

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

Part Four - Sunday, April 3rd, 2016, 6:00 p.m. - Teaching #1875

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Jesus Christ Died On The Cross To Cancel the Demands Of The Law, Take Away Our Condemnation, And Give Us A Clear Conscience Before God

Colossians 2:13-14 - “And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, [14] by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross.”

Romans 8:33-34 - “Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. [34] Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.”

Hebrews 9:13-15 - “For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer, sanctify for the purification of the flesh, [14] how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God. [15] Therefore he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant.”

The title of this message is long because it contains the three points we will be studying. It lists the three components of divine forgiveness - the things that make the Cross **work** its redemptive power on our behalf. It’s vitally important to know these things and I want to take a minute to explain why.

I’m not sure you have to understand them all in order to be saved. You don’t have to be a theologian to experience God’s grace. You can get to heaven without being able to write a paper on these truths. But you won’t **savor** the Cross as you should without understanding these things. You will almost certainly be more **vulnerable** to temptation, doubt, and spiritual depression if you don’t understand these things. Jesus said people were vulnerable to having the truth of the Word snatched away in terms of its power in their hearts when they didn’t take the time or make the effort to **understand** it fully and properly:

Matthew 13:19 - “When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and **does not understand it**, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is what was sown along the path.”

It’s amazing how many Christians, especially in the charismatic renewal, don’t think of their intellect as an instrument of **spiritual warfare**. They learn every trick they can, from any of a thousand experts on spiritual warfare, and never take the time to simply **discipline themselves in a sound doctrinal understanding of the faith**. If you would live to resist the Devil, **learn - learn again - ponder - read - study - study again - never stop learning the doctrines of the faith**.

Most of us know the Cross is a **good thing**. We know we are **forgiven** through the Cross of Christ. Somehow it just happens. Jesus died and I’m off the hook. But **how** does the Cross work? How would you tell someone else the exact **process of redemption** that took place on Calvary? What **makes** the Cross of Christ effective?

That’s what gave birth to this whole series. I wanted to look at the Cross from many different angles. I wanted to cover with our church family **how forgiveness comes through the Cross**. Today we’re looking at three related but different aspects of Christ’s death. Ponder them carefully. Be able to tell people **why** the Cross works when nothing else will. Be able to show the **uniqueness** of the death of Christ as a saving event in world history because this is the day when we’re being pressured to consider all religions equal in the long run. And countless Christians are falling for it. Study these three points prayerfully with me:

1) **ON THE CROSS JESUS CANCELED THE CERTIFICATE OF DEBT AGAINST US**

Colossians 2:13-14 - “And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, [14] by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross.”

The important phrase is “...**by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands**....” (14). The broken law of God isn’t an idle, silent thing. It has its roots in the living character of the holiness of God. And the law doesn’t sit meekly by when its decrees are ignored or broken. The law is an accurate, passionate **record keeper**. And what it records is my **debt** to its unsatisfied demands.

We need to heed this reminder from the Scriptures because our therapeutic age is more used to measuring personal guilt by **guilt feelings**. But Paul says our problem isn’t our **feelings** of guilt at all. We all know that feelings come and go with varying degrees of accuracy. The problem is our **“record of debt”** (14).

Notice how this puts my guilt before the law of God on a **legal, official** basis. There is a certificate of debt on my house. It’s kept at the bank. It is a record of my debt. Whether or not I **feel** like I owe the bank money is not a matter of concern to them. The record of what I owe stands on its own. So it is with my guilt before the law of God.

I am also not speaking here of the **results** of our sins. Sin brings pain, misery, loneliness, and disfunctionality at a variety of levels in our personal and social experiences in this world. And God is capable and willing to restore and rebuild much of this according to the riches of His grace and kindness.

But that’s not what Paul is writing about when he speaks of the **“record of debt”** we all carry before the law of God. He’s not talking here about the **effects** of our sin. He’s talking about the **guilt** of our sin **before God**. This is the part of sin we don’t speak of as much anymore. God will, one day, restore all of this created realm. But that’s a different issue from canceling the **debt of our sin** before His holy throne.

Fundamentally, there are only **two** ways of dealing with the debt of sin. You can either **balance** the debt of sin or you can **cancel** the debt of sin. Almost all religions try the former. It’s a process as old as religion itself. People know perfectly well they aren’t perfect, but they also know they do some - perhaps even **many** - good things. And the good deeds are pictured as being piled up on the opposite side of the balance as the transgressions. God treats as just those whose good deeds tip the scales in the direction of righteousness.

This was, and is, the religion of Judaism, Islam, much of Roman Catholicism, with its doctrine of purgatory for the removal of sins by acts of suffering and penance. This is also true of Mormonism, Jehovah’s Witnesses, and a host of others. And it is fatally flawed for two important reasons:

- a) ***Apart from faith in Christ Jesus, my good deeds never get put on the opposite side of the scale from my sin.*** This is one of the most important things you can learn about Christian righteousness. The Bible says ***“Whatever is not of faith is sin”*** (Romans 14:23). Paul means whatever is not rooted in ***faith in Christ Jesus is sin***.

In other words, every action, in order to have moral worth before God, must stem from faith in Jesus Christ as Savior. Good works are the **fruit**, not the **root** of living faith in Christ Jesus.

Now follow this through. Whenever my works don’t stem from trust in Jesus Christ as Savior, I place my trust **in my own works** to satisfy God. And when I place my trust in my own works, apart from faith in Christ Jesus, I make an **idol** of my own works. And idolatry is always **sinful** in the eyes of God.

This is true even if the works themselves are benevolent, kind, compassionate - serving meals in a soup kitchen to the poor, donating time at the local hospital or crisis pregnancy center, counseling at a youth camp for runaway teens - whatever it may be - my righteousness (that's the **good** stuff I do) is, according to the Bible, "**filthy rags**" apart from faith in Jesus Christ.

See the folly of trying to **balance** your transgressions with works of righteousness. Apart from faith in Christ Jesus as Savior and Lord, **all** of your deeds - **good and bad** - get piled up on the **same side of the scales because whenever personal works are used as a replacement for faith in Jesus Christ, they are sinful works, or dead works, as they're called in the Scriptures**. There is no hope whatsoever for salvation on these terms.

b) **Most importantly, balancing bad deeds with good is not the way God has chosen to save**

This is the beauty in Paul's words - **Colossians 2:13-14** - "**And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, [14] by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross.**"

God **cancel**s our sins. He never **balance**s them. In the Cross of Jesus Christ salvation is put on a totally different foundation than balancing bad deeds with good. God only **cancel**s sin in Christ. There is no other way for sin to be dealt with.

2) **ON THE CROSS JESUS CHRIST TOOK AWAY THE CONDEMNATION OF OUR SIN**

Romans 8:34 - "**Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.**"

The condemnation of our sin is removed as surely as Jesus died. That's the logic of this powerful verse. This truth grows out of our last point. Because our debt of sin was canceled in Christ - our **actual** debt before God, not just our guilt **feelings** or the **effects** of our sin upon our circumstances - but because the actual **debt** of our sin was canceled, there is no genuine condemnation that can stand against us.

There may still come times when, due to the weakness of our own faith, or the frailty of our present human condition, we still **feel** condemned. The **world** may condemn us. Our **friends** may come against us. We know there will come times of **ridicule** and even **persecution**. So the Apostle doesn't mean there never will come times when others press us with **their** condemnation of us.

The point of the text is there is no condemnation that can **stand** before the throne of God against us. Christ has canceled the debt of our debt. And because God is truly just, He will never require payment for the same sins **twice**. As surely as Jesus died, my condemnation is gone.

3) **ON THE CROSS JESUS CHRIST PROVIDED CLEANSING FOR THE CONSCIENCE OF THE SINNER**

There is an important difference between the way sinners were cleansed in the Old Testament and the way they are cleansed since the death of Christ Jesus on the Cross. This is what the writer of the letter to the Hebrews was dealing with in our opening text:

Hebrews 9:13-15 - "**For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer, sanctify for the purification of the flesh, [14] how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the**

living God. [15] Therefore he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant.”

The whole point of these words is the blood of Christ cleanses ***“much more”*** than the blood of ***“goats and bulls.”*** But ***how*** is the cleansing since the Cross different? What does the blood of Jesus do that the blood of goats and bulls did not?

Our text says the blood of Christ cleanses the ***conscience***. The blood of goats and bulls only dealt with the ***outward, ceremonial cleansing of the sinner***. This is what the text means when it talks about the ***cleansing of the flesh*** (13). In the Old Testament God only ***covered*** the sins of the sinner. His sins were ***overlooked*** by God when the sacrifice was offered. But this never changed the ***heart*** of the sinner. And the sinner’s ***conscience*** knew the heart hadn’t been transformed.

The writer of Hebrews tells us the reason for this:

Hebrews 10:3-4 - ***“But in these sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year. [4] For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.”***

This was a huge problem. Those Old Testament sinners knew full well that even as they brought their animal to the temple for sacrifice there was no way under heaven that the blood of animals could atone for human sin. They knew this wasn’t adequate payment for transgression. They knew ***animal*** sacrifices left ***human*** sin basically untouched in terms of its grip on their hearts and minds.

Only in Christ is sin truly canceled out. Only in Christ is there truly adequate payment - ***more*** than adequate payment - for my sin. Only Jesus, God the Son, fully became ***one of us***. He entered the battle against sin on our own terms. Sin is truly atoned because Jesus was truly one of us in a way no bull or goat ever was. The conscience is cleansed and at peace because Christ’s sinless life and sacrifice for sin was a ***genuine establishing of righteousness, not only by God Almighty, but by one of us!***

This is why we glory in the Cross. This is why the Cross works. It works because in it God ***cancel[s] the certificate of our actual guilt before His holy law***. The Cross works because in it ***no condemnation can stand against us before the throne of God***. And the Cross works because it has ***power to inwardly cleanse the conscience of a previously futile system of sacrificial redemption through the sinless life and death of Jesus Christ, God the Son***.

The hymn writer knew more than many when he prayed, ***“Jesus, keep me near the Cross.”*** The one who penned these now famous words knew he was saved. That wasn’t what his prayer was about at all. He wanted the Spirit of God to, in ever increasing measure, keep the power and influence and impact of the Cross flourishing in his mind and heart. And that’s good praying indeed.