



# *The Cross: Its Effectiveness*

What did Jesus' crucifixion accomplish? His death was not an accident of history, nor was it merely the death of a martyr who willingly sacrificed Himself to call attention to His ideals. Jesus was not overcome by the forces of evil, but achieved a great victory over them. His death powerfully accomplished six great purposes of God.

## **HIS DEATH FULFILLED THE OLD TESTAMENT**

Jesus told His disciples,

Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished (Matthew 5:17, 18).

Jesus was the Messiah toward whom all the Old Testament looked. When He died on the cross, the old covenant, which was "our tutor to lead us to Christ," was taken away (Galatians 3:24, 25).

... He Himself is our peace, who made both groups [Jews and Gentiles] into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, *by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances*, so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace, and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity (Ephesians 2:14-16; emphasis mine).

On the cross, Jesus fulfilled the old covenant, and so He abolished "in His flesh" "the Law of commandments contained in ordinances"—in other

words, the law of Moses—which had previously separated the Jews and Gentiles.

As Jesus died, He cried out, "It is finished!" One thing that was "finished" on that terrible occasion was the Law given through Moses to Israel. The fact that the veil of the temple was torn when Jesus died indicated that the old approach to heaven had been cancelled and that a new and better way had been introduced to give human beings access to the very presence of God.

## **HIS DEATH INAUGURATED THE NEW TESTAMENT**

As He instituted the Lord's Supper, Jesus said, "This is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins" (Matthew 26:28). Jesus' death was necessary to put into effect His will (His testament, or covenant). Hebrews 9:16-23 says,

For where a covenant is, there must of necessity be the death of the one who made it. For a covenant is valid only when men are dead, for it is never in force while the one who made it lives. Therefore even the first covenant was not inaugurated without blood. For when every commandment had been spoken by Moses to all the people according to the Law, he took the blood of the calves and the goats, with water and scarlet wool and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book itself and all the people, saying, "This is the blood of the covenant which God commanded you." ...

Therefore it was necessary for the copies of the things in the heavens to be cleansed with these, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these.

Just as the first covenant was ratified by blood,

so was the new covenant. Christ's death was required to inaugurate the new covenant. Doctrines specifically connected with the new covenant are indelibly linked to the death of Christ—for example, the doctrines of baptism (Romans 6:3, 4), the Lord's Supper, and the church.

## HIS DEATH PURCHASED THE CHURCH

Jesus built the church (Matthew 16:16–19), but He also bought it. To the Ephesian elders, Paul said, “Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd *the church of God which He purchased with His own blood*” (Acts 20:28; emphasis mine). In Ephesians 5:23–25, we learn that Christ is “the Savior of the body” (which is the church; Ephesians 1:22, 23) and that “Christ . . . loved the church and gave Himself up for her.”

Is the church important in the plan of God? Yes! Christ died to purchase it with His blood! The Bible says Christ loved the church and died to save it! The church is a blood-bought institution! Let us never belittle it, but make sure that we are faithful members of it.

## HIS DEATH PROVIDED A REMEDY FOR SIN<sup>1</sup>

The New Testament emphasizes that Christ's death takes away sins. Paul wrote, “Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures” (1 Corinthians 15:3b; see also 1 Peter 3:18; 2:24). Galatians 1:4a explains that Christ “gave Himself for our sins so that He might rescue us from this present evil age.” When He instituted the Lord's Supper, Jesus said, “This is My blood . . . poured out for many for forgiveness of sins” (Matthew 26:28). Because of God's love, Jesus died for our sins to justify us. Then He was raised in victory (see Romans 4:25; 5:8).

How does Jesus' death provide the remedy for sin's effects? The consequences of sin and the corresponding benefits provided by the blood of Christ are pictured in multiple ways in the Bible.

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<sup>1</sup>For further study on this subject, see Coy Roper, “If Jesus Was Such a Good Man, Why Did He Die Like a Common Criminal?” in “Contemporary Religious Questions,” *Truth for Today* (February 1991): 41–44. That lesson is also available online at [http://www.biblecourses.com/english/en\\_lessons/EN\\_199102\\_10.pdf](http://www.biblecourses.com/english/en_lessons/EN_199102_10.pdf).

The following concepts are not mutually exclusive; these truths overlap. Considered separately or together, they help us to appreciate what Christ accomplished through His death on the cross.

### No More Separation

*Man's sin separates him from God* (Isaiah 59:2). Just as Adam and Eve were separated from God when they were cast out of the garden, our sins result in our being denied the presence of God. Before we sinned, we were God's friends; after we sinned, we were His enemies.

*Christ's death reconciles man to God.* Sin separates us from God, but the death of Christ has brought us near to God and reconciled us to Him. Through Christ's death, we again become friends with God. Romans 5:10a says, “While we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son.” Paul wrote,

Remember that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and *without God* in the world. But now in Christ Jesus *you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ* (Ephesians 2:12, 13; emphasis mine).

God “reconciled us to Himself through Christ.” He “was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them” (2 Corinthians 5:18, 19a). Romans 5:11 repeats that “through [our Lord Jesus Christ,] we have now received the reconciliation” (see also Colossians 1:20).<sup>2</sup> Jesus died so that sinners who were separated from God could be reconciled to Him!

### No More Wrath

*Man's sin calls forth the wrath of God* (John 3:36; Ephesians 5:6). Sin not only separates man from God, but it also makes God angry and causes man to be subject to His wrath. Paul wrote that

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<sup>2</sup>The word translated “reconciliation” in the NASB in Romans 5:11 is translated “atonement” in the KJV. The Greek word is *καταλλαγή* (*katallagē*), which, according to one source, means “a change or reconciliation from a state of enmity between persons to one of friendship. It is the result of the *apolutrōsis* . . . , redemption, the divine act of salvation, the ceasing of God's wrath” (Spiros Zodhiates, ed., “Lexical Aids to the New Testament,” *Hebrew-Greek Key Word Study Bible* [Chattanooga, Tenn.: AMG Publishers, 1977], 1846).

“the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men” (Romans 1:18).

*Christ’s death serves as a propitiation to God.* That is, the cross is the means of appeasing the wrath of God; Jesus’ death causes God to look on man favorably.<sup>3</sup> God “displayed” Christ Jesus “as a propitiation in His blood through faith” (Romans 3:25). Hebrews 2:17 says, “He [Christ] had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.” John wrote,

My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and *He Himself is the propitiation for our sins*; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world (1 John 2:1, 2; emphasis mine).

Later in the same epistle, he said, “In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins” (1 John 4:10).<sup>4</sup> Since Christ’s blood propitiates God’s wrath, Paul wrote, “Having now been justified by His blood, *we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him*” (Romans 5:9; emphasis mine).

Another way of expressing much the same thought is to say that Christ died as a sacrifice for our sins. We read,

[As our high priest, Christ] . . . entered through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation; and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. For if the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling those who have been defiled sanctify for the cleansing of the flesh, how much more will the blood of *Christ*, who through the eternal Spirit *offered Himself* without blemish to God, cleanse your

<sup>3</sup>“The sacrifice of Christ upon the cross appeases the righteous anger of God against sin (Romans 1:18) and alters the disposition of God toward the sinner” (James Smeal, *Study Guide for DC 301V, Systematic Christian Doctrine Videotape Course* [Florence, Ala.: Heritage Christian University, n.d.], 28).

<sup>4</sup>Other translations of the word rendered “propitiation” in 1 John 2:2 include “atoning sacrifice” (NRSV; NIV; see the REB), “expiation” (RSV; NAB; see the NJB), “remedy for the defilement of our sins” (NEB), “sacrifice that takes away our sins” (CEV), and “personal atonement” (Phillips).

conscience from dead works to serve the living God? (Hebrews 9:11–14; emphasis mine).

Animal sacrifices were required under the old covenant to make atonement for sins (but were ultimately ineffective; Hebrews 10:4). Christ’s death atones for our sins today (and for the sins committed under the old covenant; Hebrews 9:15). Atonement is necessary now, as it was then, to avoid the wrath of God. Therefore, anyone who does not want to experience the wrath of God must be saved by the blood of Christ!

### No More Bondage

*Man’s sin enslaves him* (John 8:34b). We read in Romans 6:16–18,

Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone as slaves for obedience, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin resulting in death, or of obedience resulting in righteousness? But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed, and having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.

Since all people sin (Romans 3:23; 1 John 1:8, 10), all are enslaved to sin.

*Christ’s death frees sinners from the bondage of sin.* Christ came to set people free (John 8:32). As Christians, we have been set free from sin and can say that Christ “released [or freed] us from our sins by His blood” (Revelation 1:5). Jesus paid the price to deliver us from our enslavement to sin. He came, He said, “to give His life a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:28; Mark 10:45; see 1 Timothy 2:5, 6).<sup>5</sup> He ransomed, or redeemed,

<sup>5</sup>“The word ‘ransom’ is most often heard in connection with a kidnapping. The ‘ransom’ is the price demanded by the kidnappers before they will release their victim. Such a concept is included in the Greek word translated ‘ransom’ (λύτρον, *lutron*), but the meaning of the word is broader than that. In the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, the word was used in reference to the price paid to buy a slave’s freedom, in reference to the amount required to secure the deliverance of a hostage or a prisoner of war, and in other ways. We could summarize the basic meaning of *lutron* as ‘to release by payment.’

“In the New Testament, the word is used exclusively to refer to the price paid to release us from the guilt of sin. *Lutron* itself is found only in Matthew 20:28 and Mark 10:45, but related words are used in other passages on our redemption (see Rom. 3:24; Eph. 1:7; and Heb. 9:12), including the great text in 1 Timothy 2:5, 6 . . .” (David L. Roper, *The Life of Christ, 2—A Supplement*, Truth for Today Commentary [Searcy, Ark: Resource Publications, 2003], 221–22).



us—that is, He bought us back—by His death on the cross. Therefore, we can say that “in Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace” (Ephesians 1:7). Being Christians, we can rejoice in the fact that we have been “bought with a price” (1 Corinthians 6:20). We have been “redeemed”—not “with perishable things like silver or gold,” but “with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ” (1 Peter 1:18, 19; see John 1:29). The only way to escape the slavery of sin, to be free, is to turn to Christ.

### No More Death

*Sin kills people* (Romans 6:23). Sin makes a slave of a person and then pays him wages, but the wages paid by sin is death! The death spoken of in Romans 6:23 is not just physical death (though an individual’s sin may result in his physical death<sup>6</sup>); rather, it is spiritual death. Such death means separation from God now and leads to eternal death, or separation from God forever! Paul told the Christians in Ephesus, “You were dead in your trespasses and sins” (Ephesians 2:1).

*Christ’s death allows us to live again.* “When we were dead in our transgressions, [God] made us alive together with Christ” (Ephesians 2:5) by bringing us near to God “by the blood of Christ” (Ephesians 2:13). Jesus came to give people life; but in order to do so, He had to lay down His own life (John 10:10, 11). He died that we might live! Because of the cross, we can live again!

### No More Condemnation

*Sin condemns souls; the justice of God decrees that the penalty for sin must be eternal punishment.* That is, because of our sin, according to a universal divine decree, we are sentenced to eternal condemnation in hell. Why? Because sin is an affront against an altogether holy God (Psalm 145:17) who is absolutely just (Deuteronomy 32:4). Since God is holy, He cannot tolerate sin. Since He is a just God, He must punish sin. The only just punishment for sin against an infinite God is unending punishment in hell!

*The death of Christ pays the penalty for our sin.<sup>7</sup>*

<sup>6</sup>Also, because of Adam’s sin all men die physically.

<sup>7</sup>Leon Morris expressed this idea as follows: “In dying

God is a loving God (1 John 4:8, 16, 19) who wants to save us even though we are sinful (2 Peter 3:9). He provided a way to punish sin while still saving the sinner. He put our sins on Christ! On the cross, Jesus experienced the penalty, the just punishment, for our sins. He bore our guilt when He died on Golgotha! The Bible says,

But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:8).

... 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 (1 Peter 2:24).

But we do see Him who was made for a little while lower than the angels, namely, Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, so that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone (Hebrews 2:9).

For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit (1 Peter 3:18; see also Romans 5:18, 19; 2 Corinthians 5:14, 15).

Our Savior, on the cross, took upon Himself the sins of all the world. He “redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us—for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree’” (Galatians 3:13). “[God] made Him who knew no sin [Jesus Christ] to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Christ’s death on the cross enabled God to be both just—as One who punishes sin—and the justifier—as One who saves undeserving sinners.<sup>8</sup> Paul wrote:

... 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; whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously

then Christ died that [kind of] death which is the wages of sin. His death is effective to deal with the consequences of our sin. We had involved ourselves in death. Christ took over our involvement and freed us from it” (Leon Morris, “The Centrality of the Cross,” *Christianity Today* 10 [18 March 1966], 15).

<sup>8</sup>An excellent discussion of how God could be both just and the justifier of those who believe is given in David L. Roper, “Christ Crucified: The Center of God’s Love,” *Jesus Christ and Him Crucified* (Arvada, Colo.: Christian Communications, 1976), 40–45.

committed; for the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus (Romans 3:23–26).

On the cross, the demand of justice was met: Sin was punished, and justification was made possible. At the cross, the sentence of death, of eternal condemnation, was lifted so that we can live again!

In whatever terms we think of salvation—as redemption, reconciliation, justification, atonement, a new life or a new birth, or being set free—the blood Jesus shed on the cross makes it possible! The crucifixion provides the only remedy for our sins.<sup>9</sup>

### **HIS DEATH & RESURRECTION DEFEATED THE DEVIL**

In Hebrews 2:14, 15, we read,

Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He 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.

When Jesus was crucified, it appeared that Satan had won a great victory. Perhaps he thought that he had triumphed over the Son of God. However, the resurrection proved that appearances are deceiving and turned the apparent defeat of the forces of good into a great victory for God. On the cross, Jesus defeated the devil, overcame death, and delivered us all from the fear of death.

### **HIS DEATH SHOWED US THE LOVE OF GOD**

How much does God love us? The cross answers that question eloquently:

By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins (1 John 4:9, 10; see John 3:16).

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<sup>9</sup>Christ's blood is the remedy for the problem of sin for the alien sinner (the person who is not a Christian); only through the blood of Christ can he be forgiven of his sins and become a child of God. It is also true for Christians, who are assured that "if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His son cleanses us from all sin" (1 John 1:7; emphasis mine).

Jesus said, "Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). The love that Jesus demonstrated when He died on the cross was even greater because He died not just for His friends, but also for His enemies (Romans 5:8). We could ask for no greater demonstration of the love of God!

### **CONCLUSION**

Some things on this earth are extremely powerful, but nothing is more powerful than the death of Christ. Jesus' death on the cross fulfilled the Old Testament and inaugurated the New Testament. By His death, He purchased the church, provided a remedy for sin, defeated the devil, and demonstrated the love of God.

Most important is the fact that, when He died, Jesus died that everyone might be saved. If you are not yet a Christian, you can accept the gift of salvation offered by means of the cross by believing in Jesus, repenting of your sins, confessing your faith in Christ, and being baptized for the forgiveness of sins.

To reject Christ is to refuse your only hope of salvation. Do not reject the One who loved you more than anyone else has ever loved you!

Coy Roper

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### *Christ Died Our Death*

What did Christ do? He died. To say this is not simply to state a fact, but to explain it because human death in the Scriptures is never a meaningless phenomenon. On the contrary, death is always a fact of theological significance, the dreadful penalty for human sin. From Genesis to Revelation, the same theme is consistently emphasized: "the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23). Since Jesus had no sin either in His nature or in His conduct, He need never have died, either physically or spiritually. He could have been "translated" like Enoch and Elijah. He nearly was—at the transfiguration; but He deliberately stepped back into the world, voluntarily, in order to lay down His life. Why did He do it? There is only one possible, logical, biblical answer. He died for *our* sins, not His own. The death He died was our death, the penalty which our sins richly deserved.

Adapted from *Authentic Christianity*  
John Stott