

# Obedience to the word of the cross

*Luke Pomery in fellowship with the presbytery  
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## Introduction

- In his first letter to the Corinthians, the apostle Paul explained that his principal aim was to deliver *the message of the cross* to them. 1Co 1:23. The word, or message, of the cross grants every person an opportunity to walk each day in the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings. Paul testified that he gladly suffered the loss of all things in order that he might know Christ in this way. Php 3:8.
- Throughout his letter, Paul disclosed the culture of his own life, which was the result of his walking in the fellowship of Christ's offering. 1Co 2:4-5. He did not provide them with 'a theological statement'. Rather, he spoke his testimony. Furthermore, Paul went to the Corinthian church to demonstrate this culture among them. It was for this reason that he said, 'I determined *not to know anything* among you *except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.*' 1Co 2:2.
- Paul also said that he and his fellow presbyters *preached Christ crucified* as a word of faith. 1Co 1:23. He described the two possible outcomes for every person, which correspond with the way in which they receive the word of the cross. He explained that this message is 'foolishness to those who are perishing' and are drawing back. 1Co 1:18. Heb 10:39. Yet this same message is 'the power and wisdom of God' to those who are mature and are pressing forward to salvation. 1Co 1:18. The gift of faith enables them to walk in obedience to Christ's instruction.
- Paul also stated that, through his own testimony and conduct, Christ was being '*portrayed as crucified.*' Gal 3:1. This is true for all believers. Christ is lifted up and portrayed as crucified before those to whom we are testifying, through both our 'word' and our 'conduct'. Christ is lifted up before them, giving them an opportunity also to join the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings.

## The word of the cross

- The word of the cross brings to light, or exposes, our practices and ways of relating which do not belong to Christian culture. Heb 4:12-13. These ways of living and relating pertain to the elementary principles of the world, and do not pertain to Christ. Col 2:8. They are 'elementary', or fundamental, because the whole world functions in this same way. For example, God clearly described the effect of the curse within the marriage covenant of Adam and Eve. Gen 3:16. Every marriage operates by this same underlying principle. The word of the cross exposes this way of relating, and calls us to a new culture.
- The Scriptures teach extensively on all that belongs to the world, including the wisdom of the world, the speech of the world, the love of the world and the cares of the world. The apostle John specifically summarised all that belongs to the world when he wrote, 'If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world - the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life - is not of the Father but is of the world.' 1Jn 2:15-16.
- Christ rebukes us when we live according to these fundamental principles of the world. We note, for example, that Christ rebuked Peter concerning the nature of his

conversation and the way in which he was setting his mind. Mat 16:23. Amazingly, before the word exposes the true nature of these practices, we are blind to their presence in our lives. They are hidden from our understanding because they are so familiar, or reflexive, to us. 2Co 4:2. The Scriptures describe these practices as ‘the aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers’. 1Pe 1:18. The word calls us to repent from choosing to walk by these principles and, further, to carry the accountability for our impact upon others.

- As we obediently walk in the fellowship of Christ’s offering and sufferings, we are letting go of, and forsaking, this former conduct, and we are joyfully walking in a way that is *new*. Also, we are reaching forward to participate, each day, in a manner worthy of, and conforming to, the gospel of Christ. Php 1:27. Paul expressed this sentiment when he wrote, ‘For we are the [true] circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh’. Php 3:3.

## Two implications of walking in obedience to the word of the cross

- In his letter to the Galatians, the apostle Paul testified, ‘But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.’ Gal 6:14. In this verse, Paul is drawing our attention to two specific implications of walking in obedience to the word of the cross. First, the world has been crucified to us. And, second, we have been crucified to the world. Let’s consider these two implications further.

### *‘The world has been crucified to me’*

- As we discussed before, the message of the cross identifies the conduct and conversation that belongs to the principles of the world. Through our fellowship in the offering and sufferings of Christ, we are being delivered from living by these principles. It was for this reason that Paul exhorted us to ‘put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts’. Eph 4:22.
- Each person is accountable to continually respond to the word of the cross that calls for cultural change. Rom 14:12. As an implication of this fundamental reality, we accept that we are now *separated from* those who remain loyal to these former practices. We are no longer able to continue to relate with them in the same way. This is how ‘the world is being crucified’ to us. We are only able to be truly *joined to* those who are, likewise, walking in obedience to the culture that Christ teaches.
- We walk in the reality of the world being crucified to us as we let our ‘yes be yes’ and our ‘no be no’ regarding how we live and relate. Mat 5:37. Our ‘yes’ and ‘no’ are responses of faith. Anything more than this confession is not of faith and is of the evil one. Rom 14:23. In the same way that the apostle Paul testified of his participation in Christ’s offering so, too, we testify of the cultural change that results from our obedience to the word of the cross. This is the confession of our obedience and submission to the lordship of Christ. Jesus instructed us to not ‘script or rehearse’ how we express our obedience to His word prior to testifying before family, friends and rulers of this age. Luk 21:13-15.

### *‘I have been crucified to the world’*

- Jesus explained that the cultural reform in the life of one person will elicit a crisis among their whole household. Mat 10:34-36. Further, the impact of their obedience will reach also to their relationships with their peer group, with others in the church and within their community settings.

- As a result of Christ's offering, every person is 'cut free', and is individually accountable to respond to the message of the cross. Some will choose the way of the cross of Christ. Others will choose to remain loyal to the principles of the world. Those who follow after the ways of the world will eventually separate themselves from those who are obedient to Christ. Through these experiences, we are becoming 'crucified to the world'.
- Interestingly, in many instances, we may have previously experienced a long history of relating with these ones with apparent 'ease'. However, the testimony of our obedience to Christ suddenly provokes a *different* kind of response. Why is this? Through our testimony of obedience to the word of the cross, *Christ is being lifted up and portrayed as crucified* before those to whom we are testifying. Their reaction is not, firstly, against us, personally. Rather, they are reacting to Christ, who is being revealed to them.

### Bearing Christ's reproach

- Both of these aspects of separation belong to the reproach which Christ bore during His offering journey from Gethsemane to Calvary. We bear Christ's reproach, as a member of His body, when we *accept* these two implications of the cross, and the subsequent separation that we experience. Heb 13:13. Through the prophet Isaiah, the Lord spoke concerning this aspect of reproach, saying, 'Listen to Me, you who know righteousness, you people in whose heart is My Law: Do not fear the reproach of men, nor be afraid of their insults.' Isa 51:7.
- The responses of the two thieves who were crucified with Christ represent the two fundamental responses of mankind to the word of the cross. We will encounter both responses as our conduct and conversation sets forth Christ as crucified to those around us. One thief was illuminated concerning his sonship. The other thief continued to rail against Christ. He accused Christ of not being supportive of his personal needs and, as a result, he deemed Christ as being the source of his pain.
- We will encounter this same kind of accusation when individuals deny their own need to carry the accountability for their choices in life, and instead blame us as being the source of their pain and discomfort. Embracing this abusive treatment in the hope that it will turn a person back Christ is a fallacy. The apostle Paul said that this kind of 'sophisticated' entreaty or allegiance, for the sake of worldly peace, is not the weakness of Christ. 2Co 11:20-21.

### Summary

- The world, through its own 'wisdom' and 'understanding', can never come to know God. Yet, it pleased God to use the foolishness of the message of Christ crucified to proclaim the true wisdom of God as a word of faith. 1Co 1:21. *The wisdom of God is the message of the cross* which calls every son of God to walk in the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings. Paul exhorted us to meditate on the preached word in order to obtain the understanding of its reality in our life. Php 4:8.
- Faith working by the love of God compels us to apply our hearts, and to lift our voices, to obtain the *understanding* that the Lord gives. Pro 2:2-3. King Solomon made this same point, teaching us to neither revert to, nor depend upon, our *own* understanding. He taught, 'In all your ways acknowledge [the Lord], and He shall direct your paths'. Pro 3:6. Spiritual understanding is the knowledge of how we participate in the fellowship of Christ's offering each day.

- King David explained the fruit of meditating on the word of the Lord. He testified, 'The Law of the Lord is perfect, *converting the soul*; the testimony of the Lord is sure, *making wise the simple*; the statutes of the Lord are right, *rejoicing the heart*; the commandment of the Lord is pure, *enlightening the eyes*; the fear of the Lord is clean, *enduring forever*; the judgements of the Lord are *true and righteous altogether*.' Psa 19:7-9.
- The apostle Peter made a helpful distinction between the different kinds of sufferings which we will endure as disciples of Christ. Some sufferings are directly related to *our own faults* or disobedience; we are to endure these sufferings for the purpose of *our chastening*. However, he also identified another aspect of our fellowship in Christ's offering and sufferings. That is, *suffering as a result of our obedience*. In relation to the latter, he wrote, 'When you *do good* and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God'. 1Pe 2:20. The apostles testified of their *joy at being counted worthy* to suffer shame for Christ's name when they were obedient to His instructions. Act 4:19-20. Act 5:41.