



## The Pattern of the Cross - May 31, 2020

### OPEN

CrossFit training has been around for twenty years. “The aim of CrossFit has been to build a program that would best prepare trainees for any physical contingency...The CrossFit prescription is constantly varied, high intensity, functional movement.” [CrossFit Journal, Issue 56, April 2007](#)

Becoming spiritually “cross fit” is not manipulating kettle bells and speed ropes. In Philippians 2:1-18 we learn that the cross of Christ conditions us for following Him. Despite the way the cross has been artistically styled it was an ancient instrument of execution – it stands first and foremost for the *sacrifice of Jesus Christ*, in which He provided the rescue from our sins. And it follows that the cross is for every follower of Jesus a *transformative force*.

In **Philippians 2:1-4** the church is urged to be united. In the blossoming church family at Philippi, there was discord and disagreement (see **4:2-3**). Despite all the glowing things that Paul wrote about the Philippian believers, there was a lack of harmony which needed to be changed by the cross!

I was always interested in the Philippian church. So, in May 2013 Lana and I set out by car from Thessaloniki, about mid-day for the two-hour drive to the archeological site. However, I missed the exit to the national highway, and we went miles off the route. Trying to cut across country meant many stops asking for directions, much backtracking...and bickering. As travel frustrations grew, tempers flared. Finally, we arrived at the site of ancient Philippi. It was 4 pm. The site closed at 3 pm! So...these pictures are taken through the fence...



Friends, we are on a frustrating journey as a congregation. Over the past year some members and leaders of our church have stepped back. We were evicted from our facilities. And now we are in the tailspin of a pandemic. If ever we needed to have unity, harmony, and safeguard a common purpose, it is now! Let's pay careful attention to the pattern of the cross!

### DIG

In Philippians 2:6-11 we read about the **EXALTATION** of Jesus. How often have you encountered these eloquent words? Remember, He embraced the physical, mental, and spiritual horrors of the cross for you and for me.



**When you hear this description, what words would you use to describe Jesus?**

We could use words like these: selfless, self-emptying, sacrificial, and even servant. But we must also remember that verses 6 to 11 comprise an early Christian hymn. Some scholars argue that this may have been liturgy, written in Aramaic, and used by the early church in Palestine. Others believe Paul is the author. However, the result is the same. It is a reverent and reflective *interruption* into the lecture.

What do you need to say to Jesus in worshipful response to all He has sacrificed for you? Let's take a few moments of quiet reflection to celebrate and worship Jesus who gave Himself for us!

***Pause and ponder in worship...listen to this song by Selah as you reflect...***

[My Jesus I Love Thee](#)

These truths about Jesus' selflessness and suffering are not merely for theological analysis...they are to be personally encountered! As a whole, verses 6-11 celebrate the condescension, humiliation, crucifixion, and exaltation of Jesus. Rather than cling to His rights and privileges, Jesus emptied Himself of these for humanity, servanthood, and a brutal death.

“The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.” (Matthew 20:28) Wonderfully, His sacrifice provided for our salvation – and it led to His exaltation as the Lamb of God, who is worshipped for eternity – **see Revelation 5:12-13**.

However, we need to circle back to verse 5 where we read that followers Jesus should adopt the *attitude* of Jesus. The way Paul wrote this command is abrupt: “this think!” Paul could have moved the lecture on unity along more efficiently by moving from verses 1-4 to the instructions starting in verse 12.

But this would have sacrificed a significant truth. A person cannot simply *copy* Christ. The cross is not merely an *example* of selflessness. The cross is the mechanism by which God rescues humanity *and* places an individual into a restored relationship. “In Christ” our lives are indwelt by His life, by faith.

In **Philippians 2:12-18** we read about the **EMULATION** of Jesus. To emulate is to imitate or replicate another. To emulate Jesus is to do what He does; to say what He says; to have the attitude that He has. First, we do not have to wonder what the alternative is. In 3:18-19 we read about those who “walk as enemies of the cross of Christ.” These are people characterized by self-indulgence, corruption, and being “earthly minded.” This is a life lived unaffected by the cross of Christ.

In contrast, Paul invites all believers to emulate Jesus. How? Through a reverent response of obedience (v.12). We work out salvation as God works in salvation – **see Philippians 1:6**. God will complete His work in us of making us “cross fit”. What do you need if you are going to progress in a physical cross fit program? You need to do the exercises, obviously. You also need drive/desire. According to verse 13, God Himself provides us with the motivation and the operation of living like Jesus lived.

Physical CrossFit attempts to develop the entire body – working from core to extremity to increase load, distance, and speed. In verses 14-18 Paul suggests three ways in which become spiritually cross fit.

### 1. Bitterness exchanged - vv. 14-15

Complaining and arguing is our human default. “These are grumblers, malcontents, following their own sinful desires; they are loud-mouthed boasters” (James 1:16) “Complaining” has the sound of a grumble and expresses discontent and complaint. Arguments lead to criticism and skepticism. But the cross changes everything.

**Colossians 1:22** tells us, “by giving himself completely at the Cross, actually *dying* for you, Christ brought you over to God’s side and put your lives together, whole and holy in his presence.” (THE MESSAGE) Then, by our obedient response we can leave sinful patterns behind for a life that is “blameless, harmless, faultless”. Then we will truly stand out against the backdrop of an evil society.

### 2. Blamelessness exercised - vv. 15b-16a

In verse 15 we are promised an amazing experience – we can be bold – we can “shine like stars”. And what is the purpose of such boldness? We are to offer to our world the life-giving Word of God.

In his book ***Disciples Are Made Not Born*** (Victor, 1974) Walter Henrichsen tells about the time when Hernan Cortez sailed from Spain, landing at Vera Cruz in 1519. There he began his dramatic campaign against the Aztecs.

He only had 700 men. Cortez purposely set fire to his fleet of eleven ships. His men on the shore watched their only means of retreat sink to the bottom of the Gulf of Mexico. With no means of retreat, there was only one direction in which to move – forward! This is how the cross conditions our lives. It cuts off our old sinful past and pushes us forward in faith.

### 3. Boasting experienced - vv. 16b-18

Paul anticipated the “day of Christ” when he would realize the full fruit of all his efforts. This would not mean self-centered pride, but the “boast of joy”. When we are being ushered into an eternity in heaven, we will have reason to celebrate the completion of our obedience. And as Paul could confess in verses 17-18, this future time of glory makes current difficulties worth it.



Can you think of an area in your life where you need to obediently imitate the attitude or actions of Jesus?

### REFLECT

Do you want to obey Jesus and have your life conditioned by the cross of Christ? Are you ready to become “cross-fit”? When followers of Jesus are conditioned by the cross, they will be ready for anything – even a pandemic!

In Matthew 16:24 Jesus gave this challenge, “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.” In the first Century, if someone were carrying a cross, all would know the significance – that person was condemned to die. And as we noted last week, Christian’s are “born crucified”. Our connection to the cross of Jesus separates us from our old, sinful nature.

The cross is also the source of our life. Colossians 1:22 promises that through the cross we are reconciled to live according to the pattern of the cross! As Francis Schaeffer wrote, “As Christ’s rejection and death are the first steps in the order of redemption, so our rejection and death to things and self are the first steps in the order of true and growing spirituality.” (***True Spirituality***, Tyndale, 2001, 26).

Are you cross-fit today? Do you long to be? God will give you all you require to successfully follow Christ in His selflessness and service to others!

Here are a couple more songs to help you reflect on the cross of Christ...

[Wonderful, Merciful Savior](#)

[Oh The Blood](#)