

Things Connected to the Cross

Ephesians 5:21-32

“. . . Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word” (Ephesians 5:25, 26).

God meets sinners only at the cross. However, the blessings of God are received on God’s terms—not ours. We must plant the cross in the middle of our hearts, and then God plants us in the middle of His salvation.

The cross is central; things connected to it are paramount. If you spend money to buy a suit, the good from that money comes from wearing the suit. Medicine can heal, but only when you take it. Medicine left in bottles is worthless. Paul said, “. . . not in cleverness of speech, so that the cross of Christ would not be made void [or lose its power]” (1 Corinthians 1:17). The power is there, but we must be connected to it.

The New Testament

Jesus said, “For this is My blood of the covenant [testament], which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins” (Matthew 26:28). The Bible is a book about blood. More than four hundred times, the Bible mentions “blood.” Are we too proud to be associated with blood? Is it too messy? Man could not write the Bible, and he would not have written it if he could. Had man written it, he would have covered it with sunshine; God, the One who wrote it, stained it with blood.

Too many think the cross of Christ was defeat and His resurrection was victory. The New Testament only reveals death as the victory. Hebrews 9:15, 16 pictures Jesus as the mediator of the new covenant, or testament. A testament (or will) is good only upon death. Jesus took the power of death from Satan through His death. The resurrection validates the death! Jesus won at the cross. Paul said, “. . . And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him” (Colossians 2:14, 15).

Jesus is the key to the Scriptures. You can find Jesus implied in every verse. To know Jesus, read the Bible, not some theological study written by man. The “Living Word” is only found in the “Written Word.”

It always amuses me how people are labeled according to their religious opinions. These labels are not biblical words. We must want to be just Christians, period! The issue is authority: Will we go by the Bible or not? Let us just be members of Christ’s church . . . no more, no less. Would you have liked to be a member of the first-century church? You can! God will add you to it, if you follow His Word.

The New Testament Church

The Gospels focus upon Jesus; Acts through Revelation focus upon His church. Jesus promised Peter that He would build His church (Matthew 16:13–20). He purchased the church with His own blood (Acts 20:28). He loved the church and gave Himself for it (Ephesians 5:22–30). Just as a husband ought to love his wife, Jesus loved the church and gave Himself that He might present to Himself a glorious church at the end of time (vv. 25–27). The benefits of His blood come in, through, and by His church.

You cannot separate Christ from His church. The physical body of Christ purchased the spiritual body of Christ. The church is “God’s forever family.” Nothing on earth is like it. Nothing on earth can do what the local church does when it is doing right. All that Jesus left upon the earth was His church. He did not die for man-made organizations. Christ is head over all things to the church, which is His body (Ephesians 1:22, 23; Colossians 1:18). Unity and equality are only found in God’s church. Jesus broke down the wall, reconciling both to God in one body through the cross (Ephesians 2:13–22). The church is one, not many.

You may say, “But the church cannot save you!” Correct! Christ is the Savior—the church is the saved. The saved were added to the church (Acts 2:41–47). If you are saved, you have been added; if you have been added, you are saved. God does not forget. There are no saved people outside the church. When you preach Christ, you get the church. The church is universal, but the only way to contact the church is through a local congregation. The local church is the only stable, secure place on earth.

Some say, “I’m against organized religion!” Then are they for “disorganized religion”? I have also heard,

“I love Christ, but I reject the church.” This is neither scriptural nor sensible. The greatest joy of happily married men is their wives. They would rather hear a compliment about their wives than themselves. Some of them will not even verbally defend themselves—but they will not allow anyone to harm their wives or speak against them! Who would wish to stand before God having harmed Christ’s church, His bride? Christ is going to present to Himself a glorious church not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing (Ephesians 5:27).

The Lord’s Day, The Lord’s Supper

Jesus is Lord. Culture cries, “Love, love, love,” while refusing to define “love.” Culture also cries, “Believe in believing.” This makes belief a human work! Believe what? Believe in whom? Someone says, “It doesn’t make any difference what you believe—just be good, honest, and sincere.” If you are “good, honest, and sincere,” then it matters what you believe! What is the latest culture cry? It is to say, “Jesus” or “Jesus is Lord.” Jesus silenced that view of Himself. He said, “Why do you call Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I say?” (Luke 6:46); He said, “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter” (Matthew 7:21). He will say to these, “I never knew you” (Matthew 7:23).

The Lord’s Supper connects with the cross. The early church steadfastly assembled every Lord’s Day (Acts 2:42; 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:1, 2; Hebrews 10:25; Revelation 2:10). The Lord’s Supper was placed in the assembly. The Christian does not partake alone and then assemble. The church that does not meet cannot survive. As a community, the church has a life of its own (Acts 2:42). When the church assembles, Christ is present! Jesus is the host, not the guest! The Lord’s Supper is not a church sacrament that forgives us—it is a memorial declaring that we are the forgiven. Jesus only has one command: “Follow Me.” He only has one request: “Remember Me” (Matthew 26:26–29; 1 Corinthians 10:16; 11:23–26). He has one Bible, one bread, one cup, one body, one blood, and one covenant. Here is a good rule: The Lord’s Supper every Lord’s Day; and no Lord’s Day without the Lord’s Supper! Think what was used: the unleavened bread and the fruit of the vine. These emblems represent His body. It would be unthinkable to substitute anything for the bread and the cup.

The church does not grow on religious holidays, but it does grow on the Lord’s Supper! To fail here is to make the church weak and sickly (1 Corinthians 11:23–30). The Lord’s Supper is the greatest memorial on earth. Every member can participate. The focus is on the Word, the cross, and His forgiveness! Members examine themselves. Members “proclaim the Lord’s death until He comes” (1 Corinthians 11:26). This is why we take the Lord’s Supper to those who are unable to leave their homes. They, too, are part of the body. The Lord’s Supper is the one memorial around which the church rallies!

Baptism

The cross must be placed again at the center of society and not just on the steeple of a church building. Jesus was not crucified in a cathedral between two candles, but on a cross between two thieves. All of us must raise (and answer) the question “What must I do to be saved?” Some suggest “The Sinner’s Prayer,” based on Luke 18:9–14, when the tax collector prayed, “God, be merciful to me, the sinner!” To offer this as a way to salvation exposes our failure to study the Word or our failure to accept the Word, or both. In this story, both the Pharisee and the tax collector were Jewish brethren at the temple. Neither was a sinner who was coming to God for the first time. One was proud; the other was contrite. This is the lesson. This parable of Jesus was before the cross, the Great Commission, the gospel, the Book of Acts, the Day of Pentecost, and the church. This incident was not about salvation. Jesus was not known, needed, or mentioned in this story!

Baptism connects sinners with the cross. Read Romans 6:3. In this act we contact the blood of Jesus. It is the only place on earth where a non-Christian can. Therefore, it must not be reduced to a meaningless church ritual.

No religious word upsets people more than “baptism.” If baptism is useless, why get angry about it? The fact is that a non-baptized Christian is foreign to the Scriptures after Jesus went back to heaven. It is also foreign to the history of the first-century church. Baptism is an important event in salvation. Jesus put baptism in His Great Commission (Mark 16:15, 16). Sinners are baptized into the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:18–20). The heart of the gospel is the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (1 Corinthians 15:1–4); sinners are baptized into His death, burial, and resurrection (Romans 6:3–6; Colossians 2:12). In baptism one accepts the Lord and is clothed with Him (Galatians 3:26–28). In scriptural baptism a sinner becomes a Christian (Acts 2:38).

Baptism is not a meritorious work of man, but the work of God. Each sinner must hear, believe, repent, and confess Jesus. No one can do these things for me, but someone else had to baptize me! Sinners, literally, “receive baptism.” Twelve men were “rebaptized by Paul” in Ephesus because they had been baptized incorrectly (Acts 19:1–7). Paul believe that baptism was important and that it should be done correctly.

Baptism saves (1 Peter 3:20, 21). The Jews on the Day of Pentecost needed to be baptized (Acts 2). The Ethiopian nobleman also needed to be baptized (Acts 8:26–40). Paul even needed to be baptized (Acts 9; 22:16). Cornelius, the Gentile, needed to be baptized (Acts 10). Who can read all these passages and not conclude that all accountable people need to be baptized?

The Crucified Life

The cross results in the crucified life. Paul said, “I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me . . .” (Galatians 2:20, 21). Jesus lived the life before He died the death. Salvation is free, but it costs us everything—our lives! In the historical sense, Jesus is risen; but in the holy sense, He is still on the cross. The church was brought into existence through the cross and lives as an expression of the cross. Jesus calls us to die. Paul died daily (1 Corinthians 15:31). We come to the cross; we live at the cross. Paul said it best:

Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory (Colossians 3:1–4).

The crucified Savior can be communicated best by crucified servants. The church can only learn how to live when it has the courage to die. The church must never be more like the world that He came to save than the Christ who died to save the world. We cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons at the same time (1 Corinthians 10:21). All the Bible that one really has is what he lives.

Give God the first fruits of your day.
Give God the first day of the week.
Give God the first portion of your pay.
Give God the first place in your heart.

When you undermine the book of blood, the blood-bought church, the Lord’s Supper of remembrance, or baptism, nothing remains to connect you with the cross.

*The cross . . .
there is no other way!*