

Dying to Self (The Epic of the Cross Series – Part III)

3/15/2009

The notes that follow each question below come from discussions that occurred after the sermon or further consideration of some of the issues raised. They should not be considered the “correct” answers by any means. It is hoped that they will provide a starting point for developing your own discussion of Pastor Steve’s sermons.

1. What do you see (what comes to mind) when you look at a large wooden cross?

As Pastor Steve said, we tend to comprehend the cross based on where we are spiritually. Thus, words like murder, sacrifice, offering, suffering, ransom (for our sins) might be used by those familiar with the Biblical story. Nonbelievers might just see it as a religious symbol denoting a church.

2. Pastor Steve suggested that each of us tends to look at the cross through a window of some sort in the same way that some of the female followers of Christ “beheld” the cross as Jesus died (Luke 23:49). They were constructing theories of what was going on. Isn’t the cross just the cross? How would you explain these “windows”?

Each generation sees the cross through a new, relevant perspective. The cross is still the same, but we need new metaphors to help the cross speak to the message God would have for that person. We can’t all look through the same window because we don’t all perceive the exact same theology and don’t define things in the same way.

3. Read Galatians 2:15-16

It seems like Paul is saying the Jews are different and at the same time saying they aren’t different. How can that be?

While the Jews are still God’s chosen people (v. 15), no amassing of good works or compliance with Old Testament laws will be enough to get them to heaven. Whether Jews or Gentiles, everyone must trust Christ for their salvation.

4. Read Galatians 2:19-21.

a) There is lots of talk about dying and crucifixion. What is Paul trying to say in verses 19 & 20?

Paul says our focus no longer is on the Old Testament laws, but our allegiance is to Christ. My old self has died and I am a new creation. Because Christ lives in me, His love is demonstrated through me.

b) What warning is Paul giving the reader in verse 21?

If we try to show God we are good enough to enter his holy presence by complying with the rules, then we are telling God that we don’t really think He needed to send Jesus to die on the cross as the final perfect sacrifice. However, Christ is enough! Thus, we must set aside the temptation to impose a set of rules on people, as if obedience to man-made rules will somehow make them a better Christian.

5. Pastor Steve said there is a difference between the crucifixion and the cross. How are they different?

The crucifixion is an event that occurred 2000 years ago on a Friday. It lasted for about six hours and then was over. The cross is a living reality. It is a symbol of the way God thinks; it reveals God's mind to us. Thus, the cross is no longer a symbol of shame, but of glory. It reveals power, not weakness.

6. Toward the end of the sermon, Pastor Steve said that some of us have small crosses, while others have big crosses. What did he mean?

A small cross is easily put off to the side. It isn't seen as adequate for our salvation, so we still must follow a list of rules. We are always reminding others of what was required in the past and trying to continue those restrictions.

If we have a large cross, it is enough. In fact, it is so large that we are running into it all the time in everything we do. The cross is always in the center of our vision as we react and respond to people and situations in our lives. We are no longer self-righteous because our space is so filled with this large cross that we can not stay self absorbed.

7. Work your way through the acronym SELF, explaining what each letter signifies.

S = Style – How do I look? Focus is on accomplishments, degrees, image. We have this idea of what it means to be a Christian and try to mold ourselves to this man-made image.

E = Effort – We work hard at doing good things. The focus is on works. If we do enough good things, then we will be worthy of a spot in heaven.

L = Laws – We set up expectations, standards, and limitations that reflect our understanding of what a Christian should do and look like. Then, we impose them on ourselves and those around us, as if compliance with “our” rules would be the key to salvation.

F = Fellowship – While the Bible encourages Christian fellowship, this describes a focus on winning the approval and admiration of those around us. Our feeling of righteousness comes from how others see us, rather than a right relationship with God.

As we are less SELF, we are more “Christ”, focusing on others and desiring only to do God's will.

8. Does it help to think of dying to “self will” rather than dying to self?

We still have our personality traits and interests that we have always had, but now we turn over control of our lives to God. Our focus is on doing His will, using our gifts and talents to do His work. It's not about us, it's about Him.

9. So how do we do this? How do we die to self?

Always seek God, remaining humble. Look to the interests of others rather than yourself. Focus on what God wants rather than what you want.