

CHRIST IS THE ANSWER

Matthew 16:13-17—Now when Jesus came into the parts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Who do men say that the Son of man is? And they said, Some say John the Baptist; some, Elijah; and others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets. He saith unto them, But who say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the [Messiah], the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-Jonah: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father who is in heaven.

1 Corinthians 1:18-24—For the word of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us who are saved it is the power of God. For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, And the discernment of the discerning will I bring to nought. Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For seeing that in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom knew not God, it was God's good pleasure through the foolishness of the preaching to save them that believe. Seeing that Jews ask for signs, and Greeks seek after wisdom: but we preach Christ crucified, unto Jews a stumblingblock, and unto Gentiles foolishness; but unto them that are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God.

Mark 8:27-35—And Jesus went forth, and his disciples, into the villages of Caesarea Philippi: and on the way he asked his disciples, saying unto them, Who do men say that I am? And they told him, saying, John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; but others, One of the prophets. And he asked them, But who say ye that I am? Peter answereth and

saith unto him, Thou art the Christ. And he charged them that they should tell no man of him. And he began to teach them, that the Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders, and the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. And he spake the saying openly. And Peter took him, and began to rebuke him. But he turning about, and seeing his disciples, rebuked Peter, and saith, Get thee behind me, Satan; for thou mindest not the things of God, but the things of men. And he called unto him the multitude with his disciples, and said unto them, If any man would come after me, let him [give up all right to] himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever would save his life shall lose it; and whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's shall save it.

May we have another word of prayer:

Beloved Lord, we are so thankful that You are with us and that we are gathering unto You. Our prayer now is very simple: beloved Lord, we need You. Dear Lord, You know that without the anointing, it will be just words even though it will be truth. But with the anointing that you have won for us at Calvary and made a living reality by the presence of the Holy Spirit, that word will dwell in us. You will open our eyes and give us an understanding of what is ours in the Lord Jesus and the power and the ability to follow Him whatever the cost. So Lord, make this time very special to every one of us. Do not let it pass, Lord, with just words. We stand into that anointing of grace and power by faith both for the speaking of Your word and for the hearing of it. Lord, do something in every one of our hearts. We ask it in the name of our Messiah, the Lord Jesus.

Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth and the life." There is absolutely no way in which you and I can prepare the way for the coming again of the Lord without the Lord Jesus. He is the key to our preparation and for our being ready. He is the means by which you and I can go on into more and more of the fullness of God.

THOU ART THE SON OF THE LIVING GOD

When the Lord asked those disciples: "Who do men say that I am?" Peter, without waiting for anyone else to say a word, said, "Thou art the Messiah, the Son of the living God." The Lord Jesus immediately replied: "Blessed art thou Simon Bar-Jonah, for My Father in heaven has revealed this to you." It is a tremendous blessing when the Holy Spirit opens the eyes of our hearts and we begin to see what is the hope of our calling, what the glorious riches of His inheritance is in the saints, and what the exceeding greatness of His power is towards us who believe. Our inheritance is salvation to the fullest extent; it is Jesus. He is our Bridegroom; He is everything. But we, as the church, are His inheritance. That is something tremendous.

What did Peter really see when he said: "Thou art the Messiah, the Son of the Living God"? I do not know how much he did see, but Jesus said: "You are blessed because My Father has touched the eyes of your heart, and you have seen something." There is absolutely no doubt that as Peter went on, he saw more and more and more of what that simple declaration of faith really signified.

"Thou art the Messiah, the Son of the living God." In that one statement, all sixty-six books of the Bible are summed up. It is almost as if the whole Bible from Genesis 1 to Revelation 22 is encapsulated in that one statement of faith. That is why the apostle Paul said, "To us who are being saved, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God." Everything that we need of ability and power are in

Him. Everything that we need of wisdom and understanding are in Him.

It is a tragedy when our love goes cold, when we become lukewarm, and there is no longer the fire of His love in us.

The problem of sin has been totally met by Christ, the power of God. Christ crucified is the power of God and the wisdom of God. Every time I think about this, I am awestruck that God not only could have conceived such a plan, but in His wisdom could have accomplished it through Christ crucified as the way for our sin, iniquity, transgression, and our alienation from God be met. You and I through the death of our Lord Jesus—the crucifixion of the Messiah—have been reconciled to God. That is far more than to just be on speaking terms with Him. We have been made one with Him. There is a union that has been established and created through the finished work of the Lord Jesus on Calvary whereby you and I are positioned by the Father through the Holy Spirit, in the Messiah the Lord Jesus. We have a union with God the Father by the Holy Spirit in the Messiah Jesus. What wisdom!

CHRIST CRUCIFIED—THE WISDOM AND POWER OF GOD

We know that wisdom is not knowledge; wisdom is all to do with how to handle facts. Knowledge is about facts, and wisdom is how to handle them. God did not just tell us that we are sinners and alienated or divorced from Him. Christ crucified is the wisdom of God or the ability of God to cancel our sins which are as scarlet and make them whiter than snow. Only the wisdom of God—Christ crucified—can take our sins and blot them out as far as the east is from the west.

Christ crucified is not only the wisdom of God to handle the situation of sin, iniquity, transgression, and being divorced from God, but it is the power of God. Christ

crucified is the ability of God to take a person lost in sin and wickedness, as evil as a person can be, cancel it all out and create living faith in him—and join him to the Father in Christ. That is the power of God—Christ crucified.

THE SELF-LIFE WITH ITS AGENDA

However, it is not only sin that is the problem in this world; it is self. We can have all our sins blotted out, all our sins forgiven and washed away, but we still have a self-life. And this is as much of a problem as sin. Our self-life has an agenda—its own agenda which is a self-interested and self-advancing agenda. Our self-life has a will, and generally speaking, that will is opposed to the will of God; it is out of sorts with God's will.

Many people do not like to talk about their self because they think it is beautiful and God loves them as they are. He does love us; but that confused, proud, self-willing, self-advancing self-life is an enormous problem.

God planted two trees in the garden for Adam and Eve to choose from—the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and the tree of life. God chose those two trees to define a human constitution. It is either a God-centered, God-conscious, or God-dependent constitution represented by the tree of life, or a self-centered, self-conscious, self-interested constitution represented by the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. That is why Satan said, “Did God say that if you eat of that tree, you will die? You will not die, but you will become as God. You will become a demigod and equal with God. You will have the center in yourself.”

The history of this world is the expression of the self-life that Adam and Eve chose. They chose to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil—a self-centered constitution. Every one of us, no matter who we are, has been born with a self-centered constitution. We cannot get

away from it. When we are babies, we grab the things we want. This is quite clear, that even when we are just a few months old we are so self-interested. The whole of this world history is the expression of this constitution that Adam and Eve chose. We are all born with it.

CHRIST DIED AS THE LAST ADAM

The amazing thing is that when the Lord Jesus died, He died as the last Adam. He took that constitution and crucified it; it died with Him on the cross. He is the second Man, the Man that Adam and Eve should have been if they had only chosen to eat of the tree of life. This constitution that you and I have is expressed everywhere in history. The great despots, dictators, geniuses, architects of so many incredible buildings are all the expression of self-grandeur that comes out of our fallen constitution. The League of Nations is the perfect expression of self-interest. Also, the United Nations is the collection of a whole number of self-interested and self-advancing nations. It is all there. Every ideology that has hit this world has had this fallen constitution at its heart no matter what it has been.

MAN IS A TRIPARTITE BEING

God created man as a tripartite being. Theodore Austin-Sparks used to always say, "If you do not understand the tripartite nature of the human being, you will be destined to go wrong." When Adam and Eve chose the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, their spirits died. Their soul became the supreme part of their being and took the dominant place.

I always give this example: when our spirits are dead, they are like an electric bulb that is disconnected from electricity. It is there, but it is dead and inanimate; it cannot give light. Only when the bulb is fixed into the socket and

the power goes through it, that it gives light. And so it is with the human spirit. It is only when it has been made alive unto God, when one has been born of God that in one's spirit for the first time, divine light shines. Then there is the ability to begin to understand the things of God, to understand the heart and mind of God, and to read, as it were, the Lord Jesus as the alphabet of God. Otherwise, we are left with our soul. Then it makes no difference whether it is beautiful classical music or jungle music, magnificent architecture, wonderful literature, it all comes out of the soul. The ingenuity of fallen man and the creativity of fallen man is all there.

Christ crucified is both the power of God and the wisdom of God to answer this problem of our self-life. When the Lord Jesus died, He took our constitution and nailed it to His cross. And Christ crucified—not just Christ—is the power of God for that self-life of ours to be laid down; it is the divinely given ability to let go of our self-life. In the Greek word *psuche*, we get the English word *psychiatry*, which has everything to do with the psychological. Of course, that is the Greek word for the soul; but it is much easier to understand it as our self-life—our emotions, our will, and our reasoning. When we are not alive to God in our spirit, there is no possibility of God ruling in our soul-life.

Christ crucified is God's answer to sin; it has been blotted out. You and I have been declared righteous, justified in the sight of God the Father through the work of the Lord Jesus on the cross but we still have a self-life, and in some Christians, that self-life is rampant. It is very much alive and very dominant. It is *the* problem.

Let me explain it this way: It is *I*, *I* and *I*. It is quite simple: "I think; I feel; I know; I will." And when we have someone else saying: "I think. I feel. I think," and it is not what we feel or think, we have a huge problem.

In English, sin is spelled with three letters—s **I** n. *I* is in the center; *I* is in the dominant place, *I* is the beginning and the end. It is entirely possible to make our Christian lives literally begin with *I* and end with *I*.

THE SELF-LIFE WILL WRECK OUR CHRISTIAN LIFE

Our Christian life will be a total mess if our self-life is in charge. It will be run by our emotion, will, and reason without regard to the Lord. Oh, we will sing hymns about Him, even worship songs about Him. We will study His Bible and His words, we will even pray in His name when we are in trouble. We make the Lord a glorified charlady who cleans up the messes after we make them, who is always available to clean us up, and makes life a little more comfortable for us.

There is no answer other than Christ crucified—the power of God and the wisdom of God to our self-life. It will wreck you if you are not prepared to really follow the Lord wholeheartedly in this matter. It will wreck your family life because your wife will say, “I.” You will say, “I.” Your children will say, “I.” When everyone is saying, “I”, what a mess!

You may be very wealthy and have even gotten to the very top, but when it is controlled by *I* your business will be wrecked. There is a wonderful old Welsh hymn that says: “Guide me O Thou great Jehovah, pilgrim through this barren land.” When Sankey published the first edition of his hymnal, they discovered a dreadful mistake in that famous hymn. It says in the original: “Land me safe on Canaan’s side.” But one single letter was wrong. It said, “Land *my* safe on Canaan’s side.” There are many people who have been so successful in business and in their careers that they would love to land their safe on Canaan’s side. There is no possibility. We come in naked, we will go out naked. We will leave our jewelry, money, letters before

a person's name and or after their name, even our clothes. Everything will be left behind.

Do I have to say anything about church life? This self-life is the destroyer of church life. It wrecks it. If you get a whole collection of people saying, "*I, I, I, I, I* and *I*, what are you going to do? There is going to be division, faction, jealousy, rivalry, gossip, and backbiting. It all comes from this simple origin.

THE WORK OF THE LORD IS WRECKED BY THE SELF-LIFE

I remember when I was in Egypt and went to a mission station manned by three lady missionaries. They had not spoken to one another for three years even though they lived in the same small house. They had Muslim servants who all knew that the three missionary ladies never spoke to one another nor ever prayed together. It was *I*; and we can multiply that a thousand, thousand times. This fallen self-life wrecks the work of the Lord when it is never broken.

Now every human being has been born with this old constitution, and it has an agenda. Of course, we always think that a lot of that agenda is not wrong—we want to get married, to have children, to get on with a good job or career—but it is our agenda. Very often, our understanding of the Lord is that He stands behind our agenda and supports it. He even helps us to forward it; but this is not the gospel. Let me put it another way: Until our will is surrendered totally to the Lord Jesus, we will always be in danger.

C. T. STUDD

I preached about two years ago in Melbourne Hall in Leicester, England. It was founded by Dr. F.B. Meyer. The

place was full; and after speaking on the subject that was given to me, the pastor, who had been there thirty-four years, said to me: "Do you realize that you stood in the very pulpit that C.T. Studd spoke from the last time he was in England? He was on his way to China with the Cambridge Seven, then later to India, and finally to the Congo in Africa. He never came back to England."

The pastor then said to me: "When C. T. Studd was in the vestry, Dr. F.B. Meyer was so moved by what he said that he asked him: "Tell me the secret of your life and your ministry." C.T. Studd thought for a moment and then said: "I have surrendered my will entirely to the Lord Jesus."

C.T. may have had many faults but there was one thing about him that was above all others. As he lay dying he said to Norman Grubb, his son-in-law, who wrote his biography: "I have made many mistakes, caused a lot of problems for other Christian, but one thing I can say: of all that the Lord has told me to do, I have done it." That was the secret of a life that produced the greatest fellowship of missionary servants of the Lord in the world. He surrendered his will to God.

SURRENDERING OUR WILL IS THE HARDEST

I know very well from my own life and experience that the hardest thing in the world to do is surrender our will because our agenda is all to do with our will. We have a will, and we feel safer to be in charge of our lives, to will our lives, than to surrender to someone else who will lead us.

There is no way for the way of preparing the way for the Lord to return to be fulfilled if our self-life remains unbroken. We can talk till the kingdom comes; we can preach and preach and work our fingers to the bone, but if we are not prepared for our self-life to be dealt with, it will not happen. Our sins have been dealt with, but it is our self-

life that is the problem. We must see that the gospel is not just to do with sins being forgiven. That is tremendous, but it is not the whole gospel. The full gospel is when we allow Christ crucified to deal with our self-life, when we make Him Lord of our lives, when we make His will our will, and when we make His agenda our agenda. Only then are we in possession of a full gospel.

PETER'S AMAZING CONFESSION

When Peter made the statement: "Thou art the Messiah the Son of the Living God," and the Lord Jesus looked at the other disciples, was there shock on their face or a little bit of jealousy? Maybe their attitude was: "Well, that is Peter jumping in again where the angels fear to tread." But it was at that point, for the first time in those years of His ministry Jesus began to reveal to the disciples that He was going to die and on the third day be raised again. And not only that, but the leaders of the nation were going to do it. After Peter said this and probably feeling very, very thrilled that Jesus had said, "My Father in heaven has revealed this to you," said, "Never. I would rather die than for You to go through with this. This is ridiculous!" Then Jesus looked into his eyes and said, "Get thee behind me, Satan." Now He was speaking to Satan, but He was speaking to Satan in Peter.

Some of you Christians would probably say, "Never! That is impossible for Satan to be in me. Never!" However, if you have an uncrucified self-life, if your will has never been surrendered to God's will, and your agenda transformed into His agenda, the poison of Satan is in your self-life. It will wreck your Christian life, your service to God, your church life, and your family life; it will wreck and wreck and wreck. It can do no other. This is why Jesus used this extraordinary statement: "Get behind me, Satan."

If I were to look into your eyes and say, “Get behind me, Satan,” I think you would make a speedy line to the brothers and say: “Never ask him back again. Do you know what he did? He did not look around me or beyond me but looked into my eyes and said, “Get behind me, Satan.” That is a terrible thing to say to a Christian, a believer born of the Spirit of God. You cannot say things like that. If he had only said, “Satan is troubling you, Peter” then I would have understood it, and that would have been quite nice. Then I would have said, “What a lovely thing to say, Lord. Thank You.” If He had said, “Peter you are thinking negative thoughts,” that would have been okay. But for Him to call me Satan is unforgivable.

We need to know that there is a poison in our self-life and only Christ crucified—the power of God and the wisdom of God—can deal with it. That is why I find this passage extraordinary. When Jesus had said that about Satan, He looked for the other disciples and saw that they were all there, so He began to teach them. Then, He saw the multitudes and beckoned them to come closer, and they pressed in. Then Jesus said, “If any man follow Me, let him give up all rights to himself, take up his cross, and follow Me. For whosoever will lose his self-life [that is the word *psuche* again], for my sake and the gospel, the same shall find it, and whosoever shall seek to preserve his self-life shall lose it” (see Matthew 16:24-25).

In other words, it was the gospel. It was as if Jesus was saying, “I am going to die for the sin of the world. I will die for your justification; but if you want to know My power, the power of God in your Christian life, family life, business life, church life, the work of God, you have to let Me deal with this.” No one can follow the Lord without giving up all right to himself. It is everywhere in the Bible; you cannot get away from it.

HOW CAN I DIE

How can I die? How can I die to self? You cannot. That is the simple answer. You cannot. It is only through Christ crucified—the power of God and the wisdom of God. Through Him, you can die to yourself.

Very often I travel to different parts of the world, and everywhere I have gone through the years of my ministry, young people have asked me again and again one question: “How can I live the Christian life?” It seems as if young people find it impossible to live the Christian life as it is portrayed in the New Testament. “How can I do it?” is their cry. Many people think: “Maybe the Holy Spirit will come upon me and give me the power to live the Christian life.” But I always say to them—having said it now for fifty, sixty years. This is not the question to ask: “How can I live the Christian life?” The question you should ask is: “How can I die.” Once you have the secret of dying with Christ, your Christian life will take care of itself. It is a spontaneous, organic thing. The Christian life is not that you continue to add something to it, or you go to Bible school and get more knowledge, or you go somewhere else and get some experience. The Christian life is spontaneous; it is the life of Christ in you. But the thing that hinders that life is yourself—your uncrucified, unbroken self, your will, and your agenda. You can start in the spirit and end in the flesh. What then can you do? The Christian life will blossom, will grow, will fruit, and be fulfilled once you learn how to die.

Years ago I asked Elizabeth Fischbacher how she first came into the experience of the Lord, and she said, “It was through Watchman Nee. There was one thing he said that I have never forgotten: ‘If you can fall into the ground and die, there will be fruit.’”

I HAVE BEEN CRUCIFIED WITH CHRIST

This matter is quite simple when our eyes have been opened. It is not simple when they have not been opened. When the eyes of our heart have been illumined, when the light of God has shone on the eyes of our heart, it is so simple. When Christ died, we died with Him. When Christ was raised from the dead, we were raised with Him.

Let me put it more simply: this is something that Brother Nee said to some of the brethren in England. Look at this Bible as Christ, and this little tag as you. God placed you in Christ even as I place this tag in this Bible. Wherever this Bible goes, the tag (which is you) goes because it is in the Bible. Now the history of the tag is the history of the Bible. Wherever the Bible goes, the tag goes with it. God put you in Christ when He was crucified, and wherever He goes, you go.

That is why the apostle Paul could say in Galatians chapter 2: "I have been crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and that life which I now live I live by the faith of the Son of God who loved me, and gave himself up for me" (see v. 20).

This is not morbid holiness—the kind of teaching that says dress in black and look miserable with bowed head and heaviness. No, I have been crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live, yet not I, but Christ lives in me: and the life which I now live, I live by the faith of the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself up for me." Live, live, life. It is all living. Christ liveth in me.

The thing that blocks the Christian life is the *I*. Once we see that the self-life has been crucified with Christ, the way is opened. Christ crucified—the power and wisdom of God. Who but God could have thought of a way to handle our self-life? Who but God could have thought of a way by which we are given ability to die daily, to receive within

ourselves the sentence of death so that we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead? There is no way that we can prepare for the coming again of the Lord unless we allow the Lord to have His full way in our lives. Will you respond in your heart to Him?

Shall we pray:

Lord, we all have a problem with this self-life. It rears its head again and again. We thank You for Christ crucified, Your power and Your wisdom. In the same way that You have dealt with our sins, iniquities, transgressions, and alienation from You, would You deal with this problem of our will and the agendas we have for our lives? Lord, touch us. May we never be the same again! Open our eyes to see that in Christ we have been crucified and in Him we have been born of the Spirit and raised to fullness of life. Hear our prayer; we ask in the name of our Lord Jesus.