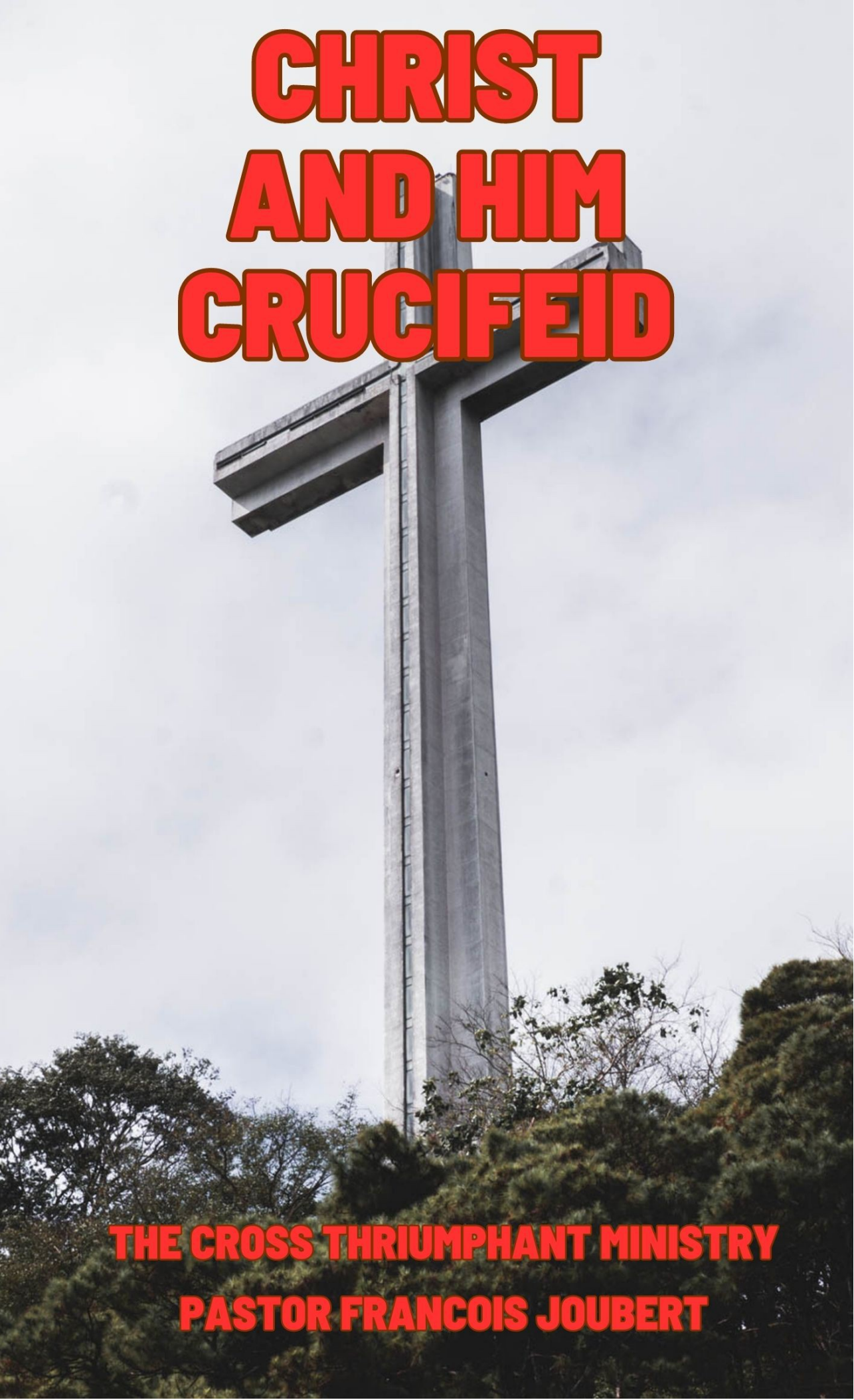


CHRIST AND HIM CRUCIFEID

A tall, modern concrete cross stands prominently against a cloudy sky. The cross is constructed from thick, grey concrete beams. At the base of the cross, there is a dense line of green trees, including some evergreens and bare deciduous trees. The overall scene is captured in a low-angle shot, emphasizing the height of the cross.

THE CROSS THRIUMPHANT MINISTRY
PASTOR FRANCOIS JOUBERT

CHRIST AND HIM CRUCIFIED.

Christianity begins with and centers around the person of Jesus and His work on the cross. It was Paul who said the cross was everything to him. He had a greater education, knowledge, and revelation than any other apostle called before him, including those who knew Jesus personally in the flesh. Yet everything he wanted to know was summed up in one sentence: **"Jesus Christ and Him crucified."** When Christ is placed in His rightful place, the believer places himself in a unanimous walk as He. Our way of sanctification, correction, chastening and growth is not without suffering. Christianity is cross-centered, as it is the core point of why Christ came to earth. All of God's blessings come from Him through the cross, and are delivered to believers through His Spirit and His Word. But to walk in the blessings means that we must have faith in God and His Word. We cannot ignore the reality that we are experiencing suffering and even persecution. The fact is that the cross means suffering. The cross becomes the center of the believers' walks as Jesus said that we must also carry the cross. Today we can listen to most of the popular Christian TV preachers who promise everything to a believer, but they neglect this essential ingredient to Christianity. What is being taught today is that we should not suffer or suffer pain or tribulation.

This leads to illegal children, not true children of God.

It is said:

2 TIMOTHY 3:12.

"Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution."

Today it is said:

"Those who lead Divine lives will be rich and successful in this world."

And what was once applied to an individual Christian is now being applied to churches. They strive for growth in any way. The bigger the church, the more success they have. Jesus said there would be a remnant who would remain faithful to His teachings despite persecution and ridicule. He never said the remnant would become the majority. He taught that only a few will travel on the narrow road with the cross, but that many would go on the broad road to destruction.

The apostle Paul wrote:

2 TIMOTHY 2: 8-15.

"Remember that Jesus Christ of the seed of David was raised from the dead according to my gospel: Wherein I suffer trouble, as an evil doer, even unto bonds; but the word of God is not bound."

Therefore I endure all things for the elect's sakes, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory. It is a faithful saying: For if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him: If we suffer, we shall also reign with him: if we deny him, he also will deny us: If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself. Of these things put them in remembrance, charging them before the Lord that they strive not about words to no profit, but to the subverting of the hearers. Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth."

Paul, who was imprisoned and suffered for the Word of God, wrote many of his God-inspired letters to the Church during this hardship and sufferings. Paul concentrates on our continual death after self, even though we have been wrongly accused, so that the word and the gospel may prosper. But we need endurance. Why? For we will continually suffer for our testimony and even be persecuted. The early Church suffered greatly. James presented this example to the believers:

JAMES 5:10.

"Take, my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience."

For even the prophets, which were the type of Christ, suffered all things; No one has had an easy life for too long. The descriptions of the believers in Hebrews 11 carry it out. Jesus did not promise Paul or any other apostle a life of comfort and material wealth or health. In Acts 9:16, after Paul was saved, Jesus said:

ACTS 9:16.

"For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake."

2 TIMOTHY 2:14.

"Of these things put them in remembrance, charging them before the Lord that they strive not about words to no profit, but to the subverting of the hearers."

What words can he speak of this, we have no spiritual benefit from? Words that are not related to the gospel, words that are not centered on the life of Christ and the cross. Empty spiritual promises. The guarantee of success, prosperity and healing without the main ingredient, the cross and suffering in this life. The glorification of the Cross through the death of the self. The cross destroys any way we become acceptable on our own merits. We cannot accept Jesus for who He is without the cross. He has gone through suffering, and everyone who wants to follow Him right must too.

HEBREWS 12: 2.

"Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God."

Jesus went to the cross through obedience and through suffering. For this reason, He was given the most honorable and exalted position to sit at the right hand of the Father and have a Name above all names. He also has a promise for the believer who overcomes:

REVELATION 3:21.

"To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne."

LUKE 14:27.

"And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple."

Here Jesus makes it clear. He is the pattern we must follow. Without suffering, without ridicule, without dying ourselves, we cannot learn from Him, nor can we receive His blessings. We not only look to Him, but follow Him, which is an activity, a way of life. Jesus was nailed to the cross. He did not move from this place because He was perfectly obedient to fulfil God's will, to suffer and die for us so that our sins could be forgiven.

1 PETER 2:21.

"For to this end you were called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow his steps;"

He then described the different sufferings one has to go through and decided:

1 PETER 4: 1-2.

"Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind: for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin; That he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God."

We have guidance in the flesh so that the Spirit can fill us and control our lives. We have to go against the old human nature that still lives in us, it can be painful, it can sometimes be a fierce battle, but it is our sanctification process that makes us the victors we must be. We must have the same attitude, as our selfish desires must be conquered in our lives by resisting them in the Spirit through Christ. This does not mean that we should use suffering as an outward symbol of our walk with the Lord, because it does not point to our spiritual condition.

This means that when we oppose the ways of the world with the authority of the Lord, we must always expect to suffer. He did not remove this element from our life here on earth. He promised that we would get rest from our labour and reward for our work with Him hereafter. We must follow Him by bearing our cross. Carrying a cross is uncomfortable, it is a guidance, and it causes pain. See in your imagination that we walk with the cross as a crossbar on our shoulders while people walk past us at a faster speed. We slowly slow down with this object on our shoulders. People stare at us; they mock us; they laugh. They ask why would anyone wear something like that? Look at how mobile we are. We can go anywhere we want; we are free. But you can only travel on the road designated for someone carrying a cross. We can go in and out at any door and at any place; you can not. Try to fit yourself through a doorway with a crossbar; It will be very uncomfortable. You will have to force yourself to enter. This is how Jesus wants us to live, to be in the world, but not of it. We should not be comfortable with the things of the world and our past lives. As a Christian, a new person in Christ no longer fits into the ways of society and the world. What seems like freedom to some is really not, because it leads away from the narrow path that Jesus is asking us to follow. The narrow road causes trouble; The wide road is effortless.

Are you nailed to your cross? Or do you sometimes take it off and carry it as far as you want, until it is uncomfortable and then you lay it down again? You may miss what God wants to do in your life by not suffering for Christ.

2 PETER 4: 13-14.

"But as you have communion with the sufferings of Christ, rejoice, that you also may rejoice in the revelation of his glory. If you are offended by the Name of Christ, you are happy, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. As for them, He is blasphemed; but as for you, he is glorified. "

True Christianity is sacrifice, a death for the self, so that we may now have fellowship with God, which is our spiritual blessing. But we will be rewarded later for how we persevered through the test of our lives today. How we face them and go through them will be later in heaven in our eternal life.

ROMANS 8:18.

"For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us."

Suffering for Christ was considered a privilege by the apostles. Maybe you are someone who has been told that suffering is from the devil and that there are no tests. That God will always bless and if you do not receive your share, you will not walk in faith. That is not what Jesus and the apostles taught. What is the faith that was once delivered to all the saints? It is a faith that can be tested, one that is strengthened by trials. They may be physical, they may be emotional, they may be spiritual, they may even come from the devil, but they all come through Christ's hands. **If there is no test, there is no growth!** Tests are to prove our faith. This is the proof of a true Christian.

ROMANS 5: 3-5.

"And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; And patience, experience; and experience, hope: And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us."

Jesus said that while we are in this world, we will all suffer tribulation, but only a Christian has trials to prove his faith. In Hebrews 11 we read how the believers lived in the world. Everyone gave up something and suffered for God so that He could use them.

HEBREWS 11: 36-40.

"And others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; (Of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth. And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect."

HEBREWS 12: 3-4.

"For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds. Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin."

Another good example is in Daniel 3: 16-18, where three Jewish men in Babylonian captivity refused to bow before the golden statue of the then ruler Nebuchadnezzar. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered the king,

DANIEL 3: 16-18.

"Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, answered and said to the king, O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not careful to answer thee in this matter. If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up."

PHILIPPIANS 3:10.

"That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death;"

There are many today who have bowed down to a golden image and will not be able to be in the fire of testing for a moment, and will not be willing to go there. Because they have been taught that it is the devil who will test them and that God is not involved. But Scripture calls us to witness through the sufferings of Christ:

DANIEL 3: 23-25.

"And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, fell down bound into the midst of the burning fiery furnace. Then Nebuchadnezzar the king was astonished, and rose up in haste, and spake, and said unto his counsellors, Did not we cast three men bound into the midst of the fire?"

They answered and said unto the king, True, O king. He answered and said, Lo, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt; and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God."

These three men became witnesses of an unbeliever through their trial and He saw the Son of God with them. Nebuchadnezzar then blessed the God of these three brave Jews because of the outcome of their devotion. In Daniel 3: 23-25, when Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were thrown into the flames, the men who threw them died from the heat. Then Nebuchadnezzar the king marvelled, and hurried, and spake, and said unto his counsellors. Did not we cast three men into the midst of the fire? And they answered and said unto the king, Behold, O king! He replied, **"Behold, I see four men walking loose in the midst of the fire, with no injury to them; and the appearance of the fourth is like the appearance of a son of God."** They chose to burn instead of turning to other gods. They had faith, not the suspicion that they would not die. They were willing to accept death, but God spared them because they already considered their lives dead. John the Baptist came on the scene and preached repentance and prepared the hearts of the people for the Messiah. He was clothed with garments of repentance.

He demonstrated what He said through how He lived. John came in the robe of humility, clothed in camel's hair. He would certainly not be fit for TV evangelism if he were here today, not just because of his message, but because of his garment.

Jesus said to the crowd:

MATTHEW 11:7-8.

"And as they departed, Jesus began to say unto the multitudes concerning John, What went ye out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken with the wind? But what went ye out for to see? A man clothed in soft raiment? behold, they that wear soft clothing are in kings' houses."

You will not find much remorse in such places of prominence. For this reason Jesus said that it is more difficult for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven than for a camel to go through the eye of a needle. One has to give up a lot to gain the spiritual life because many things stand in the way. Instead, the Church is told that we do not have to give up anything; we can have the best of both worlds. We are *"a child of the King"*, so keep your head high and receive the blessings. After all, we deserve it;

The Bible says we are blessed, but it is with;

EPHESIANS 1: 3.

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ:"

Anything more than that, consider it God's special grace in your life. In modern times we have a new cross in popular evangelical circles. It is like the old cross, but different: the parables are superficial; The differences, fundamental. From this new cross arose a new philosophy of the Christian life, and from it came new evangelical techniques, new kinds of meetings, and a new kind of preaching. This new evangelism uses the same language as the old one, but its content is not the same and the emphasis is not placed as before. ... The new cross encourages a new and completely different evangelistic approach. The evangelist does not require the crucifixion of the old life before a new life can be received. He does not preach contrasts but similarities. He seeks to enter into the public interest by showing that Christianity makes no unpleasant demands; rather, it offers the same thing that the world offers, only at a higher level. Whatever happens in the sinful world is now emphasized. Only the religious product is better. The new cross does not kill the sinner, it leads him into it.

It turns him into a cleaner and happier way of life and saves his self-esteem. To the confident, it says, "**Come and strive for Christ.**" To the selfish sister it says, "**Come and glory in the Lord.**" For the thrill seeker it says, "**Come enjoy the thrill of Christian fellowship.**" The Christian message is skewed in the direction of the current way of making it acceptable to the public.

Paul writes:

PHILIPPIANS 3:18.

"(For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ:"

People today want only the blessings and prosperity, not His suffering. But without it, there are no eternal blessings, only temporary blessings that people quickly spend on earth. The teachers of the faith told the people to get to know Jesus in His blessings, the Bible and the apostles taught that we should get to know Jesus by following Him in His suffering. If the cross is not central to your theology, then you have no alternative but to eliminate any suffering, even if it is the right thing to do. This is how most of the church's walk is today. For Paul, there was no knowledge of God without knowing the crucified Messiah, and there was no consequence of Him without picking up His own cross and suffering for His tribal fellows.

Paul wanted us to know Him in the power of His resurrection.

PHILIPPIANS 3:10.

"That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death;"

When we think of power, we often interpret it as miracles. But the power of the resurrection is that we must live our lives differently, to be in God, separated to do His work. *"The fellowship at its suffering"* is an interesting concept, but it sounds strange. How does a *fellowship* with suffering, when he is not feeling well, or has optimal living conditions and may have been hurt? How can one have an intimate relationship in suffering? It means to be with Him, to go through His suffering with Him, and we will now have strength and the promise of the resurrection later. Without it we can not know Him and we certainly cannot have the resurrection power. By participating in suffering, we can understand how Christ felt, who had no sin when He suffer in His flesh to become perfect.

We can then have a personal experience of Christ's power;

GALATIANS 5:24.

"And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts."

WILLIAMS TRANSLATION.

"And those who belong to Jesus the Christ have crucified the lower nature with its passions and evil cravings."

Taking up your cross is a lifestyle of suffering in the flesh to follow Jesus. God is slowly transforming us into new persons made in the image of His Son through testing and strengthening our faith. It is not easy because it goes against everything we have tried to live once. There is no crown without going to the crossroads. Paul gives this command as a requirement to know Christ.

ACTS 14: 21-23.

"And when they had preached the gospel to that city, and had taught many, they returned again to Lystra, and to Iconium, and Antioch, Confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.

And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed."

Suffering is foreign to the Christian lifestyle today, but it was a way of life for the early Church. Without it we can not know Him in His death and we can certainly not experience the resurrection power we have available. When I am weak and dependent on Him, He is strong. It is by denying all that we have in our own abilities that can prevent us from saying, "It is not I but Christ who lives in me." If we can lead it under pressure, the power to do His will is transferred to us, and then we can give HIM all the glory to His Name. Jesus made specific qualifying statements to help us grow in our relationship with God. A crossless Christianity does not mean walking with Christ, it means we cannot have a relationship with Him. Jesus explained this to his disciples more than once in different ways.

LUKE 9: 23-26.

"And he said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it.

For what is a man advantaged, if he gain the whole world, and lose himself, or be cast away? For whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he shall come in his own glory, and in his Father's, and of the holy angels."

MATTHEW 10:38.

"And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me."

Jesus makes it clear that one cannot learn from Him without doing so. The truth is, only one kind of walk of faith will lead us to eternal life. Those who refuse to allow His suffering and discipline to change them will face the judgement. God wanted to be Lord over our lives, but we did not allow Him. Instead, we practised lawlessness (Matthew 7). We do "God's" things our way and in His Name, without being under His guidance.

Jesus said:

MATTHEW 11: 29-30.

"Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

A yoke was an adapted piece of wood used to connect two oxen to each other so that they could work together in the field. Our yoke for Christ is the cross. If we walk beside Him, He can bear our burdens; when we get behind or in front of Him, it becomes more difficult. When we walk through the field (the world) working together, it is then that we have joy, because we know He is with us as we want to do His will. Fruit began to grow in the field we were working on because He was with us in our labour. There is a secret to the Christian life, and it has only remained a secret because it is avoided. Through the Word, God has revealed to mankind everything we need to live a life of godliness.

The Word of God tells us:

1 TIMOTHY 6: 8.

"And having food and raiment let us be therewith content."

Being "**content**" is a concept that is almost unheard of. Paul understood this concept and considered it essential for endurance and joy. Once our basic needs have been met, we must be content. It was part of Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount. If God feeds the birds and we are worth so much more, we should not "**stress**" about His provision for us. Knowing that He is with us, we can be assured of His provision.

Yet the popular pastors of the doctrine of prosperity tell us not to be content with what we have; it is not enough, there is always more. What they are teaching is not faith to get more, but actually a lack of faith, to make people dissatisfied with what God has already given. The definition of faith means to trust, be patient and content with what you have received.

A scripture that is often ripped out of context to justify getting what you want is the following.

PHILIPPIANS 4: 11-13.

"Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me."

In context, Paul declares that even in a bad situation he is not overcome by it. He is not saying that he can get ALL things through Christ, but that he has learned to be content in whatever condition he has been through Christ's endurance. We need the grace of God to maintain an attitude of contentment. We must choose to be content and not look at our circumstances or even what we need. In the doctrine of prejudice is **"blessed"** as an abundance of possessions.

It teaches that the Church, under a new and better covenant, should have more than some of the great men of the faith had under the old covenant. It is said that we are not under the curse, but the blessing. There is surely a portion of the truth in this; the writer of Hebrews tells us that we have a new and better covenant. Most prosperity preachers believe that this should include an abundance of health and wealth. If the Jews were promised prosperity and health, why not us? The prosperous teachers fail to see that the blessings for Israel depended on Israel's obedience. If they obeyed the commands, they were blessed. It was a conditional covenant; we are under an unconditional covenant that works by trusting in God and His will for us as individuals, not as a nation. One of the reasons why the new covenant is better is because it is practised by grace. Israel was punished if they did not obey, and this punishment was sometimes quite severe. What we see today is no mention of chastisement, but only the blessing. Honey can taste sweet and we can devour ourselves to the blessings of the Word without realizing that we have placed ourselves in a position of judgement.

PROVERBS 25:27.

It is not good to eat much honey: so for men to search their own glory is not glory.

It's not good to seek your own honour.

PROVERBS 25:16.

"Hast thou found honey? eat so much as is sufficient for thee, lest thou be filled therewith, and vomit it."

Just *"eating"* the sweet things of God and neglecting the difficult truths that make you grow will make one sick and unbalanced. This is why the body of Christ finds itself in a mentally poor *"health"*. We chased honey like a hungry bear. We only want to hear positive words, not those that challenge us to change or walk right. Both Ezekiel and John were revelators of great Scriptural truths, saying that the truth first tasted good until it was consumed.

EZEKIEL 3: 3.

"And he said unto me, Son of man, cause thy belly to eat, and fill thy bowels with this roll that I give thee. Then did I eat it; and it was in my mouth as honey for sweetness."

But the Word is not always sweet.

REVELATION 10: 9

"And I went unto the angel, and said unto him, Give me the little book. And he said unto me, Take it, and eat it up; and it shall make thy belly bitter, but it shall be in thy mouth sweet as honey."

Once the true Word has been accepted, one must swallow its contents (meditate on it to understand). It can upset you after being digested; it touches sin in us. The church has *"every spiritual blessing."* If one sees the word *"blessing"* and understands its concept, then it affects more than just the material abundance that is spoken and learned about.

EPHESIANS 1: 3.

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ:"

GALATIANS 3:14.

"That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith."

This is the gospel of salvation. This is the blessing of Abraham that is now available to all - to have a spiritual relationship with God through faith. Pride was the downfall of Lucifer, the greatest being God created. You could say that pride is the devil's workshop. We all have pride to some degree, and are proud that we live by faith. Pride is self-reliance; we think we can achieve something on our own. Pride means thinking more of yourself compared to others, it is an overestimation of the self.

It is to think that we deserve something if we do not deserve it. Jesus was our example of humility. He was God, but became humble.

PHILIPPIANS 2: 5-8.

"Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross."

He had the power and might to use a legion of angels to stop the event of the cross. However, He in no way used this power for himself. He did not use the power or position that was legally His. Jesus gained his victory on the cross by humility, not by exercising power. Martin Luther said the flesh wants to be glorified, not crucified. Our flesh likes to brag, even if we do something right for God, we want the credit. If you want to please the devil, be busy with yourself, brag, because pride is the devil's fishing net and he has caught many fish in the web of independence.

"A true Christian will dispose of his self-esteem and self-confidence to make room for God in the heart where there was no one but sin."

Now the preference of self before God is the essential part of the corrupt nature Self-esteem, self-reliance, self-control denies love and submission to God."
(Stephen Charnock, 1628-1680)

All false teachings come from pride, because it does not want to submit to the Word as it is written. It does not seek the true meaning, but seeks a new interpretation. Why? Himself wants the credit because we want to be noticed! Thus the true Word becomes like putty in their hand, because they consistently want to add their own meaning of it in the word. We must be humble to receive the true Word.

JAMES 1: 21-22.

"Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls. But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves."

But to be doers of the Word we must first crucify the self; otherwise we will not have the power to live it out. Self must be put down so that God can be exalted. Only then can we share in the blessing He has for us. If there is no chastisement, God cannot deal with our pride. Paul was given a thorn in the flesh so that he would not become proud on account of his many revelations.

But many today do not have a discipline in their Christian walk, and actually think this is the way it is supposed to be. It is a terrible thing to know that God does not discipline a person to improve himself in his walk. This may mean that he is not walking with God. Job, who went through the greatest and longest human discipline recorded in the Bible, said:

JOB 5:17.

"Behold, happy is the man whom God correcteth: therefore despise not thou the chastening of the Almighty:"

LEXHAM ENGLISH BIBLE.

"Look, happy is the human being whom God reproves; and you must not despise the discipline of Shaddai,"

Job did not blame his tribulation on Satan, but saw the hand of God in it. Tertullian called the devil **"God's ape"**.

Solomon says:

PROVERBS 10:17

"He is in the way of life that keepeth instruction: but he that refuseth reproof erreth."

A FAITHFUL VERSION.

"He who keeps instruction is in the way of life, but he who refuses reproof goes astray."

David knew the value of suffering. He reflected on everything he had in *Psalm 119: 67*. "Before I was afflicted I went astray; but now I keep your word."

And in verse 75: "I know, O LORD, that Thy judgments are right, and that Thou hast afflicted me by faithfulness."

David attributed his misery to God's hand, not the devil's sense. We must understand that whether we are struck by an extremely long chastisement or not, God is not angry with us. Even if it involves discipline, it is done out of love, and His purpose in it is always good for us.

PHILIPPIANS 1: 29-30.

"For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake; Having the same conflict which ye saw in me, and now hear to be in me."

To be chastened does not mean that the Lord has forsaken you or loves you less. It could actually mean that He turned His favour on you.

HEBREWS 12: 5-8.

"And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him:

For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons."

HEBREWS 12:11.

"Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby."

WILLIAMS TRANSLATION.

"and you have forgotten the encouragement which is addressed to you as sons: "My son, refrain from thinking lightly of the discipline the Lord inflicts, and giving up when you are corrected by Him."

If you find someone who teaches us not to go through chastisement and trials, stay away from them. They contradict the most important concept in Scripture for our sanctification. Everything we have as Christians came through Jesus' suffering in life and His crucifixion.

Jesus explains:

MATTHEW 10:38.

"And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me."

Trials shape our faith to conquer the world. We have examples of faith that come from the hand of God. They are tailor-made for each of us, as God deals with all of us on a personal basis.

JAMES 1: 2-4.

"My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing."

The apostle Peter says the same thing.

1 PETER 1: 6-7.

"Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ:"

WILLIAMS TRANSLATION.

"In such a hope keep on rejoicing, although for a little while you must be sorrow-stricken with various trials, so that the genuineness of your faith, which is more precious than gold that perishes even after it is shown by the test of fire to be genuine, may result in your praise and glory and honor at the unveiling of Jesus Christ."

With our patience in the trials, endurance comes as it leads us to wait to a great extent for God's salvation. True faith is forged in the fire of your trial, false faith disappears and asks for an escape from God's process to perfect them.

ROMANS 1:17.

"For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith."

How does it work "from faith to faith"? Through the trials we overcome! God works His nature in us and takes out what is not pleasing to Him at the same time. Through this we learn to trust Him as a child would trust His parent. Unfortunately, the church is rarely told of these trials today, but instead Jesus becomes a self-image booster to work out our own dreams. Everything we have as Christians has come through much suffering and Christ's crucifixion.

It is all done by His grace. But grace can only be given if we walk according to His ways of humility. It means an emptying of self.

MARK 10:15.

"Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein."

What do we preach? Paul says if anyone adds to the gospel, even some of the law required in the Old Testament, he is cursed.

GALATIANS 1: 8-9.

"But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed."

Today, all sorts of things are added to the gospel to make the Church more attractive. Then there are things that are taken away, the gospel itself is changed. False teachers will sometimes mention the gospel; it makes them so deceptive. But they will change portions of the message. If a doctrine is an essential truth, there will be many Scripture verses to compile it.

It will not be isolated. If it is a head teaching, it will be clear and repeated throughout Scripture. False teachers can sometimes even preach the correct gospel, but bring deception into the discipleship process as they teach things not found in the Bible. These teachings can consist of additions such as the promise of health and wealth, or omissions such as saying that the followers of Jesus will never have any loss or suffering. This is complete nonsense! The apostles who wrote the Scriptures certainly did not have this world view. Everyone who learns this must visit the persecuted Church around the world today to get a dose of reality and see the real first-century Christianity in practice. Hebrews 11 adequately proves that life without suffering is not a general promise to the believer, but that the believers will overcome in their suffering.

1 CORINTHIANS 15: 12-14.

"Now if Christ be preached that he rose from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen: And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain."

If death and resurrection are not consistently proclaimed in the Church, how will people believe? Remember Paul said it is the gospel that is the power of God. His death proves that we are sinners and that was the only way to be brought to God. The resurrection proves His claim to what He said, He is the Lord God. Death and resurrection were at the heart of the apostles' preaching. They did not attract people by their ability to deliver power performances. Today we are confronted with a new kind of gospel, one that emphasizes the need to experience the supernatural. We are now practising a crossless Christianity, which is becoming a Christless Christianity. Today in many churches miracles are preached for salvation, not Christ crucified. Paul preached the cross, Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

1 CORINTHIANS 1:18.

"For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God."

The Bible declares that it is the **"preaching of the cross"** that contains the **"power of God"** for salvation. Is Christ crucified, or have we revised the ancient story to fit into our contemporary culture?

It became very popular to preach Christ without the discomfort of the cross. Can we expect large numbers to come together when we cast the net if we have large holes in it?

Jesus asks:

MARK 8: 36-37.

"For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's, the same shall save it. For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?"

If someone is won to Christ by offering success and wealth, they are not gaining for Christ, but for the world. If the cross is not the centre of their preaching and life, than what are they lifted up? Jesus said if I am lifted up, I will draw all people to me. It is who brings us to them, Jesus, not the Church, not our pet doctrines. We exchange what the world offers for a chance to bear the cross, it is temporary but the reward lasts through eternity. The crucifixion brought death from sin and the victory over the old nature. The cross speaks of the lack of man and the ability of God. It speaks of our total dependence on our Creator. It takes us away from being self-centred toward Christ-centred.

The cross gets rid of the old nature by killing it so that we can be witnesses of Christ for others. If you are not willing to face death, then you cannot live life to the fullest in Christ. Churches today strive for growth; a larger church is often interpreted as having received greater blessings from God. However, if the people were won for Christ by the offer of success, wealth and an easier life, then they were not won for the Christ of the Bible, but for the Christ of the world system. This Jesus accepts the whole world because He is patient and tolerant of their way of life. Jesus was not accepted or known as someone who was always happy, but as a man of sorrows (Isaiah 53: 3).

The Bible says:

MATTHEW 8:20.

And Jesus saith unto him, The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head.

They will never say you have to give things up; Instead, Jesus will add all the things you want in life. Nowhere in the Bible does it teach us to always feel good or be loved by everyone. The writers of Scripture, the apostles of Christ, were honest about their condition:

1 CORINTHIANS 4: 11-13.

"Even unto this present hour we both hunger, and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwellingplace; And labour, working with our own hands: being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it: Being defamed, we intreat: we are made as the filth of the world, and are the offscouring of all things unto this day."

Yes, they gave a lot to follow the Jesus who saved them from their sins. They have not preached a life of ease and blessing and success that awaits those who receive Christ. In fact, it was the opposite; Trials await the believers. Without the cross, the Church becomes just another religion with wonderful teachings about a man named Jesus. When Jesus said that He was the truth, He meant that He was not just the words He said, but that He came for us because we are sinners. **Again, this speaks of the cross.** When He said that He was the life, He referred to Himself and what He achieved on the cross and gave us hope through the resurrection. He taught that **"no one comes to the Father except through Him,"** but it is in a certain way, through the cross. Jesus told us, **"unless you pick up the cross, you can not follow Me, and you are not worthy of Me either."** Not that we literally carry a cross; Rather, we live a lifestyle of selflessness and self-denial so that God's will can be accomplished in our lives.

Without applying the cross daily and denying ourselves, we revived our old nature and kept it alive as if we did not know Christ. It becomes the spiritual battlefield for our discipleship and growth. A crossless Christian life means that we do not exercise our spirituality from the Word, but from another's word and worse. It can be our own, it can be someone else, but it can certainly not be Christ. It is Christ's words ONLY that are life, but to receive them and grow ourselves, we must deny ourselves. Jesus said, **"My words are life and they are spirit."** If they are to be alive, the self must diminish. The apostles throughout the New Testament wrote down these words; they are not just the words written in red ink.

They all wrote with the same ink, as Paul said;

2 TIMOTHY 3: 16-17.

"All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works."

There are no less inspired passages.

MARK 8: 34-36.

"And when he had called the people unto him with his disciples also, he said unto them, Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's, the same shall save it. For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?"

Look at what Jesus said and consider what is being said today. We lose our lives for Him and the Gospel. And immediately He warns to leave the things of the world. Yet today we hear that if we become a Christian, it means that we deserve all these things, it is our spiritual right to obtain them because we are followers of Jesus. I do not have to mention any names. You can hear this rhetoric from the majority of TV preachers. The list is quite long.

Jesus said, "Unless you take up the cross, you cannot follow Me, and you are not worthy of Me." If someone does not pursue God's call in their life, have they really come to the point of denying themselves?

As Jesus put it, we can gain everything in the world and lose our soul. Or we get our souls by not pursuing what is in the world and pursuing God. It is not both; One cannot serve God and Mammon at the same time. It means we must hate the things Jesus does and love the things Jesus does. Jesus was not unbalanced in His life and teaching. He made it clear what was contrary to God and what was acceptable to God. It is up to us to make a decision.

His death our life, our death His life.

JOHN 12: 23-26.

"And Jesus answered them, saying, The hour is come, that the Son of man should be glorified. 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. He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal. If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be: if any man serve me, him will my Father honour."

Jesus says that He died to produce life. Once again He repeats the concept that we lose our lives for His sake. And to follow Him, we must do so through service, not self-assurance, aggression, or authority.

Jesus asks us to die in ourselves so that we can live for God. The people who dedicate themselves completely to protecting their own lives will miss the life of Christ who is eternal. Our commitment to Christ is to be pure; if we are willing to lose our life, we will gain true eternal life. In our loss of self there is great gain, in our benefit of self there will be great loss. The modern church stands at the crossroads of which path they will travel. Both thieves were crucified with Christ; they died right next to him. Yet one of the thieves embraced the cross, the other rejected it. One had to admit his guilt before the sacrifice of the Lamb to be included in His kingdom. Our old life ends at the cross and the new life begins there. For in his death there is life.

MATTHEW 27: 42-43.

"He saved others; himself he cannot save. If he be the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him. He trusted in God; let him deliver him now, if he will have him: for he said, I am the Son of God."

MARK 15:30.

"Deliver Yourself and come down from the cross!"

Many people today think that we too can save ourselves without the cross. God's way was for us to look at the cross, see the sacrifice, and believe. Man's way is to take Him off the cross and ignore it. To be on the cross, the victim's hands were tied with nails and ropes to hold him there. Many of us want to distance ourselves from our cross and walk with Christ without it. But it is impossible. We must stick to the cross, less than that makes us turn to an easier path. Many people today want to get rid of Christ and the cross. Putting the cross aside will make it less offensive to preach and live. But to do so is to reject His Rule over your life. The cross became the universal emblem of Christianity. Yet those who hate Christ the most are able to wear them as jewellery without conviction, and mock the event that can save them. The cross does not draw them closer because they do not understand what came out of it. Unfortunately, it can be the same in the Church.

2 CORINTHIANS 4: 11-12.

"For we which live are alway delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh. So then death worketh in us, but life in you."

We consider ourselves dead so that Christ's life can manifest to those around us. As we die to our desires and people see our lives, it can bring life to others because they will see Christ, but the condition is the death of the self. Maybe we're trying to make it too easy for people to accept Christ. The fact is: it's hard. As Jesus said, strive to enter the narrow gate. The road is narrow. Even after we are saved, we must walk this narrow path so that we do not drift away from Him and lose our fellowship.

GALATIANS 5: 5-11.

"For we through the Spirit wait for the hope of righteousness by faith. For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love. Ye did run well; who did hinder you that ye should not obey the truth? This persuasion cometh not of him that calleth you. A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump. I have confidence in you through the Lord, that ye will be none otherwise minded: but he that troubleth you shall bear his judgment, whosoever he be. And I, brethren, if I yet preach circumcision, why do I yet suffer persecution? then is the offence of the cross ceased."

And this is where he puts his finger on the critical issue. It was the cross! The word **"transgression"** means a stumbling block. In our presentation of the Gospel, the cross of Jesus should never be seen as anything other than central. The question is, **"why is the cross so offensive?"** The cross of Jesus never brings danger, and never strikes the victim. **He lives alive after the cross - and dies if taken away!** The cross represents death to the old nature and a new life to live. It comes through sacrifice, selflessness, devotion, holiness and separation, and humility - it's all about death itself. (Mark 10:21). No one can tell me that it is not difficult, especially in the times in which we live. We must realize that the times in which we live are not the same as those of the apostles. As we draw nearer to the coming of the Lord, all hell on earth will break loose to overcome each and every one of God. We need endurance through a true faith that will stand and bring us through the valley of death. Not the whipped cream with the desert of the health and wealth mentality. The power of God is in the cross, the cross we carry is a crucified life, we must not be inactive. Spectator Christianity does not live the Christian life. This is not possible, since James says I will show your faith through my works. Walking in death brings life. It preserves us in us and helps us to achieve the effectiveness of sanctification. No one who walks with the cross can walk with confidence in himself.

You have to leave the one to carry the other. A person who is fully committed and dedicated his life to Christ will find the power manifested because he counted (and remains) himself as dead. God's power works according to the gospel and the subject of that message is Jesus Christ. God's power always works in and through His Word of truth. It is true in our salvation, it is true in sanctification, and it will certainly be true in our glorification. We are bought with a price (on the cross) we are not our own.

GALATIANS 6: 14-15.

"But 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. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature."

The cross was inclusive because Christians died, all who would accept Him died with Him. He took away the nature of the first Adam where nothing of the first Adam could go through the cross and rule over us. The resurrection becomes the starting point of our new life. When we understand that Christ died for us, our eyes are open to see that what we have of Adam died with Christ. Just whoever dies can be a candidate for a resurrection. Paul said if we died with Him, we would live with Him.

ROMANS 6: 5-8.

"For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection: Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. For he that is dead is freed from sin. Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him:"

We must allow His word to work in us through our obedience and experience true growth through the Holy Spirit. Then we will have unspeakable joy. The times we live in are probably the most challenging since the first-century church. Many believe the Church has never been as strong as it is today. We have false gospels and a famine of the Word from the pulpit. People run back and forth in search of OTHER solutions to their failed spiritual condition, a condition that is really caused by a lack of attention to God's Word.
