

Your Cross – Part 11

Welcome to Your Cross, Part 11, August 15, 2007. In Your Cross we covered the subtopics of the foundation, the mechanism, the purposes and the choices. Last time we came together, we spoke on the questions asked by Your Cross and today we'll finish up that subtopic of the questions asked.

Do you know that you get to choose? Last week we went over the first 8 or 9 of these. You do get to choose; do you know why you get to choose? You get to choose that it may be of love that you may reciprocate the love relationship with your God rather than being a simple mechanical robot. Do you know that you cannot not choose?—that every system has a default mechanism and our default mechanism is the flesh. The well worn ruts in our unrenewed minds left over from decades of living that way. That's why the kingdom of God is taken by violent men. If you don't have a violent attitude, then you will simply function not choosing and by not choosing you default to the flesh. Do you know that you cannot choose the choices? The choices are ordained by God. The one thing you get to do is choose; but you don't get to choose what the choices are. The only way to choose the choices is to create your own universe. Do you know what the choices are? Well for us as Christians, the choices are flesh and spirit. Do you know and understand the choices? It's one thing to utter the words; it's another to understand all that lies behind those words. And I don't claim to know all; but I do know that by going through the mental exercise of putting flesh and spirit through the prism of those 24 frames of reference that we reviewed, I came away with a clearer understanding of the extreme contrast between those two worlds.

Do you know that you cannot choose the consequences? Again, it's not your universe; you didn't design it; you don't get to choose the choices and you don't get to choose the consequences of the choices. Do you know what the consequences are? Well in short form, they're in Galatians 5:19-21 – reviews the outcome of the flesh; and verses 22 and 23, review the fruit of the Spirit.

Now I'm going to use layman's terminology to go further into life in the flesh. The summary phrase that I use is that choosing the flesh is a pressing matter. I've used that phrase before. The reason is that if you live life in the flesh as a Christian, sooner or later you will be suppressed, oppressed, repressed and depressed. When self is the basis of your choices, then self can never be content. There will always be some portion of your circumstances or those around you that are behaving in such a way that you view as less than ideal and dissatisfaction to one degree or another will always be present. Remember, happiness is circumstance dependent and time limited. It's always relative and it lasts only as long as the favorable circumstances last. So trying to be happy with self as the basis is hard work; because you're competing against the natural deterioration over decades of the human body. You're competing against all the natural forces in our physical creation including volcanoes and floods and hurricanes and tornadoes and ice storms and insects and every other threatening creature.

You're also trying to compete against 7 billion other people in order to out-strip them with your efforts, all trying to be happy. Your goal is to control circumstances; but most circumstances are out of your control. Thus you'll always, to one degree or another, feel violated or abused by

natural circumstances and by the behavior of others. You're also in combat to control others because your happiness is dependent on it. But someone will always control you; thus, you'll always feel somewhat suppressed and oppressed by outside forces who are controlling you. That's why the drive for world control has never really succeeded by any man. Pol Pot failed; Idi Amin failed, Hitler failed, Alexander the Great (though conquering the known world) ended up grotesquely unhappy and died at a young age. You will always grumble because you will always believe that you're receiving less than ideal which you think you truly deserve. That's why all our marketing, if you watch it on TV, every single ad focuses on catering to the flesh because they all say get the ice cream you deserve, get the vacation you deserve, get the food mixer you deserve. Every single ad uses that catch-phrase because human nature is to think you deserve better than you're getting and if you just get this next thing in addition, then you will find happiness.

If you're temporarily controlling certain others, you'll always live in the unspoken fear that it won't last. Your pride won't let you express that you actually have some deep seated fear about being out-competed; thus, it remains unspoken. You fear that if it ever is revealed that others will begin to see you as weaker than you want them to see you; and thus, begin to compete with you more aggressively. Pride always hides its own lies and always excuses its own lies because pride always presumes that it knows best; and thus, reaching the self-determined best end will always justify any self determined means because self is the basis of decision making. But the price of such pride is to live in fear, unspoken fear that someone will uncover your lies, see your fragility and render you vulnerable. So self in the flesh lives in the constant need to repress not only the truth of God, but the truth about one self. That's why so many people have defensive patterns of behavior. The attitude becomes that the best defense is a good offense. That's why you see people who address truth when it's spoken about them with an aggressive reaction. That's true in the social world; it's true in the family life; it's true in the business world. That is to say the reaction is to blast the one who is speaking truth about you by calling them self-righteous declaring they have no right to judge you, no ability to judge you, and you then look for impurity in them so as to dismiss their ability to address your impurities—not exactly what you'd consider a fulfilling way of life.

Romans 1:18-20 speaks of men who suppressed the truth in unrighteousness. So anyone choosing life in the flesh is always 24/7 in the business of suppression of truth about God and suppression of truth about themselves. That is an energy-consuming process. Now Jesus said My yoke is easy, My burden is light; because Jesus never had to be defensive and never really had to choose because He had laid down all choice except doing what He saw the Father do, and speaking what He heard the Father say. So for Him life was easy. But that's not the way life is in the flesh because when you're competing against 7 billion other people and all the natural elements and the deterioration of your body over decades, there's nothing about that that can be called light or easy. So the pathway of self in the flesh is varying combinations of suppression, oppression, and repression. The ultimate result is depression. The antidote sought for that is always comparison with others; because if you can find someone around you less competent than you, then it will constantly feed your self image that you are better than you really are. The problem is that antidote is self defeating; because when comparison with others is used, eventually you'll see someone who is either more competent than you or someone who is on a growth curve to shortly become more competent than you.

I used to scratch my head and wonder, why is Iraq's army so weak? You look at it and it was in the hundreds of thousands of people with all the weaponry bought from Russia and so on, but as soon as the battle would start, they would immediately be defeated and I couldn't understand that. But the answer is because Saddam Hussein was living life in the flesh. Just as a dramatic example: when he would see a young officer begin to rise with ability and charisma, he would have him assassinated; because he lived in fear that someone would arise within the ranks and topple him from his position of power. So he would have helicopter crashes to wipe out all the capable leadership; so he was left with a beheaded army with no capable leaders; people just could operate in a fallen subservient manner to himself. So he rendered his whole military, no matter how strong on paper, absolutely weak by beheading it of all competence. But that's just life in the flesh. And we tend to do the same thing. The problem only worsens as we get older and lose vitality. Every person choosing that kind of life in the flesh operates under the delusion that it offers hope and that he has sufficient energy to reach that hope. That, of course, is untrue. That's not how God views reality. Eventually every knee will bow before Jesus Christ; it's all a matter of timing. You'll either bow now in humility or bow then in dread and terror. But you will bow—a simple truth that most people prefer not to live in the light of. Life apart from Him is hopeless. And despite delusions to the contrary among mankind, every man is helpless to change the fact that it is hopeless apart from Jesus Christ. That's the pathway of life in the flesh. It distances itself from its creator, distances itself from hope, distances itself from salvation, and distances itself from the intended destiny of its creator.

Now how can I speak with a certain degree of authority? As the saying goes...because I had real estate there, by experience, I lived there. But over time circumstances and energy consumption of that kind of life eventually drained me and left me without vitality to go on another day. So the circumstances did not create helplessness and hopelessness. They simply reveal the helplessness and hopelessness which had already been there but which I suppressed the truth of in unrighteousness by insisting that I knew what truth was and that I knew how to ascertain further truth. That was the origin of that little rhyme. I've always been helpless; I just did not know it. Then struggles came just to show it. Helpless I am, now helpless I know. Before in pride, now in humility I go. You may say that's not true for the Christian. Well it should not be; but in large part it is. Why? Because Jesus taught us by their fruit you will know them. There is such a lack of joy in the body of Christ. That's how I know that.

That leads to the 9th question. Do you know that you cannot complete in the flesh what was begun by the Spirit? That's the question asked by Your Cross constantly. It's the question asked by Paul in Galatians 3:3 – having begun by the Spirit, are you now perfected by the flesh. God is Spirit; we're to worship Him in Spirit; we're born of the Spirit; we're indwelt by the Spirit. Can any of that be perfected by the flesh? The answer is self evident. Most Christians in significant part are still choosing life in the flesh rather than life in the Spirit. They often walk by sight, not by faith. Interpretations and decisions are based on sensory input from the physical realm, focused on temporal things, using the frame of reference of self, defining truth as what I think about what God said rather than what God said, viewing suffering as something to be avoided, grumbling because of suffering more than thought deserved, comparing self to others, hungering for the praise of man, seeking control over others and circumstances, while analyzing everything through the cocoon of carnality of cost, comfort, convenience and control. Hence, the

name carnal Christian; such Christians are not understanding their cross. They missed the point about their suffering. They focus on the suffering while ignoring the underlying truth that their suffering is only asking them a series of questions. That's akin to shooting the messenger who brings the bad news. So Your Cross brings the questioner who is asking you these questions but we complain about the cross while paying no attention to the questions that are being shouted at us.

Why is your cross required for this? Well because such is the fallen nature of man before salvation and the fallen qualities of the unrenewed mind in which we habitually walk after salvation. That kind of thinking simply will not face the truth about God and about oneself until forced to do so through suffering. The suffering is not the point. The point is to bring you to the truth by the only method that you will allow. We're always free to choose, even during our cross; that's part of our freedom in Christ. But we tend to view Proverbs 16:18 (in the King James Version) as bad news – Pride goes before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall. But everything works for good when viewed properly because that fall causes brokenness; brokenness leads to openness; and openness leads to God. Because we will not turn to the Spirit with Jesus as the basis until we lose confidence in the flesh with self as the basis. And a good fall is what's required before we will allow that to occur. So don't ever despise a good fall, including in the life of a Christian.

I've been listening to Jimmy Swaggart, the man who had the greatest fall of any minister during my lifetime. And I'm telling you after listening to him, that man has the most authentic testimony about life in the Spirit with Jesus as the basis of anyone I have listened to. He had the greatest fall and has the purest heart. Imagine that! Well, you know Job in the Old Testament who was the purest man on Earth; but he underwent more suffering than any man on Earth. Because the greater suffering was required to bring him to the point of saying I wasn't there when You created the Heavens and the Earth; and I have no right to argue my case before you. It took all that suffering and then the 40 rhetorical questions asked by God before Job would receive the revelation. So we look at that and view God as unfair and God is looking at it saying it's the only way Job would receive the revelation. And I wasn't content with part of him; I wanted all of him to be one with Me. So you may have heard it said in the secular world that experience is a dear school; but some fools will learn in no other. The more down-to-earth, paraphrase from the South is, there ain't no sense like bought sense and you buy sense with experience. That's true for the unsaved, living life apart from Jesus. It's also true in large part for the carnal Christian who is trying to perfect in the flesh that which was begun by the Spirit. A good fall may simply be required to break the flesh and bring him into the Spirit with Jesus as the basis where all things are summed up in Jesus; because Jesus wants to be one with you. If your head is too hard, your heart too resistant, your neck too stiff to allow oneness with Him, then He will either cause or allow a good fall. Now I say a good fall because that kind of fall is good. That's love, not wrath. It's love because its goal is to fulfill His love for you which is to become one with you. And He cannot become one with you while you're living in the flesh because He is good and in your flesh dwells no good thing. So how can the goodness of God become one with that which contains no good thing? So a good fall either caused or allowed by God is not wrath in the life of a Christian. It's to fulfill the love that God has for you and He cannot be satisfied without oneness with you.

Now look at the next and 10th question asked by Your Cross. Do you know that you cannot choose both the flesh and the Spirit? So what happens when you try to have it both ways? Well, instability. It's like having one foot on the boat and one foot on the dock and trying to live life that way. It's not going to work. James 1:8 – Being a double-minded man unstable in all his ways. I Corinthians 14:33 – God is not a God of confusion. So when we Christians are confused, unstable, steady one minute and caving in the next, it's simply the revelation that we're trying to have it both ways by living in the flesh and in the Spirit. Confusion is the inevitable result. John 14:6 – Jesus said I am the way. Not I am one way, not I am part of the way; when double-minded, living life one foot in the flesh and one foot in the Spirit, in effect we're saying no, my thoughts are higher than your thoughts. You are partway the Christ, partway the Son of God, part of the way; so I partway trust You and will partway abide in You. We want fullness of peace while coming part way to the Prince of Peace. We want His love fulfilled for us, not with us, but with part of us while we remain in the position of deciding which part and to what degree. But we can't testify of the Rock while being blown by the wind. We can't come into oneness while declaring part of ourselves off limits to the One Who is wanting oneness.

Well now look at the summary question, the last question asked by Your Cross which in a way summarizes all prior questions. It is in fact what all other questions are about. Matthew 16:15 – Jesus asked of Peter, who do you say that I am? Well Your Cross is constantly asking you that same question. Who are you saying that Jesus is? In the midst of Your Cross, by your last thought, word, and deed, who are you saying that He is? Did you answer as Peter answered? Matthew 16:16 – Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God. The tendency is to say that this approach is too simple. But I think that's why Paul prayed in II Corinthians 11:3 that they not be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Jesus. Ephesians 1:10 – speaks of the summing up of all things in Christ, things in Heaven and things upon the Earth. Well our cross is here on this Earth. Your summing up of all things in Jesus is the simplicity and purity of devotion to Jesus including during Your Cross by constantly asking yourself that same question: Who am I saying that He is at this very moment? Am I like the three Hebrew boys? Our God is able to save us from this fiery furnace; but whether He does or not is not the point. The point is I will not bow down to a false god. Do we answer that way in the midst of our cross or do we cry out to God to show His love and His power by taking away our cross? So what is your deepest desire; to glorify Jesus or be free of Your Cross?

So why is it important to view Your Cross in the light of these questions? Because the quality of your life as a Christian and your testimony of Jesus is determined by the answers that you give during your cross. Will you be suppressed, oppressed, repressed and depressed while trying to testify of the joy of your Lord? Or will you have the more abundant life? Will you manifest the fruit of the Spirit or will you manifest the fruit of the flesh? Are you bearing fruit or only bearing circumstances? Are you a living epistle telling a true story of Jesus or telling a story of yourself? Because make no mistake about it. All others in your sphere of influence will judge your Jesus by seeing you. You are His ambassador to represent Him. They will either judge Him by seeing you in all your fleshly glory; or they will judge Him by seeing Him in you in all of His spiritual glory. That's why we have to address the questions asked by our cross. Our testimony of Jesus is Who we say that He is, by our verbal testimony and by our lifestyles and choices including in the midst of our cross. Because anyone can praise Jesus when there's no

suffering; but not everyone can praise Jesus in the fullness of persecution or the fullness of suffering from other means. Your Cross and its questions simply ask that ultimate question. Who am I saying that He is at this very moment? The world is looking to you for the answer to that question. And they will hear your nonverbal answers more than your verbal answers. So what do we shout to the world about our Jesus when we're in the midst of our cross?

The cross is the questioner; but the cross is not really the question. The question is what are you saying? What are you declaring? What are you choosing? What are you manifesting in the midst of Your Cross? Are you a living epistle, telling a true story of Jesus, like Paul? To live is Christ no matter what's going on around me and to die is gain? Are you an earthen vessel bringing Jesus and only Jesus, or bringing your little grab bag of fleshly grumbling? Are you an ambassador for Christ who is faithfully representing Him at all times? Or are you saying that no, if my God, I will know He loves me and I will know He's powerful and I'll know He's faithful when He takes me out of these circumstances rather than allowing Him to be revealed through me in the midst of the circumstances? Your Cross is the mechanism of doing that. Remember I told the story that I read in Max Lacado of the little kid asking the sculptor how he made that lion out of granite? And the artist, remember, said it's easy; you just chip away everything that's not a lion. So suffering is the mechanism by which everything is chipped away that is not of Jesus Christ. You say why must we do that? It's because we will not allow it to occur any other way.

You get to choose; you choose flesh or Spirit. You cannot worship Christ by life in the flesh. I'm reminded of the story in I Kings 18:21 when Elijah was confronting the prophets of Baal. And he basically says choose this day whom you will serve; if the Lord be God, then Him, if Baal be god, then him. And you remember the Scriptural response? But the people spoke not a word. In spite of such a glaringly evident crystallized choice phrased by Elijah, they wouldn't choose. And I'm afraid that that's true for many of us Christians. So paraphrased: Choose this day whom you will serve, fellow Christian; if Jesus be Lord, then Him. That's the Spirit with Jesus as the basis; if self be lord, then him. That's the flesh with self as the basis. And that's simply the fundamental question asked by Your Cross. Deuteronomy 13:19 tells us – choose life that you may live. Now as Saints, of course, we have eternal life with our God guaranteed through the cross of Jesus Christ. To live, for us as Saints, given the choices that we have of flesh versus Spirit, is to choose the abundant life. But that is a life we must choose. And we must choose it even in the midst of Your Cross. See we want to define the abundant life as the absence of a cross. Jesus defines it as bearing witness of Him in the midst of Your Cross. That's simply how God views reality and it is His universe. I did not create it; I wasn't there. So I get to choose; but I don't get to choose the choices; I don't get to choose the consequences of the choices; and I don't get not to choose; and I can't choose both including in the midst of my cross.

So my time is up and I thank you for listening.