

The Cross of Christ

- *The Greek word that is translated as cross is σταυρός (stauros) and it literally means an upright stake, but it was also used to denote the Roman cross that was used to execute criminals.*
- *The Romans used the cross to execute the most notorious criminals. Crucifixion was most often performed to dissuade its witnesses from perpetrating similar (usually particularly heinous) crimes.*
- *Crucifixion was usually intended to cause a physical death that was agonizingly slow, painful, and gruesome. There was also an emotional aspect since the crucifixion was humiliating and public, with those being crucified spit upon, mocked, and put to an open shame.*
- *The word “excruciating” literally means “out of crucifying” conveying the degree of suffering that was associated with crucifixion.*
- *Although the word “cross” is only used 28 times in the New Testament, the centrality of Jesus’ suffering on the cross is indisputable. Without Christ’s suffering on the cross at Calvary there would be no Gospel, no salvation, and no hope for lost mankind.*
- *The Bible does not just point to the fact that Jesus died in our place so we could be saved and reconciled to God, but that He willingly allowed Himself to be executed in the most horrible, cruel, and humiliating way. Jesus didn’t just shed His blood for us but He shed His blood on the cross.*

Colossians 1:19-20 (NKJV)

¹⁹ For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell,

²⁰ and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross.

- *The cross was the most despised method of execution. To the Romans, whose empire had become barbaric and merciless, crucifixion represented the cruelest way possible to inflict pain and punishment on their worst enemies and criminals.*
- *The Jews considered those who hung on a cross as detestable, beyond the possibility of redemption, and under the wrath of God. Paul, referencing the Law in Deuteronomy 21:22-23, pointed to death on a cross as a sign of those who have been cursed by God.*

Galatians 3:13 NKJV

¹³ Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree”).

- *As we contemplate and meditate on Christ’s sufferings on the cross it provides essential insights into at least two things. Through the depths that Jesus had to suffer for us, it*

clearly reveals how great our sins and rebellion are and how they grieve God. It also reveals how much God loves us and that His love for us knows no bounds—even to die in our place.

Ephesians 3:17-19 (NKJV)

17 that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love,

18 may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height-

19 to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Jesus' love for us is wide and reached out to all of mankind.

Jesus' love for us is long and it goes to those who are even the farthest from Him to save them no matter how far they have wandered or gone from Him.

Jesus' love is deep and He was willing to go to the depths of Hell for us.

Jesus' love is high and nothing can supersede His love for us.

This should give us comfort no matter what we face.

John 19:17-22 NKJV

17 And He, bearing His cross, went out to a place called the Place of a Skull, which is called in Hebrew, Golgotha,

18 where they crucified Him, and two others with Him, one on either side, and Jesus in the center.

19 Now Pilate wrote a title and put it on the cross. And the writing was: JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS.

20 Then many of the Jews read this title, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city; and it was written in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin.

- *It was at the cross of Calvary that Jesus' true identity was proclaimed to the entire world. Jesus hung naked, beaten, bloodied, and in agony of body and soul. Nailed to the cross above Jesus' head was His title for all to see. It was written in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin to proclaim His true identity to all mankind— JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS.*
- *The title nailed to Jesus' cross not only proclaimed Who He is but it also proclaimed why He hung there. Jesus came to save and redeem the lost because He was their God and their King who created and loved them. Pilate had written down the true reason He hung on the cross—Jesus IS the King of kings and the Lord of lords.*

John 19:21-22 (NKJV)

21 Therefore the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, "Do not write, 'The King of the Jews,' but, 'He said, "I am the King of the Jews.'"

22 Pilate answered, "What I have written, I have written."

- *The Jewish religious leaders, who were hoping to rid themselves of Jesus and obliterate His memory once and for all, were indignant to find that such a title was visible for all to see and read. However, they were powerless to remove or change it. The Jewish leaders demanded that Pilate crucify Jesus, but they were unable to compel Pilate to remove or alter the inscription that hung above Jesus on the cross. The Jewish religious leaders were powerless to veil Jesus' true identity from the world.*

1 Corinthians 1:18 (NKJV)

¹⁸ 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.

- *To the world the message of the Gospel seems totally foolish. When they see Christians gathering together in fellowship they hear what to them seems like a rehashing of the same old stories and speaking of Someone who was executed. To unbelievers it seems foolish, but to believers it is our source of greatest comfort and joy because through the cross of Christ we have been saved.*

1 Corinthians 1:19-21 (NKJV)

¹⁹ For it is written: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, And bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent."

²⁰ Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?

²¹ For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe.

- *The wise and the prudent of this world, the philosophers and debaters, have tried to understand the purpose of life and the remedy for all the wars, conflicts, and suffering. However, all their great and reasoned arguments have come up empty. In the "foolishness" of preaching the cross of Christ millions upon millions of people have found peace with God and true and eternal purpose—"it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe."*

1 Corinthians 1:22-24 (NKJV)

²² For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom;

²³ but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness,

²⁴ but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

- *The cross of Christ is both the power of God and the wisdom of God to save those who are willing to receive the revelation of the Gospel and put their faith in Christ.*

1 Corinthians 1:25 (NKJV)

²⁵ Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

- *Verse 25 makes a startling statement when it speaks about God's foolishness and God's weakness. When was God ever foolish or when was God ever weak?*
- *To the Jewish religious leaders and the Roman authorities Jesus looked like the biggest fool. They thought He was so foolish and naïve that even one of His very own disciples betrayed Him and He didn't even have a clue. The Jewish leaders thought they had outwitted and out maneuvered Jesus.*
- *To the Jewish religious leaders and the Roman authorities Jesus looked like the weakest, most helpless and feeble person who ever lived as He hung on the cross, naked, bloodied, beaten to a pulp, and gasping for breath.*
- *However, the Jews, the Romans, and the demonic powers of darkness played right into the very plan of God to see Christ become the Saviour of mankind. God's foolishness is wiser than men.*
- *As Jesus hung helpless on the cross, the world perceived as weakness the greatest power in all creation. Almighty God manifested His infinite omnipotence and perfect divine nature through His Son, Jesus, by coming in human form. Although the world saw what appeared to be a totally powerless Saviour, Jesus overcame and totally defeated Satan. Jesus took away our sin, and the punishment and guilt that sin brought, our sicknesses and diseases, the curse, redeemed us, and reconciled us to God.*
- *No power in all creation could stand in the way of Christ's resurrection. Death was defeated through Jesus' death and resurrection. The weakness of God is stronger than men.*

Ephesians 2:11-12 (NKJV)

¹¹ **Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh—who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands—**

¹² **that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.**

- *The Gentiles were alienated and separated from the commonwealth of Israel and had no part in the covenants of promise. They were without hope, without a Saviour (Christ) and were without God because the covenant promises only belonged to Israel—until Jesus sealed the New Covenant with His own blood. Now all believers, Jew and Gentile are partakers in the Abrahamic and the New Covenants.*

Ephesians 2:13 (NKJV)

¹³ **But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.**

- *God's solution to the Gentile's dilemma was to bring them into the fold of God's love through Jesus' blood shed on the cross at Calvary.*

Ephesians 2:14 (NKJV)

¹⁴ For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation,

- *Before we knew Christ we were trapped in a state of hostility. Our sins separated us from God and from one another. However, through Jesus' sacrifice He reconciled us to God and removed the separation which divided Jew and Gentile, so in God's sight we could all become His beloved through our faith in Christ. We are all one new man in Christ.*
- *Jesus not only brought us peace—He is our peace. There may not be peace in the world, and we may not have peace with one another, but we can always have peace with God.*

Ephesians 2:15 (NKJV)

¹⁵ having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace,

- *Through His sacrificial suffering and death on the cross, Jesus took the hostility that was against us because of our lawlessness and rebellion and carried it in His own body and soul.*
- *God's redemption is so wonderful that He didn't take the Gentiles and make them into Jews, nor did He take the Jews and make them into Gentiles. He brought the two together into one, making them into "one new man" which is called the Church where there is neither Jew nor Gentile. We all stand united together as equals and part of His beloved!*

Ephesians 2:16 (NKJV)

¹⁶ and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity.

- *This reconciliation only came about through the cross of Christ where through His death He put to death the enmity and hostility that was directed toward us because of our sins.*
- *Through the cross, Jesus became the bridge between sinful man and a holy God. In our New Covenant with God, Jesus is "the Mediator of the new covenant," still mediating on our behalf before God. (Hebrews 12:24).*

Ephesians 2:17 (NKJV)

¹⁷ And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near.

- *Jesus came and proclaimed peace to those who were afar off (the Gentiles) and those who were near (the Jews), because in reality every person whether Jew or Gentile has been separated from God and became adversaries of God because of our sinful and rebellious ways.*

Ephesians 2:18-19 (NKJV)

¹⁸ For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father.

¹⁹ Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God,

- *Through Jesus we have direct access to the Father and we are no longer strangers and foreigners. We have become fellow citizens of Heaven and have become part of God's family as His sons and daughters!*
- *The gift of salvation that we receive when we put our faith in Christ is so wonderful. However, as humans we can so easily forget what our salvation cost Jesus and take our salvation for granted. That is why Paul begins his discourse in Ephesians 2:11 with the words "Therefore remember..."*
- *We can so easily take for granted what Jesus suffered for us at the cross of Calvary. His sacrifice can be so far from our minds and hearts that we remain unmoved by His love or what He willingly suffered for us. Every day we need to make a conscious effort to remember and be thankful for all Jesus did for us on the cross and the benefits that accrue to us because of what He did as He took the punishment we deserved.*

John 3:14-15 (NKJV)

¹⁴ And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up,

¹⁵ that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.

- *The first reference to the cross found in the Gospel of John doesn't mention the word cross, but it is clearly speaking about Christ's sacrifice on the cross. These verses preface one of the most quoted Scriptures in the entire Bible and one that beautifully summarizes the Gospel message: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." (John 3:16).*
- *The phrase "even so must the Son of Man be lifted up" is a clear reference to Jesus being placed on a cross and crucified.*
- *When Jesus said, "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up" He was referring to an event that happened in Israel, recorded in Numbers, Chapter 21, when they were traveling through the wilderness. Jesus revealed that this event actually contains a prophetic picture regarding His death on the cross. It also spells out God's redemptive plan.*

Numbers 21:4-5 (NKJV)

⁴ Then they journeyed from Mount Hor by the Way of the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom; and the soul of the people became very discouraged on the way.

⁵ And the people spoke against God and against Moses: “Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and our soul loathes this worthless bread.”

- *Soon after God miraculously delivered Israel from the bondage and oppression of Egypt they began to complain against God and despise His provisions—“our soul loathes this worthless bread.”*
- *Israel’s complaint against God and all He provided for them closely mirrors the attitude of Adam and Eve when they were tempted by the serpent in the Garden. God allowed Adam and Eve to abundantly partake of and enjoy everything in the Garden except for the fruit from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.*
- *However, Adam and Eve succumbed to the lies of the serpent and believed that God had withheld the very best from them.*
- *In spite of all God had given them they were dissatisfied with God’s provision and they craved the one fruit that was restricted—fruit from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Likewise, Israel despised God’s miraculous provision of the manna and desired to return back to Egypt.*

Numbers 21:6 (NKJV)

⁶ So the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and many of the people of Israel died.

- *The consequence of Israel’s murmuring was similar to that of Adam and Eve—it produced death and they were given over to the power of the serpent which inflicted suffering.*
- *The serpents biting the Israelites are described as “fiery serpents” denoting the affliction, the burning pain, and death that their bites caused.*

Numbers 21:7 (NKJV)

⁷ Therefore the people came to Moses, and said, “We have sinned, for we have spoken against the LORD and against you; pray to the LORD that He take away the serpents from us.” So Moses prayed for the people.

- *Once the people saw the pain and death their rebellion and murmuring caused they cried out to Moses to intercede on their behalf so the Lord would remove the serpents and deliver them from their suffering and even death.*

- *When they sought deliverance from the consequences of their sins and rebellion, they failed to understand that the destruction and ramifications of their rebellion wouldn't simply disappear. Sin comes with a very high price tag.*

Numbers 21:8-9 (NKJV)

⁸ Then the LORD said to Moses, "Make a fiery serpent, and set it on a pole; and it shall be that everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, shall live."

⁹ So Moses made a bronze serpent, and put it on a pole; and so it was, if a serpent had bitten anyone, when he looked at the bronze serpent, he lived.

- *The Lord's solution to save and deliver the people of Israel from the fiery serpents and death from their bites was for Moses to make a bronze serpent and set it on a pole.*
- *At the time the meaning and significance of the bronze serpent placed on a pole probably eluded many in Israel. However, the bronze serpent contained the prophetic picture of the method God would employ to deliver not only Israel, but all of mankind, from the power of the devil and the consequences of sin.*
- *The bronze serpent placed on a pole and lifted up also provided a prophetic picture of how much Jesus would have to suffer to redeem mankind from the consequences of their sins and free them from the torment of the devil.*

Hebrews 2:14-15 (NKJV)

¹⁴ Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil,

¹⁵ and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.

- *The bronze serpent placed on a pole and lifted up before the people provided a picture of Christ's suffering on the cross.*
- *In the Bible, bronze is the metal that depicts divine judgment. Christ took upon Himself God's judgment for our sins, transgressions, and rebellion.*

Isaiah 53:6 (NKJV)

⁶ All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way; And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.

- *The serpent represents Jesus, who when He hung on the cross became that sin offering. He became our sin for us so that through His sacrifice we could be counted as righteous.*

2 Corinthians 5:21 (NKJV)

²¹ For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

- *The pole that the bronze serpent was lifted up on represents the cross where Jesus was crucified. The Hebrew word translated as “pole” means “something lifted up, a standard, ensign, signal pole.” It can also refer to a rallying point which an army gathers around.*

John 12:32-33 (NKJV)

³² **And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself."**

³³ **This He said, signifying by what death He would die.**

- *However, for someone to be saved from the bite of the fiery serpents there was one important condition—“it shall be that everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, shall live.” Even though God made a covenant with the nation of Israel through Abraham, each individual Jew had to personally choose to put their faith in the God of Israel to receive salvation. Salvation requires voluntary acceptance.*
- *As the fiery serpents bit each person, that person had to choose to raise his eyes and look at the bronze serpent hanging on the pole so they could be saved and healed. If they chose to turn away in unbelief, they would experience the consequences of their sins and rebellion and die.*
- *God has provided the way of salvation for each person—whoever was or will be born, but each person must choose to respond to the calling of the Holy Spirit and the Gospel in order to be saved.*

John 3:18 (NKJV)

¹⁸ **“He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.”**

2 Kings 18:4 (NKJV)

⁴ **He (King Hezekiah) removed the high places and broke the sacred pillars, cut down the wooden image and broke in pieces the bronze serpent that Moses had made; for until those days the children of Israel burned incense to it, and called it Nehushtan.**

- *Although Moses was instructed to make the bronze serpent, there came a time when King Hezekiah had to destroy it because the children of Israel had made it into a focus of worship and turned it into an idol.*
- *The children of Israel gave the bronze serpent the name Nehushtan which in Hebrew means “a thing of bronze.” They lost the prophetic significance of the bronze serpent and its Messianic foreshadowing. Instead of remembering how wonderfully God had delivered Israel from the fiery serpents and looking forward to the coming of the Messiah who would fully redeem them, they turned away from God and turned the bronze serpent into Nehushtan—a source of idol worship.*

- *The world has taken the cross and made it into a “good luck charm” or into a superstitious relic. Christians sometimes look at the cross with eyes blinded by complacency and forget that it represents Jesus’ sacrifice and the indescribable sufferings He endured for us.*
- *Every day, as believers, we need to consider the cross of Christ and what He has done for us. This should fill our hearts with thanksgiving and praise for Jesus, but also strength to endure whatever hardships or difficulties we face.*
- *The world has taken the cross of Christ and distorted it.*
- *The crusaders made the cross a symbol of aggression.*
- *The religious people have made it into a symbol of superstition.*
- *The strong see it as a symbol of weakness.*
- *The wise people see it as foolishness.*
- *But to those who are saved it is the wisdom of God and the power of God to salvation.*
- *We are going to look at one more prophetic picture of the cross found in Exodus, Chapter 15.*

Exodus 15:22-26 (NKJV)

²² So Moses brought Israel from the Red Sea; then they went out into the Wilderness of Shur. And they went three days in the wilderness and found no water.

²³ Now when they came to Marah, they could not drink the waters of Marah, for they were bitter. Therefore the name of it was called Marah.

²⁴ And the people complained against Moses, saying, "What shall we drink?"

²⁵ So he cried out to the LORD, and the LORD showed him a tree. When he cast it into the waters, the waters were made sweet. There He made a statute and an ordinance for them, and there He tested them,

²⁶ and said, "If you diligently heed the voice of the LORD your God and do what is right in His sight, give ear to His commandments and keep all His statutes, I will put none of the diseases on you which I have brought on the Egyptians. For I am the LORD who heals you."

- *Israel was journeying from the Red Sea when they came to the Wilderness of Shur. In Hebrew, Shur means “wall.” They were up against a wall—confronted by an impossible situation. They desperately needed water but all they found were the waters of Marah—water so bitter it was impossible to drink. Once again Israel faced a potentially life threatening situation with over a million people in need of water.*
- *Israel complained against Moses. The bitterness in the waters mirrored the bitterness in their souls.*
- *Moses turned to God and the Lord showed him a tree. Moses took the tree and threw it into the waters of bitterness. Miraculously, the bitter water that was previously undrinkable and produced only death became sweet, refreshing, and life giving!*

- *When we apply the reality of what Jesus did for us on the cross to whatever circumstances we may face, no matter how bitter we feel, God will take the bitterness hidden in our hearts and bring sweetness and life.*

Romans 8:28 (NKJV)

²⁸ And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.

- *If we live in the reality of Christ's redemptive sacrifice at the cross by fully trusting in Jesus we will find healing for our bodies and our souls and protection from the storms of life that try to destroy us. We will live fruitful lives for the glory of God.*

“If you diligently heed the voice of the LORD your God and do what is right in His sight, give ear to His commandments and keep all His statutes, I will put none of the diseases on you which I have brought on the Egyptians. For I am the LORD who heals you.” (Exodus 15:26).

Matthew 16:24-26 NKJV

²⁴ Then Jesus said to His disciples, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.

²⁵ For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.

²⁶ For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?”

- *What does it mean for believers to take up our cross?*
- *To take up our cross means to live a life of self-denial and self-sacrifice. We live unselfish lives for the glory of God. We die to ourselves and live for God.*

Galatians 2:20 (NKJV)

²⁰ 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.

- *To take up our cross means to realize that our old sinful nature has been crucified, so we are able to live out our new identity in Christ.*

Romans 6:6 (NKJV)

⁶ knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin.

- *To take up our cross means to realize we no longer have to be controlled by the world's standards; we are free to live by God's standards.*

Galatians 6:14 (NKJV)

¹⁴ But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.

- *But possibly the most important meaning of taking up our cross is to fully identify with Jesus Christ.*

Philippians 1:21 NKJV

²¹ For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.

- *The centrality of the cross of Christ brings the correct balance by which all other Scriptures and promises found in God's Word can be understood and applied.*
- *Without fully identifying with Jesus Christ and His sacrifice on the cross we can easily turn the Gospel into a very self-centered and self-serving message. We gladly accept God's blessings, but reject suffering as part of the Christian life.*
- *While the prosperity message contains a lot of truth its focus is always exalting self—that we should always be happy, healthy, and rich. But the true Gospel message seeks to glorify Jesus Christ, in whatever circumstances we face.*

Philippians 1:20 NKJV

²⁰ according to my earnest expectation and hope that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death.