

## **“Cross Examination” by Jon Ikin**

### **(The Cross in Galatians)**

The Cross and Bible prophecy should always go together. As Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians, *“...you proclaim the Lord’s death till He comes”* (1 Cor.11:26). To have one without the other is to be imbalanced and unbiblical. Real prophecy students love the message of the Lord’s return supremely because He is the Saviour who died for them. As Dr Harry Ironside once said, *“To me it is not just a doctrine. The reason I love to speak of it is this. My friend of Calvary is coming back again.”* (The Crowning Day, p22) With this in mind let us look at one of the foremost books of the Bible on the teaching of the cross, the book of Galatians.

### **The Background**

Simply put, the Galatian churches were going astray. They were being misled by false teachers commonly known as, ‘the Judaizers.’ These men, who claimed to be Christians, wanted to bring Gentile believers under the Law of Moses and especially the practice of circumcision. In effect they taught the Galatians that they must be Torah-keepers in order to be saved by the Lord Jesus. Similar teachings are growing in the church today which makes this book so relevant. Paul obviously saw the work of the enemy in this and so he reminded the Galatians that we are *justified by faith in Jesus Christ alone*. It was inevitable that in doing so he should make so many references to the cross, and this article will study the basic teaching of each one.

#### **1. Christ Died For Our Sins (Gal.1:3-5)**

The first reference to the cross in Galatians is in the opening of the letter. Paul writes, ***“Grace and peace to you from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be glory forever and ever.”*** (Gal.1:3-5) Usually the apostle wrote somewhat briefer introductions than this, but on this occasion he was eager to get to the *crux* of the matter. And yes, my pun was intended. You see, the heart of Christianity is the simple message of the cross, that Jesus’ death was a payment for sin. Not His sins, but *“our sins.”* The Lord Jesus had no sins of His own to pay for and therefore He was able to take the punishment for ours. As someone has said, *to God, one Man without sin is worth all the men with sin.* That’s why He alone can be our Saviour. How grateful we should be that the Lord Jesus set His will to do *“the will of our God and Father”* and go to the cross for our salvation. By it we are delivered *“from this present evil age.”* According to John MacArthur, *“The Greek word for ‘age’ does not refer to a period of time but an order or system, and in particular to the current world system ruled by Satan.”* This has an obvious connection with our belief in the rapture, doesn’t it? One day the Lord Jesus will rescue His church out of

this sinful world and take us to our heavenly home. This is our future hope. But let's be clear: only those who have been to the cross will be going to heaven. If you haven't received salvation from your sins by trusting in the Lord Jesus yet, you are in serious danger of being left behind when He comes for His church. Please don't delay. Plead the blood of Jesus for your salvation before our holy God in prayer. Ask Him to forgive you because of what your Saviour did on the cross and rest in that alone for your hope of heaven. If you do, then one day He will deliver you not only from the punishment of sin but from the presence of sin as well.

## 2. We Were Crucified With Christ (Gal.2:20)

The second reference to the Cross introduces us to an unusual concept for some people, that of our spiritual death with Christ. In Galatians 2:20 Paul wrote, ***"I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me."*** Although he only mentions one cross here Paul speaks about a double crucifixion: that of the Lord Jesus and believers. You see, because of our union with the Lord Jesus – a concept which is taught repeatedly in Paul's letters – when He was crucified, spiritually we also died with Him. This is taught not only here but elsewhere in the New Testament and it has great ramifications for us as Christians. Did Christ die for sin? Then we died *to* sin (Gal.5:24 & Rom.6:2). Did He die for the world (1 John 2:2)? Then we died *to* the world (Gal.6:14). And most importantly in the context of Galatians, did He die under the Law (Gal.3:13)? Then we died *to* the Law. It is no longer over us. May we ever remember that this is so and not go back to the things we were saved from.

## 3. Christ Died For Us Out Of Love (Gal.2:20)

Before we leave Galatians 2:20, let us notice the last few words in that verse: ***"the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me."*** Why did the Lord Jesus die on the cross for our sins? Answer: because He loved us. More personally than that, Paul said, ***"who loved me."*** Can you say that? Do you know that He died to save you personally? If you have a revelation of that fact, then you can appreciate the wonder of those three simple words: ***"who loved me."*** Charles Spurgeon once preached a sermon on those three words called, ***"Christ first, me last: nothing between but love."*** Isn't that a wonderful thought? Praise the Lord for such love that took Him all the way to Calvary....***"for me."***

## 4. The Cross Is The Only Way Of Salvation (Gal.2:21)

The very next verse in Galatians is also on the cross. It says, ***"I do not set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the Law, then Christ died in vain"*** (Gal.2:21). This verse clearly teaches us that the death of the Lord Jesus is the only way for us to be saved. If men could be saved by keeping the Law of Moses – or anything else, for that matter – then ***"Christ died in vain."*** Let me put it to you like this: if you had a son that you loved with

all your heart, and you saw him being crucified, would you try and rescue him? Of course you would! Then why didn't God? The answer is obvious: because this was the only way sinners could be saved. *"If a man can be saved by his own works, and willings, and doings,"* said Spurgeon, *"then Christ's death was an unnecessary piece of torture; and instead of being the most glorious manifestation of divine love, it was a shameful waste, putting upon Christ a terrible burden of suffering which was totally unnecessary."* (Vol.40, p.346). What should we do, then, with religious teachings that say we must achieve certain things in order to be saved? We should turn away from them and put our trust in Christ's saving work alone to save us. As the old hymn says,

*"Not saved are we by trying,  
From self can come no aid,  
'Tis on the blood relying,  
Once for our ransom paid,  
'Tis looking unto Jesus,  
The Holy One and Just,  
'Tis His great work that saves us,  
'Tis not "Try", but "Trust."*

## **5. The Cross Must Be Preached (Gal.3:1)**

***"O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified?"*** (Gal.3:1) The apostle's rebuke to the Galatians shows us clearly that he had proclaimed the message of the cross to them in the most vivid terms. The Greek word translated 'portrayed' ('set forth,' KJV) is PROGRAPHO, which means, 'to write before' or 'to write in public,' and described the posting of official notices in public places. This is what Paul's preaching of the cross had done, as was his common practice. He said elsewhere, *"For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified"* (1 Cor.2:2). This is clear evidence that the message of the cross must be preached regularly in the church of Jesus Christ. Let's stop and ask ourselves how often we do this. When was the last time, *"Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified"*? We hear many worthy subjects being preached in our churches, but there is an urgent need to return to the soul-saving message of the cross. When Field Marshall William Slim was leading the British forces during the Burma campaign in World War II he was concerned about one extremely despondent soldier under his command. He asked the senior chaplain to have a member of his staff visit the man. Shortly afterward, the field marshal sent for the senior chaplain again. Keenly dissatisfied and upset, he said, "One of your chaplains went to see the man. He was very nice and they drank a cup of tea together, but he never showed the soldier what he needed to see."

"And what was that?" the surprised chaplain asked.

Field Marshall Slim answered, *“The Man on the cross.”* This would not have been the case if Paul had visited the soldier. Let us resolve to proclaim the cross in personal work and public preaching more than we have done in the past.

## **6. The Cross Dealt With The Curse Of The Law (Gal.3:13)**

The next reference to the cross is a shocking one. Found in Galatians 3:13, it says that, ***“Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree’).”*** To think of the Lord Jesus becoming a curse for us is disturbing in the least. It is parallel with the statement in 2 Corinthians 5:21 that God, *“made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us”*. But such terrible things had to be borne by our Saviour in order that we might be reconciled to God. You see, what those who want to take us back to the Torah (Law) forget is that there is a curse connected with it: *“For as many as are of the works of the Law are under the curse; for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the Law, to do them.’”* (Gal.3:10). And since none of us are perfect, we would all be under that curse. It is only because the Lord Jesus fulfilled the Law’s demands by His perfect obedience, and suffered the Law’s utmost penalty by His death that we can be saved. The curse that lay on us was transferred to Him, and He assumed it in full, exhausting the wrath of God on sin, that we might be *“redeemed”* (Greek: EXAGORAZO, ‘to buy from’). This, of course, is the significance of the cross of wood itself. It was, in effect, a tree – the very thing a cursed person had to die on under the Law (see Deuteronomy 21:23). When a criminal was executed he was removed from the earth. This is what the Saviour went through for us. No wonder we can sing, *“Thank you for the cross, my Friend.”*

## **7. The Cross Is An Offense To Some (Gal.5:11 & 6:12)**

Moving on in his argument Paul says, ***“And I, brethren, if I still preach circumcision, why do I still suffer persecution? Then the offense of the cross has ceased”*** (Gal.5:11). The main point here is that the cross brings offense when it is preached as the only way of salvation. Literally, as the Greek word SKANDALON suggests, it is a scandal in some people’s minds to say that the Lord Jesus alone can save you. As Spurgeon explains, *“The offense of the cross is that it sets up faith in the infinite merit of Christ’s atonement, and knocks down all confidence in outward rites and ceremonies”* (Vol.57, p227). This brought great persecution on Paul and was the reason many people turned away from Gospel. In chapter 6:12 he goes on to say, *“As many as desire to make a good showing in the flesh, these would compel you to be circumcised, only that they may not suffer persecution for the cross of Christ.”* Let us never be surprised at ‘the offense of the cross.’ We do not preach to be deliberately offensive, but if the Gospel is faithfully presented it will sometimes have this effect. In fact, whenever young men whom John Wesley returned from their preaching assignments he would ask them two questions: ‘Was anyone converted?’ and ‘Did anyone get angry?’ If the answer was no to both those questions he cautioned them about entering the ministry!

## 8. The Cross Is What Believers Should Glory In (Gal.6:14)

The final reference to the cross is in the closing section of the book: ***“But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world” (Gal.6:14).*** Here Paul is making a contrast with the Jusaizers who, *“desire to have you circumcised that they may boast in your flesh”* (v13). His boasting, however, was not in circumcision but in the cross of Christ and its absolute sufficiency to save. May it be so with us. As Bishop JC Ryle wrote, *“Other religions have laws and moral precepts, forms and ceremonies, rewards and punishments. But other religions cannot tell us of a dying Saviour. They cannot show us the cross. This is the crown and glory of the Gospel.”* (‘Old Paths,’ p256). Let us never be ashamed of it, or even be bored of it, preferring the excitement of end time prophecy over it. Rather, let us be like Paul and ever glory in it. Remember what Dr Ironside said. It is our Friend of Calvary who is coming back again.

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