

CHAPTER 2

THE CROSS AS OUR STANDARD

JESUS' DEATH DECLARES THE ONLY STANDARD OF LOVE FOR ALL OUR RELATIONSHIPS

Before driving down to Ohio for a small conference in the summer of 2000, I had been thinking much about the standards by which we live and judge others. I became concerned as I realized in a vague way that the standards that unconsciously governed my behaviour were perhaps not totally based on a likeness to Jesus Christ. Along with this, I was especially concerned about how to respond to the severe criticism of me by someone who was to be at the conference. These things were very much on my mind as I drove down to Ohio. Because of the cloudiness in my thinking and my difficulty in hearing anything from the Lord, I prayed for a breakthrough that would give me clarity about my standards and about what it really meant to be like Christ in my relationship with this person.

The pastor in charge of the conference asked us all on Friday evening to come prepared to share the next morning any passage of scripture that had been a blessing to us recently. After retiring early, I closed my eyes and reflected on a couple of passages that had been meaningful during the week; however, I did not feel any assurance that I should share about them. Then after a while, I was surprised to see, as if I were having a dream or a vision, the following large white letters seemingly above the foot of my bed:

ISAIAH 53

I was puzzled, as I saw no particular connection with this chapter and my recent experiences or concerns. As I could practically recite from memory the first few verses of this chapter, I meditated for a few minutes on the graphic descriptions of Jesus' sufferings described vividly therein, but nothing about these verses seemed especially significant.

Then suddenly, the words of Paul in Philippians 3:10 came to mind: "... the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death". Powerful emotions rose within me as I connected this verse with statements from Isaiah 53. This chapter detailed exactly what it meant in Philippians 3:10 to be like Him in His death. Here I was confronted with the only real standard that I must seek to follow—the attitudes and disposition of Jesus during His sufferings.

Weeping deeply as I repeated one phrase at a time, I first found myself worshiping Jesus for each way I saw His beautiful love and His strength of character shining through His suffering for us. Then, as I realized how much I had fallen short of being like Him, I repented and committed myself to become more like Him in each specific aspect. Further, I rejoiced as God gave me a greater measure of faith to believe that such a life was not only possible for me but would be fulfilled in me.

... He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. (Isa. 53:2b)

My response to these words was to admire and praise Jesus for His complete lack of concern about what people thought of how He looked and for His humility in not trying to attract others by an outward display of His glory. I saw somewhat of His inner glory, the glory of His love in giving up so much to save me. I wept tears of repentance as I considered how much I had worried about what impression I made on people. Then I sensed a new degree of faith that God would free me to be like Jesus in His humble and simple love.

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He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows. (Isa. 53:3b, 4a)

As I meditated upon these words, I was filled with adoration of Jesus, as I saw how He had no problem with men's rejection and how He accepted sorrow and pain to bring salvation and love to others. Again I repented, committed myself to be changed, and believed that I would be conformed to His likeness in loving more those who might seem to reject me and that I would be willing to suffer for others, willing to actually feel the grief, sickness, weaknesses, and pain of others.

. . . yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted.
(Isa. 53:4b)

I was awed by Jesus' amazing lack of any anxiety or anger about how others interpreted His judgment as being from God. As I repented, I knew that I would be changed to be like Him, becoming free of tendencies to be anxious and angry about how men judge me.

But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. (Isa. 53:5)

As I thanked Jesus for what He did for me on the Cross and expressed appreciation for His incredible love for me, I was convicted that I had inwardly rebelled when I had been wounded by others. However, I somehow knew that I would be conformed so that I can feel deeply others' pain and guilt as I interceded for them that they might find healing and wholeness. I knew, too, that Jesus would enable me to be like Him in being able to bear blame when I am innocent in order to obtain peace.

He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. (Isaiah 53:7)

Again, I adored the Lord for having no desire to defend Himself. He was oppressed and afflicted by others, but did not open His mouth in complaint. I had not been silent when I had been criticized, but now I knew that the Lord would work His nature in me to express the same lamb-like nature.

During the meeting in the morning, my heart pounded as others came forward to share scriptures and experiences. Finally, near the end, I went forward with much fear and trembling. After relating some of what I had experienced the previous evening, I read phrases from Isaiah 53 and commented through my tears about the challenge for us to be like Jesus during His suffering, in much the same way that is detailed above.

As soon as I returned home, I started a study into the paradigmatic aspects of the Cross; my whole concept of being like Jesus was radically changed and clarified.

I would implore every reader to pray through Isaiah 53 much the way I did, phrase by phrase—turning each phrase in these four types of prayer: (1) worship, (2) commitment, (3) repentance, and (4) declaration of faith. It would make an excellent series of devotions for a week with each day's focus being on one or two verses. I am confident that praying through this chapter will help cause us to share Paul's passion to be conformed to Christ's death as the apostle Paul proclaims in Philippians:

I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, **becoming like him in his death**, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead. (Phil. 3:10, 11)

One of the most famous Christian books ever written is *In His Steps* by Charles Sheldon (30 million copies sold).¹ The main theme is about our need to accept a standard of life based on not

¹Charles M. Sheldon, *In His Steps* (New Kensington, PA, Whitaker House, 1979).

doing anything without first asking the question “What would Jesus do?” His main scripture for this is:

For hereunto were ye called; because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, that ye should follow his steps. (1 Peter 2:21)

Repeatedly throughout the book, Sheldon emphasizes that we should be willing to suffer men’s criticism or financial loss to do what would express most clearly the sacrificial love of Jesus Christ. The main character in the book challenged his church by asking:

“What is meant by following Jesus? . . . Do you mean that you are suffering and denying yourselves and trying to save the lost, suffering humanity just as I understand Jesus did?”²

In the last few years, it has become popular to wear items that have these letters WWJD on them. (“What Would Jesus Do?”) I wonder how many of those who have displayed these letters know that this idea came from Sheldon’s book and how many of these people seriously are willing to truly be like Jesus and suffer that others might be helped.

Sheldon treats the paradigm of the Cross as the standard for all Christian behaviour and encourages every Christian to find practical ways to live out the standard of the Cross. I was moved to tears at times reading his book again and praying that such a transformation would come to my community and asking the Lord to change me so that I can help bring about such a revival.

Another book that I discovered recently and that challenged me greatly is *If* by Amy Carmichael. In Part II, she has presented 65 poetic sentences, each one starting with the word “If” and ending with the statement, “then I know nothing of Calvary love”.³ You will see that what she calls “Calvary love” is identical to what I refer to as “the paradigm of the Cross”.

She was aware that some may “be troubled by the statement ‘*then I know nothing,*’” and explains:

. . . the soul, suddenly illuminated by some fresh outshining of the knowledge of the love of God shown forth on Calvary, does not stop to measure how much or how little it knew of that love before. Penetrated, melted, broken before that vision of love, it feels that indeed all it ever knew was nothing, less than nothing⁴

The first short poem is presented here much the way it is on page 65 of *If*. The other few I have chosen are written in prose format to save space. It was difficult choosing only these few, because so many of the verses hit home with me; if these touch you, do get the book and read the rest. It is best if these are read slowly, pausing to pray about every phrase, as I discussed earlier in this chapter regarding Isaiah 53.

If I have not compassion on my fellowservant,
even as my Lord had pity on me,
then I know nothing of Calvary love.

If I am perturbed by the reproach and misunderstanding that may follow
action taken for the good of souls for whom I must give account, then I
know nothing of Calvary love.

If I cannot commit the matter and go on in peace and in silence, remembering
Gethsemane and the cross, then I know nothing of Calvary love.

If I know little of the travail (a sharp and painful thing) till Christ be formed
in them, then I know nothing of Calvary love.

²Charles M. Sheldon, *In His Steps*, 13.

³Amy Carmichael, *If* (London: CLC, 1997) 13-77.

⁴Amy Carmichael, *If*, 6.

If I take offence easily, then I know nothing of Calvary love.

If I feel injured when another lays to my charge things I know not, forgetting that my Sinless Saviour trod this path to the end, then I know nothing of Calvary love.

If I feel bitterly towards those who condemn me, as it seems, unjustly, then I know nothing of Calvary love.

If the praise of man elates me and his blame depresses me, then I know nothing of Calvary love.

If I avoid being “ploughed under” with all that such ploughing entails of rough handling, isolation, uncongenial situations, strange tests, then I know nothing of Calvary love.

If I refuse to be a corn of wheat that falls into the ground and dies (“is separated from all in which it lived before”), then I know nothing of Calvary love.

If I covet any place on earth but the dust at the foot of the cross, then I know nothing of Calvary love.

May the Lord give us a deep revelation about “Calvary love” and may it become the only standard that we passionately seek to follow as a pattern—our paradigm for all our attitudes and behaviour.

Often I feel that I truly “know nothing of Calvary love” and am not qualified to be teaching about it; nonetheless, I believe that if I can always remember to apply the challenges regarding being like Christ first of all to myself, then the Lord wants me to continue to share such challenges with others.

Let us not focus unduly on the ways we fall short of the paradigm of the Cross, but let us adore much each of the qualities of Jesus found in each explanation of Calvary love found in the above statements. As we meditate on Jesus’ incredible Calvary love, we can truly “**rejoice in the Lord**”. Such rejoicing in each aspect of Jesus’ nature can lead us to repent of our lack in each area of Calvary love; and repentance leads us to commit ourselves to be conformed more to His nature; i.e., to live out the paradigm of the Cross. Rejoicing in Jesus’ forgiveness helps give us the faith that He is changing us as we worship and repent.

Thus, the main goal of this book is not self-improvement, but a further realization of the nature of God as revealed in Jesus and thus a progressive deepening of our worship of God. Our commitment to reflect the glories of God is a significant aspect of true worship and this manifestation of His glory in us will be a result of such worship.

As you read each sentence in this book, may you seek to

**(1) More passionately worship God as He is revealed in Jesus’ death.
and**

(2) Further reflect Jesus’ nature shown in His suffering.

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