



---

---

## FOREWORD TO THE 2006 EDITION



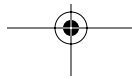
In the twenty years since its publication, John Stott's *The Cross of Christ* has established itself as the most respected and authoritative evangelical writing on this most important of subjects. It remains the standard work on its great themes, inspiring, challenging, encouraging and informing its many readers. It is, in my view, John Stott's greatest and best work, written at the height of his career, when he was sixty-five years old. We see in its pages more of this great writer's mind and heart than in any other of his many writings. It is as if he waited until he felt he was ready to write on so great a theme, enabling him to distil the theological precision, pastoral wisdom and rhetorical gifts of a lifetime. If this is so, it was definitely worth waiting for.

Why is this book so important? At one level, its significance lies in its being the masterpiece of the Christian who is widely regarded as one of the greatest Christian writers, speakers, thinkers and leaders of the twentieth century. John Stott was born in 1921, the son of Sir Arnold Stott, a leading Harley Street physician, noted for his agnosticism as much as his medical skills. He was educated at Rugby School, where he became head boy. Although spiritually inquisitive, he could not at first find any meaningful association between faith and life. As he later recalled:

As a typical adolescent, I was aware of two things about myself, though doubtless I could not have articulated them in these terms then. First, if there was a God, I was estranged from him. I tried to find him, but he seemed to be enveloped in a fog I could not penetrate. Secondly, I was defeated. I knew the kind of person I was, and also the kind of person I longed to be. Between the ideal and the reality there was a great gulf fixed. I had high ideals but a weak will.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup>Timothy Dudley-Smith, *John Stott: The Making of a Leader*, vol. 1 (Leicester, U.K./Downers Grove, Ill.: Inter-Varsity Press, 1999), p. 89.





Yet this spiritual restlessness came to an end after John Stott heard Eric Nash give a talk to the Rugby School Christian Union in February 1938. As he recalls, “what brought me to Christ was this sense of defeat and of estrangement, and the astonishing news that the historic Christ offered to meet the very needs of which I was conscious.” As he later reflected on his conversion:

That night at my bedside I made the experiment of faith, and “opened the door” to Christ. I saw no flash of lightning . . . in fact I had no emotional experience at all. I just crept into bed and went to sleep. For weeks afterwards, even months, I was unsure what had happened to me. But gradually I grew, as the diary I was writing at the time makes clear, into a clearer understanding and a firmer assurance of the salvation and lordship of Jesus Christ.<sup>2</sup>

John Stott went on to Cambridge University, taking first-class honors in modern languages, then, as he trained for ministry in the Church of England, in theology. In 1945 he became curate at the London church now firmly associated with his name and ministry—All Souls, Langham Place. In a highly unusual move, John Stott was appointed rector of this church in 1950 and remained in this position for twenty-five years. During this time, All Souls became the center of John Stott’s dynamic ministry, including pioneering work involving guest services, student missions and a punishing speaking schedule which took him all over the world.

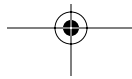
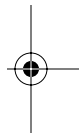
So what gave such energy to this mission? What resource both propelled John Stott into this ministry and sustained him throughout? To read this book is to find the answer. John Stott found—and enables his readers to find—the intellectual and spiritual riches of the cross that sustain the life of discipleship, especially in times of darkness and difficulty. John Stott’s carefully calibrated analysis of the significance of the cross enables us to gain an appreciation of how “the cross transforms everything . . . [giving] us a new, worshiping relationship to God, a new and balanced understanding of ourselves, a new incentive to give ourselves in mission, a new love for our enemies, and a new courage to face the perplexities of suffering.”<sup>3</sup> At point after point, readers of this book will realize how and why the cross stands at the center of John Stott’s faith and ministry.

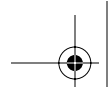
John Stott would insist, however, that the importance of the book ultimately lies in the subject itself. There is no greater, no more challenging task for a Christian leader than to set out the meaning of the cross for the church and for the world. John Stott’s masterly examination takes the form of four major sections:

---

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., pp. 93–94.

<sup>3</sup>John Stott, *The Cross of Christ* (Leicester, U.K./Downers Grove, Ill.: Inter-Varsity Press, 2006), p. 17.





“Approaching the Cross,” “The Heart of the Cross,” “The Achievement of the Cross,” and “Living Under the Cross.” The first section offers a survey of Christian history, reflecting on the remarkable way in which the cross became the central theme and foundational image of the Christian faith.

For many readers, however, it is the second and third sections of the work that bring us to the heart of the gospel. In a bold yet careful investigation of the human situation, John Stott demonstrates our incapacity to change our own situation. We are sinners; and how can such sinners hope to stand in the presence of a holy and righteous God? How can we hope to gain access to such a God when everything about our nature seems to stand in our way? John Stott’s answer is classic in itself, and classic in its inspiration: a divine redeemer was needed, able to bring God’s salvation to the human situation. “Neither Christ alone as man nor the Father alone as God could be our substitute. Only God in Christ, God the Father’s own and only Son made man, could take our place.”<sup>4</sup> The cross is the place at which God brings his salvation and revelation to sinful humanity. John Stott’s exploration is marked by a clarity of biblical exposition and precision of theological dissection which few could hope to achieve. It is at present, as it has been for the last twenty years, the best and most persuasive account of the classic evangelical understanding of the meaning of the cross.

The final section of the work explores the relation between the cross and Christian discipleship in the church and world. We are called to abandon “our supposed right to go on our own way,” and come under the authority of the crucified Christ.

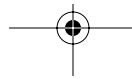
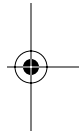
To deny ourselves is to behave toward ourselves as Peter did toward Jesus when he denied him three times. The verb is the same (*aparneomai*). He disowned him, repudiated him, turned his back on him. Self-denial is not denying to ourselves luxuries such as chocolates, cakes, cigarettes and cocktails (though it might include this); it is actually denying or disowning ourselves, renouncing our supposed right to go our own way.<sup>5</sup>

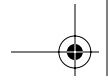
The way we think and the way we act must be shaped by the cross. Though this book deals thoroughly with theories of the atonement, John Stott explores its relevance far beyond this traditional horizon, examining its implications for Christian discipleship, the sacraments, and the enigmas of faith. John is at his best when exploring the link between the cross and spiritual concerns, perhaps nowhere as well as when he explores how Christians are enabled to bear the bur-

---

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 159.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 272.





den of suffering through the cross of Christ.

Any book has weaknesses, some intrinsic, others resulting from the passing of the years. For example, at certain points, John Stott makes judgments on issues of biblical scholarship which might merit revisiting in the light of the last twenty years of publications in this field. Equally, new works of theological scholarship have appeared, moving the discussion on over certain matters. I would personally judge that John Stott would not feel any particular need to change any of his main conclusions in the light of what I would take to be his evaluation of those developments. Nevertheless, it would be helpful to have his response to some of these scholarly shifts and his assessment of their significance. At other points, the rapid changes in culture since the book was first written have perhaps left parts of the book's final section a little less persuasive than they were on their original appearance. Yet even with the passage of twenty years, the acuteness of John Stott's judgment remains impressive.

This, then, is a book that will amply repay study. Its continuing impact and relevance after the passage of twenty years since its publication suggests that this book has all the makings of a classic—a work written in and for one generation, which its successors continue to find important and illuminating.

Alister McGrath  
Professor of Historical Theology, Oxford University  
October 2005

