

Christ Came to Save Sinners

By Tom Hill

Bible Text: Galatians 1:1-5

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Since the first century, the Church of Jesus Christ has faced many challenges to the death of Jesus Christ. It began immediately when the guards lied about the resurrection. In short order, false doctrines and fictitious conclusions developed.

Since the 1600s, the challenge has come more persistently against the meaning of Christ's death. This attack has concentrated upon the atonement of Jesus Christ and called it an universal atonement. According to this position, Christ did not die for any one in particular, but all mankind in general. In His death, Jesus merely provided the means for salvation, which made it possible for all mankind to secure salvation. In short, the death of Christ, they say, did not actually secure the salvation of any one; it only made it possible.

To many, these statements appear Biblically correct. Yet, they contain subtle deviations from true Biblical doctrine. To err on the atonement of Jesus Christ, the central doctrine of Scripture, carries serious implications upon virtually all other doctrines. Note Charles Spurgeon's warning on this very issue:

“The doctrine of redemption is one of the most important doctrines of the system of faith. A mistake on this point will inevitably lead to a mistake through the entire system of our belief.”

(Hayden 108)

In contrast, the Biblical truth concerning the death of Jesus Christ contradicts these popular, but false, ideas. It presents a death that actually saves sinners. It explains that Christ's death actually worked and accomplished its purpose: to provide payment for sin in full for the sins of God's chosen people. Again, Charles Spurgeon spoke to this question:

“We hold that Christ, when He died, had an object in view, and that object will most assuredly and beyond a doubt, be accomplished. We measure the design of Christ's death by the effect of it.”

(Hayden 109)

Numerous Scriptural references describe Christ's death in exactly these terms. In particular, Galatians 1.1-5 sets forth three aspects of these truths clearly and concisely. From this passage, I want to examine with you this Biblical truth: Jesus Christ gave His life as a Substitute for the sins of God's people to deliver them from sin. I pray that the Holy Spirit

will use these truths in your life to clarify the truth to your heart, convict you of sin, and convince you of your true position before God .

A selfless death

To all mankind, death is a certainty. It takes many forms, but it has one common thread. Death comes upon all mankind: sometimes by accident, sometimes by mistake, sometimes by disease. It is something that happens to all of us.

But the death of Jesus Christ has no equal in history. Life was not taken from Him, nor did it occur by accident. As stated in Galatians 1.4, “(He) gave Himself...” In an entirely selfless act, Jesus laid down His life: freely, lovingly, completely, voluntarily. In His own words, Jesus described His death this way in John 10:17-18:

"Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. { 18 } No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father."

Again, I refer you to Galatians 1.4, which says that He gave Himself. No precious thing like gold, silver, or precious stones could meet God's demands. Neither would an angel or other created spirit being fulfill the Father's requirements. Only the gift of Christ Himself could redeem sinners. The Spirit of God explains this gift in 1 Peter 1:18-19:

"Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; { 19 } But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot:"

In short, Jesus died a selfless death. No one took His life from Him. He gave Himself, freely, completely, and voluntarily.

A substitutionary death

By definition, a substitute takes the place of another person, place, thing, or concept. It contains two key elements: replacement and a specific object that the substitute replaces. Otherwise, substitution does not occur. With particular emphasis, the Spirit makes clear in our text the substitutionary death of Jesus. Jesus did not just die. He died on behalf of and in the place of others.

This truth strikes at the very heart of the fallacy of universal atonement. As noted earlier, an universal atonement of Jesus Christ states that he did not die for any particular person. Yet the Scripture says, “(He) gave Himself for our sins...” It shows the death of Jesus to be a substitutionary death on behalf of specific people for a specific purpose.

In fact, Jesus Himself described His death as a substitutionary death for particular people. The following two references confirm it:

Matthew 20:28: "Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many."

John 10:11: "I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep."

In addition, Jesus described His death this way in His explanation of Communion, the Lord's Table. With clarity, He revealed that He came to give His body and blood for others. He had in mind particular people, "His Sheep," God's chosen people, for whom He died as their Substitute. Note this emphasis in Luke 22:19-20:

"And he took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave unto them, saying, This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me. {20} Likewise also the cup after supper, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you."

The substitutionary death of Jesus Christ is a crucial Biblical doctrine. Without question, Scripture confirms that Jesus died as a substitute for God's people, and for them alone.

A saving death

Finally, an universal atonement does not save any one. If it provided salvation for any one, then it would by definition provide it for all mankind. However, we know by the Scriptures and by practical observation, that not all mankind is saved. So from a logical point of view, Jesus' death could not provide an universal atonement.

But more importantly, the Bible clearly confirms that not only did Jesus die for a specific people. He died for a specific purpose. He died to put away the sins of those for whom He died. Our passage plainly declares that Jesus' death accomplished its purpose. Note what it says in Galatians 1:4:

"Who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father:"

The Spirit through Paul summarizes this truth. Jesus gave Himself for our sins. As a Substitute, our Savior endured sin's penalty in the place of specific people. He gave up His life for their sin. His death atoned for the sins of those for whom He died. It did away with their sins, every sin and every kind of sin. Sin would never again condemn those for whom Christ died.

Further, the passage says that Jesus delivered those for whom He died from this present evil world. He rescued them and emancipated them from the course of life corrupted by sin. Jesus plucked them out of the affairs of life that sin had corrupted. This completed

work of Christ resulted not according to any one's merit. It resulted from the counsel, purpose, mind, and intention of God.

In other words, it was God's intention to recover lost sinners, not make it possible for sinners to be saved. The Bible says in Matthew 18:11:

"For the Son of man is come to save that which was lost."

Therefore, unless Jesus actually recovered what He came to save, He failed. In addition, Scripture states that Jesus came to save His people from their sins, not make salvation possible. Two references confirm this truth:

Matthew 1:21: "And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins."

1 Timothy 1:15: "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief."

Thus, unless Jesus completed what was required to save them, He failed. In stark reality, then, Jesus fulfilled His intention and completed all the requirements to save those He came to save. Any other doctrine opposes Biblical truth and dishonors God.

Nothing can summarize nor more clearly say it than a statement from the London Baptist Confession Of Faith of 1689:

"The Lord Jesus, by His perfect obedience and sacrifice of Himself, which He through the eternal Spirit once offered up unto God, hath fully satisfied the justice of God, procured reconciliation, and purchased an everlasting inheritance in the kingdom of heaven for all those whom the Father hath given unto Him."

(London 21)

I pray that the Holy Spirit has clarified these truths for you and opened your eyes to understand them. It is important to identify false doctrine and areas of incomplete knowledge of the truth. It is especially significant to know and understand the Biblical doctrine of the particular substitutionary death of Jesus Christ for God's chosen people. Further, it details knowledge about the character of God: His love, grace, mercy, and faithfulness. It also shows His relationship with mankind and mankind's relationship with God. From this passage, we learn false doctrine to avoid and sinful practices to shun. These truths will mold our judgment by giving instruction to believe. These truths will bring comfort for doubt and uncertainty, grounding in faith, and rest to the conscience.

This, then, is the truth about the death of Jesus Christ. Does it describe what you believe? Do these truths mold and shape your life? Where has the Holy Spirit identified your fail-

ure to apply these truths in your life? Perhaps you have wrongly believed in an universal atonement of Jesus. Or maybe you have not fully understood the death of Christ.

Whether it comes from ignorance, self-righteousness, or outright rebellion, such unbelief glorifies mankind and robs God of His proper glory. It denies the death of Jesus of its effects and abases it. I pray that the Holy Spirit has examined your heart today and identified your failure to apply these truths in your life.

What conclusions about your condition has the Holy Spirit revealed to you? Has He found you believing or doubting the truth? Has He approved of your faith or reproved you for your unbelief? Has He found you innocent or guilty?

If you are a believer in Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit wants to reveal to you the truth about the death of Jesus. He longs to bring you to fully praise and honor God for what He has done. He wants His children to glorify Him. In the process, has the Spirit brought to you a guilt of sin? Your sin grieves Him and brings God's judgment. It separates you from fellowship with God and hinders growth in righteousness.

It is possible, that in reading this article, you realize that you have no part in Christ. These truths have had no application in your life. You realize that you have no personal trust in God or in His Son, Jesus Christ. Has the Holy Spirit brought to you a guilt of sin? Do you realize your lost and ruined condition before God? Do you recognize that as a result, you deserve and are in danger of God's eternal judgment?

Perhaps today, you know for the first time your need of a Savior. Your sinfulness makes you helpless before God with no inherent ability to save yourself. Perhaps today the Holy Spirit has opened your eyes to see God's provision in Jesus Christ. He died to pay the penalty of sin for sinners like you. Has the Spirit shown you that Jesus is your only hope for salvation from sin? I pray that He has opened your eyes to see these truths and will bring you to salvation by personal trust in Jesus Christ as your Savior.

What changes does the Spirit of God need to bring into your life today because of these truths? First, He wants you to realize the refuge of lies that keep you from faith and obedience to these truths. To say, "No harm was done. It's no big deal," only minimizes your sinful conduct. You are accountable to God for your unbelief and disobedience, which brings God's judgment to believers and unbelievers.

Second, you must realize God's requirements and your obligation to them. He demands immediate personal faith in Biblical truth, with no excuse for delay. You will only find relief from your sin by immediate repentance. Turn from your sin unto Christ. He is both an Advocate for believers and Savior for sinners.

I pray that you will experience the work and ministry of the Holy Spirit in your life today. I pray that God by His Spirit will come to you in grace and bring a spiritual transformation in your life today.

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