

3. THE WORD OF THE CROSS

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that **Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures**, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. (1 Corinthians 15.3-5 NASB)

The death of our Lord Jesus on the cross of Calvary is the foundation of the faith of all who believe in this day, and these few words, penned by Paul, the apostle of the nations, sum up the evangel by which one is saved. One commentator has stated that there are seven glorious accomplishments of the cross: repudiation of sin (Hebrews 9.26), inactivation of death (2 Timothy 1.10), inactivation of Satan (Hebrews 2.14), justification of mankind (Romans 5.18), subjection of enemies (1 Corinthians 15.25), reconciliation of all (Colossians 1.20), and vivification of all (1 Corinthians 15.22). ¹ I would add one more, and that is glorification (Romans 8.30).

These are the accomplishments of the death of the Son of God on a cross that will ultimately extend to all mankind and all God's creation. The first to come into the **full** joy of these accomplishments in the next eon is the body of Christ.

This is the glory of the cross that has been, and yet will be, one hundred percent successful in undoing all that was wrought by the one transgression of the first Adam. In the last Adam, shall *all* be made alive (vivified). We could say that the riches of Christ are discovered in the cross of Christ.

Now, in his first epistle to the Corinthians, Paul used a phrase that is not used in any other place in Scripture, and he used it not only in reference to the past finished work of the cross but also as a present work for all who believe.

For **the word of the cross** to those indeed perishing is foolishness, and to us—those **being saved**—it is the power of God.... (1 Corinthians 1.18 YLT)

The word of the cross is the power of God. To understand what Paul meant by this phrase, it is best to start at the beginning of his epistle to see the issue that he was trying to address with the believers in Corinth. In other words, let us understand *the word of the cross* in the context of Paul's epistle.

¹ *The Word of the Cross*, Arthur C. Lamb, Concordant Publishing Concern.

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Hallowed in Christ Jesus, called saints.

Paul, a called apostle of Christ Jesus, through the will of God, began by declaring the position that the ecclesia of God in Corinth had in Christ Jesus.

To the ecclesia of God which is in Corinth, **hallowed in Christ Jesus, called saints**, together with all in every place who are invoking the name of our Lord, Jesus Christ, both theirs and ours.... (1 Corinthians 1.2 cv)

Some translations use the word *sanctified* in the place of *hallowed*, which means “to make holy” (*holyize*). Either way, Paul reminded them that they were set apart for or consecrated to God. No matter where they were in their spiritual walk in Christ, they belonged to God, along with all the other believers in every place that named the name of the Lord Jesus. We could say that this is an objective truth for all who believe and all who call on the name of the Lord. It is not dependent on the details of our theology or whether we have differences with one another; it is dependent on Christ, in whom we have been sanctified or hallowed. Christ is our sanctification. This is something that we need to be mindful of in any dealings with our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Grace and peace.

Then, Paul proceeded by blessing the brethren with grace and peace from God, our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ. This beloved apostle had some stern and corrective words for the ones he loved, and they would need the grace of God to receive his word and the peace of God to remain in fellowship with their apostle, who died daily for them (1 Corinthians 15.31). This should be another reminder to all who serve the Lord’s people.

Thank my God concerning you.

Next, Paul commended the brethren. It is so much like our old humanity to tear down others rather than build them up. However, Paul, as our example, revealed the way of the spirit of God in dealing with the ecclesias, even when there are deficiencies in their service and understanding. The order is first to commend our brethren by encouraging them in the good that they have done or that they have in Christ, and then, in love, to correct them. Paul’s goal was always to build up and not to tear down (2 Corinthians 10.8; 13.10).

I am thanking my God always concerning you over **the grace of God which is being given you in Christ Jesus**, for in everything are you enriched in him, in all expression and all knowledge, according as the testimony of Christ was confirmed among you, so that you are not deficient in any grace, awaiting the unveiling of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who will be confirming you also until the consummation, unimpeachable in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is God, through Whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. (1 Corinthians 1.4-9 cv)

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What faith in a great God is expressed through this beloved man! Regardless of the challenges that he faced with the Corinthians, he saw through all that to the God who is faithful. He thanked his God for the grace given to them in Christ Jesus that was enriching them in Christ to the point that they were not deficient in any grace or spiritual gifts as they were looking forward to the day in which Christ is unveiled. The Lord Jesus Christ Himself will confirm them to the consummation or the end, making them unimpeachable or blameless in His day when He appears to all His people. Until then, God is faithful, and He called the Corinthians into the fellowship of His Son.

Oh, that we would look at our brethren in Christ and commend them in such a glorious way!

I am entreating you—Christ is parted!

Now I am entreating you, brethren, through the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all may be saying the same thing, and **there may be no schisms among you**, but you may be attuned to the same mind and to the same opinion. (1 Corinthians 1.10 cv)

In spite of the good that he saw in this ecclesia, Paul, nevertheless, also saw something that was a great danger to them. There were schisms or strifes among those who are called saints. They were dividing into camps based on men. Some said they were of Paul, some of Apollos, some of Cephas and yet some of Christ. For this, Paul indicted them: *“Christ is parted!”* They had divided into camps, which to Paul was like parting or dividing Christ. Paul retorted to the Corinthians: *Not Paul was crucified for your sakes!* See 1 Corinthians 1.12-13. They had taken their eyes off Christ who was crucified for their sakes. There was only one ground upon which they were joined together, and that was Christ and Him crucified. Any other ground was schism, for it parted Christ.

Evidently, one of the issues that led to the schism or division among the saints was who baptized whom. The saints were claiming that they were baptized in the name of the brother who performed the baptism. Paul refused to allow anyone to claim that they were baptized into the name of Paul. Why? Because they were baptized into Christ alone! In fact, in his later epistle to the Colossians, Paul declared that we are complete in Christ, in whom we were circumcised also with a circumcision not made by hands, in the stripping off of the body of flesh in the circumcision of Christ; and were entombed together with Him in baptism, in whom we were roused together also through faith in the operation of God, who rouses Him from among the dead (see Colossians 2.10-12). In other words, Christ’s circumcision and baptism became our circumcision and baptism, just as we are identified with His death, burial, and resurrection. Consequently, Paul removed all the emphasis on the physical requirements, including water baptism, and placed the emphasis on Christ and Him crucified.

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Today, there are so many emphases throughout Christendom; countless divisions based on the teaching of men and their ministries, their names, their titles, their books, and the list goes on and on. One group of believers emphasizes one thing and refuses to have anything to do with others who emphasize something else, and vice versa. Many even continue to debate and divide over the whole matter of baptism. If he were on this earth today, surely Paul would declare: *Christ is parted!* We have divided Christ in so many ways that, outwardly, the body of Christ seems to be a disjointed body with parts scattered all about.

Paul would have none of this sectarianism, for according to his evangel there is only one ground upon which the ecclesia is to stand and be united, and that is the cross of Christ.

For Christ does not commission me to be baptizing, but to be bringing the evangel, not in wisdom of word, lest **the cross of Christ** may be made void. (1 Corinthians 1.17 cv)

The cross of Christ is the foundation of Paul's evangel. Truly, there are many great truths and even secrets (mysteries) revealed in Paul's evangel, but at the heart of it all is the cross, not the wisdom of words (cleverness of speech). In this verse, Paul wiped aside everything that divides and conquers the heart of man and even the Lord's people and focused straightaway on the heart of the matter. Man uses words liberally, as if in his words are great truths and wisdom, and presents them in clever ways to persuade others for his own glory. To hear people claim that they were baptized into a man's name is a great boast in the one doing the baptizing. Oh, the pride of man!

We could say that men can produce their own evangel with the cleverness of their speech, but Paul stood against such a thing lest it void the cross of Christ, that is, make the cross into something less than what it truly is. Paul severed all that would make void the meaning and value of the cross, causing it to lose its effectiveness. Standing against *the wisdom of word*, Paul introduced for the first time the phrase *the word of the cross*. In doing so, he contrasted two groups; one is perishing and the other is being saved by the power of God.

For **the word of the cross** is stupidity, indeed, to those who are perishing, yet to us who are being saved it is the power of God. (1 Corinthians 1.18 cv)

The word of the cross refers not only to the finished work of the cross that will ultimately reach all mankind; but also, it refers to the practical action or outworking of the cross in the life of those who believe. The finished work of the cross refers to that which was accomplished on the cross and will never be repeated. The word of the cross includes this but also goes beyond it to refer to that which is ongoing and which will be operative until the consummation of the eons. We could say that the word of the cross speaks of the action to bring about the purpose of the eons, for the word of the cross speaks of the active power of God to save believers.

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Perishing and *being saved* refer to a present action and not a past act that is finished. There is no practical effect of the cross on those in unbelief. The cross is stupidity to them and consequently they *are perishing*.² However, for those who believe, the cross has the opposite effect. The word of the cross is a daily active force in their lives. They are *being saved* by the power of God.

The cross severs.

What is the word of the cross? Or, we could ask: What is the message of the cross? In its simplicity, it means that the cross severs all that is of the old humanity until one is brought into all that is new. This is what Christ accomplished on Calvary, but it is more than a message about an historical event; it is a message about a very practical and operative force in the life of the one who believes. It is the power of God to sever and set apart a people for Himself.

It is most appropriate that Paul was the one to reveal the word of the cross, for his whole life is a testimony of the severing of God, even beginning at his birth.

Now, when it delights God, Who **severs me** from my mother's womb and calls me through His grace, to unveil His Son in me that I may be evangelizing Him among the nations.... (Galatians 1.15-16 cv)

Some translations use the phrase *set apart*, which means that the calling on Paul's life was set by God even before he came into this world through his mother's womb. He served God as a Hebrew of Hebrews and a Pharisee and was so zealous for the traditions of his fathers that he became the enemy of God in trying to destroy His people. But this all changed on the road to Damascus when he met the risen and glorified Christ seated in heaven at His Father's right hand. On that infamous day, Paul was severed from all that he had been defending and upholding. Paul was severed from holding one of the highest ranks in Judaism to become one of the lowest as a slave of Christ in God's kingdom.

Paul, a slave of Christ Jesus, a called apostle, **severed** for the evangel of God. (Romans 1.1 cv)

He was severed from all that he once held so that he could take the evangel of God to the nations, which began in some measure when he was severed for the work.

Now, at their ministering to the Lord and fasting, the holy spirit said, "**Sever**, by all means, to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." (Acts 13.2 cv)

² *Perishing* is not for eternal destruction or torment. It is entering into death, either the first death (of the body) or the second death (of works) for the eons of the eons, thus missing out on the glory of those eons or ages.

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The Holy Spirit severed Barnabas and Saul (Paul) for a special work to which they were called. This represented something new. The twelve apostles had failed to reach the heart of the entire nation of Israel. Their message had been rejected by the majority, which meant there would be no national repentance in that day, and consequently, the kingdom they longed for would not come in that day. It was at this point that Paul began to take the evangel to the scattered Jews and some proselytes, until finally he took his evangel to the nations in obedience to the charge given him by the Lord.

In reading Acts, it is important to keep in mind that it is the history of a *transitional* time that started with Pentecost. We should not view the record of Acts as only the beginning of our present era of the body of Christ. Rather, it also should be viewed as the end of an era that involved the Jews according to the flesh. Israel was in apostasy and Acts reveals that because of this and their lack of repentance, *the kingdom of the heavens* that the prophets spoke of and that they long sought would not come in that day, and it remains so to this day.

Consider how Acts ends.

And some believed the things which were spoken, and some disbelieved. And when they agreed not among themselves, they departed after that Paul had spoken one word, Well spake the Holy Spirit through Isaiah the prophet unto your fathers, saying, Go thou unto this people, and say, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall in no wise understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall in no wise perceive: for this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest, haply they should perceive with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and should turn again, and I should heal them. **Be it known therefore unto you, that this salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles: they will also hear.** (Acts 28.24-28 ASV)

We could say that it was at this point that Paul turned from his fellow Jews and took his evangel to the nations or gentiles. However, we must not think that Paul never tried to reach a Jew again, for it seems that his longing for them never left his heart. Actually, historical records seem to indicate that Paul traveled to Britain near the end of his life, discovered some of the lost tribes of Israel, and shared the good news of Christ with them.

Finally, in reference to Paul being severed, there is one more proof as recorded in his epistles.

Whoever are wanting to put on a fair face in the flesh, these are compelling you to circumcise only that they may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ Jesus. For not even they who are circumcising are maintaining law, but they want you to be circumcised that they should be boasting in that flesh of yours. Now may it not be mine to be boasting, except in **the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ**, through which the world has been **crucified**

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to me, and I to the world. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is anything, but a new creation. (Galatians 6.12-15 cv)

Circumcision was a hot topic among even the believing Jews; after all, they were given the seal of circumcision through their father Abraham. But what did this seal mean? Circumcision is the cutting away of the flesh. It is a severing from the flesh. Of course, the Israelites missed the significance of this act and saw it purely as a physical act that placed them in a position beyond the nations. It was the boast of the Israelites, a boast in the flesh. However, Paul proclaimed that neither circumcision nor uncircumcision was of any value. Why? All boast in the flesh was severed at the cross.

Paul saw himself crucified to the world and the world to him. He was severed from the world and its boast in the flesh, and the world was severed to him who had no boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. Consequently, Paul is our example of one who is severed for Christ, and it is in this context that we can and must understand Paul's use of the phrase *the word of the cross*.

The word of the cross severs all of the old humanity or, we could say, the old creation. However, there is one more aspect of this word that we must understand in light of Paul's evangel, and that is, it removes all the boast of the heart of the old humanity that is filled with pride.

No boasting in the flesh.

What were the Corinthians doing when they claimed that they were baptized in the name of this man and in the name of that man? They were boasting not only in the name of the man who baptized them but also in the fact that they were baptized. It is as if they were saying: "Look at me; I was baptized *and* Apollos, that great man of God, baptized me." It was the very same thing of which the circumcision was boasting. "Look at me; I am of the circumcision. We have the seal given to us by God through our father Abraham. This makes us special."

They were all boasting in the flesh, something that Paul detected like a hound dog on a fox hunt that smells the scent of the fox. To Paul, it was the foul odor of the flesh trying to exalt itself and take credit for what it did. Nothing of the sort was allowed to enter the evangel with which Paul was entrusted to discharge to the nations. The word of the cross severs the flesh from boasting of any kind.

So that **no flesh** at all should be boasting in God's sight. (1 Corinthians 1.29 cv)

The word of the cross removes all boasting in the flesh and places all boasting in the Lord.

He who is boasting, **in the Lord** let him be boasting. (1 Corinthians 1.31 cv)

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Anytime we start to boast in anything or anyone other than the Lord Jesus Christ, we are boasting in the flesh, and we are parting or dividing Christ. This is a real danger in the ecclesias of our day. Some boast in their pulpit (the message coming forth) and pastor to the point that it is what could be called “pulpit worship” or “pastor worship,” which amounts to idolatry.

As we have seen, in his opening salutation to the Corinthians, Paul greeted *the ecclesia of God, hallowed in Christ Jesus, called saints, together with all in every place who are invoking the name of our Lord, Jesus Christ* (1 Corinthians 1.2 cv). In spite of all their sectarianism and other faults, Paul declared them to be saints, which means holy or one who is consecrated or set apart for God. Being set apart for God severs one from the world and the flesh. Obviously, the Corinthians had not learned this lesson. They were immature and Paul could not feed them solid spiritual food.

And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual, but as **to fleshy**, as to minors in Christ. Milk I give you to drink, not solid food, for not as yet were you able. Nay, still, not even now are you able, for **you are still fleshy**. For where there is jealousy and strife among you, **are you not fleshy** and walking according to man? For whenever anyone may be saying, “I, indeed, am of Paul,” yet another, “I, of Apollos,” **will he not be fleshy?** (1 Corinthians 3.1-4 cv)

When the flesh boasts, it divides brethren from one another. When the flesh is severed, there is no boast, and there is unity with one another. We can be assured that when the cross has not worked in a life to sever the flesh, there will be boasting and there will be parting or division. By contrast, we can also be assured that where the word of the cross is active, there is no boasting or parting.

Now, let us return to the text of Corinthians and fill in some detail.

The perishing.

For **the word of the cross** is stupidity, indeed, to those who are **perishing**, yet to us who are **being saved** it is the power of God. (1 Corinthians 1.18 cv)

Paul applied the word of the cross to two groups of people; one is *perishing* and the other is *being saved*. Again, note that it is a present action, not a past act. To one group, it is stupidity; and to the other group, it is the power of God. What a contrast!

Obviously, the perishing are those who reject the message of the cross. Why do they do such a thing? To them, it is stupid to believe in Christ crucified, for they see no wisdom in a man dying for them to save them. To them, how can life come from death? It is even greater stupidity to them to know that the cross would

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sever them from their old humanity, which they adore. This is folly to them but to God their wisdom is stupidity.

For it is written, I shall be destroying the wisdom of the wise, and the understanding of the intelligent shall I be repudiating. Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the discussor of this eon? **Does not God make stupid the wisdom of this world?** (1 Corinthians 1.19-20 cv)

The world, which represents the world (*kosmos*) system in which mankind operates, has a wisdom of its own, apart from the wisdom of God; however, this wisdom never leads to knowing God. In fact, it yields the opposite result.

For since, in fact, in the wisdom of God, **the world through wisdom knew not God**, God delights, through the stupidity of the heralding, to save those who are believing, since, in fact, Jews signs are requesting, and Greeks wisdom are seeking, yet we are heralding Christ crucified, to Jews, indeed, a snare, yet to the nations stupidity.... (1 Corinthians 1.21-23 cv)

It is as if God turns the whole matter right on the head of mankind and delights in heralding what they call stupidity and saving those who are the least accepted by the world, even what we would call the “down and out.”

The Jews viewed the word of the cross as stupidity, for they were requesting signs rather than cutting off their love of the flesh. Why were signs important to them? First, we need to be reminded that the outward sign of the flesh was the boast of the Jew. Second, their fathers were miraculously delivered out of Egypt, and they were expecting the same thing in their day. They requested a sign as proof that God was delivering them. However, signs never kept the Israelites from apostasy, and would not keep them from it in Paul’s day, nor will they in the closing days of our era. To tell a Jew that the only sign they would receive was the sign of Jonah, that is, the death of their Messiah at their own hands, was untenable. Death to bring them life or being severed from their ancestral ties that were given to them by the Lord to enter the kingdom was stupid, pure folly to their religious minds. It was more than stupidity to them; it was a snare. They tripped over the very thing that would have delivered them in that day.

The Greeks were another class of people in Paul’s day. They were not representative of all the nations. We could say they were the intellectuals of the day that took pride in their philosophy, which was their boast. They put great trust in their mental capacity to explain the universe and mankind. They had wisdom on all the great matters of life, and the word of the cross was stupidity to their intellectual minds.

According to Webster’s dictionary, *philosophy* is “the processes governing thought and conduct; theory or investigation of the principles or laws that regulate the universe and underlie all knowledge and reality.” This is the thinking and wisdom of man and not the wisdom of God. Christ is not philosophy, and the

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cross does not present merely another view of death and life. It is the very explanation of all the wisdom of God.

Paul continued by contrasting man's wisdom with God's wisdom.

Yet to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, **Christ, the power of God and the wisdom of God**, for the stupidity of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. (1 Corinthians 1.24-25 cv)

For you are observing your calling, brethren, that **there are not many wise according to the flesh**; not many powerful, not many noble, but the stupidity of the world God chooses, that He may be disgracing the wise, and the weakness of the world God chooses, that He may be disgracing the strong, and the ignoble and the contemptible things of the world God chooses, and that which is not, that He may be discarding that which is.... (1 Corinthians 1.26-28 cv)

Man's thinking and strength cannot even approach the lowest level of God's thinking and strength, if there is even such a thing. In His wisdom, God has not taken the high and lofty of society to prove His wisdom and power. He has taken the least from among mankind so that He can prove the utter folly of man and his ways. This is the wisdom and power of God.

Man is always seeking to justify himself, to defend himself, to commend himself, to exalt himself, to glorify himself. Look around; listen to or read the daily news reports. It does not take very long to see that this is the heart of man, and this is exactly what the word of the cross exposes.

How will **the "good" of the world** respond when told that in the sight of God there are none good; all are sinners and their goodness will not save them? Most people think that they are good since they have not done anything really bad. After all, they will say: "I haven't killed anyone or robbed a bank." Their boast is in their goodness. To these self-proclaimed good people, the word of the cross is foolishness.

How will **the "comfortable" of the world** respond when told that a comfortable life apart from God will not save them? After all, they have all the money they need, good health and can do whatever they want. The world would say, "They have it made." They have no needs, most of all the need of a Savior. Their boast is in their riches. To these "I am rich and in need of nothing" people, the word of the cross is foolishness.

How will **the "philosopher" of the world**, a lover of man's wisdom and knowledge, respond when told that his wisdom is foolishness, mere child's play, and it will not save him, for God's wisdom is in His Son who died on a cross? Their boast is in their wisdom and knowledge. To the philosopher, the word of the cross is foolishness.

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How will the “**religious**” of the world respond when told that works and outward piety through sacraments and rules that subdue the flesh will not save them? Their boast is in their religion. To the religious, the word of the cross is foolishness.

What is the purpose of the word of the cross? Paul nails it!

So that no flesh at all should be boasting in God’s sight. (1 Corinthians 1.29 cv)

The cross reduces everyone down to the lowest level where the flesh is completely severed and no one has any ground upon which to stand, and then raises up all mankind to the highest level where Christ is all in all. In the consummation of the eons, no one will be able to boast, for all will boast in God’s Son as every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Praise God for His wisdom!

But there is more, for God’s wisdom is not even on the same plane as man’s wisdom. God’s wisdom is in the Person of His Son and not merely in another set of rational thought. To those who believe, Christ has become the very wisdom of God.

In Christ.

Yet you, of Him, are **in Christ Jesus**, Who became to us **wisdom** from God, besides **righteousness** and **holiness** and **deliverance**, that, according as it is written, **He who is boasting, in the Lord let him be boasting.** (1 Corinthians 1.30-31 cv)

Have you grasped the glory of these words? Christ is not only our wisdom but our righteousness, our holiness and our deliverance. Oh, how can we refrain from making our boast in the Lord? We do not need the wisdom of man; we need Christ who is the wisdom of God. We do not need our own righteousness; we need Christ who is our righteousness. We do not need our own holiness; we need Christ who is the Holy One. We do not need to turn to the world to deliver us by its power; we need Christ who is our Deliverer and the power of God.

Dear brethren, all that is in Christ comes through the cross where our Lord Jesus was crucified. For this reason, Paul wrote: *For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified* (1 Corinthians 2.2 NASB). The world will have nothing to do with such a determination and we can expect nothing else from it, apart from the spirit of God moving upon hearts. It is folly to the mind of the old humanity.

The word of the cross is the sum total of the accomplishment of the cross, which is both an historical fact and a present and future reality. The accomplishments of the cross are the entire foundation of the word of the cross, but the glory of an

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historical fact extends throughout the eons and will be proven fully in the consummation of the eons. It is a present power for those who believe. We could say that the word of the cross is God's power in action.

Who are being saved.

The word of the cross to us who are **being saved** it is the power of God.
(1 Corinthians 1.18 cv)

When we first believe, we are saved. Let us not doubt for a moment that when the spirit of God took up residence in us and we were sealed in Christ with the Holy Spirit of promise as an earnest of our inheritance of glorified bodies (Ephesians 1.13), we were forever saved and can never lose our salvation. Many will tell us otherwise, but this is due to faulty understanding of Scripture. However, once we are saved, according to Paul's evangel, we are also *being saved*. Saved from what? Saved from the flesh that sets its desire against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh (Galatians 5.17)! Saved from our old humanity that will rob us of the joy of serving God in this life and of being enjoyers of our future allotment!

Paul declared that the power of God is for salvation for those believing. This is not a reference to the lost being saved but to the believer being saved. To the Romans, Paul declared: *For not ashamed am I of the evangel, for it is God's power for salvation to everyone who is believing* (Romans 1.16 cv).

In other words, according to the evangel, the power of God is the word of the cross. What does this mean? Simply, the power of God is the cross being applied to the life of believers to sever them from all that is of the old humanity, from the first man, Adam, and to bring them into all that is of the new humanity, in the last Adam, Christ.

The power of God conquers the old creation and the old humanity. It is a present power for one being saved, the believer, so that his or her life is severed from the flesh and any boast in the flesh, and thus is united with the person of Christ so that all boasting is in Christ.

Dear brethren, do not think for a second that you have your own power to conquer the flesh of the old humanity. If you believe, you are a new creation in Christ, who is your wisdom and power. His life in you is the life that conquers the flesh and its boasting.

Being saved is a daily saving from our flesh that would exalt itself by taking glory for itself rather than giving all the glory to God. Do not fool yourself; it is in all of us to want glory for ourselves and to receive it from man and even our brethren in Christ. Just listen to the words being spoken all around you and it won't be too long before you hear the self-exaltation of man. It may come over the airwaves, on the street corner or even from the pulpit. Only the action of the cross in our lives will keep us from such folly.

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I die daily.

Again, Paul is our example of the daily action of the cross.

Why do we also stand in jeopardy every hour? I protest by that glorifying in you, brethren, which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, **I die daily.** (1 Corinthians 15.30-31 ASV)

For the ecclesias of God, Paul died daily. Is this not what the cross is all about? Most assuredly, at times, Paul's flesh must have tried to rise up to take charge on occasion as he was beaten, hounded by the messenger of Satan, hungry and cold, and as he endured many hardships. Each day he faced all sorts of perils that would have crushed most people. Thank God; the cross was operative in Paul each day he went forth to bring the evangel to the nations, even when he was imprisoned for the sake of the evangel. He died daily!

To the Corinthians, Paul made a statement that most people, even many believers, would consider foolishness. He stated: ***It is my ideal rather to be dying*** (1 Corinthians 9.15 cv). This sums up the word of the cross.

Now, knowing how some people take words like these literally, in this verse, Paul did not desire death, the state of unconsciousness. He desired to die to anything and everything that would have hindered his service in the Lord.

Are you not aware that the workers at the sacred things are eating of the things of the sanctuary? Those settling beside the altar have their portion with the altar. Thus the Lord also prescribes that those who are announcing the evangel are to be living of the evangel. Yet **I do not use any of these things.** Now I do not write these things that it may be becoming thus with me, **for it is my ideal rather to be dying, than that anyone shall be making my boast void.** (1 Corinthians 9.13-15 cv)

Take note that Paul willingly severed himself even from what was legitimately his so that his boast in the cross would not be made void. He had every right, according to Scripture, to be living of the evangel. So, why did he not use this right?

For, being free of all, I enslave myself to all, that I should be gaining the more. (1 Corinthians 9.19 cv)

Being free of all was being severed from all, even what was legitimate, so that he could be a slave to all. Is this not the word of the cross in action? Can you imagine many of the men today who have great ministries forgoing their legitimate compensation for their work for the evangel of Christ so that the boast of the cross would not be made void? Oh, where are the men of our day who are examples of the life of Paul? Who of us wakes in the morning proclaiming that our ideal is to be dying so that our boast is in the Lord?

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Old humanity crucified with Christ.

What is the key to dying daily? It is reckoning that our old humanity was crucified together with Christ. If we have been crucified with Christ, then the life we live has to be that of Christ. How else are we to live?

For if we have become planted together in the likeness of His death, nevertheless we shall be of the resurrection also, knowing this, that **our old humanity was crucified together with Him**, that **the body of Sin** may be nullified, for us by no means to be still slaving for Sin, for one who dies has been justified from Sin. (Romans 6.5-7 *CV*)

The old humanity is called the body of sin, which is the source of all boasting in the flesh and exalting oneself and standing against the wisdom and power of God. If we have believed in the Lord Jesus, then we know that we died with Christ. In other words, our old humanity died on the cross with Christ. He took our old humanity to the grave with Him and left it in the grave that we might walk in newness of life, His life.

The word of the cross begins with reckoning what Christ has done for us on the cross in relation to our old humanity.

Jesus directed His disciples to deny self, take up their cross and follow Him (Matthew 16.24). I won't deny that there is truth in our Lord's words for us today; however, I believe that our walk with the Lord, as members of His body, goes beyond taking up our cross. According to Paul, who was given great revelation by the risen Christ, we do not have a cross of our own; we have the cross of Christ, for this is where our old humanity was dealt the death blow. Consequently, I believe that we are not to embrace our own cross but to see that when Christ died on a cross for our sin, He also took our old humanity with Him. We are to reckon that we have died with Christ and that we now live by His life, by His faith and through His grace. It is true that we must not live by our old humanity, but we are never told by Paul to deny it. Rather, we are told to reckon it dead by faith.

The word of the cross tells us that we have died with Christ, for *I am crucified with Christ, and no longer live, I, but Christ lives in me; but in that I now live in flesh, I live by faith, the faith of the Son of God, who has loved me and given himself for me* (Galatians 2.20 *DNT*).

Here the flesh is spoken of in a neutral way. It simply refers to the body in which we live and not the old humanity. Notice that it is Christ through and through—crucified with Christ, Christ lives in me, the faith of the Son of God. This is where the power and wisdom of God are revealed and where the cross is operative.

How do we attain to it? By the faith of the Son of God! How is it operative in us? Through the grace of God!

THE WORD OF THE CROSS

Paul's instruction to the body of Christ is to put off the old humanity and put on the new humanity (Ephesians 4.20-24; Colossians 3.9-11). How do we put off the old humanity? Again, by reckoning that it is dead! If by faith we know that it is dead, then it is not a question of denying it but of reckoning it dead. Another has died on our behalf, taking our old humanity with Him. All we must do is strip it off and not participate with it. How do we do this? By grace!

Again, Paul's life is very instructive to us. He was given such tremendous revelation of Christ and the purpose of the eons that he was in danger of his old humanity rearing its ugly head and causing him to boast in himself. To protect him from such boasting, he was given a messenger of Satan. Three times Paul asked that this thorn or splinter in the flesh be taken from him. Instead, the word of the Lord came to him.

My grace is sufficient for thee: for my power is made perfect in weakness.

Paul responded to this, not by running from or complaining about it, but by embracing it.

Most gladly therefore will **I rather glory in my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.** Wherefore I take pleasure in weaknesses, in injuries, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong. (2 Corinthians 12.9-10 ASV)

Is this not the very heart of the word of the cross? In weakness, we discover the power of the cross. In weakness, the grace of God is most operative. This is the wisdom and power of God. Christ is the power of God. In a day in which strength is idolized, who is willing to glory in weakness in order to experience the power of Christ and to bring honor and glory to Him alone?

Dear brethren, how are we to live by the word of the cross? It is by grace working through faith.

Fellowship of His sufferings.

There is one more matter in relation to the word of the cross, and that is in relation to where the cross leads us. When it is operative in our lives, we know that the cross will sever us from all that is old and in Adam and all that is of the world. It will lead us to weakness in the eyes of the world and all that are living according to the old humanity. It will also lead us to suffering for Christ.

Again, Paul is our example.

More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom **I have suffered the loss of**

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all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith, that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and **the fellowship of His sufferings**, being conformed to His death; in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. (Philippians 3.8-11 NASB)

Here we see that Paul was severed from all that he had at one time considered of the utmost value to him. However, when he met the risen and glorified Christ, Paul counted all that was of value as loss in view of the surpassing value of Christ. In other words, Christ was of such greater value than anything of the world or that the flesh could offer that he willingly suffered the loss of all.

Is this not how it should be for any of us who have seen the surpassing greatness of our Lord? Nothing compares with Him and nothing should compete with Him in our hearts. **Let us sanctify Christ as Lord in our hearts** (1 Peter 3.15)!

Paul not only saw it all as loss but also as rubbish so that he might gain Christ. This was the goal of Paul, and it involved a full severing so that he would gain Christ and be found in Him. But Paul did not stop at this point, for he desired to know Him in the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death.

What did Paul mean? Paul meant that he was willing to enter into the type of suffering that Jesus had prior to the cross itself. Surely, Paul could not die the death for the sin of the world as his Lord had done, but he could enter onto that sacred ground of suffering the humiliation and shame that Christ endured at the hands of man. Without a doubt, the Lord exemplified dying daily as He headed toward the cross. Rather than doing His own will, Jesus continually denied His will to do only the will of His Father, even to death on a cross.

Paul desired to follow in the footsteps of his Lord. He desired to be so conformed to the death of the Lord that he would know nothing but Christ Himself. Does the import of this grasp your heart? Paul wanted to be so severed from everything so that all that remained was Christ. This is the action of the cross in one who is serious about gaining and knowing Christ, and of **one being saved**.

Now, notice the outcome that Paul sought. It was to attain to the resurrection from among the dead. The word in the Greek should actually be translated as the *out-resurrection* from among the dead.

If by any means I might arrive at the goal, namely, the **out-resurrection** from among those who are dead. (Philippians 3.11 WABT)

Surely, Paul knew that he would be resurrected from the dead one day. Even the Jews of his day knew that. So, what was Paul trying to attain?

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Paul knew that only those who conquer or overcome while living in their bodies of humiliation or of death will be counted worthy of the first resurrection (Revelation 20.4-6) that will lead to reigning in the kingdom of Christ in the oncoming eon. After all, Jesus said: *“The sons of this age marry and are given in marriage, but **those who are considered worthy to attain to that age and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry nor are given in marriage; for they cannot even die anymore, because they are like angels, and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection**”* (Luke 20.34-36 NASB).

Paul was seeking to attain to the age to come by being considered worthy of that age and the resurrection from the dead. The use of the word *from* is a clear indication that this resurrection will not include all the dead, even all the dead believers. Only those considered worthy of the next age will be resurrected. The rest will remain dead until the end of the millennial kingdom, at which time they will appear before the great white throne (Revelation 20.11-15). The believers that will be resurrected at that time will be *saved, yet so as through fire* (1 Corinthians 15.15 NASB). Paul was not seeking for this resurrection but for the one that comes 1,000 years before.

Paul was seeking to enter the sufferings of Christ that fully and unequivocally severed him from everything so that he would fully gain Christ. There would be absolutely nothing left of Paul's old humanity, and he would enter fully onto the ground of the new creation that will come about for the body of Christ in the *out-resurrection*. In other words, Paul saw the possibility of gaining Christ in his life in such a way that he would be living as if he was actually resurrected, not in a glorified body, but in character, clothed in Christ's perfect righteousness. This is why he wanted to know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death. It was in the fellowship of His sufferings that he would be conformed to His death; and in attaining to this death, he would know Christ in the power of His resurrection.

Why? In Christ, death must lead to resurrection life!

Paul's goal was so great that we can imagine only a few people even start down this path. By his own admission, Paul declared: *Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus* (Philippians 3.12 NASB).

Paul was seeking to lay hold of Christ in every way he could; he sought the perfection of Christ. How was this possible? Only through the word of the cross! The cross had laid hold of Paul, and he sought to lay hold of it in Christ Jesus. When he wrote this epistle, Paul had not laid hold of it, but he continued to press on toward it. How did he do this?

Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: **forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies**

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ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 3.13-14 NASB)

Notice that Paul had but one thing to do, not many but one. He forgot all that lay behind him; that is, he severed himself from all of his past, even the good past when he was zealous for the things of God and his conscious was perfectly good before God (Acts 23.1). He reached forward to what lay ahead. What was ahead for Paul and all who enter into the sufferings of Christ?

The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, **if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him.** (Romans 8.16-17 NASB)

If we suffer with Christ, we will be glorified with Him. Suffering leads to the first resurrection or the *out*-resurrection, and glory! This is the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. It is to be glorified as our Lord is glorified.

For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, **but also to suffer for His sake**, experiencing the same conflict which you saw in me, and now hear to be in me. (Philippians 1.29-30 NASB)

Paul's evangel does not promise a life of smooth sailing. His life was nothing of the sort, and he did not indicate that it will be any different for those who are being saved by the power of God, which is the word of the cross. Being severed is a suffering, a suffering that leads to glory.

Beloved in Christ; the world despises the word of the cross; it is an enemy of the cross. But for us who are being saved, it is the power of God. Let us allow the word of the cross to sever us from all so that we might know and gain Christ and live in these dark days as if we are on resurrection ground as we press on toward the *out*-resurrection in which we will be glorified as He is glorified.

The cross severed the Lord Jesus from this world, and it will sever us as well. At the consummation of the eons, there will be only one boast, and it will be to the glory of God as every knee bows and every tongue confesses that Jesus Christ is Lord. All will praise God's Son, the Beginning and the Consummation of the eons.

No man or creature will boast that they had any part in their arrival at the consummation of the eons. There will be one mighty voice going forth throughout creation: Grace! Grace! God's grace!

Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ (John 1.17 *cv*).

Let our boast be in the Lord!