

Robert R. McLaughlin Bible Ministries

The TREE OF LIFE is a weekly teaching summary.

Tree of Life 08/02/98

The Doctrine of the Cross Part 4.

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Tree of Life for 08-09-98

We are still in our doctrine of the Cross throughout the Scriptures and have come to the 29th point, being Paul's teachings on the cross! The Lord Jesus Christ did not ask His disciples to forget what took place at the shameful, disgraceful, degrading place of Golgotha but to remember it well especially in light of the resurrection. There has never been a more dynamic victory accomplished than that of the cross! At the cross the head of that old serpent, the devil, was bruised, cf Gen 3:15. At the cross the rights and authority of man's greatest enemy was forever annulled. Through death, the Redeemer, Jesus Christ, destroyed him who had the power over death, the devil, Heb 2:14.

Paul was incredibly intense at that which he put his hand to and when he was involved with the Law he was 100% for it and therefore he persecuted and killed many Christians. And yet this man who murdered Christians would become, under the headship of TLJC, the master builder of the church! Paul knew that the power which knocked him to the ground on the road to Damascus was the glory of God and he also knew that the voice which spoke to him on that day was the voice of Jesus! Jesus identified Himself as God and Paul bowed in acknowledgement of this fact. Imagine how difficult it must

have been for Paul in that all which he was living for and all he fought for was a lie. The Law was not meant to be kept as a means of righteousness but was sent to magnify man's unrighteousness and man's need for a Savior. All that his life stood for came to a complete halt as he learned that the very One he had been persecuting (Jesus) was God!

Here, on the road to Damascus, Paul was now faced with reconciling the glorious revelation of the cross of Christ with the shame of having persecuted those who believed in the cross! On this day Paul entered into a totally new system of thought which centered around the cross of Christ. And he became very intimate with the work of the cross, the forgiveness and grace of the cross since he, the worse of all sinners, was forgiven much, Luk 7:47. The principle of A Fortiori tells us that if God could forgive a man called Saul of Tarsus who murdered Christians, He could forgive the lesser sinner, us, 1Ti 1:12-16. God's patience with those who are negative toward Him is exemplified in the life of Saul. At the exact time Saul was forgiven he harbored sheer hatred toward Christians only to find that after the awesome revelation of the cross of Christ that he too was now a Christian. What a turn of events! Because of the cross and the fact that another had born his guilt he was forgiven forever. The One who bore his guilt was the very one he previously hated. What a rude but sweet awakening. Paul quickly learned that in Christ he would forget what lies behind: the murdering of Christian men and women, and look to what lies ahead: becoming a winner believer, Phi 3:13!

Paul really grabbed onto and cherished the work of the cross. God's forgiveness and grace became the very core of his existence and the focal point of his rich teachings. His mind was opened to the cross and to the learning of the doctrines of Christ, 2Pe 3:15, even more so than any of the other apostles. It wasn't that Paul was special. Jesus Christ gave the other eleven apostles the opportunity to learn of and magnify the cross but Paul was the one who embraced it with all his life and all his energy. Think of Paul's joy in knowing he was justified by the Savior's work on the cross, Rom 5:8; 1Ti 1;15; Rom 8:1.

After Paul's conversion, he was not only still hated by Christians, and of course the other apostles who were still leery of him, he was now hated by the Jews. He had no associates in his corner, it was him and the Lord Jesus Christ. And this is where he received his truth from, directly from the Lord, Gal 1:11-12. After his conversion Paul spent the next three years in the Arabian desert. It was there he was taught the fantastic mystery doctrines of the church age from God the Holy Spirit, Gal 1:15-17. Paul was not taught by the other apostles, but from God Himself. Hence, the only apostle who did not directly walk with TLJC knew more about Him than all the other apostles. It would seem he also needed this time alone with God to admonish his shame at having persecuted Christians. In having been drenched in the doctrines of the cross, Paul came to embrace and fully appreciate God's grace in forgiving him, justifying him, reconciling him and freeing him from the bondage of the old sin nature.

Until we recognize the attitude of what the cross is all about, we will never begin to live the Christian life. And there is not a man you could learn more about the cross from than the apostle Paul. No one gloried more in the cross of Jesus Christ than the apostle Paul and he is the apostle given to the Gentiles; to the church. Gal 6:14. God used the number one enemy of the church to become the master builder of the church, there lies our great example of grace and forgiveness and the availability of the spiritual life if we really want it. 2Co 5:16 tells us we are to know no man according to the flesh but according to their new nature. During his desert sabbatical, Paul learned that it is the cross that meets absolutely every aspect of man's fallen state. Guilt will burden the soul unless the cross be apprehended. If you do not believe in what Jesus Christ did on the cross there is absolutely nothing you can do for salvation and nothing you can do about your fallen state. It is only through the cross of Christ that we are forgiven and declared perfectly righteous. What other religion offers the solution to sin?

Rom 5:1 "Therefore since we are justified, acquitted, declared righteous and given a right standing with God through faith,

let us grasp the fact that we have the peace of reconciliation to hold and to enjoy!" (Amplified Version)

As Peter tells us, to understand the work of the cross leaves one in a state of amazement and inexpressable happiness, 1Pe 1:8. It is by reason of the efficacy of the work of Christ on the cross that God can declare man perfectly righteous and free from all guilt. We who are in Christ are holy and victorious, do we live as such? Do we treat others as such? To comprehend this marvelous fact frees the believer from all guilt and condemnation and affords the believer the opportunity to execute the spiritual life. How God forgave and treated Paul is how He forgives all believers. Paul expounds on the principle of how God viewed mankind and what God did for us in Rom 3:10-18. There was none righteous but through the cross of Jesus Christ we are made right before God. We are reconciled not only to God but to man.

Through the grace of God by way of the cross of Christ, fallen man is offered salvation, forgiveness, eternal life, justification, reconciliation and freedom from the enslavement of the sin nature, Rom 6:1-3,6-7,11,14. The cross then is the ultimate revelation of God's love and the horrible manifestation of man's sin. And yet in Mat 21:38 we see man's answer to God's solution, "we will kill your Son." Paul explains that God cannot pass over man's wickedness where there exists such a profound antagonism between the righteousness of God and the unrighteousness of man. The Lord cannot pardon the sinner but He did find a way to offer salvation and forgiveness in accordance with His divine justice. This pardon can never be taken away by anyone, man nor angel! Because of the work on the cross a flaw can never be found in any believer in Christ, Rom 8:33-39. God has shut all up in disobedience so that He could show all mercy by way of the cross, Rom 11:32.

The cross is the ground of our reconciliation before the Father, Col 1:16-22. The cross does away with all problems man had with God and all problems man had with man. Man is no longer left to the destructive, God-defying part of his life. The cross frees mankind from the bondage of the sin nature. And the sin nature not only produces sin and guilt but also produces self righteousness and morality. Believer's in Christ

have the option of operating in the new power we have through the cross. The cross is for sinful man, those who understand their totally depravity before God and recognize their need for a Savior. Many Christians today are justified before God but are still in bondage to their sin nature, therefore they end up in either antinomianism (not living in that which you claim to believe) or they enter into some form of legalism (rules and regulations used to please God). In Rom 6:6-7 we have the phrase "Christ died for the sinner" but along with that we also need to note that "with Christ the believer also died". Anything done in the old nature is evil and completely unacceptable to God. It is only that done in the nature offered to us in Christ that is considered spiritual and acceptable by God. The cross is what breaks the backbone of that old monster, the old sin nature, and sets man free from its dominion. The cross is God's answer to man's struggles and bondage. The believer has been crucified to the old sin nature and now has the availability of spiritual victory in Christ. We can have victory over the world, the flesh, and the devil through our identification with Christ on the cross in His death and our death to the flesh and all it produces. But our identification must continue on to the resurrection of the new man in Christ, Eph 3:22-24; Col 3:10! Rom 8:8 informs us that we cannot please God with any system of SELF effort. On the cross not only were all sins paid for but the entire sin nature was stripped of its governing principle over the life of the believer as it was taken down into death with Christ.

We must rest on the accomplished fact that Christ not only dealt with sins on the cross but also with the sin nature. On the cross, Christ rejected all that the sin nature would produce and its govern over man's life. God is not interested in our old nature becoming good or being cleaned up, He is interested in us operating in our new nature supplied to us through the cross. When Jesus Christ came He terminated the legal system man was under (the Mosaic Law) and instituted the new system of GRACE. He came to fulfill the Law and then abolish it, Col 2:14. This is not to say that there is anything wrong with the Law, though there is definitely something wrong with us. Therefore we could never keep the

law. It was not given for man to keep but to expose man's need for a Savior.

The Lord Jesus Christ took what was against us and nailed it to the cross freeing us to marry/unite with another system... grace, Rom 7:1-4,8,14,21. Unless we learn to live in the new nature, it doesn't matter what we do, if it's a part of the old human/sin nature, it is evil! The Law or man's endeavors are impotent and powerless to do anything for us, Rom 8:3. The old sin nature is not even able to subject itself to the keeping of the Law, Rom 8:7. The Law was given to show us our illness, our need, hence to provoke a crisis requiring a cure. The Law then is our tutor which leads us to the cross of Christ. Satan loves to drive Christians back to Mount Sinai where the law was given. This can only lead to frustration with the so-called Christian life and lead believers to quit or fake it.

Another principle Paul taught is that the Church was born crucified. She was taken out of the wounded side of TLJC, the last Adam, just as Eve was taken out of the first Adam's ribs. This is why the church is called the bride of Christ. Unfortunately the church does not understand this intimate relationship. Hence the world looks at the church and sees her divisions and rivalries and shakes its head unconvinced that Christianity is the truth. The church has become an impotent witness of the cross of Christ. This is why Paul emphasizes that she was born crucified, and that apart from the cross she becomes impotent and filled with pride and rivalries, 1Co 12:12-27. Unity in the church can only exist when the cross is taken up among believers, 1Co 2:2; 2Co 5:16. There is but one remedy for that which even within the Church causes divisions and separations, that is, understanding the application of the cross to our relationships with one another. The only hope is in the church realizing she was not born Presbyterian, Methodist, Baptist, Congregational, nor any other denomination but was born crucified. Take the cross out of the Church and the spirit of the world takes over. Christ is no longer the head, the flesh works its subtle evils instead. It was at the cross that the Lord terminated the old creation which generates divisions, and strife, and jealousy, and pride.

In the power of the resurrection the new man, the new creation was brought into being, 2Co 5:15-18. The cross is the power of God. It has the power to change men's lives. At the cross nothing was withheld, the glory of God was revealed in its most complete, most exalted, maximum power. The cross of Christ freed us from the law of the flesh. The cross released us from the bondage of the old, dead nature and opened the way for our operating in the new nature of Christ and this is what Paul brings out to us again and again in his epistles.

In closing let us note the following principles:

- a) The believer has died to the Law, Gal 2:19.**
- b) The believer has received all the benefits from God the Holy Spirit by faith in the cross (not by works), Gal 3:1-5.**
- c) The law brings nothing but condemnation, Gal 3:10-14.**
- d) The law has no power to give life nor to sustain life, Gal 3:21.**
- e) The law is nothing but bondage for the believer, Gal 4:9.**
- f) Law and Grace are mutually exclusive and one or the other must be chosen, Gal 4:21-31.**
- g) The believer has an abiding freedom in Christ and therefore cannot be under the law, Gal 5:1.**
- h) The believer must keep all the law if he would attempt to keep part of it, Gal 5:24.**
- i) Persuasion to put the believer under the law is not from God, Gal 5:8.**
- j) The legalism of the believer does away with the offense of the cross, Gal 5:11.**
- k) The believer's proneness to sin calls for his dealing with grace, not dealing according to the law, Gal 6:1-5.**
- l) Anyone who advocates the law for the believer cannot even keep it themselves, and their intention is ultimately glory in the flesh, Gal 6:13.**

The believer in the cross of Christ must understand and appropriate what took place on the cross in order to be freed from the bondage of legalism. Otherwise, there is no spiritual life and that is what Paul is emphasizing. The work of Christ on the cross must be the focal point in our Christian walk!

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