

# The Stumbling Block of the Cross

*"But we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block."  
1 Corinthians 1:23; see also Galatians 5:11*

The message of Christ crucified is a stumbling block because it strikes at the root of man's self-righteousness and rebellion toward God. To receive Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior, we must humble ourselves and acknowledge our unrighteousness before God. By faith, we then depend on Christ and His atoning sacrifice on the cross for our righteousness. This is what is called saving faith. Unbelievers reject the message of Christ crucified because they do not want to acknowledge God and give up their soul-life by submitting to the sovereignty and righteousness of Jesus Christ. "He who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. And he who has found his soul-life will lose it, and he who has lost his soul-life for My sake has found it (Matthew 10:38-39)." The message of the cross confronts each person with a spiritual crisis - a decisive moment in their life to choose whether to give up their self-identity, self-life and self-righteousness and submit to Christ's authority. Many people are so fiercely determined to protect and control their soul-life (self-rule) that the Holy Spirit cannot convict them of their unrighteousness and their need for Jesus Christ to save them. Anyone who wants to maintain their own self-righteousness and self-sovereignty instead of submitting to Christ's righteousness and sovereignty will stumble over the cross of Christ (see Romans 9:30-10:4). The Bible says, "He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him (John 3:36)."

However, the word of the cross goes far beyond just cleansing us from sin. Christ's death on the cross not only provided us forgiveness for sins; His death also provided us deliverance from sin's power. Christ not only bore our sins on the cross, He bore our sin nature on the cross with Him.

If we believe in Christ, then when Christ died we died with Him. Since our sinful nature has died with Christ and been removed from us, we have been freed from sin's power (Romans 6:6-7). Jesus Christ not only died in our place, He now wants to live in our place. This is Christ's complete provision for us as a result of His crucifixion. But why is this complete truth of the cross a stumbling block to even many Christians? Why don't more Christians want to embrace the exchanged life that is provided for us in Christ? Why would any Christian be satisfied with a life that is just an outward cultural or moral change?

Once again, the cross strikes at the root of our self-identity, self-righteousness and self-will. The real crux of the matter is whether we are willing to lose our soul-life and submit to Christ's authority. In order to "see" that you have died with Christ so that He can live in you, you must be willing to completely surrender your whole life to Jesus Christ. The exchanged life means you give up control of your soul-life in return for Christ's Sovereignty and His divine life. You cannot enter into the experience of Christ's exchanged life unless you are willing to give up your soul-life (your natural attitudes, affections and abilities) for Christ's attitudes, affections and abilities. Jesus said, "He who loves his soul-life loses it, and he who hates his soul-life in this world will keep it to life eternal (John 12:25)."

This means when Christ becomes your life, you died to the right to run your own life. Knowing and acknowledging the truth that you have been crucified with Christ will affect all of your life's decisions, such as whom you marry, which friends you choose, what job you have, how you spend your money, where you live and how you live. "Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple... none of you can be My disciple who does not give up everything he has (Luke 14:27 & 33)." Submitting wholeheartedly to Christ's Sovereignty will impact every area of your life - spirit, soul and body. "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and

follow Me (Matthew 16:24)." Christ's Lordship will completely pervade your daily life and all your pursuits, activities and associations. Christ's Sovereign Spirit will ultimately transform even your natural temperament and your affections and attitudes. If knowing Christ and submitting to His Sovereignty is what you really desire, then entering into the knowledge that you died with Christ is liberating. However, if you do not want to wholeheartedly submit to Christ's authority, then the message of the cross will offend you. Tragically, many so-called "Christians" love their soul-life too much to give it up for Jesus Christ and misuse God's grace as an excuse to practice sin. Just as the apostle Peter warned, "Do not use your freedom as a cover for evil (1 Peter 2:16)."

Some Christians sincerely want to surrender completely to Christ, but they do not know how and their experience makes them feel that they will always fail. The gospel of Christ crucified is indeed good news for these people, for the Word of God teaches us that because Jesus surrendered His life to God (to the point of death), we are capable by faith of doing the same thing because we no longer have a sinful nature and Christ now lives in us. If you are willing to lose your soul-life so that you can find it, you do not need to suffer from defeat anymore. Jesus said, "If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free... so if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed! (John 8:31-32, 36)." The message of the cross is only a stumbling block if you do not want to submit to Christ's Sovereignty. If you are willing to lose your soul-life for Christ's sake, then the gospel of Christ crucified is great news!

*"This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil. For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But he who practices the truth comes to the Light, so that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God."  
John 3:19-21*