

The Death of Innocence (The Epic of the Cross Series – Part II)

3/8/2009

1. Protestant church buildings tend to contain empty crosses, and the members within them tend to wear empty crosses. Why do we do that, and how might we benefit from thinking more often about Christ on the cross??

Protestants tend to emphasize the risen, living Savior. The crucifixion was a means to an end – forgiveness of our sins. Jesus paid the final blood sacrifice price, so forgiveness of our sins is now available simply by confessing our sin and accepting this gift of salvation.

The potential problem with focusing on beautiful crosses that are works of art and wonderful to behold is that it ignores the ugliness, pain, and suffering that it represented. Visualizing Jesus on an old, rugged, wooden cross rather than a bright chrome pendant might help us comprehend more completely what He did 2000 years ago – and force us to consider why He did it.

2. Pastor Steve described a typical Christian mindset as:
God is Holy; we are not. Thus, God wants nothing to do with us, because we are not worthy. Jesus' blood was a sacrifice for our sins. If we accept that gift of grace, then we are reconciled with God. What did he say was the problem with this thinking?

It emphasizes the wrath of God as the cause of the cross. Somebody has to appease God by paying the price. It ignores the fact that God purposefully sent His Son because He loved us. (John 3:16) It also deals with my sins up until the point at which I've accepted Christ as my Savior and been forgiven, but ignores those that I commit afterwards. Further, it does not address why I continue sinning.

3. Read 2 Corinthians 5:14-16.

a) What motivates Christ?

Love

b) What does it mean that Christ's love "controls" or "compels" us?

His love causes us to take certain actions and not do other things because we want to please Jesus.

c) Verse 16 seems like a riddle. What is Paul saying here?

Jesus' followers first interacted with Him as a human being, but now that he has died on the cross and been resurrected they know Him as the Messiah, their Savior. He truly was, and is, the Son of God.

4. Continue reading 2 Cor. 5:17-21.

a) What is the difference between being cleansed of our sins and being a new creation?

If we are just cleanup up, we are still our old selves, just washed off a bit. On the other hand, if we are new creatures (v. 17), we now have the mind of Christ and can act and think completely differently. It changes how we see ourselves and how we view life.

b) Pastor Steve talked about Jesus dying on our behalf, not in our place. How are these different from each other?

Jesus gave up His life in exchange for everyone else's lives. His sacrifice reconciled us with God. His life for our life. We are thus free to live life as God wants. "In our place" focuses on our guilt. "On our behalf" focuses on our opportunity to accept grace and then live changed lives (lives more like what was envisioned in the Garden of Eden).

c) What can we do as a result of becoming new creations that we could not do before?

We can have a close relationship with God (v. 18-19).

We can become ambassadors for Christ, serving as the feet, hands, and mouth of God to those around us (v. 20-21).

5. Our sinful natures cause us to feel both guilt and shame. How are these two emotions different?

Guilt comes from specific acts that we perform that we know are wrong. If we break a rule, then we realize we are guilty and must pay the price (at least, if we get caught). Guilt tends to be more of an external issue. Shame is feeling of disgrace, a sense that we have not lived up to the standards that we and others have set that may have nothing to do with illegal actions. Thus, it requires some moral sense of right and wrong and is more of an internal issue.

6. As described by Pastor Steve, we confess our guilt, but underneath is shame. How is that a problem?

We acknowledge our sins and seek forgiveness. But even after God has forgiven us, we still feel unacceptable, inadequate, weak, and ugly. That certainly does not reflect a sense that we are reconciled with God and ready to hold up our end of a close relationship with Him; nor can we head out as ambassadors on His behalf.

7. Toward the end of the sermon, Pastor Steve challenged us to let the person that we now are crucify the person that we once were. What is he saying we should do?

We need to receive the forgiveness that comes from the death of Christ on the cross and then understand that we are now a new creation. Our old self died on that cross and exists no more. We don't need to feel either guilt or shame. Instead, we should expect a transformation in which we have exchanged a new life for an old one. We have exchanged innocence for what was defiled.

8. Close with Colossians 1:19-23. Reflect on the open invitation for reconciliation with God.

God wants everyone to spend eternity with Him. He made that pathway available through the death of Christ, so that we can present ourselves holy and blameless before Him.