

BEYOND THE CROSS

As an introduction to this article we are quoting the first paragraph from the article "Cherish the Old Rugged Cross?" from the July 2011 issue of *The Living Waters Newsletter*: "The cross as we know it today has become a symbol of Christianity. The Roman Catholic Church has attached great mystical significance to the cross that has resulted in the crucifix becoming a physical token of the presence of God. People have come to feel that wearing a crucifix or regularly making the sign of the cross, God will be with them. While Protestants debunk the idea of a crucifix they have nevertheless made an image of the cross something sacred and have simply taken the figure of Christ off the crucifix and the empty cross has taken its place. Many Christians have a great emotional attachment to this symbol. It is worn as a necklace, worn as ear rings, graced the steeples of church buildings and the tops of communion trays. Our hymn books are filled with songs about the cross and the death of Christ and few about the significance of the living Christ. Upon examining a popular Hymnal used in many churches today there was found 44 songs about His birth, 56 about His death, only 19 about His resurrection and none on the ascension."

To understand the significance of the cross we must turn to the beginning—the book of Genesis, When God placed Adam in the garden He told him: "From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die" (Genesis 2:17). Adam disobeyed, sinned, and God enforced the penalty of death. Adam lived to be nine hundred and thirty years old, but on that day he died spiritually because he was cut off from fellowship with God. Thus because of Adam's sin death (spiritual and physical death) passed upon all Adam's posterity. This is seen in Romans 5:12: "Just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned" and I Corinthians 15: 21-22: "Since by man came death...in Adam all die." James states; "...when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death" (James 1:15). Therefore the Apostle Paul concludes "the wages (penalty) of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23). God is a just God and will not simply overlook and forgive sin. The penalty of sin must be paid by death. This is a forgotten and neglected fact in modern teaching and preaching.

Knowing that the wages of sin is death, mankind lived in "the fear of death and were subject to slavery all their lives" (Heb. 2:15). When Jesus went to the cross our sin was shifted from us and laid upon him (II Cor. 5:21; Isa. 53:6) and he, having paid the debt for us, we are free from the fear of death and the power of sin's bondage. Our sin was not merely forgiven by the cross; our sin was punished by Jesus paying the wages of sin for us. This puts us in the position of being forgiven because the wages of sin (death) has been paid by Christ. God can now forgive us "of all sin" (Col. 2:13). In the Old Testament animal sacrifices

could only "cleansed to the purifying of the flesh" (Heb.9:13) because their sin was not punished. Their sin was punished by the death of Christ: "...since a death has taken place for the redemption of the transgressions *that were committed under the first covenant*, those who have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance" (Heb. 9:15). It was only after the death of Christ that God could forgive sins and remember them no more (Heb. 8:12; 10:17). The penalty of sin is death, not unending punishment. The cross is the basis of God's forgiveness of sin, but we have to go beyond the cross in order to understand its full meaning.

II Corinthians 5:21 states: "He made him who knew no sin to become sin on our behalf that we might become the righteousness of God in him." He took upon himself more sin than any one man had ever had individually...he took upon himself the sins of the world. If he *became sin* how can he go into the presence of God with all the sins of the world upon him? If God cannot accept one man who has sinned, how can He accept Christ with all the sin of the world upon him? If sin excludes man from God, then doesn't it exclude Christ from God if he became sin? Hebrews 9:12 states: "and not taking the blood of goats and calves, but taking his own blood, he entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption" (RSV), Not even Jesus could enter into the presence of God without blood, so he shed his blood for all those sins he carried. He "became sin" and paid the wages for those sins. It was on the cross he paid the wages of our sin, but was not until he went into the presence of God that he obtained eternal redemption for us.

The religious world has laid so much emphasis on the cross we have neglected the importance of the resurrection and have ignored the ascension as having anything to do with our spiritual life. We have clung so tightly to the cross as the instrument of salvation we have failed to understand that the cross would have meant nothing without the resurrection and ascension. When the risen Christ appeared to Mary Magdalene he told her "stop clinging to me, for I have not ascended to my Father, but go and tell my brethren, 'I ascend to my Father and your father, and to my God and your God'" (John 20:17). One of the great tragedies of the church has been a failure to realize the significance of the ascension and getting beyond the cross. We are still "clinging" to Christ and will not allow him to ascend. We want to keep him at best on the cross, shedding his blood and not presenting it to the Father on our behalf in the Holy Place not made with hands. This is no way said to belittle, denigrate or minimize the cross. We are simply saying we should get beyond so much emphasis on the cross and give attention to things the cross made real for us besides the payment for our sin. The writer of Hebrews urges his readers to leave "the elementary teaching about Christ and press on to maturity." Some things he mentions are: repentance, faith, baptisms, resurrection and eternal judgment (Heb. 6:1-3). Not that these teachings are not important, he just wanted them to get beyond them to other things. Let's get beyond the cross.

This article is taken from the June 1997 issue of *The Witness*

THE VANISHING CONSTITUTION

By Curtis Dickinson

How then shall we live without the protection of the constitution?

For the past half century there have been national efforts to “restore” the constitution to its original place in law and politics. Many patriots have spent their lives and fortunes trying to do this in order to leave a heritage of freedom to our children and grand children. Retired Lt. Col. Archibald E. Roberts, Director of The Committee to Restore the Constitution wrote: “Gone is the Constitution and its protective covenants. Gone are the courts and their shield to personal freedom. Gone is representative government, and the sovereignty of the individual.” Elsewhere he writes: “The United Nations Charter is not a treaty. It is a constitution of one world dictatorship designed to replace by deceit and subterfuge the Constitution of the United States.”

Events in the past few years proves that, indeed, the Constitution is no longer in force to guarantee freedom of speech, freedom of religion, freedom from unwarranted search and seizure, the right to a speedy trial by jury on one’s peers, and other freedoms as stated in the first ten amendments of the Constitution.

The Constitution was designed upon the principle that there is one moral standard for all mankind, and that its principles would be held and applied by those who lived by that standard. But for the past century the moral character of the nation has been eroding, with that erosion accelerating over the past decade. Add to this the fact that our nation has been receiving millions of foreigners who do not share the moral concepts of our founding fathers. This deterioration of the moral standard has undermined the Constitution and it no longer stands as the foundation of law and freedom in our nation.

The Constitution cannot be restored unless and until the moral principles upon which it is based are restored in the majority of the people of the United States. With all the information to which I am exposed, including scores of newsletters, newspapers and other sources, I do not see any signs of this happening in this generation. For all practical purposes the Constitution is gone, just as Col. Roberts said. It is history, a relic of the past.

What Christians must do is to learn to live as did Jesus, the Apostles, and the early Christians, none of whom ever had the protection and guaranteed rights of the Constitution. This may seem like an impossibility to many who have revered the Constitution as if it were divinely inspired and who hold it as the only means of “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” To some the Constitution has become their god to which they looked for salvation from the evil and oppression of our day. If, as they believe, the Constitution was given to us by God, it should not be surprising if God should take it away, that we might learn once again to depend upon Him, rather than upon this instrument of paper and ink. This is not to suggest that the Constitution is faulty and should be abandoned. The fault does not lie in the

Constitution but in the sinful nature of those who have shaken off its restraints in order to advance their own agenda of lust and power. Free men must be able to govern themselves from the inside, that is, by their own commitment to the right moral standard. When that commitment is abandoned he must be governed from the outside, by force of law. When those who administer the law are themselves committed to that standard, peace, justice and freedom may still prevail, but when the standard is displaced for the sake of a multicultural society, the foundation of law crumbles and with it the promise of peace, justice and freedom.

As the morals of the nation fall lower and lower, more and more laws are enacted to insure peace and safety, resulting in greater loss of justice and freedom. Some think that if we pass the right kind of legislation, we will have a Christian nation. *Not so!* Those who hate the rules will never succeed in keeping them. Jesus said that it isn’t enough to refrain from adultery, one must not even desire it (Matt. 5:27, 28). It isn’t good enough to resist killing a neighbor when you hate him, you must not hate him in the first place (Matt. 5:21, 22).

Jesus never suggested that his disciples were to try to force people to live like Christians. It can’t be done. A Christian is one because of faith. His actions are the result of belief, not the other way around. Belief is not produced by forced behavior. This is not to say that you cannot legislate behavior, rather it is the reason for legislating behavior. Even Christians need regulation, for none of us have reached perfection, and still fall into temptation, or use poor judgment, or disagree about what course to follow. Rules are necessary. We must follow the rule to drive on the right side of the road, or we will be crashing into each other. Without rules we could not function as a society. Now we have almost reached that point, where the government and the courts no longer recognize the moral bedrock upon which the Constitution was written.

The question is: **Can we live the Christian life without the protection of the Constitution?** Indeed we can. For almost eighteen centuries Christians lived by faith, established Godly homes, evangelized nations, served God, and left us examples of faith and discipleship, all without the benefit of a Constitution with its Bill of Rights. The Christian faith was established all over Europe and the British Isles before our Constitution was ever dreamed of. Had Martin Luther had the protection of our Constitution, the Reformation might never have taken place. Jesus sent his disciples out to preach the gospel and to announce the Kingdom of God, not to preserve and depend upon the laws of the Roman Empire, from which much of our Constitution is borrowed. It is time for churches to stop dealing with superficial problems and appealing to man’s carnal nature by entertainment and social activities, and to begin establishing the members in a deep faith in the sovereignty and power of God, so that their dependence will be upon Him, and not upon the diminishing strength of the Constitution. Our strength is in Christ Jesus the Lord, , not in the fallible works of man and his government, and certainly not in the amount of real estate that bears the church’s name. Nothing in Scripture indicates that either Jesus or the Apostles had any interest in accumulating real estate for the sake of “saving souls.”