

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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Series:	Scripture Memory		Pastor/Teacher
Number:	12		Gary L.W. Johnson
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CHRIST OUR SAVIOUR AND REDEEMER

“There is no one of the titles of Christ,” observed Warfield, “which is more precious to Christian hearts than ‘Redeemer.’ There are others, it is true, which are more often on the lips of Christians. The acknowledgment of our submission to Christ as our Lord, the recognition of what we owe to Him as our Saviour – these things, naturally, are most frequently expressed in the names we call Him by. ‘Redeemer,’ however, is a title of more intimate revelation than either ‘Lord’ or ‘Saviour.’ It gives expression not merely to our sense that we have received salvation from Him, but also to our appreciation of what it cost Him to procure this salvation for us. It is the name specifically of the Christ of the cross. Whenever we pronounce it, the cross is placarded before our eyes and our hearts are filled with loving remembrance not only that Christ has given us salvation, but that He paid a mighty price for it.”¹ Elsewhere he writes, “In the Pastoral Epistles the compound names ‘Jesus Christ’ and ‘Christ Jesus’ occur also in composition with the epithet ‘Saviour’: ‘Christ Jesus our Saviour’ (Titus 1:4), ‘Jesus Christ our Saviour’ (Titus 3:6), ‘our Saviour Christ Jesus’ (2 Tim. 1:10), ‘our Saviour Jesus Christ’ (Titus 2:13). In the earlier Epistles, Jesus is indeed not only treated as our ‘Saviour,’ but the epithet is given Him as a title of honor, it being a mark of Christians that they look for a ‘Saviour’ from heaven, even ‘the Lord Jesus Christ’ (Phil. 3:20, cf. Eph. 5:20). But the precise forms of expression occurring in the Pastorals are not found in these. The significance of the epithet ‘Saviour’ thus applied to Jesus may perhaps be suggested by the circumstance that it is in the same Epistles a standing epithet of God. Paul describes himself as an apostle of Jesus Christ “according to the command of God our Saviour and Christ Jesus our hope” (1 Tim. 1:1, cf. Titus 1:3), and wishes Timothy to live so as to be acceptable ‘in the sight of God our Saviour’ (2:3, cf. Titus 2:10) whose glory it is to be ‘the Saviour’ of man (4:10), in accordance with His love to men as our ‘Saviour’ (Titus 3:4). The ascription of this epithet thus interchangeably to God and to Jesus assimilates Jesus to God and leaves us in less doubt how we are to take the passage in Titus 2:13, which in contrast with Christ’s first coming in grace speaks of the impending ‘appearing of the glory of’ – shall we say ‘the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ’? – or shall we not rather say ‘our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ’? If the latter construction is followed, as it seems it should be, it provides us with one of the most solemn ascriptions of proper deity to Jesus Christ discoverable in the whole compass of the New Testament.”²

In 1 Cor. 1:18-25, the Apostle Paul writes that in the eyes of “those who are perishing,” the gospel (“the message of the cross”) is “foolishness.” The message of a crucified Christ is a “stumbling block” for the Jews and utter “folly”³ to the Greeks (1:23). We need to recognize that the early Church had to deal with their culture and society in preaching the gospel. Think about it. The One Whom Christians claim as their God was put to death on a cross – a dead god? Isn’t that a blatant contradiction? If that were not enough, He had been justly condemned as a criminal to suffer the worst form of death imaginable! The very heart of the Gospel, which Paul called “the word of the cross,” ran, as Hengel has noted, “counter not only to Roman political thinking, but to the whole ethos of religion in ancient times and in particular to the ideas of God held by educated people.”⁴ In

other words, the church at that time had to resist the cultural conditioning of that society. The shameful death of Jesus on the cross could not be altered. The offensive “word of the cross” *had to be* proclaimed. The gospel cannot be detached from this and be interpreted independently. Separated from the particular death that Jesus suffered, the gospel becomes vague and incomprehensible. We must not make the cross of Christ void (1 Cor 1:17). As we have documented over the past few installments in this series, an increasing number of professing evangelicals are in fact rejecting the core theology of the Reformation. This is not, however, something entirely new in the history of evangelicalism. Charles Finney (1792-1875), the highly influential 19th Century evangelist, has, in many ways, shaped the character of much that passes for Evangelicalism today. Finney contended that salvation is primarily a matter of moral improvement, individually and socially. In doing so, he categorically rejected such important biblical doctrines as original sin and total depravity. He spoke with contempt of such doctrines as penal substitution and the imputation of Christ’s righteousness as the grounds for justification by faith alone.⁵ “Charles Finney totally redefined the Christian message along the lines of the arch-heretic Pelagius, the latter condemned by more church councils than anyone else in history, and no one seemed to blink . . . Nobody cared about theology as long as the show was going on (evangelism) and moral victories were being won (politics). The modern Church growth movement and the Christian Right are merely perpetuating this moralistic stream in American revivalism. Impressively sprawling buildings may have replaced giant tents, and moral crusades might be conducted through high-tech direct-mail marketing, but the capitulation to secular sentiment and ideology runs throughout its two-century history.”⁶ What has all of this to do with the cross of Christ? The Apostle Paul instructs us that in the preaching of the Gospel we must set forth Christ as crucified (Gal. 3:1). The Lord’s Table not only presents us with the bread and wine as symbols of Christ’s Body and Blood, but serves as well to proclaim the Lord’s death (1 Cor. 11:26). What is the point? How are we to understand the New Testament when it speaks of Christ being crucified and dying for sinners? The Apostles’ Creed tells us He “suffered . . . was crucified, dead and buried.” Why?” What did God do at the cross? What did Christ do? What did He suffer?

I. HE SUFFERED AND DIED UNDER THE JUSTICE OF GOD

All that the righteousness of God demanded for the broken Law, Christ satisfied. All that the Law demanded from you and me, the Lord Jesus fulfilled, not only in His perfect obedience, but also in His enduring the penalty of the broken Law.

A. ***What did God do?*** He *gave* His only begotten Son (John 3:16). God set “*Him forth*” to be a propitiation (Romans 3:25). God *spared Him* not (Romans 8:32). What the holiness and righteousness of God required against sinners, the Lord Jesus paid to the fullest. He redeemed (paid the price) us from the curse of the broken Law being made a curse for us (Gal. 3:13). Charles Finney and his contemporary followers like Clark Pinnock claim that penal substitution reflects a bad image of God Who looks like a sadist gleefully inflicting punishment on a guiltless Jesus.⁷ “In connection with such criticisms, it may be helpful for us to see the penal substitutionary death of Christ in the context of God’s loving provision for the deliverance of those who otherwise were without hope. After all, the biblical writers frequently stress this: ‘God so loved the world that He gave His only Son,’ ‘God demonstrates His own love to us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.’ The atonement stems from the love of God and, since God’s love is *just* love and His justice is *loving* justice; the cross is a demonstration *par excellence* of that love in a way that is commensurate with His justice. Similarly, His justice requirements are fully satisfied in a manner which displays the amazing grandeur of His love and grace. Problems arise when the atonement is analyzed in detachment from the frame of reference that the Bible gives it. It can then seem a cold, almost heartless, business transaction. When we recall the serious nature of sin and our hopeless condition apart from Christ, the sheer love of God in providing an escape thrusts itself, in all its magnitude, to the centre of our attention. When we

remember that this was at the cost of His own Son, who willingly took our place, we are left with no words adequate to express our gratitude.”⁸

- B. ***What did Christ do?*** We must not, then, think of the Father torturing Jesus, or of Jesus persuading the Father, for to do so is to set them over each other or even in conflict with each other. We must never make Christ the object of God’s punishment or God the object of Christ’s persuasion, for both God and Christ were subjects not objects, taking the initiative together to save sinners. Whatever happened on the cross in terms of “Godforsakenness” was voluntarily accepted by both in the same holy love which made atonement necessary. It was “God in our nature forsaken of God.” If the Father “gave the Son,” the Son “gave Himself.” If the Gethsemane “cup” symbolized the wrath of God, it was nevertheless “given” by the Father (John 18:11) and voluntarily “taken” by the Son. If the Father “sent” the Son, the Son “came” Himself. The Father did not lay on the Son an ordeal He was reluctant to bestow. There is no suspicion anywhere in the New Testament of discord between the Father and the Son, “whether by the Son wresting forgiveness from an unwilling Father or by the Father demanding a sacrifice from an unwilling Son.” There was no unwillingness in either. On the contrary, their wills coincided in the perfect self-sacrifice of love.⁹

II. HE SUFFERED AND DIED FOR SINS

Our passage tells us that “Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God.” The New Testament uniformly teaches that Jesus died for sinners who need forgiveness. According to data gathered by the likes of Gallup, Barna, and Harris, most people today, however, do not sense any need for forgiveness. What they want is not forgiveness but acceptance. One prominent Evangelical theologian has accented this therapeutic approach to the Gospel by attempting to recast the gospel along lines that are in harmony with modern self-esteem psychology. “If our sin is viewed as causing the death of Jesus on the cross, then we ourselves become victims of a ‘psychological battering’ produced by the cross. When I am led to feel that the pain and torment of Jesus’ death on the cross is due to my sin, I inflict upon myself spiritual and psychological torment.”¹⁰ Peter and the rest of the New Testament writers do not share Anderson’s perspective. They *did* see the death of Christ exclusively in terms of His sacrificing Himself for our sins (cf. also 1 Peter 1:19; 2:24 and Heb. 5:1-5; 10:12-26; Romans 8:3-5 and Isaiah 53:5). The death of Christ effectively carried away the sins of Christ’s people, *i.e.*, it secured forgiveness (Col. 3:13-14).

III. HE SUFFERED AND DIED TO RECONCILE US TO GOD

The unjust or unrighteous *need* to be reconciled. The ultimate benefit of Christ’s death is not simply conversion but reconciliation to God. Robert Leighton, the famed 17th Century Puritan Divine, captures the essence of this when he wrote: “This the Apostle hath excellently expressed, Ephesians 2:16, *He hath reconciled us by His cross, having slain the enmity*: He killed the quarrel betwixt God and us, killed it by His death; brings the parties together, and hath laid a sure foundation of agreement in His own sufferings; appeases His Father’s wrath by them, and by the same, appeases the sinner’s conscience. All that God hath to say in point of justice is answered there; all that the poor humbled sinner hath to say is answered too. He hath offered up such an atonement as satisfies the Father, so that He is content that sinners should come in and be reconciled.”¹¹

CONCLUSION: George Smeaton, a noted Reformed theologian from the past, wrote a massive two-volume work on the atonement. One of the errors that he sought to expose was the popular notion that the atonement was, strictly speaking, focused on impressing on the human mind the degree to which God would go to show His love. This, Smeaton declared, turned the Person and work of Christ into a mere drama, an act or theatrical performance that was designed to make an inward

subjective impression on sinners. Commenting on the expression *He gave His only begotten Son* (John 3:16), the allusion, he notes, “to the sacrificial death of Christ; the very idea of which, while it involves the utmost conceivable degree of love, implies that it has the effect of pacifying an offended God. The thought to which all these terms point is that God cannot forego His inalienable rights when He has been wronged, but necessarily punishes, as a satisfaction to Himself; for He cannot deny Himself. This thought is capable of solving several difficulties. (a) The plain meaning of this clause is repugnant to the notion, too widely current in our time, that pure love, without any tincture of wrath, is the sole principle of the divine action toward man; that we are not to speak of punishment borne, or of vicarious obedience rendered; that, in a word, it is not God’s relation that is to be changed, but man’s. The clause under consideration teaches the opposite, and shows us that the love of God peculiarly appears in this, that He provides the very atonement which puts Him on a new relation to those whose sins had incurred His anger. The two principles, love to the race and love to Himself, are so far from being incompatible that they can be placed together in the atoning work of Christ. Punitive justice, which is just regard for His perfections, called for the penalty: love for our race provided the substitution to bear it. What is there of incompatibility in these two? But, it may be further asked, as the atonement is the effect of the divine love according to this testimony, how is it also the cause of the divine favour? Does not love so great imply that He is already reconciled? Here we must distinguish between the moving cause and the meritorious cause. If we look at the prime source of the atoning work, then the incarnation and death of Jesus must be regarded as the fruit of love, and not as its cause. But if we look at our actual acceptance, or the enjoyment of divine favour, and the new relation on which God stands to the redeemed, the atonement is as much its cause as the counterpart Fall was the cause of divine wrath.”¹²

ENDNOTES

¹*The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield: Biblical Doctrine II* (rpt. Baker, 1981) p. 375.

²B. B. Warfield, *The Lord of Glory* (rpt. Baker 1974) p. 244.

³MORIA is the source for our English word “moron.” It means that someone lacks knowledge and discernment and is in fact, not capable of learning. The word was used in reference to people who were mentally deranged. Cf. *The New Dictionary of New Testament Theology III*, ed. C. Brown (Zondervan, 1978), p. 1023ff.

⁴Hengel, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

⁵C. Finney, *Lectures On Systematic Theology*, ed. J. H. Fairchild (Doran, 1878), p. 384. He refers to the Reformation’s doctrine of justification alone on the basis of Christ’s imputed righteousness as “impossible and absurd.” B. B. Warfield accurately said of Finney’s theology, “God might be eliminated from it entirely without essentially changing its character.” *Perfectionism: Part Two* (rpt. Baker, 1981), p. 193. Clark Pinnock, one of the foremost critics of traditional Reformational Christianity, follows in Finney’s line by likewise questioning the validity of the doctrines of original sin and substitutionary atonement and makes this gleeful announcement: “It is my strong impression, confirmed to me by those not pleased by it that Augustinian [read here Reformational] thinking is losing its hold on present-day Christians.” *The Grace of God and the Will of Man* (Zondervan, 1989), p. 26.

⁶M. S. Horton, *Beyond Culture Wars* (Moody, 1994), p. 116.

⁷Cf. C. Pinnock and R. Brow, *Unbounded Love: A Good News Theology for the 21st Century* (IVP, 1994), p. 103, where they reject the notion of penal substitution by declaring “Christ is not appeasing God’s wrath. God is not sadistically crucifying His beloved Son.” This kind of distortion is repeated throughout the book.

⁸Robert Letham, *The Work of Christ; Contours of Christian Theology* (IVP, 1993), p. 138.

⁹Cf. the excellent discussion by J. R. W. Stott, *The Cross of Christ* (IVP, 1986), p. 151.

¹⁰R. S. Anderson, *The Gospel According to Judas* (Helmer & Howard, 1991), p. 99.

¹¹R. Leighton, *Commentary on First Peter* (rpt. Kregel, 1972), p. 348.

¹²G. Smeaton, *The Doctrine of the Atonement as Taught by Christ Himself* (rpt. Alpha Publications, 1979) p. 49.

