

## The Victory of the Cross

One of the early church fathers, Anselm, wrote a book called, "Christus Victor," in which he proclaimed Christ's victory on the cross on our behalf over death, sin, and Satan. In Paul's letter to the Colossians he gives these same reasons why the cross is the basis of our salvation.

"When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him." (Col. 2:13-15).

Before the cross we were spiritually dead. All men were accused by God's Law and condemned to death in hell for all eternity. As a result of being sinful all men were in absolute bondage to Satan, sin's power, and eventual death. On our own we were helpless and hopeless to find purpose, be restored to God, and find life. God's remedy for man's dilemma was the cross, where Christ would pay the price that sin demanded to justify men, and reconcile us to God. This is the central theme of the Bible. As John Stott writes, "Christianity is a rescue religion. It declares that God has taken the initiative in Jesus Christ to deliver us from our sins."<sup>1</sup>

On Friday I was discussing God's plan of salvation with a young man. He reminded me that all religions were acceptable. Having learned that he had been raised Lutheran, I reminded him that Martin Luther would take issue with the concept that all religions would lead to God. When Luther nailed his '95 Theses' to the Wittenberg door, he was given a death-sentence by the Catholic church as a heretic, for daring to question the authority of the Pope and the church leadership. His key issue Luther challenged was the church's selling of indulgences to raise money. He stated that a man is justified by faith alone in the finished work of Christ on the cross, not by purchasing indulgences that supposedly helped someone get out of purgatory. The Reformation that changed history and restored salvation to people in that day and to this day began by

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<sup>1</sup> John Stott, *Basic Christianity*, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), p. 81.

refocusing on what God had done in Christ --on the cross. "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them..."<sup>2</sup> I also mentioned that all religions believed in their exclusivity. A cursory reading of what each believed would reveal their differences and that they didn't share the belief that all religions would equally bring people to God. Since all of the world's religions claim to be true, then all of them cannot be right. In one sense all religions but Christianity are similar – they're all wrong, because they reject Christ and His work on the cross.

Jesus stated, "I am the way and the truth and the life,  
no one comes to the Father but by Me." (John 14:6)

"A Christian is someone who is committed to the person of Christ, the body of Christ, and to the work of Christ."<sup>3</sup> (C. Peter Wagner)

Today as we share the gospel with the average person, there are key points of importance to keep in mind: the sinfulness of men, the futility of man's efforts to be saved, the death and resurrection of Christ as the only means of salvation, and the only acceptable response --by grace through faith in Christ alone.

As Luther would say: Grace alone, faith alone, and Christ alone.

### **Counterfeit and False Beliefs that do not save:**

- **Legalist:** salvation comes through a works-righteousness system.
  - Gal. 3:6-9 "And Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness."
- **Moralist:** Slightly different version – as long as good deeds outweigh his bad ones in God's scales he will be all right for eternity.
  - Eph. 2:8-9 "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 that no one should boast"
  - Rom. 3:12 "There is none righteous, not even one."
  - Rom. 3:23 "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."

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<sup>2</sup> 2 Cor. 5:19.

<sup>3</sup> Kenneth L. Chafin, *The Communicator's Commentary: 1, 2 Corinthians*, Vol. 7, (Word, 1985), p. 240.

- **Racial heritage** – Jews argued that their salvation was based on being related to Abraham.
  - Rom. 9:6 “They are not all Israel who are descended from Israel”
  
- **Universalist:** misinterprets Rom 5:18 So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men.”
  - He ignores Jesus solemn warning to “...enter by the narrow gate for the gate is wide, and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and many are those who enter by it.” (Matt. 7:13)
  
- **Ritualist** – salvation comes through observing rituals or externals
  - The Bible says that salvation comes not through rituals but through faith in Jesus Christ. (See Col. 2:16-17)
  - “...if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation.” (Rom. 10:9-10).
  
- **Experientialist** – Salvation by religious experiences – Judas was in the boat when Jesus calmed the stormy seas and walked on water. He was also one of the disciples and with Jesus when He performed great signs and wonders on a daily basis, yet he was called the “*son of perdition from the beginning.*” Jesus also warned of those who were counting on their spiritual service of performing miracles, casting out demons, and prophesying in Jesus’ name, to enter heaven. His words on the day of judgment were simply, “...I never knew you.” We cannot substitute spiritual experiences for a personal knowledge of Christ.
  - Heb. 6:4 speaks of those who have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit...
  - They have only tasted and not eaten
  - They have partaken – (metokoos, “sharers” ‘*I was there*’ --not koinos)

Satan’s substitutes confuse the issues, result in wrong beliefs, are perversions to Biblical truth, and end in destruction.

Paul in writing to the Corinthians, said that he determined

...to know nothing among [them] except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.  
(1 Cor. 2:2)

Why is the Cross of Christ so important?

## I. **Jesus Conquered the enemies of Death, Sin, and Satan**

“When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him...” (Col. 2:13)

### 1. **Death**

Jesus did not come to make bad people good,  
He came to make dead people live.

God’s warning to the first man and woman was not to eat of the forbidden fruit,  
*“for in the day you eat of it you will die.”*

Paul spoke of this in his Roman letter,

“Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world,  
and death through sin, and so death spread to all men,  
because all sinned-” (Rom. 5:12)

When Jesus died for our sins He bore sin’s penalty, which was death. Then when He rose he conquered death itself. Peter spoke of this in his Pentecost sermon,

Peter’s gospel message was of Christ’s crucifixion and resurrection:

“Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know – this Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death. But God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power.” (Acts 2:22-24)

Christ’s victory over death became our victory.

Jesus said,

“...I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?” (John 11:25-26)

Paul added this great theological note:

“... having been raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead...He made you alive together with Him...” (Col. 2:12, 13)

All of us who were joined to Christ (Gk. Baptize, *placed into, joined*)<sup>4</sup> were also joined to His resurrection. The meaning is that we were identified with Christ. **“Whatever happened to Christ also happened to us.”**

On the cross Jesus conquered death.

## 2. Sin

He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.

Our sins and the Law that accuses us of our sins were nailed to the cross.

Peter wrote,

“...He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed. For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls.”

(1 Peter 2:24-25).

Through the Law comes the knowledge of sin. Without the Law we would not have known sin. The Law becomes our accuser, condemning us and never able to save. On the cross Jesus paid for our sins, satisfying the justice God’s holiness demanded.

Paul wrote,

“...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus...” (Rom. 3:23-24)

Wiersbe writes,

“When He shed His blood for sinners, Jesus Christ canceled the huge debt that was against sinners because of their disobedience to God’s holy Law. In Bible days, financial records were often kept on parchment, and the writing could be washed off. This is the picture Paul painted.”<sup>5</sup>

Paul added,

“We are delivered from the Law...We are not under Law but under grace...”

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<sup>4</sup> Baptism is a picture of salvation where believers are joined to Christ and placed into His body at salvation (1 Cor. 12:13).

<sup>5</sup> Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary, Vol. 2*, (Colorado Springs: ChariotVictor Publishing, 1989), p. 127.

(Rom. 7:6; 6:14).

### 3. Satan

When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him.” (Col. 2:15).

Jesus referring to the cross said,

“Now is the judgment of this world; now shall the prince of this world be cast out”  
(John 12:31)

**What looked like a defeat on the cross, was really a victory over Satan.**

This Scripture speaks of three victories won on the cross on our behalf:

#### **First, Satan and his authorities were *disarmed*.**

Satan’s weapons were taken from him.

Jesus became human in order to die, and defeat the devil’s power over mankind.

“Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He [Jesus] might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives.” (Heb. 2:14-15).

#### **Second, Satanic forces were put on *display*.**

He made a public display of them (NIV) ...public spectacle

Jesus totally exposed Satan, his demons, and all their deceitful schemes.

Christ vindicated God and vanquished the devil.

#### **Third Jesus *triumphed* over the Satanic forces of evil ...having triumphed over them through Him**

#### **Wiersbe writes,**

Whenever a Roman general won a great victory on foreign soil, took many captives and much loot, and gained new territory for Rome, he was honored by an official parade known as “the Roman triumph”...Jesus Christ won a complete victory, and He returned to glory in a great triumphal procession.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Wiersbe, p. 128.

At the cross Jesus defeated sin, death and Satan. His death was the payment that redeemed<sup>7</sup> mankind from slavery and brought them into God's family.

Stott writes,

“...There is healing through his wounds, life through his death, pardon through his pain, salvation through his suffering.”<sup>8</sup>

O sacred head, now wounded, with grief and shame weighed down,  
 O Sacred head, surrounded with thorns, Thine only crown!  
 O sacred head, what honor, what glory once was Thine!  
 Yet, though despised and gory, I joy to call Thee mine.

What Thou, O Lord, hast suffered, I should myself have borne;  
 For truly I am guilty of all thy grief and scorn.  
 Behold, here stands a sinner who naught deserves but woe;  
 Do Thou, O my Redeemer, on me Thy grace bestow.

Scottish preacher, Alexander MacLaren wrote,

“The cross is the center of the world's history. The incarnation of Christ and the crucifixion of our Lord are the pivot round which all the events of the ages revolve. The testimony of Christ was the spirit of prophecy, and the growing power of Jesus is the spirit of history.”

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<sup>7</sup> 'Redeemed' – the purchase price of a slave

<sup>8</sup> Stott, p. 97.