

The Death of Christ in Biblical Perspective
“The Death of Death in the Death of Christ”

Romans 5:1–11

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We will start by looking at Romans 5:1–5 which says *[1] Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. [2] Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. [3] Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, [4] and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, [5] and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.*

The grass withers, the flower fades, God's Word abides forever and by His grace and mercy may His Word be preached for you.

I have been asked ‘Harry if you had just a few minutes to tell someone about Christianity what would be the crux or focus of Christianity you would share?’ First I'd like to say I love all that I do Monday through Saturday but I literally just live for the Lord's Day for two premiere reasons but not the only reasons. One reason is just the joy and anticipation in my heart of assembling with God's people for gathered praise to God. I think it's the premiere moment of my life and I get to do this each Lord's Day. Secondly, is the extraordinary privilege and calling of God with the patience of you that allows me to be an expository preacher of the Word of God where we're working through texts of Scriptures and being able to understand and apply them.

I also realize I only have about 40 minutes to get across this information to you when you have been exposed to and received countless hours of a secular world and life view that has been poured into you with amazing skills and amazing media technology. Yet I only have a small amount of time to confront that and challenge that in the context of worship, so it's a challenge but it's one I'm grateful for and live for each day. As I was thinking about what to share today in light of all the exigencies of the moment I decided to go to my favorite book of the Bible which is Romans. My favorite chapter is 8 but my next favorite chapter is 5 which is where I will speak from today.

I want to approach this text by asking you if you had a few moments to share with someone what Christianity is what would you share? You probably would immediately be aware of passages like I Corinthians where the Apostle Paul says in I Corinthians 15:3–4, *[3] For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received (The Gospel): that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, [4] that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures.* This tells you that everything in the Bible is important, that some things are of secondary importance but the one thing of primary importance even before everything in primary importance is the Gospel.

In other words, if you don't get the Gospel right you don't get baptism right and that's why Paul said ‘I didn't come to baptize but to preach the Gospel’ (I Corinthians 1:17). He is not belittling baptism, he is just telling us that baptism is meaningless if we don't get the Gospel right. The same goes for the Lord's Supper, church government and eschatology. You have to get the Gospel right to get these things right. The Gospel is the foundation, formation and the motivation of the entire Christian life. So is there a shorthand for the Gospel? The Apostle Paul indicates that there is. When he came to preach the Gospel he says in I Corinthians 2:2, *[2] For I*

decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. That is Paul's statement of shorthand for the Gospel.

There are a number of young men in our church who are moving toward ordination, to be ordained as a minister of the Gospel and that means they have to go to the Presbytery for the trials of ordination. During these trials, they will be examined by teaching elders concerning their knowledge of the Bible, the Westminster Confession of Faith, the book of church order and all those things that they are required to take vows to. One of them said to me 'When I am up there in front of them, under the gun with a question where I've just gone blank and I don't really have an answer, should I just say 'I don't have an answer'?' I said 'Don't ever do that. If you get a question that you don't know the answer to, all you have to do is say 'for the glory of God' for they will never tell you that's wrong. They may want some more information but they will not tell you that's wrong. You'll at least get off to a start with them.'

I love the story Kennedy Smart gave when he was in the pastorate and he decided to do children's sermon in worship. So he would invite the children up front each week and he said it was the hardest thing to work on because he would always need an illustration for the children. He realized after doing this for a while that no matter what illustration and question you asked there was always one answer they would give you. The answer they will always give is 'Jesus.' Who built the ark? Jesus and it's because they know you will never tell them that's wrong. The story Kennedy told was when he asked the children 'what is gray and furry, runs around on four legs with a long bushy tail, picks up nuts and lives in a tree?' Seems like every group of children has a boy named Johnny and Johnny says 'I know the answer is Jesus but it sure sounds like a squirrel to me.'

So I will do what Paul says which is 'Christ Jesus and Him crucified' when asked to give the crux or focus of Christianity. It's interesting to note that the very word crux comes from the Latin meaning cross. We also get the word 'crucial' from the Latin meaning cross. So Paul gives us the crucial point of Christianity. When Paul says '*For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified*' is he losing sight of the virgin birth? Absolutely not, because the death of Christ on the cross is meaningless if Christ is just born as the son of Adam for He can't die for my sins because He has His own sin to deal with, but here is a New Adam by way of the virgin birth. The Son of God takes upon humanity, why, to go to the cross.

Why was it written of Him to go to that cross? Is he belittling the resurrection? Absolutely not, because the resurrection is the shout of victory, but victory of what? It is victory of the cross. The resurrection declares that He was delivered up because of our transgressions and He was raised because of our justification. The victory of the death of Christ is the resurrection shout. What about the second coming? The second coming is to bring about the consummation all that has been secured at His first coming when He went to the cross. It is not that any of those are unimportant but it is that the virgin birth was leading to the cross, with the resurrection declaring the victory of the cross and the second coming brings the consummation and final declaration of the victory of the cross. It's the cross, the crux, the crucial point for in the death of Christ is the death of death in the death of Christ.

One of my favorite theologians is John Owen. I have a portrait of John Owen drawn for me and given to me by a friend. I believe he is one of the smartest men there is but he is the ugliest theologian I've ever seen in my life. Honestly I feel pretty good about myself when I look at that portrait. To me there is nothing that declares to that glorious declaration that he wrote that he embellished from the Word of God – the death of death in the death of Christ. Why is this so important to us?

Take baptism for instance – not the methodology of baptism but the theology of baptism is the declaration of the death and resurrection of Christ. When we come to the Lord's Supper we are not taken back to the manger for our focus or the empty tomb for our focus, for all of those are assumed but we are brought back to the body and blood of Christ. There is our foundation, formation and motivation in the Christian life. Let's now take a look at the text in Romans 5 for this study.

Did you notice what Paul said to those who are in Christ by faith and Christ is in them by His Spirit? He says that there is no condemnation, you are justified, you have peace with God, you stand in God's grace, and your suffering is used for the glory of God, your well-being and your growth in grace. He says that your character is being framed and formed for all eternity to give praise to God. You are redeemed and living by faith. In these very few verses it's almost like these glorious statements are coming at us in a staccato way to our hearts. On what basis are they coming to us? Why is all that true? Here is why you are right with God and live with absolute assurance in the hope of Christ.

Romans 5:6–11 says [6] *For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. [7] 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. [9] Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. [10] 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.*

So the reason we are declared innocent, with no condemnation, are justified, stand in His grace, suffer for His glory and have His peace, is because of the death of Christ. In this text Paul gives us five things about the death of Christ that I want to share with you and then leave you with one takeaway. The first thing about the death of Christ is that it is an atoning death. It is a death to pay for sins, our sins. The Bible is unmistakably clear about this. One we are sinners. Two every sin carries a death penalty.

When the Bible talks about death it refers to three different kinds of death that sin has produced in this world as its wage. Romans 6:23 says [23] *For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.* The Greek word for death is *thanatos* meaning radical separation. Don't think of it as the tearing of something perforated but think of it as the rendering separated what was not supposed to be separated. So when Romans tells us that the wages of sin is death it is a radical separation of what was not supposed to be separated. So the Bible is clear that physical death is the clear separation of the soul from the body.

The best illustration I have of this is when I was asked by someone to pray that they would have a natural death and my response was 'no'. The person initially was a little upset with me thinking that since I was pastor that I should pray that they have a natural death. Then I said 'Because I'm a pastor I can't pray for you to have a natural death because as a pastor I know there is nothing natural about death. Death is not a part of God's natural order and that is seen in Genesis 1 and 2. Death only comes in Genesis 3.' Death is an enemy because it's not part of the cycle. Death is an intruder and is a just payment from a holy God because of our sin where we declare our sovereignty over God in word and deed. Therefore we have a physical death.

Secondly, the Bible says we are born spiritually dead. Ephesians 2 talks about us being born dead in our sins where we are born separated from God. We are not born sin sick where all

we need is a little help to get saved for we are born sin dead and we need to be born again in order to come to the Savior.

Thirdly, there is eternal death where those who are apart from Christ and have said ‘no’ to the revelation of God’s glory and grace, He then says to them ‘separate, depart from Me you workers of lawlessness for I never knew you.’ They are separated as He casts them into the unendurable yet eternal death. This place is called hell, ghenna, the lake of fire. Everyone who is born into this world are facing death and we have no ability to avoid it, in and of ourselves, but God being rich in mercy has sent His Son to die the death we should die and live the life we would not live. It is in His death from His perfect life that we can be redeemed because it is an atoning death.

He is paying for our sins. He did not die a martyr’s death and He tells us this when He says in John 10:18, *[18] No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father.* Why did Jesus die? He died for two reasons. One is the Father sent Him and then the Father put Him to death and He willingly died. There have been many martyrs in praise to God who have died because of His death but His is not a martyr’s death but an atoning death.

His was not a model’s death although there is much we can learn from it. He is not simply showing us how to do or giving His life up for something else. He has come to go to the cross to die an atoning death, a sacrificial death. His death was prophesied and pictured in the Old Testament. One picture of His death was Yom Kippur, called the Day of Atonement. We think of the Day of Atonement as a day a sacrifice (a lamb, bull, goat, a dove or pigeon) was brought to the priest who would put the animal to death as a sacrifice of redemption for the family who brought the sacrifice.

We probably tend to picture this type of sacrifice as a Cecil B. DeMille movie in all its formality with a choir singing but that is not what you would have seen at all if you had been there. There would have been the stench and filth of thousands of sacrifices on one day. The entrails and blood would have been all over the vestments of the priests. We are told that the sacrifices were so overwhelming that the Kidron Brook outside of the Eastern wall ran red with the blood of the sacrifices. The next year would have brought thousands again, etc. What is God telling us? Sin costs and its cost is death and a sacrifice is needed. Thirdly, these animal sacrifices can give the picture but they can’t be the sacrifice, otherwise why thousands and why year after year but when Christ comes those are now no more. He is the Lamb of God and in His sacrifice, once and for all, He has won the victory in His death. O praise Him!

That is why in this 500th year of celebrating the Reformation we remember the Reformers who would die martyr’s deaths because they would not participate in a communion that said Jesus was being sacrificed again. They said ‘Oh no! Here is our Hope that Jesus has brought the sacrifice, is the Sacrifice and once and for all our Savior has died for His people.’ Romans 8:33–34 says *[33] 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.* This is the atoning death of Christ. Here are the remaining four things about His death.

Secondly, it is a substitutionary death. He died the death He did not need to die for us who had a death that we ought to have died. He lived a life for us that we would not live for God because we were too busy and too committed to living our life as if we were God. He now takes our place with His life and His death. With His death He takes away our sins and with His life He saves us as He intercedes for us and gives us His righteousness that makes us acceptable. His

death removes our unacceptability because it takes away our sins and His life brings us His righteousness so that now we are accepted in the beloved. This is a substitutionary death.

Who did He put Himself in the place of? We could say on the one hand from heaven's declaration and the covenant He died for His people, the elect – for He will save His people from their sins, but from the earth's perspective He gives us four terms in the text. First, Christ died for the weak. We were powerless. We have no power to deal with our sins and to be saved. I am not weak anymore for now I have the Spirit of God who lives in me. So I have the strength of the Lord that is within me but apart from Christ I was weak, powerless.

Secondly, He dies for the ungodly. The text says that Christ died for us and who were we? We were ungodly. We thought ourselves to be god and we lived accordingly. Thirdly, Christ died for sinners. We were living in rebellion against God. We were cosmic traitors and in constant treason before the God of glory. Fourthly, Christ died for His enemies. He died 'while we were yet enemies of God.'

We are seeing in the news where people who escaped this massacre personally in Las Vegas went back under the field of fire to save others with some even losing their life. And were reminded of what our Savior reminds us that there is nothing more powerful and overwhelming than to see a man who lays down his life for his friends. Some of them laid down their life for those they didn't even know. Sometimes people will lay down their life, as the text says, for the righteous but Christ died for the assassin – you and me. Our life was devoted to the assassination of God's glory.

And Christ died for us, the weak, powerless, without God, ungodly, sinners in word and deed in rebellion against God with sin's wages being death and that made us the enemies of God. Because of Christ's death we are no longer weak. The power of God is within us. We are no longer ungodly for God is within us. Even though sin is still living in us, we are no longer under the dominion of sin but the reign of grace. We are no longer enemies of God. We are now not only the friends of God but the sons and daughters of God because of the death of Christ.

Thirdly, Christ's death was a timely death, for at the right time Christ died for the ungodly, the text says. Several times in the Gospels Jesus said 'My time is not yet.' Then that last week before His death, while He is in the temple He says to His disciples 'My time has come.' My family enjoys J.R.R. Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings and in the Fellowship of the Ring Gandalf, the wizard, delivers these people all the time and it's always just in time. One of them finally says to Gandalf, 'Why are you always just in time?' He said 'That's what a wizard does. A wizard is always on time.' Tolkien is using the preternatural to teach us the supernatural. Our God is always on time.

When is Jesus coming again? He is coming at the right time. Don't ask me for a date because I will just tell you 'at the right time.' When does Jesus intervene in our life when we are going through trials? He intervenes 'at the right time.' When did Jesus die on the cross? According to Romans 5:6, at the right time, Christ died for the ungodly.

Number four, Christ died a redeeming death. I have a number of women who are unbelievable important in my life, relationally and biologically – my mother, my three sisters, my wife who is in the supreme position, my two daughters and my daughter in law. They are all amazing women and there is one thing they all have in common. If you take a look in their pocketbooks somewhere you will find coupons. The other day I said to my wife 'Why don't we stop and get a Subway sandwich' and she said 'we can't because I left the coupons back home.' We are not going to pay full price. We are going to redeem that sandwich before we eat it. When you put the coupon down, you buy it back, you redeem it and that's what Jesus did.

All these women in my life are gracious, secure, stable and thoughtful but you ought to see them when some proprietor tells them the coupon is out of date. They all become Tiger Lily at that moment and that guy is fully aware that if he doesn't honor that coupon regardless of its date we're going to the Supreme Court. But when Jesus goes to the cross He puts Himself down on the table and He pays for our sins with an atoning death, a substitutionary death, a timely death, and He buys us, redeems us back. Just like you redeem that sandwich or item with a coupon and take it home, He bought you back from sin and He will take you home forever because it is a redeeming death.

This leads to the fifth thing about Christ's death and that is it's a reconciling death. You were His enemies but now you are reconciled to God. You are with Him and He is with you that you belong to Him. Everything was all wrong and now you are all right with God because your sins have been removed by God's grace through His Son who came in power to overcome your weakness to bring you to God and God to you, who brought grace which is greater than sin in your life and has made you to be in the family of God where you are now reconciled to God.

Now where does that leave us? That leaves us with an invitation and this is my takeaway. The takeaway is the death of Christ is an invitation to you to die. One might be thinking it would be an invitation to life and it is, for to live you have to die. Paul says in Galatians 2:20, *[20] I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.* I live this life in the power of the Spirit. Christ's death was an atoning, timely, substitutionary, redeeming, reconciling death for me. So I die to myself so that I might live unto Him. In Christ is life, your King with His death has crushed death because He has defeated our sin and His saves us. To receive Him you die. It is no longer I who live but Christ lives in me and that life I now live with power from the Son of God who loves me and gave Himself for me.

If you have not yet come to Christ you will find some religion to serve in this world or you will just end your life. You will never find the Gospel in any of them. I have Good News. God has loved sinners and gave Himself who loved us to the cross to save us from our sins, our impotence, unto Himself for everlasting life. So come to die that you might live forever. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, I pray that You this day would reaffirm to those who know You, the glorious truth of the Gospel that in the triumphant death of Christ, declared in His resurrection, this virgin born Redeemer, who is coming again, has saved us, not when we got better, but when we were weak, powerless, when we were without God and did not want God, when we embraced our sin in rebellion against God and when we were declared enemies of God, our Savior died for us at the right time. He bought us back from sin and death that we might have life with Him, reconciled forever. I pray that for those of us who have known that would be refreshed in the amazing truth of our Redeemer's death and resurrection and with an unstoppable passion may we share that with others and with a relentless commitment live in light of our Redeemer. I pray this in Jesus' Name, Amen.

Power Point

THE DEATH OF CHRIST

1. An Atoning Death
2. A Substitutionary Death
3. A Timely Death
4. A Redeeming Death
5. A Reconciling Death

LIFE TAKEAWAY

The Death of Christ is an Invitation Death.