



May 2018

Dear Friends and Partners of CWR/PTM,

These first century A.D. Christ-followers lived in a port city, surrounded by promiscuity and permissiveness. They seemed anything but “one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28) as they debated and endlessly argued some rather minor, inconsequential issues while losing sight of the BIG PICTURE altogether. Some appeared proud that they indulged and tolerated incestuous sexual sin within their fellowship.

The Apostle Paul wrote two letters to this “wild bunch” of Christians in Corinth, addressing many specific problems and issues while relentlessly insisting on the BIG PICTURE of the cross of Christ. At the beginning of his first letter to the Corinthians Paul says:

*You’ll remember, friends, that when I first came to you to let you in on God’s master stroke, I didn’t try to impress you with polished words and the latest philosophy. I deliberately kept it **plain and simple**: first Jesus and who he is, then Jesus and what he did—Jesus crucified (1 Corinthians 2:1-2, *The Message Bible*, my emphasis).*

At the end of this impassioned letter Paul again calls the attention of his spiritual brothers and sisters to the importance of concentrating on and being centered in Jesus Christ and his cross:

*The first thing I did was place before you what was placed so emphatically before me: that the Messiah died for our sins, exactly as Scripture tells it; that he was buried; that he was raised from death on the third day... (1 Corinthians 15:3-4, *The Message Bible*).*

Far from being an obscure point of doctrine, the cross of Christ is ground zero of our faith. All of the teachings of Jesus are best understood and illuminated by his cross. The crucifixion of Jesus is a priority—a defining part of his identity, and for that matter, a foundational building block for all of us, as Christ-followers. *The cross of Christ is an essential part of his identity—it is the heart and core of the gospel.*

- The cross crushes the tyranny of attempting to please God on the basis of law while simultaneously and tenaciously insisting that the lavish grace of God is the ground of our being.
- The cross shocks and startles us with the mercy and forgiveness of God while convicting us of the perfect justice of God for one and all.
- The cross stands as a forever memorial that God understands and intimately knows our suffering and our shame.
- The cross of Jesus Christ, rather than the stone tablets of Sinai, is the ultimate spiritual script written by the finger of God, revealed, translated, published and proclaimed for the whole world, in and through Jesus, the rock of our salvation.
- The cross is the love of God enshrined, his love letter to you and me and the whole world (John 3:16) lifting up Jesus and thus drawing all humanity to himself (John 12:32).

It may sound simple to keep our focus on the cross of Christ, but that’s easier said than done,

isn't it? Remember? It was during the "Last Supper" (Luke 22:24-30) as Jesus clearly pointed the way forward from the Passover lamb of the old covenant to himself, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29), when the discussion disintegrated into a huge free-for-all as the disciples argued about which of them would be the greatest in Jesus' kingdom.

Later on, that same evening (see Luke 22:39-46), Jesus asked his disciples to pray with him in the Garden of Gethsemane, only hours from the time when he gave himself sacrificially on his cross, in the greatest ever demonstration of love. When he finished praying, with such passion that his sweat "was like drops of blood falling to the ground" (Luke 22:44), he came back to the place he had left his disciples only to find them sleeping.

When Christian missionaries from Europe first preached the gospel of Jesus Christ in North America, Native Americans could not understand how and why the powerful and technologically advanced European civilization could worship a man who died on a cross. **The natural inclination for every human is to be confused and perplexed with the seemingly upside-down message of the cross of Christ.**

To the human mind, God should be powerful, and *never vulnerable*. He should be strong and *impervious to human limitations*. God should be hearty and healthy—*not weak and fragile*. God, as humans perceive him, apart from the gospel, should control and rule and dictate and demand, *not submit and serve*.

Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength (1 Corinthians 1:22-25).

Paul's message to the Corinthian Christ-followers (with their addictive behaviors, pride, squabbling and a myriad of other spiritual dysfunctions) is so very relevant to our Christ-less religious world today. Religious wars based on pride and claims of spiritual superiority remind us that at the foot of Jesus' cross the soldiers "divided up his clothes by casting lots" (Luke 22:34), oblivious of the cosmic, earth-shaking and eternal significance of the drama playing out a few feet above their heads.

Denominations, churches and congregations throughout Christendom seem similarly oblivious of the central, unifying and amazing significance of the cross of Christ even as they jockey for position—self-promoting by ostensibly using Jesus' clothing and name to gain more "market share."

In a never-ending battle of the Christ-less A-B-C's (Attendance, Buildings and Cash) religious authorities twist themselves into pretzels with all kinds of competing truth claims. They take pride in how long their brand name has existed—their faithfulness to creeds and dogmas—and they promise God's special blessings to those who participate in their rituals and ceremonies.

Christ-less religion is singularly focused on its own growth and its own desire to perpetuate its own institutional legacy, often completely missing the unifying, powerful message of the cross of Christ. Christ-less religion obsesses about wafers or crackers, leavened or unleavened, wine or grape juice, whose baptism, how much water must be used—so preoccupied with its dogmas, processions and its holy days that it forgets the holy ground at the foot of the cross of Christ.

Institutionalized, Christ-less religion, in love with its own traditions, teachings, history and heritage more than the people it purports to serve, is actually hanging mill stones around the necks of the little people who are searching for God (Matthew 18:6).

As we look to Jesus, as we set our hearts on things above (Colossians 3:1), as we gaze on his cross as he is lifted up before us, we are reminded of his message—his invitation (forgive my paraphrase and interpretation of his message):

Accept, embrace, believe and trust in my love. Don't get bogged down in trying to please me with a lot of religious stuff—"throw off everything that hinders" (Hebrews 12:1) and run with patience the race I set before you. Creeds and rituals and ceremonies can confuse and take you away from following me. Religious buildings have no special significance. Follow me. Don't allow yourselves to become "bewitched" (Galatians 3:1) by religious pied-pipers, no matter how impressive they may seem.

My dear friends and fellow partners in this worldwide work—my spiritual brothers and sisters in Christ—THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT IN OUR COLLECTIVE, CHRIST-CENTERED MINISTRY. Thank God he allows you and me to serve him, and as we do let us not become bedazzled and mesmerized by superstition or religion—don't be deceived by religious pomp and circumstance—don't be seduced by the fool's gold or the costume jewelry of Christ-less religion—the **real treasure is Jesus.**

My dear friends and fellow partners in this worldwide work—my spiritual brothers and sisters in Christ, whom I love and appreciate so dearly—I leave you with the last verses of Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, as translated by Eugene Peterson, in *The Message Bible*:

Our Master Jesus has his arms wide open for you. And I love you all in the Messiah, in Jesus (I Corinthians 16:23-24).



Greg Albrecht
President, Plain Truth Ministries

Here's a note of thanks from a woman in Arizona who is thankful for the life-changing work of Plain Truth Ministries, which you help to provide through your donations and prayers. **Thank you for your faithful support!**

I want to acknowledge how much my life has changed as a result of the insight I have received from all the wonderful sources of learning made available to me through CWR/PTM. To experience life from the perspective of God's love and grace truly brings a peace beyond understanding, even when troubling times occur. I know God's presence is with me. How comforted and blessed I feel to have released many old fear-based false concepts of God to a clearer understanding of His love for us. I am so thankful for each and every one who contributes so much to me and to all those who benefit so deeply from the efforts of Plain Truth Ministries. May God's blessings continue to abound!

CWR/PTM Prayer List—May 2018

These requests for prayer represent just a few of the thousands we receive and pray for. We invite you to join us in praying for these and the others that space does not permit us to include here. Thanks for joining with us as a CWR/PTM Prayer Partner.

Please pray for my next-door neighbor who has had several health problems and is now dealing with treatments for lung cancer, and pray for his wife as she cares for him.—Maryland

Please pray for my husband—he has had Multiple Sclerosis for 37 years and has been bedridden for ten years.—Ohio

Please pray for me that God will heal my spine which causes me much pain.—Florida

I desperately need your prayers as I am suffering severe depression and PTSD. Currently I am being treated, clinically, on an outpatient basis. Please pray that I don't have to be hospitalized.—Tennessee

Please pray for me—I am suffering with anxiety and I fear for my life.—Georgia

Please pray for an old friend who has cancer spreading through his body.—New York

Please pray for my wife, who is now disabled and struggling with depression. Praise God that she does not have cancer—her biopsy came back negative.—South Carolina

Please pray for our two nephews and their wives—they are having marital difficulties. One couple has a two-month-old son. It breaks my heart.—Pennsylvania

Pray that God will comfort and encourage people who have lost loved ones.—Texas

I hurt my right arm and shoulder, affecting my ability to work. It has been several weeks with little improvement. Thank you for your prayers and concern.—Wisconsin

Please pray for me and my family—I need help in my old age.—West Virginia

I am requesting prayer for spiritual growth and my continued faith in Jesus Christ.—Louisiana

Please pray for my husband that God will help him be stronger in his body—he has had several strokes.—Ohio

Please keep my grandson in your prayers as he starts another round of chemotherapy.—Tennessee

Please pray for my left eye. I had retinal detachment surgery and the swelling inside my eye hasn't gone down.—Indiana

Please pray for me—I'm tired of being alone. It has been 25 years since my husband passed away.—Idaho

My wife recently lost her job. We request prayers for a new job assignment.—New Jersey

My brother and I have continued high blood pressure even though we take BP meds. Please pray for healing of all our ongoing health problems.—Maryland

I have problems with weakness and am having tests to determine the cause in order to start treatments for it.—New York

Please pray for my friend, a single mother of two boys. She lives with her father who mistreats her.—Kansas

Remember me in your prayers as I am having great difficulty coping with day-to-day life. I am handicapped and disabled... it's a terrible struggle.—Tennessee

Thank you for your continued prayers for me and my household, as I pray for you all. May Jesus our brother and our Father hear our prayers for one another and may we all continue to grow in his protected grace.—California

Our Father in Heaven: We thank you for your grace, mercy and love. You know each of these individuals, and we thank you in advance for the answers you will provide for each request. With thanksgiving for our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, our suffering servant who heals us, in whose name we pray—Amen.