

# Galatians 4:21-31

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Starting at verse 21, or look on the screens if you prefer to do that, but we'll be looking through the whole passage. It's found on page 974 of the Pew Bibles in front of you, if you're looking at one of those. Let's read Paul's words to the Galatians together. Galatians chapter 4, starting at verse 21. He says, Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not listen to the law? For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by a slave woman and one by a free woman. But the son of the slave was born according to the flesh, while the son of the free woman was born through promise.

Now this may be interpreted allegorically. These women are two covenants. One is from Mount Sinai, bearing children for slavery. She is Hagar. Now Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia. She corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. But the Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother. For it is written, Rejoice, O barren one who does not bear. Break forth and cry aloud, you who are not in labor. For the children of the desolate one will be more than those of the one who has a husband. Now you brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise. But just as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the spirit, so also it is now. But what does the scripture say? Cast out the slave woman and her son, for the son of the slave woman shall not inherit with the son of the free woman. So brothers, we are not children of the slave, but of the free woman. Let's pray. Gracious Lord, who has caused all holy scriptures to be written for our learning, grant us so to hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life which you have given us in our Savior Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit as one God forever and ever. Amen. Some passages in the Bible are complex and hard to understand. This is one of them.

John Stott begins his commentary on this passage by saying, many people regard this as the most difficult passage in the epistle to the Galatians. So you might have been asking questions as I was reading the passage like, what does Paul mean when he says in verse 25, Hagar, the mother of Abraham's oldest son, is Mount Sinai in Arabia and she corresponds to the present Jerusalem? What's the connection there?

Or why is Paul interpreting a historical account from the book of Genesis as an allegory? And why does he quote in verse 27 a seemingly unrelated passage from the book of Isaiah?

Does Paul's reasoning here make any sense at all? Now this passage is also challenging because of its implications. Paul says Abraham had two sons from two different mothers who represent two different covenants, two different ways of approaching religion. And one of the implications of this passage is that not all religions are heading in the same direction. Just because several different religions share a common source, like the person of Abraham, doesn't necessarily mean that they're heading to the same destination. If you have three roads and they all start in Kansas, one goes north, one goes east, one goes west, they all start in Kansas, but they end up in completely different places. So Christianity, Judaism, Islam, the Baha'i faith, all trace their lineage back to Abraham. But they follow different paths. They head in different directions. And even among people who claim to be Christians, who claim to follow Jesus, there's not clear agreement on what that means. Within the city of New Haven alone, there are over 160 different churches. Maybe you've visited several different churches. Maybe you've noticed that not every church teaches the same thing. And in fact, sometimes one church teaches something that's the exact opposite of what another church teaches. So we need to discern what is the true Christian message, and discern the difference between true Christianity and other forms of religion. And Paul teaches us how to do that in this passage. So as we look into this passage, I want to do two things. First, I want to look at

[ 4 : 47 ] Paul's reasoning and say, does this make sense? Does Paul's reasoning make sense here? And second, I want to consider three implications of Paul's teaching that are relevant to living in a multi-religious world. Now, when you first read the passage, Paul's logic may seem quite confusing. But the main thrust of Paul's argument is actually quite clear. If you look throughout the whole passage, Paul draws four contrasts. He says, Abraham had two sons, one slave, one free. Born of two different mothers, one slave, one free. Representing two covenants, one bearing children for slavery, one bearing children for freedom. And two cities, the present Jerusalem and the Jerusalem above. And Paul builds up to his conclusion. And Paul states his conclusion twice, just so we don't miss it, in verse 28 and verse 31.

He says in verse 28, you, brothers and sisters, like Isaac, are children of promise. Or verse 31, so brothers, we are not children of the slave, but of the free woman. Now, if you've been coming to our series on Galatians the last few weeks, you might notice that this is exactly what Paul has already said in chapter 4, verse 7. Paul says, you are no longer a slave, but a son. And if a son, then an heir through God. So what Paul is saying here is, brothers and sisters in Christ, all who believe in Christ, who are not in bondage, were free, were not slaves to the law, were sons and daughters of the living God, eternally belonging to his family. So Paul's not actually saying anything new in this passage that he hasn't already said. But what he is doing is he's giving a vivid picture, a provocative illustration to drive home the point that he's been making throughout chapter 3 and 4 of Galatians.

So with the big picture in mind, let's look into some of the details. Verse 22 and 23, Paul gives the historical background. Paul begins by pointing out that Abraham had two sons, Ishmael and Isaac, born of two different mothers, Hagar and Sarah. Now, Paul assumes that his readers are familiar with the story. In fact, he doesn't even mention Ishmael or Sarah by name. But if you're not familiar with the story, you can read it in Genesis chapter 15 through chapter 21. Here's a basic recap of the story. Abraham was married to Sarah. Sarah was barren. She was unable to have children. But when Abraham was 75 years old, God promised Abraham that he would have a son. Ten years pass. Every month. They try and realize we're not pregnant.

Yet, still not pregnant. And so finally Sarah says, Abraham, why don't you just go sleep with Hagar, one of our household servants. Take her as a second wife and have a child with her. And this was a common custom back then. Everybody wanted kids. So if you couldn't have one with your wife, you just eventually take a second wife. It seemed very normal in that society. And so Abraham goes ahead, sleeps with Hagar, and Hagar bears him a son, Ishmael. Now, if you read the story in Genesis, there's no divine voice that comes in and says, Abraham, you have sinned. But if you look at how the story plays out, you see the results of Abraham's action. There's rivalry, there's tension, there's hatred. Hagar treats Sarah with contempt. Sarah treats Hagar harshly. Hagar runs away. The family begins to break down. And Paul says in verse 23, he says, the son of the slave was born according to the flesh. In other words, God had made Abraham a promise. But Abraham decided that God wasn't coming through in time. So Abraham said, I'll take matters into my own hands. I'll make this happen, like it or not. And he acts on his own initiative outside of God's boundaries. And the result was a mess. Because

Ishmael wasn't the child through whom God's promise will be fulfilled. Ishmael grew up in Abraham's house. Abraham provided for him and for Hagar. But in the end, even though he was the oldest son, he didn't receive the inheritance. Now, of course, God doesn't give up on his promise. And so 13 years after Ishmael's born, God comes to Sarah at the ripe old age of 90. Sarah gets pregnant and gives birth to Isaac.

[ 9 : 35 ] Isaac's son was Jacob. And Jacob's 12 sons became the 12 tribes of Israel. So that's a story from Genesis. Now, in Paul's time, as well as today, the Jewish people considered themselves to be the children of Abraham. And particularly the children of Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, and Jacob. Because they were physically descended from that line. And the book, there was a book called Jubilees. It was a popular Jewish book written about 200 years before the New Testament. And it said, Sarah was the mother of the Jews, descended from Isaac. And Hagar was the mother of the Gentiles, descended from Ishmael. It was a very common view back then. But in this passage, Paul completely overturns that prevailing view. He completely subverts it. Now, Paul's writing to the Christians in Galatia, most of whom are not Jews, most of whom are Gentiles. And after Paul had left Galatia, some Jewish religious teachers had arrived. And they also claimed to be Christians, to believe in Jesus. And they said something like, we're the children of Abraham. We're descended from him, after all. We're circumcised, just like he was. We obey the law, just like Moses did. And so it's good that you believe that Jesus is the Messiah. That's fine. We agree.

But in order to really be part of Abraham's family, you need to become like us. You need to get circumcised like us. And obey the law like us. But as we've seen in Galatians, Paul says, no.

The way that you become a child of Abraham is not by having a perfect genealogy. It's not by being circumcised. It's by trusting in Jesus. Because Jesus is the descendant of Abraham who fulfilled God's promises to Abraham. So this is what Paul's already said in chapters 3 and 4.

And verses 24 through 27, Paul reinforces this point through what he calls an allegory. He says, in other words, there's a spiritual principle going on here in this story about Sarah and Hagar. Paul says, you know, these teachers, they say that they're children of Isaac and Sarah, just because they have a perfect genealogy and they're circumcised. But actually, they're descendants of Hagar and Ishmael. Because they're doing exactly what Abraham did. They're trusting their flesh.

[ 12 : 04 ] They're trying to make God fulfill his promise in their own way. They're not trusting God's promise, which has been fulfilled in Jesus. But instead, they're trusting their own efforts.

Paul says, Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, which corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. In other words, Paul's saying, Hagar, Ishmael, the law given at Mount Sinai, and the present city of Jerusalem all share a connection.

They all represent bondage in one form or other. Hagar was a slave, a household servant. She wasn't Abraham's legitimate wife.

And so Ishmael, her son, never received the inheritance that Isaac did. Similarly, the law given at Mount Sinai, it didn't actually produce faith in God. It didn't lead to spiritual freedom.

Instead, it exposed the Israelites' bondage to sin. So Paul's already said this. If you've been coming the last few weeks, you'll recognize these ideas. He's already said this, chapters 3, back in chapter 3.

[ 13 : 12 ] But you know, if you read the Old Testament, if you read Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, and you look for the word faith or believe, you look for where it says the people believed God and trusted God, or the people didn't believe God and didn't trust God.

That word only appears five times in those five books. It's quite rare. But it's very interesting, because three times before God gives the law to Moses at Mount Sinai, the people believe God.

So Genesis chapter 15, verse 6, says Abraham believed God. He believed God's promise, and it was credited to him as righteousness. Exodus chapter 4, the people were in Egypt.

They heard the words of Moses and Aaron. Moses and Aaron say, God's come to deliver you from slavery. And it says, the people believed, and they bowed their heads and worshipped. Exodus 4, 31. Then Exodus 14, 31.

When they left Egypt, crossed the Red Sea, come to the other side, it said, the people feared the Lord, and they believed in the Lord. But then if you look after the laws given, twice it says, they didn't trust God.

[ 14 : 23 ] They didn't believe God. Numbers 14, 11. The Lord said to Moses, how long will this people not believe in me, in spite of all the signs I've done among them?

Numbers 20, verse 12. The Lord said to Moses and Aaron, you did not believe in me. Therefore, you shall not bring this assembly into the land that I've given them. See, it's very interesting.

If you read the Old Testament very carefully, it supports exactly what Paul is saying. The law didn't produce faith in God. Instead, it brought out their worst tendencies towards sin and unbelief.

And Paul points out, he says, Mount Sinai is in Arabia. In other words, it's outside the promised land, just like Ishmael was outside the line of God's promise.

And finally, Paul says, the present Jerusalem isn't free either. At that time, it was under Roman occupation. Pretty obvious.

[ 15 : 28 ] It wasn't a free city. And spiritually speaking, it was still under the law. Paul says, if you're under the law, you're still in bondage, like Hagar and Ishmael, like the present city of Jerusalem.

But then Paul says, there's another Jerusalem. Jerusalem above. The heavenly Jerusalem. He says, that is a free city.

And she is our mother. Now think about Sarah. Think about Abraham's wife, Sarah. She was completely barren. She had no power to produce children. She had no hope of producing a child.

Isaac was born to her simply by the power of God's promise. No other way. And Paul's saying to his friends in Galatia, these Gentile Galatian Christians, he's saying, my dear brothers and sisters, you're exactly like Sarah and Isaac.

You had no hope of life in yourselves. You were without hope and without God in the world. But God has granted you life through Jesus Christ. God has granted you life by his spirit.

- [ 16 : 36 ] You're children of God's promise. You have an eternal inheritance in the heavenly Jerusalem. In verse 27, Paul quotes from Isaiah 54. And Isaiah was speaking to the people much later on after they had been exiled for their sin or speaking toward that situation.

They were spiritually unfruitful. They were spiritually hopeless. Right? They'd been thrown out of the land for their sin. And Isaiah comes to them and says, rejoice.

God's going to give you new life. He says, you're like a barren woman who has no power to produce children. But he says, rejoice, O barren one.

Break forth and cry aloud. You who are not in labor, I'm going to give you a house full of children. But you won't go into labor, is what he says.

Now you might say, what in the world does that mean? Well, the answer is found if you read the book of Isaiah. Isaiah 54 comes right after Isaiah 53.

- [ 17 : 41 ] Isaiah 53 is the song of the suffering servant. We read it if you were here for our Good Friday service about Jesus who laid down his life on the cross, who died for the sins of the people as a sacrifice.

And at the end of Isaiah 53, it says, though the Lord makes the servant's life a guilt offering, he will see his offspring. In other words, through the sacrifice of Jesus, many children will be born into God's family.

Through Jesus' sacrifice, many children will be brought into God's family. In other words, Jesus, by his death and resurrection, Jesus did for us what we could never do for ourselves.

Through Jesus, we're no longer under the law covenant of Mount Sinai. We're under the new covenant, sealed by Jesus' blood on the cross. In Jesus, we have an eternal home, not in Jerusalem, not in any other earthly city, but in the Jerusalem above, which will one day come to earth when God comes back to make all things new.

And so the verse we read at the beginning of the service tonight, 1 Peter 1, says, Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. He has caused us to be born again into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus from the dead to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading.

- [ 19 : 06 ] And in this, you rejoice. You know, that's what Paul's, that's what Paul really wants the Galatians to see here. He says, rejoice. I don't want anyone to take away your joy.

Jesus is risen from the dead. Jesus has poured out his spirit on you. Jesus gives life to those who are spiritually dead and hopeless.

So burst into song and shout for joy. God's fulfilled his promise by sending Jesus. And you are now his child. You are eternally adopted by him.

You belong to him forever. He loves you with an everlasting love. Don't let anyone else take away that joy. You know, Paul's argument in these verses, it's a complex argument.

It's a tight argument. I hope you're able to hang in there and follow through it. But the main point that Paul wants them to get is rejoice because you are free in Christ. You are a child of God. Rejoice, oh depressed child of God.

- [ 20 : 11 ] Rejoice, oh guilt-ridden child of God. Rejoice, oh fearful, anxious child of God. Rejoice, you who are haunted by your past sin and failure because Jesus is risen.

He's risen indeed. And you're a child of God, not a slave, but free in Christ. So that's Paul's reasoning and that's his main point.

Now let's look at three implications of what Paul says here for living in a world that, in a multi-religious world. So the first thing Paul wants, first implication, Paul warns us against redefining Christianity to suit our own traditions and culture.

Now in the context of Galatians, Paul's warning against these teachers, sometimes they're called the Judaizers, who are basically insisting that in order to become Christian, you have to also become Jewish. You have to get circumcised, keep kosher, observe the Sabbath, etc.

Otherwise you're not true child of Abraham. Paul says no, Jesus is enough. And in a similar way, Paul would warn us today against teachers who claim to be Christians, but who insist on adding non-biblical beliefs and requirements to the Christian faith.

[ 21 : 28 ] Now historically speaking, this is one of the major concerns that Protestant Christians have had with the Roman Catholic Church, that the Roman Catholic Church has added beliefs and traditions and requirements, many of which they admit don't come from the Bible, they come out of the church tradition.

And these added elements obscure and distract people from Jesus and from the Bible. It's a little bit like a room containing two priceless paintings, but which has become full of storage boxes so that the paintings are no longer clearly visible.

and they're no longer clearly the center of attention. But you know, this is not just a problem in the Roman Catholic Church. This is not just a problem for some other weird sect that calls themselves Christian or someone else that we can point to.

This can become a problem in any church. We can gradually redefine what it means to follow Jesus in order to suit ourselves.

I grew up in an evangelical church in many ways like Trinity. My dad was an elder in the church, my mom did children's ministry, my grandfather was a pastor, and most people assumed without ever questioning that my sister, my brother, my cousins, and I were all Christians.

[ 22 : 48 ] And you know why? Because we came to church with our parents, because we did well in school, and because we were nice. Whatever nice means. Now, practically speaking, no one would have ever said it that way, but practically speaking, Christianity became equated with being nice, being successful, going to church, and praying before you eat.

Now, all of those things you can do in your natural strength without the Spirit of God necessarily living in you. But Jesus never said, if you are nice and successful and go to church once a week with your parents or with your friends, you are my disciple.

Jesus said, you must be born again. Jesus said, you must be born of the Spirit. Repent. Turn from your self-centered ways, your self-justifying ways, and believe in me.

Take up your cross and follow me. You know, following Jesus isn't something you can do by your own natural abilities. It's something where you need Jesus to fill you with His Spirit.

So Paul warns us, beware of redefining Christianity in order to suit ourselves, whether it means adding non-biblical traditions or reducing it to something that we can achieve on our own.

[ 24 : 14 ] Now, second, Paul wants us to understand a crucial difference between Christianity and other religions. We live in a world that's increasingly diverse religiously.

So in New Haven alone, just walking through the streets, you might see Orthodox Jewish families with fathers and sons wearing yarmulkes, Muslim women wearing the hijab, the scarf, the headscarf, Hindu women with a bindi, with the red dot to protect you from evil on their forehead, or Mormon missionaries.

A couple weeks ago, my wife had some Mormon missionaries, very nicely dressed, white shirts and ties come up to us, had a nice conversation with them. They said, we're Christians just like you are.

And you know, how do we live in this world with people who have many different religious traditions and many different religious convictions? Christians. Well first, it's important for those of us to follow Jesus, who follow Jesus, to love our neighbors, to extend and receive hospitality, even to suspend some of our preconceived notions.

You know, we all have preconceived notions about what those kind of people believe or what those kind of people do and how they live. And some of those may be right, but some of them may be wrong. And so we need to suspend them sometimes because that's how we want people to treat us.

[ 25 : 33 ] Right? This is simply the golden rule. Do to others as you would have them do unto you. Love your neighbor as yourself. At the same point, Paul is warning us that we must be discerning with regard to different religious teachings.

So Paul says, the teachings and traditions of the world's religions are not like a great big buffet with American and Chinese and Brazilian. The best. Right?

Brazilian barbecue. It's not like a big buffet where you can go back and forth and just take whatever tastes good and mix and match and have a great time.

Paul says, beware. Some of the teachings, some of the religious teachings out there are poisonous. They might smell and taste good at first, but over time, if you eat them, they will confuse you.

It will make you sick. Don't eat it. Paul says, be discerning about different religious teachings before you accept them. Now, to be sure, we may share much common ground with people of other faiths.

[ 26 : 38 ] We care about raising our families well. We want to build a just and compassionate society. We may admire one another's character because all people are created in God's image.

We may agree on some, we may even agree on some theological ideas. we can live side by side as neighbors in peace and with mutual respect. But there will always be a crucial difference between Christianity and other faiths, and Paul wants us to know that.

See, Paul says, every religion ultimately follows one of two ways, one of two patterns, the Ishmael pattern or the Isaac pattern. The Ishmael pattern is a religion of law where it's ultimately about what people can do and what people must do.

The Isaac pattern is about God's promise where it's ultimately about what God has done and what God promises to do. And Paul says, Christianity is an Isaac pattern religion.

Christianity is about God's promise. It's about what God has done in Jesus Christ. It's about what God has done and what God promises to do when Jesus returns one day.

[ 27 : 52 ] C.S. Lewis was once asked during a conference on comparative religions. He says, someone asked him, what makes Christianity different from all the others? And he said, oh, it's grace.

God's grace. Paul says, true Christianity is fundamentally about God's grace, about God's promise. You, brothers and sisters like Isaac, are children of promise, children of God.

You know, according to Muslim teaching, people can become servants of God, but never children of God. Now, the Quran explicitly rejects the idea that God could ever have a son, even an adopted son.

It says, had God wished to take to himself a son, he could have chosen whom he pleased out of those whom he created, but glory be to him, he is above such things. In Islam, the primary paradigm for relating to God is servant, master.

You submit to God because he is above you. Now, at one level, we can affirm that there is some truth there, because the New Testament does say that Christians are bondservants of God and of Jesus, of Christ.

[ 29 : 02 ] The New Testament does teach the transcendence and the holiness and the infinite power of God. God is God and we are not. But the New Testament also says that God chose to draw near to us in Jesus Christ.

That Jesus came and he took on our human nature. He became like us so that we might one day become like him. He became like us in order to heal and transform us from the inside out.

God didn't just send down a law to us that we must obey and that one day we will be judged by. But God sent a Savior. He sent Jesus to fulfill the law perfectly and to pay the penalty that we deserved in his death on the cross so that we could be forgiven and adopted as God's children forever.

When my wife Jane was in college she had a good friend who was a Muslim and along with a Jewish student and several other students they started a group called the Interfaith Justice League. They had long conversations about faith and social justice.

They developed a deep respect for one another. And one day Jane and her Muslim friend were talking and somehow the conversation turned to the final judgment. And he said when the final judgment comes there will be a scale.

[ 30 : 22 ] On one side there will be my good deeds. On the other side there will be my bad deeds. And I hope that Allah will be merciful and that my good deeds will outweigh my bad deeds.

And at that point she realized a crucial difference between Christianity and Islam. Because in Islam in the end it comes down to a scale. Your good deeds versus your bad deeds.

But Christianity says if it came down to a scale our bad deeds can never be outweighed by our good deeds. Only a perfect life pleases God.

Only a perfect life can wipe away our sin. And Jesus has lived that perfect life and died the death that we deserve so that we might have a clean record before God.

So that we might stand before him and approach him with confidence and without fear and even one day face his final judgment without fear of being rejected.

[ 31 : 26 ] Because we're accepted in Jesus. So first Paul says beware of redefining Christianity. Second he says understand a crucial difference between Christianity and other faiths.

And third Paul teaches us how to face opposition with humility and confidence. Verse 29 says just as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the spirit so also it is now.

Now if you read Galatians if you look at the context there's no evidence that the Galatians were actually in danger of physical persecution at that time.

Physical harm. Unlike the readers of Hebrews or Thessalonians no one was threatening to kill them no one was threatening to take away their property. The persecution that they were facing was of a more subtle kind.

Mocking. Shame. Exclusion. Just as long ago Ishmael had mocked his younger brother Isaac it's found in Genesis 21. Now for the most part that's what you and I might face today here in the United States.

[ 32 : 35 ] We don't face threats of physical harm for the most part here in the United States for being a Christian. But you might face mocking.

You might face mocking from family members who don't understand why you're so into this Christianity thing. Or maybe at work maybe you feel pressure to hide the fact that you're a Christian.



At work for some reason or other. Maybe you feel pressure to redefine Christianity according to our prevailing cultural norms in some way or other.

How do we deal with this when we face it? Martin Luther wrote Ishmael persecutes Isaac but Isaac does not persecute Ishmael in return.

In other words what he's saying is that true Christians will be persecuted but true Christians do not persecute in return. Now of course throughout history Christians have persecuted others.

[ 33 : 34 ] There's a tragic history of that. But they have only done so when they have forgotten the true message of the cross. When they have redefined Christianity to suit their own national or personal interests.

Paul's saying when we are mocked when we are persecuted it's an invitation to treasure the inheritance that we have been given in Christ.

To remember that we belong not to any earthly city but to the heavenly Jerusalem which will one day come to earth when Jesus returns. Let me conclude with one example that I think expresses this attitude well.

Some of you may remember this. It happened about a year ago last spring during Holy Week a large cross with the initials ROFL appeared one day in the middle of the Yale campus. ROFL stands for rolling on the floor laughing.

I guess it's one of those acronyms that people send each other on Facebook or in text messages or whatever. I've never got it yet but that's supposedly what it means. Clearly it was a mocking sign.

[ 34 : 42 ] Nobody knows who put it up or what exactly the motive was but it was a mocking sign. Now there was some controversy because the Yale administration did not speak out publicly against it.

They removed it but they didn't really make any public response to it. And in response to the event two students wrote editorials in the school newspaper in the Yale Daily News.

One was a rather angry and defensive editorial condemning the administration for their hypocrisy for not defending Christian students. Another student wrote the following and he wrote this last year on Good Friday.

And I think that this is a good example of how we might respond when we face mocking or opposition. And he wrote this. He said, how should we react to this insulting symbol?

Does ROFL belong on a Christian cross? Perhaps we should ask instead, does the Christian cross belong on a Christian? Christians have worn the symbol on their chests for two millennia.

[ 35 : 45 ] But the cross is an instrument of torture. The cross is what humiliated and killed Jesus. The cross does not belong on the Christian. The Christian belongs on the cross.

For the Christian believes that, but for the grace of God and the sacrifice of Christ, he or she would bear the penalty that Christ bore instead. This is why the Christian holds up the cross.

And the cross is meaningless if it is no longer a reminder of this painful, mocking fact. It is when Christianity has forgotten this fact that the faith has been at its worst.

It is because Christians forgot what the cross meant that they were able to paint it on their shields and march to the Crusades. Who could kill and conquer under the cross if they understood that it was a symbol of their Lord's mockery and death?

Who could march to the Crusades with ROFL painted on their shields? Christianity is a strange and paradoxical creed and the cross is at the center of it.

[ 36 : 48 ] Its glory is precisely in its king's shame and defeat. It honors its humiliation, lives by its death, loves its enemies. Today is Good Friday.

Good. For those among us who are Christian, it is good to remember Jesus' suffering and death today. Good to remember that he was beaten and mocked and killed so that you didn't have to be because that was your punishment that he bore.

So if you are hurt by the ROFL cross, if you are mocked by it, then you should be glad. It means you understand Good Friday. Take up the ROFL cross because it is the cross of Christ.

Carry it with pride and with humility because on it your king was mocked, killed, and victorious. And on Easter Sunday, roll on the floor laughing because people then as now went to such lengths to humiliate Jesus, to mock Jesus, and ultimately to kill Jesus.

And it didn't work. Christ is risen. He's risen indeed. In him we have an eternal inheritance. Let's pray. Lord, we thank you for the status that you have given to us as your adopted children.

[ 38 : 07 ] We thank you for the forgiveness that we have through your death on the cross. Lord, we pray that when we face mocking or opposition that we might respond with humility, remembering that we deserve far worse.

We deserve the penalty that you paid on the cross for us. And yet, we pray that you would also give us a joyful confidence because we know that we have an eternal inheritance in Jesus Christ and that he is risen from the dead as our Lord.

We pray this in his name. Amen. Amen.