

THE CROSS IN OUR LIVES

The apostle Paul's words, "So then death works in us, but life in you" (2 Cor. 4:12), reveal the inner dynamic of the cross in our lives. When the working of cross is present in our lives, a spiritual phenomenon takes place in our relationships — life is imparted to others. In other words, when death works in us, life works in others. This is the key to all our relationships — family, work, church, etc. Thus, it is crucial to understand how death operates in us and how the cross works in our lives.

The outer man and the inner man

The working of death has to do with two primary realms: the realm of the outer man and the realm of the inner man (2 Cor. 4:16). The working of death is specifically related to what takes place in these two realms. When the cross is working in our lives, the outer man is being disabled and weakened, while the inner man is being renewed and refreshed.

In 2 Corinthians 4:7 Paul says, "But we have this treasure in earthen vessels." The treasure is Christ in our inner man, our human spirit joined to the Lord (1Cor. 6:17). But this inner man is surrounded by an outer man — our body and our soul. Our outer man is constituted with our independent self-life developed through the years. Thus, the working of the cross is related to the outer man being progressively weakened so that the treasure in the inner man will shine forth in the vessel.

We see the dynamic of the working of death in 2 Corinthians 4:16: "Therefore, we do not lose heart; but

though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day." The outer man is falling apart. The outer man is weakening. The outer man is crumbling. The outer man is decaying. But the inner man is being renewed. Both of these processes are going on at the same time within us. Death operates in a way on the outer man through environments that so affect it that it cannot avoid going through discouragement, defeat, wretchedness, rebellion, sorrow, and wanting to give up. You cannot help but go through this with your outer man. This is because it takes a *real* defeat in the outer man to make us a person wholly dependent on God. It is not mere doctrinal or theoretical defeat we are talking about — it is real experiential defeat.

So an aspect of experiencing death operating in us is to have a soul that is disturbed and troubled. This is death operating in the realm of our outer man. God sends the cross and we are handed over to death (2 Cor. 4:11), and that death environment often causes us to react with, "I can't handle this! I'm troubled! I can't take it anymore." That kind of reaction means that the cross has hit its target of the outer man. The outer man has lost control of its supports, and is troubled, weakened and disabled.

The working of death in the Lord's experience

To understand how death works in us, we need to study how it worked in the Lord's life as a man. Watch how death operated in His own experience. Consider what happened to the Lord's soul when He faced the cross. Death was operating in Him at every juncture. In

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John 12:23-24 the Lord says, ²³ “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. ²⁴ Truly, truly, I say to you, Unless the grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it abides alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.” This is the Lord speaking as the Son of Man apart from sin.

The death of the grain of wheat reveals the principle that even apart from sin, death is the way to life. When sin is out of the picture, we still have the natural, good, soul-life. The God-given faculties of our soul must all go down into death so that our natural life would be processed with God’s life. That is, God’s original intention for man, before sin entered the picture, was that man would live by God’s life by voluntarily laying down his soul-life in death. Yes, even man’s “good” soul-life must be governed by the principle of death and resurrection.

The example of the grain of wheat reveals how the soul-life of man is to be treated. To let the grain of wheat die is to treat our soul-life in a way of not loving it, but hating it (John 12:25). The Lord says, “He who loves his soul-life loses it.” The Greek word used here for “love” is *phileo*. It means to be friendly with, affectionate with, to pity yourself or pamper yourself. By loving your soul-life in this way, you will lose it. But “he who hates his soul-life in this world shall keep it unto eternal life.” Then verse 26 continues this thought: “If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there also My servant will be. If anyone serves Me, the Father will honor him.” Together these verses in John 12 show that the Lord intended to identify us with Himself in the same process of death and resurrection.

Now we see death operating in the Lord’s soul. We observe the process of how he “hated” his soul when it gave him trouble. In verse 27 the Lord says, “Now is My soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save Me out of this hour.” A troubled soul is a soul feeling the pressure of the trial, and wanting to say, “Lord, get me out of this. Just take the pressure off.” In other words, we may go through some kind of inward cogitations where we are considering, “And what shall I say? Father, save Me from this hour?” This demonstrates that when death operates in us, all kinds of thoughts and questions may surface in our mind. “Why is this happening? Why do I get treated this way? Why am I misunderstood? Why do I always lose my job? Why is this? What should I say? Father, save me from this hour?” As the Lord was contemplating, He was not trouble free. No. He was troubled. Death was operating. He was considering, “What shall I say, Father, save Me from this hour? But for this hour I came.”

Then in verse 28 the Lord says, “Father, glorify Your

name. Then a voice came out of heaven: I have both glorified it and will glorify it again.” So the Lord immediately released His whole being to the Father and experienced the release of His inner man and the dying of the outer man. By this example, we see that when the outer man dies, he dies with feelings. He dies sometimes with tears. He dies with heaviness and sorrowful emotions. When you feel that way, it is not a cause for condemnation. Rather, it is an occasion to look your soul straight in the face and say, “Soul, this is all you’re capable of.”

Death operates in a way to totally convince you that your soul will never be capable of submitting to God. It is weak to the uttermost. As you and I feel this weakness, two things are happening: the outer man is being disabled, and the inner man is being renewed day by day. There is a growing sense that I don’t trust myself. But at the same time there is a release of the spirit with a greater sense of dependency upon God. There is more and more realization of a dependency upon the sufficiency of God when death operates. That is how that sense of dependency happens to us. It happens by death operating.

Beholding the Lord supplies the cross to us

To appreciate the source of “death working in us,” we need to see the context of the previous verses in chapter 3. Second Corinthians 3:16-18 says, ¹⁶ “Whenever their heart turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. ¹⁷ And the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. ¹⁸ But we all with unveiled face, beholding and reflecting like a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, even as from the Lord Spirit.”

When we are turning and beholding the Lord, that turning and beholding activity keeps us in a state of “being transformed into the same image.” This continuous transformation process is the supply line for death to operate in us. Then 2 Corinthians 4:1 says, “Therefore having this ministry...” In other words, beholding and reflecting the Lord is our ministry. To be in His presence and reflect Him *is* ministry. Let Him shine in your heart and give light and life to others.

Then Paul continues in verses 1-2, ¹ “As we have been shown mercy, we do not lose heart; ² but we have renounced the hidden things of shame, not walking in craftiness nor adulterating the word of God, but by the manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God.” Here you are dealing with God. You are renouncing hidden things.

Such an inner operation comes out of the transforming supply of the Lord, the Spirit. When we are being transformed through beholding the glory of the Lord, there is an inner operation that causes us to deal with God and be dealt with by God. That operation includes the working of the cross in our lives.

Death operating touches two sides of our being

We have to see that when death operates, two sides of our being are touched. Our outer man is touched, and our inner man is touched. The outer man is crippled and feels helpless, but simultaneously in our inner man we are supplied to relate to this crippled outer man. We pass through the throes of the outer man's decaying strength, and the result is a greater sense of need for God every step of the way. God operates in our being with a renewal of our inner man. What is produced is a person with a greater sense of dependency upon God (cf. 2 Cor. 1:8-10).

When death operates, your soul gets troubled — your soul is affected in many different ways (cf. 2 Cor. 4:8-9). You are passing through all the environmental dealings. Passing through them is part of death operating. Now what matters is how we relate to what we pass through — whether or not we go to *our* Gethsemane. For example, driving down the street in the middle of a troubled soul, you start to have a Gethsemane of your own. Death is working, and you can feel intimidated by the strength of your own will. You can feel your own stubbornness. You feel it. You know it. You know the struggle. It is your will seeking to assert itself above God.

What you feel is the outer man struggling for existence. What you feel is death operating to terminate the self of your soul-life. The self gets exposed through environment. Its rebellion comes to the surface. And now it is there to deal with, not in the strength of ourselves, but in an utter dependency upon God. Inwardly you are contacting God. You are touching the Spirit, saying "Abba!" and from within there comes a prayer that says, "Not my will."

The Lord Himself became the embodiment of child-like dependency when death was working the strongest in his own soul. In the middle of His troubled soul — in the middle of His own soul-life and reactions to the outward environment — He prayed, "Not My will." That means He was feeling the intimidation of His own will. He felt the temptation of a proposal — "Father, would you save Me from this hour? Father, is it Your will that I escape this?" He felt it. But He counteracted his soul-

reaction with His spirit-reaction to the Father's will. Death operated in Him. By not loving His soul-life unto death, He multiplied Himself as the one grain of wheat into multitudes for eternity.

In the same way, all of us pass through real things. All the trials in our lives are real. It is all real stuff. Real rebellion gets manifested in our soul. Real unhappiness surfaces in our outer man. There is real troubling and sorrow within. Thank God for all the real stuff, because death operates in it all. With that operation the outer man is decaying and the inner man is being renewed. This is more than encouraging. This is the way it works. This is the way death operates.

The experience of the cross and trouble

The outer man's experience of the cross is in the midst of *trouble*. Consider the nature of trouble. There is trouble by reasonings rising up in your mind (Luke 24:38). There may be trouble by knowing you will deny the Lord (John 13:38—14:1). You have denied Him before and you are going to deny Him again. But the Lord said, "Don't let your heart be troubled." He said this immediately after He told Peter, "You are going to deny Me. You are going to deny Me three times." Then He added, "Don't let your heart be troubled. You believe in God. Believe also in Me." And then He said, "Peter, when you are turned again, strengthen the brothers" (Luke 22:31-32).

The inner man's experience of the cross is in this *turning again*. It is the survival of a living faith inside of us that keeps coming back after we have been dragged through the mud and feel contaminated by ourselves. You come back with a faith that turns again. The Lord said to Peter, "When you are turned again." The Lord had prayed for him that his faith would not fail. This means there is ability to come back on the heels of the sorrow and bitterness of our soul when our outer man has been shredded into pieces. The confident Peter had a soul that was shredded. Death operated. That is the way it operated. It operated to humble the man. But the Lord could say, "When you are turned again, strengthen the brothers." This is encouraging for all of us.

The New Testament reveals that there are many ways our soul can be troubled. The following are a few of them: troubled by "words" (Acts 15:24); troubled by "some," referring to distracting persons (Gal. 1:7); and troubled by things or persons that affect us (2 Cor. 7:5-6). Why do these things happen? It is for death to operate. It

is for us to be reduced once again, to see that in ourself we cannot do anything (John 15:5). We need Another life!

The cross and being put to death

The working of death in Romans 8 is expressed in verse 36: "For Your sake we are being put to death all day long; we have been accounted as sheep for slaughter." In other words, we didn't choose what would put us to death. All the environmental problems just put us to death. Your husband is a nail, to nail you right to the cross. Or your wife is a nail, to nail you right to the cross. Her look is a nail right into you. You were just put to death. And you feel that death, you feel your hostility with "the files" of past offenses behind it. And you feel like you want to pull the files out and start reading them. All this comes to the surface. You feel it and you want to say it, so you reason, "Well, I don't want to be a hypocrite. I had better say it. I don't want to be false." But we are not talking about that. Some people think, "Well, I don't want to be a hypocrite so I am just going to let it out." But it makes a huge difference if you don't let it out, if you don't murmur. Just don't murmur. It is there, but do all things without murmuring, because it is God who is working in you (Phil. 2:12-14). So just say "Amen."

The operation in desperate situations

Second Corinthians chapter four describes what it is like to be in desperate situations. You feel like you are actually not going to make it. I have been through these experiences over the years where there have been environments, situations, troubles, and I felt like we were right on the brink of a disaster. That was death operating. It operated in feelings that the environment had gone over our head, that we couldn't handle it. But it all caused us to say, "Lord, thank You. You are over all. Let that die in me which needs to die, that I could be catapulted into Another life."

"We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair...struck down, but not destroyed." Paul experienced all these things, but somehow he kept coming through. Because he was bearing about in his body the putting to death of Jesus, and the life of Jesus was being made manifest in his mortal body (2 Cor. 4:8-12).

We have seen that the inner man's experience of the cross is *turning again* — that is, coming back with a faith that will not fail. It is praying through and crying "Abba,

Father!" all the way to the willing spirit.

The context of our experience of the cross is the very thing the outer man is passing through. Is your outer man being troubled? Is death operating? It is not just saying "Amen" without any pressures. The cross provides a context for us to say, "Amen." And the context is all the environments that weaken and disable our outer man.

When the cross is in our lives, when God is operating in this way, life comes to those around us — "death operates in us, but life in you." It is life for our homes, our families, the church, and our situations. Oh, may more of this kind of life spring up on the earth.*

— Bill Freeman

God's great work in our lives is to transfer us experientially out of ourselves and into Himself. *The Cross and the Self* describes the depths of the self-life while at the same time showing us God's way of dealing with it — the cross. God does not leave us to ourselves. He deals with us so that He might become our source. This book helps us understand the experiences of the cross in our daily life.

* The above article is taken from the 9th chapter of *The Cross and the Self*, by Bill Freeman. This book of 317 pages may be ordered for \$15.95 postpaid from **Ministry Publications**, PO Box 1077, Moses Lake, WA 98837, or call (800) 573-4105; (509) 762-0400 / Email: MinWord12@aol.com.

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