

The Cross

By Paul O. Nichols

The God of heaven who gave His Son Jesus Christ to suffer, bleed and die for the sins of the world never authorized His people to glorify the cross and exalt it as a symbol of Christianity. It is true that the inspired apostle Paul said in Galatians 6:14, “But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.” This is a figure of speech. The reason for such a statement was that he gloried in **what was accomplished at Calvary** when Jesus died on the cross. The law was fulfilled; the innocent died for the guilty; reconciliation was made for sin; salvation was procured for the sinner and there Christ purchased our redemption. Paul did not glory in the old wooden cross, but in what had been accomplished when Christ “became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” (Phil. 2:8).

Crucifixion is one of the most cruel and inhumane means of death ever devised by

mortal man. Execution on the cross is slow and horrible which finally results in the suffocation of the victim as his strength ebbs, his muscles cramp and he can no longer sustain his weight with his arms and legs. He struggles to breathe, and his torturous agony is indescribable before he finally gives up and dies from lack of oxygen.

The cross was never meant by God to be a decoration for the wall of a Christian, nor an ornament or piece of jewelry to be hung about the neck of a child of God, nor used as a symbol of religion on a place of worship. All of these practices have been borrowed from others, who have made an idol of the cross. And remember, John said, “Little children keep yourselves from idols (1 John 5:21). Such use is without the least hint of Biblical authority. There is absolutely no scripture in God’s inspired word where we find a command, an apostolic example, nor even a necessary inference to justify such use of a cross. Some Christians have an attitude much like that of the children of Israel. In the days of Samuel the prophet they wanted a king to rule over them **so they could be like the nations around them** (1 Samuel 8:5). Some members of the church today want to use the cross like other religious people, but fail to check to see if it is the will of God. Remember, Jesus said, “Every plant, which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up” (Matt. 15:13). Again, he said “If

the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch” (Matt. 15:14).

If a person lost his mother to a sadistic killer who used an axe as the murder weapon, can you imagine his hanging an axe on the wall of his home to remind him of his mother? Or would a woman hang a shotgun on her bedroom wall to remind her of a husband who had been gunned down by a robber? Or would a man hang a knife in his living room to remind him of a brother who was slain by a ruthless killer? Absolutely not! Such practices would be condemned by any normal civilized person. So why would any child of God hang a cross on his wall to remind him of Christ, or decorate a church building with such an inhumane implement of death which brought shame to our Lord?

A fact that many Christians do not realize is that the cross was a symbol used by heathens and pagans long before Christ was crucified at Jerusalem. The cross symbol was used among the Babylonians of ancient Chaldea. It was used to honor the false god Tammuz according to Vine’s Expository Dictionary (p.256). The cross in the form of a “T” which was the first letter of the name of Tammuz was used in his honor. Later the beam was lowered to stand for the cross of Christ. This symbol in its most ancient form was revered among the Chaldeans, Phoenicians, Mexicans, and other ancient

people. In India for centuries the non-Christian people have used the sign of the cross to mark the jars of “holy water” taken from the Ganges River. The symbol of the cross has been used for the disembodied spirits of Jaina saints. In South America the pagan aborigines in ancient times used the cross as a religious sign. In Peru ancient pottery has been found that is marked with the sign of the cross, which had nothing to do with the Christian religion. Papal missionaries adopted the cross sign from the heathens and pagans and “Christianized” it.

One theory is that the sign of the cross first began to be used by pagan “sun worshippers” who emerged from their dwellings early in the morning and saw the reflection of the bright sun shining on the dew on the grass which appeared to them as a cross. Therefore, they adopted it as symbol of their “Sun God.” Later when missionaries came and “converted them” they allowed them to continue to use the sign of the cross and adopted it themselves, because they could rationalize that it was a fitting symbol for the cross of Christ. In that way the “converted” pagans could still practice their heathen ways in the name of Christianity. However, remember, God warned his people, “learn not the way of the heathen” (Jer. 10 2).

Thousands of men and women have died on crosses. According to history in the siege

of Jerusalem by the Romans which began in the year A. D. 70 there were as many as five hundred crucifixions a day. This means of torture and death has been outlawed for years now by every civilized nation in the world. And that was the shameful means used to execute our Lord Jesus Christ, “the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Heb.12:2).

The Lord gave Christians a memorial called the Lord’s Supper for the purpose of reminding us of Jesus and His cruel death on the cross. He does not give His people license to borrow a heathen or pagan practice to help us remember the great sacrifice that was made for our redemption. Crosses on our church buildings, on church pews, and on Bible stands and communion tables are as out of place as a “cowbell in a symphony.” “Wherefore come out from among them, and touch not the unclean thing, and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty” (2 Cor. 6:17,18).

Paul O. Nichols has served the Church of Christ faithfully for over sixty years.

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