

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

717 North Stapley Drive, Mesa, AZ 85203 Phone: (480) 833-7500

Series: Exposition of Romans
Number: 182
Text: Romans 12:1-2; I Corinthians 1:18-2:5; I Peter 3:18
Date: March 24, 2013 a.m.

Pastor/Teacher
Gary L.W. Johnson

The Mercies Of God At Their Apex

MORTEM TURPISSIMA CRUCIS is a Latin expression that comes from the early church father Origen and his commentary on Matthew (27:22ff).¹ The phrase MORTEM (from which we get words like *mortuary*) TURPISSIMA (our word *turpitude* is derived from this) CRUCIS (you can easily recognize this as the source for the English *crucify*) means “the utterly vile, disgusting, shameful death of the cross.” Martin Luther spoke often of the THEOLOGIA CRUCIS (the theology of the cross). Indeed this was to Luther descriptive of his understanding of the nature of God’s revelation and, therefore, of theology as a whole. The great reformer argued that God has chosen to reveal Himself in the weakness and scandal of the cross. Human reason, on the other hand, finds this offensive and would rather go about proclaiming a THEOLOGIA GLORIAE (theology of glory).² In 1 Corinthians 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? And 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 the 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 Corinthians 1:17). And yet, many self-professed *Evangelicals* today follow the lead of Charles Finney, who Billy Graham called the greatest evangelist since the Apostles. Charles Finney (1792-1875), the highly influential 19th century evangelist, has, in many ways, shaped the character of much that passes for Evangelicalism today.⁵ 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 substitution⁶ and the imputation of Christ’s righteousness as the grounds for justification by faith alone.⁷ “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.”⁸ 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 (Galatians 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 Corinthians 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 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?

1 CORINTHIANS 1:18-2:5

I. PAUL'S RESOLVE

"I resolved to know nothing except Jesus Christ and Him crucified." The Apostle is not saying that he was disinterested in everything else--he is, however, declaring that the scope and centrality of his message revolved around two things.

A. The Subject Matter Generally: Jesus Christ

Paul in his epistles takes up a large number of issues, but the *focus* around which everything else depended was JESUS CHRIST. Paul's only design in going to Corinth was to preach Christ; and Christ not as a teacher, or as an example, or as a perfect man, or as a new starting point in the religious consciousness in mankind--but Jesus Christ the Redeemer, the Saviour of sinners. As Charles Hodge puts it, "Christ as a propitiation was the burden of Paul's preaching."⁹

B. The Subject Matter Particularly: Christ Crucified

This "word of the cross" Paul readily acknowledges was the one doctrine he magnified. Notice how he deliberately accents this message in spite of the fact that it was highly offensive to the very people he was trying to evangelize. To the offense which the Jews took at the word of the cross (it was a weak doctrine), Paul declares that "Christ crucified *is* the power of God" and to the offense which the Greeks took (it was a foolish doctrine) he declares, "Christ crucified *is* the wisdom of God" (1 Corinthians 1:24). Finally, note the words of Warfield on this text, "Christianity consists not merely of *Jesus Christ*, but specifically of Jesus Christ and *Him crucified*. Here the apostle was defining a special doctrine of Jesus as the essence of Christianity."¹⁰

II. PAUL'S PREACHING

We have in 1 Corinthians 2:1-5 a clear example of a statement of purpose. Paul explains that his preaching was intentionally not patterned after the popular orators of the day. He did not seek to win followers with eloquence. The reason (which is also the effect of his action) is given in verse 5: "so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power."

I PETER 3:18

III. CHRIST 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 fulfills, 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 (Galatians 3:13).

IV. CHRIST 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.”¹¹ 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 Hebrews 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 (Colossians 3:13-14).

V. CHRIST 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 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.”¹²

CONCLUSION: Obadiah Sedgwick, another of the great Puritan pastors and a member of the Westminster Divines, duly noted that unless there is a clear understanding of the doctrine of justification by faith alone (and all that it implies, i.e., penal substitutional atonement, imputation of Christ’s righteousness), we will always be on a performance treadmill and full of doubts.¹³ We need, therefore, to grasp the great significance of Christ’s death on our behalf. He placed Himself in our stead, putting His soul in the place of our souls, His person in the place of our persons. He underwent our punishment. Why did He do this?...to bring us to God, to make us acceptable to God. Over the last few years disturbingly large numbers of professed Evangelicals have begun to alter the historic Christian position that there is salvation *only* in Christ (this is clearly stated in Acts 4:17 and 1 Timothy 2:5). Some have gone so far as to claim that Jews do not need the gospel since they can be saved the way Abraham was in the Old Testament by faith in the promises of God. The late Clark Pinnock,¹⁴ Charles Kraft, of Fuller Theological Seminary,¹⁵ and others adamantly claim that this position is fully Evangelical and Biblical. If so, then Christ’s death on the cross was meaningless. Paul taught otherwise. The death of the crucified Messiah, the Son of God, who had vicariously taken upon Himself the curse of the broken Law and made atonement for sins, is the only means whereby sinful people can be acquitted before the tribunal of a holy God.

ENDNOTES

¹ As cited by Martin Hengel, *Crucifixion: In the Ancient World and the Folly of the Message of the Cross* (Fortress, 1977), p. 1.

² This was Luther’s term for the theology of the medieval scholastics. God was discussed in terms of His glorious attributes rather than in terms of Christ’s cross. God was chiefly discussed philosophically. Luther is actually drawing a sharp contrast between these two types of theology. “That person,” Luther declared, “does not deserve to be called a theologian who looks upon the invisible things of God as if it were clearly perceptible in those things which have actually happened. He deserves to be called a theologian, however, who comprehends the visible and manifest things of God seen through suffering and the cross.” As cited by Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther* (Fortress, 1966), p. 23.

³ MÖRIA 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

⁴ Hengel, op. cit., p. 5.

⁵ The Billy Graham Center at Wheaton College has a huge painting of Charles Finney hanging in the foyer.

⁶ S. Lewis Johnson, Jr. has written: "Recent theological history indicates that the denial of penal substitution has led to a modification or perversion of several orthodox doctrines. The divine attributes are brought under direct attack when we eliminate penal substitution. Among those doctrines directly affected are (1) retributive justice based on God's perfections, (2) God's immutability, and (3) the proper biblical emphasis on the infiniteness of sin's evil." *The Coming Evangelical Crisis: Current Challenges to the Authority of Scripture and the Gospel*, ed. J.H. Armstrong (Moody, 1996), p. 120. 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.

⁷ C. 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.

⁸ M.S. Horton, *Beyond Culture Wars* (Moody, 1994), p. 116.

⁹ C. Hodge, *I & II Corinthians* (rpt. The Banner of Truth Trust, 1974), p. 30.

¹⁰ *Selected Shorter Writings of Benjamin Warfield II* (P & R, 1973) p. 255.

¹¹ R.S. Anderson, *The Gospel According to Judas* (Helmer & Howard, 1991), p. 99.

¹² R. Leighton, *Commentary On First Peter* (rpt. Kregel, 1972), p. 348.

¹³ Obadiah Sedgwick, *The Doubting Believer* (rpt. Soli Deo Gloria, 1993), pp. 109-122

¹⁴ Clark Pinnock has argued that Acts 4:17 should *not* be appealed to in support of salvation by Christ only. Amazingly, he says, the entire Christian church down through the centuries has misunderstood this text and as a result has fostered an attitude of exclusiveness for the gospel that the New Testament never claims(!). Cf. *The Openness of God* (IVP, 1994), and especially *Unbounded Love: A Good News Theology for the 21st Century* (IVP, 1994).

¹⁵ Charles Kraft of Fuller Theological Seminary writes: "Can a people who are chronologically B.C. (i.e. who have not heard of Christ), or those who are indoctrinated with a wrong understanding of Christ, be saved by committing themselves to faith in God as Abraham and the rest of those who were chronologically B.C. did....I personally believe that they can and many have." *Christianity in Culture* (Orbis Books, 1979), p. 254.