. No one would choose to become blind, lame, a paraplegic, or even poverty-stricken. While it is good for us to bear these burdens cheerfully, such patient endurance comes short of fulfilling the principle of the cross *as Jesus taught it*.

More than any other of the apostles of Christ, Paul recognized the tremendous impact the cross has on human nature. Not only had he been well educated in Jewish thought; he had mastered also the ideas of Greek philosophy. The startling idea of the cross

struck Jews and Greeks differently. To the Jews it was a “stumbling block;” to the Greeks it was “foolishness” (1 Cor. 1:23).

CHRIST’S CROSS IS NO MORE WELCOME TODAY THAN ANCIENTLY

It is not surprising that the Greeks saw the cross as “foolishness;” unenlightened as they were with that wisdom that the Jews ought to have given them. The Greeks had a word for “self”—*ego*. But what to *do* with *egoism*, they hadn’t the slightest idea. When Paul came along and said that self must be “crucified,” they thought his idea was “nonsense” (TEV).

On the other hand, the idea of a cross was repugnant to the Jews because they were blindly (though inexcusably) ignorant of a psychology of human nature. Had they seen the meaning of their own sanctuary service, they would have recognized the atonement of Christ the perfect answer to the need of all human nature the world around. But they were pathetically ignorant of the meaning of their own revelation.

Being familiar with Greek philosophy, Paul sensed how “the sons of this world are more shrewd in their generation than the sons of light” (Luke 16:8) in that they at least were aware that human nature needed something which none of the religions of their ancient world supplied. “The Greeks seek after wisdom,” Paul said (1 Cor. 1:22); but he recognized that in the principle of the cross lay the wisdom they were vainly seeking and which the unconscious repression of human nature had obscured.

PAUL’S UNDERSTANDING OF THE CROSS EXPLAINS LIFE’S GREATEST PROBLEM

¹ Luke 9:23. Romans 6:3-7. “Praise the Lord,” “At the Cross”

Nothing in the New Testament claims to be a full, systematic outline of the teaching on the cross as Paul presented it to his audiences in Asia Minor. All we have is a collection of occasional letters, none of which Paul intended as a transcript of his ideas which turned the ancient world “upside down” (Acts 17:6). Therefore we find in these letters evidence of Paul’s dynamic concepts that split history in two.

Much comes to light that shows Paul’s vivid idea of the cross as the only way to change selfish human behavior. The clearest explanation is found in his letters to the Roman and Galatians churches:

“Surely you know that when we were baptized into union with Christ Jesus, we were baptized into union with His death. By our baptism, then, we were buried with Him and shared His death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from death by the glorious power of the Father, so also we might live a new life. . . . Our old being has been put to death with Christ on His cross, in order that the power of the sinful self might be destroyed, so that we should no longer be the slaves of sin. *For when a person dies, he is set free from the power of sin*” (Rom. 6:3-7, TEV).

“I have been put to death with Christ on His cross, so that it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me” (Gal. 2:19, 20, TEV).

The King James Version describes “our old being” as “our old man.” He is a strange figure. Who is he?

Is he Satan? Hardly, because Satan will never consent to be crucified with Christ, nor can God force him to be.

Is the “old man” our “sinful nature”? Paul had another term that he used when he spoke of our “sinful nature.” He called it “sinful flesh” (Rom. 8:3). (Obviously, there is nothing sinful about one’s flesh in the sense of physical body! “Sinful flesh” is “carnal mind” or “sinful nature” (Rom. 8:7).

Paul’s original idea of our “old man” is more than what our “sinful nature” means. What he is talking about is not merely what *appears* to be bad. It may be what we would like to think is a good nature, unenlightened as we are concerning our true spiritual condition. Unless we are very careful we may say, “this must be crucified, but that need not be crucified,” when in reality both aspects of our nature alike stem from a love of self. After we are proudly certain that the “sinful nature” has been thoroughly crucified today, tomorrow the “old man” may still be peeking at us from behind the curtains of our self-centered façade.

GETTING DOWN TO THE ROOT OF OUR HUMAN PROBLEM

For example, our “sinful nature” is thought to be revealed in sinful acts, so that the crucifixion of the “old man” is supposed to consist only of mortifying those *acts* of sin. But Jesus taught that it is the lustful thought, not merely the act, which is the sin of adultery; and cherished hatred even before the act of killing is murder. The sinful nature stems from the existence of the self, or ego. It shows itself in a love for sin. David recognized this truth when he said, “I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me” (Ps. 51:5). Every cell of our soul is egocentric in its being.

Sin is therefore not only what we *do*, but what we *are*. Sin is rightly understood to be “transgression of the law” (1 John 3:4). The word “transgression” is *anomia*, which means hatred of the law, thus a hatred of God. But it must be remembered that transgression is much deeper than outward acts. The first sin was the cherishing of the “*I*” in the heart of Lucifer. The last sin of mankind that must be overcome is the same.

In our search to understand who the “old man” is, we are perplexed by another term: what is the “body of sin” which is destroyed when the “old man” is crucified? Is the “body of sin” the same as the “sinful body”?

We know that the physical cravings of our body are sometimes connected with acts of sin. Does that mean that the bodily cravings or instincts are themselves sin? In order to destroy the “body of sin,” must we continually repress our physical cravings?

The “body of sin” is not the physical body, but it is the root or source of sin. The “old man” is so important that once he is crucified, the “body of sin,” or source and taproot of it, is “destroyed.”

WHO IS THE “OLD MAN”

WHO IS CRUCIFIED WITH CHRIST?

Paul himself answers our question as simply as we can answer what x is in the equation $x + 2 = 4$. We simply answer: $4 - 2 = 2$; therefore, $x = 2$. In Romans he says the “old man” is crucified with Christ; in Galatians he says that what is crucified with Christ is *I*. Therefore, the “old man” is simply

“*I*”, or *self*. In Today’s English Version it is translated “the sinful self.”

To Paul the truth was as simple and obvious as sunlight: the love of self is the source of all sin; and self cannot be dealt with merely by punishment, beatings, or even denial. It cannot even be ignored. *It must be crucified.*

Forthwith, says Paul, the sin problem is solved, because in dealing with the source, or “body of sin,” we have dealt with its taproot. Pull out the root of a tree, and the tree is dead. “He who has died has been freed from sin” (Romans 6:7).² Understood and accepted, the principle of the cross would go far to solve the psychiatric problems in our modern world as well as in the Greek world of Paul.

BUT HOW IS SELF TO BE CRUCIFIED?

Such an idea would have been worse than foolishness and utter vanity, were we not given an object lesson showing *how* it can be. The cross of Christ is our demonstration. Self can never be

² “The body of sin was the first husband. We became disgusted with that union, and desired to become united to Christ, but could not as long as the first husband was living; and in order for that husband to die, we ourselves have to die. For the moment, both are dead; then we are raised to be henceforth joined to Christ in a new life, because the first husband, the old man, the body of sin, remains dead. So long as that body of sin remains dead, we, although alive in Christ, are dead in the eyes of the law. But if at anytime the old man should come to life by our calling back going back to our old sins, that moment the law would condemn us as adulterers.” E. J. Waggoner, “Brief Comments on Romans 7,” *Signs of the Times* (June 17, 1886) p. 360.

crucified by ourselves alone; it must be crucified *with* Christ.

In fact, for self to be crucified *with* Christ is as natural for the heart that believes as it is to say “thank you” to someone who does a gracious deed for us. The way of the cross is not difficult so long as we behold the Lamb of God on His cross. *Seeing* Christ crucified, comprehending what it means, leads to self being crucified with Him. “I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself” (John 12:32).

Satan’s favorite scheme therefore is to envelop the cross of Christ in a hazy mist of confusion so that we cannot understand what happened there. He will then be free to taunt us with the supposed impossibility of our bearing our cross: “What foolishness the idea of the cross is in our modern, competitive world! How dare you crucify self? There’s nothing you can do but surrender to the popular and universal idea of self-love! Pamper yourself! Get ahead! Walk over others!” So the enemy would bombard us everyday.

If the cross of Christ is hidden, Satan is right; without the clear vision of Christ crucified, there is nothing any of us can do but do but live unto self.

But let Christ’s cross emerge out of the mists, and it becomes the “power of God” (1 Cor. 1:18) to all who appreciate its worth.

THE CLARITY OF THE TRUTH

No involved, difficulties, or obscure process of doing battle with sin is the method of God. His plan is simplicity itself. In fact, sin itself is as simple a thing as God’s remedy for overcoming it—indulged

love of self. Kneeling before the throne of God as the “anointed cherub who covers” (Eze. 28:14), Lucifer did not appreciate or love the principles of God’s self-denying character. His heart was lifted up with his own beauty, and his wisdom was corrupted by reason of his brightness (Eze. 28:17). This lack of appreciation for the character of God is what the Bible calls “unbelief.” It is the precondition of sin. From that root in the heart of Lucifer came all the pride and passion of sin as we know it.

The “old man” simply being the cherished “I,” or self, it dies with Christ when the love revealed at the cross is seen for what it is. Christ has come in our flesh, your flesh, my flesh, the “I” [love of self]; He meets our problem of life precisely as we find it. Directly from our given situation wherein we find ourselves, His honesty, His purity, His selflessness, His love, His self-surrender, led Him to His cross. He takes the raw materials of our present life and adds the ingredient of love (*agape*). The result: His cross.

Christ crucified is simply *you* crucified if you have that kind of love. If you had love, you could no more evade the cross than could He have evaded it. When you see that He has come in your flesh, that is, has taken your place in your particular situation at this moment, you can see how love is set straight on the collision course of the cross.

As readily as you say “thank you” for a kindness done you, your heart responds with a deep sense of contrition. All your petty self-love stands revealed in its ugliness. As in ultraviolet light, all the motives of your heart suddenly appear different from what you

ever saw them before. What you have seen in that light is the real you, the you that is without love. A light shines from the cross that illuminates your soul in the floodlights of heaven, and you see yourself as the beings of the unfallen universe look upon you.

And now it seems that every character-sinew and cell of your being stands out saturated with that sin of self-love. You feel as if you want to hide your face. But as this strange light of love bathes your soul, every little root of pride and self-esteem shrivels up. The sense of guilt that rises in the heart would kill you outright were it not that Christ already bears that guilt on His cross. You are never crucified alone, but you are crucified with Him. You live, but nevertheless the “old man” dies. Your love of self, your pride, your smug satisfaction with yourself, are shattered—well, there is no better word for it than “crucified.”

AND THE TASK OF CONQUERING SIN IS DONE

No offerings of penance, no expensive pilgrimages to Rome or here or there, no beating yourself or starving yourself, no wearing haircloth, no grim gritting your teeth to shake off evil habit after evil habit while you tick off a check-list of assumed “progress.” “He that has died has been freed from sin” (Rom. 6:7). The atonement of Christ does it; and nothing else in the wide universe can do it.

The best that any other so-called cure for the problem of egoism can accomplish is to suppress the symptoms in one place while they break out afresh in another place, to our embarrassment. So long as the root (the “body of sin”) is there intact, we can lop off all the branches we like, but the love

of self will go on bearing its fruit of passion, anxiety, worry, envy, lust, and even subtler pride.

But now Christ has drawn you by being uplifted before you. You sense the power in that drawing. Consider it well, for it is the power of love. It is stronger than the mightiest brute forces of nature. It is the principle of God’s free universe. Look for yourself, realize for yourself. You don’t need to take anyone else’s word for anything!

(1) Christ bore His cross all His earthly life, on which, as a principle, He constantly denied and “crucified” self. He took on His sinless nature (which He brought with Him from heaven) our fallen, sinful nature (which was in the humanity which He assumed), that He might know first-hand all the temptations which we have to endure, “yet without sin.”

(2) Thus Christ endured temptation not only from without, but from within. He says, “I seek not Mine own will, but the will of the Father which has sent Me” and “I came down from heaven, not to do Mine own will, but the will of Him that sent Me,” and He had to pray, “Nevertheless, not as I will, but as Thou wilt” (Jn. 5:30; 6:38; Mt. 26:39).

(3) It’s useless talking about following Christ unless we too, in principle, take up that same cross on which self is “crucified with Him” (Luke 9:23; Rom. 6:6).

(4) For self to be “crucified with Christ” appears terribly difficult for us, unless we understand how His “yoke is easy, and [His] burden is light,” as He says (Matt. 11:30). The answer: we identify with Christ; He is our new “Adam,” the new Head of our

human race; not by works of obedience but by faith we “comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height, and to know the *agape* of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that [we] might be filled with all the fullness of God,” that is, prepare for translation at His second coming (Eph. 3:18, 19).

(5) Faith therefore is re-defined as “heart-work,” to borrow someone else’s definition, a heart appreciation of what it cost the Son of God to save us. The true definition of “faith” therefore is what Mary Magdalene experienced when the Lord cast seven devils out of her and she washed His feet with tears. He said to her: “Go in peace,” “thy faith hath saved thee” (Luke 7:50). In other words, “with the heart man believeth unto righteousness,” not with the cold, calculating head only that figures that $2 + 2 = 4$ (Rom. 10:10). “We love, because He first loved us” (1 John 4:19).

When you sit with legs crossed, your leg “goes to sleep,” you lose consciousness in it, it feels as though it is not there; then when it begins to “awake” it tingles with painful feelings. When you’re being converted, you’re being “born again” and it tingles with painful feelings; it’s always painful to be “born,” much nicer to stay snug and cozy in mother’s womb.

But your Creator and Savior says No, come out into the world and face Reality; be what you are; share life with its Author. The New Covenant gospel assures you that even though you have left the “womb,” you are still as secure in the battlefields of life as if you were still in the womb. The Lord

assures you, “I will never leave you nor forsake you.’ So we may boldly say, ‘The Lord is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?’” (Heb. 13:5, 6). So, now instead of cozying up in the “womb” you are living by faith. Exciting, but it’s living with Christ.

To refuse to be “born” is therefore the sin of unbelief.

God is not saying that you must *do* this or *do* that in order to be saved eternally; but He has to tell us, You *must* believe. Learn to believe? It will stretch every “muscle” of your soul, but it’s the beginning of eternal life.

Was it for crimes that I have done
He groaned upon the tree?
Amazing pity! grace unknown!
And love beyond degree!

Well might the sun in darkness hide,
And shut his glories in,
When Christ, the mighty Maker, died
For man, the creature’s, sin.

Thus might I hide my blushing face,
While His dear cross appears,
Dissolve my heart in thankfulness,
And melt mine eyes to tears.

But drops of grief can ne’er repay
The debt of love I owe;
Here, Lord, I give myself away;
‘Tis all that I can do.