

**A Layman's Thoughts**  
**On**  
**“Taking Up His Cross”**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Recently, while watching video clips on the website [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com) (Bailey, 1996?), I stumbled across a clip of Gail Riplinger, a noted King James Version Only (KJVO) advocate. For those that are unaware of this debate, a KJVO advocate puts forth the supposition that the only valid translation of the Bible for English speaking people is the King James Version (KJV). Those that hold to this KJVO position, often members of fringe fundamentalist sects, express a wide range of reasons for doing so. Some insist the KJV is superior for the language style used, believing it is the clearest to understand for the widest audience. Others have more technical reasons, including a belief that the underlying base documents used to construct the translation are superior to those used in modern translations. Extreme KJVO advocates contend that someone cannot be saved using any translation other than the KJV and the very fringe will argue that the KJV is in itself an inspired document and corrects the underlying Greek and Hebrew base manuscripts. Most adherents along the entire KJVO spectrum believe to one degree or another that differences between modern translations and the KJV indicate some level of corruption inherent in today's Bibles. In any discourse on the topic of Bible versions, it is normative for a KJVO advocate to use the King James translation as the measuring rod for comparative analysis with today's translations, rather than more appropriately judging a translation against its underlying base manuscripts.

Most believers have preferences as to what Bible translation they use, and certainly some translations do reflect the intended message better than others. There is certainly nothing wrong with holding to a version that best speaks to a reader, but before discounting the validity of a translation, it is important for the reader to understand certain things about it. For example, one should be familiar with the various methodologies used in the translation process, understand the base documents drawn upon for

that translation, and understand the objective(s) for creating the translation in the first place. A deeper discussion of this material is beyond the scope of this paper, but there is no doubt in this writer's mind that we have preserved for us God's inerrant message in its entirety, and one can discover this for themselves in the many translations available today.

Back to the video clip mentioned earlier, Riplinger was expounding on the supremacy of the KJV in its translation of Mark 10:21, particularly of the phrase “and come, take up the cross, and follow me”. At issue was the translation of “the” and whether it was appropriate to translate the underlying Greek as “the” or “his”. Ironically, most modern translations leave out the phrase “take up the cross” entirely. While that aspect of the subject is quite interesting, of even greater interest is in determining what Jesus meant by this phrase and what can we take from it today.

This writer does not pretend to be an ancient language scholar by any stretch of the imagination, but there are a great number of resources available today to allow anyone willing to do the study to develop an understanding about these matters. This paper will discuss a few passages that mention the cross, compare how various translations have presented it and speculate as to why. Next, this paper will provide a brief exegetical analysis of Mark 10:21 and will conclude with what it means to take up and bear the cross.

For further reading on any topics covered by this paper, please refer to the notes and bibliography pages.

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## Section I – Just The Facts

As stated in the introduction, the inspiration for this document was the result of viewing a video clip featuring Gail Riplinger (Bailey, 1996?), a noted KJVO advocate. The clip featured an interview in which she was discussing her book, “New Age Bible Versions” (Riplinger, 1993). A favorite tactic of KJVO advocates is to attempt to show the superiority of the KJV by casting doubt on newer translations. This is done by insinuating new translations either alter or eliminate key doctrines through alterations or omissions of common proof verses, thus causing the reader confusion as to the true interpretation of the text.

During this particular video, attention was given to the 10th chapter of Mark and verse 21, specifically the phrase regarding “the cross”. The table below is a list of six verses, including Mark 10:21, where Jesus is quoted regarding the cross, indicating whether the phrase is included or not.

<u>Scripture</u>	<u>Content (KJV)</u>	<u>NIV</u>	<u>TNIV</u>	<u>NASV</u>	<u>ESV</u>	<u>YLT</u>	<u>KJV</u>
Matthew 10:38	<i>And he that taketh not <b>his cross</b>, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me.</i>	X	X	X	X	X	X
Matthew 16:24	<i>Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up <b>his cross</b>, and follow me.</i>	X	X	X	X	X	X
Mark 8:34	<i>And when he had called the people unto him with his disciples also, he said unto them, Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up <b>his cross</b>, and follow me.</i>	X	X	X	X	X	X
Mark 10:21	<i>Then Jesus beholding him loved him, and said unto him, One thing thou lackest: go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, take up <b>the cross</b>, and follow me.</i>					X	X
Luke 9:23	<i>And he said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up <b>his cross</b> daily, and follow me.</i>	X	X	X	X	X	X
Luke 14:27	<i>And whosoever doth not bear <b>his cross</b>, and come after me, cannot be my disciple.</i>	X	X	X	X	X	X

All Scripture above is quoted from the KJV.

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.  
- Ephesians 2:8-9 NASV

In her book, Riplinger (1995) contends that modern translations omit the call to “take up the cross”, with the implication that the reader of a modern translation, rather than looking unto Christ’s cross (“the” cross) for salvation will instead rely on their own cross (“his” cross). This writer agrees

For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.  
- Colossians 1:19 NIV

entirely that it is not through ones own efforts that leads to salvation (Ephesians 2:8-9), but only by Christ's efforts (Colossians 1:19) and one's faith as given by God in that work. The question is, is the apparent omission by modern translations really a conspiracy intended to steer readers in the wrong direction, or are there other reasons for this?

While it is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss in depth how the Bible came to be, it is appropriate to give a very high level overview in order to understand what the chart above is indicating. The scriptures contained in the one book today known as the Holy Bible are, in fact, a collection of many books written over a millennium by various individuals under the inspiration of God. The books themselves are of different genres including historical, poetic, wisdom and apocalyptic literature. Various materials were used in ancient times to record writing including copper, leather and papyrus (Clowers, 2007). Due to their fragile nature, the first hand originals of these documents are no longer extant, but a vast number of ancient copies are, dating back in some cases over 2000 years.

These writings were preserved by an unknown number of individuals, who for each generation faithfully copied God's inerrant message, enabling future generations access to God's revelation. For

most of this time through history, these copies were made by hand. Due to the nature of the process, changes were introduced into these documents as they were copied, some of which were by accident and some were intentional. As scholars today examine these thousands of manuscripts, patterns of these changes emerge allowing these documents to be classified into manuscript families.

For the Old Testament (OT), the major manuscript families (also known as text forms), are referred to as the Masoretic, Septuagint, and Samaritan and for the New Testament (NT), there is the Byzantine, Alexandrian and Western. There is no doubt that God's message has been preserved for people today, but given no two manuscripts match 100%, scholars (as has been done since the canon of scripture was first assembled) have had to determine between different manuscripts, what the correct text is or is most likely to be. There are a number of strategies employed by scholars to arrive at the preferred text, but regardless of the strategy, the result is the creation of an eclectic text, a unique text compiled from the manuscripts available to the scholar.

One process for creating a text is through what is often referred to as textual criticism (Lightfoot, 2003), the product of which is referred to as the critical text. This strategy attempts to arrive at a text that represents what the original author most likely wrote. Another strategy is to choose variants that occur most often among the various manuscripts, resulting in another eclectic text referred to as the majority text. Both strategies have their advantages and disadvantages, but either way, the result is a text that provides a faithful witness to God's revelation to mankind that can be used for study or translation. Both preserve the history and doctrines that define the Christian faith.

Returning to the chart above, one can easily see of the verses sampled that there is a lot of agreement between modern translations and the KJV regarding the cross. In fact, the only disagreement involves

Mark 10:21. As White (1996) indicates, it would seem at first glance that modern versions are removing the text “take up the cross”, which was included in some previous versions of the Bible. One should note, however, this apparent disagreement among translations goes back to ancient times<sup>1</sup>. In fact, one can find the phrase<sup>2</sup> in both the Geneva (created in 1560) and Bishops (created in 1568) Bibles, but interestingly, the same phrase is not included in the Latin Vulgate<sup>5</sup> (created in 384) or Wycliffe's translation<sup>3</sup> (created in 1382) and a different twist is introduced in Tyndale's translation<sup>4</sup> (created in 1526) as it says “take up thy (your) cross”. Upon further investigation, one finds that the inclusion of the phrase is dependent on what manuscript family one is translating from. If the phrase is included, the translation was most likely influenced by the later Byzantine family of manuscripts generally, and often via the use of what is now known as the Textus Receptus (TR) in particular. The TR is an eclectic Greek text originally compiled by Erasmus in 1516.

Again, referring to the chart, the NT portion of the KJV (created in 1611) and Young's Literal Translation (YLT of 1898) were translated primarily from the TR. While the TR closely resembles the majority text, at the time of its creation it was heavily influenced by less than a dozen manuscripts from the Byzantine family dating from the late 12<sup>th</sup> century and later. The modern translations listed were created from a number of sources including an eclectic Greek text known as the Nestle-Aland Text, often referred to as the critical text, and are influenced by readings by a more numerous and some earlier dating base manuscripts numbering in the thousands, many of which have only been discovered in the last few centuries.<sup>6</sup>

So what is the reason for the phrase being missing in modern versions according to White (1996)? It was simply not in the eclectic Greek text from which their translation was made! White (1996) goes further contending that the phrase “take up the cross” may have been added by a scribe at some point in

time to harmonize the thought presented in Mark 10:21 with Mark 8:34. Compare the following:

Then Jesus beholding him loved him, and said unto him, One thing thou lackest: go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, **take up the cross**, and follow me. -Mark 10:21 KJV

And when he had called the people unto him with his disciples also, he said unto them, Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and **take up his cross**, and follow me. -Mark 8:34 KJV

Harmonization is a rationale often cited in disputes over textual variants of this type. This may be speculative, but consider the following verses White (1996) proposes as further evidence the phrase was not intended to be there.

Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me.  
- Matthew 19:21 KJV

Now when Jesus heard these things, he said unto him, Yet lackest thou one thing: sell all that thou hast, and distribute unto the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, follow me. - Luke 18:22 KJV

As one can see, the phrase is missing from the parallel accounts of the narrative in the synoptic gospels of Matthew and Luke, thus the likelihood of a conspiracy existing for omitting Mark 10:21 is not very high. But there is one more point to consider.

To the Jewish mindset of the time prior to Jesus' crucifixion, the cross was seen from one perspective. It was seen as an instrument of humiliation used to torture and execute in a most barbaric fashion those rebellious slaves, bandits and enemies of the Roman state ( Lockyer, 1986). Jews considered it an offensive means to die. It was only seen from another perspective later by a Jewish sect known as Christians, who after the resurrection would see the cross as a positive symbol of Christ's work. The fact that Jesus used the term at all gives one pause as it can only be imagined how his audience



interpreted it, but it certainly would provoke thoughts about the depth of the sacrifice of what Jesus was asking for.

It can be seen after the gospel period in the NT, writers point believers to “the” cross, but remember, they had the benefit of looking back at it and an understanding that rather than a tragic end, it was a wonderful beginning. But for Jesus to point people to it before his work was done would not have made any sense to a culture that looked at it in such negative terms. It would have been a concept for which they would not yet be able to understand. Thus in this writer's view, it is not very likely to have been said by Jesus in Mark 10:21. What does seem likely, and seems strongly supported by the synoptic gospels, is his direction for one to “take up his cross”, a phrase with an entirely different meaning. That is the point one should take away from the gospels. The next section will shed some light on this different meaning through the Mark 10:17-27 narrative.

## **Section II – An Exegetical Analysis**

This passage of scripture picks up with Jesus and his followers making a final journey to Jerusalem from the area where Jesus spent much of his time during his earthly ministry, the area of Capernaum and the Galilee. Along this journey, a man encounters Jesus. This man is not identified by name, but Luke calls him a ruler, so it can be inferred he is some kind of an official, and Matthew calls him young. The beginning of the encounter is as follows:

As Jesus started on his way, a man ran up to him and fell on his knees before him. "Good teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

- Mark 10:17 NIV

It is interesting in this passage that the man does not ask for any kind of blessing in this world (Henry, 1721), but rather is interested in the next, something few people then or now have the wisdom to ask.

He asks about eternal life, but in the context of **what he must do** to inherit it. Can anyone perform any act so impressive to God to merit anything, let alone eternal life? The Bible is clear that this cannot be done (see Romans 3:10), but all too often, people fall under the assumption that anything gained must be earned, that something must be done to achieve it, but eternal life in Heaven is not so given on the basis of works man can perform (see Ephesians 2:8-9).

"Why do you call me good?" Jesus answered. "No one is good—except God alone. You know the commandments: 'Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, do not defraud, honor your father and mother.'"

"Teacher," he declared, "all these I have kept since I was a boy." -Mark 10:18-20 NIV

Jesus points the man towards the One that is good, and cites not those commandments given to govern man's relationship to God, but instead with fellow men and in a sense with one's self; for how can man be right in the presence of God, if he cannot do right by his fellow man or with himself? Jesus does not quote any other law because the law can only reveal the sin nature, not change it, and what he has pointed out is enough.

By his own testimony, the man confidently proclaims that he has kept the law. This is not a statement made from a prideful heart, but one of sincerity, of a man well versed in the Jewish religion of the day and faithful to it. He was a devout Jew and Jesus does not offer any denial of this! He has conformed to those external practices required in the Jewish tradition, but Jesus is just as concerned, if not more so, with man's internal condition, that of his obedience from the heart (NIV, 1984), something the young man perhaps was not even aware he had a problem with. Sometimes the outward man can be made to be the epitome of faithfulness and spirituality, but the inward man cannot be so easily subdued. In this area, the NT is clear that no man can satisfy this requirement of obedience.

Jesus, not in a rebuking manner but out of a spirit of love, brings this to the forefront in the following verses:

Jesus looked at him and loved him. "One thing you lack," he said. "Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."

At this the man's face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth.

- Mark 10:21-22 NIV

With this one instruction, Jesus reveals the young man's heart condition, and the message is not missed on the man's part. One cannot be split between this world and the next, outwardly having a form of spirituality but inwardly being consumed with the issues of this present world. Everyone must make the choice of what will govern their life, the world or God. Although a cross is not mentioned, Jesus asks him in essence to bear a present one, to sacrifice present comfort for a future gain, that of eternal life.

The culture today is one of considerable wealth with a focus much of the time on instant gratification. While it is nearly a polar opposite of the Jewish culture of Jesus' time, some aspects of men then and now have not changed much at all. Too many people place too much importance on material wealth in the here and now and fail to see the implications of that narrow focus on the long term, especially the eternal. Certainly, scripture does not command believers to give away everything they own for the sake of treasure in Heaven, but each and every Christian is asked to put aside whatever obstacles hinder their walk with God.

Does the man in this passage of scripture value eternal life over the riches of this world? The scripture teaches that this man has great wealth and unfortunately, at the moment at least, he cannot part with it,

even for eternal life. Jesus explains this difficulty to his disciples in the following passage:

Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!"

The disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said again, "Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."

The disciples were even more amazed, and said to each other, "Who then can be saved?"

Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God."

- Mark 10:23-27

It is clear that the focus of the narrative is not Christ's work on the cross, but rather it is with the heart condition of the rich man and mankind generally. In this example, the young man was faithful to be sure, well grounded in the Jewish scriptures and practice. Unfortunately, at this point he was not able to take that next step of faith as he was too attached to the things of this world to live for the next. Heaven only knows how many are unwilling to take that step today!

At this point, the reader must be asking, "Why does this paper provide evidence for why the phrase 'take up the cross' should not be included, and yet interject the thought of the cross back in again?" Repeatedly in scripture, Jesus commands the believer to take up his cross or to bear his cross. The next section will discuss this notion of taking up and bearing this cross.

### **Section III – What Does This Mean Today**

In a broad sense, when Jesus asks someone to bear his cross, he is asking for one to be willing to sacrifice not only that which is an obstacle to their faith, but to give of themselves for the faith. This is

not how one achieves salvation, but rather how at least in part how one achieves a successful spiritual walk. In the OT, dealing with the obstacles to faith proved to be a much easier thing to proclaim than to accomplish. Then as now, the forces of a non-God centered world were quite strong. Still, there were believers that participated in the sacrificial system, who through their obedience provided sacrifices for what was required for the expressions of thankfulness, for the request of forgiveness, for the request of blessings and to show their faith that through following God's instructions, sin would be atoned for.

By the first century before Christ, Jewish sects like those at Qumran had begun to believe that sacrifice could mean something other than animal sacrifices at the Temple in Jerusalem. Documents like the Dead Sea Scroll 1QS, The Community Scroll, show how believers began to conceive of the idea that God did not dwell in a temple made by man, but that it was within men that the true temple could be found (Wise et al., 2005). The Qumran community conceived that a sacrificial system based on this new idea of a temple would not be based on animal sacrifices, but in personal sacrifice in the form of prayer, righteous living and blameless behavior. They realized also, that without a proper attitude of the heart, sacrifices, whether at the Temple or Qumran were worthless (Wise et al., 2005).

J. W. Carter (2006) provides a similar framework for believers today in his article, “The Disciples Cross”. He provides four areas that include the study of God's word, the development of a relationship with God himself through prayer and worship, and the building of proper relationships with other Christians and Non-Christians.

Never before in the history of the world have so many people had access to the entirety of God's revelation through the Bible. Prior to the last few centuries, one would be lucky to have a complete

copy of just one book contained within the Bible, let alone all of it. But now the average person can have arrayed on their bookshelf for very little cost numerous same language translations, translations in other languages, and for the more studious, complete copies of the scriptures in their originally written languages. If not in print form, all of these can be easily obtained in the form of software and even online at various websites. It is unfortunate that despite this ease of access to the scriptures, our society is at a point of being perhaps the most illiterate stewards of this sole source of spiritual authority at any time since they were revealed. It is incumbent on every believer to study these scriptures in order to better understand God's creation and their role within it. Scripture is God's primary means of making revelation to believers today and it is a cross to bear because it takes the sacrifice of much time and effort.

The believer should also understand that God is a social being, and He desires to be in fellowship with the pinnacle of His creation, mankind. Man can receive revelation from His written word and at times through that still small voice of the Holy Spirit that dwells within, but God also expects communication to happen the other way, from the Believer to Him through prayer and worship. God, being omniscient, already knows man's heart, his desires and his wishes, but just like a parent desires to hear the desires and wishes of his or her children, God also desires to hear from His. It is a cross to bear now more than ever in this very hectic age, to spend this time with Him, in prayer.

Christians who...never make any attempt to share the gospel with the lost...become keepers of the aquarium rather than fishers of men. - J. W. Carter

Man was created in the image of God according to the creation account in Genesis, therefore man is, or should be, a reflection of his creator. One can see in scripture that the Godhead enjoys fellowship from everlasting to everlasting within itself, and likewise, people should also enjoy fellowship with each other.

As a part of God's creation, man was not designed to be a solitary creature. The Bible teaches that Christians should come together as believers to support one another, for those more mature in the faith to teach the younger ones and to be a stronger influence in the culture. This can only be done through a broader outreach to Non-Christians, to be accomplished as Christians labor together for the Lord. As the culture becomes more secularized, this cross will only become heavier to bear.

The sacrifices noted above are but one aspect of bearing the cross, i.e. what the believer should be willing to do for the cross. The other notion to consider is what the cross does for, and in a sense to, the believer. Even giving a cursory reading of the book of Acts, one can glean a great deal from Paul about the hardships he incurred due to his bearing of the cross. But through it all, believers then and now through this exercising of the faith, become proven believers through these hardships as faith in oneself is replaced by obedience and dependence on God alone. Believers should not despise this working of the Lord for it is proof that He is laboring for the perfection of the believer.<sup>7</sup>

Even today, as the believer takes up his cross, the load may be lite and joy will abound. But more often than not, the load will be heavy and the believer may despair. Despite all this, Paul reminds us through his writings that one should not forget that the God we praise on the hilltop is still the God to be praised in the valleys. Calvin, in chapter 3 of his work “On the Christian Life”, explores deeply this notion of bearing the cross and at the end of the chapter sums it all up saying:

Whether poverty, or exile, or imprisonment, or contumely[humiliating treatment], or disease, or bereavement, or any such evil affects us, we must think that none of them happens except by the will and providence of God...that in the very cross with which he afflicts us he provides for our salvation.

## **NOTES:**

<sup>1</sup> The dates and information on translation sources come from data found at the Wikipedia links in the Bibliography.

<sup>2</sup> Verification of the phrase inclusion made at <http://www.studylight.org/par/>

<sup>3</sup> Wycliffe's Bible was translated from the Latin Vulgate.

<sup>4</sup> Tyndale used both the Latin Vulgate and Erasmus' Textus Receptus

<sup>5</sup> Latin Vulgate comparison made here: <http://www.latinvulgate.com/verse.aspx?t=1&b=2&c=10>

<sup>6</sup> For more information regarding these various Bible translations and Greek texts, please refer to the Bibliography.

<sup>7</sup> For more information on this aspect of the cross, refer to John Calvin's "On the Christian Life", chapter 3.



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