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## Daily Crosses and Divine Discipline

Today I want to talk again about our experiences of pain and suffering and try to come to a clearer understanding of this from a Scriptural perspective. If you'll remember, last week we talked about despair, and how some despair is God's gracious gift to Christians who are still trying to offer something to God from themselves, apart from Christ.

We mentioned briefly the contrast between Cain's offering – the fruit of his labors, the fruit of the earth, versus Abel's offering – the life of the sacrifice. And how God has always been interested in, not what we can produce for him from ourselves, but only ever in the increase of Christ in and through us as His body.

We need to remind ourselves again and again that the purpose of any body is to make manifest the life that lives within it. We are the body of Christ and we are to make manifest His Life, and not our own.

And, as we talked about last week, until despair brings us to this fundamental understanding, that “in the flesh dwells no good thing”, “the flesh profits nothing”, “apart from Christ you can do nothing” the Holy Spirit will again – out of love – need to bring us to despair, where we truly no longer “put any confidence in the flesh”.

If we live from the flesh, we will only ever offer God the offering of Cain. We will build towers of Babel up to the heavens that will bring confusion and division in the body. But if we live and walk in the Spirit, abiding in Christ, we can offer up to God the life of the Sacrifice.

Some of the daily trials, frustration, self-hatred, self-condemnation, striving, hopelessness, fear and insecurity, comes from the fact that we have failed to learn this foundational lesson. And the Spirit of God, wanting us to find and abide in Life, peace and joy, allows us to be brought again and again to the painful end of man, so that we can begin with Christ.

That, by way of review, is the purpose for some of our despairing. But, once we learn this, once we genuinely agree that “in the flesh dwells no good thing”, it is not as if that is the end of our trials. This lesson is a huge foundational, pivotal lesson...but not the end of suffering for a Christian.

Because, even though we come to understand that self-life, the nature of Adam, the flesh, has never been a source acceptable to God...it is not as though we effortlessly and immediately stop living in the flesh.

We recognize the distinction between flesh-life, and the life of Christ. We see that it is supposed to be “no longer I that lives but Christ that lives in me”... but we find that walking in the Spirit verses walking in the flesh is not something that we seem to naturally be able to do. We see the distinction between these two sometimes painfully clearly, but seem to be terribly entangled, intertwined, knotted up with the flesh.

We have seen something of truth in that we have been set free from the nature of Adam by the Cross of Christ. We see that we have died with Him to that nature, to that life, and have come forth with Him in resurrection life. We see that with the eyes of our spirit...but seem to lack the ability to abide in that new life. We seem to not be able to do what Paul says in Galatians 5:25 “if you live by the Spirit, so then walk by the Spirit”.

This seems entirely necessary...absolutely essential, but so difficult. Because almost effortlessly...you find yourself resorting back to identifying yourself with Adam, and so living as a man or woman independently of God. As though you were not one spirit with Christ. As though you have not been brought into a living union with Christ.

In a word, it seems like the opposite of Galatians 2:20 is true. Whereas it should be “I have been crucified with Christ, it is therefore no longer I that live but Christ that lives in me”. We find that “I have been crucified with Christ, nevertheless it is not Christ that lives in me, but I that still live”.

So...what needs to happen to remedy this problem? What can be done to disentangle us with flesh-life. Well, I think part of the answer to that lies in understanding daily crosses. Understanding the idea of dying daily, or carrying our cross and following Him.

A couple people have asked me (and it's a good question) what is the balance between the once-for-all finished work of Christ on the Cross (the end of Adam, the new creation) and us carrying our cross and dying daily. I think we can find the answer to that question in the Scriptures today, and also come to better understand some of our suffering. But to do that we need to first look at the life of Jesus.

One of the things that is so important to understand about Jesus' life is that, though He was God the Son, He lived as the Son of Man, expressing the life of His Father, through the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus was God the Son when we walked on the earth. There is no question about that. And though He certainly could have done and said many good and wonderful things of Himself as God the Son...He emptied Himself for a time of all self-living, and chose to live by the life of Another.

Jesus Christ never acted or spoke independently from the Father. He never stepped out of union with the Father and manifested an independent life, will, teaching, etc. He became a branch to His Father's vine...and remained in that Vine.

And so we see him saying things like:

- John 5:19 “Truly, truly I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing, for whatever the Father does these things the Son also does in like manner.”
- John 5:36 “I do the works that the Father has given me to accomplish”
- John 8:28 “I do nothing on my own initiative, but I speak these things as the Father taught Me”
- John 8:29 “And He who sent Me is with Me; H has not left me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to Him”
- John 10:32 “I have shown you many works from the Father”
- John 12:49 “I did not speak on my own initiative , but the Father Himself who sent Me has given Me a commandment as to what to say and what to speak...I speak just as the Father has told me”
- John 14:9 “Have I been with you so long and yet you have not come to know me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father.”
- John 14:10 “The words that I say to you I do not speak on My own initiative, but the Father abiding in Me does His works”

These are just some of the verses in the book of John that demonstrate this reality. Jesus came to make manifest the life and will of the Father.

I believe the baptism of Jesus was the public sign that He would live by the life of another. That is truly what baptism means for us. We have been dunked, put into, the life of Christ. Baptism isn't just a symbol of washing away our sins. Baptism is a placing us into another. Coming out of ourselves and being joined in life and purpose to Christ. So, here at the very beginning of Christ's ministry, Jesus was baptized into a living a life wherein he would be a vessel for the Father.

And all of Christ's temptations were temptations to step out of union. All of his temptations, not just the three in the wilderness, were temptations to act independently of the Father.

What happens immediately following this baptism? Immediately, the Scripture says, He was driven into the wilderness to be tested. What were these tests?

1. The Bread ~ He was tested to make food for Himself. Provide for yourself. Sustain yourself. Step out of a relationship of receiving everything from the Father and make something for yourself. Jesus says “I have a different source of life than just this bread...my life comes from every word that proceeds from the Father.”
  - a. He says this same thing again in John 4 to the disciples after talking to the woman at the well. “I have food to eat that you know nothing about.”
2. Exalt Yourself ~ He was tested to receive a kingdom, an inheritance, for Himself that was not given to Him by the Father's hand. Satan says “bow to me and I'll give it to you...here's another way that you can get it!” Just like the garden of Eden “Here's another way, Adam, that you can be like God!”.

3. Fulfill prophecy your own way ~ Satan quotes Scripture and says “its written that if you fall, His angels will bear you up so you wont get hurt”...here’s a way that you can do that. Throw yourself down from the temple and let the angels catch you...if you’re the Son. Jesus says, in essence, “I don’t need to make prophecies come true. Abiding in the Father, all things written of me will be accomplished and have their fulfillment.”

All of Christ’s life was like that. This wasn’t His only temptation. His entire life was a series of temptations to act apart from the Father. To step out of union. Lets look at a few more.

1. Peter comes to Jesus and says “you don’t need to go to the Cross!...there’s obviously a better way”. Jesus says “get behind me Satan...I recognize the source and goal of that temptation”.
2. James and John come to Jesus and say “this town refuses to let you pass through. I have an idea...lets cast fire down from heaven upon it”. Jesus says “you don’t get it...I’m not living for me, getting revenge for my offenses”.
3. A crowd rushes up to Jesus and wants to make Him king. Jesus will have none of it. If the kingdom isn’t handed to Him by the Father, he’ll receive nothing at the hands of man.”
4. So many times in his life when he was being maligned, insulted, attacked, He could so easily have exposed people, condemned people, unveiled their secret sins...but he remained silent.
5. He was asked for signs as evidence of who He was, and so easily could have proved through miracles, words of knowledge, prophecy, signs in the heavens. And He would not do it. He was only there to accomplish the Father’s goals, and perform the Father’s signs.
6. The crowds were taking turns beating him while he was blindfolded and were saying “prophesy to us, if you’re the Son of God, who hit you?” And Jesus, having created them, and the tree limb which was now being used to strike Him, could have done just that...but would only say what the Father was saying.
7. Or the garden of Gethsemane? “Not my will by Your be done!”...as he sweat drops of blood.
8. Or what about this one...”get down off the Cross if you’re the Son of God. You saved others, and you cannot save yourself”. Oh yes He could have!

So He left us this example. And this is the imitation of Christ. The imitation of Christ isn’t the imitation of His works...it is living as He did – never stepping out of union. Never living of Himself. Never operating independently.

And this helps us get to where we’re going this morning. We too were baptized into the life of Another and are to walk by His life. We too are tempted in life to continue to walk independently though the Cross has given us the ability to abide in a new life. We too are to walk, not in our flesh, not in our selves...but in the Spirit.

Lets look at a few verses that teach us this. I always like to give you a handful of references so that, in your own times with the Lord, you can dig these things up and search them out.

1. Romans 8:4 "...the requirements of the Law are fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit"
2. Romans 8:10-14 "If Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, yet the Spirit is Life because of righteousness. 11 But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you. 12 So then brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh – 13 for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body you will live. 14. For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are the Sons of God.
3. Galatians 2:20 "I have been crucified with Christ, it is therefore no longer I that live, but Christ that lives in me"
4. Galatians 5:16-18 " But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desires of the flesh. For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law."
5. Galatians 5:25 "if we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit"
6. John 15:4-5 "Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

We could go on and on. The fundamental point is simply that our temptation is exactly like Jesus' – to live from ourselves, rather than be the body of Christ. Rather than being a earthen vessel that contains and expresses the treasure within it. And it is essential to see this if we are going to understand our daily crosses, trials, dying.

So, with this foundational reality in mind, what then are our daily crosses. Let me first of all say very clearly what our crosses are not.

1. Our crosses, pains, suffering, trials are not punishment for sins. Friends, I cannot be too emphatic about this. Your daily sufferings are not punishment for your sins. Your sins are far too serious for them to be punished by God making your car not start on your way to work.
  - We need to understand that if ever we say that our pain is punishment for our sins, we are taking away from the Cross of Christ. We are, in effect, saying that the Cross of Christ was not sufficient to punish my sins, and something else, beyond the Cross, was needed to punish me. This is ridiculous, and very dangerous.
  - The only punishment for sins and sin nature that ever was needed was the Cross of Christ...and the punishment stopped there.

- a. Think how silly it is to say that the Cross may have taken care of some of my sins, but this broken leg, this divorce, this financial crisis, is punishing me for the leftover debt that the Cross couldn't cover. No friends, the pain in your life is not God punishing you for your sins and failures.
2. Our crosses are not karma – God giving back what we gave out...to teach you a lesson not to do it again. God is not hurting us to “give us a taste of our own medicine.”
  - a. The law of sowing and reaping has its place. You sometimes certainly do reap the natural consequences of bad decisions, or fleshly living. But that is totally different than God “paying you back” or “getting revenge” for wrong behavior.
3. Our crosses are not the crucifying of the Adam nature. That nature has been once and for all time crucified by the Cross of Christ.

Well, if its not that stuff, what are our crosses? What is the meaning and purpose of God's discipline? **I would suggest to you that daily crosses, in a word, are the daily bring back to the cross of Christ everything in us that tries to operate independently of Jesus Christ as our life.**

Our daily crosses are the Lord's working in our lives to remove our entanglement with the flesh as the source of our life. Remember how we said that, though we have despaired of believing that the flesh profits anything...we still find ourselves entangled in flesh living.

Crosses are the divine solution to that situation. Here's how I think it works. The Lord begins to apply pressure to our self-life, to our flesh living...in order to make it uncomfortable to live independently, out of union, drawing from ourselves. The Lord applies pressure or pain...a crucifying effect...to the places in our lives where the I still lives. Where we still walk in the flesh. Where we live outside of union.

And so he brings us to the experience of what Scripture calls

- “picking up our cross and carrying it daily” Or
- “carrying about in our body the dying of Jesus so that the life of Jesus may be manifest in our mortal bodies.” Or
- “though our outer man is perishing, our inner man is being renewed day by day”.  
Or
- “those who, by the Spirit, are putting to death the deeds of the body, will live”,  
etc.

We were born again into a living union with Christ. We were made to live and move and have our being in Him. We have been given the mind of Christ, the life of Christ, etc. And so, motivated by kindness and love, **the Lord tries to bring an experiential death to everything that still tries to live apart from Him.** Does that make sense?

And it hurts. This explanation, by no means, is meant to minimize your pain in these circumstances. Only to help us understand and participate with the intent of God in our crosses.

If you like analogies...I have one. Its not a very good one, but I think it illustrates my point. Picture yourself under an umbrella and its pouring outside.. Only this isn't rain, it is actually molten lava – the result of a volcanic eruption. Standing under the umbrella represents you standing in Christ. You are in the covering of His life, walking in the Spirit, abiding in Christ. To whatever extent you step outside of Christ to act independently, there is a fire, a pain, applied to your life in that exact area of independence to get you to draw your hand back into that umbrella. It is purposeful, and for your protection.

Maybe some practical examples would be helpful:

1. You struggle with pride (knowingly or unknowingly) ~ The Lord allows difficult or painful circumstances in your life that remove your ability to exalt in yourself so that, in time, He would be exalted in your smallness. That is exactly what Paul describes as the purpose for His thorn in 2 Cor 12. It was a thorn **in the flesh** to keep him from exalting in himself.
2. You are far too concerned with your reputation, your identity in the eyes of man. The Lord allows the slandering of your reputation, rumors and gossip among peers that, in time, brings an end to self-reputation and replaces it with a true desire to see Christ have the pre-eminence in all things.
3. You have an undetected confidence in your own righteousness. A hidden sense of self-righteousness. The Lord allows your confidence to lead you to moral failure in order to convince you that any righteousness of your own is “filthy rags”.

We could go on and on. I said last week, and I want to say again, that not every pain and suffering that you're experiencing fits in this category. So don't try to make yours fit if this is not what is going on.

But, that being said, much, I believe, of our daily struggles, trials, and pains, as Christians have to do with the Lord trying to teach us to live as Jesus did – never operating independently. Never stepping out of union.