

Discipleship Training Course

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- The Old Testament tetragrammaton name of God (derived from the four Hebrew letters translated into English as YHWH) has been rendered LORD unless translated Jehovah or Yahweh
- Pronouns referring to the Trinity and some specific terms relating to the Trinity (such as Name and Word) have been capitalized
- Speech marks around entire quotes and at the beginning of new paragraphs have been omitted
- Anglicised spellings have been used
- All quotes begin with a capital letter and end with a full stop
- Some weights, measures and times have been replaced with easier to understand terms given in the footnotes using square brackets
- All verse numbers, footnote numbers and symbols have been removed
- Poetry has been indented and only new sentences start with a capital letter

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Chapter 20. Living a cross-centred life

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1. Introduction

As born-again Christians, the death and resurrection of Jesus is central to our faith. We receive the gift of eternal life and the grace of God by faith in Christ's sacrifice at Calvary. His death and resurrection also sets an example for us in the symbol of baptism and the practical experience of the renewal of our minds, as discussed in previous chapters. However, the relevance of the cross and resurrection of Christ to our lives should not end here: it should also be at the centre of our hearts in our daily Christian experience.

Firstly, from Colossians 2 we see that the way we received Christ is the way we should continue in our faith:

Therefore as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, walk in [union with] Him [reflecting His character in the things you do and say – living lives that lead others away from sin], having been deeply rooted [in Him] and now being continually built up in Him and [becoming increasingly more] established in your faith, just as you were taught, and overflowing in it with gratitude.

Colossians 2:6-7 (AMP)

2. Example of Jacob

The life of Jacob is an example of God dealing with a man's character over an extended period. His name means deceiver and in his earlier years he used deception in order to gain an advantage. In particular, when he deceived his father into giving him his brother Esau's birthright he had to flee the family home and ended up at his uncle Laban's home in Haran (Genesis 27). Laban took advantage of Jacob by making him work fourteen years for his two daughters and six years more for his flocks (Genesis 29-30). Through this experience Jacob began to understand that blessing came from God and not from his deception.

Jacob's change in character reached a peak when he fled from Laban and was preparing to meet his brother Esau again. He met a man, representing Christ, who wrestled with him all night. Jacob finally fully understood that blessing came from God when he refused to let the man go before he had blessed him. The man then changed Jacob's name to Israel, meaning **prince with God**. Jacob's limp can be taken figuratively to represent that his daily walk for here onwards was fully dependent upon God:

During the night Jacob got up and took his two wives, his two servant wives, and his eleven sons and crossed the Jabbok River with them. After taking them to the other side, he sent over all his possessions.

This left Jacob all alone in the camp, and a man came and wrestled with him until the dawn began to break. When the man saw that he would not win the match, he touched Jacob's hip and wrenched it out of its socket. Then the man said, "Let me go, for the dawn is breaking!" But Jacob said, "I will not let you go unless you bless me."

"What is your name?" the man asked.

He replied, "Jacob."

"Your name will no longer be Jacob," the man told him. "From now on you will be called Israel, because you have fought with God and with men and have won."

"Please tell me Your Name," Jacob said.

"Why do you want to know My Name?" the man replied. Then He blessed Jacob there.

Jacob named the place Peniel (which means "face of God"), for he said, "I have seen God face to face, yet my life has been spared." The sun was rising as Jacob left Peniel, and he was limping because of the injury to his hip. (Even today the people of Israel don't eat the tendon near the hip socket because of what happened that night when the man strained the tendon of Jacob's hip.)

Genesis 32:22-32 (NLT)

3. Teaching of Christ

When Peter confessed that Jesus was the Christ, Jesus explained the cost of following Him involved **daily** sacrifice:

Now it happened that as He was praying alone, the disciples were with Him. And He asked them, "Who do the crowds say that I am?" And they answered, "John the Baptist. But others say, Elijah, and others, that one of the prophets of old has risen." Then He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" And Peter answered, "The Christ of God."

And He strictly charged and commanded them to tell this to no one, saying, "The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised."

*And He said to all, **"If anyone would come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it.*** For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself? For whoever is ashamed of Me and of My words, of him will the Son of Man be ashamed when He comes in His glory and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels.

Luke 9:18-26 (ESVUK)

Later on, Jesus explained the cost of following Him in a similar manner to a wider group of followers, emphasising that this cost needed to be evaluated before choosing to follow Him:

*Now great crowds were going with Him. He turned and said to them, **"If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father, mother, wife, children, brothers, and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. Whoever does not bear his own cross, and come after Me, cannot be My disciple.*** For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, to see if he has enough to complete it? Or perhaps, when he has laid a foundation, and is not able to finish, everyone who sees begins to mock him, saying, 'This man began to build, and was not able to finish.' Or what king, as he goes to encounter another king in war, will not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is yet a great way off, he sends an envoy, and asks for conditions of peace. So therefore whoever of you who does not renounce all that he has, he cannot be My disciple. Salt is good, but if the salt becomes flat and tasteless, with what do you season it? It is fit neither for the soil nor for the manure pile. It is thrown out. He who has ears to hear, let him hear."

Luke 14:25-35 (NHEB)

Both these events recorded in Luke took place before Jesus died on the cross and must therefore have appeared very strange and radical to His hearers.

4. Teaching of Paul

When Paul taught the Corinthians about the resurrection of believers he related it to his own experience of dying daily:

*Now if there is no resurrection, what will those do who are baptised for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why are people baptised for them? And as for us, why do we endanger ourselves every hour? **I face death every day** – yes, just as surely as I boast about you in Christ Jesus our Lord. If I fought wild beasts in Ephesus with no more than human hopes, what have I gained? If the dead are not raised,*

*“Let us eat and drink,
for tomorrow we die.”*

1 Corinthians 15:29-32 (NIVUK)

In his second letter to the Corinthians, Paul recounted an occasion when he and his travelling companions were in Asia and particularly identified with an experience of dying in their hearts, but this later resulted in the reality of Christ's death and resurrection transforming their experience:

*We don't want you in the dark, friends, about how hard it was when all this came down on us in Asia province. It was so bad we didn't think we were going to make it. **We felt like we'd been sent to death row, that it was all over for us.** As it turned out, it was the best thing that could have happened. Instead of trusting in our own strength or wits to get out of it, we were forced to trust God totally – not a bad idea since he's the God who raises the dead! And He did it, rescued us from certain doom. And He'll do it again, rescuing us as many times as we need rescuing. You and your prayers are part of the rescue operation – I don't want you in the dark about that either. I can see your faces even now, lifted in praise for God's deliverance of us, a rescue in which your prayers played such a crucial part.*

2 Corinthians 1:8-11 (MSG)

Paul taught the Corinthians that they needed to follow the experience of Christ by dying to themselves and living for the One who died for them:

*For Christ's love compels us, because **we are convinced that One died for all, and therefore all died. And He died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for Him who died for them and was raised again.***

2 Corinthians 5:14-15 (NIVUK)

He also taught them that dying was part of the continual experience of a servant of God:

*We put no stumbling-block in anyone's path, so that our ministry will not be discredited. Rather, **as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way:** in great endurance; in troubles, hardships and distresses; in beatings, imprisonments and riots; in hard work, sleepless nights and hunger; in purity, understanding, patience and kindness; in the Holy Spirit and in sincere love; in truthful speech and in the power of God; with weapons of righteousness in the right hand and in the left; through glory and dishonour, bad report and good report; genuine, yet regarded as impostors; known, yet regarded as unknown; **dying, and yet we live on;** beaten, and yet not killed; sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, and yet possessing everything.*

2 Corinthians 6:3-10 (NIVUK)

Paul reinforced this when he wrote to the Galatians by explaining that because he had been crucified with Christ he no longer lived but it was Christ now living in him:

*For through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God. **I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me.** The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.*

Galatians 2:19-20 (NIVUK)

Paul testified to the Philippians that his life was bound up with Christ to the extent that dying physically was of no consequence to him:

*I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. **For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.** If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labour for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body. Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith, so that through my being with you again your boasting in Christ Jesus will abound on account of me.*

Philippians 1:20-26 (NIVUK)

Later in this letter, Paul testified to his desire to become like Christ in His death so that he might somehow attain the resurrection from the dead. It is clear from the context that Paul considered this to be an ambition and a daily walk, not just a past event which occurred at the beginning of his faith:

*I once thought these things were valuable, but now I consider them worthless because of what Christ has done. Yes, everything else is worthless when compared with the infinite value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For His sake I have discarded everything else, counting it all as garbage, so that I could gain Christ and become one with Him. I no longer count on my own righteousness through obeying the law; rather, I become righteous through faith in Christ. For God's way of making us right with Himself depends on faith. **I want to know Christ and experience the mighty power that raised Him from the dead. I want to suffer with Him, sharing in His death, so that one way or another I will experience the resurrection from the dead!***

I don't mean to say that I have already achieved these things or that I have already reached perfection. But I press on to possess that perfection for which Christ Jesus first possessed me. No, dear brothers and sisters, I have not achieved it, but I focus on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead, I press on to reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us.

Let all who are spiritually mature agree on these things. If you disagree on some point, I believe God will make it plain to you. But we must hold on to the progress we have already made.

Philippians 3:7-16 (NLT)

In his letter to the Colossians, Paul repeated his teaching of the close connection between a Christian's life and the life of Christ:

For you died [to this world], and your [new, real] life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.

Colossians 3:3-4 (AMP)

Paul described the end of life like being poured out as a drink offering, indicating that his experience of dying to himself was reaching a climax:

For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time for my departure is near. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is

in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day – and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for His appearing.

2 Timothy 4:6-8 (NIVUK)

5. Dying to self and spiritual warfare

Finally, Revelation 12 teaches that one of the weapons by which we can overcome Satan is **not to love our lives even unto death**:

Then there was war in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon and his angels. And the dragon lost the battle, and he and his angels were forced out of heaven. This great dragon – the ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, the one deceiving the whole world – was thrown down to the earth with all his angels.

Then I heard a loud voice shouting across the heavens,

*“It has come at last –
salvation and power
and the Kingdom of our God,
and the authority of His Christ.*

*For the accuser of our brothers and sisters
has been thrown down to earth –
the one who accuses them
before our God day and night.*

***And they have defeated him by the blood of the Lamb
and by their testimony.***

***And they did not love their lives so much
that they were afraid to die.***

*Therefore, rejoice, O heavens!
And you who live in the heavens, rejoice!
But terror will come on the earth and the sea,
for the devil has come down to you in great anger,
knowing that he has little time.”*

Revelation 12:7-12 (NLT)