

Participants of the Cross Christ's Death Our Death

by F.J. Huegel

F.J. Huegel's sermon emphasizes the believer's essential participation in Christ's death and the transformative power of the Holy Spirit in achieving true spiritual life.

Scripture: Romans 6:3

Topics: "Identification with Christ", "The Cross and Self-Denial"

Description

F.J. Huegel emphasizes the profound principle of participation in Christ's death, illustrating that true believers are grafted into Him, becoming one with His body. He explains that this identification with Christ necessitates a death to the 'self-life' and a willingness to embrace the transformative power of the Cross. The Holy Spirit plays a crucial role in this process, revealing the necessity of dying to the old self to experience the new life in Christ. Huegel warns against a superficial understanding of salvation that neglects the moral implications of Christ's sacrifice, urging believers to fully engage in their crucifixion with Christ to live in His resurrection power. Ultimately, he calls for a deeper revelation of the Cross to awaken the Church to its true identity and purpose.

Transcript

MY purpose is to trace step by step the scope of this great principle of participation in Christ-to measure, as it were, the length and breadth, the depth and the height, of this marvellous identification of the believer with his Saviour. Christ, and all true believers, are one. They constitute His body. They are, in the language of Adam, "bone of His bone, and flesh of His flesh." Just what the implications of this oneness with Christ are-the overwhelming glory of such a positionmost Christians have never had -so much as an inkling. May the Father of Lights enable us not only to understand, but to enter into this holy temple, and to realize our oneness with Christ. This is the only spring that can quench our thirst. There is no other way to the fulfilment of our deepest aspirations as Christians.

We must bear in mind that it is the office of the Holy Spirit to graft the believer into Christ, as a gardener would graft the branch of a tree into the main body of another. "By one Spirit are ye all baptized into one body" (I Cor. xii. 13). Paul dwells upon this grafting process in the eleventh chapter of his letter to the Romans, where he speaks of the breaking off of Israel from the Root, Christ, and the grafting in of the Gentiles, to become partakers of the Root.

True conversion in its deepest aspect is just this. If it fails to result in a veritable grafting into Christ, it is spurious, and from the nature of the case, unfruitful. Indeed, we must be born again. We must be rooted into the very Trunk of the Eternal Godhead. We do not simply strive to imitate a Divine Leader; exceeding great and precious promises have been left to us whereby we are made partakers of the Divine Nature (2 Peter i. 4). The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are children of God, heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ (Rom. viii. 17) .

It was the Spirit who convicted us of sin, creating in us a deep antipathy for sin, and a burning desire to be free from its foul dominion. It was the same Spirit who revealed Christ to us as the only way out of our sin-bearer (John xvi. 7-15) . It is the same Spirit who binds us to Christ, rooting our lives into His Divine Life, and causing us to grow up into Him who is the Head. Madame PennLewis, in one of her books, points out that in the Greek, the much-loved John iii. 16, conveys a very different meaning from that of our English versions. It is not simply he that believeth in Christ, but rather he that believeth into Him, who shall have eternal life. By the co-action of the Spirit (and the Holy Spirit works so in conjunction with our spirit that we are often altogether unconscious of His working) we have believed into Christ. He has become our life. "But he who is joined unto the Lord is one spirit" (1 Cor. vi. 17) .

Now this grafting necessitates some cutting, of course. If we will not die to the natural, how can we expect to live to the supernatural? Paul puts it thus: "If we be dead with Christ we believe that we shall also live with Him." The branch which contrary to nature is grafted into a tree of another species, must die to the old life. It must send its roots into a new trunk. It receives a new life. Its relation with the old is severed so utterly, and so completely, and so continuously, that for it, the old no longer exists. It imbibes the new with a constancy which brings about a veritable fusion of the two.

A study of Christian biography reveals the fact that the great saints of the Church (and I use the term in its Biblical sense as descriptive of all those who have truly lived in and for Christ) have with few exceptions experienced what some have called "a second work of grace." There came a time when they panted after a fuller participation in the life of God. We may speak of it as sanctification; others dwell upon the aspect of rest, and speak of the "rest of faith." The modern emphasis seems to be upon the victorious aspects-it is the Victorious Life. Or, we might speak of it as the Abundant Life. Be that as it may,-Christian experience will not be bound by terminology-the fact remains that, sooner or later, the Christian is awakened to a sense of the sin of "self-hood." There is no reason, Scriptural or otherwise, why Christians should not immediately upon conversion, be brought to this stage, but the facts indicate that they usually wander for some years in the wilderness of a divided affection before entering into the land of milk and honey.

Again, it is the Holy Spirit who works in the believer this conviction of the sin of a divided heart. He shows the believer how tragically self-will has thwarted Christ's purpose to bring him into utter union with Himself. He re

veals with racking precision and crushing clearness, the awful consequences of the "self-life" in its enmity to Christ, and its power to choke the life of the spirit. He shows the believer the duplicity of his way, the shamefulness of a hollow piety, the mockery of a superficial devotion to Christ. The believer comes to realize that he is crucifying Christ afresh by his lust for pleasure, his greed for excitement, and his passion for self. He sees that though he has been rooted into Christ, yet, he has been drawing more from the old roots. He sees how muddy is the stream of his life, how tainted the waters, how the stench of the "self-life" has blighted what flowers have grown by their side. He begins to understand Romans vii. He, too, would be free. The secret cry of his heart also becomes: "O wretched man that I am! who will deliver me from the

body of this death ?"

This marks a crisis. The hour has come for a fresh revelation of the scope and efficacy of Christ's redemptive work. The believer's eyes are now to be opened to the meaning of the deeper aspects of the Cross of Christ. The Cross is unveiled. The Holy Spirit reveals Christ, this time not as the Divine Sin-Bearer (though the believer never gets beyond the need of a constant appropriation of the efficacy of Christ's sacrifice for sin), but as the way out of this loathsome thing we call "Self." It is a vision of himself as one with Christ in His death-crucified with Christ -which the Spirit now vouchsafes to the believer. He is made to see that he too died to sin in the death of the Saviour, and was ethically committed to a position of death, in order that he might be brought by the cataclysmic action of a corporate participation in the Cross, and the Tomb of the Son of Man, out from under the dominion of the "selflife" to a new life of Divine potency. He begins to see that without this participation in the death of the Son of Man, sin as a principle (that very thing which precipitated the heinous tragedy of Calvary) continues to operate in him, and to place him, in a sense, in a position of complicity with the very murderers of the Saviour. He realizes that if he fails to sign the death sentence of "self," his position as a believer becomes utterly intolerable, the acme of contradictions. He begins to realize that Christ not only died for him as a sinner, but that he, as a sinner, potentially died in Christ to sin, and that the former without the latter would involve him in moral contradictions deep-dyed and infamous. The logic of it all bears down upon him with the force of a demon, and drives him from his position of duplicity (unconsciously held, no doubt). He must either die with Christ to sin, or continue to crucify Christ (the carnal mind is enmity against God, (Romans viii. 7). He sees that unless Self is crucified, Christ is.

It is all the work of the Holy Spirit. It is not natural for a man to turn against himself and to begin to hate that which by nature he loves, as he loves nothing else under the sun; namely, "self." The Holy Spirit, as writes Dr. A. B. Simpson in *Drays of Heaven*, is the great Undertaker who finally brings us to the place to which God has assigned us; namely, to a sharing of Christ's tomb. But He cannot bring us to a participation in crucifixion-life-bring us to the place called Calvary-without our consent. We must consent to die. All that the Cross signifies of pain and shame, ignominy, and death-the breaking of the Heart of Christ-is nothing more nor less than God's infinitely delicate and moral way of bringing us to a willingness to die. This was not too much if He could but woo us from ourselves, and get our consent to die.

That is why the Cross saves. It is not by Divine magic. It is not simply that Christ bore our sin. He did that. But the purpose of Calvary strikes infinitely deeper than that. In a sense, I agree with Lord Beaconsfield, who casts aspersions upon the doctrine of the atonement, and says that it is positively immoral. As conceived by many it is immoral. If Christ's substitutionary death for me stands before God as something the merit of which may be imputed to me simply because I accept the Saviour's sacrifice regardless of my mode of living, leaving in me the venomous weed, the dastardly thing which has caused this historic stench we call sin, to grow; then, by all that is potent in reason, I say that the Cross is immoral.

But that is not the Cross of Christ. That is the dismembered Cross of modern Christians. The Cross of Christ is substitutionary for "the Lord laid on Him the iniquity of us all," but it is more. The very nature of the Redemptive work of Christ consummated on Calvary, is such that you cannot receive its penal benefits without partaking of its moral benefits. That is to say, if you have looked to the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world, without coming by a profound willingness to be detached from self-unhinged from the false center, self, to be hinged to the true, which is God-then it is safe to say that the actual purpose of God in that indescribable event, which one writer has called the sublimest moment in the moral history of God, simply has not been attained. The Holy Spirit has never had a chance to work in you so as

to bring you to a spiritual participation in the death of the Son of God which in the Divine economy was corporate -the Body, the Church, dying in its Divine Head.

The 'Chief of the Apostles saw this so clearly that he cries out as if stabbed, when the startling thought of a possible continuance in sin, after faith in Christ, is suggested,-a doctrine which even in the primitive Church had its acceptance. "Wht, shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?" Why not, if after all, salvation, as so many are wont to think o f it, is simply a release from the penal consequences of sin. Ah ! says the Apostle, "How shall we who are dead to sin live any longer therein? Know ye not that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ, were baptized into His death ? . . . We are buried with Him . . . into death. . . . We have been planted together in the likeness of His death. . . our old man is crucified with Him, that thee body of sin might be destroyed In that He (Christ) died, He died unto sin once . . . Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. vi).

Truth out of proportion, it has been fitly said, becomes error. The truth of Christ's substitutionary death without this that we find in Romans vi, namely, the fact, in the judgment of God, of our participation in the Cross, our oneness with Christ in His death to sin, our willingness, in a word, too have the Spirit terminate the old life of "self," the carnal life which is enmity against God, detaching us from "self," and centering us in God,-the truth, I repeat, of the Former held without the truth of the latter, precipitates the holder into the confusion which error always entails: It is a decapitated gospel, which, because it is a false home, may do, in some cases, more harm than good.

In the Memoirs of Mrs. Penn-Lewis, there is a strange story connected with the Madame's visit to India, which fits most beautifully into this line of thought. A Missionary, who later gave himself with the zeal of an Apostle to the task of propagating the writings of Mrs. Penn-Lewis, which almost all bear upon the believer's identification with Christ in death and resurrection, had a dream that greatly impress--d him. It was of the Cross of Christ. However, it was not the Saviour's bleeding form which held his eye. It was an exceedingly ugly thing, an indescribably loathsome thing, the nature of which he could not make out. What was this thing which so horrified him? Later, as he heard the message of identification, and realized that with Christ he had been crucified, the Spirit revealed to him that this loathsome thing he had seen in his dream, was none other than himself.

Oh! that the Church might catch a fresh vision of Calvary and come to appreciate the meaning of the deeper aspects of the Cross; that Christians might realize that Christ's object was to terminate, as it were, the "old creation," taking Man (Christ was the Son of Man) down into the grave to destroy the "body of sin," putting an end to the "old life," and then to bring him forth in resurrection power charged with the dynamic of a Heavenly life. Speaking of Jew and Gentile, Paul says: "Christ . . . having abolished in His flesh the enmity . . . for to make in Himself of twain, one new man . . . by the Cross" (Eph. ii. 15-16). What a spiritual revolution it would work in the life of the Church. How the tidal wave of a Divine life would sweep through her, charging the members of Christ's body, so many of whom are languishing in the sloughs of spiritual decrepitude, with a fresh joy, and firing them with a Heavenly life-the Life of the Ages. The Church, as has said the great French preacher, Lacordaire, was born crucified and until, like her Divine Head, she falls into the ground and dies, she abides alone, the life-giving streams cannot break forth from her bosom. It is not, as some one of our British brethren has said, a great stir in the realm of fleshly doing, but a Divine dying, which will bring the Church again to a flaming Apostolic zeal, and a fruitfulness comparable to that of primitive Christians.

God grant us the grace to be clear about one thing: Christ does not come into our lives to patch up the "old man." Here is where unnumbered multitudes of Christians have been "hung up." They thought it was Christ's mission "to make them better." There is absolutely no Biblical ground for any such idea. Jesus said that He had no intention of pouring His new wine into old pig-skins. He said that He had not come to bring peace, but a sword. He said that unless a man should renounce himself utterly, he could not be His disciple. Christ does not come to us to simply straighten out the "old life." He has never promised to make us better. His entire redemptive work consummated upon the Cross, rests upon the assumption (it is more than an assumption-God says it is a fact) that man's condition is such that only a dying and a being born again, can possibly meet the exigencies of the case. So far from attempting to patch man up, and then leaving him to imitate as best he can the pattern given in Judea two thousand years ago, Christ takes him down into the grave where the "old life" is utterly terminated, and then makes him the participant of His resurrection. Christ our Lord fastens us to Himself and imparts to us an entirely "new life." But we have the new upon the basis of our refusal of the old. Christ is the Vine, we are the branches. He is the Head, we form the body.

Paul's epistles are punctuated by a momentous "if," which again and again points us to Calvary, and startles us with an imperative demand-we must consent to co-crucifixion. "We shall live with Christ, if we be dead with Him." "We shall be with Him in the likeness of His resurrection, if we have been planted together in the likeness of His death."

"We shall reign with Him, if we suffer with Him."

I have often wondered why in that symbolic standard Moses lifted up in the desert, and to which our Lord in that classic interview with Nicodemus, when "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, must the Son of Man be lifted up,"-I have wondered, why it had to be a serpent. Why not some thing lovely, inasmuch as it was to typify the King in His very work upon the Cross? We read that all who the serpent were healed. But why a serpent-why a yew, or a rose, was it not the Rose of Sharon who was represented? It was only after I had discovered the principle of identification that I came to understand. Was not there on Calvary's Cross alone. Our "old self" being crucified in the second Adam-the Representative Man-who was there upon the accursed Tree, Himself, but for man; there as One so identified suffering, sinning man, so merged with the Human its iniquity and its depravity, that He could not die and to sin without that man should ethically die in since my accursed, loathsome "self-life" was nailed there to the Cross with Christ, and in the judgment of God died in Him, what more fitting symbol than the serpent? there is in man a serpent which has stung him with the sting of death, and poisoned the springs of his being. plunged him in the night of alienation from God, if the vile thing is removed and a new life injected, that is, to say the least, most unenviable. No other need be pronounced, no other doom sealed, no other action involved-the very nature of "self," once we get use into its true workings, and its real nature, we see that misery must follow in its wake. It is inexorable law.

Not long ago, I was reading about the strange lot of certain young ladies who are employed in a laboratory where contact with radium is inevitable. These young ladies know that upon entering this factory their fate is sealed. They will die. After a few months, or years-I do not recall the exact time, they are released from their work with a handsome cheque for ten thousand dollars. Some live a year, some two, some three, but all eventually die from the effects of radium. Hence the ample remuneration. Doctors have examined girls who have thus toiled in contact with radium, and have found by means of the X-ray, that a strange fire slowly consuming the life, burns in their bones. Radium kills. It is the most highly concentrated force known to scientists.

Two thousand years ago, there in the manger of Bethlehem, God gave to the world His only-begotten Son. In Him, was concentrated the infinite love of the Father. But the full force of that redeeming love was not released upon a sin-stricken world until there on Calvary the flaming heart of the Beloved broke. Then it was that the Radium of the Celestial was focused upon the great cancer of humanity's sin and shame. Radium kills. There is no power under Heaven that can withstand its concentrated dynamic. The Cross kills. The man who exposes himself to Calvary soon discovers that a hidden fire burns within his bones. The old "self-life," so resentful, so fussy, so greedy, and so touchy, so haughty and so vain, so blind to all save its own particular lust, so ready to sacrifice the good of the many if only its own glory may be secured-the old "self-life" can no more resist the impact of Calvary, than some frail barque, the onrush of a great tidal wave.

Dr. Marbie in his notable work on The Cross, speaks of the Saviour's death as "Immortal-dying." It generated a force-moral force destructive of sin-beside which all the cold ethics of the ages, all the precepts of the moralists, yea, all the laws of the nations are as the twinkle of a star beside the sun's meridian blaze. Indeed, it was not mere dying. The rocks were rent, and the earth quaked when in that hour of triumph the Son of Man cried out (the Evangelists insist that it was with "a loud voice"), "It is finished." Life did not merely ebb out. The force of it increased. That is why in the final hour the great Cry of Consummation shook the very earth. "When the centurion saw that so He cried out. . . he said: Truly this Man was the Son of God." (Mark xv. 39). Rightly does Dr. Mabie speak of the "death-resurrection-midprocess." The resurrection was in the death, and the death is in the resurrection. Now this concentrated Moral Radium, if I may so speak, is released in the believer's spirit when he yields himself to the Christ of the Cross. The "old life" brought under the dynamic of the Cross, is doomed to die. Resurrection life takes its place. Little wonder the Apostle to the Gentiles cried out "God forbid that I should glory save in the Cross of the Lord Jesus Christ, by whom I am crucified unto the world, and the world unto me."

"We preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God." (Power, Greek, Dunamis, from whence we get our word Dynamite.)

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