

The Cross Of Christ

Was it a ghastly mistake?

One thing at least can be said with certainty about the crucifixion of Christ, it was manifestly the most famous death in history.

In countries like Italy and France it is impossible to go a hundred yards without being confronted with some version or other of the Crucifixion.

Billions of crucifixes must have been made, from a huge cross on a building to tiny jewelled versions to hang round the neck or over the heart.

The cross today is so easily glamorised, but there is nothing lovely or beautiful about the sufferings of Christ on His cross.

The facts are too horrifying to be told in any detail, crucifixion was the most cruel and shameful of all punishments.

Crucifixion was designed to cause the greatest of pain for the longest period of time possible.

The victim was held down on the cross, while laying on the ground. He was nailed, with fierce, rough nails to the cross, arms outstretched.

The cross was lifted up with the victim on it and dropped into a socket in the ground. The impact as the cross hit the base of the socket would tear at the flesh around the wounds made by the nails.

The victim would be exposed naked to the intense heat. Developing an unbearable thirst. Exposed to a plague of flies attacking their open wounds.

The victim would be open to the mockery of the crowds for hours until life slowly and in unthinkable pain, drained away.

A lingering, agonising death.

Our English word “*excruciating*” is derived from the same root word, as crucifixion.

Galatians 6:14 [NIV] *“May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.”*

How could Paul boast in such a horrifying death of His Saviour?

Paul understood that the belief of ever true Christian centred on the death of Jesus Christ.

The cross is the key to everything.

One-third of the gospel records is taken up with the passion of Jesus Christ, an extraordinary proportion compared with the biography of almost any other human.

Christ Himself frequently referred to His coming death. Christ called it “*my hour*”.

Luke 9:28-31 [King James] *“And it came to pass about an eight days after these sayings, he took Peter and John and James, and went up into a mountain to pray. And as he prayed, the fashion of his countenance was altered, and his raiment was white and glistering. And, behold, **there talked with***

him two men, which were Moses and Elias: Who appeared in glory, and spake of his decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem.”

“accomplish” – a very strange word to use of one’s impending death.

If you want to understand the Christian message you must start with the crucifixion of Jesus Christ.

The question is ‘*Why is the cross the Christian’s boast and the symbol of Christian faith?*’

Many people cannot relate the cruelty of the cross with a God of love.

The disciple Simon Peter shared this confusion of faith in Christ’s own words and actions.

Matthew 16:13-17 [NIV] *“When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say the Son of Man is?” They replied, “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” “But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?” **Simon Peter answered, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”** Jesus replied, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven.”*

Peter through revelation from God knew who Christ really was.

Matthew 16:21-23 [NIV] *“From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life. Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. “Never, Lord!” he said. “This shall never happen to you!” Jesus turned and said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling-block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men.”*

Peter did **not** understand why Christ had to die in such a humiliating way.

Like all good Jews of those days, under the Old Covenant Peter was brought up to believe in a direct connection between suffering and sin.

John 9:1-2 [NIV] *“As he went along, he saw a **man blind from birth**. His disciples asked him, “**Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?**”*

An example of this mindset.

Therefore, for Christ of all people to suffer was for Simon Peter inconceivable.

It is **not** hard to understand Peter’s dilemma.

At last Peter felt he had found a man who was perfect, without fault and blameless, which was a true observation.

God’s supreme revelation of Himself on earth, which was true.

How could Christ talk about suffering and dying like an evil human who to a Jew was cursed by God and under the extreme judgement of God?

Again, what did Peter as well as the rest of the disciples make of Christ’s agony in the Garden of Gethsemane?

Mark 14:34 [NIV] *“My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death,” he said to them. “Stay here and keep watch.”*

We can see the confusion in Peter's mind by the way he tried to defend his Master with a sword.

John 18:10-11 [NIV] *“Then Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it and struck the high priest’s servant, cutting off his right ear. (The servant’s name was Malchus.) Jesus commanded Peter, “Put your sword away! Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?”*

A loyal but misguided action that received a rebuke from Christ.

We cannot prove that Peter saw the crucifixion itself.

It is certainly possible he did not as a response to his remorse of denying being a disciple of Christ.

What could he make of the hideous sight and the final cry of his Master?

Mark 15:34, 37 [NIV] *“And at the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, “Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?”, which means, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” ... “With a loud cry, Jesus breathed his last.”*

Without a doubt Peter’s faith in Christ and in God had received a shattering blow.

Most of the disciples felt the same.

Luke 24:13-17 [NIV] *“Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; but they were kept from recognising him. He asked them, “What are you discussing together as you walk along?” They stood still, their faces downcast.”*

These disciples did **not** recognise Christ because they were so depressed and dejected, only looking at the ground just ahead of their feet.

Luke 24:25-31 [NIV] *“He said to them, “How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?” And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself. As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus acted as if he were going further. But they urged him strongly, “Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over.” So he went in to stay with them. **When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognised him, and he disappeared from their sight.**”*

At last the disciples could see the connection between Christ’s suffering and sin.

It was **not** Christ’s sin that caused His suffering but ours.

Atonement

I have little doubt that Peter did some concentrated Bible study as the truth began to dawn.

Leviticus 16:16 [NIV] *“In this way he will make atonement for the Most Holy Place because of the uncleanness and rebellion of the Israelites, whatever their sins have been. He is to do the same for the Tent of Meeting, which is among them in the midst of their uncleanness.”*

All the sacrifices made by the High Priest were for the sins of the people.

The lamb that died at the first Passover was a substitute for the death of the people.

John 1:29 [NIV] *“The next day John saw Jesus coming towards him and said, “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”*

Didn't John the Baptist call Jesus the “lamb of God” ?

The horror of the truth hit the disciples, their beloved Master had died because of their sins.

1 Peter 1:18-19 [NIV] *“For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.”*

Christ's blood redeems us from our sins.

1 Peter 2:24-25 [NIV] *“He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed. For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.”*

Christ bore our sins in His crucified body.

1 Peter 3:18 [NIV] *“For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous [One] for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit,”*

Christ's death and resurrection created a bridge between us and our Creator God that removed the great barrier that our sins had created.

Matthew 27:50-52 [NIV] *“And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit. At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook and the rocks split. The tombs broke open and the bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life.”*

The curtain that excluded all human beings from the Holy Presence of God [the Holy of Holies in the temple] was torn from the top [indicating God's doing] completely to the bottom.

Christ's sacrifice gives all of us total access to God the Father's throne.

The astonishing biblical revelation is this.

It is God we have all had a part in crucifying!

2 Corinthians 5:18-19 [NIV] *“All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.”*

How is this true?

John 1:1-2, 14 [NIV] *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning.” ... “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.”*

God became a human being who had blood to shed, to be our Passover [lifesaving] lamb.

John 19:30 [NIV] *“When he had received the drink, Jesus said, “It is finished.” With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.”*

These last words of Christ are very significant because they help us to understand the heart of the matter.

“*It is finished*” is one word in the Greek language – “*τέλειω*” – meaning completed, discharged [a debt] to make an end.

All that was prophesied about the Messiah, the anointed one who would come to save Israel, Jesus Christ had discharged in His birth, life, death and resurrection.

The agreements [covenants] God had made with His people, the nation of Israel, are fulfilled, brought to an end, in Jesus Christ.

Luke 22:14-20 [NIV] “*When the hour came, Jesus and his apostles reclined at the table. And he said to them, “I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. For I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfilment in the kingdom of God.” After taking the cup, he gave thanks and said, “Take this and divide it among you. For I tell you I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.” And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, “This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me.” In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, “**This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.**”*”

Christ introduced a new agreement [covenant] that God was making this time with all humanity **not** limited to the nation of Israel.

This covenant was about to be ratified with Christ’s blood as the Old Covenant was with the blood of animals.

This New Covenant was forecasted by the prophet Jeremiah.

Jeremiah 31:31-34 [NIV] “*The time is coming,” declares the LORD, “when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. **It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them,**” declares the LORD. “This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after that time,” declares the LORD. “I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will a man teach his neighbour, or a man his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest,” declares the LORD. “For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.”*”

Not like the Old Covenant that Israel never kept.

Hebrews 8:6 [NIV] “*But the ministry Jesus has received is as superior to theirs as **the covenant of which he is mediator is superior to the old one, and it is founded on better promises.***”

The Old Covenant promises were limited to Israel and to physical blessings to be received during the physical life only.

There was **no** promise of life after death.

John 3:16-17 [NIV] “***For God so loved the world** that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.”*”

The New Covenant Christ brought did include eternal life and is for all humanity.

What were the conditions for the people to fulfil?

Faith in what Jesus Christ had done for us through His birth, life, death and resurrection.

Hebrews 12:18-21 [NIV] “*You have not come to a mountain that can be touched and that is burning with fire; to darkness, gloom and storm; to a trumpet blast or to such a voice speaking words that*

those who heard it begged that no further word be spoken to them, because they could not bear what was commanded: "If even an animal touches the mountain, it must be stoned." The sight was so terrifying that Moses said, "I am trembling with fear."

Referring to Old Covenant of which the Ten Commandments were a part.

Deuteronomy 29:1 [NIV] *"These are the terms of the covenant the LORD commanded Moses to make with the Israelites in Moab, in addition to the covenant he had made with them at Horeb."*

Terms of the covenant include all the listed statutes and rulings that followed.

Exodus 24:3 [NIV] *"When Moses went and told the people all the LORD's words and laws, they responded with one voice, "Everything the LORD has said we will do."*

Words as well as Ten Commandments.

Deuteronomy 4:13-14 [NIV] *"He declared to you his covenant, the Ten Commandments, which he commanded you to follow and then wrote them on two stone tablets. And the LORD directed me at that time to teach you the decrees and laws you are to follow in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess."*

Decrees and other laws given at the same time, all part of one complete covenant.

Jeremiah 11:2-4 [NIV] *"Listen to the terms of this covenant and tell them to the people of Judah and to those who live in Jerusalem. Tell them that this is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: 'Cursed is the man who does not obey the terms of this covenant, the terms I commanded your forefathers when I brought them out of Egypt, out of the iron-smelting furnace.' I said, 'Obey me and do everything I command you, and you will be my people, and I will be your God.'"*

Obedience to the Old Covenant included all of the statutes and rulings that were the conditions given with the Ten Commandments.

All of this amounted to **an impossible task for human beings**, and Israel failed completely in fulfilling their side of the Covenant.

Colossians 2:13-14 [NIV] *"When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having cancelled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross."*

The impossible to fulfil terms of the Old Covenant ended with Christ on the cross.

What God is telling us now is *"look at My Son Jesus Christ on the cross. That is where you should be because of your sins.*

"But because I love you so much I hang there in your place and this is where I will meet you at the foot of the cross and nowhere else.

"You meet Me by identifying yourself with the one on the cross.

"By this identification with Christ I can say to you as I did to Him, you are my beloved son."

Galatians 6:12-15 [NIV] *"Those who want to make a good impression outwardly are trying to compel you to be circumcised. The only reason they do this is to avoid being persecuted for the cross of Christ. Not even those who are circumcised obey the law, yet they want you to be circumcised that they may boast about your flesh. May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is a new creation."*

Some of the Christians who were former Old Covenant Jews were trying to make all new Gentile followers of Christ also adhere to the Old Covenant statutes and laws of which circumcision was symbolic.

Paul, a former Pharisee, now only boasted in the cross of Christ and joining Him in that sacrifice.

Romans 6:3-10 [NIV] *“Or don’t you know that all of us who were baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin, because anyone who has died has been freed from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God.”*

The new life we should be living for God can only start with our joining Christ by crucifying our old life [the Old Covenant] and accepting the New Covenant that Christ ratified by His shed blood on the cross.

Romans 12:1 [NIV] *“Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God, this is your spiritual act of worship.”*

Out of gratitude for what Christ has done that we could never do, as the Israelites under the Old Covenant proved. We should offer our whole body, mind and spirit to Christ to use as He sees fit.

This is the way we can worship God *“in spirit and in truth”* [John 4:23].

God only forgives sins through the cross of Christ.

Many people are conscious of a barrier between themselves and God.

Prayer means little if anything to them.

The Bible seems to be a closed book.

God is far away and unreal to them.

Why is this?

Isaiah 59:2 [NIV] *“But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear.”*

Our sins are this barrier.

When Christ died that barrier was removed.

[Read **Matthew 27:50-52** [NIV] again]

It all seems too good to be true yet it is for all who trust [believe in] Jesus Christ.

Although Christ’s death on the cross happened at a moment in history, it has eternal significance.

What questions do people ask?

1 Is there any other way to go?

In these days of multi-faith services, the implication is that all roads lead to God, and it doesn't matter on which road you travel, provided you are sincere.

The answer to this question is very clear.

If we can reach God by doing good works, why did Christ bother to die?

If we can earn forgiveness by being religious and keeping a set of rules, why did Christ suffer the torments of the cross.

If we can do it by following a man who is dead or who will die like us, why did Christ bother to be born a human being?

There is no other way to God except by Jesus Christ.

John 14:6 [NIV] *“Jesus answered, “I am the way and **the** truth and **the** life. No-one comes to the Father except through me.”*

Acts 4:12 [NIV] *“Salvation is found in **no-one else**, for there is **no other name** under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.”*

1 Timothy 2:5-6 [NIV] *“For there is one God and **one mediator between God and men**, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all men, the testimony given in its proper time.”*

Why?

Jesus Christ is the only being who can faithfully represent both God and humanity, the only mediator.

2 Does it really matter?

Briefly, there is no greater proof of the reality of God's judgement than the cross itself. Christ died to save us from that judgement.

Hebrews 2:3 [NIV] *“how shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation? This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him.”*

3 Can I come to Christ later when I want to?

This is a surprisingly common fallacy that we can treat God, perhaps unconsciously, as our servant, ready to do our will when we are ready for Him. *“Not yet, I'm too young”*, we may say.

Isaiah 55:6 [NIV] *“Seek the **LORD while he may be found**; call on him while he is near.”*

God will **not** always be found by you, He will not always be near.

Hebrews 3:7-8 [NIV] *“So, as the Holy Spirit says: “**Today, if you hear his voice**, do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion, during the time of testing in the desert,”*

If we do **not** act when we hear God's voice, then we do harden our hearts, and we stand in grave danger of **never** hearing God's voice again.

Revelation 3:14-19 [NIV] *“To the angel of the church in Laodicea write: These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God's creation. I know your deeds, that you are*

neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm, neither hot nor cold, I am about to spit you out of my mouth. You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realise that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so that you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so that you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so that you can see. Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent."

A group of people who felt that they had no need of God in their lives, did not want His discipline.

Revelation 3:20-22 [NIV] *"Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me. To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."*

God will **not** continue to knock at the door of our lives.

If you are hearing God's voice or reading His words now, don't delay responding.

4 But I could never keep up this new life?

The simple answer is no you cannot, but Christ living again in you can.

Jude 24 [NIV] *"To him [Jesus Christ] who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy,"*

Christ knew this and made provisions.

John 14:15-18 [NIV] *"If you love me, you will obey what I command. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counsellor to be with you for ever, the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you."*

Christ will come to live in us, in the person of the Holy Spirit, and the fruits of this union will be God-like fruits.

Galatians 5:16, 22-25 [NIV] *"So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature." ... "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit."*

This is the new life we live in Christ.

Philippians 4:13 [NIV] *"I can do everything through him [Jesus Christ] who gives me strength."*

The "him" is Jesus Christ.

5 Is there anything for me to do to earn this salvation?

In one sense the answer is no.

Romans 6:23 [NIV] *"For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."*

Eternal life comes as a free gift.

Romans 8:1-4 [NIV] *"Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death."*

For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man, in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit.”

6 How then do we react to this freedom from any condemnation from God?

Romans 8:5-6 [NIV] *“Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but **those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires.** The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace;”*

Allow the Holy Spirit to guide our mind.

Romans 12:2 [NIV] *“Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but **be transformed by the renewing of your mind.** Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is, his good, pleasing and perfect will.”*

Our sinful mind has to be transformed to a mind that only desires to fulfil what God wants to do in and through us.

Paul then lists the characteristics of this new life which is summed up in last verse of the chapter.

Romans 12:21 [NIV] *“Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”*

The cross of Christ was not a mistake.