

THE GREENWOOD BULLETIN

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No Comfortable

Cross

By Gary Henry –
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“. . . knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin” (Romans 6:6).

PRIOR TO OUR CONVERSION, MOST OF US UNDERSTOOD, AT LEAST ON SOME BASIC LEVEL, THAT WE MUST “DIE WITH CHRIST.” But unless we’re among the few who’ve truly counted the cost of discipleship, we probably underestimated the pain that would be involved in having our “old man . . . crucified with Him.” As we begin to discover how painful it is for our old habits to be put to death, we may back away from the process. We didn’t expect that any part of being a Christian would be so painful. We’re surprised by the

unpleasantness of it all. Perhaps we even resent or resist it.

Yet there is no such thing as a comfortable crucifixion. The word “excruciate” is simply a variation of the word “crucify,” and so in a quite literal sense, death by CRUCIFIXION is always EXCRUCIATING. If our Lord chose the concept of crucifixion to describe the removal of sin from our lives, then we ought not to expect that process to be entirely pleasant. Deeply rooted habits can’t be easily denied or conveniently removed. Their destruction requires nothing less than the dying of the person that we used to be.

But if we saw where sin takes people, we’d be willing to make any sacrifice to be free of it. Jesus said that if we couldn’t keep our right eye or our right hand and still stay away from sin, then we’d be better off plucking out our eye or cutting off our hand (Matthew 5:29,30), however painful those removals might be.

If the crown that awaits us requires that we first go to the cross and die, then the crown is worth every bit of the cross. Paul said that “if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him”

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(Romans 6:8). It would be worth dying a thousand times if that meant we could live with Christ. But let’s not be silly. Our cross can’t be any more painless than His. It’s going to hurt.

“If we are wise, we will do what Jesus said: endure the cross and despise its shame for the joy that is set before us. To do this is to submit the whole pattern of our life to be destroyed and built again in the power of an endless life. And we shall find that it is more than poetry, more than sweet hymnody and elevated feeling. The cross will cut into our lives where it hurts worst, sparing neither us nor our carefully cultivated reputation. It will defeat us and bring our selfish life to an end” (A. W. Tozer).

Renewing the Mind

By Clark Dugger

Certainly our mind controls our actions, for all that we do or say must first come from our mind. But the word “mind” can refer to more than just thought process. The apostle Paul uses the word “mind” on many occasions to refer to the attitude and disposition that an individual has towards life, and uses the word to indicate purpose, inclination and intent. He speaks of those at variance with God as having “reprobate minds” (Rom. 1:28), “corrupt minds” (1 Tim. 6:5), “defiled minds” (Titus 1:15), and says that such individuals “walk in

the vanity of their mind” (Eph. 4:17).

For one to be converted to the Lord there must first be a radical change in mind or attitude toward God and His will. This change of mind will manifest itself in a change of behavior. But conversion is more than external reforms. It is a transformation of character, a change of heart or mind from which flow the issues of life. The wise man says: “Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life” (Prov. 4:23). As people of God we are concerned exclusively with serving and pleasing Him so that we might be able to “dwell in the house of the Lord forever.”

We therefore reflect the Divine viewpoint in life. We set our “minds on the things that are above, not on the things that are upon the earth” (Col. 3:2). Being spiritually minded rather than carnally minded we have the mind of Christ who emptied self, took the form of a servant and “humbled himself, becoming obedient even unto death, yea, the death of the cross” (Phil. 2:5-8).

But such transformation is not a onetime occurrence. It is, rather, a continuing process that must be constantly

renewed. And so Paul writes, "And be not fashioned according to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God" (**Rom. 12:2**). This renewing process is essential to the new man, the man of God who is striving to become more like his Lord. And so we "have put on the new man, that is being renewed unto knowledge after the image of him that created him" (**Col. 3:10**). May God help us to continue this renewing of our mind so that we may be truly transformed into His image.

Joyful Longing

**By Gary Henry –
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“... Jesus Christ, whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, receiving the end of your faith — the salvation of your souls” (1 Peter 1:7-9).

IT IS POSSIBLE TO BE CONTENTED AND UNFULFILLED AT THE SAME TIME. Even though our deepest longings won't be completely satisfied until our Lord returns,

we can still live in the present with a sense of satisfaction at God's goodness. And looking at it from the other direction, even though we experience the peace that passes understanding right now, we can live with a joyous expectancy that the best is yet to come. Contentment and desire need not be contradictory. We can long for God with a joy that's just as deep as our longing. Indeed, our longing can be a part of our joy.

Peter wrote that we can “rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory,” since we are “receiving the end of [our] faith — the salvation of [our] souls.” It's important to notice that this inexpressible joy can be ours even though the end of our faith, the final salvation of our souls, has not yet been received. Our joy is the joy of HOPE. It's the joy of those who're confident that they're on the path that leads to their Father. We're grateful to be going home!

And yet our joy can be more than the joy of hope: we can learn to enjoy the PROCESS that is leading to our salvation. We are indeed on a path, and we haven't yet

reached the end of it. But the path itself is full of pleasant things, things that have been created by God for us to enjoy along the way. Surely it would be wrong to have our hearts so set on heaven that we failed to appreciate the goodness of the journey by which God plans to get us there.

The Christian really does have the best of both worlds. So when we say godliness is profitable for all things, for “the life that now is” and for “that which is to come” (1 Timothy 4:8), we ought to be espousing more than a theory; we ought to be stating our own experience. We need to be people who reach forward eagerly, but also those who reach forward GRATEFULLY. We need to long for God fervently, but to long for Him with a joy that is REAL RIGHT NOW.

“We are not to make the ideas of contentment and aspiration quarrel, for God made them fast friends. A man may aspire and yet be quite content until it is time to rise; and both flying and resting are but parts of one contentment. The very fruit of the gospel is aspiration. It

is to the heart what spring is to the earth, making every root, and bud, and bough desire to be more” (Henry Ward Beecher).