

## **THE CROSS AND THE HOLY SPIRIT**

There are many believers—you can say the majority of the believers—who were not filled by the Holy Spirit when they believed in the Lord. On the contrary, after believing in the Lord for many years, they are still entangled by sins and have become fleshly believers. What we will talk about in the following portion concerning how the fleshly believer obtains salvation is according to the experience of the Corinthian believers and others like them. We are not saying that a believer must first believe in the substitutionary work of the cross and later believe in the uniting work of the cross. It is because many believers do not have the clear revelation of the cross from the beginning that they have only believed half of the truth. For this reason they need another chance to believe the other half of the truth. If the reader has completely believed the two sides of the work of the cross, this section will not be that deeply related to him. But if he is like the majority and has only believed half of the truth, this section will be indispensable to him. However, we want the reader to be clear that it is not necessary to believe the two sides of the work of the cross at separate times. It is because of the lack in man's believing that there is the need of believing the second time.

## **THE SALVATION OF THE CROSS**

After the apostle spoke concerning many items of the flesh in Galatians 5, he continued, "But they who are of Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and its lusts" (v. 24). This is the way of salvation. What the believers pay attention to and what God pays attention to are very different. The believers are concerned about "the works of the flesh" (v. 19) which are the works, item by item, of the flesh. They are paying attention to sins individually: today's anger, tomorrow's jealousy, and the next day's strife. What they are sorrowful about and hope to overcome are certain sins. But these are simply fruits born of the same tree. You may pick one fruit—not to say that you cannot pick any one of them—and there grows another. One after another they grow without end, until eventually there will not be one day of victory. What God pays attention to is "flesh" (v. 24), not the works of the flesh. If a tree is dead, do we still fear that it will bear fruit? Believers always plan to deal with the offenses (fruits) and forget to deal with the flesh (the root). Therefore, it is unavoidable that one offense has not been dealt with clearly before another offense has already come. We need to deal with the root of sin.

The babes in Christ, being still of the flesh, should know more deeply the meaning of the cross. The work of God is to crucify the believer's old man with Christ so that those who are of Christ "have crucified the flesh with its passions and lusts." No matter whether it is the flesh or the strong lust in the flesh, both are crucified on the cross. In the past it was through this cross that sinners obtained regeneration and knew that they had been redeemed by the Lord from their sins. Now it is also through this cross that the babyish, fleshly Christians—perhaps already regenerated for many years—can obtain salvation and be freed from the dominion of the flesh that they may walk according to the Holy Spirit and no longer walk according to the flesh, in order that they may become spiritual men before long.

Thus the fall of man is in contrast to the work of the cross. The salvation afforded by the latter is the very remedy for the former. One being the sickness and the other the cure, they match one another perfectly. On one hand, the Savior died for the sinner

on the cross to redeem him from sin so that the holy God can righteously forgive him. On the other hand, having died with the Savior on the cross, the sinner no longer is ruled by the flesh. Rather, his spirit regains the control, the body becomes the servant on the outside, and the soul is the medium in between. Thus, the original order of spirit, soul, and body is restored.

If we do not first understand what the death mentioned in this verse is, we will still not be able to receive salvation. May the Holy Spirit be our Revealer.

"But they who are of Christ Jesus" refers to everyone who believes in the Lord. Everyone who has believed in the Lord and has been regenerated belongs to the Lord. No matter what this person's spiritual level is and no matter how his work is, whether he has been freed from sin, has been fully sanctified, or has ever been overcome by the lust of the flesh, all do not matter. The thing that matters here is whether this person has ever been joined to Christ in life. In other words, has he been regenerated? Has he ever believed in the Lord Jesus as Savior? If he has believed, no matter what his present spiritual condition is, whether he is victorious or failing, this person has "crucified the flesh" on the cross.

It is not a question of ethics or spirituality; it is not a question of knowledge or work; it is only a question of whether he belongs to Christ. If he does, he has "crucified the flesh" on the cross—he "is" not crucifying nor "will" he crucify, but he "has" crucified.

We must have the right focus. This verse is not speaking concerning the matter of experience—regardless what your experience is—but is stating God's fact. "They who are of Christ Jesus," whether strong or weak, "have crucified the flesh with its passions and its lusts." You may say you are still sinning; God says you have been crucified on the cross. You say your temper still exists; God says you have been crucified on the cross. You say your lust is strong; God says your flesh has been crucified on the cross. Please do not pay attention to your experience now. Pay attention first to God's speaking to you. If, instead of listening to and believing in God's Word, you merely look at your own experience every day, you will never have the experience of the crucifixion of the flesh. Do not pay attention to your feeling and experience. Since God said your flesh has been crucified, it has indeed been crucified. We must hear and believe God's Word first—then we will have the experience. God said to you, "Your flesh has been crucified." You need to answer, "Amen! Yes, my flesh has been crucified on the cross." By doing this, you will see that your flesh has indeed been crucified.

The believers in Corinth committed adultery, had jealousy, strife, divisions, and lawsuits, and committed many other sins. They were fleshly. But they were "babes in Christ;" therefore they were still of Christ. Can it be true with even this kind of believer that their flesh has been crucified? Yes, even the flesh of these fleshly Corinthian believers has been crucified. How can this be?

We must realize that the Bible does not tell us to be crucified. Rather, it tells us that we are those who have been crucified, because it is not that we are to be crucified by ourselves but that we have been crucified with the Lord Jesus (Gal. 2:20; Rom. 6:6). Since we are crucified with Christ, at the moment Christ was crucified on the cross, our flesh also was crucified on the cross. Also, our being crucified does not mean that

we were crucified by ourselves but that the Lord Jesus, at the time when He was crucified, also carried us up onto the cross. Therefore, in God's eyes our flesh "has been crucified" on the cross. This matter, in the eyes of God, has clearly been done, has been accomplished, has already become a fact. Therefore, whether people have the experience or not, God's Word says, "They who are of Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh." If we want to have the way to experience the crucifixion of the flesh, we do not need to pay attention to experience. Of course, experience is not wrong, but do not give it too much of a position. We need to believe God's Word. "God said, my flesh has been crucified—I believe my flesh has really been crucified." "God said my flesh has been crucified on the cross—I confess that God's Word is true." In this way we will have the experience. We must first pay attention to God's fact; then we pay attention to man's experience.

The flesh of those Corinthians, in God's eyes, had been crucified with the Lord Jesus on the cross. But they did not have the experience. The reason might be that they did not realize God's "fact." Therefore, the first step for us to receive salvation is to deal with the flesh according to God's point of view. It is not that the flesh is going to be crucified on the cross but that it has already been crucified, not according to what we see, but according to what we believe—God's Word. If we are firm on this point—the flesh has been crucified—we will be able to go on to deal with the flesh in our experience. Unless we do not care for all our spiritual progress and stand firm on this fact, considering that in any event our flesh has been crucified on the cross, there is no possibility for us to have the real experience. Those who want to have the experience should not care first for their own experience but only believe in God's Word. Then they can obtain the experience.

### **THE HOLY SPIRIT AND EXPERIENCE**

"For when we were in the flesh, the passions for sins...operated in our members to bear fruit to death. But now we...having died..." (Rom. 7:5-6). Therefore, the flesh can dominate us no more.

We have already believed and confessed that our flesh has been crucified on the cross. Now—not before this—we should pay attention to the question of our experience. Even though we may pay attention to experience, we still hold fast the facts we have before God because what God has accomplished for us and our experience of the accomplishment of God are two inseparable matters.

God has already done all that He could do; He has already accomplished all. Now, the only questions are how do we deal with what He has done and what is our attitude toward what He has accomplished. He has crucified our flesh on the cross, not just in term, but in reality. If we are willing to believe and willing to exercise our will to choose what God has accomplished for us, that very matter will become experience in our life. There is no need for us to accomplish it, because God has already accomplished everything. There is no need for us to crucify our flesh, because God has already crucified it on the cross. Now the questions are whether we believe that this is real and whether we want this to be accomplished in our life. If we believe it and we want it, we need to work together with the Holy Spirit to obtain this experience. Colossians 3:5 says, "Put to death therefore your members which are on the earth." This is the way to have the experience. The word "therefore" follows the

foregoing portion. Verse 3 says, "For you died." This is what God has accomplished for us. "For you died." "Put to death therefore your members which are on the earth." The first death is a positional fact which we have in Christ. The second death is the real experience which we possess. We can see the relationship between these two deaths. The failure of the believers in the flesh is because of not seeing the relationship of these two deaths. Some only want to put to death their flesh, first paying attention to their experience of death, but the more they put to death their flesh, the more alive their flesh is. Some only know that their flesh has been crucified with the Lord Jesus on the cross and do not pursue the practice. In both cases they cannot have the experience of crucifying the flesh.

If we want to put our members to death, we must have a basis. Otherwise, even though we eagerly pursue experience, relying vainly on our own efforts, we will not have the experience. We believers who know that the flesh has died with the Lord and do not apply what the Lord has accomplished for us will see that the knowledge of the believers is also of no avail. In order to put the flesh to death, we must first understand co-death. Having known co-death, we must practice putting to death. These two go together and support one another. If we are only satisfied with knowing the fact of co-death, thinking that now everything is spiritual and the flesh has been extinguished, we deceive ourselves. On the contrary, if while putting to death the evil deeds of the flesh, we pay too much attention to the evil deeds and do not take the attitude that our flesh has already died, this also is in vain. If while putting to death the flesh, we forget that death already took place, nothing can be put to death. "You died"—you died with the Lord Jesus because, when the Lord Jesus died, He crucified your flesh on the cross. "Therefore," you now need to practice applying the death of the Lord to put to death all the practices of the members. This "putting to death" is based upon "you died." To put to death means to apply the death of the Lord Jesus to execute the death sentence on every member. The death of the Lord is the most authoritative death, the most fatal death, and whatever meets it cannot but die. Since we are identified with His death, if temptation is in any of our members and lust is going to operate, we can apply this death to deal with that member and cause it to die instantly—to put it to death.

The death in which the believer is joined with the Lord has already become a reality in his spirit. (The death of Christ is a most powerful and active death.) Now the believer should bring that definite death out of his spirit to deal with all the activities in his members because the lust in his members can operate at any moment. This kind of spiritual death is not once for all. Whenever the believer is not on the alert or loses faith, the flesh will operate again. If the believer wants to have his whole being conformed to the Lord's death, he must often put to death the deeds of his members so that that which is in the spirit can also reach his body.

But how can we have power to apply the Lord's death to our members? Romans 8:13 says that "by the Spirit you put to death the practices of the body." A believer who wants to put to death the practices of the body must depend on the Holy Spirit to make his co-death with Christ become experience. When a believer puts to death the practices of his body by the Lord's death, he must believe that the Holy Spirit will cause the death of the cross to become real in the particular matter which he wants to put to death. The crucifixion of the believer's flesh with Christ on the cross is an accomplished fact. There is no need to crucify it again. Nevertheless, if the evil deeds

of the body seem about to operate, then the Spirit should be there to apply the death which the cross of the Lord Jesus has accomplished for us to that very evil deed that it might be put to death by the power of the Lord's death. The evil practices of the flesh at all times and in every place are ready to come out and be manifested from our body. Therefore, unless the Spirit empowers the believer with the power of the holy death of the Lord Jesus, the believer cannot overcome. If the believer can put to death his practices in this way, the indwelling Holy Spirit will be able to accomplish God's purpose that the body of sin might be annulled (6:6). When the baby believers know the cross in this way, they can be liberated from the dominion of the flesh and be joined to the Lord Jesus in the life of resurrection.

From here on the believers should "walk by the Spirit" and "by no means fulfill the lust of the flesh" (Gal. 5:16). We must take notice that no matter how much the death of the Lord is rooted and grounded in our life, we cannot expect, even for an hour, that we will not have to be watchful in order to prevent the practices in our members from rioting in us. Whenever a believer is not walking by the Spirit and being led by the Spirit, right away he is walking by the flesh. The real condition of the flesh which God reveals to us in Romans 7, after verse 5, is the real condition of the believer himself. If for one moment the believer stops walking by the Spirit, he right away becomes the kind of person about whom we are speaking. Since Romans 7 stands between chapter six and chapter eight, some people consider that once a believer has passed through chapter seven and has entered into the Spirit of life in chapter eight, chapter seven will become merely a past history. But in reality chapter seven and chapter eight are simultaneous and parallel. Whenever the believer does not walk according to the Holy Spirit in chapter eight, there immediately is the experience of chapter seven. Therefore Paul says in verse 25, "So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh, the law of sin." "So then" is the conclusion of all his speaking concerning experiences before 7:25. Before verse 24 he was a failure. Not until verse 25 is he victorious. But, it is after he failed and then gained the victory that he said, "With the mind I myself serve the law of God," which means that what God wants is my new life. "With the flesh, the law of sin" means that no matter how he served the law of God with his mind, his flesh always served the law of sin. And no matter how he was freed from the flesh, his flesh always served the law of sin (v. 25). The meaning here is that flesh is always flesh. No matter how our life in the Holy Spirit is growing and rooted, the flesh has not changed its nature and still serves the law of sin. Therefore, even though we do not walk according to the flesh, in order to be led by the Spirit of God (8:14) and be freed from the oppression of the flesh, we always need to put to death the practices of the body and walk according to the Holy Spirit.

## **THE EXISTENCE OF THE FLESH**

We need to realize that even though we can put to death the flesh and cause it to be annulled (original Greek meaning for "destroyed" in Rom. 6:6 [KJV]), it nevertheless still exists. A very great mistake that people make is that they think that they have extinguished the existence of sin and have uprooted the flesh from within them. This kind of doctrine leads people astray. The regenerated life does not change the flesh. The crucifixion together with Christ does not cause the flesh to disappear. The Holy Spirit who indwells our spirit does not force people to not walk according to the flesh. Whether it is the flesh or "the fleshly nature" as people have called it, it always exists

within the believer. Whenever the believer fulfills the condition for it to work, it operates right away.

We have seen how much man's body is associated with the flesh. Therefore, before we are separated from this body, we can never be separated from our flesh such that it has no possibility to operate again. That which is born of the flesh is flesh. Before the transfiguration of our body, which we received by birth from Adam's corruption, we shall by no means have the flesh eradicated from within us. Our body has not been redeemed yet (Rom. 8:23). We have to wait until the Lord's second coming to have this redemption (1 Cor. 15:22-23, 42-44, 51-56; 1 Thes. 4:14-18; Phil. 3:20-21). Therefore, as long as we are in this body for one day, for one day we cannot avoid watching and guarding against all the activities of the flesh in the body.

We should know that our walking may, at most, be like Paul's. He said, "For though we walk in flesh, we do not war according to flesh" (2 Cor. 10:3). Because he still had the body, he still walked in the flesh. But, due to the corruption and wretchedness of the flesh and its nature, he did not "war according to flesh." Although he walked in the flesh, he did not "walk according to the flesh" (Rom. 8:4). Before the believer is separated from his body, he can by no means be separated from the flesh. Physically speaking, he lives in the flesh (Gal. 2:20). Spiritually speaking, he does "not war according to flesh." If Paul still had the flesh according to which he might war (only he did not do that), who would dare to say that he did not have "flesh"? Therefore, both the cross and the Holy Spirit are needed at all times.

Because of the great importance of this point, we cannot be inattentive. Otherwise, believers will fall into hypocrisy or idleness, thinking that their flesh is gone, that they are therefore perfectly holy, and that there is no need of watchfulness. Herein is a fact: children born of regenerated and sanctified parents are also fleshly and need to be regenerated even as the worldly people. No one can say that the children born of sanctified believers are not fleshly and have no need of regeneration. The Lord Jesus said, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh" (John 3:6). If what is born is flesh, this proves that the one who begets it is also flesh! This is because flesh only gives birth to flesh. Therefore, the children's being fleshly proves that the parents are not yet free from the flesh. The reason saints pass the fallen nature on to their children is that they had this fallen nature originally. They are not able to pass on to them the divine nature which they received in regeneration, because this divine nature is not their own but is obtained by each one through grace from God. The reason that the believers' children have a sinful nature is that the believers have a sinful nature and have passed it on to them. This obvious fact proves that the sinful nature in the believers exists.

In view of this, we know that a person who is a new creation in Christ is not recovered in this life to the position of Adam before his fall, simply because of, not to mention other things, the fact that his body has not been redeemed (Rom. 8:23). Even a man in the new creation still has a sinful nature and still has the flesh. Sometimes his feelings and his desire are not perfect and are mostly more base than those of Adam when he was sinless. Unless man's flesh has been rooted out from within man, he can never have the perfect feeling, desire, and love. Man can never reach the position of having no possibility of sinning because the flesh still exists. If a believer does not walk according to the Holy Spirit and still gives ground to the flesh,

the flesh will exercise its dominion again. However, we should not despise the salvation which Christ has accomplished. There are many places in the Bible which tell us that whatever is born of God cannot sin. This means that whoever is born of God and filled with God has no inclination to sin. It does not mean that there is no possibility of sinning. When we say wood cannot sink, it means that wood has no tendency to sink rather than that wood has absolutely no possibility of sinking, because if wood is soaked in water for many days, it may sink. The hand of a child may also cause it to sink. But the nature of wood is that it does not sink. In the same way, God saves us to the degree that we have no inclination to sin but does not save us to the degree that we have no possibility of sinning. If the believer is still filled with the intention to incline to sin, this proves that he is still fleshly and has not obtained full salvation. The Lord Jesus will cause us not to incline to sin. Meanwhile, we still need to be watchful because, if we are contaminated by the world or tempted by Satan, there is still the possibility of sinning.

A believer should realize that, on the one hand, he is a new creation in Christ, having the Holy Spirit dwelling in his spirit, having the death of Jesus working in him, and having the sanctifying life, but that, on the other hand, he still has the sinful flesh and can still sense the existence of the flesh and its filthiness. He has the sanctifying life because he, by the Holy Spirit with the death of the cross, puts to death the practices of his members so that the flesh cannot act, not because he has no flesh. After seeing the fact that a believer passes on his sinful nature to his children, we know that what we have obtained is not the natural perfection of Adam when he was sinless. We also know that the existence of the flesh does not cause the believers to become no more sanctified.

All the believers should admit that even those believers who are the most holy also have times of weakness. Sinful thoughts may enter into their mind unintentionally, words may come out of their mouth unconsciously, they may feel that it is hard to surrender their will to the Lord, and they may have confidence in themselves. All these are works of the flesh. If a believer is under the control of Christ and does not make provision for the flesh, he will have a lasting experience of overcoming the flesh. Therefore, a believer should know that the flesh may regain its power at any moment. The flesh has not been eradicated from the body, but, because we have presented ourselves to the Lord (Rom. 6:13), the body has left the control of the flesh and has come under the control of the Lord. If a believer walks according to the Holy Spirit (this refers to the attitude of not letting sin reign in our body—v. 12), no matter what sin devises, it cannot cause the believer to stumble. Rather he is always free. In this way the body is not reigned over by the sinful nature and is free to be the temple of the Holy Spirit and to do the holy work of God. The way the believer obtains his freedom is the way he keeps his freedom. Because the believers answer God with the vital "yes" and answer the flesh with the vital "no," accepting the Lord's death, they obtain freedom. Therefore in this life, before the separation from the body, this "yes" to God and "no" to the flesh have to always continue. Not one believer at this time can reach a position of not being tempted. Therefore, good discernment, watchfulness, prayer, and sometimes fasting are necessary that he may know how to walk according to the Holy Spirit.

However, the believer should not lower God's purpose and his own expectation. It is possible for the believer to sin, but he must not sin. The Lord Jesus has died for us



and has crucified our flesh with Him on the cross, and the Holy Spirit has indwelt us in order to manifest in us the reality of what the Lord Jesus has accomplished. We have the absolute possibility of not being under the control of the flesh. Its existence is to call us to be watchful but not to make us surrender. The cross has completely crucified the flesh. If we are now willing to put to death the practices of our body by the Holy Spirit, we will experience the accomplishment of the cross. "So then, brothers, we are debtors not to the flesh to live according to the flesh; for if you live according to the flesh, you must die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the practices of the body, you will live" (Rom. 8:12-13). Since God has such grace and such a way of salvation, if we make the mistake of still living according to the flesh, it is our responsibility. Since we have such a salvation, it is no longer as though we are debtors to the flesh and are obliged to pay it. Now we do not have to. If we still live according to the flesh, it is because we want to, not because we ought to.

Among many matured saints, there is a long period of complete victory. The flesh exists, but its effect amounts to zero. Its life, nature, and activity have been put to death by the believers with the Lord's death through the Holy Spirit so that the flesh is in the position of existing yet as if not existing. Because the work of putting to death is so deep and so real and because the believer is so faithful in following the Holy Spirit in a lasting way, the flesh, although it exists, is made powerless to resist, and it even seems difficult to have it come again to excite the believer. Such a complete victory over the flesh is attainable to every believer.

Now here is a warning: "For if you live according to the flesh, you must die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the practices of the body, you will live." Because salvation is complete, there is no excuse for rejecting this salvation. All that matters here hinges on the two "ifs." God, on His side, can no longer do anything; He has accomplished all. Now it is only up to man, on his side, how he will deal with God's work. Although you have been regenerated, "if you live according to the flesh, you must die." You will lose your spiritual life; you will be living yet will be as dead. "If by the Spirit" you live, you also must die, but die in the death of Christ. If by the death of Christ you put to death all the practices of the flesh, that is real death. However, if you do not die in this way, you will die the other way. Either way, you must die. Which death, then, do you want? When the flesh lives, the Holy Spirit (in reality) cannot live. Which one, then, do you want to live? What God has arranged for you is to put all the ability and activity of your flesh under the power of the death of the Lord Jesus' cross. What you are lacking now is nothing but death. You should talk less about life and talk first about death, because if there is no death, there is no resurrection. Are you willing to obey the will of God? Are you willing to let the cross of Christ be experiential in your life? If so, you should, through the Holy Spirit, put to death all the practices of the body.