

The Path of Reckoning;

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We now come to a matter on which there has been some confusion of thought among the Lord's children. It concerns what follows this knowledge. Note again first of all the wording of Romans 6:6: "Knowing this, that our old man was crucified with him." The tense of the verb is most precious, for it puts the event right back there in the past. It is final, once-for-all. The thing has been done and cannot be undone. Our old man has been crucified once and for ever, and he can never be un-crucified. This is what we need to know.

Then, when we know this, what follows? Look again at our passage. The next command is in verse 11: "Even so reckon ye also yourselves to be dead unto sin." This, clearly, is the natural sequel to verse 6. Read them together: "Knowing that our old man was crucified,... reckon ye yourselves to be dead." That is the order. When we know that our old man has been crucified with Christ, then the next step is to reckon it so.

Unfortunately, in presenting the truth of our union with Christ the emphasis has too often been placed upon this second matter of reckoning ourselves to be dead, as though that were the starting point, whereas it should rather be upon knowing ourselves to be dead. God's Word makes it clear that "knowing" is to precede "reckoning." "Know this ... reckon." The sequence is most important. Our reckoning must be based on knowledge of divinely revealed fact, for otherwise faith has no foundation on which to rest. When we know, then we reckon spontaneously.

So in teaching this matter we should not over-emphasize reckoning. People are always trying to reckon without knowing. They have not first had a Spirit-given revelation of the fact; yet they try to reckon, and soon they get into all sorts of difficulties. When temptation comes they begin to reckon furiously. "I am dead; I am dead; I am dead!" but in the very act of reckoning they lose their temper. Then they say, "It doesn't work. Romans 6:11 is no good." And we have to admit that verse 11 is no good without verse 6. So it comes to this, that unless we know for a fact that we are dead with Christ, the more we reckon, the more intense will the struggle become, and the issue will be sure defeat.

For years after my conversion I had been taught to reckon. I reckoned from 1920 until 1927. The more I reckoned that I was dead to sin, the more alive I clearly was. I simply could not believe myself dead, and I could not produce the death. Whenever I sought help from others I was told to read Romans 6:11, and the more I read Romans 6:11 and tried to reckon, the further away death was: I could not get at it. I fully appreciated the teaching that I must reckon, but I could not make out why nothing resulted from it. I have to confess that for months I was troubled. I said to the Lord, "If this is not clear, if I cannot be brought to see this which is so very fundamental, I will cease to do anything. I will not preach any more; I will not go out to serve thee any more; I want first of all to get thoroughly clear here." For months I was seeking, and at times I fasted, but nothing came through.

I remember one morning--that morning was a real morning and one I can never forget--I was upstairs sitting at my desk reading the Word and praying, and. I said, "Lord, open my eyes!" And then in a flash I saw it. I saw my oneness with Christ. I saw that I was in him, and that when he died I died. I saw that the question of my death was a matter of the past and not of the future, and that I was just as truly dead as he was because I was in him when he died. The whole thing had dawned upon me. I was carried away with such joy at this great discovery that I jumped from my chair and cried, "Praise the Lord, I am dead!" I ran downstairs and met one of the brothers helping in the kitchen and laid hold of him. "Brother," I said, "do you know that I have died?" I must admit he looked puzzled. "What do you mean?" he said, so I went on: "Do you not know that Christ has died? Do you not know that I died with him? Do you not know that my death is no less truly a fact than his?" Oh it was so real to me! I longed to go through the streets of Shanghai shouting the news of my discovery. From that day to this I have never for one moment doubted the finality of that word: "I have been crucified with Christ."

I do not mean to say that we need not work that out. Yes, there is an outworking of the death which we are going to see presently, but this, first of all, its basis. I have been crucified: in Christ it has been done.

What, then, is the secret of reckoning? To put it in one word, it is revelation. We need revelation from God himself (Matt. 16:17; Eph. 1:17, 18). We need to have our eyes opened to the fact of our union with Christ, and that is something more than knowing it as a doctrine. Such revelation is no vague indefinite thing. Most of us can remember the day when we saw clearly that Christ died for us, and we ought to be equally clear as to the time when we saw that we died with Christ. It should be nothing hazy, but very definite, for it is with this as basis that we shall go on. It is not that I reckon myself to be dead, and therefore I will be dead. It is that, because I am dead--because I see now what God has done with me in Christ--therefore I reckon myself to be dead. That is the right kind of reckoning. It is not reckoning toward death but from death.

THE SECOND STEP: "EVEN SO RECKON ..."

What does reckoning mean? "Reckoning" in Greek means doing accounts, bookkeeping. Accounting is the only thing in the world we human beings can do correctly. An artist paints a landscape. Can he do it with perfect accuracy? Can the historian vouch for the absolute accuracy of any record, or the map-maker for the perfect correctness of any map? They can make, at best, fair approximations. Even in everyday speech, when we try to tell some incident with the best intention to be honest and truthful, we cannot speak with complete accuracy. It is mostly a case of exaggeration or understatement, of one word too much or too little. What then can a man do that is utterly reliable? Arithmetic! There is no scope for error there. One chair plus one chair equals two chairs. That is true in London and it is true in Cape Town. If you travel west to New York or east to Singapore it is still the same. All the world over and for all time, one plus one equals two. One plus one is two in heaven and earth and hell.

Why does God say we are to reckon ourselves dead? Because we are dead. Let us keep to the analogy of accounting. Suppose I have fifteen shillings in my pocket, what do I enter in my account-book? Can I enter fourteen shillings and sixpence or fifteen shillings and sixpence? No, I must enter in my account-book that which is in fact in my pocket. Accounting is the reckoning of facts, not fancies. Even so, it is because I am really dead that God tells me to account it so. God could not ask me to put down in my account-book what was not true. He could not ask me to reckon that I am dead if I am still alive. For such mental gymnastics the word "reckoning" would be inappropriate; we might rather speak of "mis-reckoning!"

Reckoning is not a form of make-believe. It does not mean that, having found that I have only twelve shillings in my pocket, I hope that by entering fifteen shillings incorrectly in my account-book such "reckoning" will somehow remedy the deficiency. It won't. If I have only twelve shillings, yet try to reckon to myself: "I have fifteen shillings; I have fifteen shillings; I have fifteen shillings," do you think that the mental effort involved will in any way affect the sum that is in my pocket? Not a bit of it! Reckoning will not make twelve shillings into fifteen shillings, nor will it make what is untrue true. But if, on the other hand, it is a fact that I have fifteen shillings in my pocket, then with great ease and assurance I can enter fifteen shillings in my account-book. God tells us to reckon ourselves dead, not that by the process of reckoning we may become dead, but because we are dead. He never told us to reckon what was not a fact. Having said, then, that revelation leads spontaneously to reckoning, we must not lose sight of the fact that we are presented with a command: "Reckon ye ..." There is a definite attitude to be taken. God asks us to do the account; to put down "I have died" and then to abide by it. Why? Because it is a fact. When the Lord Jesus was on the Cross, I was there in him. Therefore I reckon it to be true. I reckon and declare that I have died in him. Paul said, "Reckon ye also yourselves to be dead unto sin, but alive unto God." How is this possible? "In Christ Jesus." Never forget that it is always and only true in Christ. If you look at yourself you will think death is not there, but it is a question of faith not in yourself but in him. You look to the Lord, and know what he has done. "Lord, I believe in thee. I reckon upon the fact in thee." Stand there all the day.