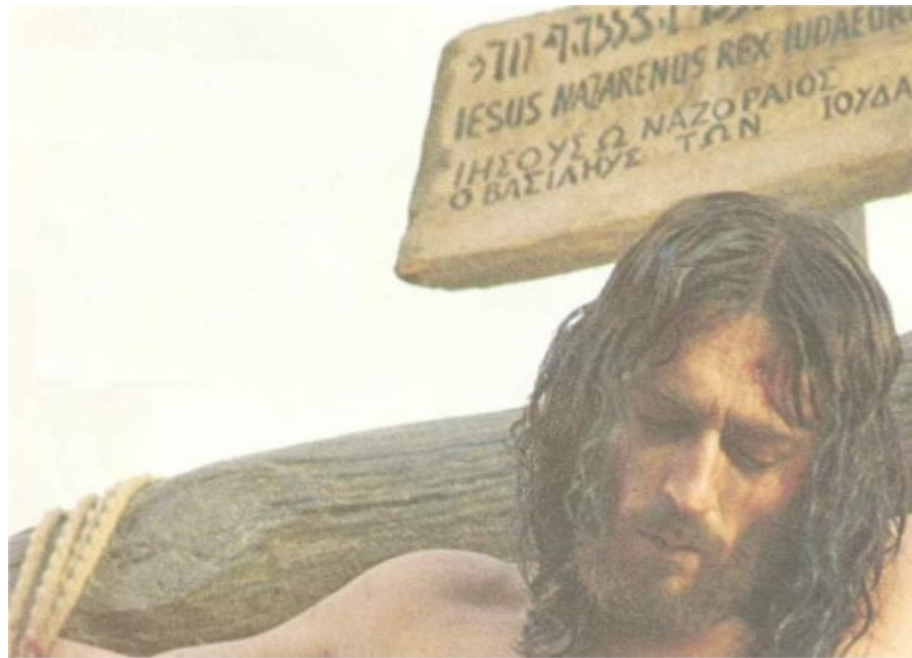


The Centrality of the Cross

By George Davis and Michael Clark

In spite of the pain, suffering and open shame of the cross it remains at the center of all God's dealings with men. The word of the cross was especially central to the redemptive purposes of God.

For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. (1 Corinthians 1:22-25, NKJV).



Today the message of the cross is no less disdained by men than it ever was. The societies of the west still seek after wisdom and Jews (the East) still require a sign. Both halves of the world have spawned many diverse religions, but they all have one thing in common--they have no place of honor or obedience to the working of the cross of Jesus Christ. Yet without it there is no unity or obedience to God and His Spirit. Men will seek scholastic wisdom in seminaries, they will give their bodies to be burned for a cause and even give great sums of money to charitable organizations. They will wax

eloquent about the death and resurrection of Jesus from their pulpits, but few will embrace their cross and follow Him.

All of creation reveals the secret of life. It can be seen in the smallest seed. A seed must die before it can live. Before a tree or any other living plant can germinate and grow a seed must fall into the ground and die. Before many seed bearing fruit trees can reproduce, they must go through a winter where they lie dormant. If you plant an apple tree in Florida where it does not normally freeze in the winter, it will produce wonderful foliage, but will remain fruitless.

This principle of death is reflected throughout creation as well as revealed on every page of the scriptures. It was out of "the deadness of Sarah's womb" that Isaac, the son of promise, came forth. Although God provided Abraham a sacrifice in the place of Isaac, He demanded in type that that seed should fall in the ground and die before it sprang forth and multiplied in number as the stars of the sky and the grains of sand by the sea. In figure, the sacrifice of his son, Isaac, was also a type of God's redemptive plan yet to unfold.

Yet again, Jonah was in the fish's belly for three day and nights. Jesus said this was a prophetic sign, "the sign of Jonah," foretelling His death and resurrection unto salvation. Jonah's obedience was the salvation of Nineveh as was Christ's that of the world.

As in nature, so it is in the kingdom of God. The way to life is through death. We see a vivid picture of this when Israel crossed the Jordan River to enter the land of promise. Joshua put twelve rocks in the middle of the River representing the twelve tribes of Israel. In a figure of baptism into death and resurrection life, they buried their stoney hearts and left the reproach of Egypt behind them to enter a new life. (See Romans 6:3-11 & Joshua 4:9.) In Hosea 6:2 we also see this principle of death overcome by life. "After two days will he revive us. On the third day he will raise us up, and we will live before him."

Nothing so vividly captures this principle as the cross. The cross was an instrument of death and shame. It was despised by the Jews, in whose law it was written, "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree . . ." Even the Romans who loved the brutality of the coliseum abhorred the gore of the cross. The Roman Cicero wrote, "Let the very name of the cross be far away not only from the body of a Roman citizen, but even from his

thoughts, his eyes, his ears." It was forbidden for Romans to be crucified for it was considered "the death of a slave" --a description that certainly fits the servanthood of Jesus Christ, whose whole life was in service to His Master, the Father.

In spite of the pain, suffering and open shame of the cross it remains at the center of all God's dealings with men. The word of the cross was especially central to the redemptive purposes of God. So much so that Paul wrote, "For the word (logos) of the cross is foolishness to those who are dying, but to us who are saved it is the power of God" (1 Corinthians 1:18). The King James Version reads, "For the preaching (logos) of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God." This is somewhat misleading for the Greek word logos is much broader in scope and meaning than the word preaching conveys. When you hear the word "preaching," what comes to mind? Do you envision a man standing behind a pulpit expounding on the written word, teaching about the cross? Although the Greek word logos means "a word," the emphasis is not upon the utterance itself, but upon the inward thought, reckoning or reason behind the utterance. The logos of the cross is the logic or reason of the cross. But more, logos is the Divine thought, the heavenly principle of life, power, witness and growth in the kingdom of God.

The prologue of John's gospel reads, "In the beginning there was the Word (logos). The Word (logos--not preaching) was with God, and the Word (logos) was God. He was with God in the beginning. All things were made by him, and nothing was made without him. In him there was life, and that life was the light of all people. The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overpowered it." (John 1:1-5, NCV) The translation of the New American Standard Version of our verse in first Corinthians comes the closest. "For the word of the cross is to those who are perishing foolishness, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God."

The author of Hebrews wrote, "In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world." (Hebrews 1:1-2, RSV) Jesus is the Logos, the Word or Divine thought. He is God's final and ultimate word! Jesus is God's summation, embodying the sum total of divine wisdom. He has been made unto us wisdom. He exemplified the logic of God, and as far as the cross is concerned, Christ's every word and action revealed its logic -- logic that defies human logic. It is a logic that defies death and hell itself, thus breaking the hold of

Satan's corrupted wisdom (Ezekiel 28:17) on mankind. It makes the grave the very door to victory. "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?" (1 Corinthians 15:55).

The Cross and Fruitfulness

In John 12:20-28, we read about certain Greeks who came to Philip, and asked him, saying, "Sir, we want to see Jesus." Philip told Andrew, and in turn, Andrew came with Philip, and they told Jesus. There is nothing in the record to indicate that these Greeks ever saw Jesus that day. Although it seems somewhat off the topic, Jesus' answer to the request of these Gentiles gives us a deeper understanding of the redemptive work of the cross. "The time has come for the Son of Man to be glorified" (vs 23). How did God glorify His Son? How would God make His Son, who was perfect and without sin, more glorious or excellent than He already was? And in what way does this relate to the inquiry of the Greeks, "We would see Jesus"?

Perhaps turning His eyes upon the ripening fields of wheat that were so commonly seen throughout Israel, Jesus went on to explain how the Gentile world would see Him. "Most assuredly I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains by itself alone. But if it dies, it bears much fruit. He who loves his life will lose it. He who hates his life in this world will keep it to eternal life" (Vs 24). The way to glory does not lead through the mountains of selfish ambition, distinguished acts in the field of battle or through the lofty peaks of noble rank and status, but through the valley of the shadow of death. There the noble, the wise, the brave, the weak and foolish alike must die the same death.

As in nature, unless the grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies it remains alone. So also is the path to life and fruitfulness, but more, it is the path through which Jesus is seen. Jesus knew that if he never went to the cross and died, He would remain alone and the Greeks, those sheep of another fold who so desired to see Him, never would. To see and know Him is to know Him fully as the wisdom of God not just as the man Jesus or "Son of Man." It is to know Him as the light and life of the world, "the true Light, which gives light to every man coming into the world."

It is not enough to know Him as the Son of Man after the flesh (2 Corinthians 5:1), knowing and believing in Him as some great historical figure, but we must see and know Him as the Son of God--the second Adam--the life-giving Spirit. Until Christ the

seed fell into the ground and died, the Gentile world would never see and know the glorified Christ!

How would the Gentile world see Christ? Not one of them knelt at the foot of the cross. There were no Greeks at the tomb, so how could they see the risen and glorified Lord except through those who followed Christ? This was the reason Christ turned His attention to the disciples and said to them, "follow me . . . it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven . . ." Did they know where He was leading them? Did they know that the cross waited at the end of the path in this life, as the doorway into the heavenly realm? Did they know that the path to glory led through the shameful death of the cross?

Jesus continues.

If anyone serves me, let him follow me. Where I am, there will my servant also be. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him. 'Now my soul is troubled. What shall I say? "Father, save me from this time?" But for this cause I came to this time. Father, glorify your name!

When Jesus said, "If anyone serves me, let him follow me," where was He leading? Where was He going? When He said, "Where I am, there will my servant also be," where would He be and where would His servants gather? The answer to all of these questions is, at the cross. The cross was central to Christ's mission here on earth. " . . . for this cause I came to this time." Jesus promised that the Father would honor them who gather where He is--at the cross--and serve Him there. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him. Jesus goes on to remove all doubt where this gathering place is. "Now my soul is troubled. What shall I say? 'Father, save me from this time?' But for this cause I came to this time. Father, glorify your name!" Then there came a voice out of the sky, saying, "I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again." (Vs 26-28) The glory that Christ was really concerned with was not His own, but the glory of the Father, and that glory is seen in the cross. The Father glorified His name in the obedient death of His son Jesus and He has and will glorify it again and again in the obedient death of His saints. Regarding this fruitfulness, Tertullian wrote, "The blood of the martyrs is seed."

Take up Your Cross and Follow Me

"When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die." --Dietrich Bonhoeffer (*The Cost of Discipleship*)

Toward the end of His ministry Jesus began to show his disciples that he would have to go to Jerusalem and suffer a great deal because of the elders, the high priests, and the scribes. Then he would be killed, but on the third day he would be raised (Matthew 16:21). In reaction to this revelation, Peter took the Lord aside and rebuked him, saying, "Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!" But Jesus turned around and said to Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men!" Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If anyone wants to follow me, he must deny himself, pick up his cross, and follow me continually. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it." (Vs 24-25).

It was not Peter who sought to dissuade Jesus from His mission. Jesus recognized this. It was Satan who sought to turn Christ from embracing the cross and save himself, desiring the things of men. Even when Jesus was hanging on the cross, Satan, through the religious rulers, mocked Him saying, "You who destroy the temple, and build it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross!" (Matthew 27:40)

Nothing can serve Satan's purposes better. O dear Christian, Satan comes to us, often through well-meaning Christians, like Peter and others, tempting us to avoid the unpleasantness of the cross and, in various ways, save ourselves. Remember Christ's words, "He who finds his life will lose it; and he who loses his life for my sake will find it" (Matthew 10:39).

"Save yourself!" Satan's message to man has never changed. He knows the nature that he placed in man with that forbidden tree. When he was dickering with God about the fate of Job he appealed to this innate nature in fallen man to save himself, "Skin for skin! Yes, all that a man has he will give for his life." It is this self-preservation of the natural man that is enmity against God and His kingdom. Today we seek to save our lives more than ever. We set out to find our lives in an identity and prosperity in the things of this world. We spend years building up our worldly careers. We put away vast sums to retire on. Many of us are insurance premium poor as we try to hedge against

any unforeseen disaster that might come upon us. This is neither the walk of faith in Christ and His kingdom nor is it embracing the cross. To us, like he did to back-slidden Peter, Jesus is saying once again, "Do you love me more than these?"

The One Thing Lacking

Now as He was going out on the road, one came running, knelt before Him, and asked Him, "Good Teacher, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?" So Jesus said to him, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God. "You know the commandments: 'Do not commit adultery,' 'Do not murder,' 'Do not steal,' 'Do not bear false witness,' 'Do not defraud,' 'Honor your father and your mother.'" And he answered and said to Him, "Teacher, all these things I have kept from my youth." Then Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, "One thing you lack: Go your way, sell whatever you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, take up the cross, and follow Me." (Mark 10:17-21, NKJV).

It is very easy to keep certain commandments and yet lack the one thing. We may not murder, commit adultery, steal, give false testimony, or defraud, but there is the one thing lacking in us, that fanatical act of selling all and following Christ. Do we abstain from all the religious taboos and yet lack that one radical thing, that single aggressive and reckless attitude of abandonment? Like the rich young ruler, do we brag of our religious abstinence while there is yet one thing lacking? Have we gone beyond the usual customs and institutions to a radical following of our Lord? Have we sold all? Have we denied ourselves? Have we taken that path that leads outside the camp of Christian mediocrity, bearing His reproach (Hebrews 13:13)? Have we taken up our cross? Have we gone out unto Him who bore our shame and sorrow? Have we truly followed?

As we look around Christendom with its garish multi-million dollar churches and temples surrounded by shiny new cars every Sunday morning, the answer is all too obvious. Today, the church has never had so much wealth, yet spent so little on the poor and needy and the furtherance of the gospel in foreign lands. Once it lived like the widow in the temple who gave her all to God, but now it stands there beating its breast like the self-righteous Pharisee, thanking God that it is not like one of these lowly ones.

Have we gone out, bearing our cross, to Golgotha, "The Place of a Skull"? Or are we at ease inside the camp, enjoying all the latest Christian fineries, far removed from its

gore? How can we call ourselves Disciples of Christ when it was He that said, "Whoever doesn't bear his own cross, and come after me, can't be my disciple"? (Luke 14:27) It doesn't get any clearer than this. Cross bearing is the prerequisite to discipleship.

The Path of the Christian is the Path of Christ

In Philippians chapter three Paul plainly sets forth the path, the goal and calling of every Christian. This chapter can be divided into six distinct parts or subheadings.

- (1) Denying self (Verses 1-9), e
- (2) Taking up the cross unto utter salvation (Verses 10-11),
- (3) Following Christ (Verses 12-14),
- (4) The cross and leadership (verses 15-17),
- (5) The Enemies of the Cross (Verses 18-19), and finally, e
- (6) The cross as the door to our true home and citizenship in Christ (Verses 20-21).

In this passage Christ's teaching about the cross can clearly be seen as the governing rule, first in the life and passion of the apostle Paul and then in the corporate body of Christ. Let us carefully look at these six parts, since this will help us to understand how the cross effects our daily Christian lives as the only means of knowing and serving Christ.

1. Denying Self

"Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you, to me indeed is not tiresome, but for you it is safe. Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of the false circumcision. For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh; though I myself might have confidence even in the flesh. If any other man thinks that he has confidence in the flesh, I yet more: circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the assembly; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, found blameless. However, what things were gain to me, these have I counted loss for Christ. Yes most assuredly, and I count all things to be loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus, my Lord, for whom I suffered the loss of all things, and count them nothing but refuse, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a

righteousness of my own, that which is of the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith . . ." (Philippians 3:1-9 WEB).

We usually repeat ourselves for the sake of emphasis, to stress the importance of a thing. In this instance, Paul is writing the same things that he had written before, things that were of such importance as to determine the safety or peril of the reader. So to write them again was not tiresome. This gives us a sense of their importance.

Using some rather strong language, Paul warned the Philippian believers to "Beware of the dogs or evil workers of the false circumcision." He then goes on to explain the true circumcision -- those who worship God in the Spirit, making it very clear that they have no confidence in the flesh. Paul proceeds to explain what he meant by confidence in the flesh, drawing from his history as a Pharisee. He listed those things that were gain to him, those things that were considered praiseworthy in the religion of his fathers. He had a sterling religious pedigree. He was circumcised on the eighth day. He was of the tribe of Benjamin, one of only two tribes that did not revolt with Jeroboam or pollute the worship of God with idolatry. This was considered quite an honor. Paul was of pure stock, a Hebrew born of Hebrews. Paul was a Pharisee and concerning the righteousness, which is in the law, he was without blame. All these things that were gain to Paul, that his fellow-Pharisees so admired about him, had to be counted as loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus. None of it held a candle to that glorious relationship he had with the living God. Alongside Christ these things were comparatively of no greater value than dung. Paul gladly denied himself these things that he might gain Christ.

2. Taking up the Cross

" . . . that I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, becoming conformed to his death; if by any means I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. (Philippians 3:10-11)

How may we know Him in the power of His resurrection? Paul gives us the answer, "the fellowship of His sufferings and conformity to His death." These two are prerequisites to attaining to the resurrection from the dead, both in the present quickening of God's Spirit in our daily lives and in the future resurrection. The Greek word for fellowship in the above passage is *koinonia*, which comes from the root word *koinonos*, meaning partnership or participation. We are called to a partnership and participation in the

ongoing sufferings of Christ. Not that we are called to seek suffering, but suffering will seek us out if we follow Christ. ". . . all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (2 Timothy 3:12). (Acts 14:22).

Elsewhere Paul said, "I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church." *That* is fellowship with Christ. So many want the power, but avoid Christ's sufferings in their lives. These will never know His power. They will never be able to say with Him, "The prince of this world has come and found nothing in me." Instead, SATAN has the power over these.

Now, what does it mean to become conformed to his death? The Greek word for conformed is *summorphizo* [4833v], "to make of like form with another person or thing, to render like" (sun, "with," morphe, "a form") . . . (W.E.Vine)

Our identification and partnership with Christ in His sufferings are necessary if we are to be joint-heirs With Him. (See Romans 8:17). We cannot be Christ-like without being like Him in His sufferings, conformed to His death. Everything is dependent upon our partnership with Christ in His sufferings. The consolation of Christ cannot abound in us unless the sufferings of Christ abound in us. (See 2 Corinthians 1:5, 7). Paul rejoiced in sufferings saying, " I complete what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church" (Colossians 1:24).

All Paul had to do was to compromise and start preaching circumcision and the offence of the cross would cease. The persecution would stop and he could return to the comfortable life of a Pharisee. ". . . if I still preach circumcision, why am I still persecuted? Then the stumbling-block of the cross has been removed." (Galatians 5:11). Would Paul save himself? No. Like the heroes of faith, he chose rather to suffer affliction than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season. (See Hebrews 11:25).

3. Following Christ

"Not that I have already obtained, or am already made perfect; but I press on, if it is so that I may take hold of that for which also I was taken hold of by Christ Jesus. Brothers, I don't regard myself as yet having taken hold, but one thing I do. Forgetting the things which are behind, and stretching forward to the things which are before, I

press on toward the goal for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."
(Philippians 3: 12-14)

Having shouldered his cross, Paul would now press on toward the goal for the prize of the high calling, following on to know the Lord. He refused the stiff-necked attitude that is so common in religious circles, claiming to have already attained, but instead acknowledged that he had not already obtained perfection and therefore must press on. "I don't regard myself as yet having taken hold . . ." One thing must happen before Paul could realize the prize he so earnestly desired. He must embrace that ONE THING lacking. He must assume that radical attitude of heart that turns the affections and leads to a forgetting of those things that are behind. "ONE THING I do," said Paul. Paul chose to forget those things that had entrenched him, which had kept him, like Samson, blind and tethered to the treadmill of Judaism, never progressing but going in circles, treading out the same routine every day, every week, every month and every year. Unless we forget we cannot press on. Unless we forget those things that are behind and stretch forward to the things that are before, we can never press on toward the goal for the prize of the high calling. Unless we deny ourselves and take up our cross, we cannot follow on.

4. The Cross and Leadership

Let us therefore, as many as are perfect, think this way. If in anything you think otherwise, God will also reveal that to you. Nevertheless, to the extent that we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule. Let us be of the same mind. Brothers, be imitators together of me, and note those who walk this way, even as you have us for an example. (Philippians 3:15-17)

True unity is found in all that are perfect having the same mind. Therefore Paul boldly states, "If you think anything differently, God will also reveal this to you." In other words, as Christians who have the mind of Christ because of the indwelling Spirit of God, there is only one correct way to think. All are to walk by "the same rule, being of the same mind" and that attitude of thought was distinctly set forth in the previous scriptures. Paul exhorted the Philippian believers to be fellow-imitators of him and to mark brothers who walk in this way, considering their example. What was that example? It was that of the Suffering Servant, even Christ who Paul followed. "Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the

likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." (Philippians 2:7-8)

We are to note those who walk this way. Only those who walk by this rule are following Christ. Only those who have this mind are leaders.

5. The Enemies of the Cross

"For many walk, of whom I told you often, and now tell you even weeping, as the enemies of the cross of Christ, whose end is destruction, whose god is the belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who think about earthly things. For our citizenship is in heaven, from where we also wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; who will change the body of our humiliation to be conformed to the body of his glory, according to the working by which he is able even to subject all things to himself." (Philippinas 3:18-19)

What makes someone the enemy of the cross? An enemy is someone or something that is hostile, hateful and poses a threat to someone or something else. Today in the visible church we have many enemies of the cross. They give lip service to Jesus as being the Son of God and Lord over all, yet they live and speak as if He were not. Notice the earmarks of the enemies of the cross mentioned above:

(a) "whose god is the belly. . .who mind earthly things." Have you ever asked yourselves why the majority of today's ministers are overweight? Jesus said that a man cannot serve two masters. He would love one and hate the other or serve one and deny the other. When there is such an emphasis from today's pulpits on getting more money from the people to build bigger churches, get bigger salaries and support bigger programs to bring in more people, to get more money, etc., it is obvious that the god of Mammon (worldly gain) is in control. The next time you watch one of these so called servants of Christ lecture the congregation about giving more money to his church, ask yourself one question, "Did Jesus do this? Did he ever ask people to whom He ministered to give money to His ministry?"

(b) "Whose glory is their shame." Have you ever noticed that along with this service of the god of Mammon, there is this open arrogance and pride displayed as these men lord over the people who submit unto them? They glory in what should be a shame, and the more they parade around in their righteous robes, the more their followers like it. The words of the prophet have come to pass, "An astonishing and horrible thing has been committed in the land: The prophets prophesy falsely, And the priests rule by

their [own] power; And My people love [to have it] so. But what will you do in the end? (Jeremiah 5:30-31). The more things change, the more they remain the same.

You cannot serve your belly, seek the things of this world and have a single eye on following Jesus. The cross strips you of all things in your heart that seek the things of this world order. To serve mammon and one's own self interests and to encourage others to do the same whether by word or example is to be an enemy of the cross.

The New Christian Hedonism -- A Cross-less Christianity

Hedonism is the doctrine that pleasure or happiness is the sole or chief good in life. Egoistic hedonism is defined as "the ethical theory that achieving one's own happiness is the proper goal of all conduct." We have already seen that the condition for discipleship is self-denial and cross bearing, so there can be no such thing as "Christian Hedonism." Either you are a hedonist or you are a Christian. You cannot be both. The term itself is an oxymoron, like "loving hatred," or "Christian atheism."

In spite of Christ's teachings and example of self-denial, what we have chosen to call "the new Christian Hedonism" Has emerged. You are invited to come to Jesus to receive happiness, wealth and power. Suffering is seen as evidence of unbelief and all that pertains to suffering and sacrifice is viewed as "negative" and therefore to be avoided. In such hedonistic churches the cross is nothing more than a symbol on the wall, an icon representing the unfortunate price that Christ paid to purchase our happiness. Few see its present ramifications, and even fewer take it up on follow on.

Pampered and spoiled by self-indulgence and denying itself none of the world's fineries, a Cross-less and powerless Christianity has risen to usurp the faith that was once delivered to the Saints. They live as though Jesus said, "Deny the cross and take up your desires and follow me." All who don't deny themselves, take up their crosses and follow Jesus are enemies of the cross. By their refusal to bear it they have become its foe.

The cross that George Bennard envisioned in his hymn, "The Old Rugged Cross" was not a gold-covered icon nor a shining symbol on the shields of knights and crusaders, but a rugged splintered " emblem of suffering and shame . . . stained with blood ". But more, he understood that it fell to every Christian to gladly bear its shame and reproach until at last he lays down the world's trophies.

6. The Cross, the Door to Our True Home in Christ--Eternal Life

For our citizenship is in heaven, from where we also wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; who will change the body of our humiliation to be conformed to the body of his glory, according to the working by which he is able even to subject all things to himself. (Philippians 3:20-21)

Once I (Michael) was accused by a pastor of being "so heavenly minded that I was no earthly good." When we start to live as if our kingdom was not of this world, we have often heard this phrase from the Christian elite, pulling us down back into a life focused on the things of this world. Paul wrote, "But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world" (Galatians 6:14, NKJV). The working of the cross severs us from this world order. Yes, you have a heart for the lost who are trapped in this world system and want to see them saved out of it, but remember that you are in the world without being OF the world. It is far easier to save a drowning man with a life ring and rope thrown from a boat on the raging sea, than it is to dive in the foaming brine and be pulled down by his thrashing struggle as he pushes you under to get his own head above water. Much of the church has become so "seeker friendly" and has become so earthly minded that it is no longer any *heavenly* good. Paul wrote,

For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your bondservants for Jesus' sake. For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us. (2 Corinthians 4:5-7, NKJV).

The eternal light shining forth from these clay vessels is the power for all true evangelism. Like Paul revealed to the Corinthian church,

"And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God." (1 Corinthians 2:1-5, NKJV).

If we are not a sample of heavenly things to come, the world has the right to reject our sermonizing. Our eye must always be single if we are to be lights to a dying world around us. Jesus promised that only as we abide in Him and He abides in us, only THEN, would we bring forth much heavenly fruit.

Note Paul's words again, ". . .our citizenship is in heaven, from where we also wait for a Savior." God's kingdom should be such a reality to us if the cross has done its work, that the "things of this world have grown strangely dim." Our citizenship is IN HEAVEN! We have become true strangers and pilgrims in a strange land here on earth. We should be living humble lives here in this body of our humiliation, not strutting around with our chests puffed out in pride over the things of this world. Our only hope should be in Jesus ". . .who will change the body of our humiliation to be conformed to the body of his glory, according to the working by which he is able even to subject all things to himself." What a precious hope!

In his second letter to the believers at Corinth, Paul said,

"Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal. For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven, if indeed, having been clothed, we shall not be found naked. For we who are in this tent groan, being burdened, not because we want to be unclothed, but further clothed, that mortality may be swallowed up by life. Now He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who also has given us the Spirit as a guarantee. So we are always confident, knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord. For we walk by faith, not by sight. We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord. Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him. (2 Corinthians 4:16-5:9, NKJV).

I, Michael, am now fifty-eight years old and I am watching my outward man perish as my body ages. If THIS life was my only hope I would be panicky by now seeing the

health of my youth melt away. But I have this hope within me -- I see my inward man being renewed in Christ day by day. From time to time I have experienced His glory abiding in me and have experienced what it means to go from Glory to Glory. Yes, we are going from death to death on this temporal plane, but we who are in Christ are also going from life to life. We are exchanging this temporal life that the whole world makes their focus for one that is eternal. Eternal life is NOW as we abide in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. It is a life source that gives us hope and strength regardless of what happens to our outward man.

As His Spirit finds a safe haven within us, we are caught-up unto Jesus in our inner man. Our whole being starts to take on a different look as the inward life starts to shine forth. Like Jesus, Moses and Steven, we have an opportunity to be so caught-up with the presence of the Lord and His Spirit that our faces can shine forth with a heavenly light.

One time, I was invited to a friend's house to meet a dear old saint named Norman Grubb. As I walked into the dining room there sat a little gray-headed old gentleman with the warmest smile I have ever seen. As I was introduced to him I sat down next to him and all I could do was just sit there and hold his hand. Words didn't cut it. If I were to speak it would only take away from the moment of being in the presence of the Lord in this wonderful saint of the Lord. Just seeing the presence of Jesus within him gave me hope.

Jesus said we have this hope within us, "When He appears, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is." Paul wrote,

Nevertheless when one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord. Therefore, since we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we do not lose heart. (2 Corinthians 3:16- 4:1, NKJV).

Could it be as the veil is taken off of our own eyes, we would see the result in the mirror? Could it be that instead of seeing the dying of our old outward man, we would behold the glory of the Lord? We are being transformed into His image from glory to glory.

For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified. What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? (Romans 8:29-31, NKJV).

It is the desire of the Father that we should be totally transformed into the image of His own Son. He is FOR US! His desires for us go so far beyond anything we can imagine. So let us not limit Him in our lives by the limitations of our earthly minds. Faith knows no boundaries.

But as it is written: 'Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, Nor have entered into the heart of man The things which God has prepared for those who love Him.' But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. (1 Corinthians 2:9-10, NKJV).

Paul prayed that we might all have spiritual eyes with which to see the boundless nature of our callings in Christ.

. . . that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power. (Ephesians 1:17-19, NKJV).

The only thing that limits the boundaries of God within us is our lack of faith. Jesus prayed that we might all be just as He and the Father and that we might know the same glory upon us as He prayed, "I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me." (John 17:24, NKJV).

Jesus prayed this just before He went to die on the cross, that where He was, there we might be also. What does that mean? As I, Michael, was praying about this article, the Lord showed me an old fashioned hourglass. He told me that the cross was not the goal but a means to the end. The cross is the constriction in the hourglass that only allows one grain of sand to pass at a time. It is like the eye of the needle the camel

must pass through if it is to enter the kingdom. It is that thing that strips away everything that is not fit for eternity. It is that "yonder wicket gate" that John Bunyon saw in his vision. The cross is the gate we must pass through if we are to go on with Christ and be where HE is. The cross is the beginning of all true life in the Spirit. It is the door into God's eternal kingdom. The cross may be the end of our lives that have been so bound to this world, but it is the beginning of true eternal life within the saints of God. The cross is our friend. Take up your cross, embrace it and and follow Him.