

Looking beyond the flesh

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Let us spend some time to ponder over who the Lord Jesus is and what He has done for us, and what this should mean to us.

Let us turn to **2 Corinthians 5: 14-16**

- 14 For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died;
- 15 And He died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf.
- 16 Therefore from now on we recognize no one according to the flesh; even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him *in this way* no longer.

As we seek to consider our lives before God, it is good for us to reflect on what we believe: Who the Lord Jesus is, and what this means to us. What convictions have we developed over the years and what do these convictions mean to us? What does it mean when we call the Lord Jesus “Lord” in our lives and we say that we want to follow Him?

The apostle Paul tells us, “the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died.” Here, he was sharing with regard to the burden in his heart. He understood the seriousness, the significance of what the Lord Jesus had done and what it could mean to all mankind. He understood that without Christ, we would be without hope. Without the cross, there would be no forgiveness; without Christ in our lives, we would be failures. And so, he was motivated by the love of Christ to reach out to others, to help others so that we could find life, we could find forgiveness, we could find victory.

One died for all, therefore all died. What the Lord Jesus has done for us on the cross has made it possible for us to pass through death into life, to know not just forgiveness, but life eternal and life with God forever. And this direction can only be experienced by us, can only become real in us, if we are willing to follow this path: that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf.

One of the main reasons why Christians find life difficult, superficial, frustrating, is that they are too preoccupied with themselves. When we are preoccupied with ourselves and what we want, what we like, what we seek for, the tendency is for us to dwell on our own abilities, on the things of this world, on the opinions of man, on what is available in this world. When that happens, we will find that life cannot be meaningful, because true meaning in life resides in God, in God and His life, His purposes, His will.

So it is only as we come to appreciate the meaningfulness of living for God, living for Christ, following Him, walking in His ways, appreciating Him, that we will find life to be truly meaningful. We must learn no longer to live for ourselves as we used to do, but to live for Him, who died and rose again on our behalf.

But then, we may ask, “How can we do that? Christ died two thousand years ago. We do not see Him like Peter and the other disciples, walking with Him, eating with Him, talking to Him. We are so involved in our daily affairs of life, there are so many things that affect us, there are so many responsibilities to fulfil, there are so many things that can attract us in this world. How can we live for Christ?”

The answer lies in **verse 16**. The apostle Paul tells us,

Therefore from now on we recognize no one according to the flesh; even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him *in this way* no longer.

If we concentrate on the physical, the visible, the material, the temporal, and we think of Christ in the same way, then He will not be real to us, the world will be much more real to us. We are confronted with the world every day, we see our friends at work, we meet members of our family, we have responsibilities in society; there are so many demands and pressures and needs all the time. How can we be so conscious of the Lord Jesus Christ in the physical realm?

The apostle Paul tells us we have to learn from now on not to recognize anyone according to the flesh. We should no longer view things from the natural physical point of view, a temporal view-point of life. We have to go beyond the natural and the visible, to see the spiritual.

When people saw the Lord Jesus Christ, many people thought of Him only as the son of Mary and Joseph, as a carpenter. But those with spiritual eyes, whose hearts were longing for God, could be touched in their hearts to see Christ: the Saviour of the world. For us as Christians, we have seen Him in our hearts, we acknowledge Him as our Saviour, our Lord; He has forgiven us, He has helped us, He has taught us. But very often, He is still very far from us in our daily lives.

The reason is that knowing Christ, seeing Christ, appreciating Christ, is in the realm of the spirit. We worship God in the spirit but we are preoccupied with the flesh, we are preoccupied with the physical, the material. We use our brains more than we use our spirit. So because of this, it is difficult for us to know the Lord Jesus Christ. We can be very easily distracted by many things in this world.

In order to appreciate Christ, we must concentrate on the spiritual realm. There are many things to consider, but for today, I just share one aspect for us to ponder about, to deepen in our appreciation of Christ, our consciousness of Him, our living for Him.

A very major aspect of the exercise of our spirits is the exercise of prayer. When we pray in the right way, we are exercising our spirit. Of course, there are many people who pray merely words. They use their brains to pray, their hearts are not present. But when we exercise our hearts, our spirit, and we pray to God, it means that we recognize that beyond the visible and the physical, there is the spiritual, the ultimate, the things that are not seen, that are eternal.

As we exercise ourselves in prayer, we come before God, we are conscious of who He is, we begin to appreciate who He is, and what He has done for us will grow in meaningfulness and reality.

If in our hearts we are prepared to respond accordingly, to live according to what we understand of who the Lord Jesus is, we will develop a deepening relationship with Him. Ultimately, our oneness with Christ is in the realm of the spirit: he who is joined to Christ is one spirit with Him.

As we go through our daily lives, if we learn to pray more and more, if we learn to be more conscious of God and His will, we learn to identify with what is important to Him, then we will find that our way of life will change. The things that seem so important will no longer be that important; the things that seem so far away in the spiritual realm become more and more real to us.

Many people find that God is not real to them, but that is because their hearts are far away from Him. As we draw near to Him, as we seek Him, as we come to Him, as we pray to Him, as we appreciate Him, as we ponder over who He is, we will understand what God requires of us. Many decisions that we make in life are made based on natural reasoning, based on the calculations of the people of the world, based on natural grounds and preferences. If we do that, then we cannot draw close to God.

We have to learn to consider issues based on what God says, based on what it means to Him, based on what is important to Him, based on what is in His heart. To the degree that we learn to identify with the Lord and what is in His heart and what is important to Him, to that degree we will grow to be like Him.

When the Lord Jesus is our treasure, then that is where our heart will be, we will grow in fellowship with Him, we will know Him more and more. It is in that context we will see more deeply what He has done for us, we will appreciate more the meaningfulness of a life of oneness with God. It is in that kind of context and spirit that we can make wise decisions, that we can understand what would be pleasing to God, what would be the right path to take.

So then let us ask Him to teach us to pray, teach us to draw near to Him, to be conscious of Him each moment of our lives, each day, each situation that we go through. When we do that, we learn to see things from a spiritual perspective; we learn to see things not according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. The Holy Spirit will guide us and teach us, we will know His presence, enabling, more and more. We will find that the things of the world will not have the same interest to us. We will be able to set our hearts on things above increasingly.

So let us, as we appreciate what He has done for us on the cross, thank Him for what He has done for us, draw near to Him, and tell Him that we will live our lives for Him and not for ourselves. As we do that, we will indeed find the life that we long for. As we give up our lives to Him, we will be transformed to become like Him.