

The Messiah and The Cross - Part 1: Common Misunderstandings

By [Dave Hunt](#)

The coming of the Messiah has been the great hope of the Jewish people from the very beginning. Messiah means "anointed." The Greek equivalent is Christos. In the Old Testament, the priests (Lv 4:3, 8:12; Ps 105:15) and kings (1 Sm 15:1, 24:7-11; 1 Kgs 1:34; Dn 9:24-26) are referred to as the "anointed." In 1 Kings 19:16, we have the anointing to the office of prophet. The Messiah of Israel was to embody all three offices: prophet, priest, and king - and thus would uniquely be "the anointed one." Though "Christ" is simply the Greek form of "Messiah," Jews seem to take a special offense at that word, perhaps because they have endured so much hatred and persecution from many who call themselves "Christians."

Neither Jesus nor His disciples ever used the term, which was unheard of in their day. It may surprise the Jews to learn that the followers of Jesus were "called 'Christians' first in Antioch" (Acts 11:26). It was a derogatory term that marked them out for scorn and persecution.

More Christians than Jews have been slain by Catholics. That statement would surprise Jews. Why were they killed, and why by Catholics? It was because true Christians, out of love for the Messiah, have always refused to give allegiance to popes and have rejected the false doctrines of that false church. For that refusal they were slain by the thousands for hundreds of years, even before the Reformation. Both Jews and Christians were victims of the Inquisitions, a horror of which the Roman Catholic Church has never repented.

Prior to his recent death, Ted Kennedy, a devout Roman Catholic, wrote a letter to the present pope requesting prayer and addressing him as "Most Holy Father." True Christians find that title an abomination.

Jesus taught His disciples to pray, "Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name...." He also said, "Call no man on earth your father [excepting, of course, one's natural father]: for one is your father, which is in heaven." The popes have usurped that position, and Roman Catholics, in ignorance of Christ's command, willingly give it to them and obsequiously bow in their presence. History records that many of the popes were among the most evil scoundrels the world has ever seen, yet they are all honored as successors of Peter. Tragically, Mother Teresa, following the example of the popes, looked to the Church and especially to Mary instead of to Christ for answers to prayer and for salvation. The rosary never left her hand, though she was haunted to her dying day by the fear that she would not get to heaven.

Jesus is almost always portrayed as a babe in Mary's arms and even appears as a babe in acclaimed apparitions, which are then honored in shrines in many countries. There are nearly a thousand such shrines in France alone. One would have to search long and hard throughout the world to discover more than a handful of Catholic shrines honoring Jesus.

The cross-waving soldiers of the First Crusade, motivated by Pope Urban II's promise of instant entrance into heaven without suffering purgatory for those who died, slaughtered Jews all along their path to Jerusalem. In 1096, not one of the 1,600 Jews living in Worms, Germany, survived when the Crusaders passed through that city. About half were hunted down in their homes and on the streets. Those who fled to the bishop's palace were given temporary shelter, provided they converted by baptism. Locked in a large conference room to contemplate their decision, all 800 killed themselves rather than convert. It was Masada repeated over and over all along the Crusaders' path. In the process of "liberating" Jerusalem, the Jews were chased into the synagogue, which was set ablaze, incinerating all those within its walls.

Sadly, there are Christians who deny that the Messiah came to be the Savior of all. They seem to contradict what John the Baptist declared:

"Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). This is also a contradiction of the message given by the angels to the shepherds in announcing the birth of the Messiah:

"Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people" (Lk 2:10).

These good tidings could hardly be to all people if they are, as some would tell us, effective only for the elect (specially chosen for heaven), leaving the "unchosen" to go to hell.

Jesus preached His good news from the Old Testament, often using events in the history of Israel as illustrations. He introduced the best-loved verse in the New Testament, John 3:16 - "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" - with an illustration from Numbers 21:8-9. There had been an insurrection among the children of Israel against Moses and Aaron. In judgment, God sent "fiery serpents" among them. The remedy was for Moses to quickly form a likeness of the poisonous serpents and put it on a pole where all could see it. Everyone who had been bitten was marked for death, while everyone who looked upon the brazen serpent on the pole was healed.

The serpent, of course, is a picture both of sin and Satan. Every human being has been bitten by both:

"for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Rom 3:23); and "the wages of sin is death" (Rom 6:23).

This illustration at first seems difficult to understand. Was Jesus, lifted up on the Cross, both a picture of sin and Satan?

"He hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him" (2 Cor 5:21).

We know that Jesus was entirely sinless. He knew no sin. He did no sin. In Him there was no sin. Then what does it mean: "made to be sin for us"? It could only mean that He was punished as though He were sin itself. How else could John the Baptist have said that this Lamb would "[bear] away the sin of the world"? It was through the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus that Satan, the serpent, would be destroyed. We read of his final demise in Revelation 12:7-11:

"And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels.... And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.... And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death."

The serpent on the pole was certainly not indicating that Satan would be the co-redeemer of the world, any more than the serpent on the pole in the wilderness indicated that the serpents that bit them had any part in their cure. Satan was not on the Cross, but through the Messiah's death, he would be destroyed.

Of the Messiah it was prophesied:

"He shall not cry...nor cause his voice to be heard in the street. A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench: he shall bring forth judgment unto truth" (Is 42:2-3).

Jesus quotes this passage, then adds:

"and in his name shall the Gentiles trust" (Mt 12:21).

Jesus was not forbidding street preaching. I myself have preached on Wall Street in New York, where, of all places, it would seem that I was casting my pearls before swine in the sense that the passers-by had their minds on everything but the gospel. Nevertheless, who knows what seed from the Word of God may have somehow taken root?

Jesus did not come to start a crusade. The gospel is not to be forced upon anyone. Unfortunately, special efforts to preach the gospel are often called "crusades," even today. No poorer word could be chosen for spreading the good news of the gospel of Jesus the Messiah to Jews, who Scripture specifically declares are to be given priority in receiving it. Special efforts to preach the gospel, rather than using this offensive word, "crusades," could be called "campaigns," or "presentations," or something else to make it clear that we are not in any way taking an example from the Catholic Crusaders sent out by the popes. We want to avoid any possible misunderstanding about some relationship that could hinder spreading the good news to the world.

Paul said,

"God forbid that I should glory, [except] in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world" (Gal 6:14).

Paul's emphasis is clearly upon the One who was crucified, not on the means of His death. How many people emphasize the Cross rather than the One who died upon it? Nor does the Roman Catholic Church remedy this omission with crucifixes that have Jesus perpetually hanging on the Cross. The Cross itself, rather than what transpired upon it 20 centuries ago, has become the focus of attention. The power of the Cross lies not in its display but in its preaching; and that preaching has nothing to do with the Cross itself but with our Lord's death upon it, as declared in the gospel (see 1 Cor 15:1-4).

It comes as a shock to many that the gospel includes no mention of a cross. Why? Because a cross was not essential to our salvation. This was the manner of the Messiah's death, foretold in Psalm 22 - not because the Cross itself had anything to do with our redemption. What was essential was the shedding of Christ's blood in His death, as foreshadowed in the Old Testament sacrifices (Lv 17:11; Heb 9:22).

At the Last Supper, Jesus gave bread and wine to His disciples, explained that this was His body and blood, told them to partake of these elements, and commanded them, "This do in remembrance of me" (Lk 22:19-20). Evangelicals have varying ways of attempting to obey this command. Some do it weekly, others monthly, others quarterly, some annually, and some never. Generally, this is done at the end of a sermon and the usual Sunday morning service, with little time for meditation and with no hymns or prayers specifically in remembrance of Jesus. Such remembrances are a form, as though going through these motions has some efficacy in itself. It is up to everyone's conscience to decide how this is to be done, but it is very rare to find a fellowship of believers who make the remembrance more than form.

Our topic is "The Messiah and the Cross," not "The Cross and the Messiah." Nor was it the scourging, mocking, and physical abuse He suffered at the hands of men; the wicked Roman soldiers who scourged Jesus could hardly have been God's instruments for punishing Him for the sins of the world, as the Catholic film *The Passion of the Christ* portrays. Isaiah 53:10 says,

"It pleased the LORD to bruise him, he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin...."

Obviously, *The Passion of the Christ* could not possibly portray the fact that it was not the physical sufferings that saved us. What man did to the Messiah could not save but only add to our condemnation. Ever since Eve believed the serpent's lie that physically eating the forbidden fruit would turn her into a god, her descendants have been materialists. Materialism has carried over into everything man touches. It has turned love into physical lust. Human beings imagine that happiness and possessions are what make life worth living. The lives of many men and women are consumed with acquiring physical things and the money that purchases them. Jesus said a man's life does not consist in the

abundance of things that he possesses. Jesus did not say that money is the root of all evil. In fact, it is necessary. He condemned "the love of money."

Materialism has even perverted the gospel and religious observances. This is particularly true of Roman Catholicism, a large part of which involves physical acts or objects: baptism, relics, statues, robes, etc. The bread and wine of communion, which are only symbolic of the body and blood of Jesus, through the magic of transubstantiation are allegedly turned into the physical body and blood of Jesus.

For Catholics, baptism is another physical act that "confers" salvation, yet salvation is a matter of the heart:

"If thou shalt confess...the Lord Jesus, and...believe in thine heart...thou shalt be saved" (Rom 10:9).

Catholics "bring converts to heaven" through water baptism, though, like many Protestants, they think baptism only involves sprinkling the water on someone's head. Thus it can be administered to babies. Mother Teresa's "Sisters of Mercy" have been known to put a damp cloth on the foreheads of dying patients and whisper a prayer that allegedly forgives their sins and gives them free passage through death into heaven.

This "way to heaven" was forced upon many unwilling people under threat of death during the days of the Inquisitions. Catholicism was spread across Latin America with the sword. In a heated discussion, Cortez rebuked Aztec chief Montezuma for offering human sacrifices. With amazing insight, Montezuma responded, "At least we don't eat the flesh and drink the blood of our god." The Spaniards slaughtered thousands of Aztecs in their attempt to force them to submit to baptism into the Roman Catholic Church.

One need go no further south than to Mexico to see the effects of Roman Catholicism in its continuing dominance throughout Latin America. Evangelicals attempting to bring the gospel to Latin America still encounter stiff opposition from the priests in every town and city.

Common sense recognizes that forcing one to "believe" something is a futile effort. There is an old saying, "A man convinced against his will is of the same opinion still." Yet in Islam, force is the main means of "conversion." Muhammad even boasted that to become a Muslim, one does not need to believe.

The Messiah simply said to Jews and Gentiles, "Follow Me," an invitation that may be accepted or rejected. The Bible ends with this gracious offer, "Whosoever will may come." The Messiah, who came to the world through Israel, forces nothing upon anyone. One is free to choose hell or heaven. Jesus paid the penalty for all of mankind's sin, but this payment is effective only for those who believe and receive His sacrifice on their behalf. Tragically, most Jews still remain resistant to the salvation that God offers through the promised Messiah.