

The Message of the Cross

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"For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God" (1 Corinthians 1:18). "For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified" (1 Corinthians 2:2). "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).

The message of the cross is the foundation upon which everything else rests. It is the basis upon which God is building today. Without a clear revelation of what God did through Jesus Christ on the cross, our message will be faulty and our gospel will lack power. Paul said that he was persecuted for the message of the cross (Galatians 5:11). What is the message of the cross? Why was Paul persecuted for it? If we were to boast, as Paul did, would we "boast in the cross"? Can we say with Paul that "by the cross the world has been crucified to me and I to the world"? Does the cross hold a central place in our understanding and in our daily experience of God?

Our purpose here is to take a fresh look at the cross of Christ and what was accomplished there for us. It is our prayer that in doing so, inadequate concepts would be washed away and replaced with a true and expanding revelation of what God did at Calvary, that we, as Paul, may experience the power of God that comes from the message of the cross.

The Problem of Mankind

God always begins with the root of things, not surface matters. If the root is right, the leaves will grow green and the fruit will come. The cross deals with the root problem of mankind. What is that problem? It is that at the beginning, Adam sinned and led the whole human race into death. *"And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, 'Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die'" (Genesis 2:16-17).* The serpent told Eve that she would not die, but he deceived her. When Adam and Eve disobeyed God, they both died, as God said they would.

Since Adam and Eve lived on earth for hundreds of years after this event, how did they "die"? The use of the word "death" in the Bible is not limited to physical death of the body and does not necessarily mean non-existence. Before Adam and Eve disobeyed, God used to come every day to walk and talk with them. After they disobeyed, when God came to spend time with them, they found that their relationship had changed. Instead of welcoming Him, now they hid from Him in shame. Then they were put out of the garden (separated from God) and the process of physical death began in their bodies. They were now "dead" to God, and this death spread to the entire human race. *"Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned--" (Romans 5:12).*

Thus, every descendant of Adam is born in "spiritual death"--separated from God, without the fellowship and communion with God that He intended and desired. Separate from God and His grace, sin reigns supreme (Romans 5:21). The essence of sin is self-rule--"I am my own god and I will not have any other tell me what to do." In his state of sin and death, man walks by his own light, his own

reasoning, strength, and wisdom--all for his own purposes and desires. His desires and the influences of this world rule him. He is bound, unable to free himself. He cannot please God, and any attempt to be righteous is like "filthy rags" to God. He cannot lift himself out of this condition. He cannot give himself life to enter back into fellowship with God, any more than a dead man can rise from the grave by his own will. He needs someone to rescue him from this state of death. This is the gospel message: how God can bring a man, woman, or child back to life and into fellowship with Himself. This is the only solution, and it took the death of Jesus Christ to make it possible.

God's Answer: His Life

In the beginning, God did not tell Adam and Eve they could not partake of the tree of life. When they listened to the lies of the evil one and lost not only their relationship with God, they also lost their opportunity to eat of the tree of life. This left man on his own, living from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and the result is sin as we see it in the world today. The root of all sin is pride. It has many faces, but the root is always the same. "I want to be recognized. I want to be independent." "I don't want to have to depend on God, because that would make me look weak." "I don't want anyone (including God) to tell me what to do." "I want to be esteemed for who I am on my own merits." For God to be able to take a man or woman into heaven for all eternity, this disposition must be dealt with. If God allowed one person into heaven with an independent, self-seeking spirit, heaven would cease to be heaven.

God never intended for man to live separate from Him. We were created to live in union with Him, finding fulfillment in that relationship. *"For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist"* (Colossians 1:16-17). Man was created in the image of God with a capacity for choice and fellowship with God. But this fellowship can only be realized by the full provision of God: the Holy Spirit indwelling man and being the source of his life.

The world's condition, as we see it today in all its ugliness, is the result of men living separate from God. Although we may struggle to understand why, it had to be allowed. To deny men the choice to live separate from God would destroy the opportunity for true fellowship, because fellowship can only exist between those who desire and choose that relationship. Man's part is to freely give himself to God as a vessel through which the life of God can be revealed. God's part is to be the source of that life. The union of God and man is the glory of God's creation.

God was not taken by surprise by Adam's choice. He is Almighty God and He not only knew what would happen, but also what He would do about it. Calvary was not an afterthought--it was in the plan of God before the foundation of the world (1 Peter 1:20). Calvary was the way God chose to make a way for mankind to be righteous by partaking of His own life. In this way man can enter into true and lasting fellowship with God for all eternity. Since God always does things in perfection, we can conclude there was no other way for God to bring many sons to glory. The cross was God perfect answer to man's dilemma.

God's Plan in Calvary

How could God make dead men alive, so that God and man could again enjoy fellowship for all eternity? There was only one way. He had to give Himself to *be* man's life. He could not give out little portions of His life to save us, because God cannot be separated from His life any more than you can separate your own life from your body. Life is expressed in a body, and when the life departs, a man is dead. God's life is similar, but of a higher order. The only way we can partake of the life of God is to be united with God. This is why God gave Adam physical life, but could not give him spiritual life (His own life) in the same way. He could raise Lazarus from the physical grave by a command, but He could not raise him from spiritual death in the same way. Although we may never have considered these things in quite this way before, I believe it can help us to understand why Calvary is the foundation of God's plan.

How then could God become united with Adam? (We use "Adam" as the figurative name for the whole human race.) We were dead in sin, so the only way God could be united with Adam was to first be united with his condition of death. Then, by that union, He could raise Adam from the dead through the life God has in Himself. This is exactly what Jesus did! Jesus is God, and He first united with Adam's race by being born into a human body. He became as we are in every aspect except sin. *"Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. For indeed He does not give aid to angels, but He does give aid to the seed of Abraham. Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted"* (Hebrews 2:14-18).

Jesus, as the eternal Son of God, took on a human body and permanently identified with mankind, thus becoming the Son of Man. As Son of Man, He became like his brethren in all things, except that He was perfect and never sinned--and in reality He could not sin because He was God. Because His Father was God, He was not born in death as we are. He was the unique God-Man. He maintained a perfect relationship with His Father from the beginning to the very end of His life on earth. He was the perfect Lamb of God. He was perfected as our Savior, but not out of weakness and sin as we are. His "tempting" or testing was necessary, but only to reveal who He was. The devil thought he could cause Him to fall, but the devil himself was deceived to think that. *"Though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him..."* (Hebrews 5:8-9).

If Jesus was not born in sin and could not sin, how then could He be our Savior? How could He really understand our plight or meet our need? Until He underwent death at Calvary, He was not yet fully identified (united) with Adam, so He could not yet lift us out of death. It was at Calvary that His identification or union with mankind was completed. *"For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him"* (2 Corinthians 5:21). *"Now from the sixth hour until the ninth hour there was darkness over all the land. And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, 'Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?' that is, 'My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?'"* (Matthew 27:45-46). In the final hour of the cross, Jesus *became* sin for us and suffered the result of sin, which is *death*. His identification with Adam was now complete, as He took the whole of Adam's sin upon Himself. In that hour of total abandonment to the will of God, Jesus entrusted

Himself into the hands of His Father, who was able to raise Him out of the grave. *"And when Jesus had cried out with a loud voice, He said, 'Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit.' Having said this, He breathed His last"* (Luke 23:46).

Three days later, God raised Jesus triumphantly from the grave. *"Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death; whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that He should be held by it"* (Acts 2:23-24). When Jesus rose, He arose alone, but He would not be alone for long. In a few days a new family would begin to grow. Jesus arose as the Head of the new man, the "new Adam"--the Head of a new creation. God was beginning again in Christ, and this race would not fail, because it was based on God, His life, and His ability working within man.

After Jesus rose from the dead, He ascended to the Father and received the promise from the Father. *"This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses. Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear"* (Acts 2:32-33). On the day these words were spoken, the first group of 120 were raised up together with Christ in newness of life. They were baptized (filled) with the Holy Spirit (who is God) by Christ, and were thus united with Him in His resurrection. They were born of the Spirit into a *new life* in union with God. Old things passed away; now all things were new. What that first group of believers experienced is what every believer experiences when he comes to Jesus as Savior and Lord to receive life from above. Jesus takes us out of our death (separation from God) and brings us into His life (union with God). This is the glorious salvation that Jesus purchased for us at Calvary.

How We Enter Into the Provision of Calvary

Many things happened at Calvary. We can summarize some of them as follows:

Jesus paid the price of our redemption.

"But Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation. Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the most holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? And for this reason He is the Mediator of the new covenant, by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance" (Hebrews 9:11-15).

Jesus was perfected as our Savior.

"Though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him..." (Hebrews 5:8-9).

The law was done away with.

"Having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross" (Colossians 2:14).

Satan and his power over men were destroyed.

*"Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage" (Hebrews 2:14-15).
"Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it" (Colossians 2:15).*

The division between Jew and Gentile was broken down.

"For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity. And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near. For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father" (Ephesians 2:14-18).

The way into the presence of God was opened.

"This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the Presence behind the veil, where the forerunner has entered for us, even Jesus, having become High Priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek" (Hebrews 6:19-20).

The Holy Spirit was given for those who believe.

"But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified" (John 7:39).

All of this, and more, was done by God at Calvary. The foundation was laid for the kingdom of God in every generation. The question for us is this: How do we enter into all of the provision of Calvary? If Christ has finished the work, what is our part?

I think Paul's ministry to the Galatians gives us some good direction at this point. *"Is the law then against the promises of God? Certainly not! For if there had been a law given which could have given life, truly righteousness would have been by the law. But the Scripture has confined all under sin, that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe. But before faith came, we were kept under guard by the law, kept for the faith which would afterward be revealed. Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor. For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ" (Galatians 3:21-27).*

Paul says that faith has now come, and that we are sons of God through faith in Jesus. Someone has said that the currency in God's economy is faith. We experience the riches God has opened up to us by faith. The Galatians were ones who began well, but allowed themselves to be turned aside from the pathway of faith. In pointing them back to Christ, here was Paul's strong statement: *"O foolish*

Galatians! Who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified? This only I want to learn from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?-- Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh? Have you suffered so many things in vain--if indeed it was in vain? Therefore He who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you, does He do it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? just as Abraham 'believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.' Therefore know that only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham. And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, 'In you all the nations shall be blessed.' So then those who are of faith are blessed with believing Abraham" (Galatians 3:1-9).

Everything Christ provided at Calvary as the Savior of mankind is potentially available to every person. The death He died was for the whole race descended from Adam. But to experience all the reality of this provision, we must be personally united with Christ by the Holy Spirit. Christ died to sin once for all men (Romans 6:10), and the way we die to sin is to be baptized into His death (Romans 6:3). We cannot die to sin on our own. (If we could, Christ did not need to die.) Now, if by faith we have been united with Christ, then we also have risen with Him. *"Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection..."* (Romans 6:3-5).

As we mentioned earlier, the term "death" is used different ways in scripture. We are told that we were "dead in our trespasses and sins," and also that we are "baptized into His death," which enables us to walk in newness of life. These are obviously different kinds of death. What is the difference?

The hold that Satan had on men was death. *"Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage"* (Hebrews 2:14-15). Our death (existing condition at birth) is separation from God, and unless we are raised from this death in Christ, we can only look forward to the final judgment where we shall be found guilty--resulting in what scripture terms "the second death." At Calvary, Christ became one with Adam's race, even to the point of human death. But God raised Christ up again as victor, revealing that He is master over all, including death and the devil. When we are baptized into union with Christ, we are baptized into His death, but also into His life; thus, death no longer has dominion over us. To say this another way, when we are baptized into His death, we no longer face the "second death" which we deserve, but are delivered from our sentence of death into His resurrection life.

This spiritual baptism is our gateway into union with Christ and everything He provided for us at Calvary. It is entered into by faith, as we believe His word that comes to us. By faith we receive God's provision at Calvary and invite God to take what He rightfully owns--ourselves. This relationship has a beginning, but it also has a continuing, and the continuing is also by faith. It is a "faith relationship" or a "faith walk" in His life. In many ways, it is similar to a marriage. A marriage has a beginning day where the union is begun, a wonderful day with much rejoicing. But a marriage is not lived by the emotion or commitment of the wedding day, but by a love relationship that is worked out in the everyday details of life. So it is with Christ. We walk day by day in faith and love with God, drawing

on the grace that is ours because of the indwelling Christ.

Old Man--New Man

It may be helpful to look specifically at the terms "old man" and "new man" that Paul uses. They are unique to the writing of Paul, and I believe that a misunderstanding of these terms may hinder our walk in the life of God. Some translations substitute the term "sinful nature" for "old man," but this is an interpretation that can mislead our thinking. For our discussion, we will keep to the literal translation "old man" and "new man." I think it will help us to see more clearly what Paul is saying.

In Romans 5:12-20, Paul compares Adam and Christ, saying that Adam is a "type" of Christ, the new Adam who was to come. *"Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those who had not sinned according to the likeness of the transgression of Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come"* (Romans 5:14). He goes on to compare the differences between Adam and Christ, referring to them as "one man" and "one Man." He continues in chapter 6, referring to Adam as "our old man." *"Knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin"* (Romans 6:6). Notice that Paul uses another term here to refer to the race that descended from Adam, namely the "body of sin." The reference here is not to the physical body of one man, but rather to the whole "body" of Adam's race.

We find Paul using similar terminology in his letters to the Ephesians and the Colossians. *"That you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness"* (Ephesians 4:22-24). *"Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him, where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all"* (Colossians 3:9-11).

There is one more place Paul uses the terminology "new man," and that is to describe how God has made both Jew and Gentile "one new man" in Christ Jesus. *"For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity. And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near"* (Ephesians 2:14-17).

Thus, according to Paul, God looks at mankind through two men, namely Adam and Christ. *"And so it is written, 'The first man Adam became a living being.' The last Adam became a life-giving spirit"* (1 Corinthians 15:45). The race descended from Adam is spoken of as "one man," "the old man," "the body of sin," "the body of death," and "a living being." The race descended from Christ, on the other hand, is referred to as "one Man," "the new man," and a "life-giving spirit."

The significance of this to us is that we began *in* the old man and have been *transferred to* (or born into) the new man through the provision of God at Calvary. The old man was not in us--rather, we were in the old man. There are many today who think of the old man being inside them, warring against the new man. They have been taught that this war will never cease while we are here on earth, and that they have to live with it until they get to heaven where God will give them a new body. I do not believe

an honest reading of the scripture supports that view. This view leaves us in defeat and struggle, while Paul says that we are "more than conquerors" through Christ. We need not wait until heaven to be delivered from the old man. We are delivered when we are baptized into Christ with the Spirit. We are now *in the new man* who is created by God in true righteousness (Ephesians 4:24).

If we do experience conflict within, and it is not the "old man fighting with the new man," what is it? I believe there are several possibilities, and if we come before the Lord with an honest desire for the truth, He is faithful to show us where we are and give us a place to respond in faith, and to lift us up to victory.

The first possibility is that we have never been taken out of the old man and put into the new man. We may have come to Jesus in some manner, but we find ourselves in the place Paul once was: trying by his own efforts to do the will of God. We have good desires and intentions, but no power to obey. Paul describes this condition in Romans 7. Many today believe Romans 7 to be a description of the normal Christian life, but it is not. It is the normal struggle of a religious person trying to serve God by his own strength. Christ died to deliver us from this bondage! "*O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?*" (Romans 7:24) How will we be delivered? "*For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit*" (Romans 8:2-4).

A second possibility is that we have indeed been taken out of the old man and baptized into the new man, but we are trying to work out our relationship with God by self-effort and following rules, rather than drawing upon His grace in a faith relationship. This can produce the same bondage we just described. God has called us to walk by faith day by day, abiding in Him. If we have been made alive in Christ Jesus, the apostle Paul instructs us as follows: "*As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving. Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ. For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power*" (Colossians 2:6-10).

A third possibility is that we are interpreting the "war" within us wrongly. We all have human bodies that were exercised in sin before we came to Christ. Now we are being exercised in righteousness by the Holy Spirit. Change does not often come instantly or easily. It takes diligent obedience over a period of time to see our bodies brought under the control of the Spirit in all areas. Thus, Paul admonishes us to "put off the old man with his deeds" and "put on the new man who is renewed." To the Colossians he explains that since we *have* put off the old man and *have* put on the new man, we should not let the deeds of the old man manifest themselves, but instead put on the deeds of the new man. His basis of appeal for new conduct is that a believer is a new creation in Christ Jesus. The believer has a grace he did not have before, because of his standing in Christ Jesus. Paul admonished the Romans to "put to death the deeds of the body." We *can* obey Christ our Lord. A Christian *can* stop sinning. Not only *can* he stop sinning, but he *must* stop sinning if he wants to know fellowship with God (see 1 John 3:6-9). As we exercise our human natures in righteousness and obedience, the "war" will subside and we will find ourselves at peace with God and within ourselves.

I Have Been Crucified With Christ

"I have been crucified with Christ; 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 for me"

(Galatians 2:20). This was Paul's testimony. It should be our testimony also. What does it mean in practical terms? How does it work out in our lives?

When was Paul crucified with Christ? What does he mean by it? I think if we go back to the account of his conversion, we can gain some insight. Paul was a very zealous man. He said he was a "Pharisee of the Pharisees." He was whole-hearted, giving himself to what he believed was right. Then on the Damascus road he came face to face with Jesus Christ. God stopped him in his tracks and he fell to the ground. "Who are you, Lord?" Paul asked. "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting," was the reply. For three days after that, he was shut up to God. We do not know what transpired during those days, but perhaps we could say he was three days in his grave. He was blind, he had to be led by the hand, and everything he thought he was doing for God crumbled. In many ways, he was a dead man.

We have some insight into how God saw him by what God told Ananias. Ananias had misgivings about going to Paul because he knew what Paul had been doing. *"But the Lord said to him, 'Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake'"* (Acts 9:15-16). God knew what was taking place in Paul's heart and what He wanted to do through Paul. He sent Ananias to pray for him, that he might receive his sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit. Paul later said of himself that he was shown mercy because he had acted ignorantly in disbelief. When Ananias prayed for him, his eyes were opened and he rose up a new man, filled with the Holy Spirit.

So, when was Paul "crucified with Christ"? We are told clearly in scripture that the transaction for all of Adam's race was accomplished when Christ died at Calvary. *"For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us"* (Romans 5:6-8). In one sense, Paul was crucified with Christ as a member of Adam's race when Christ died on the cross. It was an accomplished fact because we were all in Adam and Christ bore all the sin of Adam's race at Calvary.

But for Paul to benefit from what Jesus did, he had to "receive the reconciliation" that was accomplished at Calvary. *"Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. And not only that, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation"* (Romans 5:9-11). When did that happen? Was it not at that time of prayer with Ananias? The old Saul died. When he received the Holy Spirit and the scales fell from his eyes, Paul became a new creation in Christ Jesus. Old things had passed away--behold, all things were now new. Jesus was now his Lord. He had now risen with Christ and was fully identified with Him. As he began his new life in Christ, he was going to fill up the sufferings of Christ in his earthly body. Jesus had ascended to heaven and poured out the Holy Spirit so that the ministry He began during His time on earth would continue through other vessels. Paul was one of those chosen ones.

If we consider Paul's testimony, I think we can learn something of how God deals with men. First, Paul had a desire to please God. We see that based on the testimony of his experience under the law in

Romans 7. However, his desire had been formed and misdirected by the religious environment he grew up in. God is bigger than all of that, and at the appointed time He moved to rescue him and set Paul's feet on the straight and narrow way. When Jesus revealed Himself, Saul said "Who are you, *Lord*?" Is this not our beginning place with God? Jesus must be Lord. He reveals Himself as Lord, and then we must freely bow and acknowledge Him as our Lord.

On the day of Pentecost, Peter stood up and proclaimed Jesus as Lord. "*Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ*" (Acts 2:36). Our place is to acknowledge Him as our Lord. On that day, we are crucified with Christ in experience as we fully identify with Him and His place as Lord of lords. We lay down our will, our right to ourselves, and our life. It is the door through which every person must pass if they choose Christ. But when we do, Jesus will not leave us in the grave, any more than His Father left Him in the grave. The Father raised Jesus up, and Jesus will also raise us up from the grave. He raises us up a new person--a new creation. We will then say with Paul, "Yet I live, but not I." It is now Christ living in me His resurrected life.

How is the new life lived out? Does my life continue as before? Or does God express His will through my life without my cooperation? I think we know better than that. The evidence of the indwelling God is a transformed life. It is lived out of an active faith relationship with God day by day and hour by hour. Paul said that "the life I now live, I live by faith in (of) the Son of God." I continue in the choice (transaction) that I made on the day when Christ became my Lord, and God is present by the Holy Spirit to give me the grace (ability) to live dead to this world and alive to the will of God. "*Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God calls Jesus accursed, and no one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit*" (1 Corinthians 12:3). The indwelling God makes me alive unto Him. In Adam I was dead, but now in Christ I am alive. I am a new creation in Christ Jesus (in union with Christ) and my whole purpose is now to express the new life that God has brought me into. I am part of the "new man" and my Head (Christ) will express His life through me as I submit and obey. This is our walk in His life.

Our Walk in His Life

"As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving" (Colossians 2:6-7). This is our calling: to walk in the power of His life by faith. As we do, we will be established in our love relationship with God, and at the same time reveal His life in this body of clay, so that others also may be drawn to Jesus. It is not just a one-time "Damascus road experience," but a continual walk in every circumstance of life. It is a continuation of the life of Jesus, now lived out through a multitude of vessels around the whole world. It is our privilege to participate with God in this high calling.

I believe we can relate this walk to the cross in the following way. The cross of Jesus Christ was full identification with Adam's race, so He could lift us out of death into His life. From the beginning to the end, He lived His earthly life with the cross in view. As He walked the dusty roads of Galilee and looked on the masses and their great needs, He knew that their real need was the life of God, and that could only come through the cross. The reason He came was always in His heart, and He never deviated from that goal. He needed to "go up to Jerusalem," even though He knew the cross awaited Him there. He had come to earth to do the will of God, and He considered nothing else. In a similar way, our cross is full identification with Jesus and His cross, that we may live with Him and be a vessel

through which He can continue His earthly ministry to others. We can take up our cross because He took up His cross. If Jesus had not taken up His cross, step by step, we could not live in Him today.

The physical cross of Jesus Christ is never to be repeated. It happened once in human history. Jesus looked forward to His cross because He knew the results that would come from it. We now look back to His cross to receive the provision that was made for us there, and as our example in our daily walk. When we take up *our* cross, it is our own beginning place in God. It signals death to our old life and a beginning in His life. As Jesus lived His life with the cross in view, He lived it as dead to His own will and alive to the will of His Father. As we take up our cross, we also live as dead to our will and alive to the will of God. He lived "dead to the world" and we are called to do the same. As we live His life, we will also be able to say with Paul, "*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).

Hindrances

When we consider these things, we sometimes have difficulty relating them to our own experiences. We might wish we'd had a Damascus road conversion that solved everything all at once, but maybe our story doesn't seem so simple. We know that we should be dead to this world, but in reality it seems we are very much alive to it. What should we do? What is the problem? In this short discussion we cannot cover every detail, but just mention some of the things that may hinder us. God is faithful and will meet us where we are if we have ears to hear.

To begin with, we may have never heard the true gospel. There are many gospels today which are not the true gospel. Some preachers do not preach the cross of Jesus Christ. They may name the name of Jesus, but instead of the message of the cross, they preach a gospel of prosperity in this life. They do not bid men to come and die, but to come and live the good life. They promise men that God wants to bless them in this life. This is not the gospel of Jesus Christ. It has no power to deliver men from sin. It promises men they can live in their sins and still go to heaven. It is a false gospel, and Paul said if any man preaches another gospel, he should be accursed.

Maybe we have heard the true gospel, but we have not yet come to the cross to die. We have struggled, wanting to do our own will but still wanting the blessing of Christ. Our life has been a conflict. We can relate very well to Paul's testimony in Romans 7. We want to do the will of God, but we lack the power to do it, and we find ourselves doing what we do not want to do. We find that sin reigns in our heart and we don't know how to get free. I believe this is the state of many today. There are many preachers ready to assure us that this experience is the normal Christian life and we should not worry. Many say, "God understands, and He will change it all between here and heaven." God does not "understand" us in this way. Jesus went to the cross to *deliver* us from sin, self-effort, and struggle, and if He paid the ultimate price for our deliverance, He expects us to avail ourselves of that provision. To experience the benefit of Calvary, we must come and pay our price. That price is to be crucified with Christ. He will raise us in power if we will come and die. Are we willing? God will not force us.

Perhaps at one point in our lives we came and laid all on the altar of sacrifice. We rose up as a new creation in Christ Jesus. It was a wonderful day, and we knew the blessing of His presence. But as time went on, the relationship started to grow cold. The world began to attract us again. What happened? I believe the answer is simple. God called us to walk by faith in this new life every day, but we thought everything would be automatic. We did not guard that love relationship and keep our eyes fixed on Jesus. We did not continue to obey Him as an expression of our love. We did not pursue fellowship and

encouragement from others of like mind. As we have already seen, it is a *walk of faith*. The only way we can continue to know the presence and power of God is by abiding in Him.

Another problem may be that we started adding something to Christ. This happened to the Galatians. Paul said that they started well, but something hindered them. This error can come in many ways. In the beginning, Jesus was all we needed, but along came the tempter in some form and we listened to his message. "Yes, the message of the cross is good, but we need some other things." It could be rituals, keeping of days, parts of the Jewish laws, joining a religious organization, and so on. Brothers and sisters, Christ is all we need! This is not a small statement. If we have Christ, His love has been shed abroad in our hearts, and that love *will* keep His commandments. These are not the commandments of the law, or of men, or of our reasoning, but *Christ's* commands--*what He speaks to us by the Spirit as we walk in this world*.

There may be many other things that enter in to deter us. We may try to serve God in our own strength and our own way. We may have come to a place where God put His finger on something and we said "no." We may have let the relationship grow cold through neglect, or we may have let our desires control us. We may face a challenge in our life and turn to resources other than God. We may have allowed an idol in our life that eclipses our vision of Jesus. These and many other things take our eyes off Jesus as our Lord and the simplicity of the message of the cross. There is only one solution. Turn back to Jesus and the message of the cross. Lay aside that which has hindered and believe that Jesus is enough. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. He will not fail any person who comes and bows at the foot of the cross. He is there to meet us.

The Message of the Cross is the Power of God

"For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written: 'I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, And bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent.' Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. 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 1:18-25).

How is the message of the cross the power of God? We have already touched on this briefly, but I believe it may help us to look at this more closely. I think all of us want power--power to live above sin, power to do the will of God, power to love as He loves and to live as He lived. Why do we often seem to lack this power? I believe the answer lies in the message of the cross.

In the passage we just have quoted from 1 Corinthians, Paul focuses on the problem. Men by nature want to be wise and strong in their own strength. The message of the cross cuts across that. It says we must come and die. That is not a popular message. Man does not want to come and die. He wants to come and live. He wants to bring his own wisdom and understanding to God and ask God to bless it. Then he can look back and say, "Look what I have done." So often, this is the root of why we do not know the power of God.

The one who has heard the message of the cross understands when Jesus says, "Without Me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). While we may agree with this statement in our mind, our hearts may not respond so easily. To let God penetrate to the depths of the heart and touch our secret motives and ambitions takes real dealing with God. It does not come overnight. God is able, but we must lower our defenses, come before the Lord, and allow His word to penetrate and shed light. *"For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart"* (Hebrews 4:12).

The most difficult area seems to be our service to God. We may have turned aside from the world and all that it has to offer. We have lain down every other goal and set our eyes on the kingdom of God . We want Jesus and we want to live for Him. But when we begin to face the needs that crowd into our lives, it is too easy to turn to our own resources to try to meet those needs. For example, suppose we don't see clearly in the area we are discussing: the cross. Many of us have different translations of the Bible available to us, so we start to compare translations. We may have access to Bible commentaries, so we turn to them and begin to read. In all of this, we find ourselves looking to our own intellect to try to grasp the things of God. We come up with answers, but they lack power because they do not have their root in a revelation of the cross.

Or, we may see the needs of men and women around us, and desire to meet some of them. We begin to look at our resources and come up with a plan. It may seem good on the surface and others are quick to praise us for the good we are doing, but if we are honest, we find it lacks power. Men are not being delivered from sin. The sick are not being healed. The kingdom being built rests on the wisdom of men and not on the power of God. Why? It is because we have not focused on the cross and what God provided there. We have preached and practiced a message that looks to man and his ability, instead of taking all of that to the cross and letting it die.

The kingdom that will last is the one that is built on what God can do, not what man can do. Paul said that all of the weapons of his warfare were spiritual. God is building a spiritual kingdom, and the message of the cross is that all we need is Jesus. We don't need the wisdom of men in education and medicine. We don't need to educate the mind through great institutions of learning. We don't need great musicians and musical instruments, nor great fund-raising programs or attractive media presentations. We don't need great buildings or beautiful surroundings. All of these have roots in man, and there is much opportunity for the display of fleshly efforts. These touch the emotions and intellect and may look good for a while, but they do not touch the spirit and heart of man. The message of the cross goes to the heart and puts us in touch with the living God. That is where there is power--in God. Are we willing to be persecuted for the message of the cross? Paul was, and God used him to lay the foundation of the early church. What about us?

When we begin to live and preach the message of the cross, I believe we will find considerable opposition, especially among religious people. Religion as a whole is built on man's effort to work for God. When Jesus and what God did on the cross are held before men in a proper way, it condemns the man or woman who is not willing to lay all at the feet of Jesus and only move by His direction. "What's wrong with that?" is often the response. "It does not originate in God," is the answer. It takes spiritual eyes to see this, and a heart of submission and obedience to move in God and what He is doing. Let us approach the throne of grace in boldness, knowing that apart from Him and His grace we can do nothing that has any value to God. Let us bow low before God, keep ourselves in His love, and let the

Holy Spirit move as He desires. Then we will know His power moving in and through us, and God will be glorified.

The New Creation

"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. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a new creation" (Galatians 6:14-15). Let us close by looking more closely at the new creation Paul speaks about. This new creation is the direct result of what God did through the cross of our Lord Jesus, and Paul said this is the only thing that has any meaning. The death of Christ opens the door for us to experience newness of life, which comes by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. We become a "new creation" when we experience this union with God.

"Therefore, from now on, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him thus no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation" (2 Corinthians 5:16-19). What Paul speaks about is what is on the other side of the cross. When Christ went to His cross, He laid the foundation for this new creation, and when we "go to our cross" (so to speak) we become a new creation. God has designed that we live as a new creation *in* Christ Jesus, and that is where we will know true fellowship with God in all things.

This new creation is something that never existed before Calvary. It could not exist, because it took Calvary to bring it about. It is a union of man with God, a union of His Spirit with our spirit--whereby our spirit is made alive and connected to the living God. It compares with nothing else known to man. It sets Christianity apart from every other religion. The fact of this union is the basis of the majority of instruction in the New Testament letters. The early church began in this understanding and reality; thus, the teaching that followed assumed this union existed and built upon it.

What does this union, this new creation, mean to us in practical terms? I believe the first thing it means is an assurance that God has brought us near to Him in the Spirit, that we are part of His family--His sons and daughters. The Spirit within us cries "Abba, Father." Perfect love casts out all fear and we know that we are accepted in the Beloved. We can lay our heads down at night and rest in His loving arms. We can rise up each day with confidence, knowing that we are children of God. There is peace in our hearts and joy in our souls. No matter what each day brings, we know that His grace is sufficient, because it is God who dwells within these earthen vessels. Without this assurance, we could not face the demands of life in the way God intended us to.

Secondly, as we face the challenges that come our way, we know we have a resource within that is not of ourselves. We do not look to others, or to our own abilities, but to Jesus and His grace to face every challenge. We are vessels through which God has designed to reveal Himself. He can send us on a mission, and we can go in His authority and grace. When we come face to face with the enemy, we do not fear, for Jesus dwells within us by the Spirit, and "greater is He that is in us than he that is in the world." Faith walks in this confidence and draws from His grace, knowing that the resource is God Himself. It is "Christ in you, the hope of glory."

Because it is God who dwells within each child of His, and because He is One, we find ourselves one spirit with every other child of God. This is the basis of the body of Christ. We are members of that body because of the work of God, and our responsibility is to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. God has given grace to each member; therefore, I am responsible to minister the grace God has given me, and to receive the grace that comes to me through others.

All of this is to the glory of God, for He is the One who is doing the work. Everything in the kingdom of God is positive. It is God's love that is binding us together. It is His life that overcomes all things. The enemy has been defeated at Calvary, and we now can walk in that victory. This is a glorious salvation. It is not a struggle from defeat to defeat, but a triumph from glory to glory. Why? Because the work is of God and not of us. We are participants by faith--we yield, believe, and obey--but God brings about the results. What glory! What rest! What victory! No wonder Paul gloried in the cross. No wonder he was beside himself, that others might also know this great salvation. No wonder he was adamant in denouncing any other way. The cross, and the power of God that comes from the cross, is the only way. Every other message is false. Let us live in the message of the cross and proclaim the message of the cross. We will find perfect satisfaction, and God will be glorified in all things. Amen!