

THE CROSS

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Luke 9:23-27

1. The first gospel message preached by Peter on the Day of Pentecost contained these words. Acts 2:22-24

22 "Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know — 23 this Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death. 24 "But God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power."

2. God used that message to save and radically transform the lives of 3000 people.

3. Those saved on that day could have testified to the truth of Paul's words written some time later to the Corinthians. 1 Cor 1:18

For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

4. The fact that lives were radically changed and redirected is clear to any honest reader of the record of the early church that is found in the book of Acts.

5. How then, if we are preaching the same message, do we explain the sad condition of that which calls itself the evangelical church in our day?

6. I think the problem is that the goal of our preaching is different, and since the goal of our preaching is different we have reinvented the cross.

7. Let me quote from a short essay by A. W. Tozer titled, "The Old Cross and the New."

"All unannounced and mostly undetected there has come in modern times a new cross into popular evangelical circles. It is like the old cross, but different: the likenesses are superficial; the differences fundamental.

From this new cross has sprung a new philosophy of the Christian life, and from that new philosophy has come a new evangelical technique—a new type of meeting and a new kind of preaching. **The new evangelism employs the same language as the old, but its content is not the same and its emphasis not as before.**

The old cross would have no association with the world. For Adam's proud flesh it meant the end of the journey. It carried into effect the sentence imposed by the law of Sinai. The new cross is not opposed to the human race; rather, it is a friendly pal and, if understood aright, it is the source of oceans of good clean fun and innocent enjoyment. It lets Adam live without interference. His life motivation is unchanged; he still lives for his own pleasure, only now he take delight in singing choruses and watching religious movies instead of singing bawdy songs and drinking hard liquor. The accent is still on enjoyment, through the fun is now on a higher plane morally if not intellectually.

The new cross encourages a new entirely different evangelistic approach. The evangelist does not demand abnegation (to give up, renounce) of the old life before a new life can be received. He preaches not contrasts but similarities. He seeks to key into public interest by showing that Christianity makes no unpleasant demands; rather, it offers the same thing the world does, only on a higher level. Whatever the sin-mad

world happens to be clamoring after at the moment is cleverly shown to be the very thing the gospel offers, only the religious product is better.

The new cross does not slay the sinner, it redirects him. It gears him into a cleaner and jollier way of living and saves his self-respect. To the self-assertive it says, "Come and assert yourself for Christ." To the egotist it says, "Come and do your boasting in the Lord." To the thrill seeker it says, "Come and enjoy the thrill of Christian fellowship." The Christian message is slanted in the direction of the current vogue in order to make it acceptable to the public.

The philosophy back of this kind of thing may be sincere but its sincerity does not save it from being false. It is false because it is blind. It misses completely the whole meaning of the cross." ("The Radical Cross" page 53-54)

8. So, what did Jesus mean when He said, "If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me?"

I. What did the cross mean to those who heard Jesus speak these words?

- A. They would have connected Jesus' words with the cross used by Rome to execute those who were sentence to death.
- B. Everyone who was forced to take up the Roman cross knew that his life was essentially over.
- C. A condemned man could resist, he could protest, he could refuse to cooperate, but in the end the cross was going to win.
- D. Short of a last minute stay of execution everyone who took up his cross died on that cross.

II. How does the cross Jesus spoke about differ from the Roman cross?

- A. The Roman cross was imposed upon its intended victim.
- B. Their actions and choices led to the cross, but they did not embrace their cross willingly.
- C. Jesus said, "If anyone wishes (or wills) to come after me."
- D. It is important to note that Jesus, unlike other Roman prisoners, did not have His cross imposed on Him.
 - 1. John 10:17-18
17 "For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life so that I may take it again. 18 "No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This commandment I received from My Father."
 - 2. Matt 26:52-54
52 Then Jesus said to him, "Put your sword back into its place; for all those who take up the sword shall perish by the sword. 53 "Or do you think that I cannot appeal to My Father, and He will at once put at My disposal more than twelve legions of angels? 54 "How then will the Scriptures be fulfilled, which say that it must happen this way?"
- E. If we would know the full reality of what it means to be a Christian we must willingly embrace our cross.

NOTE: There is a difference between our cross and God's discipline. God disciplines every child He receives whether we want to be disciplined or not. However, God does not impose our cross on us if we are not willing to take it up.

III. What must I do to take up my cross?

A. I must want to take up my cross for the same reason Jesus took up His-out of love for God and a desire to fulfill the Father's will.

B. I must deny (say no to) myself and every manifestation of self (the old man).

C. I must take up my cross daily and trust God to put me to death.

1. Rom 6:1-7

What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase? 2 May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it? 3 Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? 4 Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. 5 For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection, 6 knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; 7 for he who has died is freed from sin.

2. 1 Cor 15:31

31 I affirm, brethren, by the boasting in you which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily.

3. Gal 2:20-21

20 "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.

D. Until I take up my cross I will never fully follow Jesus because the old man will continue to oppose.

APPLICATION

1. The misguided brand of Christianity being preached and embraced today will never impact our world like first-century Christianity did.

2. Many of those who are earnestly praying for revival have no idea what true revival will lead to.

3. We are like those who, in Amos' day, anticipated the day of the Lord. Amos 5:18-24

18 Alas, you who are longing for the day of the LORD, For what purpose will the day of the LORD be to you? It will be darkness and not light; 19 As when a man flees from a lion And a bear meets him, Or goes home, leans his hand against the wall And a snake bites him. 20 Will not the day of the LORD be darkness instead of light, Even gloom with no brightness in it? 21 "I hate, I reject your festivals, Nor do I delight in your solemn assemblies. 22 "Even though you offer up to Me burnt offerings and your grain offerings, I will not accept them; And I will not even look at the peace offerings of your fatlings. 23 "Take away from Me the noise of your songs; I will not even listen to the sound of your harps. 24 "But let justice roll down like waters And righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

4. Do you have a God-given desire in your heart to be fully identified with Jesus regardless of what that means for you personally?

5. Will you say no to yourself and yes to your cross and by following Jesus allow Him to slay the old man?

6. May God restore the true expression of His church in our day, and may you and I be a part of that restored church.