

## Lesson Seventeen THE CROSS

In continuing our study in the book of *Pilgrim's Progress*, we are now leaving the House of the Interpreter which was the illuminating ministry of the Holy Spirit. A word about this. We found out several things in this particular house, but recognize that the book is written from a book form, and just because Bunyan describes the Christian leaving the House of the Interpreter, do not understand that to mean that the Holy Spirit's ministry is over in the life of the Christian. Bunyan merely had to give this in a pictorial form so as to go from one scene to another. But no, the Holy Spirit is going to go ahead of the Christian and lead him right on into the Celestial City. So when we talk about leaving the House of the Interpreter, in actual Christian life, we are not talking about leaving the ministry of the Holy Spirit behind and going on. No, He will be there throughout our whole life to guide us through whatever pitfalls and trials we come in contact with.

We will now begin in the portion after he has left the Comforter, who encourages him to maintain in the way that leads to the city. We begin with these words:

***Now I saw in my dream, that the highway up which Christian was to go, was fenced on either side with a wall, and that wall was called Salvation.***

That is a quotation from Isaiah 26:1 - the wall of salvation.

***Up this way, therefore, did burdened Christian run, but not without great difficulty, because of the load on his back. He ran thus till he came at a place somewhat ascending; and upon that place stood a Cross, and a little below, in the bottom a sepulchre. So I saw in my dream, that just as Christian came up with the Cross, his burden loosed from off his shoulders, and fell from off his back, and began to tumble, and so continued to do, till it came to the mouth of the sepulchre, where it fell in, and I saw it no more. Then was Christian glad and lightsome, and said with a merry heart, He hath given me rest by his sorrow, and life by his death. Then he stood still a while, to look and wonder, for it was very surprising to him that the sight of the cross should thus ease him of his burden. He looked, therefore, and looked again, even till the springs that were in his head sent the waters down his cheeks. Now as he stood looking and weeping, behold, three***

***shining ones came to him, and saluted him with, "Peace be to thee:" so the first said to him, "Thy sins be forgiven thee;" the second stripped him of his rags, and clothed him with change of raiment; the third also set a mark on his forehead, and gave him a roll with a seal upon it, which he bid him look on as he ran, and that he should give it in at the celestial gate: so they went their way. Then Christian gave three leaps for joy, and went on singing.***

Then we have the particular words of his song that he sings:

***Thus far did I come laden with my sin,  
Nor could aught ease the grief that I was in,  
Till I came hither: What a place is this!  
Must here be the beginning of my bliss?  
Must here the burden fall from off my back?  
Must here the strings that bound it to me crack?  
Blest cross! blest sepulchre! blest rather be  
The man that there was put to shame for me!"***

This is a most moving portion of the book indeed. Remember, we are talking about a man who has already entered the gate of conversion. At that time, the normal Christian experience is that one has his burden removed. I repeat, the normal Christian experience is that when one enters the gate of true conversion of repentance and faith, then they have the guilt and burden of their sin removed and they are given peace with God. But that isn't always true. As it was in Bunyan's own personal experience, this would emphasize that there was a time lapse between his actual conversion and when he gained assurance of his acceptance with God. In other words, salvation or true conversion does not always give one an assurance of his acceptance with God at the same time. That is why the Cross comes a little bit further on down the road than the gate. But normally you will see the cross clearly at the gate so as to obtain your assurance of salvation.

The Christian is traveling on from the Interpreter's house, and he is fenced in on either side with a wall. That wall was called salvation, and in between these two high walls was what is known as "the way," which incidentally is what the Christian faith was called in the early centuries. It was known as "the way." Why do you think it was called that? What does Jesus say in John 14:6? He said, ***"I am the way."*** That is what the early Christians were called. So now, Christian is in "the way" but he still has this burden of the guilt of sin upon his back.

Now as Christian walks along in the way, we find that he suddenly comes to the cross. It was his looking upon this cross that suddenly with no explanation given, the burden breaks off of his back rolling down the hill into a sepulchre, or a tomb. Then Bunyan says that he never sees it anymore. Now of course this is the time Christian is given a clear vision of the work of Christ upon the cross, His burial in the tomb, and where his sins had gone. There is a modern song which says, *"Living He loved me, dying He saved me, buried he carried my sins far away, rising He justified freely forever, one day He is coming, oh glorious day."*<sup>1</sup> The Christian had heard that before or else he would not have been able to enter the gate. However, it was here that he saw the cross in a light that he had never seen before. It was here that he saw that his sins had been placed on the One on the cross. The Christian did not see Jesus hanging on the cross as a dead Christ, but he saw the empty cross. That is one of the basis of our salvation. We do not worship a dead Jesus on a cross. We worship a risen Lord who had died on a cross. He died bearing our sins and was placed in the tomb carrying our sins upon Him. Now He has arisen and ascended to the right hand of God as a risen LORD. Bunyan saw that his sins had been placed on Christ, and that Christ was no longer on the cross or in the tomb. Jesus certainly didn't take our sins into the presence of the Father so the sin question was settled as to our relationship with God. So for Bunyan, that is when peace came, and with that peace came assurance. Again I repeat that this is true in many lives of many Christians. I could probably ask tonight how many of you had assurance when you were initially converted? How many of you knew you were saved and your sins forgiven when you were initially converted? How many of you, did it take a time period before you really were assured of this? Do you not see that there are some variations even here tonight? This does not mean that you were not necessarily converted at the cross, but it meant that you were given enlightenment upon the doctrine of the cross. Then you saw what Christ had truly done with your sins, how they were placed in the tomb, and He arose with victory. As I think we have already brought out, assurance is not essential for the "being" of a Christian, but it is for the "well-being" of a Christian. You can go to heaven without assurance, but it sure makes the road a lot easier when you have assurance. You

**We do not worship a dead Jesus on a cross. We worship a risen Lord who had died on a cross.**

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<sup>1</sup> *One Day* by J. Wilbur Chapman

can go to Springfield, Missouri on a clear day driving 55 mph and get there in one hour and ten minutes. But on a foggy day, you have to just creep along. Have you ever had the occasion of driving through the fog having to look out the window to find the white line in the road? Some Christians are like that, and that is the way they go to heaven, just creeping along through a fog. But you ought to have assurance, you ought to have joy, you ought to have victory and go to heaven in the 55 mph zone, knowing that Jesus Christ has dealt with the question of sin on the cross of Calvary. When you see that work is yours, then it ought to produce an assurance. Again I would point this out, a preacher cannot give you that assurance. A lot of preachers try to do that. They try to read a dozen verses of Scripture and use a little positive psychology to make a person think they are assured, but only the

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Holy Spirit of God can reveal to you that your sins are forgiven. So when Christian went through the wicket gate and asked Goodwill, "can I get this burden off my back," what did Goodwill (or Christ) tell him? He said, "Just be patient, it will come off in due time." It seems like we have the

idea today that just as soon as a person shows any interest at all in Christ, we are supposed to give him or her an assurance of his or her state before God. Now remember, it is the Holy Spirit who showed him his need, it must be the Holy Spirit through the Word which will also give him his assurance. When the Holy Spirit gives that assurance and the insight as to where the sin burden has gone, down into the sepulchre, never to be seen again, then the individual will truly be able to leap for joy. Then his faith will not just be because some man or preacher, priest, or the Pope himself, told him that his sins were forgiven, but God Himself had told him that he was in a right relationship with God. So we see then that the way leading up to the cross is a very narrow way causing the burden to fall away.

Now lets look at these three Shining Ones. The Christian is standing there weeping tears of joy. How many of you shed tears of joy when you were saved? How many didn't? It won't be a sign that you were not converted if you didn't weep. I shed no visible tears, but yet my heart was breaking. Many people will say, "You didn't get it unless you got it the way I got it. Unless you cried, wept, and unless you did this, you just don't have it." Now remember, that is not the Biblical basis for our acceptance. But as the individual stands

there and has been made to see his acceptance with God in the person of Jesus Christ, he is standing there humbled and broken. Oh, he is rejoicing in his heart to think that God would do something for such a sinner as he is. While Christian is standing there, we have three Shining Ones that come to greet him. Who are the three Shining Ones? They represent the three Persons of the Trinity. God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit are each going to come and give a message to the individual who is standing here.

Now first, we have the message of the Father, and that is **"Peace be to thee, thy sins be forgiven thee."** That is a prerogative of God. Only God can forgive sins. Only God can exercise the prerogative to forgive an individual's sin. Remember it is God in whom all of us have sinned against. Now the prerogative is with the offended party to either forgive or not forgive. We find that Jesus Christ holds the keys of death and hell. (Revelation 1:18). A lot of individuals believe that it is Satan who holds the keys of death and hell, but the revelation of God says that it is Jesus Christ who controls the keys of death and hell. Why? It is because he has conquered death and hell, and has risen to the throne of God where all authority has been given unto Him to give eternal life to as many as the Father has given Him. So the Father exercises the right to say, **"Thy sins be forgiven thee."**

This question of forgiveness of sins has been one which has troubled many, many different people down through the centuries of human history, because it basically involves two questions that Calvary has to deal with. The first question is this: "How can sin be forgiven to the worst sinner?" How can God do that? Let's take the individual known as Saul of Tarsus, later known as the Apostle Paul. After his conversion he acknowledged, **"I am the chief of sinners."** (I Timothy 1:15). Prior to his conversion, Paul had killed Christians and persecuted the church. How could God forgive a person such as this? That is one question, but there is another question which is wrapped up in the cross of Calvary and that involves this: How can that forgiven party be given a deeper hatred of sin? Now if Saul of Tarsus is going to be pardoned, then how is Saul going to be given a hatred of sin so that he will mourn when he desires to kill someone or such as that? It involves this question here. Let us say that this young man here has committed murder and is in prison. He is a murderer at heart and loves to kill people. Society has put him behind bars in order to protect society. I exercise my right as a governor to pardon him, and set him free right back out where you live and where your wife and kids are walking the streets. Now he goes forth and does the

same thing that put him in prison. What are you going to think of me as a governor? Does not our own society rise up when we hear about someone like Richard Speck who murdered all those nurses a few years ago, now that he is going to be released back into our society, free perhaps to do the same things again, and we cry out, "Where is justice?" It is true that he has been pardoned, but where is the justice of it all? Now is that the way God does with a sinner such as Saul of Tarsus? No, there is a two-fold work of the blood of the covenant. It not only pardons this young man's sin, but also contained in the blood of the covenant is a work of the Holy Spirit producing a new heart in him so that he is sent back out to you with a different nature than what he had before. Thereby, God is the Just and the Justifier of those who believe in Jesus. This is set forth in this old hymn, "Rock of Ages, Cleft for Me."<sup>2</sup> I want to read the words to you. We sing it here ever so often, and I hope we always will. Now listen to the words and watch for the two-fold work of the blood of the covenant.

*"Rock of Ages cleft for me, Let me hide myself in Thee; Let the water and the blood, From Thy wounded side which flowed," (Now catch this) "Be of sin the double cure," (What is the double cure?) "Save from wrath and make me pure."*

Do you see that is what the blood of Christ does? It is a double work, in that God pardons the individual from his sin, but he also turns about that individual toward Himself so that

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now he has a hunger and thirst after righteousness. We are going to see that this is not of perfection, or else the individual would never have to hunger and thirst and would never have to confess his sin before God the Father. The new Christian now has a

new direction, a new King, a new Lord, and a new Master. This is both brought about by the blood of Christ. It is the blood of Christ that pardons us of our sin, and it is the blood of Christ which creates within us a new heart.

Look at Hebrews 10:15 - ***"Whereof the Holy Ghost also is a witness to us: for after that he had said before, This is the covenant that I will make with them after***

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<sup>2</sup> By Augustus M. Toplady

***those days, saith the Lord, I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them;***" That is purity

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of heart, internally written within so that out of that heart there now flows a desire to be what God would have us to be. We love what God loves, and we hate what God hates, not of perfection, but when we do violate one of the laws of God, then that work of the Holy Spirit causes us to say, "Oh my, when will that day come when I shall sin no more?" There is another song that we could look into which says, "*When all the ransomed church of God shall be saved to sin no more.*"<sup>3</sup> Until then the blood of Christ shall never lose its power. You see the blood has a continual cleansing effect upon us. Look in verse 17 of the same chapter, "***And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more.***" There is pardon. The same blood which pardons is the same blood that purifies. That is our hope. I am glad that God didn't just pardon me of my sin and left me to purify myself, because I know how impure I am. I also know that without the cleansing of the blood of Jesus Christ I will have no power to be able to want to live the godly life that is desirable before God the Father.

We see then that the first Shining One has the message of the forgiveness of sins, "***peace be to thee.***" Now the second Shining One, who is God the Son, comes and He stripped Christian of his rags and clothed him with a change of raiment. This is what the Bible refers to as "Justification" which comes by faith. Justification is that act of God whereby we are put right with Him. It is an act which is done for us on behalf of Jesus Christ whereby we are put in a right relationship with God. It is strictly a legal thing. How many of you have been a Christian for thirty years or more? How many of you have been a Christian for less than ten years? There are several different periods here tonight, so listen carefully. The people who have been converted for thirty years and the people who have been recently converted, the older convert is no more justified than the new convert. In other words, justification is not that you are just partly pardoned. Justification is a full and free pardon so that the newest saint, as well as the oldest saint, is put the same legal basis as being just before God. However, when we come to sanctification, the matter of growing in grace in the Lord, then that is a different matter. The old Christian never becomes more justified than

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<sup>3</sup> "*There is a Fountain*" by William Cowper

when he was first introduced into Jesus Christ. That is a work that is done once and for all. That is what Christian saw here at the cross when his rags of righteousness were stripped from him, and he was given a change of clothing. What happened here with this young man, is that he has had his sins stripped from him and imputed to Jesus Christ. We can understand that, but justification is more than that. It is taking the righteousness of Jesus Christ and charging it to the believer's account. Take this for example. If I went down to the bank where I owed a debt, and before I arrived, one of you kind people went there and said to the bank president, "put this to the account of Jim Gables." When I go there, I find my account is settled, whereby the debt I owed has been charged to another and that another person's righteousness has been charged to me. Now I legally stand before God the Father in a justified state. When we come to the matter of sanctification of life over the power of sin, that is a progressive thing which takes place day by day. Paul said, **"I die daily."** (I Corinthians 15:31), but he was also living daily. So he said, **"I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me."** (Galatians 2:20). So we see the victory of forgiveness of sin, a pardon once and for all. But the blood of Christ doesn't stop there, it continues to work in our hearts to produce a righting of God's will internally within.

Let's now go on to the third Shining One who comes and sets a mark upon Christian's forehead and gives him a roll with a seal upon it. This third Person, of course, is God the Holy Spirit, and He comes and puts a seal upon the believer. This is the fruit of the Holy Spirit. What is this seal? It is the down payment of the Holy Spirit which is given us until we are perfected in heaven. Go to the book of Ephesians chapter 1 verse 13 where we read: **"In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory."** When we first believe, we are justified, but we are not yet made perfect in experience. That awaits us. Paul says, **"Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus."** (Philippians 3:12). That is glorification - a perfect state whereby we shall be enabled to do the will of God as the angels in heaven do now. How many of you would like to be in that state?



Would you like to be able to do the will of God as the angels in heaven do it? That is glory. That is heaven. But until that time comes, the Holy Spirit comes to dwell within us, and internally we have now been given what is called the "down payment" of the Holy Spirit who is going to abide with us until we reach that state of perfection. What does the Holy Spirit give us, and what does He teach us? He is going to teach us holy things. He is going to teach us the holy will of God and work in us to bring about our desire for the holy will of God. This past week in a series of evangelistic meetings in another church, we studied, **"Blessed are they that mourn" or blessed are they who are the pure in heart.**" (See Matthew chapter 5). These verses describe those who are earnestly seeking to enter into a state whereby they shall never sin anymore, and they shall be able to serve God perfectly. That desire has been implanted within us by the work of the Holy Spirit of God. This is the reason that at the same time we find ourselves loving the Lord, we find ourselves loving our sin. David prayed this prayer: **"Unite my heart to fear thy name."** (Psalm 86:11). What is a heart that needs to be united? It is a divided heart, is it not? When a person is brought into a saving relationship with Christ, he has now been given a new nature, but it is not a nature that has yet been perfected, and thereby he says with Paul, "I find a desire to serve God, but I also find something else." What is that? "I find within me a nature of sin." (See Romans 7). How many of you will be honest as Christians and say that you know that your heart is divided? Let me see your hands. How many of you have a perfect heart? How many of you know that you love the Lord, but at the same time you find a desire for the things of this world? Do you see this divided thing? David, says, **"Unite my heart to fear thy name."** When a Christian has this attitude that has been blessed by God, it is an evidence that God has truly taken up His abode within him. Here is a person that when they find their heart *prone to leave the God they love*, then what do they do? They do like the songwriter<sup>4</sup> does, he says, *"Oh come and tune my heart to sing Thy praise."* So this characteristic, this desire to hunger and thirst after God is also a work which is done through the blood of the covenant.

Let's go to a passage of Scripture in Ezekiel chapter 9, in the Old Testament. This is a very sobering passage of Scripture, and yet Jesus said it describes a "blessed person." Where do we go when we hunger and thirst after righteousness? Where do you go when you

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<sup>4</sup> *"Come Thou Fount"* by Robert Robinson

get hungry? Do you go to a garbage can, or do you go to a table that is spread with food? Where does a Christian go when he is starving for spiritual food? He goes to the Bread of Life, he goes to the Water of Life, whereby he is encouraged, in that he does not live by bread alone. So, this condition whereby we are made to see that we are not yet perfect, drives us to the cross to eat. It is by this whereby we grow in grace. The more that we eat and feast off of Christ, the stronger we become. Do you ever go out and call the hogs and put the "slop" out there before them? When they are hungry, they will come running. It has been a characteristic that the Holy Spirit of God works in the heart of a believer to cause him to hunger and thirst after His righteousness. So that when we do that, we flee out of ourselves and go to the table which is the Bread of Life.

Now, look in Ezekiel 9, a very sobering passage which we will close with tonight. Jerusalem is about to be destroyed and there are only a few people that are going to be spared. Lets find out who these people are and how the death angel was told that he could know who they were. God knows His people. In II Timothy it says **"the foundation of the Lord standeth sure, having this seal, the Lord knoweth them that are His."** (II Timothy 2:19). They are marked by God. It also says in that same text, **"Let everyone that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity."** Thereby they are marked by men. That is, what God sees, and what men see, is a hunger and thirst after God. Ezekiel 9:1 - **"He cried also in mine ears with a loud voice, saying, 'Cause them that have charge over the city to draw near, even every man with his destroying weapon in his hand.' And, behold, six men came from the way of the higher gate, which lieth toward the north, and every man a slaughter weapon in his hand; and one man among them was clothed with linen, with a writer's inkhorn by his side: and they went in, and stood beside the brazen altar. And the glory of the God of Israel was gone up from the cherub, whereupon He was, to the threshold of the house. And He called to the man clothed with linen, which had the writer's inkhorn by his side; And the Lord said unto him, 'Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and that cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof.'"** God says, "I am going to destroy the city, the people of Israel, but I am going to spare some of them. I want you to go and with the inkhorn put a mark on the foreheads of the ones I am going to spare." The death angel asks, "Lord, who are you going to spare, how am I going to know who they are?"

The Lord says, "they are the ones who are going to be sighing and crying because of the troubles and the sins of Zion." I wonder if God sent notice tonight to the First Baptist Church of Osceola that He was going to send judgment upon us, and He said to the death angel, "you take the membership role and go down it. Here are the ones I want you to mark. I want you to mark those who are crying over the spiritual condition of the First Baptist Church." I wonder how many would be marked. Does your heart break when you see our coldness? Does your heart break when you see our indifference to those around about us? Does your heart break when you see the sins of our young people and those in our midst who have so little interest in the things of God? My friend, if that is true in your life, it is an evidence that the Holy Spirit is revealing to your heart that you long to see God at peace with men, and that you long for a state in which sin will never more cause misery, heartache, and so forth. That is an humbling thing. I hope your heart is that way tonight. I hope you can look through the needs of this church and that you can say, "Oh God, revive us again!" I hope that you can't just sit back and care less whether anybody was saved, or whether anybody was having troubles with their spiritual life. I hope that your heart is such that if God looked down tonight, He would say, "Mark that young man. Mark him, he is one of mine. He is concerned about the spiritual state of Zion." Do you have that mark tonight? Do you have the forgiveness of God and a free justification of your sins being forgiven? Are you clothed with the righteousness of Christ? Has the Holy Spirit implanted a holy desire in your heart to be like God? If so, may you be enabled to do as this person does, stand and leap for joy because of your accepted state with God.

Richard Powell, would you please sing the song, "its Real." Search your heart to see if you can say this tonight.

(Words of the song "*Its Real*" by Homer L. Cox 1907)

*Oh, how well do I remember how I doubted day by day,  
For I did not know for certain that my sins were washed away;  
When the Spirit tried to tell me, I would not the truth receive;  
I endeavored to be happy, and to make myself believe.*

*Refrain:*

*But it's real, it's real;  
Oh, I know it's real;  
Praise God, the doubts are settled,  
For I know, I know it's real!*

*When the truth came close and searching, all my joy would disappear,  
For I did not have the witness of the Spirit bright and clear;  
If at times the coming judgment would appear before my mind,  
Oh, it made me so uneasy, for God's smile I could not find.*

*When the Lord sent faithful servants who would dare to preach the truth,  
How my heart did so condemn me as the Spirit gave reproof!  
Satan said at once, " 'Twill ruin you to now confess your state;  
Keep on working and professing, and you'll enter heaven's gate."*

*But at last I tired of living such a life of fear and doubt,  
For I wanted God to give me something I would know about,  
So the truth would make me happy and the light would clearly shine,  
And the Spirit give assurance that I'm His and He is mine.*

*So I prayed to God in earnest, and not caring what folks said;  
I was hungry for the blessing; my poor soul, it must be fed;  
Then at last by faith I touched Him, and, like sparks from smitten steel,  
Just so quick salvation reached me, oh, bless God, I know it's real!*