



Discovery Series
Bible Study

Why Did Christ Have To Die?



"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him."

John 3:16-17 (NIV)



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Couldn't He have accomplished more by living a full and happy life? Think of the people He could have healed, the teaching He could have done, the problems He could have solved. Why was He obsessed with dying? Why didn't He defend Himself in court for the sake of His family, His disciples, and all who admired Him? This booklet, compiled by our staff of writers, takes a look at the reasons given in the Bible why Christ planned and allowed His own death.

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THE CONTROVERSIES OF THE CROSS (PART 1)

- Reading For Study No. 1 -



The Symbol Of The Cross

Can you imagine what public reaction would be if a fundamentalist religious group adopted an electric chair as its symbol? Think of what it would be like to see an image of an electric chair on top of their meeting places or as jewelry hanging around their necks.

Yet that's what the cross amounts to. The cross was a means of capital punishment. Crucifixion was the way the Romans put their worst criminals to death. It was horrible—far worse than a gas chamber, firing squad, or even a hangman's noose.

Why, then, do Christians make so much of this instrument of public ridicule and torture? Why are Christians obsessed with this symbol of death? Do they realize what they are doing?

The cross has become so widely used as religious jewelry that it has lost much of its original meaning and horror.

In many cases, the answer seems to be no. Even Christians fail to realize the implications of the cross. It has become so widely used as religious jewelry, as a symbol of love and hope, and even as a sign of good luck that it has lost much of its original meaning and horror. It has become so generally accepted, in fact, that everyone from devoted followers of Christ to atheists wear its image around their necks.

THE CONTROVERSIES OF THE CROSS (PART 1)

- Reading For Study No. 1 -



The Opinions Of The Cross

So what do people think of the cross? More specifically, what do they think of the cross as it relates to Christ? That's where the symbol comes from, and that's where the real discussion begins. Why did a beautiful life have to come to such a terrible end? What was in His mind? What should now be in ours? Here are some of the explanations people give for the death of Christ.

"It's an example of nonresistance."

Some people feel that when Jesus died on the cross He was giving us the ultimate example of how to live in a violent, hostile world. They say that His death shows us how to live successfully by being strong enough to let others have their way.

"It means whatever you want it to mean."

Those who take this approach generally believe that Christ did not actually accomplish anything when He died on the cross. Since it has become such a part of our awareness, it can be used to symbolize many different things.

"It has no real meaning."

Some people say that the significance of Christ was in His life—not in His death. They believe that He came to live a flawless life on earth so that we could know what God is like. But that was all God sent Him to do. His death, they say, was not related to His mission on earth.

"It represents failure."

Those who hold this view say that Jesus had a noble and global plan for earth, but that He died before He could carry it out. His mission was aborted when the Roman soldiers nailed Him to the cross like a common criminal. When Christ died, these people say, it meant that He had failed.

The Symbol & Opinions Of The Cross



1 Corinthians 1:18—"The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God."

Objective:
**To understand
some of the
objections people
have to the cross.**

Bible Memorization:
1 Corinthians 1:18

Reading:
**"The Symbol &
Opinions Of
The Cross"
pp.4-5**

Warming Up

How do you think people would respond to a religion that used an electric chair or gas chamber as a symbol of its faith?

Thinking Through

How much do you know about the actual process of crucifixion? When you think of the horrors of death on a cross, how do you feel?

Consider the statement on page 4, "[The cross] has become so widely used as religious jewelry, as a symbol of love and hope, and even as a sign of good luck that it has lost much of its original meaning and horror." Is this good or bad? Why?

In the different opinions of the cross expressed on page 5, which one do you think is the most dangerous? The most subtle? The most absurd? Why?

Digging In

Key Text: Matthew 27:35-44,51-56

As we consider different opinions on the meaning of the cross, it is helpful to see that there were differing views on Christ's crucifixion even as it was happening. In Matthew 27, what six groups/individuals are seen at the cross of Jesus, and what were their different reactions to it?

The religious leaders (vv.41-43) and the women from Galilee (vv.55-56) had very different opinions of the events on the cross. How do you think the religious leaders viewed Jesus' crucifixion? How do you think the women viewed it? Explain your answers. Why were they both wrong?

The centurion was watching the same events on Calvary that day as everyone else. Why do you think his opinion (Mt. 27:54) was so different than the opinion of most of the other spectators there?

Going Further

Refer

Compare the four Gospel accounts of the crucifixion. In what ways are they similar? In what ways are they different? (see Mt. 27:33-56; Mk. 15:22-41; Lk.23:26-49; Jn. 19:16-30).

Reflect

How can we reflect the cross of Christ in our own lives? (see 1 Pet. 2:19-24). What effect can our lives have on how people view the credibility of the gospel? Does your life attract people to the Christ of the cross?

³⁵Then they crucified Him . . . ³⁷And they put up over His head the accusation written against Him: THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS. ³⁸Then two robbers were crucified with Him, one on the right and another on the left. ³⁹And those who passed by blasphemed Him, wagging their heads ⁴⁰and saying, 'You who destroy the temple and build it in three days, save Yourself! If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross.' ⁴¹Likewise the chief priests also, mocking with the scribes and elders, said, ⁴²'He saved others; Himself He cannot save. If He is the King of Israel, let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe Him. ⁴³He trusted in God; let Him deliver Him now if He will have Him; for He said, "I am the Son of God."' ⁴⁴Even the robbers who were crucified with Him reviled Him with the same thing. . . . ⁵⁴So when the centurion and those with him, who were guarding Jesus, saw the earthquake and the things that had happened, they feared greatly, saying, 'Truly this was the Son of God!' ⁵⁵And many women who followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering to Him, were there looking on from afar." **Matthew 27:35-44,54-55**