

## Issues, Etc.

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### **A Theology of Glory and a Theology of the Cross**

Everyday in every way we are getting better and better. Really?

*by Don Matzat*

Theology is systematic. All the pieces are supposed to fit together. Within Protestantism there are two very distinct systems of theology. One is a *Theology of Glory* and the other is a *Theology of the Cross*. I believe that it is very important that we understand the differences between these two ways of thinking. In so doing, I believe we will arrive at the conclusion that these two systems cannot be mixed.

#### **The Place of the Gospel**

The Protestant theology of glory begins with a one-time trip to the Cross of Jesus Christ. The preaching of human sin and divine grace is only directed at the unbeliever in order to "get him saved." The person who gets saved can sing, "*At the Cross, at the Cross where I first saw the light and the burden of my sin rolled away . . . and now I am happy all the day.*"

Very often, when discussing on *Issues, Etc.* the place of the Gospel in preaching and teaching, someone will call-in and say, "I've already been to the Cross. I've heard the Gospel. I'm saved." In other words, in the thinking of that person, the preaching of the Gospel is directed at unbelievers. Once unbelievers are saved the Gospel is no longer relevant.

The theology of the Cross is quite different. The preaching of sin and grace or Law and Gospel is not only intended to convert the unbelieving sinner but is intended to produce sanctification in the Christian. The preaching of the Law continues to convict the Christian of sin, leading to contrition, and the Gospel continues to produce faith in the atoning work of Jesus Christ.

#### **The Definition of Repentance**

A theology of glory defines repentance as a sinner being sorry for his sins and determining not to sin anymore. Repentance is the determination of the sinner to live a better life. Before being saved, the sinner is required to repent of all known sins. Incomplete repentance will cause a person to doubt whether or not they have really been saved.

Alternatively, the theology of the Cross defines repentance as contrition and faith rather than contrition and human determination. While the preaching of the Law will lead to contrition or sorrow over sin, the preaching of the Gospel will produce faith in the redemptive work of Christ Jesus.

Repentance is therefore not a singular act that precedes "getting saved" but defines the totality of the Christian life. The preaching of Law and Gospel produces repentance – sorrow over sin and faith in Christ Jesus.

## Sanctification

A theology of glory separates the Christian life from the Gospel. Once you are saved you are given a list of do's and don'ts. More often than not, these are "evangelical house rules." If you continue to break the rules or backslide, the solution is the rededication of your life to God or, in some cases, the emotional determination to keep your promises. You wouldn't go back to the Cross again because you already did that when you got saved. Rather, you rededicate your life, because "once saved, is always saved."

The theology of the Cross never gets you past the Cross. The preaching of the Law is not intended to provide you with a list of do's and don'ts. Rather the preaching of the Law is intended to drive you back to the Cross through the hearing of the Gospel. As a result of the Gospel, your faith is strengthened. Out of faith, the good works defining the Christian life are produced.

Those who mix the theology of glory with the theology of the Cross may initially preach Law and Gospel but will end the sermon with Law, principles, or house rules. This is usually introduced with "May we" or "Let us." Such a sermon will cause you to go home, not rejoicing in forgiveness, but determined to live a better life.

## Holiness

A theology of glory produces people who think they are better than other people. "Getting saved" moves you to a higher level. You are now a better person, a step above those who are not saved. You can think of yourself as a part of the "moral majority" as opposed to the "immoral minority." You share your testimony so that other people will get saved and be a good person just like you are.

The notion of getting saved as taking a higher step on the ladder of holiness begets other steps. Some teach that getting saved is merely the first experience, now you have to get sanctified. This is the "second work of grace." This second work removes your old sinful nature so that you are no longer a sinner.

You now add to your testimony your experience of perfect sanctification. You not only witness to unbelievers, but you tell other Christians who still refer to themselves as "sinners saved by grace" that you are no longer a sinner. You have taken the next step. They should do the same.

The Pentecostals (and Charismatics) add another step on the ladder of holiness. They promote a baptism in the Spirit with speaking in tongues which gives you spiritual power that you didn't have before. Former Southern Baptist pastor Charles Simpson said, "Before I got baptized in the Spirit I almost wore out my rededicator." In other words, now that he has received power, unlike other Baptists, he no longer has to rededicate his life.

There may be many more steps and experiences for you to take. The popular Charismatic showman Benny Hinn speaks of four or five different anointings awaiting you as you climb the ladder of holiness. The so-called revivals that have broken out in Toronto and Pensacola offer a wide variety of experiences from being "slain in the Spirit," to being "drunk in the Spirit," to simply standing in one spot and shaking your head back and forth. According to testimonies, these experiences will produce in you higher levels of spirituality and holiness as you move on to glory.

Your testimony will now focus on trying to convince other Christians that they should come to where you are and get baptized in the Spirit, speak in tongues, and seek these other experiences. Even though you don't say it, everyone knows that you think you are a better Christian, because you have taken the next step.

Living in a theology of the Cross never makes you any "better" than anyone else. Every day in every way you are not getting better and better. In fact, the preaching of Law and Gospel will not lead you to an awareness of your holiness, but rather to greater awareness of the depth of your sin. As a result, you will develop an ever-increasing faith in and appreciation for the redeeming work of Jesus Christ.

Your witness will focus upon the work of the Cross, not upon your experience of getting saved, sanctified, or becoming more spiritual. You have taken no step toward God or arrived at any higher level of holiness. You don't talk about your spirituality. You talk about the grace of God in Christ Jesus.

When dealing with these issues on the radio, I often encounter opposition. People will fight to defend their theology of glory. I often challenge them to share their testimony without ever talking about themselves. I have developed the pet phrase, "This thing called Christianity – **it's not about you!**"

Martin Luther accurately defined sin as man turning in on himself. While a theology of glory continues to turn you to yourself as you measure your growth in holiness against a plethora of spiritual experiences, the theology of the Cross turns you away from yourself. As a result of the conviction of the Law, you forsake your own good works and spiritual experiences and cling to the blood and righteousness of Jesus Christ.

### **Which is Correct?**

Any reading of the New Testament will demonstrate that the systematic theology of the Apostle Paul was a theology of the Cross. His focus was not upon his spirituality but upon the Cross of Christ. He boasted of his weaknesses. He referred to himself as the "chief of sinners" and a "wretched man." As far as he was concerned, his holiness and goodness was manure compared to the righteousness of Christ. For the Apostle, the dynamic of both justification and sanctification was "not I, but Christ."

The Reformation theology that characterizes both Lutheranism and traditional Calvinism is a theology of the Cross. There is no doubt that the theology of glory appeals to natural man. It is a theology of Adam. It is self-focused. It defines "popular Christianity." The reality is, it is not biblical Christianity.

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