

版权声明：若使于此文章用于任何印刷品，请事先与本站联系，经授权方可！

# The Surrender of Self

## 降服自我

乔·克鲁斯 著



降服自我.....	2
靠人的努力便可解决罪的问题吗? .....	3
内在之灵的争战.....	4
判断外在的行为.....	4
我们能获得何等的胜利? .....	5
不幸基督徒之谜.....	5

**一个奇妙真相：**胡迪尼出生于 1874 年 3 月 24 日，真名为艾瑞克·外斯，他可能是美国最著名的魔术师和脱身术大师了。1896 年，当他去新斯科舍拜访一位精神病学医生朋友时，胡迪尼看到了他人生的第一件拘束衣（精神病院用来约束有暴力倾向之病人的衣服）。他并未感到惊恐，反倒产生灵感，想要发明一种从中逃脱的表演。胡迪尼不仅能从拘束衣中脱身，即使把他倒挂在地面以上数米，他依然能够逃脱。

之后，胡迪尼扩展了他的逃脱范围，他不仅能从提供的各种手铐中脱身，还能从人们提出的大多数地点脱逃。胡迪尼曾从牢房中逃脱；戴着手铐从桥上跳入水中，在短短的坠落过程中就解开了手铐；也曾被装入有锁链封锁的木板箱中，被扔进河中逃脱；从帆布邮袋，甚至从一个巨大的纸袋中成功脱身，而没有留下任何破口。最令人难忘的可能就是他那著名的舞台幻象表演了，包括从水刑笼（译者注：把犯人装进一种大箱子，然后系进水中，在犯人即将溺水断气时，将笼子提上来。）以及牛奶罐里消失不见，甚至在活埋之后依然成功逃生。

尽管胡迪尼学习借着灵巧的假动作以及不懈的坚持从各种最为牢固的束缚中逃脱，但一个人若不将自己的生命彻底降服在上帝的旨意之中，他就决不能挣脱罪的捆绑。

## 降服自我

我想大家都明白，自我是我们所要面对的最大敌人。我们一旦解决了那企图控制我们的老旧人，其它的胜利就水到渠成了。

在我们与自我本性作战的过程中，上帝赐给我们每个人一件强大的武器。意志是我们唯一与生俱来的辅助性武器，并且可以肯定的是，凡事都取决于这一资源的正确使用。最终导致一个生灵丧亡、也是上帝眼中最重的罪便是故意抗拒上帝的旨意。我们的选择决定自己将成为什么样的人。我们的感觉，或在生活中偶尔冲动时的所言所行，并不是真正的自己。我们无法始终控制自己的情绪，但却能控制自己的意志。

上帝的真理与感觉无关。使你成为上帝儿女的并不是你的感觉或你的情绪，而是对上帝旨意的遵行。或许今早你一觉醒来感觉头痛或关节疼，但那能改变上帝爱你这个事实吗？能改变第七日是安息日这个事实吗？不论你的感觉是好是坏，真理始终是真理，丝毫不会改变。

有些人在布道大会或一次特别的周末奋兴会中大受感动，但当此类聚会结束之后，他们的信心便一落千丈，重回谷底。这是一种飘忽不定的效应，因为他们凡事都依赖环境所产生的情绪而定。

我们必须认识到一个事实，在某些时候，我们的意志和上帝的旨意必定会发生激烈的冲突。我们要么让祂做主，要么选择自己的方法。当发生此类剧烈的冲突时，大多数人却不愿意承认其背后所隐藏的真实原因。他们没有看出其实此种冲突主要与自我的本性有关。

在传福音的过程中，关于不愿全然跟随基督的“理由”，我听过数百个之多。包括安息日上班的问题，对圣经的怀疑，或亲人的反对，等等。其实这些都不是真正的原因。真实的原因其实深藏在这些理由的背后。他们不愿委身的背后还有一个主要的本质问题。他们谈论的都是细枝末叶，真正的问题才是根本。事情的真相是，上帝想要的东西，自我却不愿意放弃。他们爱某样东西超过了爱上帝！

你有没有想过耶稣为何在马太福音 16 章 24 节做了这样奇怪的论述：“若有人要跟从我，就当舍己，背起他的十字架，来跟从我。”为什么主没有在这句话中清晰的列出人需要舍弃的东西呢？“舍己”一舍弃什么呢？是指毒品吗？是酒？烟草？还是违反安息日？都不是，而是舍己。耶稣知道，在抵挡真理的激烈斗争中，隐藏在背后最凶险的敌人就是自我。一旦胜过了自我，其它一切就都胜过了。

许多人游离于上帝的旨意并教会之外，他们不愿放弃某些事物，因为他们爱这些超过了爱上帝。还有许多信徒，虽然人在教会，但状况却极为可怜，因为多年来他们生命中还有某些方面与上帝的旨意背道而驰。要作一名真实的基督徒，降服必须作为首要的工作。

## 靠人的努力便可解决罪的问题吗？

现在，让我们回到你我罪的问题上。我们不得不承认，我们与之战斗的仇敌比我们更强大。因为我们软弱的肉体，我们发现自己的思想和身体都被属灵的敌人更强大的力量所捆绑。我们顽强地挣扎，想从这种奴役下解脱出来，但越是努力挣扎，在网罗中陷得就越深。最后，当我们完全筋疲力尽之时，一位好心的朋友走过来，说，“我知道你的问题所在，你还需要做更进一步的努力。”

对于罪的问题，如果这是我们唯一的答案，我们就不该派传教士去印度了。我从未见过比印度教徒更加努力想得蒙拯救的人。我曾经亲眼见过可怜的忏悔者俯伏在炎热的土地上，一寸一寸痛苦地向前挪移，一英里又一英里，慢慢地向某处圣河的聚集地点爬行。到达之后，他们就泡在肮脏的河水中，抬起头，目不转睛地望着灼热刺眼的太阳，不停地祈祷，之后一而再、再而三地重复这一过程。

也曾有身家百万的富商，为要赚得救恩，便放弃他们所有的钱财，拿一只要饭的破碗，在乞讨别人施舍的残羹剩饭中度过余生。我从未见过一个基督徒像印度教徒那样努力求得拯救。然而，我也未曾见过任何一个印度教徒获得了心灵的平安或保证，即便是在印度社会地位最高的婆罗门中也是如此。

你知道为什么“努力”不能打破罪的枷锁吗？因为罪的倾向深深植根于世上每一个婴孩的本性之中。我们天生就具有使我们倾向于悖逆的遗传性弱点。而且，我们都屈从了这些倾向。耶稣生来也具有这同样堕落的本性，但祂却是唯一一个没有向这些弱点低头的人。祂度了一种完全顺从的成圣的人生。

无需进行专门的神学培训我们便可明了自己堕落本性的事实。我们都在失败与妥协的记忆中挣扎。我们拼命尝试从思想中抹去种种不忠的情景，但每次都以彻底的失败告终。

我曾听说印度有个圣人，他走村串乡声称自己拥有一种特殊的创造力。在一次喜马拉雅山朝圣之旅归来后，这个圣人宣称自己掌握了制造金子的秘诀。他将一口大锅注满水，之后念诵咒语，并用力搅动。但在搅动过程中，他暗暗向锅里扔了一些金块而没有被人发觉。

一个村庄的首领想要购买这制造金子的秘诀，那圣人同意以五百卢比的价格将这个秘诀卖给他。在解释了搅动的方法以及重复念诵的咒语之后，圣人带上这五百卢比准备离开。转身之际，他对那位首领说了一句最后的警告：“当你搅动锅里的水并念诵咒语时，你必须一下都不能想红脸的猴子，否则金子就不会出现了！”

如你所想，这个头领学来的制金法从未奏效，因为每当他搅动水的时候，就会有一只红脸的猴子浮现在脑海，朝他嬉笑。

我们肯定没有能力控制自己的思想或想象，因为它们根植于我们的罪性之中。只有当思想通过悔改的过程重生之后，一个人才能制伏那些低级的、肉体的力量，并将其置于圣灵有效的控制之下。只有这样，内心的意图才会圣化并与基督和谐。若非使人获得新生的转变之恩，“原来体贴肉体的，…不服上帝的律法，也是不能服。”（罗 8:7）

我曾用三年时间在一个印度教祭司的指导下学习印度语，他每天骑自行车来我住的地方。这使得我有机会向他询问各方面有关印度教崇拜的问题。数月的相处使我们之间建立起一种师生般的友谊，鉴于此种友谊，我感觉可以向他询问有关其父辈信仰当中一个令人困惑的特点。“为什么印度教大多数的庙宇前都有淫秽的雕刻呢？”我问道。

这个问题着实让这位古鲁（印度教的领袖或教师）震惊不已，他坚决否认有任何这样的雕刻存在。于是我便邀请他出去走走，我们沿着公路走过一两个街区，看见一座新落成的庙宇。我亲眼看到施工人员在前门口处摆放淫秽的雕像，所以他无法否认其存在。但他再次表示惊讶，并言之凿凿地说他之前从未见过此类的东西。他会找出原因并在次日答复我。

第二天下午，当他要骑车离开时，我又问他关于那些雕刻的事。他说：“哦，我知道他们为什么要把那些雕像放在庙前了。你应该知道，当人们进庙朝拜神明时，他们不应该想那些污秽的东西，所以我们把那些雕像摆在门前，提醒他们在里面朝拜时不要想这些东西。”

对于如此离奇的解释，我不禁哑然失笑。关于这些淫秽思想的侵入，难道我们还需要提醒吗？若没有上帝约束的能力，这些思想岂不是常在我们脑子里盘旋吗？我们真正的需要乃是神圣恩典的良方，以便制伏并战胜这些思想。要想解决引人犯罪之内在与外在的因素，其关键就是思想的更新。

## 内在之灵的争战

然而，你有没有注意到，处理外在的行为永远比处理内在的性情更容易？那些训练有素的人，即便是内在的情感与外在的行为不符，也能够强迫自己有正确的外表的行为。圣经教训说，我们的思想与行动之间的争战必须停止。一个真基督徒应该表里如一。

我们都看过司机在开车驶过有学校标志的区域时，都会出于责任感把车速降到每小时十五英里。当他们开车在穿着制服的交通巡警面前慢慢驶过时，他们似乎是遵纪守法的公民。然而这些司机常常因为耽误了一次约会而内心翻腾着怒气和咒骂。潜伏在这场愤怒之战背后的就是自我，顽固的意志还没有降服于顺从的思想。这便是那些自称为上帝家里之人迫切的需要了。无论何人，只要具备一点点表演技能，就能强迫自己顺从规则（特别是当他们认为有人在监视时），但几乎没有人能强迫自己甘心乐意地顺从。即使我们不断努力直到咽气的那一刻，我们也决不能靠着自己的决心去改变那未悔改的性情。这样一种重大的改变需要新态度、新思想模式的创造。

许多人相信他们之所以是基督徒，单单是因为他们按照一定的规则行事并顺从一定的圣经律例和原则。换句话说，他们的生活方式和行为表明他们不属这世界。是这样吗？我们总能通过行为认出上帝的真儿女吗？或许在一段时期之内可行，但善于伪装的人能在相当长的时期内欺骗我们大多数的人。最终，隐藏在好行为背后的本性开始显露，他的伪装也暴露无遗了。

以赛亚写道：“你们若甘心听从，必吃地上的美物。”（赛 1:19）有些人的顺从不是出于甘心，他们虚假的果子很快就必显露。这对我们有何教训？这告诉我们，关于那些认真遵守上帝律法的人，我们可能会犯两个错误。我们可能会因为他们对很微小的不顺从过于严格而错误地认为他们是律法主义者；还可能仅仅因为他们对遵守律法表示出极大的热情而错误地认为他们是真正的基督徒。

## 判断外在的行为

没有人能够真正看透别人的动机。因此，你若抨击一个看似认真遵守诫命的基督徒同胞，这是一种危险的、评判的态度。如果他的行为的确是基于自我努力并自我拯救的原则，那么真相自会很快显现。然而，倘若他一丝不苟地顺从乃是出于与基督有一种真爱的关系，那么他该得到赞赏，而不是批评。

因此我们当得出结论：试图借更努力并更长久的挣扎去战胜罪恶的理论是一种致命的欺骗。得胜的秘诀在于信靠，而不是挣扎，越是挣扎结果就越糟糕，只能使一个年轻的罪人变成一个年老的罪人。最终，

我们必须承认，我们的仇敌的确比我们更强。当我们放弃人的力量和努力时，上帝就会为我们提供荣耀的胜利。

耶稣说，“离了我，你们就不能作什么。”（约 15:5）这是一条极大的真理，但我们必须远远超越这个否定的论述，通过腓立比书 4 章 13 节来经历其肯定、积极的一面，“我靠着那加给我力量，凡事都能作。”“什么也不能（不能做什么）”与“凡事都能”之间的区别就是基督。

但这并不意味着当上帝担负起拯救我们的所有责任时，我们就可置身事外、袖手旁观。在战胜罪恶的过程中，可能性与责任之间有一个平衡。一方面属于上帝，另一方面属于我们。可能性在于上帝，责任在于我们。当我们行动起来，抵挡生活中的罪恶时，上帝就会提供能力，切实打破罪恶的捆绑，与其决裂。

藉着宣扬凭信心而得胜的方法，我们能获得何等的胜利呢？约翰说：“使我们胜了世界的，就是我们的信心。”（约一 5:4）藉着顺服那自天而来的更大权力，人便能使每一种思想都降服于基督了。

## 我们能获得何等的胜利？

藉着将我们的意志降服于那自天而来的更大的权力，我们便能从肉体的捆绑中得蒙拯救。整个人都会顺服上帝的灵，我们便能以基督耶稣的心为心了。保罗声明我们能与神圣的性情有份并有基督的思想。这一过程再三被描述为意志的降服及放弃我们自己的方法。“也不要将你们的肢体献给罪作不义的器具；倒要像从死里复活的人，将自己献给上帝，并将肢体作义的器具献给上帝。”（罗 6:13）

保罗进一步形容这种降服的过程是将自我的本性钉在十字架上。他说：“我已经与基督同钉十字架，”还说，“我是天天冒死。”我们所能做的任何决定或努力都无法使意志达到始终的顺服。自我决不会选择治死自己。只有圣灵能创造一种脱离爱罪之本性、脱离其辖制的愿望。只有圣灵能带领我们甘愿放弃每一种败坏、堕落之本性的放纵。

当我们的心思和意志与圣灵合作时，我们当坚信自己的旧人已经死了，此种活泼的信心本身便给有罪的旧人以致命的一击。生命开始走向甘美与胜利，充满了新的属灵能力。当小偶像不再在我们的心中作王时，它们就消失得无影无踪。上帝对我们的旨意也不再显得那么神秘，不需要再有任何遮掩或感到羞耻，失败也不再是我们生活的常态。我们快乐地将自我的装饰以及世界撇在一边，腾出更多的空处让基督爱的品行得以彰显。

尽管罪恶的生活中也有短暂肤浅的快乐，但此等罪中之乐无法与跟从耶稣的喜乐相提并论。自我使得基督徒的道路幽暗可怖；但当自我降服并钉在十字架上时，这条窄路便充满了无法言喻的欢乐。

## 不幸基督徒之谜

每次你看见一个不快乐的基督徒，便是看见一个没有向基督的十字架降服自我的人。他们允许内在属肉体的生命、自我的本性存活，在这大打折扣的忠诚中没有真正的平安可言。那些没有自愿与基督同钉十字架的人，信仰对于他们仍旧是沉重的负担。他们使我不断想起我曾经在印度拥挤的街道上看到的印度教徒的队伍。祭司和众教徒扛着沉重的偶像吃力地前行。他们偶尔会停下来休息，暂时放下他们的神，卸下重担，那时他们看上去真是轻松啊！

以赛亚在他所处的时代描述了同样的事，想必他是看到了类似的景象。他写道：“那从囊中抓金子…的人…制造神像，他们又俯伏又叩拜。他们将神像抬起，扛在肩上，安置在定处，他就站立，不离本位。人呼求他，他不能答应，也不能救人脱离患难。”（赛 46:6, 7）

这简直就是形容我在印度的所见所闻。他们的神明真是无用，还得把它们背来背去。他们因挪动这些偶像而筋疲力尽。那是重担，而他们只有在停下来休息时才能从中暂时解脱。

这是一种什么宗教？信它的人必须如此痛苦地忍受并背负某些悲惨的重担。我曾见到过一些自称是基督徒的人也有与此相同的经验。他们的宗教看上去对他们没有任何益处，反倒使他们疲惫不堪，牢骚满腹。

对于这种奇异的状况，只有一种解释。这种情况是极不正常的。基督徒应该是世界上最快乐的人。倘若他们做不到这一点，那是因为自我还没有降服，还未钉在十字架上。

我们回到以赛亚书，这位先知描述了当时代的偶像游行。其实这段话并不是以赛亚说的，而是耶和华中上帝亲口所说。上帝在第 7 节论到偶像说：“他们将神像抬起，”现在请读第 4 节中上帝对以色列人说的话：“直到你们年老，我仍这样；直到你们发白，我仍怀握。我已造作，也必保抱，我必怀抱，也必拯救。”

你今日所侍奉的是哪个神呢？你所声称的是哪种信仰呢？你要么侍奉上帝，要么侍奉自我。当你毫无保留地将那败坏、贪婪、放纵的自我置于死地时，对于自我所推崇的罪来说，你便是死了。既想过基督徒的生活，又不愿向自我死去，这无异于背着一个异教的偶像，悲悲惨惨、沉重不堪地挣扎前行。实际上，当自我未放下、未向十字架死去时，它就会阻挡在你和救主之间，变成一个货真价实的偶像（原文作：神）。若靠着人的努力试图制伏自我之神，那么就连最坚定的信徒也会因为这个卸不去的重担而精疲力竭。

但当信心向这世界、向肉体、向魔鬼夸胜时，会有何事发生？我们这重担将卸除，因为上帝曾应许，“感谢上帝，使我们藉着我们的主耶稣基督得胜。”（林前 15:57）“使我们胜了世界的，就是我们的信心。”（约一 5 :4）“我已造作，也必保抱，我必怀抱，也必拯救。”（赛 46:4）

我们不难想象，撒但最大的努力乃是旨在高抬自己。他只能控制那些持续喂养肉体本性的人。或许他所开列的单子上最吸引人的标题中包括自以为义、靠赖自己、自私自利、取悦自我、固执己见、自我保护以及自负自满。

因撒但是这世上暂时的王，他激起物质大爆炸，到处都是琳琅满目的商品，这一切旨在使人培养自我之爱。当然，我们需要认识到自己在上帝眼中的价值。上帝视我们每个人的生命比祂自己的生命更宝贵。但这个客观的事实与我们人类以自我为中心的堕落本性是截然不同的。尽管我们有与生俱来的软弱以及肉体上放纵的食欲，上帝依然能爱我们。我们越是亲近耶稣，对于自己那顽固的方式就越没有兴趣。实际上，当我们通过圣灵进入一种悔改的生活时，我们倚靠血肉的信心将完全转向救主。保罗在描述新生命的经验时将其与属灵的割礼相比较：“因为真受割礼的，乃是我们这以上帝的灵敬拜，在基督耶稣里夸口，不靠着肉体的。”（腓 3:3）

就像我们刚才看到的，那伟大的使徒将这种转变比作将自我钉在十字架上。实际上，每个婴孩、儿童、成年，对于以自我为中心的本性，都有自己的方式。这种本性必须钉在十字架上，必须处于新的属灵本性的掌控之下，我们的爱必须建造在耶稣之上。自我不再重要。肉体再没有力量控制我们的生命或满足它自己的意志。现在，我们的灵魂之歌乃是：“愿祢照祢的旨意行，耶和华中啊，愿祢照祢的旨意行。祢是窑匠，我是泥。”愿上帝赐我们这样的经验。

# The Surrender of Self

by Joe Crews

**An Amazing Fact!** *Houdini, born Erich Weiss on March 24, 1874, is perhaps America's most famous magician and escape artist. While visiting a psychiatrist friend in Nova Scotia in 1896, Houdini saw his first strait jacket. Instead of shock, he was inspired to create an act around escaping from it. And Houdini didn't just escape from a strait jacket-he did it hanging upside down from his ankles, suspended yards above the ground.*

*Houdini then expanded his act to escape not only from any handcuffs offered, but also from most any location suggested. Houdini escaped from jail cells, handcuffed bridge jumps, padlocked crates thrown into rivers, locked canvas mailbags-even a giant paper bag, without making a single tear in it. Possibly his most memorable escapes were the stage illusions he made famous, including the Water Torture Cell, the Milk Can Escape, and Buried Alive.*

*Even though Houdini learned to escape from the most secure physical restraints by slight of hand and a great deal of persistence, the bondage of sin is impossible to break without a complete surrender of one's life to the will of God.*

## **The Surrender of Self**

I think it has probably already been revealed to most of us that self is the greatest enemy we face. Once we have settled it with that old man of the flesh who seeks to rule over us, all the other victories will come in their course.

God has given every one of us a powerful personal weapon to use in combating the self-nature. The will is our only natural reserve weapon, and absolutely everything depends on the right action of this resource. The ultimate sin in the eyes of God, the final factor that will cause a soul to be lost, is to deliberately say "no" to the will of God. We become whatever we choose to be. We are not what we feel, or what we might do or say in a single impulsive moment of our life. We cannot always control our emotions, but we can control our will.

Feelings have nothing to do with the truth of God. It is not your feelings, your emotions, that make you a child of God, but the doing of God's will. Perhaps you had a headache or arthritis pain when you woke up this morning, but does that change the fact that God loves you? Does it alter the truth that the seventh day is the Sabbath? Whether you feel good or bad, the truth remains exactly the same.

Some people can feel wonderful during an evangelistic crusade or a special revival weekend, but when the meetings are finished, their faith plummets to rock bottom. It is a yo-yo effect with everything tied to emotions generated by circumstances.

We must recognize the fact that our will and God's will, at some point, must come into violent collision. Either we let Him have His way or we choose our own course. And when it happens, most people are not willing to admit the true cause behind the raging conflict. They do not see the battle as primarily linked to the self-nature.

In evangelism I have listened to hundreds of "reasons" for not going all the way with Christ. They tell me it is because of Sabbath work, or doubts about the Bible, or opposition of relatives. But none of those things are the true reasons. It goes much deeper than the words they are uttering. There is a basic nature problem behind their lack of commitment. They talk about twigs and leaves when the real problem is the roots. The truth is that God wants something that self is not willing to give up. They love something more than they love God.

Have you ever wondered why Jesus made that strange statement in Matthew 16:24, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me"? Why didn't the Master finish the sentence by spelling out the thing to be denied? "Let him deny himself"-what? Drugs, alcohol, tobacco, Sabbath-breaking? No. Just deny himself, period. Jesus knew that self was behind every angry battle against the truth. Once that victory is gained, all other victories will be won also.

Multitudes are outside the will of God and outside the church because they are not willing to give up something that they love more than they love God. Thousands are in the church and are perfectly miserable because something in their life has been fighting the will of God for years. To be a true Christian requires surrender above everything else.

### **Is Trying the Answer?**

Now let's come back to the question of your sin and mine. We have to admit that we fight an enemy who is stronger than we are. In the weakness of the flesh we find ourselves bound in mind and body by the superior strength of our spiritual enemy. We resolutely struggle to extricate ourselves from the bondage, but the harder we try the deeper we sink into the mire. At last, when we are totally exhausted from the effort, a well-meaning friend comes by and says, "I know what the problem is. You need to try harder."

If that is the only answer we have to the sin problem, we should stop sending missionaries to India. I've never seen anyone try harder to be saved than the Hindus. I've watched the wretched penitents prostrating in the hot dust, painfully measuring their length, mile after mile, as they inch toward some sacred river rendezvous. There they will dip under the filthy water, look up at the blazing sun, and pray-then repeat the process again, and again, and again.

Millionaire businessmen will give away all their wealth, take a beggar's bowl, and spend the rest of their lives feeding on scraps of shared food-all in an effort to earn salvation. Never have I seen a Christian try as hard to be saved as a Hindu does. Yet, I have never met a single Hindu seeker who had found any assurance or peace of mind-not even among the Brahmin brotherhood of the highest caste.



Do you know why "trying" will not break the chain of sin? Because sinful propensities are deeply embedded in the very nature of every baby born into the world. We are brought into this life with inherent weaknesses which predispose us toward disobedience. Furthermore, we have all yielded to those propensities. Jesus, born with the same fallen nature, is the only One who never gave way to those weaknesses. He lived a totally sanctified life of obedience.

We do not need instruction in theology to acquaint us with the facts about our fallen nature. All of us have struggled with memories of failure and compromise. We have desperately tried to blot out scenes of unfaithfulness from our minds, but every such effort has ended in utter defeat.

I heard of a holy man in India who traveled from village to village laying claim to special creative power. As a result of his Himalayan pilgrimage, this sadhu professed to hold the secret for making gold. He would fill a large caldron with water and then stir the contents vigorously while uttering his sacred incantations. But in the process of stirring he also slyly slipped some gold nuggets into the water without being detected.

The head man of one village wanted to buy the secret for making gold and the holy man agreed to sell it for 500 rupees. After explaining the stirring and the prayers to be repeated the priest took his 500 rupees and started to leave. Then he turned back and gave a final word of warning, "When you are stirring the water and uttering the prayers you must never once think of the red-faced monkey, or the gold will not come!"

As you can imagine the head man never could make the formula work because every single time he stirred the water, there was the red-faced monkey sitting at the edge of his mind, grinning at him.

We have absolutely no natural ability to keep the thoughts and imagination under control for the simple reason that they are rooted in our sinful natures. Only when the mind has been regenerated through the process of conversion can the individual subjugate the lower, physical powers and bring them under the effective control of the Holy Spirit. Only in this way may the very intents of the heart be sanctified and brought into harmony with Christ. Without the transforming grace of the new birth, "the carnal mind ... is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be" (Romans 8:7).

For three years I studied the language in India under the tutelage of a Hindu priest who came to my house daily on his bicycle. This gave me the opportunity to ask questions about various aspects of Hindu worship. Only after many months of classroom camaraderie did I feel clear in asking my teacher about one puzzling feature of his ancestral religion. "Why," I asked, "did most all the temples have obscene carvings all over the front of the buildings?"

My pundit seemed genuinely shocked by the question and vociferously denied that any such carvings existed. Whereupon I invited him to walk down the street a block or two where a new temple was being constructed. I had watched the builders placing the obscenities by the

front entrance door, so the teacher could not deny they were there. But once again he professed surprise and stated categorically that he had never seen anything like it before. He would find out the reason for it and tell me the next day.

On the following afternoon as he was mounting his bicycle to leave, I asked him about the carvings again. "Oh yes," he said, "I found out why they put them on the front of temples. You see, when the people go in to worship the gods they are not supposed to think of those evil things, so we place the carvings to remind them not to think of those things while worshipping inside."

I chuckled at his novel explanation, realizing that none of us need reminding about the intrusion of such thoughts. Without the restraining power of God they are ever with us. What we need is the panacea of divine grace to subdue and conquer them. The renewed mind holds the answer to both the inside and outside factors which lead to transgression.

### **Controlling the Inner Spirit**

Have you noticed, though, that it is always easier to deal with external actions than with internal dispositions? Well-disciplined people can force themselves to act correctly on the outside, even when the inward desires are at war with the outward conduct. The Bible teaches that this conflict must cease between how we think and how we act. A true Christian will be the same in both mind and body.

All of us have seen drivers dutifully slow down to fifteen miles per hour through school zones. They appear submissive and law-abiding as they creep along in front of the uniformed traffic patrol officer. Yet those drivers are usually seething with internal anger and rebellion because of missing an appointment. Self is behind that angry battle, and the stubborn will has simply not yielded to the idea of obedience. Here is where the desperate need lies for those who claim to be in the family of God. Almost anyone with minimum acting skills can force conformity to the rules (especially if they think someone is watching) but almost no one can force himself to be sweet about it. We can try until our dying breath and we will never be able to alter the unconverted disposition by dint of determination. Such a major shift requires the creation of new attitudes and thought patterns.

Many are convinced that they are Christians just because they act in a certain way and conform to certain biblical rules and principles. In other words, their lifestyle and behavior identifies them as not of this world. Or does it? Can we always recognize a true child of God by his conduct? Perhaps we can over a period of time, but pretenders are able to deceive most of us for a good while. Eventually the nature behind the good works begins to appear and the charade is seen for what it really is.

Isaiah wrote, "If ye be willing and obedient ye shall eat the good of the land" (Isaiah 1:19). Some people are obedient without being willing, and their fruit is soon exposed as artificial. What does this teach us? It teaches us that two mistakes can be made concerning those who keep God's law carefully. We might wrongly assume they are legalists because they look so

seriously upon the slightest disobedience, or we might wrongly assume they are true Christians just because they show zeal for conforming to the law.

### **Judging the Outward Actions**

No one can read the motives of another. Therefore, it is a dangerous, judgmental attitude to deprecate the apparent caring concern that a fellow Christian has for keeping the commandments. If his works indeed are based upon principles of self-effort and do-it-yourself salvation, the truth will be exposed soon enough. But if he has a genuine love relationship with Christ which constrains him to be meticulous in obedience, then he deserves commendation instead of criticism.

So we must conclude that it is a fatal delusion to depend upon trying harder and struggling longer to get the victory over sin. The secret is trusting instead of trying, and time will only make a young sinner into an old sinner. Finally, we must admit that we are not as strong as our adversary, and as we surrender our dependence upon human strength and effort, God provides the glorious gift of victory.

Jesus said, "Without me ye can do nothing" (John 15:5). That is a tremendous truth, but we must go far beyond the negativism of this statement and experience the positive reality of Philippians 4:13, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." The difference between "all things" and "no thing" is Christ.

This does not imply that we sit back in relaxed idleness while God assumes all the responsibility for our deliverance. There is a balance between the possibility and responsibility of overcoming sin. One belongs to God and the other to us. The possibility rests with God and the responsibility rests with us. And as we begin to act against the sin in our life, God provides the power to actually break with the sin.

How far may we go in utilizing that faith method of claiming the victory? John declares that "this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith" (1 John 5:4). By submitting to that higher power which reaches down from above, the soul is able to bring every thought into captivity to Christ.

### **How Far Can We Go in Victory?**

By yielding our will to the higher powers from above, we can be delivered from the bondage of the flesh. The entire being is made captive to the Spirit of God, and we are able to think His thoughts after Him. Paul declares that we partake of the divine nature and have the mind of Christ. Again and again, the process is described as a surrendering of the will, and a giving up of our own way. "Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God" (Romans 6:13).

Paul further described the surrender process as a crucifixion of the self-nature. He said, "I am crucified with Christ;" and again, "I die daily." This constant subjection of the will is not

achieved by any decision or effort which we can manufacture from within ourselves. Self will never make the choice to put itself to death. Only the Holy Spirit can create the desire to escape from the domination of a sin-loving nature. Only He can bring us to the point of being willing to give up every indulgence of that corrupt, fallen nature.

As the mind and will cooperate with the Holy Spirit, a faith-reckoning renders the death blow to the old man of sin. The life opens up to the sweet, triumphant in-filling of a new spiritual power. Little idols disappear as they are dethroned from the heart. There are no more secrets from God, no longer anything to hide or to be ashamed of, no more defeatism as a way of life. Joyfully we put aside the ornaments of self and the world to allow more capacity for the loving character of Christ to be revealed.

Although there are brief superficial pleasures in a life of sin, those indulgences cannot be compared with the delight of following Jesus. Self makes the Christian path seem dark and fearsome; but when self is surrendered and crucified, the narrow road is filled with joy unspeakable.

### **The Enigma of Miserable Christians**

Every time you see an unhappy Christian you are looking at someone who has not surrendered self to the cross of Christ. That inward life of the flesh, that self-nature, has been allowed to survive, and there can be no peace in a divided loyalty. Those who have not submitted to be crucified with Christ still carry their religion like a heavy burden. They remind me of the Hindu processions I observed, again and again, on the crowded streets of India. The priests and devotees staggered along bearing the heavy idol on their shoulders. Occasionally they stopped to rest, and it was an obvious relief to put down their god momentarily to relieve themselves of the burden.

Isaiah described the same thing in his day as he must have watched similar scenes. He wrote, "They lavish gold out of the bag ... and he maketh it a god: they fall down, yea, they worship. They bear him upon the shoulder, they carry him, and set him in his place, and he standeth; from his place shall he not remove: yea, one shall cry unto him, yet can he not answer, nor save him out of his trouble" (Isaiah 46:6, 7).

How accurately this describes what I observed in India. Their god was so helpless that they had to carry it from place to place. They wearied themselves with the effort to move it to another location. It was a burden which they were relieved to be rid of when they stopped to rest.

What kind of religion is it that must be painfully endured and borne like some miserable weight? I've seen professed Christians with that same kind of experience. They have a religion that seems to do nothing for them but to make them weary and disgruntled.

There is only one explanation for this kind of bizarre situation. It is abnormal in the extreme. Christians should be the happiest people in the world. If they are not, it is because self has not been surrendered and crucified.

Come back now to the text in Isaiah where the prophet described the idol processions of his day. In truth it is not Isaiah speaking but the Lord God Himself. In verse 7 He said, concerning the idol god, "they carry him." Now read verse 4 where God declared to Israel, "And even to your old age I am he; and even to hoar hairs will I carry you: I have made, and I will bear; even I will carry, and will deliver you."

Which god do you serve today? What kind of religion do you profess? You can only serve God or self. When you unreservedly surrender that spoiled, greedy, indulgent self to be put to death, you may reckon yourself dead to the sins which self promotes. Trying to live a Christian life without dying to self is just as miserable as struggling to carry a pagan god. In fact, when self has not been given up to the death of the cross, it comes between you and the Saviour, becoming a real god. The constant strain of trying to subdue that self-god by human effort can wear out the most determined saint.

What happens then when faith claims the victory over the world, the flesh, and the devil? We are relieved of the strain, because God promises to carry us. "Thanks be to God which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 15:57). "And this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith" (1 John 5 :4). "I have made, and I will bear, even I will carry, and will deliver you" (Isaiah 46:4).

It is not hard to imagine that Satan's strongest efforts are aimed at the exaltation of self. He can only control the individuals who continue to feed the carnal nature. Perhaps some of the most appealing subtitles in his list would include self-righteousness, self-dependence, self-seeking, self-pleasing, self-will, self-defense, and self-glory.

Because he is the temporary prince of this world, the devil has inspired an avalanche of material which focuses on developing the love of self. There is a sense, of course, in which we need to recognize our value in the sight of God. He counted every one of us as more precious than His own life. But that objective recognition is entirely distinct from the basic self-centeredness of the fallen human race. God can love us in spite of our genetic weaknesses and indulged carnal appetites, but the closer we come to Jesus, the less charmed we should be by our own perverse ways. In fact, as we enter into the converted life through the Holy Spirit, the confidence we placed in the flesh will be wholly shifted to the Saviour. In describing the new birth experience, Paul compared it to spiritual circumcision. "For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh" (Philippians 3:3).

As we have noted already, the great apostle equated this conversion experience to the crucifixion of self. The truth is that the egocentric nature of every baby, child, and adult is to have his or her own way. This nature must be crucified, and under the mastery of the new spiritual nature, the affections are set upon Jesus. Self is no longer important. The flesh has no strength to control the life or fulfill its own will. The song of the soul now is, "Have thine own way, Lord, have thine own way. Thou art the potter; I am the clay." God grant us this experience.