

## WHAT PAUL TAUGHT ABOUT SELF

A popular love song regarding societal difference between two lovers laments the fact that they “live in two different worlds.” In a very real sense, Christians live in two different worlds. These are the physical world and the Kingdom of God. The value system and the view of reality of these worlds are literally “worlds apart.” The difference creates tension in the life of the believer. The old nature (self) struggles to survive though it has been consigned to the cross. It desperately wants to come down off the cross and asserts its rights. Most of us will tolerate the antics of self and excuse it by such statements as “well I’m only human.” First, that is not a true statement for one who has been born again of the Spirit of God. We are NOT only human. Such statements deny the reality of our life in Christ and the demands of being a citizen of the Kingdom of God. We fail to realize the basic wickedness of the old human nature.

The wickedness of “self exaltation” is evident when we consider the source of these words. “I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God; I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly, on the utmost heights of the sacred mountain. I will ascend above the tops of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.” (Isaiah 14:13-14) We recognize this as coming from Lucifer who became the embodiment of evil. Every statement in this passage from Isaiah starts with “I.”

In the Garden of Eden, when man did what the devil wanted him to do, he caught the same disease of Self. Self is a nature that is incorrigible to God. Another word for “self” is “the flesh” or the “carnal mind.” Paul wrote in Roman 8:7 and 8 “the sinful (carnal) mind is hostile toward God. It does not submit to God’s law nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature (the flesh) cannot please God.”

We should ask, “Did Christ Jesus come so that our selves could be *improved*?” No! Christ came to replace self. This fact is why “coming to Christ” is so difficult for people. Coming to Christ means giving up self which is contrary to the first basic human drive, Self Preservation.

*Discipline* is not the answer because “self” is not subject to the law of God. We could educate it and expose it to the highest kind of morality but self (the heart of the natural man) is still “deceitful above all things and desperately wicked.” (Jer 17:9) When self is manifested the results are as Paul has enumerated in Galatians 5:19-21. “The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.” We often hear that we should dedicate “self.” When that is done, we simply create a system that operates on selfish motivation and selfish rewards.

The course of self is pre-plotted. It will look at everything from the perspective of how “self” will be affected. It will always magnify itself. It is touchy, sensitive when not recognized, and always struggling for the position of highest honor and praise. It cannot bear to be rebuked or corrected. It is full of self-defense. It pushes its claims on others.

It will defeat us. (Romans 7:18-19) “I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do--this I keep on doing.” We can recognize that this is NOT the victorious, overcoming life that we are to have in Christ.

It will despair us. (Romans 7:24) “What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this

body of death?” In this statement of despair, we can begin to see that self cannot save itself. Someone external to ourselves who is not in the same predicament as we are in must be involved if a solution is to be found. The only One Who can help us is Jesus since He was not born of the seed of Adam. The virgin birth of Jesus is, therefore, critically important to His ability to rescue or redeem us from the condition of being enslaved to sin. Another person who was also enslaved to sin by virtue of being born of the seed of Adam would have no standing to “save” us. In fact, he could not even save himself.

It will doom us. (Romans 8:6) “To be carnally minded is death.”(KJV) The Amplified Bible states it this way. “Now the mind of the flesh [which is sense and reason without the Holy Spirit] is death -- death that comprises all the miseries arising from sin, both here and hereafter.”

A cure for “self” does exist though we cannot improve it, discipline it, or dedicate it. The cure is death. We are not asked to kill ourselves. However, we are to “reckon” ourselves to be dead to sin and alive to God through Christ. (Rom 6:11, KJV) Paul also said, “I am crucified with Christ.” That is the death to which he referred. It is an acceptance of what has already happened. No one ever committed suicide by crucifixion. The accomplishment of this reality can only be “in Christ.” After Paul said “I am crucified with Christ” he then said “nevertheless, I live; yet not I, but Christ lives in me.” Having reckoned (considered) ourselves dead to sin, the only way we are alive is “to God by the life of Christ in us.”

**ROMANS 8:12-14** “Therefore, brothers, we have an obligation--but it is not to the sinful nature, to live according to it. For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live, because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.” The death and resurrection of Jesus pictures for us the need to die to self and experience the new birth. However, that was not the end of the story. God also provides the power to gain the victory and overcome the world system to which the old nature is drawn. That power was personally delivered by the Holy Spirit. On the day of Pentecost following the resurrection, God poured out His Spirit and made it available to all people. This was the fulfillment of God’s promise through the prophets and it was evidence of Christ being exalted to the right hand of the Father.

The vacancy created by the death of self makes room for Christ Jesus to dwell in us by His Holy Spirit. We will have more of the fullness of Christ as we provide more room for the Holy Spirit by giving less room to “self.”

Earlier we listed the terrible things that result from a life devoted to self. Immediately following that list is another enumerating the good things that result from a life of one who is led by the Spirit. “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.” (Gal 5:22,23)

The very next verse is a “directional marker” we should apply to every situation. “Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires.” As we examine ourselves we should ask “Does every action we take reflect the fact that we belong to Christ Jesus?” Or to put it another way, “Does every action we take reflect the fact that we have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires?”