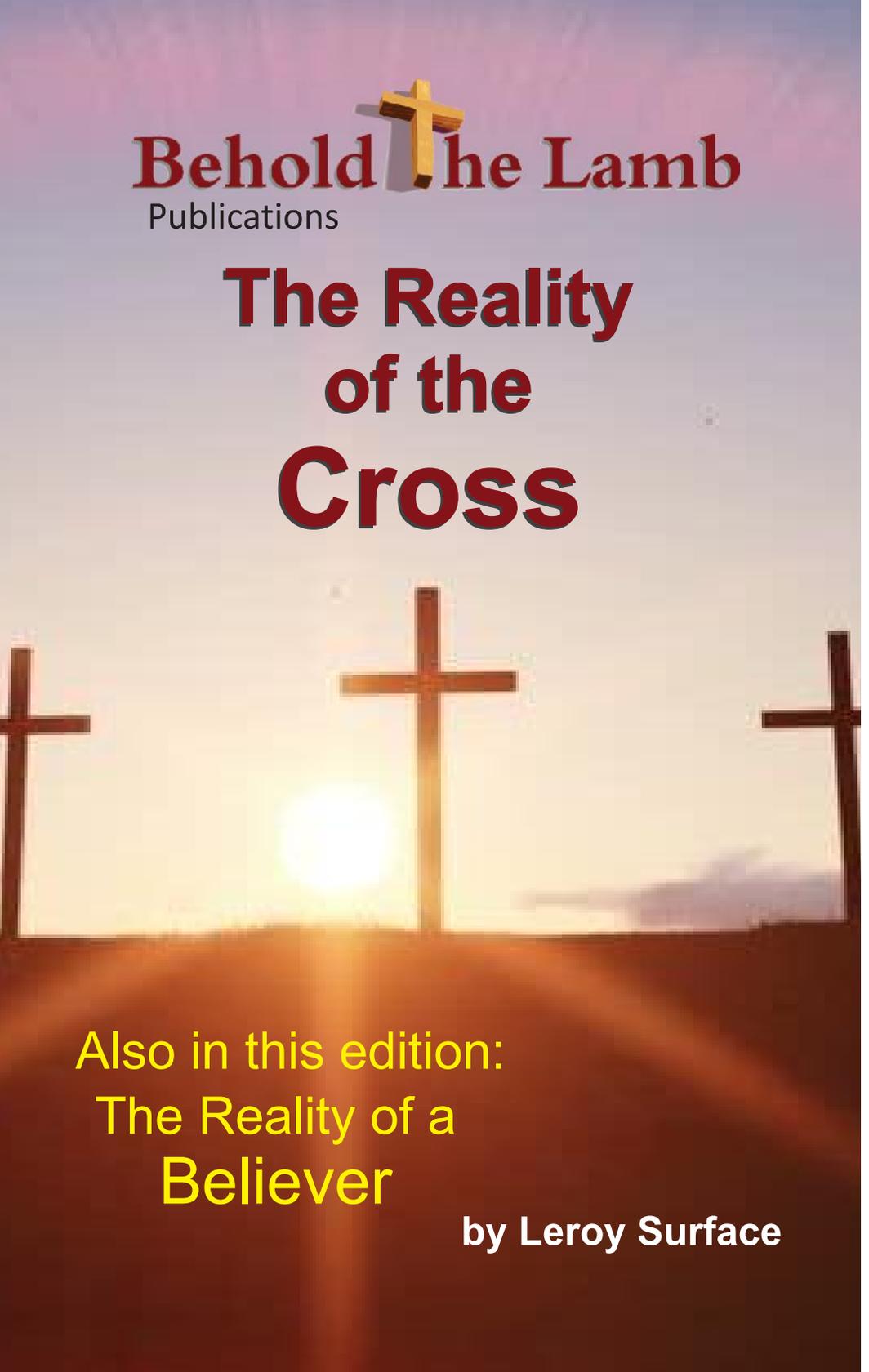




**Behold** **he Lamb**  
Publications

**The Reality  
of the  
Cross**



Also in this edition:  
The Reality of a  
Believer

by Leroy Surface

# The Reality of The Cross

Message by: Leroy Surface

*“From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day. Then Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee. But he turned, and said unto Peter, 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. Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man 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: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.”*

*Matthew 16:21-25*

## Born to Die

The apostle John began his gospel with these words in John 1:1; *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”* In the fourteenth verse he said, *“And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us....”* From the moment the eternal Word of God, which was God, was born into this world as the Son of God, there was only one destination and purpose for his life in the flesh; it was that He should die on a cross. In Hebrews 2:9 we read these words: *“But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels **for the suffering of death**, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man.”* The *“Word”* which was *“with God”* and *“was God”* was made *“a little lower than God”* to shed His precious blood and die on the cross to take away the sin of the world. I want us to get a picture in our mind. Jesus said *“For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me.”* John 6:38. That *“will”* was that He would die the death of the cross. It is confirmed in Hebrews 10:10 with these words; *“**By the which will** we are sanctified **through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ** once for*

all.” In Philippians 2:6-8, Paul wrote of “*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.***” The picture I want you to see is this: when He “*came down from heaven,*” it was as a microscopic, but incorruptible “*seed*” planted in the womb of a young virgin. Even then, His destination was the cross. When He was born as “*Christ the Lord, the Son of the living God,*” wrapped in “*swaddling clothes*” and placed in a manger, his destination was the cross. When He took those first tiny baby steps, they were the first steps of a journey that would lead Him to the cross. If Jesus of Nazareth was to “*do the will of His Father,*” He must die the scandalous death of the cross.

## His Destiny

By the time Jesus was of age to enter His ministry and calling, he must have known something of His destiny. His words to Mary when she urged Him to do His first miracle seem to reveal this fact as He said, “*My hour has not come.*” Again, in John 7:8, when He refused to openly attend the feast in Jerusalem, He said, “*I go not up yet unto this feast; for my time is not yet full come.*” It was less than a week before His death on the cross that Jesus told His disciples, “*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...*” John 12:23-26. The night before He suffered the cross, Jesus began His prayer to His Father with these words, “*Father, the hour is come...*” John 17:1, and several hours later after His sorrowing in prayer at Gethsemane, He told His disciples, “*The hour is come; behold, the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners*” Mark 14:41.

Throughout the three and a half years of earthly ministry, Jesus was ever aware that every step He took brought Him nearer that purpose

for which He came into the world, which was to die on the cross for the sin of the world. On the day of our text, Jesus had revealed to His disciples for the first time that He would suffer and die in Jerusalem when they attended the feast of Passover. The disciples could not comprehend nor would they entertain even the thought of such a thing. Peter, ever the outspoken one of the disciples, said, *“Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee.”* Jesus immediately rebuked him sharply, saying, *“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.”* Jesus made it very clear to Peter that His suffering and death in Jerusalem were the will of His Father that sent Him. It is in the context of His steady and faithful journey to *“the death of the cross”* that I have chosen the following words of Jesus as the text for this message.

## **An Instrument of Death**

*“If any man 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: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.”* Matthew 16:24-25

The cross is an instrument of death. If you had lived under Roman rule in those days, you would immediately understand the implications if you saw a procession following a man who was carrying a cross on his back. You would know that man was carrying his cross to the place of his own death. That was the manner of the Romans in executing the death sentence on criminals. Jesus, knowing the purpose for which His Father sent Him into the world, symbolically carried His cross every day that He lived in this world. When He called His disciples at the first, He simply called them to *“follow me.”* Now, over three years later, He is telling these same disciples, *“If you determine to come after me, deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow me.”* How confusing such talk must have been to the disciples, who were still expecting Jesus to claim the throne in Jerusalem and drive the Romans out of the city. They had expected to receive great earthly glory through following Jesus. How is it that He was now speaking to them of suffering and death? It proved impossible for Jesus to prepare His

disciples with words only for the reality of what was coming to Him. Less than twenty-four hours before Jesus suffered the death of the cross, His disciples listened to His words and said, “...*by this we believe that thou camest forth from God.*” Jesus answered them, “*Do ye now believe? Behold, the hour cometh, yea, is now come, that ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave me alone...*” John 16:30-32. They had yet to determine if they would “*come after Him.*”

## Let Him Deny Himself

*“The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, hath glorified his Son Jesus; whom ye delivered up, and denied him in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let him go. But ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you; And killed the Prince of life, whom God hath raised from the dead; whereof we are witnesses.” Acts 3:13-15*

Jesus spoke of three necessary things for all who will “*come after Him.*” The first of these is to “*deny yourself.*” The definition of the Greek word translated “*deny*” is to “*utterly deny,*” or to “*disown.*” The root word means to “*contradict, disavow, reject, or abnegate.*” This is what the Jews did to Jesus when they called for Barabbas, a murderer, to be released, and demanded that Jesus should be crucified Matthew 27:20-22. When the Holy Ghost convicts the heart of a man or woman of sin, He is serving as a “*prosecutor*” in a court of law. The difference is, the one who is being prosecuted is also the jury in the case. A “*conviction*” is obtained in a court of this world when the jury returns a guilty verdict. When the Holy Ghost is seeking a conviction against a person, the conviction is obtained when the one prosecuted cries “*Guilty! Guilty! I am a sinner; I am worthy of death.*” With this verdict, the defendant, who is also the jury, casts himself on the mercy of the judge. This is what Jesus meant when He told those who determined to come after Him to “*deny themselves.*”

Many religious teachers say that if we “*deny ourselves*” of certain things of this world, God will be pleased and receive us on that basis. This is the prescription for a lifetime of struggle. Sin

continues its reign in their hearts, but they must, through their own determination and willpower, overcome it. They enter into an endless cycle of struggle and failure, ever condemned in their hearts because of the content of their hearts. This is not what Jesus told us. He said, *“Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest”* Matthew 11:28. Jesus clearly promised *“rest,”* and not *“struggle,”* to all who would come to Him. He also promised freedom from the power and presence of sin John 8:31-36 to all those who would *“continue”* with Him. The *“cross of Christ”* is the place where that *“freedom”* begins.

## **Crucifixion**

Crucifixion was a long and torturous death for most. Some would linger for days before their body would be so weakened from hunger and dehydration that it would collapse under its own weight and die of suffocation as it hung suspended by ropes under the armpits. The crosses of the condemned were always planted outside the wall of the city along the Roman highway, where the crucified criminals would be displayed for a spectacle to all who passed by. Travelers would wag their heads in mockery; many would pause to taunt and torment the condemned with their words. The ordeal for the condemned would begin at the court of law where they were tried and found guilty. They would then be delivered up to soldiers who were appointed to carry out the crucifixion. As the procession to the place of crucifixion began, the captain of the soldiers would command the condemned, *“Take up your cross, and follow me.”* They were required to carry their own cross from the place of their condemnation to the place of their crucifixion. Along the way, they would be followed, not only by a few grieving loved ones, but also by a mob of jeering spectators. Little children would throw stones; others would run by and hit them, laughing and mocking along the way. A close examination of both Isaiah 53:8 and Acts 8:33 will show this to be so in the case of Jesus. It was this procession that was called *“His humiliation,”* and what a humiliating ordeal it was. John records this very simply with these words: *“And they took Jesus, and led him away. And he bearing his cross went forth into a place called the place of a skull, which is called in the Hebrew Golgotha: Where they crucified him, and two*

*other with him, on either side one, and Jesus in the midst”* John 19:16-18.

Jesus had not literally taken up His cross at the time He told His disciples to take up their cross, yet in a very real sense He had carried it for a lifetime, because Calvary was His destination from the beginning. It was at Calvary (Golgotha, *“the place of the skull”*) that Jesus laid His cross down, and there He was crucified. The crucifixion of the Son of God was different than most. Others were only tied with ropes to the cross. Theirs was not a *“bloody”* death, but a death of dehydration and suffocation. Jesus was *“nailed”* to the cross. Long spikes, driven through His feet supported his body weight, while the spikes in His hands held Him upright. Blood poured from the place in His hands and feet where the spikes were driven. Blood poured from His head and brow from the sharp thorns of the crown that was beaten into His flesh. The beating Jesus took upon His back was described in prophecy in this way: *“The plowers plowed upon my back: they made long their furrows”* Psalms 129:3. Blood poured from the long *“furrows”* the whip had *“plowed”* into His back. Isaiah said, *“His visage (face) was so marred more than any man, and his form (body) more than the sons of men”* Isaiah 52:14. The mocking multitude believed Jesus was a blasphemer and a deceiver. They believed it was God who had so punished Him. They mocked, *“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”* Matthew 27:42. They taunted, *“He trusted in God; let him deliver him now, if he will have him: for he said, I am the Son of God”* Matthew 27:43. Isaiah, writing seven hundred years before, saw much more clearly the events of that day; *“He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all”* Isaiah 53:3-6.

## Following Jesus

*“For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, **leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps**: Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously: Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed. For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls.”* 1 Peter 2:21-25

The example Jesus left to us was His sufferings and death on the cross for us. Of course he “*did no sin*,” but that is not an option for a sinner. The continuous struggle that religion offers begins when sinners are taught to stop sinning, which is as absurd as telling a skunk to stop stinking. Every created thing does that which is its nature to do. As long as a person is a sinner, they will continue in sin, whether in action or in thought. The “*steps*” of Jesus that we are told to follow are the same that Jesus told His disciples in our text; “*Take up your cross, and follow me.*” The steps Jesus took brought Him to the place of His death, which was called “*Golgotha, the place of the skull.*” Those are the steps we are to follow. Notice the words in I Peter 2:24, “*Who his own self **bare our sins** in his own body on the tree, **that we, being dead to sins** ....*” Jesus “*died for us*” and we are “*dead to sin.*” That is because “*Golgotha,*” the place we call “*Calvary,*” is also the place where “*we die.*” The exhortation Jesus gave to His disciples in our text, “*If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me,*” was not given after His death at Calvary, but before. It was not given to “*new creations in Christ Jesus*” that have been “*born again of the Spirit of God:*” instead, it was given to unregenerate men who had determined before to “*forsake all*” and follow Jesus, but would soon “*forsake Him*” in the time of His suffering. They were still “*without strength*” Romans 5:6, and would be until Jesus died for them and rose again the third day. In Romans 5:8, Paul said, “*...while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.*” Notice those words, “*While we were yet sinners.*” Notice that Paul was speaking

in the past tense to those who were no longer sinners. What happened between the “*past*,” when they were sinners, and the “*present*” when they are not sinners? **“Christ died for us.”** Oh, pray for understanding of what is meant when we say, “*Christ died for us.*”

*“For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: And that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again.” II Corinthians 5:14-15*

The Greek text literally says, “...*if one died for all, then all died.*” It gives us understanding of the saying, “*Christ died for us,*” because “*if Christ died for us, we died with Christ.*” Paul does not leave us wondering about the “*hypothetical statement (if One died for all);*” he continues, “*And He died for all, that they which live....*” Praise the Lord! Everyone that can believe this truth has died with Christ. Paul said in Romans 6:8, “*Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him.*” It is only those who are “*quickened together with Christ* Ephesians 2:5” who also “*live,*” and their life is “*unto Him which died for them, and rose again.*”

## **By Means of Death**

*“Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned:” Romans 5:12*

*“And for this cause he is the mediator of the new testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance. For where a testament is, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. For a testament is of force after men are dead: otherwise it is of no strength at all while the testator liveth.” Hebrews 9:15-17*

Death entered into the world by sin. In the incredible wisdom of God He chose death as the means to take sin away. It would require the death of the Son of God. It would also require that it be death by

crucifixion. The apostle Paul spoke of Jesus when he said, “*He humbled himself, and **became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.***” Philippians 2:8. The “*death of the cross*” is the “*means*” God chose to deliver His people from sin. Everything that was accomplished at the cross was “*through death.*” It is through His death that we are reconciled to God: “*...we were reconciled to God **by the death of his Son...***” Romans 5:10. “*And you... hath he reconciled in the body of his flesh **through death...***” Colossians 1:21-22. It is through the death of Jesus Christ that Satan is defeated: “*...that **through death** he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil...*” Hebrews 2:14.

*“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.**”* Romans 6:6-7

The “*power*” of the gospel to save is vested in the fact that Jesus not only “*died for us,*” but that we also “*died with Him.*” The simple truth is that when Jesus died for us, our “*old man*” died with Him. The purpose of the “*death*” of our “*old man*” is to “*destroy* (render entirely idle) *the body of sin,*” in order that we would no longer be slaves to “*serve sin.*” Paul concludes the thought of our death “*with Christ,*” saying, “*For he that is dead is freed from sin.*” Paul speaks of our “*death to sin*” repeatedly in his writings as follows:

*“God forbid. How shall we, that are **dead to sin,** live any longer therein?”* Romans 6:2

*“Now if we be **dead with Christ,** we believe that we shall also live with him.”* Romans 6:8

*“Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be **dead indeed unto sin,** but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.”* Romans 6:11

*“Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become **dead to the law** by the body of Christ;”* Romans 7:4

*“But now we are delivered from the law, that **being dead wherein we were held;** that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter.”* Romans 7:6

*“For I through the law am **dead to the law**, that I might live unto God. I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me:” Galatians 2:19-20*

*“Wherefore **if ye be dead with Christ** from the rudiments of the world...” Colossians 2:20*

*“For **ye are dead**, and your life is hid with Christ in God.” Colossians 3:3*

*“It is a faithful saying: For if we be **dead with him**, we shall also live with him:” II Timothy 2:11*

The apostle Peter also confirms the message of deliverance from sin through our death with Christ. He says, *“Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, **being dead to sins**, should live unto righteousness.” I Peter 2:24.*

With such a vast body of evidence in the writings of the apostles, who can continue to deny the truth of our *“crucifixion with Christ?”* Notice in these verses there are three different things we are *“dead”* to: **first**, we are *“dead to sin;”* **second**, we are *“dead to the law;”* and **third** we are *“dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world.”* There are several things we should understand in these sayings. First, it is by one death that we are dead to all three, and that is *“death by crucifixion with Christ.”* In each case, our *“death with Christ”* brings *“glorious liberty”* and *“freedom.”* Second, no one is *“free from sin”* who is not also *“dead to sin,”* and no one is *“free from the law”* who is not also *“free from sin,”* and, vice versa. Millions of *“Christians”* in our generation trust in the keeping of hundreds of *“principles of life”* to help them live for God, but these are nothing more than the *“rudiments of the world”* which Paul warned the child of God against, saying, *“Wherefore if ye be **dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world**, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances, (Touch not; taste not; handle not; Which all are to perish with the using;) after the commandments and doctrines of men?”* Colossians 2:20-22. The truth of *“death with Christ”* easily reveals what the apostle is saying in this text. He is not saying to go ahead and *“touch, taste, and handle”* those things that perish with the using. That is the way of the world, to live for the temporary rather than the eternal. The

question begins with *“If ye be dead with Christ.”* Those who have died with Christ are dead to sin, dead to the world, dead to the law, dead to the commandments and doctrines of men, and dead to all things that are contrary to godliness and righteousness. They do not need the *“rudiments of the world”* to keep them from the world. Paul said it this way: *“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 anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature. And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God.”* Galatians 6:14-16.

## Take up Your Cross

Many believe they have *“taken up their cross”* the day they were *“born again.”* To them, the cross of Christ is a lifetime of struggle against sin. They believe they are *“purified”* through the things they suffer in this present life. This belief is not much different from the ancient Catholic system of *“penance”* and *“temporal punishments.”* To these it is *“hard”* to live a Christian life, with the *“hardest thing”* being to *“love your enemies.”* Some believe their *“cross”* is sickness, or some affliction, which they believe has made them a *“better person.”* It seems the *“cross”* of these *“believers”* is always connected with present sufferings, whether self-inflicted, inflicted by their adversary, or even inflicted by God. Millions of people believe they are *“born again,”* and spend the rest of their lives trying to die. They are trying by every means to *“learn how”* to live for God, but continually fail in their efforts. The simple fact is, they have never *“taken up their cross.”*

When Jesus told His disciples to *“take up your cross, and follow me,”* His face was already set to go to Golgotha (Calvary). He had told them only three verses (moments) before *“...how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day”* Matthew 16:21. He knew that His death would be by crucifixion just as he told His disciples: *“Ye know that after two days is the feast of the passover, and the Son of man is betrayed **to be crucified.**”* Matthew 26:2. Over three years before, Jesus had called these same men,

simply saying, “*Follow me.*” They forsook everything to follow Him wherever He went. On this day He is telling them, “*Take up your cross, and follow me.*” This call is different. It is a call to not only forsake every “*thing,*” but their own lives also. It was more than a call to “*follow me to Jerusalem;*” it was a call to “*follow me to Calvary;*” yet even more, “*follow me to death, even the death of the cross.*” He continued His discourse saying, “*For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.*”

We are not “*born again*” with a cross to bear; instead, we are “*born*” with a cross. It is the death sentence that every person born into this world carries throughout their life because of sin. That “*death sentence*” will be carried out. If you carry your cross to the grave, your “*death*” will be “*eternal damnation, and separation from God.*” If, as Jesus commanded His disciples, you “*carry your cross*” to Calvary, there to be “*crucified with Christ,*” your “*death*” will be to “*sin, Satan, and the world.*” The “*cross*” is the “*end of sin*” Daniel 9:24 to the believer, for it is at the cross of Christ that we “*died to sin.*” It must be understood that the cross is not the “*source*” of anything; but it is the “*end*” of everything. Paul said, “*Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: **old things are passed away;** behold, all things are become new. And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ...*” II Corinthians 5:17-18. “*Old things*” speaks of “*the original,*” or, “*the old creation.*” “***The old has passed away....***” This is the language of death. What happened to the “*old man?*” He “*passed away,*” and we “*buried him.*” This is the means of salvation for sinners. We are “*born again*” through “*death, burial, and resurrection*” with (in union with) Christ.

## **Freedom From or Power Over ...SIN?**

*“For he that is dead is freed from sin.” Romans 6:7*

*“Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness.” Romans 6:18*

*“But now being made **free from sin**, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life.”* *Romans 6:22*

Is your experience with the Lord based upon “**freedom from sin**,” or “**power over sin**?” The way you answer this question will tell much about what you believe, as well as the nature of your walk with God. If you are one who believes the only way you can cease from sinning as a child of God is to obtain “*power over sin*,” your walk with God is through constant vigilance, constant struggle, and with often failure. Actually, there is not a single verse of scripture in the bible that speaks of power over sin. If, on the other hand, your experience is based upon “*freedom from sin*” as the three verses above relate, you are one who has entered into the “*rest*” Jesus promised to all who would “*come unto Him*.” You have not found the Christian life to be one of constant struggle with sin. You have found the answer the man in Romans 7:24 cried for: “*Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?*”

*“To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus. Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay: but by the law of faith. Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.”*

*Romans 3:26-28*

Where is boasting? Paul said it is “*excluded*” by the “*law of faith*.” Yet, there are many who boast. Again, I ask, “*Where is boasting?*” Is it the one who rejoices in Christ Jesus who has “*made them free*” through His death on the cross? Or is it the one who openly confesses that they are still a sinner, while also claiming God has given them “*power over sin*?” The truth is, there has not been a man or woman since the transgression of Adam that has had “*power over sin*,” but there have been many who have discovered “*freedom from sin*” through the wonderful redemption that is in Christ Jesus. There can be no boasting in those who truly experience “*freedom*” from sin, because it is not through their works, their struggles, their will power, nor through anything that is of their own self that they rest in freedom from sin. It can only be through faith

in “*Jesus Christ and Him crucified*” 1 Corinthians 2:2; He “*died for us,*” in order that we would “*die with Him.*”

Let me illustrate. A vicious man-eating lion has escaped and found its way into your house. You arrive home to find this killer waiting for you. If you are a lion-tamer, you may not fear the lion, because you “*have power over*” it. You can control the lion; you can make it sit; roll over, and even purr like a kitten. You have reason to boast, because you are able to control the beast that has devoured others. Yet, there is one thing you can never do. Even though you have power over the lion, you can never rest. You cannot lie down to sleep in peace at night, for fear the vicious beast will devour you. I, on the other hand, am not a lion tamer. I fear the lion like I fear death itself. I cannot go into my house because I know the lion is there. I have no rest day or night. I have lost all the comforts of home to the man-eating lion. The lion tamer encourages me that I also can learn how to tame the lion, but every attempt to do so ends in near disaster. Then one day a lion-hunter comes to my house. He boldly enters my house and slays the lion. Now, the lion is dead, and I have no fear to enter. I am well able to throw the carcass of the dead lion out of the house and bury it in the ground. I am at rest and peace because the lion is dead. I have nothing to boast about of myself, but oh how I rejoice that the lion-hunter came to my house. Now I rest and rejoice in the glorious liberty the lion-hunter has given me. The lion-tamer continues to boast in his ability to control the vicious beast in his house, and scoffs at the very idea that I live in a house where there is no lion because it has been slain and its stinking carcass buried in the ground. “*Nobody,*” he sneers, “*is free from the lion.*”

This has been an analogy. The “*house*” is my human nature. The “*lion*” is sin that entered my human nature through Adam’s disobedience. The “*lion-tamer*” is the doctrines and traditions of men, who come with many different techniques, varying from the “*Law of Moses,*” to “*philosophy,*” to the thousands of so-called “*principles of life*” which so many Christians trust in to control sin in their human nature. I am just an ordinary person; a fallen man, who can never free himself from sin, nor find any control over it. The “*lion-hunter*” is the Son of God, who came to “*take away*

*the sin of the world*” John 1:29. Now, relate each of these “characters” to what Paul said in Romans 8:3; “*For what the law (the lion-tamer) could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh (human nature), God sending his own Son (the lion-hunter) in the likeness of sinful flesh (human nature), and for sin (the man-eating lion), condemned (tried, condemned, and punished with death), sin (the man-eating lion) in the flesh (our human nature).*”

## **A Word to the “Lion-tamers!”**

Do not be angry if you hear some soul rejoicing, “*Jesus has made me free!*” Even if you cannot believe it, can you not rejoice, saying, “*Wouldn’t it be wonderful if it were true?*” It is true! Jesus came into this world to “*take away sin.*” In the eighth chapter of John, He told the Jews who said they believed, “*Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.*” They protested, “*We are Abraham’s seed; we’ve never been in bondage to any man.*” Jesus answered them, “*He that commits sin is the slave of sin... if the Son therefore shall make you free, you shall be free indeed (from sin).*” If you are a true “*lion-tamer,*” you really have something to boast in. You have a strong determination, a good “*will-power,*” and a true commitment to the task of “*controlling the lion.*” Yet, you do not believe the scriptures that so clearly teach “*freedom from sin*” because of your own experience. There was a time in my own ministry that it seemed my favorite “*text,*” which I quoted often, was “*I know by experience....*” My “*experience*” became the judge of what truth was. I could not comprehend that anyone experienced anything more or better than I experienced, because I knew that I was very “*sincere*” in all those things I believed and did. I believed, as do so many others, that what Jesus did for me was only “*positional,*” and it was up to me to raise my “*condition*” to the level of my *position.*” Sadly, every effort to do so only took me deeper into the struggle against sin. Seeking God one day, I heard the Spirit say, “*You know nothing by experience; you can only ‘know’ by my word.*” I had spent years trying to “*crucify*” my flesh so I could say with Paul, “*I am crucified with Christ...*” Galatians 2:20. The result of those struggles was a negative attitude about Paul, thinking he must have been incredible conceited. I tried to explain away all the sayings of the apostle John; sayings like, “*Whosoever*

*abideth in Him sinneth not; whosoever sinneth hath not seen Him neither known Him...*” I John 3:6, “*He that committeth sin is of the devil...*” I John 3:8, and finally, “*We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not.*” I John 5:18. I could not possibly believe these scriptures at face value because of “*my experience*” which judged the apostle and found that he was mistaken. I knew that God had saved me and baptized me with the Holy Ghost years before, yet my experience was so far beneath what I read from the apostles. Did that prove that I was lost, that I had never been saved? No! But it did prove that I did not know the truth that Jesus said would make me free. Also, I would never know the truth as long as I continued to “*twist*” the scriptures to fit my experience. Today, I know, along with Paul before me, my “*old man is crucified with Christ*” Romans 6:6-7. I know that I am “*dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ my Lord*” Romans 6:11. I “*know*” because I, like Abraham before me, have “*believed God.*” I have “*believed the record that God gave of His Son*” I John 5:10. It is not through any strength of my own that I am free, but rather through “*weakness.*” It does not take human strength to be “*dead to sin.*” II Corinthians 13:4 says this, “*For though he was **crucified through weakness**, yet he liveth by the power of God. For we also are weak in him, but we shall live with him by the power of God toward you.*” These things I know. They are my present experience because I know the truth, and I “*know the truth*” because I “*believe God.*” This is the “*reality*” I enjoy with nothing to boast in but Jesus Christ.

*“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. And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God. From henceforth let no man trouble me: for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus. Brethren, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen.” Galatians 6:14-18*

# The Reality of a Believer

By Leroy Surface

The following is my answer to an inmate who wrote with questions about our message of “freedom from sin.” This man was a very sincere believer who sometimes found himself in a struggle with sinful thoughts or actions. He did not write as a critic, but as one who was sincerely trying to believe. I have published my response because I believe it may help others to avoid some of the pitfalls that challenge our faith. I have obviously not used the brother’s real name.

Dear John Doe;

I cannot often answer mail due to the fact that the limited time I have is consumed with writing, ministry, and other necessary works. Your letter, however, indicated to me a man that is hungry for reality and the knowledge of the truth, and I felt that an answer to your questions is in order. For your friend who wants to know how long it has been since I have sinned, I have also enclosed my booklet, *“Is a Christian also a Sinner,”* which I first published over a dozen years ago. I wrote it in response to a letter from a lady wanting to know basically the same thing.

John, the *“freedom from sin”* that I preach is a work of grace, and not of works. Jesus promised to give *“rest”* to those who come to Him. The apostle Paul says, *“For we which have believed do enter into rest”* Hebrews 4:3 and *“He that is entered into His rest, he also hath ceased from his own works”* Hebrews 4:10. When the apostle says in verse eleven, *“Let us labor therefore to enter into that rest,”* he is not speaking of our works. The word *“labour”* was translated from the Greek word *“spoudazo,”* which means *“to use speed.”* *“Don’t hesitate; be quick to believe what God has said in the gospel of Christ and cease from your own works.”*

It is a common error to believe that we are *“saved by grace,”* but *“kept”* through our own works or efforts. Jude closes his short epistle saying, *“Now unto him that is able to **keep you from falling,***

*and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen”* Jude 1:24-25. The words “*from falling*” were translated from the Greek word “*aptaistos*,” which means “*not stumbling*, that is, (figuratively) *without sin*.” John, it is a mistake for anyone to think they can “*keep themselves*” from sinning through their will power. Only Christ can keep us, which He does absolutely as long as we abide in Him.

John, you wrote, “*I do have victory over sin more than ever before because the truth is setting me free from faith to faith*.” We must understand that our wonderful salvation is not based upon “*victory over sin*,” but “*freedom from sin*.” “*Victory over*” is an “*active*” term, which requires our effort. “*Freedom from*” is a passive term, which requires our rest. I realize this is hard to comprehend, but I illustrate as follows;

A man-eating lion is loose in my house. If I am to live in that house, one of two things must happen; **1.** I must have power over the lion, which means I must be a trained lion tamer. If I have that power over the lion, I can keep him at bay. I can make him lie down, roll over, sit up and beg, but there is one thing I cannot do. I cannot rest in sleep, because if I am not “*ever vigilant*,” the man-eating lion will kill me. **2.** I am not a lion tamer. If I must live in the house with the lion, I will soon be devoured, but I know a “*lion killer*,” so I bring Him into my house and he kills the lion and takes his carcass out of my house. Now, I can rest without fear of the lion, because the lion is dead. Christ did not come into the world to tame the lion (sin), but to kill the lion. In fact, He came into the world to destroy Satan Hebrews 2:14 and nail sin to His cross I Peter 2:24. He did this for “*whosoever*” will believe and trust in Him who did it through His death on the cross.

John, you also wrote, “*...reality shows me that we don't “abide” in Christ 100% of the time, and so we make the foolish choice to sin*.” We must have a correct view of what “*reality*” is. The apostle Paul says, “*...we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal*” II Corinthians 4:18. We look

at the things around us, and think they are the “*reality*” because we can see them with our eyes, touch them with our hands, smell them, hear them, etc. These are not the reality, however, because they will all pass away. The “*reality*” is that which is eternal. The “*new heavens and earth*” will be the reality of which the present heavens and earth is only the image. The “*new man in Christ Jesus*” is the reality, and the gospel of Christ is the reality; if our experience does not match the word of God, the “*word of God*” is still the “*reality*,” and our experience is the lie.

When God first began teaching me the “*truth as it is in Jesus*” Ephesians 4:21, I argued with Him. Concerning I John 3:9, “*Whosoever is born of God doeth not commit sin...*,” I said, “*I know by experience that those who are born of God do sin.*” The Spirit of God rebuked me sharply; “*You do not know anything by experience; you only know by my word.*” Let God be true, and every man a liar. As long as we judge what reality is by our experience, we must continue in sin, because we will never be free. I made a choice almost twenty-five years ago to “*believe God*” even when I did not understand. It was when I believed without understanding, and without “*experience*” to prop me up, that God gave me understanding, and with that understanding came glorious freedom from sin.

John, again, you wrote, “*...so we make the foolish choice to sin.*” When Christ has taken our sin away, which condition is received by grace through faith, and not by works Ephesians 2:8, we do not have the “*choice*” to sin, because our hearts have been “*purified by faith*” Acts 15:8-9. Jesus told us that everything that defiles a man “*comes out of the heart.*” “*For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: All these evil things come from within, and defile the man*” Mark 7:21-23. All these evil things are in the heart of man until such time that Christ, who “*came into the world to make an end of sins*” Daniel 9:24-25, takes sin out of the heart of those who believe and trust in Him to do it. Those “*evil things*” Jesus spoke of in this text are not in the heart of those who “*know the truth*” John 8:32 ” and “*trust in Him*” Ephesians 1:12-13.

I come to the part of your letter that asks how long since I have sinned. On pages ten and eleven of the booklet *“Is a Christian also a sinner,”* which I have sent to you, I go into some detail concerning what the apostle John called *“sin unto death”* and *“sin not unto death.”* When sin is taken out of the heart of man, it is impossible for that person to *“sin a sin that is unto death”* unless they have been moved away from Christ. John told us to pray for those among the believers that *“sin a sin **not unto death**”* <sup>I John 5:16</sup>. He continued to say *“There is a sin **unto death**; I do not say that you should pray for it”* (verse sixteen), and in the seventeenth verse, *“There is a sin **not unto death.**”*

The sins that are *“unto death”* are clearly listed; *“Be not deceived: neither **fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God**”* <sup>I Corinthians 6:9-10</sup>. These are the sins that it is impossible for the children of God to commit, because these things are not in the heart of those who are *“born of God.”* Sadly, I did commit some of these sins after I was *“born again”* and even *“filled with the Holy Ghost,”* but I was first *“moved away from Christ”* before any of these things were possible. I was backslidden and lost during that horrible time which came into my life almost forty years ago. If I had died during that time, I would have been eternally damned. It was after I was forgiven and even restored to ministry that I began a desperate search to find the answer for the sin problem that is in the heart of man. My mind was sometimes tormented by the horrible sins I had committed and even though I was not sinning, my mind was still troubled with sinful thoughts. It was in the spring of 1991 that the understanding of Hebrews 9:13-14 shone into my heart as a great light. *“For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: **How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?**”* In a moment of time the Holy Ghost fell upon me and the filth that troubled me at nights turned off like you would turn off a faucet. I can honestly say that since that day, I have been free.

Have I sinned since that day? Not a single sin *“that is unto death.”* Those are the sins that require sin in the heart to commit, and those whose heart is pure cannot commit them. *“Sins not unto death”* are a different story. These do not consist of the *“evil fruit on a corrupt tree,”* but of *“lack of fruit on a good tree.”* The apostle Paul says, *“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law”* Galatians 5:22-23. A lack of any of these in a child of God’s life is what John calls a *“sin not unto death.”* Certainly, there have been many times that I have not shown enough love, joy, peace, etc. Oftentimes not gentle enough or patience enough, and sometimes not meek enough. These are the things that John told us to pray for one another concerning. If a person *“dies in sin”* they will be lost eternally because of those *“sins unto death”* that are still in their heart. Concerning the *“works of the flesh,”* Paul says, *“Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God”* Galatians 5:19-21. How many times must the apostles tell us these things before we believe them, and how many times must they tell us that Christ died to take these things away before we will believe the truth and trust in Christ?

Many people have been deceived to believe that a man or woman could die in the act of adultery, and Christ would receive them *“if their faith is grounded in the cross of Christ.”* That is about the most ridiculous thing I have ever heard. The cross of Christ is the end of sin for those who trust in Christ *“who loved us, and gave Himself for us”* Galatians 2:20.

John, you said that your friend is a skeptic. Remember *“doubting Thomas?”* When he was told about the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, he said, *“Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe”* John 20:25. Thomas did not believe, but he was willing to believe. Jesus did not thrust him away,

but appeared again on the eighth day especially for Thomas' sake. Seeing Jesus, Thomas fell before Him crying, "*My Lord and my God.*" If a person's skepticism is an honest doubt in a person that is willing to believe, Christ will reveal Himself to them. If their skepticism, however, is because they "*love unrighteousness,*" the apostle said they will "*believe a lie*" and "*be damned*" II Thessalonians 2:11-12, which millions are doing in this generation.

It is hard for people to believe the truth when they first hear it because it is foolishness to them. They know they are not "*strong enough*" to live free from sin, so their first inclination is to believe that it is only the "*self-righteous*" who would believe such a thing. It is a wrong understanding of "*grace*" that actually blinds the people. They think we are "*covered by grace,*" or that we "*go to heaven by grace.*" Neither of these is true. The truth is that we are "*made free from sin*" by grace. It is not by works. In my early experience, several years before I backslid into sin, I went to the extremes trying to "*sanctify myself,*" and "*crucify my flesh.*" I fasted more days than I ate for three years straight. During the same time, I gave over 50% of my income to the church, and tried to pray several hours a day. Many of those around me thought I was the most consecrated young man they knew, but they didn't know the struggle that was in my heart. This intense disciplined lifestyle actually helped in my backsliding, because a person can maintain such a lifestyle only for a period of time. Before I was "*made free from sin,*" which is the promise of the gospel of Christ, and what He came into the world to do, I had to cease from my own works Hebrews 4:10. I had to "*believe God,*" which is to "*believe the record that God gave of His Son*" I John 5:10. God gave His record through the prophets of the Old Testament and the apostles of the New Testament. It is called "*the testimony of Jesus.*" John, the "*glorious liberty*" you seek is the gift of God to fallen man. It must be received as a gift, which means it is "*by grace*" and "*not by works.*" Believe and trust in Christ, who has already done the work. Spend time in His presence every day until you live "*in His presence.*" Very soon, you will say with the apostle Paul, "*I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me...*" Galatians 2:20.

I must close this letter. John, I appreciate your sincerity towards the word of God. I hope we can meet some day and get to know each other. I know that many others have the same questions you have asked, so I may also publish this letter in a future “*Behold the Lamb,*” but I will not use your name. Please know that this letter is written out of the love of Christ which I have for you.

May God richly bless you,

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