

H Y M N S

Concerning Union with Christ through the Experience of the Cross

- 1 Though Christ a thousand times
In Bethlehem be born,
If He's not born in thee
Thy soul is still forlorn.
The Cross on Golgotha,
Will never save thy soul;
The Cross in thine own heart,
Alone can make thee whole.

O, Cross of Christ, I take thee
Into this heart of mine,
That I to my own self may die
And rise to thy life Divine.
- 2 What e'er thou lovest, man,
That too become thou must;
God, if thou lovest God,
Dust, if thou lovest dust.
Go out, God will come in;
Die thou and let Him live;
Be not and He will be;
Wait and He'll all things give.
- 3 To bring thee to thy God,
Love takes the shortest route;
The way which knowledge leads,
Is but a roundabout.
Drive out from thee the world,
And then thy heart shall be
Filled with the love of God,
And holy like as He.

The most extraordinary and unique event in the history of humankind was the birth of the God-man, Jesus of Nazareth. By that miracle of divine intervention into human history, God entered into time and became a part of His own creation. Even the angels were so affected by the wonder of His birth that they appeared to men and worshipped God in heavenly anthem (Luke 2:13-14). Following His birth, the child, Jesus, grew in a surprisingly normal manner, passing through thirty years of human living in obscurity. This was the time of His perfecting in obedience. As a man, He learned to submit to an earthly father and mother, and He learned to know the will of His heavenly Father. In Jesus, God was manifested purely and without limit. Whatever the Father did and said, the Son also did and said. In the final three and a half years of His living as a man in the flesh, He carried out the ministry that had been given to Him by His Father.

At the prime of His human life, this God-man passed through death by crucifixion. No one could imagine that God would become a man, but even more incomprehensible to the finite mind is the death of this God-man. Through His death, He achieved several wonderful accomplishments in God's economy: He terminated all things of the old creation; He redeemed back to God all the created things that had fallen under sin; and He destroyed the devil, God's enemy. Furthermore, His divine life, which was released from the shell of His humanity, became the life element to regenerate all of His believers in His resurrection. The death of the God-man was an unparalleled act in time and eternity. His death was followed three days later by His rising from the dead, an action which changed the course of mankind for eternity.

Notwithstanding the exceptional sacrifices and the superlative achievements made by God in Jesus Christ—the marvels of His incarnation, human living, crucifixion, and resurrection—these extraordinary facts are regarded as nonevents by the majority of humanity. Even among us who have believed on Him as our Savior and Lord, the special significances of His birth, crucifixion, and resurrection are barely recognized. Their application to us is often neglected or unrecognized as viable factors for Christian life and living.

But this hymn expresses a startling pronouncement of the inconceivable consummation God intends for His chosen people through the person and accomplishments of His only begotten Son. The hymn was written in the third century by an unknown author. A. B. Simpson later added the chorus. Both the original author and Simpson realized that the monumental historical occurrences of the birth, human living, dying, and resurrection of the God-man must be appropriated into the life of a believer before their real significances can become manifested in humanity: "Though Christ a thousand times / In Bethlehem be born, / If He's not born in thee / Thy soul is still forlorn." Although the birth of Christ is beyond our comprehension in its weight and gravity, only those who receive Him—that is, who believe into Him (John 1:12)—will be touched and changed by it. Hence, if He is not born *in us*, our soul will still be forlorn. Such a birth must become our experience. Through acceptance of Christ, He is born in us; that is, He as the Spirit enters into our being, bringing His very life and nature into us and becoming the living element within us by

which we are born anew (3:3; 1:12-13). Thus, we organically receive the life of the Lord Jesus. The man Jesus was God incarnated—the Word who was God (v. 1) became flesh (v. 14). God partook of human nature and participated in human living. But even if such a wonderful person were born a thousand times in Bethlehem, the hymn reminds us, unless He is born in us, our soul is still abandoned, desolate, lost, and alone! We must subjectively appropriate that birth in our personal experience.

Similarly, the objective cross, “The Cross on Golgotha, / Will never save thy soul.” Although the cross on Golgotha certainly redeems us from eternal perdition through the redemption accomplished by the vicarious death of our dear Savior, that objective cross cannot save us in our daily living, in our subjective experiences. The cross must enter into us experientially if it is to save us from self, the flesh, and the world in our practical daily life: “The Cross in thine own heart, / Alone can make thee whole.” To encounter the cross in our own heart is to allow the cross as an element of the Spirit to crucify all of our actions, thoughts, and words that originate in our self so that the divine life can operate. Romans 8:13 indicates that a believer must put to death the practices of the body by cooperating with the Spirit’s application of the effectiveness of Christ’s death to terminate the practices of the body. We thus cooperate with the Spirit who indwells us to experience the cross in our own heart.

The chorus added by A. B. Simpson picks up the theme of taking the cross into our own heart. “O, Cross of Christ, I take thee / Into this heart of mine, / That I to my own self may die / And rise to thy life Divine.” To take the cross into our heart is to deny ourselves, take up our cross, and lose our soul-life (Matt. 16:24-26). Such an application of the cross touches the deepest part of our being in every detail of our daily life and ushers us into an intimate fellowship with God which issues in our becoming the same as He is in life, nature, expression, and purpose. The final two stanzas of the hymn explore the transformation resulting from experiencing the cross.

The profoundest line of poetry in this hymn is reached in the second stanza. Here we are challenged with the realization that whatever we set our heart upon determines how we will grow and develop in our Christian life and expression. “What e’er thou lovest, man, / That too become thou must; / God, if thou lovest God, / Dust, if thou lovest dust.” To many who are used to just the shallow teachings of Christianity, this declaration may disturb and perhaps offend. Can we really say that one who loves God *becomes* God? The Bible offers a glimpse of the monumental purpose of God for those who love Him. In 1 Corinthians 2:9 the apostle writes, “But as it is written, ‘Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard and which have not come up in man’s heart; things which God has prepared for

those who love Him.’” What God has prepared *for those who love Him* is beyond even the imagination of man. In Romans 8:28 we are told, “And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.” Hence, those who *love God* are those who are called according to His purpose. Verse 29 reveals this purpose: “Because those whom He foreknew, He also predestinated to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the Firstborn among many brothers.” Also, John declared that the heavenly Father has bestowed such love on us that we should be called children of God, and we are; furthermore, when He is manifested, we will be like Him (1 John 3:1-2). Based on what is revealed in the divine revelation, Athanasius made a statement which has become a maxim of orthodox theology: “He was made man that we might be made God.” Loving God is intrinsically related to our entrance into His purpose of becoming God in life and in nature, but not in the God-head. Through loving God, we become His expression.

The second half of the second stanza continues, “Go out, God will come in; / Die thou and let Him live; / Be not and He will be; / Wait and He’ll all things give.” In these lines, the cross in its essential operation in our human living is clearly depicted. Here is the fundamental impact of living in intimate fellowship with God under the working of the cross. The critical factor which limits God in the achievement of His purpose and frustrates Him in reaching His final goal is our self. The self stubbornly resists the spirit within the believer and alienates him from God. As we cultivate a loving relationship with our Lord, the self is exposed and deposed from the throne in our heart, and we progressively are made one with Him in everything. We “go out” by opening our entire being to Him; then He comes in. We die by allowing the cross to terminate our natural life, as expressed in our opinions, our likes and dislikes, and our interests. Hence, He lives.

The final stanza delineates more aspects of the pragmatic outworking of the believer’s loving relinquishment to his God portrayed in stanza 2. Love is the shortest route to bring us to our God. If we try to gain a place in the good pleasure of God through knowledge, we will find ourselves on a “roundabout,” going around in circles without progressing in life or experience. Finally, if we exercise to drive the world out of our affections, not clinging to our soul’s enjoyment of the pleasures of this age, our heart will be filled with the love of God, and we will partake of His holiness (cf. 1 John 2:15; James 4:4; 1 Pet. 1:7-9, 14-16). We must be desperate to develop a joyful, personal, and affectionate relationship with Him so that we may become Him in life and nature, and He may be expressed in us. In this process, we must learn to experience the work of the cross in our heart.

by Gary Kaiser