

THE CROSS CRUCIAL FOR DESTINY

Study 8

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INTRODUCTION

There is a strange statement in the New Testament, where the Apostle Paul speaks of God the Father's active involvement in the event of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, saying:

For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (2 Corinthians 5:21).¹

Given that human sin is not 'but a *remora*², or drag, on Humanity'³, but rather, 'its death and hell' - and given that, 'the wrongest thing with the world is its sin'⁴, then the need to deal with sin finally and fully is the matter upon which the destiny of humanity, and the holy character of God, must centre. What it means for Jesus Christ, God's Son, to be made to *be sin* lies at the heart of the gospel.

THE CRUCIALITY OF THE CROSS

In following P.T. Forsyth's book, *The Justification of God*, (1917), we now come in our series, to Chapter IX. It is entitled 'The Eternal Cruciality of the Cross for Destiny', and it may remind you (if you know of Forsyth's other books), of his work first published in 1909, entitled *The Cruciality of the Cross*. While we have much to read, digest, and study already, I would nevertheless like to include in this study some quotations (taken *slowly*), from the final few pages of *The Cruciality of the Cross*.

In being "*made sin*," treated as sin (though not as a sinner), Christ experienced sin as God does, while he experienced its effects as man does. He felt sin with God, and sin's judgment with men. He realised, as God, how real sin was, how radical, how malignant, how deadly to the Holy One's very being.⁵

When Christ died at sin's hands it meant that sin was death to the holiness of God, and both could not live in the same world. When He rose it meant that what was to live and rule in the world was the holy God.⁶

¹ Luke also draws attention to the Father's involvement in the cross, saying that Jesus was handed over to the Israelites, 'according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God' (Acts 2:23); In Acts 8:32-33 Luke shows how Isaiah 53 is a prophecy including the Father's involvement in the cross – *the Lord has laid upon him the iniquity of us all* (Isaiah 53:6); similarly Matthew 26:31 takes the prophecy of Zechariah 13:7, *I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered*, indicating the Father's sovereign activity.

² *Remora* - a suckerfish – which attaches itself to sharks, whales, sea turtles or the hulls of ships

³ P. T. Forsyth, *The Justification of God*, NCPI, 1988, p. 146

⁴ P. T. Forsyth, *The Justification of God*, p. 167

⁵ P. T. Forsyth, *The Cruciality of the Cross*, NCPI, (1909), 1984, p. 212

⁶ P. T. Forsyth, *The Cruciality of the Cross*, p. 213

Dying as man, Christ placed His whole self beside man under the judgment of God. He was beside man in court but on God's side in the issue, confessing God's holiness in the judgment, and justifying His treatment of sin. Justifying God!⁷

Forsyth then gives a poignant illustration, with a comment, which is pure theodicy:

A missionary to the North American Indians records that having seen his wife and children killed before his eyes, and being himself harried in bonds across the prairie amid his tormentors, he "justified God in this thing." I do not know a sublimer order of experience than from the heart to bless and praise a good and holy God in despairs like these. It is to this order of experience that the work, the blood, of Christ belongs. And there is no justification of men except by this justification, this self-justification, of God.⁸

Never is man so just with God as when his broken, holy heart calls just the judgment of God which he feels but has not himself earned; and never could man be just with God but through God's justification of Himself in the blood of Christ.⁹

In speaking here of atonement, Forsyth is keen to retain the word 'satisfaction':

We cannot in any theology which is duly ethicised dispense with the word satisfaction. It was of course not a quantitative replacement of anything God had lost, nor was it the glutting of a God's anger by an equivalent suffering on who cares whom. It was no satisfaction of a *jus talionis*.¹⁰

But it was the adequate confession, in act and suffering, "Thou art holy as Thou judgest." That man should confess this vicariously and victoriously in Christ crucified and risen is the re-establishment of God's holiness in the world. We can only understand any justification of man as it is grounded in this justification—this self-justification—of God. The sinner could only be saved by something that thus damned the sin.¹¹

In a far more nuanced manner, than is employed by many evangelicals today, Forsyth then speaks of what is not the Father's action in the cross (punishing Jesus), as well as what is his action in the cross, (namely imparting unto Christ, the penalty upon sin).

The Saviour was not punished, but He took the penalty of sin, the chastisement of our peace. It was in no sense as if *He felt* chastised or condemned (as even Calvin said), but because He willingly bowed, with a moral understanding possible only to the sinless, under the divine ordinance of a suffering death and judgment which was holily ordained to wait on the sin of His kin.

⁷ P. T. Forsyth, *The Cruciality of the Cross*, p. 213

⁸ P. T. Forsyth, *The Cruciality of the Cross*, p. 213-214

⁹ P. T. Forsyth, *The Cruciality of the Cross*, p. 214

¹⁰ *Jus talionis*: an eye for an eye; quoted from P.T. Forsyth, *The Cruciality of the Cross*, p. 214

¹¹ P.T. Forsyth, *The Cruciality of the Cross*, p. 214

The blood of Christ cleanseth from *all* sin. The metaphor denotes the radicality, totality, and finality of the whole action in the realism of the moral world which even high sacrifice, not resisting unto blood, only slurs or shelves—when it does not toy with it.

Forsyth notes that Jesus early teaching wholly relates to his suffering deeds in the cross:

It is notable that Christ speaks of His blood only at His life's end, while during life He spoke only of forgiving grace without any such expiation (except in the ransom passage). Why was this so?

Two reasons are given:

1. Was it not, first, because His grand total witness, which death but pointed, was to the grace of God's holy love; and the exposure of sin could only come by the light of that revelation?
2. And was it not, second, because His revelation and offer of holy grace without sacrifice and judgment failed of its effect; because even the great, uplifted, and joyful *invitation*, "Come unto Me," failed till it was *enacted* from the mighty gloom of the cross; because only the uplifting of the cross, and not the uplifting of His voice, draws all men unto Him;

The cross draws people. It does so as the holy love of God breaks through to human beings by revelation. God's very wonderful loving kindness is brought home livingly by the Spirit of God - the mystery of the cross is opened, and poured into hearts and minds.

THE CROSS AND GRACE

Forsyth saw the biblical relationship between *the cross* and *grace*, in a way, that many others failed, and fail still to see and proclaim (that is why many abandon atonement theology). Robert McAfee Brown followed Forsyth's corrective theology well:

God is willing to go to the length of suffering and dying to enter into fellowship with man. There is a misunderstanding of the Christian doctrine of atonement that goes something like this: God is an angry God, angry at men because men have sinned, and he decides to condemn mankind; but Christ intercedes for man, and God's vengeance is sated by punishing Christ instead. Although this is a travesty of the Christian position it has unfortunately been too often suggested by interpreters of the atonement as well as by their critics. But Forsyth, who said, "The doctrine of grace and the doctrine of the atonement are identical," the true interpretation is that *the atonement flows from grace, it does not "procure" grace*. This extremely important insight means that our reading of the atonement is more like this: Because God loves men, he suffers on their behalf, bears himself the weight of their wrongdoing, and this restores fellowship, or reconciles. Grace is not something Christ earned for us from God; grace is rather

something God gave us in Christ. "Do not say: 'God is love. Why atone?' Say: 'God has atoned. What love!'"¹²

SALVATION IS THE SOLUTION

We are not taught or argued by proofs, or theology into the kingdom of God. Rather we are transferred, by way of rescue. *He has delivered us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.* (Colossians 1:13-14) The victory of the resurrected Christ is our salvation. The work of the crucified Christ is our forgiveness of sins, and it means the redemption of the world. We are not seeking our own solution. We are given one.

Not only can God solve the world, He has solved it, in His own practical way of solution, by saving it—by an act done, and not a proof led, nor a scheme shown. His wisdom none can trace, and His ways are past finding out; but His work finds us; and His grace, His victory, and His goal become sure.¹³

The message of the apostles was always of what God had done, in the death and resurrection of Christ (see Romans 5-8). And yet, Forsyth identifies good reasons why God's ways in revelation, are unsearchable; Drawing upon apostolic insight - *O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!* (Romans 11:33) – Forsyth comments:

If we saw all His scheme our faith would be compelled, and not free. It might do more to overwhelm us than to raise or fortify. It would be sight—something too satisfactory to a merely distributive justice; it would not be faith creative and constitutive for the holy soul. The faith we keep means more for our soul than the views we win.¹⁴

Faith in receiving the truth of God in the cross is an absolutely essential factor. Faith is not some well-reasoned conclusion. Faith is at once a gift from God, and an action of personal trust, of belief, of receptivity.

Job's friends had sounder views on some points than he, but they did not receive the reward that his desperate faith had. In the Cross of Christ we learn the faith that things not willed by God are yet worked up by God. In a divine irony, man's greatest crime turns God's greatest boon. *O felix culpa!*¹⁵ The riddle is insoluble but the fact is sure. The new man, remade in Christ and not simply impressed by Christ, is sure amid a world of strident problems. We know what God has done for the world in redeeming it; we have tasted that in our soul; but we do not know why He

¹² Robert McAfee Brown, *P. T. Forsyth: Prophet For Today*, Westminster Press, 1952, p. 82-83

¹³ P. T. Forsyth, *The Justification of God*, p. 154

¹⁴ P. T. Forsyth, *The Justification of God*, p. 154

¹⁵ *Felix culpa* – Blessed fault or fortunate fall', or "O happy fault".

took the way with it that He did, why it must mean the Cross. He speaks not an all-solving but an all-liberating word.¹⁶

THE FATHER AND SON CARRY AND SUFFER THE MISERY OF THE AGES

Jesus said: *the Father and I are one* (John 10:3). He also said, *the Father is in me and I am in the Father* (John 14:10). When we see the Cruciality of the Cross, we see the action of the Father giving up his Son in love, and the Son honoring the Father. God, the Father, was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself. We are often made aware of the sufferings of Christ. However, Forsyth draws our attention to the depth of the Father's suffering too, saying: 'And the Father suffered in His Son even more than the Son did'.¹⁷

There is an Eye, a Mind, a Heart, before Whom the whole bloody and tortured stream of evolutionary growth has flowed. We are horrified, beyond word or conception, by the agony and devilry of war, but, after all, it only discharges upon us, as it were from a nozzle, a far vaster accumulation of such things, permeating the total career of history since ever a sensitive organism and a heartless egoism appeared.¹⁸

The war is an occasion, to turn anew to the sufferings of God throughout human history:

This misery of the ages, I have said, vanishes from human thought or feeling, till some experience like war carries some idea of it home. But there is a consciousness to which it is all and always present. And in the full view of it He has spoken. As it might be thus: 'Do you stumble at the cost? It has cost Me more than you—Me who see and feel it all more than you who feel it but as atoms might. "Groanings all and moanings, none of it I lose." Yea, it has cost Me more than if the price paid were all Mankind. For it cost Me My only and beloved Son to justify My name of righteousness, and to realise the destiny of My creature in holy love.'¹⁹

Forsyth spotlights the love of the Father, for the Son, and calls us to consider this. (We are often very self-centred when we ask questions concerning theodicy). He continues, along the lines that the Father, might say, concerning his Son, Jesus:

And all mankind is not so great and dear as He. Nor is its suffering the enormity in a moral world that His Cross is. I am no spectator of the course of things, and no speculator on the result. I spared not My own Son. We carried the load that crushed you. It bowed Him into the ground.²⁰

This suffering however, achieved the Father and the Son's shared purpose for the world:

On the third day He rose with a new creation in His hand, and a regenerate world,

¹⁶ P. T. Forsyth, *The Justification of God*, p. 154

¹⁷ P. T. Forsyth, *The Justification of God*, p. 169

¹⁸ P. T. Forsyth, *The Justification of God*, p. 164

¹⁹ P. T. Forsyth, *The Justification of God*, p. 164

²⁰ P. T. Forsyth, *The Justification of God*, p. 164

and all things working together for good to love and the holy purpose in love. And what He did I did. How I did it? How I do it? This you know not how, and could not, but you shall know hereafter. There are things the Father must keep in His own hand. Be still and know that I am God, whose mercy is as His majesty, and His omnipotence is chiefly in forgiving, and redeeming, and settling all souls in worship in the temple of a new heaven and earth full of holiness.²¹

THE SUPREME THEODICY IS ATONEMENT

As we have been saying in other studies 'that day' - the coming close of history as we know it, *the telos* - is an essential part of God's plan, through the cross and Christ's resurrection; this is a continuation of what Forsyth, understands the Father is saying to us.

In that day the anguish will be forgotten for joy that a New Humanity is born into the world.²²

However, the matter is never just hoping for heaven. It is the holy name of God fully honoured, through atonement. It means leaving no room or place for sin, eternally.

But all this is groundless if in the Cross of Christ we have but the love of God shown in sacrifice and not its holiness secured in judgment; if the Cross be but to reconcile man and not atone to God, to impress many and not first to hallow the holy name.²³

In hallowing the Father's holy name, Christ is doing more than being obedient unto death he is being obedient unto judgment, the final judgment of holiness. Paul says, 'For just as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous.' (Romans 5:19) Others who have studied Forsyth have also pointed out that he saw Christ's *obedience* as of prime importance:

The important thing is not the "wounds of Jesus", but the fact that in going to the cross he offered a perfect obedience to the holy will of God. This has never been sufficiently emphasized.²⁴

As this series of studies, is looking at this whole matter of theodicy, it is appropriate that we close this study, with Forsyth's closing words for the chapter:

Christ was the new Humanity doing the one needful and right thing before God. God's justification of man, therefore, was by His justification of Himself in man. The last theodicy is a gift of God and not man's discovery nor an achievement. It is not a rational triumph but the victory of faith. Christ is the theodicy of God and the justifier both of God and the ungodly. The supreme theodicy is atonement.²⁵

²¹ P. T. Forsyth, *The Justification of God*, p. 164

²² P. T. Forsyth, *The Justification of God*, p. 165

²³ P. T. Forsyth, *The Justification of God*, p. 165

²⁴ Robert McAfee Brown, *P. T. Forsyth: Prophet For Today*, p. 83

²⁵ P. T. Forsyth, *The Justification of God*, p. 169