

What Rod Parsley Sees as Scandalous in Today's World

In his new book, *The Cross*, Rod Parsley shares how he believes society has diluted an important focus on the symbol of Christ's sacrifice and why Christians should actively strive to recapture its significance in this critical season for the church. *Charisma* recently checked in with Parsley to ask him about the book, its inspiration and why the cross is "scandalous." Here's what he had to say.

Charisma: Do you feel this is the most important book you've written? Why?

Rod Parsley: I'll leave it for others to sort out which of my books are the most important. Certainly I consider it a timely message for the body of Christ. It has been a two-year labor of love for me, and I've thoroughly enjoyed the process.

I do believe this is a critical season for the church. When I was researching *Culturally Incorrect* a few years ago, I was shocked to learn that just 4 percent of Generation Y—my daughter's generation—were Bible-believing Christians. That compares to 35 percent of my generation and 65 percent of my parents' generation. We certainly can't afford any greater erosion of the church!

The **cross** has been the centerpiece of my preaching for more than 30 years. In part, I felt impressed to write this book now in order to bring some neglected truths back to the forefront of our national conversation. I'm convinced that the answers to today's major moral issues will not be found in the halls of Congress, the decisions of the Supreme Court, within the platform of a political party or in the talking points of elected officials. The answers are found at the foot of an old rugged cross. The sooner we realize this, the more

readily we'll see the moral decline of our nation turnaround.

Charisma: You write that we live in a cross-less generation. How has the cross lost its significance in our modern world?

Parsley: I've noticed a trend for the past few years where the cross is more commonplace than ever, yet it's being trivialized as never before. They dangle around the necks of entire constellations of godless gyrating pop-stars. Professional athletes brand their bodies with cross **tattoos** of every size and variation imaginable. But for many of them, their lifestyle portrays a stunning ignorance of the cross's meaning.

Additionally, the culture has marginalized the cross to a greater degree than at any other moment in my lifetime. In the public square, a fatally flawed interpretation of the Constitution has essentially driven the cross from our public landmarks and cityscapes.

And sadly, the church has followed suit. Many modern churches don't render the cross as the focal point of its architecture, and it has largely disappeared from the interior and exterior of our church buildings. Maybe we've listened to too many consultants who have convinced us that the cross belongs to the last century or that it's bad marketing.

As I've been saying for many years, there is much to be gained by a return to the discarded values of the past. Certainly that includes a reverence for Jesus's sacrificial death on the cross.

Charisma: When did the gospel drastically change your life?

Parsley: My family attended a number of Free Will Baptist churches on the south side of Columbus, Ohio, when I was a boy. Even at a young age I was fascinated by the stained-glass windows in those churches, each depicting a biblical scene that was superimposed upon a large cross. In those days, there

were no self-imposed taboos about the preaching of the cross. That's why I dedicated this book to the Free Will Baptist preachers who painted a vivid picture in my mind about the **sacrifice of Christ**, the love displayed on Calvary and the desire to help humanity find their way to the foot of the cross.

Charisma: Why do you call the cross of Jesus Christ scandalous?

Parsley: Because that's what Scripture says! Paul records in 1 Corinthians 1:23, "But we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles." The Greek word rendered "stumbling block" is *skandalon*. That's where our English word *scandal* comes from. It actually describes something that causes a person to trip or an obstacle that stands in his or her path.

The message of Jesus and the cross was a stone of stumbling for the religious, tradition-loving Jews and an absurdity to the trendy, intellectual Greeks. And those are essentially the same responses of those who reject that message today.

The cross is **scandalous** because it's an affront to man's pride, to his wisdom and intellect, to his self-righteousness. There is something deeply ingrained in the collective heart of fallen mankind that demands a better, nobler, prettier narrative than the cross offers. In our fallen state, we can't believe that the pathway to redemption is so simple and straightforward. Only when we embrace God's offer of **salvation** can we see this scandal for the truth that it is.

Charisma: We see revival crusades happening more frequently. Do you see more of a need for the gospel emerging in the United States?

Parsley: This generation has the same desperate need for the gospel that every generation before it has had. Those of us who grew up in the Church sometimes adopt the mindset that we

inherited our faith from our parents. But we are each responsible for our response to God's **offer of salvation**. Ultimately, the goal of this book is for readers to be so radically transformed and motivated that their life's mission becomes to introduce others to the love of God that motivated Him to send His one and only Son as our substitute and provide us with life everlasting.

If there are more revival services today, that is probably a function of more people in need of reviving! My prayer is that the lasting fruit that comes from these revivals is an influx of the jewels of souls being placed in the crown of our Savior.

Charisma: How can we as a culture regain reverence for the message of the cross?

Parsley: There has been a lot of bad theology spread by theologians of prosperity regarding the cross in the past 10-15 years, with a stream of books calling for a "reimagining" or "reinterpreting" of the cross. The cross does not need to be rethought. It needs to be proclaimed. As ministers of the gospel fulfill their divine calling and preach the cross, people will give it the **reverence** it deserves. Jesus said it best: "And I, *when I am lifted up* from the earth, will draw all people to myself" (John 12:32, emphasis added).

Charisma: How can Christians evangelize effectively to their friends and family?

Parsley: The most effective means of evangelism is one the evangelist will do—and that includes the evangelists who sit in our pews.

I am proud of our work with [my television show] *Breakthrough*, and we have the documented results to prove that we are adding daily to the **kingdom of God**. But my image and voice via television are not nearly as effective as a faithful saint

simply telling friends and family members what Jesus Christ has done for him or her and what He will do for them.

But it takes commitment! That's why the church, in addition to winning the lost, needs to be about the business of edifying and encouraging the saints to be ministers of the gospel where they are most influential.