
Scripture Class Studies

Lesson Three

THE WORD OF THE CROSS

The death of Christ on the cross is the basic truth of the evangel (1 Cor.15:3). It is the great corrective that will eventually lead to:

1. Repudiation of sin (Heb.9:26)
2. Inactivation of death (2 Tim.1:10)
3. Inactivation of Satan (Heb.2:14)
4. Justification of mankind (Rom.5:18)
5. Subjection of enemies (1 Cor.15:25)
6. Reconciliation of all (Col.1:20)
7. Vivification of all (1 Cor.15:22)

These are glorious accomplishments and goals, but in the meantime the cross has a meaning to us which is quite sobering. The phrase, "the word of the cross" (1 Cor.1:18), is not speaking directly of the historical fact of the cross, nor even of the great accomplishments of the cross, but rather of the *manner* of Christ's death. It speaks of the humiliation and shame.

THE HUMILIATION OF CHRIST

It was necessary for the sinless One to become the sin offering (2 Cor.5:21), to forsake the place of blessing for the place of the curse (Gal.3:14). He was:

1. Rebuked, reproached and reviled by enemies
2. Scoffed at by criminals
3. Betrayed by one of the twelve disciples
4. Denied by another, His most loyal supporter
5. Forsaken by God.

According to the law, the death meted out to a criminal was stoning (Lev.24:13-17). In the wilderness, a man gathering sticks on the sabbath was stoned (Num.15:32-36). When Achan coveted and stole a Babylonian garment and money, he and his sons, daughters and all his livestock were stoned to death (Josh.7:20-26). Even an innocent victim, such as Zechariah, the son of Jehoiada, was stoned (2 Chron. 24:20,21).

But Christ was killed in accord with a law of an alien nation, Rome, by its most hideous method. Its shame is great; its suffering horrible.

Yet it requires the shame and sufferings of the cross and the humiliation of the Son of God's love to bring creation into the glorious freedom of the children of God. Justification, too, is based on the blood, and there is no shedding of blood in stoning. Because He stooped so low, the universe will eventually be led into the joy of grace and the peace of reconciliation.

STUPIDITY TO THOSE PERISHING

The word of the cross involves the fellowship of His sufferings (Phil.3:10), which is stupidity to those who are perishing (1 Cor.1:18). The unbeliever considers it foolishness that to us "it is graciously granted, for Christ's sake, not only to be believing on Him, but to be suffering for His sake also" (Phil.1:29).

But more than this, the unbeliever can see no wisdom in the message "Christ crucified." How can victory come through shame? How can life come through death?

TO JEWS, A SNARE

All the promises to Israel were based on flesh. The covenant made with Abraham in Genesis 17:1-14 es-

tablishes this fact. Circumcision in flesh was the seal of the covenant, and whoever did not submit to this seal would be cut off from the people. They had broken the covenant.

On the other hand, the cross of Christ speaks of the end of the flesh, and this was a stumbling block to Israel. We of the body of Christ must reckon ourselves crucified together with Christ (Rom.6:6-11; Gal.2:20). With the flesh goes its boasting and its pretensions.

The Jews were told of the "word of the kingdom" (Matt.13:19) with all its millennial glories, but Paul proclaimed the word of the cross which gives no place for the flesh.

THE WISDOM AND POWER OF GOD

"The word of the cross . . . heralding Christ crucified . . . Christ, the power of God and the wisdom of God" (1 Cor.1:18,23,24), this is the message to us today. Paul, the apostle of the nations, brings this evangel, showing us its significance for the race of mankind. This *word* distinguishes between the old creation and the new creation (Rom.8:19-23; 2 Cor.5:17; Gal.6:15), and between the old humanity and the new humanity (Rom.6:6; Eph.2:15). It obliterates and discards all the features of the old creation, with all its divisions (such as Circumcision and Uncircumcision) and pride.

The old must be put away. It cannot be reformed; it must be put to death. Through the cross the old humanity was crucified, and the new humanity finds its foundations.

Some do not want to be "persecuted for the cross of Christ Jesus" (Gal.6:12), but faith seizes this message with joy, knowing that the new is far better than the old which was nailed to the cross.

CLASS PROJECTS

1. Provide scripture references for the five steps in the humiliation of Christ given at the beginning of this study.
2. Give possible reasons for Christ's death being by crucifixion rather than by stoning.
3. If man had God's power how would he go about saving the world? Map out a typical human strategy for betterment.
4. Look up the ten occurrences of the word "cross" in Paul's epistles. What special significance does Paul give to the term?
5. Discuss the differences between the "word of the kingdom" and the "word of the cross."

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