

# The Cross Dynamic

*Living the Cross Life in a World of Law, Wisdom, and Power*

Arlin Weaver—Ontario, Canada



Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit. Jn. 12:24

**W**hen Jesus brought the gospel to Palestine, it was a world already dominated by legalists, philosophers, and Romans, each with their distinctive world views.

There were the Jews, the timeless custodians of the *Law*, who ordered their entire society with strict ethical codes. They were the purveyors of righteousness, who marketed righteousness like most salesmen market lesser wares. The people on the street were expected to ask, “What does the Law say?” and the Jewish interpreters of the Law were expected to answer with legal, binding definitions. Amid the loose world of Greek philosophy and Roman excess, the Jewish people offered order and ethics—all through the force of Law.

There were the Greeks, always preoccupied with the pursuit of *Wisdom* and the discussion of ideas. Convinced that any practical or philosophical question could be answered by disciplined thought, the Greeks made wisdom and knowledge the foundation of lifestyle. While divergent Grecian thinkers followed divergent patterns of thought and lifestyle, all defended their thinking and living with philosophical defenses.

And there were the Romans. Appreciative of both law and wisdom, but ultimately preoccupied with *Power*, the Romans’ objective was world dominance. Through Caesars and swords, the Romans subjected neighboring nations and cultures through brute force and military power. They were soldiers with authority, and all of Rome wore power with pride.

*Law. Wisdom. Power.* How did Jesus fit into the dynamics of His era? Was His life defined by law? Or by philosophical wisdom? Or by a preoccupation with power?

## A New Dynamic

When Jesus entered the scene, the three conventional dynamics were not wearing well. The Jews were in bondage to the Law. The Greeks were disillusioned by the multiplicity of their ideas. And the Roman culture was “hollowing out” from the rot that comes with power. It was time for a new dynamic, a new, life-defining essence; the ultimate “new idea.”

The Apostle Paul hints at the advent of this “fourth dynamic” when he exclaims, in essence, that the gospel of Christ was an idea whose time had come!<sup>1</sup> This gospel, or good news, is ultimately the announcement of a new King with a new kind of reign—or a new kingdom dynamic.

However, the good news of the new message at first glance appears as bad news—news defined by death. And the proclamation of the new kingdom threatens to disappoint, because at its essential center is an ignoble cross.

But hidden in that cross—the instrument of death—was the fourth dynamic, a dynamic so unexpected that the world could scarcely understand it. (And still doesn’t!)

*In God’s kingdom, it is this cross that is infused with power.* Jesus takes the timeless curse of death—the worst disgrace and defeat hell could bring against Him—and makes it the ultimate means of triumph, conquest, and eternal life.

In the kingdom, salvation is through the cross. Kingdom citizenship is dependent on “taking up the cross” and following Christ. Abundant life is offered to those who die. With this new dynamic, success stories begin, not with laws, great thinking, or sheer power, but by “falling into the ground and dying.”

The methods of this fourth dynamic stand in stark contrast to the methods of law, wisdom, and power.

Christ took the Jewish *Law*, and, according to Colossians,<sup>2</sup> nailed the ordinances to His cross. His fol-

**Kingdom citizenship is dependent on “taking up the cross” and following Christ. Abundant life is offered to those who die.**

1 Romans 10:15

2 Colossians 2:14

lowers, in identifying with His death, are said to be legally delivered from the demands of the Law through the rite of spiritual death.

When two Greek men sought out Christ for dialogue—and, most likely, to suggest that He would visit Greece as the star philosopher in the Greek galaxy of thinkers—Christ answered *Wisdom* by insisting that His death would be far more

valuable than philosophical teaching. “Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.”<sup>3</sup>

Christ also rejected the Roman model of *Power*, insisting that His kingdom would be a soldierless kingdom. “My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence.”<sup>4</sup> Likewise, the dynamic of force—or striving for supremacy, “lordship,” or authority—is outside of Christ’s kingdom dynamic.<sup>5</sup>

The fourth dynamic stands alone, absolutely unique, ultimately powerful, and eternally triumphant.

## The Forgotten Cross

However pervasive in New Testament language, theology, and thinking, this perspective of the life-defining cross is sadly missing in much of the Christian scene today.

The cross that is celebrated in most of Christianity is basically theological, offering a theological salvation, as opposed to a life-shattering, perception-altering reality that imposes a new way of life. The force, the sublime beauty, and the sheer dynamic of the cross is seldom truly honored in an era of—well ... law, wisdom, and power.

Too many Christians still live fundamentally like the Jews, Greeks, and Romans of the first century—preoccupied with law, wisdom, and power. Many of us have reverted to conventional answers for conventional problems. The “otherness” of the cross has been neglected in favor of humanly native thought patterns; and the cross is a shelf item, not something that is seared into our hearts and lifestyle.



Paul didn't opt for this theological, iconic cross.

the authority of the cross because he had abandoned himself to the way of the cross.

How many Christians today let the cross define their lifestyles—or live lives branded with cross-wounds, if you please? And how many manage to skirt the cross, thus missing out on its dynamic, its unique power, and its strange triumph?

Because we hold back from Christ’s cross and death, we do not discover His power. And since we’ve compromised the cross, Law, Wisdom, and Power bind us with their appeal and present themselves as the logical preference to the cross.

And so, we live holding others to artificial ethics of *Law*. We attempt to effect spiritual change through imposing requirements on other believers, rather than reaching for hearts and ensuring that an authentic cross experience has rewritten their life fundamentals. We set out to change behavior, rather than substance; we deal with effects and ignore the essence. In fact, this legal approach to ethics is so pervasive that many Western believers actually feel they can create societal change by effecting legal, political, or legislative change, or that they can bring about fundamental changes in spiritually cold churches through similar means. Such is the allure of Law.

Paul didn't opt for this theological, iconic cross. “I bear in my body,” he said, “the *stigma* of the Lord Jesus.”<sup>6</sup> In other words, his life was branded with cross-wounds, or evidence of the effects of the cross. And because he had become a participant in the cross, he could speak authoritatively to the legalists, to the “wise,” and to the people who played games with power. He bore



How many manage to skirt the cross, thus missing out on its dynamic, its unique power, and its strange triumph?  
(It costs little to wear a cross on a string around your neck ... or put it in your theology book.)

3 John 12:24

4 John 18:36

5 Mark 10:42-43

6 Galatians 6:17. KJV translates the Greek word stigma as “marks.”

Similarly, we defend our faith with *Wisdom* arguments, insisting more on doctrinal accuracy and rational discussions than on true Christlikeness. Within the church, we master hermeneutics to outargue others, and to convince them of the solidity of our arguments. In the world, our approach to evangelism too often is little more than a crusade to bring unbelievers to acknowledge the truth of our belief system, not so much to bring others into Christ's cross kingdom. Such are the mind games of Wisdom.

And like Romans, we're preoccupied with the problems of *Power*, struggling for supremacy, and protecting our personal rights. Determined and defensive, we watch our chances to project our dominance, assert ourselves (whom we're taught to esteem), and be the despot of our narcissistic worlds. Even in Christianity, things like self-realization and self-empowerment are the "power sins" of the individual; while politics, prejudice, and hidden agendas are the "power sins" of institutions, however respectable their garb. Such is the Christian dance with power.

Ask yourself honestly how much of your life and activity as a believer, or your corporate experience in the body of Christ, has been defined by an ideology of law, wisdom, and power? Law can be invoked to maintain ecclesiastical order. Wisdom dynamics lies at the heart of countless arguments. And power, or the struggle for supremacy, has defined countless church politics, polity, and procedure—far more than we care to confess.

And yet Christ established this cross dynamic as the glory and the force of His kingdom. He intended for the cross to be the true kingdom dynamic, the way Christians live—the ultimate guerrilla tactic, if you please, to overthrow domination by sin and self.

This cross is Christ's liberating answer to law, the shrewd supplanter of wisdom, and the "weak" road to ultimate power.

## Taking up the Cross

No wonder that Jesus said, many years ago, that being a disciple depends on our willingness to "take up the cross and follow" Him. In other words, our lives should be defined by the cross on our shoulder or the *stigma* in our hands.



Men with crosses on their shoulder are seldom impressed with wealth.

When a Jew in Christ's era took up the cross, it meant one thing—he was on the way to his crucifixion. Carrying his cross meant he was under a death sentence, already condemned, "as good as dead."

A victim with a cross on his shoulder was beyond final appeals to law. He had no stay of execution because of his wisdom. He had no sword or soldiers at his disposal to effect a rescue. He had one thing left to do—*die*.

And so it is with believers. When a new disciple takes up his cross, he is functioning under a death sentence. He is "as good as dead." There is only one thing left for him to do: fall into the ground and die to bring forth much fruit.

## Living in the Cross Kingdom

When believers actually take on the cross as a way of life, how does it impact their lives? How would a cross kingdom filled with cross-bearers look? How might your church and its faith expressions change if it became an assembly of the crucified? Or, in other words, how does the cross dynamic

express itself in practical expression?

### The cross and the world ...

The typical, moral religious response to the threat of "the world" is one of law—"Touch not, taste not, handle not," as Paul described it.<sup>7</sup> In other words, believers often answer the world's threats of assimilation and accommodation with a response of Law—protection through restriction.

The kingdom has its restrictions, without question. But Christ's cross dynamic goes far deeper, answering "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life" by dealing with the *appeal* of the forbidden. In the cross kingdom, mature believers surrender at the "lust level," not necessarily just at the action level. To quote Paul again, it is through the cross that "the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world."<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Colossians 2:21. Paul, in the surrounding verses, is addressing the Colossians' attempts to answer the "world issue" with worldly answers of law and restriction. Only through death to the world and being risen to focus on "other-worldly" things can freedom from the bondage of worldliness be discovered.

<sup>8</sup> Galatians 6:14

In other words, there is little merit in imposing “other-worldly” expectations on worldly hearts. The dynamics of mere law will never be an adequate answer to worldly lusts. Only the heart that has experienced the life-changing power of a new love, who has surrendered to death on the cross, and whose heart cry is “Lo, I come to do thy will, O God,” will discover real answers to the tug of the cross-denying world.

### The cross and wealth ...

Men with crosses on their shoulder are seldom impressed with wealth. After all, wealth no longer has relevance.

Likewise, we check our possessions at the door when we enter Christ’s kingdom. Jesus told the rich young ruler, “Go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, take up the cross and follow me.”<sup>9</sup>

In the kingdom, giving up is valued more highly than gifts; sharing is treasured over possessing, and the greatest wealth is “the joy of the cross.”

### The cross and authority ...

Jesus seems to have largely defined worldliness along two lines: wealth, and the abuse of authority. Both function on principles of power—the Roman problem. In Mark 10, Jesus pointed out that ruling, or exercising lordship or authority, is not a kingdom *modus operandi*.

Instead, in His kingdom, where believers live by the pattern of the cross, greatness comes through ministering to others and authority comes through a life of self-abandoning service, all in the pattern of the cross-embracing Christ. “For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.”<sup>10</sup>

### The cross and evangelism ...

Conventional Christian evangelism relies heavily on “Greek” methodology—dependence on the force of reason, rational argument, and the power of persuasion.

In other words, Christianity is often presented using the same approach as a salesman uses when he offers products or services—the attempt to be convincing. This approach is fact-oriented and argumentative.

Not so with Christ, and not so in the cross kingdom.

Before the cross, Jesus was unparalleled as a preaching evangelist. For three years, He spoke with power and authority, bringing incredible crowds to hear Him preach. They listened and were stunned by what they heard, acknowledging Him as a truth-speaker. But few truly followed Him ... until He died. Then the rest is history.

When Christ had sealed His gospel with His cross, Jerusalem and the entire world was turned upside down, and thousands became “little Christs.” No wonder that, under the shadow of the cross, He said, “And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me.”<sup>11</sup>

If we feel the proclamation of biblical facts is adequate evangelism, we have missed the fullness of Christ’s approach to evangelism—the cross dynamic. It is through the cross, and particularly through the witness of cross-embracing Christians, that real, New Testament evangelism takes place.

Christ’s pattern has been vindicated many times through history. When believers embraced the cost of the cross in their witness, God made their witness effective. The

Anabaptists, meeting in the Martyrs’ Synod and putting in place a calculated missionary plan at the cost of their lives; the Moravian missionaries who were willing to sell themselves to West Indies slave owners to bring slaves to Christ; or the countless Methodist circuit-riding preachers who died young in attempts to be gospel bearers—all became successful evangelists when they embraced the cross.

Like Jesus Himself, when believers are crucified, others are drawn to Him.

### The cross and relationships ...

By nature, we are all little Romans in the matter of interpersonal relationships. We default to the struggle for dominance that governs human relationships, and interacting becomes a test of wits, words, and war—using ev-



By nature, we are all little Romans in the matter of interpersonal relationships.

9 Mark 10:21

10 Mark 10:45. Emphasis the author’s.

11 John 12:32

ery way at our disposal to “come out on top,” or to win the upper ground for our own ego.

But in the kingdom of the cross, we are called to have the mind of the crucified Jesus, who “made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and ... humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.”<sup>12</sup>

Christ’s call to self-abandonment makes us, theologically, a footnote in our universe. Christ matters, and others matter, thus we seek to serve them.

Striving for superiority is a mark of the old life—the worldly life. The only direction for a Christian to go as he relates to others is down—further and further down. In the cross kingdom, healthy relationships are marked by this descending servant humility and burden bearing.

Even in marriage, the all-too-common battle of the spouses must give way to lives of self-sacrifice. The husband is to be like Christ—a dead, crucified man—before he can relate to his wife with the spirit of the kingdom.

Do you want to bless your relationships? Follow Christ ... down, down, and down.

## Enter In

Such is the effect of the cross dynamic, and such is life in the cross-kingdom. Today, you can have your choice of an entire smorgasbord of “Christian” viewpoints and lifestyles to choose from. You can use Christianity in a hundred ways to your advantage. You can give mental assent to Christianity because it provides the ultimate self-help philosophy. Or you can embrace Christianity as a way to bring psychological closure to sorry sinners.

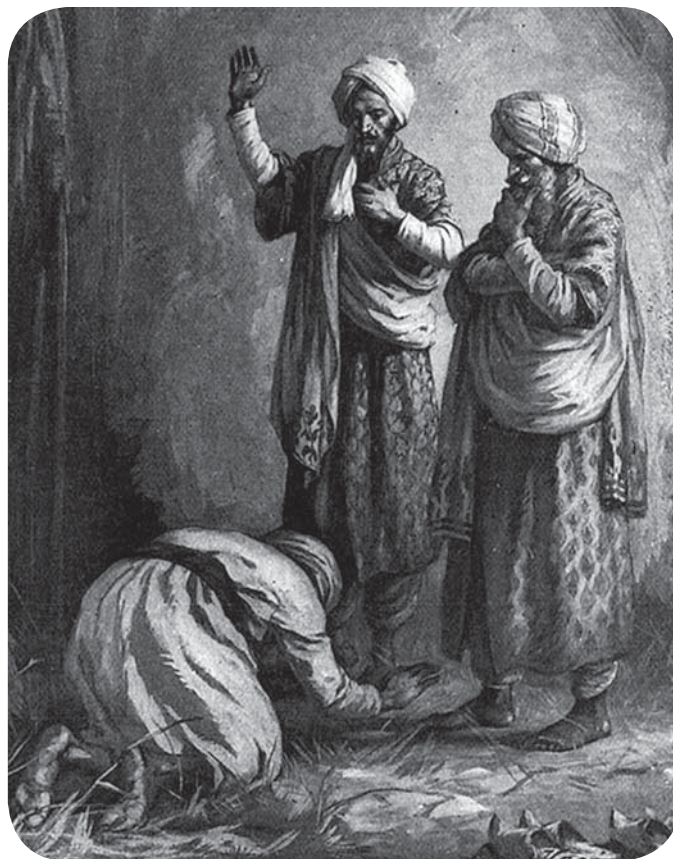
But cross-kingdom Christianity is far narrower. Only those who have died can enter into it, and “few there be that find it.”

But it is also authentic. Everything else is gold paint on a fundamentally rotten

structure—a religion, a faith, a facade, ultimately, that has simply rebranded worldly (Jewish, Greek, or Roman) thinking as faith. Thousands of Law-, Wisdom-, or Power-preoccupied thinkers are “born again” evangelicals, High Churchmen, or part of “discipleship traditions.”

It’s because of this illusion that I weary of asking if you are born again. You’ll say you are, regardless; but

12 Philippians 2:5-8



**Do you want to bless your relationships?  
Follow Christ ... down, down, and down.**

what I really want to know is whether you’ve died, or whether you’ve been crucified so that you can enter into Christ’s kingdom of the cross. I want to know whether you have allowed the cross concept to impact your lifestyle and your thinking.

And I want to know whether you are a Jew, a Greek, or a Roman. Do you live after Law, like a legalist? Do you live after Wisdom, like a mere theologian or thinker? Do you live for religious power, supremacy, or self-exaltation? Or do you live after the cross?

In other words, “Show me your *stigma!*” Show me the wounds of the cross in your hands, in your feet—in your entire life! Show me how dead men and women live in Christ’s kingdom!

The strange thing is, when you choose to enter into the kingdom with the brand—the *stigma*—of the cross, God gives you the “*law* of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus.” He gives you the “*wisdom* that is from above.” And He gives “Christ crucified . . . the *power* of God.”

And, in the cross kingdom, He gives *fruit*. “Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.”

*Die, and enter in! ~*