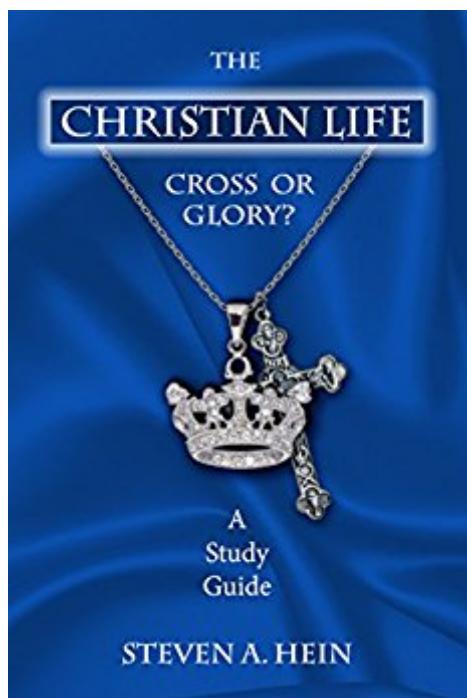


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The Christian Life: Cross Or Glory? A Study Guide



Synopsis

The objective of this study guide is to move readers within a study group, or an individual in private study, to assess (with Bibles open) the truth value and application of cross theology as the biblical model of a healthy Christian life. To this end, it is divided into eleven sessions corresponding to each of the chapters in the book. For each study session, readers are encouraged to reflect on and discuss major points of the chapter through a series of quoted sections and questions designed to stimulate discussion and critical reflection. It is the author's desire that *The Christian Life: Cross or Glory?* and this study guide may increase the student's awareness and appreciation that their not-so-great, ordinary faith life is always and forever overcome by the extraordinary grace and forgiveness of the life of the crucified Christ.

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Customer Reviews

This book is a must-read for anyone trying to come to grips with the struggles of living your Christian

identity. Dr. Hein offers a winsome and scholarly approach to the question of "how am I doing in my Christian walk?" The author points us to Christ for the answer, rightly placing our hope and confidence in His perfect life given for ours. I would recommend this book especially to those who would equate God's blessings with our spiritual commitment. Dr. Hein shows how full-strength Law places us into "checkmate" in regard to the things we would do, but fail to do-- and those things we have attempted to stop, but keep right on doing. Who will deliver us from this body of death??? Only Jesus Christ! Do yourself a favor and add this book to your Christian library! It's a treasure!

The work of sanctification that God performs in the believer is important to grasp. How does this process occur? Assuming that God is active in our spiritual growth, to what extent are individuals active? In order to answer these questions, Steven Hein has given the Church a help in understanding "the relevance of the crucified Christ for daily Christian living" (p. 1). We will look at the book according to its three main sections.

The Cross Life of the Christian The author begins by defining the difference between cross and glory in the Christian life by drawing from Martin Luther's Heidelberg Disputation wherein the reformer spells out his understanding of what living under the cross looks like in light of a proper distinction between God's Law and God's Gospel. This Law/Gospel paradigm is necessary for developing the thesis, so Hein gives an illustrative parable involving the relationship of a married couple to make his point. The illustration works well in conveying the how one acts and reacts by following rules versus acting from joyful gratitude and freedom. From there, he moves to the demands made by God in His Law and the paradoxical problem that we are required to meet them but are completely unable except in Christ who met them fully. And even there we stumble because of sin working in us. Finally, there are chapters on justification and sanctification wherein the author establishes that just as surely as salvation is the work of God by grace through faith, so sanctification is by grace through faith.

The Experience of Living in the Cross This short section is rather important because of the principles they investigate. First, there is the conflict the apostle Paul describes in Romans 7: the internal struggle between the Old Sinful Self and the New Self in Christ. Hein points out the changes of priorities and desires in the life of the Christian that conflict with the desires of the flesh to act out. These struggles are real, and if allowed to escalate, can cause the believer to doubt God and His promises. Examining different bases from which doubt can arise, the author answers how one ministers to the doubt. Second, there is the conflict from without: tribulation or what Luther called tentatio (Latin). The constant barrage on the believer from the world and the devil

wears on the believer causing a holy anguish or anfechtung (German). This is a normal course of the Christian life as noted in the first epistle of Peter and that of James and should cause us to look even more to the Savior and cling to Him, though as with the internal struggle, doubts may arise.

Faithful Living in the Cross This section deals with what the life of the cross entails as it is lived out. What does it look like in regards to good works performed for our neighbors and operating within the Reformation understanding of vocation? not our occupations, but the offices we have in life (i.e., spouse, parent, child, employer, employee, etc., each operating within specific boundaries and for specific reasons)? What is the relation of our freedom in the Gospel compared to our obligation of doing good for our neighbor? These areas and questions are addressed in a practical and biblical way, finally looking at our eternal destinies (heaven and hell) in relation to our lives, with a unique consideration of their actual locations.

Observations Dr. Hein is an engaging writer. I enjoyed perusing this book, especially because he based his arguments on Scripture. I raise this, because he wrote from a confessional, Lutheran (LC-MS) perspective. Most LC-MS authors I have read tend to rely heavily or primarily on the Lutheran Confessions while using Bible passages as reference. The author does the opposite, and I believe this makes the book more accessible to the reader who would insist on the biblical primacy and also to the person not having the background in Lutheran dogmatics. Some will be puzzled by or disagree with the Lutheran understanding of the Sacraments, Means of Grace, etc. that the author works through, since they firmly within the boundaries of his confessions. However, these inform rather than distract from the thesis, making this work a solid, useful read for the average reader.

Disclosure of Material Connection: I received this book free of charge. I was not required to write a positive review, and the opinions are my own. I am disclosing this in accordance with the Federal Trade Commission's 16 CFR, Part 255: "Guides Concerning the Use of Endorsements and Testimonials in Advertising."

Any Christian who takes their faith seriously must sooner or later confront paradoxical questions like these: If I am growing as a Christian, why am I only more aware of my sin? If I am trying to follow God's law more, how come I seem to be doing it less? If I am maturing in faith, why do I struggle with temptation? If I am progressing in my walk with Jesus, why do I still encounter so many trials? These are sanctification questions, and the answers will either strengthen or shipwreck faith. If the answer depends upon the individual's efforts and piety, then the conclusions will be devastating. The answer, however, should begin with the cross, with Jesus Christ crucified for our sins and raised for our justification: it's

there, in fact, that Christian living begins and remains. That's the "theology of the cross," as detailed by Martin Luther. In "The Christian Life: Cross or Glory?", Steven Hein explores the theology of the cross and shows its sharp, scriptural contrast to many of today's "theologies of glory." Hein has a simple, easy-to-read style. At the same time, the book can make for challenging reading: not so much because the writing is difficult, but because the content seems so counter-intuitive to everything you'll find in the "Christian living" shelf at your local bookstore. Held against the entirety of Scripture, I'll take this volume over those anytime. Seasoned with articulate teaching and penetrating application, there's thought-provoking stuff in here for inquiring laymen and experienced pastors alike. This is a book of comfort for those who seek peace with God, though their sins still goad them; for here one finds the certainty that our holiness is found in Christ alone.

Dr. Hien has a very down to earth writing style that is easy to the reader to understand the depth of what Martin Luther found during the reformation one of my favorite books on the topic

This book is probably the most valuable book besides the Bible for living the Christian life. If you had to choose one other book besides Bible for religious reading, pick this one. It's life changing. Honestly, it's what the vast majority of American christians need to hear. I own it on Audible, Kindle and in paperback. It's that good.

In the midst of popular theology that says Christianity is all about "having your best life now," Cross or Glory returns to Christ's model of what it means to be a Christian as an alien in this fallen world. The book is a wonderful summary of what it means to be simultaneously saint and sinner. I would recommend this book for pastors and laypeople alike.

Difficult read. Very dry.

Dr. Hein uses a slightly different approach to define the theology of the cross. His style is more accessible than others who have written on this subject. This should be a great book for a congregation book study, possibly in conjunction with works by Gene Edward Veith.

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