



SELF- ESTEEM

*The essence of true Christianity
is not to have either high or low
thoughts of self, but rather not to
be thinking about self at all. "For
to me to live is Christ."*

DR. W. J. PROST

“A Man in Christ”

Now let us consider man in Christ. We have already seen that sin was brought into this world by man's disobedience and that it has affected every part of our being. Because sin entered this world, each of us has a sinful, fallen nature. We have seen that sin takes even our God-given abilities and uses them in a wrong way. In the last section we have said that the answer to everything for the believer is found at the cross. In order to understand this statement fully we must consider the truth found in Romans, chapters 6, 7 and 8.

In the book of Romans up to verse 12 of chapter 5 we have the matter of **sins** taken up. The absolute guilt of the whole world is established, and then the finished work of Christ is presented as the only remedy. Then, from Romans 5:12 to the end of chapter 8, the question of **sin** in its root and principle is brought before us. We must be clear on the sin problem if we are to see the scriptural answer to the question of self-esteem.

It is important to see that when God saves us, He does not forgive our sinful, fallen nature, nor does He take it away. The Lord Jesus said to Nicodemus, “Ye must be born again.” John 3:7. When we come as guilty sinners, God forgives our **sins** and gives us a new life in Christ. Now the believer has two natures: one which is hopelessly sinful and cannot please God, and a new nature which is truly life in Christ and cannot sin. Having these two natures in us causes the conflict in our lives.

The old, sinful nature never improves as long as we live. It is always with us, and is just as bad after I have been saved for twenty years as it was before I was saved. God wants me to display the new life and its nature in my Christian walk, but how often the old nature tries to assert itself! That is why Christians sin, and occupation with myself and pride are part of those sins.

In Romans 5, we get the truth that the blood of Christ has put my **sins** away. In Romans 6, we get the further truth that, in the death of Christ, God saw the death of our “old man.” “Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.” Romans 6:6. Now the command is to “reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.” Romans 6:11. Before the death of Christ, man was never told to reckon himself (that is, the old man) to be dead. Rather, he was placed under law, until Christ came. “The law has been our tutor up to Christ.” Galatians 3:24 JND. Now Christ has died, and is risen again. The believer is identified with

Christ can say that he too has died to sin, and thus sin has no more dominion over him. Now God sees us, not as fallen sinners, but as those who have new life in Christ. We are to allow the new life and nature to characterize our Christian walk, and we are to recognize that we have died to sin.

The act of baptism brings this new position before us. By undergoing baptism, the believer confesses his identification with the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. No longer is he identified with a sinful world that has rejected the Lord Jesus, but is now part of the family of God. He has died to sin. No longer is he to go on with his former ways of sin; he is now to walk in “newness of life.” Romans 6:5. Sin in me—my old, sinful nature—has no more rights over me. “If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.” 2 Corinthians 5:17.

This conflict between the old and new natures is brought before us in a practical way in Romans 7. Here the man is truly born again and has a new life, but has not yet experienced deliverance from sin. Like so many of us, the man in Romans 7 found that while he had a new life and wanted to do what was right, he had no power to do so. How many of us have sincerely wanted to live the Christian life, yet constantly found that we sinned in spite of ourselves? How many of us have found, in the words of Romans 7:15 JND, “For that which I do, I do not own: for not what I will, this I do; but what I hate, this I practise.”

What is the reason that we are unable to get the victory? We find the answer in verse 18. We must come to the scriptural conclusion that “in me, (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing.” So often we are willing to admit that we have sinned, but are not willing to admit that there is nothing in us that has any merit towards God. We are unwilling to recognize that there is absolutely nothing in us in the flesh that God can accept—all has been ruined by sin. More than this, we must also come to the sad conclusion the Apostle comes to in verse 24, when he says, “O wretched man that I am!” Not only is the old nature within us incurably bad, but our condition is wretched beyond belief. This is a painful thing to realize, but essential if we are to know deliverance from sin. It is only when this is realized in our souls that we cease to have any confidence in our old, sinful nature, and turn to Christ. That is why the last part of verse 24 and verse 25 says, “**Who** shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through

Jesus Christ our Lord.” Deliverance comes, not through being occupied with ourselves and trying to improve ourselves, but rather with looking outside of ourselves, at Christ. Then we find immediate deliverance, because we are occupied with what Christ is, instead of what we are.

Often we shrink back in horror when we see how awful our sinful nature really is. We do not want to admit it, so we defend our old, sinful nature, or make excuses for it, rather than admitting that it is as bad as it appears to be. The pathway of deliverance is to admit fully what God has already told us in His Word, that “the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked.” Jeremiah 17:9. Let our sinful nature be as bad as God says it is—God has condemned it at the cross, and in the death of Christ I have died to sin. “God sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh.” Romans 8:3.

Romans 8 brings before us the blessed position of the believer who has been delivered from sin. Not only are my sins washed away, but I have been delivered from the law (or principle) of sin and death. No longer am I before God as a ruined sinner, but I stand “in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1), and “walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.” Romans 8:4. Instead of trying to improve the sinful nature, I simply turn away from it, recognizing that before God, I am “in Christ,” and have a new life in Him.

In years gone by more people burned wood and coal to heat their homes, and men known as chimney sweeps were very common. As you may know, with the burning of wood and coal a substance called creosote builds up in chimneys and, if it is not cleaned out periodically, it eventually results in a chimney fire. These chimney sweeps used to go around and clean out chimneys for their living. Sometimes the chimneys were large enough for boys and men to get right inside them to do the cleaning, and you can imagine how filthy they became. They were covered from head to toe with soot. You would see the men going from house to house, black all over, with their brooms and other tools over their shoulders.

Now let me ask you the question, “Which would get you more dirty, hugging a chimney sweep, or fighting with him?” If you think for a moment, you will agree that it would not make much difference—you would get hopelessly dirty either way.

If we think of the chimney sweep as our old, sinful nature, the application is obvious. The devil does not care whether we

embrace sin, or continually fight with it, because we become defiled either way. We must give the chimney sweep a wide berth—keep well away from him. That is what the Word of God tells us to do when our sinful nature tries to act—I am simply turn away from it, and allow the Spirit of God to bring Christ before me. Every true believer is indwelt with the Spirit of God, and the Spirit of God is the power of the new life. We will speak more of this later.

The Apostle Paul spoke of himself as “a man in Christ.” 2 Corinthians 12:2. No longer was he the man he had been before he was saved, although his sinful nature remained with him, and was just as bad as before. But before God he recognized that he was “in Christ,” and that God looked on him as “a man in Christ.” No longer did he try to improve his sinful nature, for that had been condemned at the cross, and he had died to sin. As “a man in Christ” he viewed himself as God viewed him, and practically took the position that he was dead to sin. Then he sought to live in the good of that position.

“Christ Liveth in Me”

We have seen that true Christian position is that of being dead, buried and risen with Christ. As far as sin is concerned, God has condemned it at the cross. In the death of Christ, God saw the crucifixion of my old man, and the cross was the end of all that I was as a sinful creature of Adam’s race. Now I am entitled to take that position practically, and reckon myself to be “dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.” Romans 6:11. With this blessed truth in mind, we can go on to see the true, scriptural answer to self-esteem.

The title of this section is from a verse in Galatians: “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me.” Galatians 2:20.

The wisdom of this world, as we have already seen, says that we must develop our good qualities, and realize what our potential is. We must realize that we are valuable people, and have a contribution to make. We are told that we must have faith in ourselves. We have already commented that there is some merit in getting us to recognize our God-given abilities,

but unless the factor of sin is brought in and dealt with, such teaching will never solve the problem of self-esteem.

Occupation with ourselves will always end in either pride or disappointment. All has been tainted by sin, and we will either be puffed up because of what we are, or depressed because of what we are not. Doubtless in some cases such teaching will develop a quality or ability in an individual, so that people will say that it works. However, such an approach can never take us beyond the realm of ourselves. The basis for it is so fragile, and can be lost so easily. The one who is occupied with himself is never truly happy.

What we need is to let Galatians 2:20 get a grip on our souls. We need to realize what it is to be "crucified with Christ." The "I" here is what I was before I was saved, the "I" that I was as a child of Adam, and a member of a sinful, fallen race. Having a new life in Christ, I am entitled to say that the old "I" is not really who I am anymore. Before God, I am "in Christ," and I am to let the new life Christ has given me be the "I" from now on. Since this is really life in Christ, I can truly say, "Christ liveth in me."

God tested man throughout the Old Testament, and all His testing only proved the utter ruin of man in his fallen condition. Now God has finished with the "first man," and is beginning again with His Man, the Lord Jesus Christ. The marvelous truth is that when the first man (Adam, and ultimately ourselves) failed in everything God committed to him, God brought forth His Man, the Lord Jesus Christ. Christ was faithful in every area where the first man had failed, and all God's purposes are going to be fulfilled in a man, His own beloved Son. This is the meaning of Psalm 8:4-5, which says, "What is man, that Thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that Thou visitest him? For Thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honor." In wondrous grace God has chosen to associate you and me with Him, and has given us new life in Him! Instead of expecting something from man, God is putting something into him. God's answer is not self-esteem, but "Christ-esteem"!

I read a story some time ago, which I think illustrates the point very well. There was a young woman who had had a very difficult upbringing. Some of you can relate to this. She had been told by her parents and others that she could not do anything right, and as a result had serious problems when she got into early adulthood. To a casual observer she seemed to have

a lot going for her. She was attractive, had quite a bit of natural ability, and was a true Christian, but she just could not seem to get over the idea that she was worthless. She went to psychiatrists and all sorts of self-help groups, but nothing seemed to change. Finally she came to a Christian man who was prepared to listen to her story and try to help. She told him her situation, how that she could never seem to do anything right, and ended by saying, "I just feel so worthless all the time."

After listening carefully for a long time, he looked at her and said softly and gently, "Maybe you are worthless." He was referring, of course, to her sinful nature, not to her God-given abilities. You can imagine her reaction. She looked up at him with anger in her eyes, and said, "No one has ever spoken to me like that before! My psychiatrist always tells me that I am a valuable person, that I need to believe in myself, that..." Then he interrupted her by asking, "And has it worked?" "No," she said, "but I am not ready to give up on myself yet!"

We must be ready to give up on ourselves as to our sinful nature, if Christ is to live in us. We had to come to the end of ourselves in order to be saved, and we have to realize the total ruin of the "old man" if we are to walk as Christians in the right way. As long as we focus on ourselves, things will never be right. God wants our new life in Christ to be practically expressed in us.

Perhaps we say, "Oh, I've tried, but it's no use. I just can't seem to do it." Then we are like the man in Romans 7, who was trying to do it in his own strength. There will always be a struggle, and we will always lose until we lay hold of what Christ has done for us at the cross. Just as we had faith that the blood of Christ was sufficient to put away our sins, so we must have faith that our "old man" was crucified with Christ. In both cases faith counts on God's estimate of the finished work of Christ. Faith believes what, in God's sight, is an already accomplished fact—that in the death of Christ, I died to sin. Then I have power to act on Romans 6:9, and reckon myself as dead practically. Then I take God's view of me, that the real "I" is now the new man, the new life I possess in Christ.

If I have a new life in Christ, is it possible that I can fail in something that God gives the new "me" to do? No, for all the resources of God are available to the one walking in the path of obedience, and allowing the new life in Christ to express itself. This seems elementary, and yet is an astounding fact. The

new life, which always acts to please God, cannot fail in anything it does.

Yet the challenge of allowing the new life to display itself in our lives is probably the biggest single difficulty every Christian has. Like the young woman to whom I referred, we are not ready to give up on ourselves and recognize that our sinful nature can do nothing to please God. We want to be more like Christ. We talk about it, perhaps we sing about it, but the bottom line is that we like ourselves too much. It is not self-love that we need, for that will only occupy me with what I am by nature. The antidote is to be occupied with Christ, and enjoying His love in our hearts. Then I will be occupied with what He is, and not with what I am.

We see an example of learning to look away from self and to the Lord in the life of Gideon. The Lord had delivered the children of Israel into the hand of the Midianites because of their sin. When the angel of the Lord approached Gideon and told him that the Lord was going to use him to deliver Israel, his response was, "Oh my Lord, wherewith shall I save Israel? behold, my family is poor in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house." Judges 6:15. But he was willing to be obedient, and the Lord led him on gently. When he still could not be persuaded to go ahead, the Lord graciously answered when he put out the fleece on two separate occasions. Then, to show that it must be done in His strength, the Lord reduced his army to only three hundred men. Finally, he told Gideon to go down to the camp of the Midianites, and there he overheard a conversation inside one of the tents that convinced him that the Lord was going to give him the victory. Gideon got the victory, but in such a way that the Lord got all the glory. Gideon had nothing in which to boast, for it was clearly the hand of the Lord. He exemplified the scripture, "When I am weak, then am I strong." 2 Corinthians 12:10.

After the victory, when the men of Ephraim were upset with him because they felt he had not given them the place of honor, Gideon's right attitude was displayed in his answer to them. Instead of pride displaying itself, grace gave them credit for what they had done, while Gideon took the low place. The bad feeling was defused because Gideon wanted no credit for himself, but was glad to give it to others. Later when the men of Israel wanted Gideon to be the ruler over them, he refused, saying that the Lord should rule over them.

Contrast this with Jephthah some years later, who evidently had a real problem with pride. He refused to lead the people in battle against the children of Ammon unless they promised to make him head over them if he delivered them. Then, when the same men of Ephraim became upset again, Jephthah answered them roughly, and a civil war ensued in which forty-two thousand were killed. The world would say that both Jephthah and the men of Ephraim had low self-esteem, but pride is the right word here.

“Oh,” you say, “but if I didn’t have some pride in myself, I wouldn’t bother about my appearance, about doing a good job at my work, about looking after my home, etc.” My late father-in-law once told me that as a young man he had asked his father that same question. His father’s answer was, “Son, if you remember that every time you step out the door and walk down the street, every time you go to work, every time you interact with others in any way, you are a child of God, and that everything you do and say reflects on the One to whom you belong, it will take care of all those things such as your appearance, work, etc., but without giving you any room for pride. If you remember that you have been sent into the world to please the Lord, you will do all those things in a right way, but with an Object outside of yourself.”

Occupation With Christ

True Christianity makes everything of Christ, and nothing of self, and here lies the root of every problem in the Christian life. Why are there (and I say it with shame) so many divisions among Christians today? Why did the Church not stay together as it was at the beginning? It is because man wanted to have a place, instead of allowing Christ to be everything. Every false teaching, without any exception whatsoever, gives some glory to man, and takes away from the glory of Christ.

If you and I are occupied with Christ, and our thoughts are taken right away from ourselves, it will have an amazing effect on us. People will look at us and say (not that this is our wish, but it will happen), “They seem to be at peace with themselves. They have no problem with self-esteem.” We will have a moral dignity about us which others may call self-esteem, but it is not self-esteem, it is “Christ-esteem.” Why? Because the believer who is occupied with Christ has neither high nor

low thoughts of self, but rather has been taken right out of himself. The essence of true Christianity is not to have either high or low thoughts of self, but rather not to be thinking about self at all. What should we do when thoughts of self begin to fill our minds? I suggest that we put them right out of our minds. We can truthfully say that those thoughts come from self, and that self is not the correct "I" to reign in our lives anymore. I do not owe self anything—it no longer has any rights. I recognize that it is an attack of Satan, attempting to use self to make me sin. I simply turn away from it, for I am now "in Christ," and He is to reign in me.

When I took driver education, one of the things they stressed was to aim high in steering. They told us not to look at the front of the car, or at the road immediately in front of us, but rather to have our eyes several hundred feet down the road. Then the car would go in a straight line, take the curves more smoothly, and make for more even driving. The same principle applies in the Christian life. The believer who has his eye on himself will have an "up and down" course, and will not be able to walk an even path. The one who is occupied with Christ and is not concerned about himself will walk a steady path, because his sights are outside of himself. We will deal with some practical points about this in the next section.

We may rest assured on the authority of the Word of God that there is more in Christ to encourage our hearts than there is in ourselves to discourage us. Do we look at ourselves and feel discouraged and depressed? Do we think about how we have failed, the wrong we have done, the qualities we do not have, and so on? Satan will occupy us with ourselves in this way, and worldly wisdom will tell us that we have to believe in ourselves, that we have to think positively, and tell ourselves that we can do it. The point to realize is that Satan wants to occupy us with self, and does not care whether it is in a positive or a negative way. It all amounts to the same thing, and robs us of our joy in Christ. Only the Spirit of God can fill our hearts with the things of Christ, and take us right out of ourselves.

Again the question comes up, "Are we not to recognize the abilities that God has given us, and use them?" Yes indeed, and we find this brought out in Romans 12:3, "For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to

think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith." Does this verse imply that it is all right to think highly of ourselves, but not too high? No, that is not the meaning of this passage. Rather the thought is that I am to recognize the abilities God has given me, and the work He has given me to do, and I am to do it. We must remember that this verse is in Romans chapter 12, and we have to go through chapters 6, 7 and 8 to get there. When we have understood true Christian position as being dead, buried and risen with Christ, then our talents are brought in, to be used for the glory of God. We are to recognize what God has given us to do, and not to think more highly of ourselves than we ought to think—not to want to do something for which we are not fitted. Even as Christians, pride is apt to come in, and we may want to do something which God has not given us to do. This exhortation guards against that. Just as every member of the human body has a function, so every member of the body of Christ has a function.

I recognize that some of these considerations are difficult to explain in a totally harmonious way, and we stated at the beginning of this article that some of these things have to be experienced rather than explained. While there is nothing in the Bible contrary to sound reason, there are many things that are beyond reason, because it is a book of God and deals with subjects beyond human understanding. For example, the Bible teaches both the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of man. The mind of man cannot reconcile these things completely, but it is only the foolishness of man's narrow mind that denies one of them in order to emphasize the other. In the same way it is difficult for the natural man to reconcile the recognition of his natural abilities with his total depravity as the result of sin.

To the spiritual mind these seeming contradictions present no difficulty, for "the spiritual discerns all things." 1 Corinthians 2:15 JND. It becomes only another wonderful dimension of the Word God has given to us. In natural things, we must learn the definitions of things before learning the things themselves, while in spiritual things we must often learn the things themselves in communion with the Lord before being able to define them.

Our subject contains some of these things, one of which is illustrated in the life of the Apostle Paul. Paul could speak of himself as the chief of sinners (1 Timothy 1:15), and could

also say that he was “less than the least of all saints.” Ephesians 3:8. These words were not merely high-sounding rhetoric, for Paul recognized clearly how sinful his natural “self” was. He never forgot that he had persecuted the Church of God before he was saved. On the other hand, he had no difficulty recognizing what grace had worked in his soul, so that he could say of himself, “By the grace of God I am what I am.” 1 Corinthians 15:10. As a servant of Christ, he could say, “I suppose I was not a whit behind the very chiefest apostles” (2 Corinthians 11:5), and, “I labored more abundantly than they all” (1 Corinthians 15:10), but then adding, “Yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.” 1 Corinthians 15:10. Pride was not connected with it, although the tendency was there, for God sent him a “thorn in the flesh” lest he should be “exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations.” 2 Corinthians 12:7. When the objections of some in Corinth forced him to speak of what he had suffered for Christ, he could say, “I speak it not after the Lord, but as it were foolishly.” 2 Corinthians 11:17. It gave him no pleasure to speak of himself. We ought to be content to be anything or nothing so long as Christ is glorified, and this was Paul’s aim. May it be our aim!

Out of my bondage, sorrow, and night:
 Jesus, I come, Jesus, I come;
Into Thy freedom, gladness, and light:
 Jesus, I come to Thee.
Out of my sickness into Thy health;
Out of my want and into Thy wealth;
Out of my sin and into Thyself:
 Jesus, I come to Thee.
Out of my shameful failure and loss:
 Jesus, I come, Jesus, I come;
Into the glorious gain of Thy cross:
 Jesus, I come to Thee.
Out of earth’s sorrows into Thy balm;
Out of life’s storms and into Thy calm;
Out of distress to jubilant psalm:
 Jesus, I come to Thee.

William T. Sleeper

Practical Effects in our Lives

Some of you are probably wondering whether it is really possible to carry all this out practically in our lives, or whether these are all just nice theoretical ideas. Can we hope to live these things out, or were they only for exalted Christians like the Apostle Paul? Do not think for a moment that others have not had the same difficulties. If you knew the agony that others have been through in attempting to put these things into practice, you would realize that it is not easy for self (1 Peter 4:1). Someone has said, "Truth is simple; it is we who are complicated." If you see other Christians who seem to have put these things into practice, it is only because they have come to grips with them in the Lord's presence. Sometimes it has cost many tears. An old poem expresses it well:

Full many a rapturous minstrel
Amid those courts of light
Will say of his sweetest music
"I learned it in the night!"
And many a rolling anthem
That fills the Father's home
Sobbed out its first rehearsal
In the shade of a darkened room.

While these things do not come easily, it should not cause us to give up, as perhaps we are apt to do. If we believe the Word of God, that in the death of Christ we too have died to sin, then there is power now for us, by faith, to reckon ourselves to be dead unto sin. We can count on God to be as good as His Word. What we need are willing hearts, for the Bible was written for willing hearts. If there is a true desire in our hearts to be more like Christ, then God will work it in us.

The substance of this pamphlet was originally given in some talks to young people at Lassen Pines, California. In those situations, sometimes we experience such joy in Christ and such happiness in our hearts that we feel that we could never be discouraged again. Then we come down from that "mountain-top" experience only to find that it was not the real world, and that both the world around us and our sinful nature are still the same. Sometimes the problems seem even a little worse, as Satan makes us the object of a special attack because we have

been enjoying the Lord so much. Is there an answer to this dilemma?

The Spirit of God

Let us remember that God never gives us instruction in His Word that is impossible to carry out. No, God has set the believer in the most blessed position of being “in Christ,” and now tells him to live up to the position in which he has been placed. God gives us all the instruction we need for this in His Word, and gives us the power to do it. That power is the Spirit of God.

Only the Spirit of God can minister Christ to our souls and take us right out of ourselves. Romans 8 brings this before us: “For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace.” Romans 8:5,6.

We may well ask what it means to be “spiritually minded.” If we are truly saved, we have life in Christ. It is the more abundant life about which the Lord Jesus spoke in John 10:10, and is meant to be lived in the power of the Spirit of God. This is very much neglected among Christians today, for instead of being led by the Spirit, we try to live the new life in our own strength.

Recently I read a book written by a Christian on the subject of knowing the will of God. His whole thrust was that we had to use our own judgment within the framework of the Word of God, and that as long as what we wanted to do was not contrary to the Word of God, we could feel free to use our own best judgment in making a decision. This is totally contrary to what is taught in the New Testament, for we are to live, not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.

In John 14:16, the Lord Jesus refers to the Holy Spirit as the “Comforter,” and tells us that He will send Him to abide with us forever. Perhaps “comforter” is the best word we have in English, but it does not adequately convey the thought contained in the original Greek word “paraclete.” This word is also translated “advocate” in 1 John 2:1, and means “one who takes charge of and looks after all your affairs.” Do we realize that we have a Person of the Godhead dwelling within us to look after us in every possible way? Yes, He is here to do that, but do

we let Him lead and guide as we should? Or do we trust our own thoughts, our own strength, and grieve Him by allowing sin in our lives?

We do not have to ask or prompt the Spirit of God to guide us. Rather we have to be careful to remove the hindrances to His working. When we are in a good state of soul, and have no unjudged sin on our conscience, then the Spirit of God occupies us with Christ, and brings joy to our hearts. When we have sinned, then the Spirit of God must occupy us with that sin until we confess it and experience God's forgiveness (1 John 1:9).

We see then that the Spirit of God is the power of the new life we have in Christ, but that sin which is allowed our lives grieves the Spirit (Ephesians 4:30), and prevents Him from carrying out His true work. We are responsible to deal with the hindrances to His work, and this is subject of our next section.

Self-Judgment

We have seen that we are to reckon ourselves to be "dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord." Romans 6:11. When we have seen our true Christian position as being dead, buried and risen with Christ, then we can never be satisfied with anything less than this for ourselves. By faith we accept what the death of Christ has done for us and accept the fact that we are dead and risen with Him. But how easily we fall back into our old ways! We must go to 2 Corinthians 4 to find how this tendency is to be overcome.

2 Corinthians 4:10 reads, "Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body." This is a step farther than reckoning ourselves to be dead to sin. We may take this blessed position before God, and it is right to do so, but then we find that our old, sinful nature does not take kindly to being put in the place of death. We find that Satan does not leave us alone just because we view ourselves as God sees us, as dead and risen with Christ. The more we want to live for Christ, the more the sinful nature will rear its head. More than this, every new truth that the Spirit of God reveals to us will find its corresponding rejection in some part of my sinful nature.

When I was younger, I used to look at older ones who seemed to be walking with the Lord, and it seemed that the sinful nature became "burned out" after a while. As I got older I real-

ized how untrue this was. It was rather that those who seemed to be walking with the Lord had learned in their measure not to have any confidence in that sinful nature. They had learned the truth of this verse, that it is a daily, hourly, moment-by-moment exercise of self-judgment to keep the sinful nature in the place of death.

There is a very special significance to the way this verse is worded. Notice that it does **not** say, "Always bearing about in the body the fact that I am dead to sin." No, we are to bear about in our bodies "the dying of the Lord Jesus." It is the practical reality of applying the death sentence to the desires of our natural bodies. The Lord Jesus appeals to our hearts, and reminds us that it cost Him His life in order that our "old man" might be "crucified with Him."

We will never be able to walk properly as Christians unless we are continually brought back to the cross. It is not enough for us to know in an intellectual way that God sees our old man as crucified with Christ, and that we are dead to sin. It is not enough for us to know in our minds that God wants us to be occupied with Christ, and not with ourselves. We will continually fail unless our hearts are touched by the fact that it cost our Saviour His life so that we might be able to reckon ourselves as "dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God." We will never be able to separate from this world in a right way unless we remember that it was this world that put our Saviour on the cross. God appeals to our hearts rather than our intellects, for it is only when our hearts are right that we can live the Christian life properly.

It is not the one who **knows** the most who makes the best Christian, but the one who **loves** the most. I would encourage you to read the Word of God and also the good, written ministry that is available, because they bring Christ before you. But knowledge itself will not keep you—the Person of Christ must be precious to you. Sometimes we see a simple believer who knows relatively little about the Scriptures, but who seems to be closer to the Lord than we are and seems to have more joy in his soul. Perhaps we have been brought up in a Christian home, and have heard these things from our earliest years. We may have been saved for many years, and know so much more. Why do we not have that joy? It is because that simple believer is enjoying what he does know of Christ, while we have allowed some hindrance to come in.

Perhaps you say, "How do I get that love in my heart for the Lord? I want to love Him more!" A brother now with the Lord used to remind us constantly, "Never try to love the Lord any more than you do! Just think of how much He loves you!" If we have been taken back to the cross and are occupied with the Lord's love for us, then our love will flow back to Him, and we will find that these things will become clearer to us.

I can hear some of you saying, "But you don't know the difficulties and problems in my life. You don't know the home I come from, the job situation that I have to face every day. You don't know the loneliness and the temptations that I have to cope with. It is easy to talk about these things, but it is hard to put them into practice!"

To answer this objection, let us read Jeremiah 2:13: "For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water." A fountain is a continual source of water, while a cistern is only a place to store water that has been put into it. A cistern is a good thing, but if there is a crack in it all the water runs out, and it is useless. We should ask ourselves which we are going to have, the fountain or the broken cistern? We may find ourselves looking at this world and saying that we have to have companionship. If we cannot get Christian companionship, then perhaps we look for worldly companionship. Others may look at material things, or a career, thinking that it will satisfy them. Some who are older may focus on their families, or travel, or a hobby. While there is nothing inherently wrong in some of these things, we have to realize that they are all broken cisterns. The truth must get hold of my soul that only Christ can satisfy my heart.

What about service for the Lord? I may say to myself that I will go out and preach the gospel—perhaps that will satisfy my heart. I may want to go to some foreign field and serve the Lord. Or I may make the local assembly my focus, and turn all my energies towards making it a happy place, because I want to see it grow, and see my brethren encouraged. Will any of these things make me happy? No, they will not. "But," some may say, "are not all of those things good things to do? Does not the Lord tell us to preach the gospel, and to encourage other believers?" Yes, but they fall short of the highest motive God has set before us. In all of these things, our sights are too low. If I set out to preach the gospel and perhaps do not see much

blessing, I will tend to become discouraged. If I set out to make my family my focus, I may well neglect what is due to the Lord.

What is the answer to it all? The Word of God teaches us to have our sights above it all, on Christ Himself. When He is before us, we do not depend on anything down here for our happiness. He is unchanging, and when our hearts are occupied with Him, there is a steadiness, a calmness, a peace that nothing can shake. If our joy depends on anything down here, even the best things, then our state of soul will go up and down depending on how things are going down here. God wants to lift us above it all.

Will being occupied with Christ make us neglect our responsibilities down here? No, for the thought that we want to please Him in all things makes us want to do everything for Him and in the best possible way. We will not neglect our work, our family, the local assembly or even ourselves. But they will not be our object—rather we will want to do everything for Christ.

One of the biggest problems among Christians today is that we are using the failures of others in the body of Christ as an excuse for our own failures. We are making our joy dependent on the behavior of others and our ability to live as Christians dependent on how others walk.

I say with complete conviction that our joy in Christ should not depend on anyone else. If it does, then we have allowed something to come between us and the Lord, and He loves us too much to let us be truly happy under such circumstances. Our happiness may last for a while, but then the Lord will test us, perhaps by removing that one on whom our happiness depends, or permitting some trial to come into our lives. Then it becomes clear that others and other things are really our object, and not Christ.

I knew a brother who moved away from the assembly where he was because things were difficult there. He thought that if he took his family to another place things would be better and his family would be happier in the Lord. It did not work, because neither our brethren nor the assembly should be the source of our joy. If we cannot overcome in the situation where we are, we will not be able to overcome anywhere. This applies to a family situation, a work problem, the local assembly, or any other situation. Christ is able to give the grace for any circumstance in which He places us. My brethren may be a real encouragement, and a happy assembly is a great blessing, but

both are helpful only to the extent that they bring Christ before me.

Of course, the Lord may sometimes lead us to change our circumstances, and in doing so may remove us from a difficult situation. Then we can be thankful for the removal of the trial, and take it from the Lord. But only the Lord can guide us in such cases, and we should be much before Him, lest we make the move for our own reasons, and not because it is His mind.

I should make it clear that I am not speaking about a situation where the Lord would not have us. Sometimes we ask the Lord for His help in a situation where His only will for us is that we should not be there at all. In such a case, we must leave that situation whatever the cost, as, for example, a job where one is unequally yoked with an unbeliever. We cannot overcome where we are in direct disobedience to the Word of God. But in a situation where the Lord has placed us, we should submit to what He has allowed and learn the lesson He is teaching us. Our next subject is very helpful in this connection.

“Delivered Unto Death”

We have spoken about the importance of “always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus,” but the verse immediately following it takes us one step further. 2 Corinthians 4:11 states, “For we which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus’ sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh.” We may have felt the need to bear about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, and even have carried it out to some extent, really wanting to deal with what is not pleasing to the Lord. If we always did it perfectly, verse 11 would not need to be there. But the Lord sees things in our lives that we do not see—perhaps things we do not think are too bad, perhaps an attitude to which we have long become accustomed, or some hidden motive that we do not realize is having such an effect on our lives. Then we are “delivered unto death”—a strong statement. What does it mean? It means that the Lord allows circumstances in our lives to bring before us that hidden motive, that sin that we do not see, or at least do not think is too serious. It is the mercy of God that He does this, for then we are able to see more clearly what is hindering our full enjoyment of Christ, and get

rid of it. But how often we rebel against the Lord's dealings with us, and do not learn the lesson! We look at the circumstances themselves, or perhaps at the individuals involved in them, and refuse to let the Lord show us that He has allowed the difficulty.

We must remember that there are never any second causes with God. When we have accepted the trial from the Lord, and Him alone, then we can go to Him in the spirit of Hebrews 12:11, exercised by the chastisement and finding that it yields "the peaceable fruit of righteousness." If others are involved and have acted wrongly toward us, we can leave that with the Lord; He will deal with them. May God give us the grace to accept all our circumstances from Him, and then to go to Him, asking Him why He has allowed them. If we do this, then He can show us things in our hearts that need to be dealt with. Then the life of Jesus will be more and more exhibited in us, instead of the old, sinful nature. If this is God's purpose in the trial, does it not make it all worthwhile?

We should never allow ourselves the luxury of feeling sorry for ourselves. We all like to do that sometimes. We have heard of people who have what is called a "pity party." A number of people (sometimes only two!) get together and take turns going over the wrongs they have suffered from others, the way they have been misused, the way people have taken advantage of them, and so on. There is a subtle satisfaction in recounting all those wrongs, and then having someone else say, "Oh, how awful—you poor thing!" I have been guilty of doing it myself, and had to realize before the Lord that it was nothing but sin. It was allowing my sinful nature to act. God has given us the example of One who always felt for others in every situation, even when He was experiencing the greatest suffering. When we are occupied with Christ, God will give us the grace to feel sympathy even for those who are doing us the greatest harm.

To illustrate how the Lord Jesus wants us to live, I would like to refer to an incident in His life.

"Then came to Him the mother of Zebedee's children with her sons, worshipping Him, and desiring a certain thing of Him. And He said unto her, What wilt thou? She saith unto Him, Grant that these my two sons may sit, the one on Thy right hand, and the other on the left, in Thy kingdom. But Jesus answered and said, Ye know not what ye ask. Are ye able to drink of

the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? They say unto Him, We are able. And He saith unto them, Ye shall drink indeed of My cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with: but to sit on My right hand, and on My left, is not Mine to give, but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared of My Father. And when the ten heard it, they were moved with indignation against the two brethren. But Jesus called them unto Him, and said, Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; and whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many.”
Matthew 20:20-28.

Here the Lord showed His disciples that Christianity is not characterized by what it finds, but by what it brings. Our blessed Saviour came not to be served, but to serve, and He has left an example for us. Are you in a difficult situation at home or at work? God will give you the grace to meet that situation, first of all to give you peace about it in your own soul, and then to help you show some of the love and grace of Christ to others. Are you in a difficult situation in your local assembly? The Lord can use you to be a help. A consistent godly walk will never go unnoticed.

When the Lord was in the garden of Gethsemane (I speak reverently) He might have thought only about Himself. Rather than this, His thoughts were for His disciples, and He said to them, “Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation.” Matthew 26:41. When the soldiers came to take Him, He said, “If therefore ye seek Me, let these go their way.” John 18:8. When Peter subsequently denied Him, the Lord turned and looked on him, no doubt with love and compassion. When men were nailing Him to the cross, He said, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.” Luke 23:34. When the thief beside Him, who shortly before had been railing on Him, said, “Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom,” He said, “Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with Me in paradise.” Luke 23:42,43. When He saw His mother stand-

ing by the cross, as the eldest son in the family He took the responsibility of arranging for her care, and committed her to John. In everything His thoughts were for others, and not for Himself. Surely you and I bow in humble adoration at such grace, realizing that we will never attain to it while we are down here. As we have remarked earlier, God is beginning that work in us down here, and if Christ is filling our hearts, then we can ask for the grace to react to situations as He did. If I focus on the wrong others are doing, I will go wrong myself. If my eye is on the Lord, while others may be guilty of wrong actions, I can have right reactions.

If someone else is doing something right, I can feel **with** them and be a help and an encouragement to them. But if they are going wrong, I can feel **for** them. I can go to the Lord for the grace to be a help to them, even if I am suffering from the wrong they are doing. This is always difficult to do, and sometimes there are situations where, humanly speaking, it would seem downright impossible. There are situations where the wrong is so great and the emotional damage so severe that it seems impossible to have the grace to feel for the wrongdoer. I would in no way minimize the seriousness of some of these wrongs. But then we are brought back to the cross, and are reminded of Hebrews 12:3: "Consider **HIM** that endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds." None have ever gone through such sorrows as our blessed Saviour, and He went alone. What kept Him (and again I speak reverently) was the joy that was set before Him, and in this He has left us an example. I trust I say it with feeling, that while the difference between one situation and another may be one of degree, the principle remains the same. One situation may require more grace than another, but "He giveth more grace." James 4:6. To say that there is a situation that may arise in our lives where He could not give the grace to act according to His Word is to deny His all-sufficiency.

I remember speaking to a girl who came from a very difficult home, where her father had not treated her very well. After listening to her for some time, I could surely sympathize in the hurt she was feeling. She had every reason to be bitter and resentful about what she had experienced. When I had gotten to know her a little better, and we had talked about the remedy for those feelings, I said to her, "Can you get above your own hurt and feel sympathy for your father, who is probably hurt-

ing too, and needs help?” She had never thought of that before. Worldly wisdom would say that we have to express that anger, that we have to confront the wrongdoer, that we have to make them feel how much we have been hurt. But the wisdom of God shows us that we can take our hurt to the Lord and have it all out with Him alone. (And it is important to deal with that hurt—blanking it out and pretending that nothing happened is **not** the answer.) Sometimes a trusted friend and confidant can be a great help in sorting out for us the many conflicting emotions at such a time. But if such an individual is not available, let us remember that the Lord Jesus went through the agony of the cross in the garden of Gethsemane alone with His Father. That is where the sweat fell from His brow, and where He asked His Father if the cup might pass from Him. Then, before the world, His thoughts could be for others.

It is not wrong to express the hurt, and perhaps to give vent to the feelings that well up in our hearts—no, it is a most necessary thing in dealing with some of these awful experiences. Nor is it wrong to confront the wrongdoer, to make him aware of how much we have been hurt. If done in the right way and under the right circumstances, it may be most helpful in resolving the matter. But let us remember that the Lord understands better than any other. Then He will give us the grace, first to be at peace in ourselves, and then to have right feelings towards the wrongdoer.

Joy and Peace

If we are walking with the Lord, we will find that we can have love and care for others, and forget about ourselves. We do not need to be concerned about ourselves, and what will make us happy. We should put the Lord Jesus first in our lives, and make it our object to please Him. Then we should look around at others and ask the Lord how we can be a help to them. If we do these things in that order, we will find that the Lord will look after our happiness without our thinking about it. But if we follow the Lord in order to be happy, we will probably not be, because that is another wrong motive—it is another broken cistern. Sometimes we have times of special joy, as, for example, time spent with other Christians away from the world. As I mentioned earlier, we may enjoy the Lord so much under those circumstances that we feel that we could never be un-

happy again. Perhaps we say, "I want to hold on to this. I want to be this happy all the time!" What we should be saying is, "I want to follow Christ. I want to live for Him, and to be more like Him. I want to please Him more, for His sake." Then our motive is right, for we are occupied with Him, and not with ourselves. To please the Lord Jesus is the highest motive the Word of God sets before us.

Times of special joy are like the thrill we get when we put the gas pedal to the floor and jump into passing gear. We enjoy the thrill of power that comes with that, but we should never think of driving fifty miles in passing gear. The car is not built to operate like that, and the transmission will revert back to a higher gear after we have reached a certain speed. In the same way, rapids or falls in a river may make pretty scenery and be necessary to restore oxygen to the water, but they do not constitute the most productive part of the river. Fish do not generally live in rapids, and rivers full of rapids are not good for navigation. It is the quiet peaceful part of the river that is the most useful, and it is the steady running of the car in a normal gear that is the most helpful in getting us from one point to another.

While the Lord may give us times of special joy, I would attach more significance to peace than to joy. Peace for the believer has a twofold meaning. In John 14:27, the Lord Jesus said to His disciples, "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you." I believe that the first peace is that which we get in Romans 5:1, the peace that comes from knowing all our sins forgiven, and that we have nothing to fear from the judgment of God. But the second mention of peace is what the Lord called "My peace," and this was the peace that He had in doing the Father's will, and in knowing that His Father was ordering every circumstance for Him as the perfect, dependent Man. We have had that peace given to us, and we can enjoy it too, to the extent that there is nothing between our souls and the Lord, that He is our object, and that we are seeking to please Him.

We should always walk in peace, although we may not always walk in joy. The Lord was the Man of sorrows, yet He was always walking in that peace which He called "My peace." Sorrow is a necessary part of the Christian life, and we should not expect it to be otherwise. We are following a rejected Christ in a world that is still against Him. But He has passed through it too, and has left us His peace as a legacy.

The happiest Christians are those who are not even thinking about themselves, but whose hearts are filled with Christ, seeking to please Him, and then occupied with the good and blessing of others. But again, do not do it to be happy—do it to please the Lord! Think of His happiness, not your own. You will find that it will put a glow on your face, a spring in your step, and you will have that confidence with which we should walk as Christians. Moses was not aware that his face shone, but others saw it. In walking with the Lord there will be a moral dignity about us that others will see, and they will take knowledge of us, that we have been with Jesus.

When we survey the wondrous cross
On which the Lord of glory died,
Our richest gain we count but loss,
And pour contempt on all our pride.

Forbid it, Lord, that we should boast,
Save in the death of Christ, our God;
All the vain things that charm us most,
We'd sacrifice them to His blood.

There from His head, His hands, His feet,
Sorrow and love flowed mingled down;
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet,
Or thorns compose so rich a crown?

Were the whole realm of nature ours,
That were an offering far too small;
Love that transcends our highest powers,
Demands our soul, our life, our all.

Isaac Watts