
Part 3 | Christ's Cross

The Importance of Christ's Cross

- The cross, at one time a mark of shame, is now the visible symbol of the Christian faith.
- The cross is believed to be the cruelest method of public execution that was ever carried out on a consistent basis.
- The cross is the basis of our salvation and of the motivation of our service for Christ.

The Necessity of Christ's Cross

- Imputed Sin –
 - Imputation is *putting to someone's account what may or may not be his*.
 - Adam's sin was imputed on all mankind (Rom. 5:12).
 - The issue is not that each man commits sinful deeds during his lifetime, but that when Adam sinned, the human race sinned in him.
- Inherited Sin
 - Being born into the human race, we "were by nature the children of wrath" (Eph. 2:3).
 - Also as humans, "there is none righteous, no, not one" (Rom. 3:10).
- Individual Sins
 - Because we are sinful in Adam and have inherited sin from our parents, we soon become guilty of committing individual sins, which also serve to condemn us.
 - With individual sins (added to imputed and inherited sins), no one is able to do anything to merit favor in the sight of God, nor contribute anything (at the time of salvation or, by way of promise, for the future) for salvation.
- Social Sins
 - There are sins of society that no single person can be held responsible and no single person can alter. These sins of society require the sacrifice of the cross just as the sins of the individual. (See Isaiah 6:5 for an example).
 - Views of social sins:
 - They are the composite of the sins of individuals, and only as individuals are regenerated will society be altered.
 - Society's problems are larger than individuals and reform must involve changing the structures of society, thus political involvement is necessary.
 - Society's problems are so dangerous that revolution is necessary.
- Natural Evils
 - A *natural evil* is often called *acts of God*. While Christians would argue over the terminology, they would recognize that suffering in our world comes through natural disasters, disease, etc., that are not directly tied to any individual nor societal sin.
 - In the fall of man, creation itself came under a curse.
 - One can explain natural calamity without resorting to manipulating Scripture, as do some forms of Calvinism, or the denial of evil, as in Christian Science.
 - The work of Christ on the cross the creation itself will be removed from the curse.
- Can Man Save Himself?
 - Man's Estimate of Himself – since Adam and Eve, mankind has been trying to make coverings to make them acceptable to God.
 - God's Estimate of Man – God has said that all people will perish apart from the Salvation that He alone offers through Jesus Christ (John 3:16, 36, etc.)
 - The Truth About Sin – A biblical viewpoint (as opposed to the New Age viewpoint) is that man is sinful and alienated from God, totally unable to remedy this problem without God's initiative and work.

The Divine Purpose of Christ's Death

- The Real Issue
 - The task is to discover the biblical answer to the question, "Why did Christ die?"
 - After this, the question becomes, "For Whom did Christ die?"
 - This question can only be answered by understanding the intent of the Father in the death of His Son.

- The question is not, “What did the reformers believe and teach?” or “Shall I be a Calvinist or an Arminian?” nor even, “What is the historical view of the church?” As important and helpful as these matters are, the crux of the matter is, “What saith the Scriptures?”
- It is far better to say, “I believe in this tenet or that one” rather than to accept an entire theological system that is humanly-constructed.
- The Arminian Answer
 - Arminianism is named after James Arminius (1560-1609), professor of theology at the University of Leyden (Holland), though modern Arminiansims would hardly be identifiable with the work of Arminius himself.
 - The Arminian point on the extent of the atonement is all that pertains to our discussion.
 - The Arminian position is that, “Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the world, died for all men and for every man, so that he has *obtained for them all, by his death on the cross, redemption and the forgiveness of sins* [italics mine]; yet that no one actually enjoys this forgiveness of sins except the believer, according to the word of the Gospel of John 3:16”¹
 - The Arminian believes that Christ’s death *obtained* salvation for all and made the decision to believe or not to believe unrelated to the electing purposes of God or the effectual working of the Holy Spirit, resting entirely with the individual.
- The Strict Calvinistic Answer
 - Though John Calvin died more than 50 years prior to the enumeration of the five points of Calvinism (at the Synod of Dort in 1618-1619), he expounded the view of modern Calvinism.
 - Calvinism’s third point, of limited atonement, is all that pertains to our discussion.
 - The Calvinist position is that, “the most precious death of His Son should extend to all the elect, for bestowing upon them alone, the gift of justifying faith, thereby to bring them infallibly to salvation...”²
 - The design of the atonement according to Calvinists was to secure the salvation of the elect.
 - Calvinist Charles Hodge says, “The righteousness of Christ did not make the salvation of men merely possible, it secured the actual salvation of those for whom He wrought.”³
 - Both strict Calvinists and Arminians believe that God *obtained* salvation. The Arminian believes God obtained it for all that receive it, the Calvinist believes that God obtained it for the elect. So while the Arminians and Calvinists view the design of the atonement similarly, they view the extent very differently.
 - The strict Calvinist believes that the work of Christ on the cross did not just provide salvation, but actually secured it for the elect, and had no provision whatsoever for the non-elect.
- The Moderate Calvinistic Answer
 - The moderate Calvinist believes that Christ died to secure the salvation of those who believe *and* to provide the basis of salvation for *all* men.
 - For the moderate Calvinist, the elect will believe (it is the sign of their election) and will therefore receive eternal salvation. The non-elect give evidence of their non-elect status because they do not believe, and the provision of their salvation stands as the basis of their condemnation.
 - The moderate Calvinist, therefore, rejects the idea that Christ died to *secure* the salvation of all men or that He provided every man with sufficient grace to cooperate with God.
 - The moderate Calvinist believes that the twofold testimony of Scripture can be harmonized only in the view that believes Christ died to make possible the salvation of all men and to make certain the salvation of those who believe.
- A Third Choice
 - The Arminian solution is to ascribe to all men sufficient grace, enabling them to believe if they so choose.
 - The Calvinistic solution is to restrict the extent of the atonement to the elect and make it the only saving instrument.
 - The theologian does not need to restrict him/herself to these two views, but can face Scripture objectively and accept Scripture’s clear teaching about man’s total inability to please God to the point of Salvation and also its clear emphasis on the unlimited provisionary nature of the work of Christ on the Cross, with the necessary condition of faith for salvation.
 - The third choice accepts certain guiding principles set forth in the Bible:
 - The Bible views all men as spiritually lost and sinners unable to do anything to please God.
 - Personal faith the sole condition for the appropriation of Calvary’s benefits to the individual.
 - Faith in Christ as Savior does not add anything to the full and complete redemption procured by Christ. Faith does not save; Christ saves and Christ alone. Faith must be viewed as the means through which the grace of God comes to a needy heart.
 - Faith is not a work.

¹ Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom*, III (New York: Harper and Son Publishers, 1919).

² Ibid.

³ Cited by Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*, p. 155.