

Having the Right Message

A Study and Comparison of Different Emphases in Ministry

WHAT IS THE MESSAGE?

A Need to Find What It Is that God Wants to Emphasize

There are hundreds of subjects and themes in the Bible. However, the Bible is not like an encyclopedia that simply contains many subjects that are unrelated to each other. All the subjects of the Bible are interrelated and important. What is more, even though all the individual themes may be important, they are not all preeminent. Our task as believers is to discover the things that are paramount in the eyes of God and not just the things that we find more interesting or to our liking.

There is one central theme in the New Testament to which all other subjects must adhere. That theme is not just important, nor is its value based on the times we live in or the needs of today. The theme that is above every theme in the Bible is Christ and Him crucified. The preaching of the Cross is the central message of the New Testament. Listen to what the Apostle Paul had to say about the Cross of Christ: *"For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the Cross of Christ should be made of none effect. For the preaching of the Cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God"* (1 Cor. 1:17-18; see also 2:2).

To Paul, the preaching of the gospel was synonymous with the preaching of the Cross, and it is the Cross of Christ that is the power of God. Paul refused to glory or boast in any other theme or subject in the Bible but the Cross of Christ. *"But God forbid that I should glory, save in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world"* (Gal. 6:14). This not only was the emphasis of the Apostle Paul but of all the New Testament writers.

Why is this theme or message so important? Why aren't other, more "positive" themes such as spiritual gifts, blessings, or personal happiness the focal point of the New Testament? Why is it that the Cross is elevated to such a position of prominence in God's plan, and yet so little emphasis is put on it in our day? We will answer these questions in a moment, but first let us consider some of the things that many Christians emphasize.

Where Do We Put the Emphasis?

In today's modern Christian world, we find believers emphasizing many subjects and themes. Some emphasize anointing, doctrines, experiences, ordinances, evangelism, good works, and even the Holy Spirit. The problem is that many tend to place a strong emphasis on their own unique brand of religion as being the true representation of Christ's interests in the earth. The task of the Christian is not to flip through the Bible and pick the subjects that most interest him but to find the heart of God and put all efforts toward that -- even if that particular emphasis is

uncomfortable to the flesh. It is clear that the writers of the New Testament had to lay down many personal interests in order to take up the interests of the Lord Jesus.

What Was Paul's Emphasis?

Paul preached *"the unsearchable riches of Christ"* (Eph. 3:8). He boldly declared, *"For I am determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ and Him crucified"* (1 Cor. 2:2). That verse is no passing statement made by Paul; it was the theme of his whole life and ministry. All throughout the Apostle's writings, you find him emphasizing Christ and the Cross.

Even though the Cross is the great theme of the New Testament, we still find that many believers and ministers do not understand or preach the Cross of Christ in a manner consistent with our founding Church fathers. It can be said of many leaders that the Cross is not preached as the sole reason for boasting in God. In pulpits across the world there is virtual silence on the emphasis of the Cross and its work in the believer, other than for salvation from hell. Paul writes, *"But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed"* (Gal. 1:8).

What Is the Holy Spirit's Emphasis?

The Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity. If anyone can be trusted to lead us to the crux of the matter, it is He. The Holy Spirit will honor God's Word and guide us into all truth, not leaning to an extreme emphasis on any particular thing. However, the one thing the Holy Spirit wants to keep at the center of the whole spectrum of divine revelation is Christ and Him crucified (see Jn. 3:14-15, 12:32, Rom. 1:16, 1 Cor. 1:18, 2:2). We can read John 16:13-14, which says, *"Howbeit, when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will show you things to come. He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall show it unto you"*.

It is clear from these passages that the Holy Spirit did not come to emphasize Himself; He came to lift up Christ. There is much talk nowadays about anointing and anointed ministry, but the truly anointed ministry is a ministry that emphasizes Christ, for the word "Christ" means "anointed". God did not give His Spirit in order to preach what the Spirit can do or is doing. The Holy Spirit was given that we might know and preach Christ and Him crucified.

People are always talking about the "next wave of the Holy Spirit". Of course, this phrase is not found in Scripture. Though the Spirit may move at different times to spotlight a new area of truth or to counterbalance some heresy in the church, He always is consistent to emphasize Christ in all seasons. Problems and truths come and go, but there is one unchangeable truth that remains the same (Heb. 13:8). Present day movements of the Holy Spirit will rise and fall, but His primary purpose for having been sent to us will always be the same.

Let me share with you a story that speaks of unchanging truth as opposed to momentary emphasis. A man went to visit his old violin teacher and asked, "What's new?" "I'll tell you what's new," said the teacher. He grabbed his tuning fork and hit it. The tuning fork, at 440 cycles per second, vibrates an "A", and the "A" came out loud and clear.

"Do you hear that? That's an 'A'," he proclaimed. "Now, upstairs a soprano rehearses endlessly, and she is always off key. Next door is a cello player who plays his instrument very poorly. There is an out-of-tune piano on the other side of me. I am surrounded by terrible noise night and day."

Striking the "A" again, he continued, "Do you hear that? That is an 'A' today. That will be an 'A' tomorrow. It will never change."

This story illustrates that there are many subjects in the Bible, and they all have their place. We should give time to the study of these things, but the one abiding truth that is timeless and changeless is Christ and Him crucified. It will not change as the theme of all eternity but will remain the truth to which all other truths must be tuned. Jesus will forever be the Lamb on the throne and should be the gathering point for all Christians, regardless of emphasis.

Fully Preaching the Gospel of Christ

"...so that from Jerusalem, and round about unto Illyricum, I have fully preached the gospel of Christ." Romans 15:19

During the first century, there was constantly one point of contention concerning Paul's preaching that was based on the question: "What was the gospel he preached?" Paul's gospel was none other than Jesus Christ and Him crucified (cf. I Cor. 2:2). He did not merely preach that Jesus was the Christ or that He died on a cross. To preach Christ and Him crucified is to preach not only that Jesus died on a cross, but why He died and what His death accomplished in relation to us. In the above passage, the Apostle spoke of *fully* preaching the gospel. That should be the endeavor of every minister and every child of God.

Some of the different emphases become heretical, not because of what they teach but because of what they do not mention. Preaching on the subject of crucifixion is very different than preaching the Cross. In some men's preaching, they may refer to the act of crucifixion some 2000 years ago, but that can be nothing more than a historical fact. The physical crucifixion of Christ and the work of the Cross in our lives today are two different things. Moving people to tears over Jesus' agony and torture was not the motive for Paul preaching the Cross. We must find more meaning than just an emotional release. The true meaning is that Jesus died to bring us to death in order that Christ may be our life. This view of the Cross will bring us into the *full* meaning of preaching the Cross. Our task should be to not only understand what the great theme of the New Testament is but also to *fully* understand its implications and vastness. To do that we must understand what Paul means when he refers to the gospel and the subject of Christ and Him crucified.

The Common Meaning of Christ and Him Crucified

Christ uniquely takes our place, for He is our substitute (cf. Jn. 11:50; I Tim. 2:6). As such, He endured God's wrath for us. As we accept the work of the Cross, the benefits of his death are applied to us. One of the benefits is propitiation, which means that at the Cross the wrath of God is turned away from us due to the substitutionary work of Christ. The blood of Jesus appeases God's wrath. This is described in Romans 3:25, where it says, *"God hath set forth [Jesus] to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past..."* Another benefit is forgiveness of sins received by faith. Our faith is counted to us for righteousness (cf. Rom. 4:3).

In the above paragraph is a description of the "basic Cross" that so many ministers preach. Let me make it clear that teaching these things as the Cross is not wrong, but it is certainly limited in scope. These things are only the substitutionary aspects of the Cross. We know that Jesus died to satisfy all the righteous requirements of God the Father and to redeem, justify, and sanctify everyone that would receive Him. Even though these things be true, is that all there is to the phrase "Christ and Him crucified"? Is all that is required in "fully preaching the gospel of Christ"?

How did Paul preach this Gospel? *Fully!* He did not only present parts of it that he felt would be more widely accepted by the masses.

To believe in the Cross of Christ is not just to believe in His love and redeeming work on the Cross. It is to believe in the *full* work of the Cross, which includes our death with Christ, and not just Him dying as a substitute for us. What will be the result of a gospel that is set forth only in part? Consider the church today to find the answer. To receive only a part of the gospel will result in a church that is blessed in terms of gifts and comfort but powerless in terms of victory over a sinful nature and a selfish lifestyle.

The Cross was not just devised to deliver us from the penalty of sin but also from its power. Notice below what aspects of the Cross that Paul boasted in and the effects upon his life: "*I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live, yet not I, Christ liveth in me*" (Gal. 2:20). Most Christians never seem to discover any passages in the Bible that relate to their own crucifixion but only those which speak of Christ's death for us. They have not *fully* comprehended the work of the Cross.

The primary Apostle whom God used to write the New Testament said, "*But God forbid that I should glory, except in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world*" (Gal. 6:14). If you will look closely at the last two verses to which I have referred and believe what they say, you will find that the work of the Cross goes much deeper than what some call "simple salvation". The Cross is meant to have a profound impact upon our lives and not just on our belief systems.

The True Meaning of Preaching Christ

Jesus did not just come to save us but to give us Life. That reality is far greater than just understanding that Jesus exists, or that He was God, or even that He saves us from sin. While the reality of Christ as God or even Savior is both wonderful and powerful, the Scriptures give much more room to understanding Him as our Life. Christ as the Life in the believer is the source from which any real experience should flow. His life in us is the cornerstone of any true Christian work. Paul recognized that the gospel was to be more than just simple salvation and saw the need for the revelation that Christ was His Life and the source by which he should live (cf. Gal. 1:11-16; 2:20).

Comprehending Christ more fully in this manner begins to open great reservoirs of victory and freedom for the believer. Glorious things are spoken of the people of God, but few things are more glorious than that Christ — God manifest in the flesh — lives in them. Paul prayed, "*My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you*" (Gal. 4:19). The particular children of God Paul was praying for had already received Christ as Savior, but they needed something more if they were going to live satisfactorily unto the Father. They needed the Christ they had received at salvation to be formed in them as Life.

The realization of this great marvel among the Gentiles is "*The mystery which hath been hidden from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to His saints, to whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory*" (Col. 1:26-27). The mystery has to do with Christ in us, the hope of glory. Christ, the One Who would rule and reign, was now being proclaimed among the Gentiles as Life in them. Their hope was not only found in the fact that Jesus would save them but that He would inhabit them. So these Gentiles, who previously possessed "*no hope*" (Eph. 2:12), were now in possession of a hope. It was Christ in them proclaimed that now caused them to be in possession

of *"the hope of glory"*. The mystery had to do with the Gentiles no longer being alienated from this *"hope of glory"*. Clearly, they did not find their hope in Christ returning for them in the clouds one day or even in being saved from hell one day. The hope was met in Christ being formed in them.

Acts 3:19 states, *"That your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord"*. The "times of refreshing" were not based on our sins being blotted out but from "God with us" becoming the presence of God. In Ezekiel 37 we find the people of God in a fallen and unrevived state. When it comes to reviving dry, dead bones, pointing out sins will not be sufficient to bring results. The need is for Life. *"Thus saith the Lord God unto these bones, Behold, I will cause breath to enter into you and ye shall live"* (Eze. 37:5). Likewise, the message Paul preached was one of Life and not just repentance. Yes, we should receive forgiveness, but let us not stop there; we must receive Life. We must understand being refreshed by the presence of the Lord in greater terms than just getting happy because we feel the Spirit move. That can be momentary and fleeting. What we need is the presence of the Lord revealed in us bringing more than just joy; we need it to bring life to the inner man.

So many churches languish in spiritual decay, not because they do not preach against sin or fail to seek revival, but because Christ as Life is not the emphasis. The definition of the presence of the Lord must be made clear. The presence of the Lord that many seek pertaining to revival is not the same presence of the Lord that the New Testament emphasizes. Paul's revival prayer for the Galatians was that Christ be formed in them; not that Christ would fall upon them. The question that we must force upon our minds is this: is Christ being *fully* preached? We may well expound upon our dry emphases, but the question rings out loud and clear: Is Christ being *fully* preached?

The Emphasis of Christ as Life

"And he shall send Jesus Christ, who before was preached unto you..." Acts 3:20

All true revival and spiritual blessings are dependent upon Christ being preached. A church without the emphasis of Christ has missed the mark. They are as the dry bones of which the prophet speaks in Ezekiel 37:1-10. Preaching unity may bring the bones together, as we see in verse seven, but there is still no Life. Our emphasis on unity, revival, and the like may bring about a noise, which causes a shaking, so that the bones come together, bone to its bone (see Eze. 37:7), but there is still no breath in them. These dry bones came together, but they were spiritually dead until the true emphasis of Life had come. Therefore the emphasis is not just Christ as Savior but Christ as Life. Many people think Christ as the emphasis refers only to His work of salvation, but there are many who are saved that continue to live their own lives *for* Jesus instead of looking to "Christ in you" as their hope of glory. Christ as Savior may only require a Jesus that sits at the right hand of God, but Christ as our Life requires a Christ who lives *in us* on a daily basis.

The Gospel, God's wondrous message to us, is Christ! There is no other. The Christian Life is Christ. There is no other. Eternal Life is Christ. There is no other. *"He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life"* (I Jn. 5:12). With all the themes there are in the Bible that can be emphasized, how could *this* message of Christ as our Life be relegated to a back seat?

Christ Liveth In Me

"I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me."
Galatians 2:20

As has been stated earlier, the real emphasis of the gospel is not simply that Christ saves us but that Christ lives in us. It is the realization of the promise: *"For ye are the temple of the living God: as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people"* (II Cor. 6:16). Most of us are familiar with Jesus' command to abide in Him (cf. Jn. 15). As the supplier of Life to all the branches, Jesus spoke as the Vine and said, *"Abide in me, and I in you"* (Jn. 15:4), His reasoning being that Christ's very own Life and nature may abide in us. This is to be a continuous process, taking place long after we have been established in salvation by grace.

Notice the clarity of purpose behind Paul's prayers to the Christians at Ephesus, and add that to his prayers for the Christians at Galatia. We read in Ephesians 3:14-17, *"For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith."* In Galatians 4:19 the Apostle states, *"My little children, of whom I travail in birth until Christ be formed in you."* This travail was taking place in Paul because another gospel was being introduced that endangered the clear message of Christ in them as their Life. His travail was not for a move of the Spirit but that Christ be formed in Christians. His first concern and emphasis was not for revival or anointing but for Life.

The Cross Is Not a Special Emphasis

Paul's statements to the Church at Colosse make it plain that what he preached was not just a special emphasis but the heart of the gospel message. He boldly proclaimed, *"Christ in you, the hope of glory"*. He then went on to add, *"Whom (referring to Christ in them) we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom"* (Col. 1:28). Of course, none of these statements is as clear as the simple declaration that Paul made in Galatians 2:20: *"Christ liveth in me"*. We have received a new Life, an altogether new Life. You are not a new creature because you were saved *out of* something but because you have received *"newness of life"* (Rom. 6:4).

Notice in the following verses the relationship of faith and how it is linked to living by Christ in us: *"That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith"; "The life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me"*. It was by faith that I received the living Christ, and it is also by faith that that same Christ I received at salvation now lives in me by His nature.

Also notice that the faith by which Paul lived was faith in a Person as his Life and not just a doctrine of faith. Most of the time our faith is aimed at some object that we seek to possess, whether financial or material, instead of involving our faith with releasing Christ as our Life in every situation. Many believers who talk about faith in a living Christ hold a concept that is concerned more with a Christ that lives in heaven and rose from the dead to get there. But Paul's view concerning a living Christ related directly to Jesus rising from the dead and indwelling Paul's own being as Life. The two verses quoted above speak of faith in Jesus, but not just any Jesus; these verses speak of the one who lives in us and not just in heaven. Do you exercise your faith in a living Christ? Under what view of Christ and His resurrection do you operate?

The Christian life is the Life of Christ. It is Christ living in us. There is no other way. Christ Himself is the Way (cf. Jn. 14:6). The early Church knew this so well, and so Paul by the Holy Ghost could say to them, "*You are dead!*" (Col. 3:3, cf. Gal. 2:20), and they understood exactly what he meant. Sadly, the question must be asked to each believer today: Do we understand what Paul means when he declares that we are dead? Look at where a New Testament Christian places his emphasis: "*I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me... I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain.*" (Col. 3:3; Gal.2:20,21). Most churches who have adopted a particular emphasis have done so either because they thought that this particular theme would sustain their church or because they needed to draw their church out of a dry spell. Dry bones need many things, but the greatest need, and therefore the greatest emphasis, should be that Christ's Body be filled with Christ's Life.

WHERE DO WE PUT THE EMPHASIS?

Paul's Warnings Concerning Emphasizing Other Things

There are ministers in church pulpits who preach prosperity with an emphasis on gain. Others preach a "seek to save" mentality with particular emphasis on self being central to the message. These ministers are preaching a spirit other than the Spirit of the Cross and the Spirit of the Lamb. It is important to see that Paul was not just concerned that we preach the right words and have them in the right order; he was concerned with what "spirit" we convey.

Many preachers are intense, articulate, pleasant, and resourceful, but are they *fully* preaching the gospel? Paul warned that ministers would come "...*preach(ing) another Jesus, whom we have not preached, or...another spirit, which ye have not received, or another gospel, which ye have not accepted...*" (II Cor. 11:2-4). Think of what Paul is saying here. Preachers will appear that seem to be men of honesty and righteousness, who will fail to deliver the whole message as Paul had done. Worse yet, they are delivering to you another spirit that is contrary to the nature of the Lamb, whom we all claim to serve.

A Gospel Bent on Pleasing Man

In Galatians 1:6-9 the Apostle says that they are preaching another gospel – one that seeks the favor of men and pleases men. Now it is very important to look at the context of the verses to which I have referred and accept the gospel about which Paul is speaking instead of the gospel about which *we think* he is speaking. I challenge you to read the Scriptures as they are written rather than by the interpretation you may have always been taught! If you continue reading verses 11 through 24, you will find that Paul is talking about a gospel by which Christ was revealed *in him* and not just *to him*. Paul was astounded that the Galatians would begin to follow after a gospel that was devised to please man's flesh rather than a gospel that glories in Christ in us (see verse 24): "*I marvel that ye are so soon removed from **Him** that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel, which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed*" (Gal. 1:6-8).

In the beginning verses of the first chapter of Galatians, Paul only tells what the wrong emphasis is, but through the course of this same chapter, he clearly defines *his version* of what *he calls* the gospel. Do not miss it! Our faith must be built upon the foundation laid by the apostles and prophets, and Paul is an Apostle (I Cor. 3:10-11; Eph. 2:20). It is the gospel that Paul preached that we find in the pages of Scripture. This gospel does not need updating for a new century, for it has proved adequate for the centuries before us up to this point. His emphasis should be *our* emphasis.

In II Corinthians chapter three, Paul taught that we are not like Moses, who put a veil over his face when he came out from the presence of God. Whenever we turn to the Lord and behold Him, we are changed into the image of Christ. In that way, the Word of God is like a mirror. The method of transformation is by spending time in the presence of the Lord with the goal of His image being formed in us. This is more than spending time in prayer or in a glorious church service basking in the presence of God. We are not to simply seek to get a hold of the glory of God but to get His likeness formed in us. We have spent far too much time in services experiencing the presence of God, only to go away in the basic same condition in which we came.

People Are Spoiled

Paul warned us to *"Beware lest any man spoil you..."* A lot of people have been spoiled rotten. How have they been spoiled? *"... through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world and not after Christ. For in him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in him, who is the head of all principality and power"* (Col. 2:8-10). So many people today are spoiled with teaching that pets the flesh. Such teaching is based on obtaining blessings in this life and finding rudimentary answers in the world while ignoring Christ all the while. This teaching does not ignore the Christ that helps us; in fact, it is very much in tune with *that* Christ. But seeking Christ to the loss of our old selfish identity is seldom sought. However, we are not to find our completion in blessings and a pleasing earth existence, for our completion is only found in Him.

What Is Gnosticism: Christ or Spiritual Warfare?

Toward the end of the apostolic era and at the beginning of the second century, a heresy called Gnosticism developed in Christianity. Its title came from the Greek word "gnosis", which means "knowledge". The Gnostics were inordinately fascinated with the unseen world and hierarchies of angels. To the Gnostics, a person was only considered "spiritual" if they bought into the so-called secret knowledge of the Gnostics and their mapping of the world of principalities and powers. Paul warned the Colossians: *"Such a person goes into great detail about what he has seen, and his unspiritual mind puffs him up with idle notions. He has lost connection with the Head, from whom the whole body, supported and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows as God causes it to grow"* (Col. 2:18-19 NIV).

The Gnostics looked down on the Christians whose center was Christ and Him crucified, of which Paul was one. These Gnostics prided themselves on their "superior" knowledge, which pertained to angels, demon principalities, and spiritual warfare. They assumed that they had the "meat" while others had only the "milk". The Gnostics felt that they were mature because they understood "the deeper things of the Spirit". The clear teaching of Paul in Colossians was not that the teaching of the Cross and the emphasis of being in Christ was Gnosticism, but that this new teaching about angels (principalities) was moving away from the norm.

Keep in mind that the troublemakers at Colossae were trying to impress the Colossians with their spiritual knowledge and mysteries. Throughout Paul's letter to the Colossians, he emphasized realities such as a need for the revelation of Christ, the fact that we are in Christ, the work of the Cross in circumcising our flesh, our relationship with one another in the Body of Christ, as well as "Christ in you, the hope of glory".

To counter the Gnostics' "deeper knowledge", Paul used the term "epi-gnosis" when referring to the realities of the Christ Life to show that they were far above any teaching on dealing with spiritual entities. In this way, he was assuring the church at Colosse that they had already received the real thing. This was no half-gospel which needed to be added to before it could be considered complete. It was the true gospel, full in every sense, and nothing of which to be

ashamed. No one would be able to come along later with a message that could improve upon it. It was the heart of what God wanted preached, and the Colossians should consider any other teaching to be "vain philosophy".

Paul Preached a Revelation of Christ

In Galatians, Paul speaks of experiencing three years of separation in the desert of Arabia. Those were three glorious years, sitting in the heavenlies at the table of the Lord. It was there that the Holy Spirit taught Paul the Christ of the Bible. After those three years in the Word of God, every reference Paul made of Jesus comes straight from the Scriptures. Though Paul lived at the time that Jesus walked the earth, he never made one reference to the earthly Jesus or to His earthly ministry. His was a revealed Christ.

Before those three years came about, Paul had already experienced salvation. However, for Paul, conversion was not enough! A supernatural visitation on the road to Damascus was not enough! A blinding vision of Christ that included hearing an audible voice from heaven was not sufficient! Not only that, but he had encountered one of the most experienced-filled and spiritual calls a man of God had ever received. For some reason, however, all these experiences were not sufficient. Paul hungered for the Christ of the Bible, and it was there that Jesus was made *fully* known to him. Paul said, *"By revelation he made known to me the mystery"* (Eph. 3:3). How many preachers, missionaries, and teachers can say with Paul, *"The gospel which was preached by me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ"* (Gal. 1:11-12)?

Not "A Word" but "The Word"

It seems today that everyone wants a fresh word from God – but God wants us to have *the* Word of God, and He wants it to be made flesh and dwell among us. There is certainly nothing wrong with having a visitation from God or to be given "a word" from the Lord, but God is looking for believers who are not satisfied with temporal moves of God and are seeking something more permanent. He is looking for those who will seek a revelation of Him as their very own life and nature. II Corinthians chapter three talks about God's desire that we be changed into the image of Christ from glory to glory. Moving from glory to glory does not mean to move through various themes of the Bible such as success preaching, motivation seminars, and preaching on having a good self-image. For Paul, moving from glory to glory was an ever-increasing revelation of Him into whose image we are being changed. The context of this passage bears this out. At some point we need to do away with all of the "emphasis teaching" and find the rock upon which He will build His church – the revelation of Christ (see Matt. 16:18). Usually when we receive "a word" from a prophet or minister, we apply it to some temporal need such as healing or finances. God uses me very often in giving such "words" to members of the church, but what is needed most today is His infallible Word – a true and living revelation of the Lord Himself. Yes, let all the themes, gifts and blessings in the Bible be ours, but never let them be emphasized above Christ. When we declare that Jesus Christ is Lord, then let it be so, and let no other emphasis within the church replace Him. No matter how glorious a new experience may be, never let an experience supersede the Person of Christ.

THE CROSS AS THE FOUNDATION

The Pre-eminence of the Cross above All Other Messages

Is the work of the Cross a mere stepping-stone to something beyond itself? Shall we ever cease to glory in the Cross of Christ? Jesus spoke of taking up the Cross daily, and yet too many are ready to move on past it unto something more glorious. The reason why many churches are in dire straits is because the subject they have chosen as their emphasis is not foundational. That means that they have built on something that is not secure and lasting.

The Foundation Upon Which All Else Is Laid

I Corinthians 3:11 tells us, "*For other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ*". The foundation for all other emphasis is Jesus Christ. To preach some other emphasis in a manner that would portray it as the foundation is to unseat Christ from His rightful place. Is it any wonder David said in Psalm 11:3, "*If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do*"? Christ is the only sure foundation. When your main emphasis is revival, evangelism, discipleship, faith, or any subject other than Christ, then you are placing something above Christ. For example, believers have the little saying, "Prayer changes things". To make a point, let me say that prayer in itself can change nothing. God is the one who changes things. He hears our prayers, and He moves. Technically speaking, our prayers did not bring about the change. This may seem insignificant to some, but to say that prayer changes things is just a slight step in the direction of removing Christ as the foundation of all movement. If you combine this slight "off-centeredness" with many others, you may eventually miss the mark completely.

Again, simply to make a point, surely you have prayed many prayers, and nothing changed. Why? Because if God does not want something changed, then all the prayers in the world are not only powerless, but worthless. I have gone to great lengths to make one simple observation: Christ is the source for everything. What He has done on the Cross has opened the door whereby God will even listen to our prayers. Emphasize whatever area you feel compelled to by God, but never let it overshadow that ministry which lifts up Christ and Him crucified.

The Cross Is the Power of God

I am not specifically picking on the subject of prayer, but I want to continue to make a point concerning what we emphasize. I could use the example prayer, evangelism or any other emphasis and still make the same valid point. For example, we say, "Prayer is powerful". Certainly it is, and I have no qualms with that. However, the Scriptures never declare that prayer is the power of God. But Paul did write these words: "*For the preaching of the Cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us who are saved it is the power of God*" (I Cor. 1:18). To some believers, the Cross is the power of God, but to others, the power of God may be some work the Holy Spirit will do. The anointing may break the yoke, but the Cross breaks the power of sin, self, Satan, condemnation, and a myriad of other things. If this is true, then why would so much

emphasis today be placed on the anointing breaking a yoke instead of the Cross breaking the power of everything else? God does not consider those who preach the Cross to be preaching foolishness. To Him, they know what is the power of God while others are trying to bestow power in other places. So many ministers preach lesser subjects that never really deliver the people of God; might God consider this sort of preaching "foolish"?

It is important to realize that the preaching of Christ and Him crucified is not an emphasis but the message of God. There are many emphases in the Bible such as praise, revival, evangelism, and family; nevertheless, to Paul the Cross was the very heart of the gospel. We may properly bestow the term "emphasis" upon every other subject in the Bible, but the preaching of Christ and Him crucified is the foundation for all other truths and the heart of what God desires to communicate to man. Like the rod of Moses that swallowed up all the other rods, the message of the Cross swallows up all other realities (Ex. 7:9-12).

We see this to be true for many topics that are emphasized today, such as power and wisdom, whose true natures find their beginning in Christ. The Cross swallows these emphases up, such as the subject of power, for the Cross is the power of God. We find that I Corinthians 1:24 tells us that the preaching of the Cross is both the power and wisdom of God. The wisdom of God is incorporated into the reality that the death of the Cross is God's means of victory. Many consider this to be foolishness, but in God's eyes, to lose is gain. Our only priority must be to present Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

Many Christians set themselves up as experts in many fields, but the Apostle Paul's example should be an example for all of us. He was determined not to know *anything* but Christ and Him crucified (I Cor. 2:2). Every emphasis that usurps the Cross of Christ has the potential to lead people astray. Be faithful to what God has given you to emphasize, but let it bow its knee to the thing that God has declared as eternally preeminent.

How Big Is the Message of Christ and Him Crucified?

It is essential that every Christian be aware of how important the message of Christ and Him crucified is to God, to the point of surpassing and overriding all emphases. To help us grasp this in a small way, consider another example: Jesus never told us to take up praise daily and follow Him. Or consider the fact that the only ground of boasting for Paul and his ministry was in the Cross of Christ. But to truly understand the significance of the message of Christ and Him crucified, one must explore the vastness of the Scriptures.

On the next page, I have given just a few passages that, if examined with a pure heart, will show exactly how the message of the Cross swallows up all other truths. Also found in these verses are references of the Cross as the place of *our death* with Him and not simply Jesus' death *for us*. If we do not grasp the magnitude of the Cross and how it swallows up these things, then our particular emphasis, though not bad in itself, has the potential to move out of balance. Other dangers can arise in this situation, such as misinterpretation of the Scriptures, false doctrine, and even deception. Please take the time to look over the chart. However, the benefit to you could be tremendous if you took the time to look up these verses while allowing the Holy Spirit to speak to your heart.

Having used the Scriptures as testimonies to the superiority of the message of the Cross, let us now look to another source. The Cross is not most clearly comprehended in an act but in a

nature, and that nature is most clearly displayed in the person of the Lamb of God. The preaching of the Cross is the revealing of the Lamb; therefore the Cross is not just something that happened in the past but an ever on-going reality in the lives of those who love the Lamb. Jesus put the Cross in the context of "daily" living for God (cf. Lk. 9:23). Of all the things a person can encounter and emphasize throughout his day, contact with the Lamb on the throne and His nature within us should have precedence. The things of God should not override the Person of God.

In this greater sense, the Cross should be ever before us. The purpose of the Book of Revelation is to show us the great significance of the Cross in the person of the Lamb. "The Lamb as it had been slain" is what is enthroned as governor of the universe. The Cross is the symbol of both a dying and a risen Christ. It is a slain Lamb that sits in the position of the risen Son. The Book of Revelation shows that the Cross is the theme of eternity. Over twenty times does the word "Lamb" occur in the Book of Revelation, thus bringing His significance perpetually before the redeemed. The Lamb is the central focus of eternity, as if to prevent the possibility of our losing sight of *Christ crucified*. The Lamb stands as an affront to those who think their emphasis will take precedence over God's emphasis.

An Emphasis for All Time

Know this: the Lamb representing the Cross is what endures. The one thing God will never put up with is the casting aside of the preaching of the Cross! Why? He will not allow it because it would be a rejection of His Son – the Lamb. The Lamb is the name by which Jesus is best known in the heavenlies. As such, we obey, honor and worship Him, never being allowed to lose sight of the Cross amid all the glories of the kingdom. Paul's glorying was in the Cross, and so shall it be for all spiritual men who recognize Who it is that God has enthroned above everything else. It is the Lamb who stands in the midst of the elders (cf. Rev. 5:6), and before Him those elders fall down, saying, "Thou art worthy". See how Christ and Him crucified is above an emphasis on church government, offices, and position as these things fall prostrate at the feet of the Lamb! All those who have the proper emphasis sing, "Worthy is the Lamb". Notice that even though praise and worship are taking place, the theme of it is Christ and Him crucified. Praise and worship are swallowed up of the reality of Christ and Him crucified. Yes, we should continue to carry out the ministry of praise and worship, but *worship Him!* These heavenly scenes have said their farewells the old creation and now dwell upon heavenly themes. Long after every sin has been removed and forgotten, the Lamb will still be the focal point.

It is the Lamb who stands on Mount Zion (Rev. 14:1). That is where the tabernacle of David sits. Never forget that it is the Lamb who inhabits David's tabernacle, and it is the Lamb who is worshipped there. David's tabernacle in earth was only a shadow of the heavenly tabernacle (Heb. 9:24). It is the song of the Lamb that is sung in the true tabernacle (Rev. 15:3). It is in the heavenlies that we also find out from where we gain our victory. Emphasize spiritual warfare all you want, but it is the Lamb who wars and overcomes (Rev. 17:14). In this culminating Book, we find that Christ and Him crucified sums up all things.

All the glory of that which is from above revolves round the Lamb. Of the New Jerusalem it is said, "*The lamb is the light thereof*" (Rev. 21:23). Every object on which the eye falls is seen in the light of the Lamb. Can we say this of the themes of revival, financial prosperity, and evangelism? The Lamb is only another name for Christ crucified. With its light are all other things illuminated. The glow of the Cross penetrates every part of the New Jerusalem and reflects every gem. Golgotha is the fountainhead of this entire splendor, and the light from Calvary that fills the heaven of heavens.

The Cross is no dim light of a passing subject. It shines for all eternity and covers every object that has passed the test of time and made it into eternity. It is not shined upon by other objects

but itself shines upon all other emphases and truths. We will never get beyond the message of Christ and Him crucified and should never turn our backs on it – even for a moment.

True Disciples Follow the Lamb

Since all Christians everywhere claim to be disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ, let me leave you with one more example. We have an account in John 1:35-37 of the disciples encountering the true emphasis of God for the first time. It was the Lamb of God. The disciples not only beheld the Lamb but also left all and followed Him. The multitudes beheld the miracles of Jesus and followed after them. Others saw some other work that Jesus did and made it their point of emphasis because of its benefit to them personally. However, true followers of Jesus follow the Lamb and put no other thing before Him. As disciples today, we follow Him and shall follow Him eternally, as it is written, "*These are they who follow **the Lamb** wherever He goeth*" (Rev. 14:4).

The Cross is the source from which all spiritual things emanate. A tree, regardless of what kind it is, can never be independent of its roots. Even great trees that experience phenomenal growth are dependent upon their roots. No grand amount of fruit produced can remove the need for a seed to "*fall into the ground and die*" (Jn. 12:24). The Christian who ceases to honor the Cross of Christ above everything else has probably unwittingly placed his own personal emphasis above God's.

ENEMIES OF THE CROSS OF CHRIST

There Is an Offense of the Cross that Must Be Overcome

We read in Romans 6:3-5 that we are baptized into Jesus' death and planted together with him in the likeness of his death. We also read Paul's words in Galatians 2:20, which say, "*I am crucified with Christ*", and "*They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts*" (Gal. 5:24).

Paul would only boast in one thing, and that was the Cross of Christ (cf. Gal. 6:14). How strange that the preaching of the Cross, which was the only thing Paul determined to know, would be the one thing that so many people would reject! Why do people reject the preaching of the Cross? Why do people allow other things to be emphasized? Why do some not agree with preaching the Cross and cannot bear the message of the Cross? Why are human minds resistant to even taking the time to consider the validity of the message of Christ and Him crucified? Part of the answer to these questions is that many of these people have a wrong perception of the Cross.

An Offense to Modern Christianity

Jesus died to put away the flesh. He also instructed His followers to walk in a lifestyle of self-denial (Matt. 10:38-39). However, many Christians have been taught that Jesus came to cater to our flesh. You can see how there could be a clash between those who claim that the way of the Cross is God's way while others believe that God is simply interested in blessing and improving our earth-life.

Many Christians are quite prepared for Jesus to be their Friend and Savior. They are happy for Him to go along with them where they go and with what they want to do. However, Jesus is not supposed to follow us; He expects us to follow Him. The step that precedes following Jesus is taking up the Cross. Jesus said, "*If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his Cross daily, and follow me*" (Lk. 9:23). We cannot give one hand to the service of Jesus while reserving the other for self-gain and comfort. If we try to minister like that, we will not get very far, for our work will be disjointed and confused. Jesus called us to leave our things and yoke ourselves with Him. Either we are with Him in His desires, or we are trying to persuade Him to leave what is important to Him to join us. Jesus said, "*He that findeth his life shall lose it; and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it*" (Matt. 10:39). This is a call to take up the Cross, not just as a teaching, but as a daily involvement and emphasis. Never be mistaken: Jesus' desire is to free us from the world and the flesh, not to make us at ease in them.

Modern Christianity has presented the Cross in a whole different light than that of a way of self-denial. As was stated in the second chapter of this book, modern Christianity has presented another spirit. It presents the Cross as a tool God uses to bring about power and victory in our lives. The modern emphasis is all about overcoming every obstacle of this life in a successful and victorious manner. It is about God empowering us to such a degree that we can accomplish and overcome anything. This plays right into the hand of the nature of fallen humanity that likes to

boast in its accomplishments and glory in its strength and superiority. Modern Christianity carries with it the concepts of self-sufficiency and the bolstering of proud flesh. Reaching goals and a sense of accomplishment can be very gratifying to our flesh. The true meaning of the Cross and the need for it flies right into the face of this viewpoint. To truly understand the implications of the Cross is to constantly be reminded of mankind's insufficiency, lack, and need. The real reason that the Cross is offensive to proud human nature is because the true work of the Cross is bent on exposing and eradicating willful flesh.

The Cross Strikes at the Heart of Proud Flesh

The implications of the Cross are these: man will boast in strength and accomplishment. He is so inclined toward self-sufficiency that God must use negative circumstances to bring about brokenness in order for a person to become receptive to the need for another life and nature (that of Christ). In other words, God is not only not trying to negate bad circumstances, for there are many occasions when He allows them so that we might find our greatest need met in becoming conformed to the image of Christ (cf. Rom. 8:26-29). Of course, we all have experienced God delivering us out of extreme circumstances, but He did not do this so that we could always live in victory. His desire is that we might be made aware of our great need for Another.

Proud man wants a Savior who comes down from heaven and defeats the enemy in a glorious battle that has the flavor of a Super Bowl victory. Instead, Jesus appeared to be defeated while dying a horrific death at the hands of His own enemies. The "lifting up from the earth" that Jesus mentioned in John 12:32 was a reference to his own crucifixion. He was lifted up before the whole world on the Cross, an image of suffering and shame before the eyes of proud men. The way of the Cross is not a route that men of means and reputation want to follow.

Because this view of the Cross is so unpopular, many preachers veer away from talking about it from their pulpits. Instead, they pour most of their energies toward meetings built on pleasing the masses. In an effort to amassing large congregations, ministers have resorted to building church facilities that offer people amenities and comfort. Activities of the church are no longer centered on the setting aside of all earthly things in order to seek God but on retreats that involve snow skiing, family fun and recreational outlets.

Christians who are attracted to such churches would likely be repulsed by a presentation of taking up the Cross daily and denying themselves. In an effort to appear successful and garner needed finances, some pastors have played right into the hands of carnal Christianity. In an effort to maintain big congregations and a large financial base, a minister is tempted to make things more agreeable to the flesh. It is tempting to tell people what they want to hear, but we must not do so. Ministers must resolve not to dilute the gospel presentation. Christ must be glorified *in the church*. When the emphasis of a church becomes something other than Christ and Him crucified, a door is open to the possibility for great harm to present itself. Whether this is a result of hurtful emphasis or a slow drifting with the currents of the times, the result is the same. In contrast, the anchor of the Cross will deter subjects that cater to pride and flesh while magnifying the need for believers to be inhabited and controlled by the nature of Christ. Without this, even good, decent emphases will not be enough to keep a church in the way of Christ because the leader himself will be subject to fleshly pride and habit, not being corralled by the Cross.

Freedom from sin involves not only the forgiveness of sins but the breaking of its power by the Cross. God's purpose in forgiving us of our sins was not to comfort us in our self-life. When the Cross is fully preached, we do not hear only about the removal of the penalty for sins. The Cross that Paul preached involved death to the self-life. The message of the Cross is essentially God's

removal of us and His impartation of Christ as life. That is why it is an offense to every person who does not desire to give up his own life and embrace the life of Christ. There are many Christians who believe that Jesus paid it all, but the same Christians fail to embrace the weightier matters of the Cross and the resurrection. At the Cross, the believer faces the removal of his life instead of finding a blessing for it.

The first step toward having proper emphasis is to agree with Jesus' word about His Cross being our Cross and His death being our death. The Christian who has proceeded to this point is ready for some of the more wonderful truths of Christ and Him crucified. While the Cross is a hard truth to our flesh, it is not the end of the matter; we must never forget that *life comes out of death*. The fact of our death with Christ is superseded by something even higher, in that there can be no greater blessing than Christ filling us with His life. Yes, the Cross means death to the self-life, but it also means that His Life becomes our life. To truly embrace the Cross is to truly embrace the resurrection as well. The glorious truth of the gospel is that if we die with Jesus, then we also come into the glory of His resurrection, which relates to newness of life. If His Cross is our Cross and His death is our death, then His resurrection is our resurrection. This takes place through identification and union with Him.

Even this reality may be an offense to some who insist on living their own lives because of personal ambition and preference. Also, many ministers may be afraid to present the claims of the Cross pertaining to our death and His life to his congregation. In this way, many ministers have done away with this view of the Cross and the resurrection. Instead, they present a gospel that allows people to continue in a lifestyle of self that does embrace salvation and refuses the Cross as an instrument of death. This may present necessary elements of the gospel but it falls far short of what Paul called "fully" preaching the gospel. Even if our main emphasis is on the substitutionary aspects of the Cross, we have not yet laid hold of God's full emphasis of what that Cross is supposed to accomplish in our congregations and in our personal lives.

THE CONCLUSION OF THE MATTER

A Brief and Final Summary of This Book

The purpose of this book is not so much to present the message of Christ and Him crucified in its entirety as much as to simply say that Christ and Him crucified is the only true foundation beyond any emphasis made by man. In reading this book, it may be hard for some to understand what is the most important message. For that, let me refer you to other writings of my own and to other writers who present the message of the Cross with even greater clarity. I am speaking of writers such as Jesse Penn-Lewis, T. Austin-Sparks, Watchman Nee, L. E. Maxwell, and DeVern Fromke, to name a few.

A Brief Summary

To give a brief summary of the message of Christ and Him crucified, let me say that the Cross is more than just an historical fact. All of Christianity claims to believe in the Cross, but the Cross that many believe in is a Cross that primarily exists to bless them. For many, the understanding of the Cross was something Jesus suffered with the express purpose of enhancing our earthly existence. The only death that such Christians believe occurred for us at the Cross is Jesus' death. They have no thought of a crucifixion meant for their lives. Most Christians want God to crown them in front of others, but He said, "*Be thou faithful unto death (Do not try to avoid it!) and I will give thee a crown of life*" (Rev. 2:10). To live victoriously above death, we must go through death. It is victory over death by death.

Jesus told us to take up the Cross daily, not just to believe in it every day. The Apostle Paul said, "*I die daily*" (I Cor. 15:31). He stated that he was "*always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body*" (II Cor. 4:10). How small is the number believers who actually spend their time emphasizing a Cross that is daily impacting their lives in just such a way!

Most Christians Do not Know about the Daily Cross

The fact that there was a Cross a long time ago that removed my sins is all most Christians know. However, the Cross of Christ relates not just to the removal of sins by the blood but to the removal of the old nature that continually produces sin. This was accomplished by the old man being crucified (cf. Rom. 6:6).

Most of us know that Christ died for us, but few Christians seem to understand that *they are crucified* (cf. Gal. 2:20). Until we come to this aspect of the Cross, how can we ever begin to let Christ live His Life in us? Without this revelation, we will simply continue to live *for* Christ instead of *by* Christ. As long as we continue without revelation, we will experience no conformity to Christ (see II Cor. 3:18; Rom. 8:29; Gal. 4:19). The result will be that the church will continue to conform more and more to the means the world uses to reach people and fewer and fewer lives will be transformed (cf. Rom. 12:1-2).

The daily working of the Cross in the life of a believer has another effect. He will no longer live for himself (cf. II Cor. 5:14-15); therefore the works of the flesh such as ambition, pride, independence, and self-love will not only not be encouraged, but crucified (cf. Gal. 5:24, 26). The churches are heaping to themselves people who want to be pampered, blessed, and petted, while God's people ought to be the most self-giving, self-sacrificing people on earth. Man's view sees independence and freedom as virtuous, but can be considered the traits of selfishness and rebellion from God's view. When man's view is dominant, passages of Scripture that relate to becoming free from a selfish existence are somehow changed to promising hope for a fleshly earth life. What we must come to understand is that anytime we do "our own thing" (rather than God's), we sin. Anytime we compromise the truth for self-preservation, we sin. Anytime something or someone has more influence in our lives than God, we sin. We must face the fact that people find the Cross offensive because it shows them a picture of themselves that they do not wish to see.

Only uncrucified self will cry out that the Cross is too much and that it is too hard. Love of self is the enemy of the Cross and therefore the enemy of Christ. To recognize self for what it is and condemn it with the same judgment which God has passed upon it is the only way we will be able to walk in true newness of life and resurrection power. When this begins to happen, we begin to view the preaching of the Cross in a whole new light. No longer is it just an Easter Sunday sermon. Jesus' words that say, *"And he that taketh not his Cross and followeth after Me, is not worthy of Me"* (Matt. 10:38) begin to have profound meaning in our daily Christianity.

Foundation – Not an Emphasis

If indeed this message is foundational to all other emphases, then we must see how it is so. If my emphasis in ministry is upon the power of God, then without the in-working of the Cross I may well be in danger of getting puffed up and prideful. My ministry is in danger of mixing with selfish ambition and vainglory. This is not so farfetched. I think many of us have seen this in modern day television ministries and even in some larger local churches. In some cases, it has led to the total destruction of that ministry. However, had that minister been founded in the Cross, there would have been more room for humility and less room for pride.

This same scenario works with almost all other teachings and truths we might emphasize. An emphasis on revival may seem harmless enough, but without a firm foundation on the Cross, it can lead to extremism and excess. Some leaders who seek for the coming of revival may move into control, legalism, and harsh treatment of members, blaming them for the lack of revival. This may move into abusing people through demanding long nights of prayer or other excesses in order to bring about revival. Do not misunderstand; I realize that for revival to come, it will take sacrifice on our part. I am not addressing true sacrifice but the pushiness and control that some men exercise, thinking that this will bring about revival. Furthermore, any ministry founded on the Cross that experiences true revival will have the maturity to handle the excesses that will surely arrive when revival comes.

Using these two emphases, I hope I have made my point. All emphases are in danger of perversion by the devil or by man if they have not gone through the purifying work of the Cross. We should never treat an emphasis as if it were the foundation. Nor should we ever treat the foundational message of Christ and Him crucified as if it were simply another emphasis of equal or lesser value to all other truths.

Many saintly men have fully believed in the way of the Cross, but few will tread it. Men concerned with their reputation, ministry, and fame will reject it as a viable method for reaching God's end. But there is only one pathway that can lead a man into the fullness of life in Christ. We can walk along other paths if we like, but we shall never fulfill God's purpose along any other road. All will

only be wasted if we avoid the pathway of the Cross in our lives. We can accept it or reject it; the choice is entirely ours but Christ is worthy of *all glory*.