

(Cross of Christ) 3. THE BRAND OF THE CROSS**A.B. Simpson:**

"From henceforth let no man trouble me: for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus" (Gal. 6:17)

The word marks in this text is translated by Rotherham, "brand marks." The world describes a mark that has been branded into the flesh, and suggests the idea of the cruel practice of certain nations in branding political offenders in the face with a badge of dishonor which never could be erased. The Greek word literally means "a stigma," and suggests a mark of reproach and shame. The apostle says that he bears in his body to branded scar which identifies him with Christ and His cross.

The kind of mark which he refers to is made plain by the verse almost immediately preceding, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world" (Gal. 6:14). It is the cross of Christ which is the object at once of His shame and His glory. Let us look first at the marks of the Lord Jesus, and then at their reproduction in His followers.

The Cross Marks of Christ

He was always overshadowed by the cross which at last He bore on Calvary. His life was a life of humiliation and suffering from the manger to the tomb.

His birth was under a shadow of dishonor and shame. The shadow that fell upon the virgin mother could not be removed from her child, and even to this day only faith in a supernatural incarnation can explain away that reproach.

His childhood was overshadowed by sorrow. Soon after His birth, He was pursued by Herod with relentless hate. He spent His early childhood as an exile in the eland of Egypt, which had always been associated in the history of His people as the house of bondage.

His early manhood was spent in toil and poverty and He was known all His later life as "the carpenter's son." A modern painter represents Him as under the shadow of the cross even in the early days at Nazareth; as He returns from a day of toil with arms outstretched with weariness, the setting sun flings the shadow of His figure across the pathway, suggestive of a dark cross.

His life was one of poverty and humiliation. He had nowhere to lay His head, and when He died His body was laid even in a borrowed tomb.

He was rejected and despised by the people among whom He labored. "He came unto his won, and his own received hem not" (John 1:11). His work was, humanly speaking, a complete failure, and when He left the world He had but a handful of followers who had remained true to His teachings and person.

His very friends and companions were of the humblest class, rude fishermen and common people without culture and, indeed, often without the ability to appreciate their blessed Master. Coming from the society of heaven, how H must have felt the strange difference of these rude associates; and yet, never once did He complain or even intimate the difference.

The spirit of His life was ever chastened and humble. The veil of modesty covered all His acts and attitudes. He never boasted or vaunted Himself. "He shall not strive, nor cry; neither shall any man hear his voice in the streets." (Matt. 12:19), was the prophetic picture which He so literally fulfilled. He sought no splendid pageants, asked no earthly honors; and the only time that He did assume the prerogatives of a king, He rode upon the foal of an ass and entered Jerusalem in triumph as the King of meekness rather than of pride.

Perhaps the severest strain of all His life was the repression of Himself. Knowing that he was Almighty and Divine, He yet held back the exercise of His supernatural powers. Knowing that with one withering glance He could have stricken His enemies and laid them lifeless at His feet, He restrained His power. Knowing that He could have summoned all the angels of heaven to His defense, He surrendered Himself to His captors in helplessness and defenselessness. He even surrendered the exercise of His own will, and drew from His Heavenly Father the very grace and power which He needed from day to day, the same as any sinful man who lives by faith and prayer. "I can of mine own self do nothing," He said. "As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father: so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me" (John 6:57). He took the same place of dependence that the humblest believer takes today and in all things lived a life of self renunciation.

At last the climax came in the supreme trial of the judgment hall and the cruel cross. When He became obedient unto death, a death of shame and unparalleled humiliations, insults and agonies completed His life sacrifices for the salvation of His people. What words can ever describe, what tongue can ever tell the weight, the sharpness, the agony of that cruel cross, the fierceness of His fight with the powers of darkness and the depths of woe when even His Father's face was averted and He bore for us the hell that sin deserved.

After His resurrection, He still bore the marks of the cross. The few glimpses that we find of the risen Christ are all marked by the same touches of gentleness, self abnegation and remembered suffering. The very evidences that He gave them that He was the same Jesus were the marks of the spear and the nails; and in His manifestations to them, especially in that memorable scene at Emmaus, we see the same gentle, unobtrusive Christ, walking with them by the way unrecognized and then quietly vanishing out of their sight when at last they knew him.

And even on the throne to which He has now ascended, the same cross marks still remain amid the glories of the heavenly world. John beheld Him as "a limb as it had been slain." The Christ of heaven still bears the old marks of the cross as His highest glory and His everlasting memorial. Such are the marks of the Lord Jesus, and all who claim to be His followers and His ministers may well imitate them. The men who claim to be His apostles and ambassadors, and who come to us with the sound of trumpets, the bluster of earthly pageants and the pompous and egotistical boastings of pride and vainglory, are false prophets and wretched counterfeits of the Christ of Calvary and can deceive only the blind and ignorant dupes who know nothing of the real Christ.

These were the marks of the Master, and they will be worn by His servants, too.

The Cross Marks of the Christian

"The servant is not greater than his lord" (John 13:16). The tests of the Master must be applied to His followers. We may not preach a crucified Savior without being also crucified men and women. It is not enough to wear an ornamental cross as a pretty decoration. The cross that Paul speaks about was burned into his very flesh, was branded into his being; and only the Holy Ghost can burn the true cross into our innermost life.

We are saved by identification with Christ in His death. We are justified because we have already died with Him and have thus been made free from sin. God does not whitewash people when He saves them. He has really visited their sins upon their great Substitute, the Lord Jesus Christ, and every believer was counted as in Him when He died; and so His death is our death and it puts us in the same position before the law of the supreme Judge as if we had already been executed and punished for our own guilty, as if the judgment for us was already past. Therefore, it is true of every believer, "He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life" (John 5:24). The cross, therefore, is the very standpoint of the believer's salvation, and we shall never cease to echo the song of heaven. "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive ... honor, and glory, and blessing" (Rev. 5:12).

We are sanctified by dying with Christ to sin. When He hung on Calvary, He not only made a settlement for our acts of sin, but He bore with Him on that cross our sinful self; and by faith we reckon ourselves as actually crucified with Him there to the whole life of sin. It is our privilege, therefore, to identify ourselves with Christ in His death so fully that we may lay over our sinful nature upon Him and utterly die to it, and then receive from Him a life all new, divine and pure. Henceforth we may say, "I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me" (Gal. 2:20). Sanctification is not the cleansing of the old life, but the crucifying of that life and substituting for it the very life of Christ Himself, the Holy and Perfect One.

We must keep sanctified by dead reckoning. And dead reckoning is just the reckoning of ourselves as "dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ" (Rom. 6:11). This is not merely a feeling or experience, but a counting upon Him as life and drawing from Him as breath from the air around us.

Our spiritual life is perfected by the constant recognition of the cross and by our unceasing application of it to all our life and being. We must live by the cross and must pass from death to death and life to life by constant fellowship with His sufferings and conformity unto His death, until at last we shall "attain unto the resurrection of the dead" (Phil. 3:11).

Now this principle of death and resurrection underlies all nature as well as the Bible. The autumn leaves with their rich crimson are just a parable of nature's dying to make way for the resurrection of the coming spring. Pick up an acorn in the forest, and in its heart, as you break the shell, you will find a crimson hairline as the

cross mark of its hidden life. When it bursts through the ground in the spring, the first opening leaf is red, the color of the cross, and when the leaf dies and falls in autumn it wraps itself in the same crimson hue.

But all this is but a stepping stone of the life that follows. Look at the structure and growth of a flower. First, the calyx or flower cup tightly clasps the enfolding petals, refusing to let go. But gradually these fingers relax, these folds unclasp, and the petals burst open in all their fragrance and beauty. But still the calyx holds them tightly as if it would never let go, but hour by hour, as the flower life advances, those petals have to be relinquished from the grasp, and in a little while the blossom floats away on the summer winds and seems to perish. "The flower fadeth," the beauty of nature dies. But observe that after death comes a richer life. Behind the flower you will notice a seed pod. It also is held for a time by the grasp of another cup. But as the seeds ripen, even they must let go this grasp, and gradually the seed pod relaxes and at length bursts open and the seeds are scattered and sink into the ground and die. But from the buried seed comes forth a new resurrection of plants and trees and flowers and fruits. The whole process is one of dying and living, one life giving place to a higher, and all moving steadily on to the reproduction of the plant and the stage of fruit bearing.

So marked is this principle in the natural world that botanists tell us that when a flower gives too much attention to the blossom and develops into a double flower, which is the most beautiful form of the bloom, it becomes barren and fruitless. Nature puts its ban upon self life even in a flower. It must die and pass away if it would bear much fruit. A beautiful double petunia is no good; but a single-petalled blossom has in it the life of another generation. And so our spiritual life must pass down to deeper deaths and on and up to the higher experiences of life, or we shall lose even what we have. We cannot cling to the sweetest spiritual experiences, the fondest object of our highest joy, without ceasing to grow and ceasing to bear that fruit which is the very nature of our salvation.

The Principle of Death in Our Deeper Life

We must learn not only to give up our wrongs, but even our rights. It is little that we should turn from sin; if we are to follow Christ and His consecration, we must turn from the things that are not sinful and learn the great lesson of self renunciation even in rightful things. The everlasting ideal is He who though in the form of God, thought it not a thing to be eagerly grasped that He should be equal with God, but emptied Himself and become obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. There are many things which are not wrong for you to keep and to hold as your own, but in keeping them, He would lose and you would lose much more.

We have the cross mark upon our affections and friendships. Thus Abraham gave us his Isaac, and received him back with a new touch of love as God's Isaac. We shall find that most of the lives that counted much for God had somewhere in them a great renunciation, where the dearest idol was laid upon Moriah's altar and from that hour there was new fruit and power.

Our prayers must often have the mark of the cross upon them. We ask and we receive the promise and assurance of the answer; and then we must often see that answer apparently buried and forgotten, and long after come forth, to our amazement and surprise, multiplied with blessings that have grown out of the very delay and seeming denial.

So the life of our body which we may claim from Him must be marked with the cross. It is only after the strength of nature fails us that the strength of God can come in. And even then the answer is sometimes not given until we have first surrendered it to Him and have been willing to give up even life itself and have learned to seek the Blessor rather than the blessing. Then often God reveals Himself to us as a Healer, as He could not do until we were wholly abandoned to His will.

Our religious experiences must have the mark of the cross upon them. We must not cling even to our peace and joy and spiritual comfort. Sometimes, the flower must fade that the fruit may be more abundant, and that we may learn to walk by faith and not by sight.

Our service for God often must be buried before it can bring forth much fruit. And so God sometimes calls us to a work and makes it appear to fail in its early stages, until we cry in discouragement, "I have labored in vain, I have spent my strength for naught." Then it comes forth Phoenix like from the flames, and blossoms and buds until it fills the face of the world with fruit. So God writes the mark of the cross on everything, until by and by, the very grave, may be the passport to a better resurrection and death will be swallowed up in victory. In fact, we believe that the universe itself has yet to pass through its dissolution and come forth in the glory of a final resurrection so that the marks of the Lord Jesus may, as last, be written upon the very earth and heaven, and so that the universe to its furthest bounds may re-echo the great redemption song: "Worthy is the Lamb that

was slain."

Beloved, have you the marks of the Lord Jesus? These sacrifices to which He sometimes calls us are just great investments that He is asking us to make and that He will refund to us with accumulated interest in the age to come.

Good Richard Cecil once asked his little daughter, as she sat upon his knee, with a cluster of pretty glass beads around her neck, if she truly loved him, and if she loved him enough to take those beads and fling them into the fire. She looked in his face with wonder and grief; she could hardly believe that he meant such sacrifice. But his steady gaze convinced her that he was in earnest, and with trembling, reluctant steps she tottered to the grate, and clinging to them with reluctant fingers, at last dropped them into the fire, and then flinging herself into his arms, she sobbed herself to stillness in the bewilderment and perplexity of her renunciation. He let her learn her lesson fully, but a few days later, on her birthday, she found upon her dressing case a little package, and on opening it she found inside a cluster of real pearls strung upon a necklace and bearing her name with her father's love. She had scarcely time to grasp the beautiful present as she flew to his presence and throwing herself in his arms, she said, "Oh, Papa, I am so sorry that I did not understand."

Some day, beloved, in His arms, you will understand. He does not always explain it now. He lets the cross have all its sharpness. He lets the weary years go by; but oh, some day we will understand and be so glad that we were permitted to bear with Him and for Him the "brand marks of the Lord Jesus."