The Christ-Centered Life

By T. Stanley Soltau

The goal that the Lord Jesus Christ Himself has placed before each of us is that we grow up into His glorious and perfect likeness. It was for that purpose that He, in His grace and mercy, identified Himself with us. "He is not ashamed to call them brethren," we read in Hebrews; we are "heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ," and other similar statements all show how the Lord Himself was "made sin for us," taking upon Him the burden and the guilt of all of our sins that we might in turn be identified with Him in the glory and holiness of His person and the glory of His position with God.

In regard to becoming like Christ, I think that one of the things of which we need constantly to remind ourselves is that becoming like Him is much more a matter of being and becoming than it is one of doing. Doing is, in the nature of the case, very often largely a matter of the outward conduct and appearance, whereas being, or becoming, is an inward matter of the heart. It is always the inner heart condition in which God is interested and at which He looks, while with men it is the opposite.

One other thing about this God-appointed goal for us is that it is the highest possible mark at which we can possibly aim. To be Christlike means that every possible faculty and capacity for good will be developed to its greatest extent. It also means that every faculty will be used with the highest possible motive, namely, to the glory of God.

The Means of Attainment

How then can we ever attain to such an infinitely high and glorious goal? It will mean first of all the concentration of all our powers and faculties toward that one end. The struggle will be an intense one in which the enemy will do his utmost to confuse us, to hinder us, or to throw us off our course by one means or another. Paul found it to be so in his own case, so he writes, *"...Forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark..."* (Phil. 3:13-14). Like an athlete running in a close race, he was unmindful of everything but the goal that lay ahead, and every muscle, nerve, and ounce of energy and willpower was concentrated on the one matter of gaining the prize that was to be his in Christ Jesus.

The means of reaching the goal, as Paul so clearly states in this same third chapter of Philippians, is through an intimate and intelligent knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. As he says, *"That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings"* (Phil. 3:10). Again in Second Corinthians 3:18 he writes, *"We all, with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are transformed* [or transfigured] *into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord."* To have our hearts exposed to Him and to His glory will mean that we will have His image and likeness transferred to us by the Holy Spirit.

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To make this thought quite plain, Paul uses Moses as an illustration. He reminds his readers of the way in which Moses spent forty days and nights on Mount Sinai in the presence of the Lord, and when, at Moses' request, the Lord revealed to him a small portion of His divine glory, "the fringes of His skirts," as someone has put it. When Moses came down from the mount the children of Israel were afraid to look at his face because of the glory that radiated from it. Now Moses "knew not that his face shone," but he wore a veil when speaking to his people that they might not be disconcerted by the glory of the Lord there. Just by being in His presence the Lord's glory was transferred to the face of His servant; in the same way, and even much more truly, if you and I habitually live in the presence of the Lord, feeding on His faithfulness, rejoicing in His love and mercy, ever seeking to please Him in all things, and coming daily into a closer walk with Him and a greater devotion to Him, the beauty of His person and character will be transferred to us by the Holy Spirit. Although we may remain quite unconscious of it, others will begin to see in us the glory, the grace, the peace, and the joy that belong to the eternal Lord of glory and to Him alone, and will begin to "take knowledge that we have been with Jesus" and, still more, that He is constantly with us and abiding in our hearts.

The Final Outcome

The final outcome promised to us, and which will therefore surely be fulfilled, is that, when the Lord appears again in glory, the process of transformation will be complete. As John says, *"Now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is"* (1 John 3:2). Now we see Him by faith and the transforming process has already begun. Then we shall see Him face to face and our transformation will suddenly be brought to its completion, and we shall be ready to be presented faultless and without blemish to God the Father.

We praise Thee, O Lord, for the glory of the goal which Thou hast set before us, by Thy grace and which Thou hast guaranteed that some day we shall reach. Grant to us a keener desire to know Thee and to take on more of the beauty of Thy likeness, that the process of transformation may be hastened in us and that we may live more to Thy glory. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

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