

The Cross-Centerpiece of our Unity

What ideas, what emotions, what thoughts enter your mind when you hear the word of the cross? 5 letters that have as much importance, meaning, and significance as any in the alphabet. It is just not any word but is a word that history has its hinge on, looking back in time, and looking forward in time. In many minds, a piece of wood registers in one's mind, in some a piece of metal that one wears around one's neck, yet in others a piece of Styrofoam that marks a sacred place or a grave. People have worn it, people have gold plated it, people have burned it. People have done everything to the cross except to ignore it. It cannot be ignored. It is that which the Prince of Glory has died upon, it is that which the seed of the woman bruised the serpents head with, it is that which separates the old covenant with that of the new covenant. It is an emblem, a symbol, of suffering and shame. It is an instrument devised by wicked man to put other wicked men, criminals, transgressors to death upon. Take away the cross, and the Bible becomes a dark book, one that has no meaning, no purpose, no destination for one who reads it. Without the cross, the Bible would be like a heaven without a sun, a moon, and stars, like an arch without a keystone, like a compass without a needle, a clock without springs, a lamp without oil. Stephen Charnock states, "If our faith stops with Christ's life, and does not fasten upon His blood, it will not be justifying faith, His miracles which prepared the world for His doctrines, His holiness which fitted Himself for His sufferings, had been insufficient for us without the addition of the cross." In our Bibles, in the 4 Gospels, many items are not always brought to our attention in all 4 accounts, but one thing that all 4 gospels cover quite clearly and fully, and that one thing is the story of the cross. In Biblical times 2 pieces of rough timber fastened by nails and ropes, similarly, fastened the criminals in much the same way, a form of capital punishment carried out in the presence of many, a visible reminder of what would await anyone that committed a particular crime, a visible deterrent to keep evil out of society. Only the guilty of those who were a threat to peace, were commonly assigned this heinous punishment. These people were made an example of the penalty that awaited them if they were a threat to the peace in which they lived around. The cross is a symbol of cruelty, violence, pain, and more. The cross, an integral piece that the Prince of Glory died upon has an indelible image inscribed upon all who see it as One man giving His life up so that another might find it and live. As we will see today, some will see the cross as foolishness, non-sense, and absurdity, and some will find, great meaning, great help, and great hope because of it. This Man on the cross is the most significant act of hope in history, God becoming Man, He the only begotten Son of God, He the beloved Son of Mary, He the sin forgiving Son of man, has rescued us from the wrath of God and reconciled us to Him in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy, and blameless, and beyond reproach. (Col.1:22)

Read our text 1Cor.1:17-25

God's limitless love is never shown more vividly, more distinctly, and in more reality then on the cross. For John 3:16 states, "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have ever lasting life." And the Apostle Paul re-iterates it in 2Cor.9:15 as an indescribable gift, and in Eph.3:19, that God's love thru Jesus Christ surpasses knowledge, comprehension, and understanding, and in Phil.3:8, that the things of the world are loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ, and in Eph.2:7, that in the ages to come, it will take ages, God might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. Who is this Jesus Christ

that we refer to as the One nailed to this cross we are talking about today.

Christ means as you might know, anointed One, He is commissioned by God, equipped, qualified as virgin born, for the work of saving. Yes, saving from the wrath of God, to take away the enmity, or hatred we have of God, and reconcile us back to God the Father. Jesus quotes the Old Testament prophet Isaiah in Luke 4:18-19, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor, He has sent Me to proclaim release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed, and to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord."

1) Christ had an inclination, a desire to take care of the poor, even for our sake He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich. (2Cor.8-9)

2) Christ proclaimed release to the captives, He gave Himself to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds. (Titus 2:14) **Explain redeem.**

3) Recovery of sight to the blind, He could heal and make well again one who once saw, and those who never saw. (Mark 10, and John 9)

4) He sets free the oppressed and downtrodden by the truth He speaks, (John 8:31-32), "If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine, and you will know the truth and the truth will make you free."

5) The favorable year of the Lord, Jesus had come to liberate His people from sin, just as in the Year of Jubilee people were liberated from their debt, guilt, and crimes.

Jesus means Savior, He is an anointed Savior, a commissioned Savior. Math.1:21, "They call His name Jesus for (because) He will save His people from their sins." Only God can forgive sins, He is the most offended party, and Jesus is the fullness of Deity dwelling in bodily form, states Paul in Col.2:9. He is able to be touched with the feelings of our infirmities because He is man, Heb.4:15, and He is able to save to the uttermost because He is God, Heb.7:25, and He, the Son of Man came to seek and to save that which was lost, Luke 19:10.

1) Why do some not receive the life-giving benefits of the Cross? WE will start with a quick summary to begin. The reason for the Cross, the one Christ bled and died on, was to show man's utter depravity and the manifestation of God's infinite love to guilty man. God's righteousness demanded that sin is punished, and there it was punished. 1Pet.2:24, "He Himself (Jesus) bore our sins in His body on the Cross." Jesus appeased the wrath of God for our sins by showing His love for us by sending His Son to be a propitiation for our sins, 1John 4:10. He was indeed the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, John 1:29.

In verse 17 of 1Cor. Paul says, "he was sent to preach the gospel but not in cleverness of speech", that word speech is the same Greek word for word in our 18th verse, so that the Cross of Christ would not be made void. In other words, that the Cross would not be made of less value than if it came with great words of oratory beauty, words of great eloquence, words of great wisdom, that so many desired to

hear in that day. Paul shows that human wisdom and worldly reason have absolutely no place in the salvation of human souls. Isa.29:13 "People draw near with their words and honor Me with their lip service, but they remove their hearts from Me." Jesus repeated those very words in Math.15:8-9. Jer.9:23-24, "Let not a wise man boast in his wisdom... but let him who boasts boast of this, that he knows and understands Me, that I am the Lord who exercises lovingkindness, justice, and righteousness on earth, for I delight in these things, declares the Lord." 1Cor.2:8, "The wisdom which none of the rulers of this age has understood, for if they had understood it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory." Math.1:25 Jesus states, "I praise you Father, Lord of heaven and earth that You have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants." Paul determines to know nothing among us except Jesus Christ and Him crucified, 1Cor.2:2. It is his treasure, that which fills his heart, the center organ for all our affections, for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. If you talked with Paul about anything, these words would be ready on his lips to respond to you about the gospel. Worldly wisdom has no place in Christian salvation because the message of the Cross is a divine revelation. No verse proves this better than 1Cor.2:14, "A natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them because they are spiritually appraised." John Mac Arthur states, "Paul is contrasting man's word, which reflects man's wisdom, with God's word which reflects God's wisdom."

We notice two groups of people in our text, ones who are perishing, and ones who are being saved. There is a dividing line in humanity. Jesus mentions two groups of people similar to these in Math.7:13, of ones being on the broad way leading to destruction, and ones being on the narrow way that leads to life. To those who are perishing, this Cross is foolishness. The New Testament uses this Greek word for foolishness only 5 times, all of them in this epistle of 1Cor. It is the Greek word, "MORIA", in which the English word moron comes from. Simply meaning, foolish, stupid, irrational, absurd, good for nothing. The spiritual truth this reveals in our text can only be revealed to a man's mind by the Spirit of God. The natural man, in our prior state of unbelieving has our minds blinded so that we might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, .2Cor.2:4 Paul states, "For God, who said, Light shall shine out of darkness, is the One who has shown in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ." That is how we got saved.

Our verse talks of two actions, one of those who are perishing, one of those who are being saved. These both are in the perfect tense, simply showing they are both ongoing process that have begun in the past. The groups of people being talked about are continuing to perish or are continuing on being saved. We are either continually being delivered from the disease of self and sin, or we are continually becoming more selfish and sinful despite our self-effort. Where are you on this journey of life? We must be on the course of being saved! We can have a joy that will not be eclipsed when the Light continually shines in our hearts, that God is our everlasting, our all sufficient, our ever-present treasure for our hearts to bask in. Do not allow happiness to escape you in this life and hope in the next. Repeat.

II) Why do some receive the life-giving benefits of the Cross? Sovereign grace is shown in the Cross. Jesus will one day in the future judge the world in righteousness, He will either say, "You fool, your soul is required of you tonight, Luke 12:20, into outer darkness you will go, where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth, Math.22:13, and the smoke of your torment will rise up forever, and there will no rest

for you day or night, Rev.14:11. Or He will say My dear child, you are to dwell with Me today, your work is done. Enter into the joy of your Master, Mat 25. And in His presence, there will be fullness of joy and at His right hand pleasures forever more, Psa.16:11.

Those that are perishing, what does that look like compared to what it is set up and contrasted to in those who are being saved? To see what a particular word may mean, we can go to the same writer or others in the Bible to see what it can mean, or a Bible dictionary can be of help too. In the best known verse of all, it is mentioned in John 3:16. It is used 85 times in the New Testament and you may see the word translated in a number of ways, Math.10:28, Christ says we should fear Him who is able to DESTROY both soul and body in hell, in Luke 15:24, the word lost, in which the prodigal son, of which it is said, He was LOST and now is found. and in Luke 19:10 Jesus states that the Son of Man came to seek and save that which was LOST. The Greek word, APOLLUO, means something like being in a state of utter ruin, to destroy utterly, but not to cause one to cease to exist, to be an entire failure to be what God intends a man to be, it is a continual downward direction which no human has a power to stop. In other words, they do not fulfill the purpose for which they were created, mainly, to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. The word in 1Cor.1:18 shows it is ongoing-USE APPLE AS EXAMPLE. The natural man is on this path and there is nothing he can do about it. But God, Paul has a contrast-he mentions another group that are being saved. Surprisingly enough, Paul mentions these same two groups of people again in 2Cor.2:15, "For we are a fragrance of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing." How grateful can we be as Spirit born believers that we all not perish. We are being saved, being rescued, being removed from a great peril, from a great danger, from a great distress. Jesus came to save His people from their sins. Eph.2:5, we were dead in our transgressions, not a hint of spiritual life in us. Sinning and perishing are inextricably lumped together and without the forgiveness of sins, we shall surely perish. There are 3 tenses to this being saved. We see them in scripture. In Eph.2:8-9, we see the past tense, "For by grace are you saved through faith, in our text of 1Cor.1:18, we see a present on going tense, and in Rom.13:11, For now salvation is nearer to us than when we believed. We have been reconciled, and justified, but yet to be glorified. Many other verses confirm this as well. While perishing shows more and more interest in worldly things, being saved shows more and more interest in heavenly things. So, what would being saved look like? Since by the Cross we are set free by the One we have wronged by faith, what sort of people ought we to be? We will need to be diligent in continuing to increase our acquaintance with our Savior. Diligence makes faith fruitful. Growth in godliness requires diligence. Continuing in prayer, bible study, fellowship with the saints will go a long way. Have we any more of Christ's beauty in our character? Have we any more of Christ's truth in our minds? Have we any more of Christ's grace in our hearts? Then a year ago, then 5 years ago, then 10 years ago? Christians that just float get into grave peril, evidence of godliness is seen in our swimming progress. Our lack of progressing in Christ likeness may show that we are not on the way to heaven at all. The gospel is a Person to be welcomed, a truth to be believed, and a life to be lived. John Flavel said, "Though thy faith be weak, yet it is growing, if it be saving faith. The largest tree was once but a kernel, or acorn, The most famous believer, at first a weak and doubting one, be not discouraged therefore, God will fulfill all the good pleasure of His goodness in you, and the work of faith with power." The Christian life is not merely a set of doctrines to be accepted, it is a power to be experienced. A.W. Tozer on John 15:14, "You are My friends if you do what I command you." He stood at

the door of his church in Toronto after the sermon, greeting people as they left. A young man who he had never seen stopped by and said good morning Pastor! Tozer took hold of his hand and said, Are you a friend of Jesus? Somewhat taken a back, the young man replied, I consider myself a friend of Jesus. Tozer still hanging onto his hand said, Jesus said, "You are My friends if you do what I command you." Are you a friend of Jesus? The young man with drew his hand and slipped out." Which leads us to part three, the phrase, The power of God, and How do some receive the life-giving benefits of the Cross?

III) As we have seen, no one has the power to see anything else but foolishness in the word of the Cross. Only the Holy Spirit will give us the ability to not see foolishness in it that leads to perishing, but to see the power in it to save us from perishing. It is the power of God that we believe our minds must be renewed. Romans 8:6-7 shows that our minds cannot, left on their own. Paul states there, "For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God, for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so." There is bad news for each one of us unless we receive the good news, to see that which was of first importance to Paul in 1Cor.15:3-4, "For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the scriptures." Gospel is good news comment. That in which Paul points to in Rom.1:16, "For the gospel, the good news, the Cross of Christ, is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes." Paul uses this phrase "Power of God" 15 times, more than any other writer. It is twice in 2Cor.13:4, "For indeed He was crucified because of weakness, yet He lives because of the power of God. For we are also weak in Him, yet we will live with Him because of the power of God directed toward you." Charles Hodge states, "The power of God is manifested and exercised and therefore it is divinely efficacious." In other words, His call to you will draw you. God makes the call efficacious, and it always accomplishes what it commands. Lazarus is a good example. His call is experientially done through election, it is sovereign, it overcomes all our resistance. And He offers to us freely what He demands, namely His own righteousness. The power of the Cross offers to us daily, victory over the world, the flesh, and the devil. He strengthens us by His indwelling us, John 14:23 shows he makes His abode (dwelling place) with us. J.I. Packer states, "The saving power of the cross does not depend on faith being added to it, it's saving power is such that faith flows from it." Christ and the Cross bring deliverance from the guilt of sin in the past, it breaks the slavery of sin in our daily lives in the present, and it promises complete deliverance from the presence of sin in the future.

Paul does not jump from foolishness to its opposite, wisdom, but to power. He gets the people's minds off of wisdom and onto what is really important, and that is power. 1Cor.1:25, "The foolishness of God is wiser than man." The Greek word for power is DUNAMIS. We get our English word dynamite from it. The word is generally used by Paul of divine energy to accomplish something super naturally, which cannot be accomplished naturally. While the English word dynamite explodes and destroys, the biblical Greek word creates and establishes. And God's best evidence of this to refute worldly wisdom is a transformed life. And we believers are distinguished from those who see the word of the Cross as foolishness, by living a godly and holy life, because this is the design and the end of election. So, in our fallen world, and in our diverse times, a Cross displayed on public property will likely be decided in our courts but displaying the power of the Cross in our lives will be decided in our hearts. Can we excel still

more? Can we serve Him a bit more? Can we love Him a bit more and then follow all His commands? Eph.1:18-19,"I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will 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 surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. These are in accordance with the working of the strength of His might." Wow! What a prayer, good night! A great request, a great desire of the Apostle Paul for those within ear of his voice, and sight of his words. May we pray that we might have power to grasp the limitless dimensions of His love toward us, what is the breadth, the length, the height, and the depth, to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge.

LASTLY) A theological point of interest for believers and unbelievers. In John 6:37 Jesus says, "All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out." In short, if you come, He will have you and keep you. You could refer to this as a LITOTES- a figure of speech, meaning that you affirm something by denying it's opposite, that you deny something by affirming it's opposite. Jesus is doing just that. For example, "How did you do on the test?" and you say, "not too bad", meaning you did pretty good. Or "how was your flight?" you say, "not too rough", meaning pretty smooth. Jesus is saying, He will certainly not cast you out, meaning He will certainly keep you in. If we come to Him, He will certainly not throw us out. In verses 38-39 that follow, Jesus goes on to say," For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing but raise it up on the last day."

D.A. Carson states this, "It is no more possible for someone whom the Father has given to the Son, to fall away, than it is for the Son to fail to obey His Father. Indeed, that is exactly what it would take. For Jesus to lose someone whom the Father has given to the Son, Jesus would either have to refuse to obey His Father, or prove unable to obey His Father, both of which are unthinkable." If anyone told you that you can lose your salvation, you must have had a hand in getting it. But since you did not, but that it was you He predestined, that it was you whom He called, that it was you whom He justified, that it was you whom He glorified. If you are justified by Him, you cannot be unjustified, you have an absolute eternal security. There are no failures, no one comes up short, there are no dropouts. You have been given eternal life, and you will never perish, you will continually be being saved, and no one can snatch you out of His hand or His Father's hand. Because He and the Father are one.