

REALITY CHECK
“Dying to Self”
or
“The Fellowship of His Sufferings”

Introduction

Phil 3:3-11

3 For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.

4 Though I might also have confidence in the flesh. If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more:

5 Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee;

6 Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.

7 But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ.

8 Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ,

9 And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith:

10 That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death;

11 If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead. KJV¹

Though Paul had things to brag about in the flesh (family lineage, religious affiliations, personal zeal), he considered them things that kept Him from Christ. In light of knowing Him, he considered all those things cow patties! He didn't want his own righteousness, he wanted Christ's righteousness, which is by faith.

Isa 64:6-8

6 But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away.

7 And there is none that calleth upon thy name, that stirreth up himself to take hold of thee: for thou hast hid thy face from us, and hast consumed us, because of our iniquities.

8 But now, O LORD, thou art our father; we are the clay, and thou our potter; and we all are the work of thy hand.

Holding His righteousness and not our own is another way of saying “to know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings.” In order to go on, we must define our terms. What is the measure of His resurrection power? What is the substance of His suffering?

A. The Power of His Resurrection

¹ All references are from the King James Version unless otherwise noted.

Eph 1:15-23

15 Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints,
16 Cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers;
17 That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him:
18 The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints,
19 And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to usward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power,
20 Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places,
21 Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come:
22 And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church,
23 Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.

The power of His resurrection is the power that God exhibited when He placed Christ as victorious over death and above all things. Would you like to flow in that power?

B. The Fellowship of His Sufferings

The fellowship of His sufferings is clarified by the following phrase in Phil 3:10 “being made conformable unto his death.” Those who would experience resurrection power, victory over death, must pass through death. This is non-optional for disciples. Disciples die.

Matt 10:38-39

38 And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me.
39 He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it.

Matt 16:24

Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.

The Greek word translated “deny” in Matt 16:24 is aparneomi. It means “to deny utterly, to affirm one has no connection with a person.” A great example of this is when Peter denied the Lord three times. It is this word aparneomi. He was stating unequivocally that he stood in no relation to Jesus.

We need to affirm that we have no connection with ourselves. It’s not about me, it’s about Him. Can you say that with me? It’s not about me, it’s about Him.

*The truth is that we either deny ourselves or we deny Him. We cannot have it both ways. If we are not to deny Him, we **must** deny ourselves.*

2 Tim 2:11-13

11 It is a faithful saying: For if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him:

12 If we suffer, we shall also reign with him: if we deny him, he also will deny us:
13 If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself.

“If we be dead with him” means that we denied ourselves. “If we deny him,” this means that we kept our lives for ourselves and wound up losing that which we could not keep.

C. Why Resurrection First?

Certainly, resurrection comes after death. Why would God tell us of the power of the resurrection first and then tell us the qualification for enjoying it, which is the fellowship of His sufferings? Because it is debilitating to suffer without cause. The Lord always gives us hope.

Rom 8:18

For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.

Heb 12:2

Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Heb 11:17-19

17 By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son,
18 Of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called:
19 Accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure.

As we proceed to understand the foundation of the fellowship of His sufferings, we need to bear these promises in mind.

I. **The Suffering of Sin**

It is almost a divine irony that to be free from the suffering of this world we must take up the suffering of Christ. This world groans and suffers because of sin. When we speak of dying to self, we are talking about walking in freedom from sin.

A. Children of Wrath

Eph 2:2-3

2 Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience:

3 Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.

Left to our own devices, it is the nature of the devil that we exhibit, fulfilling the desires of our flesh and mind. Dying to self means not paying service to those desires – dying to them, if you will.

B. We Should not Suffer for Evil Doing

1 Peter 2:20

For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God.

We get no blue ribbons when we have trouble in life because of our faults. How much less patience do you think God will exhibit when we complain about just punishment?

1 Peter 4:15

But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters.

Our suffering should not be the suffering for sin.

C. We Need to Die to Sin's Suffering (passion)

Rom 7:5-6

5 For when we were in the flesh, the motions of sins, which were by the law, did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death.

6 But now we are delivered from the law, that being dead wherein we were held; that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter.

The word for "motions" in verse 5 is used 18 times in the New Testament and is most often translated as "sufferings." Sin's sufferings bring about death. So, I can either live by my desires and have sin kill me or I can die to them and be revived by His Spirit.

Gal 5:24-26

24 And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts.

25 If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.

26 Let us not be desirous of vain glory, provoking one another, envying one another.

We need to crucify the flesh with all its affections.

To better understand what it means to die to self, let's look at several aspects of it. This will help us identify areas of our lives we may still be keeping.

II. Taking Up the Cross (Death to Self)

Matt 16:24-25

24 Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.

25 For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.

*Remember, this is the fellowship of **His** sufferings. He is the example of how this is to be walked out.*

A. Death to my name

Phil 2:7

But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men:

He made himself of no reputation – He emptied himself. Though the Father would give Him a name which is above every name, He didn't make it about His name while He was on earth. He made it about the Father's glory!

Matt 16:20

Then charged he his disciples that they should tell no man that he was Jesus the Christ.

In contrast, mankind has sought notoriety for itself.

Gen 11:4

And they said, Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; **and let us make us a name**, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth.

I cannot be worried about people knowing my name or what my title is. I must die to my name and live for His.

B. Death to my personality

John 14:9

Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Shew us the Father?

Often time, in the life of a young man, there comes the moment when he desires his own identity. He does not want to be known as "so-and-so's son." "I want people to know me for who I am," he says. And this desire causes tension in the family.

Jesus didn't go through such angst. He was so fully identified with the Father that to look at Him was to see the Father. How was this accomplished? He did what the Father did (John 5:19)², He spoke what the Father said (John 8:28, 38)³, and He

² John 5:19 "Then answered Jesus and said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do: for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise."

³ John 8:28 "28 Then said Jesus unto them, When ye have lifted up the Son of man, then shall ye know that I am he, and that I do nothing of myself; but as my Father hath taught me, I speak these things. 38 I speak that which I have seen with my Father: and ye do that which ye have seen with your father."

held the same opinions as the Father (judged as the Father judged) (John 8:16-17)⁴. If you talk like someone, walk like someone, and think like someone, then you might as well be that some ONE!

Matt 4:8-9

8 Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them;

9 And saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me.

In contrast, the devil says, "Worship ME!" He is the epitome of self-absorption. God is the great "I AM." All the devil can do is say, "Me, me, me."

C. Death to my goodness

Matt 19:16-17

16 And, behold, one came and said unto him, Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?

17 And he said unto him, Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God: but if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments.

Did Jesus have right and claim to goodness? Absolutely! As a matter of fact, many commentators interpret this section in exactly that way. They state that what Jesus was doing was proclaiming His goodness as a member of the Godhead. But I don't think that is it. Even though He had a right to claim it, He laid it down. He diffused the flattery of the one who asked Him the question. He died to His own goodness.

In contrast, the devil lost himself in the goodness that God had given him.

Ezek 28:17

Thine heart was lifted up because of thy beauty, thou hast corrupted thy wisdom by reason of thy brightness: I will cast thee to the ground, I will lay thee before kings, that they may behold thee.

He was so captivated by his own beauty that he left off worshipping God in the beauty of His holiness!

Watchman Nee has made the insightful comment that most Christians fail to bring their "good" qualities to the cross to have them die. We must recognize that our good cannot approach Him. We must die to our goodness and receive His.

D. Death to my will

Luke 22:42

Saying, Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done.

⁴ John 8:16-17 "16 And yet if I judge, my judgment is true: for I am not alone, but I and the Father that sent me. 17 It is also written in your law, that the testimony of two men is true."

I think we all realize what a pivotal moment this was in the story of redemption. In bloody sweat and tears, our Lord laid down His will and in suffering became obedient to the death of the cross.

But do we realize that this wasn't just a garden variety moment (pardon the pun)? He didn't just walk into the garden and then decide, "OK, all right. I'm ready. I'll do it, God." No, it was a lifetime of laying down His will and taking up the Father's.

John 5:30

I can of mine own self do nothing: as I hear, I judge: and my judgment is just; because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me.

*He spent His life seeking the Father's will and executing it! If we don't lay it down in the small matters, we will never lay it down when it really matters, which means that laying down our will for His **always matters!***

All we are doing when we die to self is recognizing that we are already dead! The point of dying is resurrection. No death, no resurrection. When we take our names, personalities, goodness, and will to the cross and crucify them there, His promise is to resurrect them in power for His glory.

III. The Power of His Resurrection

A. A Resurrected Will

Ps 37:4-5

4 Delight thyself also in the LORD; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart.

5 Commit thy way unto the LORD; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass.

When my delight is in Him, He will birth godly desires in my heart, desires that are in accordance with His will for my life. I can then pray out those desires and He will bring it to pass. Isn't this so much better than clawing, scraping, and grabbing about to fulfill the desires of my flesh?

1 John 5:14-15

14 And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us:

15 And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him.

My life can now have confidence. I don't have to worry about "am I praying the right thing." I have delighted myself in Him. I have sought out His will. He has placed a godly desire in my heart to see His kingdom established on earth. I can then pray with boldness.

Luke 11:2

And he said unto them, When ye pray, say, Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. **Thy will be done, as in heaven, so in earth.**

The power of a resurrected will is the power of bringing to bear the kingdom of God on earth through prayer. The decrees of heaven become the realities of earth because we have been resurrected to His will. Hallelujah!

B. A Resurrected Goodness

It is interesting to note that in the parable of the talents (Matt 25:14-30) none of the servants invested their own money. It was the money of the Master that they invested (or failed to) and were rewarded for.

If they had invested their own money and had received a profit for themselves, what compulsion would the Master have to reward them? It is the same for us. If I take my own talents and invest them in the kingdom, what profit do I make for Him? But if I invest what He gives me, then I cause an increase in the economy of God and am rewarded for it.

Phil 1:6

Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ:

A resurrected goodness is His goodness, His good work in me, which He continues and perfects unto the coming of Christ. I will thus be found, not having my own righteousness but His, which is by faith.

C. A Resurrected Personality

2 Cor 5:17

Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.

Honestly, who wants to be the “old thing”?

Rom 8:29

For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.

It is our intended destiny to be conformed to the image of His Son.

2 Cor 3:18

But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.

This change in our souls is brought about by the Holy Spirit as we seek His will in His word.

1 Cor 15:49

And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly.

We have born the image of Adam, we will bear the image of Jesus Christ.

1 John 3:2

Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.

D. A Resurrected Name

Rev 2:17

He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it.

Rev 3:12

Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and I will write upon him my new name.

A change of name indicates an intrinsic change in person. Even as the Lord renamed Simon to Peter, so He will define us by a new name – His name for us.

Conclusion

Surely our sufferings take on many forms. But at the base of it all is death to self. Whether this is exhibited in a life of discipleship or a martyr's death, it matters not. They are the same. Each one is the result of the continual decision, "do I live for myself or do I live for Him?"

- My desires or His will?
- My beauty or His goodness?
- My identity or His image?
- My reputation or His name?

These are the decisions we must make. If we want to know Him in all the power of His resurrection, then we must fellowship in His sufferings on the cross. We must die to self and live for Him.

Amen!