

ON A HILL TOO FAR AWAY - Fifteen Protestant Truths About the Death of God the Son - Part Eight

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Jesus Christ Died On The Cross To Deliver Us From This Present Evil Age And Keep Us Holy And Faithful To God, Zealous For Good Deeds

Jeremiah 32:38-40 - “And they shall be my people, and I will be their God. [39] I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear me forever, for their own good and the good of their children after them. [40] I will make with them an everlasting covenant, that I will not turn away from doing good to them. And I will put the fear of me in their hearts, that they may not turn from me.”

Galatians 1:3-4 - “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, [4] who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father....”

Titus 2:11-14 - “For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, [12] training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, [13] waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, [14] who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.”

I hope you can keep some of the past studies in your mind as we continue on our journey through the wondrous accomplishments of the cross of Christ. What I wanted to do in this series of messages was unfold the many layers of blessing wrapped up in the Calvary event. Many Christians just live on the surface of Calvary. They know they are somehow forgiven. They know they can face death with assurance of heaven. And they are grateful for it, but never get around to **pondering** the cross of Christ.

That is what we're doing in this series. We're taking **time** at the cross. We're not just being religiously **moved** by it, though that too is very important. But we're **thinking the cross through** - we're **“surveying”** the wondrous cross - in the great, classic words of Isaac Watts. I have seen experts **surveying** a construction site recently. They have all their equipment set up. They set up their tripods - several of them - they look through the scope. Then they stop and take some measurements. They write the results down. Then they move their tripod to another location and check the same thing again. They write more measurements down again.

Surveying takes time. And ours is not an age favorable to this kind of study and thought. People want slick answers to their problems. They want to be in and out of church quickly because they are busy and have other things to do. Above all else they want to **feel good** about themselves and their religion. But surveying is **necessary work** for a sound foundation. It must precede everything else you build in your life. It is the most practical thing in all the world, though it never **feels** like it when you're doing the surveying.

Here's what we've seen so far. Please try to keep these things alive in your mind. Write them down. Make them issues of thanksgiving and worship and meditation and prayer. Jesus Christ, God the Son, died on the cross....

- a) **...to absorb God's just and holy wrath against sin and please His heavenly Father**
- b) **...to learn obedience by the things He suffered and complete the obedience that fulfills all**

righteousness

- c) *...to show the richness of God's love, grace and forgiveness to guilty sinners*
- d) *...to cancel the laws demands, take away our condemnation, and give us a clear conscience before God*
- e) *...to abolish circumcision and the earthly priesthood by becoming our eternal High Priest*
- f) *...to become a sympathetic High Priest instead of a condemning High Priest and give us ongoing access to the throne of God*
- g) *...to give us confidence that God will give us all things ultimately good and blessed*

I want to start today's teaching by making one central point. ***The cross of Christ, when genuinely encountered in faith, brings about a discernable, visible change of heart.*** In other words, to come to faith in the cross of Christ isn't just to come to accept certain ***truths*** or ***doctrines*** about the cross (it ***is*** that, but it isn't ***just*** that).

Rather, to encounter the cross of Christ in personal faith - to be ***saved*** - to be ***converted*** - to be ***born again*** - whatever terminology you want to use - is to experience a definite ***change of heart*** toward the will of Father God. I want to come at this central truth from the texts we've just read:

1) **THE CROSS OF JESUS BRINGS A FUNDAMENTAL CHANGE IN THE HEART OF THOSE WHO ENTER THE "NEW COVENANT IN CHRIST'S BLOOD"**

The reason you have both an Old Testament and a New Testament in the Bible is to bear testimony that the cross of Jesus Christ brought about the ***end*** of one covenant and the ***beginning*** of another. Jesus came to bring about a ***"new"*** covenant through His death on the cross.

Why did we need a new covenant? Why couldn't we just go on stoning those who curse their parents? Why not just kill idolaters? There are still theocratic religions in our world that do those things today. What does the new covenant do that the old didn't? The prophet Jeremiah must have salivated for the fulfillment of his own prophetic words:

Jeremiah 32:38-40 - ***"And they shall be my people, and I will be their God. [39] I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear me forever, for their own good and the good of their children after them. [40] I will make with them an everlasting covenant, that I will not turn away from doing good to them. And I will put the fear of me in their hearts, that they may not turn from me."***

The old covenant could only tell people what they should do. Because it brought about no inward transformation it was powerless to ***incline*** people to obey its terms. This is what Jeremiah said would be changed when the new covenant came. God would not only give people ***outward instructions***. He would cause His people to ***long to keep*** His instructions because they wouldn't be written externally on tablets of stone (picturing the Ten Commandments), but would be encoded on their hearts - like ***spiritual DNA*** - ***"...And I will put the fear of me in their hearts, that they may not turn from me."*** (Jeremiah 32:40).

These were the words Jesus was thinking of when He told His disciples ***"...This is my blood of the***

covenant, which is poured out for many..... (Mark 14:24). This is what the writer of **Hebrews** meant when he described Jesus as the **“mediator of a new covenant”** (9:14). The covenant was new, not only because it was second in succession to the first, but because its **terms** and its **power** were completely different from the old covenant:

2 Corinthians 3:5-6 - “Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God, [6] who has made us sufficient to be ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit. ***For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.***”

This is the very same idea in different words. Don't be confused by those closing words. Paul doesn't mean the Bible all by itself is lifeless and dead. He means the letter can't bring hope and mercy when sin against. But the Spirit given by the Risen Lord - the Spirit of the finished work of the cross brings the life of the New Covenant. There was a **life** that came with the new covenant. It brought about its own **inward transformation and motivation** by the power of the Holy Spirit. These are such important words. If your religion is only bringing you **instruction** or **fellowship** or **self-esteem** it isn't the life of the new covenant. This is the place where Paul tells the church goers at Corinth to **examine themselves to see if they are in the faith** (2 Corinthians 13:5).

Jesus Christ died on the cross to secure your affections and priorities in Father God. **How new are you?** That's the central issue of genuine conversion and Christian experience. There is no other option than becoming a new creation through the cross of Christ Jesus. That's why He came and that's why He died. This newness will manifest itself in two primary areas:

2) **THE NEW LIFE OF THE CROSS OF CHRIST IS ANTIMAGNETIC TO THIS PRESENT EVIL AGE**

Galatians 1:3-4 - “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, [4] who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father....”

Paul makes a three-link chain in these two verses. The first link in the chain is the **grace** we've all received - **“Grace to you....”** We can't survive without God's grace. We're doomed without God's grace. The second link is the **cross of Christ** - **“who gave Himself for our sins....”** That's the cross. This is where Christ gave Himself.

Today you have to point out the obvious truth that you never used to have to point out in church - Paul sees no possibility of receiving divine grace apart from embracing the cross of Jesus Christ. Grace comes through the cross or it doesn't come. The third link in the chain is the **result** of experiencing God's grace in Christ through the cross - **“...to deliver us from this present evil age....”**

“This present evil age” is the age you live in between your birth and your death, or your birth and Christ's second coming. Jesus wants us to be rescued or delivered from this age, not by **removing** us from it, but by transforming and keeping us **in** it - **John 17:15** - **“I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one.”**

Jesus saw an **“evil one”** operating behind the visible face of life in this world. In other words, the world is not an **innocent** place. It is not a **spiritually neutral** place. It's a very destructive place for holiness and godliness. Jesus, in the very same chapter, told His disciples that this world **warred against Him**

and it would **war against those who truly followed Him.**

The first sign of the life of the new covenant is **eyes to see the nature of this present evil age.** Sharp Christians know the **terrain** of the world. They **live** in it, but they aren't **impressed** by it. They know what John meant when he said the **"...the whole world lies in the power of the evil one."** (1 John 5:19). They don't just know that like they know their phone number or their birth date. They **feel** the whole world in the power of the wicked one.

This is what the hymn writer meant when, in thinking of the cross, he said it was there that he first **"saw the light"** - **"At the cross, at the cross, where I first saw the light...."** A light went on when he really surveyed the cross carefully. Like any other time you turn a light on, he **saw things he didn't see before.** And the very first thing he saw was the way he had been living his whole life - and the way those around him in the world were still living their lives - in self-deception:

Ephesians 2:1-2 - **"And you were dead in the trespasses and sins [2] in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience...."**

The first rays of light of the new covenant **expose** the nature of life in this world. Only the cross reveals this truth. Those who are still **"dead in trespasses and sin"** are sleepwalking. They think **they** are the ones with freedom and **we** are the ones without it. But, says Paul, they are in the dark. They don't know that what they **perceive** as freedom is really bondage. It is only the inward drumbeat of the **"spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience."**

And here's how I want to close this second point. My heart fills with fear and pain for so many careless church-goers who know only by Sunday School lessons that, yes, they were sinners and are now saved, but have never had a truly **seismic shaking** over how **desperately lost, corrupt and completely unimpressive this dark and evil age is.** They **talk** salvation but are **enamored** with this present evil age. And increasingly churches **pander** to unconverted affections rather than **rebuking** and **exposing** and calling out to God to **replace** them.

3) THE SECOND SIGN OF THE POWER OF THE NEW COVENANT IS A ZEAL FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS

Titus 2:11-14 - **"For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, [12] training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, [13] waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, [14] who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works."**

There is a world of difference between **trying to avoid sin** and being **zealous for good deeds.** Again, please read those verses carefully. Paul specifically mentions the death of Christ yet again - **"...who gave Himself to redeem us...."** He's talking about **why** Jesus came and died on the cross. This fits in perfectly with our subject. It's exactly what Paul is talking about.

Paul mentions **two** reasons where many Christians only list one. Yes, Jesus died to **"redeem us from all lawlessness...."** (14), but Paul doesn't stop there. He doesn't see this as the end of the project. He goes on to say that Christ died on the cross to make us **"...zealous for good deeds"** (14).

I say again, there is a world of difference between merely *trying to avoid sin* and being *zealous for good deeds*. Zeal means *passion*. It means *fervor*. It means *intense desire*, something that just heats up your heart and bubbles up uncontrollably inside. It's not something you are *obligated* to do. It's something you *long* to do.

O, how this is needed in the church today! You can't live any kind of Christian life at all just trying *not* to do certain things. There is no *passion* in that kind of life at all. That is an empty, useless life. Jesus died, says Paul, to deliver us from that kind of empty existence. It's the religion of the Pharisees. The cross produces a zeal - a passion - for good deeds. This is the second sign of the life of the new covenant in your heart. Jesus died to make you *passionate* about good deeds. You are not *saved* by good deeds. But you are saved *for* good deeds:

Ephesians 2:8-10 - "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, [9] not a result of works, so that no one may boast. [10] For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them."

Verses 8 and 9 don't explain everything you need to know about salvation. Your good works can never be offered as the *source* of your salvation. But they must always be the *fruit* of your salvation. Why did Paul say Jesus died to make us *zealous* for good works? Jesus explains:

Matthew 5:16 - "In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."

It's your *good works* that bring glory to God, never merely the avoidance of wickedness. True, God is *shamed* when professing Christians turn to wickedness. But He is only *glorified* when people see our *good deeds*. But you and I aren't out merely to avoid *shaming* or *hurting* Father God. After all He's done for us, we're not out to avoid hurting Him like we'd avoid hurting a dog or squirrel on the highway. We are out to spread His glory among all the nations of the world. We are out to make His Name great and marvelous.

We simply must see that this is why Jesus came and died. He came to create a *dominating passion* for good deeds. Through the power of the cross of the new covenant the glory of God *draws out our hearts in the same way wealth, success, influence and popularity used to*. The new covenant *turns our attention* to serving God like it used to be turned to the bubbles and bobbles of this present evil age.

What do you see when you look at the cross. Do you just see forgiveness? Do you see a lovely necklace for evangelical religion. Or do you see the source and power for inward transformation and a new, Spirit given passion for righteousness? Because that's why Jesus came and that's why Jesus died. Linger at the cross. Weep. Meditate. Repent. But never leave the nail-pierced feet until that passion to spill your life out for His glory dominates your soul. Be saved. Be sure. Be happy. Be fruitful. And let God be glorified.