



## **HIS CROSS AND YOURS**

*"If any man would come after Me, let him deny himself,  
and take up his cross, and follow Me:"*

(Matthew 16:24)\*

\*Quotations are based on the Authorized (King James) or Revised Version, but the words used have occasionally been brought up to date for ease of understanding. No fundamental changes have been made, as can easily be seen by comparing the quotations here with those versions.

### **FOREWORD**

This booklet explains how true believers may share the salvation which Jesus made possible by his sinless life. It sets out the evils which come from within men and which will keep them from the Kingdom of God. With God's help the Lord Jesus Christ denied all temptation and endured crucifixion that he might be made perfect. His followers too must deny themselves and through the rite of baptism begin a new life.

While waiting for his return from heaven they have access to God through Jesus Christ in their fight to overcome sin.

It was only a small affair which sparked off a major dispute between the Lord Jesus, and those self-righteous leaders of Jewish thought called the Pharisees. After a busy time spent in preaching and healing, the Lord and His disciples were apparently eating a picnic meal out of doors (Mark 7:2,17), when Pharisees lodged a complaint:

*“When they saw some of His disciples eat their bread with defiled, that is unwashed, hands, they found fault. For the Pharisees and all the Jews will not eat unless they scrub their hands with the fist, holding the tradition of the elders”* (Mark 7:2-3).

It is, no doubt, a good idea to wash before meals, and no doubt in ordinary circumstances the Lord and His disciples did so. But the Pharisees were not thinking primarily of hygiene and disease-prevention when they “held the tradition of the elders.” If they did not wash they thought of themselves as spiritually unclean; if they did, they imagined that God would be pleased with them, whatever the state of their hearts. Indeed, so much did they concentrate on outward appearances that the Lord said about them:

*“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you make clean the outside of the cup and plate, but within they are full of extortion and excess ... You are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but inside are full of dead men’s bones and of all uncleanness. Even so you also appear outwardly righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and iniquity”* (Matthew 23:25-29).

It was not just the Pharisees, though. All men were at least potentially the same, and while dismissing as unimportant the question of outward washing, the Lord pointed to the real problem which all men must face if they want to please their God:

*“There is nothing from outside a man which can defile him by going in: but the things which issue out of a man are the ones that defile him ... For from inside, out of the heart of men, evil thoughts issue: fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, covetings, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, envy, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: all these evil things issue from within and defile the man”* (Mark 7:15-23).

No-one can look at that list and refer it only to other people. Apart from the large and growing number of people who are guilty of the major sins set out here, there is none of us who can plead Not Guilty at least in some degree to coveting, deceit, envy, pride, and foolishness. And there is none who does not know from the inside how true it is that these desires exist and, once granted their freedom of operation, lead us into sin.

### **The heart is deceitful and desperately sick**

The Lord Jesus Christ knew the Old Testament very well. He would remember that before the Flood:

*“the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually”* (Genesis 6:5).

Indeed, His very choice of words suggests that He was consciously comparing the hearts of the men around Him with those of the men who were destroyed by the Flood in the days of Noah. Yet why should there be any comparison between them? If the Flood came and took them all away, so that their wickedness might be wiped out, would we not expect that the new start with Noah and his small and righteous family would make for better things?

In the plainest possible way the Bible says not. For scarcely were Noah and his family safe on dry ground again, and were offering their sacrifices of thanksgiving to God, than God said,

*“I will not again curse the ground any more for man’s sake: because the imagination of man’s heart is evil from his youth”* (Genesis 8:21).

Again the same words are used, and even to a company whose youngest member must have been around 100 years old God could speak of the evil imagination of the hearts of young people. In other words, it is something with which men are born, to tend to think in this way, and then to do the wicked deeds which arise when thoughts are given house-room in our lives.

It becomes plain that there is something fundamentally wrong with the state of the human heart, and if we read the earlier chapters of Genesis it is clear what this is. When our first parents elected to partake of the forbidden fruit in Eden, they not only became dying creatures (for “in the day thou eatest thou shalt surely die”), but also afflicted both themselves and their offspring to follow with desires which they found it hard or impossible to resist. As a result, sin multiplied among the children of Adam and Eve before the Flood, and with the same inevitability among the children of Noah afterwards.

No matter what remedies God might from time to time take in order to hold the worst of human sinfulness in check, sin constantly reared its head again, even among the people whom God chose, for:

*“The heart is deceitful above all things, and it is desperately sick: who can know it?”* (Jeremiah 17:9).

And that is why no amount of external washing can do anything about our real need. That is why the Lord Jesus said what He so truthfully did about the condition of the human heart; and that is why Paul, too, can make the same point about our helpless bondage to the desires of the flesh:

*“The works of the flesh are plain, and are these: fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousies, wraths, factions, divisions,*

*heresies, envyings, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of which I forewarn you, even as I did forewarn you, that they who practise such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God” (Galatians 5:19-21).*

Once again, this long, but not exhaustive list includes evils of which we are all capable. We have all, with one exception, been repeatedly guilty of some at least of these works of the flesh, and it is clear from Paul’s words that we therefore have no hope of “inheriting the kingdom of God” if we are left to our own devices.

It is for this reason that we need a Saviour; but before we consider Him, let us take that thought of our being disqualified for entry into the kingdom of God a little further.

What keeps us out of the kingdom of God?

Consider this remarkable list of New Testament passages:

1. *“Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall by no means enter into the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:20);*
2. *“Unless you are converted, and become like little children, you shall by no means enter into the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 18:3; Mark 10:15; Luke 18:17);*
3. *“Unless a man is born again (or from above) he cannot see the kingdom of God; ... Unless a man is born of water and of the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God” (John 3:3,5);*
4. *“Fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, womanizers, homosexuals, thieves, covetous, drunkards, revilers, extortioners shall not inherit the kingdom of God” (1 Corinthians 6:9-10);*
5. *“Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God” (1 Corinthians 15:50);*
6. *“Those who practise (the things referred to above) shall not inherit the kingdom of God” (Galatians 5:21);*
7. *“No fornicator, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, which is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God” (Ephesians 5:5).*

From these quotations it is very plain that committing sins can keep us out of God’s kingdom. Being self-righteous like the Pharisees can do the same, however good living we may seem to be. Indeed, just being human beings prevents our entering the kingdom of God unless we become like little children, to the extent of being reborn and making a fresh start: all these things are sufficient to keep us from enjoying the

blessings of salvation.

At the end of that parade of evidence none of us can suppose that our life is good enough to deserve God's blessing. Unless we make a fresh start there seems to be no hope for us at all. But how is that fresh start to be made?

We can only find the answer to that by considering:

### **The Lord Jesus Christ**

You and I have inward dispositions which move us to sin, and we have all yielded to them. The Lord Jesus Christ very clearly had the same nature as our own, for:

*“Since then the children are partakers of flesh and blood, Jesus also, Himself, in the same way partook of this”* (Hebrews 2:14);

and this means that He had to battle against temptations from inside which were no less than ours, for:

*“We do not have a High Priest who cannot be affected by the feeling of our weaknesses; but One who was in every way tempted just as we are, though He did no sin”* (Hebrews 4:15).

We have abundant examples in the Gospels of the way in which the Lord Jesus Christ experienced the temptation to behave just as we ourselves so often behave. He was tempted to use divine powers to satisfy His human hunger; to exploit the protection of the angels to make Himself a popular idol; and to sidestep the purpose of God which asked Him to suffer a shameful death in order to obtain immediate universal power (Matthew 4:1-11). He was tempted to avenge Himself ruthlessly on men who insulted Him (Luke 9:33-34). Most of all, He was tempted by enemies, by friends, and His own inward feelings, to evade the death on the Cross and its associated sufferings (Matthew 16:21-22; Luke 13:31; John 12:27-28). Temptations came to Jesus which would never come to you and me, simply because He had powers which we have not: we would not be moved to turn stones into bread, or cast ourselves down a precipice, or call down celestial fire on our enemies, simply because we know that we have no such powers. Jesus, because He possessed special powers and special authority from God, had to endure these especially severe temptations in addition to the ones which afflicted Him, in common with ourselves, because He was Son of man.

He endured these temptations without falling. His enemies were unable to prefer any valid charge against Him (John 8:46), and Peter sums up the flawlessness of His behaviour in this way:

“He did no sin, and no guile was found in His mouth; when He was reviled He did not

revile in return; when He suffered He did not threaten. He gave Himself into the hands of Him who judges righteously” (1 Peter 2:23).

If ever a life was lived perfectly before God, the life of Jesus Christ was that life. But in His own judgement this was not enough.

### **Why do you call me good?**

This is a remarkable thing for Jesus to have said. Jesus never sinned, and yet He could rebuke a man who presumed to call Him good:

*“As He went out on His way, someone ran to Him, kneeled to Him, and asked Him: ‘Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?’ And Jesus said to him, ‘Why do you call Me good? Nobody is good except One, that is, God’” (Mark 10:17-18).*

There are many people called ‘good’ in the Bible: “God causes the sun to rise on the evil and on the good” (Matthew 5:45) shows that plainly enough. Some people are even called ‘perfect; as in “Let us, as many as are perfect, be of this mind” (Philippians 3:15). Yet Jesus refuses the title of ‘good; and the word ‘perfect’ is never used about Him until He has died.

What this plainly means is this: some men are better than others, so that one man may be called good when another is not so good. But all men are capable of sinning, and however ‘good’ they may be today, they may be ‘evil’ tomorrow if they yield to the desires in their hearts, as we have already been plainly shown. God, on the other hand, has a goodness which cannot be compromised. He is good, and He will remain good come what may. With Jesus at the time of this episode this was not so. No matter how successfully He might and did resist every temptation which came His way, the temptations did come, and would come again as long as He lived His mortal life. He did nothing but good, yet His goodness was not safe against the next attack of temptation. It would be a long and hard war which must be fought before the Lord could be spoken of as perfect without the peril that one day He would fail.

If the Lord Jesus had temptations beyond our experience, it is also true that He enjoyed peculiar advantages in His fight against sin. As the Son of God He had a discernment of the will of God, of the Scriptures, and of the human heart, such as no other has had. He would always know how He ought to behave in any circumstances, but that conveyed no guarantee at all that He would do that thing. Only by utter reliance upon God and the Scripture of truth and by seeking His Father’s unfailing help through prayer was He preserved against the incessant threat of desires which were just like our own:

*“In the days of His flesh, having offered up prayers and supplications with strong*

*crying and tears to Him who was able to save Him out of death, and having been heard for His godly fear, though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered” (Hebrews 5:7-8).*

Every moment of His life He must face the demands of His human flesh, submit them to the judgment of His Father’s will, and make the conscious and deliberate resolve that the Father’s will must prevail. Neither ambition, nor desire for comfort, nor the needs of earthly love, nor any other selfish or self-centred motive must be allowed to deflect Him from the overriding claims of his Father’s purpose:

*“I do always those things that are pleasing to Him (John 8:29).*

It was not only in the Garden of Gethsemane that the Lord must say,

*“Not My will, but Thine, be done” (Luke 22:42).*

He was saying it throughout His life, alone with His own thoughts, faced with the misunderstandings of His disciples, in hunger and in thirst, provoked by His enemies, threatened with death, and throughout His life knowing what horror of pain and shame awaited Him Each time His mind moved to the appointed time when His hour would come (John 2:4; 7:30; 8:20; 12:23; 13:1; 17:1) the Lord would taste in anguished anticipation what awaited Him: and it was in that knowledge that, “with strong crying and tears” He must seek for the strength and the resolve to go unflinchingly forward, leaving aside everything which would have made it possible to avoid the suffering, and resisting ever thought of sin which, if indulged, would have made the suffering vain.

Only by reading for ourselves the records of what He underwent, throughout His life in some degree, especially from the Last Supper to the cry, “It is finished!” on the cross, can we understand - and even then only dimly-what the Lord endured in His war to conquer sin. What we know as we do so, though, is that this was a battle to death in which the Victim was the Victor:

*“Him, being delivered up by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, you did crucify and slay by the hands of lawless men. Him has God raised up, having loosed the pangs of death, because it was not possible that He should be held by it” (Acts 2:23-24).*

Indeed, the Bible with graphic imagery pictures mortal sin as conquered in the dying of the Lord Jesus Christ. With a nature like our own, and with temptations like our own, His sinless life and willing death brought about for him, and will bring about for His faithful followers, the destruction of ‘the devil’:

*“Since then the children (of men whom Christ came to save) share in flesh and blood, Jesus also Himself, in the same way shared the same nature, that through*

*His death He might destroy him which had the power of death, that is, the devil”*  
(Hebrews 2:14).

### **Jesus made perfect**

Jesus would not, as we have said, allow men to call Him good, as though His fragile sinlessness could be compared with the absolute faultlessness of his Father. Yet he spoke of a day when He would be “made perfect” and as soon as He has died and risen again, this is the description which the Bible gives of Him:

*“I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I shall be made perfect”* (Luke 13:32);

*“It was proper for God, in bringing many sons to glory, to make perfect the Captain of our salvation through sufferings”* (Hebrews 2:10);

*“Though Jesus was a Son, He learned obedience by the things which He suffered, and having been made perfect He became to all those who obey Him the Author of eternal salvation”* (Hebrews 5:8-9);

*“The law appoints high priests who have infirmities but the word of God’s oath, which was after the law, appoints a Son, made perfect for ever more”* (Hebrews 7:28).

No longer would Jesus be tempted; no longer is it possible for Him to die, for death has no more dominion over Him. He whom God sent to live among sinners and share their nature; to seek to help them and share their temptations, and to die for them so that, conquering sin in His own person, He may be able with full knowledge of what the battle is like-He it is who has conquered both sin and death, and who is set before us both as our example and our Saviour:

*“Have this mind in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not think it a lawful prize to seek equality with God, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a slave, being made in the likeness of men. Being found in fashion as a man He humbled Himself, becoming obedient even to death, and that the death of the cross. For this reason God has highly exalted Him, and given Him the name which is above every name, that in the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus is Lord, to the glory of God the Father”*  
(Philippians 2:5-11).

When our first parents sinned in the garden of Eden, they were tempted to become “like God;” and if it had been possible for them to attain their goal, created beings would have lived in constant competition with the God who created them. Mortal man



lives in much that condition now, in a world estranged from God. But the Lord Jesus Christ resisted every temptation to trespass on God's sovereignty, humbling Himself utterly beneath His Father's will. As a result, when the sinlessness in which He had lived was sealed by His death, the risen Lord still has no desire to supplant or compete with His Father, and therefore "all power in heaven and in earth" can be given to Him (Matthew 28:19), in the complete assurance that this power will only and always be used "to the glory of God the Father:"

### **The Cross must come first**

It had to for Jesus, as we have seen. It must for all His followers too. Our natural selves find this hard to accept and when the Lord spoke of going to Jerusalem to be crucified, Peter, who had just confessed Him to be "the anointed King, the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:16), no doubt expressed the feelings which we all should have had in the circumstances, when he cried out:

*"Be it far from Thee, Lord. This shall never be unto Thee!"* (Matthew 16:22).

But Jesus, so far from allowing Peter to dissuade Him from crucifixion, required him to accept it, not only as - the right thing for Jesus to do, but as the right and essential thing for every disciple:

*"If any man would come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me"* (Matthew 16:24).

something which we must now consider carefully for ourselves. It was for this reason that this booklet was given the title, "His Cross and Yours:"

First, we do not "deny ourselves" when we give up some personal indulgence, either temporarily or permanently: in those things we "deprive ourselves" of the things we forego, which may be a very good thing in itself, but it is not the same as denying ourselves. Peter "denied" Jesus when he said He knew nothing of Him (Matthew 26:34,70-75). We should be "denying Jesus before men" if, when we had become disciples of His, we pretended before others that we were not; and in that event, warns Jesus, the time will come when He will deny those who have denied Him. (Luke 12:9).

Quite clearly, then, if we "deny ourselves:" we do to our own human desires what unfaithful disciples do to Jesus: we say that we do not know them, that we have nothing to do with them. It is very much the same as it was with Jesus when He "emptied Himself ... and became obedient to death" (Philippians 2:7-8). It amounts to a sincere desire to be rid of all that characterized our life before discipleship was offered us: it means a turning away from all the evil things which belong to the heart of man, which we have discussed earlier.

Next, we do not “take up our cross” when we accept with resignation some suffering (say a current disease), or some nuisance (say a quarrelsome spouse, child, or parent). It may be good and praiseworthy to endure these things patiently, but it is not taking up one’s cross. The only reason there ever was for taking up a cross was to be crucified, which is just what happened to the Lord Jesus Himself when He had been condemned by the Romans:

*“They took Jesus therefore: and He went out, carrying His cross for Himself, unto the place called The Place of a Skull, which is called in Hebrew, Golgotha” (John 19:17),*

even if, the burden proving too heavy for His tormented, scourged, and worn-out body, it had to be shared for some part of the journey with the bystander Simon of Cyrene (Luke 23:26). Indeed, if Luke’s record means that Jesus carried the front end of His Cross, while Simon - who seems to have later become a disciple of the Lord (Mark 15:21; Romans 16:13) - carried the rear, we have a very fitting acting parable of the disciple following his Lord to the cross, as Jesus had stipulated.

Jesus is saying, then, “My true disciples do not try to prevent Me being crucified: they join Me on the cross:” Yet He is plainly not meaning this literally. No doubt many of His early disciples did die violent deaths, some of them by crucifixion, but this is a commandment to all disciples, and has nothing to do with the way in which their natural life comes to an end. And, in fact, we only have to go to one of them, the apostle Paul, to discover what He understood by taking up the cross. In his writings the following telling references to his own crucifixion, and to those of all other disciples, are to be found:

*“I have been crucified with Christ, yet I live; and yet no longer I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live in faith, the faith which is of the Son of God, Who loved me, and gave Himself up for me” (Galatians 2:20):*

*“Far be it from me to glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world” (Galatians 6:14);*

*“They that are Christ’s have crucified the flesh, with its passions and lusts” (Galatians 5:24);*

*“We were buried with Him through baptism into death ... 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 6:4, 6).*

The general meaning is quite clear. It was by dying willingly on the cross that the Lord brought the power of sin to an end. It was by rising from the dead that He

revealed His triumph. He recognized the tendency to sin which lay in His mortal body, and determined in response to God's will to bring it to an end. Evil men condemned Him to death on charges (of claiming to be Christ and Son of God) which, though true, were not crimes, for the Lord was indeed these things. But the effect was to condemn His body to death on the cross which ensured that when it was raised from the dead it would be free from all desire to sin and possessed of true perfection. We stand trial before our own consciences, and know ourselves to be, not only possessed of the same nature of the Lord, but guilty of yielding to the temptations which He so perfectly withstood. Desiring to have our natures changed, and signifying our repentance of the sins we have committed, we "deny ourselves;" declaring before God and our fellow believers that we "have no confidence in the flesh" (Philippians 3:3); and then, "taking up our cross;" we reckon ourselves crucified with Christ.

Indeed, as in our minds we hang side by side with our loving Lord, our attitude ought to be that of the repentant malefactor who actually hung there, with the confession:

*"We indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this Man has done nothing amiss" (Luke 23:41).*

### **Baptism and the Cross**

The meaning of the true introductory ceremony for discipleship now becomes quite plain. Baptism is a burial to an old life, and as such must be undertaken by one who knows the meaning of our sinfulness and mortality, who has learned and acknowledged the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, who repents of past sins, and who sincerely desires to start anew and live a life in Christ. The baptism must be a burial in water, not a mere sprinkling or pouring of a little water on the head, and it must represent the true desire of one who in his heart is willing to "crucify the flesh with the passions and lusts;" to put the past behind and to start life afresh as a reborn child of God:

*"Unless a man is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God ... Unless a man is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God" (John 3:3,5);*

"When the kindness of God our saviour, and His love toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit ... that, being justified by His grace, we might be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life" (Titus 3:5-7); "Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, through the Word of God that lives and endures" (1 Peter 1:23).

The New Testament provides the plainest possible evidence that such a baptism is the accepted and divinely commanded way of introduction to the Christian life.<sup>1</sup>

Only if we have failed to recognize our need, and if we are unmoved by the example, the love, and the sufferings of our Lord Jesus Christ, shall we demur at the conditions and refuse the humble submission which Jesus Himself showed at His own baptism:

*“Let it be so now, for this is the way for us to fulfil all righteousness”* (Matthew 3:15).

### **What does hinder me to be baptized?**

One of the examples of people baptized during New Testament times is particularly significant. One whom we would call a ‘good’ man, a convert to the Jewish faith from an African race, and a regular worshipper at the temple in Jerusalem, as well as a diligent reader of his scriptures (Acts 8:30), had been to a feast at the temple; and on his return journey was reading the Book of Isaiah about someone who

*“was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and as a lamb before his shearer is dumb, so did he not open His mouth”* (Acts 8:32; Isaiah 53:7-8).

He was evidently much concerned to know of whom the prophet was writing, for a reason which is very easy to see, if we ourselves turn back to the Old Testament passage, discovering that it speaks of One who

*“has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows ... was wounded for our transgressions and was bruised for our iniquities. The chastisement of our peace was upon Him, and with His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all”* (Isaiah 53:4-6).

In other words this man, whoever He was, was the Saviour. As a result of His sufferings salvation from sin was possible; and the man who read these words was desperately anxious to find out who He was. “Of whom does the prophet speak this: of himself, or of some other man?” (Acts 8:34) was the critical question. If he could find Him, this ‘good’ man would find forgiveness for his sins, and admission to the way of life.

So when Philip the evangelist “began from that same scripture and preached to him

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<sup>1</sup> It is only necessary to look up the words ‘baptize’ and ‘baptism’ in a good concordance to see this, but the following passages should be looked at by anyone who is seriously considering obeying the call of the gospel: Matthew 3:15; 28:19; Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38,41; 8:12; 9:18; 10:47-48; 16:15,33; 18:8; 22:16; Romans 6:3,4; Galatians 3:27; Colossians 2:12; 1 Peter 3:21.

Jesus;’ this seeking sinner, however ‘good’ men might think him to be, came to learn about the life and the death on the cross of the Christ; and then, crucifying the flesh with Him, was able to go down into the water of baptism, and so go rejoicing (Acts 8:39) into his new life in Christ.

If this man, whom the world would have regarded as particularly righteous, felt the need to go to His Saviour and, for the forgiveness of his sins, be crucified with Him and then buried in baptism, how can the rest of us sinners resist the same call?

### **A ransom for many?**

The approach to the meaning of the crucifixion of our Lord Jesus offered here is very different from that sometimes found in the writings of certain religious communities. There we may be told something like this: God condemned man to death because of his sin, and therefore we are all dying creatures, who cannot deliver ourselves from our fate. So far this is certainly true. But, we are told, the only way in which the problem can be resolved is if someone else agrees to die, without himself actually deserving death, the life of this someone being no less valuable than the lives of all those who he saves by his death. We have thus a kind of equation:

One infinitely valuable righteous life + The deaths of many sinners = One infinitely valuable death + Life restored to many sinners.

But, of course, there is no substance in this equation.

God laid down long ago the obviously just law that “The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son: the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him” (Ezekiel 18:20). If this is true of the ordinary carrying out of judicial sentences on criminals brought before God’s courts, how much more is it true of the deaths we all die because, as children of sinning Adam, we all yield to the sinful bent of our natures? Nothing can take away the terrible wresting of justice involved in this theory of ‘substitution’ of one person for others, nor anything be more artificial than the theory which requires it.

It is true that the Scripture sometimes uses language suggesting a transaction in which a price is paid for the redemption of sinners from death, such as:

*“The Son of man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many”* (Matthew 20:28; compare 1 Timothy 2:6),

or,

*“You were redeemed, not with corruptible things, with silver or gold, from your*

*vain manner of life handed down from your fathers; but with the 110 precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot” (1 Peter 1:18-19).*

Yet the language is drawn from the payments which used to be made for the liberation of slaves, in order to show us how utterly we were enslaved to our natures and our desires before the loving kindness of God in Christ appeared. No payment was, or could be, made to the slave-owner called “your vain manner of life”; no use was actually made of the blood of Christ, which was shed on the ground as He died on the cross. No one could possibly make any use of the life which Christ died as “a ransom for many.” So extravagant are some of the ancient theories of the atonement that according to one of them God made a compact with the devil that he could have the death of Christ if only he would let the rest of men go free, to which the devil agreed, only to find that he could not hold Christ either, “for it was not possible that He should be held by death;” and so the devil was cheated both of what he had and of that which he hoped to get in exchange: a theory which adds one more to the absurdities and immoralities which a substitute doctrine must involve.

The Bible’s symbols must be used for the purpose for which they were intended, and then they have much to teach us. Christ did not buy us back from anyone, but He did ‘pay’ the biggest price to secure our salvation that anyone could pay, and so,

*“God had commended His love toward us in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8).*

We have never made any contact with the blood of Christ, yet it is because that blood was shed that we can be cleansed from our sins, and be like the Israelites who were sprinkled with the blood of sacrificed animals in the wilderness when God made His covenant with them and delivered them from bondage; and so it can be said,

*“These are they which are come out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the lamb” (Revelation 7:14);*

and,

*“You have come to Jesus, the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, which speaks better things than that of Abel” (Hebrews 12:24).*

The Lord showed us, by the death He freely accepted, what our flesh deserves, and if we are ready to be crucified and buried with Him, in baptism, we acknowledge that this is so. The Lord showed us, by the sinless life He lived, what God desires of us, and when we rise from baptism it is with that life before our eyes for our admiration and our imitation. The Lord showed us, by undergoing all these things for our sakes, with what love His Father and He have loved us: and it is a response to that love

which makes us seek to live our lives, not merely selfishly in the hope of reward, but also gratefully in the hope of filling up the joy which our Lord will have at the end when the saints He has redeemed stand before Him to share His glory.

### **The Great High Priest**

The life of the Lord Jesus Christ has three phases. There is that in which He suffered for our sakes, and taught us to take up our cross and follow Him to our own symbolic death. There is the third in which He will return from the heavens to raise His dead saints, and glorify those and His living ones together with a life in glorious bodies like unto His own. But between the two is the life which began with his resurrection, and will continue until His return.

Here, in the presence of His Father in heaven He seeks to further the prayers of His disciples as they fight their fight against sin here on the earth. After the pattern of the high priests of Israel's days, who went into the presence of God to bring the offerings of their people and take back God's blessing to them, the Lord performs most perfectly His own service for them after the same pattern. Here, in procuring forgiveness for sins truly repented of, and granting strength to resist lie temptation when this is faithfully and penitently sought, the Lord assists the disciples as they "take up their cross daily" (Luke 9:23), to continue the struggle against sin which they undertook to do when they were crucified with Christ at their baptism; and many are the Scripture passages which assure us that the risen Lord remembers the sufferings through which He went on the road to glory, and seeks with full compassion to aid His disciples as they take their pilgrimage in their turn:

*"It is Christ that died, yes, rather, that was raised from the dead, who is at the right hand of God, who makes intercession for us" (Romans 8:34);*

*"It was right that Christ should in all things be made like to His brethren, that He might be a faithful high priest in things concerning God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For in that He Himself has suffered being tempted, He is able to succour them that are tempted" (Hebrews 2:17-18);*

*"Let us therefore draw near with boldness to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy, and may find grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:16).*

The cross made our Lord perfect, beyond the reach of sin. His resurrection made Him immortal, beyond the power of death. But neither the one nor the other - robbed Him of the compassion which led Him to die, and for us who have taken up our cross and followed Him, there stands available all the help now needed to live lives successfully in His sight; and as to the future:

*"Inasmuch as it is appointed to men once to die, and after this the judgment; so*

*Christ also, having been once offered to bear the sins of many, shall appear a second time, without sin, to them that wait for Him, unto salvation” (Hebrews 9:28).*

### **Take up Your Cross**

If you feel the burden of your sins; if you know the weakness and mortality of your own flesh; if you desire to fulfil the purpose of your creation and live, now and in the age to come, in a way which pleases your Creator: - then you will not delay to follow the pattern of the Lord Jesus, and “take up your cross and follow him:”

You will do this by admitting both your weaknesses and your faults, in obedience to the gospel’s uncompromising call, “Repent ye!”. You will seal it by accepting the “baptism of repentance for the remission of sins;” remembering always the way the Lord Himself submitted with the words,

*“Let it be so now, for this is the way for us to fulfil all righteousness” (Matthew 3:15),*

and you will then commence a “newness of life:” It will need both determination and prayer. It will have its disappointments as the old man shows that he is not quite dead, and you will, to keep the promise of your baptism, need to “take up your cross daily and follow Him” (Luke 9:23). It will not be possible to live the new life successfully either without constant feeding from the Scriptures, constant confession and search for help from God in prayer through Jesus Christ, and the constant assurance that He will not forsake those who come before Him in such a spirit. If any man sin,

*“we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous” (1 John 2:1).*

There need be no failure, for:

*“He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how is it possible that He should not also with Him freely give us all things?” (Romans 8:32).*

*Alfred Norris*