

Slide # 1

Crucified by Christians!

Part One: An overview of Crucifixion



Adapted from 'Crucified by Christians'
by Gene Edwards*

*This book should be in the hands of every believer who has known the exquisite agony that comes from being hurt by other Christians.

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Roger Spackman

Te Atatu Baptist Church

📁 Crucified by Christians! Part One.DOC

Allow me to ask you a direct, and somewhat personal question this morning.

‘Why have you come to church today?’

What do you hope to get out of it?

Have you come looking for hope, for guidance, for something to help you through the journey of life?

I hope you’ve come here looking for more faith!

Because I can guarantee you, based upon the promises of God’s Word, that you will leave here today with more faith than you came in with!

You WILL leave here with a greater trust in God for your life and the lives of those you love.

Slide # 2

A paraphrase of Romans 10:17 says this:

**Faith to trust and believe
in God comes as we listen
to His holy Word.**

So, I'm hoping and trusting that you've come here today with a 'need for God'.

With questions for which you are searching for answers.

With hurts and pains than need soothing and healing.

Today, I invite you to join with me on a journey together, as we discover the 'beauty of the Cross' in ways you never imagined or dreamed!

Let's talk about the Cross for a moment.

The beauty of the Cross – in ways you never knew existed!

Slide # 3

What does Jesus mean when He says 'Take up your cross daily and follow Me!'?

Slide # 4

What does the Bible mean when it talks about 'Denying yourself' – 'Crucifying your earthly carnal nature'?

Slide # 5

In what way did Jesus 'Learn obedience through the things He suffered'?

Slide # 6

Just how does God turn our 'mourning into dancing' and 'our sorrow into joy'?

Slide # 7

What on earth is the Bible talking about when it says in James chapter 1 to 'Count it all joy when you experience trials of various kinds'?

How on earth are we meant to cope with the pain of divorce, the death of a loved one, redundancy or chronic illness – let alone the pain of church or Christian conflict and division?

Slide # 8

How is the Cross relevant to our lives in these circumstances, and where on earth is God when it hurts!

The Cross will offer you hope this morning – glorious hope!

It will offer you a purpose for your suffering and disappointments in life.

It will offer you life, and life in all its fullness!!

This series of four sermons may well be the most powerful and influential sermons you have ever had the privilege of hearing.

Slide # 9

However, it will require you to 'renew your mind' in accordance with Romans 12:1-2.

To 'renew your mind' requires us to set aside what we previously understood and perceived about certain situations and circumstances.

Renewing your mind – will require you to let go of some fundamental and foundation assumptions you have held about life – even about Christianity – up until this point.

It will require you to ‘trust’ me, as I unpack God’s Word for us this morning.

You will discover the true riches that Jesus spoke about when referring to the ‘joy’ of pain and suffering.

The principles and truths contained in this study have deeply and profoundly shaped my life.

Through some horrific circumstances many decades ago, I had to either accept the truths of what I will share with you today,

...or else slip in to an existence of bitterness and anger against the church, Christians, and ultimately God.

What I expect to hear, but honestly don’t want to hear, at the conclusion of this study, if for some of us to say, ‘Isn’t it horrible how some Christians treat others!’

If that is what you come away with from today’s Bible study, then I am afraid you have missed the whole point of what God is wanting to teach us.

In fact, even over the last couple of years, I have had to reapply these principles to events in my life and ministry that threatened to overcome and crush my life, my ministry and family.

If I had not learnt these principles, then I would be like the thousands of Christians even this morning in NZ, who are too hurt and disillusioned to step foot inside a Christian church!

It is my expectation that you won’t like what I have to share with you today.

And the reality is, that I'd rather not share it with you either.

The only reason I am, is that it is truth, and just as it has deeply impacted my life and faith, I know it has the power to do the same for each of you who hear it.

Let me briefly explain:

One of the most devastating experiences you could ever have as a believer, is to be grievously mistreated, slandered or condemned by *other* believers!

To discover other believers can be so cruel – to gossip about you and spread rumors about your family – can ruin the faith and joy of even the most mature Christian.

The damage done through church splits, dissensions and divisions are – almost unfathomable.

A truly vicious attack on one believer from another, is almost unrecoverable.

Most never recover!

The same can be said of the areas I mentioned a minute ago, of divorce, death of a loved one, chronic illness, redundancy or family feuds.

In all these things, the devil's ploy isn't to get you loose faith in God, that would be far too obvious.

His plan is to get you to loose faith in the church and other Christians!

You see, I know something about this.

I've been hurt – horrifically hurt and deceived by the church, and by Christians!

When working fulltime at my first church as a young man of just 18 years of age, I witnessed such abuse at the hands of my pastor, that I was offered police protection from him, if I would testify against him in a court of law.

I've experienced the trauma of two – if not three major church splits.

As a pastor, I've been horribly misjudged and mistreated!

I've had people I love – turn on me, call me 'deceived', a 'false teacher' and told they doubt I even have a relationship with God.

When some Christians couldn't get directly to me and hurt me, they have even turned instead upon my wife and children.

Some of you know what this is like too!

Maybe instead, you've been on the receiving end of spiritual abuse, of toxic religion.

You know the stuff:

'Your sickness is your own fault! If you had any faith at all – then you'd be healed!'

I've had people try to cast demons out of me because I have a chronic digestive illness, blaming it on unforgiveness and bitterness.

Of a mature lady who was prayed for by a traveling evangelist to have her hearing restored, and then condemned the next Sunday because she still wore her hearing aids.

Christians we trust and respect doing things against us and the church that are just plain nasty and hurtful!

Some of this sound familiar, doesn't it?!

Some of you, like me, may have even been responsible for doing it ourselves *from time to time*.

It's hard – isn't it.

And it's horrible!

My trust has been destroyed – many, many times.

And it will continue to be so in the future!

I've been tempted to 'run away' many times before.

My faith and trust in pastors, in leaders, in ministries and in Christians has been broken time and time again.

That presents a real problem to have your faith in pastors destroyed, especially when you're a pastor yourself!

I've sat in a room of Christian leaders and professionals, to listen to them be honest enough to say that they 'no longer like other Christians',

...and would prefer to spend their time with the unsaved, because on the whole the unsaved are less judgmental and harsh.

What's the answer to all of this pain?

Is there a way to cope with it, to deal with it, to survive it all?

Is healing even possible – given the reality of our Christian life?

Let's be honest today - recovery is rare.

Slide # 10

Pain is common – very common – even a *necessity* for the deeper Christian life – despite what many ‘contemporary – shout at the devil and deny any hardship’ churches might propagate.

‘Fall out’ from Christian conflict is rampant.

Healing is the exception, rather than the norm.

But I'll share a secret with you this morning – recovery, healing and complete freedom is fully possible, fully believable!

You see, I've done it!

I'm still here!

What makes me different from the hundreds, or thousands who haven't made it through – is that I've learnt to see these things from a different perspective.

As have *all* who have passed through the baptism of fire and come out the other side.

We have learnt to view these things from God's perspective as revealed through the scriptures!

And I have some *keys* to share with you this morning.

YOU might have never experienced these things, but one thing I know - without a doubt – you will!

Today you will discover the answers to the questions you were too afraid to ask.

So - have you been hurt?

Mistreated?

Misunderstood?

Slandered against?

Had letters written about you?

Gossip spread as if it were fact?

Have you been bitterly disappointed in life?

Have you experienced the heartbreak of a broken marriage, redundancy, chronic illness or any other of a thousand tragedies?

Did the pain crush you – causing you to cry out to God in frustration and anguish?

Did the *hurt* rob you of your sleep, or intrude even into your dreams.

Did it consume you to the point of imagining and ‘practicing in your head’ your responses to the accusations of others.

Have you found yourself imagining what your ‘could have said’ to win the argument, what words your ‘could have used’ to hurt the other person and ensure your own victory.

What did that feel like?

Did it feel like nails driven through your flesh, like chords of leather ripping into the flesh of your back.

Did it hurt!?

Let's relate it to something the Bible mentions many times in relation to *a growing disciple of Jesus*.

In relation to the many different issues of conflict and relational breakdown, how did it feel to be slandered, gossiped about, criticized or mistreated?

Did it feel like what you might imagine the injustices of a *crucifixion* – even a *public crucifixion* – might be like - unfair and cruel?

Slander, accusations, backbiting, criticism, gossip, pain and agony!?

And a constant 'refrain' I can hear echoing around this sanctuary this morning, are the words of Jesus;

Slide # 11

'Take up your cross daily, deny yourself, and follow in my footsteps.'

The practical outworking of the words of Jesus are deeply painful and hurtful, and in our natural personhood, we are tempted to run a mile and escape the pain!

Rest assured you're not alone.

History, even Biblical history is full of unjust crucifixions.

Countless hundreds of believers throughout history have been literally, and figuratively crucified at the hands of other 'well meaning' believers.

But there are more crucifixions *today* than there ever was in history.

And yet the *pattern*, the *method* and the *outcome* is still the same – each person crucified feels that no one else has ever been so unjustly treated.

Slide # 12

Has it happened to you?

I want you to be honest with me this morning.

Have you experienced pain and insults from other believers, from pastors or church conflicts?

If you have, then I'm surprised you're even at church today.

Most never return.

The pain is that deep.

Slide # 13

A crucifixion can leave you maimed and broken for the rest of your life, even into the next.

On the other hand – it can be the most glorious and redemptive event ever to bless your life.

So positive can this experience be, that when you re-emerge, you are almost a totally different person.

You see, I've seen a few crucifixions in my time.

They are especially hard upon the lives of those in ministry – and the minister's family.

One thing I know for certainty – whether the outcome of a crucifixion is positive or negative – the destruction upon a person's life is nothing short of awesome.

Horrifically awesome!

It's not just the crucifixion that is horrible – but the aftermath as well.

Have you experienced pain and conflict at the hands of other believers?

If so, where are you this morning, in the aftermath?

From where will you get your healing and deliverance?

The answer to the question is the root and the foundation of your healing, and it might surprise you!

Your first step to healing, is dealing with the person who hurt you, who crucified you and said all those nasty words against you.

Do you know this person's name, can you see their bitter face in your mind even now?

Who is it?

Today, you must *lay aside their name*.

The villain lies elsewhere!

Drop the obvious, the natural – for the culprit does not belong to the realms of this world.

Only in the realm of the spiritual will you find the one responsible for your pain.

Find the one who caused your destruction, and you will also find freedom and healing.

For this is the one who has caused ALL other believers to also be crucified, even the Lord Jesus Christ.

And how shall we find the one responsible?

Let us ask the Risen Lord, for surely He and only He knows who is truly responsible.

As we seek Jesus and find His crucifier, we shall also be able to identify and share with Him in His sufferings.

We shall understand together that there was, and is, and will ever only be ONE crucifixion – that of our Lords.

Slide # 14

Who caused *His* cross, *His* crucifixion, *His* Golgotha?

It was exactly the same one who plotted YOUR crucifixion!

That person actually wants YOU to share in the sufferings and pain of our Lord.

After all, as believers, we are called to share in ALL His sufferings and glory alike.

Aren't we?

SO – who was it?

Who did this horrible thing to you or to your loved one, to your family or friends – to *the Lord Jesus Christ*?

Who arranged the false witnesses, the gossip and slander, the mocking and pain?

Who really is responsible?

If you listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit through the Gospels of the Bible, you will hear something very tender from the lips of our Saviour!

Father forgive them!

My God – my God – why have YOU abandoned Me?

These are the hardest words you might ever have to hear, and it will rock you to your very depths!

But hear them you must!

Who crucified the Christ?

Was it the Romans or the Jews?

Perhaps if you are more spiritually astute, you might concede that it was actually Satan, the accuser of the brethren who orchestrated the torture, crucifixion and death of our beloved Saviour.

But is that is what you think, then you are still looking in the wrong place, and your still lack understanding of the purposes of God in your life.

Slide # 15

Short Intermission

Slide # 16

Father forgive them!

My God – my God – why have YOU abandoned Me?

My Father – YOU are behind all of this!

My God – it is YOU who chose my crucifixion!!!

These are the hardest words you might ever have to hear, and it will rock you to your very depths!

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Who crucified the Christ?

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It wasn't any human or demonic entity that crucified Jesus, it was His only beloved and adoring Father that was responsible for the cruelty!!

Slide # 17

Yes - God the Father, in His love and mercy – planned the crucifixion of Jesus, and it was He, and He alone, who also planned yours!

For your healing to begin, you must lay aside every other accuser, you can blame no other person, and you must accept that it was God the Father who willed that you – *and Jesus* – be hurt, condemned, treated unfairly, and crucified!

This, my brothers and sisters – is your first step to healing.

Reject this fact, and you will forever feel mistreated and hard-done-by.

Refuse this reality, and bitterness will cripple you, and the only option left will be a greater crucifixion in the future.

Or else you will forever live in un-brokenness and stubbornness of heart.

Fail to understand that your crucifixion was from God, means you were never truly crucified, you were only mistreated – and unjustly at that!

And if that's the case, then bitterness has every right to take root in your heart, and take root it will!

The crucifixion of a Christian comes from the hand of God, and God alone.

It is He, and He alone that wrote the script for your pain and mistreatment.

What do you think the Bible means when it talks about ‘taking up your cross daily and following Jesus’, of ‘fulfilling the sufferings of Christ’, or ‘Nailing your old carnal and ungodly nature to the cross’.

Something about, ‘counting it all joy when you experience hardships and trials of various kinds’.

Maybe you’ll be able to understand a little better after today.

Just like the crowd around Jesus, He also chose the participants.

The harsh words, the unjust gossip that will ring in your ears for decades to come – all of it organized and chosen by your loving heavenly Father.

It still hurts – doesn’t it!

You know what I’m talking about.

God planned the destruction to be very painful.

The nails driven into flesh.

Splitting bone, hurting to the core.

Bringing death.

All crucifixions involve certain elements:

- Rejection
- Pain
- Unfairness
- Rumor
- Misunderstandings

- More pain!
- Loss of reputation
- Loss of friends

You need to know – your Father wants you to experience ALL these things – and the deeper the better.

He planned all these things – but most of all – He planned for YOU to be at the heart of it!

And that – my brothers and sisters – is an *honor* God has bestowed upon your life!

‘An honor!’ you say.

‘How can THAT be an honor! You have no idea what was said about me! It was unfair – I never got a chance to defend myself!

God would NEVER be so heartless as to bring *that* upon me!’

You know what – YES, He did.

Remember, He’s already done it to at least One person before.

His was much more brutal than yours ever was.

God planned the crucifixion of Jesus before the world began.

It was the purpose of God – right from the beginning of creation.

All of the Old Testament pointed towards, and climaxed in the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Isn’t that amazing – doesn’t that bring a whole different light to the unfairness of crucifixion – both His and yours?

There is far more purpose in a crucifixion than you first realized.

Crucifixions are actually part of the plan of God for His creation.

Yes, it has a purpose, and it is a purpose we must discover together, for you to find your healing and complete freedom today.

When God crucified Jesus, it was an act of love – complete and utter love!

Can you see it now – destruction and pain can be the outworking of love.

That is our second step to recovery and healing.

Accept it, and embrace it.

Welcome it into the depth of your soul – and you are on the road to healing.

Slide # 18

Understand this principle of Scripture, and your need to chase after freedom from pain will melt away in the heart of a loving God.

Suffering will no longer be avoided or rebuked in the Name of Jesus!

Chronic and terminal sickness can actually be turned into a blessing!

Slide # 19

Victory will never be seen as an absence of pain, but because of it, and despite it!

We must turn our bitterness into a prayer, an act of worship:

Slide # 20

Lord, the circumstances leading to my crucifixion were yours. They didn't come from the hand of others, like I first thought. Father, I accept it all. All, as coming from You.

Lord, help me to understand, and see my crucifixion from Your vantage point!

But why?

Why a crucifixion?

Why me?

Of all people – why me?

I was doing my best to serve, love and obey God!

My marriage is destroyed, my loved ones gone, my health disintegrated!

Worst of all – my faith has grown cold, and I have lost my ‘first love’.

Why would He do this to me – when all I wanted to do was follow after Him?

The answer to this is found in the purpose of any crucifixion.

A crucifixion is intended to destroy all who take part in it!

The false witness, the lies, the rumors, the pain and suffering – all had a singular purpose – to destroy you!

However, understand this:

There are two types of destruction in life, two types of crucifixion.

One leads upwards to a higher understanding and love for God, the other is like a rock smashed against the face of a clock.

Fail to accept and understand your crucifixion, and your Christian life will stop dead in its tracks.

You'll be like the countless damaged Christians who can't even bring themselves to step inside a church again, because the pain and memories are too great.

Stuck in the past, stuck in bitterness, stuck at their crucifixion.

Slide # 21

Otherwise, you can see your crucifixion from God's perspective.

There are certain elements in your life, so deep, so dark and horrible, that they only surface under the intense strain of a crucifixion.

It is those things God wants you to surrender to Himself.

He's brought them to the light through your crucifixion, and He wants them delivered from your life.

Once they've been brought to the surface, you have no choice but to deal with them.

Or else, once unleashed, they will overpower your life and destroy your faith.

Be warned.

If you choose to still view your crucifixion from a surface view, blaming others for your pain – then those hands on the clock of your Christian life will come to a grinding halt.

You will never survive, you will become like the other causalities we see around us – falling down on every side.

Let's go back in time a little.

When you gave your heart to the Lord, didn't you tell Him that He could do 'whatever He wanted' with your life?

Haven't you prayed and asked to be transformed into His image, to be more like Him?

You need to consider this:

Transformation depends upon you being a living sacrifice!

The only other option is self-protection.

Blaming others!

I've observed something about how God works in people lives, within those who love Him and pray things like we just mentioned.

His will for those who love Him, always includes a time of almost total destruction.

Something like the parable of a seed falling to the ground and dying...

Something about our 'self will' being nailed to the cross.

Something about our ego and pride being brought down.

Something about ‘denying yourself and taking up your cross daily...’

What all these things have in common – is death and destruction!

Your death – your destruction!

But remember, all we are doing, is following after His death, after His destruction!

Interesting to note, how did He learn obedience? (Something about ‘through the things He suffered’!)

Never forget this!

Our Lord was destroyed – publicly, brutally!

And so must we be.

Consider it all joy...!

For only through a crucifixion will our dark nature be revealed.

The way we react.

The thoughts inside our heart.

The darkness.

Slide # 22

Believe me, if there is sin in your heart, hatred, anger, resentment, pride, arrogance and righteousness – then the only thing that can really bring it to the surface – is a crucifixion.

The more unjust the crucifixion – the greater the pain, and the greater the depths of our sinful heart are revealed.

True, isn't it.

Let's think about it for a moment.

How did YOU handle the insults, the criticism, the unfair attack?

Did you find fault, analyzing the actions of the other party?

Did you try to scrutinize even the smallest deed or action of those who hurt you?

In other words – did your dark side emerge?

How did you do?

Typically, in reaction to insult or unjust accusations, most Christian resent.

They argue and defend.

They reason and they talk – usually a great deal of talking!

They internalize, and most of us hold grudges - we keep alive the fire of our horrible memories.

What about you? How have YOU reacted to YOUR crucifixion?

It's hard, really hard – being crucified!

Crucifixion is cruel, and it is against all that is natural and human.

In order to understand and accept a crucifixion, we must no longer view it from our human perspective, but from a higher, spiritual plane.

We must rise above insult, above reason, and above logic.

We must even step beyond what our previously held opinions of God are like.

We must be born again – *again!*

You see, up till now, we've loved a God that provides for our every need.

Who gives us a new car, job or answers all our prayers.

But what about when the 'loving' God gives consent to nails ripping through our skin, or insults that shred our souls!

Do we still love God as much when He allows tragedy and calamity into our lives?

Let this possibility enter your hearts,

...that God might just allow these things into your life, that you will learn – learn to love Him, no matter what He allows into your life!

So, how did you react to your crucifixion?

There is yet another deeper question to answer.

No matter how you reacted, good or bad, do you want to stay in that state of heart or mind for the rest of your life, or do you want to find release and healing?

Some Christians, actually *don't* want to be healed.

Some are stuck in a rut, in a state of ‘perpetual victim’ that actually enjoys being bitter or wounded.

Be warned – if you desire healing, you can no longer live in bitterness or resentment!

You’ll have to surrender your anger and bitterness.

You’ll have to stop those comforting thoughts of revenge upon those who hurt you!

Imagine it – a return to innocence!

Is it possible?

No – it is not – at least not if you *continue* to blame, to relive the memories.

Yes – you may have lost everything, you may have lost your innocence or childhood.

The issue is: Will you place this crucifixion behind you and see it as God’s path for your life, to bring you fullness and life.

Slide # 23

Will you embrace the crucifixion of Jesus as your own, and in doing so, embrace your own crucifixion as Christ’s.

When you embrace a crucifixion, you have to crucify your very desire NOT to be destroyed!

The cross seeks out man’s desire NOT to suffer, NOT to sacrifice.

It brings to the surface YOUR desire to never be wrong, your need for innocence, your attempt to *not* suffer pain or discomfort!

At its core, a crucifixion alerts yourself, and others, or your need for self justification and lack of self awareness.

You see, that weekend Jesus was crucified was full of false rumors and innuendoes.

Some of the lies spoken against Him still exist today.

It will be the same with you.

Some of us will have to face a life time of knowing others believed lies about us, or only heard half of the story.

Your anger and repulsion over this – will either destroy you, or be replaced with patience and divine acceptance.

How deeply has it affected you?

Are you fearful of following after the Lord with all you heart, soul, mind and strength again?

Are you skeptical of new believers and their passion and innocence?

If so – then you still need healing.

Do you still feel indignant – hurt – angry even?

It is not God's intention for you to allow your crucifixion to become a platform for self defense.

Slide # 24

It has one and only one purpose – to reveal and then destroy the dark side of your heart.

You must embrace your crucifixion more fully.

If you do – you will loose a large amount of enemies, and a large amount of bitter memories.

You will also see the death of the dark side of your heart!

The horror of our sinful nature is so deeply ingrained in our hearts, and our ability to deny it – can only be dislodged by the cruelty and horror of a crucifixion.

Slide # 25

Malachi 3:3

He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; he will purify the Levites and refine them like gold and silver.

When life is difficult...

There was a group of women in a Bible study on the book of Malachi. As they were studying chapter three they came across verse three which says, "He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver." This verse puzzled the women and they wondered what this statement meant about the character and nature of God.



One of the women offered to find out about the process of refining silver and get back to the group at their next Bible study. That week the woman called up a silversmith and made an appointment to watch him at work. She didn't mention anything about the reason for her interest in silver beyond her curiosity about the process of refining silver. As she watched the silversmith, he held a piece of silver over the fire and let it heat up. He explained that, in refining silver, one needed to hold the silver in the middle of the fire where the flames were hottest so as to burn away all the impurities.

The woman thought about God holding us in such a hot spot - then she thought again about the verse, that He sits as a refiner and purifier of silver. She asked the silversmith if it was true that he had to sit there in front of the fire the whole time the silver was being refined. The man answered that yes, he not only had to sit there holding the silver, but he had to keep his eyes on the silver the entire time it was in the fire. For if the silver was left even a moment too long in the flames, it would be destroyed.

The woman was silent for a moment. Then she asked the silversmith, "How do you know when the silver is fully refined?" He smiled at her and answered, "Oh, that's the easy part -- when I see my image reflected in it."

If today you are feeling the heat of the fire, remember that God has His eye on you and will keep His hand on you and watch over you until He sees His image in you.

P.s.

I'm assuming, that as you reflect upon today's Bible study, you'll be left with more questions than answers.

I invite you to join with me next Sunday, as we look directly at the three most famous crucifixions of all time.

As we do, we'll be presented with one of three choices, one of three crucifixions.

Over the next three weeks, I'm bringing a mirror to church each week, the mirror is God's Word, and as I hold it up and reflect these three crucifixions from it,

...one thing I know for a certainty, is that you WILL see your reflection, your personality, your character reflected back from it!

Let's pray together!