

"THE MAN WHO GIVES ME THE MOST TROUBLE"

Text: John 3:30

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I do not hesitate to confess it. The man who gives me the most trouble is Arthur Rich. And I do not believe that I am a great exception. I believe that every person who is honest will admit that his greatest problem is himself.

Someone has said that we "live in an era of ego! Or to put it in simpler terms, all of us suffer from "I" trouble.

The French speak of a disease which they call "La Maladie du moi" or me-sickness". This, it seems to me is a universal malady. One of the deadliest diseases is to be concerned with self. Despite all the strides science has made, it has never offered a vaccine to combat this deadly ailment of too much concern with self.

This "raw ego" is best described by the words of Jeremiah: "The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked." Jeremiah 17:9.

Raw ego is the disease the entire world suffers from. The story is told of Abe Lincoln when he and his family lived in Springfield. A neighbor was drawn to the Lincoln home because of the crying of two Lincoln boys. "What is the matter?" he asked. Mr. Lincoln answered: "Just what is the matter with the whole world. I have 3 walnuts and each boy wants two." This is the spirit, which strives in our world.

Raw ego is the disease that infects the church. Dr. H. A. Ironside, tells of the small religious sect which possessed an exclusive temperament. They were holding a convention. Outside the auditorium, they were displaying the sign: "JESUS ONLY". A strong wind came along and blew off the first three letters of the sign, and for an embarrassing period of time, the religious group was announced by the large sign: "US ONLY". Too often this is a parable of the church.

Raw ego is the malady that makes miserable our homes. Back of every fight between a husband and wife is selfishness. Back of every spat, which reaches the door-slamming or dish-throwing stage, is selfishness. Back of every conflict that changes holy wedlock into "unholy deadlock" is selfishness.

Too many people expect "to live happily ever after" and at the same time remain "selfish ever after". They do not seem to realize that if we are selfish, are in conflict with others before marriage, and insist on having our own way, then no marriage can mysteriously and miraculously change us into happy persons.

Did you know that in a nation-wide poll by Dr. Gallup, four couples out of five readily admitted having scraps? Frankly, I am a little suspicious of the 20% who claimed they never had any disagreements. As Wayne Dehoney suggests, they may have short memories, like the husband who said: "We never had an argument in thirty years of married life. However, we have engaged in serious discussions which the neighbors heard a block away"

Back of most of the misunderstandings is some form of selfishness. I have never counseled with a family in marital trouble that I did not find that either one party or both parties had failed to grow up emotionally. Someone still wanted his own way.

Psychologist John Levy says, "Marriage, if it is to be successful and enduring, has one requirement. Two people shall be ready to sink themselves in the creation of a new unit bigger than either of them." There you have it. If we could realize that marriage is more important, bigger than self and self-centeredness, our homes would be heaven on earth instead of a little hell!

If raw ego is the disease that infects the world, the church, and the home, then unmistakably it is the thing that gives so much trouble to the individual. We are on the way to the cure when we can identify the malady. It is a wholesome sign when you and I say frankly and honestly: "The man who gives me most trouble is myself:" But the diagnosis must be followed by a desire to overcome the sickness of self. I must earnestly desire to overcome the sickness of self. I must earnestly desire to overcome the man who gives me the most trouble: This I must do for three reasons:

1-That I might have the right relationship to Christ.

2-That I might have the right relationship to self.

3-That I might have the right relationship to others.

I. I WANT TO OVERCOME THE MAN WHO GIVES ME THE MOST TROUBLE BECAUSE I WANT TO HAVE THE RIGHT Relationship TO CHRIST.

Immediately, there comes to my mind the Biblical account of the relationship between John the Baptist and Christ. John the Baptist was the forerunner for our Lord. He was the great introducer of the Master. At first, John the Baptist enjoyed popularity. Great crowds came to hear this unusual, and dynamic man who came with great mystery from the desert. Many decided to be disciples of John the Baptist. Then came the real test, when the one he was announcing came upon the scene. The Son of God began to gather the crowds around himself. Many of the followers of John began to leave him and to follow Christ. Finally, some of the people were so unkind as to say: "John, the crowds have turned from you to Christ. You are a has-been."

John the Baptist gives us a glorious example of how a man has to overcome himself, if he is to have the right relationship to Christ. He reveals a total lack of envy and resentment. He completely forgets himself. He demonstrates a spirit of generosity and selfishness. As the INTERPRETER'S BIBLE describes his reply: "Did I not tell you that this is what I wanted and that it was for this I have been working. Each of us can use only what God has given him. For any good we do comes not of ourselves, but is God working in and through us. To me he gave the privilege of being the bridegroom's friend, who makes arrangements for the wedding, and sees it through; but that done, he steps back into obscurity again, with no feeling in his heart but happiness in his friend's happiness. All this that is happening is right, and fitting, and as it ought to be. He must increase but I must decrease. And I exult that my preliminary work has made it possible for him to come, that he has come, and that increasingly I am being forgotten and he being accepted."

"I must decrease" is the only determination that can bring about a right relationship with Christ. The entire aim of Christianity is "to abase the sinner and exalt the Savior. The more we realize our sinfulness, the more we realize His sufficiency.

Why must I decrease? I am subject to the law of decay and death. I am only a sinner saved by grace. I enjoy only what I receive as the gift of God. My authority and my influence, compared to Christ, are pitiful and partial. Why must He increase? Because He is the Son of God, heir of all things. Because he has the power to overcome every enemy. I can't even overcome myself! He must increase because the world was made by him and for him. He must increase because even his increase was prophesied: "Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end. Isaiah 9: 7.

II. I MUST OVERCOME THE MAN WHO GIVES ME THE MOST TROUBLE, BECAUSE I WANT TO HAVE THE RIGHT Relationship WITH SELF

I have within me a carnal self, an earthly relationship which still retains much of its power even when I become a Christian. This self-life is the ground and root of all my sin. I have discovered that the assertion of the "I SELF" is the perpetual tendency of the flesh.

The biggest problem in your life and mine is that we love self. Will Rogers used to say: "I'll always like to hear a man talk about himself because I never hear anything but good!"

I will never overcome the man who gives me the most trouble until I realize that the nature with which I was born- my human nature, my selfish nature, will still continue on in my life even after God has implanted a new nature from above. The old nature will never yield in obedience to God. Even Paul had to admit: "Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, NEITHER INDEED CAN BE". Rom. 8: 7.

Jeremiah was also right when he said: "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?" (Jeremiah 17:9). Now Jeremiah is not talking about the new nature, which comes into a man's life at the time of the new birth. He is describing the natural self, the old nature of self, with which we came into the world in a natural birth!

This self-life will frustrate Christ. In Galatians 2:21, Paul wrote: "I do not frustrate the grace of God." But he didn't say that until after he said: "I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me," Until the self-life begins to undergo crucifixion, it will always frustrate Christ. Jesus will always be frustrated in my life when self gets in the way. Self in my life will set up barriers, prejudice barriers, disobedience barriers.

Christ cannot really get through to me in the presence of such frustration of self. His words cannot truly reach my soul. In such a life with self-imposed barriers to the will of God, there is frustration instead of fulfillment, confusion instead of calmness, tension instead of trust. How tragic it is to pay money to get words from a psychologist or a psychiatrist, but never let Jesus speak words of peace and power.

I see so much evidence of self even in Christians. I see Christians who will work if they get the credit. There is no limit to what we could do as Christians if no one cared who got the credit.

I heard Dr. Ben Haden say recently on a Radio Bible message: "I have heard as many as three different people claim to have led the same man to the Lord". Self can never enter into soul winning. It is only sinful selfishness that causes a man to seek to take all the credit for leading a certain individual to Christ. What difference does it make if you or a dozen people had a part in a man's conversion. What right have you to brag: "This person I led to the Lord. Look how much fruit I am bearing"!

Oh, that we could get some of the garbage out of our lives. We are hearing a lot about garbage strikes. Garbage accumulates on the street because there is no one to pick it up and haul it away. But we have a different situation with God. I say it reverently. God drives up to our hearts with a divine garbage truck. The Holy Spirit and His helpers say: "We have come to pick up your pride, your unbelief, your anger, your self-importance, your jealousy, your gossip, your evil desires." But we refuse to let Him haul away the garbage of self.

Please do not misunderstand me. I am not trying to say that we can ever reach a stage *of* sinlessness in this life. Allan Redpath tells of the time he was in a meeting in England. A young man came to him and said: "Hallelujah, I want you to know that 18 months ago I was sanctified, and now I am completely free from sin." Dr. Redpath replied: "My dear friend, you have gone further in 18 months than I have in 25 years. And, if I read my New Testament correctly, you have gone further in 18 months than Paul did in his entire lifetime. At the end *of* his life's story, Paul said: 'Lord, I am the chief of sinners.

III. I WANT TO OVERCOME THE MAN WHO GIVES ME THE MOST TROUBLE BECAUSE I WANT TO HAVE THE RIGHT RELATIONSHIP TO OTHERS.

Once at a railroad crossing I saw these words: "Safety First." These words may be good for a railroad crossing, but they are mighty bad for a human life. I wish that we might change one word and display in our lives: "SERVICE FIRST."

Some people just don't want to be disturbed. There is a suburb of Richmond, Virginia named Hampton Gardens. There was a lovely lady Mrs. William Smith Morton, who so anxious to have the St. Giles Presbyterian Church move to Hampton Gardens that she offered her lot and her house, worth \$100,000.00 to the St. Giles Presbyterian Church of Richmond. Other residents of Hampton Garden, however, put up a petition declaring they would not welcome a church because peace and quiet of the locality would be disturbed...and clustering of a large number of cars on Sunday would constitute traffic in convenience and hazard. To preserve their Sabbath selfishness, the Hampton Gardens Association voted, 51 to 7, against allowing St. Giles or any other church to build there: "

I still believe that service is a great answer to self. What is so important about service? Aristotle explains all our faulty tendencies by two things: Bad temper and ill-regulated desire. When you serve, voluntarily undertake work in obedience to the will of God, you correct these two things.

Service will correct temper. If you serve from your heart, you cannot continue to engage in self-assertion. It is absolutely impossible to hate the man that you are trying to serve. When you love people you cannot demonstrate the proud, temperamental self-assertion, which likes to make others feel small. Self-assertion usually becomes tyranny. If you are a tyrant in your office or in your home, you are so because of your pride and selfish temper.

Service will correct sinful desire. Self wants you to take the easy way. Why is it that some of you with ability are doing nothing to serve the Lord in and through your church? It will cost you effort and time! Slothful, self-pleasing soil is the soil in which sinful desire easily flourishes. Self causes you to think more of yourself than of God. Self causes you to worship created things instead of the creator. The answer is this: Make God the object of your desire. As you love God, you will love the souls' of men, you will express that love in service.

God has written the law of service in all nature. The clouds the sky are God's water carriers. The mountains perform a service. The Andes Mountains lift a great hand to stop the moisture of trade winds from the Atlantic, and send it back across the plains in life-giving streams. Not a drop of water leads a selfish life. There is not a breath of air without a mission. You weren't put on this earth for an ornament. You were put here to serve.

Dr. A. C. Gaebelei once noticed a sign in front of a small business, which provided dyeing service. The sign read:

**I LIVE TO DYE, I DYE TO LIVE
THE MORE I DYE, THE MORE I LIVE
THE MORE I LIVE, THE MORE I DYE.**

Why not read these words, using the word "DIE". As you read them aloud, you will discover a great spiritual truth. The more there is death to self, the more fully the Lord Jesus Christ is able to live His life in us. As Paul put it: "Reckon you also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord." (Romans 6:11). The more self dies, the more I truly live in Christ. Only in such a victory can I overcome the man who gives me the most trouble!