

## The Cross of Christ – Part 6

Remember, we went through the Holiness of God to understand the sin of man to then come to the judgment of God. Then we moved into the cross of Christ. We prepared to land at the foot of the cross. We began with Jesus as the God-man in the Garden of Gethsemane...fully God, fully man; thus the God-man. “If it be possible, may this cup pass from Me; but nevertheless, not My will, but Your will be done.” To understand then, that we are God-men. Do you not know that the Spirit of Christ dwells within you? Do you not know that you are the temple of the Holy Spirit?

Then we looked at “sweet suffering.” Remember, suffering is sweet when it’s done to the glory of God. Remember, we defined masochism as that willful seeking of pain because of feeling unworthy of pleasure and defined the self crucifixion, or the crucified life of the Christian as the willful acceptance of pain out of devotion to a greater pleasure; namely the glory of God. Then we looked at targeted tears; “don’t weep for Me; weep for yourselves and your children.” “Because I, Jesus, am perfectly fulfilling my destiny by laying my life down.” Then we looked at the forgiving of ignorance; “Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.” We then took that model and applied it to ourselves of how we can walk out in a practical way, the forgiving of ignorance.

Today, we’ll move into paradise promised; that is to say to the thief on the cross, Jesus said “today, you will be with Me in paradise.” I’m not going to belabor these posters. There are three and we looked at them last time; but when we were looking at practical applications of forgiveness, we saw that we could only worship our God in the precious present, right here and right now. When we’re living in unforgiveness, we’re living in the past, refusing to worship God in the precious present. In regard to contemplations of the future, when we’re contemplating revenge because of that which we hold in unforgiveness, we again are refusing to worship our God in the precious present. So the percentage of time that we, as Christians, spend in the Holy of Holies, having given up the past, given up the future, rejected the unholy, refusing to try to complete in the flesh that which was begun by the spirit, we move then into the Holy of Holies where we function as the God-men that we, in fact, are.

Then we looked at unforgiveness and how it invariably results from offense. First of all at others; and we looked at the possibilities in regard to our offense at others. When someone offends me, it may well be diffuse evil; in other words, a liar will lie to me, but he won’t lie to me because I’m me, he will lie to me because he’s a liar. So the lie to me is an impersonal act for which there is no reason for me to take personally that which is impersonal. Or, he may be responding to something that is ungodly in myself. As I analyze myself in response to how someone has transgressed against me, if the behavior was precipitated by something ungodly in me, the only proper course of action is repentance, not taking offense. Or if he is responding to something in me that is, in fact, godly, then as Jesus said, if they reject Me, they will reject you. They’re not rejecting me, Buddy; they’re rejecting Christ within me that I’m presenting to them as an Earthen vessel. Well, if they’re rejecting Jesus, there is no reason for me to take personal offense because it has nothing to do with me. And when we’re taking offense at others, we are invariably, spoken or unspoken, taking offense at God. That is to say we’re offended at God, thinking that He’s not here and He should be; or that if He is here, He’s misbehaving. Because if He were behaving properly, He would have prevented that which has offended me, or would have already have punished the one who has offended me. So, when we live in unforgiveness, we refuse to worship in the precious present and we take offense at others and thus, take offense at God, which of course is ungod, anti-God, not choosing God.

Next poster. Then we looked at how Christians overlap these to a point where they get them confused. The stratification, if you will in regard to the attitude toward the one who has violated me. Love always, because we set our love upon them in an unconditional way just as God has set His love upon us. We excuse their sin, never. Because no sin is ever excused; because if it could be excused, Jesus had no reason to come; because we wouldn't have needed a Savior for that which could be excused. Forgive, when someone transgresses against me, I forgive them if I am in Christ. We are in Christ for salvation, but we are also told to abide in Christ. So the pathway to forgive when I am a saved New Testament Christian, is to abide in Him and then I'll look at this transgressor as Jesus looks at them. So, I forgive if in Christ. Trust? Maybe someday. We contrasted forgiveness with trust...two different things; although people get them confused, thinking that if I have forgiven, therefore I must trust. No. Forgiveness is to let go of the past; trust is to embrace the future with confidence. So trust takes a track record of trustworthiness. We looked at how a pedophile may be forgiven, but we don't put him in charge of the church nursery until there is a prolonged track record of trustworthiness.

So those are practical applications of, forgive them, for they know not what they do. In the summary statement, remember, when someone doesn't know, they are veiled. And we learned then that the veiled are simply who we were and thus serve as our present reminder of the grace of God for us. Because we were veiled, children of wrath, but God...out of His love, through His mercy, saved us, even when we did not know what we were doing. And that's to be our heart attitude toward the one who violates us. We forgive them for they do not know; but they are simply who I was before I did know and thus serve as my present reminder of the grace of God.

So today, we move on into the next utterance of Jesus Christ on the cross. Begin with the setting: Matthew 27:38 – Two thieves were crucified with Him, one on the right and one on the left. So what was the set of the heart of each of the two thieves? Matthew 27:44 – “And the thieves who had been crucified with Him were casting the same insults at Him.” Both thieves began the same; but they did not remain the same. And their courses serve as a concrete, finite, understandable, personal example of all of humanity; because they're presented with a choice. And remember, we looked at how every choice human beings make is the same choice—God or un-god. You're either going to accept what God says is truth or think that you know a truth that is higher than the truth of God. It will be either God, or according to Proverbs 1:31, if they choose un-god, “they will eat of the fruit of their own way.” So these two thieves, one on the right, one on the left, observed the same events. They were crucified at the side of the same person. External events, thus did not determine the outcome of the two thieves. Internal events did. The question was not phrased directly, but was phrased nonetheless. Matthew 16:13 – “Who do people say that I am?” (the question asked by Jesus) The two thieves both saw, who people said that He was; a guilty criminal deserving death by crucifixion. But that next question, remember, that Jesus asked is the key question for us, for all human beings, and for these two thieves. Matthew 16:15 – “But who do *you* say that I am?”

Now this is where the eternal destinies of these two thieves parted. This goes past theology into the personal; and for those who say that Christianity is too difficult, it's too complicated to be understood, you need to see the simplicity that there are only two choices. One way is broad, one way is narrow. So, where does that broad way lead? Jesus said in Matthew 7:13 – “For the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction and many are those who enter by it.” Well, where does the narrow way lead? Matthew 7:14 – “For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life and few are those who find it.” So Jesus tells us how these ways are labeled indirectly. John 14:6 – Jesus said, “I am the way, and I am the truth, and I am the life.” So this way, this narrow way, is labeled with a huge sign presented by God Himself, Jesus; because He is the way. This way is truth. Remember, Jesus said He is

truth. Remember how we defined truth? Truth is what God is and how God views everything else. In short form, truth is how God views reality. So Jesus is the truth; because Jesus, as the Son of God, is God; thus, He is God and he came to tell us and to model for us how God views all other things. So Jesus is also the life. Well, what life is that? The life of God Himself, the source of all life, the God, Who in the beginning spoke creation into existence. So that's how the way that is narrow is labeled. The big sign, saying who do you say that I am? Jesus. The other way is labeled, anyway other than Jesus. In other words, non-Jesus would be the only other street sign available to the human race. And this one goes his own way. Jesus, Himself, stands at that "Y" in the road and simply asks all of humanity, who do you say that I am? All of mankind, then says one of two things. First, You are who You say You are; and that was how Peter answered in Matthew 16:16 – "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God." Or alternatively, You are not who You say You are, You are not truth; truth is not what You say, truth is what I say about what You said. That is the non-Jesus way and there are only the two ways.

So let's look at the heart response of the unrepentant thief; because he's the model of all human beings who take the broad way called non-Jesus; and we need to recognize the pattern. Also, as Christians, remember we're to be transformed by the renewing of our minds? So as Christians, any un-renewed part of our minds that is still trying to walk on the broad way, while having it both ways, needs to be understood and dealt with. Discernment of spirits, remember, is a gift of the Holy Spirit as listed in I Corinthians 12:7-11. But one of the primary discernments of spirits is the following. Who is on the broad way that leads to destruction? Who is on the narrow way that leads to life with God? And of those on the narrow way, what residual part of them is trying to keep one foot on the broad way, while trying to have it both ways, while trying to acknowledge Jesus as Savior, but not as Lord. That's called double mindedness. That's called the flesh. That's called trying to live in the flesh and complete that which was begun by the Spirit. In other words, they, as Christians, want to take Jesus as part of the way, but not as the way and not as the life.

So the unrepentant thief remains in pride. Well pride, remember, is that sin that protects all other sins. Pride is that sin that makes the person say, "I am not sinning." Pride resists revelations about its own sin. Pride does not see its need; thus, pride does not see that it needs a Savior; and if it needs a Savior, only a little bitty Savior to deal with my little bitty sin. Pride insists on living and dying by its own righteousness and its own proclamations. Pride presumes a certain level of intrinsic holiness. Pride does not acknowledge holiness even as it's hanging on the cross beside holiness. Pride does not see that its righteousness is as filthy rags before a Holy God. Pride mocks God even as pride judges God. Luke 23:39 – the unrepentant thief says, "if you are the King of the Jews, save yourself and us." So pride says, "*if* you are"; not "*you are*." Pride says "prove it to me because you've not provided enough proof to satisfy my intellect thus far." Pride does not recognize the truth as truth hangs by it. Pride does not receive a love of the truth based on how God views reality so as to be saved. Thus pride exchanges the truth of God for a lie. Pride suppresses the truth of God in unrighteousness. Pride does not accept that truth is what God is and how God views everything else. Pride believes that it can determine what truth is as a finite created being and one little drop out of the whole universe, that that created being can look at all that is and proclaim what truth is. Pride does not honor God and certainly never honors God as the God that He is. Pride says to heck with, forgive me; just save me from what I'm undergoing in the physical circumstance. Pride does not fear God; doesn't hold Him in awe and reverence. Pride does not give God thanks. Pride has exchanged the incorruptible for the corruptible. Pride grumbles because pride believes that it's always getting worse than it truly deserves. Pride is addicted to self preservation in its own little cocoon of carnality based on the analysis of cost, comfort, convenience, and control. Pride says you probably are not God, but just in case You are, You surely must be pleased enough by me

to reward me by saving me as I am. Pride is unwilling to give up anything for some theologic abstraction. Pride does not acknowledge guilt. Pride insists that its unchanged self be pronounced as holy enough for God. Pride thus precludes salvation. Pride will eat of the fruit of its own way. Pride is resisted by God. Why? Because pride resists God by insisting on judging Jesus Christ in the light of pride's own heart, rather than looking at the heart of Jesus and then judging its heart in the light of the heart of Jesus. Pride is thus, untouched by the person next on the cross saying, Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.

But do you want to see love? Do you want to see the God Who is love? Wonder of wonders that woeful, unrepentant, prideful thief is still loved by God. Hear again Jesus say, Father, forgive them for they know not what they do. And hear the heart of God—remember, like Father, like Son we talked about—the Old Testament God that we prefer to think of as wrathful compared to our cuddly, loving Jesus?. Ezekiel 18:23 – God speaking through the prophet says, “I God take no pleasure in the death of an evil one, rather that he should turn from his ways and live.” So the heart of the love of God, right up to the moment of death of the unrepentant one is only that he would turn from his evil ways and live.

Well, now let's compare that unrepentant thief with the repentant thief. Recall the Scripture began with...and the thieves cursed Him. And now follows the best example of a renewed mind that I know of in the Bible. Listen to the testimony of the repentant thief. Susan will read for us, Luke 23:39-42. “And one of the criminals who was hanged there was hurling abuse at Him saying, are You not the Christ? Save yourself and us. But the other answered, and rebuking him said, do you not even fear God since you are under the same sentence of condemnation and we indeed justly, for we are receiving what we deserve for our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong. And he was saying, Jesus, remember me when You come in Your Kingdom.”

“Do you not even fear God?” The fundamental question for all of humanity. Because that's why we started with...in the beginning God created the Heavens and the Earth—to awaken within us, the revelation of the Holiness of God, to show us what the only proper heart response of a created human being is, the fear of the Lord, to hold God in awe and reverence, that which is called the fear of the Lord. Do you not even fear God? If not, then understand what you are rejecting because Scripture tells us, the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, the beginning of understanding, and the beginning of wisdom. So as you reject these, look at what you are choosing. You are choosing pride because pride is that condition of the human heart that is dominant in the absence of the fear of the Lord. So you only have two choices: the fear of the Lord, the awe and reverence of a Holy God, or walk in pride. Because the only antidote for human pride is to have it crushed by the awe and reverence of a Holy God.

But listen as this repentant thief now rebukes unrighteousness by addressing it, not avoiding it, and confronting it rather than tolerating it. Not out of a spirit of self righteousness and judgmentalism, but out of an evangelistic spirit of love. Here this repentant thief say to the unrepentant thief, you are almost at your eternal destiny, look at what you are, compare it with the One hanging by you, and look at what you are doing, as you choose to death in going your own way, rather than listening to the words spoken by the One hanging by you. Listen as this repentant thief says, I am hanging here justly. Hear the humility in him as he receives conviction by saying, I did it and it was wrong, living this life as a thief. What I did was contrary to how God views reality. Hear him refuse to grumble as he says, I am receiving what I deserve for what I've done, rather than grumbling. He is refusing to say, I deserve better than I'm receiving even as I hang on this cross. Hear him recognize holiness when he sees it as he says of Jesus, this man has done nothing wrong. This man does not deserve to be here. There must be another reason that He is here. This man is Holy, but only a holy man could hang there and say,

“forgive them for they know not what they do.” God allows Him to be here. Could this be the One prophesied by Isaiah? Could this be the One, that it is said, would take away the sins of the world? Hear him receive the conviction of the Word of God, remember, the Word of God is the seed in the parable of the sower as that, “Father forgive them for they know not what they do.” And his attention turns because this is an unnatural act. This is an inhuman act. This is something that only purity could produce and receive the conviction of that. And then hear him make it personal as he says, “Jesus.” He calls Him by name. He doesn’t call out a doctrine because a doctrine can’t save him. He doesn’t call out a philosophy. He doesn’t call out a religion. He doesn’t call out the names of his forefathers. Hear him call out the name of Acts 4:12 – “And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under Heaven that has given among men by which we must be saved.” Hear him as he calls. He doesn’t call the name of his rabbi. In modern terms, he didn’t call the name of his preacher, his pastor, his elders, his teacher, his counselor, his family, or his friends...or anyone else to mediate for him. Hear him call the one name, Jesus, the name of the one mediator between God and man. I Timothy 2:5 – “For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Jesus Christ.”

Now all men are that close to salvation because they only need that one moment of grace to be touched by the testimony of Who Jesus is and what He did and then cry out Jesus. And that one moment of grace can take an unrepentant cursing thief and turn him into an Earthen vessel, revealing the truth of God to the rest of humanity by proclaiming the name, Jesus. Now hear him as his faith is intrinsic in the words that follow. Remember me. He is not focused on faith, he is not focused on his faith; he’s focused on the object of his faith, namely Jesus. Remember me is not stated harshly as though a command that he somehow deserves to be remembered. It’s not stated with hesitation as though he’s unsure about his statement. It’s not stated with begging as though if it’s done, it will be done grudgingly. It’s stated with conviction and, remember, faith is the conviction of things not seen. He hasn’t seen Jesus come into His Kingdom; but he is operating in the certainty of the unseen. It’s not stated with self righteousness; because he’s already proclaimed, I’m getting what I deserve. It’s not followed by a recipe of what God should do next. He simply rests in Jesus, the name that he has called out. Jesus, followed by, remember me, is considered sufficient; because he seen the heart of the One that is hanging by him. He has no doubt that the love of this One is sufficient to remember me, and if He remembers me, then I will be blessed as a result. Because I heard this man say, forgive them for they know not what they do. No man can do that.

Hear his faith as he says, Jesus, remember me when...not, if. Hear him as he calls the things which are not as though they were as we’re told in Romans 4:17. And in modern day terms, he calls the things which are not as though they were; the complete sentence would say, he calls the things which are not yet; but which assuredly will be, because they’re based on the sovereignty of the Holy God, Who in the beginning created the Heavens and the Earth, as though they already were. Because when a sovereign Being says something; He can call it as though it already were. And that’s what the thief is doing here. Hear the specificity of the faith of this thief; it’s not vague faith in a theologic abstraction called God, it’s Jesus, remember me when You come. Not when anyone else comes, not when some vague theologic abstraction comes, not when mother Earth comes, not when nature comes, not when a million separate gods come, but when You come; when the One Who I called out to comes.

There’s a lot more, but I think it’s so close to time, that this is a reasonable breaking point. So I think I’ll stop it for today and we’ll pick it up the next time to keep looking at paradise promised, comparing the repentant thief and the unrepentant thief as the two models of all humanity; when they come to the “Y” in the road and Jesus simply says, “who do you say that I am?” “I say, I am the way. Will you proclaim in your pride and your self righteousness, no, there’s another way, there’s a better way and I

am capable as a finite human being of declaring what that other way is and that it's superior to the way ordained by a Holy God." So, thank you for listening.