

The Enemies of the Cross

Philippians 3:18-19 New American Standard Bible (NASB)

¹⁸ For many walk, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even as I weep, that they are **the enemies of the cross of Christ**, ¹⁹ whose end is destruction, whose god is **their appetite**, and whose glory is in their shame, who have their minds on earthly things.

Romans 16:18

¹⁸ For such people are slaves, **not of our Lord Christ but of their own appetites**; and by their smooth and flattering speech they deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting.

1 Corinthians 1:17

¹⁷ For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not with cleverness of speech, so that **the cross of Christ would not be made of no effect**.

Introduction

In today's text, Paul the Apostle talks about the enemies of the cross of Christ. Who are they? No matter who they are, none of us wants that! They are the people who stand against the cross of Christ. They are those who don't know Christ. They do not walk in the Law of Christ. Neither do they serve the Lord. Instead, they follow their own desires. On the throne in their hearts, they themselves, not Christ, are seated.

When I was pondering the text, I hoped that Paul was talking about the people in the world outside faith, outside salvation, not the people in the Church. But considering the context in which this letter was written, he is really talking about the people inside the Church (See also Romans 16:18). Otherwise, why would he often tell the believers about them, and even "weep" when he talked about them? (v.18). Definitely, even back then, the Early Church had the enemies of the cross of Christ, and it broke the Apostle's heart.

Here's the thing we need to beware of: we may carry the name of Christ, but in reality, we can be an enemy of the cross of Christ. In verse 19, Paul identifies four characteristics of the enemies of the cross of Christ. First, their *end is destruction*, not eternal life. Next, *their god is their appetite* (Greek: η κοιλια--its literal meaning is 'belly' or 'stomach'). In other words, they pursue and obey their fleshly desires not the LORD. Thirdly, their *glory is in their shame*, not in the Lord Jesus. Lastly, *they have their minds on earthly things, not on things above*. They live out their lives as if this earthly life is the only one that matters to them. My prayer for all of us is this: May it never be for us to become the enemy of the cross of Christ. Amen?!

Content

So, this morning we will talk about cross, what happened at the cross, what is the cross of Christ, and proper attitudes toward the cross of Christ.

First, here is some **general information** on the cross.

Although it appears 158 times in the Bible, (119 times in the Old Testament and 39 times in the New Testament), the word 'cross' is a New Testament thing. In the Old Testament, the word 'cross' is entirely a verb, which means 'to move from one place to the other.' E.g., crossing the Jordan river into the Promised Land. In the New Testament, the same word is used either as a verb or a noun. The noun 'cross' carries a totally different meaning. People, in the first century, associated 'cross' with the death on a tree in public display. Indeed, it was the means of capital punishment in the first century in the Roman Empire. Typically, they executed criminals on the death penalty on a tree. It was so violent and inhumane that the Roman Empire forbade its citizens from being crucified. Crucifixion was allowed only for the non-Roman criminals. Roman citizens were beheaded instead. E.g., Paul the Apostle was a Roman citizen who was beheaded. Peter the Apostle, a Jew, was crucified upside down.

Another interesting fact: the phrase, "the cross of Christ" is exclusively used by Paul the Apostle. It appears only four times in the New Testament, all in the letters of Paul (1 Corinthians 1:17, Galatians 6:12, 14, and Philippians 3:18).

Jesus Used the Word 'Cross.'

Now, let's find out who used the word 'cross' for the first time in the New Testament. It was none other than Jesus. In Matthew 16:24, Jesus said to His disciples, "*If anyone wants to come after Me, he must deny himself, take up his **cross**, and follow Me.*" In fact, the same Jesus took up His own cross and went all the way to Golgotha the Place of Skull: *They took Jesus, therefore, and He went out, carrying His own **cross**, to the place called the Place of a Skull, which in Hebrew is called, Golgotha* (John 19:17).

Of course, Jesus was not a felon. He didn't deserve to be crucified. He was sinless. However, God allowed Him to suffer at the cross, the righteous for the unrighteous. Why? To fulfill a divine plan for humanity: to save them from the bondage of sin and death. People failed to recognize such God's plan in Christ, so they treated Jesus with mockery saying, "*You who are going to destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save Yourself! If You are the Son of God, come down from **the cross***" (Matthew 27:40).

At the foot of the cross, the disciples, along with Mary the Mother of Jesus, witnessed their Master's painful death for hours: *Now beside **the cross** of Jesus stood His mother, His mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene* (John 19:25).

So, What Really Happened at the Cross?

Outside, Jesus' death on the cross was a terrible loss of a good man. However, His death was God's mysterious plan to bring reconciliation and peace between the Holy God and the sinners. God sent His beloved Son to the cross to cancel our debt of sin by nailing it to the cross. To fulfill God's plan for Him, Christ submitted Himself to the point of death on a cross (Philippians 2:8). Through the cross, Christ ended the hostility between God and us (Ephesians 2:16). Through His death, Christ the sinless paid the wages of our sin once and for all that covers all the generations of people; past, present, and future. In Him, the peace between the holy God and the sinners was restored. Through the blood of the cross of Christ, God reconciled to Himself not just us but "all things..., whether things on earth or things in heaven" (Colossians 1:20).

Let me say it again. What happened at the cross? Your sin and mine, the Bible calls it our debt, were nailed to the cross. Colossians 2:14. "having canceled the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to **the cross**." (Christ's last word on the cross: It is finished (John 19:30)--te-te-les-tai--the Greek meaning is 'it is paid off'). Christ indeed brought our sins in His body up on the cross (1 Peter 2:24) and when He died, our sins were fully paid off.

Who Nailed Him to the Cross?

We would say that all the bad religious leaders, jealous of Jesus' popularity, asked Pilate the Roman governor to crucify Him. Pilate, in turn, ordered the soldiers to crucify Him. But interestingly Peter the Apostle pointed out that it was nobody but we who did it. Our sins nailed Him to the cross. Listen to Peter yourself. In Acts 2:23: "*this Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a **cross** by the hands of godless men and put Him to death.*" It is our sin that sent Him to the cross.

What Is the Cross of Christ?

To the world, and to those who have no hope of resurrection or eternal life, it is foolishness and a stumbling block. However, to us the believers, it is the power and wisdom of God. 1 Corinthians 1:18 says, "*For the word of **the cross** is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.*"

The cross of Christ is also our glory and boast. Galatians 6:14 says, "*But far be it from me to boast, except in **the cross** of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.*"

Lastly, what is the proper attitude toward the cross of Christ?

Threefold Attitude toward Cross

1. Carry Your Own Cross

Christ the Crucified commands all disciples, you and me, to come after Him taking our own cross daily. *“And He was saying to them all, “If anyone wants to come after Me, he must deny himself, take up his **cross** daily, and follow Me” (Luke 9:23).*

2. Live for Christ

It means to stop living for self and start living for Christ the Son of God. Paul the Apostle said, *“I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me” (Galatians 2:20).* Live for Christ. Glorify Him in your words and deeds.

3. Seek Things Above

Therefore, if you have been raised with Christ, keep seeking the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ²Set your minds on the things that are above, not on the things that are on earth. ³For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God (Colossians 3:1-3). Seeking the things that are above and set minds on things that are above, not everyone can do it. Only those who have been crucified with Christ and raised with Him can do it. Only those who consider themselves dead to sin and alive to God can do it. Ask yourself: Do I live my life with the eternal life in mind? Is my mind set on the things above?

Conclusion

Caution. Many sermons today that you hear from the pulpit even on YouTube focus on how to live our lives abundantly and happily. Health and wealth, for instance. Indeed, such messages are very popular, and people love them. However, the problem is this: that's not the whole Gospel. If we long for and welcome only such messages at the exclusion of the cross, the cross of Christ will lose its effect on us. In other words, what Christ has done on the cross will have no effect on our walk with God. E.g., The Unity Church shuns the cross claiming that it reminds them of too much violence. Do you think the message of Christ's suffering on the cross is ever preached in that Church? I doubt it.

Folks, the Bible commands us to discern every spirit we encounter. *“Do not believe every spirit, but **test** the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world” (1 John 4:1).* Here's how you discern the true Gospel message: if the teaching is centered on the cross, discipleship, keeping Jesus' commandments and following Jesus with your own cross, then it is a sound teaching. However, if you don't see any trace of the cross in the message, you need to stop listening to the preacher or even change the place of worship.

Please pray for your preacher that I handle accurately the Word of truth without adulterating it (2 Timothy 2:15). Pray for your preacher that I always preach the Gospel---the cross of Christ. Remember: Christ didn't send me here to preach the gospel with cleverness of speech. If I do, the cross of Christ will have no effect on you (1 Corinthians 1:17).

Let me remind you one more time with a sincere heart. Do not be an enemy of the cross of Christ. Embrace His cross in your life and live for Christ. Amen.