

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

Part Three - Sunday, March 20<sup>th</sup>, 2016, 10:00 a.m. - Teaching #1870

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Jesus Christ Died On The Cross To Show The Marvel Of God's Love, Grace, And Forgiveness To Guilty Sinners

John 3:16 - "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."

Romans 5:7-8 - "For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— [8] but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

Ephesians 1:7 - "In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace...."

We're continuing to unpack the treasure chest of Calvary. The rest of the teaching of the New Testament - the whole breadth and width of its theology - all unfolds around the nucleus of the Cross of Christ. Before we're done with this series we will study no less than 27 effects of the Cross of Christ Jesus on our lives today. All of them are beautiful beyond proper telling, though, being sinners as we are, this morning's truths perhaps warm our hearts most immediately and deeply - ***Jesus died on the Cross to show the marvel of God's love, grace, and forgiveness to guilty sinners.***

Just to be clear - we're not just examining how wonderful it is to ***be forgiven*** - true as that obviously is. What we're examining - and I hope to show you why it is vitally important to do so - is ***how God is magnified*** in the ***way*** we are forgiven. The subject is the ***glory of God*** in our forgiveness.

Even as we study the subject of forgiveness received through Christ Jesus, it's important that the spotlight be kept where it belongs - on the marvel of ***God's*** love, grace and forgiveness. Or to put it into Paul's words from Ephesians, "***.....according to the riches of His grace.***" We are ***recipients*** of forgiveness but there is a sense in which forgiveness isn't primarily about us. It's all about ***God*** as the ***giver*** of it.

In other words, forgiveness, as I'm going to take some time explaining in a minute, magnifies the greatness of ***God***, not the greatness of ***me***. Forgiveness, according to the Scriptures, is according to the richness of ***God's grace***, and not (as many in the North American church would teach today) according to the richness of ***my worth***. ***God*** is magnified in the Cross of Christ, not ***I***.

### 1) THE BIBLE SETS FORTH THE GLORY OF GOD IN OUR FORGIVENESS WITH TWO DIFFERENT ARGUMENTS

First, we see the greatness of God's forgiveness in the ***preciousness*** of the sacrifice given - John 3:16 - "For God so loved the world, that ***he gave his only Son***, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."

The argument of this verse is crystal clear. God loved the world ***so*** much ("...God ***so*** loved the world..."). ***How*** much is ***so*** much? Well, He loved the world ***so*** much He gave His only begotten Son. You can tell ***how much*** God loved the world by the ***nature of the gift He gave***. He didn't give something little or valueless or marginal. He didn't give something extra or left over. He gave the best He had as Creator and Owner of all that is.

But that's only ***one*** argument to show the marvel of God's love. The second is, not the ***value*** of the gift given, but the ***nature of those for whom it was given*** - Romans 5:7-8 - "For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— [8] but God shows his love for us in that ***while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.***"

Sometimes, says Paul, people will do special things for special people. In fact, on very rare occasions, someone will give his or her life for others - perhaps a parent for a child, or a husband for a wife, or a soldier for his or her country. This doesn't happen often, and when it does we all stand back in silent admiration of the sheer heroism of the event.

But Paul says this is not at all what happened on the Cross. People right here on earth will make special sacrifices for people whom they feel merit it. Paul, in his very carefully crafted contrast, says we are not to think of the event of the Cross in terms anything like that. He doesn't **deny** that we find ourselves in unique place in God's creation. He just says we must not **think** of ourselves as creatures of **merit** when we consider the Cross.

What makes the glory of God's love and forgiveness shine so brilliantly is the fact that Christ died for us **while we were sinners**. In another place he says Christ died while we were God's **enemies**. In still another he simply says Christ died for the **ungodly**.

The point is the same in each case. This is how we are to **see ourselves** when we think of God's redeeming grace in Christ. God's love wasn't drawn out by something wonderful in its **object**. We are to stand and glorify only the **source**. Only **God**. That's why forgiveness truly is, as Paul says in our Ephesians text, according to the **"riches of His grace,"** not the **worthiness of the recipient**

But this is still only stating the obvious. The real question is **why does this matter?** It matters more than anything else you can think of. It matters because, if God's grace is given to me because I'm worthy of it, then God is simply making a good business deal - a prudent choice. If I get grace because I am somehow worthy of it then what I am getting **isn't** grace. It may be **help**. It may be **assistance**. It may be a **bargain** of some sort. It may be an **investment in my future**. But it isn't **grace**.

That's because grace, by any dictionary's definition, is **undeserved** favor and kindness. Once it's deserved, it is no longer grace. If you're **worthy** of grace, you **neuter** grace. And if the Cross of Jesus isn't pure, undiluted, unexplainable, breath-taking grace, you have re-written the whole New Testament.

Here's a huge question. **How is my love for God increased?** What kind of praying and worshiping and thinking helps the church to love God with all of our heart, soul, and mind? Or, perhaps to state it differently, how do I hold all of the competing idols for my attention and affection at bay?

That's where today's teaching comes into play. We stoke the furnace of love for God in **two ways**. **First**, by remembering **Who it is** that came and died - **"...in Christ God was reconciling the world to Himself...."** (2 Corinthians 5:19). And **second**, we stoke the furnace of love for God by remembering **who we were** when He came and died - **"...while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of His son...."** (Romans 5:10).

O, the curse of putting these thoughts in a file marked **"as if"** they were true. Remember these two New Testament explanations for the Cross and you will go a long way in keeping yourself in the love of God - **Jude 21** - **"....keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life."**

Note to self - **"Keep yourselves in the love of God...."** This isn't done for you. **You** do it. That's the heart-beat of today's Palm Sunday teaching.

## 2) **REMEMBERING MY UNWORTHINESS OF GOD'S GRACE IN CHRIST JESUS CREATES CONFIDENCE AND FAITH IN A WAY THAT MAGNIFYING MY SELF-WORTH NEVER CAN**

Consider this - how you perceive your **start** in grace has everything to do with how successfully you **grow** in grace. If you **begin** doing nothing but humbly magnifying God's **undeserved** love and grace in Jesus Christ, you will more readily **continue** to trust that same undeserved grace in the future.

And you're going to **need** to rely on God's grace all your life. We all know the schemes of the Devil to gum up spiritual power and life in our souls. We know how constantly he reminds us of all that we should be but aren't. He loves to suck the wind out of our sails with his accusations and condemnation. **How are we going to fight that?**

The **wrong** way to fight it is to argue and debate with him that you **aren't as bad** as he says. This kind of mental twiddle-twaddle is counter-productive and death-dealing because you'll feel the lack of your own integrity as you try to defend your own strengths. And then the Devil will make you **feel** like a hypocrite for even trying to put on a good front.

Unless you're truly an amazingly wonderful, righteous person, unless you are absolutely certain you unflinchingly love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength with every breath you take - as long as you can't think of one human being - not even one annoying enemy you don't love more than you love yourself - then your defending yourself against the Devil is a dangerous game because, even if you are so amazingly holy you can say those things about yourself in complete honesty, the Devil will cause you to revel in your own righteousness until you choke on your own pride.

Let me tell you the **right** way to stand your ground in confidence when the Devil marshals your failures in front of you. **Don't argue with him.** Don't waste your time even speaking with Satan. He's not interested in you anyway. But **do** remember to do this - **remember how you started out in your Christian walk.** Remember that Christ already came and died for you when you were His **enemy**. Remember that He knew your fallen, hopeless spiritual state when He took you into His redeeming love. Remember He wasn't surprised by your sin and failure. Nor was He so turned off that He refused to offer you His forgiving grace.

Now, here's the point. Just as our Lord **began** His redemptive work in you while you were totally unworthy of His grace, He will **continue** to cleanse and forgive as you place your trust in that **ongoing** grace. This is the whole point of Paul's argument:

**Romans 5:10-11** - "For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, **shall we be saved by his life.** [11] **More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.**"

Do you see it? Magnify your self-worth and you short-circuit your own future. Your **unworthy start** is your ace in the hole. It is your path to **continued confidence and hope**. It's your proof that Christ will never leave or forsake you. You didn't earn His love and grace at the beginning and that means you don't earn it now.

Your **unworthiness** is the fountain of God's grace. And God's grace is the fountain of your future hope. Don't ever throw it away because when you have to start making withdrawals, the bank account of your own worthiness will run out long before the bank account of God's endless, undeserved grace and love.

This is why teaching, thinking and praying about sin and repentance is never **negative** when properly understood. Many times we sing "At the Cross" during our communion service. I still remember the time a person spoke to me after the service about the phrase **"...would He devote that sacred head for such a worm as I?"** "I refuse to sing those words," she said. "I'm not a worm. Jesus didn't die for worms. He valued me more than all the worms in the world!"

I also noticed that the editors of our hymn book must have agreed with those sentiments. They changed the line to remove any mention of worms. Then I noticed that in a large American church, when they sang "Amazing Grace," they changed the line "...that saved a wretch like me," to "...that saved a one like me." Apparently our self-esteem is a fragile beast.

Now, it is true that we are not worms. We are people made in God's image. And I can't help but think Isaac Watts knew the anatomical differences between people and worms when he wrote his great hymn. We all know the difference between people and bugs, so **what was Watts trying to say in those words?** What was going on in his mind that our culture of self-esteem is in danger of missing?

I think he was trying, in the most striking words of his day, to underscore this powerful truth of our total **unworthiness** when we bow before the Cross of Christ. True, I'm not a worm. But, when considering the Cross of Christ and the grace there revealed, I **do** have something in **common** with the worm. Neither one of us **deserves** grace. Not ever. Neither one of us is **worthy** of the love of God in Christ Jesus. God condescends as fully to reach me as any other creature on earth.

And there's one other thing to remember when you feel insulted by Isaac Watt's words in that hymn. No, you are **not** a worm, and I think Watts knew that all along. And Jesus didn't die for worms, true enough. But, then again, He didn't **have** to die for worms. Worms don't make idols so insulting to God and then bow down and worship them. Worms don't fill their lives up with material goods until love for God is spoiled and drowned out. Worms have never treated God with contempt and ignored Him as inconsequential. Worms never blaspheme God, or quench His Spirit, or reject His Son. People do that. Not worms.

Jesus didn't die for worms because He didn't **have** to die for worms. Worms don't sin. People do. Worms aren't made in the image of God and less is expected of them. So it is true we are created in a much more wonderful way than worms.

But that sword cuts two ways. We have also fallen a much greater distance than worms and rebelled against much greater light. True, worms are of much less consequence than you and I. Yet it's also true that **worms aren't bad enough for a Redeemer to die for. People are.** There's not a worm on earth with as much to repent of as I. And there is certainly not a worm on earth with as much at stake or as much to rejoice in as you and I. Maybe we shouldn't feel so insulted when we sing that hymn after all.

Magnify God's grace and forgiveness in the Cross. Never fall into the **worthiness trap**, because you certainly won't **feel** worthy all the time in this life. And when you lose that sense of worthiness you will have nothing else to build your confidence on. Glory in the bare, breathless love revealed in Christ Jesus, and the shed blood that makes it right for God to forgive unworthy sinners like me.