

DISCIPLESHIP SERIES

We Believe...

IN THE WORK OF THE CROSS

"GO THEREFORE AND
MAKE DISCIPLES OF
ALL THE NATIONS...
TEACHING THEM TO
OBSERVE ALL THINGS
THAT I HAVE
COMMANDED YOU"

MATTHEW 28:19, 20

By Dr. Lester Sumrall

We Believe in the Work of the Cross

**by
Dr. Lester Sumrall**

*All Scriptures are taken from the
King James Version of the Holy Bible*

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We Believe in the Work of the Cross

The Lord's Supper is necessarily linked to the death of Christ. The bread represents His broken body; the cup represents His shed blood. Any consideration of the Lord's Supper must focus to some degree on Calvary and the crucifixion of Christ.

Let us, then, study the Crucifixion by discussing three crosses. These are not the crosses that stood on the hill outside of Jerusalem. These are the crosses mentioned in Galatians 6:14. "But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world."

The three crosses of which Paul spoke are, in fact, only one cross. Yet there are three distinct aspects of the work of that cross. In a sense, we do no injustice to Paul's writing to speak of three crosses.

CRUCIFYING SELF-GLORIFICATION

Paul desired that he should never glory, or boast, or find reason for pride, in anything but the cross of Jesus Christ. Paul's desire was to glorify Christ, not Paul. He meant that there should never be any self-glorification. How easy it is to place ourselves upon a pinnacle and feel that we are better than others, cleaner than others, or more holy than others! How easily we forget that any value we have, any cleanness, any holiness we have comes to us through Jesus Christ. Self-glorification is a terrible thing. It is a nonspiritual attitude. It says that what I am is of my own making. Such an attitude ignores the fact that we are descendants of Adam, men and women who are sinful and unrighteous by our very nature.

Paul chose to glory in nothing but the cross of Christ. Why the cross? Why not some other aspect of Christ's work? Paul chose the cross because it was at the cross that Paul, in Christ, was crucified. Remember, when we accept Christ we accept His death as our own death. When He

died, all that we were in Adam died with Him. Our “old man,” our old way of life, was crucified with Christ. Therefore, all the things in which we might find reason to glory have already been nailed to the cross of Christ.

If we quit looking at the cross, if we take our attention off that cruel scene, we may not remember that we are crucified with Christ there. As long as we keep the cross before us, we are reminded that any reason for personal boasting was nailed to that Roman cross with Jesus. Again, we see the value of the Lord’s Supper. How can we possibly eat the bread and drink of the cup without being reminded that our old man is dead? There is no reason to glory in ourselves.

Still, self-glorification is common. It takes many forms. One form is race-glorification. We frequently see people boasting of their particular race, implying that others are inferior in some way. One says, “I am black.” Another boasts that he is not black. One boasts of his Asian heritage, while another is proud not to be of Asian descent. This

is foolish. It is carnal. Race-glorification will never bring anyone to heaven. It is all for no reason. No race is superior or inferior to any other.

The blood that flows through our veins is the same, regardless of the pigment of our skin. The blood of an Asian can be used in a life-saving transfusion for a South American. The blood of a South American can save a European. The blood of a European can save an American Indian. The blood of an American Indian can save an African. From a purely natural sense, race-glorification is without basis. From a spiritual standpoint, it is even more unfounded. When Jesus went to the cross, all that we are died with Him, including our racial distinctions. The sins of men and women from all races sent Jesus to the cross, and the sins of men and women from all races died with Him there. He did not die for certain racial groupings. He died for everyone.

The important question is not whether we belong to a certain racial group, but whether we are in Christ.

When we come into union with Him, our individual racial heritage loses significance. This does not mean we should be ashamed of our racial heritage. We should not be ashamed to be black, white, or yellow. This simply means racial heritage is irrelevant. In Christ we have a new racial heritage. We are the offspring of God, born into His family. There, the color of our skin is meaningless. The cross of Christ should be a constant reminder of that fact.

Another form of self-glorification is the glorification of nations. Often various nations will rise and boast that theirs is the greatest country. Whether they are French, German, Japanese, or American, this attitude is not pleasing to God. Paul said, "I will not glory in this." Understand that Paul had apparent reason for boasting. He was Roman, and being a Roman in those days was much like being an American today. Still, Paul chose not to boast of his national heritage. I am not suggesting that Christians be ashamed of their national heritage, that they refuse to salute their flag, or

that they be disrespectful to their national leaders. I only wish to emphasize that there will be no ethnic neighborhoods in heaven. In Christ there are no national distinctions. We may thank God that we live in a country that, by His grace, allows greater liberty and more opportunity than another does, but we must never lose sight of the truth that we have that liberty and opportunity only through God's grace.

We cannot glory in something that God has given us that we in no way earned. We may be grateful for our national heritage, but we should only glory in the cross of Christ.

There are many areas in which Christians continually glory and boast, when in fact there should be but one—the cross of Christ. There are those who boast and glory in their church. The local church is important; we should support our church, love it, and be grateful for it. However, our glorying should be in the cross of Christ.

Others boast of their education. Paul was an educated man. In fact, he was so well educated

that one governor said that he had gone crazy because of too much learning. Still, Paul chose not to glory in his education, but only in the cross.

Others boast of their philosophy, traditions, rituals, or material possessions, but Paul decided to glory only in the cross of Christ. It was the cross that reminded Paul of the grace of God. It was the cross that reminded Paul that all his national heritage, racial heritage, education, philosophy, traditions, and all the advantages of this world had to offer could not bring him one step closer to God, or one foot nearer the gates of heaven.

Paul knew that long after race had been forgotten, nations had faded, education had ceased, traditions had vanished, and material wealth had decayed, the cross and the work that Jesus did there would remain. Paul had his emphasis in the proper place. He chose not to glory in those things that are temporary. He chose to glory in that which is eternal—the cross of Christ.

CRUCIFYING WORLDLINESS

Paul also said the world was crucified to him. This is another aspect of the cross. Paul developed a new viewpoint of this world. One of the major difficulties for many Christians was no problem for him. Many believers have no trouble loving Jesus. After all, He loved us and gave up all the wealth of heaven to bring us forgiveness and eternal life. But ceasing to love the world *is* a problem. We, as descendants of Adam, were born into this world. We grew up here and live here every day. The things we enjoy doing are found here. The people we love live here. We have no trouble loving God, but we just can't seem to let go of the *world*.

The real problem is that we cannot, or will not, distinguish between the temporal and eternal. We confuse temporary pleasures and values with eternal ones. We become spiritually cross-eyed, and our only cure is the cross. Paul identified those things that were temporary and nailed them to the tree. His attitude was, "The world is nailed to the

tree like a criminal. The world is doomed. I will take the world, with all its rottenness, and nail it to the cross. It is crucified to me.”

That was Paul’s solution. It should be ours, too. Identify those things that are of this world and execute them on the cross.

Identifying the things that are of the world is a continuing process. On one day, the Holy Spirit may convict us that something is of the world, and we quickly take that thing and nail it to the cross. The next day, He may show us something entirely different that must go to that same cross. We shouldn’t expect to put everything on that cross in one trip, nor should we be discouraged if, just when we think the world’s hold on us is dead, the Spirit shows us a new area that needs to be crucified. This is normal. It is part of spiritual growth.

We should not be discouraged if we cannot clearly identify all that needs crucifixion at any one moment, as long as we are always ready to crucify any form of worldliness that the Holy Spirit

reveals to us. Identifying worldliness is really a matter of developing heavenly vision. We need to see things as God sees them. We need to look at things the way God does. Then the things of the world will become easily visible to us.

As descendants of Adam we were born into this world. However, we dare not forget that the cross of Christ has cancelled our inheritance from Adam, and the resurrection of Christ has given us a new birth. In a very real sense, we are no longer connected to this world. Our birth through Adam is done away with. Now we are born of God. All that we have as a result of our Adamic birth is only temporary. It can go to the cross.

We have said that we grew up here; that is partially true. Our physical bodies have experienced growth on this planet, yet our physical bodies are part of the old birth. As newly born Christians, we began to experience spiritual growth. We are even now growing in the Lord. Our physical growth and our physical bodies are temporary. They, and all their sickness, pain and imperfections,

are not a part of God's new creation for us. They can go to the cross. We have said that we live here every day. That is true, as well, and the truth of it is a large part of our problem. In Ephesians 2:6 Paul tells us that God has raised us up from spiritual death through Christ Jesus and has elevated us to sit with Christ in heavenly places. In other words, our true position is in heaven. Our life is there. Our position here is only temporary.

For the next few years, and none of us can be certain how many, our day-to-day activity will be limited to this world, but our life is not of this world; our life is heavenly. In a short time, whether through physical death or at the return of Christ, our temporary existence here will give place to our permanent existence with Christ in heavenly places. We have also said that the things we enjoyed doing are here. Can you imagine Paul at the Roman Colosseum watching a gladiator contest? What Rome considered the choicest pleasure, Paul considered vile and depraved. He nailed it to the cross. The popular pleasures of this day would

sicken Paul. Ours is a world eaten up by pleasure. Like the Romans of two thousand years ago, we live for enjoyment. Yet these senseless frivolities last only a few moments. They bring us temporary pleasure, and whet our sensual appetites for even more. These temporary pleasures must go to the cross.

I am not suggesting that all enjoyment is wrong, though some forms of enjoyment most definitely are. I believe that Paul enjoyed frequent moments of clean and wholesome pleasure. But even these wholesome things were temporary. They did not control Paul, nor did he live for them. He was willing to lay even the harmless pleasures aside if God required it. This entire world was crucified to him.

Finally, we have said that the people we love live in this world. One thing that makes heaven near and dear to us is the knowledge that many of our friends and loved ones are already there. We are drawn to that place because it is where people we love are living. We have already seen that

those of us who are in Christ are not of this world. Our physical being exists here temporarily, but our life is in heaven. The same is true of our friends and neighbors who have accepted Christ but have not yet gone on to meet Him. In that sense, the people we love do not live here. Some of them have already transferred their resident status to heaven. Others, though waiting to make that transfer, have not yet departed. It is of little consequence whether we go before them or vice versa. Eventually we will all be united in that glorious place.

The element of sadness enters in the fact that many whom we love are neither living in heaven nor waiting to move there. They are lost and without hope. They, too, just like every other thing that is of this earth, must be taken to the cross. There are two dimensions, two ways, in which we must place them there.

First, we must realize that only God can save them. Our righteousness cannot save them, and theirs certainly cannot. So in prayer we must take

them to the cross. We must say, “I love these people, and I know that You do also. I cannot save them. You can. Please, by Your Holy Spirit, show them they need salvation and bring them to a place of accepting Christ.” We cannot die for them; Christ already has. Therefore, we must take them to His cross in prayer.

There is a second way in which we can take them to the cross. That way is the gospel. We may speak to them personally about Christ; we may invite them to attend a gospel service; we may give them good books or gospel tracts; we may direct their attention to Christian radio or television broadcasts. There are many paths down which we may lead them, so long as those paths end at the cross.

CRUCIFYING SELF

Not only did Paul regard the world as dead and gone, he also considered himself as dead to the world. Paul, as a believer, was crucified with Christ. When Christ went to the cross, Paul went too. When Christ died, Paul died. What good are

the things of this world to a dead man? They are of absolutely no value. Before his conversion, Paul was rapidly advancing in the religious system of his day. He was a Pharisee. He was zealous. He had studied under the greatest teachers of the time. His future was bright. He had ambition and potential, but Paul never fulfilled that ambition or realized that potential. Just when he seemed near to reaching the height of success within the Jewish religion, Paul “died.” How many times have we heard of or read about a promising young man or woman who has been cut down in their prime by death? It seems such a tragedy. In Paul’s case, however, it was not. Paul was filled with promise and was at his prime, but his death was no tragedy. It was a victory.

Saul of Tarsus left Jerusalem en route to Damascus. He had official papers from the high priest. He was going to take some Christians into custody. At some point along that road, Saul of Tarsus came face to face with Jesus of Nazareth. And Saul of Tarsus died. His body did not cease

to function, and his heart did not stop. He did not quit breathing, but he died, nonetheless. He was no longer advancing in the religious system of his day. He was no longer a Pharisee. He was no longer ambitious or zealous. His future no longer held the promise of popularity among his fellows. In fact, he was no longer even Saul of Tarsus. He was crucified with Christ, and the old way of life was gone.

How beautiful this is, how lovely! Here is a man who chose to identify himself with all the suffering and giving of Christ, even though it meant the end of all that had once seemed important. Those of you who have lived enough years have watched bright young stars appear in the entertainment industry, sparkle for a brief time, then vanish. You have beheld the fallen stars of the financial world. But Paul shows us a better way. It is better for you and me to be crucified with Christ than for us to live a flagrant life of sin and pleasure, only to die and be eternally lost.

Paul could have been someone important in

the eyes of the world, yet he chose to die. He chose to allow his plans and dreams to be crucified with Christ. He chose to become a nobody. To those of his time, he wasted his life on a poor cause. He went from potential to oblivion. Yet in a way that few could have foreseen, God elevated Paul to a position of spiritual prominence that no one outside of Christ Himself has ever enjoyed. Paul gave up everything. He became a nobody willingly. Because of that attitude God made him somebody very special.

This world had no place for Paul. Though he had once been important in it, he said, "I want no place in this world." To many, that seems like an old-fashioned idea, a dead Puritanism. But it is not. There are young men and women rising up today with a greater desire and willingness to abandon all and go to the cross with Jesus than this world has ever known. There are young people within the church who have more desire to sacrifice themselves in order to save the world than we have had in many generations. This is

thrilling, yet there are still so many to whom religion is comfortable and cozy. They know of no death to the old way, no sacrifice, and no crucifixion. The church, especially in America, has become luxurious and lazy. We have many million-dollar, and even multimillion-dollar, churches. Yet half the people living on earth have never heard the name of Jesus, much less the wonderful truth that He will forgive their sins and give them eternal life.

We have not carried out the Great Commission. We have not given the gospel to our generation. We sit in expensive buildings with gorgeous carpets beneath our feet, magnificent stained-glass windows filtering the rays of light, glorious pulpits before us, and with inspiring choirs entertaining us. We glitter with our own glamour, but our spirits are not at the cross where Jesus died.

Jesus had to die, or we could not be saved. There is no salvation apart from the cross of Christ. Christ, the Son of God, came from a resplendent throne in heaven, surrounded by tens of

thousands of angels who constantly sang His praises, in order to face the cross for you and me. He accomplished on our behalf all that God requires in order for us to enter into His presence. His cross was sufficient to do that which nothing else could do. For that reason Paul chose to glory in nothing but Christ's cross. He said, "I will nail the world to the cross. It is dead to me." Further, he said, "I will go to that cross, as well." I do not know many people who are, at this moment, crucified to this world. They glory in their big cars, beautiful homes, and prestigious careers. They cannot say with Paul, "The world is crucified to me, and I unto the world."

As we take Communion we should be impressed with the need of adopting Paul's attitude. The bread is broken. So should our lives be broken. It should not be torn to pieces by sin, but humbled by the grace of God. We should allow our hearts to be broken with the burden that Paul carried for the salvation of the world. Our hearts should be broken for the thousands who die each

day, for the millions who are hungry, and for the multitudes who suffer from disease or distress.

As we take that broken bread we should ask God to break our will, our pride, and our self-righteous attitudes, even as the body of His only begotten Son was broken for us. That bread should forever remind us of the attitude we, as believers, should always display toward those around us. As that bread is broken, as Christ was broken, so should we be broken also.

When we drink of the cup, we should recall the blood that Jesus gave for us. Three thousand years before science had unlocked the mysterious functions of the bloodstream, Scripture told us blood is the source of life. Since the day of Adam, blood has been the price paid for sin. Blood speaks of atonement for sins. Blood should be our reminder of the means whereby we have a hope of heaven, and the responsibility that we have to share that hope with the world.

Three crosses were erected outside Jerusalem on the day Christ was crucified. On one cross

a man died in sin, the thief who would not believe. On the middle cross a Man died for sin, paying the price required for the salvation of the world. On the third cross a man died to sin, gaining eternal life through faith in Christ. Those three crosses speak to us of rejection, redemption, and reception.

The first man rejected the message and was lost. The second Man *was* the message, giving Himself for the sins of others. The third man received the message and was saved. My first concern is that everyone who reads these pages be like that third man, who received Christ as Savior. I can only pray and hope that anyone reading these words who has not received Christ would do as that dying thief, and place all hope for eternity in Jesus Christ.

Many who read these pages have long ago placed their trust in Christ. Of them I would ask whether the three aspects of the cross that became so real to Paul have become real to them, too. How many of us can honestly say that we

glory, or boast, in nothing but Christ's cross? How many of us can say that the world is dead, that it holds no pull or fascination for us? How many can say that they are dead to the world, that they have lain aside all their hopes, dreams, ambitions, family, material wealth, and job and life itself, in order to serve Christ?

The next time we receive the Lord's Supper, the next time we partake of the broken bread and the cup, may we hear the words of Paul again: "But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world."

Prayer of Salvation

Lord Jesus I confess I am a sinner and I repent (stop sinning and turn away from my sins). Please forgive me. I accept you as my Lord, Master and Savior. I thank you for taking my judgment of death for my sin debt, by being nailed to the cross and shedding your blood for the forgiveness of my sins. I thank you for giving me your righteousness for my sins.

I promise to love you and with your help obey you all the days of my life. I will confess you before all mankind and never be ashamed of you. Please change me, and give me your grace and love for all people. Show me the plan you have for my life and help me to fulfill it.

Sign your name

(1) -Be sure to read your Bible daily, (2) -Pray daily, and (3) -Attend a Bible believing Church.

We Believe in the Work of the Cross
originated from excerpts from the book
The Stigma of Calvary

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Dr. Lester Sumrall

1913~1996

The voice of Dr. Lester Sumrall remains prominent in the Christian world today. More than 65 years of ministry in over 100 nations made Dr. Sumrall a respected source of wisdom and understanding. He was an author, teacher, missionary, evangelist, and the pastor and founder of Christian Center Church in South Bend, Indiana.

Throughout his lifetime, Dr. Sumrall worked tirelessly to fulfill the Great Commission by carrying the Gospel to the ends of the earth. In 1957 he founded LeSEA, a multi-faceted global outreach. Today, with the help of our faithful partners and friends, the ministry continues to blanket the world through television, satellite, FM and shortwave radio, LeSEA Publications, and LeSEA Global Feed the Hungry®.

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