

1 Corinthians #2
Direction Decides Destiny
1 Corinthians 1: 10-18

In 1 Corinthians 1:18, the original Greek verbs indicate continuous action in the present tense, as reads this way, "For the preaching of the cross is to them that are perishing foolishness: but unto us that are being saved, it is the power of God." Here we have two contrasting experiences of life: "being saved," and "perishing." **Paul highlights them for us, showing us that neither of them is static, that both suggest movement, a journey along some road.** The category of which each one of us belongs is quite clearly defined by our attitude toward the message of the cross: "...to them that are perishing, foolishness; but unto us that are being saved, it is the power of God."

In its context, we find this tremendous statement set against a church situation which was full of strife, envy, and a divisive spirit. They were divided about which preacher they were going to follow. Verse 12 tells us that some said, "I am of Paul...And I am of Apollos...and other said, And I of Cephas." Still others were saying, "I do not belong to any of them, I am of Christ."

To that Corinthian church, split by selfishness attitudes and demonstrating all the evidences of immaturity, Paul is determined not to take sides, but to focus on Christ, as seen in verse 2, "I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified." **In this significant epistle you will find that Paul constantly brings his hearers back to the cross.** He is convinced that the answer in each controversy and to every failure, as well as all hope for the future, is "the word of the cross."

As we study this passage of scripture, I want us to first of all to consider these two conditions which Paul describes for us here: "perishing" and "being saved." To comprehend the meaning of that dreadful word, "perishing," we need first of all to fully understand the meaning of the words "being saved."

These days the word "salvation" is rather like a well-worn coin, which is being passed from hand to hand until it is almost unrecognizable. In many instances it has been reduced to a convenient little formula, and if you fit the formula you are all right. **But in the New Testament sense, the word "salvation" has both a negative and a positive implication. Negatively, it means being saved from danger, being made secure; positively, it is emancipation from sin: sanctification.** It is deliverance from guilt and the forgiveness of all our sins by virtue of the blood of Jesus Christ our Lord shed for us on Calvary.

Joy abounds in the life of the saint who realizes the depth from which he has been delivered. And that understanding gives him the courage to gladly

announce to those which whom he meets, **"I have been saved."** But it is not long before such a man begins to recognize that the sins from which he has been forgiven are only the symptoms of a problem that goes far deeper. **Soon he begins to realize that many of the same old feelings, the same old desires, and the same old pulls of the flesh are still present.** It is from that situation that many a Christian cry out as the psalmist in Psalm 51:10, **"Create in me a clean heart, O God."** But the truth of the matter is that God has created in you a clean heart, He has taken up residence in your heart, and He has imputed to you the righteousness of Christ himself. The problem is not with your salvation, the problem is with your flesh. And herein lays the problem.

Let me remind you that just because you have been saved, does not necessarily change your life's situations. Salvation just might not solve all of your marriage problems. Salvation just might not solve all of your financial problems. **Salvation just might not solve all of your family problems.** Now please do not misunderstand what I am saying, because salvation will give you a different perspective and a different understanding. But the truth of the matter is this – your life did not get messed up in a day and it just might not get fixed in an instant. And if you are not careful, you might be saved, but still living a defeated life.

In the New Testament sense of the word, "salvation" is not merely a negative thing, the forgiveness of sins. Salvation is that and much, much more. When the Lord saves us today, He does not bar the gate through which Satan enters and attacks us, but He gives us victory, whereby we can say with Paul in Romans 8:37, **"...we are more than conquerors through him that loved us."** When the Lord saves us today, He does not simply place a new patch on an old garment, but 2 Corinthians 5:17 says, **"Therefore, if any man be in Christ, he is a new creation; old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new."** When the Lord saves us today, He does just blot out the memory of past sin, the Bible tells us in 1 Corinthians 1:30 that He imputes the righteousness of Christ to us, **"But of him are you in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption."** **Oh no, salvation is much, much more than that.** Salvation is taking a man who has been twisted and bent by the affects of sin, scarred by the destruction of choice, made hopeless by the lies of Satan, and giving him the privilege of living in complete deliverance. And that, my friend, is grounds for rejoicing.

Now look with me at the second word, "perishing." It means entire failure to be what God intends a man to be: the disease of sin running its course unchecked. It indicates an increasing distance from God, a gradual sinking into depravity, a withdrawal of the only source of real happiness and power. It is the drift downward in spite of all the efforts made to pull oneself up.

Each one of us is in one or the other of these, categories: either we are being delivered from the affects of self and sin, or we are becoming more sinful and more selfish and more depraved in spite of all our self-effort.

But notice, in the second place, that both "being saved," and "perishing" describe a continuing process. Life is pictured for us here as something that is moving and active. In the New Testament we have the great idea of salvation considered from at least *three* different points of view. Sometimes it is spoken of as having been accomplished in the past, "You have been saved." That describes the initial act of faith in the blood of Jesus Christ as Savior. Again it is spoken of as in the present, "You are being saved." That describes our present day-by-day living. Sometimes salvation is relegated to the future. Romans 13:11 says, "Now is our salvation nearer than when we believed." That describes that grand and glorious day when Jesus returns to establish His eternal state and we shall reign with Him forever. But there are many passages which describe salvation as a continuous experience, running through life, such as Hebrews 10:14, "By one offering he has perfected forever them that are being sanctified." Therefore, the Bible very clearly teaches that salvation is much, much more than just being saved.

The one thing that will characterize the life of every genuine believer is growth and development. The person who lives out his Christ-likeness does not talk about how spiritual they are; they do not brag their tremendous anointing; they do not boast about their experiences. Why not? The answer is simple: the more they are filled with the Spirit and conformed to the image of Christ, they more gracious and gentle they become. In other words, their life will become more and more marked by relationships built on love instead of selfishness.

Having said that, I must confess that it is my firm belief many professing Christians show no evidence of such growth at all. In fact, I would dare to say that the majority of our churches are filled with a membership that live and act like spiritual babies! They may have been, saved, perhaps, for ten, twenty, thirty, or forty years, but they are still as mean, hot-tempered, selfish, jealous, unkind, impure, and worldly as ever. There are no marks of maturity, no evidence of becoming more like the Lord Jesus. And the tragic results of such low spiritual living, is that we are influencing our families to develop the very same low spiritual living! Why? Because they see before them the example we are setting.

The moment we accept forgiveness through the blood of the Lord Jesus we are privileged to bear His name and to stand for righteousness, purity, and holiness. Our goal in life is to seek to win somebody else for Jesus; the redemptive ministry of the love of God should be expressed through our lives in service to others. That is the mark of the real thing.

Just as "being saved" is a constant process, so is "perishing." The process of **"perishing"** begins when we become more and more interested in worldly things, accepting defeat and compromise without blushing. It is that process of allowing the way and attitude of the world system to dominate your life to where there is no longer any interest in the things of God, the Word of God, nor the people of God. **It is that process that takes you so low that when someone mentions church, salvation, and Jesus Christ, there is a burst of anger and frustration, because you no longer want to hear of such things.** It is that process that causes your heart to become hardened to the calling of the Holy Spirit for you to be saved. And, finally, it is that process that causes you to settle down in your lostness for all of eternity. What a sad state of affairs!

In that same manner, Paul describes salvation as a process that is going on constantly. Therefore, the indication here is that salvation is not something that just changes your eternal destiny, it is something that changes your character. Paul is saying that when we accept Jesus Christ as our personal Savior it changes the way we act and treat other people. **It affects the way we dream, the way we plan, and the way relate to the things of God.** The indication is that salvation causes us to have an increased hunger for truth, for holiness, for righteousness, and for the Lord Himself. I wonder, tonight, if that describes your life as a child of the Living God.

It is a scriptural fact that we make constant progress along one road or the other, but what is the determining factor? What guides our direction and governs our destiny? It is the "preaching of the cross." **Now we need to be careful that we understand what that phrase means.** It does not mean the *act* of preaching itself. The Greek word that has been translated "preaching" is actually the word "logos" which means "divine expression" and is translated "Word" in John 1:1-2, 14, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father), full of grace and truth." **In other words, just as Jesus was the "divine expression" of the Person of God, "preaching" is the "divine expression" of the Word of God.** And if there is going to be any spiritual progression is your walk with God, my friend, there must be some exposure to the **"preaching"** of the Word! There must be an understanding of what God has done for us through the finished work of Christ on the cross!

Having said that, verse 21 reminds us that the "preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness." **What is Paul saying to us right here? Simply to those who are perishing, the word of the cross is foolishness.** It stands in contradiction to all the philosophy, education, and knowledge of this world, because the preaching of the cross puts the sentence of death upon them all. Ladies

and gentlemen, the Word of God is the word of absolute power, but it is also the word of absolute weakness.

To get a better picture of what Paul is saying, go with me to a lonely hill outside a city wall and hear the word of the cross, as recorded in Luke 23:34, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." Here is a cry of unutterable anguish from the heart of our Redeemer, coming through pain and suffering, but the prayer was heard.

Listen to the words of Luke 23:43, "Today you shall be with me in paradise." A dying Man, crucified and helpless, turns to a fellow sufferer and speaks the word of victory, and the word was heard.

Listen to the words of John 19:26-27, "Woman, behold your son. (Son,) behold your mother." Heartbreak and loneliness, a sword going into the soul of Mary, but the concern of her Son in the hour of His death introduces her to a new and wonderful relationship.

Listen to the words of Matthew 27:46, "My God, why have You forsaken me?" Alone in the darkness, utterly cut off from God, He is introducing a countless multitude to glory; this is victory through isolation.

Listen to the words of John 19:28, "I thirst." Out of the agony of lips that are parched there flow rivers of living waters to men and women like you and me.

And, listen to the words of John 19:30, "It is finished." Obedient unto the very death of the cross, Jesus Christ fully accepted all the will of God. He has been forsaken by friend and foe, but now it is all finished, the price is paid, the last drop of the cup is drunk. The outcome - resurrection.

Those are the words of the cross! And they make absolutely no sense whatsoever to the unbeliever until they are embraced by simple child-like faith!

What is the word of the cross in your life and mine? It is power through weakness, life through death, resurrection through crucifixion. What does that involve in terms of personal experience? How can you make contact with that word of the cross? It is only when you get to the end of every attempt to do anything without Jesus Christ, when you lay aside your ambitions, crucify your prejudices, die to your so called intellectual approach, and humble your pride that you can look up into His lovely face and say, "Lord Jesus, I need you. I want you to come into my life, forgive me of my sins, and make me a Christian." And this is the promise of Romans 10:13, "For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved."