

Gleaners Bible Studies c 12

THE CHALLENGE OF THE CROSS

Study 1

SIN



Romans 3 and 5: 1-11

The central event of time and eternity is the death of the Lord Jesus. This means that all that went before looked forward to the Cross, and that all that will ever happen looks back. Have you ever given much thought to the meaning of the death of Christ? Like so many other things from the Bible, it is so easy to look at the Cross as merely a fact in history, or as part of the body of Christian truth which we must believe. Yet we may never think really seriously about the practical application to our lives if we are Christians. These four studies will consider some of these matters.

The point of this lesson is to show that the Cross is a challenge to SIN. Sin is a dreadful disease. It is a blight and a curse upon our lives. The worst physical illness that we can think of is nothing compared with the awfulness of sin. Sin also is bondage. If we commit sin we become its slave, and we become prisoners to Satan. Experience tells us that we often sin when we would rather not. The chains bind us fast. Sin is also a barrier between our lives and God. Because of its influence, we become enemies and strangers to God. There is no point of contact - no basis for harmony. 'Is this too black a picture?' you might ask. Take a concordance and look up the references to sin. You will find that all that has been said is true; and there are many more. **"Sin, when it is full grown, brings forth death."** (James 1: 15) So it is that when we use the word **"sin"** we begin to talk about the greatest tragedy in the history of man.

Having looked in some detail at the nature of sin, we can look at the challenge the Cross presents to it. Disease, bondage, distance and death - what can we find in the death of the Lord Jesus to answer these? Look at the Scriptures we have for the readings. It is important that you can qualify all that you say about the Cross with Scripture.

Every discovery that man has made in the field of medicine is a challenge to disease. It challenges its right to hold sway. Look at **Romans 5: 6. "When we were still without strength, in due time, Christ died for the ungodly."** In our weakness we can come to the Lord and through His death we can find healing and strength. The most interesting picture of the disease of sin in the Bible is leprosy. The Lord Jesus met with lepers in His lifetime and while humanly speaking it was incurable, He was able to heal them. **"I am willing, be cleansed"** (Luke 5: 13), were

the words of Jesus to those who appealed to Him. This is what we mean when we speak of the cleansing from sin by the blood of Jesus. (1 John 1: 7) Through faith in His death, and the blood that He shed, the dreaded disease of our sin can be healed. We are made clean in the sight of God.

Through the death of the Lord Jesus the BONDAGE of sin can be broken. The Cross was a conflict between Satan and Christ for the control of human lives. If you look at it in this way, you will realise how important it was that the Lord Jesus should be victorious. The very right of Satan to hold men captive was challenged when the Lord Jesus gave His life at Calvary. 1 John 3: 8 is very clear on this: **"He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested that He might destroy the works of the devil."** This effect of the death of Christ can bring tremendous blessing into our lives. Freedom from sin is a very wonderful thing. **"Sin shall not have dominion over you."** (Romans 6: 14)

It is through the Cross that BARRIERS are broken down. **Romans 5: 10** tells us that **"when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son"**. This tells us of a wonderful result of the Cross. God was not at enmity with us, but rather we were the enemies. **Romans 5: 8** tells us that His love was proven through the Cross.

The enmity was created in our lives by SIN. So it is that we find that the Lord Jesus **"made peace through the blood of His Cross."** (Colossians 1: 20) We can enjoy the friendship of God and feel free from fear when we trust Him. Through the Cross, God is brought very close to our lives. This makes real prayer possible.

Are you beginning to realise now just how the Cross is a challenge to sin? And when we think of DEATH, it was through the Cross that the Lord Jesus destroyed death. (see Hebrews 2: 14) He rose again and is alive today. When we know the Lord Jesus as our Saviour we need never fear death and its consequences. Even though we may be the very worst of sinners, we can definitely say 'He died that I might live.'

One point before we finish, which is vitally important to our study:- only because Jesus was SINLESS could He die for our SINS. 2 Corinthians 5: 21 tells us this. He was absolutely the SINLESS SAVIOUR, yet He bore our sins in His own body on the Cross. Only in this way could the CROSS be an effective challenge to our sin. Once we face up to its challenge and accept its provisions, we can be delivered from sin for ever. Give thought to this.

Study 2

SELF

Read

Romans 6 and Galatians 2: 20

To become a Christian means that not only is the 'sin-life' dealt with, but also the 'self-life'. Although it may sound strange to say this, it is often easier to appreciate that our sins are forgiven and put away, than it is to accept the fact that our self-centred pursuits and desires have to be done away with as well. The fact is that God is not satisfied until He has made us completely new. **"If any one is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new."** (2 Corinthians 5: 17) This can never be emphasised too much. We are going to think about the part that the Cross plays in regard to 'self'.

You will notice in reading the New Testament that it speaks of "old" and "new" in regard to the Christian life. **Romans 6: 6** speaks of our **"old man"**. Have you ever thought about the meaning of this? Look at **Colossians 3: 9-10**: **"Since you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man"**. It is obvious that there are things about our lives that do not fit in with living as a Christian should. It is so easy to say that Christ gives us new life without realising this means new behaviour in practice. If you read **Colossians 3: 8-9** you will see what kind of practices are linked with the old life. **"Anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy..."** This means that we have to find an effective way of dealing with our own weaknesses. So often we can say with Paul in **Romans 7: 19** - **"the good that I will to do; I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practise"**.

You will notice as you study that the Cross of the Lord Jesus is a challenge to our 'self-life'. We can look at it in two ways:-

1. The SIGN

Romans 6 talks about BAPTISM. It is a very important stage in a Christian's life. You will notice that it is linked with the death of the Lord Jesus. **Verse 3** tells us that if we have been baptised, it is into His death that we are baptised. Have you been baptised? It was practised by early Christians as soon as someone accepted Christ as Saviour. The Lord Jesus also commanded it (**Matthew 28: 19**), and we have the evidence in Acts that this command was obeyed - **see Acts 2: 41 and 8: 36-38**. This was not a meaningless rite, nor was it linked with any magic formula. It had a deep significance in the lives of those who were going to live as true Christians. Paul tells us that by being baptised we proclaim to others that we have died with the Lord Jesus, that we have been buried and, just as He rose from the dead to a new, glorious life, we are raised with Him to **"walk in newness of life"**. (**Romans 6: 3 & 4**)

Someone has said that over every baptism of a believer in the Lord Jesus there is the shadow of His cross. This is true. It is only through realising that Jesus died for me and that I also died with Him, that sin and self are dealt with. It may be that you have never thought of things in this way. Perhaps you have not been baptised. We want you to realise through this lesson and the study of **Romans chapter 6**, how important the truth of baptism is. Its importance lies not in itself as an outward act, but in its meaning as a sign

that you intend, as a Christian, to finish with the old self-life altogether and to make evident your new life in Christ. It is in the consideration of things from this standpoint that you will realise that the Cross is a continual challenge to SELF.

2. The SECRET

How does this work out in practice? We talk about the 'old man' or the 'old life' or; perhaps 'self-life' and we wonder just what it means. **Galatians 2: 20** is a very important verse. It is quite startling in what it says. **"I am (or 'I have been') CRUCIFIED with Christ"**, says Paul. He looks at the death of the Lord Jesus as something with which he is identified. Crucified and yet committed to life, Paul says **"It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me."** It is a matter of life or death. Finished with the old life, we begin to realise that the new life means nothing less than Christ alive in me! Another way of putting it is shown in **Romans 6: 11**. **"Reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord."** Every time the temptation to yield to the weakness of our old nature comes, we must reckon that we are dead to sin. There is no response to sinful attractions in the lives of those who are dead to sin.

As we close our lesson we can think of the words 'Put off.... put on'. This is another way of putting it, which tells us so clearly that if we are to know victory, we must ACT. To live a worthwhile Christian life we must be ready to deal with our weaknesses and sins in a positive way. We must face up to the challenge of the Cross. Just as we would put off a coat that is ragged and filthy, to put on a new one that looks good, so we must put off the 'tattered garments' of our old sinful life, putting on the new life we live in Jesus Christ. Read for yourself the challenge in the verses following **Colossians 3: 1** **"If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above..."**

Study 3

SACRIFICE

Read

Hebrews 9: 1-10 and 24

In thinking about the Cross and its challenge we have seen how it affects sin and self. We have noticed what a tremendous event it was when Jesus died at Calvary. Christians will readily admit that they owe everything they have and are, both for now and all eternity, to the fact that the Lord Jesus died for them. They can truly say in individual way: 'My sins deserved eternal death, but Jesus died for me.'

But we might stop and ask, what was there about the nature of the death of Christ that makes it so important to our lives? In looking for an answer, we notice that the death of the Cross is described as a SACRIFICE. We do not have to look very far to see that the whole of the Bible seems to be built around the idea of sacrifice. The first recorded sacrifice is that of Abel in **Genesis 4**. Remember this - no sacrifice would ever have been needed if man had never sinned. Abel and Cain brought their sacrifices to God. The incident tells us a lot about the way in which the idea of sacrifice was going to be developed in the Bible: a spotless lamb, slain and offered on the altar, and accepted by God. Here you have three clear facts which set the tone for the sacrifices

which were going to be offered in future times until the Lord Jesus died on the Cross. The fact that Cain's sacrifice was not acceptable to God only stresses the importance of coming to God in the right way. If you look at it this way, you will see that Abel's sacrifice pointed forward to the sacrifice of the Cross.

Let us now look at some definite ideas associated with the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus. It is quite a deep subject. Someone has said that there are depths in the work of the Cross that we shall never fathom. Yet God wants us to understand and enjoy for ourselves the meaning of Calvary.

1. SOMETHING FREELY GIVEN.

The whole idea of sacrifice begins with giving. In both of the terrible wars that the world has seen, it can be stated truthfully that many gave their lives for their country. Many were ready to do this because of their love for their nation. They went but they never came back. They had died for the cause. When we speak of the Cross, we remember one who gave His life for sinful men. The Lord Jesus Christ need not have died. Yet for love of God and of us He gave Himself for us. See **John 10: 11**. With Paul we can say, **"He loved me and gave Himself for me."** (**Galatians 2: 20**) This is sacrifice.

2. SOMETHING GOD DEMANDED.

It may be that you find our reading difficult or strange. This could be because you have not realised how much the Bible has to say about sacrifice. Sin demanded a sacrifice. This is the only way in which it can be dealt with. The writer of Hebrews is looking back to Old Testament sacrifices. As a Jew he knew that God demanded these. **Leviticus chapters 1-7 and chapter 16** are behind these ideas in Hebrews which you have read. The reason the Lord Jesus died is clear. He died for us, because we could never satisfy God's demands. All the sacrifices of the past **"can never take away sins."** (**Hebrews 10: 11**) They could never meet God's requirements. Only Jesus could do this.

3. SOMETHING COSTLY.

We cannot use the word 'sacrifice' without thinking of COST. How much did it cost the Saviour to save those He loved? We realise that it cost Him everything, because **He put away sin by the sacrifice of HIMSELF.** (see **Hebrews 9: 26**) Perhaps this is the greatest appeal that the Cross has to us. It is the appeal of love, the love that gave everything. Our love for Jesus is so poor in comparison to such love. Let us remember that this fact of the total commitment of the Lord Jesus to the death of Calvary is something we have to face up to at all times in our Christian testimony.

4. SOMETHING EFFECTIVE.

The main point of **Hebrews 9-10** is that the Lord Jesus offered an all-sufficient sacrifice. Notice the number of times 'once' or 'once for all' is mentioned in the reading. Many sacrifices were offered each year, **chapter 10: 1**. Every time they were offered they brought a reminder of sins committed. (**10: 3**) They could never give peace to the conscience or take away sins. (**10: 4 and 11**) How sad for those who really longed to find relief from a guilt conscience. 'Impossible' is the verdict of the writer Hebrews. As Christians, we can be glad that the Lord Jesus will never die for our sins again. He will not need to. His one sacrifice was sufficient to put away sin forever. (**10: 12-14**) Make sure you learn this important

lesson. **"ONCE FOR ALL"** describes perfectly the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus at Calvary.

If you are saved you will agree that it is wonderful to know what God says about our sins and our failures - **"Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more."** (**10: 17**) It has been said, 'When God forgives - He forgets.' This aspect of the Cross and its challenge perhaps lies in the fact that it challenges our fears and our failure to trust God completely for salvation.

Study 4

SURRENDER



John 12: 20-36; Romans 12: 1-2 and 1 Peter 2: 21-25

We come to the final lesson in this series. Just look back carefully over the things we have studied. It could be that, at times, you have wondered why the cross of the Lord Jesus is so important. You will find if you study your New Testament that it is mentioned in almost every book after the four Gospels. Paul builds his teaching around the fact that **"Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures."** (**1 Corinthians 15: 3**) We can say that it is VITAL to the whole of the teaching of Scripture. The teachings of the Christian faith depend upon the foundation of the finished work of Jesus upon the Cross, and of course upon the fact that He is alive today.

But is it only in the field of TEACHING that the cross is so important? No! We have got to learn that it is also vital in EXPERIENCE. That is why we are thinking about its challenge. The fact that Christ died for us should wake us up and make us different people. It should so challenge our lives that we are ready to surrender all to the Saviour who died for us. This is going to be the point of this study concerning the Cross.

Christian living is life with PURPOSE. This means that, as Christians, we should know WHY we are living. It is here that the challenge of the Cross comes in. It challenges the reason for living. In **John 12: 20-36** the Lord Jesus leaves no doubt as to His reason for coming into world. The fact of the Greeks seeking Him thrilled Him very much. It seems to bring a crisis in His way. He spoke of the hour when He **would suffer and die**. Read **verse 27** carefully. It so clearly tells of the sense of purpose in the life of the Lord - **"For this purpose I came to this hour"**. Because He wanted to bring glory to God, His Father, and because He wanted to draw all men to Himself. (**verse 32**) He went through with His purpose. He went all the way. For the Cross asks the question, 'How far are we willing to follow Him?' Surrender to Christ means that our purpose should be set on following Him fully.

We think of our CHOICES as Christians. We have the power to choose those things which are going to fill our lives. Our pleasures, our careers, our friends and associates; all these and other things we can choose and our wills are free to make the choices. Yet when we become Christians a new dimension of choice comes into living. We have to consider what God's will is going to mean to us. Again the challenge of the Cross comes across our path. The Lord Jesus, as He faced Calvary, and all that it was going to cost Him, cried out in Gethsemane, **"Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me, nevertheless**

***not as I will, but as You will.* (Matthew 26: 39)** Consider this carefully. When He could have chosen otherwise, the Lord Jesus chose His Father's will. This teaches us a very serious lesson. Surrender means giving God first place in all our choices in seeking His will in our lives. This is the lesson of **Romans 12: 1-2**. Paul is asking that the lives of these Roman Christians should be just like living sacrifices offered to God for His service. They were to prove in their surrender what the will of God for them was really to mean. The world and all it had to offer was to be set aside. The choice for them was to be governed by what Christ had done for them.

This is a serious matter for every Christian to consider. It may cost us a lot to put God's will first. Maybe we know that something is standing in the way of our giving the Lord Jesus the place He should have. Remember - complete surrender to the will of God, without any hindrance, will bring a complete sense of God's blessing and joy.

Finally, we think of our BEHAVIOUR. This is important. The Cross is a challenge to the way we live. In effect, when we come to the Lord Jesus, and accept the fact that He died for our sins, we should be like rebel soldiers laying down our arms in surrender. We say that because sin cost Him so much, we are finished with it. Our lives are going to be different.

1 Peter 2: 21-25 speaks of Jesus as our example. We must follow His steps. Everything that is truly great, holy and worthwhile can be seen in the way the Lord Jesus lived. No flaw could be found in His words or deeds. Yet, in His own body, He bore our sins. We should be ready always to allow Him to be the pattern for our lives. This is true surrender to the challenge of Calvary.

We end these lessons with one vital consideration. We can never meet the challenge of the Cross in our own strength. It is far too high a standard to maintain. Only through the work of the Holy Spirit can we find the answer. Through our willingness to allow the Holy Spirit to take control of our lives, we can know the blessing of surrender to Christ.

Questions

STUDY 1 - SIN

1. State the three effects of sin in our lives which are outlined in this study.
2. In what way is sin a barrier between our lives and God?
3. a) What disease in the Bible is a picture of sin?
b) How did the Lord Jesus deal with it?
4. Say in your own words how the bondage of sin can be broken by the death of Christ.
5. Why was the sinlessness of the Lord Jesus so important to the effectiveness of His death for our sin?

STUDY 2 - SELF

1. What difference should having new life in Christ make to our lives?
2. Why should every Christian be baptised?
3. List the things that are associated with the **"old man"** in **Colossians 3**.
4. In what two ways does baptism identify us with the Lord Jesus Christ?
5. Say in your own words what is meant by being **"crucified with Christ"**. (**Galatians 2: 20**)

STUDY 3 - SACRIFICE

1. To what do Christians owe everything?
2. Why did God accept Abel's sacrifice and reject Cain's?
3. What do we remember when we speak of the Cross as a sacrifice?
4. a) How much did it cost Jesus to save us?
b) What is the greatest appeal that the Cross has to us?
5. Why will the Lord Jesus never die again for our sins?

STUDY 4 - SURRENDER

1. What fact does the Apostle Paul build his teaching around?
2. How should the fact that Christ died for us affect our lives?
3. What fact should always influence the choices we make as Christians?
4. Give two things you have learned about surrender and the challenge of the Cross.
5. Why should we allow our behaviour to be governed by the example of the Lord Jesus?