

more than to the written Word of God and still be able to let the word of Christ dwell in you richly? How do you expect to listen to the world's music and minister to yourself and others with songs, hymns, and spiritual songs? How do you expect to do everything in Jesus' name with thanksgiving when you spend your time with the greed, ugliness, self-centeredness, violence, lust and immorality of TV, or in idle talk, crass jokes, or grumbling with family and friends?

The Poisonous Sweet Tooth

I'm reminded of people who develop a sweet tooth. They become addicted to sugars. They're being physically poisoned by their passion for sweets, as their taste for healthy foods such as fruits and vegetables is eroded.

Just so, Christians who feed their passions for the things of this world lose their desire for the things of the world to come. I beg you to stop seeing how much of this world you can hold onto and still be a good Christian. Instead, see how many of the things of this world you can let drop out of your life, in preference for Him who is your life.

Filling our minds with the world's words and works is putting back on the old man. Surely his deeds will follow!

Don't Stop Short

One of the old writers who has helped me said many start down the road to close intimacy with our Lord only to fall short of their goal because they stop short of applying the cross to their lives. May this not characterize you or me! May we turn to the Lord, letting Him apply the cross to our idolatry. "Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry. I speak as to wise men; judge for yourselves what I say" (1 Corinthians 10:14-15).

At Peace with the Cross

The key blockage that needs to be unstopped, if we're to find Christianity that really works, is our self-pleasing in all its forms. We need to be willing

to let Him make us willing to forsake all to follow Him.

No salvation exists apart from the cross. Christ could not escape the cross and come forth in resurrection life, nor can we. The cross is the crux, the crucial point. We must deny ourselves, die daily, and take up our cross if we would follow Christ. We can't escape the cross and live in newness of life. If we choose ourselves and our way, we decide with death and destruction against life. The cross must be laid like an ax to the root of the tree. The cross must be applied to our every desire.

How does this coordinate with just living at rest in Him? Rest follows the cross; it does not precede it. "There is no peace," says the LORD, "for the wicked" (Isaiah 48:22). Even Jesus sat down in rest only after He had gone to the cross:

"For the joy that was set before Him, [Jesus] endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." Hebrews 12:2

Let there be no mistake. Conviction, repentance, confession, and restitution are followed by peace and rest, not the reverse.

But then we come full circle. Anything that robs us of peace and rest and joy in our Lord must go. Apply the power of the cross to it. Let God in His grace cross it out.

Let there come an end to defending any attitude of self-pleasing. We're full of wants that aren't of God, covetousness that is idolatry. Food, fun, fantasy, pleasure, and passion, be willing to let God deliver you even from your slavery to these. Then you can live at peace in Him, content to live not after the desires of the flesh, but after the desires of the Spirit.

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By: Pastor Ron Marr

"And there went great multitudes with Him. and He turned and said to them, "If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple." Luke 14:25-27

By depriving me of the ministry I had been building for more than fifteen years, God started me seriously seeking Him. We could shortly have been without a car or home. But He had me at last where He wanted me, with my back to the wall. The culmination of about seventeen years of His efforts had brought me to my knees.

When God gave me a new ministry, He put some extraordinary demands on me. I could no longer ask for financial support, incur debt, or issue tax-deductible receipts. Yet, He saw us through the financial impossibilities in most miraculous ways, and He continues to do so.

At one point, it seemed like He sent a financial windfall. A supporter financed a place for me in a sales operation that seemed tailor-made for me. The dream of publishing large numbers of books calling God's people to Himself in love mushroomed.

Then God said, "No."

I couldn't quite believe He said it. So He had to tell me again and again. But how I praise Him that, in this instance, all I really wanted was to be as sure as possible of what He wanted so I could do it. I felt He was asking me to throw away a fortune, but that didn't really matter. I only desired to do what He wanted and do it gladly just to please Him.

APPLYING THE CROSS

The idea of applying the cross scarcely seemed relevant. Obedience came so easily, considering what I thought I was giving up. What was truly being reflected was the way the cross had already been applied to my life in the struggle of the previous five years, and my quest to know Him for Himself alone.

I Struggle, Too

I confess it isn't always like this. I've wrestled for years with being glued to the television. I believed that all spiritual life and victory was of the Lord Himself, none of me. As I struggled with my TV addiction, I frequently told Him I was hopeless and helpless. I repeatedly owned that if anything was going to be done, He would have to do it.

But my deliverance was still incomplete. I watched TV drama much less frequently. I tried to remember that He will share my love with no idol. But over and over I returned to watching when I had promised Him I would not.

The Way of Escape

“No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it. Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry. I speak as to wise men; judge for yourselves what I say.”

1 Corinthians 10:13-15

Our Lord has made the way of escape through the blood of His cross. We are free in Him and the power of His death and His resurrection life in us. In each new temptation He makes a way of escape by revealing to the sensitive heart the sin into which it is being led, and Himself, our way of escape.

Thus, the cross is applied to each particular tempta-

tion or situation. As we carry on in His comfort, His joy, and His victory, He enables us to seek Him and His eternal praise rather than our short-term pleasure.

But many times we simply are morally incapacitated even to take Him as our way of escape. Instead, in spite of our wishes for it to be otherwise, we try to find a way out ourselves and, of course, end in failure.

So it was with me and TV. Finally He just reached down and touched me! He scared me to death that I dared to tempt Him so. At last I was delighted to take His way out.

Just so, every deliverance must be of the Lord alone, never from us in any measure if it is to be real deliverance. He must do it His way, not any other, but He must do it!

Idolatry Hasn't Ended

“Now these things became our examples, to the intent that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted. And do not become idolaters as were some of them. As it is written, “The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play Nor let us commit sexual immorality, as some of them did, and in one day twenty-three thousand fell; Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they are written for our admonition, on whom the ends of the ages have come. Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.”

1 Corinthians 10:6-8, 11-12

At heart, temptation is always an issue of idolatry or of the covetousness the Bible says is idolatry. (See Colossians 3:5.) Idolatry is putting something ahead of God in importance or wanting something God doesn't want for us.

Why doesn't He want us to have certain things? Because they aren't good for us!

Our problem from the beginning has been our covetous, idolatrous lust for things other than the Lord Himself and what He knows is good for us. This idolatry brought the Old Testament kingdoms of Israel and Judah to their downfall. They often sought to cling to the Lord and their idols, to please the Lord and themselves. We must learn it isn't possible.

Let's not be foolishly misled, either, into blaming God deep within for our failure. He is everything we need. All we have to do is to turn to Him from the tempting goodies the evil one holds out to us.

Cast yourself on Him. Let Him, not your will, backbone, or self-discipline, be your hope. If you find yourself morally incapacitated to let go of the thing to which you so foolishly cling, don't abuse yourself. Instead, humbly admit your inability. Cast yourself on Him all the more. Be assured that ultimately His victory will be yours.

Finding Our Standards

If we look to the church for our model of conduct rather than to the Word and the Spirit, we'll frequently find little encouragement to apply the cross to our covetous idolatries. The Word admonishes us not to be conformed to the world, but the church generally fails to respond. Church people look much like their counterparts without Christ. They think like them in so many ways. They value so many of the same things. They have so many of the same practices and habits. Those who would really be different for Christ's sake are often oddballs even within the church.

No better picture exists in the Scriptures of what God would have us to be than that found in the third chapter of Colossians. I urge you to get your Bible and read it with prayer.

The opening verses admonish us to give our attention to things above where Christ is at the right hand of the Father. Then we're counseled to put to death our covetous idolatry that brings God's wrath on the lost. Next we're urged to put off the old man with his deeds and put on the new man. After the command to let the peace of God rule in our hearts, we're told to let the word of Christ dwell in us richly, teaching and admonishing one another with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, doing all in the name of Jesus with thanksgiving.

Look at all this realistically. How do you expect to give your attention to newspapers, radio, and TV