

Grow in Righteousness

2. Don't Be An Enemy of the Cross

Philippians 3:17-4:1

This is the second Sunday of Lent, the season in which we talk a lot about sin and sing sad songs about the Cross. It's not the happiest time of the year for church attendance. As I said last Sunday, if you want to skip it and wait until Easter, you are welcome. You'll have lots of company. However, those who are willing to endure Lent will enjoy Easter. When they celebrate the gift of eternal life on Easter Sunday, they will appreciate it more, because they know how much it cost.

This morning I'm going to talk about sin and the cross some more. I'm going to talk about those whose sins make them enemies of the cross of Christ.

Paul talks about those who are enemies of the Cross of Christ. Doesn't that make your blood boil? Who would dare be an enemy of the Cross of Christ?

Well, in the immortal words of the cartoon character Pogo, "We have met the enemy, and they are us."

When Paul wrote about enemies of the Cross of Christ, he was not speaking of people who are opposed to Christ and the gospel of Christ. On the contrary, he was talking about Christians. That's why he has tears in his eyes when he talks about them. These are people who have professed their faith in Christ, who have given their lives to Christ. And yet their lifestyles make them enemies of the Cross of Christ.

Those people are here with us this morning. They are right here in this sanctuary, right now.

Who are they? They are us.

Often the way we live is contrary to what we believe. It is. You know it, and I know it. Often the way we live makes us enemies of the Cross of Christ.

The Cross of Christ is the ultimate example of sacrificial self-giving. The Cross is about loving people so much that you are willing to give yourself completely for their sakes.

The opposite of the Cross is a life of self-indulgence. When we live for our own pleasure, when our purpose in life is to make ourselves as happy as we can, we are enemies of the Cross.

We have become a self-indulgent society. We go from pleasure to pleasure, from amusement to amusement. We want to be entertained constantly.

Then, at the end of the day, we find ourselves feeling empty and dissatisfied. The reason is that we aren't fulfilling our purpose. We were created to give ourselves in loving service to others in the name of Christ. We won't be satisfied until we do that.

Christ received eternal life by laying down his life for us. When he tells us to take up our crosses and follow him, he is saying that is the way to eternal life for us as well. Real life, joyful life, meaningful life, life rich with meaning and purpose and fulfillment and satisfaction belongs to people who give themselves for others, using their God-given gifts to serve people in obedience to Christ.

Does that mean we are to deny ourselves all the pleasures of life? No, if we are to be effective in taking care of others, we have to take care of ourselves. We say we believe that.

What do you think would happen if you never took care of your car? What if you never changed the oil? Or tuned it up? Or cleaned it up? Or put gas in it?

When I was a student pastor, I served a little community outside of Mineola. There was an older couple in my church who actually did not have electricity or running water. This couple didn't have a car either. They walked everywhere they went. Well, they walked until someone who knew them would stop and give them a ride. One time I picked the old man up on his way to the store. I asked him why he had never got a car. He said, "I had a car once." He said, "Back about 1925, when people started using cars here in East Texas, I bought a car. I drove it around for a couple of weeks. Then one day it just stopped running. I called the car dealer, and he came out and looked at it. He said it was out of gas. Well, when I bought it, he didn't tell me anything about having to buy gas for it. I told him that if I had to buy gas for it, I didn't want it. Just take the thing back. And I have never wanted another car since then."

If you want your car to do what it's meant to do, you have to take care of it.

And the same is true of you. We were put here to take care of one another in the name of Christ. But if you don't take care of yourself, you'll run out of gas pretty quickly.

God expects us to take care of ourselves.

But that shouldn't be our mission in life. Our mission in life should be to take care of others.

Strangely enough, the more we are centered on our own needs, the more our needs grow. But when we turn our attention to other people's needs, we find our needs diminish.

There is a story about a reporter who was sent to do a human interest story at a local mission. This mission was serving hurricane evacuees. The reporter saw one man who helping dish out the food,

and he began talking to him. He asked him if they had been busy. The man said, "Oh yeah. I haven't stopped working since I got here. I've been dishing out food as fast as I can for most of the day." The reporter asked the man if he volunteered regularly at the mission. The man looked at him funny and said, "I'm no volunteer." The reporter asked him what he meant. And the man said, "I'm an evacuee. I came here this morning because I was hungry." The reporter asked him if he had gotten anything to eat yet, and the man said, "You know, I've been so busy feeding others that I forgot all about being hungry."

That's the cure for a self-indulgent life. Get so busy feeding others that you forget about being hungry.

Christ offered his life on the Cross so that we could live—and I mean really live. Christ really wants us to enjoy life to the max.

A self-indulgent life promises us a joy-filled life. But it can't deliver on those promises.

Don't settle for a life of amusement and pleasure. They can't give you what you are looking for. You were created to love. You were created to love God and people with all your heart. You were created to give yourself completely to God and your neighbors. You won't be satisfied until you do that. And when you do, you will find what you are looking for. That's where you'll find life that is abundant and eternal.

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