

What is the Cross?

First Bible Lesson: 1 Corinthians 4:12

"And labour, working with our own hands: being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it:"

Second Bible Lesson: 2 Corinthians 4:10

"Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body."

Golden Text: 1 Corinthians 9:19

"For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more."

"Anybody who wants to follow me but is unwilling to take up the Cross after me cannot be my follower". (Luke 14:27).

Brethren, our gospel this afternoon is about the "Cross". After that celebrated gospel on: "*What is Brotherhood*," during the Pentecostal Convention, many had thought that the gospel on Cross and Star would follow. But since my Father did not give the signal throughout the convention that I should do so, I could not do anything more than to allow His will to prevail. This afternoon Brethren, it is His pleasure to give the signal that I continue. Therefore, I shall be failing in my duty as His mouthpiece, if I do not give you the gospel on 'Cross' today.

Does Cross Mean Alms Giving?

Some think that to give alms means carrying the Cross. Others think that to heal the sick by praying means carrying the Cross. Many others think that to pray three times a day means carrying the Cross. Yet another class of people think that to pay tithe, freewill offering and charity means carrying the Cross. Cross has been made into different forms. Some hang it around their necks; some hang it on their doors. Do all these make up the Cross that Christ says we should carry?

We all know that Christ fell down with the Cross as he was carrying it to Calvary. Does carrying the Cross then mean that piece of wood that he carried? Without the Cross the world could not have been saved. The Cross is light, and it is also heavy. For the world to be in perfect peace each of us should agree to carry the Cross. By what means does one convert a smoker, a snuffer, a fornicator, a thief, a murderer, a back-biter, or a liar? It is by carrying the Cross. **If we all should decide today to take up the Cross, the sins of the world would vanish immediately.**

Then what is the Cross? Is it vision and prophecy, building of houses to people, giving food to people, buying dresses for people? If Jesus had only healed and prophesied without carrying the Cross, His work could have come to nothing.

It Means Bearing One Another's Burden

If you rent bicycles for brethren going on ministry work, to make their job less difficult, you are not carrying the Cross. Cross is not huge as you might have imagined. It is very small, it is light but it is very heavy. What is the Cross? Cross means bearing another man's burden without complaining; tolerating all kinds of sinners, the murderers, the thieves, the back-biters etc.

If you stand firm with Christ without fighting back whenever you are falsely accused, or spat upon, or jeered at, disgraced, and insulted without just cause; if you are informed that someone has planned to shoot you and you fail to run away when he takes his aim at you, then you are carrying the Cross. To carry the Cross does not cost anything. To be able to carry the Cross *you must resign yourself completely to God*. You must be loving and humble. You must esteem others better than yourself. You must not be envious. If Jesus did not possess these qualities he could not have carried the Cross.

If you move with a cunning man without hurting his feelings for being tricky and crafty; if you can stay with a notorious liar very happily, without stirring up his anger when he tells you a lie; when one persecutes you falsely and seeks to destroy your life by all means, yet you tolerate him wholeheartedly, you are carrying the real Cross.

The Turning Point in Saul's Life

Saul was the greatest enemy of Christ. He travelled from place to place, intimidating the Christians. He took permission from the high priest to go from Church to Church to arrest, imprison and kill Christ's followers. He witnessed the stoning to death of Stephen, and took custody of his garments. But on that fateful day on his way to Damascus, Christ knocked him cold on the ground. He was flat on his face and could not move an inch when he heard a voice saying: "*And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?*" (Acts 9:4)

He answered, "who art thou Lord." And the voice said, "I am Jesus whom thou persecutest." He trembled and asked Jesus what he would want him do. The Lord told him to arise and go into the city; there, he would be told what to do. Those who travelled with him to Damascus were shocked for hearing only a voice without seeing anybody. Saul rose from the ground, a completely blind man. He was led by hand into the city of Damascus.

There, Jesus told one Ananias, a disciple to go into the street called Straight, and enquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul of Tarsus. But Ananias told Jesus that Saul had been very much against Christ especially his Saints. Ananias told Jesus that Saul had authority from the Chief priest to have all those who call on the name of Jesus bound. What did Jesus tell Ananias? He told him to go his way for he had chosen Saul as a vessel unto Himself to bear His name before the Gentiles and Kings and the children of Israel. If Saul had seen Jesus face to face he could have killed him if it were possible. Jesus caught him red-handed, and did not kill him but rather made him a vessel unto Himself.

Coming to One's Wit's End

When you stay with a wicked person, allow him to finish playing his wickedness because if you stop him when he had not yet finished, you are blocking his salvation. That cunning man who tricks you daily must be allowed to continue in his profession until he comes to his wit's end. That liar who lies to you every day must not be forced to stop lying. If he does not stop lying by himself how can he be saved? You have to tolerate them all. This is what is meant by carrying the Cross.

If you can rejoice in tribulation and humiliation; if you can tolerate abuses from people, be they young or old, then you are carrying the Cross. When people have bargained to get you involved into trouble, yet you continue to treat each of them as your friend; rendering to them any necessary help that they may demand; continuing to bring them nearer and nearer to yourself; this is Cross bearing. Though you may know that the more you go near, the more death stares at you, but on the other hand you are giving them life. Finally, the power of life in you will kill the evil ways in them and you have given them life. This is carrying of the Cross.

If you cannot carry the Cross, you cannot convert an evil doer. If you get annoyed with him you have failed in your duty as a Cross bearer. It requires determination and endurance without complaining. As a Cross bearer, you must always be prepared for the worst, all in the name of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

First Bible Lesson: 1 Corinthians 4:12

"And labour, working with our own hands: being reviled, we bless: being persecuted, we suffer it".

When you are accused falsely and you bless such a person; when one assassinates your character and you bless him; when one hates you without reason and you bless him; when you do not complain for being painted black; when you go on your knees to ask God to forgive your enemies wholeheartedly, you are carrying the Cross.

When one wrongs you and hurts your pride; yet, you go to him to tell him that you have offended him instead, and ask for forgiveness, you are carrying the Cross of Christ. You can now understand what the Cross means. Without this kind of Cross you cannot convert a single soul. This is the Cross I am asked to preach to you. When you smile at every persecution, smile at false accusations; when you continue to do good in the midst of strong temptations; when you are hated because of the good things you have done, yet you are not discouraged, you are carrying the Cross.

The Sentence

If you built a house for a man and instead of him being appreciative, he turns around to abuse you; if you repay him in the same disgraceful way, you have willingly dropped your Cross. If you drive him away from the house, your sin becomes greater than his. If you give out your

house for rent and because your tenant does not pay his rent, you eject him from the house, you have not even lifted up the Cross.

If you see a thief in your house, and you shout thief, thief, without allowing him to achieve his objective, you are not carrying the Cross. You may say that this is humanly impossible. But I tell you that it is humanly possible. This is the only way you can carry the Cross. When you have him arrested and imprisoned, have you stopped him from stealing? This method in the end will make him a hardened criminal. You have not changed him. But when you allow him to steal what he wants, he will be in peace and you also will be in peace. Supposing by shouting thief, thief, he cuts off your head or have you completely maimed; who is at a loss?

By simply asking him to steal what he wants you have set his mind thinking; much more when you tell him that you are prepared to help him carry the stolen goods out. He may come to his senses and may be ashamed of himself; he may even confess to you why he has come to steal; he may become converted because you have not wounded his pride. From that simple but unbelievable sentence, "*Steal what you want to steal*," you have done the greatest work in the sight of God.

Argument That Will Not Help

If somebody comes to you with one Naira and tells you that it is only thirty kobo, do not start an argument with him. Agree that it is what he says it is. You do not gain anything through argument. In the end you will still be wiser because, after a while, he would get at his wit's end. It is there that he will know that he has been making a fool of himself.

If someone comes to tell you that he has refrained from all manner of sins, don't ask him any question, just agree, for sooner or later, you will know whether he has refrained from sin without any loss of face. Do not say that you are good when you are not. This may make your Cross burdensome. Do not look for life; you may lose it. Allow yourself to be persecuted, accused falsely or disgraced. The more you suffer these things, the more you see the glory of God in you.

If Abraham did not tell the king that Sarah was his sister, God could not have revealed the relationship between Abraham and Sarah to the king. If we agree to be cheated, the glory of God will certainly be manifested in us. Preaching alone does not change a man to live a Christian life. Carrying of the Cross is the shortest means of converting a soul. If we agree to bear one another's evil way; if we are convinced that the fall of our brother is ours, we all will carry the Cross without looking back. The work will be made lighter until the Cross which is fire burns away the sins in us, and no one will know.

Second Bible Lesson: 2 Corinthians 4:10

"Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body".

Why Not Defend Yourself Said Pilate

Pilate said to Jesus, have you nothing to say in defense against the accusation heaped on you? Jesus did not do anything more than to take up the Cross and resign Himself completely to providence. This put an end to the unnecessary struggle to save His life. When you witness false accusations, false persecutions and disgrace, do not apply worldly wisdom. Because by struggling to save your life, you may lose it.

It requires complete resignation to God; for by counting your life as lost, you will regain it. That is God's wonderful way. Your faith in carrying the Cross will reveal the Christ in you to your persecutors and false accusers. If you can endure false allegations and put up a bright countenance both within and without, don't you think people will call you Jesus? There is no other Cross apart from enduring evil, tolerating fornicators, adulterers, backbiters, murderers, thieves, etc.; and you have won their souls. Though it is not a simple thing to do carnally, but with complete resignation to God you have nothing to worry about. You gain nothing by driving them away. They gain nothing by being separated from you. You cannot stay alone; for a tree cannot make a forest; but you gain everything by accommodating them. Put on the life of Jesus Christ and you can do everything you want to do.

Judas Reported To Jesus

What kind of Cross are you carrying when you get flared up by the slightest provocation? When Peter, James and John told Jesus that Judas Iscariot was keeping the harlots happy with the money from their common purse, Jesus did not get flared up. Before he was made the treasurer, Christ had known him well because Jesus had the power of reading the heart of all human beings. If Jesus had decided on any line of action against Judas, He, Jesus, would have fallen. The Cross could have meant nothing to Him. If He had thought of entrusting their purse into the care of another disciple, all His work could have come to an end. In whichever way you may look at the carrying of Cross, it means the same thing; the determination and the endurance to tolerate all kinds of people. How many people in the world today can carry the Cross? If we cannot carry the Cross how can we promote the work of God?

Jesus knew before Judas decided to betray Him. To prove Himself right He told his disciples that one of them would betray Him. If it were you, you would have sought for a way to kill Judas. But for the sake of the Cross, Jesus allowed Judas to accomplish his aim.

When you see a thief coming to steal your clothes and you allow him to steal them you are carrying the Cross. If you chase him out, you are obstructing the work of God. Let us carry the Cross, for by carrying the Cross the world will be in peace.

Golden Text: 1 Corinthians 9:19

"For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more".

Be Servants Unto Others

The main reason why we should make ourselves servants unto people is so that we may draw them away from their sinful ways. When we have done this, we have therefore drawn them nearer unto ourselves. Even though we are not under any suffering, we must endure other people's sinful ways so that they may be saved.

You can now see why we accommodate all kinds of people, even though they may be false accusers and false persecutors. Unless we allow the wicked man to torment us for righteousness' sake we cannot be true Cross bearers. If Christ did not allow Himself to be tortured, there would have been no salvation for mankind, and the world would have been lost. Let deceivers go on deceiving us. Let false accusers continue to accuse us. Let us suffer afflictions and tribulations. Let rogues continue to steal our things. *“He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still.” (Rev 22:11)*

Let not our Spirit succumb to the evil planning of this world. Let us not be tired by the craftiness of the neighbors we have helped so much. Let us agree without complaining when they show us three things instead of five things; for in the end, we will be blessed, they will be saved, and the glory goes to our Loving Father.

Vultures abound where you find corpses; equally do the birds of the air congregate where ripe palm fruits are found. Where you find foolish men, there too will you find wise men. Let us for the sake of our brethren who have wandered away from this truth, agree to tolerate them by carrying the Cross at all costs.

Those who have ears to hear, let them hear. May the Lord bless the preaching of His Holy Word. Amen!