

Cross Bearing

There is a tendency in most of us to avoid the most crucial and painful issues. We want roses without thorns. We yearn for a life of spiritual luxury, happiness and eternal security.

How many long for the joy of the Lord, but don't want to share in His suffering? We don't want to get hurt. Rather than to face problems as they come, we try to take the line of least resistance.

Convictions are good to have but should not require too much effort or expense. Of course it is comparatively rare for a man to entertain the thought of suffering as necessary for his convictions. Suffering is far from pleasant.

Christians can neither afford to take the easy way out nor run away from involvement. To want the easy life is to ask for disillusionment. Poor is the person who only wants ease and avoids difficulties. He misses out on so much. Involvement leads to fulfilled living.

According to popular thinking, a Christian is a nice person who will never offend anyone. He will never rock the boat but accept the status quo. He will journey through life without kicking up any dust. He will go to church on Sunday and during the week he will watch how others run the affairs of community and state.

But Christianity is not a spectator religion. Christ calls people to enlist in the service of His Kingdom. He enlists people for an all out war and not for a spiritual garden party. The Lord does not want rocking chair Christians, people who sit with their arms folded watching the world parade by, but soldiers who fight in the army against the powers of darkness.

The Christ who offers His all asks also all of us. He calls us to the experience of cross bearing. Don't think that to be a Christian is either easy or a way to cop out. You will be thoroughly disappointed if you hope to find the comfort of Christ and avoid the cross. They are as inseparable as the beauty of the rose and the sharpness of the thorns. Christ has given His church marching orders. He demands a total commitment of all the skills, talents and intellectual powers we possess. But here is the paradox. When you are bound to Christ, you are truly free.

The Lord calls you to a freedom from preoccupation with self and to heroic and adventurous living. And a committed life is a blessed life. To follow the real way of living, the way of Christ, may be costly and difficult but of spiritual satisfaction.

Jesus said; "Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake, Rejoice, and be exceeding glad;

for great is your reward in heaven; for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you."

And our Lord does not ask more of His followers than what He experienced Himself. He said to His disciples:

"If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before' it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they persecute me, they will also persecute you; if they kept my saying, they will keep yours also."

Some of the choicest saints have been cut by the thorns of persecution. David was persecuted by Saul. Daniel was thrown into the lion's den for his convictions. I wonder whether any man has suffered more than the apostle Paul in spite of his gentleness, kindness and righteousness. He wrote from his own painful experience: "all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." Read in the long history of the church about the lives of the martyrs and you will find this truth verified over and over again.

Where are the sufferers for Christ's sake in our part of the world? Has their breed become extinct? Have the twice born of God joined the mad scramble for security and material possessions'?

Has the cross become no more than a symbol, a mere sign that there is still a church in existence? Are we now afraid to follow the way of the cross and unwilling to die? I hope, but I wonder. God alone knows the answer.

Johan D. Tangelder
September, 1972