

Articles and Sermons :: The Cross Day by Day * Maxwell**The Cross Day by Day * Maxwell - posted by hmmhmm (), on: 2008/3/6 3:46**

THE FACTS OF CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE indicate that most believers wander for some time in the wilderness of Romans 7, in the land of a mixed and divided affection, before they enter into the life of victory in Christ. The great apostle himself reveals the tragic breakdown of his own inner life subsequent to his conversion, when he cries out in an agony of despair, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" (Rom. 7:24.) He then learned what he later wrote in Romans 6:11 -- "Reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord." He came to see that God's deliverance from the thralldom of a loathsome self-life is not through resolution, but through reckoning on co-crucifixion with Jesus Christ.

Sooner or later most of us as believers awaken to a sense of our sinful selfhood. We, too, would live for Christ. We hunger and thirst after righteousness, but, alas, how tragically self-will thwarts the flow of the living waters. The stream of our life is mixed and muddy. We fight and pray and struggle. We redouble our resolutions. We see that we must experience an inner crucifixion; that the Cross must be at the heart of our Christian lives. We try to crucify ourselves, but all to no avail. Self cannot, will not, crucify self. In utter self-despair we sign our own death sentence, sinking into our death-union with the Crucified. We let go and let God, yielding ourselves in total self-surrender. Once and for all we take by faith the position God gives us of death and resurrection with Christ.

Such is the beginning of a life of Christian victory--but it is only a beginning. This death-position once taken must then be learned. The life of the Crucified must be received moment by moment. There is the Cross once and for all, and there is the "cross daily." It is a lifelong process. "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me" (Luke 9:23). The early disciples must often have seen the long procession of murderers and criminals on their way to crucifixion, carrying their crosses.

This matter of the Cross once-for-all and the "cross daily" is what Bishop Moule calls an "inexhaustible paradox; on one side, a true and total self-denial, on the other, a daily need of self-crucifixion." We are followers of the Crucified. We must surrender to Him once-for-all. There is also what has been called the "spread-out-surrender, a surrender which covers our whole sphere of action and lasts all our days." The Cross-life is not an attainment, but a lifelong attitude. It is not a goal, but a road. There is no ready-made holiness that we can put on like a suit of clothes. God does not show us everything at once. Those who have entered into the life of Christian victory will all their lives be making deeper discoveries of the depths of self. The scriptural attitude, then, must ever be: "Not as though I had already attained."

In remarking upon the "cross daily" Bishop Moule insists that it is "without intermission, without holiday; now, today, this hour; and then, tomorrow! And the daily 'cross'; a something which is to be the instrument of disgrace and execution. . . . And what will that something be? just whatever gives occasion of ever deeper test to our self-surrender . . . just whatever exposes to shame and death the old aims, and purposes, and plans, the old spirit of self and its life." New occasions, fresh tests, difficult circumstances--all bring us up against the question of the will of God, or the will of self. If we are hungry to go on with the Lord; if we have an appetite whetted for reality at any cost, then we will set our faces like a flint Cross-ward. Each of us will find "his cross" in his daily pathway--waiting at his feet. Providential circumstances bring us up against choices which cross self. These will become the instruments of death to our own wills.

The Bishop of Durham sums up the daily cross as: "Some small trifle of daily routine; a crossing of personal preference in very little things; accumulation of duties, unexpected interruption, unwelcome distraction. Yesterday these things merely fretted you and, internally at least, 'upset' you. Today, on the contrary, you take them up, and stretch your hands out upon them, and let them be the occasion of new disgrace and deeper death for that old self-spirit. You take them up in loving, worshipping acceptance. You carry them to their Calvary in thankful submission. And tomorrow you will do the same."

Many times you have cried, "Anything but that, Lord." You have feared it might come upon you. And there it is, staring you in the face. To obey God will now occasion new pain and shame and disgrace. But in the divine wisdom it will apply Calvary more deeply to self. Take it up, therefore, stretch your hands out upon it, and there make a fresh break with self. When Christ shouldered His cross, He went forth to lay down His life. That is what you will do as His follower. He means you to embrace this new test as His instrument of your own undoing. There you unlearn self and learn Christ.

That circumstance, when embraced, is your "cross." We must not think of our cross as something compulsory or unavoidable such as misfortune, infirmity, or calamity. Our cross is the voluntary embracing of a path which exposes self to fresh denial, disgrace, and death, and which may actually cost us our life. When we embrace the cross, Golgotha is our goal.

Has some occasion caught the reader in a net of suspicion, slander, and humiliation? Shrink not. "Expose yourself to the circumstances of His choice." All things are subject to Christ, and all things work together for good to those who love God. Take up this circumstance, therefore, as your cross; shoulder it and go forth to lose your life. The "world" knows only how to "take it on the chin." But we take it up, embrace it as our cross, stretch out our hands upon it, and lay down our lives. We thus "put on the livery of humiliation worn by Christ."

You may be handicapped in health. It is the one thing you cannot get over. Now welcome your weakness, and take it up as the instrument of a new death to old ambition and pride. Paul embraced the "thorn" even though it was a "messenger of Satan" to buffet him. He learned: "When I am weak, then am I strong."

Have you been utterly misrepresented and your good evil spoken of? The Saviour says: "Rejoice ye in that day, and leap for joy." But, before you can rejoice, you must first stretch forth your hands, and be nailed, as it were to that very falsehood. A man of God had embraced the pathway of reproach for Christ, had left a modernistic church, and had gone "without the camp, bearing his reproach." He was maligned and falsely accused as being a "holier-than-thou" kind of Christian. As he turned away, answering them never a word, the Spirit of glory illuminated this truth: "If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye." He was happy beyond words.

Thus it is that we learn to die daily, "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" (II Cor. 4:10). Our lives must be poured again and again into the mold of the cross--"made conformable unto his death." Madame Guyon, the mystic, cried: "O life, which cannot be lost without so many deaths! O death, which can only be attained by the loss of so many lives!"

In his book, *The Cross of Christ*, F. J. Huegel quotes from the *Sunday School Times* as follows:

Dr. J. G. Fleming tells how, in the days of the Boxer uprising in China, Boxers captured a mission school, blocked all gates but one, placed a cross before it, and sent in word that anyone who trampled on that cross would go free, but that anyone who stepped around it would be killed. The first seven, we are told, trampled on the cross, and were allowed to go free. The eighth, a girl, knelt before the cross, and was shot. All the rest in a line of a hundred students followed her example.

In order to avoid pain, humiliation, disgrace, and death, we can trample on our cross and go forth to a false freedom; or, we can kneel in "worshipful acceptance," and carry it to our Calvary "in thankful submission," there to find the liberty wherewith Christ sets us free, the life that is hid with Christ in God, the joy that is unspeakable and full of glory.

And all through life I see a cross,
Where the sons of God yield up their breath;
There is no gain except by loss;
There is no life except by death;
There is no vision but by faith;
No glory but by bearing shame;
No justice but by taking blame;
And that Eternal Passion saith
Be emptied of glory and might and name.
Has the reader embraced "his cross" today?
And tomorrow you will do-the same?