

Morbid Introspection

By Ginny Larsen

“An idol is anything which usurps the place of God in the hearts of His rational creatures.”

-Webster's 1828 Dictionary

We think of many things when we think of an idol. We think of statues made to be worshipped as gods. We think of things in our lives that perhaps we have too much affection for, or that we spend too much time on. We think of people that we hold in too high of a position in our lives, rather than God. But the surprising thing I had to learn in my own early walk with God was that my greatest idol, which had to go in order for God's Spirit to have His way in me, was my own religious, self-righteous flesh of “morbid introspection” – after all, the root of idolatry is “self.” I was given to morbid introspection. I thought it necessary, in fact, in order to live a holy life. I looked inward constantly to examine myself and was always finding things to “give up” that I thought would make me holier to God. I found something wrong with everything. I was continually miserable and never had assurance in my heart that I was ever pleasing to God, nor was there any joy in my salvation. How could there be? The more inward I looked, the more sin I saw. I began to think anything I enjoyed was an “idol” and God didn't want me to have it. The funny thing was, the more I gave up, the more those things preoccupied my mind and heart. They were not the idol that was usurping the place of God in my heart. My idol was my own introspection – my thinking that I could make myself clean and holy through it. I looked at myself as “holier than thou” because of things I was able to give up that others didn't.

Morbid introspection is nothing more than our flesh trying to improve itself, cleaning itself up to make itself righteous. I was always trying to “crucify” my own flesh instead of “*reckoning myself dead with Christ to sin and alive with Him*” (Romans 6:11). I was trying hard to do what God had already done! Of course my attention then was always on myself. It couldn't be on God, because I was preoccupied with improving myself, with making myself holy, with performing in a way I thought God expected me to, and with how I was doing. I sought to have more faith, but with eyes on myself, **my faith was only in my faith**, rather than in HIS faithfulness. I became an idol to myself. I looked to myself for what I should have looked to God for. Self-introspection usurped the place of the Holy Spirit in my heart. It limited me to “my own understanding” of my heart rather than God's understanding (Proverbs 3:5-7).

It is impossible for our sinful fleshly nature to improve itself or to keep itself (Romans 7:18). If this was possible, the law would have been sufficient. Even if we ask God to “help us,” He cannot help our flesh improve but will expose it, so that Christ in us will be revealed in His power. It is impossible for anything holy to come out of any action of my flesh, no matter how religious it appears. It is impossible for me to live up to the standard of God's righteousness which is absolutely perfect, not breaking one jot or tittle of the Law. If I am looking to myself, my introspection, or my works to do that, I have become an idol to myself. I have either lowered God's Law or put myself above it. It is not Christ helping us through our “faith” but **Christ in us** that is our hope of glory. Even our “faith” can be a work or striving of the flesh. In this case, our faith is in **our** faith, rather than **resting** in Christ and His finished work. It is the power of God and His indwelling presence alone that is our life, our righteousness, our salvation, and our rest. We are kept by THAT power of His finished work alone and THAT faith (1 Peter 1:5). We can't have true faith in the power of God to keep us unless we understand that power is from His finished work, resting in that alone, which is to the uttermost, complete, and forever. If

we don't understand that finished work, our faith is only in our own faith to keep ourselves.

*“For a married woman is bound by law to her husband while he lives, but if her husband dies she is released from the law of marriage. Accordingly, she will be called an **adulteress** if she lives with another man while her husband is alive. But if her husband dies, she is free from that law, and if she marries another man she is not an adulteress. Likewise, my brothers, you also have died to the law through the body of Christ, **so that you may belong to another**, to Him who has been raised from the dead, in order that we may bear fruit for God”* (Romans 7:2-4). When we live under a “law principle,” we are actually guilty of spiritual adultery, since we have been married to another. Dead to the law, we are married to Christ, and He alone now is our righteousness. We live under a new law—the law of “the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus.”

Living under constant introspection, trying to “die” to self, was only another way of living unto a “law principle” in myself—by my own righteousness, rather than living in complete trust in His righteousness alone in me to do all. The Lord so clearly convicted me of this and made me see that rather than looking to myself, I was to look to Him, not only as my righteousness but that I could trust **Him** to reveal *true* sin in my heart and cleanse me and keep me. I did not have to do that by always introspecting and giving up things. In fact, when I gave up the introspection, I was able finally to see things from God's perspective and that those things that I thought I had to give up in order to be more pure and holy were not important to God at all. They produced no righteousness in my heart, nor did they truly subdue the flesh (Colossians 2:20-23). In fact He began showing me things in my flesh I had no idea were there. Truly, the more I was introspective, the less I truly saw myself and my self-centeredness. Now, I began to truly see. We can't truly see ourselves by looking inward. The only way to examine myself is to come into His Light and look upward. As we come daily to God's Word, the mirror of our soul, presenting ourselves to Him, His Spirit pierces our hearts. We need not introspect, but we do need to let God inspect. He does that by His Word and His Spirit. He does the changing in our hearts by His Spirit indwelling us as we continue to learn of Him and abide in Him. His Word reveals the truth of our hearts. *“For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And no creature is hidden from His sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account”* (Hebrews 4:12-13). Therefore, *“search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!”* (Psalm 139:23-24)

It is only as we come before God, eyes on **Him**, and allow **Him** to search our hearts that we can see. In the Light of His holiness, we see our own “undone-ness” (Isaiah 6:5). It's only then, as we take His side against our flesh, agree with Him, and trust Him to enable us to walk in the righteousness of Christ that is now in us, that we are truly able to overcome and subdue, **by the Spirit**, the deeds of the flesh. First, we have to understand that we already have that righteousness if we are in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:21), and now we must “put it on” by faith - reliance or “reckoning” on it. We must let Christ live in and through us as our life. We can only “put on” what has already been given. *“For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. I **have been** crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me”* (Galatians 2:19-20).

I had no assurance in my heart before God when I was introspecting, but I always had a fear of condemnation and failure to “measure up.” Once I realized I did have assurance in the finished work of Christ and His righteousness, I was free to truly live in His love and for His

love, and that is what filled my heart. My mind was now on Him, not myself. My motives were led by His Spirit and His love in me, not a fear of judgment anymore, nor a fear of never being able to measure up and having to do more and more to be pleasing to Him. I found rest in His finished work. I wanted to please Him now more than anything because of my delight in Him and His wonderful salvation and grace! Once He was in the right place in my heart and mind, as my only righteousness, other things in my life had more pleasure in their rightful place. I was able to enjoy God's creation, because I saw His glory in it. I was able to enjoy the pleasures of life He gave, because it caused me to rejoice in Him and His love revealed in them and give Him glory for them (James 1:17). They were in their rightful place. No longer did they have a hold on my heart as though I needed them, nor were they idols in my heart, but they were instruments of God's glory. Morbid introspection causes us to deceive ourselves because we find loop-holes in our thinking to set up a law to follow, but making sure we give up something and hold on to something else. The flesh can never please God, because it is always trying to please itself, even while it tries to "crucify itself." *"For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God"* (Romans 8:5-8).

Paul, though he attained a level of righteousness according to the law that probably few others had, thought it nothing at all in comparison to gaining Christ. How much more should we consider our own "holiness" nothing but dung and rather have the true righteousness of Christ alone: *"But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For His sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith (not faith in my faith but trust in His faithfulness)—that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and may share His sufferings, becoming like Him in His death"* (Philippians 3:7-10). Though appearing to try to please God, religious flesh will always only please itself. Morbid introspection is religious flesh. It is self – usurping the place of the Holy Spirit in our lives and hearts and minds so that it can never please God. It must be brought to the cross and done away with, just as every other deed of the flesh, by God's Spirit.

Father, open our eyes to see our flesh, even our religious flesh, and enable us to be free of it, trusting in Your righteousness alone and Your life in us alone to be our life. Amen.