



The Theology of the Cross

Lesson 8: Crosses of the Visible Church

Goals

- Identify crosses carried by the visible church
- Answer remaining questions on the Theology of the Cross

Opening Prayer

Jesus Christ, you yourself said, “If anyone wants to follow me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me.” These crosses, though difficult and painful, are necessary for us as your followers. However, in your wisdom and power you change these crosses into blessings for us which always draw us closer to you and your cross. Through your Spirit and in studying your Word give us hearts of joy and thanksgiving as we daily take up our crosses and follow you. Amen.

The Visible Church and Her Crosses

1. What is the church?
 - a. **Matthew 16:15-20** - He said to them, “But you, who do you say that I am?” Simon Peter answered, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Jesus replied, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell will not overpower it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven. Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” Then he commanded the disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Christ.
 - b. **1 Corinthians 3:16.17** - Do you not know that you yourselves are God’s temple, and that God’s Spirit lives in you? If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy him. For God’s temple is holy, and that is what you are.
 - c. **Ephesians 5:23** - ...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.
 - d. **1 Timothy 3:15** - But if I am delayed, I wanted you to know how it is necessary to behave in God’s household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth.
 - e. **Revelation 21:2,9** And I saw the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband... One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls that were filled with the seven last plagues came and spoke with me. He said, “Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.”

2. Yet, just as with the individual Christian, this glory is hidden under the cross.
 - a. **Apology, Art. VII & VIII, par. 17-19** ... because the kingdom of Christ has not yet been revealed, they [the ungodly] intermingle with the church and hold offices in the church. Just because the revelation has not yet taken place does not make the ungodly the church. For the kingdom of Christ is always that which he makes alive by his Spirit, whether it has been revealed or is hidden under the cross, just as Christ is the same, whether now glorified or previously afflicted... Thus he [Christ] teaches that the church has been hidden under a crowd of wicked people in order that this stumbling block may not offend the faithful, and so that we might know that the Word and sacrament are efficacious even when they are administered by wicked people.

What are some examples in the Bible and history of the church bearing crosses which came from outside her?

3. What are some examples in the Bible and history of the church bearing crosses which came from inside her?
4. Crosses of the church go beyond unbelievers or heretics who maliciously do harm. We can with good intentions inadvertently do the church harm. Identify the cross present in each of the following statements. When have you recognized these ideas in yourself or churches you've been a part of?
 - a. "Our church and school need to grow and get back to the membership and enrollment numbers from the past. If our church is going to continue to tell people about Jesus through the next generations, we need to get more people into our church and school. If our church or school closes, they will never hear the gospel. After all, Jesus tells us to go and make disciples."
 - b. "What matters most is that we keep doing what we're doing. There are good reasons for everything we do—our worship, our education, our evangelism—so as long as those things happen we're good."
5. What is the church's only right response to these and other crosses?
 - a. **Apology, Art. XII, par. 58** - Therefore, let us ask, brothers, that we be told how great are our iniquities and sins, and let us desire that our crimes and offenses be shown to us. Let us search our ways and with earnest attention examine all our pursuits and dangers. Let everyone say in his anxiety: "I will go to the gates of hell," so that now we may take courage in no other way than in God's mercy alone. This is the true trust of a person who forsakes self and relies on the Lord.

6. What challenges to repentance exist for the church?

7. In what ways can we as a church encourage, promote, and facilitate repentance?

Your Questions

8. How can our church be a help to cross-bearers?

9. How do we better get the “Theology of the Cross” instilled in the minds of our general church membership?

10. “How can we as members of St. Paul’s help you, Pastor, with any cross you may bear as you serve us?”

11. Are only things we bear “for Christ” crosses? Or do the everyday troubles of the whole world count as crosses by reason of the *way* we deal with them for Christ’s sake?

Summary/Conclusion

12. How would you teach/explain the Theology of the Cross to your (imaginary) 7 year-old child or grandchild?

Closing Prayer (CW 465:1)

Jesus, I my cross have taken, All to leave and follow you.
Destitute, despised, forsaken, You on earth once suffered, too.
Perish every fond ambition, All I’ve ever hoped or known;
Yet how rich is my condition! God and heaven are still my own.