



The Theology of the Cross

Lesson 7: Crosses—A Sampler

Goals

- Identify common crosses for each stage of life.
- Share questions you may still have regarding the theology of the cross.

Opening Prayer

Almighty God, in your wisdom you allow sin and evil to continue in this life. You allow us to struggle in our sin and under our cross through our whole life. Open our eyes to the grace you show us in and through these crosses. Also enable us to serve those you've placed around us who are carrying similar crosses. May we be a blessing to them in loving service. Amen.

Introduction

Think of a stage in your life where you either had a lot of struggles or dealt with your biggest struggle to date. Take a few minutes to write a short "note to self" where you can provide encouragement for yourself and insight into that period of your life.

The Young

1. Where do young people usually look to find happiness?
2. What aspects of our present culture promote sinful sexual activity?
3. **Agree/Disagree.** Our present culture causes more sin than previous generations.

"If we remembered or admitted to ourselves that we were once just as confused as our young people are today, we might be of more use to them. And that is the point: We want to be of use to them; we want to comfort and strengthen them. They badly need our help to bear up under the pressures of their own sinful flesh and the world in which they live--under the weight of the cross. Without such help they will certainly stumble and fall more than they would have otherwise. Without such help the pain of their existence will only increase and the happiness they are seeking will become ever more distant. Real happiness found only in the arms of the Savior, real fulfillment found only in self-denial that serves may seem so far away as to be unreachable to them.

But they never listen! is the excuse that we too readily offer for not offering help. It will help if *we* listen first. Too easily we compare their problems to our own adult problems. We consider our problems real, their problems just temporary and trivial. We forget that God has broadened our shoulders to bear the weight of heavier crosses by granting grace earlier to bear, or at least to survive, the lighter ones. Yes, and those lighter ones on narrower shoulders are not all that light--they were not so light for us either 10 or 20 or more years ago!" (Deutschlander, 170)

4. What are some things that Christian parents can do to help their children cope with the problems of growing up?

5. What are some things that the church can do to help its children cope with the problems of growing up?

The Middle

6. The author states that the crosses that come into the lives of adults during their most productive years in one way are much more difficult: "The crosses of adults are often so subtle that they go unrecognized." What are some priorities in the lives of middle-aged Christians that can create special problems?

7. "Work is good and God-pleasing", but how might it ruin a Christian's life?
 - a. **2 Thessalonians 3:6-12** "We instruct you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, to avoid every brother who is walking idly and not in accordance with the teaching that you received from us. In fact, you yourselves know how necessary it is for you to imitate us, because we were not idle among you. We never ate anyone's bread without paying for it. Instead, with labor and hardship we worked night and day, so that we would not be a burden to any of you. This was not because we lacked authority, but to provide an example for you to imitate. In fact, when we were with you, this was our command to you: If anyone does not want to work, he should not eat. Indeed, we hear that some among you are idle, not busy working, but being busybodies. In the Lord Jesus Christ, we command and urge these people to work quietly and eat their own bread."
 - b. **1 Timothy 6:9** "Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and many foolish and harmful desires, which plunge them into complete destruction and utter ruin."

8. How can a Christian marriage be affected by our misplaced or confused priorities and changing means into ends?
- a. **Genesis 2:23,24** “The man said, ‘Now this one is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh. She will be called ‘woman,’ because she was taken out of man.’ For this reason a man will leave his father and his mother and will remain united with his wife, and they will become one flesh.”
 - b. **Ephesians 5:22-26** “Wives, submit to your own husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, just as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he himself is the Savior. Moreover, as the church submits to Christ, so also wives are to submit to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, in the same way as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, by cleansing her with the washing of water in connection with the Word.”
9. What happens to our Christianity if work, the acquiring of respect, the gaining of things for now and for tomorrow become the ends instead of the means?
- a. **Mark 8:36,37** “After all, what good is it for a man to gain the whole world and yet forfeit his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?”
10. What is the means by which God gives us his righteousness?

“Thus, though work, respect, and honor, and the things of the world are not the goals and ends of life, they are important as _____. They are not means for *finding* or *gaining* the kingdom of God and his righteousness, but they are means for demonstrating that we _____ the kingdom of God and his righteousness.”

The gifts we receive through those pursuits (“food and clothing, friends and family, respect and honor, health and wealth, and the abilities to attain and keep them) are gifts given not as the ends or goals of life but ... for us to use in _____ .

11. **Agree/Disagree.** Everything good in our lives has the potential to become our idol.
12. **Agree/Disagree.** The best way to combat Christ becoming less of a priority in our lives is to schedule more church events during the week.

The Golden Years

“If the most prominent spark for the cross in youth is unruly passion, if the hallmark that presages the cross in the middle years is a confusion of priorities and the reversal of means and ends, then the most common source of the cross in the golden years may well be *calluses on the soul*.” (Deutschlander, 187-188)

13. What changes in life might cause calluses on the souls of older Christians?

14. How might physical changes that come with old age change our attitude regarding *self* denial?

15. List some promises that sustain Christians during their last days on earth.
 - a. **2 Timothy 4:6-8** “You see, I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight; I have finished the race; I have kept the faith. From now on, there is reserved for me the crown of righteousness. The Lord, the righteous Judge, will give it to me on that day, and not only to me but also to everyone who loved his appearing.”
 - b. **1 Peter 1:3-5** “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he gave us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, into an inheritance that is undying, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you. Through faith you are being protected by God’s power for the salvation that is ready to be revealed at the end of time.”

Deutschlander concludes this chapter saying, “There are but two tasks to focus on as the end draws near:

1. Ever more to see _____ only and, as much as possible,
2. To _____ still by making the work of those around as easy for them as possible, as we _____ for them and _____ for them.”

Summary

What was Professor Deutschlander's purpose in discussing typical crosses of Christians in different age groups?

- **1 Corinthians 10:13** "No testing has overtaken you except ordinary testing. But God is faithful. He will not allow you to be tested beyond your ability, but when he tests you, he will also bring about the outcome that you are able to bear it."

Conclusion

We have considered the absolute and constant necessity of Christ's cross for our redemption. We have discussed the necessity of the cross that comes as the result of our own sinful nature, on the one hand, and from his grace and goodness, on the other hand. We have looked at obstacles to cross bearing that we encounter both in ourselves and from those around us. We have pondered the glory of God that is hidden under and in his cross, and ours as well, and reasons why that glory is and must ever be a hidden one. We have given thought to the benefits that come to us and to others as a result of this cross bearing. And we have looked at some typical and very specific crosses that can be found in the household of faith.

On a notecard, please write one main take away from the lessons so far and any questions you may still have regarding the theology of the cross.

Closing Prayer (CW 515:1,4,5)

Shepherd of tender youth, Guiding in love and truth Through devious ways,
Christ, our triumphant King, We come your name to sing
And here our children bring To join your praise.
Oh, ever be our guide, Our shepherd and our pride Our staff and song
Jesus, O Christ of God, By your enduring Word
Lead us where you have trod; Make our faith strong.
So now and till we die Sound we your praises high And joyful sing;
Infants and all the throng Who to your church belong
Unite to swell the song To Christ, our King.