

THEOLOGY OF THE CROSS

By Mark E Moore, PhD

I. Introduction:

- A. The cross as the key symbol of Christianity is somewhat surprising when we realize how odious it was to both the Greeks and Jews (1 Cor 1:18-25)
 - 1. There were a number of other potential symbols: Fish, Dove, Shepherd, and Anchor.
 - 2. Even Hindus, Moslems, and humanists reject the cross (Stott, pp. 40-43).
- B. Who is responsible for Jesus' death?
 - 1. Pilate (Romans)--Pilate released him to a death sentence and the Roman soldiers nailed him to a cross.
 - 2. Caiaphas (Jews) (John 11:45-57; 19:11)
 - a. Points of tension
 - b. Didn't keep the Sabbath
 - c. Blasphemy
 - d. Fraternized with sinners
 - e. Didn't keep ritual washing and fasts
 - f. Unstated: He was more popular (envy)
 - g. Unstated: He didn't jump through their hoops, yet taught with authority (Mark 11:28; John 5:43-44)
 - h. Unstated: He was uncontrollable and therefore dangerous. He disturbed their status quo.
 - i. By extension it does apply to all the Jews (Matt 27:25; Luke 23:34; Acts 2:36-37; 4:27)
 - 3. Iscariot--Remembered in perpetuity (1 Cor 11:23 and lists of Apostles, Matt 10:4; Mark 3:19; Luke 6:16)
 - 4. Us--Our sin
 - 5. Jesus--Voluntary (John 10:11, 17-18; Gal 2:20; Eph 5:2, 25)
 - 6. God--Sovereign design (Acts 2:23; 3:18; 4:28; Rom 8:32; 1 Pet 1:19-20)

II. Preludes to the Cross

- A. O.T. Predictions (Psa 22; 118:22-24; Zech 13:7; Isa 53; Gen 3:15[?])
- B. Jesus' predictions
 - 1. Matt 9:15; 10:38-39; 12:39-40 (Luke 11:30); 16:21 (Luke 9:22); 20:18-19 (Mark 10:33-34; Luke 18:31-33); 26:2; Mark 8:31; 9:9, 31; 10:38-39; Luke 2:34; 5:35; 12:50; 17:25; 22:15; 22:37; John 2:19; 3:14; 6:53; 10:11; 12:7, 32-33; 14:19; 15:13; 16:20.
 - 2. How did Jesus know he was going to die?
 - a. Hostility of the Jews
 - b. Synagogue at Nazareth (Luke 4:16-30)
 - c. First Passover (John 5)
 - d. Healing of the Man's withered hand (Mark 3:1-6)
 - e. John 7-9
 - f. Jesus knew that this was how they treated the Prophets (Matt 23)
 - g. O.T. Predictions (Mark 14:21; Luke 24:25-27, 44-47; Acts 3:18; 1 Cor 15:3-4)
 - h. He deliberately chose to obey God's plan (Luke 19:10; Mark 10:45). Jesus repeatedly said he "must" die.
- C. O.T. Sacrifice (John 1:29; Rom 8:3; Rev 5:6)
 - 1. Jesus fulfills three O.T. sacrifices:
 - a. Guilt offering (Isa 53:10) -- a Lamb
 - b. Day of Atonement -- a goat
 - c. Passover -- a Lamb

2. Life is in the blood = death as a penalty for sin (Lev 17:11)
3. Day of Atonement (Lev. 16:4-20)
 - a. Dominant features
 - b. Priest allowed access to God
 - c. One goat received the penalty of sin while the scapegoat was released.
 - d. It was ultimately ineffective (Heb 9:23-10:4)
- D. Last Supper (Matt 26:26-29; Mark 14:22-25; Luke 22:17-20; 1 Cor 11:23-29; cf. John 6:53-55)
 1. Its connection with the Passover (1 Cor 5:7; John 18:28 & 19:14, 36)
 - a. Blood as protection from the angel of death. "Poured out for many" is sacrificial language (Isa 53:12).
 - b. Lamb, consumed whole without bones being broken (1 Pet 1:19).
 - c. Four cups of wine (Exo 6:6-7a): Exodus, Freedom, Redemption, Intimacy with God.
 - d. Celebration of the Exodus
 2. New Covenant (Jer 31:31-34)
 3. "Blood" and "Covenant" are used together only in Exo 24:8 & Zech 9:11 outside this celebration.

III. The Heart of the Cross

- A. The problem of Forgiveness--Why can't God just forgive our sins without the death of Jesus?
 1. After all, we are required to forgive each other and without any kind of (blood) sacrifice.
 - a. We are not God and our obligations can't be compared to His.
 - b. Carnegie Simpson, "Forgiveness is to man the plainest of duties; to God it is the profoundest of problems," (in Stott, p. 88).
 - c. God is both perfect in his love but also in His justice.
 - d. The problem for God is not forgiveness but propitiation. In other words, He is willing to forgive, but His justice demands adequate propitiation.
 2. Seriousness of Sin (Psa 51:4).
 - a. With God the issue is not merely misdeeds but rebellion as well as a breach against our own best well-being and our own *imago dei*. The bottom line is that we have committed mutiny against the living God.
 - b. SECULAR EXCUSES: We have trouble seeing the seriousness of sin because we have turned it into a sickness. Thus treatment replaces punishment. It will do no good blaming it on our genes, parents, human weakness, hormones, education, etc. We are free moral agents not programmed computers.
 - i. Guilt is not the problem. Like pain it is healthy.
 - ii. "Sin is not only the attempt to be God; it is also the refusal to be man, by shuffling off responsibility for our actions. . . . It is part of the glory of being human that we are held responsible for our actions" (Stott, p. 101).
 - iii. C.S. Lewis, "The Humanitarian Theory of Punishment" shows the cruelty of rehabilitation as opposed to punishment.
 - c. CHRISTIAN EXCUSES: This seems to negate the doctrine of original sin even though there is a strong emphasis the moral influence we inherited "in Adam" (Rom 5:12-14).
 - d. We are slaves to sin (John 8:34).
 - e. Adam's curse was passed on to us (Rom 5:12).
 - f. Nonetheless, we are able to choose to accept or reject God (Matt 22:14; 23:37; John 5:40).
 3. Majesty of God
 - a. God is perfectly holy. And that holiness is incompatible with sin.
 - b. This gives rise to two other attributes of God:

- i. Wrath (Rom 2:5; 5:9; 1 Thess 1:10; 2:16). God's wrath, unlike mankind's, is not arbitrary.
- ii. Transcendence--God is above and apart from us. Metaphors: Height, distance, light, fire, vomiting. In other words, God doesn't covenant with sinners. Read Stott, p. 109.

B. Satisfaction for Sin

1. Introduction:

- a. Is God a cruel tyrant appeased by blood sacrifice? Read Stott p. 111, on Sir Alister Hardy.
- b. Neither "satisfaction" nor "substitution" is a biblical word so we must proceed with caution.
- c. Nevertheless, sin is a significant problem that can not merely be swept under the rug. It must be dealt with.

2. Who is Satisfied?

- a. Satan--He captured you and Jesus was his ransom (Origin & Augustine).
 - i. This credits the devil with more power than he has. He has no right to you. Hence, Jesus doesn't need to "deal" with the devil.
 - ii. According to the theory, Jesus deceived the devil in the transaction.
 - iii. Read Stott p. 113, Gregory of Nyssa's "fish hook." & Augustinian "Mouse Trap" (p. 114)
 - iv. However, this does take seriously the power of the devil (cf. Luke 11:21-22).
- b. Man--(Barton W. Stone, Virgil Warren): By Christ's example of self-sacrifice men are struck with their own sinfulness and drawn to a higher level of morality. Thus, they become worthy of fellowship with God.
 - i. It is based on the idea that neither sin nor righteousness can actually be legally imputed (Exo 32:32-33; Psa 49:7-8; Eze 18:20).
 - ii. Substitution talk is primarily metaphorical. We may not want to press these figures too far.
 - iii. Questions:
 - (a) How can Jesus' death show us how to live? Aren't there better examples available?
 - (b) If we can be forgiven without Jesus' death, why would God pay such a high price?
 - (c) Are men really changed by observing Jesus' death?
 - (d) What does the language of the Bible suggest for the meaning of the cross?
- c. The Law--Sinners must be punished for breaking the law.
 - i. There is much truth in this position (Gal 3:10, 13). But we must not think God a prisoner even to his own law as Darius was the Medes and the Persians.
 - ii. "The real reason why disobedience of God's moral laws bring condemnation is not that God is their prisoner, but that he is their creator" (Stott, p. 117).
 - iii. God must enforce his laws in order to be self-consistent. Parents may/must change their minds because their decisions are sometimes flawed. This cannot be said of God.
- d. God himself--Our sin alienated us from the Holy God. To be reconciled, an appropriate penalty must be paid. The only payment great enough to atone for such a heinous crime is blood death.
 - i. Doesn't this make God seem blood-thirsty?
 - ii. Is there really no other way?

- e. Guilt can be transferred in certain relationships, especially husband-wife and parent-child, both of which are used as illustrations of our relationship with God. However, in human governments the punishment of capital crimes cannot be transferred.
- C. Substitutionary Atonement
- 1. O.T. Sacrifice
 - a. Lev. 17:11, "For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one's life."
 - i. Heb. 9:22 "Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness" & 10:4 "It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins."
 - ii. 1 Pet 1:19--The precious blood of Christ was able to redeem us.
 - b. Scapegoat (Lev. 16:7-10)--One exhibited the means of atonement, the other exhibited the results.
 - c. Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac (Gen 22).
 - d. Passover (Exo 11-13; John 1:29, 36; 1 Cor 5:7-8).
 - e. Isa 53:4-6, 12; 1 Pet 2:22-25.
 - 2. N.T. teaching
 - a. The Good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep (John 10:11, 15, 17).
 - b. Give his life as a ransom for many (Mark 10:45; 14:24; 1 Pet 1:18-19; cf. Matt 26:28; John 11:49-52).
 - i. *anti* = in place of
 - ii. "Many" = "All" in Semitic idiom.
 - c. Rom 5:8--Christ died for [*huper*] us. And 2 Cor 5:14-15, "One died for [*huper*] all" (cf. Rom 3:23-25).
 - d. 1 Tim. 2:5-6 "Who give himself as a ransom [*antilytron*] for [*huper*] all men" (cf. Titus 2:14).
 - e. Christ accepted our curse (2 Cor 5:19-21; Gal 3:13-14).
 - f. 1 John 2:2--Jesus is the propitiation for our sins (cf. 1 John 4:9-10).
 - 3. Conclusion, "The one thing God could not do in the face of human rebellion was nothing. He must either inflict punishment or assume it. And he chose the latter course, as honoring the law while saving the guilty" (Stott, p. 153).
 - a. "For the essence of sin is man substituting himself for God, while the essence of salvation is God substituting himself for man. Man asserts himself against God and puts himself where only God deserves to be; God sacrifices himself for man and puts himself where only man deserves to be. Man claims prerogatives which belong to God alone; God accepts penalties which belong to man alone." (Stott. p. 160)
 - b. Hell is the only alternative to the cross. Therein lays the stumbling block of the cross. We hate to admit that (1) our sin is that serious, and (2) there is nothing we can do about it.
 - c. "We would rather perish than repent; rather lose ourselves than humble ourselves" (Stott, p. 162). But only by humbling ourselves can we return both our human nature and God to their proper places.

IV. The Achievement of the Cross

A. Propitiation--Rituals at a shrine.

- 1. Definition: To appease or pacify someone's anger.
 - a. We must reject crude concepts of anger. God's anger is righteous and just.
 - b. Is the object of atoning personal, God propitiating a person? Or impersonal, man expiating a transgression?

- i. It is true that man's sins are cleansed (i.e. expiated).
 - ii. But it cannot be denied that God is angry and must be appeased.
 - 2. Description:
 - a. *hilasterion*--Rom 3:24-25 & Heb 9:5 (it is translated in a variety of ways, indicating the difficulty we have with the word).
 - b. *hilasmos*--1 John 2:1-2; 4:10.
 - c. *hilaskomai*--Luke 18:13; Heb. 2:17.
 - 3. God is angry and must be appeased. But this is unlike animism or pagan sacrifices.
 - a. His anger is not capriciously or arbitrarily.
 - b. The appeasing sacrifice is made by God himself, not men. "The atonement did not procure grace, it flowed from grace" (Forsyth, *Cruciality of the Cross*, p. 78).
 - c. The sacrifice was a person, not animal or vegetable.
- B. Redemption--Transactions in the market place.
 - 1. Definition: Ransom price paid for the release of a slave or captives of war, esp. nobles who were not good at menial labor.
 - a. 112 uses in NIV (17 N.T.)
 - i. *lutrosis* (n), 10x
 - ii. *apolutrosis* (n), 2x
 - iii. *lutroo* (v), 3x
 - b. Used in O.T. to describe the exodus from Egypt (Exo 6:6; 15:13; Deut 7:8; 15:15; 2 Sam 7:23) and Babylon (Isa 43:1-4; 48:20; 51:11; Jer 31:11). God paid the price of redemption, but not to Egypt (cf. Luke 1:68; 2:38; 24:21). The metaphor simply indicates that redemption cost God dearly.
 - c. Our bondage was to sin and the penalty of the law.
 - 2. Description
 - a. We are slaves to sin (John 8:31-34; Rom 3:24; 6:14-18; Tit 2:14; Heb 9:15).
 - b. The price was Blood (cf. Lev 17:11-14; Deut 12:23; Eph 1:7; Heb 9:12; Col 1:14; 1 Pet 1:18-19; Rev 5:9)
 - c. This has practical implications for us (1 Cor 6:18-20; 7:22-23; Gal 5:1).
 - d. Yet a future reality (Luke 21:27-28; Eph 1:14; 4:30), even redemption of our bodies (Rom 8:23).
- C. Justification--Proceedings in the law court.
 - 1. Definition:
 - a. *dikaoo* (v) 39 Xs
 - b. Primarily a legal term. To be declared right with God. God is not declaring bad people good, but noting that the legal penalty has been paid.
 - c. Both the words "justification" and "righteousness" (and their cognates) come from this single Greek root.
 - d. It is to be differentiated from sanctification which is a life-long process.
 - 2. Description:
 - a. It is by faith (Acts 13:39; Rom 3:20-28; 5:1; Gal 2:16; 3:24; Phil 3:9) in Christ (Rom 8:1; 2 Cor 5:21; Eph 1:6), by blood (Rom 5:9), through the resurrection (Rom 4:25).
 - b. Not by works (Rom 3:20; 4:2; Gal 2:16-17; 5:4) but culminates in works (Rom 2:13; James 2:21, 24-25).
 - c. It is the work of God (Rom 8:30, 33) as a free gift (Rom 5:16, 18).
- D. Reconciliation--Experiences in the home/family.
 - 1. Definition:
 - a. Uses
 - i. *katallasso* (v) 6 Xs
 - ii. *katallage* (n) 4 Xs

- iii. *apokatallasso* (v) 3x
 - b. Former enemies being renewed in their relationship. We were enemies of God:
 - i. God was our enemy (Rom 5:10-11; 11:28; Eph 2:14).
 - ii. Likewise people were hostile to God (Rom 5:10; 8:7; Eph 2:14, 16; Col 1:21; James 4:4). Both sides are thus alienated from each others.
 - iii. Like the relationship of a husband and wife (1 Cor 7:11).
 - c. Since our legal debt has been paid, God again freely fellowships with us. This can be seen in two terms:
 - i. Adoption (Rom 8:14-17; Gal 3:26-29; 4:1-7).
 - ii. Access (Rom 5:1-2; Eph 2:17-18; 3:12; 2 Pt 3:18; Heb 10:19-22).
- 2. Description:
 - a. Rom 5:9-11--Individual
 - b. Eph 2:16--Church
 - c. Col 1:15-20 (cf. Rom 8:21)--Nature
 - d. 2 Cor 5:18-21--Our ministry

V. Living Under the Cross

- A. A full view of God
 - 1. Greater wrath than you ever imagined
 - 2. Greater love than you ever imagined
- B. A realistic view of yourself
 - 1. A new way to think about yourself
 - a. Avoid self-love
 - b. Avoid self-hate
 - 2. A new way to live
 - a. Bonhoeffer said, "When Christ bids calls a man, he bids him come and die."
 - b. Manning, "The cross is not simply an event of history, it is a way of life."
 - c. We are part of a very real, very politically active kingdom! We imitate Jesus' politics of abandonment.
- C. A vital participation in a community
 - 1. Fellowship
 - 2. Lord's supper
 - 3. Baptism
- D. A Radical confrontation with the world
 - 1. A benevolent love of one's enemies
 - 2. An expectation of persecution