

CHAPTER 3

THEOLOGY AND PARADIGMATIC ASPECTS OF THE CROSS

THE CROSS AS A PARADIGM—A MAJOR FOCUS OF NEW TESTAMENT THEOLOGY

The term “paradigm” referring to the Cross in the writings of certain Christian leaders, is a very appropriate term, carrying with it deep significance. To begin with, here is an excerpt from an address by a Rev. Huebel, called “A Forgotten Paradigm: the Theology of the Cross”:

A paradigm, we are told, is a whole new way of perceiving and evaluating the world or our ministry in the world, not merely another program or strategy. . . . The cross is a paradigm for the way God has always worked and always will work in the world.¹

As stated in the Introduction, I read through the whole New Testament and recorded all the references I could find about our being like Christ (over 100). I was amazed that over 80% of these passages were in the context of His sufferings and death. In other words, **the concept of the Cross as a paradigm is clearly a major emphasis of the New Testament**. To comment on this, here is a quote from L. W. Hurtado, theologian, of the University of Edinburgh:

The basic thesis that I shall seek to advance here is that, when considered collectively, the various paradigmatic functions of Jesus’ death are referred to impressively widely in the New Testament. In fact, I contend that the New Testament treatments of Jesus’ death as paradigmatic offer powerful resources for Christian self-understanding and ethical effort. The New Testament references to Jesus’ death as paradigmatic make heavy intellectual and behavioural demands, but are ignored at great risk to the theological integrity and the efficacy of the endeavour of Christians.²

The following is how John MacArthur summarizes the Cross as a paradigm:

In His death Jesus taught us how to live. We often look at His dying moments and observe that His death illustrates the seriousness of sin and the need for a Savior to pay the price for our iniquity. We recognize that by His substitutionary death, He died in our place. But Peter said that there’s even more to the cross than that. Christ died not only for us, but also as an example to us. He died to show us how to live.³

. . . Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. (1 Peter 2:21)

Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourself also with the same attitude, . . . (1 Peter 3:20)

The following is an extremely challenging reflection on Dietrich Bonhoeffer and his writings:

In his well-known book *The Cost of Discipleship*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote, “When Christ calls a man, He bids Him come and die.” With that, the German theologian, preacher and martyr (he was executed by the Nazis in 1945) has succinctly and profoundly identified the very heart and core of what it means to be a

¹ Glenn E. Huebel, “A Forgotten Paradigm: The Theology of the Cross,” <http://user.txcyber.com/~wd5iqr/tcl/cross.htm>.

² L.W.Hurtado, “Jesus’ Death as Paradigmatic in the New Testament”, *Scottish Journal of Theology*, Vol. 57 (2004) 413-433.

³ John MacArthur, “Christ Humbled, Christ Exalted: Jesus’ Death Shows Us How to Live”, www.BibleBB.com.

disciple of Jesus Christ. The Master Himself put it this way, “If anyone desires to come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me,” (Luke 9:23) Jesus was saying, “Just as I must die, so must you.”⁴

In commenting on Jesus’ criteria for a disciple, here are some excerpts from an essay by Jeffrey P. Greenman of Tyndale Seminary entitled “The Shape of Christian Leadership”⁵:

. . . Throughout the New Testament, leadership is cruciform—literally, “cross-shaped.” As disciples, we follow a leader whose own path of obedience to God led him to the cross, a leader whose identity is revealed unmistakably by his wounds, a leader whose Gospel is simply “the word of the cross” (1 Corinthians 1:18).

. . . Taking up the cross means intentionally conforming our lives to the pattern of life shown in Jesus’ death on the cross—a pattern that Michael Gorman has labeled “cruciformity.” It is living by the “law of Christ,” which means having a “ministry shaped by Christ’s paradigmatic status-denying, other-regarding love.”⁶ . . . Leaders are first and foremost disciples, people whose identity is found in the crucified Jesus—not in their leading, not in their ministries, not in their positions or titles or credentials, and not in their own strength. . . The cross is the supreme revelation of God’s power-in-weakness, and the resulting paradox is that God’s power is “made perfect in our weakness” (2 Corinthians 12:9) just as God’s power was made perfect in the self-emptying weakness of Jesus at the cross.

. . . Christian leaders are people who live the Cross—humbling themselves; voluntarily divesting themselves of their rights and privileges; trusting not in their own wisdom; insisting not on their own way; doing nothing out of selfish ambition; seeking not their own advantage but the benefit of others; in humility, considering others better than themselves; giving up their lives for the sake of the lost, the vulnerable, and the neglected.

As we explore some of the many paradigmatic aspects of the Cross, some of the reasons for the lack of emphasis on the Cross in some church groups I have attended or read about will be dealt with further. Of more importance, however, is that we be humble enough to ask the Lord to reveal to us why we individually have failed in our personal lives to give the paradigm of the Cross its place as the chief way that Scripture defines what it means to be like Christ. It is my conviction that it is vital to realize one of Satan’s most successful strategies has been to rob Christians of the truths of the Cross, including the paradigmatic aspect, and it is my hope that these studies will help free us more and more of the blindness of the wonderful glories of the Cross that our Father has destined to express through us.

As you read through each chapter, seek most of all to

- **seek to know the glorious nature of God expressed through Jesus’ death,**
- **take every opportunity to worship and adore our wonderful Lord; and**
- **let the Holy Spirit convict and change you so that your attitudes and actions be more “conformed to His death” in all aspects of everyday life.**

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⁴Dennis Conner, “Death and Christian Discipleship”, www.yadkinvillechurchofchrist.org/articles2.html.

⁵Jeffrey P. Greenman, “The Shape of Christian Leadership”, <http://www.tyndale.ca/leadership/files/>.

⁶Michael J. Gorman, *Cruciformity: Paul’s Narrative Spirituality of the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 186.