

Dangerous Distortion

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I suppose all of us have used the expression, "from the sublime to the ridiculous," and the wisdom behind that little saying ought to be applied to how we interpret the relationship of the death of Christ, including our crucifixion together with Him, and such statements of Paul as "Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth;...."

(Col.3:5a),

"...but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live." (Rom. 8:13b) "And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts. (Gal.5:24).

I chose to quote from the KJV above, since, particularly, in respect to those verses, that translation of them seems to stick in the minds of most of us. I should add also Jesus' solemn warning that discipleship would involve denying ourselves, taking up our cross and following Him, as recorded in all three of the synoptic gospels.

Serious mistakes can be made if we improperly mix the truth of having been together-killed with Christ and the actual biblical call to become, as it were, killers ourselves. Let me say up front that, on these subjects, a lot that passes for sublime, deeper-life teaching, in attempting to progress from the former to the latter, clearly goes from the sublime to the ridiculous.

This has been so due to a very erroneous cross-pollination between the two that has ended in confusion among the saints and a miserable trip down the path of will worship and eventually a most insidious form of self-righteousness.

In attempting to unravel the threads that have been woven together into a religious cord that has been used to bind many believers, especially those who have desired to go beyond the status quo of spiritual experience, please, let's note the obvious: We have one set of scriptures that speak of our co-crucifixion, our co-death with Christ, that is, in Christ, we have been the object of mortification, we are the killed, and another set of scriptures, such as those quoted above, that speak of us as the killers, instead of the killed.

Again, one set deals with us being killed, the other deals with us doing the killing. Since I ought not to presume, as I'm inclined to do often, that all my readers are familiar with the co-death passages, I refer you to Romans 6:6, Col. 3:3, Gal:2:20, and 2Cor.5:14)

While pointing out the obvious, let's not forget the important matter of the use of hyperbole in scripture. Hyperbole (the literary use of exaggeration, often with symbolism, to dramatically emphasize a point of great import), is to some degree, common to the speech of all societies, but it is particularly a rich element in Hebrew culture. Jesus used it, for instance, when He spoke of cutting off offending members such as our eye or hand.

It is believed that the great church father, Origen, being so exercised in concern over his fleshly impulses as a young Christian, castrated himself on the basis of those word of Jesus. Martin Luther turned to self-flagellation in his spiritual travail before he saw the truth of justification by faith.

There can be no doubt that when Paul writes about mortifying our members which are upon the earth and mortifying the deeds of the body, that he's not speaking literally of actually deadening an arm, leg, eye or other bodily member, or that deeds, as such, can be literally killed.

Come on, friends, we, also, use such expressions. In the modern vernacular we speak of "let's kick butt;" we might threaten someone with drastic action, saying something like "I'm going to nail you to the wall." Football coach during the half-time when coaches work on the emotions of their players to wring the most out of their performance for the remainder of the game, have been known to actually say such things as, "now go out and kill'em."

Of course, they don't mean that literally. They're effectively using hyperbole to dramatically urge the players to be aggressive in the extreme. Then there's the Italian immigrant father's threat, "you toucha my daughter, and I'ma breaka you face." On second thought, scratch that last illustration. Being one myself, if you ever get that threat from an Italian, you'd be safer to treat it literally. :-)

I've noticed that probably the most fundamental error involved in the improper mix of the two sets of scriptures has to do with assuming that since there is the scriptural imperative to mortify members and deeds, that somehow this should lead us to conclude that God did not put to death the totality of our former selves, our pre-cross humanity, our "old man." Many conclude that when God orchestrated the killing of the old man on the cross with Christ, that He left some element, some dimension of who we are, in some sense, and by some definition, still alive.

Such reasoning amounts to taking away from the word of God on the basis of what appears to be the demand of logic. A careful reading and comparison of co-crucifixion passages reveals that the old man that was crucified was us, us in toto. Paul writes of the old man being crucified and of us, ourselves, the person having died with Christ. In comparing the texts, "our old man" is "you" that has died in union with Him. "Our old man" was together crucified with Christ (very careful literal rendering including the verb tense), and the meaning of "our old man" is that "ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God."

I, for one, refuse to budge from that solid and reliable foundation of how God has dealt with me, yes me, not just some aspect of my personhood. Here's some logic to ponder: I cannot imagine any mature teacher of scripture affirming that something less than who I am has been raised up and made to sit in heavenly places in Christ Jesus (Eph. 2:5,6), and that being so, in the dynamic of the relationship of the cross and the empty tomb, it must have been nothing less than me in toto that was crucified with Christ.

So how about this imperative that we kill our members which are upon the earth, and kill the deeds of the body? How about the statement that they who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its affections and lusts.

As we get into this, I should refer you to my article on our web page titled, "Taking up our Cross." Please take the time to read it. It deals specifically with the meaning of Jesus' words about taking up our cross, and, having ascertained that, we can unlock more easily the Pauline equivalents.

When Jesus' spoke to His disciples about taking up their cross and following Him, many have mistakenly superimposed over His words Paul's teaching on co-crucifixion. Paul's teaching on co-crucifixion was at the heart of what, according to the promise of Jesus, the Spirit of Truth would teach them AFTER His death and resurrection.

It was among, and central to, the things that they were not yet able to receive and understand. When He spoke of them taking up their cross, He did not intend for them to, at that point, consider the sublime dimension of their union with Him in death and resurrection.

He was drawing from a very present danger and frightful specter that was always present among peoples under subjugation to imperial Rome. Those disciples had utterly rejected the consideration of Christ facing crucifixion. He was their long-awaited Messiah, and they were Jews, in whose mind, crucifixion of Messiah simply did not compute.

The very thought of it threw them into denial. It was a totally unacceptable and scandalous proposition. When they heard the words, "If any man will be my disciple, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow me," they were confronted by their Lord with, not co-crucifixion truth at that point, but of having to accept and expect the kind of rejection, cruelty, humiliation, dishonor, and shame that was associated with Roman crucifixion, and it didn't take long for them to realize the truth of His words.

They later would understand how the cross their Lord carried and died upon, graphically portrayed that the will of the Father must be done at any cost. Even later, through Paul, they would be introduced to their union with Christ in life, death and resurrection, something that opened up a whole new dimension of the depths of the grace and glory of God for all of humanity.

You Bible students; do not superimpose co-crucifixion truth over Jesus words about taking up our cross, or Paul's words about killing the deeds of the body, etc. Co-crucifixion and resurrection are the grand umbrella truth under which all else about mortifying and cross-carrying must be interpreted.

Do not be deceived into thinking that the umbrella has not the coverage adequate to deal with all that is disqualified from the kingdom of God.

All things contrary to the new heavens and new earth were dealt with by the cross of Christ, and all newness came forth with Him out of the tomb.

What we "mortify," is all that is still allowed by God to parade about as contrary to that truth. By the truth of our union with Christ, we mortify, we deaden, we stop in its tracks the lie of the devil which is death with all its ramifications that was exposed, abolished and defeated by Christ, but is once more permitted to make its unfounded claims upon us so that the total victory of Christ might be repeated, confirmed and demonstrated in us, as a double witness to the truth. This is about the greater works that we are to do as foretold by the Lord.

What I mean is as follows:

The Lord Jesus' capstone of accomplishment will be from the throne where He sits in His exalted and glorified Humanity transmitted to us in the Spirit. We are indwelt by the Spirit of glorified Humanity, so that what the Lord shall do through us from the throne will go beyond what He did before His enthronement.

There is a difference between what the Lord accomplished before and after His enthronement as the New Man. What He will do from the throne in us, out of the substance of, and as an extension of His death and resurrection, will be one step beyond reconciliation and renewal, it will effect the very transformation of enmity itself, the lie itself, death itself. Enmity shall be changed to devotion, the lie into greater truth, and death into life abundant.

All negatives, all contrariness, are traceable back to harmonious complementary qualities in the Divine Nature which took on a perversity by the eternal entering into, and being subjected to time, but they shall return, and in that return, that from which they originated will become more gloriously glorious.

There shall be a reconstitution of all things, even evil itself. The Spirit, shall have searched out the deep things of God and brought them forth for all creation to behold. God shall have so challenged Himself

by all that is contrary to who and what He is, that He shall bring forth that which would have remained hidden within the infinity of Deity without such a horrendous challenge.

Enmity will not only be defeated, but transformed into an intensified, perfect love of God. The great lie will be transfigured into Truth, and by so doing, make Truth itself more defined. Death, not only shall be no more, but shall become the super-enhancement of life, which enhancement would never have occurred without life being subjected to death.

To repeat, we deaden, mortify, kill all contrariness to the truth, not because we are presently less than complete in Christ, but **BECAUSE** we are complete in Him. The hyperbole and symbolism in Paul's use of "mortify," or "deaden," is meant to convey a most uncompromising rejection, treatment and utter reversal of things.

We, the formerly crucified ones, have risen with Him in newness of life to strike a decisive blow against all that exalts itself against God, "For the weapons of our warfare are not physical (weapons of flesh and blood), but they are mighty before God for the overthrow and destruction of strongholds, [inasmuch as we] refute arguments and theories and reasoning?s and every proud and lofty thing that sets itself up against the true knowledge of God; and we lead every thought and purpose away captive into the obedience of Christ, the Messiah, the Anointed one," (2Cor.10:4, Amplified Version).

Notice, that we lead away that which had formerly set itself up against the true knowledge of God, and we lead those very thoughts into the obedience of Christ. That's not only defeat, that's utter transformation. Whew!

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