

SLOW DEATH

“Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires.” (Gal 5:24)

The encyclopedia states that: “Crucifixion is a form of slow and painful execution in which the victim is tied or nailed to a large wooden cross and left to hang until dead.” The cross was designed to make death “slow and painful”. One point in our text is that our “sinful nature” does not die easily. The crucifixion of our sinful passions involves a process that is “slow and painful”.

As a point of interest, crucifixion was introduced by the Persians about 519 BC when Darius 1st crucified 3,000 political opponents in Babylon. It was later adopted by the Greeks, and Romans. This history is of special interest to Bible believers because the 22nd Psalm predicted the crucifixion of Christ generations before it was used as a form of execution.

The Bible does pronounce a curse on anyone hung on a tree (Deut. 21:23), but those victims were not crucified. They were first executed, usually by stoning, and then their bodies were hung on a tree. Interestingly, the Law pronounced a curse upon anyone hung on a tree. Paul reminded the Galatians of this and wrote: **“Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: “Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.” (Gal 3:13)** Praise God! Through death Jesus destroyed him that had the power of death, that is the devil (Heb. 2:14).

But let us return to the reality that crucifixion involves a slow and painful death. As you know, we begin our journey with Jesus by taking up a cross (Matt. 16:24). This is something which we are commanded to do every day (Lk. 9:23). Remember! Crosses are not designed to be comfortable. They are designed to make death slow and painful. We conclude, therefore, that putting to death our sinful nature and passions is a daily struggle, and that it will not be easy.

When Paul wrote to the Galatians he reminded them: **“So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want.” (Gal 5:16-17)** The Galatians were already Christians yet their “sinful nature” and the “Spirit” were still “contrary” to one another. The flesh and the Spirit in all believers are like opposing armies battling for supremacy. Again, we are faced with the reality that this “conflict” is “daily” as well as “slow and painful.”

Those addicted to drugs and alcohol can verify this truth. One alcoholic confessed that he began his journey to sobriety five minutes at a time. He would pray: “Lord, help me to stay sober for the next five minutes.” Ultimately he progressed to the point where he prayed for victory one day at a time. Then he added that tomorrow was the outside limit of his prayer. He never prayed for victory more than one day at a time. He had a “daily” struggle. His sinful passions did die, but not easily. His battle for victory was like a cross which he shouldered every day.

Recognizing this reality can be of great benefit. Paul had been a believer for many years when he wrote: **“So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me.” (Rom 7:21)** The point is, Paul’s constant struggle with sin was normal, and so is ours. Yes! We will ultimately gain the victory, but the process will still be slow and painful.

Remember! The victor’s crown is not for those who start the race, but for those who finish. Paul knew he was going to get a crown (2 Tim. 4:8). One reason why is that he knew Christ was with him every step of the way. He wrote: **“I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” (Gal 2:20)** Praise God! We too have a crown laid up for us, and we also share the same promise that Christ will never leave or forsake us either (Heb. 13:5).