

IN DEPTH BIBLE STUDY: SPIRITUALITY OF THE CROSS CLASS 13 and POWER POINT 13:

The Theology of the Cross: THE HIDDENNESS OF GOD:

THE THEOLOGY OF THE CROSS (TOC) VS. THE THEOLOGY OF GLORY (TOG)

1. Just as complacency is shattered by the L, in everyday life such complacency is shattered by the cross---that is failure, frustration, disappointment, difficulties, struggles, and suffering. Both the L and the cross drive us to an ever deeper and more -intimate dependence upon Christ who meets our sin and our suffering in His cross.

THE HIDDEN LIFE:

2. It's been said that contemporary Christians lack a theology of suffering, we want to avoid it at all costs and do not know what to do with it or what it means. The fact of suffering to many means that there can't be a God. An all- powerful, all loving God would never allow one to suffer as people assume, but would want to make everyone happy. Since there is so much suffering in this world it means that God does not exist. Suffering is taken to mean that they have been rejected by God. The assumption is that Christians will not suffer if they have enough faith as God will grant healing, restoration, and success.
3. Our penchant for TOG is that entire churches are wrapped around promises of good health, financial success, not only by following Biblical principles, but 'name it-claim it, acts of faith. L Evangelical Theology of the cross offers a theology of suffering, but more than that, it offers a practical, realistic, and spiritually dynamic paradigm for the Christian life.
4. First it must be emphasized that the TOC while it talks about the significance of suffering, by no means advocates suffering as a means of spiritual enlightenment. The TOC is not ascetism, the cultivation of unpleasant experiences so as to gain spiritual favor or some salutary mortification of the flesh. The more elaborate ones are practiced by many of the world's religions; like fasting, scourges, and self- torment involve suffering. These all belong to the TOG with heroic acts of self- denial and self- glory. L, even though we

practice Lenten disciplines are rarely ever ascetic. Luther taught that our cross is never self-chosen or self-imposed, any crosses we choose can have that affect. Rather bearing the cross has to do with precisely the suffering we do not choose for ourselves. The trials and difficulties are imposed on us from the outside and we have no control!

5. Cross bearing does not necessarily involve the dramatic suffering of the cancer patient or the bereft parent, though it may. Bearing the cross deals with the petty, ordinary obstacles and frustrations of everyday life. A later chapter will show one's trouble in one's vocation. Boredom, mild depression and bad moods can be crosses, no less physical pain and emotional turmoil. No matter if the problem is mundane or traumatic, they are all "trials!" How much we try to avoid them, they are part of everyone's life! The TOC teaches how they play an important role in the life of faith.
6. The TOC does not offer some pat answer for suffering, even though new theologies attempt to give a new explanation for why God allows suffering. For Luther struggling with the 'why' is at the essence of trial. Luther even describes struggling with wrestling with God. Sometimes it seems like God is contradicting Himself when it seems God thwarts ministry to which one has been called. Luther cites Abraham's struggle with God's seemingly contradictory commands when he was told to sacrifice his son and Jacob literally wrestled with God!
7. "The most severe trial says Walther Von Leowenich quoting Luther is when it "comes upon a person who believes they have been forsaken and rejected by God." Such a trial only comes to the greatest of saints. Ironically in many traditions that would be seen as a spiritual failure, doubting one's election, and feeling God's absence. For Luther it is sign of the greatest sanctity, (thankfully) for spiritual giants.
8. What advice does Luther give in such cases? None other than cling to the Word, for the Word is none other than Christ! Over and over in his writing Luther tells those doubting if they have been saved or question if God loves them, or to those who believe they committed a sin so great God can't forgive to read God's promises and hold them to His Word. To remember the objective fact that they have been baptized, to receive communion and to cling to the cross of Jesus.

9. To believe in God in spite of one's feelings is faith. This is why trials, big and small are occasions to exercise faith. "For we live by faith, not by sight!" (2 Cor. 5:7). In the darkness, when we can't see can only listen to God's voice, where upon we can draw closer to the "Hidden God!"
10. Another reason trials can have a salutary effect is that they drive us to prayer. Moments of desperation—when we know in a panic that we can't control what's happening, in a car wreck, cancer diagnosis, when a loved one is fighting for their life, we instinctively turn to prayer. Even non- believers do!
11. For a Christian these moments bring out our utter dependence upon God and a realization that at the heart of faith. When we are in desperate need, we pray with an intensity, a heartfelt passion, that is particular and genuine and authentic. "Pray like this," says Gustav Wingren quoting Luther, "can hardly be made by anyone who is not in deep need and desperation. 'For what sort of prayer would it be if need were not present and pressing upon us?' Again, crying out to God in the depths of one's need is an act of faith and occasion in which the hidden God who answers prayer draws near.
12. How does this all play out in ordinary life? How does faith and prayer and the hiddenness of God transform day to day living? That will be the focus on the next chapter. For now, it must be remembered that God is hidden. That is, He cannot be seen or experienced in the crosses we bear, He is nevertheless genuinely present, a presence grasped by faith.
13. Furthermore, the spiritual life is itself hidden. "For you died," says St. Paul, and "Your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ your life, appears, then you will also appear with him in glory." Colossians 3:3-4. United in Christ in baptism is hidden. At the resurrection and life eternal in heaven there will be no crosses. God will manifest everything clearly, and then be the time for glory. But for now the Christian's life is hidden with Christ!
14. Next time, how crosses influence us to grow in holiness.