

From The Pulpit

by Rev. Donald M. Clark

CROSS OR COMFORT?
Christianity - a Comfort or a Challenge?

Text: Matt. 10:38. "He that taketh not his cross and followeth after me is not worthy of me."

Little do we moderns realize how influential modern advertising is in our daily decisions. A tomato processing company on the West Coast luckily hired a soft-voiced girl to sing their product's worth, and sales leaped, since people unconsciously reached for that "pleasant-sounding" brand. We men see a neatly-dressed man wearing a certain suit and we lean mentally toward buying that particular one.

The character of this advertising is highly important for our well-being; for if it generally caters to our physical and mental soundness, it can really help us. If, however, appeals are made which guide us to weakness, they are damaging.

IF ONE TAKES the pains to examine carefully the bulk of advertising today, he will see a great emphasis on comfort. We are much advised to seek comfort in everything from mattresses to breakfast cereal.

To many people, the worth of a product is measured only by the comfort it brings to living. Thus there is offered a bed which rocks you to sleep. Perhaps the limit in the search for comfort has arrived in the area of golf, with the introduction of a powered car which takes you and your partner around the course with no cares at all. Gone is the horror of breathing fresh air on the long walk over green fairways to find that sliced ball. The only thing omitted from this creation of comfort is an electronic score-keeper which will automatically fudge the score five points in your favor.

It may be logical to remove hazards from labor and to seek better ways to work, but the quest for comfort in itself can become a dangerous obsession. To judge the value of some effort strictly by its ease is a sign of the decay of our moral strength. Once when Mark Twain was a boy, his father told him to weed a tulip bed. Later he discovered that the rascal had pulled up the tulips and left the weeds. This was logical, explained the boy, since there were fewer flowers, and it was the simplest way to make things consistent. But it did not make sense to the father!

ESPECIALLY should Christians beware of comfort as their goal in life. Those who have had a vital crisis in Christ, those who have pledged themselves to His cause, have a special reason to avoid seeking comfort as an end in itself.

This is true simply because Christ and His disciples have the task of changing the world from its normal state. There is sin and error and darkness rampant in our world, and Christ is the Way which will bring that sort of world to righteousness. If the world is moving on a wrong course, Christ must bring it back; and His cause will mean struggle, suffering and sacrifice. His disciples must be those strong persons who can take what the cause requires, and so will often be far from what is known as comfort! No one committed to Christ's way can be devoted to ease alone--against the forces of evil which are never on vacation, he must be ready to be called into hard action. We can then, measure our discipleship more by the times we are "disturbed" than by the times we have been at ease in the cause.

Over against the modern appeal to be comfortable, Christians hear the stern words of Christ: "Do not think that I have come to bring peace on earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword!" These words are not to be taken as any justification for physical warfare; but rather as an indication of what will happen when one truly follows the Lord. There will not be a life lived on a pink cloud eating soothing syrup;



REV. D. M. CLARK

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but rather a real spiritual warfare against those things which oppose Christ.

Disciples cannot be true to Christ as He is and seek only a personal peace of mind. The key is choice. When a person decides to lose something from his life, as we must to be a real disciple, no one can force that decision--it is within our power to decide; and the moment we do decide to throw ourself into His service, we become one who bears a cross.

There is no more adequate picture of a human being taking up his cross and losing his life for Christ than Albert Schweitzer of Africa. Here is a man who was an expert in theology, in philosophy, in music, and could have taken the path of comfort and ease in Europe, gaining fame and fortune. Instead, an appeal from a missionary magazine about the needs of African native peoples called him to that darkened land, to fight ants and ignorance and apathy. In losing his life of comfort and ease, he gained the real life, the life under Christ; and we all know what goodness has come from him to others. The example of Schweitzer taking up his cross has proved its worth to our generation and all others beyond any doubt; and that example challenges all to imitate it.

WHERE IS YOUR CROSS in this town, in this church, in this hour? To answer this vital question ask yourself another: Where is there need? Has some need gone unmet because you, as just another comfort-seeking church member, have preferred to indulge your own interests in favor of what should be done? Has Christ been broken-hearted just because you were not willing to sacrifice some small part of your bountiful life to honor Him?

How can church people push away that fineness and worth which lies at the heart of a life given up in service to Him? When we hear the glorious note struck by men like Schweitzer, and see what they have gained for themselves and others, how can we turn aside and continue our old ways of ease? Surely no one wants to cast off such value by an obsession for enjoyment!

WE CAN BEGIN today to become real Christians by accepting some cross which needs bearing. It is best to begin with one which we can handle, one small yet genuine, so that we can learn of its value and grow steadfastly in the way of service. Take your cross willingly, trusting that Christ will give you the courage and stamina to bear it with strength. You will learn as you go along that such service is the real essence of life, and even though you are opposed or ridiculed or avoided by those who do not like Christ's ways, you are doing what the Son of God commands! How could anything be any finer in our life? We will learn that the sword which cuts into our pride or popularity or pocketbook is also cutting out our selfishness...to make our lives over into something far more worthwhile than we ever thought possible.

ALTAR CALL

By EMORY G. DAVIS, D.D.
NEGRO PRESS INTERNATIONAL

There's much discussion these days as to the best posture civil rights groups should take in their attempts to gain rights for Negro humans.

What with sporadic outbreaks all over the country--the destructive kind, that is, where dehumanized youth in an escape from the imprisonment of their frustration, toss Molotov cocktails, throw rocks and bottles, antagonize policemen and firemen--what with marches to dramatize injustices and pressure concessions on the part of the white power structure; what with violent back lash of white bigoted opposition one wonders just what the Negro has to do to secure those rights supposedly guaranteed by the constitution of our Nation.

The hue and cry of the liberals is that differences, eradication of injustice, or what have you, ought be settled at the conference table. Trouble is, no one really takes the initiative in setting up the table or calling the proper persons to it to voice their complaints. And so, the Negro is still a pawn to be bargained for.

What a sad spectacle this is for a nation that boasts that it is a Christian nation. Sad, that it is necessary for one segment of humanity to have to bargain with another segment of humanity for human rights.

The wide breach between the church leadership as they serve as part of the bargaining table, and the thousands of Sunday worshippers, called members--who in effect are saying "but not for me"--indicated the abysmal depth of our problem. After the leaders have negotiated there's really no one to implement the negotiations.

Little wonder then that our youth, least impressed with conference table talk, grow weary with impatience and take to the streets in senseless destructive violence.

Pronouncements from church leaders should be made and they are for the most part well intentioned, however, when those leaders cannot deliver their congregations with the same enthusiasm and actualization, then we--the yet not fully humanized darker beings--are caught in the proverbial "trick bag" and the streets become the only surcease for our pain.

THE ONLY WAY to get the Altar of Hope into the conference room and out of the streets is to get the people who can actually implement the changes at the head of the conference table.

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