

# The Fellowship of the Cross

*“Have you forgotten that all of us, when we were baptized into fellowship with Christ Jesus, were baptized into fellowship with His death?” Romans 6:3*

Jesus bore our sinful nature on His cross but He also said we must bear our own cross. “Whoever does not bear his own cross and follow Me, cannot be My disciple (Luke 14:27).” Therefore the work of the cross is not just His; it must by faith become ours. This is how we “work out” our salvation and prove we are His disciples. “Work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure (Philippians 2:12-13).” But how do we bear our own cross? Some Christians believe they still have a sinful nature, which they must put to death daily through self-suppression, self-discipline and self-denial. However, this is not what Jesus meant. He knew our willpower would never be strong enough to overcome the power of sin. He died on the cross for us so that just as we received Him by faith, we might now walk in Him and overcome sin by faith (Colossians 2:6-7). How did we first receive His Spirit? Was it by self-discipline? No, it was by faith in Jesus Christ and what He had done on the cross. How do we now walk in His Spirit and bear our own cross? Is it by self-denial? No, once again it is by faith in Jesus Christ and what He has accomplished on the cross (Galatians 3:1-2).

Bearing our own cross does not mean we now try to crucify our sinful nature. It is impossible for self to kill self. If we are born again, we have already died with Christ (Romans 6:8). Our sinful nature (that sin factory that produced sins) has already been destroyed and done away with (Romans 6:6). Because our sinful nature has died, we have already been crucified to the world (Galatians 6:14). By faith in God’s Word, we can now count ourselves dead to sin (Romans 6:11). Therefore, bearing our own cross means believing God’s Word: when Christ died we also died with Him (2 Corinthians 5:14). Bearing our own cross

means we stand firm in the truth that our sinful nature is dead and gone. When we know we have already been crucified with Christ, we have the ability to no longer act on our own self-initiative. We can look to Christ who indwells us as the source of our life and direction (Galatians 2:20). As we persevere by faith in the divine fact that our sinful nature is gone (in spite of what we feel or see), the Holy Spirit will confirm and establish this divine truth in our life until Christ is formed within us (Galatians 4:19; 1 Peter 5:10).

Jesus Christ has already done the work for us. He has already won the struggle against sin. He bore our sinful nature on His cross so that when He died, we died with Him. However, there is a price to follow Jesus and prove we are His disciples. The cost is bearing our own cross and losing our soul-life for Christ’s sake. Jesus said, “If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his soul-life will lose it; but whoever loses his soul-life for My sake will find it (Matthew 16:24-25).” Our soul-life is our individual personality and encompasses our attitudes, affections and abilities. Our flesh (the Greek is *sarx*, which means body and soul in this context) will suffer when we turn away from our natural desires and yield to Christ’s Sovereignty. This is our cooperation with the daily inworking of His death to our soul-life. This is our fellowship in His sufferings (Philippines 3:10). “Since Christ has suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same purpose, because he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin so as to live no longer for the lusts of men but for the will of God (1 Peter 4:1-2).”

Our sinful nature has already been crucified with Christ but now the work of the cross must begin to touch our soulish attitudes and affections. This process is what the Bible calls “sanctification,” without which no one will see the Lord (Hebrews 12:14). This is the goal of our faith and the reason why the holy seed of Christ was planted in us – so that we might bear fruit for God. If this process of sanctification does not take

place in our lives, we are bastards and not legitimate sons of God (Hebrews 12:8). Therefore, bearing our own cross is not an option, it is essential if we are to know Christ and receive our eternal inheritance in His kingdom. Bearing our own cross is what the apostle Paul called “being conformed to His death (Philippines 3:10).” As we bear our cross daily, the Holy Spirit will train us to turn away from being governed by our soul-life (Luke 9:26-33; John 12:24-25). The cross will work in us a godly detachment in spirit from everything of man’s interests and bring us into an attachment to God’s interests. God uses the inward revelation of His Word and the external pressure of His trials to bring about this transformation. God made our soul to be good and useful; therefore, the work of the cross will not destroy our soul. We will still possess our soul and its faculties. But when the mark of the cross is imprinted on our soul, we will no longer persist in independently asserting ourselves apart from Christ, but we will be yielded and fruitful vessels of our Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 12:2).

When we see the cross for what it is - a place of death, our “unconverted” soul-life may wish for self-preservation and we may hesitate to choose the fellowship of the cross. But glory to God! Jesus Christ has given us His victory over this desire for self-preservation through the power of His crucifixion! As we bear our cross by faith each day, we will experience the power of His resurrection life. “We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body (2 Corinthians 4:10).” We have already died with Jesus Christ to the world. Let us now fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, and endure “the loss of all things” for the sake of the gospel and the even greater joy of knowing Him. Let us gladly identify with His sufferings so that we might know Jesus Christ and His love.

*“I want to know Christ and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death.” Philippians 3:10*