

The CROSS of CHRIST

Part 1 - Autumn 2016

Tabernacle Baptist Church, Penarth
7 Studies For Small Groups On The Cross

The Cross of Christ

Discovering the glory of the atonement and rediscovering
the basis of our faith

	Page
Introduction	1
1. The centrality of the cross	3
2. Why did Christ die?	6
3. Looking below the surface	9
4. The problem of forgiveness	12
5. Satisfaction for Sin	15
6. The self-substitution of God	18
7. The achievement of the cross	21

Introduction

The Cross is very much centre stage in theological debate nowadays. A few years back a disparate group of theologians and writers started discussing the cross and re-imagining what it might mean. In their desire to present a Gospel which might be more attractive and understandable in the 21st Century, they questioned a central doctrine of the Christian faith – the doctrine of ‘Penal Substitution’ and in doing so caused huge controversy and debate.

Penal substitution says that God gave himself in the person of his Son, Jesus Christ, to suffer the death, punishment and curse due to fallen humanity as the penalty for our sin. He came to give himself up to punishment and death in our place as a substitute for the penalty we deserved. Penal substitution is sometimes also called substitutionary atonement, and simply means that in order to satisfy the wrath of a holy God, the sinless Jesus died in our place.

However, over the last 20 years an increasing number of theologians and church leaders have questioned this doctrine claiming that it misunderstands the nature of God’s love and judgement. They say that it divides the trinity into opposing groups – God is angry at us but Jesus loves us; they say that the theory misreads crucial texts such as Isaiah 53 or Mark 10:45; and they say that it ignores the vast love of God shown to us in the very fact that he sent Jesus in the first place (John 3:16) Some writers and church leaders started discussing alternative theories of the cross (also called ‘theories of the atonement’), and asked ‘is the wrath of God so vast that he really required the death of his own son in such a horrible way to satisfy it? If a God of love could do anything, then why did he demand such a horrible price?’

Many years back, C. S. Lewis had questions about the purpose of the cross, and he explored some of his questions through the death of Aslan in ‘The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe.’ Writers such as Steve McLaren, Rob Bell, Brad Jersak and George MacDonald picked up that baton and wrote further about it. The in 2007 the controversial Anglican minister Jeffrey John caused outrage when he dismissed the doctrine of penal substitution on moral grounds during his ‘Lent Sermons’ on Radio 4. However, the most controversial statements were made by Steve Chalke when he wrote, “The cross isn’t a form of cosmic

child abuse - A vengeful Father punishing his Son for an offense he has not even committed." (The Lost Message of Jesus (Zondervan, 2003) p. 16)

All this controversy has made many people go back to look at exactly what they believe about God, the cross and the death of Jesus. In 1986 John Stott had published a book called, "The Cross of Christ". Partly as a response to the controversy, this was updated and re-released in 2006 as a 20th anniversary edition. It proved so popular that it was reprinted in 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011 (twice) and 2014! The latter editions were published with a study guide, and this guide will provide a broad basis for this series of Tabernacle Studies. In 2007 three theologians from Oak Hill Theological College in London worked together to publish a new major work called "Pierced for our transgressions: Rediscovering the glory of penal substitution." Details of these two books can be found on the back cover of this study guide, and if you want to go deeper into this subject, I recommend both books to you. Both books are very readable, and yet theologically deep. However, they are quite thick, so you won't finish them quickly!

This study series is in 2 parts. The first 7 weeks should take us up to half-term week, allowing time for extra study or a social event. The second part of the series will then take us almost up to Christmas, again allowing time for social events or extra time for discussion and study. Each week will follow the chapter headings set out in the 14 chapters of Stott's "The Cross of Christ. This is an incredibly complex and deep area of theology, but is the foundation for our very faith. The questions in this study are designed to get you thinking and asking questions rather than give you quick or simplistic answers. Sometimes the answers may not be simple or immediately obvious. On occasion we will go back over the same ground several times. However, as you put the pieces of the puzzle together over several weeks, I pray that you will start to see a richer picture emerging of God's plans and love for us. The cross and the death of Christ are mysterious in their nature – in fact Paul describes the Gospel as a profound or deep mystery – so don't be discouraged if you find some concepts difficult to get your head around to begin with! I hope and pray that you will be blessed as we go back to the central theme of our faith and remind ourselves of just how deep the love of God really is.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Roger Crafton". The script is cursive and fluid, with the first letter of each name being significantly larger and more stylized than the others.

Study 1:

The Centrality of the Cross

Many of us know Holman Hunt's painting entitled "The light of the world" which depicts King Jesus standing outside a door with a lamp in his hand, knocking on the door. Less well known is his painting, "The shadow of death." This depicts Jesus as a young man in his carpenter's workshop prior to his teaching ministry. He is taking a break from his work, and is stretching to relieve the tension in his muscles. As he reaches up, he casts a shadow onto the wall behind him: the shadow of his outstretched arms falls on a wooden spar on which carpentry tools hang, creating a "shadow of death" which prefigures the crucifixion. His mother Mary is depicted from behind, gazing up at the shadow, having been looking into a box in which she has kept the gifts given by the Magi. At Jesus' feet a bright red head-cloth reminds us of the blood Jesus will one day shed, whilst apples on the windowsill in the background remind us of the original sin he will overcome at the cross. If possible, your group leader might like to arrange for you to see a copy of the painting.

In 'The Cross of Christ' Stott reminds us that from his youth, indeed from his very birth, the cross cast a shadow over Jesus' life. The gifts the Magi brought at his birth included myrrh, the ointment used to anoint dead bodies, and prefigured what was to come. We are reminded that ultimately the reason Jesus was born as a man was to die on the cross. Jesus' teaching was so important; his healing was transformational; his example was perfect – but his death on a cross was the very reason he came to earth in the first place. So why?

Read 1 Corinthians 1:18-31

- ✘ Are any of your study group wearing a cross around their neck or on earrings today? Does the cross have a depiction of Jesus on it, or is it an empty cross? Is there any blood? We all know that the cross is an important symbol of our faith, but it was a rather surprising choice in the context of the early church. Why?
- ✘ What would be the theological difference between a crucifix (a cross with Jesus on it) and an empty cross? What is emphasised by each?
- ✘ When you think about the crucifixion of Jesus and his death, what emotions does it evoke for you? How do you feel about it?
- ✘ Why is the message of the cross foolishness? What does Paul mean when he says that? How can he say that something so important is foolish?
- ✘ He says that wisdom or learning or philosophy won't help us understand the cross (1 Cor 1:20). Does that explain why the message of the cross has been so controversial in recent times?
- ✘ When you talk about your faith with people (if you do!), do you talk more about the love of God, the fellowship of the church, worship and ministry or the cross? Why do we feel uncomfortable talking about the cross with people sometimes?
- ✘ Jesus tried to prepare the disciples for what was coming, and he often spoke about how he was moving toward crucifixion and resurrection. (See Mark 8:31-32, 9:30-32, 10:32-34) John's gospel is less precise in the predictions it records, but John does write on seven occasions about 'the hour' of Jesus' death which was approaching. The words John uses evoke the idea of destiny. Why is this important?
- ✘ Many people who are sick or on death row know that their death is coming and are able to predict it. Looking at the scriptures from Mark's Gospel above, what was particularly striking about the way Jesus spoke of his death? Why was his death going to be different?

- ✘ The Gospel writers made the cross and resurrection the central themes of their books. According to Acts, it was also the major theme in Peter and Paul's preaching. We also see the crucifixion holding a key place in the letters of Paul, Peter and John, as well as Hebrews and Revelation. Compared to the teaching, ministry and miracles of Jesus, why does the cross hold such a central place? How much time do we spend on the life of Jesus compared to his death in church?

The writers of the New Testament and the early church all made the cross an important part of their teaching and doctrine, despite massive opposition and criticism from the world around. Islam, for example is categorical in its rejection of the message of the cross. The Koran sees no need for the death of a saviour. They are baffled as to why a 'major prophet of God' (sic) should come to such a shameful and disgraceful end. At least 5 times the Koran says, 'no soul shall bear another's burden.' (e.g. 35:18). Later on it goes on to say, "They [the Jews] denied the truth and uttered a monstrous falsehood against Mary. They declared: ' We have put to death the Messiah Jesus the son of Mary, the apostle of Allah.' They did not kill him, nor did they crucify him, but they thought they did" (4:156-157). Some Muslim scholars have said that Judas pointed out the wrong man in the Garden of Gethsemane, and so Jesus was able to escape whilst another person was crucified.

- ✘ Why would some people want to remove the cross from the Christian message? Why would the idea of Jesus being killed be so offensive?
- ✘ What would be the effects of removing the cross from its central position in Christianity?
- ✘ Can we preach the gospel without the horror of the cross? For example, could we build a gospel message around the idea of God's love alone, or the example of Jesus life and teaching?
- ✘ Is the message of the cross still a scandal today in the modern world? How do we keep the cross central in our message today?

Study 2.

Why did Christ die?

Thought history many people have been blamed for the death of Christ: The Jewish leaders, the Romans, Judas, Herod, Satan and many others have been given the blame. The anti-Semitic slur "Christ-killer" was used by mobs to incite violence against Jews and contributed to many centuries of pogroms, the murder of Jews during the Crusades, the Spanish Inquisition, and during the Holocaust.

Perhaps one of the most shocking truths of the Bible comes to light when we realise who is really responsible for Jesus' death: God is! On the Day of Pentecost Peter said that the crucifixion occurred with "the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God" (Acts 2:23) Far from being an accident, a victory for Satan or an unnecessary tragedy as some have suggested, the cross was the most gracious and deliberate act of God's goodness and mercy: the ultimate expression of the Father's love for sinners. God put Jesus to death for our sin so that we could live in sinless righteousness before Him. A righteousness only possible because of the cross. "He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Read Luke 23:1-25

- ✘ Pilate and Herod were clearly impressed by Jesus, and both had the opportunity to save him. Pilate says that he can find no basis for the charges against Jesus, and reluctantly hands him over to death. In Matthew's version of the encounter we read that Pilate even washes his hands to signify that he wants nothing to do with Jesus' death. How much responsibility do the Romans have for Jesus death?

- ✘ John Stott writes in “The Cross of Christ” “It is easy to condemn Pilate and overlook our own equally devious behaviour.” If Pilate believed Jesus to be innocent, why did he do what he did? In what ways are we like him sometimes?
- ✘ Although we cannot exonerate Pilate, we can certainly acknowledge that he was in a dilemma. How was he to keep the peace in Jerusalem at a difficult time when the Jewish leaders were so intent on having Jesus killed? What was the basis of the charges the chief priests and the teachers of the law laid before Pilate?
- ✘ What were their real reasons? Think of all the places in scripture where the Pharisees, priests, scribes and teachers plot to kill Jesus (i.e. Matthew 12:1-14). Why were they so desperate to have Jesus dead? In what ways can we be like them when Jesus makes demands on our life and faith?
- ✘ Judas is another person we can blame for the death of Christ. Some people have tried to excuse him by saying that *someone* had to betray Jesus if God’s purposes were to be fulfilled. Is that true? Was Judas just a ‘puppet’ in God’s purposes?
- ✘ Other people say that Judas only acted against Jesus after ‘Satan prompted him’ and ‘entered him.’ (John 13: 2 & 27, Luke 22:3) Is it fair to say that Judas was a victim, subject to forces beyond his control? Should he take part of the blame for Jesus’ death?
- ✘ What were the motives behind Judas’ betrayal of Jesus? Are we ever guilty in similar ways?
- ✘ If the blame cannot be fully laid at the feet of the Romans, the religious leaders, the crowd or Judas, then humanly, where does the blame lie? Remember this song we sing sometimes:

Behold the man upon a cross,
 My sin upon His shoulders;
 Ashamed, I hear my mocking voice
 Call out among the scoffers.

It was my sin that held Him there
Until it was accomplished;
His dying breath has brought me life -
I know that it is finished.

We live in a blame culture, and often look for people to accuse when something goes wrong. However, ultimately we have to hold two complimentary views together: Jesus died because of people's sin (including our own) but also Jesus died because it was the Father's will. God takes some of the blame, and so do we! Because Jesus always carried out the Father's will, the cross was his will too, even if he asked the Father to get him out of it whilst in the garden at Gethsemene. In John 10 Jesus says, "No one takes my life from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father." As we saw in the last study, human wisdom, logic or philosophy won't help us to understand the mystery of the cross, but we believe that for his divine purposes God allowed or ordained it.

- ✘ How do you feel about a Father who would allow his own son to suffer? What would we do if we saw a human parent deliberately allowing their child to be suffer so horribly?
- ✘ Do you have any sympathy with Steve Chalk (and others) when they use the phrase 'cosmic child abuse' to describe the cross? Do you understand the point they are trying to make?
- ✘ In the end then, why do you think Christ died?

Study 3:

Looking below the surface

So far we have made two points in these studies: firstly, the cross is of central importance to the New Testament writers, the early church and Jesus himself. Secondly, the cross was deliberate in character, and not an accident or a mistake. We can look around for someone to blame, but we have to accept that Jesus' death came about with the foreknowledge and approval of both God the Father and God the Son. But why? At the heart of the Christian faith is this puzzle. The cross was a horrible, painful, shameful and disgraceful way to die, so what makes it so important that God planned it in advance and Christ came to endure it? John Stott suggests 4 stages in helping us to understand this puzzle:

1. Christ died for us: there was nothing sadistic or masochistic in the torture and death of Christ. The death of Christ was not for God, it was for us. It was the ultimate altruistic act of love. Several times in the Gospels Jesus describes how he will 'lay down his life for (us).' At the Last Supper he says, "This is my body, given for you." Whatever else we say about the death of Christ, we know that it was for us! **Read John 10:7-18**

2. Christ died to bring us to God. Some people want to describe the death of Jesus as a demonstration of love. They say that the cross had no power in and of itself, but showed us the extraordinary lengths that God was willing to go to in order to show us how much he loved us. However, we have to say that the cross was so much more than just a symbol of love. It was the means to reconciliation between God and humankind. It had a power over and above what it symbolised. **Read 1 Peter 3:15-18**

3. Christ died for our sins. Specifically, the way that Christ restored our relationship with God was by removing our sins at the cross. Our sin

was an obstacle to a relationship with God, and Christ dealt with them once and for all. **Read 1 Peter 2:23-25**

4. Christ died our death. The link between us, our relationship with God and our sins is that we deserved death for our sin (Romans 3:23 and 6:23). However, Christ died in our place so that we might live. Though we deserved death, he became a substitute, dying in our place and taking the punishment we deserved. **Read Colossians 1: 19-23**

- ✘ If you caused the death of an innocent person through negligence or a deliberate act, you would carry the guilt and shame with you for the rest of your life. Imagine that you reckless driving caused the death of a child: how would you feel? How would you cope with the guilt?
- ✘ We have already seen that our sin that Christ died for. Our mistakes and deliberate acts were the reason that Christ had to die. How should that make us feel? How can we live with the guilt of having caused the death of the sinless Son of God?
- ✘ Were you conscious of feeling separated from God before you became a Christian? Do you think people feel that separation today? How might this affect how we share our faith?
- ✘ What do you feel about the death penalty in general? Should we execute serious criminals such as murderers, terrorists, rapists or paedophiles? What do you feel about countries that continue to have the death penalty?
- ✘ What do you think about a God who requires the death penalty for sin?
- ✘ Do you think that your personal sins are serious enough to warrant a death penalty? If we sentenced a prisoner to death today for what we might consider relatively minor offences, we call it a 'strange and unusual punishment.' Have you ever done anything which might deserve death? How does this affect the way we feel about sin and the cross?

In “A Tale of Two Cities” by Charles Dickens the story ends with the execution of the main character, Sydney Carton, by guillotine. Because he looks strikingly like another character in the book he is able to take his place on the scaffold, allowing the other man to go free. The last lines of the book are uttered as Carton awaits to die in another man’s place when he says, “It is a far, far better thing that I do, than I have ever done; it is a far, far better rest that I go to than I have ever known.” These could very well have been the words of Jesus as he went to Calvary! Jesus was God, but he looked just like us because he became fully human at the incarnation. He knew we were going to die, so he took our place in a deliberate act of self-sacrifice.

- ✘ How should we respond to such an incredible, selfless act as Jesus willingly going to the cross for us?

- ✘ How should it affect the rest of our life?

Study 4.

The problem of forgiveness

I have always been fascinated by the sciences – the problem is I've never been very good at them. Although I regularly read 'popular' introductions to modern science and biographies of the great scientists, I am usually left bewildered and confused by the theory. I am particularly interested at the moment by quantum mechanics and the science of subatomic particles, but I must confess that I barely understand them. As someone brought up on Newtonian physics, and with a fairly good grasp of the equations and mechanics of motion, the bizarre world of atoms and photons is hard to grasp. The only comfort to me at the moment as I plough my way through a number of introductory texts is that no one seems to fully grasp the subject! Even Richard Feynman, probably one of the most advanced thinkers in the field, once said, "I think I can safely say that nobody understands quantum mechanics."

When it comes to the cross, the theology is equally baffling. We could study the cross and Jesus' death every day for the rest of our lives, and still not come to the bottom of its deep waters. "Why did God need the cross?" some people ask. God can do whatever he wants, and if his love is unlimited, then why can't he forgive people on the basis of their repentance alone, or on the basis of their piety? Indeed, why doesn't he just cancel the debt completely on the basis of his love? In recent years developed nations have cancelled the vast financial debts of some developing countries outright – why doesn't God do the same with our sin? What is the problem God seem to have with unconditional forgiveness?

Read Matthew 6:9-15, Luke 6:27-38 and Colossians 3:11-16

- ✘ The writer and poet Heinrich Heine was a convert to Christianity from Judaism. On his deathbed he was asked by a priest whether he believed that God would forgive him. He is reported to have replied, “Le bon Dieu me pardonnera; c’est son métier.” (“Of course the good God will forgive me; that is his job [or his speciality]”) Is this arrogance, hubris or truth? Is it cheap grace? Is God bound to forgive us?
- ✘ In the scriptures we have just read, it is made clear that we are required to forgive one another unconditionally. Indeed, we are even warned of dire consequences if we do not forgive others. Why can’t God practice what he preaches and be equally generous and forgiving? Nobody’s death is required before we forgive each other, so why did God require a “sacrifice for sin” at the cross before he was able to forgive us? Is this divine hypocrisy?
- ✘ To understand the ‘problem of forgiveness’ we need to first properly understand the ‘problem of sin.’ What do you understand by the word ‘sin’? According to the Bible (i.e. Romans 8:7 or 1 John 3:4) what is the essence of sin?

In the New testament there are 5 words used to describe sin, and between them they portray various facets, some of which are active and some of which are passive. In each case the implication is that we have deliberately crossed a known line or failed to reach a set standard of behaviour:

hamartia (ἁμαρτία)	Missing the target or failing to attain a goal
adikia (ἀδικία)	Unrighteousness or acting unjustly or in a morally wrong manner
ponēria (πονηρία)	Evil or hurtful behaviour
parabasis (παράβασις)	To deliberately step over a known boundary or to trespass
anomia (ἀνομία)	Lawlessness, rebellion, to disregard a known law

- ✘ After his adultery with Bathsheba, David wrote, “Against you, you only God, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight.” (Psalm 51:4). David had used his position and power to seduce Bathsheba and arranged for Uriah’s death. He greatly wronged both of them, yet says that his sin was against God. Why does he say this? When we sin against our neighbour, why is it also a sin against God?
- ✘ Some people would say that the traditional standards the church preach are old fashioned and have no place in modern society: living with someone you are not married to, same sex relationships, divorce and remarriage, having children out of marriage, abortion, financial probity, sobriety and restraint are all areas where the church has been accused of being ‘out of touch’ with the modern world. What do you think of this compared to the five definitions of sin outlined above?
- ✘ If you have the means of playing music in your group, try to listen to the words of the song “Gee, Officer Krupke” from the musical “West Side Story”. Accepting moral responsibility and consequences for our actions seems to also be a rather old fashioned idea! We all make excuses for a behaviour from time to time (see Genesis 3:12 and 3:13). What do you think God makes of our excuses?
- ✘ If there was no consequence for sin, and it was automatically forgiven on the basis of God’s love alone, how might we view sin? How seriously would we take it if there was no cost to our unrighteousness?
- ✘ What does the cross say about the seriousness and consequences of sin? What should it say to us about our responsibility?

Read Isaiah 6:5, Ezekiel 1:26-28; Luke 5:8

- ✘ If forgiveness was simply a matter of saying ‘sorry’ and moving on, how might that affect our understanding of the holiness and righteousness of God? What should be our attitude when we approach God in worship or prayer? In light of this, how is our understanding of sin and the cross affected? How does the great cost of the cross help us to understand the seriousness of sin?

Study 5.

Satisfaction for Sin

In 2013 The Presbyterian Church (USA) dropped the hymn, “In Christ Alone” from its official hymnbook following a series of meetings by its worship committees. This is how it was reported:

The original lyrics say that “on that cross, as Jesus died, the wrath of God was satisfied.” The Presbyterian Committee on Congregational Song wanted to substitute the words, “the love of God was magnified.” The song’s authors, Stuart Townend and Nashville resident Keith Getty, objected. So the committee voted to drop the song. Critics say the proposed change was sparked by liberals wanting to take God’s wrath out of the hymnal. The committee says there’s plenty of wrath in the new hymnal. Instead, the problem is the word “satisfied,” which the committee says refers to a specific view of theology that it rejects.

The wrath of God is a real problem to some people when they think about his nature. The scriptures say that ‘God is love’ (1 John 4:8) and we know that the reason God gave us his son was because he loved his creation so much (John 3:16) How then, can we talk about the same God in terms of wrath and anger? Aren’t these two conflicting natures in contradiction?

In the 1965 Gifford Lecture in Scotland, the Zoologist Sir Alister Hardy from Oxford asked a startling question. He asked, “If Jesus was alive today, would he be a Christian?” He answered his own question by saying, “I very much doubt it. I feel certain that he would not have preached to us of a God who would be appeased by the cruel sacrifice of a tortured body. I cannot accept either the hypothesis that the appalling death of Jesus was a sacrifice in the eyes of God for the sins of the world, or that God, in the shape of his son, tortured himself for our redemption. I can only confess that, in my heart of hearts, I find such religious ideas to be amongst the least attractive in the

whole of anthropology. To me, they belong to quite a different philosophy — different psychology — from that of the religion that Jesus taught.”

Does the idea that God’s anger needed to be satisfied in some way, or that his wrath needed some sort of appeasing affect the way we think of God and his love? Does the cross of Christ undermine the notion of a loving God, and what does it tell us about his true nature?

Read Romans 1:16-25

- ✘ In the early church, many of the church fathers tried to get around the problem of ‘satisfaction’ by saying that Jesus’ death was the compensation that God was obliged to pay the devil in order to secure humanity’s freedom from his power. What is wrong with this idea?
- ✘ Another idea that developed to deal with the the perceived problem of satisfaction in the early church was that having given the Law, God could not break his own Law. A sacrifice was demanded to meet the demands of the Law, and a perfect sacrifice of a perfect man would completely satisfy the demands of the Law once and for all. What problems can you think of with this interpretation?
- ✘ According to Romans 1, what or who is God angry at? Is he angry at people?
- ✘ Sometimes Christian’s talk about ‘hating the sin, but loving the sinner.’ Is this a helpful concept? Why might it be unhelpful sometimes?
- ✘ What exactly is being revealed by the Gospel according to verse Romans 1:17? What does this mean?
- ✘ In ‘The Cross of Christ’ John Stott writes that God judges sinners “because he must if he is to remain true to himself.” Later he quotes the theologian Emil Brunner who wrote, “The cross is the only place where the loving, forgiving merciful God is revealed in such a way that we perceive that his holiness and his love are equally infinite.” What do you think he means by these two statements?

Think of this simplistic, but sometimes helpful, example. Imagine you have a pot of pure white paint. You then mix a very small amount of black paint into it. The white paint is no longer pure white. Even though there is only a small amount of black paint relative to the white paint, it has still changed its nature. Think of the paint section at a DIY store, with its hundreds of 'off white' or 'nearly white paint.' There may only be a 'hint of' another colour mixed into the white, but it does mean that the white paint is no longer a 'pure' or 'brilliant' white.

Now, think of a holy and spotless God. He wants to be joined with us and one with us. Jesus urged us to 'remain in me as I also remain in you' (John 15:4). In his first epistle, John picks up much of that language, writing "Those who obey his commands live in him, and he in them. And this is how we know that he lives in us: We know it by the Spirit he gave us." (1 John 3:24).

So a pure, spotless and holy God wants to be eternally 'mixed' or 'joined' with us. He made us for relationship with him, and he does all he can to restore relationship with us. If we brought our sin into that relationship, then the holiness of God would be compromised and changed in the same way that the white paint is changed by a tiny amount of black paint. For that reason, sin couldn't be ignored or overlooked, but had to be dealt with. The infinite love of God meant that he was willing to go to extraordinary and shocking lengths to allow us to be eternally with him whilst maintaining his holiness.

- ✘ In what ways is this illustration helpful? In what ways is it unhelpful?
- ✘ What distortions in our theology occurs if we over-emphasise either the love or the holiness of God at the expense of the other?
- ✘ What distortions are you conscious of in your own thinking about love and holiness?
- ✘ When someone hurts us and we are angry (or wrathful), how is our anger satisfied? Does thinking about human anger help us understand God's wrath?
- ✘ Can love and wrath exist side by side?

Study 6.

The self-substitution of God

When I was at university and in the years immediately following I used to play American football to a reasonably high level. When I look back at the photographs of the 22-year-old me I see pictures of a large football helmet and very wide shoulder pads with a skinny body and spindly legs hanging out of the bottom! As the standard of the game improved in this country through the 1980's it soon became apparent that I didn't have the physique to play the game anymore without being seriously injured, so in 1989 I quietly retired and took up croquet instead (honestly!)

However, there was one game in 1985 when both our manager and our coach were unavailable. I had a reasonable knowledge of the game and so the team asked me to take over responsibility of managing the defensive team. As we were short of players I had to both play as well as supervise my teammates. Fairly quickly I realised that concentrating on the management side of the game meant I wasn't concentrating enough on my own performance. I was terrible - and I do mean truly awful. I was missing tackles, dropping balls and being pushed around all over the field. At the end of the first quarter I substituted myself and arranged for another player to take my place on the field. I effectively fired myself for being rubbish! I took myself out of the equation by substituting a better player. Incidentally, we won the game!

At the heart of the doctrine of penal substitutionary atonement is a substitution of a better person for us: Jesus, the perfect man, takes our place. What we were not good enough to do, Jesus stepped in and did for us in our place.

We saw in the last study that any solution to sin must take into full account God's holiness. How then could God express simultaneously his holiness in judgement and his love in pardon.? The answer lies in God's substitution of

himself in our place. The penalty is paid and the pardon is extended without compromising either holiness or love.

Read Hebrews 9:1-28

- ✘ The writer of Hebrews closely links the idea of the sacrifice of Christ to the sacrifices offered in the Tabernacle and the Temple in the Old Testament. What are the key features in common? What are the differences?
- ✘ In the Old Testament there were two kinds of sacrifice: the first is the 'peace' or 'fellowship' offering which is based in the understanding that we belong to God and are made for relationship with him. The second is a 'sin offering' or a 'guilt offering' which was a sacrifice for sin. In other words, the first expresses that in creation we were made for relationship with God whilst the second acknowledges that through sin we are alienated from God. How does Jesus fit into this picture?
- ✘ The idea of offering is important in understanding biblical sacrifice. It is not us giving something to God to pay him, but rather God giving something to us that we can then offer back freely as an act of worship and love. In Exodus and Leviticus, a key idea of offerings and sacrifices was that we are thanking God for what he has given us by giving some of it back. This is also an act of trust which says, "I believe you can meet my needs and I don't have to hang on to everything 'just in case.'" What do you offer to God as an act of spiritual sacrifice and worship?
- ✘ In Hebrews 9:24 the writer says that Christ's death wasn't copying the Old Testament practice of sacrifice, but rather that the Old Testament practice was a copy of something in heaven (see also Hebrews 8:5 and 10:1) What do you understand by this?
- ✘ In many ancient pagan cultures sacrifices were seen as either gifts or bribes to get God on our side. Why is this an inadequate view of Biblical sacrifice? What scriptures can you go to to back up a more correct view of sacrifice?

- ✘ John Stott writes that “we must not speak of God punishing Jesus or of Jesus persuading God...” Why not?
- ✘ Jesus came to earth as a fully human yet also fully divine: he was both God and man. What problems arise when we think of Jesus just dying as a man at the cross? What problems do we have if we think of the crucifixion as purely ‘the death of God’?
- ✘ “People sometimes speak of Jesus as ‘God in flesh.’ He is the one who is fully both God and man. “On account of this he was uniquely qualified to represent both God and man and to mediate between them.” List some Biblical evidence for this statement.
- ✘ Read Isaiah 53. In his humanity, how did Jesus take our place? In his perfect divinity, what does his sacrifice mean? How and why was he a substitute for us ‘in our place?’

Slide 7.

The achievement of the cross

When they were very little, one of my children did something which put another one of my children in real danger. I won't say which child it was, but it was a heart stopping moment for me as a parent, and one which truly frightened me. I walked into the room just in time to do something about it, and the emotion at the thought of what could have happened overtook me. I experienced all sorts of feelings all at once: fear, sickness, relief and anger, and my immediate response was to punish the guilty child. I still loved them incredibly, and I would want no harm to come to them – but in that intense moment of fear and love I'm ashamed to say that anger won the day.

Earlier generations of Christians in this country were quite familiar with the word 'propitiation' through their reading of the King James Version of the Bible. However, although they were familiar with the word, it does not mean that they were comfortable with it. 'Propitiation' means an action which is meant to appease someone after you have wronged them. It specifically means to appease or pacify their anger. Does God get angry? If so, do rituals and offerings pacify his anger?

Throughout the world and throughout history there have been examples of people who give sacrifices to the gods to appease their anger. We might think of Pacific islanders making sacrifices to calm volcanoes or Aztec tribes sacrificing in their temples to the sun god. The Pharaohs of ancient Egypt sacrificed to the fertility gods to ensure a harvest, and ancient Celts made votive offerings to appease their gods. Sometimes these offerings were goods and treasures and sometimes they were animals; from time to time they might even have been human sacrifices.

But are such notions worthy of the Christian God? Is he like an angry father, ready to lash out at his children if they don't please him? If not, then what was the sacrificial system and the cross all about? Are we really supposed

to belief that Jesus, by his death, propitiated the father's anger, inducing him to turn from his wrath and look with favour upon us instead? If not, then what was really achieved at the cross?

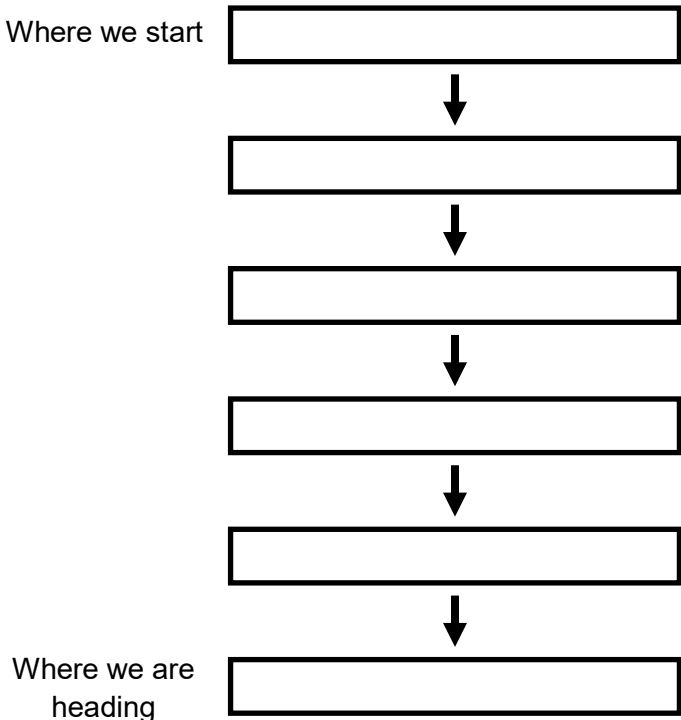
Read 1 John 4:7-21

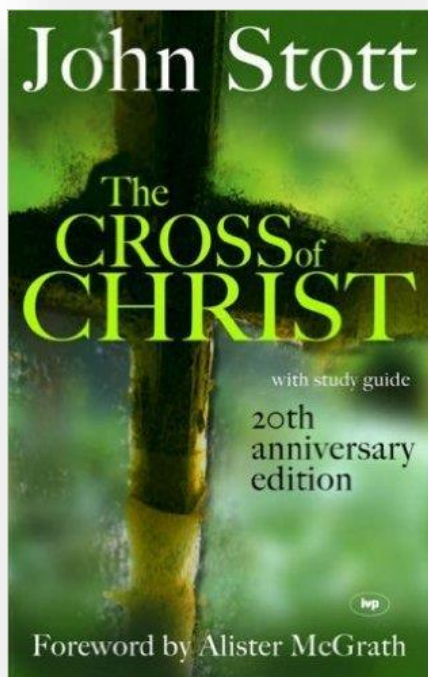
- ✘ Note that in verse 10 the word 'propitiation' is changed for 'atoning sacrifice' in the NIV and some other translations. Why are some people unhappy or uncomfortable with the word 'propitiation' to describe Jesus' death? How would you answer their objections?
- ✘ In verse 9-10 John talks about the nature of God's love. Calvin once wrote, "The work of the atonement derives from God's love; therefore, it did not establish it." Tom Smail said, "God's prior love for the world is the source of and not the consequence of Christ's atoning death." P.T Forsyth said, "The atonement did not procure grace, it flowed from grace." What was each of these theologians trying to say?
- ✘ Like asking which came first, the chicken or the egg, these theologians are answering the question what came first, the cross or grace? Why is this question important for our present studies?
- ✘ Verse 19 talks about our actions and deeds. Why do we try to live right? Is it to earn God's favour? If not, then why do we try to be righteous and holy?
- ✘ At the cross God's anger at our sin (and what it had the power to do) was dealt with. (see Romans 1:18 again and remember that God's wrath was "revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people" not against the people themselves.) How do wrath and love go together in one person?
- ✘ In his book John Stott gives three achievements of Christ on the cross. The first one is propitiation for our sins; the second is redemption of our souls and the third is justification for our life. What do you understand by the terms redemption and justification? They are terms we talk about a lot in church, but do you know what they mean.

- ✘ Here are some other theological terms and phrases which describe what happened at the cross and subsequently in our Christian life. We'll add them to the three achievements of the cross we have already looked at to the list below. Do you know what each one means? What do these things have in common and what are the differences? How are they related?

Sanctification
Glorification
Reconciliation
Redemption
Propitiation
Justification

- ✘ What order do these events happen in our lives? Fill in the boxes below. What stage are you at? How can you move towards the next stage or level in your Christian life?



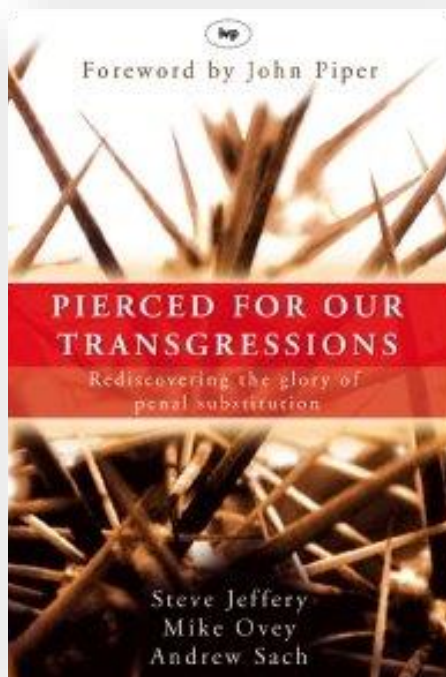


The Cross of Christ

by John Stott (forward by
Alistair McGrath)

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Pierced for our transgressions: Rediscovering the Glory of Penal Substitution

by Steve Jeffery, Mike Ovey
and Andrew Sach

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