

June 30, 2011

Jesus Offers You A Death Warrant

Dear Friends,

The core instinct of human nature is SELF-preservation. Even the tiniest baby innately knows to cry when he or she is hungry! Straight from the womb the infant mind knows that if the body is not fed, it will starve and die. Self-preservation lurks in the background of all our motivations as we grow up. Serving as the protector of "self" in all dimensions, this instinct even tries to safeguard the emotions by looking for ways to avoid painful experiences and tucking away unpleasant past memories.

An insidious progression takes place if transformation into the character of Christ isn't a priority in your life: SELF-preservation blooms into **SELF-fulfillment** (the focus of obtaining your goals at the expense of everyone else); **SELF-reliance** (a life of emotional isolation brought on by independence); **SELF-serving** (chiefly concerned with your own welfare and interests before those of others); **SELF-sufficiency** (trusting only yourself to meet your needs); **SELF-satisfied** (excessively pleased with yourself and/or what you've achieved; complacently seeing no need to change); **SELF-righteous** (an arrogant certainty that you're totally correct or morally superior in whatever stance you take; perhaps biblically knowledgeable but lacking compassion or mercy.) For many today the unrelenting pursuit of **self** often results in **SELF-pity**, a prison of egocentric misery over personal troubles and unfulfilled expectations.

Familiar with the pagan decadence of Rome, the apostle Paul well understood the danger of **SELF-idolatry** and spoke forcefully against the many forms it takes. Look at his description of characteristics the Spirit told him would permeate people living in "the last days." Paul specifically cites those who are "religious in form" but devoid of the power of authentic relationship with God in Christ. Could he be reciting news articles from today?

"But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God — having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with them" (2 Timothy 3:1-5).

There is surely much to grieve about these days, but stumbling into **SELF-pity** because of wrong focus is not Father's plan for you! The preeminence of SELF has fostered false gospels promising earthly prosperity from a coddling Deity who relaxes His standards to indulge people's fleshly desires. But those whose disinterest in or distrust of His Word as the true revelation of His character are responsive to any lies that make them feel better about themselves and allow them to continue **SELF-interest**. Be warned, however: there's no grace given to those who intentionally forsake Truth so they can

pursue self-idolatry. In time, disillusionment sets in. You find yourself hunting for yet another congregation that will make you feel good on Sunday morning; another CD or DVD or conference to help you improve your life or at least lift your SELF-esteem; another life partner to replace the old one who doesn't satisfy your expectations or make you feel good anymore.

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"For whoever wants to save his life will lose it,
***but whoever loses his life for Me will save it"* (Luke 9:24)**

When you're ruled by SELF-preservation, you may do acts of kindness and show consideration for others — but only AFTER you've first taken care of yourself. Unexpected needs of others or unanticipated demands on your time fluster you because you're not in control! But in Jesus you don't have to stay imprisoned to self. If you have ears to hear the wisdom and admonition shared by those Father puts in your life or vicariously gives you access to, the character of Jesus can be deepened in your heart and your motives can align with His. You CAN learn through His indwelling Spirit to put self aside and place the interests of others first. But as long as self rules, your sin nature will take control. Being "crucified with Christ" as Paul proclaims means DEATH TO SELF of anyone who claims they belong to Jesus. Your OWN goals, desires and motives die to earthly, fleshly inclination so that only Father's will and a heart's desire to trust that His will is best becomes your way of life.

Let's use a rather unpleasant analogy to frame this discussion. Slavery as an institution rings in modern ears as an abomination, and rightly so when you realize the extreme suffering and humiliation that has been wrought when one person owns another person as a "thing". But here's some startling news we gleaned recently from a prominent evangelical writer: Throughout the Newer Testament Jesus offers you the opportunity to become His SLAVE. Over 270 times the word that's generally translated "servant" is actually "slave": *doulos*. Modern translations have "prettified" it to make it more palatable, but nowhere is *doulos* used in the same sense as "*diakonos*", a voluntary helper/servant.

Wherever Jesus is referred to as LORD, there is the implied Master concept: "*Why do you call Me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?"* (Luke 6:46). Slaves live to do the will of their Master, to please Him and to represent Him accurately as His agent. Unlike a contract or employee agreement, slavery is a permanent state unless the master says otherwise. So it is that Jesus says to His disciples, "*A SLAVE is not greater than his LORD, nor is an APOSTLE [a sent one] greater than the one sending him*" (John 13:16, literal). Then Jesus adds, "*You are My friends IF you do what I command you. I no longer call you servants, [SLAVES, literal] because a servant [SLAVE, literal] does not know his LORD'S [literal] business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from My Father I have made known to you*" (John 15:14,15). Jesus could bestow the honor of "friendship" on these men because He was their Master; He was in position to alter the relationship to reflect a loving bond of devotion and a recognition

that they DID know their Lord's business.

Talk about contrary to the world's way of thinking! Most today who DON'T know Jesus as LORD of their life are repelled at the very idea of someone having the right to tell them how to live — even if that Someone is God. But consider this. The person who thinks he is "free" to live for himself is in bondage to his sin nature. You are either a slave to sin or a slave to God: *"Now having been set free from sin, and having become SLAVES OF GOD, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life"* (Romans 6:22, NKJV). Authentic freedom comes only as we cry out to Him as Lord — Master — and obey because of grateful love for His Lordship in our lives. As slaves of God we live according to His good and righteous purpose for our lives, along the way bearing spiritual fruit that evidences that sanctification (ongoing transformation into holiness) is taking place through His loving work in us.

Mike's comment to men:

I've been ministering to men for over 34 years. In [Teaching E-mail 22. "How Eager Are You?"](#), we wrote how we used to toss a simulated hand grenade into groups of people at our retreat center. We wanted them to see who'd self-sacrificially jump on it so that others might live. The scenario was this:

"You have three seconds before the hand grenade blows up. One...two ... three..."

- 0% of the clergy ever jumped on the grenade. Not one!!!
- 10% of non-clergy men jumped on the grenade.
- 50% of the women and teenagers jumped on the hand grenade.

When people are taken by surprise and don't have time to analyze the pro's and con's of their response, their true heart is often revealed! Nobody is born prepared to die for others. Self-sacrifice is an acquired character trait that calls for deep humility and genuine love. Yet dying to ourselves and becoming more like Jesus through His Spirit is the essential purpose of our sanctification. That's our Father's goal for His children each and every day we live. Walking in the steps of Jesus as we follow Him means a willingness to crucify all that hinders us from intimacy with Him. Remember, crucifixion meant death; there was no doubt where the path to a cross was leading, nor to the end result.

Think about our hand grenade scenario. Westernized, self-absorbed Christianity has taught men in particular to cherish self-preservation; laying their lives down for others has become such a foreign concept to today's men, especially those who haven't served in the military. In our grenade situation, a teenage boy has a 50% chance of dying for others. But when he becomes a man, his valor has been reduced to 10%. And, if he becomes a vocational clergyman, self-preservation becomes his driving instinct! Do you realize how very unChristlike and anti-Bible this self-preserving progression is?

A certain line of demarcation separates the men our Lord has used me to help develop Christ-like love and character, from those that His work through me has been futile. Men who've served in the military and those who've faced demanding situations in their life like prolonged care for an elderly parent or overcoming a debilitating illness or injury

have been the most receptive and responsive to change. Why is this so? Let's look at the transformation that takes place in someone who is part of the armed forces. Imagine yourself there.

Beginning with boot camp, you're being trained to die to your own interests. You're molded individually and collectively with fellow recruits to see your life being poured out for a cause larger than yourself—something that certainly doesn't come naturally. As your character is being transformed through training, **self-sacrifice** (giving up your own interests or wishes in order to help others or to advance a cause) dominates your motivation. (This is even more real when you've endured combat.)

Boot camp also teaches you **self-restraint** (exercising control over your actions rather than giving way to raw reaction). The entire boot camp process of "killing off" your old self-serving ways teaches you **self-surrender** (voluntarily giving up your personal will to serve another goal or person). (Have you recognized that these character qualities are esteemed by our Lord Jesus in His followers as well? His example calls us to be **self-reflective** in the pure and penetrating light of God's Word. That means prayerfully meditating on it to apply it and pursuing the particular character changes His Spirit wants to bring about in us.)

I wish there were a "Christian boot camp" where men could die to their self-pursuit and self-interest. Since that isn't outlined in God's Word as a specific window of time, then He must have other means for a man to lay down *self* of his own free will — as Much Afraid did on her pilgrimage to the High Places. The trouble for most nonmilitary men is that their years of reading the Bible for *knowledge without application* gets in their way. Puffed up with their wealth of facts, their conversation is mired down in concepts and situations "out there" beyond their own scope of influence or participation. Most have no idea that their words lack the wisdom of experience that comes from having learned to die to self and put the interests and needs of others first.

Here are 2 simple ways to discern the heart condition of a man:

- ***In conversations, what he values most is the first thing out of his mouth or what he talks about most often.***
- ***You can evaluate the authenticity of a husband's words by his wife's eyes. Does she look loved or fearful? Appreciated or criticized? Free to serve or a prisoner of war?***

Sue's Comment on Men:

Over the years I've talked with a number of wives whose husbands are self-serving despots, wielding the Bible as a club rather than a double-edged sword of righteousness and compassion. So many wives are emotional prisoners in their own marriages, wanting with all their heart to be Godly helpers/companions to their husband yet constantly criticized for not "doing it the way he would have." How grievously accurate that the earth trembles under a woman who is married and unloved (Proverbs 30:21-23).

When we first began to share the Hebraic foundations 17 years ago, about 1 out of 200

married couples purposed together to intentionally press on with these truths in their families. Why so few? Most often because *husbands* refused to humble themselves and cry out to Lord Jesus for transformation so their wives could experience the love He wants them to know through their mates.

I've sorrowed over callous married men who know so much of the Bible but don't apply it by intentionally yielding to the Spirit to work in and through them. While their words reflect a critical nature, their own character remains stunted and unchanged. Perhaps they missed learning from the chewouts Jesus pitched at the Pharisees who were trapped in the same facts-without-love dominion! In all of these men's study of Scripture, which part of 1 Peter 3:7 or Colossians 3:19 don't they understand? •"*You husbands, likewise, conduct your married lives with understanding. Although your wife may be weaker physically, you should respect her as a fellow-heir of the gift of Life. If you don't, your prayers will be blocked.*"(CJB) •"*Husbands, love your wives and don't treat them harshly.*"(CJB)

Too many men club their wives over the head with a misuse of Ephesians 5:24, demanding that these women be mindless doormats. But Paul was very purposeful in beginning this section of instruction with this command: "***Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God***" (Ephesians 5:1,2). What does the love for His own look like as it is enacted by husbands who are earnest to authentically love their wives as He would? Start by making Ephesians 5:25-33 your core motivation in how you treat your wife.

We've addressed this topic with good reason: **God intends for your marriage to mirror the relationship you claim to have with Him. If it doesn't, humbly and with trust call out to Abba Father to help you make this true in your own marriage.**

Mike & Sue