

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *Reformation & Revival* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_ref-rev-01.php

Reformation
& Revival



A Quarterly Journal for Church Leadership

Volume 5, Number 1 • Winter 1996

What actually motivates us to serve the Lord? I ask this because many of those in the ministry—even in the Reformed ministry—are working from the wrong motives. Some are motivated to make a name for themselves. Others are preaching or teaching or writing primarily to earn money. Some want to attract large audiences. Building their own little ecclesiastical empires over which they can be the authority motivates some. Then there are those who desire to impress people with their theological knowledge. Christian ministers, educators and writers who are wrongly motivated are way off track. They have forgotten that Paul's most powerful motive for dedicating his life to the ministry was the Cross of the Lord Jesus Christ.

"But may it never be that I should boast," he said, "except in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world" (Gal. 6:14).

Under the assumption that some who read this could be preaching, teaching or writing for the wrong reasons, I submit that you cannot hope to solve your problem without striving to gain a more accurate view of the Cross of Jesus Christ. We all need that view because there is nothing like the Cross of Christ to motivate us to live for Him and devote ourselves to His service.

Whether you are a minister, educator, missionary or writer, you can witness the evangelistic and edifying power of the cross in your ministry. You can increase your influence in the lives of those within the radius of your spiritual guidance by acting on these suggestions about the Cross of Christ.

Stimulate Your Mind with the Nature of the Cross

Before we can understand the nature of Christ's sacrifice, we have to acknowledge that trying to keep the law cannot save anyone. In fact, the very existence of the law defines sin and condemns the whole world as guilty before God. Some argue that we should use the Old Testament law to convict

If I see aright, the cross of popular evangelicalism is not the cross of the New Testament. It is, rather, a new bright ornament upon the bosom of a self-assured and carnal Christianity. The old cross slew men; the new cross entertains them. The old cross destroyed confidence in the flesh; the new cross encourages it.

A. W. Tozer

The cross of Christ destroyed the equation religion equals happiness.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Our salvation consists in the doctrine of the cross.

John Calvin

You do not understand Christ until you understand his cross.

P. T. Forsyth

Take away the cross of Christ from the Bible and it is a dark book.

J. C. Ryle

men of their sin and guilt. But Paul's intense study of the law did not convict him of his sin. In fact, under the law, he thought he was blameless. It took a direct revelation from God in Christ crucified and risen to show him the true nature of his sin. Convicting men of their sin is not the work of the law. According to Christ, conviction is the work of the Holy Spirit (John 16:8).

Three facts about the law demonstrate its inability to make any contribution to the Salvation of sinners. First, the law revealed sin to be exceedingly sinful. Second, Satan uses the law to encourage men to sin. Third, the law is unable to save anyone because it doesn't work with weak human nature.

Without this kind of legal information, we could not even begin to grasp the meaning of salvation by grace alone, through faith alone in Christ alone. If our desire is to be faithful and effective communicators of the Gospel, we must be able to explain that "a man is justified by faith apart from works of the law" (Rom. 3:28).

We exercise wisdom when we focus our teaching, not on man and his alleged part in his salvation, but on Christ and His perfect obedience in life and death. God intended Christ's sacrifice primarily to satisfy Him, not man. It had to meet the demands that flowed from His holy character, not the aspirations that flow from man's sinful nature.

Therefore, we evangelize and teach more effectively when we present the Atonement as an *objective work* accomplished by Christ outside of ourselves to satisfy God's righteous demands on our behalf. To understand Christ's sacrifice on the cross, then, we must see it as an objective fact of history, planned and executed by the triune God according to a divine covenant.

Planned in heaven before creation, the substitutionary death of Christ was a natural projection of the will, love and righteousness of God. His will determined it; His love motivated it; and His righteousness demanded it.

When the New Testament refers to our Lord as "Christ" (or the anointed One) it clearly implies that the Atonement was not only an objective fact of history, but a *covenant work*. Christ covenanted with His Father and the Spirit that He should represent and die for those the Father had given Him.

We find this principle of representation in Adam as well as in Christ. Adam was the federal head of the entire human race. Because he disobeyed God and sinned, every human being was born with four negative features: sin, guilt, spiritual death and physical mortality. In this way Adam is a reverse picture of Christ. Christ's atoning work is the ground for God giving His elect four positive features: righteousness, innocence, spiritual life, and the guarantee of physical immortality.

The sacrifice of Christ was also a *finished work* to which man can add nothing. The Bible calls it a once-for-all work. Right here is where we find much of the error about this doctrine. Some professing Christians still believe they can add something to the perfect work accomplished by the doing and dying of Jesus Christ. The Bible warns all such that they entangle themselves in a yoke of bondage that robs them of genuine Reconciliation. True faith always leads to good works, but good works contribute nothing to our Salvation. Paul says we are "justified as a gift by His grace through the Redemption which is in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 3:24).

The demands upon Christ also determined the nature of His Cross as a *sacrificial work*. God appointed Him to suffer in His body and die in obedience to the divine plan of Redemption. Having chosen to represent elect sinners and bear their guilt, Christ had to die a sacrificial death to save them from sin's penalty. "For the wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23).

Christ's atoning work was also a *penal work* designed to satisfy the retributive demands of God's holy law for elect sinners. This is the very heart of the Christian Gospel. Germane to this truth is the doctrine of the total inability of man to redeem himself. Man can do nothing to placate the righ-

teous wrath of God against him. That is why Christ, as our representative, had to suffer and die.

Having said that, however, we should be careful about how we perceive God in Christ's atoning sacrifice. He was not merely a stern judge viewing from afar the terrible scene of His Son's intense suffering and deep sorrow and cruel death on the cross of Calvary. On the contrary, it was *God in Christ* who paid the penalty for our sins and reconciled us unto Himself. Paul said that "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them" (2 Cor. 5:19). In this he pointed to Christ's sacrifice as a *vicarious work*. Christ didn't live and die for the good of others. He lived and died in their place. Paul wrote to Titus about Christ "who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed" (2:24). In the light of this, the acknowledgment of man's sinful condition is an integral part of stimulating your mind with the nature of the Cross of Christ.

Get Excited About God's Purpose for the Cross

The first objective in the ministry is to glorify God. Therefore we should be excited to learn that God designed Christ's redemptive work to meet the demands of His law and *glorify Himself*. This is God's primary purpose for all aspects of His plan of Redemption. Every time we use our voice or pen to proclaim God's redemptive plan, we must seek first to glorify Him. Christ died for sinners "to bring them to God." By lifting His elect people from the bondage of their sin and guilt God exalted and glorified Himself.

God also designed the Calvary scene to *glorify Jesus Christ*. I say this because Christ embodies the divinely ordained, God-man concept in the Incarnation—a concept that made His atoning ministry of satisfaction possible. It is so easy to play down the preeminent role of Christ in Redemption and emphasize the so-called part played by man. Thinking subjectively may very well cause a Christian leader to exalt good

works or rituals over the objective work of Christ.

For example, in his book *Mere Christianity*, the late C. S. Lewis said, "There are three things that spread the Christ life to us: baptism, belief and that mysterious action which different Christians call by different names—Holy Communion, the Mass, the Lord's Supper" (p. 59). Much as we admire the fine writing and the keen mind of Lewis, this statement casts doubt on the true nature and design of the Atonement of Christ and the redemptive work of the Holy Spirit in Regeneration and Sanctification. The Christ life is not *spread* to us by our faith, our baptism, or our attendance at Communion. And we certainly do not receive the Christ life from the blasphemous Roman Catholic mass! Spiritual life is given to us exclusively by the Holy Spirit's sovereign and independent work of Regeneration.

Beware of False Theories About the Cross

Modern Christians are divided by their different views of Christ's death on the cross. The four most common views may be identified with these words: universal, possibility, compromise, and predetermination.

The universal view of Christ's Atonement says that Christ died to pay for all the sins of all persons in the world—without exception. This teaches an unbiblical doctrine of Salvation: that God intends to save all persons of the world. People who hold this view believe that God is so loving that He would never send any of His creatures to a place of everlasting punishment for their sins.

This view of Christ's saving work denies many of the major doctrines of the Christian faith such as the holiness of God, unconditional Election, Justification through faith alone, and the divine authority of the Bible. It tends also to deny original sin, the total depravity of man, the reality of eternal punishment, and the vicarious nature of the death of Christ. This view is wrong because the whole doctrinal structure of biblical

Christianity emphasizes the eternal division of all humans into two classes: saved and lost.

The possibility view of Christ's death says that Christ died to make salvation possible for all, but God saves only those who exercise their own free will to accept it. People who teach this view also hold that man is responsible for his own salvation. Most of today's invitation and decision evangelism is predicated upon the possibility view of Christ's Atonement.

Those who hold this view teach *conditional* Salvation. They say that Salvation is not the act of a sovereign God, but conditioned on the exercise of man's free will. Paul denied this view when he said, "So then it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy" (Rom. 9:16). Man is spiritually dead and unable to perform the spiritual functions of faith and repentance so indispensable to his Salvation. This view says, in effect, that man's Salvation depends on him doing something he is unable to do. People who hold this view usually teach another false doctrine: that faith causes the New Birth. According to the Word, faith is the result, not the cause of Regeneration.

The compromise view of Christ's sacrifice says that Christ died to provide Salvation for all without exception, but the Salvation Christ earned for sinners on the cross is given only to the elect on condition that they believe. I call it the compromise view because it is a compromise between the possibility view and the predetermination view of the cross of Christ explained below. The people who hold the compromise view do not want to deny the biblical doctrine of Election, so they say, "Christ died to save everybody, but God saves only those of the elect who believe."

The Word of God never allows compromise of its doctrines to satisfy those who hold different views. Every preacher should make sure that what he believes and teaches is the truth of God's Word. Using compromise to explain away difficult doctrines is to deny the truth and insult the Lord. How

wise is that man who takes advantage of opportunities to keep quiet about doctrines he does not yet understand!

The predetermination view of our Lord's satisfaction says that Christ died only for His people. I call it the predetermination view because God predetermined their identity before the foundation of the world. They and only they are born again by the Holy Spirit who gives them the ability and the desire to believe in Christ and repent of their sins. This view of the Cross of Christ teaches that every element of "salvation is from the Lord" (Jonah 2:9). It says that Jesus Christ alone "is the author and perfecter of faith" (Heb. 12:2). And it contends that Salvation contains not one microscopic element of human effort.

The predetermination view is the biblical view. The Bible teaches plainly that Christ died for His people, His sheep, His church, and His elect. In his book, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*, the late Loraine Boettner said that "the nature of the atonement settles its extent. If it merely made salvation possible, it applied to all men. If it effectively secured salvation, it had reference only to the elect" (p. 152).

"But," says someone, "the Bible speaks in several places about Christ suffering and dying for all and for the whole world. Doesn't that nullify your view of a limited Atonement?"

It is true that some passages seem to teach that Christ's sacrifice was for the sins of all the people in the world. In the light of the plain, restrictive statements above, however, we must interpret such passages as meaning that Christ died for all the peoples of the world *without distinction*. Nowhere in the Bible, rightly interpreted, does it actually say or imply that Christ died for all *without exception*.

The predetermination view teaches an Atonement limited in intention and application, but unlimited in power. This view of the Atonement gives us more confidence in preaching the Gospel because we know that God will call, regenerate, and justify everyone for whom Christ died. Some will not preach

this view, however, because they say it denies Salvation to some. Not so! According to the Bible, all who desire Salvation and go to Christ with genuine faith in Him and sincere repentance for their sins will be saved. Christ will welcome them, reconcile them to God, and guarantee them an eternal home in heaven after death. Their positive response to the Gospel also proves that God had chosen them in Christ before the foundation of the world.

Know and Respect the Memorial of the Cross

New Testament writers used the ordinance of the Lord's Table to remember the Cross of Jesus Christ. It is a memorial service, not a meritorial sacrifice, as the Roman Catholic Church teaches. When we administer the Communion service we should do so with an accurate knowledge of what it means and with great reverence for Jesus Christ's personal sacrifice for our sins. Each time we attend a Communion service, we should take a faith excursion to the historic scene of Christ's crucifixion.

When we partake of the bread and wine, we do so to remember that Jesus Christ died to save us from our sins. The bread points to His human body, the instrument by which He substituted His perfect human obedience in life and death for our sinful disobedience.

When we lift the wine cup to our lips, we should see with the vision of faith our suffering Savior nailed to a Roman cross bleeding out His life for our sins! The apostles taught men to direct their faith specifically to Christ crucified, "whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith" (Rom. 3:25).

We should respect the Lord's Table because God has designed it to proclaim the vicarious death of Jesus Christ. When Christ was with His disciples in the Upper Room He spoke about the sermonic aspect of the Communion service. "For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup," He said,

"you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes" (1 Cor. 11:26).

Rejoice Over the Triumphs of the Cross

The Bible teaches that Christ's suffering constituted a series of great triumphs. Rejoice, because His atoning work triumphed over our threefold enemy: Satan, society, and sin. His triumph over them is the very foundation of the living hope of all believers.

Rejoice, too, because the new covenant Gospel of Christ gives every believer a new heart on which God writes His law. By this God creates a new heart's desire within the believer to obey His law.

Rejoice because His sacrifice for us sinners provided a new power to do battle with Satan. It also provided a faith to progressively overcome the evil influences of the world's society, and the spiritual strength to deal with personal temptations. What great themes are these to preach and write about!

Rejoice, too, because in His atoning work Christ triumphed over the rampart of separation between God and man. The Bible portrays God as One who dwells in unapproachable holiness. This means a sinful human being cannot approach Him and live. By His perfect obedience in life and death, Christ our representative has brought us into the presence of the unapproachable God of holiness. Every believer should glory in this aspect of the triumph of the Cross of Christ. Without that triumph we could not approach God in prayer or ever hope to live in His presence. Praise the Lord that "Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, in order that He might bring us to God" (1 Peter 3:18).

Rejoice also because Christ triumphed over death. The Epistle to the Hebrews says He took part of human flesh and blood that He "might deliver those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives" (2:15).

Our consciences, too, were conquered by Christ's Atone-

ment. This should give us cause for great rejoicing because, by reason of Christ's finished work, we may now stand before the divine court of heaven with no fear of punishment. God imputed Christ's innocence to us and provided the legal grounds by which He could justify or declare us innocent in His sight. It is a legal and binding declaration of "not guilty." And it doesn't matter what we feel or what we experience. Our new position of imputed innocence before God does not change because it is a gift. Paul said that "the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable" (Rom. 11:29).

Be Enthusiastic About the Prospects of the Cross

Christ's sacrifice on the cross for sinners was an indisputable fact of God's holy history, but it also had future implications—implications that should fill us with enthusiasm. For example, having taken a human body to heaven, Jesus Christ ratified His own promise that the human bodies of His people will also be taken to heaven. Though He is God, He chose to be our representative. Therefore, we are as sure of heaven in our resurrected bodies as though we were there right now. "If it were not so," said Jesus, "I would have told you" (John 14:2).

By reason of His atoning work, Christ has lifted human nature (sin excepted) right into heaven to dwell in the very presence of God. Undeserving as we are, God has united us with Christ by grace through faith. Therefore, we are in Him before the throne of God sitting in heavenly places because He is our fellow and our kinsman. Christopher Wordsworth showed his enthusiasm for this great truth when he wrote these lines:

He has raised our human nature
In the clouds to God's right hand;
There we sit in heavenly places,
There with Him in glory stand:
Jesus reigns adored by angels;
Man with God is on the throne;

Mighty Lord, in thine ascension
We by faith behold our own.

Another prospect of Christ's death on the cross was His gift of the Holy Spirit. This truth should fill us with enthusiasm because the gift of the Holy Spirit empowered the apostles to evangelize the world, perform supernatural signs, and write the inspired New Testament. Though the apostolic gifts of miracles and direct revelation are past, the Spirit does enable us (as He did the apostles) to glorify God, teach sound doctrine, establish local churches, and set an example that encourages holiness of life.

May God's blessed Holy Spirit use the suggestions made here to encourage you to use the Cross of Christ to motivate you and your ministry. And may He increase your influence for good and the Gospel to the praise of His glorious grace.

Author

George M. Bowman is editor-director of Operation Balance, a literature project designed to advance sound doctrine that holds biblical truth in balance. He is the author of a number of tracts and booklets which can be requested from:

Operation Balance
190 Hespeler Road, #1504
Cambridge, Ontario N1R 8B8
Canada