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presents

MEDITATIONS
on
CROSS-BEARING

by J. Hudson Taylor
(1832-1905)

"If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me."
Luke 9:23

WE might naturally have thought that if there was one thing in the life of the LORD JESUS CHRIST which belonged to Him alone, it was His cross-bearing. To guard against so natural a mistake, the HOLY GHOST has taken care in gospel and in epistle to draw our special attention to the oneness of the believer with CHRIST in cross-bearing; and also to prevent misunderstanding as to the character of Christian cross-bearing, and the constancy of its obligation. The LORD JESUS, in the words we are considering, teaches us that if any man, no matter who he may be, will be His disciple, he must — not he may — deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow his LORD.

Is there not a needs-be for this exhortation? Are not self-indulgence and self-assertion temptations to which we are ever exposed, and to which we constantly give way, without even a thought of the un-Christliness of such conduct? That we owe something to GOD all Christians admit; and it may be hoped that the number of those is increasing who recognize His claim to some proportionate part of their income. But our MASTER claims much more than a part of our property, of our time, of our affections. If we are saved at all, we are not our own in any sense, we are bought with a price: our bodies we must present to Him; our whole life must be for GOD.

Self-denial surely means something far greater than some slight and insignificant lessening of our self-indulgences; When Peter denied CHRIST, he utterly disowned Him and disallowed His claims. In this way we are called to deny self, and to do it daily, if we would be CHRIST'S disciples indeed. "I don't like this," or, "I do like that," must not be allowed; the only question must daily be, What would JESUS like? And His mind and will, once ascertained, must unhesitatingly be carried out.

As believers, we claim to have been crucified together with CHRIST; and Paul understood this, not merely imputatively but practically. That cross put the world to death as regards Paul, and put Paul to death as regards the world. To the Apostle nothing could have been more practical. He does not say, "I take up my cross daily," in the light, modern sense of the expression; he puts it rather as dying daily;

and therefore, as one "in deaths oft,." he was never surprised, or stumbled by any hardship or danger involved in his work.

We wish, however, to draw attention to another aspect of self-denial which is often overlooked, and perhaps we shall do this most intelligibly by use of the antithetical expression, self-assertion. What does the Word of GOD teach us about our rights, our claims, our dues? Does it not teach us that condemnation, banishment, eternal misery, are our own deserts? As unbelievers, we were condemned criminals; as believers, we are pardoned criminals; and whatever of good is found in us is but imparted, and to GOD alone is due the praise. Can we, then, consistently with such a position, be self-asserting and self-claimant?

It is clear that if we choose to remit a claim due to us by one who is free and our equal, that may not invalidate or affect his claim on his neighbor — no matter whether that claim be larger or smaller than the one we remitted. But what did our SAVIOR intend to teach us by the parable of Matthew 18:23-35? There the King and Master and Owner of a slave remits His claim in clemency and pity (and does so, as our LORD elsewhere clearly shows, on the express condition of His servant's forgiving as he is forgiven — Matthew 6:14, 15); can that slave, under these circumstances, assert and claim his rights over his fellow?

And is not this principle of non-assertion, this aspect of self-denial, a far-reaching one? Did our LORD claim His rights before Pilate's bar, and assert Himself; or did His self-denial and cross-bearing go the length of waiting for His FATHER'S vindication of His character and claims? And shall we, in the prosecution of our work as ambassadors of Him whose kingdom is not of this world, be jealous of our own honor and rights, as men and as citizens of Western countries, and seek to assert the one and claim the other, — when what our MASTER wants is witness to, and reflection of, His own character and earthly life, and illustration of the forbearing grace of our GOD and FATHER?

May GOD work in us, and we work out in daily life, not self-assertion but self-denial — not ease and honor seeking and right-maintaining, but right-abandoning and cross-taking — and this for the glory of His own holy Name, and for the better forwarding of His interests, whether among His own people or among the unsaved!