

Reflections

reading notes

OCTOBER 2004—*The “Crux” of the Matter*

Have you ever considered the meaning of the expression “the crux of the matter”? “Crux” is from the Latin word for *cross* or *torture*. Keeping that in mind, let’s see how the word is used and combined with prefixes, etc. in English.

The cross of Christ, you hardly need to be reminded, is at the heart of the gospel. In fact, Paul describes it as being that which he preached “first of all” (ASV), or “of first importance” (ESV). In 1 Corinthians 15:1ff, he summarizes the message of the gospel with four points: that Christ died for our sins, that He was buried, that He was raised on the third day, and that He appeared to a host of brethren resurrected from the dead. Paul’s summary of the gospel is the crux of the matter—in more ways than one.

The word “crucifix” comes from the Latin verb *cruciare*, meaning “torture.” Its root is the word “crux.” Let’s add to this vocabulary lesson the word “excruciating.” To say that something is “excruciating” is to describe it as extremely painful. Is it any wonder? Take a closer look at the word: “ex” means *out of* and “crux” means *cross* or *torture*. Literally, it means *out of the cross*. It would be difficult to find a form of execution more painful than death by crucifixion. So, when we speak of something being “excruciating” we are relating our pain to that exquisite pain felt on the cross.

I have found yet another connection to the word “crux.” The Crusades were originally called armed pilgrimages. The word “crusade” also comes from the Latin word “crux.” Members of the many expeditions sewed the symbol of the cross on their clothing in an attempt to associate their work with Christ. “To take up the cross” for them meant to become a crusader.

So, from the word “crux” we get crucifix, excruciating and crusade. The cross of Christ is the “crux” of the matter in more ways than one.

Steven Lloyd

