

## The Power of the Cross

*by David Walker*

It seems that it has become a fashionable part of “street wear” to wear crosses, not necessarily as a sign of faith, but as a trendy accessory. A story I heard recently tells of an encounter at a department store jewelry counter. The customer indicated to the sales clerk that he was interested in buying a cross, to which the sales clerk replied, "Do you want a plain one, or the one with the little man on it?"

To Christians, of course, the cross is more than a trendy accessory. It is a symbol of the greatest act of love the world has ever seen—the action of God forgiving sin and redeeming people from their lost condition.

Beyond any doubt the central teaching of the Bible is the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This truth has been the inspiration of numerous of creeds, hundreds of songs, thousands of books, and tens of thousands of sermons. We believe it, preach it, sing about it and tell others about it. Great artists through the ages have composed majestic symphonies and painted masterpieces to commemorate the themes of this Glorious Gospel.

Over the centuries the church has raised up great institutions to defend the core teachings of its faith and ward off concepts that distort the truth. The church has always had to reject additions to the gospel, subtractions from the gospel, additives mixed into the gospel and substitutions for the gospel.

Though the task is no less needed today, we are also faced with another challenge, “How do we, twenty-first century Christians, understand the gospel in light of our modern world, without distorting its truth or losing its first-century power?” Does the truth that energized the first-century Christians still hold relevance to us today? Must we hold to the truth of the Bible, but look elsewhere to get help for our modern problems? Does the gospel speak to modern issues of life or is it merely a set of religious terms for Sunday morning?

We believe, of course, that the gospel is relevant to us today. It does speak to the issues of our lives in this modern world. The gospel has real power for living in the twenty-first century!

When Jesus died on the cross, He did so much more than establish a doctrinal focal point for Christians. What He accomplished there impacts our lives every day. His death is more than sound doctrine, it is also extremely practical! It provides daily ability to really live our lives. Through the application of the forgiveness provided through the work of the cross we can be free from guilt, shame, bad habits, and painful pasts. We can also be free to relate well to others, to establish lives full of purpose and meaning, and envision a future full of significant achievement.

There are four chief elements to Jesus' redemptive work. Each element carries implications that need to be understood so that we can add sound application to sound doctrine. The redemptive work of Jesus and all its implications must be thoroughly worked into the soil of a believer's understanding or he will produce a mixed crop of Christianity, psychology, New Ageism, "pop" Christianity and various other elements of our culture.

*The four main things that were accomplished for us at the cross include the following:*

**1. We were delivered from the wrath of God (Rom. 5:9).**

Before we encountered Christ we were innately sinful people and we were led by a sinful will that hated God and was fully determined to go its own way. We assumed that there was no consequence for our actions since it was not rapidly meted out. We were by nature children of wrath and we deserved punishment for our sinful rebellion.

God would have been absolutely just in eradicating humanity from the Earth. But, in His patient mercy, He provided a substitute to stand in our place and receive the penalty that was rightfully ours. As a result, the mark upon our conscience which had condemned us, predicted dire things for our future and held us in captivity was taken away. We are now no longer children of wrath, but children of the King.

**2. Our obligation to serve our sinful nature was broken and a new nature was born within us (Rom. 5:11, 12).**

It is critical to remember that, before we came to Christ, we only had one nature. We behaved, thought and spoke the sinful way because that was our nature to do so. Paul says we were obligated to serve the old nature. It ruled our lives. With salvation comes a new nature that loves to please God. With that new nature there comes the restoration of human choice enabled by the Holy Spirit.

The basis for breaking habitual bondage is learning to make choices in keeping with the new nature. There is a positional breaking of that bondage at the moment of salvation. The experiential breaking comes from the daily application of godly discipline in recognition that we are not obliged to serve our sinful nature any longer. The release of faith, joy, love and all the attributes of Christ-likeness are made possible because we are no longer under any obligation to serve our old master!

**3. We were taken out from under the rule of the Law (Rom. 8:2).**

What the law did was to remind us that we were lawbreakers. It served a useful purpose to convict us of sin and point us to the life to follow in Christ. It did this, in part, by creating a system of periodic visitations to the "scene of the crime" so we could remember our sinfulness (and hopefully repent!). As we stand in Christ, we no longer need an annual revisiting of our sins to gain freedom. They have been taken away! The new life brought to us by Jesus Christ cleans our conscience from dead works.

The basis for inner healing, then, is not the psychologist's office (nor the various mixtures that creep into the church). It is in understanding and appropriating the work of Christ on the cross.

We need not make periodic visits to the recesses of our psyche to ferret out increasingly deep misdeeds of the past in order to find freedom. The work of the cross deals with sin—both sins we have committed and the sinful response we have had to the painful deeds of others. Forgiveness brings freedom.

The route to freedom is learning to “call it sin”. By “calling it sin” and rejecting various psychologically based terms for our behavior, we are candidates for the life made available through faith in Christ. Jesus died for our sins!

#### **4. The rule of death has been broken (2 Tim. 1:10).**

The victory that Jesus won was accomplished on the cross, demonstrated at the tomb, verified by the Baptism in the Holy Spirit. It is the central element of the gospel according to the Apostle Paul (1 Cor. 15:14). We rejoice in His resurrection. We sing about it and preach great sermons about it. However, it is more than good doctrine and inspiration.

The resurrection of Jesus is the basis for faith that God will fulfill all His promises. It says “He is able to deliver those who come to Him”. God is not merely full of good intent, He is really able to do something about the condition of mankind. He is able to heal our physical bodies, He is able to restore the brokenhearted, and He is able to repair broken relationships. God is not the god of warm, fuzzy love. He is the God of all-consuming, omnipotent ability.

So the essential message and power of the gospel is the power of forgiveness. There is no other message we hold before the world except the timeless gospel. In times of great renewal, restoration and revival we must remain clear about the gospel in order to guard it, continue in it and preach it.

Today, we may have new ways to apply gospel truth, but we have no new truth to add to the essential gospel message of the Bible. It is the power inherent in the preaching of the gospel which, even today, sets men free, heals them body, soul, and spirit, breaks satanic bondage and equips them in godliness.

G. Campbell Morgan put it this way, “Forgiveness means far more than saying, ‘Never mind, I will pass it over, I will make no further reference to it’. God never forgives that way. He never violates the cosmic order by lightly passing over the activity of disorder that wrecks and ruins human life and human history. I can never extend New Testament forgiveness to my own child. I cannot free my child from the guilt of wrongdoing. I cannot cleanse my child from the pollution that has gathered upon his mind as the result of wrongdoing. I cannot break the power of habit in my child through forgiveness. Consequently, whenever I try to illustrate Divine forgiveness by human forgiveness I fail, for the symbol cannot perfectly convey the infinite meaning. Forgiveness is to be set loose from sins, their guilt gone, their pollution ceased, their power broken. That is what the world needs. This is what the Christian message declares, and what Jesus Christ offers to men.” (The Cross and the Sinner, G. Campbell Morgan, 1909)