

ON A HILL TOO FAR AWAY - Fifteen Protestant Truths About the Death of God the Son - Part Nine

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Jesus Christ Died On The Cross To Free Us From Both Slavery To Sin And The Fear Of Death

Revelation 1:5-6 - "...and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood [6] and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen."

Hebrews 2:14-15 - "Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, [15] and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery."

Sometimes apparently *small distinctions* can make a great deal of difference. Each of these texts speaks of a *specific bondage* broken by the power of the cross of Christ. And neither one is the bondage of the *guilt* of our sin before God. That bondage, as we have already seen, was broken as Christ bore the just wrath of Almighty God against my sin and pronounced me forgiven. We call the breaking of that bondage of guilt *justification*. In very simple, but stunning words, the apostle Paul tells us an incredible truth - almost too wonderful to be believed were it not so plainly spoken in the Bible - God *"justifies the ungodly!"* (Romans 4:5).

That being accomplished through faith in the finished work of Christ on the cross, there are two *other* very real enslavements from which I need deliverance. The first is the bondage of sinful habit - not just the *guilt* of sin, but the *enslavement* of sin. The second is the fear of death. Both of these needs are answered in the cross of Christ. In our first text John says Jesus died that we might be *released* (notice the bondage/deliverance terminology) from the *power* of sin over our lives (**Revelation 1:5**). In the second text the writer of Hebrews says Jesus died to *deliver* us from the bondage of the *fear of death* (**Hebrews 2:15**).

1) **JESUS DIED ON THE CROSS TO FREE US FROM THE DOMINION OF SIN IN OUR THOUGHTS AND ACTIONS**

John specifically pictures the death of Jesus Christ on the cross as having a *freeing power* in our lives:

Revelation 1:5 - "...and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood...."

"...by His blood" means His death on the cross. That's where He gave up His life for us. "*Freed us from our sins*" is the *result* of the cross. This is more than merely the erasing of the *guilt* of our sins from the books of God. This verse speaks of an actual breaking of sin's *hold* over our lives. Guilt is *erased*. Our lives are *freed*.

The Apostle Paul speaks of the same truth in these powerful words - **Romans 6:14** - "For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace."

There's a very important *order* in these words. Sin, says Paul, will not be our *master* anymore. Why? Because we're strong willed? Because we're extremely disciplined? Because we're basically good, moral people? No, not for any of those reasons. Sin won't have dominion over us anymore because *we have received divine grace* - "*Sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace.*"

There is such crucial insight here. No one is going to be freed from sin's power by sheer will-power. You can't beat sin on your own. But once grace has come through personal trust in the cross of Christ, there also comes a *new capacity to walk in freedom from sin's rule*.

Or, to put it in more theological terms, once a person, by faith, has been *justified* - once the *guilt* of his sin has been erased by divine grace - there also begins the process of becoming increasingly *sanctified*. The *guilt* is removed instantly. The *life* is transformed progressively.

God's grace always does more than just *forgive* sin. That's the way countless Christians picture grace. We are guilty, but we don't get the punishment we deserve. We get grace and forgiveness *in spite* of our sin. And all of that is blessedly true. But our text says Jesus died to provide *more* than mere forgiveness. He died on the cross to bring *release* from an old, cruel

master. Paul shouts it clearly - ***because we are under grace, sin won't be our master anymore.*** John, in the same vein, says through Christ's blood we experience ***release*** from our sin. And being released means being ***set free.***

How? How does this release take place? The forgiveness seems automatic and effortless. Does release from the bondage of sin happen in exactly the same way? No, not quite.

Simplified, we cooperate with the Holy Spirit in the ongoing sanctification of our lives. We receive God's grace. I don't mean we just ***believe*** in God's grace, or ***know*** about God's grace, or have ***read*** or ***heard*** about God's grace, or ***talk*** about God's grace. Rather, we ***receive*** God's grace with ***warmth.*** There's a full-blooded ***reception*** of God's grace. We ***embrace*** it.

This first step is far too easily, and far too often rushed over and ***presumed*** in the thinking of many. This first step is the most important one of all, not only for ***forgiveness***, which would only make sense, but also for ***ongoing transformation*** by the Holy Spirit.

How can I tell if I've truly embraced God's grace in my heart? For sure, the beauty of God's marvelous love and mercy in Christ Jesus will reveal profoundly the ***ugliness*** of my own sin. Remember, the ***beauty*** of grace always reveals the ***ugliness*** of sin. So, suddenly, by God's Spirit, I begin to get a sense of how ***against*** the glory of God my own sin is. I see sin not only as being against the ***rules*** but grieving and dishonoring the Lord Who died to provide my forgiveness from sin's guilt.

This realization is the sparkplug for sanctification - for release from the ***bondage*** of sin. When the cross of Christ is truly treasured as the fountain of divine grace the Holy Spirit starts to ***motivate me against my own unrighteousness.*** He begins to ***turn me against my former self.*** My own will ***embraces*** this process, but far more than my own will is involved. The Holy Spirit fuels my best intentions. In fact, the Holy Spirit begins to ***shape*** my best intentions in the direction of denying self and following Christ.

That's why, when Paul looks closely at the kind of character that takes shape in the Christian's life ***in place*** of old patterns of selfishness and sin he calls these new qualities - like ***love, joy, kindness, patience, goodness, and surprisingly, even self-control - the fruit of the Spirit.***

He calls them this, not because your own will is ***uninvolved*** in their forming, but because your own will is being ***shaped and transformed*** by the Holy Spirit through the beauty of grace truly received, treasured, fed and savored.

Remember, this is reason number nine in our series. Jesus Christ died on the cross to ***deliver us from the bondage of sin in this present evil age.***

2) **JESUS CHRIST DIED ON THE CROSS TO DELIVER US FROM THE BONDAGE OF THE FEAR OF DEATH**

Hebrews 2:14-15 - "Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, [15] and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery."

I see ***three destiny-shaping truths*** in these verses. They do not unravel easily and need to be pondered to drain every drop of hope and life from them:

- a) ***Satan is described as having "the power of death."*** How does he have this power and what does this mean?
- b) ***Jesus destroys Satan's power through His own death - "...that through death (his own) He might destroy the one who has the power of death...."*** How does Jesus' death do this?
- c) ***Christ's death frees us from the bondage of the fear of death - "...and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery."***

Let's quickly look at each of these points:

- a) ***Satan is described as having the "power of death."*** We need to be careful about what this ***does*** mean and what it ***doesn't*** mean. Certainly Satan does not have the power of death in the sense of ***deciding*** who lives and who dies.

He doesn't choose our departure time from this world. Job was surely correct when he said ***"The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away."*** The Psalmist expressed the same conviction: **Psalm 90:3** - ***"You return man to dust and say, "Return, O children of man!"***

There *is*, however, a power of death that Satan ***does*** hold in his hand - **1 Corinthians 15:56** - ***"The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law."***

This is the power of death the Devil carries everywhere he goes. He tempts and entices us to sin. His key tool isn't voodoo, or witchcraft, or seances, or curses, or demons. His chief tool for sin is ***deception*** - his ability to cause us to think true things that are lies and to belittle or deny things that are eternally true and precious.

But he ***does*** lead people into sin and ***that*** puts a sting into death. Sin brings eternal judgment and damnation. That's where Satan gets his power in death. Through sin, death brings ***eternal condemnation and judgment and separation from Father God.***

- b) ***Jesus destroys Satan through His own death on the cross.*** The verse is emphatic - ***"...that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death"*** (Hebrews 2:14). I think we're all agreed that prior to the cross - in fact, prior to the ***Incarnation*** - Jesus, God the Son, had the sheer power to destroy Satan a thousand times over. But it wouldn't have done ***us*** any good. It wouldn't have done us any good because He wouldn't have destroyed him ***"through death."***

This is why the writer of Hebrews tells us in ***verse 10*** of this same chapter that the incarnation of Jesus was how He was ***"made perfect"*** as the author of our salvation. The pre-incarnate Christ could never experience ***death***. And only through His own death could Jesus remove the ***"sting"*** of death - destroy him who had the ***"power of death"*** - by bearing the curse for our sins.

This is how, in John's words, Jesus came to ***"destroy the works of the Devil."*** The Devil came to ***kill***. Jesus came to ***die***, not for His own sins, but to bear the Father's judgment for mine. Paul says through the power of Christ's death there is now ***"no condemnation that can stand against us."*** Jesus, through His death destroyed him who had the power of death.

With all of this background, we're in a better position to grasp the third point:

- c) ***Christ's death frees us now from the "bondage of the fear of death."*** We're not freed from the ***experience*** of death. Not yet. The Bible says there is still that last enemy to be destroyed - death. And that hasn't happened yet. People still die.

But the ***bondage of the fear of death*** has been destroyed. That's because, through faith in Christ's death on the cross and His Resurrection from that death, death doesn't take us into condemnation but into Christ's presence. The one lethal weapon Satan had that gave him the ***"power of death"*** was ***unforgiven sin***. ***That*** is what made death a dreadful experience. But Christ ***removed*** that dread through His cross.

"The bondage of the fear of death" - what does that phrase mean? It's not as simple a question as it looks on the surface. It can't mean Christians no longer ***think*** about death. After all, the Bible tells us to ***"number our days"*** and to ***"redeem the time."*** We ***all*** know - non-Christians and Christians alike - that we're going to die. We can't ***deny*** the reality of death.

The ***fear of death*** comes from ***two things***. ***First***, it comes from the fear that ultimately we're not ***ready*** for death. We don't have ***peace with God***. We fear judgment. Everything is ultimately going to come crashing down in that final, awful moment of eternal accountability. And ***second***, the fear of death comes from the gnawing awareness that everything ***ends*** with death. We fear that we can do nothing in this life that ***outlasts*** our three-score and ten years.

And the reason this fear of death is called ***bondage*** is it drives us so relentlessly to secure ourselves against its inevitable arrival. We are blindly and foolishly driven to somehow ***secure ourselves*** against something we know we can't beat.

Because Christ Jesus has removed the condemnation we all faced before God's broken law, because He has destroyed the one who had the **power** of death, we know **two things for sure**:

- i) ***We know nothing, including death itself, can ever separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.*** Satan can not destroy the soul, that goes to be with Jesus upon death. And Satan cannot destroy the body, which Jesus will raise in glory when He comes again. We can rely on Christ's work and word and have peace with God.
- ii) ***We know our labor is never in vain in the Lord.*** True enough, you can't take it with you. But you can send it on ahead - ***"Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord, for their works do follow them"*** Only through Christ can you make your life count forever. You are now free to ***risk big things*** for Jesus and His kingdom without the burden of securing your own future. That's what your freedom from bondage is ***for***.

Christians are the ***freest people in the world***. They've been delivered from the bondage of the fear of death. They don't live insecurely trying to shore up their lives against inevitable death and judgment. They are free to ***lay down their lives for Christ and His glory***.