

We Preach Christ Crucified

A six-session Bible Study by Carol Geisler

Lesson 5: “Father, Glorify Your Son”

“Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you.” John 17:1

Opening Prayer:

Heavenly Father, you were glorified in the obedience of our Son, our Savior, and in his death on the cross. We pray that we, by the power of your Spirit, might glorify you in lives of love and service in Jesus’ name. Hear our prayer in the name of Jesus our Lord. Amen.

Recalling Lesson 1: The Penalty and the Promise

Jesus took the *penalty* of death onto himself, suffering death in our place. In exchange, he has given us the *promise* of forgiveness and life.

Recalling Lesson 2: Crucify Him! Foretold and Fulfilled

The Savior *fulfilled* all that the Old Testament Scriptures had said of him. The Lamb of God “was *foreknown* before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you” (1 Peter 1:20-21).

Recalling Lesson 3: It is Finished!

Those things commanded by God in the Law were a shadow of the things to come. Jesus finished our salvation by the shedding of his blood on the cross. Those who have received this salvation have been “crucified with him.”

Recalling Lesson 4: The Word of the Cross

God chose what is weak and foolish in the world’s eyes to bring about our salvation – a baby in a manger who grew up to become a helpless victim on a cross and rose from death as our victorious Lord.

INTRODUCTION TO LESSON 5

Glory, however we might define it, astonishes and amazes us. It surrounds athletes and heroes and others whom we admire and honor. We would like to have a little of it for ourselves. Glory will be ours one day through faith in Christ Jesus. Paul spoke of this rich mystery of our future, “which is Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Colossians 1:27). But so often we want glory now – without suffering, without bearing the cross, without trust in Christ. We want to earn and achieve God’s favor and his glory on our own, by our own efforts. These fruitless attempts to

put ourselves right with God, without the cross of Christ, are sometimes referred to as “the theology of glory.”

A THEOLOGY OF GLORY

Read Exodus 33:17-23

[17] And the LORD said to Moses, “This very thing that you have spoken I will do, for you have found favor in my sight, and I know you by name.” [18] Moses said, “Please show me your glory.” [19] And he said, “I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name ‘The LORD.’ And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. [20] But,” he said, “you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live.” [21] And the LORD said, “Behold, there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock, [22] and while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by. [23] Then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back, but my face shall not be seen.” (ESV)

Scripture tells us, “The Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to a friend” (Exodus 33:11). Moses, however, hoped for a little more than that.

What did Moses want to see? God’s glory (v. 18)

Why was that not permitted? “Man shall not see me and live” (v.20)

What would the Lord show to Moses? His back (v.23)

How was Moses shielded as the Lord passed by? A rock, and God’s hand (v. 22)

Read Philippians 3:4-11

[4] though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: [5] circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; [6] as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. [7] But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. [8] Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ [9] and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith—[10] that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, [11] that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead. (ESV)

If anyone should have been able to earn righteousness before God through personal achievements, it was Paul – or at least that is what Paul used to think before he met the risen Lord.

What reasons did the apostle give for having “confidence in the flesh,” that is, confidence in the fact of his circumcision and in his personal status and achievements? All those things listed in v. 5 and 6.

Now that he trusts in Christ, what does Paul think of all those personal achievements?
Rubbish!

The Christians in Galatia were caught up in a struggle. Was faith in Christ Jesus sufficient for salvation, or did they need to trust in Christ and obey the Law of Moses? Was their hope of future glory found in Christ or in their obedience to the Law or in a combination of the two? The apostle Paul had stern words for them.

Read Galatians 1:6-9 and 3:1-9

[6] I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—[7] not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. [8] But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. [9] As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed. (ESV)

[1] O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified. [2] Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith? [3] Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh? [4] Did you suffer so many things in vain—if indeed it was in vain? [5] Does he who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you do so by works of the law, or by hearing with faith—[6] just as Abraham “believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness”? [7] Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham. [8] And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, “In you shall all the nations be blessed.” [9] So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith. (ESV)

What does Paul say to them? The true Gospel of Christ is the message that salvation (receiving the Spirit, counted as righteousness, justified) comes by faith.

What does he say about those who trouble them with a different gospel? “Let him be accursed.”

What does he say about Christ crucified? His crucifixion was public; “before your eyes.”

Did the Galatians receive the Holy Spirit through the preaching of the Gospel or did they earn the Spirit through their own works and obedience? Preaching of the Gospel.

What lessons do we learn from Abraham? He “believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.” And he was blessed by God.

Read Galatians 3:10 and 5:4

[10] For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, "Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them."

[4] You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace. (ESV)

What does Paul say about efforts to please God with our own works and obedience? They are futile ("cursed"), for one cannot abide by all things written in the Law.

What happens to those who attempt to justify themselves, that is, attempt to put themselves into a right relationship with God, through obedience to the Law? They become severed from Christ; fallen away from grace.

In what ways do we sometimes attempt to live according to a theology of glory? Whenever we trust in our works more than the gift of God given by Christ's death on the cross.

Note: Martin Luther coined the terms "theology of glory" and "theology of the cross" in his Heidelberg Disputation of 1518. The basic sense of these two theologies is that "glory" is us trying to please God with our efforts, while "cross" is us letting go of our efforts and trusting the work of Jesus alone for salvation. The distinction also helps us understand God's teaching and revelation about himself. Luther said that the theologian of glory "does not know God hidden in suffering. There he prefers work to suffering, glory to the cross, strength to weakness, wisdom to folly, and, in general, good to evil."

German theologian Hermann Sasse makes the distinction this way:

The theologian of glory observes the world, the works of creation. With his intellect he perceives behind these the visible things of God, His power, wisdom, and generosity. But God remains invisible to him. The theologian of the cross looks to the Crucified One. Here there is nothing great or beautiful or exalted as in the splendid works of creation. Here there is humiliation, shame, weakness, suffering, and agonizing death... [That] "God can be found only in suffering and the cross"... is a bedrock statement of Luther's theology and that of the Lutheran Church. Theology is theology of the cross, nothing else. A theology that would be something else is a false theology... Measured by everything the world calls wisdom, as Paul already saw, the word of the cross is the greatest foolishness, the most ridiculous doctrine that can confront a philosopher. That the death of one man should be the salvation of all, that this death on Golgotha should be this atoning sacrifice for all the sins of the world, that the suffering of an innocent one should turn away the wrath of God — these are assertions that fly in the face of every ethical and religious notion of man as he is by nature... God Himself has sent us into the hard school of the cross. There, on the battlefields, in the prison camps, under the hail of bombs, and among the shattered sick and wounded, there the theology of the cross may be learned "by dying"... To those whose illusions about the world and about man, and the happiness built on these, have been shattered, the message of the cross may come as profoundly good news.

-Hermann Sasse, "The Theology of the Cross: Theologia Crucis," in We Confess Jesus Christ, Concordia Publishing House, pp. 47-48, 50, 52.

Next Class: Theology of the Cross (Lesson 5b)

Closing Prayer

Lord Jesus, your power to save was revealed in the most unexpected way – through your suffering and death on the cross. By the power of your Spirit, help us to be witnesses to your life, death and resurrection so that others will see the redeeming power that is hidden and revealed at the cross. Amen.