

# What the True Cross of Christ Is

*Johann Arndt (1555-1621)*

**P**aul speaks of the old and new man in these terms: “As the truth is in Jesus: that ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; and be renewed in the spirit of your mind; and that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.” Ep. 4:21-24 He explains why this should be, with these words gathered from various places in his writings: “For ye are bought with a price, therefore glorify, and carry about within you, God in your hearts. And do you not know that you are the temple of the Holy Ghost? Therefore, glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s.”

We know what the old man is, namely pride, covetousness, sensualness, unrighteousness, wrath, enmity, hatred, and the like: all which must die in the true Christian so that the new man may spring up in him and day by day be renewed. The new man is brought to life in the same proportion as the old man is put to death. In other words, as pride wastes away, humility will replace it by the grace of the Holy Ghost. As wrath is quenched in the soul, meekness shines in its place. As covetousness is extinguished, trust in God is increased. And where the love of the world is taken away, the love of God replaces it and grows warm and vigorous.

This, then, is the new man and his members; these are the fruits of the Spirit. This is living and potent faith; this is Christ and His noble life in us. This is the new obedience, the new commandment; this is the fruit of the rebirth in us, which new life you must live continuously if you will be a child of God. For only they, and they alone, who live in the new birth are called the children of God and sons of the Holiest.

Therefore, for this sake, a man ought to deny himself and part with what touches most his own honor, and to lay down his own will, judgment, and evaluations. Along with laying these down, he should lay down his own loves, his pleasure, and all his profit and interest in this world. He ought to let go of his rights, and consider himself unworthy of anything, even unworthy of controlling his own life. A true Christian—one who is walking in the humility of Jesus Christ—readily acknowledges that a man by his own right cannot claim any rights on the gifts that God gives him, nor demand any benefits, since everything that

exists are simply free gifts to mankind. Therefore, whenever he uses anything on this earth, he uses them as if they belonged to someone else, with fear and trembling, and not for his own private pleasure, profit, or praise . . . much less to gain esteem from others.

Now, let us compare a true Christian, who denies himself, and a false Christian, who is possessed with this disorderly love of self. If you offer this latter what he takes to be an affront, you will quickly see him grow hot, break out in anger, and show much discontent. If you happen to reprove him a little, then he will play the madman, both in word and deeds, that he may be revenged, frequently with swearing. All this proceeds from the old man, to whom it is normal to be angry and to practice hatred and revenge.

On the contrary, the real Christian, who has denied himself, is gentle, courteous, well-pleased, patient, easy to be entreated, thinking nothing of revenge, full of compassion and tenderness, and confessing himself to be unworthy of all that he has, and worthy of all the evil which he hears of himself, and of much more. All of this falls under the name of self-denial.

Christ has gone before us in great patience, meekness, and lowliness so that He could set us an example of self-denial. This is why it is written, “The son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister unto others.” Likewise, “I am in the midst of you as one who ministers.” Similarly, he told us, “The son of man has no place to lay his head.” Like the Scriptures also tell us, “I am a worm, and no man.” David, when Shimei reviled him, denied himself and said, “The Lord has commanded him; for I am a worm in the sight of the Lord; I am worthy even of far worse things. It is the Lord; yes, the Lord has said unto him, ‘Curse David’: Who then shall say, ‘Why have you done so?’”

In short, all the saints of God and the holy prophets have denied themselves, counting themselves unworthy of every good thing. By this they were able to bear all things patiently and contentedly. They cursed no man, they gave thanks for their injuries, they returned good for evil, they blessed their persecutors, and prayed for those



who killed them. And so by many tribulations have they entered into the kingdom of heaven.

If you are going to enter in the kingdom also, then you must enter by the same manner. It has been shown you what it means to deny yourself, to acknowledge yourself unworthy of every good thing and worthy of all the evils that may or can befall you. This is the cross of Christ that He has commanded us to carry, saying to us, "Whoever wants to be My disciple, let him deny himself and take up his cross."

This self-denying life of Christ is a cross to the old man, and to flesh and blood it is a sharp punishment, yes, death itself. Because the natural man would much rather

lead an unbridled life, after his own will, in all kind of worldly pleasure, rather than in humility, lowliness, or patience; it desires nothing of assuming the lifestyle of Christ, which would be its death. But die it must, since whatever is of the old man ought to die in a Christian.

You will never put on the humility of Christ unless you put off the pride of the old man; nor put on the poverty of Christ unless you cut off greed by the heartstrings; nor put on the contempt for self-glory and the reproach of the cross, unless you pull up ambition by the root; neither shall you put on the meekness and patience of Christ, unless you correct your desire for revenge and kill your anger. This is what Scripture calls self-denial, taking up the cross and following Christ. And this self-denial is not to be done for any hope of profit, merit, reward, interest, praise, or glory, but only for the love of Christ; and because Christ has done this first, because this is Christ's life, and because Christ has commanded us to do so.

Furthermore, we should understand and believe that being made in the image of God is the greatest dignity and honor that a man could have. If we walk in self-denial, we are being made in the image of God in Christ; an honor of which there is no greater that can happen to man. It would be unworthy of us to expect anything more than to receive the honor of being made in his image! Even those who seek worldly honor often put their whole effort into striving after more greatness than their neighbor.

How crazy it would be for anyone who seeks after the image and glory of God and to be inwardly renewed in his soul, to seek something else in addition to this! Or to seek the things of this world, in addition to God's honor. The achieving of this divine image and glory in the human soul is most often hindered by lack of fixed attention to accomplishing it.

Just what is it in man that causes him to strive so hard for the honor and image of this world, by which he is not one bit better in the sight of God and often made a shame before men? Verily, it is nothing else than the poisonous and accursed root of inordinate self-love. This self-love makes a man feel he is different than others, when in fact we are all made of the same stuff. Because the greatest of this world have the same flesh and blood as the least do. One person is not a hair's breadth better than the other in this sense. They are born alike, and they die alike; their entrance and exit are the same. No king, in this respect, has anything better than the man living in the dump! What, then, is the cause of this craziness we manifest in seeking worldly honor? We foolishly vex ourselves, willfully.

It is essentially love of self, which is absolutely forbidden us if we want to follow Christ. We must needs deny ourselves if we want to imitate Christ. Let's not add the heavy (and restless) wheel of ambition to the vice of self-love, from whence the crazy and giddy hunting of worldly honor springs. Whoever loves, applauds, and flatters himself in self-love, serving the poms, the honors, and the praises thereof, purposely turns his mind from God toward the world, and from Christ toward himself.

It is to such a one that Jesus said, "If you want to keep yourself, your soul, and your life (with all that is most precious to you), you must hate all these; if you are resolved to love them, you are on the road to perdition. For whoever will save his life, shall lose it. But whoever will lose his life for My name's sake, he shall save it.

The old Adam, who always wants to be "SOME-BODY," refuses such instruction, and in fact is an enemy to those words. Whoever serves the old Adam doesn't even want to meet up with those words of Jesus, let alone take them to heart. Pride, covetousness, personal ambition, sensuality, and anger must all be slain and buried beneath the humility, poverty, suffering, and gentleness of Jesus Christ.

Whoever dies like this will easily despise the world and all its pomp, and will trample under foot wealth, honor, and pleasure. Such a person is a true stranger to this world, but a continual guest and table friend of Christ. Jesus will, after a while, fill his heart with joy exceeding, and even in this life will keep a daily jubilee with him. ~

