

CHAPTER 9

DEAD TO SIN, LIVING THE CROSS

RECKONING OURSELVES DEAD TO SIN AND LIVING OUT THE PARADIGM OF THE CROSS

I am certain that many of you know much about “dying to sin” and being risen with Christ and have experienced victory through the Cross. Nevertheless, I am sure that there are depths and applications of this teaching that will take a lifetime to appreciate and assimilate. I pray that God will use the perspectives that I share to help you to see a little more deeply into some aspects of applying this truth.

Among the great books on this foundational theme are *The Normal Christian Life* by Watchman Nee¹ and *Born Crucified* by L. E. Maxwell.² You may have discovered that the writings of Jessie Penn-Lewis³ and Madame Guyon⁴ contain helpful insights about dying with Christ, and you may be among those who are acquainted with the *Handbook to Happiness* by Dr. Charles Solomon⁵ or *Grace Walk* by Steve McVey.⁶

Even though most of you may be well acquainted with this teaching, a review of the following pertinent scriptures might prove helpful as a preparation for what I share later:

Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin— (Rom. 6:3-6)

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. (Gal. 2:20)

You will recall in my previous chapter (8), I discussed a little of how Satan has blinded us from teachings of the Cross. I hope you will continue to pray often: “Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law” (Ps. 119:18) as you contemplate the verses above and the perspectives in the next two parts of this chapter. Remember that one of the worst kinds of blindness comes with the assumption that we already have seen all there is to see; if we think that way, it shows that we have actually seen very little.

¹Watchman Nee, *The Normal Christian Life* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Pub., 1977).

²L. E. Maxwell, *Born Crucified* (Chicago, Ill.: Moody Bible Inst. , 1973).

³*The Centrality of the Cross, Dying to Live, Life out of Death.*

⁴Guyon, Jeanne, *Union with God, Experiencing the Depths of Jesus Christ* (New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 1997).

⁵Charles R. Solomon, *Handbook to Happiness* (Sevierville, TN: Solomon Publications).

⁶Steve McVey. *Grace Walk* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Pub., 1995).

(A) Being Dead to Everything Short of the Paradigm of the Cross

When I perceived the Cross as a paradigm for my life, I began to see also how limited had been my concept of death with Christ and how vital it is to reckon myself dead to all that is ***not in line with the paradigm of the Cross***. I had seen reckoning myself dead to sin only as a means of victory over obvious sinful habits. It *is* that, but it is *so* much more! It brings victory over everything that hinders us in any way from being conformed totally ***to the paradigm of the Cross***.

You will remember my experience related in Chapter 2 on “The Cross as our Standard” and how it opened my eyes to the Cross as a paradigm, as I prayed through Isaiah 53 with Philippians 3:10 in mind. As a result, I have been gaining a much larger perspective on the truths contained in verses such as Romans 6 and Galatians 2:20. As we focus on His suffering and death with a desire to be changed into His likeness, we see ways that we are not like Him. As the Holy Spirit convicts us, we repent and realize that we have died to all that has not been conformed to His death in us.

. . . He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. (Isaiah 53:2b)

In Chapter 2, I related how I found myself admiring and praising Jesus for His complete lack of concern about impressing people. I have found degrees of victory in this area, being changed by the revelation that ***all my concern to impress people died with Christ*** and I no longer need to allow this self-interest to rule or motivate me.

He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. (Isaiah 53:3a)

At times I have been worshiping Jesus and contemplating how He had no problem with men’s complete rejection. Here again, I am grateful that there have been changes in me regarding rejection. ***Every aspect of this problem died with Christ*** and as I have perceived this and reckoned on it, I have been delivered from some of my deep anxieties about rejection and from inward anger toward those who seemed to reject me in some way.

He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. (Isaiah 53:7)

I sometimes remember and adore the Lord for having no desire to defend Himself and reckon that ***all my tendency to do so died with Christ*** and find that I have less and less inclination to defend myself and more desire to bless those who accuse or criticize me.

I have given these three examples from my experience to show that being conformed to His death involves applying the truth of our union with His death to specific areas. I am eager to daily continue this process and let the Lord keep conforming me to His death by showing me more deeply how I died with Him. I hope you will continue to pray through the 53rd chapter of Isaiah and other scriptures with a desire to worship the Lord and to be conformed to His death. I am sure the Holy Spirit will show you something every day to which you can reckon yourself dead.

Consider these verses in 1 John:

This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And ***we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers***. (1 John 3:16)

And this is his command: . . . ***to love one another as he commanded us***. Those who obey his commands live in him, and he in them. (1 John 3:23, 24)

In these verses, we have the command to love in the same way and degree that Jesus loved us in His death for us. Therefore, anything less than that is not fully obeying His command and is part of the “old man” that died with Christ. In other words, being “dead to sin” is being dead to all our attitudes and motivations that are not identical to those found in the sacrificial love that Jesus Christ expressed in His suffering and death.

I am sure that you all will agree that this command is impossible to obey in our own strength. A major part of the solution is found in our identification with the Cross, as we realize and reckon that on the Cross we died to everything that is not up to the standard of Christ's sacrificial love for us.

A serious blindness causes some to consider dying to self and sin only an early stage in the Christian life. On the contrary, we do not get past needing this truth until we are completely changed into His image—conformed to His death. We need to start our Christian life with some revelation of what we died to and deepen such knowledge and experience throughout our whole Christian life as we see the completeness of the death of our Adamic nature—the death of everything not in line with the paradigm of the Cross.

(B) The Paradigm of the Cross Defines Our New Life

. . . just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. (Rom. 6:4, 5)

In this part of Chapter 9, I want to assert from scriptures that living this “new life” and “being united in his resurrection” result in *living out the paradigm of the Cross*.

His Cross was clearly in focus in Jesus' appearances after His resurrection because He retained the scars from His crucifixion. Because the disciples were constantly reminded of Calvary, their concept of being like Him, no doubt, was greatly influenced by this focus:

When he had said this, he showed them his hands and feet (Luke 24:40).

Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. (John 20:27)

Further, I have no doubt that Jesus' teaching about His Cross to the two on the road to Emmaus was just one sample of many occurrences of similar teaching that He gave during His post-resurrection appearances:

“Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?” And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself. (Luke 24: 26, 27)

After Pentecost, the apostles were committed to and empowered by the Holy Spirit to *completely live out the paradigm of the Cross*; they endured persecution and other hardships with the same attitude as Jesus had. Following are but a few of the great many verses that show that the *lives of the apostles were vivid expressions of the Cross*:

The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name. (Acts 5:41)

I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus. (Acts 21:13)

To this very hour we go hungry and thirsty, we are in rags, we are brutally treated, we are homeless. We work hard with our own hands. When we are cursed, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure it; when we are slandered, we answer kindly. . . . (1 Cor. 4:11-13)

We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. For we . . . are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may be revealed in our mortal body. (2 Cor. 4:10, 11)

Finally, let no one cause me trouble, for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus.
(Gal. 6:17)

Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, . . . (Col 1:24)

For I am already being poured out like a drink offering . . . (2 Tim. 4:6)

Besides living out the paradigm of the Cross themselves, Jesus and the apostles commanded and exhorted all believers to do likewise; the paradigmatic Cross in the lives of the first Christians is clearly a major emphasis in the New Testament. You will find many of such references scattered throughout this series and later in an appendix. In light of how extremely important it is to the Lord Himself that all aspects of our lives be conformed to His death, three questions come to mind:

- (1) How fully are we committed to be conformed to His death in every aspect of our lives, in every relationship?
- (2) How passionate are we to have the Lord open our eyes to and deal with attitudes and actions that are not truly in line with the paradigm of the Cross? (Remember it is His mercy that He does not show them all to us at once! Do try to give others the same mercy!)
- (3) How much are we experiencing the power of the resurrection to keep us focused on the “Lamb having been slain” and to accomplish this change?

It is clear that our faith in the Resurrection of Christ and in His life in us is vital for us to live out the paradigm of the Cross, for we certainly cannot accomplish this by our own efforts. More needs to be said in a later chapter about this theme of the risen Christ living in us and how He lives out the paradigm of the Cross in and through us. Further, I hope to comment later about Paul's passionate pursuit “to attain to the resurrection”:

. . . becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead. . . . But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on . . . (Phil. 3:10,11, 14)

At least it is clear that *the way to be like Christ in His resurrection is to be passionate about being conformed to the paradigm of the Cross.*

In closing, let me suggest an amplification of Galatians 2:20:

All my attitudes, actions not in line with the paradigm of the Cross have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives out the paradigm of the Cross in me. Living out this paradigm is done by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

Suggestion: Read Romans 6 again keeping these perspectives in mind and ask the Lord to show you (1) one attitude that you tend to have that is not like Christ's, (2) how to reckon yourself dead to it, and (3) how to identify with and trust in His risen nature in you to live out the paradigm of the Cross.

Above all, seek to see Jesus more clearly and more often. **Focus on Him, the resurrected Lord and let Him show you His glorious nature—the same nature that He expressed during His suffering and death.** May He give us all resurrection power to live His life every day in every situation; i.e., to step by step live out more and more fully the paradigm of the Cross.