

The Truth About The Cross

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*Little children, keep yourselves from idols.
~ 1 John 5:21 ~*

Widely regarded as a symbol of Christ's sacrifice, the cross is one of the most dominant symbols in the religious world. Most churches calling themselves Christian incorporate the cross as a part of their identity. Millions of believers wear the cross as a piece of jewelry. In fact it is often the first purchase made by a new convert to demonstrate his or her new found faith.

While most who wear a cross would probably claim that they do not worship it, many of them use it as a routine part of their religious devotions. In fact, the cross plays a central role in the faith of millions today, some of whom believe that they cannot pray effectively without it. Some churches teach that one must make the sign of the cross before praying.

For others the cross is looked upon as a good luck charm, providing safety to the wearer. When facing temptation or danger they will grasp it tightly, perhaps whispering a quick prayer, kissing the cross and glancing to the heavens to inspire a sense of connection with their Savior. The cross seems to be viewed by some as having an almost magical effect.

For example, after a celebration involving the Pope's cross at Saint Patrick's High School in Alberta, Canada, one youth from the school said, "It was like having the world come together." It was reported that:

The pope wasn't here, but his cross was, the cross that he gave to all youth in the world, the cross that has been touched by millions of hands, big and small... Eighty candle bearers led the cross into the dark twin gyms. This demonstrated the effect of light shining through the darkness (*Alberta Catholic Registry*, Nov. 12, 2001).

Clearly the cross carries with it deep emotional attachment and great spiritual significance to millions of professing Christians. But is it truly a Christian symbol? Where did it come from and what part, if any, should it play in the life of a true follower of Christ?

The Origins of the Cross

Surprising as it may sound, the cross was in use as a religious symbol for thousands of years before Christ was born. According to the *Catholic Encyclopedia*:

The sign of the cross, represented in its simplest form by a crossing of two lines at right angles, greatly antedates, in both East and the West, the introduction of Christianity. It goes back to a very remote period of human civilization (1908 edition, volume 4, p. 517).

An Illustrated Encyclopedia of Traditional Symbols authored by J.C. Cooper confirmed the ancient origins of the cross as:

A universal symbol from the most remote times; it is the cosmic symbol par excellence. It is a world center and therefore a point of communication between heaven and earth and a cosmic axis, thus sharing the symbolism of the cosmic tree, mountain, pillar, ladder, etc. (p. 45).

The cross came into widespread use in the Babylonian mystery religions. As Alexander Hislop wrote in *The Two Babylons*:

The same sign of the cross that Rome now worships was used in the Babylonian Mysteries, was applied to paganism to the same magic purposes, (and) was honoured with the same honours. That which is now called the Christian cross was originally no Christian emblem at all, but was the mystic Tau of the Chaldeans and Egyptians—the true original form of the letter T—the initial name of Tammuz... That mystic Tau was marked in baptism on the foreheads of those initiated in the Mysteries, and was used in every variety of way as a most sacred symbol... The Vestal virgins of Pagan Rome wore it suspended from their necklaces, as the nuns now do... There is hardly a Pagan tribe where the cross has not been found. The cross was worshipped by the Pagan Celts long before the incarnation and death of Christ (*The Two Babylons*, p. 197-198).

Later, the Celtic cross came to symbolize the four roads to the corners of the earth. The meetings of these roads at a central point formed a cross, and to some indicated the center of the world. The center of the cross is also supposed to represent the point of origin for life, the origin of the four mystic rivers, and the summit of the world's mountains. *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary* confirms the use of the cross in ancient times as a pagan symbol. The authors wrote:

That the cross was widely known as an emblem in pre-Christian times has been clearly shown by independent investigators. Indeed, it was a well-known heathen sign. The vestments of the priests of Horus, the Egyptian god of light, are marked (with a cross). At Thebes, in the tombs of the

kings, royal cows are represented plowing, a calf playing in front. Each animal has a cross marked in several places on it. Rassam found buildings at Nineveh marked with the Maltese cross. Osiris, as well as Jupiter Ammon, had for a monogram a cross. The cross is found marked on Phoenician monuments at an early date (p. 263).

The Druids also made use of this symbol. The 19th century scholar, Thomas Maurice, in his work, *The Indian Antiquities Vol. 6*, made an extraordinary observation about the prominence of the cross in Druidic nature worship. This respected scholar wrote:

The druids were accustomed to select the most stately and beautiful tree as an emblem of the deity. Having cut the side branches, they affixed two of the largest to the highest part of the trunk in a manner that those branches extended on each side like the arms of a man. Together with the body, they presented the appearance of a huge cross, and on the bark, in several places was inscribed the letter “T” (p. 49).

The form of the cross now used in Christianity actually had its origin in this letter “T.” This was the traditional symbol for Tammuz, an ancient false god of Chaldeans and Egyptians. Tammuz was the brother of Ishtar, the goddess of fertility who is now unwittingly worshiped by millions of professing Christians on the holiday that bears a form of her name—Easter. The symbol for Tammuz is what the mystery religions call the mystic “T.” It is an emblem of great antiquity, and it is sometimes called the sign of life. *Vines Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* confirms that the symbol for the cross did not come from Christianity, but from Babylon:

The shape of the latter had its origin in ancient Chaldea, and was used as the symbol of the god Tammuz (being in the shape of the mystic Tau, the initial of his name) in that country and in adjacent lands, including Egypt. By the middle of the 3rd cent. A.D. the churches had either departed from, or had travestied, certain doctrines of the Christian faith. In order to increase the prestige of the apostate ecclesiastical system pagans were received into the churches apart from regeneration by faith, and were permitted largely to retain their pagan signs and symbols. Hence the Tau or T, in its most frequent form, with the cross-piece lowered, was adopted to stand for the "cross" of Christ (*Vines Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, p. 138).

The lower case "t", or cross, was originally used as an amulet over the heart. Sometimes it was inscribed on the garments of pagan priests, and other ancient pagan religions used it as part of the dress of vestal virgins. These women wore crosses suspended from necklaces which they wore during the celebration of their pagan rites. Hislop wrote the following about the "t" symbol:

That which is now called the Christian cross was originally no Christian emblem at all, but was the mystic Tau of the Chaldeans and Egyptians—the true original form of the letter T—the initial of the name Tammuz... The mystic Tau, as the symbol of the great divinity, was called "the sign of life:" it was used as an amulet over the heart: it was marked on the official garments of the priests... The Vestal virgins of Pagan Rome wore it suspended from their necklaces, as the nuns do now. The Egyptians did the same, and many of the barbarous nations with whom they had intercourse, as the Egyptian monuments bear witness (*The Two Babylons*, pp. 197-198).

Given the almost universal use of the cross, it's not surprising that it also stands as one of the prominent figures in Buddhism. Buddhists often decorated their cross with leaves and flowers, referring to this symbol as the "divine tree," the "tree of the gods," or "the tree of life and knowledge."

Buddhists use a twisted version of the cross also known as a whirling cross or a swastika. They believe that it represents both the tree of life and spiritual nourishment. To many adherents, it is also a symbol of the universal man. To them, the vertical lines represent the spiritual intellectual side of mankind, and the horizontal, the earthly passive, and female side. They also think of it as forming the four rivers of paradise flowing from the root of a tree of life.



Hindus have long used a similar symbol in their religion. Their variation is frequently portrayed in reverse, and is used to represent honesty, truth, purity and stability. Its



four angles or points symbolize four directions of life. This ancient symbol was adopted by the Nazi regime of Germany leading to World War II which has further added to its infamy.

The following quote from *The Davis Dictionary of the Bible* sums up the nearly universal use of the cross as a religious symbol that predates Christianity:

The pre-Christian cross of one form or another was in use as a sacred symbol among the Chaldeans, the Phoenicians, the Egyptians, and many other nations. The Spaniards in the 16th century found it also among the Indians of Mexico and Peru. But its symbolic teaching was quite different from that which we now associate with the cross (p. 154).

We see then that the symbolism of the cross within various cultures historically has been very different from what many suppose it represents today. How the cross came to be associated with Christianity will be covered later, but clearly, Christianity is not the origin of the cross as a religious symbol. Without a doubt the cross predates the existence of Christ, and is associated with many pagan practices, symbols, and beliefs.

The unsettling truth is that the origin of this “Christian” icon is rooted in pagan religions diametrically opposed to the faith proclaimed in the pages of the Bible. As the images on the following pages demonstrate, historically the cross has reflected the symbolic beliefs of the druids, philosophers, mystery religions, the occult, and even the third Reich. The question then arises: Should a Christian revere the cross or even wear one?



Other Crosses



Celtic



Druid



Egyptian Ankh



Roman

Other Crosses



Illuminati



Tau



Dragon



Iron Cross

Did Christ Die On A Cross?

Some might reason that the cross's ancient heritage as a pagan symbol doesn't really matter because Christ died on a cross, thereby making it a legitimate Christian symbol. But was it really a cross on which the Savior was crucified?

The linguistic evidence from the Bible suggests that Christ was not crucified on a cross, but on an upright stake or post. The original word that the translators rendered as "cross" is the Greek word *stauros*. In every case it is defined as "a stake or post (as set upright)" (*Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, G4716). Some of the earliest surviving copies of the four gospels are written in Greek and these copies use the noun *stauros* to describe the wood Christ was nailed to and the verb *staroo* for the act of crucifixion. In both cases the expressions refer to a single piece of wood as the instrument of Christ's death.

Most English translations of the Bible translate *stauros* as "cross", but cross is derived from the latin *crux*. Neither *crux* nor cross accurately characterizes the meaning of *stauros* which has led many scholars to believe that Christ was actually crucified on a single beam or stake. Consider the conclusions of four respected works:

Originally the Greek, *staurós*, designated a pointed, vertical wooden stake firmly fixed in the ground. Such stakes were commonly used in two ways. They were positioned side by side in rows to form fencing or defensive palisades around settlements, or singly they were set up as instruments of torture on which serious offenders of law were publicly suspended to die [or, if already killed, to have their corpses thoroughly dishonored] (*The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Vol. 1, p. 825)

Stauros denotes, primarily, "an upright pale (pole) or stake." On such malefactors were nailed for execution. Both the noun and the verb *stauroo*, "to

fasten to a stake or pale," are originally to be distinguished from the ecclesiastical form of a two beamed "cross" (*Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, p. 138).

Crosses were used as symbols of the Babylonian Sun-god.... It should be stated that Constantine was a Sun-god worshipper.... The evidence is thus complete, that the Lord was put to death upon and upright stake, and not on two pieces of timber placed at any angle (*The Companion Bible*, E.W. Bullinger, Appendix 162).

Stauros was simply an upright pale or stake to which Romans nailed those who were thus said to be impaled, *stauroo*, merely means to drive stakes. It never means two pieces of wood joining at any angle. Even the Latin word *crux* means a mere stake (*A Critical Lexicon and Concordance to the English and Greek New Testament*, E. W. Bullinger, p. 818).

According to the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, there were two methods of crucifixion used by the Romans:

Two methods were followed in the infliction of the punishment of crucifixion. In both of these the criminal was first of all usually stripped naked, and bound to an upright stake, where he was so cruelly scourged with an implement, formed of strips of leather having pieces of iron, or some other hard material, at their ends, that not merely was the flesh often stripped from the bones, but even the entrails partly protruded, and the anatomy of the body was disclosed. In this pitiable state he was re-clothed, and, if able to do so, was made to drag the stake to the place of execution, where he was either fastened to it, or impaled upon it, and left to die. (11th ed., Vol. 7, p. 506).

The second method of crucifixion involved a stake with a crossbar. The condemned individual's hands were tied or nailed to the cross bar:

After the scourging, the criminal was made to carry a cross beam to the place of execution, and he was then fastened to it by iron nails driven through the outstretched arms and through the ankles. Sometimes this was done as the cross lay on the ground, and it was then lifted into position (ibid).

While the Bible does not specifically state which method the Romans used in the crucifixion of Christ, the use of the word *stauros* by the Gospel writers is a strong indicator that it was the first method—without a cross bar. The authors of the Gospels were eyewitnesses to the crucifixion and knew exactly what was used to crucify our Savior. If He had died on a cross, they could have chosen to use a word that would describe a cross. However, they all chose to use the word that indicates an upright pole or stake.

John Denham Parsons addressed this fact in his book, *An Enquiry into the Origin and History of the Symbol Eventually Adopted as that of our Religion*. In his work, he explained that if Christ would have been executed on a cross shaped device, the authors of the Gospels would have likely used the Greek, X shaped letter *chi*, or perhaps terms such as *kata chiasmon*. His inquiry led him to conclude that all of the apostles wrote the word “*stauros*” for the specific purpose of not confusing Christ's crucifixion with the ancient Egyptian symbol of the Tau.

Author of *The Companion Bible*, E.W. Bullinger stated that “*stauros* never meant two pieces of timber placed across one another at any angle, but always of one piece alone ... There is nothing in the Greek of the N.T. even to imply two pieces of timber” (app. 162). The Greek word used in John 19:17 is *stauros* and this indicates that Christ actually carried a stake and not a cross. Therefore, this verse

should be translated as, “He, bearing His stake, went out to a place called *the Place* of the Skull.” This view is also validated by the *Complete Jewish Bible*, which translates Christ’s words to say:

Anyone who does not take up his execution-stake and follow me is not worthy of me (Matthew 10:38).

The Serpent on a Pole

Another piece of evidence that points toward Christ being crucified on a stake or pole rather than a cross is found in the story of Moses and the miracle of the serpent erected on a pole. The story is found in the book of Numbers, chapter 21, where the people had become discouraged and sinned by speaking against God and against Moses, God sent “fiery serpents” among them. Many of the people were bitten and died, and more were in the process of dying. Witnessing this horror, the people cried out to Moses for help. So Moses prayed and God answered his prayer:

Then the LORD said to Moses, “Make a fiery *serpent*, and set it on a pole; and it shall be that everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, shall live.” So Moses made a bronze serpent, and put it on a pole; and so it was, if a serpent had bitten anyone, when he looked at the bronze serpent, he lived (Numbers 21:8-9).



Moses fashioned a serpent out of brass and fastened it to a pole which was lifted up for all to see. And all who looked on it were healed. The serpent on a pole as a symbol of healing was later adopted by the medical profession, and can still be seen in use today. But more importantly, it foreshadowed the sacrifice of Christ. Notice the words of the Messiah in the gospel of John:

And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life (John 3:14-15).

The serpent was lifted up on a pole, not a cross. God could have instructed Moses to fasten the snake to a cross, but He specifically directed him to use a pole. The implication is unmistakable. Christ was also lifted up on a pole—not on a cross.

The fact is that all the biblical evidence points to the conclusion that Christ was crucified on a stake or post rather than on a cross is for many people an eye opener. But couple that with the fact that the cross is definitely pagan in origin, and it inspires a rather puzzling question: How did the symbol of the cross come to be associated with Christianity?

How did the Pagan Cross Become Christian?

The vast majority of evidence points to Christ being crucified on a stake and not a cross. But then, how did the pagan cross come to have such prominence among professing Christians? The answer lies in the story of the Roman emperor Constantine the Great's ascent to power.

Constantine first came to a position of power in 306 A.D. upon the death of his father, Constantius, who was the *august*, or senior emperor, of the Western empire under Diocletian's system of tetrarchy. Constantine was acclaimed the successor to his father, but shared rule in the West in an uneasy alliance with his brother-in-law, Maxentius. Much has been written about Constantine's supposed conversion to Christianity, but at this time he remained loyal to his pagan gods. He did, however, unilaterally end all persecution of Christians in his territories.

By this time, the Christians had already suffered persecution at the hands of the Roman Empire for hundreds of years. In spite of this persecution, however, the Christian movement, though extensively corrupted from within, not

only survived, but grew in numbers and strength. Whether Constantine's later profession of conversion to Christianity was sincere or merely a politically expedient move is a subject of debate, but certainly he recognized that the church was a political force to be reckoned with.

Initially, a more pressing force to be reckoned with presented itself to Constantine in the form of Maxentius, who held the position of *cesar*, or junior emperor, in the West. Open hostilities between the two rivals broke out in 312, and on the eve of October 28, Constantine faced a crucial battle at the Tiber river.

There are various reports regarding the events leading up to the famous Battle of the Milvian Bridge, but nearly all include Constantine having a vision or a dream in which he saw a symbol in the sky. Constantine then heard the words "By this sign you shall conquer." What he claimed to have seen was later believed to be Christian and was later used as an emblem on coins and as military insignia.

However, Constantine's vision was not a crucifix. What he saw was a symbol later called Chi and Rho that appeared as an X overlaid with a P. This icon is the first two

letters of the Greek *Christos* referring to Christ, but a study of this subject reveals that two non-Christian uses of Chi-Rho can be found on several Greek papyri that predate Constantine. In one case the symbol simply means "good" (*XPESTON*, *chreston*). In another example the symbol is used



to represent "time" (*XPONOS*, *chronos*). Interestingly, the Greek expression for time is *chronos* and was related to the Greek god of the same name. From this term inventors of a mechanical time keeper named the invention a *chronograph*.

A similar symbol to Chi-Rho was also used long before Constantine. It is known as the Tau-Rho or a *staurogram*. Several Tau-Rho monograms can be found on three Greek New Testament papyri in the Bodmer Library in Switzerland. These manuscripts display the Greek word *stauros* as a T overlaid with a P. Nevertheless, neither the Chi-Rho nor the Tau-Rho correctly represents the method of Christ's crucifixion nor do they accurately characterize the meaning of *stauros*.



Constantine won the Battle of the Milvian Bridge and attributed his victory to the God of the Christians. As a result Constantine is purported to have converted to Christianity, but it was a conversion in name only. This man never entirely renounced the worship of pagan gods. Even after his supposed conversion to Christianity in 312, Constantine continued to pay homage to what he called “sol dios invictus” meaning the unconquered sun god. Constantine’s multi-theism resulted in symbols related to false god’s being used throughout the empire. As historian Johannes Geffcken wrote:

After 314 A.D. the coins of Constantine show an even-armed cross as a symbol for the Sun-god. If the vision of the cross impressed him, and was used as a rallying symbol, it could not have been in honor of Yahushúa, because Constantine continued paying homage to the Sun-deity and to the Sun-deity’s symbol, the cross (*The Last Days of Greco-Roman Paganism* p. 319).

This even-armed version of the cross was the old solar cross, a symbol of the Sun-deity, the center of cosmic religion, and the astrological religion of Babylon. The Solar cross is probably the oldest religious symbol in the world, appearing in Asian, American, European, and Indian religious art. Composed of an equal armed cross within a circle, it represents the solar calendar—the movements of the sun marked by the solstices and the equinoxes. The swastika and the iron cross are simply variations of the solar cross.



Ancient cave art depicting a solar cross

Following his victory, in 313, Constantine entered into an alliance with his counterpart, Licinius in the East, and together they issued a proclamation called the Edict of Milan. It neither made paganism illegal nor made Christianity a state-sponsored religion. It gave religious freedom. It legalized Christianity, returned confiscated church property, and established Sunday as a day of worship.

That the Christians in general seem to have accepted Sunday over the Sabbath is a sign of how corrupt the church had become. For most of Constantine's subjects, Sunday was the day of Mithras, the sun god. *The Catholic Encyclopedia* made the case that Constantine intended to promote not Christianity, but unity through the common worship of the sun god Mithras.

But it was especially in the western part of the empire that the veneration of Mithras predominated. Would it not be possible to gather all the different nationalities around his altars?... Could not Sol Deus Invictus, to whom even Constantine dedicated his coins for a long time, or Sol Mithras Deus Invictus, venerated by Diocletian and Galerius, become the supreme god of the empire? Constantine may have pondered over this. Nor had he absolutely rejected the thought even after a miraculous event had strongly influenced him in favour of the God of the Christians...It is true that the believers in Mithras also observed Sunday as well as Christmas. Consequently Constantine speaks not of the day of the Lord, but of the everlasting day of the sun (<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/04295c.htm>, retr. 5/23/2014).

Whatever Constantine's intentions, he pursued a policy of religious tolerance while at the same time giving preferential treatment to the church. His favor toward the church also carried with it his influence, which only increased with time. Biographer Hans A. Pohlsander wrote:

Constantine used the church as an instrument of imperial policy, imposed upon it his imperial ideology, and thus deprived it of much of the independence which it had previously enjoyed (<http://www.roman-emperors.org/conniei.htm>, retr. 5/23/2014).

When Constantine finally consolidated his power as sole emperor of Rome, he was then able to exert even more control over the church. In 325, the year following his defeat of Licinius to gain control of both East and West, Constantine convened a meeting of the church leaders at the Council of Nicea. By taking the step of calling this council

of religious officials, Constantine began the Roman Empire's unofficial sponsoring of Christianity. More and more the form of this sect of Christianity began to resemble the pagan traditions of sun worship.

One reason for this is that Constantine never gave up his allegiance to the pagan practices of the past. At the dedication of his capitol, Constantinople, he gave equal billing to Christianity and to Mithras. *The Catholic Encyclopedia* states:

In the dedication of Constantinople in 330 a [ceremony] half pagan, half Christian was used. The chariot of the sun-god was set in the market-place, and over its head was placed the Cross of Christ, while the Kyrie Eleison was sung. Shortly before his death Constantine confirmed the privileges of the priests of the ancient gods. Many other actions of his have also the appearance of half-measures, as if he himself had wavered and had always held in reality to some form of syncretistic religion (Vol. iv, 297-301, passim).

Another reason was the church itself. It was both fundamentally corrupt and overwhelmed with the influx of pagans into its congregations. With the emperor as its patron, the church began to attract pagan converts, first in trickles and finally in droves. Eventually, the influx became so great that the clergy despaired of reeducating new converts in the ways of the church. Hoping the pagans would eventually drop their ways, the religious leaders permitted them to retain the symbols of their old gods.

Thus it was that the cross, the Tau, the symbol of Tammuz and sun worship made its way into the church. Rather than the church influencing the pagans, it was a case of the pagans influencing the church. Of course this didn't happen overnight. It was a gradual influence that took place over many years.

It was not until Christianity began to be paganized that the cross came to be thought of as a Christian symbol. It was in 431 A.D. that crosses in churches and chambers were introduced, while the use of crosses on steeples did not come until about 586 A.D. In the 6th century, the crucifix image was introduced and its worship sanctioned by the church of Rome. It was not until the second council at Ephesus that private homes were required to possess a cross. Such use of the cross then was obviously not a doctrine of the early true church. It was not a part of the faith that was once delivered to the saints (Ralph Woodrow, *Babylon Mystery Religion*, p. 50).

The symbol of the cross became the emblem of both the vast Catholic Church, and the powerful Holy Roman Empire. While Constantine only interpreted his vision to mean that he would be victorious in battle; if he did in fact see a vision of a cross and the words “by this sign you shall conquer,” then the meaning was far beyond anything he ever imagined. Constantine’s military conquests paled in comparison to the conquests that were later won by the Catholic Church—the church which he sponsored.

Hundreds of years before Constantine, the Apostle John was given a vision of his own in which he saw a prophetic white horse representing false religion gone out to conquer the world.

And I looked, and behold, a white horse. He who sat on it had a bow; and a crown was given to him, and he went out conquering and to conquer (Revelation 6:2).

Some have mistaken the rider of this particular white horse to symbolize the Savior, but it does not. While Christ is also pictured on a white horse, He does not use a bow. Instead, four other verses in the book of Revelation describe

Christ as wielding powerful words that are described as a sword from His mouth (Rev. 1:16; 2:16; 19:11-21).

The white horse's rider is the first of four horsemen, each of which represents a terrible plague on humanity. This first horseman represents false religion. The color white conveys the appearance of purity, but it is only an illusion. This horse and its rider represent a counterfeit Christianity coupled with military might, symbolized by the bow, a man-made weapon of war.

The advent of false religion was foretold by Christ as He warned His disciples of what was to come. The Messiah warned that many would come in His name, stating that He was the Christ, but would deceive many.

And Jesus answered and said to them: "Take heed that no one deceives you. For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many" (Matthew 24:4-5).

Comparing the words of Christ with John's vision in Revelation, it's clear that Constantine actually played a vital role in the fulfillment of this prophecy. The church that this emperor helped shape used the name of Christ and the sign of the cross, in conjunction with the military power of the Roman Empire, and other secular governments, to conquer and rule over men.

The symbol of a cross was never a part of true Christianity. The mark of a true Christian was something else altogether. Those few who were committed to actually following Christ and obeying God's commandments were forced underground as the paganized church sought to conquer the world.

Does It Really Matter?

Some might ask if this really matters. They may reason that just because the cross was originally pagan, and just

because Christ probably wasn't crucified on a cross, there's no reason to give up the symbol that for so many years has come to represent Christianity for so many people. Can't we just keep using it? What's the harm?

The answer is that it *does* matter to God! The second of God's commandments, issued from Mount Sinai, forbids the making or use of any graven image in our worship of God.

You shall not make for yourself a carved image—any likeness *of anything* that *is* in heaven above, or that *is* in the earth beneath, or that *is* in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them (Exodus 20:4-5)

In a strange coincidence, at the very time that God was delivering this and the other Ten Commandments to Moses, Aaron was making a graven image—a calf of gold—for the Israelites to worship. God was so angered that he considered destroying the entire nation and starting over with just one man, Moses.

And the LORD said to Moses, “Go, get down! For your people whom you brought out of the land of Egypt have corrupted *themselves*. They have turned aside quickly out of the way which I commanded them. They have made themselves a molded calf, and worshiped it and sacrificed to it, and said, ‘This *is* your god, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt!’” And the LORD said to Moses, “I have seen this people, and indeed it *is* a stiff-necked people! Now therefore, let Me alone, that My wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them. And I will make of you a great nation” (Exodus 32:7-10).

This story is preserved as a warning to us (1Co. 10:11). When Aaron made the golden calf, he did not think that he was worshipping a false God. Aaron actually believed

that he was using the pagan calf symbol to worship the true God (Exo. 32:5).

But God did not want them to worship Him with idols or graven images as was the custom of the pagan nations around them. Nor does He want us today to worship Him with the symbols of pagan worship. To the Israelites about to enter the Promised Land, and to us today, God warned:

Take heed to yourself that you are not ensnared to follow them, after they are destroyed from before you, and that you do not inquire after their gods, saying, 'How did these nations serve their gods? I also will do likewise' (Deuteronomy 12:30).

God's warning to Israel was that if they adopted the pagan customs of worship of the surrounding nations, He would destroy them. Unfortunately Israel did not heed God's warning, but before punishing them, he sent the prophet Ezekiel to warn them again. Ezekiel was shown the people's blatant disregard for God in the temple:

So He brought me to the door of the north gate of the LORD's house; and to my dismay, women were sitting there weeping for Tammuz (Ezekiel 8:14).

Tammuz was intimately connected with worship of the sun. Therefore, his followers observed the course of the sun, celebrating two seasonal festivals. One of these was held in early spring, and the other in late fall. The spring celebration was a time of excitement centering on the marriage of Tammuz to the goddess Ishtar. The fall harvest, on the other hand, marked his death at the hands of demons from the netherworld.

With the death of Tammuz, the sun began to wane, bringing the decay of living things. His followers would then lament and pray. The women would weep, and with the passing of winter and the approach of spring, the people

would rejoice as they celebrated the return of Tammuz bringing with him the sun and new life with it. To put it bluntly, these people worshipped the sun. Ezekiel was shown this as he was taken further into the temple.

Then He said to me, “Have you seen *this*, O son of man? Turn again, you will see greater abominations than these.” So He brought me into the inner court of the LORD’s house; and there, at the door of the temple of the LORD, between the porch and the altar, *were* about twenty-five men with their backs toward the temple of the LORD and their faces toward the east, and they were worshipping the sun toward the east (Ezekiel 8:15-16).

The cross, as the reader will recall, was the symbol for Tammuz and was an integral part of sun worship. God calls this pagan idolatry an “abomination.”

Of course some may say that they do not worship the cross. But whether or not one worships the cross doesn’t change the fact that the cross is part of an ancient pagan religious system of worship. God forbids us to adopt the religious customs of the pagans. He says:

Do not inquire after their gods, saying, “How did these nations serve their gods?” (Deuteronomy 12:30).

Defenders of the cross may say they do not worship it, but do they? When they bow down before the cross, and kiss and pray to this man-made object, are they not violating the second commandment, which states that we are not to make any graven image, nor to bow down to it, nor to worship it? While the cross is not literally a carved representation of God, many use it to remind them of Him. They venerate it and bow down before it, just as the pagans do with their idols.

In the Roman church, the cross is greatly venerated. In the following Catholic devotion, church members are taught to pray to the cross, which is often referred to by the Roman church as the “tree of life”:

Hail, O Cross, triumphal wood, true salvation of the world, among trees there is none like thee in leaf, flower, and bud. O cross, our only hope, increase righteousness to the godly and pardon the offenses of the guilty (*The Two Babylons*, p. 200).

The following is another prayer used by many Catholics today titled “O Good Cross”:

O good cross, made beautiful by the body of the Lord, long have I desired thee, ardently have I loved thee, unceasingly have I sought thee, and now thou art ready for my eager soul. Receive me from among men and restore me to my Master, so that He, who redeemed me through thee, shalt receive me through thee (<http://www.catholic.org/prayers/prayer.php?p=2198>, retr. 3/5/2017).

These are just a few examples confirming that the cross is worshiped by many who claim to be Christian. Religious leaders have borrowed this symbol, and used it just as the pagans did to worship their false gods. Christ never taught His followers to use a cross as an aid in worship. However, contrary to God’s law, many do just that. *The Catholic Book of Blessings* reveals the church’s devotion to the cross:

Of all sacred images, the figure of the precious, life-giving cross of Christ is preeminent because it is the symbol of the entire Paschal mystery. The cross is the image most cherished by the Christian people and the most ancient; it represents Christ’s suffering and victory. ...On Good Friday the cross

is presented to the faithful for their adoration (*The Liturgy Documents: A Parish Resource*, p. 489).

Millions of professing Christians revere and adore the cross. This is the very reason why God commanded His people not to make any objects found anywhere in heaven or the earth for the purpose of religious worship. When we focus on or bow down before a cross, we have its image—not God—in our mind. The image actually draws us away from God. It is He who we must adore, not a cross. This is why the Almighty did not want us to have a physical image in our mind when we pray: because it becomes our focus instead of Him. Any worship of an image demeans and trivializes the Great God.

The Sign of a True Christian

The sign of a true Christian is something altogether different from wearing a cross. Although millions of professing Christians believe that wearing a cross displays their faith to others, the fact is that God requires a different sign of faith from His people. God has stated specifically how we are to reflect our faith to others, and we need to know exactly what the Scriptures reveal about this subject.

The Bible reveals that at the end of the age, the beast power will require all people to receive a mark in their right hands and on their foreheads (Rev. 13:16). Because of this mark everyone will recognize those who worship the beast. Some believe that this mark will be physically visible on the individual, but it's possible that the mark is not a physical mark.

Many people realize that in order to deceive people Satan has counterfeited God's way of life and His plan of salvation. They know that the beast, the enemy of God, will have an identifying mark that his people will wear. But how many realize that the mark of the beast is a counterfeit of God's mark?

Surprising as this may sound, God does have a mark! Furthermore, His mark is also found in the believer's forehead and hand. It is not the sign of the cross. God's sign is one that all of God's people have recognized down through the ages. This sign indicating who belongs to God is seen in those who keep His law!

The first time God spoke of His law being a mark, or sign, was when He brought Israel into the Promised Land. Deuteronomy the fifth chapter records God giving the Ten Commandments to His people. Immediately afterward God spoke, stating:

Now this *is* the commandment, *and these are* the statutes and judgments which the LORD your God has commanded to teach you, that you may observe *them* in the land which you are crossing over to possess, that you may fear the LORD your God, to keep all His statutes and His commandments which I command you, you and your son and your grandson, all the days of your life, and that your days may be prolonged. Therefore hear, O Israel, and be careful to observe *it*, that it may be well with you, and that you may multiply greatly as the LORD God of your fathers has promised you— 'a land flowing with milk and honey. Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD *is* one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes (Deuteronomy 6:1-8).

God's mark is the keeping of His commandments! Today, there is a movement to teach that God's law is bondage. Some preach that the Savior made us free from the

need to keep the law, but the Scriptures do not teach anything of the kind! While these false teachers proclaim that Christ made us free from the law, the Bible declares that we are made free from sin—the transgression of the law (1Jo. 3:4). Reader, beware! This movement is in total disagreement with God’s Word. Keeping the commandments is vital to salvation (Mat. 7:21-22).

The fourth commandment, which pertains to the Sabbath, is God’s test commandment (Exo. 16). It is the one that demonstrates who is really willing to obey Him. As such it was to be a sign of who were His people. As the Almighty stated:

“Speak also to the children of Israel, saying: ‘Surely My Sabbaths you shall keep, for it *is* a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that *you* may know that I *am* the LORD who sanctifies you. You shall keep the Sabbath, therefore, for *it is* holy to you. Everyone who profanes it shall surely be put to death; for whoever does *any* work on it, that person shall be cut off from among his people. Work shall be done for six days, but the seventh *is* the Sabbath of rest, holy to the LORD. Whoever does *any* work on the Sabbath day, he shall surely be put to death. Therefore the children of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, to observe the Sabbath throughout their generations *as* a perpetual covenant. It *is* a sign between Me and the children of Israel forever; for *in* six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day He rested and was refreshed’” (Exodus 31:13-17).

God said that His Sabbaths are a sign. Keeping them is the mark of those who are committed to obeying Him. What few have realized, however, is that the plural word “Sabbaths” means more than just the weekly day of rest. There are also seven annual Sabbaths which are part of the

sign of God's people (Lev. 23). For example, notice what God says about one of His annual Sabbaths, the Feast of Unleavened Bread:

Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread, and on the seventh day *there shall be* a feast to the LORD. Unleavened bread shall be eaten seven days. And no leavened bread shall be seen among you, nor shall leaven be seen among you in all your quarters... It shall be as a sign to you on your hand and as a memorial between your eyes, that the LORD's law may be in your mouth; for with a strong hand the LORD has brought you out of Egypt (Exodus 13:6-9).

This holy day observance was not just for the nation of Israel. The gentiles in the Church at Corinth were commanded by Paul to observe it (1Co. 5:7-8). God's weekly and annual Sabbaths are His identifying mark. It is not a physical object one wears, nor an idol one bows down before.

The contrasts and parallels between God's mark and that of the beast are plain to see. Both are found in a person's forehead and hand, meaning what he thinks about in his mind, and what he does with the strength of his hand. On God's Sabbaths, His people are to rest from their labor; they are not to buy or sell—this is God's mark. On the other hand, without the mark of the beast, one will not be allowed to buy or sell at all.

The keeping of the Ten Commandments and God's Sabbaths is how we are identified as belonging to Christ. It is the evidence that we have faith in Christ and obey Him.

A Tradition of Men

If we claim to believe in Christ but don't keep His commandments, we deceive ourselves. It is vitally important to understand that it is possible to worship God in vain—if such worship comes from the traditions of men.

He answered and said to them, “Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written: ‘This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men. ‘For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men— the washing of pitchers and cups, and many other such things you do.’ He said to them, “*All too* well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition (Mark 7:6-9).

The cross and its use in religion came from the traditions of men, not the commandment of God. When our Savior returns there will be many shocked to find that such worship has disqualified them from the Kingdom of God. According to Christ, even those who do good works in His name will be barred from the Kingdom if they have not kept the commandments of God:

Therefore by their fruits you will know them. Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’ (Matthew 7:20-23).

Christ says that He will reject those who practice lawlessness. In other words, He will reject those do not keep His law. This makes His commandments of paramount importance to mankind.

In fact, the greatest deception ever palmed off on the human race may be that we don’t have to keep God’s commandments. Vast numbers of people have been taught

that it is not necessary to keep God's law, but the Apostle John made it clear such teaching is a lie! He wrote:

Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He who says, "I know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him (1 John 2:3-4).

Which commandments does John speak of? Is he only referring to those things Christ said during His ministry? Does it exclude the Ten Commandments containing the injunction to keep God's sign, the Sabbath?

Elsewhere, the Apostle John showed that he spoke about the commandments given before Christ walked the earth. He wrote:

Brethren, I write no new commandment to you, but an old commandment which you have had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word which you heard from the beginning (1 John 2:7).

Clearly in his epistle John spoke of the Ten Commandments. The book of Revelation verifies this when addressing God's people living in the end time. John wrote:

Here is the patience of the saints; here *are* those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus (Revelation 14:12).

The truth is that to be God's people we must keep His commandments. It is really the only way we can truly show our love toward both God and man. Christ once said, "By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35).

The Savior said that we must have love for one another, but it must be understood that this statement goes

much deeper than simply experiencing an emotional feeling. How can we really know what love is, and how do we know the way to love one another?

The answer can only be understood in the context of God's Ten Commandments. The first four show us exactly how we are to love God. The last six reveal how we are to love our fellow man. The Scriptures are absolutely clear, and there can be no mistake when it comes to this subject. It is only by keeping God's commandments that we begin to understand what the love of God and our neighbor really is. As the Apostle John wrote:

By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome (1 John 5:2-3).

By this statement, God made it clear that in order to love Him we must obey His commandments. This means that we must forsake all of this world's false religions, its cheap rituals and false, pagan symbols of worship.

God's desire for His Church, the bride of Christ, is that she be found, "Not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing" (Eph. 5:27, Rev. 19:7-8). To accomplish this, we who desire to be genuine Christians must not work iniquity. We must stop breaking God's law and must forsake the worship and reverence of this pagan idol—the cross. If we seek God's Kingdom and Christ's righteousness, we must turn away from this idolatrous symbol and turn to the true worship of Almighty God.

The Eternal Church of God offers a variety of books, booklets, articles, video, and audio to help people better understand God's Word and His plan for humanity. Some of the printed material available includes:

Are the Ten Commandments Required Today?

The Truth about Valentine's Day

The Truth about Mardi Gras

The Truth about Heaven

The Truth about Smoking

Sabbath Confessions

The Truth about Christmas

The Truth about Easter

Understanding the Mark of the Beast

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