

IDENTIFICATION WITH CHRIST

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Do you ever fall on your knees and cry out to the Lord, “Thank You for saving me from disaster that I deserved!”?

There are many who would give anything if they could erase from memory and from their life record some act of willful foolishness or indiscretion. Often it's an embarrassing act, an alluring temptation yielded to, at an unguarded moment, or some really stupid *faux pas* that is a blot on an otherwise unstained reputation. Then almost immediately afterward comes that horrid sense of guilt and shame. It can be lethal.

Some were discussing whether Christ died because our sins were laid upon Him, or because they were borne within Him. Did He feel the guilt as though it were His own? Was His identification with sinful us, a total one?

Paul presents the complete reality of Christ's identification with us. For example, “He was made to be sin for us, who knew no sin” (2 Cor. 5:21). Ellen White says, “He took upon His sinless nature our sinful nature,” the intent being that, He had the innocence of a clear conscience in His sinless nature; but nonetheless, in taking upon Himself the burden of our guilt. “He was made to be sin for us.” We cannot discount the reality of His terrible identification with sinners, yet being sinless. This burden of guilt killed Him on the cross. Yet He was guiltless.

Were Christ's temptations simply from without? Was it just that Christ was surrounded by corrupt environment that continually brought temptation. But does not the Bible clearly reveal that Christ was tempted from within? This is really the fundamental issue! Adam was tempted only from *without*; but it was not thus that Christ was tempted! Romans 8:3 says that He “condemned sin in the flesh,” not without the flesh only.

The reality of our Lord's identification with us is clearly revealed. “For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me” (John 6:38). We read that He had two wills, and they were antithetical. He had constantly to surrender His own will in order to follow His Father's will. Thus we see the reality of His temptations from within. Yet He did what no other human has ever done—He perfectly crucified self.

We read Isaiah 53:6, “The Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all”; that's evidence for the “upon” idea. But we also read 2 Corinthians 5:21, “For He made Him [Christ] to BE sin for us, who knew no sin.” That's evidence for the “within” idea. It wasn't antiseptic poison from the rusty spikes driven through His wrists and ankles that killed Him; it was raw guilt—ours. The burden overwhelmed Him, as though He were indeed the guilty One. This profound truth illuminates the book of Psalms; Christ is all through it, especially the ones that David wrote. Christ's name is “God with us.”

If you carry a burden of joy-crushing guilt, remember Psalm 130: “If You, Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? But there is

forgiveness with You, that you may be feared” (vs. 3). You’d think the Psalmist would say, “There is guilt . . . that You may be feared.” No, it’s forgiveness; the overwhelming sense of abounding grace, His bearing your guilt and freeing you from it. All your lifetime thereafter you “walk softly” like Ahab did when he repented of his monstrous crimes (1 Kings 21:27, 28).

And if the dear Lord has saved you from yourself, you still “walk softly” for you know you have not an iota of righteousness of your own (see Isa. 54:17). You realize the evil you would have done had there been no Savior there to hold you by your hand (cf. Matt. 8:25; 14:30; incidentally, that healthy, self-humbling realization is akin to “corporate repentance”).

When you are perplexed and tempted to discouragement, think about what the Son of God accomplished for you by His great sacrifice. Then remember that He wants you to “comprehend” it—to let your mind grasp the reality of what He accomplished. Paul got on his knees and prayed for us that “the whole family in heaven and earth” might be united, “rooted and grounded in love [*agape*], . . . able to comprehend with all saints” those grand dimensions of His personal love “which passeth knowledge” (Eph. 3:18, 19).

What does it mean? We don’t want to remain like little children in immature thinking, slow comprehension, for that disappoints our Lord. Children are wonderful little creatures, but no parent in his right mind wants his child to remain a child forever.

Christ is disappointed when we do not “grow up unto the measure of the stature of [His] fullness”; and His disappointment becomes serious. Yes, He loves us, but if, generation after generation we remain content to be childish and immature, His disappointment becomes intense. Even if the church becomes so numerous that there are billions of childish, weak members who do not grow up to appreciate what His sacrifice means, His disappointment is not lessened.

What it means is that Christ is lonely, even when surrounded by untold myriads of loyal angels in heaven. They are His faithful servants, waiting to do everything He asks them to do. But don’t forget that the Son of God became the Son of man; He emptied Himself of the glories of His divinity to become one of us, to share our humanity, to become one of us, our Elder Brother, forever.

It was “we,” the human race, who rejected and crucified Him, and then we exiled Him to leave earth and return where He came from—heaven. But He is lonely there; He wants to be with those who are the purchase of His sacrifice.

No, those of His believers who have died during these 6000 years are not alive with Him in heaven—they are “asleep in Jesus.” He longs to awaken them in the first resurrection of the sleeping saints and to come to earth the second time to welcome the “alive” members of His church.

It’s time for us to begin to think about what He wants, to understand the longings of His heart, to give Him His reward!

* Does it make any difference in your personal life today what you believe about the sacrifice of Christ on His cross? If we “examine ourselves whether we be in the faith” as Paul says we should (2 Cor. 13:5), we will find it is very important what we believe.

What we believe about Jesus and what He accomplished, will seriously impact our character and our daily level of happiness. So important was the cross of Jesus to Paul’s personal living that he said, “God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified to me, and I unto the world.”

After near-failure in his ministry in Athens, he told the Corinthians, “When I came to you, . . . I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.” He told the Galatians that he had so closely empathized with Jesus on His cross that “I am crucified with Christ” (Gal. 6:14; 1 Cor. 2:1-3; Gal. 2:20).

The secret of Paul’s constant joy in the Lord even in the midst of intense suffering was his identification with Christ in His sacrifice. He learned to appreciate the “breadth, and length, and depth, and height” of the love revealed at that cross (Eph. 3:18). He chose to believe that Christ “loved me, and gave Himself for me.” He contemplated where he would be if Christ had not “given Himself,” and concluded correctly that he would be “dead” (Gal. 2:20 again, and 2 Cor. 5:14). And death would be not merely blissful sleep but the horrors of judgment and hell itself (vss. 10, 11).

The result was like day following night. Paul saw himself as literally and truly redeemed from hell. He “looked unto the rock whence [he was] hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence [he was] digged” (Isa. 51:1), and concluded reasonably and logically that he “thus judged” that his entire life was not his, but Christ’s.

It became a daily joy for Paul to “die daily” to self because he sensed vividly how Christ had died to self for him. It was a simple $2 + 2 = 4$ for Paul: Christ died for me; I must live for Him! (see 1 Cor. 15:31; 2 Cor. 5:14, 15).

* That last meal that Jesus ate with His disciples (“the Lord’s Supper,” to many) illustrates the idea of “substitution” that the New Testament teaches (yes, and the Old Testament, too), a shared experience with Him.

Jesus did not say to his disciples, I am eating this Bread instead of you, nor did He say, I am drinking from this cup instead of you. He ate with them, He drank with them; they ate and drank with Him. Using the clearest illustration possible of intimate oneness He represented His believers as “drinking My blood, eating My body.”

“Abide in Me, and I in you,” He pleads. You are branches and I am the Vine (Jn. 15:4, 5). “Ye shall know that I am in My Father, and ye in Me, and I in you.” In sending the Holy Spirit to dwell with those who believe in Him, Jesus represents Himself as not leaving them orphans, “I will come to you” (14:20, 18). Open your heart, receive His Spirit; you receive Him.

“Take, eat,” He says in that last supper; “this is My body which is broken for you.” And then in the same way, “He took the cup, when He had supped,” and said, “Drink ye all, of it, for this is the blood of the New Covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins” (Mt. 26:26-28, 1 Cor. 11:23-26). The idea again is intimate one-ness.

Jesus does not want us to think of Him as separate from us, doing everything “instead of us,” while we look on in childish wonder, uncomprehending. He did indeed die instead of us, He died our second death so we don’t have to die our own second death—that is all true; but it is only part of the truth He obviously wants us to understand and experience. He wants intimate oneness with us where we enter into His feelings and His experience as a branch enters into the life processes of the Vine.

* One of the most common-sense suggestions in the Bible is in 1 Corinthians 11. Paul has been discussing the Lord’s Supper (vss. 23ff); the bread is a symbol of the body of the Lord Jesus “which is broken for [us].” We are to observe this ordinance “in remembrance of [Him].” But then he warns us against eating “this bread or. . . . [drinking] this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner,” for such careless, thoughtless irreverence makes us “guilty of the body and blood of the Lord,” in other words, guilty of crucifying “again” for ourselves “the Son of God, and put[ting] Him to an open shame” (Heb. 6:6).

Then the apostle says “let someone examine himself,” for “he who eats and drinks in an unworthy

manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord’s body.” This guilt can even cause sickness, and “many sleep” (die prematurely). The reason is that the Lord’s Supper teaches us that “every meal becomes a sacrament.” If we eat our daily food without discerning and recognizing that all we have comes because of the sacrifice of the Son of God we “eat and drink judgment to ourselves.” Then comes the eminent common sense: “If we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged” (vs. 31). Why wait until the final judgment to face judgment? Wouldn’t it make sense to do a self-judging process first, and get it over with before the final condemnation?

The Holy Spirit’s job is to “convict of sin” (John 16:8), and enable us to do the self-judging now. It’s all in a friendly basis, though it feels severe. The primary sin at the bottom of everything is, we do “not believe in” Him (vs. 9). If we do believe, not only will those “rivers of living water” flow out of our inmost soul, but we will see righteousness in Jesus going to His Father, and we will know that “the ruler of this world” has been cast out of our lives (16:8-11). We will “trample” upon that enemy! (cf. Luke 10:19).

* Solomon, the wisest man who ever lived, has priceless counsel for us: “Remember your Creator in the days of your youth, before the bad times come and the years draw near when you will say, ‘I have no pleasure in them . . .’” (Eccl. 12:1, REB).

What he means is, “Before you say, ‘There’s no fun in life any more . . .’” Actually, you make your fun in life, as you go along. And the number of your

years does not set a limit on the fun you get out of your life.

What is it that makes the “fun in life?” It’s first-hand, friendly fellowship with the Lord Jesus, your Creator and Redeemer.

It may sound strange to say it, but there is no joy in life to match the joy of first-hand communion with your Maker—when you know He is your Friend and Savior.

You have no friend like Him; imagine all the pain of guilt taken away in something called the “atonement.” Your Creator and Savior has humbled Himself to be on the level with you. Imagine it—He longs for fellowship with you! Because of Jesus’ sacrifice the heavenly Family now includes you!

But one thought now engrosses you: the joy of personal fellowship with your Maker and your Savior. To realize the truth moves your heart beyond any imaginable wonder—Jesus died your second death.

That’s infinitely beyond going to sleep for a weekend—our concept of His death on the cross. He could not look down the sweep of centuries yet to come. Jesus surrendered His soul to die for us a death that in itself would be endless; to say “good bye” forever to His Father and all the holy angels; to enter into that dark prison that we call death with no resurrection in sight!

He could not see through the portals of the tomb to see His resurrection coming up; the memory of a resurrection was swept away from Jesus as He hung on His cross. All He could see was darkness ahead. Forever.

That’s the kind of Friend He is: He thought He was entering the dark tomb forever. That was the dimension of His sacrificial love for us.

And then coming down to the last days of history just before Christ’s return, Revelation introduces us to a oneness with Him even more intimate, even closer to our human understanding. We see how He wants us to sense an even deeper identification with Himself—a Bride’s nearness to her Husband. Here is a shared experience with Him, one in which human pride can have no place.

When “I am crucified with Christ” all my “glory” is laid in the dust forever.