

Articles and Sermons :: How to Die to Self by G.D. Watson

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The more we are divinely illuminated, the more minutely and astonishingly do we apprehend the almost infinite blindness and meanness of our past lives. How do we die to self and let Christ be all and all in us? Have we looked at the blessed Christ until we have obtained a clear conception of what it is to lose ourselves in union with Him? Have our spiritual eyes surveyed this blessed possibility, until its attainability in this life has become a settled conviction with us? Then have we calmly, deeply, irreversibly settled it that there shall be none of self and all of Christ? The first step toward this perfect death is to have a pure, divine motive. That motive must be nothing less than the ever blessed triune God Himself, that is, it must be the seeking of God as our all and in all, our last end, our exceeding great reward so that it will be for His glory, His beauty, and praise, through us, and by us, and that we have no desire to exist except as a channel for His outflow, a chosen vessel for the embodiment of His life, and the outbeaming of His glorious attributes through us.

The deepest death to self lies in the motives and intentions, hence this all-consuming motive to want to be nothing but a capacity for Christ to live in, lies at the foundation of the death of self. With this pure motive fixed in the heart we are to habitually and willingly accept every occasion for humiliation and self-abasement, which God's providence brings to us. We are to sweetly and willingly accept of every blow, or mortification, or inconvenience, or painful annoyance, which comes to us in the order of God's providential will. We are to calmly face these things, as appropriate occasions for losing our own will and letting the omnipotence of God take charge of them.

We must be exceedingly careful not to receive human honors or praise into our hearts. If we open our hearts to receive this honor and in our thoughts feed upon it as a social honey, or if we allow human praise to inflate our thought, it will instantly breed a human self-esteem, and this becomes a hot-bed of the self-life.

We must seek in everything to be child-like, and extremely simple in our manners, words, dress, tastes, and interior experiences. Self feeds on complexity and things grand and large and loud. Christ is the very embodiment of divine and eternal simplicity. The deeper we sink in the Christ-life, the more we become disappointing to the people. We talk less. We live more quietly and interiorly. Our labors are less ostentatious. We love to live like God, a profound hidden life, in which people think we don't amount to very much. This is one of the tests of sinking out of self.

"If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me." What is our daily cross? It is that one or more things which are unavoidable in our lives and which produce suffering of body or mind or heart. It is that thing, which in our poor judgment seems to hinder the easy flow of our religious life. Sometimes our cross may be composed of a combination of things, but as a general rule, it is some one instrument or cause of suffering to the soul. Were there no suffering of some kind involved, then there could be no cross at all, for the only thing in a cross is its pain. The Holy Spirit gives us to understand plainly that the multitudes of jolly, ease-loving, and easy-going religionists, who bear no daily suffering with Jesus, are only sectarian-born religious bastards, and not really kingdom-born souls. (See Hebrews 12:8)

It is your daily cross that makes you weep more than any other thing; that sends you to frequent prayer; that leads you to ransack the promises; that makes you cry out like Jesus, "Father, why is this?" that causes you to put both arms around the neck of your Saviour in yearning love; that makes you sick of earth and self; that gives you wistful longings for heaven.

There is an hallucination about getting free from our daily cross which needs to be broken; it is a day-dream worked up in our minds, a beautiful vision that hangs just ahead of us, that some day we will be rid of our cross, that we will have no painful annoyances, and then our feet can fly unimpeded toward heaven. If you want deep union with Jesus, getting rid of your cross is the very thing to defeat it. There is a better victory than freedom from the daily instrument of pain, and that is to pass into that ocean-depth of the Christ-life where every trial can be borne in exactly the same spirit that Jesus bore.

Boundless, tender love is the condition for triumphant bearing of our daily cross. When our cross has driven us so deep into the warm ocean-heart of Jesus that we are kept melted and flooded with quiet, lowly, tender yearning love for God and His kingdom, then the cross will have proved its own balsam and then every trial will be fuel to the flame of love.

People fancy that to love the cross is to love the cross on which Jesus died. No; it means loving that very cross in our lives that drives us into deep oneness with Christ; it is to meekly patiently, lovingly embrace to our inner heart the very principle of self-denial and self-nothingness. To bear our daily trial as Jesus did, we must take it into our very heart's love, and bear it meekly, quietly, lovingly, as unto God, and not to man.

How long it takes to accept our daily trials as a gift direct from the hands of our Lord! It is by persevering prayer that we get on the sunny side of every sorrow and on the triumphant side of every trial. Our daily cross cutting its way into our life's core by being folded round and round with many tears and loving prayer, becomes in our souls the very pearl of Christ-likeness, and more valuable than all our own chosen blessings. The Holy Spirit can reveal to us the very disposition in which Jesus bore His daily trials, and when we bear ours in the same spirit, then indeed do we have fellowship with Him. If it does not please our Father to remove our trials, it is because He wants us to seek and receive an overflow of tender love that will bear us on over the trials, and in spite of them.

The word crucifixion, as it applies to us in the Christian sense, may be defined as any pain or suffering which renders us dead to sin or to self. There may be many kinds of sorrow and suffering which do not serve the purpose of true crucifixion. In order that suffering may be a thorough mortification to us, it must be put in the will of God, and yielded to the operation of the Holy Spirit. When we yield ourselves absolutely up to God, and trust Him to take charge of every particle of our being and life and circumstances, it is then that His omnipotence takes gentle and firm possession of all our trials and sufferings, and makes them work a true crucifixion in us.

It does not matter what the occasion of the suffering may be. It may come from our own sins, or poverty, or ill-health, or loss of friends, or separations, or terrible and protracted temptations, or assaults of evil spirits, or the hatred of others, or great disappointment, or divine chastisements; it may come from many of these sources; but let it come from any cause in the universe, if we give it over entirely into the hands of God, and sink ourselves into His will, with a perfect desire for Him to work His best will in us, He will make every pain, every groan, every tear, every particle of our suffering work in us a death to sin and to self and to all things on earth, which will be for our highest perfection and for His glory.

When we suffer so severe and so long that we become dead to it, and divinely indifferent as to how much we suffer or how long it will continue; when the suffering soul reaches a calm, sweet carelessness, when it can inwardly smile at its own suffering, and does not even ask God to deliver it from the suffering, then it has wrought its blessed ministry; then patience has its perfect work; then the crucifixion begins to weave itself into a crown.

In such a condition, our whole being lies perfectly still under the hand of God; every faculty of the mind and will and heart are at last subdued; a quietness of eternity settles down into the whole being; the tongue grows still, and has but few words to say; it stops asking God questions; it stops crying "Why has Thou forsaken me?" The imagination stops building air-castles, or running off on foolish lines; the reason is tame and gentles; it stops debating, and quits all dogmatism; the will ceases from its own activity; the bluster and zeal of self-action are taken out of it; the choices are annihilated; it has no choice in anything but the purpose of God.

The affections are weaned from all creatures and all things; it loves nothing but God and God's will in any given thing; it has no private ends to serve; it has no motives except to please God; it is so dead that nothing can hurt it, nothing can offend it, nothing can hinder it, nothing can get in its way; for, let its circumstances be what they may, it seeks only for God and His will, and it feels assured that God is making everything in the universe, good or bad, past or present work together for its good.

Oh, the blessedness of being absolutely conquered! Of losing our own strength, and wisdom, and goodness, and plans, and desires, and being, where every atom of our nature is like placid Galilee under the omnipotent feet of our Jesus.

This uttermost crucifixion destroys the littleness and narrowness of the mind; it gives an immensity to the sympathies, and an ocean-like divine love, which is beyond words. This is because creature-love is crucified, and divine love floods the whole being. When we reach the deepest death of self, we love all creatures with God's love, and as God loves them. We become the channels through which the Holy Spirit flows; He pours His thought through our minds, His prayers and loves through our hearts, His choices through our wills. The whole being is a sea of gentleness. Everything hard, bitter, severe, critical, flinty, has been crushed into powder.

Great sufferers are noted for their quiet gentleness. There are many souls, who are sanctified Christians, who have an indescribable something in them which needs the crushing and melting of some great crucifixion. Their tongues rattle so

much, their spirit is dictatorial or harsh, they measure other people by themselves; there is something in their constitution which seems to need the grinding into fine flour. It is well worth the crushing of hearts with an overwhelming sorrow, if thereby God can bring us out into that beautiful tenderness and sweetness of spirit which is the very atmosphere of heaven.

Perfect suffering will untie the heart and gently loosen every cord that binds us to our foes or friends—to all our possessions; to all the things of the past; to all attractive sights and sounds—and gives us such perfect inward liberty from everything on earth that the things of heaven can flow down into us.