

**Galatians 5:24** And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

## **THE CROSS AND THE HOLY SPIRIT**

Many, if not most, believers were not filled with the Holy Spirit at the moment they believed the Lord. What is even worse, after many years of believing they continue to be entangled by sin and remain carnal Christians. In these pages which follow, what we intend to explain regarding how a Christian may be set free from his flesh is based upon the experience of the believers at Corinth as well as that of many like believers everywhere. We moreover do not wish to imply that a Christian must first believe in the substitutionary work of the cross before he can believe in its identifying work. Is it not true, however, that many do not have a distinct revelation concerning the cross at the beginning? What they have received is but half the whole truth; and so they are compelled to receive the other half at a subsequent period. Now if the reader already has accepted the complete work of the cross, what is given here will concern him little. But if like the majority of believers he too has believed only half the whole then the remainder is indispensable for him. Yet we do want our readers to know that the two sides of the work of the cross need not be accepted separately; a second believing only becomes necessary because of incompleteness at the first.

### **The Deliverance of the Cross**

Upon reciting many deeds of the flesh in his Galatian letter, the Apostle Paul then points out that "those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires" (Galatians 5:24). Here is deliverance. Is it not strange that what concerns the believer vastly differs from what concerns God? The former is concerned with "the works of the flesh" (Galatians 5:19), that is, with the varying sins of the flesh. He is occupied with today's anger, tomorrow's jealousy, or the day after tomorrow's strife. The believer mourns over a particular sin and longs for victory over it. Yet all these sins are but fruits from the same tree. While plucking one fruit (actually one cannot pick off any), out crops another. One after another they grow, giving him no chance for victory. On the other hand God is concerned not with the *works* of the flesh but with "the flesh" itself (Galatians 5:24). Had the tree been put to death, would there be any need to fear lest it bear fruit? The believer busily makes plans to handle sins—which are the fruits, while forgetting to deal with the flesh itself—which is the root. No wonder that before he can clear up one sin, another has burst forth. We must therefore deal today with the source of sin.

Babes in Christ need to appropriate the deeper meaning of the cross, for they are still carnal. The aim of God is to crucify the believer's old man with Christ with the result that they who belong to Christ "have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires." Bear in mind that it is the flesh together with its powerful passions and desires that has been crucified. As the sinner was regenerated and redeemed from his sins through the cross, so now the carnal babe in Christ must be delivered from the rule of the flesh by the same cross so that he can walk according to the Spirit and no longer according to the flesh. Thereafter it will not be long before he becomes a spiritual Christian.

Here we find the contrast between the fall of man and the operation of the cross. The salvation provided by the latter is just the remedy for the former. How fitting indeed they are to each other. Firstly, Christ died on the cross for the sinner to remit his sin. A holy God could now righteously forgive him. But secondly, the sinner as well died on the cross with Christ so that he might not be controlled any longer by his flesh. Only this can enable man's spirit to regain its proper rule, make the body its outward servant and the soul its intermediary. In this way the spirit, the soul, and the body are restored to their original position before the fall. If we are ignorant of the meaning of the death herein described we shall not be delivered. May the Holy Spirit be our Revealer.

“Those who belong to Christ Jesus” refers to every believer in the Lord. All who have believed Him and are born anew belong to Him. The deciding factor is whether one has been related to Christ in life, not how spiritual one is or what work he does for the Lord nor whether he has been freed from sin, has overcome the passions and desires of his flesh, and is now wholly sanctified. In other words, the question can only be: has one been regenerated or not? Has one believed in the Lord Jesus as his Savior or not? If he has, no matter what his current spiritual state may be—in victory or in defeat—he “has crucified the flesh.”

The issue before us is not a moral one, nor is it a matter of spiritual life, knowledge, or work. It simply is whether he is the Lord's. If so, then he already has crucified the flesh on the cross. The meaning clearly is not that of going to crucify, or of in the process of crucifying, but *has crucified*.

It may be helpful to be more explicit here. We have indicated that the crucifixion of the flesh is not dependent upon experiences, however different they may be; rather is it contingent upon the fact of God's finished work. “Those who belong to Christ Jesus”—the weak as well as the strong—“have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.” You say you still sin, but God says you have been crucified on the cross. You say your temper persists, but God's answer is that you have been crucified. You say your lusts remain very potent, but again God replies that your flesh has been crucified on the cross. For the moment will you please not look at your experience, but just hearken to what God says to you. If you do not listen to His Word and instead look daily upon your situation, you will never enter into the reality of your flesh having been crucified on the cross. Disregard your feelings and experience. God pronounces your flesh crucified; it therefore *has* been crucified. Simply respond to God's Word and you shall have experience. When God tells you that “your flesh has been crucified” you should answer with “Amen, indeed my flesh has been crucified.” In thus acting upon His Word you shall see your flesh is dead indeed.

The believers at Corinth had indulged in sins of fornication, jealousies, contentions, party spirit, lawsuits and many others. They were plainly carnal. True, they were “babes in Christ”; nevertheless they were of Christ. Can it actually be said that these carnal believers had had their flesh crucified on the cross? The answer undeniably is yes; even *these* had had their flesh crucified. How is this so? We should realize that the Bible never tells us to have ourselves crucified; it informs us only that we “were crucified.” We should understand that we are not to be crucified individually but that we have been crucified together with Christ (Galatians 2:20); Romans 6:6). If it is a crucifixion together then the occasion when the Lord Jesus was Himself crucified is that moment when our flesh too was crucified. Furthermore, the co-crucifixion is not inflicted on us personally since it was the Lord Jesus who took us to the cross at His crucifixion. Wherefore God considers our flesh as crucified already. To Him it is an accomplished fact. Whatever may be our personal experiences God declares that “those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh.” In order to possess such death we must not give too large a place to discovering how or to noticing our experience; we should instead believe God's Word. “God says my flesh has been crucified so I believe it is crucified. I acknowledge that what God says is true.” By responding in this fashion we shall soon encounter the reality of it. If we look at God's fact first our experience will follow next.

From God's perspective these Corinthians did have their flesh crucified on the cross with the Lord Jesus; but from their point of view they certainly did not have such an experience personally. Perhaps this was due to their not knowing God's fact. Hence the first step towards deliverance is to treat the flesh according to God's viewpoint. And what is that? It is not in trying to crucify the flesh but in acknowledging that it has been crucified, not in walking according to our sight but according to our faith in the Word of God. If we are well established on this point of acknowledging the flesh as already crucified, then we shall be able to proceed in dealing with the flesh experimentally. If we waver over this fact, the possibility of our definitely possessing it will escape us. In order to experience co-crucifixion we first must set aside our current situation and simply trust the Word of God.

## The Holy Spirit and Experience

“While we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions . . . were at work in our members to bear fruit for death. But now we are . . . dead . . .” (Romans 7:5-6). Because of this the flesh has no rule over us any further.

We have believed and acknowledged that our flesh has been crucified on the cross. *Now*—not before—we can turn our attention to the matter of experience. Though we presently stress experience, we nevertheless firmly hold to the fact of our crucifixion with Christ. What God has done for us and what we experience of God’s completed work, though distinguishable, are inseparable.

God has done what He could do. The question next is, what attitude do we assume towards His finished work? Not just in name but in actuality has He crucified our flesh on the cross. If we believe and if we exercise our will to choose what God has accomplished for us, it will become our life experience. We are not asked to do anything because God has done it all. We are not required to crucify our flesh for God has crucified it on the cross. Do you believe this is true? Do you desire to possess it in your life? If we believe and if we desire then we shall cooperate with the Holy Spirit in obtaining rich experience. Colossians 3:5 implores us to “put to death therefore what is earthly in you.” This is the path towards experience. The “therefore” indicates the consequence of what precedes it in verse 3; namely, “you have died.” The “you have died” is what God has achieved for us. Because “you have died,” therefore “put to death what is earthly in you.” The first mention of death here is our factual position in Christ; the second, our actual experience. The failure of believers today can be traced to a failure to see the relationship between these two deaths. Some have attempted to put their flesh to nought for they lay stress only upon the death experience. Their flesh consequently grows livelier with each dealing! Others have acknowledged the truth that their flesh in fact was crucified with Christ on the cross; yet they do not seek the practical reality of it. Neither of these can ever appropriately experimentally the crucifixion of the flesh.

If we desire to put our members to death we first must have a ground for such action; otherwise we merely rely upon our strength. No degree of zeal can ever bring the desired experience to us. Moreover, if we only know our flesh has been crucified with Christ but are not exercised to have His accomplished work carried out in us, our knowledge too will be unavailing. A putting to nought requires a knowing first of an identification in His death; knowing our identification, we must exercise the putting to death. These two must go together. We are deceiving ourselves should we be satisfied with just perceiving the fact of identification, thinking we are now spiritual because the flesh has been destroyed; on the other hand, it is an equal deception if in putting to nought the wicked deeds of the flesh we over-emphasize *them* and fail to take a death attitude towards the flesh. Should we forget that the flesh is dead we shall never be able to lay anything to rest. The “put to death” is contingent upon the “you have died.” This putting to death means bringing the death of the Lord Jesus to bear upon all the deeds of the flesh. The crucifixion of the Lord is a most authoritative one for it puts away everything it encounters. Since we are united with Him in His crucifixion we can apply His death to any member which is tempted to lust and immediately put it to nought.

Our union with Christ in His death signifies that it is an accomplished fact in our spirits. What a believer must do now is to bring this sure death out of his spirit and apply it to his members each time his wicked lusts may be aroused. Such spiritual death is not a once for all proposition. Whenever the believer is not watchful or loses his faith, the flesh will certainly go on a rampage. If he desires to be conformed completely to the Lord’s death, he

must unceasingly put to nought the deeds of his members so that what is real in the spirit may be executed in the body.

But whence comes the power to so apply the crucifixion of the Lord to our members? It is “by the Spirit,” insists Paul, that “you put to death the deeds of the body” (Romans 8:13). To put away these deeds the believer must rely upon the Holy Spirit to translate his co-crucifixion with Christ into personal experience. He must believe that the Holy Spirit will administer the death of the cross on whatever needs to die. In view of the fact that the believer’s flesh was crucified with Christ on the cross, he does not need today to be crucified once again. All which is required is to apply, by the Holy Spirit, the accomplished death of the Lord Jesus for him on the cross to any particular wicked deed of the body which now tries to rise up. It will then be put aside by the power of the Lord’s death. The wicked works of the flesh may spring up at any time and at any place; accordingly, unless the child of God by the Holy Spirit continually turns to account that power of the holy death of our Lord Jesus, he will not be able to triumph. But if in this way he lays the deeds of the body to rest, the Holy Spirit Who indwells him will ultimately realize God’s purpose of putting the body of sin out of a job (Romans 6:6). By thus appropriating the cross the babe in Christ will be liberated from the power of the flesh and will be united with the Lord Jesus in resurrection life.

Henceforth the Christian should “walk by the Spirit” and should “not gratify the desires of the flesh” (Galatians 5:16). We always should remember that however deeply our Lord’s cross may penetrate into our lives we cannot expect to avoid further agitations of the wicked deeds of our members without constant vigilance. Whenever one of God’s own fails to follow the Holy Spirit he immediately reverts to following the flesh. God unveils to us the reality of our flesh through His Apostle Paul’s delineation of the Christian’s self in Romans 7 from verse 5 onward. The moment the Christian ceases to heed the Holy Spirit he instantly fits into the carnal life pattern described here. Some assume that because Romans 7 stands between Chapters 6 and 8 the activity of the flesh will become past history as soon as the believer has passed through it and entered into the life of the Spirit in Romans 8. In actuality Chapters 7 and 8 run concurrently. Whenever a believer does not walk by the Spirit as in Romans 8 he is immediately engulfed in the experience of Romans 7. “So then I of myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin” (Romans 7:25). You will notice that Paul concludes his description of his experience given before this verse 25 by using the phrase “so then.” He encounters incessant defeat up through verse 24; only in verse 25 does he enter into victory: “Thanks be unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord” (v. 25a). Upon gaining victory over constant defeat we read Paul saying: “I of myself serve the law of God with my mind.” Here he is telling us that his new life desires what God desires. That, however, is not the whole story; for Paul immediately continues by declaring: “*but* with my flesh I serve the law of sin.” And this we find him saying *just after* his victory of verse 25a. The obvious inference is that no matter how much his inner mind may serve God’s law, his flesh always serves sin’s law. However much he may be delivered from the flesh it remains unchanged and continues to serve sin’s law (v. 25), because the flesh is forever the flesh. Our life in the Holy Spirit may be deepened, but this will not alter the nature of the flesh or prevent it from serving the law of sin. If we therefore desire to be led of the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:14) and freed from the oppression of the flesh, we must put to death the wicked deeds of the body and walk according to the Holy Spirit.

### **The Existence of the Flesh**

Let us note carefully that though the flesh may be so put to death that it becomes “ineffective” (the real meaning of “destroy” in Romans 6:6), it endures nonetheless. It is a great error to consider the flesh eradicated from us and to conclude that the nature of sin is completely annihilated. Such false teaching leads people astray. Regenerated

life does not alter the flesh; co-crucifixion does not extinguish the flesh; the indwelling Holy Spirit does not render it impossible to walk by the flesh. The flesh with its fleshly nature abides perpetually in the believer. Whenever opportunity is provided for its operation, it at once will spring into action.

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