# Chapter Summary – Session 11

# *Chapter 12: Cross 2, The Cross and Daily Living*

1. **Intro –** Last week, we talked about our new life in Christ. In Jesus’ physical death, all Christians died spiritually. In this way, we see ourselves united to the death of Christ (and thus, we no longer live, ie. Galatians 2:20).

*To be crucified in Christ and no longer live* means that what Christ did for Paul has changed him so much to the point that the old self is gone. Yes, he is still Paul. But because his spiritual self has died with Christ, he is a Paul who is utterly different at his core. Christ broke the spiritual power and authority sin had over us and the old self was replaced with Christ Himself!

But, if you are like me, you know that the reality of our great new life in Christ bumps up against the present reality where sin is all around us and the remnants of sin remain in us as well. You may be asking, *“If all of these things about the Spirit are true, why do I and so many other Christians struggle so much with sin? If I am new on the inside, why does it feel like so little has changed?”*

1. **The Cross-Centered Life**

To live a cross-centered life is to live connected to and in remembrance of everything about Jesus—His work on our behalf, and all the benefits we enjoy because of Him: our regeneration, justification, adoption, sanctification and future glorification. The cross must be central because it defines who you are, who you are becoming, and who you will be.

1. **Your Identity**

When you wake up, what shapes the way you face the day? This would be your functional identity. Is your identity grounded in what you do or certain skills you possess? *I am a doctor. I am an engineer. I am a pastor.* Notice how these things begin to function as identities rather than callings. Or do you define yourself in light of a past event? *I’ve been hurt by people. I’ve hurt some people I’ve loved dearly.* Maybe, you define yourself in light of a current struggle. *I am unemployed. I am divorced. I am depressed. I am angry.*

While a Christian should never minimize personal gifts, past problems and present struggles, these do not displace his or her more fundamental identity of being in Christ. *“I am a new creation in Christ, a beloved child of God who happens to be a doctor, engineer or pastor.”* Jesus defines me, not my particular calling or vocation. *“I am a Christian who was hurt by someone in my past, who* ***struggles*** *with depression, who* ***struggles*** *with anger.”* My fundamental identity in the cross of Christ supersedes whatever struggle I am going through right now.

1. **Where Did I Get Lost?**

Let’s consider Andy. When he first became a Christian, he was blown away by the freeing and amazing forgiveness of God in Jesus Christ. He was convicted with power by the word of God. In the beginning, he was faithfully engaging with biblical discipline. But, he quickly began to live as if progress in the Christian life was all up to him. He became proud because he was working so hard to grow. He became confident, but at the same time impatient and quickly rebuked others who struggled with their personal devotions or Christ-like witness. He saw very little need for the cross of Christ because he assumed that since he was a Christian now, he didn’t need forgiveness. He said he was a sinner at church and spoke through the confessions. But, he underestimated Satan’s persistence upon his spiritual life. His sense of acceptance before God and Christian identity quickly shifted from what Christ had done for him to what he was doing for Christ.

Slowly, instead of being proud of his righteous efforts, Andy became ashamed, guilty and depressed at times, and easily attracted to old temptations. He feels like a failure because he can no longer keep up the routine.

Though different, the two external behaviors had the same internal problem. The beginning evidenced serving that was more about him than about Christ, which produced pride and self-sufficiency. This eventually fizzled out as Andy was unable to be the Holy Spirit in his life.

Like Andy, many of us who begin the Christian life with a clear understanding of our need for Christ can lose sight of how central Christ must be throughout our life. Maybe, it’s busyness. Maybe, it’s money or the apparent sparkle of worldly things. Maybe, it’s a lack of faith in the truth and life of God’s Word. It is most likely a combination of these things.

If Andy had kept the cross central, it would have reminded him that anything good was the result of the grace of Christ working in him. And in his failures, the cross would remind him that Christ has given him a new identity, a real power, and the promise and comfort of His presence.

1. **The Keys: Faith and Repentance**

How do you avoid leading a cross-less life?The answer is found in moment-by-moment faith and repentance. It may be the case that so many Christians only think of faith and repentance as the way to enter the Christian life. Then, it’s up to bible reading, praying, small group participation, serving, mercy ministry, short-term missions, etc. Left to these things alone, we would be left to moralism or self-help. This is why faith and repentance is so important in our everyday sanctification.

The Christian’s life is a confession that we cannot help ourselves—not only in salvation, but also in sanctification. The premise of Jesus’ teaching is that the Christian does not graduate from a Tax-Collector to a Pharisee relying on themselves. But, the Christian shall always find themselves at the foot of the cross in repentance and faith, *“God, be merciful to me, a sinner.”* Though God does engage our mind, our reason, our thoughts, words and actions, it is all oriented not to build an egotistical confidence or a false sense of security in our own learnedness or abilities, but actually to bring us in a much more humbler place—trusting in Him and all that He gives (2 Cor 12:9-10). Though we preach what has helped us, we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ and His Holy Spirit (Gal 1:8). Though we share principles, experiences, and insights, we do not take pride or give credit to ourselves, but to God (1 Cor 2:4-5). Though we strive with all our strength, only the power of the Spirit which resurrected Jesus from the grave gives us a new heart and empowers us (Eph 1:19).

The Christian faith can be compared more so to a patient’s manual at a doctor’s office rather than a women’s or men’s magazine. Rather than self-help or moralism, we see a lot of counsel like this on a daily basis: **When these symptoms occur, go to your primary care doctor. In an emergency, please dial 911.** The Christian life is a lot like that. It is much more treatment than we might think we need or like on a daily basis. It is God, the divine doctor tending to us. Our efforts, outside of the Word and Gospel of Christ are Band-Aids on serious wounds. But, our efforts, inside the Word and Gospel of Christ produce repentance, faith, a new heart, communion with God, inextinguishable hope, persevering joy, life transforming change and good Fruit. Now, let’s see how faith and repentance brings the power of the Cross to our hearts.

1. **Faith: Seeing Who You Are In Christ**

When we first come to know Jesus, we get forgiveness. But, lapses into sin haunt us and make us doubt whether or not we are truly united to Jesus, whether or not the Spirit dwells in us, or whether or not we have what it takes to keep going. We get jaded, cynical and downcast. We start to believe that the Christian life is more about defeat than victory, more about the past than the present. We start to lose faith in the truth and power of the cross change.

So, we need, daily, a real and experiential faith to believe that God truly does forgive us each and every day, no matter what sin—big and small. We need faith to believe that God forgives us because He knows that we can change and are changing. We need faith to believe in 1) the extraordinary forgiveness of God (in Jesus Christ’s death) and 2) the extraordinary power of God (in Jesus’ resurrection). We all need faith to believe that 1) God has justified us once and for all and 2) He is sanctifying us.

**1 John 2:1-2** - *My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous. He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.*

In v.1, we see that Christians continue to struggle with sin (“if anyone does sin”). John is writing to Christians who long to progress in holiness, but sin is still a reality in their lives. Our need for the cross is not over. But, v.1 goes on to remind us our Redeemer who died not just for our past sins, but our present and future sins.

You must meditate on this with the help of the Holy Spirit! Let this re-identify you when you relapse into sins of anger, pride, gossip, stubbornness, unforgiveness, self-pity, impatience, greed or lust. You are not identified by your sin, but by the forgiveness and promise of God. He will not condemn you. Nor, will He leave you unsanctified.

As you let this flood your heart. Let this move you unbound by with guilt in the sins of the past or with fear in the temptations of the present. Let this amazing and powerful spiritual truth move you forward with tremendous identity-joy and tremendous hope for change.

Why is this so important? This is important because it’s so easy for us to ***not believe*** in this way of biblical Christian growth. There are many ways that we as Christians can deal with our ongoing sin.

It’s easy for us to believe that there’s this neutral ground of Christian living where we’re not really pursuing God’s glory and yet, we’re safe from Satan’s attacks. It’s easy for us to blame shift our sin. It’s easy to believe that we will never change or someone else will never change. It’s easy for us settle down with our sins and experience continual and repeating spiritual attack by the evil one. It’s easy for us to be taken out of the spiritual war in the battle for our lives and others, and the glory of Jesus and His kingdom. It’s easy for us to believe that we are all alone and become depressed. But we are not alone. We are in the familial and sovereign forgiveness, grace, and protection of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It’s easy to believe you are unworthy of this. Trust me, I know. But you are. Not because of who you are and what you can do. But, simply because you are in Christ. Therefore, we all need faith to believe this. A deep and sincere meditation on these things moves us towards a renewed freedom, joy, life, passion, and purpose.

**7. Repentance of the Heart**

As our identity is rooted by faith as we discussed above, it will move us towards a life of daily repentance. *Read Luke 15:11-32 (the story of the Prodigal Son).*

There are three essential ingredients in faith-driven repentance that we see from this passage.

1. **Wake Up: He came to his senses (v.17)** – Real repentance means that you see that your biggest problem is your hardened heart, not your circumstances. No matter how difficult things may be, your deepest need is not to have ***what you want***, but to know a God ***who wants you*** and the best for you. In the case of the prodigal son, it took difficulty and poverty to awaken him to his true condition. Doesn’t God often us Heat to bring us to self-awareness?

When you wake up, in some of the following ways, change is beginning.

* You see life with a sense of convicting morality that should not be taken lightly.
* You have a new sobriety about the craftiness and wickedness of sin, and your need for grace.
* Momentary pleasures reveal themselves to be truly momentary and lack the power to captivate and satisfy you.
* Biblical truth begins to make sense as you think about your situation. The Bible gets personal. It’s not just talking about them. It’s talking about you.
* You begin to make connections between you heart (and its idolatry) and your behavior.
* You begin to see that God is a God of grace and mercy, and your heart starts to realize that this eternal and amazing reality brings greater joy, peace, life and hope than the momentary things of this world.
1. **Own Up: He admitted his sin (v.18) –** The prodigal’s wake up call is followed by repentance. Three things are involved.
	* + 1. **Godly sorry, not worldly sorrow –** Worldly sorry is self-centered. Worldly sorrow is only sorry that you were caught, or that you failed to live to your own standards and potential, or that you are experiencing the consequences of your sin. Worldly sorrow produces tears of self-pity. Godly sorrow focuses on how God was offended and others were hurt. Godly sorrow recognizes how the love and care of God was ignored. Godly sorrow produces tears of true humility.
			2. **Seeing the sin beneath the sin –** You begin to see the heart sins beneath your behavioral sins—the idolatrous lies that drive you to do what you do.

***Example*** – I deserve to be angry. What that person did was wrong. That person needs to apologize. Or, that person has an anger issue. What’s their problem? I don’t need to apologize.

In this scenario, we are always the hero no matter what side of the conflict we are on. The other person is always the villain. Why? Because, our idolatrous hearts has blinded us to our own sin, weaknesses and faults.

Before any of us violate commandments 4-10, we violate commandments 1-3 by forsaking God for something else (and then sinning to get those things). When you see this, you begin to see how spiritually blind you have been. There is no more excuse making or blame-shifting. By God’s grace of His spiritual light, we all can own up.

* + - 1. **Repenting of sin and righteousness –** You start repenting of your pursuit for self-righteousness, not just your sins. What does this mean? Everything we do apart from Christ is not just sinful, but self-centered.

***Examples* -** Our desire to be a good student or hard worker can portray doing hard work for the glory of God, but it can really stem from building a self-identity in our accomplishments or security in our wealth. But, living for God’s glory is a balanced obedience to all His will—not just diligence.

Our desire to have an all around sanctified husband or wife can be portrayed as wanting spiritual maturity for our spouse, but it can really stem from selfish desires. Two broken sinners can never fully satisfy each other. But, the desire for spiritual maturity for our spouse must be girded with grace and not self-righteousness.

1. **Shift Weight: He received his father’s gracious embrace (v.2)** – Doctors cannot treat patients that can’t acknowledge their sickness. In the same way, God cannot heal us and change us unless He brings us to a place where we can acknowledge where we are broken.

When you can sincerely admit the depth of your sin, repent and embrace the love of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, as the prodigal son did, the Triune God becomes not only life giving, but joy giving. His Spirit not only breathes air into your spiritual lungs, but fresh, clean and energetic air.

The amazing grace, love and forgiveness that we find in the cross of Christ is shockingly what transforms us. This takes faith to confess our sins to God and to others. But, as the Apostle Paul said in 2 Corinthians 12:9-10:

*God said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.*

**8. Conclusion**

In the past chapter, we saw that God makes us new creatures in Christ and defeats sin’s power in our lives. In this chapter, we see what it looks like to depend on the cross as we deal with ongoing sin. It’s a continual going back to the fundamentals—placing our faith and identity in the powerful grace and cross of Christ for all our sins (past, present and future) and in Christ’s promise for our change (present and future). This new identity and power enables us to admit and turn from sin and to pursue the things that please God.

The life of faith and repentance puts to death the deeds of the sinful nature and lives more and more in righteousness. The Father who calls us to obedience provides what we need in Christ to live it out through our faith and repentance. When we fail, He promises to never leave or forsake us. He wins us back by the Spirit and gives more grace and strength when we confess and repent of sin.

Horatius Bonar, the Scottish hymn, writer wrote:

*The free pardon of the cross uproots sin and withers all its branches. Only the certainty of love, forgiving love, can do this. Free and warm reception into the divine favor is the strongest of all motives in leading a person to God—the one who has freely forgiven him of all trespasses. The fervent kiss, the dear embrace, the best robe, the ring, the shoes, the fattened calf, the festal song—all without one moment’s suspense or delay, as well as without one upbraiding word, could not but awaken him from his past and a true hearted resolution to walk with his father of such generous forgiveness. Sensuality, luxury, and the desires of the flesh have lost their relish to one who has tasted from the tree of life and drunk from His living water.*

If you find yourself struggling with anger, impatience and constant criticism, remember that Jesus Christ has paid it all—for you and these same sins in others. Sometimes, we can take even beautiful things for granted when we are exposed to it everyday. So, take some time to meditate, have faith and believe this. Wake up, own up and shift weight from guilt to grace, from bitterness to forgiveness, from enslavement to freedom, from darkness to light, from your strength in the flesh to Jesus’ strength in His Spirit, and from duty to joy.

This is what a daily cross-centered life looks like. This book does not seek to do anything more than glorifying the cross. There is no such thing as instantaneous sanctification. There is no magic pill; no silver bullet; just a majestic cross that is sufficient for sinners like you and me everyday.

***We preach Christ crucified, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God (1 Cor 1:23-24).***