

STUDY THIRTEEN

The Work of Christ-2

THE WORK ITSELF (CONTINUED)

The Work of the Cross-2

The Cross and Evil

Jesus had predicted he would defeat Satan and his powers. For this see Luke 11:21-22 and John 12:31 (cf. 14:30-31; 16:11). In Luke 22:53 he says, when apprehended, 'This is your hour and the authority of darkness'. Hence we assume (cf. John 14:30) that all evil powers assembled at the cross. First Corinthians 2:8 may refer to the powers (cf. Eph. 6:12) of this age which may mean the evil angelic powers. Colossians 2:14-15 shows that the cross defeated them. Presumably they were there!

We have the evidence of Hebrews 2:14-15 to show that it was the death which defeated evil. Satan was 'destroyed' by this death. He must then have been involved in it. As Jesus had said, 'The ruler of this world is coming'. If we include the action of Psalm 22:11-16 to embrace evil powers, and add to this Psalm 69:1-4, 13-21, then we see not only the opposition of men but also of evil supernatural powers.

We know that Satan holds men and women in his subjection by their sin. Galatians 1:4 states that men are rescued (by Christ) from this evil age and its rulers, by Jesus bearing their sins. Their guilt has held them to the age, and to Satan who is the Accuser. Passages such as Ephesians 2:1–3, 1 John 5:19, and Jude 9 show us that Satan and his powers hold men in thrall by their guilt. However, when Jesus bears the guilt the power of evil is broken.

The Cross and Law

Romans 7:1 says that as long as a man lives he is under the law. Primarily it means that man has to obey law, that he fails, and is under its condemnation. Galatians 3:10 says men get caught under the curse of the law. Verse 13 says Christ became the curse (of the law) upon the cross, for us (cf. Gal. 4:4–5). Hence when Christ bore the penalty of sin, he broke the power of the law (its condemnation) on the cross. Thus in Galatians 2:19–20 (cf. Rom. 6:6–10) the sinner is said to have died with Christ.

The law met him in the event of the cross and exacted its demands in the way of death. Hence Romans 6:7, ‘Whoever has died is freed from sin’. Romans 7:4 says, ‘You have died to the law through the body of Christ’. Hence Romans 6:14, ‘You are not under law [law’s condemnation], but under grace’, that is, the judicial acquittal of the cross.

The Cross and Death

Hebrews 2:14–15 suggests that the cross destroys the ‘fear of death’. First Corinthians 15:55–56 says that the sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law, that is, the judgement of the law. Romans 6:10 (cf. 5:10ff.

where sin-guilt means death, as in 6:23a) says he died unto sin once and so death no more has dominion over him. It did have dominion over him in some way on the cross, in that sin in some way had dominion over him. In some way he ‘played out’ death until its power was gone. This sting, sin, was borne to extinction as sin was judged in his flesh (Rom. 8:3). Whilst the resurrection seals the victory over death, *death is defeated before the resurrection*. It is defeated on the cross.

Sin being defeated, death is vanquished. Jesus did not have to fight a second battle in the grave. To defeat sin was to defeat death.

The Cross and Sin

Sin has three destructive elements, namely its *penalty* (Rom. 6:23; 1:18ff.), its *power* (John 8:34; cf. Prov. 5:22–23; 2 Peter 2:19; James 1:14–15), and its *pollution* (Jer. 17:9; Mark 7:20ff.; Prov. 25:26; etc.). We will deal more closely with the penalty of sin under the wrath of God, but in fact the guilt of sin also relates to both the wrath of God and the power of sin. Romans 6:12–14 and 1 Corinthians 15:55–57 show that with the guilt being removed, the power is broken. Romans 8:3 shows that sin was judged in the flesh of Jesus.

What then happened on the cross to break the power of sin? Romans 6:10 says, ‘the death he died he died to sin, once’. In some sense, then, he was under the power of sin. First Peter 2:24 says he bore our sins in his body on the tree. Bearing fulfils the penalty. Romans 3:25 (cf. 1 John 4:10) says he was the propitiation for our sins. Second Corinthians 5:21 says God made him *to be sin* for us. In this sense 1 Peter 3:18 depicts him as dying, ‘the righteous for the unrighteous’. Isaiah 53:4 says he has borne

our griefs and carried our sorrows, and ensuing verses show he suffered for our sins. Isaiah 53:6 says, ‘The LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all’. We take it that he bore our actual sins, including their evil nature and their penal suffering, until there was no more to be borne. He expended, played out, exhausted, and so extinguished the sins themselves, on the cross. Hence sin was judged in his flesh and defeated.

The Law and Wrath

This wrath is portrayed in Scripture as God’s righteous anger against sin. Never arbitrary, it is righteous wrath and judgement (cf. Rom. 2:4–5). Romans 1:18–32 portrays this wrath as present judgement by God in giving man up to his sin, and in this sense man lives under wrath. This wrath is the guilt which man feels in his conscience, and which alienates him from God, and makes him hate God (Rom. 1:30; 5:10; Col. 1:21). Wrath, seen from another point of view, is the penalty of the law, or the fear of death which is the fear of judgement and punishment (cf. Heb. 2:14–15; 1 John 4:18). The latter is ‘the wrath to come’ (Rom. 5:9; 1 Thess. 1:10; cf. 2 Thess. 1:6–8; Matt. 3:7f.). This is what we call the penalty of sin, but as it is *personal*, man fears to face God. The anticipation of this wrath is a heavy burden.

The teaching of propitiation as in 1 John 4:10 (cf. Rom. 3:24–25; Heb. 2:17) is that God initiates propitiation; that is, He causes His wrath to be averted from man by making Christ to be sin, or the curse, or to bear the wrath upon sin. It must never be thought that Christ simply pacifies an angry God, but that God loves man and through His Son causes that wrath to be borne which man rightly deserves to have to bear. A close study of Matthew 26:31

and Zechariah 13:7 (cf. Lam. 1:21) with the other New Testament references to propitiation indicates that in becoming the curse Christ averted the wrath of God by himself bearing it. His cry of dereliction indicates the dimensions of his suffering in his time of alienation, loneliness, darkness and rejection.

The Completeness of the Work of the Cross

As we have said, tracing (and understanding) the seven utterances of Jesus on the cross will give us some clue as to what happened whilst he was suffering. His cry of loneliness and rejection was followed by a terrible, ‘I thirst!’ thus indicating his drained resources. Then suddenly he gave a loud cry, ‘It is finished!’—this means he had completed the work. Then he bowed his head and said, ‘Father, into thy hand I commit my spirit’, and we are told he gave up the spirit. In human terms he died. We gather from this that what he had set out to accomplish he fully accomplished. He did not die in the sense that his life was taken, but rather in the sense that he laid it down (cf. John 10:11–18).

This means that his conflict with sin, Satan, the world powers, the world, the penalty of the law, the wrath of God, and death, was a truly successful one. He rescued man from these forces which would have destroyed him. This is the great work of the cross. In Appendix 1 the various theories of the atonement are set forth. It is only natural that man should try to rationalise or codify the meaning, modes and significance of the cross. As will be seen, no particular theory can adequately cover the total work of the cross, and probably each theory has at least something of the truth of the whole. Some theories come close to covering the meaning of the cross.

Finally we must see what are the fruits of the cross (and resurrection) in order to understand the extent of the work of Christ. Appendix 2 covers these effects and benefits.

THE PERSON AND WORK OF CHRIST