

The Goslar Message

The Cross of Jesus Christ – The Center of Salvation

Why people receive forgiveness of sins and redemption on the basis the Cross¹

For us as Christians, the Cross of Christ is the overwhelming proof of the love of the Triune God for us as human beings. It is therefore all the more deplorable that the message of the Cross today encounters in many ways a lack of understanding or even cold rejection. We live in an age in which the message of the Cross is hotly contested in public. Crucifixes are being taken down from public school rooms, crosses carried by demonstrators are ripped up by counter-demonstrators, and representatives of the most diverse ideologies and religions are attacking the message that Jesus of Nazareth died for the sins of mankind. Also those who have distanced themselves from the church are calling it into question. Even in the church, the meaning of the Cross for salvation is, in many ways, vanishing and being misinterpreted. The Word of the Cross is on the verge of disappearing from the view of the Christian Church.

¹ *This document, the **Goslar Message**, was unanimously approved in its German original version on October 5, 2011 by the participants of the Fourth Ecumenical Convention of Confessing Churches and Christians.*

This has grave consequences for the thinking and practice of Christians in the present age; yet, the message of salvation which proclaims the *death of Jesus on the Cross as the atoning sin offering for our sins* is the *heart of the Gospel and Biblical faith*. Indeed, the eternal destiny of the individual is decided by his response to Jesus Christ, the chief person of world history, and to His death on the Cross.

Therefore, it is an urgent concern of the *International Christian Network*, (ICN) to emphasize anew the apostolic preaching of the Cross as it is anchored in the Bible and developed in the creeds as well as in the doctrine of the Church.

We would also like to protect the preaching of the Cross from disregard and misinterpretation, and from being denied and forgotten, and in this way help in the rediscovery of the power that lies in the “word of the Cross” (1 Cor 1:18).

The Fourth Ecumenical Convention of Confessing Churches held by ICN on October 3-5, 2011 in Goslar, Germany with the theme “*The Cross of Jesus Christ – The Center of Salvation*” gives expression to this in the following declaration, which is primarily addressed to those responsible for the teaching and the preaching of the church, to those in missions and in inter-church

relations, and beyond this to all fellow Christians, reminding them that our faith stands and falls with the apostolic message of the Cross:

*“The word of the Cross is foolishness to those who are perishing,
but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God.”*
(I Cor 1:18)

I. God Brought About Man’s Redemption on the Cross

Why did Jesus’ life on earth end at the Cross of Calvary. There are differing human answers to this; however He Himself and His apostles give the valid divine answer, to those to whom He has revealed it. According to this, Jesus of Nazareth was sent as the eternal Son of God from the Father into the world out of love to people, and He willingly took death upon Himself (John 3:16; Phil 2:5-8). He did this to fulfill God’s plan of salvation (Acts 2:23; Eph 1:9f). He performed the work of the “LORD’s Servant” announced in the Book of Isaiah (Chapters 42; 49-53): like a sacrificial lamb He took the sins of mankind upon Himself

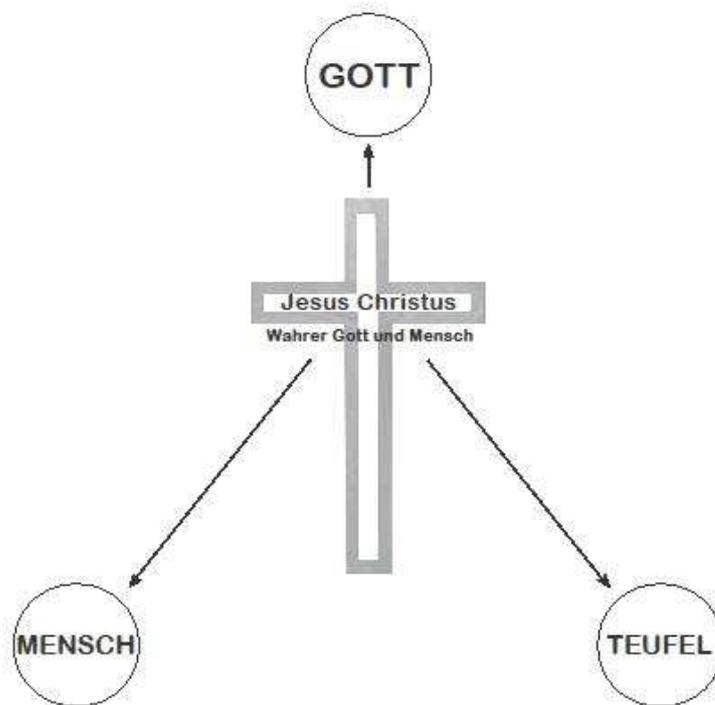
and took away their consequences (John 1:29; I Petr 1:18ff), to save us from eternal death which is the inevitable result of our having turned away from God, the Source of all life (Rom 6:23). Through His substitutionary sacrificial death (Rom 5:8; II Cor 5:14b) and His resurrection from the dead, He has given “eternal life” (John 3:16; Gal 2:20) to all who believe in Him and are baptized (Mk 16:16).

Three presuppositions shown in the Holy Scriptures are the basis for this answer.

The **first** is: God’s nature is *holy love* which cannot coexist with evil (Jas 1:17). It expresses itself when it is disregarded and opposed in a wrath that is unique to it (Ps 90:7.9; Rom 1:18).

The **second** is: The turning away of the first human beings from God by falling into sin has brought *all of humanity into a state of lostness* (Gen 2:17; Rom 3:23). This means that, since then, man has been without direction and separated from God, although, as His image, God had destined man for eternal fellowship with Himself (Gen 1:27).

The **third** is: Man has fallen under the *power of the devil* (Rev 12:9; Eph 2:1f; I John 5:19) and cannot free himself from this bondage.



Above: **God** the Father
In the center: **Jesus Christ**, Truly God and Truly Man
On the left side below: **Man** – On the right side below: The **Devil**

To this corresponds a three-fold line of attack of the work of salvation performed on the Cross:

- **God reconciled us – mankind – to Himself** (Rom 5:10; II Cor 5:18; Eph 2:16) *by presenting His Son* (Rom 3:25) *as the substitutionary atoning sacrifice.*
- *Redemption, i.e., deliverance from guilt before God and from the dominion of evil, death, and the devil, was brought about for **mankind** on the Cross and is granted through faith in Jesus' forgiveness, justification, and adoption as God's children* (Gal 4:4; Eph 1:7; I Tim 2:5f).
- *On the Cross, the power of **Satan**, as well as all the corrupting powers of sin and death, were broken, so that he had to give up his claim of dominion forever* (John 3:8; II Tim 1:10; Hebr 2:14f).

II. The Challenge of the Message of the Cross

1. The Cross – The Fulfilment of the Divine Plan of Salvation

Jesus knew that His suffering and death on the Cross were rooted in God's will to save and therefore *had to happen* (Mk 8:31). His disciples did not understand that, and Peter contradicted his Lord (Mt 16:22) so that the Lord even had to rebuke him by calling him "Satan" (Mt 16:23). His disciples first understood after his resurrection that he had given his life as God's Son to die "for many" (Isa 53:12b; Mk 10:45) in order to redeem them from their sin (Mt 26:28; Mk 14:24), and preached this as the centre of all Christian faith (I Cor 15:3-5).

2. The Atonement Event – a Mystery

It is a widely held opinion that it is outrageous to imagine a God who would demand the blood sacrifice of His own Son. A correction of this distorted picture becomes evident as we go back to the Biblical conception of God, which testifies to His holy love (i.e. his love which negates and conquers all evil), as well as reflecting upon the Old Testament sacrificial order, which points to the sacrifice of Jesus (Hebr 9:14.22). He alone, who at the same time is the one and only sinless man and the Son of God, could turn away God's wrath through His precious blood shed for us in our place, the wrath which had been provoked by the sins of humanity and continues to be provoked (I John 1:7b; Rom 5:9; Rev 1:5b).

3. The Offensiveness of the “Word of the Cross”

Modern theologians maintain that the Pauline interpretation of the death of Jesus is a reversion to a Jewish idea of a scapegoat, something which does not mean anything to contemporary people. But even Paul, like all early Christian missionaries, had

to make the experience that saving faith in a crucified man was extremely offensive. For educated Greeks it was complete “nonsense”, for Torah-observant Jews a blasphemous “scandal”. Contrary to this general rejection, the Gospel of the crucified Christ was completely convincing for those who believed in Him. For it is the one-and-only God Himself who raised His Son from the dead and thereby proved the love which had reached its completion in His Son’s self-surrender (John 13:1) to be the saving power for all (I Cor 1:18-25).

Paul calls Christ’s death “for our sins” (I Cor 15:3) a “mystery” (the Greek word in I Cor 1:7 is *mysterion*). This is accessible to human reason only where it accepts God’s wisdom for itself through the Holy Spirit (I Cor 2:10-16; John 16:8ff).

4. The Crucified Christ – Offense and Mystery even Today

A God who allows Jesus, the teacher of radical love for all people, even for one’s enemies, to die so that sinners can be forgiven by Him seems, for many of today’s critics, dehumanizing and even dangerous to society. This offense is mistaken, however, because it views Jesus as a mere man, not as

the Son of God, in whom His very own love acted. Critics also think that this God is vengeful, instead of recognizing Him as the unique Power of love which conquers by giving out itself and thereby reconciling His enemies to Himself (Rom 5:10; II Cor 5:18f).

That erroneous thinking can only be overcome by a complete understanding of the Holy Scriptures which are the sole basis for understanding, and by considering the dogmatic knowledge of the Church based on them as well as through the liberating power of faith in the Christ crucified for us.

5. The Necessity of Personal Response

The Cross of Christ, together with His resurrection, marked a turning point in history (I Cor 15:3f; Rom 4:25). For here, by His act of salvation, the Triune God made His new covenant for all mankind (Mt 26:28). This atoning sacrifice was brought once and for all (Hebr 9:26ff). The redemptive activity of Christ develops its salvific effect when a person accepts it as something which was done for him.

Redemption is *appropriated* by means of the Christian ministry, i.e. the ministry of reconciliation (II Cor 5:19f), through the

preached word and the sacraments; it is *acquired by* sinful man through repentance and faith (Lk 24:47).

III. The Blessing of the Experience of the Cross

When a person under the leading of the Holy Spirit (Joh 16, 8) recognizes his sin and accepts the message of the Cross, he gains the consoling certainty of being in favour with God and thereby begins a new life, saved under God's healing power. This consists in his experiencing, again and again, the liberating action of the Cross from the power of evil, called “sanctification” (I Cor 1:30). Sanctification is a gift of the Holy Spirit which has to be received by obedience. In a life of sanctification one learns to live from the gift of baptism (Rom 6:3, 12-18). As one proceeds, it is the vision of the Crucified One that gives Christians *comfort*, certainty, and even readiness to suffer for love's sake. People have, under the impact of the message of the Cross, experienced this through the ages and are experiencing this up until today. There are numerous testimonies to this from every culture.

Sanctification encompasses *taking up the Cross*: In the face of the loving dedication of Himself on the Cross, Christ commands

us also to present our lives to God as a “living sacrifice” (Mt 16:24; Rom 12:1). Paul invites us to let ourselves be patterned into death of Christ; for this is the way to experience Christ and the power of His resurrection more deeply (Phil 3:10f). Disciples of Jesus who each take up their own “crosses” gain with this, at the same time, a part in the continuing work of the salvation of mankind which is alienated from God (II Cor 4:10-15; Col 1:24), a work which goes on through evangelism and counseling.

IV. The Cross in its Power to Create Unity

The Cross as the basis and place of salvation gives the Christian faith its distinctive *identity* (cf. I Cor 2:2) even beyond the bounds of different Christian denominations. Through God’s act of reconciliation which took place at the Cross of Christ, He (God) also instituted the “*ministry of reconciliation*” (II Cor 5:19f). Therefore, the sacrifice of Christ on the Cross represents the guiding principle and the content of all ministries and services of the Church in liturgy, preaching, counseling, and ministries of helps.

Everyone who through faith in Jesus Christ and baptism into the Triune God accepts Jesus' death on the Cross as the basis of his existence, is, at the same time, also made a member of His community of the saved (Rom 6:3-6; I Cor 12:13). This becoming one with Christ and His redemption is re-enacted and brought into consciousness, in a sacramental way, ever again in the Lord's Supper.

The Cross created peace between the redeemed of Israel and non-Israelite mankind (Eph 2:13-18). Even today, there is a power that proceeds from the Cross which binds all Christians to one another. *The closer we come to the Cross of Christ, the closer we will also come to one another.* It unites us with the whole of Christendom on earth and in Heaven (Rev 5:6ff; cf. Hebr 9:12). Thus, the Cross has fundamental *ecumenical* significance in the sense that the crucified Lord Himself creates a unity of faith and the knowledge of Christ (Eph 4:13) that spans the world. For this reason, the Church which stands in the battle on earth is united with the Church which is triumphant in Heaven, bringing worship and praise with these words,

“Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honour and glory and praise!”

(Revelation 5:12, NIV)

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will be published in 2012.