

# HOW GREAT IS OUR GOD!

The Cross We Proclaim

1 Corinthians 1:18–2:5



## LET'S BEGIN HERE

Not many people are powerful, not many are rich, not many are famous—though many wish they were. No one wants to appear foolish or weak, which is why the allure of worldly ways is so enticing. The world has built a better mousetrap, so it seems, coaxing Christians onto its spring-loaded trap of humanism and intellectual pride. But Paul would have none of it. He warned us to turn our attention to what really matters—the cross of Christ—even if the world thinks it foolish and weak. Because through the cross, God blesses.



## LET'S DIG DEEPER

### 1. Understand the Significance of the Cross (1 Corinthians 1:18–25)

The cross of Christ brings about conflicting opinions, differing desires, and contrasting realities when compared with “wrong-way” values.

### 2. Consider the Truth of Your Calling (1 Corinthians 1:26–31)

Wrong-way Christians boast about fame, wealth, or powerful position. Instead, we can boast about our righteousness, sanctification, and redemption through Christ's cross. What an amazing perspective!

### 3. Hear the Honesty in Paul's Confession (1 Corinthians 2:1–5)

Paul's message and method: preach Christ crucified, simply and directly. Paul's purpose and motive: that the weakness of human wisdom would highlight the power of Christ's cross.

With the cross ever before us, we must never forget to remember the pit, to refuse the praise, and to rely on the power.



## Quotable

*I've always been impressed with the fact that we all stand level at the foot of the cross.*

— Charles R. Swindoll



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### A CLOSER LOOK

#### *The Brutality of Crucifixion*

Crucifixions were brutal affairs—the worst kind of punishment reserved for the vilest of criminals. So horrific was the cross to the ancient mind, the great Roman orator and statesman Cicero declared:

The mere name of the [cross], should be far removed . . . from the persons of Roman citizens, —from their thoughts, and eyes, and ears. For not only the actual fact and endurance of all these things [the executioner and cross], but the bare possibility of being exposed to them, —the expectation, the mere mention of them, even, —is unworthy of a Roman citizen and of a free man.<sup>1</sup>

The Romans didn't invent crucifixion, but they did turn it into a macabre art form. The executioner, an *exactor mortis*, was schooled in the finer points of death and led a team of soldiers whose sole task was to make Roman execution a terrifying spectacle. Held by nails in the wrists and feet, the one being crucified hung naked from splintered wooden beams, for prying eyes to mock and birds of prey to terrorize. Over time, Roman soldiers learned how to add various elements to the procedure and adjust them to achieve the desired effect. They could expertly control the amount of suffering, the cause of death, and even when the victim would die.

Victims were forced to carry the implement of their own demise to the place of execution. In Jesus' day, the cross itself was typically made in the shape of a "T"—the top crossbeam (the *patibulum*) joined to the vertical member (the *stipes*). Usually, the victim was attached to the cross with his arms outstretched on the *patibulum* and his feet on the *stipes*, the soles flat against the wood. Hung this way, victims usually took three to five days to die.

Victims nailed to a cross had to keep their bodies in constant motion to relieve the pain in their arms, chest, and legs, which only agitated the damaged nerves in the nail wounds. The primary causes of death were likely excessive blood loss, traumatic shock, or cardiac and respiratory arrest.<sup>2</sup>

This was the kind of death Paul wrote of, unadorned, in Philippians 2:8: "Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."



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## LET'S LIVE IT

If, at a sophisticated cocktail party, you were to confess that you were in love with the Eiffel Tower or describe how you bamboozled billions of dollars from taxpayers or announce that you've decided to become a terrorist, you would gather quite an intrigued and inviting crowd around you. But if you were to confess that Jesus Christ is God, who died and rose again for the salvation of humanity, you'd find yourself in an empty corner with a distinct chill in the air.

The world is not interested in Christ's cross; it is simply too scandalous! Yet we, the saved, proclaim God's gospel—considered weakness and folly by the world—as the only wisdom and power to save those who are perishing.

**Do you believe that your days could be better if you relied on the power of the Spirit more? Explain.**

## ENDNOTES

1. Marcus Tullius Cicero, "The Speech of M. T. Cicero in Defence of C. Rabirius, Accused of Treason," sec. 5, in *The Orations of Marcus Tullius Cicero*, vol. 2, trans. C. D. Yonge (London: G. Bell and Sons, 1917), 269.
2. Adapted from Insight for Living, *Jesus: The Greatest Life of All Bible Companion* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2007), 142–45.



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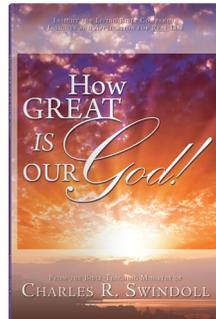
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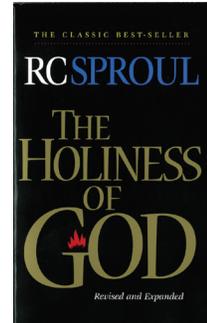
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