

DOING AWAY with the CROSS

by Vern Kuenzi

The Lord has spoken three times over the last six years about the absence of the cross in the current vision and affairs of the church. These are among the strongest and clearest words the Lord has ever spoken to me. At the time of each of these speakings, the Lord put me into a desolate place so that I would get the point and there would be no confusion that He was speaking and about what He was saying.

The first time was... at a major men's evangelistic meeting here in Honolulu. At that meeting were the best of speakers, the best of musicians, an upbeat evangelistic message, and an altar call to accept Jesus as Savior. I tried to fit in with the flow of the meeting and went down onto the arena floor to hopefully distribute my quota of pledge cards, but I was ineffective and became very grieved in spirit and walked back up to my seat and sat slumped there until the meeting was over. I thought the problem was with me. I didn't even want to attend the next day's meeting, and as I lay in bed the next morning stripped of all enthusiasm, I was very surprised when the Lord clearly spoke through David Wilkerson's latest newsletter and said, "They have done away with the cross." Obviously the very best that we can come up with in terms of evangelistic efforts amounts to nothing if we do away with cross. It might look good and sound good but still be wood, hay, and stubble. The cross is the wisdom and

power of God, and without it the captives remain bound.

About two years ago, I attended a charismatic home meeting near my house here in Pearl City. A known minister was invited and signs and wonders and prophetic utterances seemed to flow. Saints were slain in the Spirit and some claimed healings. The next morning when I woke up it was as if the Lord had pulled a plug and drained every bit of spiritual life from me. All I could think of was, "I'm not gonna make it." I have never been so empty in my life. But there was a small "Free Grace Broadcaster" pamphlet beside me on the bed which I picked up and began to read. The article that presented itself was titled, "The Glory of the Cross." And as I began to read that short article, I could feel the life flowing back into me. The Lord spoke clearly through that article by saying, "God forbid that you should glory in anything but in the cross of Jesus Christ." Apparently I had been glorying in many things that night other than in the cross.

Most recently (in mid-2002, about August) I was reviewing several books written by popular authors who embrace and oversee a current apostolic/prophetic movement. The common vision of those authors is that the church is called to overhaul the political, economic, financial, and educational systems of this nation before Jesus returns. I felt so out of step with this vision that I became unsettled for several days and wondered again what was wrong with me. I tried to buy one of the books at the Christian bookstore where I was browsing it, but the cash register was malfunctioning and I went home without the book feeling a check in my spirit. The

next day I went back to the bookstore and I picked up that book again and began to reread portions of it. I asked the Lord to show me where I was in error, and I also asked Him to keep me from being deceived. Suddenly the Lord seemed to say, "Where is the centrality of the cross in this vision?"

Three times the Lord has spoken severely about things that seemed like "good" things, and in all three cases, the problem that He identified was the absence of the cross. In all three cases, the pain of the experience was very real...

As "good" as it might seem to overhaul the economic, judicial, financial, and educational systems before Jesus returns, that is not the finish line that the Bible describes... We see a remnant of saints who overcome satan by the blood of the Lamb, the word of their testimony, and by loving not their lives unto death. The book of Daniel concludes by saying the end of the age will come when the power of the holy people has been shattered. We see a snapshot of this in the lives of the two witnesses of Revelation 11.

Together the books of Daniel and Revelation establish the true vision for the church at the end of this age, and that vision is not victory in a worldly sense, but victory through demonstration of the wisdom and power of the cross. The true remnant church is destined to follow Jesus and walk the path of the suffering servant. God's eternal purpose is to involve His saints in the defeat of the devil, and that defeat will be accomplished only as the church walks in demonstration of the wisdom and power of the cross...

We're setting ourselves up for the same mistake that the nation of Israel made 2000 years ago when they expected a political messiah. Jesus did not come to overhaul Rome, and the remnant church is not destined to overhaul Babylon, but to come out of her. Her testimony in the midst of Babylon is what will set the captives free.

The danger of having our vision slightly off-target could cause us to align with the wrong side. The antichrist is not going to come in a red suit with horns. He is going to come as a deceiver and a counterfeit. The nature of the counterfeit is to be as much like the real thing as possible, but still not be the real thing. He's going to come with an agenda of "good" things, but they will be things that have done away with the cross.

The agenda of the devil is very simple. If he can get us to skew our vision just a little bit off center by doing away with the centrality of the cross, he will have won the victory. We will not then be in position to demonstrate the wisdom and power of the cross through our lives. We will be fighting against the cross rather than embracing it.

The great dividing issue at the end of this age will be the issue of the cross of Jesus Christ. Those who embrace it as the Holy Spirit leads them will overcome. Those who do not, and rely on the understanding and abilities of natural man, will fall away. If our sin and our shortcomings do not bring us to the place of total realization that not one good thing resides in us in the flesh, then

we have missed what it is that the Lord wants to work in us. Paul came to the place where he realized that he was the chief of sinners, and that no good thing was in him, and that he could glory in nothing but in the cross of Jesus Christ. His words were not spoken in wisdom, but in meekness, fear, and trembling, and he recognized that only by the grace and mercy of God and by the power of the Holy Spirit could he ever offer anything of significance to a dying world around him.

The things that are coming upon the earth in these days are designed to purify the church, and are likened to birth pains. It is out of great tribulation that a great multitude emerges who have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. We must understand that this process is an outworking of God's love, not His wrath. His wrath will follow great tribulation, and will be directed only toward those who choose not to repent.

I once heard a man preaching on TV and saying, "God would never do that to His bride." (He was referring to the question of her going through the great tribulation) He did not understand the work of the cross in the perfecting of the saints. His doctrine had done away with the cross.