

The Message Of The Cross

Introduction

The cross is one of the most well-known symbols of Christianity, but its significance lies far deeper than the cross of Calvary.

The cross is mentioned a number of times in the Bible, but most significantly in the letters of Paul. Long before Jesus was crucified on the cross at Calvary, He exhorted us to take up our cross daily and follow Him, which is a condition of discipleship. (Luke 9:23) Jesus Himself took up this cross daily; it was the principal instrument by which He destroyed the root of sin and overcame the power of death and the devil.

Paul was gripped of the message of the cross. In his letters, we see how highly he values the cross; it permeated the whole of his life and preaching.

For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.” 1 Corinthians 1:18.

For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.” 1 Corinthians 2:2.

“I have been crucified with Christ it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.” Galatians 2:20.

These references show clearly that the cross is the crucial key, the very means by which we can follow Jesus on the new and living way into sanctification. Through the power of the cross, we are able to be transformed into Jesus’ image, so that the life of Christ can also be manifested in our bodies. (2 Corinthians 4:10-11) This is why the message of the cross is one of the central, most crucial pillars of the gospel.

What is “The cross?”

Scripture actually speaks about three crosses.

Jesus’ death on the wooden cross of Calvary allowed all people to receive forgiveness for their sins. This death, however, was really the culmination of Jesus

having taken up His cross daily – an inner, metaphorical cross on which all self-will was sacrificed and thus all sin in the flesh.

While the cross of Calvary was the end of Jesus' physical life here on earth, this cross (the forgiveness of sins) is just the beginning for a disciple who has a genuine goal of coming to a life of complete victory over all sin in the flesh– all the sin that we had inherited from the Fall – just as Jesus did.

Scripture actually speaks about three crosses, which are explained here briefly:

1. **The first cross: The cross of Calvary.** (Luke 23:33-43) This is the physical cross on which Jesus suffered and died. By faith in what Jesus did on this cross, we have peace with God. Christ has now become our atoning sacrifice, and we can receive forgiveness for our sins when we pray for it and repent. Through forgiveness we are saved, not based on our works or achievements, but by grace alone.
2. **The second cross: Crucifying the old man and the flesh with its passions and desires.** This is the metaphorical cross which Paul writes about in Romans 6:6 and Galatians 5:24. This is the cross on which our “old man” – our state of mind which agreed to do what we knew to be sin – is put out of action, and the flesh with its passions and desires loses its power over us. By this cross we are born again and become disciples. We have a change of heart and mind, and no longer commit the manifest works of the flesh. (Galatians 5:19-21) We are no longer slaves of sin, to live according to the flesh. (Romans 6:15-23; Romans 8:12) We are made alive with Christ, having received Jesus as Lord in our lives.
3. **The third cross: Taking up our cross daily and denying ourselves as disciples.** (Matthew 16:24; Luke 9:23) This is also a metaphorical cross, which Jesus took up every day of His entire life by denying Himself – choosing to do God's will instead of His own will. Jesus says that no one can be His disciple without taking up this cross *daily* as He Himself did. When we do this, we destroy the root of sin, becoming finished with it as we continue to put to death the areas of sin in our lives that the Holy Spirit reveals to us, and which we were not previously aware of. This is the hidden life with Christ in God. This is sanctification – a deep salvation and transformation of our entire inner man and we become partakers of the divine nature. (2 Peter 1:4) This is the calling of the bride..

The first cross: The cross of Calvary

This is the cross that leads to the forgiveness of sins. The “first cross” is the wooden cross of Calvary, where Jesus suffered His physical death. (Luke 23:33-43) It is possible for all people to obtain forgiveness for their sins through Jesus’ death on Calvary.

In Colossians 2:13-15, Paul refers to “the handwriting of requirements.” This was the law, given to Moses, which documented God’s will for His people, stating the requirements and the rewards for those who kept them, as well as the punishment for those who did not keep them. The bottom line was that the wages of sin is death, (Romans 6:23) so sinners had a death sentence – both physical death, and, much more serious, a spiritual death, which was severance from God. Because all people had sinned, all of them were under this judgment.

Satan used this to accuse people, because nobody could keep the whole law, especially the commandment, “*You shall not covet.*” (Exodus 20:17) Covetousness, or lust, is hidden, and the law was powerless in controlling it, because it could only deal with sin when it came out of the body. (Romans 8:3-4) Satan used these laws, or the “handwriting of requirements,” to accuse people before God and demand that they be handed over to him.

A provision was made whereby people could obtain forgiveness through the sacrifice of an animal without blemish, and the blood of the sacrifice was offered as proof of the debt having been paid. However, these sacrifices could not take away the root of sin, the lusts or *sin in the flesh*, and had to be repeated year after year. (Hebrews 10:1-4)

Jesus Christ, the Son of God, took upon Himself the same flesh and blood as us, meaning that He was in the same position as all mankind, with sin in the flesh that all people have inherited from the Fall. As a human being, Jesus was tempted to sinful desires and thoughts as we are. However, the vital difference was that even though Jesus *had sin*² (1 John 1:8; Romans 7:18), He never once gave in to temptation, and thus never once *committed sin*³. (Hebrews 4:15) Jesus never broke the law, not even the law that said that we should not covet. Instead, by denying these lusts and desires every time they came up from His flesh – refusing to agree with these temptations – He *put to death* all sin in the flesh. All the sin in the fallen human nature that Jesus took upon Himself when He came to earth, was *conquered and overcome*⁵ in His mortal body. Jesus offered Himself, His own will, as a

sacrifice each time He was tempted, allowing God to condemn sin in His flesh. (Romans 8:3-4)

Falsely accused of heresy, He was crucified as a criminal, even though He was blameless. This physical death was actually the ultimate sacrifice, because He took upon Himself the blame for the sins of the whole world, and paid the price – death.

“And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.” Colossians 2:13-14. Now Satan no longer had a claim on those who believe in Jesus. The debt for sin had been paid. He was blameless, a sacrifice without blemish, and through Him we, who are all sinners, can have our sin forgiven. (1 Peter 3:18) This is not due to any merit of our own, but we are saved by grace alone.

There was now a Man who had completely fulfilled the righteous requirement of the law, proving that it is possible for all people. (Romans 8:1-4; Revelation 12:10-11; Acts 26:18) Because Jesus overcame sin, death had no hold on Him and He rose from the grave on Easter morning, having taken the keys of Hades and of Death from Satan. (Hebrews 2:14-15; Revelation 1:18) Satan’s time as an accuser before God have ended, but he still roams the earth with great wrath, seeking whom he may devour. (1 Peter 5:8) He whispers lies and accuses us of sins we have been forgiven for (Revelation 12:7-12), but because Jesus has paid the debt of sin, those who believe in Him can now resist the devil and his lies, and he will flee from them. (James 4:7)

The second cross: Crucifying the old man and the flesh with its passions and desires

This “crucifixion” is necessary if we want to become disciples.

Those who are truly tired of their own sin and have a genuine desire to enter a new life, are led to repentance by God’s goodness. (Romans 2:4) *“Repent therefore and be converted that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord ...”* Acts 3:19. *Being converted*¹ is a wholehearted decision one makes to repent from former sins and to turn away from the world – from living in the passing pleasures of sin, to living for God a hundred

percent; not a bit of both. By God's mercy, we receive forgiveness for our sins by unmerited grace, and the foundation for a new life is now laid. (Acts 3:19; Acts 26:18)

Crucifying the "old man" (Romans 6:6; Ephesians 4:17-24)

To come to a new life, we have to put off the "*old man*"² – our old life. (Ephesians 2:2-3, Ephesians 4:22-24) Our "old man" is our mindset before conversion where we allowed sin to rule in our lives, where we had not made a conscious decision to resist sin but instead gave in to temptation. It is clear that there is no way we can stop sinning if our "old man" continues to be active in our lives. Then we will need forgiveness for the same sins we commit day by day. To believe that we can get victory over sin without putting off the "old man" is deception. Then it will just be a battle to keep up a good outward appearance. If we want spiritual progress after we have been converted, then we have to put off, or crucify, our "old man." (Romans 6:6)

Crucifying the "old man" is an act of faith, a decision we make to put off our old mindset which willingly gave in to sin, and to put on the "*new man*" – a new mindset and determination to resist sin and to live a crucified life with Him. (Ephesians 4:17-24) We reckon ourselves to be dead to sin – we no longer serve sin consciously, and to be alive to God and His workings – our bodies are used instead to serve Him in obedience. (Romans 6:11-14) We can make this decisive commitment to put off our "old man" and to begin a new life regardless of where we are – it is a decision we make by faith!

Having put off the old man does not mean that we do not have *sin in the flesh* and that we are no longer tempted by being drawn and enticed by our own desires. (James 1:14-15) It means, however, that we do not live according to them. This is the *new mind*³. Our new mind no longer serves sin, but instead declares a resounding "No!" when we are tempted. This is a powerful decision of faith, which takes place in our mind.

Crucifying the flesh with its passions and desires (Galatians 5:24)

With this new mind, our flesh with its passions and desires can be crucified with Christ. (Galatians 5:24) The flesh is the part of our body of sin of which we are conscious. Naturally, we cannot crucify what we have not recognized as sin up to this point. But as soon as we receive light that something is sin, we have to crucify

it – put it to death. (Colossians 3:5) When these lusts and desires arise from our flesh, they must be crucified – never allowed into our hearts and minds – and suffered out until they die. This incurs suffering in our flesh, because our own sinful lusts and desires that dwell there are not being satisfied. These lusts eventually die when they are continually denied to the point of death.

Our mind, our consciousness, which before was in wicked works has become subject to God's will by faith. We are to reckon ourselves as dead indeed to sin, but alive to God. (Romans 6:11) When a person continues to live in conscious sin, it is because the old man is still alive, and they don't have the mind to resist sin – they are a slave of sin. Therefore, putting off the old man opens the possibility of a life in total victory over conscious sin as far as we have light – our bodies are no more slaves of sin. *“Therefore, brethren we are debtors – not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh.”* Romans 8:12. The evil inclinations in our flesh shall no longer rule over us.

This cross is for all of us who have sinned and have sinful habits, but who have repented and have decided to begin a new life.

With the third cross our entire inner being can be transformed into the image of Christ. By taking up the second cross we are finished with serving sin with our mind. This must be active in us if we are to receive grace to live a life that is hidden with Christ in God, that comes into effect with the third cross. (Colossians 3:3-4) When the second cross is active, the Holy Spirit comes to us and writes laws and commandments in our hearts and minds – laws that liberate us from doing our own will; laws that go beyond the manifest works of the flesh (Galatians 5:19-21)

In obedience to the Spirit, we take up the third cross, which is the cross that Jesus speaks about in Matthew 16:24 and Luke 9:23. *“If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.”* Luke 9:23. Jesus' exhortation entails a deep salvation, much more than receiving forgiveness for committed sins (the first cross), and putting off manifest sin (the second cross). This is what a life of genuine discipleship is all about. Through this cross we partake of Christ, who is God's wisdom, with the result that we are conformed to the image of Jesus. (1 Corinthians 1:21-25; Philippians 3:7-11)

Paul writes about meeting the law of sin in our members that go against the will of God. (Romans 7:22-23) This inclination to sin is also called “sin in the flesh” or “my will,” and is also present in a converted believer who has received

forgiveness, and who has stopped committing manifest sin. This is what John means when he says that we all *have* sin. (1 John 1:8)

Paul, who had the mind to follow Christ, found that this law was working in his members, and cried out, “*O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?*” Romans 7:24. Immediately afterwards he provides the answer: “*I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin.*” Romans 7:25. The answer lies in looking at how Jesus did it.

Our “self-will” (or self-life) is the sin in the flesh that we have all inherited. As a man, Jesus also had inherited this self-will, and was tempted, but His firm resolve from the very start was, “Not My will, but Yours, be done!” (Luke 22:42; Hebrews 4:15; Hebrews 10:5-7) He had to *learn obedience*, because He also had a human nature. (Hebrews 5:7-8) God’s Spirit pointed out the sin in His flesh, and Jesus agreed with the judgment. In this way sin was condemned in Jesus’ flesh, and He opened a way that all His disciples could follow, which we can call the way of the cross. (Romans 8:3-4; Hebrews 5:7-8; 1 Peter 4:1-2)

Jesus tells us how this done when He says that a disciple must “take up his cross daily” and follow Him. (Luke 9:23) Here Jesus is not referring to the first cross, the cross of Calvary, where we cannot follow Him as a sacrifice for others’ sins, nor was it the second cross, where manifest sin is put off, because Jesus never sinned and didn’t need to put off sin.

The cross Jesus is referring to is the third cross, a metaphorical “inner cross” that He Himself made use of every day of His life on earth. It was upon this cross that all sin in His flesh was “crucified” when it had received its judgment. This self-denial caused suffering in His flesh, but brought about death to sin, so the inclination to sin was never translated into actual sin in thought, word or deed. This happened daily, until all sin in Jesus’ flesh was condemned, and He could cry out, “It is finished!” when He was crucified on Calvary. (John 19:30) That is why He exhorted His disciples to follow Him by taking up their cross, and hating their own lives (or self-will). (Luke 14:26-27) (Read the Essentials topic “Christ manifested in the flesh” to learn more.)

“Therefore, since Christ suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same mind, for he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin.” 1 Peter 4:1.

Peter writes that we must arm ourselves with the same mind which was in Christ. By taking up our cross daily as Jesus did, and by the revelation of the Holy Spirit whom God sent to us after Jesus overcame all the sin in His flesh, all of His own will, the Holy Spirit can continually show us new areas of our human nature, our flesh, which need to be cleansed. Gradually our old nature is replaced with the virtues of Christ, and we become more and more attuned to God's voice and will. By taking up our cross daily, our human spirit is freed from the flesh through the blood of Christ, and is the driving force in this new creation by the Holy Spirit.

It is possible to have victory over fleshly lustsThe desires that we experience that go against God's will. In other words, a desire for anything sinful. See James 1:14. Also called "sin in the flesh." Although the expression "youthful lusts" is often thought of in connection with sinful sexual desires, lusts include anything that go against what is good and right in God's eyes. (2 Timothy 2:22.; Galatians... More, have a good conscience and live a respectable outward life, but without taking up our cross daily it remains soulish – earthlyRefers to everything of this earth, as opposed to heavenly things. Example: Earthly treasures/heavenly treasures. The earthly things pass away (are temporal), but the heavenly things are eternal. (Matthew 6:19-21; Colossians 3:2; 1 John 2:17)... More. Any spiritual progress is only possible by taking up our cross and there putting to death our own will, the sin that we have in our flesh. The word of God divides between soul and spirit. (Hebrews 4:12) When this occurs, we enter into a deeper salvation and transformationThis is the process of sanctification, in which we our sinful human nature is gradually exchanged for divine nature when we in obedience to God's will deny and put to death the sinful lusts in our flesh. (Romans 12:2; 2 Corinthians 3:18; 2 Peter 1:3-4)... More of our entire inner being into the image of God. This cross lifts us up from reacting in a soulish and earthly, human way, to becoming more and more spiritual, partakers of the divine natureGod's nature, or divine nature, is perfectly pure and it cannot be tempted by evil. We are promised that we can be partakers of the divine nature by fleeing the corruption in the world that comes through our lusts. As we gradually overcome our sinful human nature it is replaced by divine nature – God shares His own nature with... More!

Jesus was the first one to go on this way of the cross, and He invites us to become His disciples and follow Him on the same way. The death over sin that He used is now something we make use of. "... *always carrying about in the body the dying* of the Lord JesusThis most often refers not to the physical death Christ died on the cross of Calvary, but to the death of the lust to sin in His human nature, which task He fulfilled while He lived on earth as a human being. (2 Timothy 2:11; 2

Corinthians 4:10; Philippians 3:10; Romans 8:3)... More, *that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body.*" 2 Corinthians 4:10.

When the "death of Christ" This most often refers not to the physical death Christ died on the cross of Calvary, but to the death of the lust to sin in His human nature, which task He fulfilled while He lived on earth as a human being. (2 Timothy 2:11; 2 Corinthians 4:10; Philippians 3:10; Romans 8:3)... More" is active, the wisdom and understanding that is of the world and which comes from below – that is to exalt oneself – is brought to nothing. Our human glory and honor according to this world vanishes in the eyes of men, because the wisdom of this world is to want to be something and have a name. (Galatians 6:14; 1 Corinthians 1:19)

But this cross sets us free from this world, as the life of Christ increases in our lives. Through the cross we are prepared to become the bride of Christ. The bride of Christ are all those who have purified themselves as He is pure and have been conformed to His image. (Romans 8:29) They cleanse and purify themselves of all sin and are true followers of Christ. The Bride is another term for the church of Christ.... More, the New Jerusalem that descends from heaven. (Revelation 21) Those who are earthly remain on the earth, but those who overcome by taking up their cross daily press on to perfection (Philippians 3:12-14), and bear the image of the heavenly – they become heavenly as Jesus is heavenly, and will receive a body which is the same as His glorified body. (Philippians 3:17-21)

What is the result of taking up our cross?

A glorious future in the knowledge of Christ.

"For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek." Romans 1:16.

"For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God." 1 Corinthians 1:18.

Freedom from sin

This message, or gospel, is now available to all Jesus' disciples – those who want to be freed from sin. Sin is anything that goes against God's will and His laws. To commit sin is to transgress or disobey these laws. The lust to sin dwells in human nature. In other words, it is contaminated and motivated by the sinful tendencies that dwell in all people as a result of the fall into sin and disobedience in the garden of Eden. This... More. For *"if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed,"* Jesus Himself said. (John 8:36) True liberation is found on the cross. Jesus was physically crucified on the cross at Calvary. Though blameless, He took upon Himself the punishment for sin, which was death, so He could pay our debts and

forgive us our sin if we are willing to believe in Him and follow Him the Apostle Paul wrote: “I have been crucified with Christ...” (Galatians 2:20) This is a metaphorical... More. We experience freedom when we are crucified with Him, suffer with Him, and become like Him in His death. The devil can do nothing when the lustsThe desires that we experience that go against God’s will. In other words, a desire for anything sinful. See James 1:14. Also called “sin in the flesh.” Although the expression “youthful lusts” is often thought of in connection with sinful sexual desires, lusts include anything that go against what is good and right in God’s eyes. (2 Timothy 2:22.; Galatians... Morehave been crucified, for this is the very source of power.

This is what is so good, that when we are tired of ourselves, we know that we are “sold under sin” – we are bankrupt – so we come to Him, allow ourselves to be crucified, and experience His death beginning to work in us over all these lusts and desiresThe desires that we experience that go against God’s will. In other words, a desire for anything sinful. See James 1:14. Also called “sin in the flesh.” Although the expression “youthful lusts” is often thought of in connection with sinful sexual desires, lusts include anything that go against what is good and right in God’s eyes. (2 Timothy 2:22.; Galatians... More. (Matthew 11:28-30)

The power that has been given to us through the message of the cross is a power with which we can put all things in order according to God’s wisdom. Gradually, as time goes on and we are walking in the lightWalking in the light is the state of being obedient to do all that God reveals to you through the Holy Spirit. For example, when He shows you that you need to overcome laziness, or lying, or any other lust. This means both that you put to death all of the sin you are shown (get light over) and obey... More God gives us, putting to death sin in our fleshSin is anything that goes against God’s will and His laws. To commit sin is to transgress or disobey these laws. The lust to sin dwells in human nature. In other words, it is contaminated and motivated by the sinful tendencies that dwell in all people as a result of the fall into sin and disobedience in the garden of Eden. This... More as it is being revealed, we notice that the life of Jesus is coming forth in our bodies. (2 Corinthians 4:10-12) Where we were bitter and demanding before, we become a blessing. Where we were anxious and discouraged, we become full of faith and power for action. Where we once were judgmental and full of spite, we learn to forgive and edify. Instead of causing arguments and strife when our feelings are hurt or our opinions defied, we become examples in mildness, kindness and patience. As our own lusts are denied, we acquire the virtues of Christ.

What power was manifested by the life Paul lived! Paul was gripped of the message of the cross, and the possibilities a “crucified life Jesus was physically crucified on the cross at Calvary. Though blameless, He took upon Himself the punishment for sin, which was death, so He could pay our debts and forgive us our sin if we are willing to believe in Him and follow Him the Apostle Paul wrote: “I have been crucified with Christ...” (Galatians 2:20)