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THE POSITION OF THE CROSS

By Eddie Gilpin

The cruel form of execution known as crucifixion was practiced long before our Lord ever tabernacled in human flesh. Many guilty and innocent individuals suffered separation of body and soul through the use of this accursed means (Gal. 3:13). However, with the death of Jesus, crucifixion took on an entirely different meaning. The cross went from a contemptual mode of warning, punishment, and execution to an exalted symbol of hope of a horn again people.

Much has been said about the priority of the cross in our lives, the place of the cross in Christianity, and the impact of the cross of Christ on the world as a whole. But, what about the significance of its position on that eventful day? Although these other aspects are indeed significant, important, and vital, the position which the cross and its lifeless yet life-giving body held is also notable, consequential, and worthy of one's attention.

Looking at the cross from the standpoint of its position, notice first its placement vertically. From this view, the cross spanned the chasm between heaven and earth. The Bible reveals that "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up" (Jn. 3:14). Spiritual separation from God is the result of sin (Rom. 6:23). From the time that sin first entered the world until the crucifixion, the word of God pointed toward the coming Saviour who, through His death, would bridge the gap that man had made between himself and his God (Is. 59:1,2). Without the cross there would be no hope of heaven for obedient man (Heb. 6:19). Without the cross there would be no connecting point for sinful man and his just Creator (I Jn. 2:2). Without the cross the fissure would remain between God and man without the junction which the Intercessor provides (Heb. 7:25). The cross fills the void of separation between

heaven and earth for those who come to it in obedience and submission to the will of God. Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: NO MAN COMETH UNTO THE FATHER, BUT BY ME" (Jn. 14:6).

Second, notice the position of the cross horizontally. As prophesied, Jesus was "numbered with the transgressors" (Is. 53:12), being crucified between two thieves (Mt. 27:38). Man, being created in God's image, has a common bond of brotherhood that binds him with every other man created in that same image (Gen. 1:26, 27). No more vividly can that tie that binds be revealed than in the position of the cross.

Jesus died between two men. He must live among men today. Every relationship man has with his fellow man should have the Lord at the very center of it (Mt. 6:33). With Christ between marriage partners, divorce would be eliminated as the husband and wife grow closer to each other by growing closer to Him. With the Lord first in the lives of individuals involved in business deals, fraudulent transactions and the "ripple effect" of illegalities resulting therefrom would cease. With Jesus as the very heart and soul of all we do (which is the way it should be), crime would be no more and wars would be eliminated. The words of the oft-sung song would echo a new meaning to all mankind - "Blest be the tie that binds, our hearts in Christian love." As the mortar binds the blocks that form a solid wall, mankind can be bound together through obedience to the One who died between two men.

With these things in mind, "how say some" that the cross is of no effect? From the position which Jesus occupied between heaven and earth how can any reason that He was merely "a good man"?

As He hung between two common men, how can anyone reason that "fellowship is only vertical" (between God and man) and "not horizontal" (between men)?

The necessity of the cross is a theme that echoes through the annals of Holy Writ. Its place of prominence cannot be denied. Its message and meaning must take priority in the lives of all Christians. Likewise, its position between heaven and earth and its interposition between two common men are lessons that mankind would do well to take to heart. Truly the cross is the center of Christianity.

WHAT WOULD YOU HAVE DONE?

By Steve Williams
Levelland, Texas

"Were you there when they crucified my Lord?" Those haunting, yet beautiful, words of a popular religious song remind us of that tragic and glorious event, the death of Christ on Calvary. What if you could have been there? What if you were transported back in time as a first century person confronted by Jesus Christ? What would have been your reaction? How would you have responded to Jesus?

We tend to overestimate how honorably we would act in any hypothetical situation. We tend to find fault with the failings of others quite easily and, at the same time, imagine that we would act quite honorably. Would we? We easily find fault with the Jews who rejected Christ and sent him to Pilate. We are horrified at the mob violence which cried "Crucify him," when presented with Christ and asked for the release of an insurrectionist like Barabbas. We tremble in disgust at the cruelty of the Roman soldiers who mocked, flogged, and crucified our Lord. They probably enjoyed getting rid of another Jew, since the Jewish people were so stubborn and difficult to rule. And

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WHAT WOULD YOU

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then we shake our heads in disbelief at the apostles for running away in fear. After all they had seen Jesus do, how could they desert him so quickly?

But what would we have done if we were there? We like to imagine that we would have been a noble Jew who spoke in defense of Jesus at his trial. We like to imagine that we would have been a just Roman soldier who would have stopped the cruel punishment and mockery. We like to imagine that we would have been a zealous Jew who would have tried to motivate the crowd to plead for the release of Jesus rather than Barabbas. We may even imagine ourself as a noble apostle who did not abandon Jesus. "Were you there when they crucified my Lord?" No, but someone like you was. The sad reality is that no one defended Jesus or stayed with him, and we would not have either! Jesus died alone, and it would have been no different if we were there. Let us weep as Peter did and repent as the Jews did (Mt. 26:75; Acts 2:38).

For honesty is before honor; and though man must write his poems in sounding words, God's poems are printed best in the brave and silent duties of common life.

Edward Garrett

ACCEPTABLE OBEDIENCE

By Burl Curtis

Any obedience to God might seem acceptable to him. Only true obedience pleases God. Obedience can be corrupted as the "truth of God can be changed into a lie" (Rom. 1:25) and the gospel can be perverted (Gal. 1:6-9). Some things are necessary to have acceptable obedience.

God-taught obedience. He once "winked at ignorance but now commands all men to repent." (Acts 17:30.) No man can come to Jesus except God draw him. Jesus explains this drawing with these words, "It is written in the prophets, And they shall all be taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me." (John 6:44, 45.)

Willing obedience. God has always allowed mankind to make a choice regarding his commandments. Forced obedience does not please him. One of the final things God revealed was that "whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." (Rev. 22:17.)

Proper-order obedience. In God's plan some things come before others. Hearing the gospel comes before faith (Rom. 10:17), faith comes before pleasing God (Heb. 11:6), and obedience to the gospel comes before acceptable worship and service (2 Thess. 1:8). Paul found about 12 men in Ephesus who had been baptized incorrectly and he had them to start over. They were trying to obey second things before first things. Paul said, "Unto what then were ye baptized? And they said, Unto John's baptism. Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus. When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus." (Acts 19:1-7.)

Sincere obedience. We are commanded to lay aside all hypocrisies. (1 Peter 2:1.)

Humble, submissive obedience. The only one who can save us taught, "For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted." (Luke 14:11.)

Self-denying obedience. Jesus said to all, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me." (Luke 9:23.)

No-substitute, no-change obedience. Man is not permitted to add to or take from God's word (Rev. 22:18, 19), nor to go beyond it (2 John 9).

Complete obedience. God ever holds before man the demand for perfect obedience. (Matt. 5:48.) It is something he needs for reaching his highest potential. Man can completely obey in becoming a Christian, in maintaining the organization and worship of the church, etc., but in many things completeness will be a life-long challenge. God's grace is essential in beginning the Christian life and it is essential for its continuance. (See Eph. 2:8; 1 Cor. 15:10.)

Continuing obedience. The history of man shows clearly what happens when obedience is not continued. Adam and Eve lost the garden; people were destroyed in the flood; the children of Israel were destroyed; and Judas hanged himself. Acceptable obedience must put its hand to the plow and not look back. Jesus said, "No man having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God." (Luke 9:62.)

THINGS NEW

Modern man is talking of a "new age," "new things," "new ideas," etc. As a matter of fact there is "nothing new under the sun." "The new age," of which some speak boastfully, is no more or less than the old world in a new garb. The thoughts that men are thinking today are, in the main, the thoughts of men in ages past. It is true that advances have been made along certain lines. It is also true that modern man has not attained certain heights reached by the ancient man.

The only new thing of today is the **new creature**. When a man becomes a Christian, he is "A new creature"; "old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (2 Cor. 5:17). This is the only thing that avails.

BACK TO THE BASICS OR OFF TO APOSTASY

By Bill McDonough

The Buckingham Report which its publishers call An in-depth critique of the issues, people & events affecting today's Christian Leaders highlighted 'Southern Baptists tightening screws on the charismatics, divorcees, thinkers and free press'. In the two and one half pages devoted to this issue the writer reports that the Baptists are forcing their home mission boards to fire all missionaries and home employees who speak in tongues, are divorced unscripturally and remarried, or who doubt the 'verbal inspiration' of the scripture. Although local Baptist churches are autonomous the swing toward fundamentalism is being reflected on the local level as well. Editor James Buckingham, himself a charismatic, disagrees with the new firm stand of the Southern Convention leaders but admits that their 'conservative views' will probably be adopted by the majority of local congregations and those dissenting will be forced out of the convention.

When we take a look at congregations of the Lord's church we must answer some of these same questions that the Baptists are wrestling with. Can we continue to ignore the error being taught and practiced among us on the issues of instrumental music, divorce, even the plan of salvation and still be the Lord's body. Men claiming to be gospel preachers are writing that the 'instrumental music issue is a mute issue' and remain in their pulpits in full fellowship. Others are simply not addressing that and other issues and their silence is betraying them. Several years ago a study was conducted as to what churches of Christ taught, by men at one of our institutions of higher learning. They concluded that what we were not teaching was going to be our downfall rather than what was being taught. Many of God's people do not realize that they are in the ONE CHURCH or that one cannot be saved outside of that body. They don't understand why they sing without an instrument or take the Lord's supper every Sunday. Ask them to explain it to you and you will see that as high as 75% in some congregations do not actually understand even these simple teachings.

Who is to blame and how do we change it? We are to blame. Everyone who is an adult Christian. Not just elders and preachers but everyone who knows the truth and has not shared it. Have you looked at the literature some of the Bible

classes are using? Much of it is designed for use in the denominational market and thus doctrinal subjects that might be objectionable to those who are 'practicing a form of christianity' are left untouched.

It is extremely important that the fundamentals are taught over and over again to our children and adults or we will surely fall into the same pattern of apostasy that Israel did when they quit reading and studying the law. Have you seriously studied the list of things the Hebrew writer gives when he accuses those brethren of being spiritual babes? Can the majority of the people where you worship, that are considered 'mature Christians', give a Biblical explanation of the things listed in Hebrews 6:1 & 2 or is there still a need to go back to the basics in your congregation?

CONTRIBUTIONS

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1001 (?) USES FOR A BROKEN CLOCK

By Eddie Gilpin

The Psalmist proclaimed: "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth his handiwork" (Ps. 19:1). To view the magnificence of the world about us is but to bask in the warmth and glory of the love of God for mankind. The beauty and comfort of God's creations are indisputable evidences that God exists.

Along with the beauty and comfort that these provide and the realization that God is, there are countless lessons to be learned from nature about us. The ant (Prov. 6:6) and the spider (Prov. 30:28) are but two of God's creations that the Bible mentions and nature affords as object lessons to man.

While it is the case that nature provides various and sundry lessons, it is also true that the inventions of man can oftentimes be used to teach eternal truths. Many lessons have been prepared around such items as postage stamps, shoes, road signs, and carpenters' tools. Great are the lessons and illustrative the applications of such instructive endeavors. The illustrations might have been fashioned by man, but the truths they teach originated with God (Dt. 34:6). A few days ago this writer stumbled upon one of those object lessons taught by such an invention.

The clock which hung as part of the decor of my office wall had stopped. I proceeded to disassemble it to find out the problem and repair it if possible. After slow and careful search, I determined the source of the problem and realized that it was beyond repair. The clock, though not an expensive model, had a very attractive wooden case and a "turn-of-the-century" type face. I took the works out of the frame and disposed of them. I then put the remaining pieces aside hoping to be able to replace the works and thus repair the timepiece.

I proceeded to begin studying for the class I was to teach on Wednesday evening, and eventually forgot about the broken clock. The lesson for that particular class was on faith. Ultimately, my studies led me to the second chapter of James. As I

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1001 (?) USES . . .

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proceeded to read, verse 17 of that grand epistle brought the events of that morning to a surprising culmination. James through inspiration declares, "Even so faith, if it hath not works is dead, being alone". The broken clock again caught my attention. There I sat with one of the greatest object lessons that could have been afforded me, and it was a broken invention of man about which I had given thought to throwing out with the morning trash.

The wooden case of that clock with its antique face once again graces the wall of my study. The clock, however, has some minor modifications. It has no hands and no mechanical works. In their place is an inscription which reads: "Even so faith, if it hath not works . . .".

There is a lesson to be learned from just about anything in life. Nature teaches us many wonderful things. The inventions of man grace our storehouse of knowledge with bountiful valid principles. And, yes, sometimes even the broken things contain a rich lesson to be learned, an eternal truth to be taught, and a profitable principle to be applied. "Even so faith, if it hath not works is dead, being alone."

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HAPPINESS

Happiness goes out from the heart before it comes in. It never by any chance stays at home. You can harvest it for the common good, but you cannot store it for your individual use. You lend it, but you cannot borrow it. You can earn it but you cannot buy it. You can spend it, but you cannot accumulate it.

A man must contribute to the stock of human joys before he can participate in its profits. To seek happiness without giving it is a futile quest, and all our longings for it, if we have not learned to give it to others, are as empty bottles in the wine cellar of the soul. Happiness never really was any good in the world but to give away. (Unknown.)

* * * * *

The best things are nearest; light in your eyes, flowers at your feet, duties at your hand, the path of God just before you. Then do not grasp at the stars, but do life's plain common work as it comes, certain that daily duties and daily bread are the sweetest things in life.

THE CHURCH OF CHRIST

1. The Bible is its only guide (Romans 1:16; I Thess. 2:13).
2. Wears a Biblical Name (Romans 16:16).
3. Established at the right place (Isaiah 2:2, 3; Acts 2).
4. Established at the right time (Joel 2:28-32; Acts 2).
5. Established on the right person (Matthew 16:18; Acts 2:36).
6. Saved are in it (Ephesians 5:23; Acts 2:47).
7. Its members are enrolled in heaven (Hebrews 12:23).
8. Membership in it is obtained by obedience to God's commands including baptism (Acts 2:41-47; I Corinthians 12:13).

GOD'S PLAN OF SALVATION

1. Hearing the word of God (Romans 10:17; Acts 16:32).
2. Believing what is taught (Mark 16:16; Hebrews 11:6).
3. Repentance (Acts 2:38; Luke 13:3; Acts 17:30).
4. Confession (Romans 10:9, 10; Acts 8:37).
5. Baptism (Acts 2:38; Mark 16:16; I Peter 3:21; Romans 6:3, 4).
6. After the above five steps, faithful Christian Living (I Peter 2:11, 12; Revelation 2:10).

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