



EMBRACE THE CROSS

A Production of
SAV-A-CHILD



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What do we do with self?

Our Saviour embraced His own Cross, and we should follow His example. Jesus said: "Take up your cross and follow me." The main issue in this article is "self" or self-centeredness versus embracing the Cross. The self or ego may be dealt with in several ways. It can be crucified by embracing the Cross. The self can be imprisoned by legalistic restrictions imposed by a religious group. The other approach to self is to express yourself or "let it all hang out"! Absolute freedom of self or the self allowed total expression is anarchy. However, an imprisoned self is more dangerous and potentially harmful than one allowed free expression. The thesis of this article is to point the reader to the best option for dealing with self and that is to crucify the self. If we are submitted to training and discipleship under Jesus, we should let self-die.

Death leads to new life

In the historical account of the life of Christ, we know that He died on the Cross first. Subsequent to his crucifixion, he was raised from the dead through resurrection. In like manner, for each death blow to the life of self, you must also embrace the New Life, or the resurrected life of Jesus. Therefore, we die to self so that resurrection life takes over in us. The Cross means death, but it is also the way to New Life, Eternal Life in the resurrected power of Jesus Christ

A Captive or Imprisoned Self

It is not a dead self that presents the biggest problem, but a thwarted, captive, imprisoned self. The captive self is even worse than the self allowed full play. The best self is a crucified self. The followers of Christ enter into freedom of the self only after embracing the cross. Jesus practised, and taught, death to the self. No repressions, just death. Petty self-life exchanged for Divine Life. The choice before all of us is religion or reality. Man's religion may deceive one into believing his self is dead when all the time his self is hiding, waiting for its opportunity to find full expression in sinful action.

This same principle applies to forgiveness of injuries. Much of the personal problems I see in counselling are directly related to unresolved hurts. These hurts often result in unforgiveness, bitterness, grief or some other such negative emotion. One of our Lord's commands is to forgive others their trespasses so that our heavenly father can forgive our trespasses [The Lord's Prayer, Matthew 6:11-15]. Here is the major stumbling block— the self in you can never forgive injuries. The more we think of our injuries and remember those who caused them, we promote self. With self in the foreground, then the injury, instead of appearing less, appears greater. The injury and the self's ability to forgive becomes the focus not God's love and forgiveness.

All true Love is of God, and is God, so all true forgiveness is of God. The only solution is to kill self!

Cease trying to forgive those who hurt you or wronged you. It is a mistake to think about it. Aim at killing the self now! Then, and not until then, you will find there is nothing that even remembers injury because the only one injured, the self, is dead.

Release As Well As Forgive

As long as a slight or injury recurs to your mind you deceive yourself if you think it forgiven. Forgiving injuries can be one way of feeding a self-life. While **forgive** and **forgiveness** are biblical terms, I prefer to use the term and the process of "releasing" in conjunction with forgiving.

Releasing others from judgement is key to resolving hurts and injuries. Releasing is an act of the will, and almost everyone has the ability to choose to release or to hold on to the hurts.

Jesus set the example for us. From the Cross, He prayed, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." I've used this same prayer, with a small change, with folks who have been severely abused. I explain to them that they do not need to "feel" anything, but simply decide to release the one who hurt them. Jesus did not say "I forgive you", but prayed that His Father would forgive them. When the counselee is struggling with forgiveness, I ask them to turn it over to God as an act of their will. I have them pray, "Father, I forgive [name] even if they knew what they were doing." Releasing someone from judgement is also resigning from playing god. God has not

called us to management but to sales. After praying the prayer of release, numerous counselees have exclaimed, "I feel a real weight came off me when I released my offender." While we do not live by feelings, the releasing of anger, bitterness, hate, and vengeance does lighten a person's psychic load, and thus takes a weight off the person!

God Gives Us Free Will

People who have been abused, abandoned or seriously hurt have a choice of dying to self or saving the self. God gives us free will. He has set before us life and death, and asks us to "choose this day whom you will serve." If a person embraces his hurts, he is likely to become more bitter. Hurt and bitterness tend to attract more of the same. The other option is to embrace the cross, die to self and be healed. To come to Jesus and be healed one must come by way of the cross. A significant part of embracing the cross or dying to self is to release those who have hurt you. To be healed, the person seeking healing must release the abusers from the judgements they have been holding against them. If you and I do not choose to release them, we hold ourselves and the offender in bondage. I've often said, "Whoever we hate, we live with." In other words, by refusing to release others from judgement, we literally bind ourselves to the abusive person and to the pain associated with the abusive events. As we truly die to self and release the offenders, we open the door for Jesus to come in and we become receptive to His healing and wholeness!

The Goal Is Wholeness

As a family counselor, the goal I aim for is **wholeness** for hurting people who are suffering from their past. My prayer for the one reading this is that the eyes of your understanding will be opened and you'll know how to deal with your "self". I hope you will gain insight into how you have dealt with the "self", or have not dealt with the "self". I am very aware, and compassionately so, that those reading this have had their share of hurts, rejections, family problems and a variety of "soul pains". One can spend a lifetime rehearsing the hurts and slights inflicted on them by family members and others. Rehearsing such only helps if the injured party really wants to move beyond the past. God's name is **I AM**. He is not in the past as **I WAS**. He is not in the future as **I WILL BE**. Our Lord is a **RIGHT NOW** God. My main concern is to point you to true healing so that you can be free of the pain and experience New Life in Jesus Christ.

How Do We Receive Wholeness?

The balance of this writing will attempt to answer the "HOW TO" question presented in the subheading above.

How does one truly receive wholeness? While there may be many routes to such healing, the only total and permanent "cure" is death to self! There is no "gentle" way to deal with dying to self. Jesus calls us to "take up your cross and follow me."

The "Self" Does Not Want to Die

We are "born in sin" or we come into this earth life with a fallen nature because of the sin of Adam and Eve. A small child does not have to learn to be self-centered. It comes naturally. Anyone who has witnessed a two-year old throwing a temper tantrum knows that the unredeemed self is not nice company! It is human nature to be self centered! A 2-year old or a 40-year old, each wanting only his way, gives evidence of our need to die to self.

We are incurably selfish, and only a commitment to Jesus Christ and total death to self will bring healing to the soul.

THE CHRIST EVENT

From my perspective as a follower of Christ, the epicenter of all history is the Christ Event. By this term I mean the entire life, teachings, death, resurrection, ascension, present-day intercession at the right hand of the Father, and the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. It is a matter of historical record that Jesus Christ of Nazareth died by crucifixion about 33 A.D. Our Lord's death by crucifixion and His resurrection is the centerpiece of our Christian faith. The twin events of our Lord's death and resurrection have been the theme of literally tens of thousands of books, commentaries, hymns, videos, stage productions and sermons. It is not necessary in this writing to elaborate on this dual theme of Crucifixion and Resurrection. The main thing is for the believer to experience crucifixion and resurrection in his or her own

life.

Our Cross

While most of us have an understanding of the Cross of Christ, the more personal issue of "our cross" is not as well known. Jesus faced his own crucifixion in the Garden of Gethsemane. His final prayer was "Father. . . not my will, but thy will be done." While he died later on the cross, his final decision to obey God was in the Garden. Likewise, our "cross" is not a real cross or place of Roman execution, but our cross appears whenever and wherever we face a choice of going our way or going God's way. Our personal cross becomes reality when our will and our selfish purpose intersect with God's will and His purpose for us. Such "intersections" of choices present us with the same crisis Jesus had in the Garden. We have a choice of taking up our cross or refusing our cross. If we say "yes" to God and "no" to our self-centered will and desires, we follow Jesus' example. We truly take up our cross and follow Him when we say "yes" to His will and "no" to our selfish desires!!!

The Finished Work of Christ

We have daily choices to either die to self or feed and nurture the self life. In Luke's Gospel, Jesus said, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross **daily** and follow me"[KJV]. Our part in crucifixion or death to self is minor compared to what Jesus has already done for us. The great good news is that the life, death and resurrection of Jesus is a **finished work!** There

are many scriptures we could quote, but the following passage summarizes our Lord's finished work in a way that applies to our embracing the cross.

Galatians 2:20, written by the Apostle Paul, states the issue like this: "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 faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me"[KJV].

This verse describes the "GREAT EXCHANGE"— our life for his life; our sins for his righteousness (*); our poverty for His wealth; our mortality for His immortality; our frail life for His Resurrection Life! The Christian life is not a matter of doing good works in order to please God. We cannot add anything to the perfect and finished work of Jesus Christ. All we can "add" is our obedience to His will, and thereby receive, by grace, his perfect life living in us as us.

(*) II Corinthians 5:21, puts it like this: "He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" [NAS], In theological terms this is called our "standing" with God. If we have trusted Jesus Christ as our savior, we are literally standing righteous before a Holy God. We have nothing to be ashamed of nor do we carry any load of guilt. We are truly "made righteous" in Christ! We do not fear judgement or hell because we are 100% righteous before our Heavenly Father. When God the Father looks at us. He sees Jesus and His righteousness.

Romans 6:3-7, is another passage which helps describe the finished work of Christ. In this passage, Paul describes our "union" with Christ in **both** His death and resurrection. Verse 3—"Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? [4] Therefore, we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, in order that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. [5] For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection. [6] knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, that our body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin; [7] for he who has died is free from sin" [NAS], **How should we respond? We should embrace the Cross, and get a mouth full of splinters!!!**

As we continue to embrace the cross, the life of Jesus in us, the new life, takes over!

SOME TERMS DEFINED

Let me rehearse some of the terms we've used earlier and expand on them to help the reader better understand.

An "imprisoned" or "captive" self refers to a person who has not really died to self, but through religious legalism or sheer will power tries to keep his lower self in check. The evil desires this person has are kept pushed down or submerged because they are not socially acceptable. He chokes off his real desires and pretends to be a good

person on the outside, but inside he burns with desires to do evil. In Romans seven [7] Paul describes his own struggles. The tragic part of this person with a captive self is that the self still rages inside him. Given the right circumstances, the imprisoned self will break out of captivity and the real self is on display! In most cases, the scene that results is not nice! The Apostle Paul does not continue struggling with the captive self, but Romans 8 is a statement of a man who has died to self, and is living in union with Christ. We too should move from Romans, Chapter 7 to Romans, Chapter 8!!!

On The Positive Side

On the positive side, the person who has embraced the cross has new life. This term, "New Life" is the life we have because we were raised with Christ from the dead, and the New Life we live is the life of Christ within us. It is not a struggle to live, but Christ does the living for us—in us and through us as us. Jesus is our substitute in death and our substitute in life!!!

Releasing Others from Judgement

We have also urged our readers to quit trying to forgive someone who has hurt us or disappointed us. The better term and action is to "release" our offenders from judgment. It is an act of the will to "release". It is not within our human power to forgive, but we can decide to quit "playing God" and holding others in judgment. The more we rehearse our hurts, the more bitter we become. Pride enters the door if we boast of how loving and forgiving we

are. The more we talk about how we've "forgiven" the offender, the more we exalt the self.

The only solution to unforgiveness, bitterness and judgment is to die to self. A truly dead person cannot be "offended"! To use a physical example:

If a person is dead and his body is in the morgue, he cannot be tempted to sin. You can offer him money, and he will not steal; you can offer him pornography and he will not be tempted to sin. He is dead. Only a self that is not totally dead can be tempted to sin.

How Do We Kill Self?

We kill the self by denying it and refusing to give in to the demands of self. We are able to do this because Christ has already done all things for us through his life, death and resurrection. Our old man was crucified with Christ [Romans 6:3-7]. Since the old man is dead it can neither forgive nor can it sin. Therefore, we are urged by St. Paul to "reckon" or consider the "old man" to be dead and buried with Christ! The deception of forgiving injuries is that you feed the undead self. Talking about or going through the motions of forgiving a person or group of people who have offended us, only strengthens the self and gives it life. The goal of God is to crucify the self. Anything that encourages us to save or protect our self is not part of God's purpose for us.

Conclusion

If you've read this far, you are a candidate for total

healing of inner hurts. It is your choice, you can **embrace the cross** and be healed or turn away from the cross and embrace your hurts! Jesus did not give us a third alternative. Under the Roman empire, crucifixion was the most barbaric form of putting people to death. It was capital punishment at it cruelist and was done in public to shame the criminal and frighten the citizens and discourage crime. Our Lord completely transformed the way we look at the Cross. Instead of an evil symbol, it is now the symbol of hope. It is now the great plus sign of all eternity. Because he died on a Cross our sins are fully paid, our salvation is complete and we are set free from hurts, pains, sins and shame! Taking up our cross does not require that we shed blood, and die a brutal physical death. But our death to self is painful [saying "no" to the self] . Our death to self does require sacrifice [laying our all on the altar of God's will]. The GOOD NEWS is that there's room at the Cross for everyone. All we have to "add" to the **finished work of Christ** is to be willing to be willing to do God's will. Every man, woman and child has been given a will with which to decide. I put it simply like this: God has voted for you; Satan had voted against you; and how you vote decides the election [John 10:10].

I urge you to **embrace the cross and get a mouth full of splinters!** Not only will you be totally and permanently healed, but you will be better prepared to help others who are hurting.

Let me strongly urge you, if you have not already done so, to view the movie 'The Passion of Christ'. This film shows how much Christ suffered for our sins. Once you've

seen this, please read Max Luccado's Give It All To Him. (**) This little book gives a good word picture of how we must choose to give all our "garbage" to Him. If you will understand first that Jesus already carried your sins, sicknesses and sorrows, you will understand that you do not have to carry them. Since He has already carried our hurts, pains and sorrows, why not GIVE IT ALL TO HIM!

(**) Copies are available FREE from Sav-A-Child office

A word from our Founder

In the mid 1980's I was the pastor of a church in Jacksonville, Florida. As a local church pastor, I was in my "comfort zone", but the Lord began disturbing me with the cries for help of hurting young victims within society. Initially, the horror of abortion caught my attention. I then began to see the much larger picture of those children who had escaped the death chamber of their mother's womb, but who now grew up neglected, abused, and "thrown away". "Throw-away children are those whose parents and family have "given up" on them, and literally told them to "hit the road and don't come back".

In September 1994 I disengaged from pastoral ministry and began full time leadership of SAV-A-CHILD. Since obeying the Lord, I have witnessed many miracles in the lives of those being touched by this ministry.

I realize that it is by the Lord's grace, and His grace alone, that we are allowed the High calling of leading this "bench mark" ministry. **We** hope that you will prayerfully consider joining us as we "Partner with Children" and see the vision God has placed in our hearts continue to unfold.



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