

Call to Obedience #20/512  
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## **The Third Work of Grace: the Cross**

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Of course, there are many works of grace—every breath of air that you take is a work of God's grace. However, most holiness theologians have popularized the concept that there are only two major works of grace that your soul experiences: salvation and sanctification which are also sometimes referred to as the rebirth and the baptism with the Holy Spirit.

There is no doubt that you must first receive Jesus Christ as your Savior, you must be born again: *Jesus answered and said unto him, Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God* (John 3:3). When you receive Jesus into your heart with penitent faith and holy surrender, you are born again. He is faithful to His promise: *Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me* (Rev. 3:20). Believe and receive Christ because He keeps His promises.

The second work of grace has its various synonyms: sanctification, the baptism with fire, perfect love, the second blessing, etc. This work of grace was experienced by the 120 who had met together in one accord in the Upper Room following Christ's ascension. It was a work that followed their conversion; *When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place... And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit...* (Acts 2:1,4).

But there is a third work of grace which is seldom discussed, and it is the work of the **cross** in your life. **Calvary must precede Pentecost**. Before you ask for the Holy Spirit, ask for the cross! You will never receive the Holy Spirit—His baptism, His gifts, His operations—without allowing the cross to work in your life. The baptism with the Holy Spirit will only come after the cross has done its work. If you seek the Holy Spirit without first taking up your cross, you shall never find Him. But if you take up your cross, you shall find that the Holy Spirit will enter into your life and start guiding you. The cross is the gateway to the Spirit-filled life. All those who come in some other way are thieves and robbers. This is Old Testament theology as well as New Testament theology.

The children of Israel were marvelously saved from God's wrath by the lamb's blood on their door posts: *And they shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and on the lintel of the houses where they eat it* (Ex. 12:7). They were set free from slavery that same night. They were led out of Egypt that night: out of slavery, out of bondage, out of death. That night, they became the people of God! They were baptized, spiritually speaking, as they passed through the Red Sea: *all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea* (1 Cor. 10:2). God then helped them to experience a cross as they dwelt in the wilderness for the next 40 years. They had to die to murmuring, unbelief, criticism and selfishness before they got to Canaan which was the Promised Land, but nearly all of them rejected the cross and died as unbelievers in the wilderness: *And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who did not obey* (Heb. 3:18). They were redeemed by blood and baptized in the sea, but they died as **unbelievers**. The children of Israel had a cross to bear as they journeyed from Egypt to Canaan. There is a cross in your life between your conversion and your sanctification.

Psalms 23 stands as another beautiful example of the cross. In the first three verses of that Psalm, the shepherd is leading the sheep in the comfortable home range. In verse 5, you see the shepherd feeding them on the beautiful, rich table land of the highland range. But before they got there, they had to go through the valley of the shadow of death (Ps. 23:4). The **only** way to the rich highlands is through the valleys, the narrow places and the dangerous canyons where wild beasts linger in crevices and flash floods, avalanches or rock slides can bring sudden death. This is where the sheep learn to stay on the heels of their shepherd and they develop an intimate relationship with him: in the valley of the shadow of death!

This is where sheep learn to follow the shepherd wherever he leads. It is here where they, so to speak, take up their cross and follow him. It is here where they learn that wandering about, exploring or straying from the shepherd will invite destruction from predators. It is here where independence must die! Self must die! In order for you to get to the highlands of spiritual adventure, you must learn to deny self, you must stop your straying from Jesus' perfect will, you must take up your cross and follow close on His heels. If you do not follow Him closely, you shall never experience Pentecost. If Jesus cannot lead you by His word, how can the Spirit lead you by His witness?

Before you will be guided by the Holy Spirit's witness, you must become obedient to God's word: the word of your parents, the word of God's servants in

your life, the word of scripture and the word directly from Jesus! This is your cross which you must carry. When Jesus was speaking to the multitudes in Luke 14, He gave them the cross: *If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple* (Luke 14:26-27). The cross is in the word that proceeds from the throne of God, whether it comes through your father or mother, through a servant of God, through the Bible or directly as a revelation from Jesus to your heart.

As you may start to see now, the cross ought to begin its work in you even before your conversion. If you have loving and holy parents, they acquaint you early in your childhood with the cross. But there are many children today that are raised without the cross because they are living in a spoiled, prosperous, pleasure seeking and undisciplined society. They are raised to be self-assertive and to seek self-glory. When they find Jesus, they are glad, but they reject carrying their cross and instead demand to experience Pentecost in their lives immediately. They feel that God owes them the pleasures of His kingdom immediately since they forsook the pleasures of the world. But their motives are just as hedonistic as before they accepted Jesus! Their lives have become so used to the continuous spirit of **getting** that they are reluctant to participate in the cross bearing response of **giving**: the giving of their time, talent and will.

Not only do you need the cross to be a major part of your life between salvation and sanctification, but you also need it at the gate before your conversion! Jesus preached more on the cross than on salvation and sanctification put together. You need to do likewise. Jesus preached the cross to the multitudes before they ever were to begin discipleship: *When he had called the people to Himself, with His disciples also, He said to them, Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me* (Mark 8:34).

The primary message of churches to the unconverted masses is: *...You must be born again* (John 3:7). Jesus' primary message to the multitudes was: *whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple*. Jesus did **not** preach the rebirth to the multitudes! **He preached that they are to carry their own cross**. The only one Jesus ever told to be born again was Nicodemus. This is the only case. He called the unconverted to the cross! Why? Because Jesus had a vision of a holy church, a committed church, a

surrendered church. He did not want anyone in His company, in His church who had not encountered the cross.

He did not preach the rebirth to the rich, young ruler who came asking for eternal life. He preached the cross to him and ended by saying: *...and come, take up the cross, and follow Me* (Mark 10:17-21). The one thing that was lacking in his life and the lives of the multitude was not rebirth but the cross. If you are willing to deny self, take your cross and follow Jesus, you will become a new creature. But without doing that, you will not become a new creature.

Today, many stress conversion without the cross, and sanctification without the cross. You must preach the cross as Jesus did—even to the unsaved multitudes; and when there is a response to the cross, there is a place for the rebirth in their lives. Conversion must be entered with an understanding that you must carry your cross because without it, your discipleship will never start. When you walk with Jesus, He will further expand your view of the cross to prepare your heart for the work of the Holy Spirit.

Salvation and sanctification are two works of grace. However, without knowing and proclaiming the cross as the third work of grace, Christianity has become a pleasure seeking, “getting kind of religion.” It has produced a church that is disobedient, uncommitted and unholy. The call of the cross is a call for you to surrender. The work of the cross creates in you an obedient heart. The glory of the cross is that your heart is aglow with the Holy Spirit.

The key to revival is in the rediscovery of the **cross** prior to any work that God does in your life! Matthew 10:38 says, *And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me.* May the Lord Jesus fortify your soul to **do His perfect will always.**

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