



Reformation Reflections

THEOLOGY OF THE CROSS

To know God is the goal of theology. A theology of glory seeks to know God by what is seen, by having success, by prosperity, and by having things go the way we want. Theology of the cross makes God known by faith as we trust his promises even when they are contrary to our experience, as we carry a cross, and as we believe he is guiding the course of history for the sake of his church.

A theology of glory leads a person either to know the wrong god or to know the true God wrongly. Theology of the cross leads us to Jesus. To know Jesus is to know God. To trust in Jesus is to trust in God. To take up your cross and follow Jesus is to be on the way to eternal life.

Dr. Martin Luther desperately wanted to know God. He quit studying law in order to take up theology. As he studied, Jesus was revealed to him in a way that he had never been taught before. He wanted to share with others that Jesus was not to be known as an angry judge but as a loving Savior who laid down his life for his loved ones.



Since Luther's official calling and vocation was to be a teacher of the church, he taught, wrote, and sought out debate. But instead of having

the glory of changing the minds and hearts of the religious and political leaders of his day, his newly found understanding of theology of the cross was almost immediately put to the test.

He was summoned to appear before the Imperial Assembly of the Holy Roman Empire (known as a Diet) at the German city of Worms. There he was to defend his teaching against the accusation of heresy in order to avoid the threat of capital punishment.



The Holy Spirit led Luther deeper into the sacred Scriptures, enlightening him with gifts of wisdom and understanding of Jesus, sanctifying him with an ongoing life of repentance, and keeping him in the true faith. As he once wrote, **"It does [a man] no good to recognize God in His glory and majesty, unless he recognizes Him in the humility and shame of the cross."**

Our places in life as children of the heavenly Father are not about us and our glory. Jesus said, **"Take up [your] cross and follow me"** (Luke 9:23). God promises to use your cross for good, so do not call your cross evil. Those who impose it on you may be evil, but your suffering isn't. Which is why St. Paul reminds us that we can, **"rejoice in our sufferings"** (Romans 5:3).

As willing servants in the kingdom of God, we offer ourselves in whatever way may serve the will of God. **"We are considered as sheep to be slaughtered"** (Psalm 44:22; Romans 8:36) were no doubt words echoing in Luther's ears as he headed to Worms.



But then he would also remember, so was our Lord Jesus **"led like a sheep to the slaughter"** (Isaiah 53:7; Acts 8:32).

Too easily we ask questions of glory like, "Is your church growing?" We know the Father's kingdom is coming. Let us be content with that. We cannot see what our Father is doing to bring it about. Therefore, we live by faith. And we carry our crosses, doing what he has given us to do in our vocations.



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