

CHAPTER VI

THE CRUCIFIXION IN THE BELIEVER'S DAILY LIFE

The Crucifixion: The "Old Man" And The Need Of Cleansing.

The believer has been delivered once for all from the guilt of his sin - that is salvation. Now he needs to be progressively delivered from the power of sin - that is sanctification.

To be successful Christians we must recognize our problems, understand them and learn to overcome them. The first and most formidable problem which stands in the Christian's path of success is himself.

The Christian is a sinful person. He not only commits sins - he has a sinful nature. The committing of sins is only the superficial evidence of the underlying nature. And this is where the problem lies - not with the deeds but with their cause and source. The Christian needs a deliverance, a cleansing, from the nature which is inseparable from himself.

But this presents an almost insurmountable problem - to acknowledge that we are at fault. It is exceedingly difficult for the believer to confess that he is in need of help. It is far easier to blame our failures on a lack of time, money, education, background, intelligence or personality. It is far easier to place the blame on parents, fellow workers, roommates, wife or husband, pastor, or even God!

Our sinful pride is often much more important and valuable to us than the glory of God and our personal success as Christians.

"Now don't blame that on me, I'm a person of spiritual integrity," is more often heard and implied than, "I was at fault," "I'm sorry I said that," "I need your forgiveness," or, "I am a sinful person and need help."

To be cleansed from my pride, lust, envy, jealousy, covetousness, dishonesty, and bigotry I must acknowledge and confess that I am a proud person, a lustful person, an envious person, a jealous person, a covetous person, a dishonest person, a bigot. This confession must be genuine. It must be more than words. It must be a truthful appraisal in the presence of God.

The way in which we begin with ourselves is to admit and confess that we need the cleansing God has promised (Romans 6:14; I John 1:9). We must open up our persons to God and allow Him to deal with us. This is absolutely necessary.

First of all, the Christian needs a divine cleansing from the power of the sinful nature - because of what it is. He has a nature which is at enmity with God (Romans 8:7)! The seriousness of this and its far-reaching effects cannot be overemphasized. The Christian must face the inescapable truth that he belongs to God and must obey God, and yet possesses a nature which is thoroughly antagonistic to all that is Holy and Loving and True. He has a built-in hindrance to any genuine progress in the Christian life. His nature will approve of lust but not purity, of pride but not humility - the list is endless.

It is not easy for the Christian to admit the sinfulness of his own nature. The Bible, however, is clear on this point (Jeremiah 17:9; Romans 1:19-32; 3:10-18) and so is our daily experience, if we are willing to look. We must admit that our first reaction to a new truth from the Scripture is one of resistance. It is much easier to find ten reasons why we

should not obey God than simply to obey! Give the ordinary Christian five seconds and can rationalize almost any of his vices into virtues!

Because of this nature and its warfare against God, the non-Christian is described as an enemy of God (Romans 5:10). Even in the Christian this sinful nature continues its opposition to God and therefore to the believer's spiritual progress. No wonder the Christian catches himself resisting God! How quickly and easily he can sit in judgment on God and refuse to accept some teaching of the Bible because of personal disapproval!

Such a description of our nature is in no way intended to imply that man is as bad as he can be nor that man cannot do civil good or approve of the good. This, however, is not to be traced to man's nature but to the common and special grace of God.

Our sinful nature, the "old man," cannot be brought under subjugation to the will of God (Romans 8:7). No amount of prayer, Bible study, decisions of faith, self-discipline, church attendance, and Christian service will change the old nature. The Scripture is very clear on this point. the command is not to change the old nature but to reject it (Ephesians 4:22; Colossians 3:5-9).

The second reason why the Christian needs to be cleansed from the power of his old nature, is because of what it does. The Lord Jesus taught His disciples that one was "defiled" by what came out of a man and not by that which went in (Mark 7:17-23). When we accept the prompting of our sinful nature, and put the suggestion into practice, the result is an action or activity out of harmony with the will of God. This expressing of the "old man" is what "defiles" us. The tragic products of the old nature are not only clearly seen in the

Bible (Mark 7:21, 22; Romans 1:21-32; Galatians 5:19-21) but, in some measure, in the lives of all Christians. Our pride, hypocrisy, jealousy, deceit, selfishness, and lust are easily discernible. So are our lack of love, lack of faith, and lack of hope.

Augustine emphasized the Biblical principle that the judgment for sin is inexorably connected with the sin itself (*Confessions*, Book I, par. 19). When sin is committed, the sinner, whether Christian or non-Christian, becomes directly influenced by the sin. Our character is changed by our deliberate choice to disobey God and to practice evil. We become characterized by the nature of our sin! Therefore, in the Bible, the one who steals is described as a "thief," the one who is immoral is an "adulterer," and the one who gossips is a "tale-bearer." When we choose to obey our sinful nature, the resultant activity will "enslave" us (John 8:34; Romans 7:15-18, 23, 24).

A third reason why the Christian should learn how to appropriate the divine provision for his old nature, is because of what it does not do. It is never a help in the Christian life. Not one victory, not one genuine desire for God, not one holy or loving thought or activity can be traced back to the old nature (Romans 7:18, 23). This alone should be reason enough for the Christian to seek how he may live in freedom from his fallen nature.

A final reason why the earnest believer must give heed to what the Scripture states about his old nature, is because of the commandment of God. The Christian has been commanded to "put off ... the old man" (Ephesians 4:22).

This leaves us with no correct alternative but that of obedience. The Christian, therefore, may not live in unconcern about the manifestation of the old nature in his life. God must be obeyed.

The Crucifixion: The "Old Man" And The Provision For Cleansing.

If it is true that the Christian possesses a nature which is at enmity with God, which cannot be brought into subjection to the will of God, which cannot be brought into subjection to the will of God, which defiles and enslaves, which is never the source of spiritual help, and a nature which he has been commanded by God to reject - then the Christian must seek to understand the provision God has made and to practice it.

In the Crucifixion such a provision for cleansing from the power of the old nature has been made (Romans 6:1-10). The Apostle Paul affirms that the sinful nature, possessed by every believer, has been judged in the death of Jesus Christ. Acting as our Representative, Christ took our nature to His cross so that we may be free from its influence. In His death the "old man" was legally stripped of its power.

It is important for us to understand that we were identified with Jesus Christ in His death. "I am crucified with Christ ..." may not only be said by the Apostle Paul but by every believer (Galatians 2:20). We were there when our Lord was crucified and we were crucified in and with Him (Romans 6:1-10; Colossians 3:3). The Apostle Paul explains this statement in Romans six. It means to possess freedom from sin (Romans 6:1-11). His reference here is not to forgiveness but to freedom from the power of the "old man."

Every believer possesses this freedom legally. We may not understand this nor manifest this freedom in any large measure in our lives. It is ours, however, simply because we are believers. The old nature of every believer, our greatest personal hindrance to the success of our Christian life, has been judged by God; it has been stripped of its power, and we have been set free. The old nature was crucified with Jesus Christ.

The Crucifixion: The "Old Man" And The Conditions For Cleansing.

What the believer possesses legally he must learn to practice in daily life. It is not enough to have an account in the bank. We must learn to write the check.

God has made a provision for our cleansing. The power of this provision, however, will not flow into our daily life until we understand the conditions for cleansing and choose to practice them.

The Apostle Paul stated that there were three conditions we must meet. The first revolves around the word "reckon" (Romans 6:11). This indicates that we must make a decision to act in harmony with and on the basis of the atoning work of Christ. We legally died in and with Jesus Christ. Now we must choose to put into practice the provision and principle of the Crucifixion - no matter what it may cost.

The second condition is a decision to live free from the old nature (Romans 6:12). There is no deliverance when we choose to live in sin or call it by some other name. No amount of tears, prayer, agony, and spiritual work can substitute for the simple decision to obey God and to forsake the sin.

The third condition is a decision to trust God (Romans 6:13). This is a deliberate dependence on God for the grace necessary to practice the first two decisions. Here the necessity of Biblical faith needs to be emphasized. Sanctification is not brain-washing or wish-fulfillment. It is the work of God in the believer. Without faith it is impossible to please God (Hebrews 11:6). These three decisions which form the conditions for our cleansing are all decisions of faith.

The important question now is how to apply these three decisions to our daily life. What do they mean in practice?

First of all we must acknowledge our own personal need of divine help. Personal involvement is absolutely necessary. No sinner is ever forgiven until he confesses that he is a sinner and no saint is ever cleansed without his acknowledgment of personal need. We must accept what God has said about our old nature (Romans 7:14-24; 8:7) and assume responsibility to obey the commandment to reject the old nature (Ephesians 4:22).

The second step in deliverance is the necessity of being specific in confession. The old nature manifests itself in specific sins (Galatians 5:19-21; Colossians 3:5-9). These must be recognized and confessed as such to God. To call our sins by any other name and to relate ourselves to them by rationalization instead of by confession will make freedom and cleansing an impossibility! When we have been proud, the only recourse is to point our spiritual finger at that sin and call it "pride." When we have gossiped, we must name it for what it is and confess before God that we are a "gossip." For most Christians this is indeed difficult. Our pride and arrogance are often much more important than the will and power and glory of God. Without confession, however, there is no cleansing (I John 1:9).

The third step is that of forsaking our sin. Having confessed an activity as sinful, we are left with no alternative but that of thoroughly renouncing the sin. What may an earnest Christian do with his sin but to forsake it? The only thing that would ever be worse than committing a sin would be to continue to practice it - once its true nature is known. to confess a sin and then not to forsake it is evidence that our confession was false!

The fourth step is to receive Jesus Christ as the specific cleansing we may need. He is our Sanctification (I Corinthians 1:30). When we were in need of salvation, we received a Person - Jesus Christ - as our Savior. In sanctification the principle is the same (Colossians 2:6). He is not only our Sanctification in general but also in all those specific areas where sin is committed and where sanctification must therefore be practiced. The cleansing which Jesus Christ has provided is inseparable from His Person. This is not only true in salvation but in sanctification. God has promised to cleanse us when we truly confess our sin (I John 1:9). Jesus Christ is our cleansing (Romans 7:24, 25; Philippians 1:11). It is necessary to be exceedingly specific at this point. "Lord Jesus, I confess that I sinned against You in that act of pride. I am a proud person. I choose to forsake my pride by Your grace. In claiming Your promise I receive You as my cleansing from the sin of pride."

The fifth step is to believe God and to live as a cleansed person. This step, as all the others, is a decision of faith. God has promised to cleanse us from unrighteousness (I John 1:9). Having claimed the promise we must act accordingly. God expects us to take Him at His Word. Any doubt as to whether we have been cleansed is out of harmony with the faithfulness of God and the truthfulness of His Word. When temptation comes we must reaffirm our previous decision. The temptation must be rejected in that the sin has already been confessed, forsaken, and cleansing has been received.

When these steps of sanctification are put into practice, the grace and power of God will flow into our lives. When we obey - God works. This principle of sanctification is found throughout the Bible (Philippians 2:12, 13; I Peter 1:22). Obedience produces freedom from sin and righteousness in daily life (Romans 6:16-18).

Only God can deal with sin and only God can produce holiness. The Christian must learn how to make these decisions of faith so the power and grace of the Crucifixion may be present in his life. And, having made these decisions of faith, he must learn to say, "No," to his old nature.

The Crucifixion is a historical event. Jesus Christ died to free the believer from the power of his Old Nature. The believer died in Christ. This crucifixion of our Old Nature is illustrated in diagram 11. The Crucifixion indicated God's disapproval of the Old Nature. Consequently the believer may not live as though this did not happen.

The Key To Success: Recognize That The Old Nature Was Crucified In The Death Of Jesus Christ. Reject It In All Of Its Sinful Characteristics. Receive By Faith The Cleansing Found In Jesus Christ

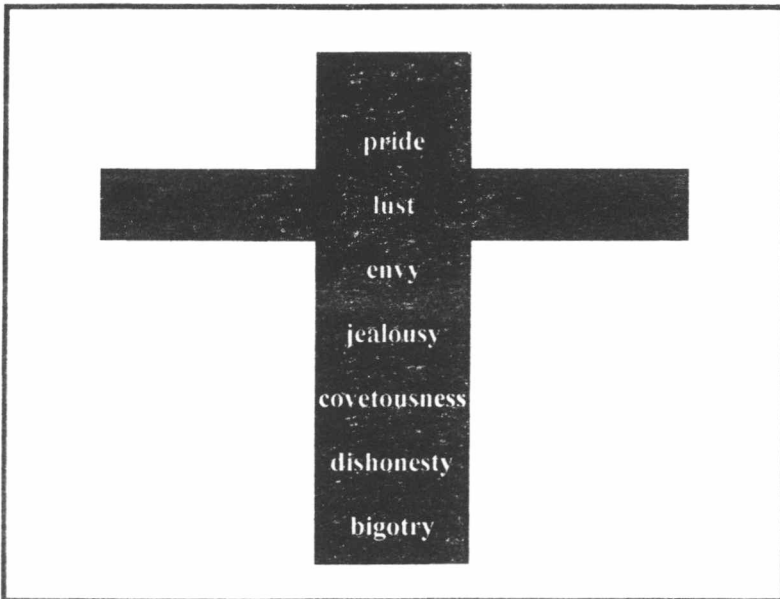


Diagram 11: God's Provision: the Old Nature crucified
in the death of Jesus Christ