



Conducted by
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“Twice I have heard preachers say that Romans chapter 6 means being baptized into the cross. Can you comment on this? (The preachers, incidentally, were not of the Church of Christ).”

ONE of the most amazing things which has happened in so-called christendom is the way in which some people still refuse to acknowledge the sonship and deity of Jesus. They treat him off-handedly and in this case they are willing to afford more importance to the cross than they are to the one who died on it. Perhaps an inanimate thing makes less demands upon them than a living Christ; it is probably easier to worship an idol than it is to worship the true God. Be that as it may, it is true to say that the cross has achieved a unique position in the minds of men. Some of our best-known and well loved hymns seem to foster the idea; ‘The old rugged cross; In the cross of Christ I glory; Jesus keep me near the Cross;’ etc. The radiance streaming from the cross has tended to outshine the ‘bright and morning star’.

Why should this be? Before we can answer that question it might be as well to explore,

- a) What the cross is,
- b) What the Word says in relationship to it,
- c) The significance of the One who died on it.

What is the Cross?

The Greek word for cross is STAUROS and denotes primarily, an upright pale or stake. On such, malefactors were nailed for crucifixion according to Roman Law. It was on such a cross that Jesus died. There was nothing special about it in the sense of its importance or intrinsic value.

As regards appearance, it should be distinguished from the ecclesiastical form of the two-beamed cross. Peter indicates the appearance when he refers to the cross as a tree (XULON), this being the upright stake. “The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree” (Acts 5:30). According to W.E. Vine the two-beamed cross had its origin in ancient Chaldea, and was used as the symbol of the ancient idol Tammuz, the ‘T’ shape being the first letter of the idol’s name. It would appear that after about the 3rd century A.D., apostasy had become so rife that pagans were allowed into the churches apart from regeneration by faith, and were permitted largely to retain their pagan signs and symbols. Hence the Tau or ‘T’, in its most frequent form, with the cross-piece lowered, was adopted to stand for the cross of Christ. Incidentally, you can read about how women in Ezekiel’s day prostituted themselves to the Phoenician idol Tammuz; it stands amongst some of the most diabolical abominations shown to Ezekiel by God as being perpetrated by the nation and elders of Israel. Small wonder that God warns against idols when people’s imaginations of the cross that Jesus died on have their origins in ancient idolatry. So much for being baptized into the cross. Would you want to be baptized into something, even if it were possible, which originally was representative of idolatry in one of its worst forms?

What the Word Says.

Perhaps it would be better to say, 'What some people think the Word says about the cross'. The trouble arises, of course, when people take statements out of context and use such statements to substantiate theories of their own. An example of this is found in Paul's first letter to Corinth, "For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God" (1 Cor. 1:18). Now in the light of this statement it would appear that (1) the object of the preaching was the cross, and (2) the cross exemplified, in itself, the power of God. In actual fact, of course, after Paul had discoursed on the foolishness of preaching, he went on to say, "But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling-block, and unto the Greeks foolishness" (1 Cor. 1:23). So when Paul speaks about 'the preaching of the cross' he means to indicate that he is preaching of the Holy One who hung on it. Without Christ on it the stake was only a Roman instrument of torture and death.

Again, some who want to make the cross itself seem important, point to Eph. 2:16 and say, 'But God put the cross as the means of reconciliation between Jew and Gentile. In form, it is symbolic of the open-armed unity that christendom aims at'. Nothing of the kind. Earlier in the same letter Paul asserts, "But now in Christ Jesus ye who were sometimes far off (Gentiles) are made nigh by the blood of Christ" (Eph. 2:13). In his second letter to Corinth Paul says, that, "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself" (2 Cor. 5:19).

You see, in all of this, the cross was only the vehicle for the enactment of God's will. A major religious group have fallen into the same mistake by the near-deification of the Virgin Mary, but, as with the cross, Mary was only a chosen vessel for the enactment of God's will. Even the Church of the Lord is looked upon by some as sacrosanct, and they fail to give place to the Head from whom the whole body is fitly joined together.

Actually, there need be no confusion. The cross and Christ are inseparable. As a matter of fact, the cross on which Jesus died is called 'His cross'. Paul when writing to Ephesus said, "For it pleased the Father that in him (Jesus) should all fulness dwell; and having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him (Jesus) to reconcile all things unto himself (God)" (Col. 1:19-20). I think we can say truthfully that hundreds of people must have been crucified. There was no significance in their crosses simply because there was no significance attaching to the people who died on them. But when the Son of God hung there, he gave a special significance, even to a Roman stake.

The Significance of Christ

The death of Christ on the cross is said to be the atonement for our sin. The O.T. idea of atonement was 'to cover', and so the animal sacrifices acted as a covering until the time should come when Christ would put away sin for ever by the sacrifice of himself. I have always thought that the christian should never look upon his sins as being merely covered by the sacrifice of Christ. The purpose of the cross was to do away with the cause of God's enmity, namely, by taking away our sin (Read Col. 1:19f.f., also 2 Cor. 5:18,19).

When Paul wrote his letter to Rome he said that in the death of Christ, "God had set him forth to be the propitiation through faith in his blood" (Rom. 3:25). Christ, in the giving of his life, appeased the just and holy requirements of God. He was the perfect sacrifice; he had to be because only the perfect sacrifice could serve to abolish sin. Herein we see the love of God expressed in the cross of Christ. God doesn't reconcile us and then love us; He reconciled us by the sacrifice of Christ because He loved us. Our salvation is a gift from God and we must receive it as such. It is not meritorious at all.

Do we fully grasp the significance of the cross of Christ when we sing, 'Redemption, Oh Wonderful Story?' Christ is our ransom. He paid it all. As Peter puts it, "Ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold...but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a Lamb without blemish and without spot" (1 Pet. 1:18,19). How often do we, foolish creatures, neglect the incorruptible and cling to that which is corruptible? How can anyone attach more meaning to the instrument of sacrifice rather than to the precious sacrifice Himself? It is sacrilegious bigotry.

On the cross, Christ was substituted for us. Was there ever a more effective substitute? Paul said, "For he (God) hath made him (Jesus) to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him" (2 Cor. 5:21). Peter says, "Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree" (1 Pet. 2:24). Do we need to say more? What a friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear!

What about Romans chapter 6?

If anyone says that this passage of scripture teaches that we are baptized into the cross then he must mean that we are baptized into Christ. We cannot separate Christ and his cross. Furthermore, all the blessings of God are in Christ. What does the passage say? Just listen to Paul, "Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection" (Rom. 6:3-5).

No, preachers, whoever you are, we are not baptized into the cross, if you are trying to separate the cross from Christ. We are baptized into Christ. Is there really anyone or anything else that we could be baptized into? We are saved in Christ. We are justified in Christ. We are sanctified in Christ. We shall stand before God in Christ. Then, please God, we shall spend eternity with Christ. Even with all of its hallowed associations, I will cling to the living Christ rather than to the dying wood.