

Chapter 9: Life Outside Yourself

Seeking and finding

The second question does not only ask if you truly detest yourself, but also if you seek your life outside of yourself in Jesus Christ.

When this question was originally being worded at the Synod of Utrecht 1923, there was a discussion if it was actually correct to ask if we *seek* our life in Christ. The question was raised: shouldn't we rather profess to having *found* our life in Christ? Well, such a question would have been correctly asked if in this case "seeking" and "finding" were opposites.

But the synod at that time rightly perceived this antithesis and did not recognize the objection. It was said that in the word "seeking", certainty is definitely not excluded. This is also very clear from Scripture itself. When the author of Psalm 119 exclaims: "With my whole heart I seek you", he is not blindly groping in the dark, but his whole heart goes out to the Lord. After all, he adds in the same breath: "I have stored up your word in my heart". (Psalm 119:10,11)

With Jeremiah "seeking" and "finding" are one, when the prophet says to the people in the name of the Lord: "You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart." (Jeremiah 29:13) Here again it is the whole heart which goes out to the Lord.

And the Saviour himself told his disciples in the Sermon on the Mount, "seek, and you will find". (Matthew 7:7) Christ the Lord says this in connection with the certainty of the hearing of prayer. The heavenly Father will give what is good to those who pray for it.

He who seeks his salvation outside himself, in Jesus Christ, does not just have some vague inkling. No, he has the sure knowledge that his salvation does not lie within himself, but in Jesus Christ, his Saviour.

Exclusive

In professing that we seek our life outside ourselves in Jesus Christ, the only Saviour, we are being exclusive. The only Saviour: that excludes any other saviours, competitors, or saviour-aids. Thus spoke the LORD through the prophet Isaiah, "besides me there is no saviour." (Isaiah 43:11) Thus spoke Christ the Lord when he was on earth: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." (John 14:6) Thus he spoke through the apostle Peter: "And there is salvation in no one else, for

there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." (Acts 4:12) Thus he spoke through the apostle Paul: "For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus". (1 Timothy 2:5)

Other people called their gods saviours. Emperor Augustus even proclaimed himself a saviour when he ascended to the throne. He saved the world in the Pax Romana (Roman Peace) which he founded. He would provide for a happy Europe. He was also worshiped as a saviour. All the subjects of the great Roman empire had to confess that in his empire all salvation, all life and prosperity were due to the blessed rule of the emperor god incarnate. And the people regarded him as the exalted one. They saw in him the tyrant, the mighty one, the conqueror to whom divine honours were due.

But we are called to confess that we will not seek our lives in ourselves, and not in any other man, but in Jesus Christ alone, our only Saviour. Apart from him there is no salvation, no real prosperity. Yes, plenty of pseudo-prosperity, but not genuine prosperity, for Jesus Christ did not come to save the world from the grip of civil wars or the threat of barbarism, but he came to save it from sin. To be saved from sin is the real need of the world.

Consistency

However, if we seek our lives outside ourselves, we must be consistent and radical. If he is the Saviour in whom full salvation is to be found, then he saves us completely. Then he doesn't deliver only *souls* from the power of sin, but also *bodies*. Then he saves people of flesh and blood, in body and soul. For if you do expect something from Jesus for your "soul", but not for the body, and your temporal life depends on your own mental capacity, will power and muscular strength, then you deny the only Saviour Jesus.

When the Lord Christ is our only Saviour, then all human endeavour is excluded. There is nothing in our life which complements or even merits his grace. There is no possibility of cooperation. If we seek our salvation in people, in the church, or in our activities in the kingdom of God, then we reject our only Saviour Jesus.

We have not yet arrived!

If we see it that way, we must conclude: we have *not yet arrived!* The apostle Paul also confirms this, "Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own." (Philippians 3:12)

That is the tremendous thing: we *seek* our salvation outside ourselves, in Christ Jesus. We seek our whole *life* in him. By confession we acknowledge that we have not come close to perfection. As we confess that our whole life is saved by Jesus Christ, we confess at the same time that there is still so much in our life which lies outside the sphere of his grace. We confess that so much of our own will must still be eradicated from our lives.

There is a sinful lust still living in our hearts. And we see we do not glorify him in our lives. We still have habits which we have not conquered through the Spirit.

Oh, how much there is to be pruned away in our lives! The fruits in our lives will only ripen when we acknowledge that much pruning must be done, and much must be cut away.

He in us

In saying that we must seek our life *outside* our self in Jesus Christ, we also say that together with him we form one vine. The Saviour used the striking metaphor of the vine and the branches. "I am the true vine", says the Lord Christ. "I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing." (John 15:1,5)

We confess this also in the prayer before the celebration of the holy supper: "that we may not live in our sins, but Christ in us and we in him." How beautifully the same form explains what it means to seek our lives outside ourselves in Jesus Christ. We do not come to this supper to declare that we are perfect and righteous in ourselves. On the contrary, we seek our lives outside ourselves in Jesus Christ, and in doing so we acknowledge that we are dead in ourselves. We are *dead* in ourselves. But if we believe in our only Saviour Jesus Christ, then we may *live*. Or better, then we repeat after the apostle Paul: "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me." (Galatians 2:20)

The apostle himself was as it were removed from the centre of his life, and was no longer the axle around which his life with all its working and expression revolved. But the Lord Christ became the centre of his life, the Source from which life came to him, the power which controlled his life, the one who directed and motivated this whole life, internally and externally. He and his communion were his goal, out of him he thought and worked, with him he reckoned in everything, he regulated his

life to him. The Lord Christ was to him one and all in his whole life and work, and he measured all by him. (S. Greijdanus)

K. Deddens