

Lambs Among Wolves

By

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Chapter 5

Victory by Dying, Not by Trying

IN OUR former study we noticed from the Bible that Adam and Eve were created in the image of God, with a pure, upright, sinless nature. But through disobedience our first parents became fallen, impure, corrupt, and incapable of doing right. Then God, in His great love and mercy, revealed to Adam that He had provided a plan to give man another chance.

That plan would necessarily include the restoration of his nature from the fallen, degenerate state to its original purity and uprightness, or, as we studied before, from the wolf nature to a lamb nature. And let us keep in mind that it is the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world, whose nature is to be restored in His people.

It is important to understand just how God plans to accomplish this transformation of nature in order that we may co-operate with Him. Many say that the way is simple and easy, for all that is necessary is to "believe on the Lord Jesus Christ" and we shall be saved.

Those who try this—with an earnest, sincere determination to put away all their sins and evil habits and develop a character like that of the Master—find that they are engaged in a conflict with an enemy more powerful than they are. They cannot stop sinning while controlled by a sinful nature, and they cannot change their nature by trying. Let us notice what is involved in God's plan to transform our natures:

"Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it." Matthew 16:24, 25.

"And he said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me." Luke 9:23.

Let us look at the setting in which these words were spoken; it may help us to grasp their meaning more fully. In the days when Jesus was here on earth, the Roman government punished certain types of criminals with crucifixion. Just outside the gates of Roman prisons there were small alcoves where crosses were kept. Probably more than once the disciples had watched the soldiers as they led a man out through the gate of a prison and commanded him to take a cross up on his shoulders.

Perhaps such a scene was being enacted at this very moment, and the man was being led down the street bearing his cross. The people stop to watch the tragic scene, knowing that in a few moments this man would be hanging helpless on the cross. Quietly the disciples stand about the Master, when He makes the statement, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me."

Shocked and perplexed at this strange announcement, one of the disciples says, "But, Master, that man is going out beyond the city gate, to die on that cross."

And Jesus might reply: "That man has transgressed the Roman laws and is under the sentence of death. He is going out under compulsion, to be crucified and die physically. Every man in this world has transgressed the divine law of God, and so death hath passed upon all men. But there is one way to escape that eternal death.

"I have come to this world to redeem the fallen race, by bearing all their penalty on the cross. If any man will come and follow Me and give himself wholly to Me, his sins will be forgiven, and My righteousness will be placed to his credit. But something more than pardon must take place before he can enter the kingdom of heaven: his corrupt nature must be removed, and the divine nature come into and control his life. This can be done only by his going to the cross with Me, by faith, and crucifying the old carnal, sinful self. Thus the great plan of salvation is accomplished: the sinful nature is crucified, and through union with Me, he is enabled to live the new life of victory and righteousness."

Notice the Scripture statements about this experience:

"And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts." Galatians 5:24. "Now those who belong to Jesus Christ have crucified their lower nature with its passions and appetites." Weymouth's Translation.

This makes it plain that every soul who really becomes a disciple of Christ must experience a crucifixion. *Crucify* means "to put to a violent and painful death." I wonder how many professed Christians, who consider themselves true children of God, have really put the "flesh" to a "violent and painful death." If they have not, how can they be Christ's?

What Is Salvation From Sin?

Jesus saves His people from their sins, but this can be done only by removing the thing which causes us to sin, that is, our fallen nature. No one who is controlled by a fallen, corrupt, selfish nature can stop sinning. God has made no provision to change or reform that nature. It must go to the cross and die, and then God implants within His own divine nature. Many seek to obtain victory by "trying," but God's method is by "dying."

The experience of justification and victory over sin is set forth more fully in Romans 6, 7, and 8 than in any other place in the Bible. The words *death*, *dead*, and *die* occur 34 times in those three chapters. Every sin we ever commit originates in our sinful nature; therefore if we are ever to stop sinning, that nature must be crucified. We enter into spiritual life through the death of our carnal nature. When by faith we kneel at the foot of the cross and earnestly pray the Lord to take our sinful self up there to share in His death to sin, He answers our prayer. Then His promise is, "Sin shall not have dominion over you." Romans 6:14.

"What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?" Romans 6:1, 2.

This spiritual death to sin on the part of God's children is plainly taught in His Word:

"That we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness." 1 Peter 2:24.

"For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God." Colossians 3:3.

"For if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him." 2 Timothy 2:11.

"Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus." 2 Corinthians 4:10.

Many sincere Christians are distressed because of besetting sins in their lives, and they long to have victory. Some are troubled with impatience or a bad temper; others may be sensitive and easily offended; some are naturally proud and worldly; others are light and frivolous. All these are

manifestations of the fallen nature, and victory and deliverance can be obtained only by dealing with the nature. God has provided no other way, but He makes this way plain: "Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death." Romans 6:3, 4.

Few people seem to understand the real significance of baptism. Scripture baptism, or immersion, symbolizes the burial of one who is dead. It also represents his resurrection. The old nature is crucified by faith. This ceremony of literal burial in the watery grave helps us to realize that the flesh, self, the old man, has been renounced and crucified, and we share with Christ in consigning it to the grave.

"Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death; that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life." Romans 6:4.

How unfortunate it is for one to go through the ceremony of immersion without having experienced this death of the old nature and becoming a partaker of the divine nature; for it is this transformation of nature which changes the whole course of life. It delivers us from the bondage of sin and produces in us the life and character of our Saviour. Notice the significance of these words:

"We are buried with him by baptism into death." Romans 6:4.

"Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead." Colossians 2:12.

We should earnestly pray that God may guide us in entering fully with Jesus into that experience of death, burial, and resurrection, which will enable us to share His life day by day.

"For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection: knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. . . . Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him." Romans 6:5-8.

Often those who seem sincere and long to be free from sin exclaim, "Oh, it is so hard to be good, to overcome my faults, and be a real Christian." Is it not quite evident that they have not understood or applied God's plan?

This experience of crucifying the flesh, or self, of which the Apostle Paul writes fully, was real to him. He declares, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." Galatians 2:20.

In harmony with the teaching of Jesus, Paul tells us that this is a daily experience. "I protest by your rejoicing which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, *I die daily.*" 1 Corinthians 15:31.

It might be well to return a moment to his former statement: "Know ye not that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death?" Romans 6:3. It makes a vital difference whether one is baptized into the death of Christ or merely in the water. Did you experience death with Him by faith before you were baptized, or was your baptism simply a ceremony by which you expressed your desire to be a Christian and unite with the church? Was it a testimony to your belief in certain facts or truths, or was it a symbol of an actual spiritual experience? This spiritual death to sin is an experience just as real as physical death. It is by this actual death to sin, by faith, that we enter into the real life in Christ.

He Died to Sin; So Must We

"For in that he died, he died unto sin once: but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God." Romans 6:10.

It may be helpful here to call attention to the fact that the Bible makes a clear distinction between *sin* and *sins*. Sins are acts of disobedience or transgressions of God's law. (1 John 3:4.) When we think of salvation, it is customary to think of seeking forgiveness, pardon, and cleansing from our sins. We may not stop to think that after we have truly repented and prayed for pardon and claimed God's promises, we go about our work and soon commit the same sin again. Why is this? Let us illustrate sin by a tree, and sins by the fruit on the tree. If the fruit is bad and worthless, we decide to shake it all off and be rid of it. But next year another crop of the same bad, worthless fruit appears.

This illustrates the fact that it is not enough to deal with *sins*. We may commit several sins during the day, and at night repent and confess them, and God forgives us. But the next day we repeat the experience. Is it not evident that salvation must mean more than pardon and cleansing, or we shall go on sinning forever? Pardon deals only with the fruit, but something must be done with the tree which produces the fruit. That tree illustrates what we have called the wolf nature, the flesh, or self.

Jesus died for our sins; and since He bore the penalty for all our transgressions, when we repent and confess them, God forgives, and the record of disobedience is cancelled.

But that does not deal with *sin*, the thing which caused us to transgress. Sins can be pardoned, but *sin* cannot be pardoned, for it is that spirit of rebellion against God, that fallen, selfish, unholy nature, that cannot be changed. Therefore God's only method of dealing with *sin* is *death*.

Jesus in His humanity died unto sin once. When by faith we enter into His death and appropriate it to sin, we are born again and receive the divine nature. (2 Peter 1:4.) Then we really belong to the family of God.

"Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto *sin*, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord." Romans 6:11.

I heard of a young man who occupied a position which brought him into contact frequently with a class of dissolute people. There were elements in his nature that responded to the practices of his associates and subjected him to fierce temptations. He professed to be a Christian and resisted the temptations with all his might, but was often near the breaking point. Then he learned the teaching of the Bible regarding this doctrine of death to self, the old carnal nature, which is death to *sin*. By the grace of God he laid hold of the experience. When it seemed necessary to meet those conditions again, he claimed the promises of God, and though brought under fierce temptations, he found to his great joy that a wonderful change had taken place within him. With a deep sense of awe and gratitude he told a friend, "I just seemed to be dead on that side of my nature," That is what God promises to do for those who will follow His plan.

We are not promised freedom from temptation, for the enemy will marshal all his forces against the soul who is determined to "take up his cross" and follow Christ. May God help us to learn to glory in the cross, where our old self is crucified with Christ and we are delivered from the dominion of *sin*. Then we can share in the triumphant cry of the Apostle Paul: "But as for me, God forbid that I should glory in anything except the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, upon which the world is crucified to me, and I am crucified to the world," Galatians 6:14, Weymouth's Translation.