

PLAIN TRUTH®

CHRISTIANITY WITHOUT THE RELIGION®

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The Crux of our Faith

By Greg Albrecht

The murder of Jesus, unlike Abel's—a homicide that cried out for vengeance—became a proclamation of grace. (Hebrews 12:24, The Message Bible)

*The meaning of history is tied up with an event which takes place in the depth and hiddenness of a man who ended on the cross. (Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Christ the Center*, page 62)*

...I didn't try to impress you with polished speeches and the latest philosophy. I deliberately kept it plain and simple: first Jesus and who he is and then Jesus and what he did—Jesus crucified. (1 Corinthians 2:1-2, The Message Bible)

The plain and simple focus of our faith is 1) *who Jesus was and is*, 2) *what he did and still does*, and 3) *who and what he will always be and do*. **The heart and core of the**

good news/gospel revolves around Jesus crucified.

Jesus crucified is the crux (“crux” is a Latin word emerging from the Cross of Christ that means the essence of any matter) around which our faith revolves and is focused.

The Cross is the singular act in history when God, in the person of Jesus, came down from the eternity of his holiness and perfection into our corrupted world to be with us, as one of us. The Cross of Christ is far more than a historical “fact” or a doctrinal dogma. The Cross exemplifies the marriage of heaven and earth, and while it happened historically, it is an eternal and transcendent reality.

The Cross stands forever as a symbol of God's vertical entry into our world from above, symbolized by the stake of the Cross. God in Christ came down and intersected

with human, horizontal life which is represented by the crosspiece on the Cross.

When God's divinity vertically intersected with our horizontal world of time and space we were enabled to be one with him, to die with him and to be risen in new life with him. The Cross of Christ is the eternal symbol of the axis between divine and human—heaven and earth—eternity and time and space.

Jesus came to fully reveal the love of Father God (John 17:6, 25-26). The Cross of Christ reveals the personification of

the love of God—the fundamental principle of his eternal existence.

God's love is the ground of his being and the crux—the essence—of his nature. The love of God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—is comprehensively revealed and demonstrated on the Cross of Christ.

Jesus crucified was the once and for all, earth-shaking moment in time when God in and through Christ transformed the universe. The Cross of Christ stands forever enshrined as omnipotent and eternal proof that God is not filled with wrath and anger. Jesus absorbed all human hatred and evil, without in-kind retaliation. He made no vows of vengeance—he didn't threaten to send his executioners to hell—rather he forgave them as they killed him.

The Cross of Christ is the most atrocious abomination ever—the

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ignominious, outrageous human attempt to kill God! **The Cross of Christ was the worst humanity could do to God, while it stands forever as the symbol of the absolute best that God does for us.**

A Curse: An Embarrassing Humiliation?

Crucifixion seems to have been invented by “barbarians” on the edge of the known world, and taken over by both the Greeks and Romans. It is probably the most cruel method of execution ever practiced, for it deliberately delayed death until maximum torture had been inflicted. The victim could suffer for days before dying. (John R. W. Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, pages 23-24)

The Cross as a symbol of our faith as Christ followers is counter-intuitive if not shocking when we consider the horror with which crucifixion was regarded in the ancient world. How could any faith venerate a man who had been condemned as a criminal, tortured, humiliated and killed in this most grotesque form of execution?

Yet, the Cross of Christ stands as a monument to the opposition of the upside-down kingdom of God to the cherished values and beliefs of this world. Paul explains:

God didn't send me out to collect a following for myself, but to preach the Message of what he has done, collecting a following for him. And he didn't send me to do it with a lot of fancy rhetoric of my own, lest the powerful action at the center—Christ on the Cross—be trivialized into mere words.

The Message that points to Christ on the Cross seems like sheer silliness to those hellbent on destruction, but for those on the way to salvation it makes perfect sense. This is the way that God works, and most powerfully it turns out. It's written,

I'll turn conventional wisdom on its head

I'll expose so-called experts as crackpots. (1 Corinthians 1:17-19, The Message Bible)

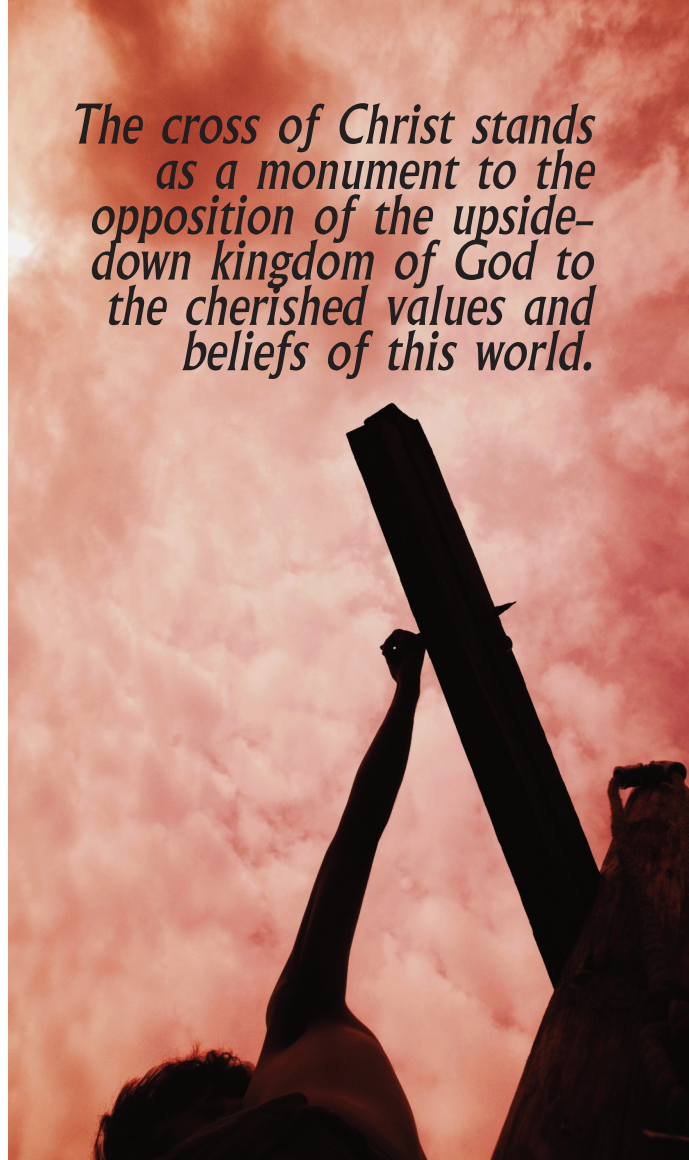
When Jesus told his disciples that he would be killed, *Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him* (Mark 8:31-32). Peter was horrified that Jesus would predict such a gruesome and premature end to his ministry. After Peter rebuked him for being “so negative” Jesus responded:

Whoever wants to be my disciples must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me (Mark 8:34).

Taking Up Our Cross

- The Cross of Christ non-violently overcomes fear, the intimidation wielded by the authorities of religion and state. The Cross strips bare the bullying and harassment of religion and state.
- Picking up our cross and following Jesus means emptying our backpacks filled with fear and worry, for Jesus sets us free from those things that enslave us.
- Following Jesus is an invitation to scuttle and abandon a works-based approach to life wherein one supposedly is the master of one's own destiny. The Cross of Christ hammers all requisite nails in the coffin of religious legalism and openly triumphs over it, dancing on the grave of performance-based religion as a preposterous and bankrupt belief. The invitation to pick up one's cross is to dump the illusion that we can earn God's love and favor.
- Following Jesus means living the way of the Cross—the Jesus Way. It is the way of service in the name of Jesus. It is the way of self-sacrifice. It is the way in which we as Jesus followers identify with Jesus and he with us. By Jesus' invitation and by the grace of God we are enabled to appropriate his death and live his risen life.
- Following Jesus means to follow him in suffering (1 Peter 2:19-25).

The cross of Christ stands as a monument to the opposition of the upside-down kingdom of God to the cherished values and beliefs of this world.



Christ-followers pick up their cross, follow him and suffer, in Christ participating in pain, and self-sacrificially living out God's own love. We discover in suffering for and with Jesus the God who wipes away all tears from our eyes (Revelation 21:4).

A Law Person or God's Person?

The Cross is the victory of grace over law.

Have some of you noticed that we are not yet perfect? (No great surprise, right?) And are you ready to make the accusation that since people like me, who go through Christ in order to get things right with God, aren't perfectly virtuous, Christ must therefore be an accessory to sin? The accusation is frivolous. If I was “trying to be good” I would be rebuilding the same old barn I tore down. I would be acting as a charlatan.

What actually took place is this: I tried keeping rules and working my head off to please God, but it didn't work. So I quit being a "law man" so that I could be God's man. Christ's life showed me how, and enabled me to do it. I identified myself completely with him. Indeed, I have been crucified with Christ. My ego is no longer central. It is no longer important that I appear righteous before you or have your good opinion, and I am no longer driven to impress God. Christ lives in me. The life you see me living is not "mine," but it is lived by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me. I am not going to go back on that.

Is it not clear to you that to go back to the old rule-keeping, peer-pleasing religion would be an abandonment of everything personal and free in my relationship with God? I refuse to do that, to repudiate God's grace. If a living relationship with God could come by rule-keeping, then Christ died unnecessarily. (Galatians 2:17-21, The Message Bible).

The Cross of Christ is the victory of God's grace over law—any law(s) that purport, by one's allegiance to them, to impart or increase already existing favor from God.

When you were stuck in your old sin-dead life, you were incapable of responding to God. God brought you alive—right along with Christ. Think of it! All sins forgiven, the slate wiped clean, that old arrest warrant canceled and nailed to Christ's Cross. He stripped all the spiritual tyrants in the universe of their sham authority at the Cross and marched them naked through the streets.

So don't put up with anyone pressuring you in details of diet, worship services or holy days. All those things are mere shadows cast before what was to come; the substance is Christ. (Colossians 2:13-17, The Message Bible)

The Cross Lifts Up The Good News!

Within a few days of his death on The Cross, Jesus spoke about his glorification:

The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it produces only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds (John 12:23-24).

He further explained:

And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself (John 12:32).

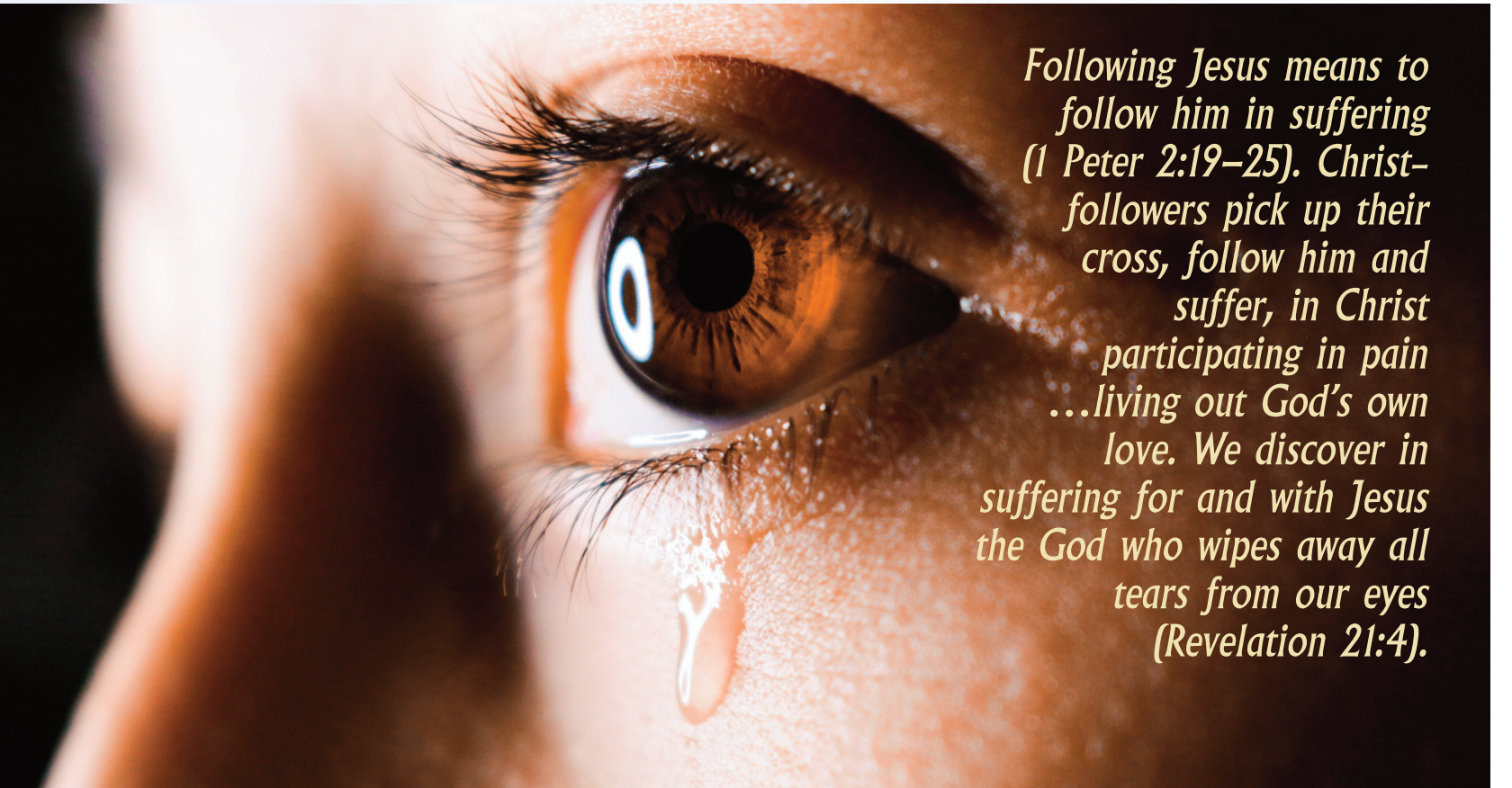
What Jesus did in time and space, in his incarnation as the God-man, perfectly reflects the eternal reality of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The love of God has always been his eternal reality.

However, in and on the Cross, in a singular historical act, all humanity could forever see Jesus lifted up.

Somewhat like a modern communication tower, the Cross of Christ lifts up the love of God and broadcasts it to the world. God's love is lifted up, on high, on the Cross so that it shines in its unrefined purity. In and through the Cross all mankind may be enlightened by the Cross, the divine evidence and testimony of who and what God is.

The Cross of Christ lifts up the One God above all other gods. Gods of human choosing and of human fabrication are safe and predictable—God on the Cross is bigger than we can define, totally unpredictable (why would he show us his love in such an extreme way?) and surrounded by divine mystery that is beyond our finite minds, the minds he gave us, as our Creator, by which we might comprehend.

In the blessed name of Father, Son and Holy Spirit—A-men! □



Following Jesus means to follow him in suffering (1 Peter 2:19–25). Christ-followers pick up their cross, follow him and suffer, in Christ participating in pain ...living out God's own love. We discover in suffering for and with Jesus the God who wipes away all tears from our eyes (Revelation 21:4).