

Session Five

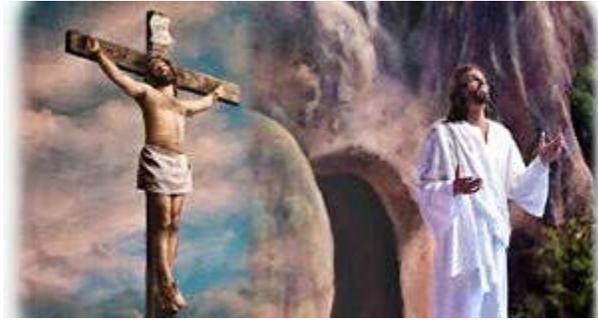
Climbing Higher

THE ASCENDING LIFE

God's Golden Stairway to Glory

PRINCIPLES OF SPIRITUAL GROWTH

THE PRINCIPLE OF BROKENNESS AND DYING WITH CHRIST



Introduction --The ascending life is the crucified life.

We must DIE in order to LIVE! This is a paradox but it is also a very vital principle for spiritual growth. It is the very heart of this series. Several scriptures are important for our understanding of this principle. John 12:24-25 gives an example from nature: ²³ *Jesus replied, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. ²⁴ I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. ²⁵ The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.*

II Cor. 4:7-12 is Paul's expression of the same truth. ⁷ *But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. ⁸ We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; ⁹ persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. ¹⁰ We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. ¹¹ For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may be revealed in our mortal body. ¹² So then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you.*

I. What is the meaning of the term "dying with Christ?"

1. It means self-denial. (Lk. 9:23 *Then he said to them all: 'If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.'*)

- (1) It means refusing to give in to the desires of our lower nature. "Our desires exact of us a very high price. For our holy desires we pay now; for our unholy desires we pay later" (source unknown). This sounds as though it is all up to us to use our will-power to keep our lower, sinful, selfish nature in check; but this is almost impossible to do, though many have tried. This is why some people have become ascetics and lived in isolation as hermits in order to avoid the temptations we normally face in the real world.
 - (2) It means that all our desires must be under the control of the Holy Spirit and under the authority of God's Word. Psalm 37:4 says: *Delight yourself in the Lord and He will give you the desires of your heart.* Our personal desires depend on whatever we delight in! If we continuously delight ourselves in the Lord then our desires will be for what pleases Him. If we delight in worldly pleasures, then our desires will be controlled by those pleasures which our hearts desire to think about.
2. It means taking up our cross. (Lk. 9:23)
- (1) It is not just suffering in silence or acceptance of negative circumstances, although the Lord may use those things to bring us to the point of willingness to be crucified with Christ.
 - (2) It means deliberately repressing our selfish desires in order that we may do what Christ desires. Consider John 12:24-25 (NIV) ²⁴*I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.* ²⁵*The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.*

In these verses Jesus makes it clear that those who follow Him must be prepared to die to self, but such a death does not mean the end of existence but rather a change in the form of life! Just as a seed planted in the ground dies and becomes food for the sprout of Life within the seed, so our death to self becomes food to a new kind of life in our real world. It results in a new kind of character with much less selfishness and much greater concern for others and for their welfare. It means putting others ahead of self and seeking their good before our own.

3. It means serving others.

When James and John wanted the seats of honor in Jesus' coming kingdom, he explained that in order to become great in God's kingdom His followers were to become servants of all the others just as Jesus came, not to be served but to serve others and to give His life as a ransom for them (Matt. 20:25-28).

Matt. 10:37 emphasizes the same point: (ESV) ³⁷ *Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.* ³⁸ *And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me.* ³⁹ *Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.*

Mk. 8:35 & Lk. 17:33 give the same emphasis. Lk. 14:25-33 talks about counting the cost of being a disciple of Jesus in similar language. (ESV) ²⁷ *Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple. . . .* ³³ *So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.* The cost of being a follower of Christ is giving up any right to control your own life, with the understanding that His control results in what is best for us and/or His kingdom.

4. It means being buried with Him and raised with Him to a new kind of life (Rom. 6:5-14) and being yielded to Him to do His will so that the sinful nature is CANCELLED or ANNULLED so that we are free **NOT** to sin.

Romans 6: 6 & 7 says, ⁶ *We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing (cancelled, annulled), so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin.* ⁷ *For one who has died has been set free from sin.* ⁸ *Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him (ESV).*

It means constantly putting to death our selfishness and pride so that the LIFE of Jesus may live in us. II Cor. 4:7-12 says: (ESV) ⁷ *But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us.* ⁸ *We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair;* ⁹ *persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed;* ¹⁰ *always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies.* ¹¹ *For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.* ¹² *So death is at work in us, but life in you.*

The treasure in v. 7 is God's gift of eternal life (John 1:12-13 and John 3:16). "Jars of clay" means our earthly bodies. Death (v. 11) is not physical death but death to our selfish selves. Spiritual death is at work in us so that the principle of life will be at work in those whom Paul has led to faith in Jesus and commitment to Him.

Gal. 2:20 expresses the same principle: (ESV) ²⁰ *I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*

5. It does NOT mean being more dedicated. We may become proud of our dedication but not usually of our death. The spiritual death of our selfish selves is what prepares us to live!

II. How does one "die with Christ?"

Dr. Sam Cannata, long-time missionary in East Africa, wrote a wonderful tract a number of years ago in which he gives us a good recipe for dying with Christ:

1. "Wash your hands." Cleansing -- James 4:7-10: ⁷ *Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. ⁸ Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. ⁹ Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. ¹⁰ Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.* This requires FULL confession and total repentance. This means agreeing with God that what He calls sin in the Bible we must call sin when we find it in our lives.
 - a. Renounce all claims to yourself. Christ has "bought" us for Himself (I Cor. 6:20: . . . *for you were bought with a price. So, glorify God in your body.*) We have no rights of our own but have become Christ's "love-slave." In the Old Testament, when a slave was content to stay with a good master and did not want to be released to become independent in the year of Jubilee, provision was made for the slave to continue to serve the same master for life. Deut. 15:16-17 (ESV) explains how this was done. ¹⁶ *But if he says to you, 'I will not go out from you,' because he loves you and your household, since he is well-off with you, ¹⁷ then you shall take an awl, and put it through his ear into the door, and he shall be your slave forever. And to your female slave you shall do the same.*

To insist on our rights is pride and it kills. What we may consider to be our rights might not be what others consider to be our rights. To give up our rights in submission to others may seem like weakness, but it is, in fact, a sign of strength. Submission to others means that we have inner strength enough to stand on our own but are willing to give up having our own way for the sake of harmony and smoothness of integration in business or marriage or in any other social situation. To hang on to our rights often leads to disaster as in this ditty: "Here lies the body of Henry J. who always insisted on the right of way. He was right, dead right, as he sped along, but he's just as dead as if he were wrong." (Source unknown)! Howard E. Butt calls submission to others "the velvet covered brick." (See book list.)

- b. Get rid of all resentment, bitterness, hatred, anger and any other negative emotions or thoughts. These negative emotions come naturally to us, but we must confess them, claim forgiveness and pray for the ability to LOVE the one (or the circumstances) which brought on our negative reaction. Try to think of why you became angry or upset. Was it because you felt insulted or demeaned? Was jealousy involved, or envy? Are you justifying yourself? Are you reacting in pride? Are you feeling deprived of your rights? Are you feeling sorry for yourself?
 - c. Confess every known sin -- everything which keeps you from growing into the likeness of Jesus. The goal is to be "conformed to the image of His Son" (Rom. 8:29). Is what you are feeling now the same as what you think Jesus would feel if He were in your place?
 - d. Confess anything or anyone you love more than you love Jesus. Ask the Lord to make Himself more precious to you than whatever gives you most pleasure in life.
 - e. Consider yourself dead with Christ (Rom. 6:11 -- ¹¹*In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.*); dead to your lower nature with all its lusts and desires, its pride and selfishness, its hurt feelings and tendency to hurt others.
2. "Empty your hands." After washing and receiving cleansing and forgiveness we must also get rid of all the "toys" which tend to fill our lives and take the place of Jesus. Let Jesus FILL your hands (your life) with HIS presence and power.

Each of us has our own list of "toys." It requires heart searching to determine what it is that we give more time and effort to than we do to Jesus and fulfilling His will for our

lives. Many of the “things” we give time and effort to may contribute also to fulfilling His will for us, but we must pray for discernment to know which ones interfere or hinder the process and which ones actually help. Do we put too much emphasis on entertainment? We know we need to relax sometimes, but can we not relax in Jesus?

CONCLUSION:

It is no defeat to be crucified with Christ, to die with Him and to be raised with Him; actually, it is VICTORY, just as Jesus' death was not defeat, but was victory! Romans 8:13 bids us to "*put to death the old man (nature)*" so that we may LIVE with HIM in power! This is the secret of a victorious life. Now all we have to do is to put it into practice DAILY! (Luke 9:23)!