

Chapter 10—Self

One of the most important factors in Christian growth is the Holy Spirit's revelation of the self-life to the believer. Self is the fleshly, carnal life of nature, the life of the first Adam—"dead in trespasses and sins" ([Eph. 2:1](#)); thoroughly corrupt before God (see [Gal. 5:19–21](#)); the life in which there is no good thing in the sight of God ([Rom. 7:18](#)). Nowhere do spiritual principles mean more than here. Plato, with his "Know thyself," was more right than he knew but still only half right. Paul, with God's "Not I, but Christ" ([Gal. 2:20](#)), was all right!

In order for one to get beyond just knowing about the Lord Jesus and enter into a consistent and growing personal knowledge of, and fellowship with, Him, one must *first* come to know oneself. Introspection is not involved here—the Holy Spirit uses experiential revelation. First, the believer learns "Not I"; then, "but Christ." First, "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone"; then, "but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit" ([John 12:24](#)). First, "alway delivered unto death"; then, "that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest" ([II Cor. 4:11](#)). In service it is first, "death worketh in us"; then, "but life in you" (v. [12](#)). All resurrection life springs out of death or else it would not be resurrection life—His risen life (see [Rom. 6:5](#), [6](#)). We are to yield ourselves to God as those that are alive from the dead (v. [13](#)).

For some years now the scene has been dominated by a conversion known as "commitment," which often, sad to say, amounts to little more than a spiritual miscarriage. When there is a bit of life, it usually blossoms overnight into full bloom and soon becomes heavy with the fruit of "dynamic," "radiant" personality coupled with busy, rushing service. The tragedy of this sort of thing is that self is at home and thrives in the glow of it all and is rarely found out for what it really is. All is indiscriminate "hearts and flowers."

The healthy new birth, based on deep conviction of sin and repentance toward God, starts out clear and strong with love and devotion to the Saviour. But before long there comes the sickening realization of an element within that pulls one back to self-centeredness, to the world, to the rule of the Law, to sin. This learning by heart-breaking experience of the utter sinfulness and reigning power of self in the everyday Christian life is the means whereby we come to know the Lord Jesus beyond the birth phase—as our Saviour; on to the growth phase—as our Lord and Life. "To me to live is Christ" ([Phil. 1:21](#)). No believer will truly come to know the Lord Jesus as his life until he knows by experience the deadly self-life deep within for what it is.

At a Spiritual Life Conference many years ago Dr. C.I. Scofield said, "Not everyone, by any means, has had the experience of the seventh of Romans, that agony of conflict, of desire to do what we cannot do, of longing to do the right we find we cannot do. It is a great blessing when a person gets into the seventh of Romans and begins to realize the awful conflict of its struggle and defeat; because the first step toward getting out of the struggle of the seventh chapter and into the victory of the eighth, is to get into the seventh. Of all the needy classes of people, the neediest of this earth are not those who are having a heartbreaking, agonizing struggle for victory, but those who are having no struggle at all, and no victory, and who do not know it, and who are satisfied and jogging along in a pitiable absence of almost all the possessions that belong to them in Christ."

J.C. Metcalfe gives this same fact an added witness: "Many a young Christian, who has not been warned of this necessary voyage of discovery upon which the Holy Spirit will certainly

embark him ([Rom. 7](#)), has been plunged into almost incurable despair at the sight of the sinfulness which is his by nature. He has in the first place rejoiced greatly in the forgiveness of his sins, and his acceptance by God; but sooner or later he begins to realize that all is not well, and that he has failed and fallen from the high standard which he set himself to reach in the first flush of his conversion.

“He begins to know something of the experience which Paul so graphically describes: ‘What I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I’ ([Rom. 7:15](#)), and, in consequence, he feels that the bottom has fallen out of his Christian life; and then perhaps the Devil whispers to him that it is just no good his going on, because he will never be able to make the grade. Little does he know how healthy his condition is, and that this shattering discovery is but the prelude to a magnificent series of further discoveries of things which God has expressly designed for his eternal enrichment. All through life God has to show us our own utter sinfulness and need, before He is able to lead us on into realms of grace, in which we shall glimpse His glory.”

Self-revelation precedes divine revelation—that is a principle for both spiritual birth and spiritual growth. The believer who is going through struggle and failure is the Christian who is being carefully and lovingly handled by his Lord in a very personal way. He is being taken through the experience (years in extent) of self-revelation and into death, the only basis on which to “know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death” ([Phil. 3:10](#)).

God works by paradox. Success comes via failure; life springs out of death and so on. The only element in the believer’s life that crumbles is that which has to go anyway—the new life can never be harmed or affected. This disintegration is something the believer cannot enter into nor engineer on his own—self will never cast out self. He has to be led into it by the mercy of the Holy Spirit—into failure, abject and total. “For we which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus’ sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh” ([II Cor. 4:11](#)). So often the means utilized by the Spirit is an unsaved mate, or even a saved one! Or poor health; yes, and good health too! A thousand and one things are used by Him—in fact, everything ([Rom. 8:28, 29](#)), to bring out the worst in us, ultimately enabling us to see that the Christian life has to be “not I, but Christ” ([Gal. 2:20](#)). People, circumstances, etc. are never the cause of failure. Self’s reaction to them is the cause and the one problem to be dealt with.

“Many of us have probably known what it was to rejoice in the grace of God without having apprehended very much the true character of the flesh. It has often been noticed that where there is the greatest exuberance of joy in young converts, there is often a levity which fails to take into account that the flesh is unchanged. In such cases the grace of God is taken up in a self-confident way; there is very little self-distrust, or sense of weakness and dependence. And the inevitable consequence is a fall, or a succession of falls, that gradually brings home to the consciences of believers their utter weakness and incapacity as in the flesh” (C.A. Coates).

Evan Hopkins shares some important light on our subject: “How infinite are the forms in which self appears. Some are occupied with good self. They pride themselves on their excellencies. Others are just as much occupied with bad self. They are forever groaning over their imperfections, and struggling with the flesh as if they hoped in time to improve it. When shall we be convinced it is so utterly bad that it is beyond all recovery? Our experience, upward, in the power of God, is just in proportion to our experience, downward, in ceasing from self.

“Is it, Reckon yourself to be weak in reference to sin? No, it is lower than that. Is it, Reckon yourself to be dying? No, lower still. ‘Reckon yourself to be dead—([Rom. 6:11](#))—indeed unto sin.’ Some believe they are very weak. But what does that imply? That they have some strength. But when a man is dead he has no strength. We must act on the fact that we are dead in reference to sin. We shall not then speak of difficulty as to resisting temptation in reference to ourselves. We shall take the lowest place, and say it is impossible. But we shall know that what is impossible with self is possible with God. We shall take our place on the resurrection side of the cross, and in so doing we leave behind the old self-life for the new Christ-life. To live in Him who is our Life, is to be in the power of God.”

Someone has rightly said, “There are many ‘separated from the world’ Christians who are not ‘separated from themselves’ Christians.”