

As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby. - 1 Peter 2:2

THE SINCERE MILK OF GOD'S WORD

The word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword... - Hebrews 4:12

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Reflecting on the Cross

The crucifixion of Christ is in many ways the central theme of the Gospel. As we study the Scripture's teachings related to the cross of Christ, we can learn much about God, the depth of His blessings, and how to respond.

For instance, the crucifixion of Christ helps us understand the *depth of God's love*.

The One sin is foremost *against* planned a means by which sinners could be *forgiven*, and He carried out this plan by giving His Son to die. There has never been a greater demonstration of love (**Rom. 5:8**).

A key word to not miss in **John 3:16** is the word "*so*." The fact that God gave His only begotten Son not only shows that God loves us, but it shows the *extent* of His love for us.

The depth of *Christ's* love is likewise shown through His death. When describing Himself as the good shepherd, Jesus stressed His *willingness* to go to the cross (**John 10:18**).

While the Father *commanded* Him to go the cross, Jesus had free will, and thus had to *choose* to obey. His doing so shows His genuine love for the souls of mankind.

Jesus' willingness to go to the cross also perfectly exemplifies what it means to *obey*. In reference to Christ, **Philippians 2:8** says, "*and being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, becoming obedient even unto death, yea, the death of the cross.*"

It is easy to obey God when doing so fits in one's comfort zone, yet seek to be *excused* from obedience when God's will is more challenging. Jesus realized that true obedience is often not *easy*. A righteous life involves self-denial (**Luke 9:23**). It often

involves choosing between what pleases God and what pleases those close to us (**Matt. 10:35-37**). It often leads to ridicule because of the stark contrast between the lifestyle of the righteous and the lifestyle of the majority (**1 Pet. 4:3-4**).

By going to the cross, Jesus showed what it means to obey God no matter the difficulty. Any time we are tempted to "excuse" ourselves from something that God commands, we might ask, "what if Christ had excused Himself from going to the cross?" He obeyed the Father's will for Him at all costs, and so must we (cf. **Matt. 16:21-24**).

Christ's obedience to this part of the Father's will for Him also exemplifies *endurance*. After exhorting Christians to "*run with perseverance the race that is set before us*" (**Heb. 12:1**), the Hebrews writer says, "*looking to Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising its shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider Him who has endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself, that you don't grow weary, fainting in your souls*" (**verses 2-3**).

When Jesus faced the hardships leading up to and including His crucifixion, He did not compromise His integrity. He did what was right even when suffering through intense trials (**1 Pet. 2:21-23**), and thus showed what it means to have a commitment that does not waver in hard times. This is what patience and endurance is about.

The severe beatings, ridicules, and death by crucifixion endured by Jesus demonstrate the *seriousness of sin*. When we consider the

extent God was willing to go to so our sins could be forgiven, we see just how great a *problem* sin is.

All other problems we face pale in comparison to the problem of sin. Had God not allowed His Son to go to the cross, there would be no solution to this great problem, and we would all would be doomed to eternal death in hell (**Rom. 6:23**).

Through Christ's crucifixion, though, a "solution" has been offered. At the cross, Jesus' blood was "*poured out for many for the remission of sins*" (**Matt. 26:28**).

By offering us remission of sins, Christ's death on the cross makes *redemption* possible (**Eph. 1:7**).

Any time a person sins, he or she becomes enslaved to sin (**John 8:34**). The debt that is owed to be released from the bondage of sin is too high for any one of us to pay. Through His death on the cross, Jesus paid the debt we cannot pay. He paid the ransom price to free His followers from the bondage sin brings us under (**Matt. 20:28**). This is what redemption is about.

Christ's crucifixion also makes *justification* possible (**Rom. 5:9**). Those who have been guilty of sin can stand before God and be pronounced "not guilty" because of the death of God's Son on the cross.

Furthermore, Christ's crucifixion has made *reconciliation* possible (**Rom. 5:10-11**). When a person chooses to sin, he or she chooses to separate him or herself from God. Were it not for the cross of Christ, that separation would exist eternally. Through Christ, though, a "bridge" has been created that we can cross to return to fellowship and harmony with God. This is what reconciliation is about.

If we understand and appreciate such blessings, it helps us see the *folly* of

arrogance and *boasting in self*. Without Christ's crucifixion, we would be nothing but hopeless sinners doomed for eternal condemnation in hell. We would forever be out of fellowship with our Creator, and enslaved to the worst imaginable master. It is fitting for all to have the mindset, "*far be it from me to boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ*" (**Gal. 6:14**).

Moreover, as we reflect on the cross, it should *motivate* us to *surrender* our lives to the One who gave His life for us. As **2 Corinthians 5:15** says, "*He died for all, that those who live should no longer live to themselves, but to Him who for their sakes died and rose again.*"

A key phrase to not miss in **Romans 12:1** is the phrase "*by the mercies of God.*" In consideration of the mercy God has shown through His Son, the appropriate response is to "*present [our] bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God.*"

If we appreciate the crucifixion of Christ, how could we respond any other way? We cannot fully repay God and His Son for the love He's shown us, but we *can* devote our lives to bringing Him glory.

As the hymn *When I Survey the Wondrous Cross* says, "Love so amazing, so divine, Demands my soul, my life, my all."

As the hymn *I Gave My Life for Thee* says, "I gave, I gave My life for thee, What hast thou giv'n for Me?"

Love for God, love for others, endurance, humility, gratitude, and joy should naturally result from a heart that understands the crucifixion of Christ.

May we appreciate the cross of Christ, and give our lives to the One who died for us.

- **Michael Hickox**