

15 Ways the Cross Inverted Worldly Kingdoms

The cross, a symbol so deeply etched into our consciousness, has, in modern times, become a mere accessory, a piece of jewelry worn casually. Its current representation is akin to someone donning a replica of an electric chair or a guillotine as a necklace.

This trivialization overshadows the profound impact the cross had on human history and its radical inversion of worldly values.

The cross and Christianity caused such a massive ideological shift in the world it transformed the normative old-world perspectives related to the sanctity of life, slavery, marriage, justice, law, compassion, education, sexual ethics and much more.

The apostle Paul aptly described the cross as “foolishness” to those who believed in his time (1 Cor 1:18). But why? What made the cross so scandalous in the Roman empire, which also comports to contemporary culture?

1. From Capricious gods to a loving God – The Roman pantheon consisted of gods who were erratic and often malevolent. Humanity was their plaything. Yet, the cross starkly contrasts this by illustrating God’s profound love for sinners, even to death (Rom. 5:8-9).

2. Power through brutality vs. selflessness – Roman rulers maintained their grip on power by instilling fear. Crucifixion was reserved for those seen as threats, thereby maintaining peace through a reign of terror. Jesus, in stark contrast, displayed a new kind of power – one that embraced suffering through a brutal death rather than imposing it. His kingship was marked by selflessness, culminating in His crucifixion.

Rather than lording it over others, He served others (Mark 10:42-45).

3. Warrior Caesar vs. sacrificial Christ – Rome propagated the narrative of Caesar, a being claimed to be divine and human, who ruled with an iron fist, conquering enemies with the sword. But Jesus presented a counternarrative. As both truly God and man, He conquered not by physical violence but through love and sacrificial death.

4. Enslavement vs. emancipation – Roman leaders and citizens maintained dominion by subjugating non-citizens. Yet, Christ's kingly power manifested differently: He freed individuals even before they became citizens of His kingdom.

5. Abusive power through victimizing others vs. victory through self-victimization – While the Roman rulers maintained their positions by victimizing others, Jesus took a radically different approach. Paradoxically, He allowed Himself to become the victim, undergoing suffering and death, to achieve ultimate victory over sin and mortality (Col. 2:15).

6. Pride and ambition vs. meekness – In the world we know, it's often the proud and the ambitious that rise to the top, seizing success and acclaim. Yet, in Christ's kingdom, a profound inversion occurs: it's the meek, those who humble themselves, who truly inherit the earth (Ps. 37:11, Matt. 5:5).

7. Self-assertion vs. self-denial – The worldly mantra promotes claiming one's rights, often at the expense of others. Yet, within the framework of the kingdom, the ethos is one of dying for one's right to find life (Mark 8:34-35).

8. Carved identities vs. unified identity in Christ – Worldly systems constantly urge us to carve out identities based on skin color, ethnicity, economic status or geography. Yet, the kingdom of God presents an alternate vision. Here, distinctions blur as believers find their primary identity in

Christ. It's not one's ethnic background, financial status or residence that defines them, but their relationship with Jesus (John 1:12-13; Gal. 3:28).

9. Transactional relationships vs. unconditional love – Ancient empires, including Rome, often operated under quid pro quo principles. Loyalty was rewarded, and betrayal was punished. The cross, however, demonstrates a love that isn't contingent upon our actions. It reveals a God who loves unconditionally, not based on what He can get in return, but because of His innate nature of love (Rom. 8:35-39).

10. Conquest through intimidation vs. invitation to relationship – Empires expanded their territories through force and intimidation. Yet, Christ did not force His dominion upon humanity. Through the cross, He extended an invitation, beckoning each individual into a personal relationship with Him, rooted in love and free will (John 3:16). Furthermore, bands of Jesus communities imitated Christ and were committed to doing good works to all people which caused whole communities to flourish (Titus 3:8).

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11. Hierarchies and class vs. universal brotherhood – The Roman Empire, like many civilizations before and after, had a rigid hierarchical system. People were valued based on their social status. However, the cross levels the playing field, emphasizing the intrinsic worth of every individual as an image bearer of God, thereby promoting a universal brotherhood among believers (Gen. 1:27; James 2:1-5).

12. Retributive justice vs. restorative justice – Ancient societies were often governed by harsh retributive justice. The cross introduces us to a God who seeks restoration over mere retribution. It shows us a path where forgiveness is a

divine attribute, encouraging believers to reconcile and restore broken relationships (Col. 3:12-14).

13. Temporal success vs. eternal significance – While the empires of the world sought temporal successes, victories that would fade with time, the cross is a symbol of eternal significance. Christ's sacrifice offers believers not just momentary triumph but eternal life, a hope that transcends the transient nature of worldly accomplishments (1 John 5:12).

14. Physical monuments vs. living testimonies – Roman emperors and contemporary elites erect statues and monuments in their honor, symbols of their fleeting riches and reigns. The cross, however, stands as a testament to the countless lives transformed by its message. Instead of lifeless stone, the impact of the cross is evident in the living testimonies of those it has touched (2 Cor. 3:2-3).

15. Authority through heritage vs. authority through service – While many rulers claimed authority based on privilege through their lineage, Jesus established His authority through His spiritual family (Mark 3:31-35). Furthermore, His service to humanity. His washing of His disciples' feet, His healing of the sick, and ultimately, His sacrifice on the cross are testaments to His model of leadership – one that serves rather than demands privileges (John 13:12-17).

The cross isn't just a symbol but a powerful declaration of an upside-down kingdom. It challenges every preconceived notion of power, authority, and success. Through its message, we are called to embrace a counter-cultural ethos, one that prioritizes love, sacrifice, and humility above all.

The cross is a scandal, not because it confronts us with a gruesome death, but because it confronts us with a radical way of life.

It challenges the norms of worldly power, identity and value. In the shadow of the cross, the grand narratives of worldly

kingdoms are upended, and a new paradigm emerges – one where love, sacrifice and humility reign supreme.

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