

## The Paradox Of The Christian Life

"Let me die - lest I die!" These words, written centuries ago by an early church writer seem to be a contradiction or a paradox. The Christian life has a number of such paradoxes. Here are some examples:

- To win the battle, we must surrender - (Matt 16:24-26).
- To find strength, we must be weak - (2 Cor 12:9, 10).
- To gain, we must lose - (Philippians 3:7, 8).
- To live, we must die - (Gal 2:20).
- To be first, we must be last - (Mark 9:35).
- To be exalted, we must be humble - (Matt 23:12).
- To be chief, we must be servant - (Matt 20:26, 27).
- To reign, we must suffer - (2 Tim 2:12).

These are paradoxes because the way to gain, victory, and life is seemingly the exact opposite direction from what one would normally take to get there. It is baffling to the natural (unsaved) man. He wants the good, the benefits, and the rewards, but he refuses the path that leads there. It is too hard and undesirable. He wants to win, but he refuses to surrender. He wants to be strong, but he will not admit weakness. He wants to gain, but he will not give up what he has. He wants to live, but he does not want to die. He wants to be exalted, but he resents being humbled. He wants to be chief, but he refuses to serve. He wants to reign, but he loathes suffering.

The Christian, on the other hand, is absorbed in surrendering, losing, dying, serving, and suffering. He does not view it as a necessary temporary evil that must be endured before he can be exalted and be chief. He rather sees it as a way of life, a way by which he stays in the shadow so Christ can be seen. He wants to be weak and humble so Christ can be magnified. He wants to die so Christ can live in him. He wants to be last so Christ is first. And when the exaltation comes, it is all a gift of the grace of God. There is no consciousness of having earned it.

Our commitment can be tested by how willing we are to face and experience the negative side of these paradoxes. The positive side is God's work. He will do His part fully and freely in His time. Until then, let us continue to die, lest we die. Let us lose, lest we lose. Then will we find strength in our present weakness and will be rewarded with life and exaltation that is all of grace.

"Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Matthew 16:24-26).

*Adapted from a tract by Glenn Sensenig*

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