

14. No Stopping Place

The lesson that “true greatness consists in true goodness” has always been difficult to learn.¹ Even the proud monarch Nebuchadnezzar had to learn the hard way. It is so natural, when striving to do right, to feel that we have achieved a degree of godliness through doing good things.

“The reason many in this age of the world make no greater advancement in the divine life is because they interpret the will of God to be just what they will to do. While following their own desires, they flatter themselves that they are conforming to God’s will. These have no conflict with self. There are others who for a time are successful in the struggle against their selfish desire for pleasure and ease. They are sincere and earnest, but grow weary of protracted effort, of daily death, of ceaseless turmoil. Indolence seems inviting, death to self repulsive; and they close their drowsy eyes, and fall under the power of temptation instead of resisting it.”²

There are two classes pictured in the foregoing paragraph. The first we could classify as permissive believers. They have no, or at the most little, conflict with self. To these it seems easier to delete sanctification from God's gift of righteousness by faith than to follow the Master's invitation, ". . . if any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me." Matthew 16:24.

The other class are stony ground believers who grow weary because their root is not wholly secure in Christ. They have not learned the joy of renouncing self and of letting Christ carry the load. They have never discovered that His yoke is easy and His burden is light.

Sanctification, as a process, reaches deeper and deeper into our lives and requires total surrender at each step. This, of course, is not easy for the proud heart to find joy in doing.³

"John and Judas are representatives of those who profess to be Christ's followers Each possessed serious defects of character; and each had access to the divine grace that transforms character . . . One, daily dying to self and overcoming sin, was sanctified through the truth; the other, resisting the transforming power of grace and indulging selfish desires, was brought into bondage to Satan."⁴

Since life is a continuous round of making decisions, it follows logically that this is the area where this daily dying to self must start. Like Jesus, our true Pattern, our automatic response in every decision must be "not my will but Thine be done." This must be more than a verbalization of the thought. It requires a willingness—as God directs—to change, drop, or carry out any given plan or desire, no matter how cherished it might be. It requires an acquaintance with, and a sensitivity to, God's will as revealed in Inspiration; we must also be tuned to the still small voice of conscience and carefully evaluate His providential leading.⁵

By following this process the grace of God will "attract the mind upward and habituate it to meditate upon pure and holy things."⁶ *God-like-ness is not doing what Christ did, but living the way He lived.* We need to understand clearly Paul's counsel for holy living as described in Colossians 3:3,4. "For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory." What glory is Paul concerned about? "To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory." Colossians 1:27.

What a privilege that we can be used of God to reveal His own character to an unbelieving world. "Jesus revealed no qualities, and exercised no powers, that men may not have through faith in Him. His perfect humanity is that which all His followers may possess, if they will be in subjection to God as He was."⁷

This is true godliness, not trying to *be good* or *doing good* things but daily dying to self—*truly trusting God*. "My son, give me thine heart, and let thine eyes observe my ways." Proverbs 23:26. We would be amazed at what God would do in our lives if we would stop *trying* and start *dying*—being in subjection to God as Jesus was.

There is, however, a real hindering factor we must face as we attempt to take this step—compromise. This is one of Satan's most effective weapons to keep the Christian from making the spiritual progress God desires him to make. Jesus' life showed no compromise at any time. He was wholly dedicated to do His Father's will. His words, "I delight to do thy will, O my God . . ." Psalms 40:8 reflect the only attitude that is God-like, or acceptable, in God's sight. Reluctant obedience is not obedience at all.

"When the requirements of God are accounted a burden because they cut across human inclination, we may know that the life is not a Christian life. True obedience is the outworking of a principle within. It springs from the love of righteousness, the love of the law of God. The essence of all righteousness is loyalty to our Redeemer."⁸

The disciples of old, the reformers, and God's people in all ages have met Satan's temptation to compromise their loyalty to God. It is often in what we consider our *strength* that Satan finds our *weakness*. Let us look again at another side at Peter's experience.

"It was on the point where he thought himself strong that Peter was weak; and not until he discerned his *weakness* could he realize his need of dependence

upon Christ. Had he learned the lesson that Jesus sought to teach him in that experience on the sea, he would not have failed when the great test came to him."⁹

Now we can better understand Christ's words to Paul in 2 Corinthians 12:9, ". . . My grace is sufficient for thee; for My strength is made perfect in weakness . . ." Then, as Paul gives answer in the next verse, ". . . for when I am weak, then am I strong." We can see the only way to godliness is by daily dying to self. No, there is no stopping place here. This round of the ladder only opens our eyes to the great vistas ahead as Christ's indwelling becomes the practical key to God-like-ness.

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Notes

- 1 Prophets and Kings, p. 521.
- 2 The Acts of the Apostles, p. 565.
- 3 Christ Our Righteousness, pp. 33, 34.
- 4 The Acts of the Apostles, pp. 558, 559.
- 5 Messages to Young People, p. 156.
- 6 Testimonies, vol. 2, pp. 478, 479.
- 7 The Desire of Ages, p. 664.
- 8 Christ's Object Lessons, p. 97.
- 9 The Desire of Ages, p. 382.