

Paul and Death to Self

July 22, 2022



But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us. We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed—always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. . . .

Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal. (2 Corinthians 4:7–10, 16–18)

Paul knew the truth of Jesus' teaching about self-denial and death to self, and his letters are full of references to this principle. One of the most impressive examples appears in 2 Corinthians 4. While you will profit greatly by reading the entire chapter, here are the highlights in the passage above.

Perhaps as in no other place, Paul is expressing his confidence in God and demonstrating the way in which he lives, looking in hope to the eternal life of God. Then, out of that confidence, the conviction of what was basic Christianity for Paul bursts forth a few verses later:

For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again. (2 Corinthians. 5:14–15)

This is the essence of the death-to-self life: that we should no longer live for ourselves, but for him who died for us and rose again.

To this we add Paul's words from Galatians 2:20, where we see again that paradoxical way of presenting the believer's relationship in Christ:

I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.

This echoes the example of Jesus not loving his own life (as in protecting it), but giving up his life as the foundation of our own lives in him. Then, later in the same letter, Paul describes what should be the normal Christian life: "And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit" (Galatians. 5:24–25).

REFLECT

We see here the contrast between what Paul referred to as "the flesh" and the Spirit is the same as the contrast between living to the self and living to Christ.



Based on the contrast between living for self and living for Christ, how would define living on the basis of "the flesh"?

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