

Echo From The Pulpit...



The State of The Heart of A Servant

What is it that keeps the true servant of the Lord going and what is it that causes others to give up? I have been giving this question a lot of thought, and I want to put it to you that it is the heart of a servant that makes the difference.

To understand what it feels like to serve the Lord we only have to turn to Exodus and look at Moses. We see the preparation, sacrifice, obstacles and frustrations that without the heart of a servant, Moses and all who would want to serve God cannot succeed nor find the motivation to go the full course.

What takes place in the core of the heart of a servant? The death of self. Not a cemetery where the dead die once; but a daily crucifixion when any signs of life must be put to death regularly. Take this out and all you have is an empty shell, not unlike those cupboard facades that Hollywood uses for their stage sets. If you are serving the Lord and find it tough to keep going or find yourself giving up on others and the power of God and especially, if the joy of service is no longer present, these thoughts may point you to the right direction.

When we first come to Christ, Jesus told us in Matthew 16:24, "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me." The first step in becoming a disciple is to deny ourselves as we come to Christ. As we grow in faith and mature as disciples, serving the Lord and His people, this self-denial takes on a deeper intensity as we totally put self to death. Now all our desires, our needs and our wants give way to the overwhelming desire to do God's bidding. None of self and all of Thee.

The apostle Paul puts it this way in Galatians 2:20, "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer that live, but Christ living in me: and that life which I now live in the flesh I live in faith, the faith which is in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself up for me."

It is extremely difficult to die to self; to give up our rights, to accept another's decision and to realise that it is acceptable to be humiliated and lose face because we no longer live for ourselves. This will not come automatically and it will not happen in any measurable time-frame. But this will take place, however slowly as we will be driven to this conclusion: that unless we die to self, we will not be able to find joy, fulfilment or energy to go on. Dying to self involves many things. I want to touch on three aspects in this article.

1. Dying to self means not ever giving up. This is most basic. If you still possess your ego you will continue to think that people have been treating you unfairly, or you are saddled with the shorter end of the stick. It is either one thing or another, and we will end up feeling pity for ourself instead

of serving the Lord with great zeal. The correct mindset is spelt out in II Corinthians 12:15 when the apostle Paul declares that "I will most gladly spend and be spent for your souls."

2. Dying to self means being open to God's calling. When I was young, my ambition was to be a doctor. "What could be more important than saving lives?" I thought. But ever since I became a Christian, I have always wanted to do the Lord's work. There was never any doubt about it. I was in the first class at Four Seas Bible College, when it was established in the 1960s. Even when there were over a dozen of us upon graduation, I was the only one who went into the ministry immediately. None of the rest did; some became journalists, teachers, managers etc. I was the only minister, but my idea of ministry was rather different. I wanted to do personal work, teach Bible class, do bulletins etc. It was this way during my first year. What a time I had. Then the missionary, brother A. L. Harbin decided to go home.

With 95% of the congregation under 20, I was doing all the preaching, planning, managing - everything. It would have been so easy for me to say that these things were not my area of work, to keep on focusing on what suited me or serving only half of my term and giving up like others. But when self is crucified, giving up is not an option and I have to be opened to the Lord to lead me wherever He saw fit as I remained obedient to His call. In the Bible, we find God becoming angry at Moses for his excuses, see how Gideon wanted God to prove Himself over and over to him and observed how Jonah was unwilling to go where God called him to go. Unless we say to God like young Samuel in 1 Samuel 3:10, "Speak; for thy servant heareth", we will think that we are serving God but are actually fulfilling our own will.

3. Dying to self also means fighting the good fight. I am not a fighter and there are few things in the ministry that put me off as much as seeing brethren fight. Yet, as God's minister, I want to be able to say as recorded in Acts 20:27, "For I shrank not from declaring unto you the whole counsel of God."

If we are to serve God fully, all the way, we cannot close one eye or let some matter drop if we know it is wrong. So even though I am not a fighter, I believe in addressing all issues, no matter how long it takes until a happy conclusion is achieved. Not letting up or giving up in the spirit of 1 Timothy 6:12 "Fight the good fight of the faith, lay hold on the life eternal, whereunto thou wast called."