

“Each His Own Cross” ~ By A. W. Tozer

An earnest Christian woman sought help from Henry Suso concerning her spiritual life. She has been imposing rigid austerities upon herself in an effort to feel the sufferings that Christ had felt on the cross. Things weren't going so well with her and Suso knew why.

The old saint wrote his spiritual daughter and reminded her that our Lord had not said, “If any many will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up *my* cross, and follow me.” He had said, “Let him...take up *his* cross.” There is a difference of only one small pronoun; but that difference is vast and important.

Crosses are all alike, but no two are identical. Never before nor since has there been a cross-experience just like that endured by the Savior. The whole dreadful work of dying which Christ suffered was something unique in the experience of mankind. It had to be so if the cross was to mean life for the world. The sin-bearing, the darkness, the rejection by the Father were agonies peculiar to the person of the holy sacrifice. To claim any experience remotely like that of Christ would be more than an error; it would be sacrilege.

Every cross was and is an instrument of death, but no man could die on the cross of another; each man died on his own cross; hence Jesus said, “Let him...take up *his* cross, and follow Me.”

Now there is a real sense in which the cross of Christ embraces all crosses and the death of Christ encompasses all deaths: “We thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead” (2 Corinthians 5:14); “I am crucified with Christ” (Galatians 2:20); “the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto Me, and I unto the world.” (6:14). This is in the judicial working of God in redemption. The Christian as a member of the body of Christ is crucified along with his divine Head. Before God every true believer is reckoned to have died when Christ died. All subsequent experience of personal crucifixion is based upon the identification with Christ on the cross.

But in the practical, everyday outworking of the believer's crucifixion, his own cross is brought into play. “Let him...take up *his* cross.” That is obviously not the cross of Christ. Rather it is the believer's own personal cross by means of which the cross of Christ is made effective in slaying his evil nature and setting him free from its power. The believer's own cross is one he had assumed voluntarily. Therein lies the difference

between his cross and the cross on which Roman convicts died. They went to the cross against their will; he, because he chooses to do so. No Roman officer every pointed to a cross and said, "If any man will, let him." Only Christ said that, and by so saying He placed the whole matter in the hands of the Christian. He can refuse to take his cross, or he can stoop and take it up and start for the dark hill. The difference between great sainthood and spiritual mediocrity depends upon which choice he makes.

To go along with Christ step by step and point by point in identical suffering of Roman crucifixion is not possible for any of us, and certainly is not intended by our Lord. What He does intend is that each of us should count himself dead indeed with Christ, and then accept willingly whatever self-denial, repentance, humility and humble sacrifice may be found in the path of obedient daily living. That is *his* cross, and it is the only one the Lord has invited him to bear.