

SHEDDING THE SKIN

“Then Jesus said to his disciples, ‘Whoever wants to be my disciple, must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me’.” —MATTHEW 16:24

Consider the following event that took place a number of decades ago. A terrorist involved in the hijacking of an overseas flight was holding a gun to a flight attendant’s head. Death for him was imminent, and the flight attendant asked him, “Are you not afraid to die?” He answered, “No”, and said he had died the day he committed to the organization he belonged to. Here, we have an illustration of shedding one’s life to the point of extreme fanaticism, however wrongly channeled.

Further to the verse above, Jesus said, “For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it” (Matthew 16:25). ‘Losing your life’ does not mean physical death, as in the above scenario, nor does it mean becoming a martyr, as there is no virtue in martyrdom itself. It is the cause we believe in that compels us, and like the skin of a serpent, our old selves are shed to make way for the new.

To take up our cross, as Jesus did in obedience to His Father, is an illustration of the challenge we face in becoming true disciples of Christ. Jesus said, “Whoever loses his life for me”, not for ourselves or any other agenda but His, will “find life”. In order to find life, we must come to the position where all that is oriented around us - our

agendas, egos and desires are relinquished to the will and purposes of God. This is a process in which the indwelling Spirit of Christ sets Himself in the midst of our sin, weaknesses and failure to bring about His will and purpose for us. Paul sums it up when he said, “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me” (Galatians 2:20).

To live with a genuine desire to serve Christ will lead us into an inner battle in which the flesh continuously fights against the Spirit. Externally, it will lead us into opposition, adversity and persecution for which we must be prepared. Again, like the skin of a serpent, our preoccupations, indulgences and egos are shed to make way for new life and new purpose. When our convictions and commitment are united with Christ, we are secure in Him, not only in our daily living, but for all He has called us to do. He is the empowerment, direction, wisdom and strength operating within us. On Christ’s agenda is where we find true and lasting joy from the deepest part of our hearts.

PRAYER: Dear Father, grant me your strength to shed my own ego and agenda so that I may be filled with the life of Jesus and His will for me.

TO REFLECT UPON: How far will I let myself die to bring the Lord’s fulfillment in my life?