

# CHRIST, THE POWER OF GOD, Pt 1

## TRADING YOUR SORROWS (The Power Of The Cross)

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### Background

The cross was the Roman equivalent of the gallows or the electric chair, combined with humiliation and torture, taking up to three days for death to ensue from gradual asphyxiation. Joints were dislocated. Victims became dehydrated.

It was an apt illustration of punishment for sin, elsewhere described as unquenchable fire, grinding of teeth, where “their worm does not die” — everlasting pain and torment.

I find this disturbing information. We so easily overlook so many indignities, injustices, and inappropriate behaviors. But this is difficult to ignore.

How could a “loving God” conceive of, much less consign His creatures to such a fate? What’s love got to do with it?

Why do some Christians believe that capital punishment is consistent with the message of God’s love?

Originally, death was the fitting punishment for a wide variety of crimes against humanity: murder, kidnapping, slavery, adultery, bestiality, incest, homosexuality, cursing or striking one’s parents, blaspheming the name of God, speaking presumptuously as a prophet, profaning the Sabbath day, child sacrifice, and practicing spiritism.

In most of those instances, God explained, “So shall you put away the evil from your midst.” It was an act of love toward the larger community: purging evil and deterring sin.

This highlights the pervasive, contaminating nature of sin. Like fire, it is not easily contained but tends to spread and consume wherever and whatever it can. Sin ever seeks another new host (“It crouches at your door.”) It is aggressive. It is virulent.

### The Antidote

The only antidote is an equally aggressive counterstrike: the love of God.

God “put away the evil” from the midst (heart) of the human race when Jesus died on the cross. Not in the sense of *removing* sin, but by nullifying its death grip, by loosening its chains, by making a “way of escape” for those who seek liberation from sin’s brutal mastery, by forgiving and transforming the evildoers.

Today, I want to look with you at the power of the cross for our lives. We will look at the power of the cross *toward us*, its power *within us*, and the power of the cross that works *through us*.

## **The Power Of The Cross *Toward Me***

The effect of the cross on which Jesus died is both objective and subjective. Spiritual life and religion should involve both elements: the objective and the subjective.

Its power toward me is first objective. It comes from outside of me. God has done something *for me* by sending His Son into the world in human form.

1. The cross removes the barrier of my guilt that separates me from God.

*Ephesians 2:14* *For he himself is our peace, who has... destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility.*

Sin not only builds walls between humans; it first builds a wall between people and their Creator.

*Isaiah 59:1* *Listen! The Lord's arm is not too weak to save you, nor is his ear too deaf to hear you call. <sup>2</sup> It's your sins that have cut you off from God. Because of your sins, he has turned away and will not listen anymore.*

My sin against God (as David said, "Against You, and You alone, have I sinned.") creates true guilt, whether I feel guilty or not. This guilt cannot be removed by talk, or excuses, or by ignoring it, or off-setting it with good deeds. Like a warrant for my arrest that knows no limits of time or jurisdiction, it follows me wherever I go, whatever I become. Some day, I must face my Maker and give an accurate account for the life I have lived.

Were it not for the cross of Jesus, I could only give that account with deep and lasting shame. But because of His cross, I am forgiven. My guilt has been washed away. My sentence has been commuted. God no longer condemns me.

2. The cross restores my affectionate connection with God.

*John 3:16* *God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.*

Jesus died to "bring us to God," to bring "many sons to glory."

It's about love! It's all about God's love. The natural result of being effectively loved is that love arises in return.

God's complete love for us drives out our dread and terror of Him. He cross shows us another side of God: His sacrificial kindness.

Because of the cross, I am loved. My fears are being replaced with hopes. My hesitation, with courage. I now know that God is for me, not against me. The cross is evidence of that.

3. The cross rebuilds my sense of spiritual purpose in life.

Apart from Jesus Christ, my life had just one purpose: *me!* I thought about me all the time — what I liked, what I wanted, how I would get it. If I thought about you, inevitably, it was because somehow it circled back to how it would serve me, how it would please me.

*Colossians 1:21* *You who were once far away from God. You were his enemies, separated from him by your evil thoughts and actions.*

*Jude 12 They feast with you without fear, serving only themselves.*

The trouble with that point of view is it's too narrow; that world is too small. Its joys are too short-lived and its sorrows are too persistent. Its friendships are superficial and its pleasures are hollow.

But the cross of Christ is an anchor for my life. It stands as a monument to life's deepest meaning: life is loving, and love is giving. It communicates that same purpose and motive to me.

Because of the cross, I am significant. My life has purpose — a purpose that outlasts my own lifetime — because it bears fruit in others around me; it trickles down to succeeding generations.

## **The Power Of The Cross *Within Me***

The cross not only works *toward* me, but it works *within* me, as well. This is where the objective effects of the cross of Jesus turn to subjective benefits — things I can feel and enjoy.

1. The cross releases my conscience from the haunting, taunting memories of my misdeeds.

Nothing is more debilitating spiritually, psychologically, and socially than a guilty conscience. It colors our perceptions, deadens our feelings, and misguides our behaviors.

The sense that “the guilt is gone!” and “the burden is lifted!” is one of the first results of putting one's trust in Jesus and His death for us on the cross. The Bible refers to it as “the joy of your salvation.”

*Hebrews 9:14 Just think how much more the blood of Christ will purify our consciences from sinful deeds so that we can worship the living God.*

*What can wash away our sins?  
Nothing but the blood of Jesus!  
What can make me whole again?  
Nothing but the blood of Jesus!  
Oh, precious is the flow  
That makes me white as snow  
No other fount I know  
Nothing but the blood of Jesus!*

Because of the cross I am free. Free from the weight! Free from the gloom! Free from the dread!  
Free from the doom!

2. The cross restrains my angry and boastful pride.

Pride is the origin of sin. It always precedes a fall. It caused Lucifer to fall from the Mountain of God. It has caused each of us to fall in so many ways.

In pride I am lifted up with inflated ideas about myself and my value. In pride I am puffed up with heated envy and boiling anger. I think in terms of “me” and “them.” I'm always in a battle to prove myself, to outdo someone — when, actually, my real enemy is only myself.

The cross cools those jets. When I remember how Jesus died for me, what He endured to save my soul, the slights I have endured seem miniscule and my ambitions and jealousies seem paper-thin.

When I recall how God has loved me, against all odds and in the face of such opposition, my life is re-oriented.

Because of the cross, I am at peace. Enemies become instruments of God's grace, difficulties become servants of His loving purpose.

*Jeremiah 29:11* *I know the plans I have for you," says the Lord. "They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope.*

3. The cross reminds me that God is greater than my weaknesses.

The cross is a measure of the utter extremity of human strength and endurance. It is the absolute exhaustion of every plan and power of humankind. It is total helplessness. Complete emptiness.

But it is also the measure of God's infinite grace and the power of His love's perseverance. Nothing that humankind could throw in His way could put Him off or turn Him aside.

*John 13:1* *He had loved his disciples during his ministry on earth, and now he loved them to the very end.*

And that love covers us today, because of the cross. In my weakness His strength is made complete. His love shines brightest when my light is nearly extinguished. His provision is revealed when I am empty.

We are not the mighty power of God. We are just flesh, made from the dust. But the mighty power of God is our covering. God Himself is our strength.

Because of the cross, I am protected. Though hardship befall me, I will not be harmed. God's hand is upon my life, and no one can pluck me from His grip.

### **The Power Of The Cross *Through Me***

The cross is so unstoppable in its influence that it reaches to every soul upon the earth. And it works within every soul that receives it. But it does not stop there. The cross of Jesus Christ is so powerful that its energy and purpose cannot be contained. My salvation is not for me alone; it is designed to burst out and to spill out on those around me.

1. The cross works through me, to reach for peace with those who mistreat me.

A primary evidence of the work of the cross in my life is my desire to make peace with those who trouble me. Anyone can toss people away in anger and disgust. Just look at the brutality and indifference around us. It is grievous what men will do to one another for a little more money, a little more land, a little more power. And why? What for? They will die and it will all pass into the hands of another!

Life is too short to hold grudges. The fiery darts of self-righteous judgment will become the nails in our own coffins. How is it that we imagine we are better than others because we despise them? I don't understand the math!

*Matthew 5:9* *Blessed are the peacemakers.*

The cross is all about making two divided parties into one family again. It is about reuniting. It is about patchwork unity. Mended nets that were broken.

*John 1:21 I pray that they will all be one, just as you and I are one—as you are in me, Father, and I am in you. And may they be in us so that the world will believe you sent me.*

His prayer, empowered by His cross, reaches through your life to make peace once more, to bring another soul to the family table.

Anybody can lob grenades! It takes a Christian to build bridges.

Because of the cross, I am gracious. “Freely you have received; freely give.” If God has forgiven my foolishness and wickedness, I can forgive others theirs.

2. The cross helps me to rest in God for the final, good outcome.

*Romans 8:28 We know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them.*

He “makes a way where there seems to be no way.”

The cross teaches me that the darkest day leads to another dawn. That my extremity is God’s opportunity. That death is swallowed up by life. That God has only one end in mind: victory.

There is nothing that can stop Him. There is nothing too difficult for Him. There is nothing that can short-circuit His purpose. He is God!

And because of the cross, I am hopeful. Even if the last days of my life are bleak, the best is yet to come! Jesus is preparing a place for me by His side.

*I've got a mansion,  
Just over the hilltop  
In that bright land where  
I'll never grow old*

3. The cross redeems the time that is left to me through loving service and leading others to faith.

We are saved to serve. The more you give God’s love away, the more love comes to you. There is no higher purpose, no greater blessing on this earth, than to be an instrument in the hands of God to minister to another person in Jesus’ name.

*Matthew 10:42 If you give even a cup of cold water to one of the least of my followers, you will surely be rewarded.*

*Matthew 25:40 I tell you the truth, when you did it to one of the least of these my brothers and sisters, you were doing it to me!*

Jesus was not too busy, not too high-minded to stop what He was doing to minister to others. They might be little children that others thought a bother, or cripples that others thought a waste, or lonely hearts that others preferred to ignore.

It is the power of His cross that gives you and I the grace to serve others today. He pours His love into our hearts so that we may pour it out on those around us — the hurting, the angry, the fearful, the outcasts, the nobodies — they all need God's love. They all need to know the Savior who died for them. Most don't know anyone who would live for them, let alone die for them.

The cross changes me. Because of the cross, I am giving. I don't give for what I can get in return. I give for the sheer joy of giving. I have already been given so much. Yet I find that the more I give the fuller I become.

*John 4:32 I have food to eat that you are unaware of.*

Jesus' death, and the power of His sacrificial death, works toward us, within us, and through us.

C.T. Studd, missionary to China, India, and Africa, lived a life defined by these words: "If Jesus Christ be God and died for me, then no sacrifice is too great for me to make for Him."

What sacrifice will you make for Him who gave His life for you?