

THE



LIFE

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"Explaining spiritual realities with Spirit-taught words."

1 Corinthians 2:13

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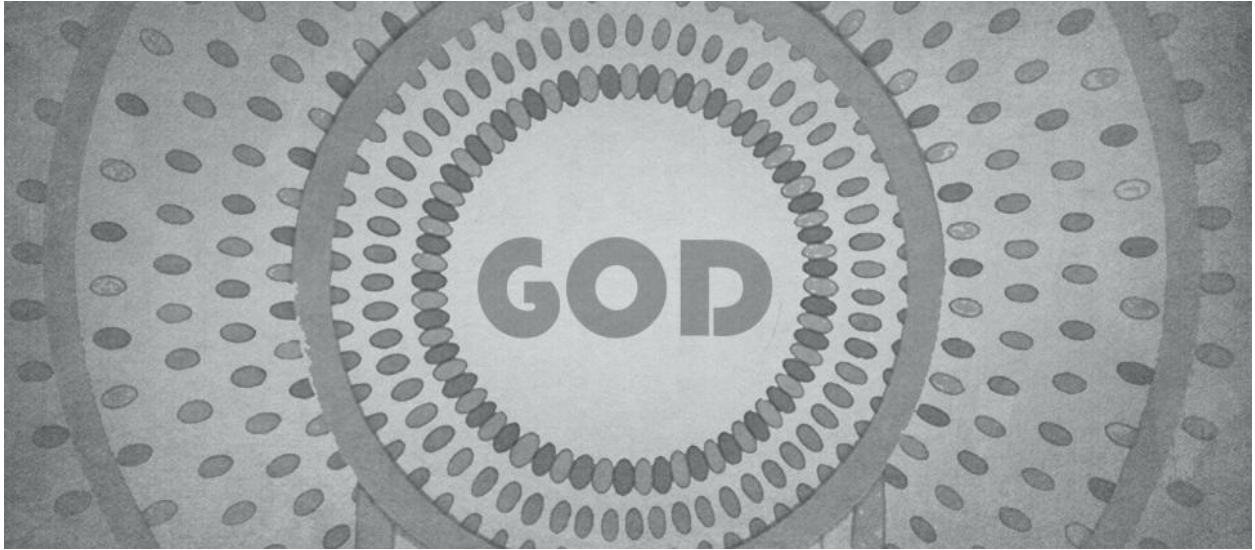
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PART I



God-Centeredness

Introduction

I've had a particular topic on my heart. As I've tried to "get it on paper", I have found it quite difficult knowing where to begin with this topic. It seems "inseparable" from sub-topics and related topics. The topic is "God-Centeredness" – particularly, God-Centeredness vs. Man-Centeredness in the Christian Life and Ministry of the Church. If I were to ask you "Where should I begin?", it seems certain you would say, "Well, obviously, begin with God (rather than Man)." In turn, I would ask, "Why is that so obvious?" The answer is our subject matter.

In order to address the topic of "God-Centeredness", we need to investigate God's intention – His plan and purpose – in creation. And in order to properly understand this, we need to see things from God's point of view. And in order to have God's point of view, we need to adopt an eternal perspective. I don't think it should be difficult to acknowledge that we all tend to be Man-Centered rather than God-Centered, see things from a self-centered point of view rather than God's point of view, and give much more thought to the affairs of this life than eternity. Therefore, we would also need to ask, "What can be done about changing all this?" Or better, "What has God provided as a

means of changing our tendencies?” The Biblical answer would be – the cross – not only the message of the cross, but also the way of the cross – a rare topic for the present generation.

So, let’s “stack” the topics, as it were:

➤ The Divine Perspective –

Seeing from God’s Point of View

➤ The Divine Intention –

God’s Eternal Plan and Purpose in Creation

➤ God-Centeredness in the Christian Life and Church

➤ The Divine Rectification –

The Way of the Cross as God’s Solution to Self-Centeredness

The Divine Perspective

Seeing from God's Point of View

Solomon wrote in Ecclesiastes: *"He has made everything appropriate in its time. He has also set eternity in their heart, yet so that man will not find out the work which God has done from the beginning even to the end."*¹ I believe we can understand Solomon to be saying something like this: "It seems like there is a **purpose to creation**², and although Man cannot totally understand it now, God has created him such that it is his very nature to want to **know and understand God's eternal plan and purpose in creation.**" *The Amplified Bible* says it this way: *"He also has planted eternity in men's hearts and minds [a divinely implanted sense of a purpose working through the ages which nothing under the sun, but God alone can satisfy]...."* *The Young's Literal Translation* actually offers a hope for some "satisfaction", as it were, even during our time on earth. It reads like this: *"... that knowledge He hath put in their heart without which man findeth not out the work that God hath done from the beginning even unto the end."* I believe that God wants us to understand His Eternal Plan and Purpose in Creation. I believe this simply because He has revealed it in the Scripture: In

¹ Ecclesiastes 3:11. Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture is quoted from the *New American Standard Bible*.

² See the preceding verses 1-10 in Ecclesiastes 3.

Ephesians 1:4-5, the apostle Paul states: “*Even before the world was made, God had already chosen us to be his through our union with Christ, so that we would be holy and without fault before him. Because of his love God had already decided that through Jesus Christ he would make us his children—this was his pleasure and purpose.”³*

In this passage, the phrase “*before the world was made*” shows us that in order to properly understand God’s **Eternal Plan and Purpose in Creation**, we must see from the *Divine Perspective* – we must see from *God’s Point of View* – that is, from an **eternal perspective**. **God’s perspective is an eternal one**. Man’s perspective is temporal. The Scripture⁴ tells us that what we see is “temporal”, but what we don’t see (God and the things of God) are “**eternal**”. “Temporal”⁵ means *enduring for a while, for a season*. If we are needing and wanting to know where it all came from and where it is all going, we need **an eternal perspective** – understanding that which was in the heart and mind of God before creation and will remain after the earth passes away.⁶

Along with this eternal perspective, **SEEING FROM GOD’S POINT OF VIEW** requires our **agreeing with and submitting to**

³ *Good News Translation*

⁴ *I Corinthians 4:18*

⁵ (Greek) *proskairos*: Strong’s # 4340

⁶ Matthew 24:35, Mark 13:31, Luke 21:33, II Peter 3:10-13

God's perspective on things. We must "sit where God is sitting", as it were, and look outward and "see what God is seeing", in order to understand things from His point of view. This puts God where He rightfully belongs in our lives – in the center. God's point of view on things is given to Man by God's Spirit in the Bible - God's words. If we agree with and submit to a Biblical perspective on things, we will have a God-centered point of view and not a Man-centered point of view. This is absolutely necessary to understand God and His Eternal Plan and Purpose in Creation, which plan and purpose also include our personal lives. We can therefore appreciate the apostle Paul's Spirit-motivated prayer for the Church: "*We are asking God that you may see things, as it were, from His point of view by being given spiritual insight and understanding.*"⁷ The "*spiritual insight and understanding*" are the **eternal** truths given to Man by God's Spirit in the Bible - God's words.

⁷ Colossians 1:9 *The New Testament in Modern English* by J.B. Phillips

The Divine Intention

God's Eternal Plan and Purpose in Creation

The Divine Perspective - *Seeing from God's Point of View* – shows us something crucially important: The Divine Intention - *God's Eternal Plan and Purpose in Creation* - goes way beyond meeting Man's needs. Firstly, God does not exist for Man (Man-Centeredness); Man exists for God (God-Centeredness). Secondly, the Divine Intention - *God's Eternal Plan and Purpose in Creation* – goes back **before** time – **before** the creation – **before** Man fell into sin in the garden – and **before** the Father sent the Son to this earth to redeem Man from sin. Does it sound right to you, that God created Man so that He could redeem him from sin – end of story? Was that God's eternal plan and purpose? Don't we just know in our hearts that our God had something much better than that in His heart and mind?

Simon Chan asks: *“Is the church to be seen as an instrument to accomplish God's purpose in creation, or is the church the expression of God's ultimate purpose itself?”* He then goes on to say: *“God created the world in order that He might enter into a covenant relationship with humankind.... The covenantal relationship always involves the election of a people*

from among humankind.... Implied in this newer canonical narrative is another way of looking at the relationship between the church broadly conceived and creation, and that is to see it not as another entity within the larger creation but as prior to creation. The church precedes creation in that it is what God has in view from all eternity and creation is the means by which God fulfills his eternal purpose in time. The church does not exist to fix a broken creation; rather, the creation exists to realize the church."⁸

I concur: The Creator existed before the Creation. **The Creator has a purpose for His Creation:** "... just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will."⁹ **God's purpose for Creation is to form a people – "the adoption as sons", that is, the Church.**

Let's look at Paul's words again using a different translation: "Even before the world was made, God had already chosen us to be his through our union with Christ, so that we would be holy and without fault before him. Because of his love God had already decided that through Jesus Christ he would make us his children – this was his

⁸ Excerpt from: Chan, Simon (2006) *The Ontology of the Church*, Chapter One, *Liturgical Theology, The Church as Worshiping Community*. InterVarsity Press. Cf. Ephesians 1:4; 1 Peter 1:20; Revelation 13:8.

⁹ Ephesians 1:4-5

pleasure and purpose."¹⁰ The Divine Intention - God's Eternal Plan and Purpose is to have **A FAMILY OF SONS IN THE SON.**

While redeeming us from sin was necessary for God to fulfill the Divine Intention, it is not His **eternal** plan and purpose in creation. And if we only have this Man-centered / Needs-oriented perspective – that God's main pre-occupation is in redeeming, saving, healing, and blessing Man, then, not only have we missed the Divine Intention, but our understanding of the whole of the Christian life, as well as the nature, mission and ministry of the Church will all be askew with a self-centered perspective.

So, the Divine Intention – God's Eternal Plan and Purpose in Creation was to "*make us his children*" — **a family of sons in The Son** – "***THIS WAS HIS PLEASURE AND PURPOSE.***" In Revelation 4:11, we see that around the throne in heaven it is being declared: "*You are worthy, O Lord our God, to receive glory and honor and power. For you created everything, and it is for your pleasure that they exist and were created.*"¹¹ From this Scripture passage we learn that God created **MAN BECAUSE IT GAVE HIM PLEASURE.**

¹⁰ Ephesians 1:4-5 *The Good News Translation*

¹¹ *New Living Translation*

The first question and answer of the Westminster Catechism¹² is this:

Question 1: “What is the chief and highest end of man?” (That is, “What is the purpose of creation?”)

Answer: “Man's chief and highest end is to glorify God, and fully to enjoy him forever.”

So, we see that God created Man **FOR HIS PLEASURE**, and intends for Man to have his source of pleasure in God. We also see, at least from the point of view of those who were in the Westminster Assembly, that God is “Number One” – that is, “It’s not about you.” It’s all about God. Again, God does not exist for Man (Man-Centeredness); Man exists for God (God-Centeredness). We get this indication in the Scriptures right from the beginning: Genesis 1:1 reads: “In the beginning, **GOD**” Yes, everything began with God – not Man. Scripture teaches that everything comes from – has its source in – God. The apostle Paul wrote in Romans 11:36: “*For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. [For all things originate with Him and come from Him; all things live through Him, and all things center in*

¹² In 1643 when the Long Parliament of England called the Westminster Assembly to produce the Westminster Confession, it also asked for a directory of "catechising". The Catechism was completed by the Westminster Assembly in 1647. It was then adopted by the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland in 1648 and by the Presbyterian Synod of New York and Philadelphia in 1788.

*and tend to consummate and to end in Him.] To Him be glory forever!
Amen (so be it)."¹³*

¹³ *The Amplified Bible*

God-Centeredness In The Christian Life & Church

In Psalm 14:2 David wrote: *“The Lord looks down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there are any who understand, who seek God.”* I believe that in Exodus 19:4-6 God told us what it is that He wants Man to understand: He set us free from the bondage of this world and *“bore us on eagles’ wings and brought us to Himself.... to be a special treasure to Him”¹⁴*. He did this because He has always desired to have a people who would be *“a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation”*. In other words: God desires a Church - that is, a people set apart from all other people - who would minister, not only to one another, but **primarily to Him – a people who are His “special treasure”**. In Ephesians 1:18 Paul wrote that **God has “an inheritance in the saints”**. Listen to some of the various translations¹⁵ of what Paul wrote in Ephesians 1, verse 11 about the Church:

- *“we were made **a heritage**”*
- *“we were also made **His inheritance**”*
- *“we have also been chosen as **God’s portion**”*

¹⁴ New King James Version: Thomas Nelson, 1982.

¹⁵ The Logos International Study Bible: Thomas Nelson, 1972.

- *“we were also made **God’s portion**”*

I think we have to admit that, in contrast to this spiritual perspective, the humanism that pervades our times has changed the focus of the modern Church’s theology, spirituality and ministry so that it has become less and less **God-centered**, and more and more **Man-centered**. Evangelicals and Charismatics enjoy talking primarily about what God has done and will do **FOR MAN**. Some Liberals remind us about what should or must be done **BY MAN**. While Pentecostal and Holiness traditions major on what God has and still desires to do **IN MAN**. None of this is wrong – it is just **OFF-CENTER**. It is **Man-centered**, instead of **God-centered**. Whereas, in his various epistles to the churches, the apostle Paul puts forth a very **God-centered** perspective:

- *“For **FROM HIM** and **THROUGH HIM** and **TO HIM** are all things.”¹⁶*
- *“For **BY HIM** all things were created...all things were created **THROUGH HIM** and **FOR HIM**.”¹⁷*
- *“...**HIM, FOR WHOM** are all things and **BY WHOM** are all things.”¹⁸*

¹⁶ Romans 11:36

¹⁷ Colossians 1:16

¹⁸ Hebrews 2:10

- “...FROM WHOM are all things, and we exist THROUGH HIM.”¹⁹

We also have the personal testimony and exhortation of Paul and his co-workers: “For the love of Christ compels²⁰ us, having concluded this, that One died for all, therefore all died; and He died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him Who died and rose again on their behalf.”²¹

In the first chapter of Paul’s Letter to the Church in Colossae, I believe he establishes a foundation for a **God-centered**, rather than a **Man-centered** church ministry – An approach to ministry where the Church focuses on loving and ministering **firstly** to the Lord rather than to itself; and the Lord, Who is love, in turn ministers to the people – both sovereignly, as well as, through one another. We have already mentioned verse 9 from the J.B. Phillips translation: “We are asking God that you may see things, as it were, from His point of view by being given spiritual insight and understanding.” Now look at verses 17 and 18: “He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. He is also the Head of the body, the Church; and He is the Beginning, the Firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place (or “the

¹⁹ I Corinthians 8:6

²⁰ NKJV

²¹ II Corinthians 5:14-15

*preeminence*²²) *in everything.*” The Greek word, *proteuo*, means to be **given first place in rank and influence.** “*He is before all things...*” The Greek word, *pro*, means He is *above, superior* in all things.²³ “*In Him all things hold together.*” The Greek word, *sunistano*, means *are held together, are sustained.* When is it that a marriage, a relationship, a church do not **hold together?** When we do not allow Christ to be **the Head** – when we do not give Him **first place** or the **preeminence.**

Please don't misunderstand me. I am not saying that ministering to the many needs of people is wrong. What is wrong, from a Biblical perspective, is when ministry to people comes **before** ministry to God, when the goal of being **held together** *with one another* comes before being **held together** *in God*, and when the desires of people occupy **first place** on the agenda, when it is the Lord Who should have the **preeminence.**

So, from a Biblical perspective, it is without question that we absolutely need to have:

²² NKJV

²³ All references to the meanings of Hebrew and Greek words are taken from: *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* and *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words.*

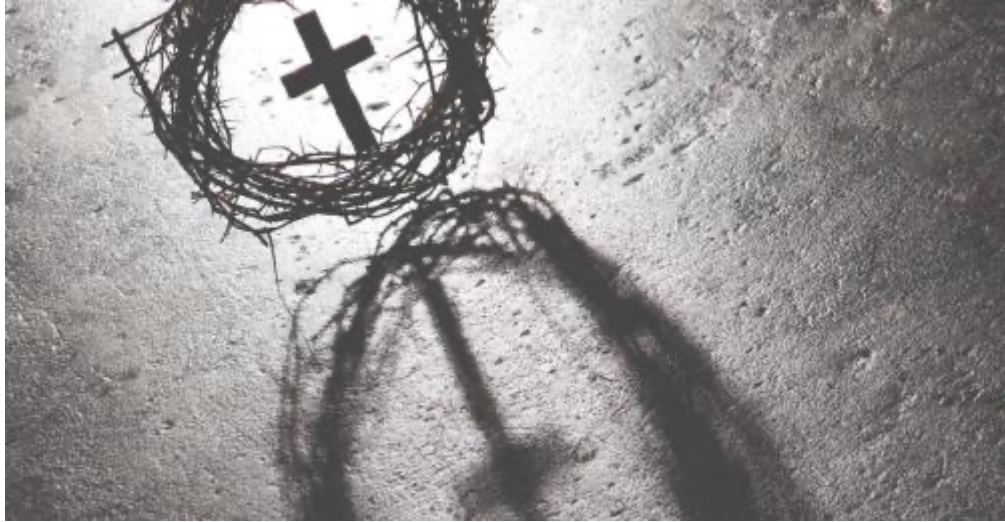
- The Divine Perspective –
Seeing from God's Point of View
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- God-Centeredness in the Christian Life and Church

It does not so much depend upon our own abilities to attain to and develop “*spiritual insight and understanding*”, but upon our humility and willingness to forsake Self-Centeredness for God-Centeredness.

But since we unfortunately tend to be Man-Centered rather than God-Centered, we need to ask, “What has God provided as a means of changing our tendencies?” The Biblical answer is **THE CROSS** – not only the message of the cross, but also **the way of the cross**. This is what I refer to as **THE DIVINE RECTIFICATION** - *The Way of the Cross as God's Solution to Self-Centeredness*. Without understanding and embracing **the way of the cross**, the Church will never be able to understand or embrace its God-centered calling. **Part II** is a discussion of **THE WAY OF THE CROSS**:

- THE WHAT AND WHY OF THE CROSS
- SUFFERING, RULING AND REIGNING
- AN EXAMPLE FOR US TO FOLLOW IN HIS STEPS
- ASPECTS OF THE TRUE CROSS

PART II



The Way of the Cross

The Divine Rectification

*The Way of the Cross
as God's Solution to Self-Centeredness*

The WHAT and WHY of the Cross

We have discussed “God-Centeredness” and found its antithesis to be “Self-Centeredness”. It is this “self-centeredness” which the “Way of the Cross” addresses. While it is more than this, the Way of the Cross is God’s solution to self-centeredness. I say it is “more than this” because self-centeredness is a human problem which originated at the Fall, while the Way of the Cross is the outworking of the Divine Nature, and therefore, an eternal principle.

But why is it that we are naturally self-centered when we were actually created to be God-centered? Let’s begin at the beginning where it all began. In the 2nd and 3rd chapters of the Book of Genesis, we read about the Fall of Man. I will paraphrase the story:

God said, “I have given you a paradise here. There is the Tree of Life, and there is the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. I would like for you to eat of the Tree of Life, but not from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Of course, in order for you to love Me, as I have defined love, I have given you a free

will; and you can disagree and disobey Me.²⁴ But, from My point of view, it would be a good thing for you not to eat of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. I have the Knowledge of Good and Evil and I have created you in My image and likeness. You have been created to be LIKE Me, but not AS Me. The difference is this: As God, I have the Knowledge of Good and Evil and I can handle it - you can't."

Then along came the Adversary – the one who hates us, and wants to steal, kill, and destroy us. He said to Eve: *"Sure, God said that He loves you and wants the best for you, but He must be holding something back from you and Adam, if He won't let you eat the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. Come over here and just take a look at this tree from my point of view: This is beautiful food that will make you wise."* So, Eve took a look at the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. And from her point of view, this looked like a good deal. So, she and her husband ate of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. In

²⁴ Humankind is **free** to love or not love God. Jesus said: **"IF YOU LOVE ME, keep My commandments."** (John 14:15) Many would ask: "Why would God create humankind knowing that they would fall into sin and suffer the sorrowful consequences of sin?" Because He **freely chose** to create and love us, He wanted us to **freely choose** to love Him, even at the risk of our choosing not to, for He had a plan of redemption already in place before the fall into sin. (Revelation 13:8, Ephesians 1:3-6)

so doing, they in as much said to God: *“Lord, thanks very much for this paradise, but we feel that if we can just decide for ourselves what we think will be good and evil for us, we will be able to make an even better life for ourselves.”*

We see the results of their choice in the same chapter: they realize they are naked, and now feel like they cannot stand before the Lord, and try to hide from His presence. In the next chapter we see that their son, Cain, kills his brother, Abel. When God confronts him about this, his response is: *“Am I my brother’s keeper?”* In other words, he was acting out of his **self-centered point of view**. Well, as they say: “The rest is history” – the history of Humanity’s hopeless attempt at living independent of God.

Our essential spiritual need is a **change** from a **self-centered** to a **God-centered** point of view. This “change” is theologically referred to as *repentance*. The Greek word translated *repentance* is: *metanoeo*²⁵. It is a combination of two words: *meta*, which means to **change**; and *noeo*, which means to **perceive**. Fundamentally, we need a **change of perception** – we need to **change our point of view** – from a **self-centered** to a

²⁵ Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible # 3340 and Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words.

God-centered point of view. And the Way of the Cross has been provided by God to accomplish this work in fallen humanity.

I've long taken note of the list of characteristics the apostle Paul gives in his letter to Timothy describing people who are living in the last days.²⁶ The list begins with "lovers of self".²⁷

I do think this characterizes our generation. The Church and those who lead it are far from being exempt. Yet, the displacement of self-centeredness to God-centeredness is a defining characteristic of Christ and therefore of true Christ-likeness. But because self-centeredness is so intertwined in our fallen human nature, what is required is that we be regularly reminded of the message of the Way of the Cross asking the Holy Spirit to apply it afresh to our lives.

²⁶ II Timothy 3:1-3

²⁷ II Timothy 3:1-3

What Do We Mean By “The Cross”?

But what exactly do we mean by “The Cross”? The first mention of “the cross” in the Bible is spoken by Jesus Himself: *“And He said to all, If any person wills to come after Me, let him deny himself [disown himself, forget, lose sight of himself and his own interests, refuse and give up himself] and take up his cross daily and follow Me cleave steadfastly to Me, conform wholly to My example in living and, if need be, in dying also].”²⁸*

Jesus is *“the Author and Perfecter of faith”*²⁹ and He defined “the cross” in terms of “denying self”. According to Jesus, a second aspect of the definition of “the cross” is that it is “for the glory of the Father”. In His prayer to the Father just before His arrest and crucifixion, Jesus said:

“Now My soul has become troubled; and what shall I say, ‘Father, save Me from this hour’? But for this purpose, I came to this hour. Father, glorify Your name ” Then a voice came out of heaven: “I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again.”³⁰

One insidious danger associated with desiring to walk the Way of the Cross is falling into the trap of taking pride in our self-denial. This does not glorify the Father, but instead, ironically,

²⁸ Luke 9:23 *The Amplified Bible*

²⁹ Hebrews 12:2

³⁰ John 12:27-28

leads to self-glorification. This type of spiritual pride is in direct contradiction to the Way of the Cross.

A third aspect of the definition of “the Cross” is that it is “**daily**”, as Jesus said that we were to “*take up our cross daily and follow Him*”. That is, the Way of the Cross is not some kind of single special act of spectacular sacrifice which may even bring notoriety and popularity; but rather, the Way of the Cross is a daily life style of self-denial – usually in ways that may go totally unnoticed except by God.

We need to make a distinction between the “Work of the Cross” and the “Way of the Cross”: The “Work of the Cross” is Christ’s sacrificial work on the Cross as “*the Lamb of God Who takes away the sins of the World*”.³¹ The message of the “Work” of the Cross is directed to the unconverted – the “old man”.³² The “Way of the Cross” is Christ’s example which He gave to “*any person wills to come after Him...and follow Him.*”³³ That is, to “*cleave steadfastly to Him, conform wholly to His example*”³⁴, and “*take the*

³¹ John 1:29

³² Romans 6:6; Ephesians 4:22; Colossians 3:9

³³ Luke 9:23

³⁴ *The Amplified Bible*

same road with Him that He takes as a habit of life".³⁵ The message of the Way of the Cross is directed to the "new man".³⁶

WHY The Way Of The Cross?

Why is the "Way of the Cross" necessary? Because it is God's way of doing things. From eternity past to eternity future, the Way of the Cross is the only way God does things:

In Peter 1:19-20 it is written:

19"but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ. 20For He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but has appeared in these last times for the sake of you."

And in Revelation 13:8 it is written:

"All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast--all whose names have not been written in the book of life belonging to the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world."³⁷

³⁵ *The Wuest Expanded Translation*

³⁶ Ephesians 2:15, 4:24; Colossians 3:10

³⁷ *New International Version*. Now, there are alternative translations for this verse. Some are communicating that it was the "names written in the Lamb's Book of Life" from (before) the creation of the world. Others, like the NIV, are communicating that it was the "Lamb slain" from (before) the creation of the world.³⁷ I favor the later. Admittedly, both views are logically problematic, requiring a worldview and faith in spiritual realities existing before empirical human history. There is an interesting phrase in Hebrew 9:14 which I think could be seen to give added support to this concept of "the Lamb slain from the creation": "**... how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?**" (Hebrew 9:14) "... through the eternal Spirit (He) offered Himself": The simple understanding is that Jesus was able to offer Himself as a sacrifice for sin through the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit. This sacrifice was taking place

From this verse we see that both the “Work of the Cross” and the “Way of the Cross” were established in God’s heart and mind as His plan and purpose from before the beginning of the world.

Also, at the end of the Book of Revelation, in the new heavens and the new earth, in the midst of the New Jerusalem, we see *“the throne of God and of the Lamb”*³⁸, Who embodies the Way of the Cross.

God’s eternal plan and purpose was accomplished **only by the Lamb through the “Work of the Cross” and the “Way of the Cross”**. In his vision into eternity, this is the truth which the apostle John saw and heard declared by angels, the living creatures and elders at the throne in heaven:

“I saw in the right hand of Him who sat on the throne a book written inside and on the back, sealed up with seven seals. And I saw a strong

through the agency of the Holy Spirit. That can mean a number of things – one of which is that this sacrifice was taking place **in the spiritual dimension**. And because it was taking place through the **eternal** Spirit, it could have very well been taking place in “eternity past”, or “from (before) the creation of the world”. This concept is also supported in I Peter 1:19-20: “... but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ. For He was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but has appeared in these last times for the sake of you.” In these verses, the apostle, Peter, is clearly stating that the Lamb was foreknown **before** the creation of the world. So, from the Scriptures we know that Christ existed **before** the creation of the world, and that He was foreordained, if not “slain” - **before** the creation of the world. So, the Lamb “became flesh”, came into the world, and was physically slain during human history; but there also seems to be the spiritual reality that He was slain in an eternal, spiritual dimension “from (before) the creation of the world”.

³⁸ Revelation 22:1 & 3

angel proclaiming with a loud voice, "Who is worthy to open the book and to break its seals?" And no one in heaven or on the earth or under the earth was able to open the book or to look into it. Then I began to weep greatly because no one was found worthy to open the book or to look into it; and one of the elders said to me, "Stop weeping; behold, the Lion that is from the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has overcome so as to open the book and its seven seals." And I saw between the throne (with the four living creatures) and the elders a Lamb standing, as if slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God, sent out into all the earth. And He came and took the book out of the right hand of Him who sat on the throne. When He had taken the book, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each one holding a harp and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. And they sang a new song, saying, "Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth." Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne and the living creatures and the elders; and the number of them was myriads of myriads, and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing." And every created thing which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all things in them, I heard saying, "To Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, be blessing and honor and glory and

dominion forever and ever."³⁹ Do you see? **The Lion is a Lamb!**
Overcoming – God’s way - is through the Way of the Cross.

The apostle John also wrote the following in one of his epistles:

*“By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.”*⁴⁰ – the sin sacrifice on the altar of the cross.

Why the “Way of the Cross”? It is God’s way. From eternity past to eternity future, it is the only way God does things. This is so, because both **the “Work of the Cross” and the “Way of the Cross” are perfect expressions of the very essence of God’s nature, which is self-denying love.**

³⁹ Revelation 5:1-13

⁴⁰ I John 4:9-10

Suffering, Ruling And Reigning

As we continue with the question of WHY the Way of the Cross, we see that the Scriptures reveal that those who have come into Christ are destined to rule and reign with Him in the age to come.⁴¹ In order to rule and reign WITH Him, and not contrary to Him, we need to learn HOW He rules and reigns. And we know from Scripture and experience that He rules and reigns with a self-denying love. If we are to rule and reign with Him, we are to learn this self-denying love, which is so contrary to our self-centeredness. This is something that we must learn to obey; and this “learning to obey” presents suffering to us. It is even said of Jesus that, “*although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered*”.⁴²

A man named Paul Billheimer wrote effectively concerning these concepts. In his book, *Destined For The Throne*, he discusses our calling to rule and reign with Christ; and in the sequel, *Don't Waste Your Sorrows*, that through the Way of the Cross, we learn the self-denying love which will enable us to rule

⁴¹ Romans 5:17, 8:17; II Timothy 2:12

⁴² Hebrews 5:8

and reign with Christ. Billheimer refers to the Cross as “the throne of the universe”.

The apostle Paul expressed the desire to know Christ *“and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death.”*⁴³ This *“fellowship⁴⁴ of His sufferings”* is a participation in, a sharing in, the sufferings of Christ.⁴⁵ And Paul mentions twice in his epistles that if, through these sufferings, we learn self-denying love (the Way of the Cross), we will be glorified with Christ and reign with Christ: *“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.”*⁴⁶ and ...

*“It is a trustworthy statement: For if we died with Him, we will also live with Him; if we endure (suffering), we will also reign with Him....”*⁴⁷

We can make this summary thus far: The Way of the Cross is defined as “self-denial”. In that it is contrary to self, the Way of the Cross entails a type of suffering. Since self-denial and suffering are contrary to our natural self, we must “learn obedience from the things we suffer”. And, **if we learn the Way**

⁴³ Philippians 3:10

⁴⁴ (Greek) *koinonia*

⁴⁵ Paul also referred to his sufferings as “filling up what is *lacking* in Christ's afflictions” (Colossians 1:24), indicating that God intends for Christ's sufferings to continue in some manner through the members of Christ's Body, the Church.

⁴⁶ Romans 8:17

⁴⁷ II Timothy 2:11-12

of the Cross, that is, if we suffer with or like Christ, we will learn how to rule and reign as He does – that is, with self-denying love.

In Galatians 6:14, the apostle Paul said:

“But may it never be that I would boast, except in THE CROSS OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, through which (the Cross) the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.” This is quite a statement but suffice for now to point out that he referred to *“the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ”* – that is, Jesus’ cross. But Jesus referred to OUR cross when He said: *“...let him deny himself, and take up HIS CROSS daily, and follow Me.”*⁴⁸ Yet, in saying “follow Me”, He was also saying that THE LORD’S cross is a pattern for OUR cross. The writer to the Hebrews confirms this in three places in his epistle:

1) *“Fixing our eyes on Jesus, the Author and Perfector of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”*⁴⁹

As *“Author and Perfector of faith”*, **Jesus is our pattern in this process of “enduring (suffering) the cross”** in order to rule and reign.

⁴⁸ Luke 9:23

⁴⁹ Hebrews 12:2

2) *“For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to perfect (bring to maturity) the Author of their salvation through sufferings.”*⁵⁰

As “Author of our salvation”, Jesus is our pattern in this process of suffering that brings us to God’s glory.

3) *“Though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. And having been perfected (brought to maturity), He became the Author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him.”*⁵¹

As “Author of eternal salvation”, Jesus is our pattern in this process of learning obedience by the things we suffer and being “perfected” (brought to maturity).

Jesus is our pattern in this process – The “process” is the Way of the Cross. And this is the operating principle in the process:

*“But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord (the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ⁵²) are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.”*⁵³

⁵⁰ Hebrews 2:10

⁵¹ Hebrews 5:8-9

⁵² II Corinthians 4:6

⁵³ II Corinthians 3:18

In other words, as we see Jesus as our pattern in the process of the Way of the Cross – seeing His self-denying love , the Holy Spirit will spiritually transform us into His image. The LORD’S cross will act as a pattern for OUR cross. The LORD’S self-denying love will act as a pattern for OUR self-denying love.

The apostle Peter wrote:

There are a number of ways Jesus left us *“an example for us to follow in His steps”* on this Way of the Cross. We will take a brief look at each of the following:

- ❖ Jesus set an example for us by **DENYING HIS WILL** for the glory of God.
- ❖ Jesus set an example for us by **DENYING HIMSELF OF PEOPLE’S ACCEPTANCE** for the glory of God.
- ❖ Jesus set an example for us by **DENYING HIMSELF BY ALLOWING HIMSELF TO SUFFER AT THE HANDS OF SINNERS** for the glory of God.
- ❖ Jesus set an example for us by **DENYING HIMSELF BY NOT OPENING HIS MOUTH** for the glory of God.

“An Example for Us to Follow in His Steps”

The Scriptures speak of both “*the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ*”⁵⁴ and “*our cross*”⁵⁵; and that “*the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ*” is a pattern for “*our cross*”.⁵⁶ The Lord’s self-denying love is a pattern for our self-denying love. This is a supernatural, transformational work of the Holy Spirit in our lives which conforms us to the image of Christ,⁵⁷ as we “*follow in His steps*” on the Way of the Cross.⁵⁸ Let’s look at some of the ways in which Jesus left us “*an example for us to follow in His steps*” on this Way of the Cross:

⁵⁴ Galatians 6:14

⁵⁵ Luke 9:23

⁵⁶ Hebrews 2:10, 5:8-9, 12:2

⁵⁷ II Corinthians 3:18

⁵⁸ I Peter 2:21

Jesus set an example for us by

DENYING HIS WILL

for the glory of God

Jesus prayed to the Father: *"My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as You will."*⁵⁹ Jesus set an example of denying our human will for the glory of God. We read in Matthews's gospel:

*"From that time Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day. Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, 'God forbid it, Lord! This shall never happen to You.' But He turned and said to Peter, 'Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's.'"*⁶⁰

Peter wanted something contrary to God's will: Peter wanted to see Jesus alive, over-throwing the Roman government, and being seated as King over Israel - with Peter seated right next to Him. Peter even said, "God forbid...", like he was speaking God's will. But Peter's will was actually contrary to God's will. Jesus called him "Satan", which means "adversary", because his will was going against God's will. And the reason this was so was because Peter's heart and mind were focused on himself and

⁵⁹ Matthew 26:39

⁶⁰ Matthew 16:21-23

seeing things from a human point of view, rather than from a God-centered point of view.

Along with denying our own will when it is contrary to God's, Jesus also instructed us to deny the will of our loved ones if it stands in the way of God's glory. Again, in Matthew's gospel Jesus says:

*"Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I came to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and a man's enemies will be the members of his household. He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. He who has found his life will lose it, and he who has lost his life for My sake will find it."*⁶¹

So, we see that walking the Way of the Cross can bring a sword – not peace – in family relationships. This happens when the will of our loved ones being exerted in our lives goes contrary to the glory of God in our lives. We are then forced into making a choice on who will be lord in our lives – our loved ones or Christ. If we choose our loved ones, we deny Christ's Lordship and are *"not worthy of Him"*. If we choose Christ and find ourselves at this departure with our loved ones, we are indeed following Jesus on

⁶¹ Matthew 10:34-39. Jesus quotes from Micah 7:6.

the Way of the Cross. And He promised that if “*for His sake*”, we temporarily – or permanently – lose this familial part of our soul-life⁶², we will find something in place of it, which God Himself has given as a blessing that comes with His will being done.

Jesus set an example for us by

**DENYING HIMSELF
OF PEOPLE’S ACCEPTANCE**

for the glory of God

Jesus said, “*I do not receive honor from men.*”⁶³

He also said: “*A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and in his own household.*”⁶⁴

The apostle John said: “*...even His brothers did not believe in Him.*”⁶⁵

And listen to what His own family had to say: “*But when His own people heard about this, they went out to lay hold of Him, for they said, ‘He is out of His mind.’*”⁶⁶

The Scripture speaks for itself: Jesus had to deny Himself of people’s acceptance for the glory of God; and if we walk the Way

⁶² The Greek word translated “life” here is *psuche*, meaning not the biological nor spiritual, but the soulish part of our lives

⁶³ John 5:41 *New King James Version*

⁶⁴ Matthew 13:57 *New American Standard Bible*

⁶⁵ John 7:5 *New King James Version*

⁶⁶ Mark 3:21 *New King James Version*

of the Cross, so will we. This is what Luke wrote about the acceptance of others in light of the cross:

“You are in for trouble when everyone says good things about you. That is what your own people said about those prophets who told lies.”⁶⁷

Or as a paraphrase version puts it: *“There’s trouble ahead when you live only for the approval of others, saying what flatters them, doing what indulges them. Popularity contests are not truth contests—look how many scoundrel preachers were approved by your ancestors! Your task is to be true, not popular.”⁶⁸*

Jesus set an example for us by

**DENYING HIMSELF
BY ALLOWING HIMSELF
TO SUFFER AT THE HANDS OF SINNERS**

for the glory of God

Probably nothing describes this better than Isaiah’s prophecy regarding the Christ as the Suffering Servant.

“He was despised and forsaken of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and like one from whom men hide their face He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. Surely our griefs He Himself bore, and our sorrows He carried; yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But He was pierced through for our transgressions,

⁶⁷ Luke 6:26 Contemporary English Version

⁶⁸ Luke 6:26 The Message

He was crushed for our iniquities; the chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, and by His scourging we are healed."⁶⁹

Later, the author of the Letter to the Hebrews wrote: "... consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart."⁷⁰ And he desired to encourage the Hebrews to continue on the Way of the Cross when he wrote:

*"... remember the former days, when, after being enlightened, you endured a great conflict of sufferings, partly by being made a public spectacle through reproaches and tribulations, and partly by becoming sharers with those who were so treated. For you showed sympathy to the prisoners and accepted joyfully the seizure of your property, knowing that you have for yourselves a better possession and a lasting one. Therefore, do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised."*⁷¹

⁶⁹ Isaiah 53:3-5

⁷⁰ Hebrews 12:3

⁷¹ Hebrews 10:32-36

Jesus set an example for us by

**DENYING HIMSELF BY
NOT OPENING HIS MOUTH**

for the glory of God

Again, this was succinctly stated in Isaiah's prophecy:

*"He was oppressed, and He was afflicted, yet He did not open His mouth; like a lamb that is led to slaughter, and like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, so He did not open His mouth."*⁷²

In his epistle, where Peter makes reference to Isaiah's prophecy, he also brings forth something more for our instruction:

*"For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, Who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth; and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously...."*⁷³

Here, Peter brings out the fact that *"while being reviled"*, Jesus *"did not revile in return"*, He uttered no threats; but rather, kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously". Through His example, we can see that keeping silent is intimately related to trust in God – that is trusting God to "do the talking" for us", if He

⁷² Isaiah 53:7

⁷³ I Peter 2:21-23

so desires. God also may decide to also keep silent. But, we can trust in that which Isaiah prophesied said:

*"If anyone fiercely assails you it will not be from Me. Whoever assails you will fall because of you. Behold, I Myself have created the smith who blows the fire of coals and brings out a weapon for its work; and I have created the destroyer to ruin. No weapon that is formed against you will prosper; and every tongue that accuses you in judgment you will condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the LORD, and their vindication is from Me, declares the LORD."*⁷⁴

Yes, to keep silent, in the midst of criticism or accusation is yet another example that Jesus set for us in walking the Way of the Cross.

⁷⁴ Isaiah 54:15-17

Aspects of the True Cross

There are certain aspects “Your Cross” which will help us recognize the true Cross in our life situations. The first of these is:

“Your Cross” Is Primarily for “You”

“Your Cross” is of benefit primarily to you. It is not primarily for the benefit of someone else – like an unsaved loved one for example. Only “The Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ” has the God-given power to save someone. “Your Cross” does not have the power to save anyone. It is written in Psalm 49:7, *“No man can redeem the life of another or give to God a ransom for him.”*⁷⁵ While our walking the Way of the Cross can help bear witness to Christ and reveal the love of God in Christ, it is wrong to think that our walking the Way of the Cross towards or on behalf of another can, in and of itself, bring that person to salvation. This mistaken idea is sometimes referred to as a “Messiah Complex”. If the Lord presents an opportunity to walk the Way of the Cross in the context of our relationship with someone, it is primarily for our

⁷⁵ *New International Version*

benefit. Again, that “benefit” is to “*conform us to the image of His Son*”.⁷⁶ “*God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God.*”⁷⁷ Much, actually everything, that happens in the life of a believer is intended by God to press you into deeper relationship with Him. So, the Way of the Cross is something that is taking place between you and the Lord. It’s possible that the other person involved may never even be aware of “Your Cross”. After all, even with regards to Jesus, Who “died for all”, not everyone has given recognition to “*the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ*”.

“Your Cross” is Seasonal

I share the following from my personal experience:
Ecclesiastes 3:1 reads: “*To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven.*”⁷⁸ Shortly before being taken down from the cross, Jesus said, “*It is finished.*”⁷⁹ There is a season for “Your Cross” – a particular time for God’s particular purpose through a particular application of the cross. In a particular area, “Your Cross” will not go on indefinitely. God’s particular work in

⁷⁶ Romans 8:28-29

⁷⁷ Romans 8:28-29

⁷⁸ *New King James Version*

⁷⁹ John 19:30

you will be “finished” for a particular season. The Lord may “revisit” an issue again later, in order to do a deeper work in that area of your life; but you will find there will be seasons in His application of the cross of that area. So, while the Way of the Cross is definitely an ongoing lifestyle, God’s particular purpose in a particular application of the cross is seasonal in that sense. Our experience should not be: death upon death, upon death, upon death. Our experience should be: crucifixion to resurrection life, crucifixion to resurrection life, crucifixion to resurrection life. The reason I am attempting to communicate what I believe is the way God deals with His children is because Satan deals with us differently, and we need to be able to tell the difference. When we allow God to have the Way of the Cross in our lives, frequently Satan will follow in God’s footsteps” with a “counterfeit cross”: After God has brought an end to His work of the cross in a season, Satan will try to continue on with a counterfeit work bringing suffering and sorrow, which God has not sanctioned. This is how we can distinguish Satan’s counterfeit work from God true work of the cross: God always allows for our free will choice to deny self for the Holy Spirit’s work of transformation; whereas, Satan violates our free will through an imposition of the work of an

evil spirit, always in an attempt to demolish, rather than transform self. This leads us to another aspect of the true cross:

“The Way of the Cross” is Voluntary

The cross was not really imposed upon Jesus – He **CHOSE** to deny Himself for the glory of God. This is what Jesus had to say on this issue in John 10:17-18 (in the Amplified Translation): *“For this [reason] the Father loves Me, because I lay down My [own] life--to take it back again. No one takes it away from Me. On the contrary, I lay it down voluntarily. [I put it from Myself.] I am authorized and have power to lay it down (to resign it) and I am authorized and have power to take it back again. These are the instructions (orders) which I have received [as My charge] from My Father.”* There was a time when the Jews attempted to kill Jesus before the Father’s appointed time for His crucifixion, and Jesus *“passed through the midst”* of the angry crowd – He **CHOSE** not to deny Himself when it was not for the glory of God.⁸⁰ Yet, as He hung on the cross, the Jews mocked Him saying, *“If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross.”*; but He **CHOSE** not to.⁸¹ We always have the **CHOICE TO CHOOSE TO OR CHOOSE NOT TO** deny ourselves. We always have the **CHOICE TO CHOOSE**

⁸⁰ Luke 4:28-30

⁸¹ Matthew 27:39-44

TO CONTINUE denying ourselves, or to CHOOSE TO STOP denying ourselves. Jesus said, “*(YOU) TAKE UP your cross daily ...*”⁸² This is not something imposed on you. This is voluntarily embracing opportunities to deny yourself for the glory of God. And this takes us to the last aspect of the true cross I have to offer here:

The Way of the Cross is Daily

*“Take up your cross DAILY...”*⁸³ As we said, the Way of the Cross is a lifestyle. EACH DAY is literally filled with opportunities for us to voluntarily “*take up our cross*” – to voluntarily stay on the cross – to voluntarily deny ourselves for the glory of God. If we embrace these opportunities, DAILY the Holy Spirit will be able to transform us; so that more and more, we will have the same self-denying love nature as the Lord. EVERY DAY of this life is filled with opportunities to learn how to rule and reign with Christ in the age to come.

⁸² Luke 9:23

⁸³ Luke 9:23

PART III



The Way of Worship

Introduction

“Then Jesus said to His disciples, “If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me.” For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.” Matthew 16:24-25

I think the phrase, “for My sake” beautifully encapsulates the concept of “God-Centeredness”. The Fall of Humanity has been a fall into *self-centeredness*, and this self-centeredness is the greatest hindrance to *God-Centeredness*. Previously, we have seen that *The Way of the Cross* is God’s way of displacing our self-centeredness to move us back in the direction of God-Centeredness. Here, in **The Way of Worship**, I would like to share what the Holy Spirit has been instructing me regarding the phenomenon of our seeking to *save* our lives while the Lord encourages us to *lose our lives*. It is obvious that it **takes faith** to “Let go, and let God.” – that is, to *let go and lose our lives*. What may be a little less obvious is that we *seek to save our lives because of unbelief*. It is that *unbelief* which the Holy Spirit has been speaking to me about in my own personal life and what I hope to communicate to you here.

“For My Sake”

“It’s not about you; it’s all about God.” Unfortunately, this statement has almost become clichéd, but in its reality, it portrays *a truly God-Centered perspective for our Christian faith*. It’s a sad fact that we can travel very far along on our spiritual journey and still be trapped in “It’s all about me.” Typically, we’re not aware of this until the Spirit of Truth who, “*desires truth in our innermost being*”,⁸⁴ removes the veil from our hearts and minds. When we do embrace the reality that “It’s all about Him”, we come to the place where we see God for Who He is – **Creator** - and see ourselves for who we are – “**createes**”. Then, and only then, do we begin to understand and find our place in HIS-story and how our lives can “*serve the purpose of God in our generation*”.⁸⁵

⁸⁴ Psalm 51:6

⁸⁵ Acts 13:36

Seeing the “Upliftedness” of God

We lived and ministered in South Africa for 13 years, and during this time I became very good friends with a Brazilian who was pastoring a Portuguese-speaking church in Johannesburg. He would regularly have me come to minister in his church there, and over the years, we became very close around the Person of Christ. He eventually returned to his homeland and planted a church in the Rio de Janeiro area. Five times, he arranged month-long ministry itineraries for me in Brazil. During one of these missions, after ministering to a church in Pau Grande, a town outside of Rio, the local pastor invited us to travel up the old road towards the city of Petrópolis⁸⁶ on a mountain overlooking the city of Rio de Janeiro. The purpose was to meet and pray with a man who had been living alone in a hut on the mountain for a number of years praying for Rio de Janeiro. After meeting the man, it was suggested that we separate on the mountain, pray individually, and then re-group and pray together.

⁸⁶ Petrópolis, also known as *The Imperial City* of Brazil, is a town in the state of Rio de Janeiro, about 65 km from the city of Rio de Janeiro in the forested hills of the Serra dos Órgãos mountain range. It is the “City of Pedro”, the former summer palace of the second Brazilian Emperor, Pedro II.

As I stood on a large boulder and looked out on the panorama of Rio de Janeiro below, the opening verse to Isaiah 6 emerged from my spirit into my mind:

“In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His robe filled the temple.”

I immediately knew that this wasn't necessarily pertaining to Rio de Janeiro. What the Holy Spirit was speaking was being spoken *to me*. The simple message was this: “Isaiah has seen Me ‘high and lifted up’. You haven’t.” I did not feel disparaged by the Lord. It just seemed that He wanted me to see something I needed to see. Then these words came up from my heart: “You see clearly the fallenness of Humanity, and this is necessary and good. But you also need to see the ‘upliftedness’ of God.” I knew what He meant: I had clear insight into the fallen human condition - sin and its pervasive and tragic consequences in the lives of people. It had repeatedly pierced my heart for 33 years on 4 continents. I understood theologically and experientially the *“death (which is) the wages of sin”*⁸⁷. But I hadn't sufficiently seen **the “upliftedness” of God – His redemptive power over sin and death.** I hadn't received sufficient revelation or personal

⁸⁷ Romans 6:23

experience of this in my life and ministry. Indeed, this had a limiting effect on my life and ministry. The effect had been specifically on **my faith**, *“without which it is impossible to please God”*.⁸⁸ It was not that I didn’t have any faith and was not at all pleasing to God. But, He wanted me to **grow in faith**. He wanted me to know more about Him. He wanted me to have more understanding of who He is. For, *“the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding”*.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ Hebrew 11:6

⁸⁹ Proverbs 9:10

Faith

I must explain what I mean by “faith”. I believe my understanding is based on what is conveyed throughout the whole of scripture. The Greek word translated “faith” - in the verb form (for *faith* is an “action” word) - is *pisteuo*, which means *to believe, to trust, to depend upon, to lean upon*. Therefore *to “grow in faith” is to grow in dependency*. Biblically, the object of such reliance is God, not self. This is expressly why **The Way of Worship**, and also **The Way of the Cross**, *displace our self-centeredness and move us in the direction of God-Centeredness*. When we do not have sufficient faith (reliance) in God, we tend to become self-reliant, and also begin to place our reliance on people, places and things. Also, we unconsciously begin to fall into the trap of “seeking to save our lives”.

I have to admit that even for many years after that experience on the mountain in Brazil, I could not say that my faith had grown significantly. In fact, it seemed that in the years I had been back in the States I saw more of my own fallenness and brokenness, more of the fallenness and brokenness in the lives of those I love, as well as, in the society around me. But the Holy Spirit had begun to make me acutely aware that I still needed to

see the Lord's "upliftedness" by showing me even more clearly how my faith, life and ministry had been limited by this lack. The details are too deep and pervasive to try to communicate here. Suffice to say, I had come to a personal spiritual crisis point. I could identify with the father of the demonized son when he said: *"I do believe; help my unbelief."*⁹⁰, and the apostles when they asked the Lord: *"Increase our faith."*⁹¹

In 2008, I saw a film adaptation of the John Patrick Shanley stage play *"Doubt: A Parable"*, which starred Phillip Seymour Hoffman as Father Flynn and Meryl Streep as Sister Aloysius. I highly recommend the film. I attended a Catholic church school in the '60s, and I would say that Shanley set the story in a 1964 Catholic church school in New York in a very authentic way. Hoffman and Streep portrayed their characters excellently. Without giving away the story line, suffice to say that both characters had a crisis of faith – doubt – based both upon their own shortcomings, but also upon their ministry experience of the human condition. We might say, their faith had become "jaded". One of the descriptions the Thesaurus lists under the word "jaded" is the very apt phrase - **"world-weary"**. In the character

⁹⁰ Mark 9:24

⁹¹ Luke 17:5

portrayals, I think Shanley and the actors ingeniously brought out some deep truths regarding “doubt” or incomplete faith. In the case of the Catholic priest, the natural outlet for him was to give a sermon about “doubt”. As it turns out, his weakness of faith was the root of a serious sin. In the case of the Catholic nun, her “doubt” is finally admitted to in the powerful closing scene of the film. But near the end of the film, one begins to realize that it was because her faith was almost gasping for its final breath, that she was driven to single-handedly work and succeed at exposing the sin of the priest – *seemingly quite without the help of God*. And that’s the point! **If we don’t believe God can or will do it, almost out of necessity, *we* are driven to do it! If we don’t have sufficient faith in God, we find ourselves *struggling on our own* against the sin and death in this world! That will make one “world-weary”!**

I longed to be able to say like Isaiah: *“I saw the Lord, and He was high and lifted up.”* – and to be able to say like Job: *“I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear; but now my eye sees You.”*⁹²

Think about all that Job went through – typifying the consequences of the brokenness of Humanity. But also think of

⁹² Job 42:5

the “*the outcome of the Lord’s dealings*” with Job.⁹³ The culmination of the Job story is that God had brought him to a particular spiritual place – Job came to the place of **seeing the Lord** – “**high and lifted up**”. It is there that we begin to have the “*faith that overcomes the world*”⁹⁴ – namely, **faith in God’s redemptive power over the sin and death that pervades human existence.**

⁹³ James 5:11

⁹⁴ I John 5:4

The Attributes of God

So, what will *“increase our faith”*? What will help us see the “upliftedness” of God? This is what the Holy Spirit showed me – it’s really nothing new – it is something very foundational: **WORSHIP**. In this context, “worship” means **recognizing and responding to the worthiness of God**. It can be said that *“Recognizing”* (or “seeing”) is the first part of worship – that which precedes and precipitates the second part, which is *“Response”*. Certainly, throughout scripture when someone “sees” the Lord, the immediate response is worship.⁹⁵

The names of God found in Scripture are like miniature portraits of His essence, nature, character – that is, His attributes. The various circumstances in the Scripture passages which bring forth each of the names of God are important.

David sang:

“I give you thanks, O LORD, with my whole heart; before the gods I sing your praise; I bow down toward your holy temple and give thanks to your name for your steadfast love and your faithfulness, for you have exalted above all things your name and your word.”⁹⁶

⁹⁵ Genesis 35:7; Leviticus 9:24; II Chronicles 7:3; Matthew 14:33; Revelation 7:11, 11:16, 19:4

⁹⁶ Psalm 138:1-2 *English Standard Version*

The names of God declare much about His person, and it is the Word of God that reveals God and His names. There are good books on the names and attributes of God.⁹⁷ Various lists of God's names and attributes are also available on the Internet. But the following excerpt from the Westminster Confession of Faith gives a wonderful introduction to the concept of seeing and worshiping God for Who He is:

“There is but one only, living, and true God, who is infinite in being and perfection, a most pure spirit, invisible, without body, parts, or passions; immutable, immense, eternal, incomprehensible, almighty, most wise, most holy, most free, most absolute; working all things according to the counsel of his own immutable and most righteous will, for his own glory; most loving, gracious, merciful, long-suffering, abundant in goodness and truth, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin; the rewarder of them that diligently seek him; and withal, most just, and terrible in his judgments, hating all sin, and who will by no means clear the guilty.

God hath all life, glory, goodness, blessedness, in and of himself; and is alone in and unto himself all-sufficient, not

⁹⁷ *The Names of God*, Andrew Jukes (Kregel); *Names of God*, Nathan Stone (Moody); *The Attributes of God*, Arthur W. Pink (Baker); *Knowing God*, J.I.Packer (IVP); *The Knowledge of the Holy*, A.W. Tozer (Harper & Row)

*standing in need of any creatures which he hath made, nor deriving any glory from them, but only manifesting his own glory in, by, unto, and upon them. He is the alone fountain of all being, of whom, through whom, and to whom are all things; and hath most sovereign dominion over them, to do by them, for them, or upon them whatsoever himself pleaseth. In his sight all things are open and manifest, his knowledge is infinite, infallible, and independent upon the creature, so as nothing is to him contingent, or uncertain. He is most holy in all his counsels, in all his works, and in all his commands. To him is due from angels and men, and every other creature, whatsoever worship, service, or obedience he is pleased to require of them.*⁹⁸

⁹⁸ From Chapter 2 of the Westminster Confession

An Essential Form of Worship

An essential form of worship is to *reflect on God and His attributes*. We see this demonstrated in scripture, when Moses asked to *see the glory of God*. God put His glory on display *by rehearsing His attributes*, and thereby demonstrated how we can give God glory and worship Him:

¹⁸“Then Moses said, “I pray You, show me Your glory!” ¹⁹ And He said, “I Myself will make all My **goodness** pass before you, and will proclaim **the name of the Lord** before you; and I will be **gracious** to whom I will be **gracious**, and will show **compassion** on whom I will show **compassion**.... ⁵ The Lord descended in the cloud and stood there with him as he called upon **the name of the Lord**. ⁶ Then the Lord passed by in front of him and proclaimed, “The Lord, the Lord God, **compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth**.... ⁸ Moses made haste to bow low toward the earth and worship.”⁹⁹

⁹⁹ Exodus 33:18-19; 34:5-6, 8. It is significant to point out that the unquoted verses in this passage (Exodus 33:20-34:1-4), indicate that the attributes of God are revealed in His written word and are embodied in law of God.

The Radiance of His Glory

“He (Jesus) is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature.”¹⁰⁰

This verse tells us that Jesus is the exact and full revelation of God – the **ULTIMATE REFLECTION** of the attributes of the invisible God. And, like the Person of Christ Himself, the **attributes of God are “the radiance” – the shining forth¹⁰¹ of His “glory”,¹⁰²** which is the very nature of the invisible God. The attributes of God are a *“representation of His nature”,¹⁰³ “the image of His person”¹⁰⁴, “an engraved impression of His essence”¹⁰⁵*

Jacob’s Ladder

In a manner of speaking, *worship – that is, reflecting on the attributes of God – can act as a bridge between the physical and*

¹⁰⁰ Hebrews 1:3

¹⁰¹ Cf. Hebrews 1:3. Greek: *apaugasma*, Strong’s # 541

¹⁰² Cf. Hebrews 1:3. Greek: *doxa*, Strong’s # 1391. “i.e. What He essentially is and does, as exhibited in whatever way He reveals Himself in these respects, and particularly in the person of Christ.” (W.E. Vine, *Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words*)

¹⁰³ Hebrews 1:3 *New American Standard Version*

¹⁰⁴ Hebrews 1:3 *New King James Version*

¹⁰⁵ Hebrews 1:3 *Apostolic Bible Polyglot Version*. Greek: the *character*, Strong’s #5481 of His *ego*, Strong’s # 5287.

*spiritual realms. Worship can act as a type of "Jacob's Ladder" stretching between the physical and spiritual realms.*¹⁰⁶ A biblical image to communicate what I am referring to is found in Genesis 28:12:

"He (Jacob) had a dream, and behold, a ladder was set on the earth with its top reaching to heaven; and behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it."

Biblical angels function as "messengers". In this picture, they are *bringing divine messages to human beings*. This implies some sort of **"translation process"** taking place between the **spiritual realm and the physical realm**. I believe this mysterious function can take place in God-centered worship. Reflecting on the attributes of God establishes a **bridge, as it were into the spiritual realm**. By reflecting on the various attributes of God, *doors, or windows, or portals* are opened between the physical and spiritual realms, through which God can reveal Himself.

¹⁰⁶ A biblical image to communicate what I am referring to: Genesis 28:12 "He (Jacob) had a dream, and behold, a ladder was set on the earth with its top reaching to heaven; and behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it." (Biblical angels function as "messengers".)

"For worship is the submission of all our nature to God.

It is the quickening of conscience by His holiness;

the nourishment of mind with His truth;

the purifying of imagination by His beauty;

the opening of the heart to His love;

the surrender of will to His purpose –

and all of this gathered up in adoration, the most selfless emotion of which our nature is capable and therefore the chief remedy for that self-centeredness which is our original sin and the source of all actual sin."

— William Temple, Archbishop of Canterbury

The God-Centered Calling

“Thus says the Lord:

‘Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom,

Let not the mighty man glory in his might,

Nor let the rich man glory in his riches.

But let him who glories glory in this,

That he understands and knows Me,

That I am the Lord, exercising lovingkindness, judgment, and

righteousness in the earth. For in these I delight,’ says the Lord.”

Jeremiah 9:23-24¹⁰⁷

Here, through the prophet Jeremiah, the Lord is calling His people to be **CENTERED ON HIM** – *to “glory” in Him* – to **“glory”** in understanding and knowing Him, the Lord who exercises the following **ATTRIBUTES: lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness** - just three of His many attributes.

The Hebrew word which is translated “glory” in this passage is *halal*, which literally means *to show forth*. The Lord intends that His people would **“glory”** in understanding and knowing Him and *“show forth His praises”*¹⁰⁸, that is, His **ATTRIBUTES**, to one

¹⁰⁷ *New King James Version*

¹⁰⁸ | Peter 2:9

another and to the world. **This is, in fact, the essential calling of the Church.**¹⁰⁹

The Hebrew word translated “know” in this passage is *yada*, which literally means *to ascertain by seeing*. Our REVELATION of God will determine our RELATIONSHIP with God. Both are engaged in knowing God. This knowing God by REVELATION and RELATIONSHIP is of such significance that Jesus said: *“This is eternal life, that they may KNOW You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ Whom You have sent.”*¹¹⁰ The Greek word translated *know* here is *ginosko*, which more fully means *to know through perception and understanding*. So, we see that here in John’s gospel, Jesus is saying the same thing the Father said in Jeremiah’s prophecy. This **“understanding and knowing”** God takes place through REVELATION and experiential RELATIONSHIP. *Our goal is always to see God*, for as we grow in our REVELATION of God, we will grow in our RELATIONSHIP with God. Our lives will become more and more worshipful in the fullest sense of the word.¹¹¹ **THIS IS GOD-CENTERED-NESS.**

¹⁰⁹ I Peter 2:9

¹¹⁰ John 17:3

¹¹¹ There are a number of Greek words translated *worship* in the New Testament Scriptures: *proskuneo*: to bow down and kiss (the feet of); *sebomai*: to reverence with awe and devotion; *latreuo*: to serve.

A fruit of SEEING THE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD is *faith* – a faith which has as its foundation *the character of God*. It is written of our “father of faith”: “*Abraham believed GOD.*”¹¹² Abraham believed, not primarily the *promise* of God, but primarily *the Person* of God, because Abraham was “the friend of God”.¹¹³ Through RELATIONSHIP, Abraham experientially KNEW the ATTRIBUTES OF GOD, and therefore was “*fully assured that what God had promised, He was able also to perform*”.¹¹⁴

Another out-working of KNOWING GOD in this way is that we begin to SEE THINGS FROM GOD’S POINT OF VIEW. The apostle Paul prayed that the Church “*may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding*”¹¹⁵, that is, that the Church would “*understand and know*” *God*”.¹¹⁶

J.B. Phillips brilliantly paraphrased this verse to read:

“*We are asking God that you may see things, as it were, FROM HIS POINT OF VIEW by being given spiritual insight and understanding.*”¹¹⁷ THIS IS GOD-CENTEREDNESS.

Also: When, because of REVELATION, we *see* life from GOD’S POINT OF VIEW, it affects our RELATIONSHIP with the

¹¹² Romans 4:3

¹¹³ II Chronicles 20:7, Isaiah 41:8, James 2:23

¹¹⁴ Romans 4:21

¹¹⁵ Colossians 1:9

¹¹⁶ Jeremiah 9:24

¹¹⁷ Colossians 1:9 *J.B. Phillips New Testament*

Lord, and we also begin to *live* life from GOD'S POINT OF VIEW. How else can we explain the apostle Paul's strong conviction evidenced in his statement: "... *may it never be that I should boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.*"¹¹⁸ Paul, who had been climbing the ladder of success within "corporate" Judaism,¹¹⁹ began - and continued to his death - to *live* life from GOD'S POINT OF VIEW, dedicating his life to KNOWING GOD. He expressed this driving passion in this way:

*"But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. 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 all things and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ."*¹²⁰

When we, as a people, come to this place of GOD-CENTEREDNESS, we begin to fulfill our calling as the Church:

*"But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, so that you may **PROCLAIM THE EXCELLENCIES OF HIM** who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light."*¹²¹

¹¹⁸ Galatians 6:14

¹¹⁹ Acts 22:3, Philippians 3:4-6

¹²⁰ Philippians 3:7-8

¹²¹ | Peter 2:9

Yes, as the Church, our calling is to “*PROCLAIM HIS EXCELLENCIES.*” The Greek word translated “excellencies” in this passage is *arête*, that is, His *moral goodness and virtues* - HIS ATTRIBUTES. Let us, therefore, commit ourselves to the pursuit of REVELATION and RELATIONSHIP – the SEEING and the WORSHIP of our God.

*“I saw the Lord sitting on a throne,
high and lifted up ...
Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts”*¹²²

¹²² Isaiah 6:1-3 *New King James Version*

Bill & Frances Furioso

~ At Christ's Table ~



Bill Furioso and his wife, Frances, have been married for more than 40 years, and have two children, four grandchildren, and two great-grandchildren.

Bill and Frances served as missionaries in South Africa for thirteen years making disciples, establishing churches, and training church leaders. Over a span of 40 years, they also traveled extensively in an itinerant Bible teaching ministry which took them to hundreds of gatherings on four continents ministering in churches, conferences, spiritual formation seminars, and home gatherings. They have shepherded several churches, discipled many to Christ, and mentored church leaders in the USA and abroad.

Being an avid student by nature, Bill has done both formal and informal study in various fields including Education, Music, Philosophy and Theology. As a writer, he has authored many publications which are distributed worldwide. Because of Bill's disabilities resulting from a spinal cord injury, their ministries of writing, recording, distributing, mentoring, and correspondence are now shared primarily via the Internet...

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