

The Cross of Christ Study Guide

By

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Resources

The Cross of Christ by John R. W. Stott

Cross-Shattered Christ: Meditations on the Seven Last Words by Stanley Hauerwas

New Revised Standard Version

Lesson 1 - The Cross Is Central

The cross dominates the New Testament. It transforms everything. It gives us a new, worshiping relationship with God, a new and balanced understanding of ourselves, a new incentive to give ourselves in mission, a new love for our enemies, and a new courage to face the perplexities of suffering. The cross undermines our self-righteousness and leaves us standing before it with bowed heads and broken spirits. And at the cross we remain until Jesus speaks to our hearts his word of pardon and acceptance, and we, gripped by his love and full of thanksgiving, go out into the world to live our lives in his service.

Theme Verses: Galatians 2:20 and Galatians 6:14

Memory Verses: Galatians 2:20 and Galatians 6:14

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

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.

1. The cross is commonly thought of today as the symbol of Christian faith. Why might it have been a surprising choice for the first century?

See Deuteronomy 21:22 and Galatians 3:13.

2. Copy the memory verses, verbatim, in the space below.
3. Read Mark 8:31-32; 9:30-32; 10:32-34. What is striking about Jesus' predictions here?

How did Jesus know that his death was inevitable?

4. Read through each of these verses and tell how the speaker or writer uses the cross of Christ.

Acts 2:14-19

Acts 3:12-26

Acts 4:8-12

Acts 5:29-32

Acts 10:32-43

Acts 13:16-41

Acts 17:2-3, 22-31

Galatians 3:13

1 Peter 2:24

5. How have the verses in our study spoken to you this week?

Lesson 2 - Who was responsible for the death of Jesus?

In this lesson we consider the human factors that brought about the crucifixion of Jesus. Behind all these factors, however, lies Jesus' understanding of his Father's will. It was his Father's will which led him to go deliberately to his death.

Theme Verses: Galatians 2:20 and Galatians 6:14

Memory Verses: John 10:17-18

The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father.

1. Read Mark 14:43–15:15. List several reasons why Jesus' trial was a miscarriage of justice.

2. Copy the memory verses, verbatim, in the space below.

3. Read Luke 23:1-25. What does the reading reveal about Pontius Pilate?

In his book, *The Cross of Christ*, John Stott says, "It is easy to condemn Pilate and overlook our equally devious behavior." In what ways do you identify with Pilate?

4. Why was the religious establishment so opposed to Jesus?

In what ways do you identify with them?

5. What was Judas' part in the crucifixion of Jesus?

Did he have a choice? Why or why not?

See Matthew 10:4; Mark 14:21; John 6:64, 71; John 12:1-6; John 13:2,11, 25-30; John 17:12; and Acts 1:15-18, 25.

How do you identify with Judas?

6. How have the verses in our study spoken to you this week?

Lesson 3 - Why Did Christ Die? (Part 1)

In our last lesson we learned that the cross is central to the Christian message and that the cross was due to the set purpose of God and voluntarily accepted by Christ who gave himself up to death. In this lesson, we address the question: What was there about the crucifixion of Jesus which, in spite of its horror, shame, and pain, makes it so important that God planned it in advance and Christ came to endure it? We will look at three of the main scenes of Jesus' last twenty-four hours on earth to help us see into the mind of Christ during this time. Today we examine the upper room celebration of the Passover.

Theme Verses: Galatians 2:20 and Galatians 6:14

Memory Verse: 1 Peter 3:18a

For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God.

1. Read the following verses and list the important fact in each about Jesus' death.

Romans 5:8:

1 Peter 3:18:

1 Corinthians 15:3:

2 Corinthians 5:14-15, 1 Peter 2:24:

2. Copy the memory verse, verbatim, in the space below.
3. Read at least one of these accounts of the upper room (Matthew 26:17-30, Mark 14:12-26, Luke 22:1-23, 1 Corinthians 11:23-26) and answer the questions below.

What was Jesus suggesting to his disciples when he said, "Do this in remembrance of me?" (Luke 22:19)

According to Matthew and to Paul, to what did the cup refer?

4. In Exodus 12–13, the Israelites were active participants in the Passover. How are Christ followers active participants in the meal of the new covenant (what we often call "The Lord's Supper")? See John 6:48-58 & 1 Corinthians 10:16-17.

5. How have the verses in our study spoken to you this week?

Lesson 4 - Why Did Christ Die? (Part 2)

In today's lesson, we look deeper into the question: What was there about the crucifixion of Jesus which, in spite of its horror, shame, and pain, makes it so important that God planned it in advance and Christ came to endure it? Today we consider Jesus' agony in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Theme Verses: Galatians 2:20 and Galatians 6:14

Memory Verse: Luke 22:42

"Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done."

1. Read Matthew 26:36-44, Mark 14:32-39, and Luke 22:39-43. List all the words and phrases that describe Jesus' mental, physical, and emotional state.

Why do you think Jesus was so distressed?

2. Copy the memory verse, verbatim, in the space below.
3. How do the Old Testament and the book of Revelation use the term "cup" to refer to God's judgment?

See Ezekiel 23:32-34, Isaiah 51:17-22, Psalm 75:8, and Revelation 14:9-10; 16:1-21; 18:1-8

Lesson 5 - Why Did Christ Die? (Part 3)

In today's lesson, we look deeper into the question: What was there about the crucifixion of Jesus which, in spite of its horror, shame, and pain, makes it so important that God planned it in advance and Christ came to endure it? Today we consider Jesus' cry of dereliction from the cross.

Theme Verses: Galatians 2:20 and Galatians 6:14

Memory Verse: Mark 15:34

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?"

1. Read Isaiah 53:1-12. Using this text, describe the dark day of Jesus' crucifixion.
2. Copy the memory verse, verbatim, in the space below.
3. In Matthew 27:45, the writer says that during Jesus' crucifixion: "From the sixth hour until the ninth hour darkness came over all the land." What do you think these three hours of darkness meant?
4. What does Jesus' cry in Matthew 27:46 mean?

Lesson 6 - The Problem of Forgiveness

To really understand the problem of forgiveness, we have to understand the extreme seriousness of sin. In order to understand the seriousness of sin, we will look at the meaning of sin, our moral responsibility for sin, how God views sin, and how God responds to sin.

Theme Verses: Galatians 2:20 and Galatians 6:14

Memory Verses: Romans 3:23, 6:23, 1 John 3:4

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness.

1. How does the Bible define sin?

What are some synonyms (similar words) for sin in the Bible?

Can you name a verse in the Bible that shows that our sins are really sins against God?

Psalm 51:4 and Romans 1:18-31

2. Copy the memory verse, verbatim, in the space below.

3. Since sin and death came into the world through Adam (see Romans 5:12), are we morally responsible for our sins? Explain your answer.

4. After Paul's discussion of sin and its consequences in Romans 1–3, what does he conclude about our guilt and accountability for our sins (Romans 3:9-20)?

5. Read these Bible texts and describe God's attitude and response to sin.

Habakkuk 1:13a	Isaiah 59:2
Romans 1:18-32	Romans 2:5-11

6. How have the verses in our study spoken to you this week?

Lesson 7 - Not in Our Place, But For Our Sins: God in Christ

The concept of Jesus dying for our sins lies at the heart of salvation through the cross. People have asserted themselves against God and put themselves where only God deserves to be. God sacrifices himself for people's sins and puts himself on the cross as he bore the sins of people. People claim prerogatives that belong to God alone; God accepts penalties that belong to people alone.

Theme Verses: Galatians 2:20 and Galatians 6:14

Memory Verse: 1 Peter 2:24

He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that, free from sins, we might live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed.

1. To begin your study of today's lesson, take some time to reflect/meditate on the lyrics of the old hymn, *Rock of Ages*.

Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
 Let me hide myself in Thee;
 Let the water and the blood,
 From Thy wounded side which flowed,
 Be of sin the double cure,
 Save from wrath and make me pure.

Not the labor of my hands
 Can fulfill Thy law's demands;
 Could my zeal no respite know,
 Could my tears forever flow,
 All for sin could not atone;
 Thou must save, and Thou alone.

Nothing in my hand I bring,
 Simply to Thy cross I cling;

Naked, come to Thee for dress;
Helpless, look to Thee for grace;
Foul, I to the fountain fly;
Wash me, Savior, or I die.

While I draw this fleeting breath,
When my eyes shall close in death,
When I rise to worlds unknown,
And behold Thee on Thy throne,
Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in Thee.

What do you think the writer of this song was feeling when he wrote this song?

What do you think is the main message of this song?

2. Copy the memory verse, verbatim, in the space below.

3. Read Romans 5:1-20 and answer these questions.

Why did Christ die for us?

Who demands death for those who sin, God or the devil?

Lesson 8 - The Salvation of Sinners

Today we look at four images that illustrate our salvation from sin by God in Christ: propitiation (sacrifice of atonement or atoning sacrifice in the NIV), redemption, justification, and reconciliation. These images confirmed that God in Christ is calling out a people for himself.

Theme Verses: Galatians 2:20 and Galatians 6:14

Memory Verses: Romans 3:25a, Ephesians 1:7, Romans 5:9, and 2 Corinthians 5:17-18

God presented him (Jesus) as a sacrifice of atonement (propitiation), through faith in his blood.

In him (Jesus) we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace.

Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him!

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation.

1. Read Romans 3:25-26, 1 John 2:1-2, and 1 John 4:9-10.

What is a sacrifice of atonement or atoning sacrifice (propitiation in older versions like KJV and ASV)?

2. Copy the memory verses, verbatim, in the space below.

3. Read Galatians 3:10-14, Galatians 4:1-7, Ephesians 1:3-10, and 1 Peter 1:18-19. What is redemption and how are we redeemed?

4. Read Romans 5:1-20. According to this chapter, how does God justify us, make us right before him?

5. Read 2 Corinthians 5:17-21. What is reconciliation and what does it mean to Christ followers?

6. How have the verses in our study spoken to you this week?

Lesson 9 - The Revelation of the Cross: God's Justice, Love, Wisdom and Power

In the death of Christ, God has given us a clear, public demonstration of both his justice and his love.

Theme Verses: Galatians 2:20 and Galatians 6:14

Memory Verses: Romans 3:25-26 and Romans 5:8

God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished—he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.

But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

1. For reflection and meditation: read Psalm 73.

How might you feel if you were in the psalmist's place?

What is the theme of this psalm?

Why did the feet of the psalmist almost slip?

According to this psalm, how does God's justice work?

2. Copy the memory verses, verbatim, in the space below.

3. Read Romans 3:21-26.

What is the "righteousness of God" in these verses?

How did God "demonstrate his justice"?

4. Read Romans 5:6-11, John 3:16-18, Philipians 2:6-8, and 1 John 3:16.

How does the cross show (embody) God's love?

5. Read 1 Corinthians 1:17-2:5. How does the cross demonstrate the wisdom and power of God compared to the foolishness and weakness of people?

6. How have the verses in our study spoken to you this week?

Lesson 10 - Conquering Evil

Victory, conquest, triumph, overcoming—these words were the vocabulary of those first Christ followers. I want to be clear at the beginning of our lesson that it is only through the cross of Christ that Satan has been defeated. This fact, combined with the witness of Christ followers, leads John to write: “They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death” (Revelation 12:11).

Theme Verses: Galatians 2:20 and Galatians 6:14

Memory Verses: Colossians 2:13-15

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 canceled 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. And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.

1. For reflection on our topic today, read Revelation 12:1-17.

What story is being described in these verses?

How did the followers of Christ (brothers) overcome Satan (the accuser)?

How does Revelation 12 describe Satan’s (the Dragon’s) strategy against those who obey God’s commands and hold to the testimony of Jesus?

2. Copy the memory verses, verbatim, in the space below.

3. Read through our memory verses several times.

What did Jesus accomplish at the cross?

4. Read Hebrews 2:14-18.

Concerning the fear of death and temptation, what encouraging words does the writer offer us?

5. What principles and/or advice does Scripture give us for our ongoing battle with evil? (See Mark 8:33, 1 Corinthians 10:11-13, Ephesians 6:10-17, James 4:7-10, 1 Peter 5:8-9, and 1 John 5:18-20)

Mark 8:33 –

1 Corinthians 10:11-13 –
Ephesians 6:10-17 –

James 4:7-10 –

1 Peter 5:8-9 –

1 John 5:18-20 –

6. How have the verses in our study spoken to you this week?

Lesson 11 - The Community of the Cross

Certainly God's saving of us through the cross of Christ is a very personal matter. However, even though salvation is an individual matter, it is not individualistic. God, through the cross, welcomes us to his family, to a community of the cross. That's what Paul wanted his readers/hearers to understand in 1 Corinthians 11:17-34. We don't break bread and drink wine in isolation or according to our own selfish spiritual interests. We break bread in community.

Theme Verses: Galatians 2:20 and Galatians 6:14

Memory Verses: Titus 2:11-14 (NLT)

For the grace of God has been revealed, bringing salvation to all people. And we are instructed to turn from godless living and sinful pleasures. We should live in this evil world with wisdom, righteousness, and devotion to God, while we look forward with hope to that wonderful day when the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, will be revealed. He gave his life to free us from every kind of sin, to cleanse us, and to make us his very own people, totally committed to doing good deeds.

1. Meditation: Read Acts 2:36-47 through several times. This is an account of the early community of the cross.

What happened to this group of people on this day (Acts 2:36-41)?

Describe this community of people. What was it like (Acts 2:42-47)?

2. Copy the memory verses, verbatim, in the space below.

3. Read Romans 16:1-27. What is Paul describing in these verses?

4. Based on what God did at the cross through Jesus, what words should be used to describe those in the community brought together by the cross?

5. What is the primary focus of the community of the cross? You might want to review the verses that we have been using as our theme verses.

6. How have the verses in our study spoken to you this week?

Lesson 12 - The Character of the Cross of Christ Follower

The cross revolutionizes our attitude to ourselves as well as to God. The community of the cross is a community of self-understanding and self-giving. We examine, today, the character of the cross of Christ follower.

Theme Verses: Galatians 2:20 and Galatians 6:14

Memory Verses: Luke 9:23, Mark 10:43-45, and
Philippians 2:5

Then he said to them all: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me."

"Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus.

1. Describe how Paul uses death and resurrection in the following verses.

Romans 6:1-10:

Colossians 3:5-11 and Romans 8:13:

2 Corinthians 4:7-17:

2. Copy the memory verses, verbatim, in the space below.

3. John Stott, in the The Cross of Christ, page 278, says, "Self-understanding should lead to self-giving."

Read carefully Mark 10:35-45 and describe the difference between the following character traits.

Selfish Ambition

Sacrifice

Power

Service

Comfort

Suffering

4. Practical application: How do sacrifice, service, and suffering work in the three areas of the home, church family, and the world?

Home (See Ephesians 5:21-33):

Church Family (See 1 John 4:7-12, Philippians 2:1-4, & 1 Corinthians 8:9-13):

World (See Luke 10:30-37 & 1 John 3:16-18):

Lesson 13 - Loving Our Enemies

If God is love and we are to love as God loves, certainly we must love our enemies. If God had not loved us when we were his enemies, no Christ follower would be spiritually blessed.

Theme Verses: Galatians 2:20 and Galatians 6:14

Memory Verses: Matthew 5:43-45

You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous.

1. Read Romans 12:1-2, 9-21. What specific directions does Paul offer us on dealing with others, especially those who don't like us or hate us?

What specific choices do you need to make to live by these words? Questions that might help you here include: How should I react to my persecutors and enemies? What do the mercies of God require of me? How should the cross, in which God's mercy shines at its brightest, affect my conduct?

2. Copy the memory verses, verbatim, in the space below.

3. According to Romans 1 and Romans 13, how does God deal with evil/evil people?

4. According to Romans 13:1-10, how should Christians regard the state and its authority?

5. How have the verses in our study spoken to you this week?

Lesson 14 - Christ's Suffering and Our Suffering

Today we explore the relationship between the cross of Christ and our sufferings. The cross speaks directly to us in our pain. Our understanding of suffering is made clearer through the suffering of Jesus.

Theme Verses: Galatians 2:20 and Galatians 6:14

Memory Verse: 1 Peter 4:1

Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because he who has suffered in his body is done with sin.

1. Read 1 Peter 2:18-25. What advice and explanation does Peter offer to those who are suffering unjustly?
2. Copy the memory verse, verbatim, in the space below.
3. Read 1 Peter 3:8-18a. In a world full of evil and suffering, how are Christ followers to live?

Read 1 Peter 2:18-25 and 3:8-18a again. How is the behavior of the Christ follower linked to the death of Jesus?

4. Hebrews 2:14 and 5:8-9 inform us that Jesus' sufferings were the testing-ground in which his obedience became full-grown (perfect).

How does God use suffering to make us holy?

(See James 1:2-4 and Romans 5:3-5. Also the examples used in Hebrews 12:7-11, 1 Peter 1:6-7, and John 15:1-8)

5. How have the verses in our study spoken to you this week?

Lesson 15 - The Influence of the Cross

Our theme verses from Galatians 2 and Galatians 6 declare the central importance of the cross to the good news. Today we will look at key verses from the book of Galatians and the influence of the cross in the life of the Christ follower. Galatians was probably written about 15 years after the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Theme Verses: Galatians 2:20 and Galatians 6:14

Memory Verses: Galatians 1:3-5

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

1. What affirmations about the death of Christ does Paul make in Galatians 1:3-5?
2. Copy the memory verses, verbatim, in the space below.
3. What does Paul mean in Galatians 2:19-21 when he says "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me."?

What practical applications can you make of this statement?

4. In Galatians 3:3, Paul says, "After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?" What did he mean?

5. Read Paul's concluding exhortation in Galatians 6:12-15. What is Paul's argument?

Put his argument in your own words.

6. How have the verses in our study spoken to you this week?