

Is The Cross An Acceptable Symbol?

How Does God Want to be Worshipped?

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As one of the two speakers this afternoon, I was a little concerned when Richard ended his message by saying he hoped everybody came back this afternoon, and then Bill Gray in his prayers said the same thing. But it dawned on me they were talking about John.

If you have ever watched a baseball game, chances are you have seen sometimes a batter about to enter the batter's box, make the sign of the cross. It is also very common to see people with a little silver cross hanging from their neck or an earring.

Is this merely the affirmation of their faith, or is it something more serious, such as idolatry? Will wearing a small silver cross around your neck keep you from harm? Will it keep a vampire away? Will it help you to hit home runs? Well I think you know the answer to these questions. Of course not, but why do so many believe otherwise?

Where did the use of the symbol of the cross originate? Did it start with the sacrifice of Christ? Are we honoring Christ's tremendous gift to us by putting a bumper sticker on our car with a cross on it? Did Jesus even die on a cross? And if He did, should the instrument of death be worshipped?

Let me start with a quote from Alexander Hyslop's book, *The Two Babylons*. Bear with me as I read just a little bit.

In the papal system, as is well known, the sign of the cross and the image of the cross are all in all. No prayer can be said, no worship engaged in, no step almost can be taken without the frequent use of the sign of the cross. The cross is looked upon as the grand charm, as the great refuge in every season of danger, and every hour of temptation as the infallible, preservative from all the powers of darkness. The same sign of the cross that Rome now worships was

used in the Babylonian mysteries, was applied by paganism to the same magic purposes, was honored with the same honors.

That which is now called the Christian cross was originally no Christian emblem at all but was the mystic tau of the Chaldeans and Egyptians. Now the tau is the original form of the letter T, and it was the initial of the name of Tammuz, the sun god, another name for Nimrod. Now this tau or this cross it was a revered symbol in ancient times at least 1,500 years before Christ, and you can find variations of this symbol used as a religious symbol in every religion except Judaism and Islam. It's just another example of pagan beliefs brought into the Catholic Church in an attempt to add numbers.

You might call it syncretism, which would be the merging of differing beliefs, but it's really more just a wholesale taking of a pagan belief and adding it to the bottom of your list of doctrines.

Now let us assume for a moment that Christ died on a cross. Are we to worship, are we to venerate the instrument of death? If Christ had died by electrocution, would we have little electric chairs hanging from our neck? If Christ had been hung, would you see a charm bracelet with little nooses on it? I think you see the point.

The meaning for us is not in how He died but that He did die for the sins of His creation.

Now there are two Greek words used in the New Testament that describe the instrument used in Jesus' death. One is the Greek word *xulon*, and it means tree. We can see in Acts 5, verse 30 an example of that use. The apostle Paul says,

Acts 5:30 The God of our fathers raised up Jesus whom you murdered by hanging on a tree.

There are many other examples of this particular translation. John read one on Passover evening, I Peter 2:24. The other Greek word is *stauros*, and it means a stake. Now it is used 28 times in the New Testament. Robert Young

has a very nice concordance that I use, and he also has a translation he's done of the New Testament. Now, in his concordance he translates *stauros* as stake. In his New Testament translation, all 28 times he renders it "cross." Now at the risk of boring you, I am going to read another passage. This time from *Vine's Expository Dictionary*. This is the entry entitled "Cross, Crucify." This was written some time ago, but it is very interesting.

Stauros denotes primarily an upright pole or stake. On such malefactors were nailed for execution. Both the noun and the verbs *stauroo*, to fasten to a stake or a pole, are originally to be distinguished from the ecclesiastical form of a two-beamed cross. The shape of the latter had its origin in ancient Chaldea and was used as a symbol of the god Tammuz, being in the shape of the mystic tau [again, the initial for Tammuz, the T], the initial of his name in that country and adjacent lands including Egypt. By the middle of the 3rd century AD, the churches had either departed from or had travestied certain doctrines of the Christian faith. In order to increase the prestige of the apostate ecclesiastical system, pagans were received into the churches apart from regeneration by faith and were permitted largely to retain their pagan signs and symbols, hence the tau or T in its most frequent form with the cross piece lowered was adopted to stand for the cross of Christ. As for the chi or X, which Constantine declared he had seen in a vision leading him to champion the Christian faith, that letter was the initial of the word Christ and had nothing to do with the cross.

Now I realize that last sentence might have been a tad confusing coming in on the end of that, but what he is mentioning there when he says Constantine, that is the Roman emperor Constantine. Many of you may know or learned in your World Civ class, he supposedly had a vision in which he was told to conquer in the name of Christ and he then converted to Christianity. But did he? When the Emperor Diocletian died in AD 313, the Roman Empire was divided into two sections. They had two Caesars, Constantine and Galerius. Well, that soon became six emperors, including Maxentius and Licinius.

Now Constantine ruled the Western Empire, and he was a very temperate ruler. He allowed the Jews and the Christians to worship openly in his

kingdom and his portion of the empire. And he had thus avoided the civil war and the revolt that was afflicting the other portions of the empire. So he saw an opportunity to consolidate and conquer other portions of the empire.

So, he is on an expedition against Maxentius, and he supposedly has this vision. He is on the road with his troops in the afternoon and the story goes, a cross appeared in the heavens and the inscription "conquer by this." Well, you know, was he drunk? Was he hallucinating? Was this a marketing ploy? I do not know, you know, but it is taught in class that this is what he saw. I remember hearing it.

But it does not take much research to find out that it was not a cross that he had the soldiers put on their shields. It was an X. The Greek letter chi stands for Christ. He would not use the cross because it was a pagan symbol and his troops were pagans. They came from backgrounds of varying degrees, but they knew what the cross was. It was a symbol of various pagan gods. It makes no sense to put that on the shield. It does not symbolize Christ. It is also interesting that you can see they struck coins commemorating his victory in this campaign and all those coins, it shows an X, not a cross. Also, there were people with the expedition that wrote about it.

And again, he conquered in the name of Christ, but it was not the symbol of the cross. It was the X standing for the name of Christ. Now, did he convert to Christianity? In AD 325 he assembled the first Nicaean Council, and that was a very good political move on his part. He had to stop the friction of all the religions in Rome. So he basically put them all in a room and said, "You're not coming out until we have, you know, one belief." And the creation of that council was the Holy Roman Church, the Catholic Church, the universal church took a little of this, a little of that, and voila, we are all the same.

It is interesting that he continued to worship the sun. His religion was called Sol Invictus, and he took his day of worship, Sunday, and told these people that is one of the things you are going to come out of that room with, and they did. So so much for his conversion to Christianity.

Now, nowhere in the Bible are we told to venerate, to honor, to worship the symbol of the cross. This creation of his, the Catholic Church, even though

they brought it with them into the church, it was still had such a pagan stigma to it that it was not until 431 AD that it was introduced into the Catholic Church. It was not until 586 AD that they put it on steeples and it was all the way into the 6th century that they sanctified the crucifix as a symbol that they could use.

I found something in the Catholic Encyclopedia that I thought was pure genius in the way that they do the double speak. They have an article called "The True Cross," and they are trying to explain why the symbol of the cross is found on so many monuments in Egypt, predating Christ by hundreds if not thousands of years.

Listen to this. This is really clever. "The Christians of Egypt seem to have recognized an anticipatory revelation of the Christian cross which they employed in their monuments." Anticipatory revelation. They anticipated getting the revelation, and that is why you see all these crosses. I mean, that is really clever.

Now the argument can be made that Christ did not die on a cross, and we could really tie up a lot of time on that. But I do not see any real point in doing that because that is not the point. There is no real reason to get caught up in a debate on that. Did He die on a tree? Did He die on a stake? Did He die on a cross? Did He carry a cross piece with Him to Golgotha? Did He carry a fully assembled 200 pound Latin cross? These are all interesting points, but they are not really necessary to get bogged down in those.

Let us look at Exodus 20, verses 4 and 5, and it tells us why we do not want to get bogged down in this. It is not really germane to the discussion.

Exodus 20:4-5 "You shall not make for yourself a carved image—any likeness of anything that is in the heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down yourself to them nor serve them. For I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God."

How much clearer could it be? No image or likeness of anything.

Now it is a curious thing about human nature. We have to have something tangible in front of us to focus on. Richard talked this morning about the children of Israel on their journey to the Promised Land over and over and over how they became discouraged.

He quoted I Corinthians 10:9,

I Corinthians 10:9 Nor let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed by serpents.

That comes from an incident in Numbers 21 where the people murmured so strongly against Moses and God that God sent snakes into the camp; killed many of them, and they repented. Moses prayed for their relief. God said, make a bronze image of a serpent and if you look at that bronze image, you will live. So, far too many of the Israelites began to worship the image of the snake. That is where their thanks went. They did not thank God for saving their life. They thanked this bronze image.

Now, for whatever reason, they kept that bronze image of the snake, and it was passed through generations and generations. The Israelites kept this image. It shows up again in II Kings. Let us go to II Kings 18. I am going to try to make a point here and tie the two together. Now this is hundreds of years later. The nation of Israel, or Samaria, is a separate nation from Judah. They are a vassal state at this time to Syria. They are just about to go into captivity because of their idolatry. Judah has a chance to watch and to learn.

And here in II Kings 18 they have a new king. In verse 1 you see that it is Hezekiah, son of Ahaz, began to reign. Verse 2 he is 25 years old. Verse 3, he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord according to all that David, his father did. Now listen to what he did, verse 4.

II Kings 18:4 He removed the high places and he broke the sacred pillars, cut down the wooden images and he broke in pieces the bronze serpent that Moses had made; for until those days the children of Israel burned incense to it.

They were still worshipping the bronze serpent! God hates idolatry, and a thorough reading of this particular episode will show you that. Is the symbol of the cross any different than that bronze serpent? Some may say that the cross serves to remind them of Jesus Christ. But there is no biblical connection to the Son of God and the sun god Tammuz.

Hanging a cross on the wall of your home or from a chain around your neck does not honor Christ. A pagan symbol cannot honor Christ. So as I read earlier in Exodus 20, God said, "You shall not bow down to these images nor serve them, for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God."