

Dead to Rights

By Sarah Halbert

In our world it seems counter-cultural to give up our rights. People fight tooth and nail for what they believe belongs to them. That, however, is not our call as Christians. God calls for us to die to our rights. When we are following Jesus, He has to become greater and I (the follower) am to become less (John 3:30). A true Jesus follower is dead to their rights.

Saying that I must put my rights to death sounds scary. And, truth be told, everything within me wants to fight against that. But when I remember who I am in Christ, that "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (Galatians 2:20), then my fears are assuaged. It is reassuring because as I lay down my life, Jesus is able to do infinitely more in me and through me than I could ever do through my rights which I cling to so tightly.

Jesus, Our Ultimate Example

Dying to my rights is also a lot less fear-inducing when I remember that Jesus is my ultimate example in this dead to rights living. Jesus taught and modeled this dead to rights lifestyle repeatedly to his disciples. An example of this is found in John 13:1-17. Take a couple minutes and read this passage. Most of us remember this about Jesus washing the disciples' feet and don't think much of it, but there is so much about dying to self that Jesus teaches us in this example from his life. First of all the timing is significant. This took place on the night of the Last Supper, so it is the very night that he knew he would be betrayed. When I know that I am spending time with friends for the last time in a while, like at the end of a semester, I want to spend that time relaxing and enjoying their company, doing something exciting that makes a fond memory. And I want us to do something that I want to do. I am selfish with my time with them. Jesus was not selfish in these last precious hours with his friends. He uses the time to serve them practically, and also to share Kingdom truth with them.

Not only did Jesus die in his right to spend his last hours before death doing something fun and exciting with his friends, he dies to his pride and serves them. Servants were the ones who washed people's feet. Jesus was not a servant. I know that I do not like to do jobs that I deem degrading to me or less than me, even if God is prompting me to do it, so I complain and grumble through the task, even if it isn't difficult or dirty. But not Jesus, he volunteers for it; no one asked Him or made Him. He did it without complaint, out of love (John 13:1). Jesus washed the disciples' feet out of love. That is a strong love and a lot of dead pride! It is hard for me to be willing to humble myself enough to let love lead me to an action like that. I have experienced that kind of love though. My friends cleaned out my refrigerator after I had been out of town for the majority of a three week period, something that I had put off. Not only did they clean it out, but they washed all my dishes, and made me dinner! That is the kind of love Jesus was modeling.

Beyond being dead to his right to spend his time how he wanted and his right to be served, Jesus was also dead to his comfort. Everyone's feet in the room would have been filthy. There weren't cars, so the disciples would have walked for miles a day in dirt, dust, mud, and everything else you can imagine that would have been thrown out on the ground in the first century Middle East. Remember animals would have also been frequenters of these roads. If you have ever been to Amish Country or even a farm you know what that means would also be everywhere and the stink that accompanies it. And there weren't tennis shoes either, so you can imagine what their feet looked and smelled like. Nor were there toe nail clippers. Yet Jesus, the King of Kings, still bent down, washed their feet, and even dried them! Now, I find it hard to

believe that this foot washing act was comfortable for Jesus. He could smell and see just like us, and I grimace just thinking about it. But to Jesus, his right to comfort was dead. When he was done, he told the disciples, "Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him." (John 13:16) Now, if Jesus lived dead to his rights, shouldn't we?

For the Sake of Those Yet to Meet Jesus

One area of our lives where the death of our own rights should be most evident is in our responsibility to share the gospel. We get so caught up in our fears about what people think and whether or not they will even listen that we let those fears overwhelm our faith. We must die to this right to fear in all the shapes and forms it creeps into our lives. "For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind." (1 Timothy 1:7) There are some rights we need to die to because of our responsibility to others.

First, my friends who don't know Jesus have a need for a savior that is greater than my need to be comfortable. Jesus abandoned the comfortable when he washed the disciples' feet, not to mention when he died on the cross for us. Even during His ministry, Jesus traveled regularly. That would not be a comfortable way to live! We are to follow Jesus' example and His is an example of loving God and others so much that His personal comfort was of no concern. Does this mean that we are all supposed to live our lives as traveling evangelists? No, probably not. But we are all called to make disciples and that requires stepping out of our comfort zones, having conversations, and putting ourselves in situations that initially may be difficult. In order to live this life we must depend on Jesus more and more. John the Baptist said it this way: "He must become greater; I must become less" (John 3:30). Following Jesus and loving others the way he did must become greater than us and our comfort.

Another truth about our responsibility to others is that sitting back and doing nothing is not an option. If you had the cure for a disease would you hold on to it? Certainly not! You would make sure the people who needed it received it. As a Christian, you know the truth the people around you are so desperately searching for in relationships, money, careers, success, material things, and false religions. You no longer live for yourself, those days are over for you. Now Jesus lives in you (Galatians 2:20) The people around you need to see and hear that. Your apathy is not an option. You cannot sit around thinking someone else will share this ultimate truth with your friends and family. If you do not share Jesus with them you are selfishly holding on to the antidote for the disease of sin, which will ultimately lead to death. Once you meet Jesus, you have to die to your right to an apathetic life. We are told in James 4:17 that, "If anyone, then, knows the good they ought to do and doesn't do it, it is sin for them."

For the Sake of My Brothers and Sisters

This death to my rights should not only positively affect those around me who have yet to meet Jesus, but should also be displayed within the community of believers. Paul told us in Philippians 2:3-5, "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus." He was talking to Christians here in regards to their relationships with one another. We are to live dead to our personal rights within the body of Christ, always considering how we can build up and encourage one another.

We can't look at the body of believers asking "What can they do for me?" Instead we need to ask what we can do to best serve our brothers and sisters. We need to die to our desire to be self-serving rather than serving others. Jesus was willing to wash nasty man feet, but how low is

my prideful heart willing to stoop to serve my brothers and sisters? Am I willing to pick up trash, drive someone to Wal-Mart, or any other task that might not be convenient or fun for me so that I might serve my brothers and sisters well? Have I died to my right to be the one served so that I can serve? John 15:13 say, "Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends." Jesus literally laid down his life for us and yes, some of us may literally lay down our lives for the sake of the gospel as well, but we are all called to lay down our right to be served so that we can best serve the body of Christ.

Another right we must die to for the good of the body is our need to always have things our way. We are not consumer Christians. Thursday Night Worship, your Life Group, and even your Resource Group are not solely about you. They are to mutually benefit and serve many. So if your favorite worship song isn't played on Thursday night, why don't you ask God to reveal a truth about himself through the songs that are played. If the message is about a truth you feel you've already grasped why don't you pray that God would open hearts so that others can walk in the freedom you've already found? If your Life Group is about a topic you don't feel applies to you why don't you supply answers that will help everyone else join in conversation? We can either live thinking we have the right for everything to be applicable to our lives right now, or we can die to that right and realize that sometimes we need to get over ourselves and minister to others instead.

We must remember that everything we think, feel, and act upon must be tested on the truth of scripture. Jesus's call is very clearly to make disciples. How did he do that? And how can we do that? By living dead to our rights.

Discussion Questions:

1. How are you actively making Jesus greater in your life and yourself less?
2. What is something that sticks out to you about Jesus' example of living dead? What about the way he lived dead to rights is so different from how we live today?
3. Where in your life do you need to die to your rights in order to make an eternal difference in the lives of not yet believers? How can you?
4. In what area do you need to start living dead to your rights for the building up of the body? How can you start doing this to bless your brothers and sisters in Christ?

Further Reading:

The LiveDEAD Journal