

CHAPTER 13

THE CROSS AND HATING SIN

THE CROSS AS A PARADIGM OF OUR ATTITUDE TOWARDS SIN

As I watched the graphic depiction of the violent brutality inflicted on Jesus in *The Passion of the Christ*, I was initially shocked and stunned; then anger rose in me against that which caused His suffering—our sin. Next, conviction hit me about how little I had truly hated sin.

As we consider Paul’s passion to “know Him” and the “fellowship of His sufferings” and to be “conformed to His death” (Phil. 3:10), let us seek for that same passion to know Jesus in His attitudes toward sin as shown during His passion; and, as we behold His glorious holiness, be “transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory”. (2 Cor. 3:18) As you prayerfully read the following accounts of Jesus’ feelings and attitudes, may you focus on Him in worship and commit to be changed to be like Him in regard to your attitudes toward sin.

In Jesus’ prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane, we can see His horror of sin as He “who had no sin” contemplated being made “sin for us” (2 Cor. 5:21):

“Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done.” An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him. And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground. (Luke 22:42-44)

We can see in Jesus’ agony in the Garden His inward struggle as He faced taking on our sins and the horrific wrath of His Father that would be rained down on Him. In some ways, Jesus knew that anger well as He was of the very same nature as God the Father; however, He, as a man, had never experienced before that anger being directed against Himself.

We marvel as we see Jesus taking no offence from the people that hurled insults at Him and accused Him wrongfully. He offered no defence, nor replied in retaliation. Although He was angry at the sin that blinded and motivated them, He had perfect love for the people. To the Roman soldiers who had whipped him mercilessly and nailed Him to the Cross and to the Jewish leaders who called for His crucifixion, we see the beauty of Jesus’ forgiveness. He was angry enough at the evil that possessed them that He went willingly to the Cross that they might receive forgiveness and deliverance.

As we try to fathom some of the pain Jesus suffered when He cried, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”, we worship as we realize that His being forsaken was because of our sin. We have no idea really the depth of agony that Christ went through in the hours of darkness, except that we know that His inner suffering for our sin was worse than His physical pain and we want to hate all the sin that caused this agony with the same holy hatred He had.

Further, we can see the holy anger in Jesus against sin in His courageous determination to go through all the suffering so that He could do away with sin on the Cross and defeat all of sin’s power:

As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem. (Luke 9:51).

And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross. (Col 2:15)

If we accept that the Cross is the paradigm that we are called to follow, then it is imperative that we consider the Cross as a paradigm for our attitude toward sin and commit ourselves to be conformed to His death in this regard.

We know that, when we became believers, the whole nature of Jesus came to live within each of us. Thus, all of His attitudes, including His anger against sin, are planted within us. However, we may be blinded by a religious spirit that prevents us from seeing that we may need to go through a process of brokenness or purification so that His holy anger can be developed in us and released through us against sin. This truth of Christ in us may have brought us a measure of victory over certain sins, but we may have a real problem in facing the need to develop a constant attitude of hating sin with the same attitude of Jesus as He anticipated and endured the Cross.

Do consider making it a daily prayer of commitment that each day you will be conformed a little more to the glorious nature of Jesus, asking the Holy Spirit to reveal what it means to express His attitudes against sin wherever it is found—in us or around us.

As I have stressed in other chapters, we must define sin, not on the basis of the ten commandments, but on the paradigm of the Cross. Anything less than the standard of Jesus' nature is falling short of His glory.

Some may argue that to be completely like Jesus is impossible in this life. Admittedly, we may all be a long way from reaching that goal at the end of our lives; however, as I have shown in other chapters, Scripture repeatedly commands and exhorts us to make the goal of being like Christ a major passion and goal of our lives.

To be conformed to the nature of Jesus, we must fully accept within us the presence of all sin that hinders us from not fully expressing His nature. We are not to try to focus on sin nor to search for it within ourselves, but we should be prepared to deal with it when it is exposed to us by the Spirit. This happens in at least the three following ways:

- (1) As a result of focusing on the nature of Jesus in worship, we realize in contrast how much we are not like Him. (Oh for a heart that is in a continuous state of worshipping the Lord!)
- (2) The Holy Spirit uses Scripture in the Bible itself, in other books, or in spoken messages to convict us. (Oh for ears always open to the Lord's voice about our sin!)
- (3) Situations and people are used to "bring out the worst in us". (Remember, all things work together for good—to change us.)

How willing are we to allow the Holy Spirit to convict us in each of these ways? One measure of our love for God is our passion to be like Him and to deal with everything that is not like Him.

Consider the following scriptures that express the struggle with sin within ourselves:

Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is **sin living in me that does it**. So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God--through Jesus Christ our Lord! (Rom. 7:20-25)

. . . **the sinful mind is hostile to God**. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God. . . . For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you **put to death the misdeeds of the body**, you will live, (Rom. 8:7, 13)

So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. **For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature.** (Gal. 5:16, 17)

Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. (Col. 3:5-8)

. . . let us **throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles**, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. . . . In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. (Heb. 12:1, 4)

The above verses not only state clearly the reality of sin in us that needs to be dealt with; they also express vividly what should be our attitude towards our sin. Those that kill other human usually are motivated by powerful hatred. Unless we hate the “the sin that so easily entangles” (Hebrews 12:1), we will not be motivated to deal with it. Any covering up of our selfishness, pride, or fear is sinful in itself, as it is not the Lord’s attitude towards sin. We need to be changed so that we are prepared to welcome the exposure of anything in us that is not perfectly like Christ and to deal with it with the Lord’s anger against sin. Perhaps all of us need some measure of that attitude to be worked more in us and must seek the Lord for this process.

“ . . . **Hate what is evil . . .**” (Rom. 12:9)

Philippians 2:12b, 13 could be paraphrased as follows:

Continue to work out your total transformation to the paradigm of the Cross by seeking how to be in complete unity with God, who is working in you to fulfil His purpose of conforming you to this paradigm, i.e., to the nature of Jesus expressed though His suffering and death.

Either we focus much on Jesus and His suffering as our paradigm, our complete role-model, or we have other idols that we focus on, which sub-consciously form another paradigm into which we are being molded.

In his book *Revolution! The Call to Holy War*, Michael L. Brown calls for a revolutionary war to break down the idols of materialism: “We have taken our eyes off Jesus and put them on earthly treasures.”¹ As we turn to the Cross, we see Jesus’ willingness to let go of everything of this world, even His own life. The paradigm of the Cross is the complete opposite to our North American craving for possessions. Jesus was completely revolutionary in His willingness to sacrifice everything to love us and save us. How revolutionary are we in declaring war on that which is opposite to the paradigm of the Cross in us and in our society?

Michael Brown deals with five specific idols that must be defeated and denounced. We can think of all these as parts of the paradigm that mainly shapes our life and as enemies in conflict with the process of being “conformed to His death”:

1. The idol of “addiction to entertainment” — our TV is often our “family altar”.² The images that it projects into us tend to form the paradigm we follow rather than Jesus and the Cross.

2. The idol of “obsession with sports”:

¹ Michael L. Brown, *Revolution! The Call to Holy War* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2000), 122.

² Michael L. Brown, 128-129.

We have made these games (which have *some* valid place in society) into gods, magnifying their importance, exalting their status, and lavishing them with time and money galore.³

Sports and its heroes are a part of the paradigm that is mentioned above. Our victory over all that is not like Christ in us should be much more important than victories won in sports.

3. The idol of “wordly fashion” — the “overemphasis on outward appearance, of sensuality, of conformity to the world”⁴. The Cross certainly expresses a paradigm completely opposite to all these things.

4. The idol of “fleshly indulgence” — “Gratification is not our god! Money is not our master! Lust is not our lord! The flesh is not our focus!”⁵

5. The idol of secular academics —

Thank God for literacy and the pursuit of knowledge. Yet academics have become an idol to so many in our culture today. . . often a matter of prestige . . . Even godly seminaries can be snared here . . . Jesus is more interested in using people who know Him than in using people who merely know about Him.⁶

It is very apparent to me that the main focus and goal of many students in the college with which I am associated is to get a degree. Of lesser importance often is the actual content of the course. Above all, the real problem is that a focus on spiritual growth, on the process of being conformed to the paradigm of the Cross, is often lost in all the pressure to get a degree.

If we can accept that sin can be defined by anything less than the paradigm of the Cross; then our passion to be like Christ can be measured by our eagerness to face and to deal with any attitudes or motivations that do not reflect those of Jesus, including those seen in His suffering and death. When we truly have the desire to have the same attitude as Jesus had towards all that is not according to His nature, then our focus will be on Him as our chief Example in His suffering and death and on being changed into His likeness. In the process of being thus conformed to His death, we will fully declare war on all our idols and find victory in the work accomplished on the Cross and in the transformation that the Spirit works us, bringing us more and more into the likeness of Christ. Then we will enter more into the brokenness dealt with in the previous chapter, and we will have more experiences of true repentance at the Cross (Chapter 6).

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³ Michael L. Brown, 131-134.

⁴ Michael L. Brown, 134-137.

⁵ Michael L. Brown, 128,137.

⁶ Michael L. Brown, 140-143.