

What Is the Truest Meaning of the Cross?

by Lou Suter

The true meaning of the cross is for God to be able to restore man back to the original reason and purpose for which man was created.

Scripture: Genesis 2:15, John 3:16, Romans 14:7, 1 Corinthians 6:19, 2 Corinthians 5:14, 2 Corinthians 5:21, Colossians 1:16, Titus 2:11

Topics: "The Cross", "Sanctification"

Description

Lou Suter preaches about the true essence of the cross, emphasizing that it is not just about forgiveness of sins but also about being set free from the bondage of sin. He challenges believers to move beyond seeking relief from guilt to experiencing true freedom from the shackles of sin, allowing the cross to restore them to the original purpose for which they were created. Suter highlights the importance of total submission to God, being in the right location with God, and fulfilling the vocation God has for each individual. He stresses the need for believers to live not for themselves but for the Lord who died and rose again, becoming ambassadors for Christ and living zealously for good works.

Transcript

What is the cross really all about? What does it really mean? In the song we saw some of what the cross is all about. We have Easter season and the Good Friday, and the whole world or western world, the Christianized so-called world, celebrates the cross.

On Friday night we went into the description of "What Is the Power of the Cross?" We talked about first of all to redeem us from our sins. Why did Jesus Christ die on the cross anyway? The first answer you would say is, "To take away my sins." But that's about half of the truth, and God wants us to see, to take away our sins, AND to take away the bondage of our sins. It's not only, "Lord, forgive me, forgive me, forgive me, but God can set us free from the shackles of that sin so I don't have to be kept bound by that sin. In other words, the cross talks about more than a relief program. If an drunkard spends all his money on alcohol, you know what his problem is--his family is starving to death. He has a problem, and there are others who feel they are starving to death, but you come along and say, "Sir, let me give you a five dollar bill to help you put some food on the table." But the problem is that next week you're going to have to be doing it again. What have you done? You've just given him a relief program. But that cross not only relieves us from the guilt of our sins, but it is a "relieving" program--it sets us free from the shackles of our sins to where it sets that alcoholic back up on his feet so he can go out and support his own family.

When you see the color of my hair--I started in the ministry when I was 16 years of age and I haven't quit yet--I want to tell you something: If I was excited about the ministry when I first started out as a young fellow with a lot of zeal, desire, and enthusiasm, I have more now than I ever had then. Why? Because then I could say, "I think it's this way, the Bible says it's this way," but now after 38 years in full-time ministry all around the world, I don't have to say "I think, I hope it's this way." I'm more excited to tell you it IS this way from the experiences of seeing broken lives. First we are free from the guilt of our sins, but then free from the shackles of our sins. Do you know the cross on that level? I hope it means that to you, and if not, move into that dimension. Don't be satisfied with anything less than that dimension.

My brothers and sisters, that still isn't all of the meaning of that cross. God is not so much interested in our sin--I told you that God sent Jesus to die on the cross to set us free from our sins, to for forgive us from our sins, and to set us free from the shackles of our sins, but in fact the removal of our sins is just a by-product of that cross. I want to get to the real issue of the cross. Basically God really isn't interested in our sins. He's interested in us. What is the real purpose of the cross, the bottom line, not the by-product? The real purpose is for God to be able to restore man back to the original reason and purpose for which man was created. That's the real meaning of the cross. To restore back to the original reason, cause, and real purpose for which man was created--for you to get back to why God made you. Have you ever seen the cross on that dimension?

Colossians 1:16 says, "All things were created by God, and FOR God..." Now look at Titus 2:11 and we'll see the real meaning of the cross. Perhaps we have been living under a superficial level of the cross. Our Christianity is a bore, a drag because we don't know the real meaning of the cross. "For the grace of God that bringeth salvation..." What is this salvation all about? We get salvation from the cross. What is salvation? The Bible says first of all it "has appeared unto all men." Everybody can get in on it. It's not just for a select few. Here is the grace of God that brings salvation--what is it? "Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously and godly, in the present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ;" (2:12-13). That's the grace of God--bringing salvation. But now God says He wants to get more specific with you: "Who gave himself for us, [that's the cross--for what?] that he might redeem us from all iniquity, [that's the first aspect, and secondly] and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works." Paul said to Titus, "These things speak, and exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no man despise thee." Don't let any man change your message or water it down, don't let anyone intimidate you that you preach something less. What is it? Jesus Christ gave Himself for us--

1. To redeem us from iniquity
2. To purify us unto Himself, a peculiar people.

The world doesn't understand this. We'll be peculiar in the eyes of people around us, but we are to be "zealous"--zealous of good works. We live in a world that had lots of Communist zealots for years. God wants to raise up another generation of people that have been purified unto God--zealots, zealous unto good works. What God has made and paid for--He redeemed us--now He OWNS. The tragedy is that our response back to that truth is where the problem is. Most of us who call ourselves Christians are not really the possession of God. Somehow it's just a theoretical thing, but in practicality we are not the possession of God. He redeemed us--that means He owns us. We have our sins forgiven, but we have never been purified unto God, and therefore we are not performing the zealous works for God that He desires for us.

In Romans 14:7-9, "For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself. If we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are THE LORD'S. For to this end Christ both died [here is the purpose for His dying], and rose, [Why did He die and rise again?] that He might be LORD both of the dead and living." The purpose for which He died that He might be LORD both over the dead and the living. That's the meaning of the cross. God wants us, not our sins. Setting us free from our sins is the by-product for getting us.

II Corinthians 5:14 "For the love of Christ"--it was all love to redeem us from our sins--"constraineth us"--holds me in a vise. You men in your workshop have a vise that you put on your work bench downstairs. Your wife gave it to you for Christmas because she got tired of running downstairs every time you needed her to hold something for you. It was one of the best gifts you ever got. What is used for? You keep turning the crank until it gets closer and closer until it holds something in its grip so you can work on that object--held in a vise, immovable. That's the meaning of the word constrains us--holds us in a vise. We have to act this way, we can't do anything else, we are gripped by the meaning of the love of Christ. "The love of Christ constraineth us, because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead." We were all dead in trespasses and sins. We come to the conclusion because we judge that if one died for all--He had to die for everybody--then we were all dead. He did die for us all, and this is how it changes us: "that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again." Do you live because He died? We should quit living unto ourselves? If we believe that He died, and we catch a vision of what that cross is all about, we should not live--we live because He died--we should not henceforth live unto OURSELVES, but live unto Him which died and rose again. We were made for God. The cross says, no longer live for ourselves. God wants you, not your sins.

What's the description of that? How did it all happen? "Wherefore henceforth know we no man after the flesh: yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we him no more." And now here it is in a nutshell: "There-fore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." If you are in Christ, if you get serious about that cross and say that you are a Christian, a child of God, he is a NEW CREATURE. What's going to happen? OLD THINGS are going to PASS AWAY. What are the old things? That we should henceforth no more--that's what it used to be--live unto ourselves, but now with all things becoming new: we live unto Him who died for us and rose again.

"And all things are of God"--see who is the owner. What has he done? "...who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ"--God has drawn us back to Himself by Jesus Christ. What does that mean? Once we get reconciled to God about our sins, and we're back into fellowship with God, look what God does: "and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation;"--the very thing He did for us in reconciling us back to Himself to the cross, God says He then turns to us and says, "I give you the same ministry, a job in this world, that you would be reconciling men to God." That's living unto God. No more living unto yourself, but get busy in reconciling men to God, like I reconciled you to my Father. That's what it says: "To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them [forgiving our sins through Christ]; and God hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation." Here is what it means to no longer live unto ourself: God gives us the ministry of reconciling others to God, then God gives the word--He puts the word in our mouth to reconcile men to God. Then He puts it in a nutshell: "Now then we are ambassadors for Christ,--that's living unto God. You are an ambassador for Jesus Christ, "as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God." We are speaking as God is speaking.

I've been in 20 countries of the world, and I've been in some American Embassies--Beirut, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan--and when you are in that environment with such suspicion all around you, when you have to show your passport or identification, and you're always passing soldiers and everybody looks at you suspiciously, everything having to be checked (and this was way back in 1964-- imagine what it's like now), it was a blessed experience when we spent a month in Beirut, Lebanon preaching in that environment. And it was a joyous experience in that environment that you have to live and move and breathe and walk around--and yet it was in 1964 when things were really pleasant. The City of Beirut was beautiful.

It was a blessed experience when the missionary said, "Would you like to go to the American Embassy?" "Yes, let's go in." And to go into the American Embassy in the midst of that sort of suspicious society in the world and to feel relief and you can "let down your hair" and take a deep breath. You didn't have to be careful what you said and how you look at somebody. You felt like you were taking a British Overseas Air Command (BOAC) airline, and you've flown back to New York and your back in your home land again. Here in the midst of that society is a little place called the American Embassy, with the decor like it is in America. You can have an American hamburger there and feel at home. It was a little bit of your homeland cut off in a foreign land. God says we are ambassadors, this is our business, this is no longer living unto self. We are ambassadors for Christ, and I am suggesting to you that ambassadors live in homes that are embassies, and who owns the embassies? His home land. Isn't that nice--you lost your house! You thought you owned your house, but if you're an ambassador for Christ you don't OWN the embassy. Secondly: The environment of the homeland was in that embassy, and I hope it is in yours--the environment of heaven.

The ambassador is the spokesman for the head of his government, standing in the stead of the president. He represents the official voice of the president in that foreign land. God says no longer living unto yourself means that you are standing and speaking in God's stead with His message: "Be ye reconciled to me." And your message to others is, "Be ye reconciled to God." We are ambassadors for Christ, "For he hath made him to be sin for us, [that's the CROSS!] who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him" (II Cor. 5:21). It is a marvelous truth that God is bringing to our hearts as the real meaning of what it is to be a Christian and what the cross is all about. I think what it is all about is GOD OWNING ME. It's really going back to the basic Manual of why God made me. The basic point of this message was: The purpose of the cross is to restore man back to the original reason for which he was created. Can we find out what that original reason was? Let's go back to when God made man. In Genesis 2:15 when God created man, what is the original reason for which God made man? Are you fulfilling it and living it? "The Lord God took the man and placed him in the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it." That's the original Manual for God's purpose in creating you, and I suggest three things:

1. God TOOK the man. He didn't have to drag him. Man didn't dig in his heels and say, "God, I'm busy. I can't come right now," and that kind of spirit. Instead, he was in TOTAL SUBMISSION to God. So the original Manual tells me that man was made to be in total submission to God. God took the man--there was no "kick" in man's spirit.

2. The Lord PLACED him in the garden--man is in proper LOCATION with God. Man's location is settled by God. God placed him in the garden, so God's original pattern and desire for you and me is that I should be in total submission to Him so then He can PLACE me wherever He wants. So my LOCATION is then ordered by my God--He owns me.

3. God said cultivate and keep the garden, dress it--God is giving him his VOCATION. God has taken a man who submits to Him, and then God has PLACED him into LOCATION--from submission to location--and then God chooses his VOCATION. God says to keep and dress the garden.

The tragedy of our life because of the Fall of Adam and Eve, and the sinfulness of our heart, is simply that you and I as we come on the scene with a fallen natural bent to live for number one, we need God to do a work of restoration in each of our hearts in all of these three areas. The fallen heart of man does not want to submit to an Almighty God, doesn't want God to tell where he should be, and the last thing in the world is, doesn't want the God of the Universe to tell him what he should do. That's in God's Manual. He wants us to be in such a state, different from the animals and the sun and moon and the trees, He made us to be in such a state of heart that He can pick us up as somebody said, "by the scruff-of-the-neck" anytime He wishes, and put us any place He chooses, without a solitary objection from us. In that way He can reveal HIS will, HIS purpose for us and to us. We are totally His--whether we live, we live unto the Lord; or whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live or whether we die, we are the LORD'S. For to this cause Jesus Christ both died, and rose again that he should be Lord both of the dead and living. That's God's Manual for life.

All of our problems, and all our frustrations, and of all the messies we get in, come when we buck God's original blueprint. That's what the cross is all about--for us to get back to the cross, to give back to God that spirit of rebellion, turn it over to God to where we go back to submission to Christ. We bow at the foot of the cross, we bow at the foot of Jesus Christ, we kneel. One dear brother knelt as we were worshiping God. It's not a casual thing, not a thing that everybody has to do it, but it's saying something in his spirit--a giving over, bowing at the foot of the cross. We hear those terms. What do they mean? I put myself under submission to the God Who made me to be submitted to Him, the God Who redeemed me--when you buy something you own, you buy. When you go into a store and buy something, you make a transaction and pay the man the money, what do you expect? You expect the man to give the object that is yours. Isn't it nice if you pay for something and then the shopkeeper keeps it? He says, "I won't give it to you," and he rebels. "What do you mean? I paid for this?" Now that's what we are doing to God. When we say, "O Lord Jesus, redeem me from my sins, save me so I can have a one-way ticket in the back pocket to go to heaven, and live for myself, and God says, "I want you." He's paid for us, now He says, "Give me that which I paid for--your life. I'm not interested in your sins. That was the price I had to pay to get you." And we hold ourself back, and God has no right in our life.

I think the question that comes to us in all of this, is: What is the essence of the sin that ruined the world and that ruins our life? We are prone to describe it in external terms. When I say sin, do you know what you think of? Adultery, fornication, stealing, cheating, murder, right? These are only expressions of sin but not the essence of it. At the very center of sin is living in pride to gratify myself. It is selfishness which made man fall, and that's the basic sin--live to gratify myself. This is still the basic problem. Most of us in the church are still living for ourselves. We ask God to cleanse us from the external expressions of sin: "Lord, forgive me of this, forgive me for that," but we never deal with the essence of sin--the spirit that still says, "I want to do my own thing and live for myself." We go on living for ourself.

When Christ challenged people to follow Him as He walked on this earth, we can get a perfect picture of what is all about because He pervaded a certain philosophy that tells us a story. He challenged people to follow Him. I say I am a follower of Jesus. Are we followers of Jesus? Are we Christian in America? When Christ challenged people to follow Him He didn't say, "Let him quit his drinking, smoking, and gambling and then he can follow Me." He said, "Let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me." He

condensed the issue to one central theme: "I want you first of all to lay down your life and your rights to your life and follow Me." He knows that if a man would die to selfishness that man would be in completely at His disposal, and God could do with him, and through him whatever God desires. If the cross is that Christ died to redeem us from ourself, then He wants total authority over your life. If He bought you, He owns you, and He wants total authority of your life. If the cross has done it's work in our life, we will be living totally for Jesus Christ. If we're not living this way, then the cross has not been allowed to do it's full work in our life.

Perhaps we ought to give John 3:16 a rest when we deal with this issue of really being a disciple of Jesus Christ and becoming a Christian. We say, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." That's true, but the tragedy of this is that we have watered down the word "believe on Him." Then perhaps we should use II Corinthians 5:15, "that he died for all [the cross], that they which live should not henceforth live unto THEMSELVES, but unto him which died for them, and rose again" to show the specific reason why Jesus Christ died and rose again, and our life should be changed. Or perhaps I Corinthians 6:19, do you not know that your body is not your own. It's the temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God. You are not your own. You are bought with a price. If you buy something the buyer OWNS it. Therefore we should glorify God in our bodies. What is it saying? We've been purchased with the precious blood of Jesus. We belong to Him. He is the rightful Owner of our life. For man to refuse to give over his life to the Owner is robbery, stealing--when I'm not the rightful owner and keeping my life for myself, refusing to give my life over to God.

Paul's favorite picture to depict what I am saying in the relationship of a Christian and Jesus Christ was that of a slave. Being a slave was one that was actually controlled by his master--he had no rights of his own, no future of his own, no money or decision-making of his own--everything belonged to his master.

A young person is studying to be a lawyer. Young person, when you become a Christian, did you ask God from that point on did He want you to be a lawyer? You have no right to say, "From now on I'm still going to be a lawyer." Order from your Father, orders from above--I'm not my own. Can God come on the scene of your life and change it and do with it whatever He wills at any time? This is the way to live. Somebody said, "The most marvelous thing in life, the most important thing in anyone's life is to do the will of God." That means, let Him be the Lord and Owner, let Him dictate it, and then I'll do the will of God. Then the most marvelous thing that anyone can say at the end of his life is to say, "I have DONE the will of God."

Ralph and I were headed in the business world when we were 17 or 18 years of age. At 21 years of age we would have owned a business that was worth 40,000 dollars, and in those days that was really something; not much today, but something then. We would have owned it just because we had the right name. And God Almighty laid His hand on us when we were just children. At eight years of age we gave our hearts to Jesus. When we were 12 and 13 God put His hand on us again and we said "Yes, Lord, what do You want?" God said, "I want you to preach," and I knew that God had made a colossal mistake. But I had enough sense to know that what God owned, what God buys, He owns. I am His, and He owns me, and I said, "Yes, Lord."

I was so shy that when I would walk down a sidewalk and saw somebody coming down on the same side, I'd quickly go across the street so I wouldn't have to say "Hi" to them, because if he came by and said "Hi" to me I would go right through the cement--and God said, "I want you to preach." "Yes, Lord."

At the age of 13 we began preparing and at the age of 16 Ralph and I started holding revivals just like we're holding now. In between our high school years we spent all summer preaching, finding little churches anywhere they let us preach. Then during our college years we preached for ten weeks during the summer. We'd go home just to say "Hello," and then out we'd go again and preach. Now through these years and looking back on our life, I wouldn't trade places with anybody in the world for the joy that was mine, and for those years of fulfillment, knowing that I was doing the will of God, and being able to bless people and for God to bless my life--filling up my life with DOING the will of God. Not everybody should do that. That was God's call on my life, and I had enough sense to say, "Yes, Lord." I was convinced that God's way was the best. He's the Owner, the Creator, the Redeemer, the Lover. He knows what He made when He made me; He knows what kind of a ticker He put in me. He knows what that ticker needs to be satisfied, and I had enough sense to say, "Yes, Lord, Your way. I'll go Your way." And I am more excited about it now than I was then. That's reality. That's Christianity. It's not a religion. It's a LIFE! God doesn't want your sins. He wants YOU.

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