

The Path of Progress: Knowing

by Watchman Nee

The sermon emphasizes the importance of knowing our death with Christ in order to live the normal Christian life and be free from the bondage of sin.

Scripture: Psalm 106:12, Romans 5:8, Romans 6:1-11, 2 Corinthians 5:17, Ephesians 1:17

Topics: "New Creation in Christ", "Spiritual Progress"

Description

Watchman Nee emphasizes that our old history ends with the Cross and our new history begins with the resurrection, highlighting that being 'in Christ' transforms us into new creations. He explains that just as we involuntarily inherit sin from Adam, we also receive grace and new life through Christ without effort, but this realization must be made practical through four steps: Knowing, Reckoning, Presenting ourselves to God, and Walking in the Spirit. Nee stresses the importance of understanding our death with Christ as a historical fact, which is essential for spiritual progress, and encourages believers to recognize that they have already been included in Christ's death and resurrection. He illustrates that the Cross addresses not only our sins but also the root of our sinful nature, urging believers to seek divine revelation to fully grasp their identity in Christ. Ultimately, he calls for a recognition of the completed work of Christ, leading to a life of praise and assurance in our new identity.

Transcript

Our old history ends with the Cross ; our new history begins with the resurrection. " If any man is in Christ, he is a new creature: the old things are passed away; behold they are become new " (2 Cor. 5. 17). The Cross terminates the first creation, and out of death there is brought a new creation in Christ, the second Man. If we are 'in Adam' all that is in Adam necessarily devolves upon us; it becomes ours involuntarily, for we have to do nothing to get it. There is no need to make up our minds to lose our temper or to commit some other sin ; it comes to us freely and despite ourselves. In a similar way, if we are 'in Christ' all that is in Christ comes to us by free grace, without effort on our part but on the ground of simple faith.

But to say that all we need comes to us in Christ by free grace, though true enough, may seem unpractical. How does it work out in practice? How does it become real in our experience? As we study chapters 6, 7 and 8 of Romans we shall discover that the conditions of living the normal Christian life are fourfold. They are: (a) Knowing, (b) Reckoning, (c) Presenting ourselves to God, and (d) Walking in the Spirit, and they are set forth in that order. If we would live that life we shall have to take all four of these steps ; not one nor two nor three, but all four. As we study each of them we shall trust the Lord by His Holy

Spirit to illumine our understanding; and we shall seek His help now to take the first big step forward.

OUR DEATH WITH CHRIST- AN HISTORIC FACT

Romans 6. 1 - 11 is the passage before us now. In these verses it is made clear that the death of the Lord Jesus is representative and inclusive. In His death we all died. None of us can progress spiritually without seeing this. Just as we cannot have justification if we have not seen Him bearing our sins on the Cross, so we cannot have sanctification if we have not seen Him bearing us on the Cross. Not only have our sins been laid on Him but we ourselves have been put into Him.

How did you receive forgiveness? You realised that the Lord Jesus died as your Substitute and bore your sins upon Himself, and that His Blood was shed to cleanse away your defilement. When you saw your sins all taken away on the Cross what did you do? Did you say, 'Lord Jesus, please come and die for my sins'? No, you did not pray at all; you only thanked the Lord. You did not beseech Him to come and die for you, for you realised that He had already done it.

But what is true of your forgiveness is also true of your deliverance. The work is done. There is no need to pray but only to praise. God has put us all in Christ, so that when Christ was crucified we were crucified also. Thus there is no need to pray: 'I am a very wicked person; Lord, please crucify me'. That is all wrong. You did not pray about your sins; why pray now about yourself? Your sins were dealt with by His Blood, and you were dealt with by His Cross. It is an accomplished fact. All that is left for you to do is to praise the Lord that when Christ died you died also ; you died in Him. Praise Him for it and live in the light of it. " Then believed they his words: they sang his praise " (Psalm 106.12).

Do you believe in the death of Christ? Of course you do. Well, the same Scripture that says He died for us says also that we died with Him. Look at it again: "Christ died for us" (Romans 5.8). That is the first statement, and that is clear enough ; but is this any less clear? " Our old man was crucified with him " (Romans 6. 6). "We died with Christ " (Romans 6. 8).

When are we crucified with Him? What is the date of our old man's crucifixion? Is it to- morrow? Yesterday? To-day? In order to answer this it may help us if for a moment I turn Paul's statement round and say, 'Christ was crucified with (i.e. at the same time as) our old man'. Some of you came here in twos. You travelled to this place together. You might say, 'My friend came here with me', but you might just as truly say, 'I came here with my friend'. Had one of you come three days ago and the other only to-day you could not possibly say that; but having come together you can make either statement with equal truth, because both are statements of fact. So also in historic fact we can say, reverently but with equal accuracy, ' I was crucified when Christ was crucified' or 'Christ was crucified when I was crucified', for they are not two historical events, but one. My crucifixion was " with him ". *

*Note. The expression " with him " in Romans 6. 6 carries of course a doctrinal as well as a historical (or temporal) sense. It is only in the historical sense that the statement is reversible-W. N.

Has Christ been crucified? Then can I be otherwise? And if He was crucified nearly two thousand years ago, and I with Him, can my crucifixion be said to take place tomorrow? Can His be past and mine present or future? Praise the Lord, when He died on the Cross I died with Him. He not only died in my stead, but He bore me with Him to the Cross, so that when He died I died. And if I believe in the death of the Lord Jesus, then I can believe in my own death just as surely as I believe in His.

Why do you believe that the Lord Jesus died? What is your ground for that belief? Is it that you feel He has died? No, you have never felt it. You believe it because the Word of God tells you so. When the Lord was crucified, two thieves were crucified at the same time. You do not doubt that they were crucified with Him, either, because the Scripture says so quite plainly.

You believe in the death of the Lord Jesus and you believe in the death of the thieves with Him. Now what about your own death? Your crucifixion is more intimate than theirs. They were crucified at the same time as the Lord but on different crosses, whereas you were crucified on the selfsame cross as He, for you were in Him when He died. How can you know? You can know for the one sufficient reason that God has said but an opening of the eyes of the heart to see what we have in Christ. How do you know your sins are forgiven? Is it because your pastor told you so? No, you just know it. If I ask you how you know, you simply answer, 'I know it!' Such knowledge comes by Divine revelation. It comes from the Lord Himself. Of course the fact of forgiveness of sins is in the Bible, but for the written Word of God to become a living Word from God to you He had to give you " a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him " (Eph. 1. 17). What you needed was to know Christ in that way, and it is always so. So there comes a time, in regard to any new apprehension of Christ, when you know it in your own heart, you 'see' it in your spirit. A light has shined into your inner being and you are wholly persuaded of the fact. What is true of the forgiveness of your sins is no less true of your deliverance from sin. When once the light of God dawns upon your heart you see yourself in Christ. It is not now because someone has told you, and not merely because Romans 6 says so. It is something more even than that. You know it because God has revealed it to you by His Spirit. You may not feel it; you may not understand it; but you know it, for you have seen it. Once you have seen yourself in Christ, nothing can shake your assurance of that blessed fact.

If you ask a number of believers who have entered upon the normal Christian life how they came by their experience, some will say in this way and some will say in that. Each stresses his own particular way of entering in and produces Scripture to support his experience; and unhappily many Christians are using their special experiences and their special scriptures to fight other Christians. The fact of the matter is that, while Christians may enter into the deeper life by different ways, we need not regard the experiences or doctrines they stress as mutually exclusive, but rather complementary. One thing is certain, that any true experience of value in the sight of God must have been, reached by way of a new discovery of the meaning of the Person and work of the Lord Jesus. That is a crucial test and a safe one.

And here in our passage Paul makes everything depend upon such a discovery. " Knowing this, that our old man was crucified with him, that the body of sin might be done away, that so we should no longer be in bondage to sin " (Romans 6. 6).

DIVINE REVELATION ESSENTIAL TO KNOWLEDGE

So our first step is to seek from God a knowledge that comes by revelation-a revelation, that is to say, not of ourselves but of the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ on the Cross. When Hudson Taylor, the founder of the China Inland Mission, entered into the normal Christian life it was thus that he did so. You remember how he tells of his long- standing problem of how to live 'in Christ', how to draw the sap out of the Vine into himself. For he knew that he must have the life of Christ flowing out through him and yet felt that he had not got it, and he saw clearly enough that his need was to be found in Christ. 'I knew', he said, writing to his sister from Chinkiang in 1869, 'that if only I could thermos flask. Do please make me one! "

What will you say?' ' I do not think even a thermos flask would be so silly,' our friend replied. 'It would be nonsense to pray like that; it is a thermos flask!' Then my brother said, 'You are doing the same thing. God in times past has already included you in Christ. When He died, you died; when He lived, you lived. Now to-day you cannot say, " I want to die; I want to be crucified; I want to have resurrection life." The Lord simply looks at you and says, " You are dead! You have new life! " All your praying is just as absurd as that of the thermos flask. You do not need to pray to the Lord for anything; you merely need your eyes opened to see that He has done it all.'

That is the point. We need not work to die, we need not wait to die, we are dead. We only need to recognize what the Lord has already done and to praise Him for it. Light dawned for that man. With tears in his eyes he said, 'Lord, I praise Thee that Thou hast already included me in Christ. All that is His is mine!' Revelation had come and faith had something to lay hold of ; and if you could have met that brother later on, what a change you would have found!

THE CROSS GOES TO THE ROOT OF OUR PROBLEM

Let me remind you again of the fundamental nature of that which the Lord has done on the Cross. I feel I cannot press this point too much for we must see it. Suppose, for the sake of illustration, that the government of your country should wish to deal drastically with the question of strong drink and should decide that the whole country was to go 'dry', how could the decision be carried into effect? How could we help? If we were to search every shop and house throughout the land and smash all the bottles of wine or beer or brandy we came across, would that meet the case? Surely not. We might thereby rid the land of every drop of alcoholic liquor it contains, but behind those bottles of strong drink are the factories that produce them, and if we only deal with the bottles and leave the factories untouched, production will still continue and there is no permanent solution of the problem. The drink-producing factories, the breweries and distilleries throughout the land, must be closed down if the drink question is to be permanently settled.

We are the factory ; our actions are the products. The Blood of the Lord Jesus dealt with the question of the products, namely, our sins. So the question of what we have done is settled, but would God have stopped there? What about the question of what we are? Our sins were produced by us. They have been dealt with, but how are we going to be dealt with? Do you believe the Lord would cleanse away all our sins and then leave us to get rid of the sin-producing factory? Do you believe He would put away the goods produced but leave us to deal with the source of production?

To ask this question is but to answer it. Of course He has not done half the work and left the other half undone. No, He has done away with the goods and also made a clean sweep of the factory that produces the goods. The finished work of Christ really has gone to the root of our problem and dealt with it. There are no half measures with God. " Knowing this," says Paul, " that our old man was crucified with him, that the body of sin might be done away, that so we should no longer be in bondage to sin " (Rom. 6. 6). " Knowing this " ! Yes, but do you know it? " Or are ye ignorant?" (Rom. 6. 3). May the Lord graciously open our eyes!

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