

STRAIGHTWAY

"And straightway they forsook their nets, and followed him" [Mark 1:18].

CHRISTIAN PURITIES FELLOWSHIP

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THE CROSS: "SOURCE OF ALL GRACE"

by Dr. O. Talmadge Spence, Founder & President
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Across my years, through many readings and the meeting of many people, I have deliberately sought out several questions over and over again. These questions have been born in my own mind and heart as being very important to the Christian life. A simple, short outline could be given as follows:

Seven Simplistic Questions

1. How old were you when God-consciousness came to you as a child?
2. What would you give as a singular noun to identify your best choice to describe who you think God is to you?
3. What is that singular attribute of God most needed in the Christian life?
4. What is the greatest problem of the home in our generation?
5. Since there are no "good" or "bad" children as far as conduct is concerned, what is the basic problem of children in a home?

6. What alone is the singular need in the salvation of a sinner?
7. What is the source of saving grace?

Responding again in simplicity, we might quickly outline what seems to be the best responses to the questions I have received. I will also make certain observations which caused my questions. They are representative of forty years of enquiry.

The God-Conscious Child Question

First, the average age of most children who become conscious, personally, of God, was ages five or six. This marks the weaning time of the child and is most appropriate for the biblical mentionings of children between the weaning time and twelve years old. The second most responsive age number has been twelve, the age of the male boy obligated to three Jewish feasts at Jerusalem in the spring, summer, and fall of the year. Ages five and twelve mark the en-

trance of the **response** of the child and then the **responsibility** of the child. This was also characteristic of my own life as a child.

The God-Noun Believer Question

Second, when the choice of a noun (not a proper noun) is made by the individual, responses are usually that of “judge,” “king,” “friend,” “good,” or other. Therefore, many do not think of Him as “Father.” The Apostle John constantly emphasizes “Father;” yea, even imperatively commands believers to acknowledge both the Father and Son. In our time, there is a present deficit of this emphasis upon the Father, and therefore, because of the breakage of many homes, the emphasis upon “Father” is being lost. Many, many Americans, including many professing Christians, cannot cry “Abba Father” in their understanding of God. The very test on our faith in the Lord Jesus is marked by our faith also in the resource of God the Father. This marks an insight to the “why” of a broken home; they have not true fathers. Even in damaged children it is being discovered that they have lost the meaning of

“Father;” and desperately seek the re-establishment of a “father” in their lives.

The God-Attribute Believer Question

Third, the singular attribute of God greatly needed in the lives of His people is His “Holiness.” Our generation has lost reverence, piety, worship, and humility before the transcendent, Almighty God. Too many professing Christians learn too late that God is “holy.” Worldliness and carnality mark the order of the day; even many Christians live without a consciousness of the holiness of God. The believer who desires a quest for the holiness of God in life is too often thought of as a legalist. But also, too often, the person who accuses the believer of this kind of legalism must mark himself as a libertine, a worldling. A larger area of truth is often rejected in all of this, in that too many Christians know very little of the **Christian life** and too many pulpits do not preach and exhort its principles.

The God-Family Home Question

Fourth, the greatest problem in the home in our generation is the presence of **misplaced headships**. There is no other harm so unfortunate as this mistake in any family. We must soon find a restoration of the male, godly head to the home as the Holy Scriptures reveal, or still greater damage will come in our nation. **Misplaced headships** include much more than the lack of the Christian leadership of the father as the head of the home. It is rooted in this truth, but other things are involved. Any over-dominant wife is a misplaced head; a weak husband is a misplaced head; untrained child-

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ren dominate parents and is another misplaced head. No matter what our postmodern generations say, God the Father is the Head of Christ; Christ is the Head of the Church; the Husband is the Head of the wife and the home. The purpose of the custom of longer hair on a woman was to simply to confirm the testimony, my husband is my head (I Corinthians 11).

The God-Children Training Question

Fifth, there is a basic truth here: there are no good or bad children, only untrained children. We must see this as a great but simple truth. The postmodern view of children, as presented by the sociologist, sets forth the child as in need of total freedom. This really means the undoing of the training of the child; it knows the lawlessness of the child instead. The “sparing” of the rod (discipline) not only spoils the child, but also indicates that the Father hates his son. However, we should understand that the moral success of these principles trains the child aright because of the power of the Word of God which supports these principles. It is not the actual hand and rod that has the power to accomplish this. The untrained child has no other way to be trained and this training will never be lost throughout the lifetime of the child. Of course, we must realize that this training (discipline) is not the Power or Promise of the Personal salvation of the child. That is known only through the redemption of Christ and by grace alone.

The God-Grace Sinner Question

Sixth, yes grace alone is the singular, greatest need of a sinner.

Mercy precedes the coming of the grace of God into the heart of the believing Christian. Mercy is God’s heart as expressed in God’s feeling and response to man’s misery. This is, undoubtedly, involved in God’s gift of prevenient grace, which is God’s enablement for man so man may want to want God if he wants Him. This is not when the sinner is regenerated. Even through natural theology God’s provision is revealed that man should live, and move, and have his being, that he might “feel” (or long or want) after God. But the grace of God itself is that precious provision, itself, to actually redeem and regenerate man, the sinner, to become a child of God through the Cross of the Son of God. The prayer of Jesus on the Cross, “Father, forgive them for they know not what they do,” marks the mercy extended, through the Cross, to temporarily postpone judgment, to give them merciful times, to come, by God’s goodness, to repentance, to be saved by grace, and grace alone.

The God-Cross Source Question

Seventh, all of our questions in this article have brought us to the source of all grace; the source is Golgotha, Calvary, the Cross of the Lord Jesus. It is at the Cross where all our sins were placed upon Jesus, the Sin-Bearer; it was at the Cross that Jesus, the Just One, became the justifier of the believer in the righteousness of God. This is the fundamental of the Gospel; this is the core truth of which the cardinal truth, the central truth, is eternally fixed. No wonder the songwriter stated, “So I’ll cling to the old, rugged cross till my trophies at last I lay down.” There is a deadline here; there is a final resting, forgiving, and

saving place here. Of course, the resurrection of the Lord Jesus gave triumph here; the ascension gave an eternal priesthood here; and all saints are saved eternally here. The Cross is the believer's all and in all here, on earth, and in eternity.

The Fundamental, Core, Cardinal Center

Man has sought his "New Republic," his "summum bonum," his "Utopia," his "Fountain of Youth," etc. The Christian has truly come to believe in the fundamental, core, cardinal, central truth of the universe: "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures" (I Corinthians 15:3). We must notice and underline this verse; it is revealed in the great, classical chapter of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. To some, this writer may seem to run the risk of an over-emphasis on the doctrine of the Cross, but I doubt that it can be rightfully proven so. There is the greater risk of trying to have the incarnation, Virgin Birth, sinless life, and teaching, miraculous life of the Lord Jesus, without the Cross. There is the greater risk of believing in a resurrection, "Many infallible proofs," ascension with Session and Intercession without this truth of the Central Cross of the Lord Jesus. A resurrection without the Cross? how could we manage it? Only Plato's "immortality," in a limited state of immanence could be our hope and that would be limited and false. Probably the Greek view of immortality is man's best offer of explanation through all history. The Romanist's "purgatory" is only a by-product of such Greek speculation. Life and immortality was brought out into the open light through the "gospel." This

Gospel, this "Good News," centers in the fundamental core, cardinal truth of the theology of the Cross.

Luther's "Justification By Faith"

Whereas Luther's Ninety-five Theses nailed to the door of Wittenberg Cathedral, October 31, 1517, effected the best spiritual success, yet Andreas Bodenstein von Karlstadt posted 51 theses for disputation at the same Cathedral, earlier, on April 26, 1517. Being the dean of the theology faculty at Wittenberg, Karlstadt's theses chiefly concerned the doctrine of justification, a discovery he had made through the **vera theologia** of Augustine he had discovered earlier the same year. It is also known that Johannes Eck posted a series of theses at Ingolstadt for public academic disputation, related to the vexed question of "usury." It was the custom of that day for a faculty member to pose and post such items for academic disputation on the door of their cathedral or church.

The Heidelberg Disputation of 1518

Martin Luther had been a member of the Augustinian Order since September of 1505, and he was invited to speak before that order in 1518 at the request of Johannes von Staupitz, the leading Augustinian at Heidelberg. It was there that Luther presented his "Theology of the Cross," and probably for the first time as a public lecture or sermon. This presentation was made on April 26, 1518, and centered around the scriptures which revealed the "hidden cross" as set forth in the words of God to Moses and placing him in the "clift of the rock" (Genesis 33:18-23). The sermon itself is very hard to locate now

in the printed books on **The Heidelberg Disputation**, as only references are made to the sermon itself.

Luther's "Theology of the Cross"

Undoubtedly, Luther's "**theology of the cross**" is far more than an historical idea. We believe it became the fundamental, core, cardinal and central truth to the entire theological system of Luther, and outweighs his famous emphasis on "Justification by Faith," if we are talking about a doctrinal priority for the fundamental, core, cardinal, central truth.

We are in great need, in our time, of returning to Luther's presupposition of "the theology of the cross." Without it our own theology will perish! There are other reformers, like Karlstadt, who picked up the word "grace," and rightly so, and magnified it because of the influence of Augustine himself. But is not the Cross of Calvary the source of all grace?

The Center of Theological Systems

When noticing the various theological systems which have proliferated since the Protestant Reformation, we see several doctrinal emphases as the fundamental, core, cardinal, central truth. Some have set "sin" or "depravity" at the center of their system. Others have placed "dispensation" at the center; or "holiness;" or "love;" or "grace."

All of our hearts will be indebted to our Puritan Fathers, of the seventeenth century, for their precious, pious, scholarly emphasis upon the grace teachings of the Lord Jesus, in the Word of God. They are our spiritual classics. Their use of the phrase "sovereign grace" will long be re-membered among us. Of course,

we all know that that particular phrase is nowhere mentioned in the entire Bible. God's revelation simply gives us the word "grace," and this singular word is not one whit less than what our American Puritan and Pilgrim Fathers meant by "sovereign grace."

Each emphasis should be noted with care as we study theological systems in our time. When and if we ardently follow theological systems, there are four doctrinal roots and centers historically: Romanism, Augustinianism, Pelagianism, and Lutheranism. These are the earliest roots from which the later systems developed. Each Christian since the Protestant Reformation has followed one of these four namesakes, or someone else who followed these namesakes. All that we know and believe we learned from books and teachers or teachers who wrote books. It is evident that God, Himself, through "holy men," revealed Himself through His Book, too. Martin Luther gave us the core, cardinal, central truth of the Cross, and this declared the great central truth of the Word of God. The Bible is Christocentric and the Cross is the center of Christology. Theologians may differ on many points in their various biblical distinctives, but all of us would do well to fix the doctrine of the Cross as the centerpiece of our theology and our life. Only one great truth was given in the Bible before the foundation of the world. No other truth in God's Word occupies a revelation that far back in time and eternity. That truth was of "a lamb slain;" this Cross was seen, a lamb was crucified! This was the source of all grace, the answer to the greatest of all questions given by man.

**THE
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The Twenty-second Year of the College

“The Central Theme of the Central Cross”

March 31-April 7, 1996

**Foundations Bible College
I-95 Dennings Road Exit 77
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President

Dr. O. Talmadge Spence, Th.D., D.D.

Vice President

Dr. H.T. Spence, Th.D.

The Foundations Annual Bible Conference

“The Central Theme of the Central Cross”

Schedule

Palm Sunday— March 31

- 9:30 AM *Dr. H.T. Spence, Vice President*
Foundations Ministries and Schools
- 10:30 AM *Dr. O. Talmadge Spence*
- 7:00 PM *Film Presentation*

Monday— April 1

- 8:00 AM *Dr. H.T. Spence, Speaker*
- 10:00 AM *Dr. Ronald J. Ausdenmoore,*
Dean of the Jacobus School
Foundations Bible College
- 7:00 PM *Dr. Dennis Lowry, Academic Dean*
Foundations Bible College

Tuesday— April 2

- 8:00 AM *Dr. Kenneth Williams, Pastor Prospectus*
Emmanuel Bible Church
Myrtle Beach, South Carolina
- 10:00 AM *Forum: “The Word of the Cross in the Word.”*
- 7:00 PM *Rev. Lawrence Jackson, Speaker*
Bethel Baptist Church
Glen Burnie, Maryland

Wednesday— April 3

- 8:00 AM *Rev. Lawrence Jackson, Speaker*
- 10:00 AM *Forum: “The Offices and Callings of the Cross”*
- 7:00 PM *Dr. Lee Wiggins, Speaker*
Wesley Bible Church;
Jackson, Tennessee

Thursday— April 4

- 8:00 AM *Dr. Lee Wiggins, Speaker*
- 10:00 AM *Forum: "Luther's Theology of the Cross"*
- 6:00 PM *Buffet & Meeting: Board of Trustees*
- 7:30 PM *Dr. Richard Dobson, Speaker*
Frankfurt, Kentucky

Friday— April 5

- 8:00 AM *Dr. O. Talmadge Spence*
- 10:00 AM *Dr. Richard Dobson, Speaker*
- 1:00 PM *Annual Christian Purities Fellowship Meeting &*
Annual Joint Meeting of all Boards
Board of Trustees
Board of Visitors
Board of Elders and Deacons
Academic Board
Administrative Board
- 2:30 PM *Tour of Anvil House by the President*
- 7:30 PM *Oratorio: "The Prince of Passion Week"*

Saturday— April 6

- 7:30 AM *Prayer*
- 8:00 AM *Gratis Work*

Easter Sunday— April 7

- 6:30 AM *Easter Sunrise Service*
- 9:30 AM *Dr. H.T. Spence, Speaker*
- 10:30 AM *Dr. O. Talmadge Spence*
- 7:00 PM *Film Presentation*

**The Twenty-second Year
of the College**

**The Foundations Fellowship Churches
(Foundations Graduates)**

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Bedford, Indiana

Rev. Jon Alexander, Pastor

Calvary Bible Church

Knightdale, North Carolina

Rev. Bradford Lowry, Pastor

The Church of the Holy Scripture

Hamilton, Virginia

Rev. David F. DeBose, Pastor

Emmanuel Bible Church

Myrtle Beach, South Carolina

Rev. Gary L. Dean, Pastor

Foundations Bible Collegiate Church

Dunn, North Carolina

Dr. O. Talmadge Spence, Pastor

Dr. H.T. Spence, Associate Pastor

Grace Memorial Bible Church

Clarksville, Pennsylvania

Rev. Paul E. Spence, Pastor

King's Chapel Church

Burgaw, North Carolina

Rev. Nathan T. Morton, Pastor

Scripture Memorial Church

Schuylerville, New York

Dr. W. Kenneth Williams, Pastor

Rev. Paul N. Cameron, Associate Pastor

Straightway Bible Church

Ladd, Oklahoma

Rev. Steve Aday, Pastor

“Operation Richmond”

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Best Western Airport Inn

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