



God's Great  
Plus Sign  
To the World

*by*

*Pastor Hollis Partlowe*



The Cross is the center of God's  
great moral universe.



*Cover photo by Stephen Myers—*  
Cross overlooking Labor Vieja, S.L.P., Mexico

G. E. Marsh Memorial Library, Church of God  
General Conference: McDonough, GA; <https://coggc.org/>



# God's Great Plus Sign To the World

Paul the apostle wrote to the early Corinthian believers and to us as well: "For I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified" (1 Cor. 2:2). That is quite a statement. Of course Paul taught other things too, but certainly the death of Christ is central in Christianity. Never was such a demonstration of love, justice, and holiness revealed as at Calvary.

Martin Luther once said: "The cross is a pulpit from which God preaches repentance and remission of sins to a fallen race." On that cross I see the man who died for me. The cross is the center of God's program of redemption. It should be the great subject of the gospel minister's preaching. Our banner is the cross, and we invite people under it. The only way to the Kingdom is by Calvary.

The cross is God's great sign of addition. The cross is a plus sign. A plus brings things together. God delights to give and give. "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool" (Isa. 1:18). God takes rebels and makes kings out of them. He takes sinners and makes saints out of them. How? Through the blood of the cross.

Judas Iscariot, who betrayed our Lord, never understood that. He tried to get Jesus to assume political power, but he only hastened Him on the way to the cross. That was the nature of the Jesus movement of that day. It had a lot of followers until the going got tough, then the ones in it cried: "Crucify him, crucify him" (Luke 23:21).

Jesus was popular enough when He was feeding the multitude with miracle bread. He was popular enough the day He rode into Jerusalem at the head of an excited crowd (Luke 19:29-38). However, a few days later these same people were demanding that He be nailed to the cross, and Jesus wasn't popular any more. The only follower with courage enough to acknowledge Him openly was a dying thief (Matt. 27:54). Two thousand years ago people didn't know who Jesus was or what to do with Him, "For had they known it [Him], they would not have crucified the Lord of glory" (1 Cor. 2:8).

His enemies wanted to destroy Him. But how do you destroy a man who went about doing good? (Acts 10:38.) They put Him to death because they said He tried to play God. The Jews accused Him of "making himself equal with God" (John 5:18). Of course Jesus never made any such claim. Rather, He recognized His complete dependence upon God. Listen to Him: "The Son can do nothing of himself. . . . I can of mine own self do nothing . . ." (vv. 19, 31).

God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son for our salvation (John 3:16). Observe, God is the giver and Jesus is the gift. God has purchased the church with the blood of His own Son (Acts 20:28).

## **The Beginning of the Church**

It is interesting to notice that Jesus was the first to mention the church. In fact, the word is found only three times in the four Gospels and used only by Christ in Matthew's account (16:18; 18:17). The church is a New Testament entity based on the death and resurrection of Christ. It was not revealed in the Old Testament (Eph. 3:5, 6; Col. 1:26; Rom. 16:25).

The Judaizers (the bigots during the days of the early church) did not deny the death and resurrection of Christ. They accepted that, but denied that it was enough. The Gentiles coming into the early church must also keep the law, be circumcised, and become Jews. Study Acts 15:1-24. This heated controversy led to the first conference of the early church.

Nothing was finished under the law. The Book of Hebrews shows that the law covenant left nothing finished. Not until Jesus died was our redemption completed.

## **The Chosen Three**

Peter, James, and John were usually with Jesus. When they thought Jesus might be Messiah, they were interested. Then James and John noticed Jesus had two shoulders, not three, so they had to oust Peter. How did they go about it? They sent their mother to Christ to ask for the two choice places in the Kingdom (Matt. 20:20-23). Notice how very human the disciples were.

When Jesus explained to them that He would go to Jerusalem, "suffer many things of the elders and chief

priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day,” Peter rebuked Him: “Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee.” Jesus replied: “Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men” (Matt. 16:21-23). When Peter had nothing to say, he usually made a point of saying it. Notice that Jesus called him “Satan.” Why? Jesus explained that Peter had his mind set on things of this world and not on the things of God.

One of the seven sayings of Jesus from the cross was, “It is finished” (John 19:30). The believer’s salvation is based on the finished work of Christ. No one can add anything to it; no one needs to.

The date of Jesus’ crucifixion is still being debated by the scholars, but His death has never lost its power.

The Duke of Wellington led the English forces against those of Napoleon at the Battle of Waterloo. News of the history-making battle came by a sailing vessel to the Southern coast of England, then by semaphore over land to London. Atop the Winchester Cathedral the semaphore began to spell out the eagerly awaited message. A fog moved in as the words “Wellington defeated” were seen. The heartbreaking news of Wellington’s defeat spread throughout London. Then the fog lifted and the complete message could be seen—“Wellington defeated the enemy.”

Many years ago on a lonely hill outside Jerusalem the sinless Son of God gave Himself willingly in a vicarious death for the sin of the world. About the sixth hour



(noon), darkness covered the land, the sun was darkened, the veil rent; about three in the afternoon Jesus died.

For a time it appeared that Jesus was defeated. His followers certainly thought so. They placed His limp, lifeless body in a borrowed grave and resigned themselves to the reality of His death. They went back to their old jobs. It appeared that Jesus was defeated. But after three days the darkness and gloom suddenly lifted. The glad news began to spread: Jesus defeated death! That's the message of the cross. "Death is swallowed up in victory" (1 Cor. 15:54b, 55). God be praised! Jesus came to the resurrection through the cross, not around it. So do we.

### **The Purpose and Meaning of the Cross**

John the Baptist looked upon Jesus as He began His earthly ministry and exclaimed: "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). Jesus Christ, the "just one," died for the unjust ones (1 Pet. 3:18). All the unjust ones out there need to know that. As believers in the Savior, "OUR MISSION IS MISSIONS."

Something needed to be done *for* man, not *by* him. The basis of our salvation is totally outside ourselves. "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast" (Eph. 2:8, 9). Our position before God has changed. All need to know that.

When Jesus died the veil of the temple was rent from top to bottom (Mark 15:38). Access to God is the message of the torn veil. We can now come to God by "a new and

living way” which Jesus has opened up for us (Heb. 10:20). The gospel ascribes a very great importance to Christ’s death. It is preeminently the saving event. “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” (Gal. 6:14).

The cross is the center of God’s great moral universe. To this center God ever points man, and we must turn to that cross as the center of blessing and the basis of our worship. The gospel is for common people.

The cross has been lifted up high and all nations and tribes need a good long look at it, that “whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life (John 3:14-16). ‘OUR MISSION IS MISSIONS.’” The death of Christ is the basis of our salvation, and there is no other basis (1 Cor. 3:11).

Of all the Christian symbols the cross is the most universally accepted. The arms of the cross reach around the world, giving man his greatest opportunity. Men don’t have to be at war with God. He doesn’t wish to be at war with them. Reconciliation is available full and free (2 Cor. 5:17-21). We are ambassadors for Christ. We represent Him in this dark world. We are His MISSIONARIES, and our ministry is reconciliation.

God’s Word won’t return to Him void but will accomplish that which pleases Him (Isa. 55:8-11). Our job is to teach and preach it to every person in our generation. The Cross is where God meets man, resulting in salvation. There is room for all at Calvary. The ground is level at the old rugged cross. Both Jew and Gentile can



come to God on the same basis, and by coming, both become members of the church (*ekklesia*), “the pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Tim. 3:15). This group is unique and separate from Israel and the nations, being called out of all nations and baptized by the spirit (1 Cor. 12:13).

Now the Word of God is true whether or not anyone believes it, but it is of value only if believed and applied. Carry the cross patiently and with perfect submission and in the end it will carry you.

“I simply argue that the cross be raised again,  
At the center of the market place,  
As well as on the steeple of the church.

“I am recovering the claim that  
Jesus was not crucified in a cathedral  
between two candles.

“But on a cross between two thieves,  
On a town garbage heap,  
At a crossroad of politics so cosmopolitan,  
That they had to write His title,  
In Hebrew and in Latin and in Greek.

“And at the kind of place where cynics talk smut  
And thieves curse and soldiers gamble,  
Because that is where He died,  
And that is what He died about,  
And that is where Christ’s men ought to be,  
And what church people ought to be about.”

—*Selected.*

---

## It Is Finished

“There’s a line that is drawn through the ages,  
On that line stands the old rugged cross;  
On that cross a battle is raging,  
For the gain of man’s soul or his loss.  
The earth shakes with the force of the conflict,  
The sun refuses to shine;  
For there hangs God’s Son in the balance,  
And then through the darkness he cries:  
‘It is finished,’ the battle is over!  
‘It is finished,’ there’ll be no more war!  
‘It is finished,’ the end of all conflict,  
And Jesus is Lord.”

“Yet in my heart the battle was raging,  
Not all prisoners of war have come home;  
They were battlefields of my own making,  
Didn’t know the war had been won.  
Then I heard that the king of all ages,  
Had fought all the battle for me,  
And victory was mine for the claiming and now,  
Praise His name, I am free!

‘It is finished,’ the battle is over!  
‘It is finished,’ there’ll be no more war!  
‘It is finished,’ the end of all conflict!  
And Jesus is Lord! He is Lord!”

—*Bill Gaither.*

---

**Atlanta Bible College  
Church of God General Conference  
P. O. Box 2950  
McDonough, GA 30253  
678-833-1839**

G. E. Marsh Memorial Library, Church of God  
General Conference: McDonough, GA; <https://coggc.org/>