

The cross is central to the Christian life. It is the foundation of our salvation. But it is more than that. Foundations are meant to be built upon. We have looked at several models of the atonement. The atonement is like a diamond with many beautiful facets: substitution, propitiation, expiation, victory, new humanity, new community, new creation.

NT Scholar Scot McKnight contends that the models of the atonement are like violin strings: “The magic of a violin is the capacity for the violinist to make each string work in harmony with the others to create the appropriate sound. If a violinist somehow managed to play only one string on the violin, the sound could never be complete. Some theories of atonement ask violinists either to pluck all but one string or to play gospel music as though only one string really mattered. I want to contend that we need each of these strings, and that we need to ask for a violinist with a bow that can stroke the strings so well that the potency of each string creates a harmonious composition that puts our hearts at rest.”<sup>1</sup>

This morning we consider another motif of the cross, usually called *Christus Exemplar*: Christ as our example. Also called “Moral Influence Theory” of the atonement. First clearly espoused in the 12<sup>th</sup> C by Peter Abelard. Often, theological liberals espouse this view and deny all the other stuff about sin, guilt, wrath, and forgiveness. But conservatives then over-react, as often happens. The pendulum swings too far in the other direction. Luther said we can be like drunks who climb on a horse only to fall off the other side.

Hear the invitation of the Lord Jesus Christ: “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me” (Luke 9:23). The call of the Christian life is to take up a cross. Take up your instrument of violent execution. Yes, the cross takes care of our sin problem, but the cross also shapes our discipleship, our posture, our vision, our values, our attitudes, and our actions. The cross gives a whole new way of life, what NT scholar Michael Gorman, who has been so helpful to me here, calls cruciformity. Gorman writes, “Ethics is atonement in action.”<sup>2</sup> But the cross is about more than merely ethics: what we must *do*. It is about a way of being in the world fueled by a new way of seeing.<sup>3</sup>

“Cruciform” is an architecture term that describes a building laid out in the shape of a cross. It means cross-shaped.<sup>4</sup> Cruciformity is being conformed to the crucified Christ. You see, the cross is comprehensive. Discipleship is cross-shaped. The cross of Christ is the source of our salvation and the shape of our sanctification, the motivation for the Christian life and the model of the Christian life, the payment of our debt and the pattern of our discipleship, the provision of life and pardon for sin as well as the power and paradigm for Christian living.

The call of the cross is to give of self for the good of another. Which, is really just another way of talking about love, isn't it? Self-giving love. Or service: practically giving up your time, talents, and treasure for the benefit of someone else. Or humility: considering others more important than yourself. Or the call to self-denial. All this and more - rooted in the cross. Cruciformity.

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<sup>1</sup> Scot McKnight, *A Community Called Atonement* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2007), 114.

<sup>2</sup> Michael Gorman, *The Death of the Messiah and the Birth of the New Covenant* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2014), 55.

<sup>3</sup> Wibourne, *The Cross Before Me*, 20.

<sup>4</sup> Rankin Wilbourne, *The Cross Before Me* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2019), 20.

I think this theme is pervasive, yet underappreciated (maybe because we are reactionary) so I want to stroll through the NT, hitting several key texts to show that the cross shows the shape of the Christian life. The Christian life is the cross-centered and cross-shaped life.

Before we do though, we must acknowledge the difficulty of this call. We don't want to give of self, we want to gain for self. Augustine said the Fall turned us inward to self rather than outward to God. Luther said, sin is being curved in on the self. Cranmer's BCP defines sin as "the seeking of our own will instead of the will of God, thus distorting our relationship with God, with other people, and with all creation." We seek our own will. We seek autonomy. Self-rule. We are like the seagulls in *Finding Nemo*. We may not say it out loud, but inwardly, all humans share their one-word vocabulary: mine, mine, mine. Me myself, and I. Even when redeemed we have to fight self-centeredness and deny the self. Charles Spurgeon said "Mr. Self is the worst enemy a Christian has." Newton: "That monster Self has as many heads as Hydra, as many lives as a cat."

In other words, we are prideful – what Lewis called "the great sin." In *Mere Christianity*, he wrote, "According to Christian teachers, the essential vice, the utmost evil, is Pride. Unchastity, anger, greed, drunkenness, and all that, are mere flea-bites in comparison: it was through Pride that the devil became the devil: Pride leads to every other vice: it is the complete anti-God state of mind."<sup>5</sup> Cruciformity is the crucifixion of pride. *I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live.*

Turn over to **Phil 2** [921]. Gorman calls Phil 2 Paul's "master story."<sup>6</sup> There is a pattern here, I want you to see all over the NT, the pattern of the Messiah, what Paul will call the law of Christ. The pattern is: although X (status/rights), not Y (selfishness), but Z (selflessness).<sup>7</sup> It is how the NT defines love. Biblical love is two dimensional. There is a negative and a positive.<sup>8</sup> On the one hand, we don't seek to please ourselves. Not Y, but Z. Not self but we seek the good, the advantage, the edification of others. 1 Cor 13:5: love is not self-seeking, 8:1: loves builds other up. Not self, but others. Theologian Graham Cole says our new life in Christ "is an other-person-centered life that expresses itself in self-donation on behalf of others rather than the selfish pursuit of one's own interests."<sup>9</sup> **Read 2:1-8 This is.**

God wants his church to have the same mind, the same love, and one mind. Unity. The main theme of all the letters in the NT is the unity of the people of God in Christ. These words "same mind" in Phil 2:2 (*autos* and *phrōnēō*) are used together in a couple of other places by Paul, but the ESV translates the phrase in a few different ways so I am going to read these verses from the NAS, which will bring Chris Mathis great delight:

Rom 12:16 - "Be of the same mind." (*auto* and *phrōnēō*)

Rom 15:5 - "Now may the God who gives perseverance and encouragement grant you to be of the same mind with one another according to Christ Jesus;" (*autos* and *phrōnēō*)

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<sup>5</sup> Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 103.

<sup>6</sup> Michael J. Gorman, *Cruciformity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 88, 168.

<sup>7</sup> Gorman, *Cruciformity*, 167.

<sup>8</sup> Gorman, *Cruciformity*, 160.

<sup>9</sup> Graham Cole, *God the Peacemaker* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 217.

2 Cor 13:11 - "Finally, brethren, rejoice, be made complete, be comforted, be like-minded, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you." (*autos* and *phrōnēō*) And then flip over a couple of pages to **4:2**. Or better, "to have the same mind in the Lord." (*auto* and *phrōnēō*).

Then he fills in what the same mindset looks like in **3-4**. Do nothing from selfish ambition. Do nothing when your motive is self-gain or self-glory. This is the exact opposite of the tendency of our flesh. Because of our sin we are tempted to do everything for the self and here the Apostle says do nothing for the self!

Side bar: If you are doing the digital detox with us during Lent, hasn't it been so cleansing? The good life. Social media is the fountain of vain conceit. Just consider the motive for the vast majority of posts: my beauty, my vacation, my kids, my possessions, my political hot take. Social media is where you present the ideal version of yourself hide the reality. Look at me, tell me I'm pretty, be impressed with my stuff, envy my family, I'm a King, I'm a queen. Selfish ambition and vain conceit.

Paul says *in humility*, we must consider others as more significant than ourselves. Others first. Then us. That's humility. CJ Mahaney defines humility as "honestly assessing ourselves in light of God's holiness and our sinfulness." We gotta have an honest assessment, which is hard because as Paul Tripp says our self-perception tends to be as accurate as a carnival mirror. But when we assess ourselves in light of God and his character, humility ensues. No one stands before the Grand Canyon and thinks, I'm a pretty big deal. No, conceit is destroyed. Conceit is an exaggerated self-assessment and humility is an accurate self-assessment. In humility, count others as more significant than yourselves. Church father John Chrysostom said "There is nothing so foreign to a Christian as arrogance." When you find it, put it to death.

Evidence of knowing Jesus is that you are not a self-promoter. You become humble, because the gospel produces humility. CS Lewis observes that the humble person is not a man who is constantly telling us he is a nobody. No, such a person is actually self-obsessed. He says you know a person humbled by the gospel because he is so interested in others. He doesn't so much think less of himself as he thinks of himself less. He is turned outward because of what Jesus has done, which is what v. 4 commands:

Look to the interests of others. Look. Scope for others. *Skopēō* – We are talking about intentional attentiveness to the interests others. Don't look to self, look to others. Life aint about you. Notice the pattern: not Y (selfishness), but Z (selflessness). Not for self, but for others. Not own interests but interests of others.

Then he points to Jesus as our example. *Christus exemplar*. **5-8** – Have the same mind. What mind? The mindset of Jesus. This is the goal: to have the mind of the Messiah. Although divine status, didn't use for the self but gave of himself so we might be saved. Imitate his mindset. Jesus is the ultimate paradigm for the selfless mindset. Though he was equal with God, he didn't use that for his own advantage. He wasn't self-focused. Rather, he emptied himself by adding a human nature. In this case, subtraction by addition. Augustine said that Christ "emptied Himself not by losing what He was, but by taking to Him what He was not." Never has anyone so great left behind so much in order to accomplish something so astonishing as Jesus did.

Look to Jesus. Have his mindset. Jesus could have shown up as a full-grown man. He was born as a baby. The Second person of the Trinity needed changing. He could have been born in a palace. It was a manger with animals. Born a prince: manual laborer. A big city like Rome, nope: rural town of Bethlehem.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Gavin Ortlund, *Humility* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2023), 8.

The one who inhabits the heights of heaven came down and not only took a human nature but died on a cross, the ultimate degradation. Jesus was arrested and grabbed with Roman hands that he formed. Spat upon using the glands that He controls to work up the saliva. They nail him to a cross made from a tree that He spoke into existence. He humbled Himself.

The son of God died on a cross. The one who made humanity takes on humanity to rescue and redeem humanity and to show us what it means to be truly human. And the reason Paul includes this here in the letter is to stir and spur us to live like Jesus. To look to Jesus as our example. To have his mindset, of laying down our rights and putting others first. Jesus is the ultimate example of self-giving love. He is the provision of our salvation and the pattern for our life. He is the source of life who shows us the shape of life. Although X (status/rights), not Y (selfishness), but Z (selflessness). I want you to see this in a few other books:

**Mark 10:42-45** (A servant exists to make the life of someone else better.)

Last words are lasting words: **John 13:12-15, 34-35**. In Francis Schaeffer's book *The Mark of the Christian*, he writes that Jesus "gives the world the right to judge whether you and I are born-again Christians on the basis of our observable love toward all Christians."<sup>11</sup> Cruciformity is what separates fans from followers.<sup>12</sup>

**Rom 14:13-20, 15:1-2** The Message says "Strength is for service, not status."<sup>13</sup> **3**.

**1 Cor 8:1, 9, 10, 9:1, 4, 5, 6, 12, 15, 19-23, 10:23-24, 31-11:1, / 2 Cor 4:5, 5:15, 8:9,**

**Gal 5:13-14**, Saved to serve. Freed, not to use our freedom on our self, but to become servants of others. In love. Because this is what the entire law is all about. **6:1-2**.<sup>14</sup>

Dearly Beloved, you get the idea. We are called to be a colony of cruciformity. This is to be our rule of life: not me but Jesus which means others. Deny self, love God, love others. The applications are endless. Cruciformity is to be applied in everyday life, in the workplace, for church unity, in debates about gray areas, in marriage (5:25), in stewardship (2 Cor 8:9), in leadership, with family: Young people, one the main ways you can practice cruciformity is with your siblings. So much sibling rivalry and squabbling comes from self-centeredness, which is the opposite of the Jesus mindset. Here is your rule of life: put the interests of your siblings above your own interests. Give of selves for their benefit.

Death to self for the good of the other – based on the cross. As Gorman says, "Those who affirm the death of Christ in creed must affirm his death in deed."<sup>15</sup> Our ethics are grounded in the evangel. Friends, the cross is the objective accomplishment of our salvation. It is also the subjective standard that shapes our sanctification. It is the provision and pattern, the foundation and form, the source and shape, creed and deed.

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<sup>11</sup> Francis A. Schaeffer, *The Mark of the Christian* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1970), 22.

<sup>12</sup> Michael F. Bird, *What Christians Ought to Believe* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 138.

<sup>13</sup> Eugene Peterson, *The Message* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2006), 1664, Rom 15:2.

<sup>14</sup> [see also Eph 4:32-5:2, 25, 1 Pet 2:21, 1 John 2:6, 3:16-18]

<sup>15</sup> Gorman, *Cruciformity*, 238.

And church, the beauty of this call is that it is the key to happiness, the foundation of flourishing. Just consider the alternative. If you don't believe in God, what is your aim? None of this would make sense. The driving ethical principle of atheism is self: self-preservation and self-promotion, the strong eat the weak, natural selection, others are only to be used to further your agenda. I would challenge you to consider what a dead end that vision of the world is. Its grotesque.

Cruciformity is the key to joy. As Mrs. White says all the time: Have JOY: Jesus, others, yourself. / We live in an anxious and depressed age (even though we are the richest and most blessed generation to ever live). And the meds aren't fixing the problem. Therapists are now assigning serving others to their patients. Go, get out of your home and out your head and do good to someone. You'll feel better. Forget the self and focus on others.

Living large hangs on a smaller self. The good life has a *summum bonum* – an ultimate aim. Our ultimate aim is to honor our Father by becoming like his Son. And the good life is the others-focused life. Positive Psychology is the new rage: Maybe focusing on all our problems isn't the path. Instead, let's focus on more positives. One of their own says that the discipline of positive psychology is summed up with three words: "Other People Matter."<sup>16</sup>

Let me close with one of my favorite Luther quotes: "Although the Christian is thus free from all works, he ought in this liberty to empty himself, take upon himself the form of a servant, be made in the likeness of men, be found in human form, and to serve, help and in every way deal with his neighbor as he sees that God through Christ has dealt with and still deals with him. This he should do freely, having regard for nothing but divine approval. . . . *I will therefore give myself as a Christ to my neighbor, just as Christ offered himself to me; I will do nothing in this life except what I see is necessary, profitable, and salutary to my neighbor, since through faith I have an abundance of all good things in Christ.*"<sup>17</sup>

**Benediction:** May the God of all grace grant you self-forgetfulness as you increasingly become a colony of cruciformity, for the good of your neighbors and for the glory of God.

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<sup>16</sup> Peterson, *primer in Positive Psychology*, 249.

<sup>17</sup> Martin Luther, *The Freedom of a Christian*, in John Dillenberger, ed., *Martin Luther: Selections from His Writings* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1961), 74-75. My italics.