

Participants of the Cross-Christ's Death Our Death (Continued)

by F.J. Huegel

We must choose between being dominated by Self or Christ and refuse the 'old life' to experience a deeper participation in Christ's death.

Scripture: Matthew 16:25, Luke 9:23, John 12:24, Romans 6:11, Romans 8:13, 1 Corinthians 1:18, 2 Corinthians 5:17, Galatians 2:20, Philippians 3:10, Colossians 3:3

Topics: "Identification with Christ", "The Cross and Self-Denial"

Description

F.J. Huegel emphasizes the profound significance of identifying with Christ in His death, urging believers to linger at Calvary to grasp the spiritual truths of their participation in the Cross. He explains that true understanding and possession of these truths come through the Holy Spirit, who reveals the need for a deeper appropriation of Christ's death to overcome the 'self-life.' Huegel highlights that while believers are judicially dead in Christ, they must actively choose to live out this reality by continually rejecting the old life and embracing the new life in Christ. He warns against superficial revivals that do not address the necessity of crucifying the flesh, asserting that true spiritual life springs from death to self. Ultimately, he calls for a commitment to the Cross as the foundation for genuine Christian living and spiritual growth.

Transcript

THE full meaning of our identification with the Saviour in His death, cannot be taken in at a glance. We must tarry here at this place called Calvary in order that the Holy Spirit might reveal to us the deep implications of our participation in Christ's Cross.

The natural man cannot receive these things. They are spiritually discerned. But, if we are willing and anxious to experience the deeper things of God, the Spirit will not fail to do His work. The Truth which Jesus said would set one free, will be unfolded to us. But, we shall not only see and understand. Far more-these truths will be woven into the fabric of our very being. No Scriptural truth which has to do with our Christian life can be said to be really ours until it has wrought within us and brought us into harmony with itself. As Christians we cannot speak of possessing truth apart from Him, who is the Truth.

Mature Christians who have experienced an inner crucifixion, and who know what it means to count upon Christ's death, reckoning themselves dead to sin, and alive unto God through Christ, even after the lapse of years, are led to discover deeper depths of the "self-life." Some fresh test, some circumstance which

brings with it the great question of the Father's will or self-will, suddenly reveals the workings of hidden "self-life." They may have thought that they were wholly the Lord's, and that the "old self" was buried with Christ, but some sudden shifting of the scenes, seemed to awaken the old life and to set in motion what has been called "the wheel of nature." As the Spirit unveils to them the secret workings of the "self-life," they come to realize their need of a fresh and a deeper appropriation of the Cross. Their only way out is through a deeper participation in Christ's death. Only the Radium of Calvary can remove the remaining roots of the old cancer. They rise, so to speak, to higher heights of spiritual life, by sinking themselves into deeper depths of death. However deep they may have gone, Calvary has for them still undreamed of depths of crucifixion. It is both a position once and for all taken by an act of faith, in which the believer commits himself to the place God assigns in the death of His Son, and a process of growth in which the believer appropriates according to his need, an ever-deeper life of communion with the Saviour's death. Paul said that he longed to know Christ and the power of His resurrection . . . being made conformable unto His death (Phil. iii. '10). It is all summed up in the great paradox of the gospel: "He that loseth his life shall find it

Not, of course, that there is any nullification of personality involved. Quite the contrary. Paul was no less Paul after the realization of his oneness with Christ in death, expressed in that amazing pronouncement of the Galatian Epistle: "I am crucified with Christ." He could, with infinitely more right say: "Nevertheless I live,"

Once the Cross removes the "I-life" so that the soul becomes 'God-centered, personality in all of its glory and the full fruition of its powers, begins to develop. We can only possess ourselves when God is supreme in our lives.

If this is not clear, I beg the reader to hold in reserve all judgment -as to the truth of my thesis, and to go forward with me in the development of the subject for I have confidence in the Spirit. He is the Spirit of Truth. No truth related to the great work of redemption, as has already been said, can be held without Him. He will unfold to us the fact of our participation in the Cross of Christ, and give us the courage to abide by the consequences. It is all His work, and He cannot fail.

We must constantly bear in mind that our death in Christ is a potential communion. Though from the Divine viewpoint it is a thing long since consummated, historically and objectively completed (we are told to reckon on it as a thing done, Rom. vi. 11), yet from the human angle, it is something held in trust for us which only upon the exercise of faith becomes effective, in experience. Just as the Saviour's substitutionary death for us becomes effective in the blotting out of our sins upon the exercise of faith, so our participation in Christ's death for the removal not of sins this time but of sin as a principle (the old life with its enmity against God and its infatuation with self) becomes effective upon the exercise of faith. The one we might call a participation in the penal benefits of Christ's redemptive work, the other, a participation in its recreative moral forces. Our willingness is the supreme condition in the reception of either the one, or the other, though as has been stated in the previous chapter, we do violence to the Spirit of the Cross in any conscious or unconscious disassociation of the two. They are one.

When I say our willingness is the prime condition, I mean to say that God's respect for man's freedom is something so great that we may say that God cannot when lean will not. He can only work these mighty works which so greatly and so eternally affect Iran's being, upon the condition of his consent. Wrought upon any other basis they could have no meaning. In the act of creation, crowning man with that Divine prerogative, the freedom of the will, God limited Himself. Moved by infinite love, He shared with man His

very Divinity, setting bounds to His own Omnipotence by endowing man with the power to choose. Now, these bounds on the Divine side never have been and never will be violated. God woos man, but never forces him. He appeals in a thousand ways to the best in him, but never coerces him. He pleads with him, shows him the heinous consequences of sin (witness the Cross), but He never obligates him to come back into loving relations with Himself.

So we must choose. Will we be dominated by Self, or Christ? Will we continue to pamper self and crucify Christ afresh, or will we die to the self-life (call it what you will, flesh-life, the old life, the carnal-it matters not), and rise up out of the grave to live in the power of Christ's resurrection, complete in the will of God?

This is the great issue which the Cross of Christ raises. That we might be compelled (in a moral way, not by the coercion of force) to come to grips with this the supreme question of all time-yea, eternity has no greater question --,God conceived the sublime object-lesson of Calvary. And that we might decide aright, that we might make no mistake in our decision, yea, that we might choose to stand with God and irrevocably break with self, Christ humbled Himself-wits willing to be spat upon, willing to be reviled, willing to be classed with criminals, willing to hang in ignominy before a jeering rabble upon the accursed tree. Could the wisdom of the ages conceive of a more potent way-a more irresistible way--a surer way of obtaining man's consent to be detached from self ? If anything more designed to engender in man a loathing for self, and a love for God, could have been found, we may be sure that the Eternal Wisdom would not have failed to produce it. "Christ crucified,"-yea, verily, this is-"the power of God and the wisdom of God" (1 Cor. i. 2'3, 2'4).

"Our old man (some versions have it in the present, some in the past tense-both are true) was crucified with Christ." Potentially it is a completed transaction. Judicially, as believers we are dead in Christ in the ethical sense. Thus, the :Father judges us. We can neither add nor subtract from a Divinely consummated work. In the Federal Head of the new race, those who spring from this the Second Adam, are crucified. Your being a German or a Frenchman makes inevitable certain habits of mind, a certain temperament of soul. Your being a Christian makes inevitable a Crucified life. The Church did not come forth from the womb of the Eternal until upon the Cross that life had been generated.

For this purpose Jesus came. His death was no mere accident. He was "slain front the foundation of the world." His death was not simply that of a martyr. "I lay down my life that I may take it again. No man taketh it from me but I lay it down of myself" (John x. 17-18). "Now is my soul troubled (referring to His Cross) ; and what shall I say? Father save me from this hour: but for this Cause come .I unto this hour" (John xii. 29), Verily, His death was no afterthought, but the indispensable achievement incident to the engendering of a Crucified Church. A crucified Christ that He might have crucified followers.

But, I repeat, we must choose. If the Christ spirit is to blossom out in us in its fullest splendour so that we shall attain the measure of the stature of the Perfect Man, we must, by an act of the will, yield ourselves to that which is already potentially our status before God: identification with the Cross of Christ. We must, on the basis of the Cross, and our oneness with Christ in death, refuse the "old life." "The Kingdom of God suffereth violence and the violent take it by force." We must not only refuse the "old life" in a sublime moment of surrender when the truth of our oneness with Christ bursts in upon us, but we must do it consistently, every time nature would reinstate itself. We must do it as consistently and as habitually as we would, so to speak hold our noses from the stench of some filthy alley which daily we must pass. In a sense, you have it once and for all in a position you intelligently take, for you are grafted into the Trunk of the Eternal Christ whose "death-resurrection-mid-process," you share; but in another sense it is all held in

Divine trust so that you might as a free moral agent choose, and choose again, and again, and continue to choose. Which will you have? The Divine Life which flows as a great river of life from the Throne and from the Lamb? Then you must refuse your own life. It has been corrupted by sin. Cut yourself off from it by standing in Christ's death. Receive a Heavenly life moment by moment. Do this, and you shall be more than conqueror. Do this, and you will no longer agonize over a role, seeking to imitate the Christ; you will all unconsciously, spontaneously walk as Jesus walked. You could not be anything but like Him, sharing as you do His death and His resurrection. It will be an easy thing, a joyous thing, a lovely thing-like the play of children. It is now natural for you to be Christian for you have been made a partaker of the Divine nature.

Oh! that the Church might see this sublime Truth. She has been enjoying a fifty per cent. redemption because she has not realized the implications of the Cross. She has not been willing to die with her Lord. She does not "possess her possessions" because she has not learned to reckon herself dead to sin. She is still under the thralldom of the "flesh, the world, and the devil," because she has not believed her Lord, who over and over, by precept and by example, and finally by the far depths of His self-emptying on Calvary, sought to inculcate the sublime principle of self-renunciation. She has not believed that eternal life can only be found by an utter renunciation of the "old life." She has sought to imitate her Lord-in the energy of the "flesh-life" reproduce His way. She has not been willing to acknowledge her utter inability in this regard, and to lay down her own life in order to become the participant of the Heavenly. She cannot convey life to a dying world because she does violence to her covenant. That covenant was made on Calvary. It is a covenant of death. Christ led the way, He bids us follow. A deep eternal union, a grafting of the soul into Christ, a great merging of interests, purposes, aspirations, all, is to be consummated. This is the gospel. But God has, in terms so unmistakable, so eloquent, so sublime, so provoking that all ages and all races, and all generations might not fail to grasp the meaning, revealed upon what basis this union may be achieved. It is through the Cross of Christ. The "old life" must be drained out, and in the person of the Son of Man it was terminated. But the Church has not come under the consuming fires of the Radium of Golgotha. Hence, her impotence in this great hour when a world crisis not only economic but moral is upon us.

It is folly to talk of revival apart from a deep participation in the Cross. Christian leaders have become suspicious. One hardly dare speak of revival. And the Church does well in holding herself aloof from all clap-trap Evangelism. All revival in the Church which springs from the "flesh-life," that is, the merely natural, which is brought about by a mere working up of the "soulish-life"; all revival which fails to cut in upon the "old-life" and bring it to the place called Calvary for execution, is spurious. If God were to lend Himself to such revivals and such gatherings, noted for their wild-fire (two of Aaron's sons lost their lives because of the introduction of strange fire into the ceremonial offerings of the Israelites), if, I repeat, God were to place the seal of His approval upon such counterfeit fire, He would constitute Himself an enemy of the Cross. He would be antagonistic to the Son. He would be reviving what Christ has slain. Saul might refuse to hew down Agag, but not Samuel. "The flesh profiteth nothing," "Our old man is crucified with Christ." "They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts." We read in Exodus that the oil was not applied until first the blood had been sprinkled. The oil (Holy Spirit) after the blood (Cross) (Exod. xxxi. 32). To share the Christ-life, we must partake of Christ's Cross.

It is interesting to note how that in the great Book of Nature, this same lesson is taught. There is hardly a page in all the Book which fails to emphasize the fact that all life springs out of death. Not a tree, not a blossom, not a shrub, not a fruit, but what cost the death of a seed.

The other day a cotton planter took me out to see his plantation. I am so glad that he insisted that I follow him out between the rows of cotton, for God spoke to me through my friend's exposition of the ways of cotton seed. He dug up half a dozen seeds-just sprouting-to show me, in a manner I can never forget, that before the seed sends any sprouts up it sends a long root down. One would imagine that the seed already buried would have enough of death, and that it would send its first sprout up for air and light and freedom. No-first down deeper in its already hidden tomb.

How clearly through Old Testament type and symbol and story, the Holy Spirit flashes light upon this mystery-this fact of our co-crucifixion with Christ. Abraham must sacrifice his Isaac. Isaac was spared, yet, in spirit, Abraham offered him up. It was because he had done this thing that the promise was made: "In blessing I will bless thee and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of Heaven, and as the sand which is upon the seashore." And even previous to that, we read, that it was from "the womb as good as dead" that he issued. Joseph is buried in an Egyptian prison before he rises to become a veritable saviour, seated on the throne which he seemed to share with the mighty Pharaoh. For forty years on the lonely slopes of Midian the fiery Moses is schooled. There were graves, if I may so speak, scattered all over the mountainside where hope after hope was buried until at last self goes down in utter annihilation. But for those graves, the Man of God who spoke face to face with Jehovah, who became the moral giant of antiquity, and whose guiding hand will be felt in the affairs of nations until the end of time, could not have been. If Leviticus with its myriad sacrifices, its rivers of blood, means anything, it means that God meets man on but one basis-the basis of the Cross.

Our pleasure-infatuated, jazz-intoxicated age will stop its ears and gnash its teeth as those who stoned Stephen. For these things hurt. But, those who have tasted of the Lord, and pant after the wine of Heaven; those who cannot be satisfied with anything short of the fullness of the Spirit, and whose hearts are, as it were, "a furnace of desire" for the deep things of God, these truths that cut and burn, and blast away the old-life are welcomed with an unspeakable joy.

Dr. Trumbull, in that masterful study of ancient sacrifices, Blood Covenant, points out that all the peoples of antiquity, of whatever race, or country, practiced in one form or another, sacrifices, either of animals, or of human beings. He wisely gathers from a study which took him to the sacrificial altars of countless aborigines, that an instinct so universal and so deep-seated reveals the fact that man in his blind gropings after God, moved by the deepest intuitions of the race, never has attempted to establish harmonious relations with the Divine, without it be upon the basis of death.

The Israelites must go down into the valley of the Jordan, leaving in the bed of the stream twelve stones, in order to enter the land of milk and honey. The waters return as Israel passes, burying the twelve stones, symbolic of Israel's twelve tribes. Israel cannot abide in Canaan without a constant abiding in death through the twelve symbolic stones, buried in the stream (Joshua iv. 9) . David does not come to the throne until in the caves of the Philistines, where he was hunted down like a dog by the infuriated Saul, he dies-deaths innumerable. The Psalms, with all their varied loveliness, so adapted to human woe, their seraphic unfolding of the life of communion, could not have been, but for the inner crucifixion in the heart of the sweet singer of Israel, brought about by the mad persecutions of Saul. Isaiah sees the Lord and is undone. He must be purged of the old life by a fiery coal from off the altar of Heaven. Jeremiah dies a thousand deaths as he weeps over the chosen people. Jonah is pitched into the sea and is swallowed by a whale-even then he does not come forth wholly purged from self. God's people have never in any age come to the mountain-peak of spiritual attainment, the glory of unbroken communion with the Most High, without having the "self-life," the "flesh-life," brought again and again to the dust of death. When the "fair

one" of Canticles cries out: "kiss me with kisses of thy mouth" (the symbolical languages of Canticles indicative of the soul's thirst for union with Christ), speedily there follows the confession: "A bundle of myrrh (bitter) is my well beloved to me." "My beloved is as a cluster of Cyprus (cemetery-tree) in the vineyards of Engedi." Ah yes! it must be death.

The Beloved cannot bring us to union with Himself without a deep participation in His Cross. The fretful, greedy, self-centered, fussy, lustful, hateful "flesh-life" (see Gal. v. 19, for an analysis of "flesh-life") must die. It must be absolutely and mercilessly terminated. At this point our Saviour must be firm. He dare not spare. He must not waver. He is compelled to be severe. He cannot bring us to the highest without coming between us and the lower.

Have you taken your place with Christ in His death? By an act of faith you must lay hold of that death as your death; you must place Christ's Cross between yourself and "the body of sin." You must learn to refuse on the basis of your crucifixion the life of nature, the so-called "flesh-life." You must take your stand with Christ on Calvary ground and each time that the "self-life" would assert itself, say: "In Christ I died. In His name, I refuse." This done, the Holy Spirit will bear witness to your faith and set you free, and keep you free.

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