

The Love of Christ

Romans 8:35

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I think we've all had this experience; a little voice inside you says, "Don't criticize your colleague to others." But the comment slips out before you can barely do anything about it; "He's not very consistent is he?" The little voice inside of us is activated by the spirit of our Creator and our Creator is really saying, "Don't you try to put others right by your criticism. My Spirit has the specific task of convicting the world of sin and he will do it -- you just keep quiet." But we, of course, reject that voice and decide, "No, we'll put them right." And the way we do it is by criticizing them behind their back to somebody else.

Now, that's sin. That is sin; that's trying to do something that God wants to do but you take it over and you do it yourself and you do it without his power or without his strength. Now that is sin, loved ones. Or you've had a retched day -- it's just been a constant strain in that office, it's been a grind the whole day at work, and beyond that you're beginning to get anxious about the finances so when you come home worn out you reach for the drink, or you reach for the tranquilizer, or you reach for the cigarette. And the little voice within you says, "I have power to give you peace and quiet at this moment if you'll just stop doing what you're doing and look to me." And that little voice even says, "You're not solving the problem -- you're only trying to suppress the symptoms of a wrong attitude to the problem that is in you." And the little voice says, "Look, there's a greater, more powerful life that I can give you to enable you to get over this if you'll just sit back in the chair and look to me for a moment or two." But we decide no; so we pour the drink, we swallow the pill, we drag the nicotine in to dull the nerve endings. That's sin.

It's not because it's smoking, it's not because it's drinking. Those things in themselves are not wrong -- but it's using them to try to find an answer to the worry and anxiety that comes from not trusting your loving Father in heaven -- that's the sin of it. It's trying to live life and face life's problems without God, rather than taking every opportunity to trust him and lean in to him. You in fact find other material things to act as a substitute for his undergirding love and assurance. What you're really doing is getting used to living without God in those situations.

You want a car, a coat, an armchair, some shoes you've just seen in a sale, or a motorbike that you've been wanting for so long. The little voice says within you, "God first and others second, then yourself." But you feel, "If I don't get it now I'll never get it" so you buy the coat, you buy the car, you buy whatever it is. Now, rejecting that little voice of conscious and deciding, "I'm going to do it; I'm going to get what I want when I want it" -- that's sin, loved ones. That's sin; that's living apart from your maker; that's living without his directions operating in your life. That's normalizing life as if there is no God, as if there's no loving Father who thinks about you and takes care of you. That's what sin is.

Now even those examples show us all, because I don't know if there are any of us who haven't done that, that it doesn't need to be the martini or a tranquilizer -- it may be something else like turning on the television to drown out the worry. There probably isn't one of us who has not experienced that in some form. Now loved ones, that's what sin is. Sin is not all this business of indiscriminate killing. Sin is not all this business of the mafia; sin is not all that kind of stuff. I'm sure those things are the out workings of sin, but sin itself is a very, very simple

independence of God; not treating him as your loving Father. Sin is not dealing with everything in life with his power and his strength, but is attempting to meet every challenge on your own, by your own power, with your own lesser methods and substitutes.

And most of us find that this has become such an automatic reaction in our own lives that we actually have gotten use to calling this our sinful natures. Really, it's so automatic that we almost say, "This is just natural -- this is the way we go; sure, I take a martini." That's not the way you deal with worry -- that's the way you lighten it up and look forward to a reasonable kind of evening where you can at least think clearly. But we say, "Yeah, that's the way to go." So many of us have gotten used to this that it's a natural thing to us and we call it our sinful natures.

God, in Romans 6, calls it the body of sin. He says it's a body of sin. That is -- the body has gotten used to being used by this power of independent life to find in the world the substitutes for God's power that it needs. So the body is the servant of sin; it takes a drink to affect the emotions, or it takes a pill to affect the emotions, or it brings the nicotine through the lungs to affect the nerve endings. But the body is being used by this independent life that wants to exist apart from God and without God's help. This has become so automatic in many of us that we just call it the sinful nature. But it is actually a dreadful perversion that has taken place in our personalities. Our personalities have gotten so used to operating this way that they cannot work any other way.

So it's become an unnatural thing for people, when they are worried, to immediately turn their eyes to God. It's become the natural thing to turn to something that will dull the worry. It's become the unnatural thing for people, when they're in financial troubles, to turn to the Father and hand the whole thing over to him. It's become the natural thing that you go to whoever may be the human answer. The thing has become so automatic and natural that it is a perversion in our personalities.

Our personalities have become reversed -- instead of taking from God and giving to the world, we take from the world and try to give to ourselves, so there is this streak of perversity or irrationality that we cannot deal with. Now loved ones, transcendental meditation does not make one dent in that tendency; it doesn't make a dent in that personality that has become reversed. Church going habits cannot affect it; they cannot change that basic way your personality works -- that is perversion -- it cannot change it. You still find yourself reaching for the drink, reaching for the pill, reaching for the cigarette. No church going habits can change it, no eastern religion can change it.

Eastern religion can bring a kind of passivity into your psychological apparatus, but it can do nothing to change that radical perversion that has taken place in your personality that makes you operate as if there is no God. Power of positive thinking can't affect at all that reversal that has taken place. In fact, there is no religion or psychological technique that can deal with that basic reversal and basic perversion that has been handed down to us over the years by our forefathers -- that have lived for centuries as if there is no God. And that's what most of us are left with.

Loved ones, that's the point of Calvary; when Jesus died 1900 years ago God included your perverted, reversed, carnal, self centered, independent personality in him. He destroyed it there so that a new one can be created by the power of his Holy Spirit in you. You need nothing less than that. Honestly loved ones, if you're struggling with some of the things that I struggled with, you need

nothing less than a new personality. You need a completely new being because your old one works the wrong way. It doesn't matter how you train it -- you can't get it to work the right way. The only solution is the solution that our Creator has found. He has put it into his son on Calvary in a super spacial, super temporal miracle and he has destroyed it there. And through the power of his own life, called the Holy Spirit, he is able to recreate a new personality in you.

That's what Calvary is all about and you can find it in several scriptural verses.

II Corinthians 5:21, "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." Jesus did not have this kind of perverted personality, you see. His personality worked the right way -- he automatically trusted his father. He didn't have that kind of perverted personality so that he had to die, but God made him your personality and my personality. He took the worst, that you can do nothing to change, and he put it into his son and destroyed it there. That's what, "He made him to be sin who knew no sin" means. So he put your personality into his son and destroyed it there -- and you see why, "So in him we might become the righteousness of God."

Then verses 14-15 of that same Chapter, "For the love of Christ controls us, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died." All of us died when Jesus died.

"And he died for all, that those who live might live no longer for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised." And that's why he died, so that we'd no longer live for ourselves.

Now that is what the love of Christ is, loved ones.

The love of Christ is not involved in reinforcing that desire to do what we want to do; that is what we call carnal self-confidence. Carnal self-confidence is trying to get from the world and other people what you really should be receiving from God. Jesus' love is not involved in reinforcing that carnal self-confidence. The love of Christ is found in that he is taking that carnal self-confidence of ours, that will eventually drive us into hell and will drive us away from God completely, and he's destroying it in himself. That's the love of Christ.

The love of Christ is that he is lovingly trying to draw us on to the cross with himself and get us to allow him to destroy that self-confidence that wants to make do with the martini or the pills or the cigarette or the television, what God himself wants to do for us. You have a loving Father. He wants you to turn to him and share your troubles with him and put your trust in him and begin to depend on him to sort things out in your life. These other methods are just declaring your rejection of that.

That's why the Bible says that the mind of the flesh is against God -- it isn't subject to God's law neither can it be because the whole attitude is, "let me get what I need for myself whether he wants me to have it or not, and let me get it apart from him so that he has no control of it." That's that carnal self-confidence that Jesus has died to destroy. That's his love, loved ones; he has experienced the worst of your independence and your pride and your self-dependence. He's taken it into himself and destroyed it there.

Now that is not what popular Christianity teaches; popular Christianity teaches that Jesus died for us so that we could go on doing what we cannot stop doing; sinning. But now we will do it like everybody else, but we'll do it with impunity because Jesus has died for us. Popular Christianity says, "Jesus died for us so that we don't have to die at all - you can carry on just the way you're doing, but now you won't be punished for it." Loved ones that is not real Christianity; real Christianity is what II Corinthians says, "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin" so that we might continue to sin with impunity -- no, "so that in him we might become the righteousness

of God.” And the whole purpose of Calvary is to deal with that perverted, self-confident personality of yours that continues to want to live without God. That’s what Calvary is all about, and that is what the love of Christ is all about. Jesus loves you so much that he is trying to get that death embrace around some part of your life; he’s trying to embrace you and draw you up onto his cross where you, like him, are crucified to the world.

He didn’t use martinis to deal with the worry or anxiety. He didn’t use nicotine to try and quiet himself down when he was nerved up. He didn’t use the television to dull his brain to the troubles around him. He wants you to join him in that death to using external substitutes for real trust and faith in your Father who made you. What he’s involved in doing now is trying to lovingly draw you into that embrace and draw you onto the cross. That’s what it is all about.

Now loved ones, that’s what makes sense of the verse we are studying today. And maybe you’d like to look at it, its Romans 8:35, “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?” Now the love of Christ is Jesus trying to draw us into his own death to using the world, instead of God as our Father and the supplier of all our needs.

What really happens is all these things draw us nearer to the love of Christ. They don’t separate us from the love of Christ; they draw us nearer to him. Because do you see that all of these things are determined to destroy our existence? Look at it in this verse -- right from the last one, you see the sword -- that is death itself. Peril is danger of life or danger of death. Nakedness is the exposure of our bodies which would eventually bring death. Famine is lack of sustenance for the body which would eventually bring death. Persecution is the persistent attempts of other people to destroy us. Distress is some difficulty that we might come into that begins to bring strain into our lives. Tribulation is the kind of pressures that we meet in this life that begin to make us feel less adequate than we really are.

Now each of those is increasing degrees of death and destruction of our old selves, and each one of those has the effect of drawing us nearer to Jesus. So let’s take an example, the very first one -- tribulation. The Greek word is “thlipsis” and it means a feeling of pressure. So the finances are beginning to fray at the edges, okay. You’ve taken on one payment too much and you’re beginning to worry about the late charges and you’re beginning to sense, “I don’t have the thing in control and I really shouldn’t have bought that last car.”

You’re beginning to have that feeling of pressure that is spoiling life -- you know it -- you lose the freedom and the joy of it and you begin to have trouble getting to sleep at night. And you’re waking up in the morning still thinking of how you haven’t paid that last bill. Or many of us have had the experience in work where the job doesn’t seem as secure as it used to seem, and we begin to worry when we come home at night and begin to experience a feeling of pressure that just grows, and grows, and you begin to sense, it’s spoiling all of life and it can easily become the next word -- distress. “Stenochoria” is a narrowness where you’re being narrowed in and you feel you’re being driven back into a corner; “I’m getting into a financial corner or a professional corner and I don’t know quite which way to turn.”

Now the reason you feel the pressure is because you long ago have taken over the management of your own finances. The reason you’re in this mess at all is you made some decisions that were not given to God at all and you didn’t refer to him at all about them. But whatever it is, you’ve begun to take the thing over yourself and you’re beginning to manage your financial life so when it begins

fraying at the edges you feel, "It's my responsibility. I got myself into it, it's mine and I have to do what I can to rectify it." You know what happens in that situation; the "self" just intensifies. In fact, some of us have found a real, almost suicidal, self-destructive tendency, "We will not sell the car -- we won't sell it -- we won't sell the thing -- no." It will be an admission that we're lacking in self-confidence, or we're failing in competence and we just seem to hold on all the tighter. It's almost as if the car is on its way over the cliff and the further it goes the harder we hold onto the steering wheel.

It's the same with the job situation; we found the job is not as secure as we thought it was and we feel it slipping out of our grasp. And you know what we do -- we intensify our efforts all the more; we try to grow more subtle in the way we get one up on the other fellow in the office, or we work harder, or we work longer hours; but we do everything to hold onto that thing. But loved ones, our whole reaction shows that we're going to keep these things, "Whether God wants us to have them or not -- I'm going to hold onto them, I am going to hold on to them."

The love of Christ is acting in every pressure situation and is saying to you, "My child, will you come onto the cross with me? Will you die to the financial situation; will you die to your need for that car or that coat? Let it go. What does it matter? In 20 years you won't know whether you had it or not. Die to your job situation; die to your control of that job. Let me take care of the job, let me give you the job I want, let me allow you to be demoted completely until you are little more than an office boy or office girl. Let me have my way in your life. Be prepared to join me on the cross. I became a nothing. I became a criminal in everyone's eyes for you -- now join me on that cross. Will you relax and forget what everyone else thinks you should do, and turn from this self-managing of your life that you're engaged in, and join me on the cross, and die to this carnal self-confident desire to run your life apart from God by all other kinds of substitutes?"

In every pressure situation -- whether it be tribulation, or distress, or whether it be people out to get you and to destroy you -- your Savior is trying to use that to draw you onto his cross; to draw you out of some self-managing of your life that you've begun to develop. All strain, and all unrest, and all discontent, comes from you wanting something that your Father in heaven doesn't want you to have at that moment and that you won't get. Or, if you get it, will turn to ashes in your hand. All unrest and strain and discontent comes from you wanting something that your Creator doesn't want you to have at this moment.

Every time you back off from that attitude and join Jesus on the cross, there comes a sense of peace and rest, and an absolute contentment, "Whatever the Father has given me that I'm happy with." That was Jesus' attitude. You remember Jesus said of Judas in John 13:26, "It is he [who will betray me] to whom I shall give this morsel when I have dipped it." So when he had dipped the morsel, he gave it to Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot. "He got up to go out and all the rest thought he was going out to do something with the money, but Jesus knew and he said, "What thou doest, do quickly." Now that was Jesus attitude, "Alright, if God has allowed this to happen, I cooperate with it. Thank you Father it's in your hands." Not, "Come back here Judas and stay." But, "Lord, it's in your hands. Judas is going to do what my Father is allowing him to do. I accept it."

Yet in no way was he fatalistic or pacifist, because Jesus was very active on others behalf, and very active on God's behalf. So loved ones, it's dying to taking care of yourself and coming alive to caring only for God and for other people. That's what Jesus is trying to draw you into every time strain or tribulation comes. So far from those things separating you from the love of Christ,

they actually are a method that the love of Jesus uses to bring you onto the cross. Do you doubt it? Then when were you last closest to God? When did you last feel closest to God?

There isn't one of us here who would not say, "Either when my dad died, or when I saw my job disappearing out from under me, or when the house burned down, or when my wife was going to die." Or we'd all refer to some hideous disaster that was outside our control. Now loved ones, what we need to see is that all these disasters are being used by Jesus and by his love -- not sent by him -- but used by him to try and draw us out of this self-management of our own lives -- that's really what he's trying to do.

So each one of you will see it differently and only the Holy Spirit can show you, but what God is after is that old independent self of yours. That's why Jesus died, and that's where deliverance comes.

Let us pray.

Dear Father, we would confess that a thousand times we have taken the thing into our own hands. Lord, a thousand times we've reached for the martini, or the cigarette, or reached for the television remote, or gone out for a walk; anything to get away from the trouble, or the problem, or the worry, or the anxiety. Lord a thousand times we've seen other people about to take our job out of our hands and we've risen up -- not questioning whether it was your will or not -- just determined that we weren't going to lose our end of the thing. Lord we see that it's completely opposed to Jesus' way; we see Father that it's often that self assertion that we produce that causes all the trouble in our homes; that same self assertion that creates the arguments and the disagreements with our loved ones.

So Lord, we do see that this personality of ours is trained in an animal like kind of self defense, self-preservation technique that wants to run our lives the way we want them to without reference to you. Lord, we see that that's not the way you meant us to live. We see Lord, that there are little sparrows that shouldn't be alive at all; they should be destroyed by all the stronger birds. There are little animals that shouldn't be alive in your world; by survival of the fittest they wouldn't be alive at all. And yet Lord, you preserve them -- even the sparrows can't fall to the ground without you seeing them.

So we see our Father that there are thousands of examples in life of you preserving the lives of those who depend upon you and who have no other defense. Dear Father, we see that our lives, too, are meant to be lived like that; we're meant to join our dear Savior on the cross, and allow you to destroy in him this carnal self-confidence and self-assertion and then commit our lives into your hands and begin to rest in you, instead of other substitutes and other saviors.

Dear Father, I trust you for any brother or sister here this morning who knows that they need to commit this whole thing into your hands and stop thrashing around and trying to get their own way by their own power. Lord, if there is a brother or sister here who has been involved in "government of the self, by the self, for the self" will you enable them to see that that leads to destruction; that there can only be one God in your universe and that's you, and that you have a plan for each one of our lives and all you want us to do is let you show it to us, and bring it about.

So dear Father, we would pray for each other this morning; pray for everybody who is in the midst of a pressure situation, everybody who is in tribulation or distress this morning -- Lord, will you

show them that they're in it because they're trying to be their ringmasters; they're trying to run the whole circus; they're trying to be God. Will you show them you want them to give up and to trust you, and trust your Holy Spirit, that you will express the love of Jesus to everyone of us this morning as he lovingly draws us into his death- embrace on the cross, so that we may experience that resurrection life that treats our Creator as our Father; one who can be trusted, can be depended upon? We ask this in your name Lord Jesus. And now the grace of our Lord Jesus, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with each one of us now and ever more. Amen.