

The Cross and the Crucifixion of Self

by G.W. North

The cross is the central theme in Paul's epistles, emphasizing its importance in salvation and spiritual growth, and is the greatest miracle of all, as it involves God becoming sin and dying for humanity's sins.

Scripture: Matthew 16:24, Luke 9:23, John 12:24, Romans 6:4, 1 Corinthians 1:18, 2 Corinthians 5:17, Galatians 2:20, Ephesians 2:6, Philippians 3:10, Colossians 3:3

Topics: "The Cross", "Self-Crucifixion"

Description

G.W. North emphasizes the profound significance of the cross and the necessity of self-crucifixion in the Christian life, arguing that Paul's epistles uniquely present the cross as both an objective historical event and a subjective spiritual experience. He highlights that true identification with Christ's crucifixion is essential for believers, as it leads to a transformed life where Christ lives in them. North contrasts Paul's subjective approach to the cross with the objective accounts of the Gospel writers, asserting that understanding and experiencing the cross is vital for spiritual growth and salvation. He concludes that the crucifixion is not merely a past event but an ongoing reality that empowers believers to live in the resurrection life of Christ.

Transcript

If it is indeed true that this is his first epistle, it is evident that Paul believed the cross to be of prime importance and was convinced that before attempting to write anything else he should expound the truth and power of the cross first and foremost. Not only so, it would also appear that the Holy Spirit by whom Christ taught and inspired the apostle must likewise have considered he should write on this theme first. Of course the Galatians needed to be taught the truth of the cross, but so did all the other churches as we shall see, but to no other did he write on the subject in such detail or at similar length as to the Galatians. We may then perhaps, after reading the epistle, agree with the apostle and the Holy Spirit that all spiritual problems are related to the cross and were dealt with there and proceed further to the logical conclusion that all man's basic personal needs can be resolved by personal experience of crucifixion. This is the most enlightening thing about Paul's introduction to the cross. If this is his very first excursion into apostolic writing then the very first thing he wrote about the cross was 'I am crucified with Christ;' how distinctly individual. Even though this whole epistle is about the virtues and glories of Christ and the cross, this is an amazing statement with which to open a written ministry, quite unique in fact. With such an approach it must become obvious to all that Paul's whole teaching about the cross is frankly subjective.

In this he differs completely from the four Gospel writers; they present the cross and the consequent resurrection objectively. Their business is to point out to us historical facts; it is the major reason for their writings. The only hint of subjectivity in all their accounts is the one statement of Jesus that His disciples must take up the cross and follow Him. He was most insistent about this and in this sense every man must make the cross his own. Even so, by the Lord's very language it is referred to as an outward cross and although it is personal, it is not the intimate cross that Paul declared. This is not because the Lord Jesus did not want it to be so personal to man in His day; He did, but He knew He could not talk to His disciples about being crucified with Him without posing serious problems to their minds; that He would not do. His teaching was masterly, His logic was impeccable, but they were no greater than His love.

In the upper room just before His apprehension He told His apostles, especially Peter, that they could not follow Him to the place to which He was going. He had previously said as much to the Pharisees, and the disciples were not surprised to hear it said to that company, but wherever He was bound they did not expect it to be said to them. Peter voiced the general feeling of the apostles when he said, 'I am willing to follow thee to prison and to death -- I am willing to die for thy sake'. Each one really believed it to be true of himself, but at that time, alas, it was not. In any case, even if it had been true, it was completely impossible for Peter or anyone else to do what they so fondly hoped.

By Paul's day, having completed His work on the cross, Christ had made it subjective and available to all mankind. With this in mind Paul saw the cross as both objective historical fact and subjective spiritual experience; his approach to it was very very personal. He made it intimately his and therefore preached a gospel of personal revelation in which the cross was central and all powerful. His presentation of it was most effective in the lives of others, as effective as it was in his own. In his grasp of truth and especially of the cross he seemed to excel all his contemporaries; in the understanding and presentation of the gospel he was an acknowledged prince. Comparisons can be odious, therefore without any intention of evaluation but in order to establish truth we take notice of a fact that will illustrate the claim. Even after Pentecost Peter's presentation of the cross was still objective; this is shown by his declaration to the men of Jerusalem, 'ye by the hands of wicked men have crucified and slain' (Jesus). What Peter said was absolutely necessary of course, his preaching was trenchantly convincing that day as the results show: those men had to be faced up to what they had done. Yet this is not an isolated incident, for years later he wrote of the Lord, 'who His own self bare our sins in His own body on the tree by whose stripes ye were healed'; again his approach seems to be objective.

Perhaps this objectivity about the cross stemmed from experience. In common with the other apostles he actually witnessed that terrible crucifixion, its horrors were so ineradicably stamped upon his mind that when he spoke of it he could do no other than think of its literal effects on Jesus; it marked him for life. On the other hand Paul, not being there had no such memories, so he could not be influenced by them or talk about them with the same certainty and authority as the eleven. This does not mean he never thought of those dreadful hours and what they meant to Christ, nor does it mean that none of those early disciples knew the cross subjectively as he; the early Church shared a treasury of knowledge through a complementary ministry. What it suggests is that in the realm of inspired ministry the Lord generally moves consistently with the writer's personal observation and experience, and wherever possible causes men to speak of what they know.

In context of that thought it is not difficult to believe that if Adam had recorded some of the events referred to in Genesis 1-4 he would have written of them in a totally different vein from Moses. Moses wrote of them objectively; he could not do otherwise, but sadly enough Adam could have written of them very

subjectively. The fact that Moses wrote by inspiration of the Spirit of God strengthens the idea that God led him to write objectively because he could not project himself backward into subjectivity. Contrary to Moses, this is exactly what did happen to Paul in spiritual experience; he had been crucified with Christ and he said so because he knew the power and truth of spiritual identification. The wonder of this gospel of ours is that, beyond the power of mortals to project themselves backward or forward in time, by the power of God human souls were incorporated into the experience of Christ, the second Adam, on the cross.

It is important at this point to clarify the extent to which identification with Christ on the cross may be claimed. Men were not included in the redemptive work of Christ, so they are not identified with Him for that; for this work we needed a substitute. We were not excused that; we were excluded from it; Christ took our place as sin-bearer also. We were not identified with Him in that either, neither were we identified with Him in the work of atonement or reconciliation; we were excluded from them all. There are other equally important areas of spiritual experience though in which He died for men as being those men; His death in respect to these was both substitutionary and representative. Such is God's provision for man that Christ took man's place and fulfilled every requirement of God for man's salvation. That is what God meant when He gave Him (a) man's name and called Him Saviour. In the light of these things far deeper levels of meaning than may ordinarily be seen appear in such texts as 'I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth', and 'we preach Christ crucified, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God'. When these things are thoroughly understood it is difficult to believe that it is possible to benefit from Christ's work on the cross when viewed objectively unless it be experienced subjectively. Equally with Paul we must all be able to say 'I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live'. Only the living can confess it and no-one is living except he be crucified.

Occasionally the apostle wrote of the cross objectively, as when writing to the Corinthians: 'Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures'; that is a statement of historical fact. The provable historical facts of Christ are indispensable to the preaching of the gospel, they are its foundation. Paul believed in them firmly and never moved off them; whenever he touched on them he wrote most convincingly. So firmly did he believe in the cross of Christ that he made it the starting point of his written gospel. How could he do otherwise? The historic cross had meant the possibility of regeneration for him, he gloried in it. Careful reading of his works reveals that Paul was clearly conscious he had a gospel to present to the world. It is not of the same events as those of which the authors of the four acknowledged Gospels wrote, but it is of the same person.

Paul is not credited with a Gospel in the same way as were his famous brethren though. There is no book in the New Testament headed 'the Gospel according to St. Paul'. He preached his gospel rather than wrote it, nevertheless it is clearly discernible in all his writings. His great friend and travelling companion, Luke, like himself was not among the number of the apostolic band who originally followed Jesus on earth. Unlike Paul though, he did set out to ascertain the historic facts about Jesus, and having done so he set them down in accredited Gospel style. Not so Paul; God did not commission him to do that. Nevertheless he could as surely speak and write of 'my Gospel' as any of the acknowledged Gospel writers could have done had they wished. All that is required of any person wishing to discover this gospel according to St. Paul is patient reading of his epistles; augmented by careful selective reading from the Acts of the Apostles this will be quite sufficient. This done, the discovery will be made that Paul starts where the others finished, namely at the cross and its immediate related events.

So we find that Paul's writings are unique and are totally unlike those of the acknowledged Gospel writers Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Each of these commences their Gospel in different ways: Matthew with David and Abraham, Mark with the prophets, Luke with Zacharias and Elizabeth, John with the Word; but not so Paul. Being raised up of God to be the apostle to the gentiles, his duty was to write specifically for a people who never had a king David or a father Abraham, a people who could not boast of prophets and knew nothing of a Zacharias and Elizabeth. The gentiles had no John Baptist, no temple of God, no scriptures of truth, no ten commandments, no spiritual heredity save of the devil's seed of sin, therefore of what immediate practical use would it have been to them if he had written from the same viewpoint as his friends?

Israel had a wonderful spiritual heritage, but the gentiles had only inherited myths; so instead of a stylised Gospel, with love and skill and wisdom from on high Paul wrote down some, if not all, of the gospel he first preached. He ignored Herod and wrote nothing of the baby Jesus or of His boyhood, nor even of the days of His manhood; his aim was entirely different. The Gospel writers wrote mainly with the purpose of showing the development of their faith in Jesus' manhood to faith in His Godhead, but Paul wrote from the position of Christ's proven Godhead. Paul made very few references back to His manhood. Paul did not write about Jesus who was called Christ any more than he preached about Him; he first preached Christ who was made Jesus and only later wrote of Him. Paul preached the only Christ he knew because He is the only Christ anyone can know, that is Christ crucified. The uncrucified Jesus could not live in anyone, but Christ crucified indwelt Paul. Paul lived Christ because Christ lived him -- a rare enough phenomenon in all conscience.

In his own way Paul did make reference once or twice to the birth of Christ, hut only indirectly: 'God sent forth His Son made of a woman, made under the law to redeem', 'Christ Jesus was made in the likeness of men': these are samples of the kind of reference he made to Christ's human birth. It is noticeable that in none of his references to Christ's coming does he mention the human side at all. He speaks only of God's side and then only briefly. Paul's greater concern is with Christ's second birth, that is His resurrection. Paul realized this was a birth and says so; he calls Him the first begotten from (among) the dead. His Father begat Him from the dead; this, and the events which immediately preceded and followed this most amazing series of all miracles, is the beginning of Paul's gospel. Christ's first birth was not a miracle; the events which preceded it were the miracle; His birth was quite natural. That He ever was born on this earth is most wonderful; it surely is miraculous that God should have given His Son to men, but His birth was not a miracle; it was the result of a miracle but it was as normal as any other man's and more normal than some. His conception, with all the great transactions leading up to it, was the miracle, His actual birth nine months later was quite ordinary.

The great miracle is that He was conceived by the Holy Ghost in Mary being yet virgin; she was virgin when she conceived and she was virgin when Jesus was born. Many miracles were involved in the wonder of His coming, everything about it was miraculous except the actual birth. However, wonderful though these things are, Paul scarcely concerns himself with them; there were enough proofs and protagonists around for the establishing and propagation of these truths; he gave his tongue and his pen to the revelation of God's gospel of further truth. Therefore, by the dispensation of God, his gospel is chiefly concerned with the greatest miracle of all time and perhaps of all eternity, namely the death and resurrection of Christ. By the resurrection from the dead Jesus is declared to be the Son of God with power -- that to Paul was conclusive, for him it is the great beginning.

Reading the Acts of the Apostles it may seem to appear that the early Church, especially the apostles, thought that the resurrection, not the crucifixion, was the greatest of all miracles for they were always talking about it, but this is not so. They published it so greatly because to men it was such a great miracle. They had seen so many die, but none had seen anyone who had risen from the dead never to die again. The re-animation of Lazarus had been a most amazing miracle, but he was still with them; Christ was not. He had not only risen, He had ascended back where He was before; His was resurrection. Lazarus' was only re-animation, he died again, Jesus did not. Lazarus was as near a testimony to resurrection as possible, but no more; Christ is the resurrection and the life, the ascension proved it; the resurrection was indeed a mighty miracle. Yet of the two the crucifixion and death which preceded the resurrection was by far the greater miracle. The wondrous resurrection was but the logical result of that, just as the birth was the logical result of the conception.

When it is remembered that the Lord Jesus claimed to be the resurrection and the life, it should not be considered a thing to be wondered at that He should rise from the dead. What else should be expected? It was natural to Him. On the other hand at no time did the Lord ever say or even hint that He was the crucifixion and the death; crucifixion and death were not natural to Him; it would have been wrong for Him to have said they were. He did say He was the resurrection and the life for that was truth, but so saying He posed a problem in His disciples' minds: if He was the resurrection and the life how could He die? Yet how could He prove He was the resurrection and the life except He did die? God solved the problem -- before He could die He had to be made sin; God did exactly that to Him, on the cross He was made SIN.

That was the way God's greatest miracle was performed. This was to Christ as the conception was to Mary; He was made sin, it was the beginning, The Great miracle. This was the most impossible of all. Incarnation of God by virgin birth is but an infantile miracle compared with this. Through Mary the babe was born; through death THE MAN was born. It was quite simple to God to work contrary to nature; the measure of impossibility was only on the human side, not on God's. It was Mary, not God, who said 'how can this thing be?' The angel's answer was, 'with God nothing shall be impossible'. Gabriel's remark was not so much pragmatic as prophetic -- he was looking into the distant future, not the immediate future. His reference was not to the enormity of the wonder filling Mary's mind, but to the enormity of the wonder that would fill the apostles' minds when they discovered the reality of the resurrection. 'Nothing shall be impossible', he said: he was not referring to God's omnipotence, nor to Mary's incredulity; if he had been he would have said, 'with God nothing is impossible', hoping to bring her assurance of the simplicity of the miracle suggested to her. Gabriel saw nothing tremendous about that. But how full of meaning his answer becomes when we think of what God had in mind when Gabriel said it. Spoken with intention of Golgotha in His heart, it was said with deep undertones of pain and sadness. God knew it was a certain step toward the time when He would have to make His Son sin. That to Him was the most terrible thing He would ever have to do -- it could be nothing less than the greatest and most horrible miracle of all, possible only to God. There are many classes of miracles, requiring varying degrees of power, done for a variety of reasons by different types of persons: God, satan, angels and men. The greatest of these are done personally by God; they are not entrusted to angels or men, and certainly not to the devil. Notable among these greatest miracles are the creation and dissolution of the universe and the destruction of the universe of sin. Of them all this latter is the greatest, for it was the most impossible of all. How could God the Son be made Man the Sin? To make Him Man, the Son (or as we more easily say it, the Son of Man) was one of the simpler miracles -- God used an angel for it -- but in order to make Him Man -- THE SIN God had to do it Himself. It was shocking, shameful, terrible, contradictory, unjust, impossible -- but He did it. Glory to His name -- glory to the name of both of them. God did it on the cross and He did it totally, so totally that

Jesus became contrary to nature, so contrary and ugly that God slew Him there.

Life was natural to Christ, so death, being overcome, the resurrection followed naturally; it had to, one of the reasons He died was that He should rise again in accordance with His nature. It was wonderful though for all that it could not have happened any other way. To have been in any other order it would have been wrong. Resurrection being natural to Him was of no great moment really, it had taken on death and destroyed it. Being so really a man, He had to wait for His Father to raise Him from death; being God He also Himself rose from among the dead ones -- He did not find those things difficult. Death was the harder thing and the greater miracle, He accomplished nothing so great. The resurrection was a marvellous demonstration of power; God accomplished mighty things by it, but of itself it simply testified to the fact that He had died; this is the reason why those jubilant apostles made so much of it. To them it confirmed that Jesus did not die as other men die; John had told them that -- standing by the cross he heard Him give out that great cry of accomplishment and then at last dismiss His spirit into His Father's hands.

Everything about His death had been different; it was not only wrong and undeserved, it was different. Having accomplished His mission, He whom they could never kill died, and He did it as He said -- 'I go My Way to Him that sent me'; He was life -- how could He die as other men do? Death was impossible to Him, yet by His own will and willingness He accomplished it. What happened on that cross was so wonderful we scarce can take it in; these minds of ours, under best instruction, still only dimly apprehend the smallest part of what it meant for Christ to die. Yet this we do know, He was in perfect control throughout; He had been all along. He once said quite publicly, 'I lay down my life that I may take it again; no man taketh it from me; I have power to lay it down and I have power to take it again'. How true: He was God.

Perhaps the intensity of Christ's purpose may best be expressed by adapting and applying to Him a Pauline phrase which the apostle used about himself when writing to the Philippians, 'He made Himself conformable unto death'. Christ who was in the form of God took upon Himself the form of a servant and was made in the likeness of man precisely that He should become conformable unto death in every form and manifestation but one -- Gehenna. In Him death took its most horrible form in the sight of God -- sin and old Adam, the nature of anti-Christ -- satan. This is how Paul saw the truth and why he embraced it; the natural, personal subjectivity of it all made it so powerfully appealing to him. Christ was so wonderful in his eyes, Christ made the cross Paul's so that to him it was the place, the point, the instrument of self-riddance in every form that self took or was expressed. He discovered that Christ's crucifixion was total over the whole field of human existence, not only his personal self but also his aged self, old in the ways of sin which came through to him from Adam and the serpent by his parents. The death of the cross was his, he saw it and rejoiced in it, embracing the truth with gratitude; he had been crucified with Christ. Like Christ he lived a crucified man. Only when a man can say 'I am crucified with Christ' is the cross his and has become operative in his life; until then it is not his, though on it Christ tasted death for every man.

Paul saw this clearly and actually wrote of his experience in the past tense, 'I was, or have been crucified'; it was true, because historically Christ's crucifixion had taken place in the past, but because it was God's work it is not only past it is present. The crucifixion is eternal in power and effect -- it is here, now. The act was in the recent past for Paul; for us it is the more distant past. But although it happened in the past it has not passed away. It is present because it was wrought in the eternal Spirit; by the grace of God the power of the cross and the experience of crucifixion are always in the present. Had Jesus been an ordinary man the crucifixion would have taken place and been forgotten, but because He was God manifest in flesh it is for ever. Whatsoever is wrought by God in Himself or upon Himself is eternal. By His grace God associated His people with Christ in that one crucifixion, it was an all-inclusive act. But in order for it to be

real in our lives we must come faithfully to it in the present. When Paul said 'I was crucified' he referred to a realization that had been to him the end of all his struggles; it was swiftly followed by the continuous revelation, 'I am crucified'. This same revelation must live to us also or else the grace of God toward us will be frustrated. To be able to live with Christ for ever we must be always crucified with Him, for the life He lives now can only be a crucified life. We are not being painfully crucified by men, bearing our own sin, making atonement, bearing our own punishment -- that was His part and His alone -- but we are and must be permanently crucified as is our Lord.

This is what the apostle intended us to understand when he said the Christ he preached was Christ crucified; the tense in which he writes expresses both the fact of the crucifixion and the result of it, implying everything brought to perfection. We preach Christ crucified perfectly and permanently; He was crucified, so He is crucified now, He can be no other. Christ is permanently crucified -- the permanence of it is due to its perfection. This is not the same as saying He is permanently dead. He is not, He is eternally alive; but He is not now being crucified, because His crucifixion brought crucifixion to perfection in every aspect and every virtue in every degree to all eternity. Because He was perfect He was crucified that His perfections should perfect the cross and fulfil it. In the same way as He fulfilled the law He fulfilled the cross; being alive He is now living crucified, perfected and complete.

This is part, if not all, of the reason why He dismissed His spirit into His Father's hands straight from the cross. He had endured the crucifixion, taken it into Himself; as a man He wrought it into the eternal life of God and it cannot cease to be. The message is that the Crucified is now living, crucifixion is now existing eternally for all mankind. Ordinary men could not live crucified; thousands have been crucified who are not crucified now; they were crucified and then ceased to be in human form, therefore all the marks and proofs of their crucifixion are gone -- they disappeared with the dissolution of their form. But He was crucified and lives on indestructible in human form, crucified, the Crucified made whole. He is not still being crucified; crucifixes are wrong for this reason -- they should never be made nor displayed or worn, for they give the wrong impression. The true Christian Church rejoices in the knowledge that Christ is neither dead on the cross, nor dying on the cross; He is alive for evermore, and by His use of the cross and His victory there He has the keys of hell and death.

'I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live' ('too' Paul and we could add); Paul saw it all so clearly and knew that what was true of Christ was true for him also, for it was true in him. As Christ lives crucified, so he lived crucified; Paul knew that he truly lived the resurrection life on earth as Jesus did. This is the only kind of resurrection life there is for us all. Paul's words were a declaration of triumph. He told the Romans that being 'baptized into His death' we are buried with Him thereby into death and planted therein, and if we are 'planted together with Him in the likeness of His death we shall be of resurrection' he says. 'Obviously', the enlightened heart cries. The words omitted from the quotation of the text, namely 'also in the likeness' and 'His' are omitted here because Paul did not write them; they were inserted by the translators. These men did it with the best of intentions to try and help in the understanding of Paul's words. This kind of help is most profitable in many places and we are most grateful to them for it, but alas they are not always so helpful and this is one of these instances; the attempt to interpret the truth here has proved rather a hindrance to arriving at its best meaning.

Paul is here stating plainly and positively the truth which lies at the heart of the gospel he preached:

(1) we have been made dead, that is slain by His death; (2) we have been buried with Him in that death; (3) we have been planted together with Christ in the likeness of His death; (4) we are of resurrection, that

is of resurrection 'substance' and quality. Paul is not speaking of a future resurrection, neither is he so much speaking of Christ's resurrection as a historic event, rather he is referring to the life that made it possible; he is speaking of resurrection life. Christ is Resurrection as well as the resurrection; unless we are of resurrection we are not of Him; Paul is powerfully stating the negative side of the truth because it is vitally necessary to put it down clearly. As much as the heart may love to think of being of Him and in His life, it is not on this that the writer is here placing the emphasis. Paul's major concern at this point is to emphasize the death and the burial and the planting lest we miss it. Given this comprehensive experience the resurrection is assured to any man; in the spiritual life it as naturally follows this death, burial and planting as in the order of nature dawn follows sunset and the death of the day and darkness.

Here then lies Paul's secret. Stated more fully and positively, the text is 'I was crucified with Christ nevertheless I live no longer I but Christ liveth in me and the life I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me'. Having spent time over what may be called the negative aspect of truth, the positive side of it is very sweet, none the less we may find it very searching. Condensing the form and structure of the text, we may understand Paul to be saying, 'I who was crucified am alive, yet it is not I who live; Christ in me lives the life I now live. I with my beliefs am no longer the source of the life I live, He is. He has human being in me and I have divine being by Him, I do not have to live my life, He lives it for me'. I live by faith, but not mine, His. Paul was very careful to ensure that no-one should think he was drifting away into fantasy, so he added 'in the flesh'. It was so powerful in him that he found it easy to live in the flesh in this world for Christ, he had discovered God's secret art of living eternally, it had been revealed in him -- briefly summarized it is no sin and no self-effort. With great relief he discovered he did not have to try to do it himself; it was a matter of incorporation; he had been incorporated into God and God had been incorporated into him.

The revelation to him was that it was not a matter of doing but of abiding -- the struggle was over, Christ was abiding in him and he was abiding in the Christ abiding in him. It is a matter of identification and oneness, the union and integration of the 'I myself' with Christ the 'I am' within; it is the shared and integrated life. This is God's way of preserving the distinctiveness of a person while infusing him or her with His own life and personality. It must be this way -- God knows no other way of doing it; human personality cannot be preserved by any other means; apart from this it must be destroyed. I must be rid of all things objectionable and unacceptable to God and kept clear of them. Crucifixion is the only way and self-crucifixion is not possible to me. Self-crucifixion was not possible even to Christ; crucifixion cannot be self-administered, it has to be administered by others -- that is why God chose it for His Son. There are many forms of suicide but crucifixion is not one of them; a man cannot nail himself to a cross. Christ had to be crucified, it was a matter of being, not of doing; His was to allow Himself to be crucified, but others had to do it.

This was one of the things finally settled between Him and His Father in the garden of Gethsemane; there He lovingly yielded up His own will to God, who in turn delivered Him up to men to be tormented and slain. Before ever a cross of wood was made on earth the cross lay in the foreknowledge and will of God for His Son, so He first sacrificed Himself as a man to His Father. That was the initial step of faith, for it is the Father who presides over and directs that consensus of will of the holy three which is the will of God. He then sacrificed Him on the cross. Jesus' final sanctification was unto this and He went as a lamb to the slaughter and remained dumb as a sheep before its shearers. He said. nothing to justify Himself and nothing to condemn Himself. He did nothing; it was not a matter of doing but of being. He knew that. By keeping silent and obedient all the way through unto death He allowed it all to happen to Him according to

God's will; everything that was done to Him was done for Him, He understood perfectly. It was wonderful, awe-inspiringly wonderful, miraculous; so also shall it be for everyone who will let it happen to him or her -- other than that it cannot be at all. Crucifixion has not changed its nature, it cannot; God has not devised any new techniques, there are none. He has not developed any forms of words called texts to which to pin 'faith' (so called) in order to be justified either. He had His Son pinned to the cross and the Spirit declares we are justified individually by the personal faith of Jesus Christ then and there, not by our faith in Him here and now. Necessarily we must believe in Him before it can happen to us. Faith in Him is obligatory to salvation.

When we believe Him for it, that justification of Christ's is imputed to us; at that moment it is an immediate gift imparted in this present world. But even then the actual justification is not self-procured; because it is by faith no man must think it is self-wrought, all is done by the faith of Jesus Christ. He justifies a person with the justification He wrought by His own faith in God on the cross. This justification by the faith of Christ is justification by grace alone. Grace alone gives a man opportunity to receive it by faith, but being received, it is sheer gift. The person thus justified by the faith of Jesus Christ can commence to live by the faith of the Son of God, no-one else can possibly do so. The real truth of the life of faith is living by the faith of God's Son; this makes a man a son of God. It is a dazzling prospect for any man, more, it is a present possibility for all men, but it is entirely impossible without the cross. To achieve it a man must live crucified like his Lord. As we have seen, except a man has resurrection life he is not alive with the life which God counts to be life, and except a man is first crucified he cannot be raised from the dead in order to live it. In the same way and at the same time, except Christ lives in him no man can have righteousness, for Christ is the righteousness of God. Life and righteousness are one. It was just as impossible for Christ to justify us without the cross as it is impossible for Him to live in us apart from the cross, in heaven or in earth, in God or in man, Christ can only live crucified.

There must come about a change in our thinking; it is customary and correct for us to think of the life of Christ and of the cross of Christ and of the death of Christ according to scripture and that is as essential as it is good. But it is just as essential for us to think of the Christ of the cross and the Christ of death and the Christ of life, and we must do so in much the same way as we might think of Him being born; He was born and lived as from the dead. He who lived before He was born of Mary and lived from Mary on the earth, lived through death also. We must never lose sight of that. He defeated death by conquering it. He conquered it by proving death's inability to kill and destroy Him. He lived through death, He never died by death, He defeated it and having done so He dismissed His spirit. He only used death for a few hours by enduring the cross, the means of death. When He had done that sufficiently to prove His superiority over it He yielded up His spirit to God and His body physically died by the expiry of His breath. He endured death, lived through it, used it and forsook it. He took His life through death, rejoined His body and raised it from the dead to prove it, and this is what Paul saw. He saw that for all men Christ was the firstborn from the dead. He had to be or He could not have been the firstborn of all creation, neither could He have saved us. Thank God, although He was the first one to be born from the dead, He is not the only one. Through this miracle the Lord has translated millions of persons into this kingdom of His Son. By passing His Son triumphantly through the realm of darkness and the power of death, God made the way through into the kingdom for all His sons.

The method God chose is awesome and wonderful and we must remember always that this extreme measure is the only way for all mankind. Christ must not be robbed of His pre-eminence in all things; He is the king but He is only king of those who by this means will become His new creations in this kingdom.

The life of redemption is only to be had and enjoyed in this kingdom, for it was only obtained by this means. The visible man Jesus was the Christ who is the image of the invisible God: He became a man by a marvellous procreative act of God. Uncreated God, by one of His most outstanding miracles, became a procreated man, that by His cross-death He should be able to rise from among the dead and qualify for the title 'the firstborn of every creature'. He was not a mere creature as men are creatures; when He came into the world He was not a descendant of created Adam as other men are -- though a woman was His mother no man was His father. God made Him of a woman and by that act and in this sense became the generator of Jesus' human life and the father of His body and because that was so His body was eternal. Jesus took that body and life into and through death that He should swallow up death in victory and be the first one to rise from the grave. No creature of any order, by whatever means it was created or procreated, had ever done so; Christ was the firstborn to God from the dead; in order to accomplish it He had to become as a creature. Being found in fashion as a man He was the image of the invisible God, and what happened in Him is law in the kingdom. By His death and resurrection He set the pattern for every person who desires to bear that same image, and by His cross and grave He established the means. None but they who bear this image are in the kingdom of the Son, and none can bear it who is not translated into that kingdom; basic transformation into His image is accomplished in process of the translation.

The translation of human beings is by means of His wondrous crucifixion and resurrection in our behalf. The spirit and power of that wondrous crucifixion and resurrection of Christ is just as wondrously made effective in all those for whom He died and rose again, who for love of Him want to die with Him from sin -- its nature, its laws, its rudiments and principles. The death of the cross accomplished all this, it was God's means of applying all His power to destroy the basic elements of sin. By dying He negated the operation of the laws of the terrible invisible kingdom into which God's fallen son Adam entered by disobedience. Adam was God's direct creation, but he consciously stepped out of union with God and as a result was thrust out from His presence and His Eden. Adam emerged from Eden into a kingdom of estrangement from His creator, and all he knew of God died within him; tragically for God and man, so did all life and potential life. Scripture says, 'in Adam all die'. All who would live must therefore come out of him and out of all that kingdom of spiritual death in him; no-one need stay there. All God's children may live in the kingdom of the Son of His love, where all is made alive by the miracle of the death and resurrection of the one who was alive to God.

In those terrible hours of crucifixion that old man of death was inescapably with Him. He took him on Him and went with him to crucifixion to kill his death-states there; He slew him, the whole nature of him, together with the laws of that nature of death which had claimed him. God by Christ crucified the old man of every one of us He chose in Christ, that He might translate us into His own kingdom of love. In the Godhead Christ is the only begotten of the Father, there are no other sons there, only Christ -- He is unique in God and among men, though by Him God has since begotten many sons from among the dead, which is part, perhaps the best part, of the marvel of the cross.

'I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live' is now seen to be most vital self-realization; apart from it no-one is alive; that is why Paul goes on to say, 'yet not I but Christ liveth in me'. It is self-realization arising from Christ-realization; Christ must be realized within or else He cannot be realized at all by mortal man. He can be imagined by men, and believed in by men too, but unless He lives in him, mortal man is terribly dead. Great as is the love of Christ for men, unless a man is living primarily by the faith of the Son of God only, His love cannot be known by him. A man may know of the love of Christ and believe all about the love of God's Son, but he cannot know that love as his own until the Son of God lives in him. Man

cannot live till he lives by the personal faith and love of Christ. Eternal life is so very individual, it is personal to each of God's sons, 'the Son of God loved me and gave Himself for me', is the basic realization of eternal life of every child of God within himself. Every man must know it in himself, he must realize it personally; he must believe and know and feel it for and in himself; that is realization. It is not sufficient to know that eternal life is only because of this love, true as that is; although such love may engender great admiration for Christ within the mind, it is insufficient; with Paul each one must be living the Christ-faith-love-life of the Son of God.

God's provision for us may be stated as 'Christ's self for my self'. Astounding as it is, this is the amazing truth, and until this is realized within himself by every man the crucifixion is in vain as far as he is concerned. Far too many believers are in this sad state and because of it the grace of God is frustrated in them, rendering Him powerless to accomplish all He wants to do in that life. Grace cannot be frustrated in God's heart, nor is it destroyed in principle or withheld from others because it is frustrated in any individual; God in heaven is not a frustrated being. But many a man on earth is a frustrated being because within his own self he is frustrating the love and faith of Christ and therefore the purposes of God for his life. Christ's crucifixion was for the fulfilment of God's purposes as originally stated by Him and recorded by Moses, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness'. Christ is the image of God, the effulgence of His being and the express image of His person, and when He was made a man He was a man in the likeness of God; therefore when He comes into a man and lives in him He makes God's original ideal possible to Him and us.

Christ did not die in vain, He died to obliterate from man first Adam's fallen image and to restore and reinstate him in the kingdom and favours of God, elevating him into the life of his creator, lifting him above all He first did when He began with Adam. In this transaction man receives a new spirit and becomes a new conscious self. Moreover this new self is combined with another Self whereby he becomes a greater person and realizes he has been made anew. This other new Christ-Self or Christ-Himself is the greater, stronger, dominant partner of the union and takes over the life. Following this miracle, providing he does not become foolish and allow someone to bewitch him and lure him off course, he will remain new and consciously grow up into the full stature of Christ.

This is what Paul found. Following this initial and most vital experience of the cross he not only had power to remain in newness of life, he had ability to evidently set forth Jesus Christ crucified before people's eyes -- his life was an example and exposition of it. Wherever Paul went and whatever he did Christ crucified went and was manifested in that place and among those people. The undeniable Christ and His undeniable death and resurrection were set forth in the man, which is what God intended. The New Testament keeps the historical cross before men's minds objectively, but wonderful as the Book is, it is only print on paper, it is not animate as Jesus was animate. God had to do something more. So knowing that only human beings could keep the crucifixion subjectively before men God planned and provided for men to enter into it.

The order of the revelation of the cross is in three simple steps or stages: first in the world, second in man, thirdly in the New Testament: (1) revelation; (2) realization; (3) record. The historic revelation being now past, only present human realization remains, if men do not see it in humanity it cannot be known. True we have the Gospels and we are grateful for those holy records of facts -- what should we do without them? But inspired though they are, the combined record is still only the documentation of truth. The writers tell us about the crucifixion and the Christ of the cross, but good and absolutely necessary though this is, the truth needs more than words to reveal it. God needs men and women to display it here and now in this

world in flesh and blood bodies as Christ did. Not that our bodies should be crucified as was the Lord's, but that our spiritual natures should be crucified from sin that our soul, the embodiment of sin, should be slain unto resurrection into new manhood.

Paul understood this clearly, especially in relation to us gentiles according to the flesh who did not have the advantages of the Jews. Beyond the few who were involved in the events of the crucifixion the gentiles could not have seen or known much about it. Very few could have read the hints and foreshadowings of it in the prophetic writings of the Old Testament, for they did not have them; gentiles needed something up to date and authentic, something they could see and hear and feel. It is perhaps for this reason more than any other that in their ignorance gentiles have made to themselves crosses of wood and metal and stone or straw, even of leaves or paint, and have carved effigies of the imagined crucifixion, all to their own hurt and shame. When a man is able to set forth in his own flesh Christ crucified and living in himself he has no need of artificial or manufactured symbols produced from people's imaginations. Such a man could not reproduce in art form something which he knows in the event can only be imaginative and untrue. To create and foist on others lifeless copies and sterile reproductions without life is abomination to him; he has reality. This restraining knowledge has nothing to do with artistic talent or the lack of it, but with spiritual law and morality; understanding of the sheer impossibility of it renders him incapable of trying.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/gw-north/the-cross-and-the-crucifixion-of-self/>

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