

The Importance of the Cross
Some Personal Reflections on the Cross of Christ
by Gareth Leaney

The cross is a familiar symbol to many of us, even those who have never set foot inside a Christian church. You see it on buildings, in graveyards, and people even wear it around their necks. But it started out as an instrument of torture and execution, reserved for the very worst criminals. Since it was used in this way to kill Jesus Christ, it has become central to the Christian faith. But down the centuries, discussion of precisely what Jesus achieved in dying on the cross has provoked strong reactions from all sides. Over the coming months, I want to look more closely at what is, and always has been, the very centre of biblical Christianity – the cross of Christ.

“God is love” (1 John 4v16). This famous statement, made by one of Jesus' close friends is completely true, but it is often used as the ultimate trump card, eclipsing everything else about God. But how would you feel if someone summed you up in one word? It is impossible to capture a person entirely in just one word – so why do we think we can do the same to God? The Bible shows us some of God's other characteristics: God is gracious and compassionate (2 Chronicles 30v9); God is mighty (Job 36v5); God is light (1 John 1v5); God is the King of all the earth (Psalm 47v7); God is holy (Leviticus 11v45); God is a righteous judge (Psalm 7v11). God is offended and angry at our rebellion against him (which the Bible calls *sin*). God is love, but he is much more than that...

Ultimately, God showed himself in Jesus. When we see Jesus in the pages of the Bible, we are looking at God. Jesus Christ, God-made man, revealed to us what God is like. He did this through his perfect life. He did it through his teaching and his miraculous demonstrations of his power. But, above all, he did it through his death and resurrection. Whipped, beaten and nailed to a wooden cross, all the facets of God were on display. At the cross, his infinite love and grace, and his infinite holiness, his purity and justice, collided. Jesus, God the Son, died in our place because God's absolute purity demanded that sin be taken care of, and the due penalty for our offence against God is death. But God is infinitely loving and gracious, and so he took the punishment upon himself. The debt was owed *to* God, and it was paid *by* God. I may not be able to fully understand it, but I am deeply grateful that it is true!

This is not just abstract theology. It has changed and continues to change my life, just as it changes thousands of others each day. The cross should be at the centre of my life, and at the centre of the life of anyone who calls themselves a Christian. In future issues I will explore some of this in more depth. But for now, inspired by a similar list I read by Jim Packer, I want to share some of the what the cross means to me, and how it impacts my life.

1. **The cross shows how serious my sin is.** The offence to God caused by my sin is so severe that the only way it could be dealt with was for God himself to die. My sin is far more serious than I could ever comprehend.
2. **The cross shows me how much God loves me.** God himself was willing to die so that I can be made right with him. I deserve to die for what I did, but Jesus Christ, God-made-man, died in my place. Is there any greater love than this? God loves me more than I could possibly understand.
3. **The cross reassures me that all my sin, past and present, is covered.** The sacrifice which paid for my sin was made by God himself; God who is infinite and mighty, God who created the Universe. The infinite scale of His sacrifice means that, if I trust what Christ is done, all my sin is forgiven. My forgiveness, and my status before God, is based on the sacrifice of Jesus, not on anything I have to do.
4. **The cross gives me a new identity.** Through Christ's death, I am not just forgiven by God. I am adopted into God's family as one of his children. I am included as one of God's people. This is only because of what happened on the cross, and not because God saw that I deserved it in some way.
5. **The cross drives me to live as God wants me to live.** The cross had to happen because of our rebellion against God. The consequence was that the Son of God had to die. When I look to the cross and see what my sin has caused, it should move me to live how God intends. And it is only because of the cross that I am able to do it.

6. **The cross is an example of how I am to love other people.** God loved me enough to die for me. As I follow Christ, I am called to love as He loved – with sacrificial, self-giving love.
7. **The cross gives me assurance for the future.** The cross was the end of sin, but it was not the end of Jesus. He came back to life and returned to heaven. The world is waiting for him to return as judge. I could never face that judgement myself, but thanks to the cross I am forgiven. And when Christ returns, I will go to spend eternity with him. Not because I deserve it, but because my Lord has paid the price I owe. This is what Jesus meant when he said:

“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” [John, chapter 3, verse 16]