

OpenTheo

The Cross and God - Part 1

June 6, 2021



The Bible for Today with John Stott - Premier

John Stott shows how that the cross of Christ is not only a deed done for us but a word spoken to us. The cross demonstrates God's love to us despite our being completely undeserving of it.

Transcript

[Music] Now, I need to ask you at the beginning this morning, do you believe in God? I think maybe somebody is responding in their mind, "Don't be stupid. Don't ask such a stupid question." Of course, I believe in God. It wouldn't be here this morning if I didn't.

Haven't we just recited the apostle's creed and affirmed our belief in God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit? It had the risk of offending you and making you angrier. I press my question. Do you believe in God?

[Music] Welcome to the Bible for today with John Stott.

There are few evangelicals who have ever influenced the global church in the 20th century as much as John Stott, and it was Betty Graham who called him the most respected clergyman in the world. Always remaining faithful to the word of God and unswayed by current trends, the person of Christ blazed from every sermon he preached. Whilst John Stott impacted the church across the world, his home church was always all souls, laying in place in the heart of London's West End.

And it's from 600 sermons he preached there that were marking his centenary with some of his most powerful messages.

[Music] The Christian crosses a powerful symbol. It's often used on a building to identify its purpose.

It may be worn by someone to indicate their religious allegiance. In many cultures, the cross is seen as offensive, and that we may wonder why. Today, John Stott will show us why the cross is so important in his message entitled "The Cross and God." Although that

begs the question, which God are we talking about? Our topic, as we've already been reminded this morning, is the cross and God.

What does the cross tell us about God? Now, I need to ask you at the beginning this morning, do you believe in God? I think maybe somebody is responding in their mind, "Don't be stupid. Don't ask such a stupid question." Of course, I believe in God. It wouldn't be here this morning if I didn't.

Haven't we just recited the apostle's creed and affirmed our belief in God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit? It had the risk of offending you and making you angrier. I press my question. Do you believe in God? Now, if in your heart you are replying yes or no, then you haven't understood the question.

Because actually this is a question to which it is impossible to reply with a simple yes or no. To the question I believe in God, the only wise response is a counter question, which God are you talking about? When some people talk about God, I want to say, "I don't believe in God." At least I don't believe in the kind of God you believe in. Because the truth is, as Paul said, yes, a guy writing in Corinthians, there are many gods and many lords.

All day for us, there is only one God, the Father, from whom are all things, and from whom we live. And there is only one Lord, Jesus Christ, for whom are all things and for whom we live. But all there, there is only one God, there are many caricatures, and there are many images of God, there are people' treasure in their mind.

Opinion polls in this country still suggest that about 85% of our compatriots say, if challenged, that they believe in God. Then the definition of God is given to them before that question is asked. Understand, still less than 5% of our population affirm that they are atheists and don't believe in God at all.

There are some agnostics, of course, but the great majority say they believe in God. But the God they say they believe in is very, very,ously perceived. For example, the God that Hindus or Buddhists or Muslims believe in, although he is behind the perception, there is only one God.

Yet the perceptions of God that Hindus, Buddhists, and Muslims have diverged considerably in different ways than the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. That are some who like the Athenians, say they believe in an unknown God. The others who believe in false gods, they think of him as a vital force or as a cosmic fan that you turn on when life gets hot.

Or they think of him as a cosmic bellboy, as Harry Emerson Fosdick once said, who we summon to do our bidding when we find ourselves in particular need. Or like Tillic and his followers, they think of him as the impersonal ground of human being. The truth is,

my friends, that the combination of letters, G-O-D, is meaningless until you stop to define what kind of God you believe in.

Now the God Christians believe in is the God who has revealed himself in nature and in scripture whose progressive self-revelation culminated in Jesus Christ, the eternal word made flesh, and whose self-revelation in Christ came to its climax on the cross, vindicated by the resurrection. The cross is to be understood not only as a deed done for us, a finished redemption, but as a word spoken to us, a finished revelation. And I do not hesitate to say that God is no more to reveal to us of himself than he revealed once and for all in the fullness of his divine majesty on the cross.

Now that is why, according to John's gospel, Jesus referred to his death as his glorification. That is to say, as the visible manifestation of his splendor. When some Greeks came to Philip and said, "Sir, we'd like to see Jesus," and Philip went to Jesus and told him, "You remember what Jesus immediately said, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified." And if there was any doubt as to what he meant by that, he immediately went on as a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it brings forth much fruit.

So that he was glorified when he was crucified. In the upper room, a little later, Jesus said in that great prayer recorded in John 17, "Father, the hour has come." And we know that means the hour of his death. The hour has come, "Glorify your Son, that your Son may also glorify you." I don't know anybody who has put this better than Calvin in his great commentary on the gospel of John.

Let me read to you this little passage. He says, "In the cross of Christ, as in a splendid theater, ever thought of the cross as a theater, in the cross of Christ as in a splendid theater, the incomparable goodness of God is set before the whole world. The glory of God shines indeed in all creatures on high and below, but never more brightly than in the cross." And a little later, he goes on, "If he be objected, that nothing could be less glorious than Christ's death." I reply that in that death we see a boundless glory, which is concealed from the ungodly.

So Jesus, according to John, referred to his death as his glorification, where the full splendor of his nature and character are revealed. But it is the pull that we turn for a full exposition of how God has been revealed in the cross. Already, I have not quite got to my text yet, but patient, I come to it in a moment.

Already in 1 Corinthians he says that Christ crucified is the power of God and the wisdom of God. God's power and wisdom are displayed in the cross. But it is in particular in Romans 3 and Romans 5, which are my texts that Paul enlarges on this more fully.

And firstly, the cross is a demonstration of the love of God. So will you please open your Bible in the New Testament section, and let us look again at that great text, Romans 5

and verse 8. Romans 5, 8, this is the revised standard version. God shows his love for us.

He gives us a display of his love. How? In that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Well, here is the new English Bible.

Christ died for us while we were still sinners. That is God's own proof of his love for us. Well, here is the new international version.

God demonstrates his own love for us in this while we were still sinners. Christ died for us. Thus, Paul clearly maintains that through the cross, God shows and demonstrates and displays and even proves his love for us.

Indeed, the Greek sentence says he proves his own love for us. His love beyond all other loves. His love unlike any other love.

He proves it in the cross. Well, you naturally respond. Well, how does he do that? How is it that the cross is a proof or demonstration of the unique love of God? Well, here I think from the text is the answer.

It's the free-filled answer, really. A, he gave his son for us. Now, through the text says Christ died for us.

But if you read the text in the context, as we must with every text of Scripture, you will see that in sending Jesus Christ, God was not sending another prophet. Like the prophets he sent in the Old Testament. He was not sending an angel or archangel from heaven.

He was not even sending the Christ. If by that you are thinking of a human messiah. In sending Christ, he was giving his own son for us.

That's clear from verse 6 when we were weak. Sorry, not 6. Verse 10, "While we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his son. And in giving his son, he was giving himself.

As Paul goes on to say in Romans 8.32, "He who spared not his own son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" And when you come to think of it, how could the cross be a demonstration of the Father's love if it was somebody else that he was giving to die there? If he was giving somebody other than himself, if he was giving a third person to die on the cross, how could it be a demonstration of his love? It can only be a demonstration of his own love for us if in giving Christ to die for us. He was actually giving himself in the person of his eternal son. To that say, the proof of God's love on the cross is because he gave his son to die and in giving his son he was giving himself.

And B, he was giving his son to die for us. Now, Mark, you, it would have been a wonderful display of love if he'd merely given his son to live for us. If he'd merely given

the eternal son to be made flesh and to assume our human nature and to live our life and to serve on it, that would have been a wonderful display of God's love.

But he went further than that. He did not only give his son to live for us, he gave his son to die for us. And the death that he died is not that he was done to death merely by wicked men, nor even that he sacrificed himself voluntarily.

But the death he died was the penalty for human sin. He so identified himself with us, the righteous for the unrighteous, the innocent for the guilty, that he bore our sin and our guilt and our condemnation and our death when he died. He did not need to die.

He had no sin of his own for which to die. Sin and death are always bracketed in the Bible. The wages of sin is death that Jesus never sinned.

He had no need to die. The death he died was for our sin. So God gave his son for us and he gave his son to die for us and see he gave his son to die for us.

Even for us. Very rarely, according to verse 7, somebody is willing to die for the righteous, for people who are cold and clinical and/or steer in their righteousness. They are for good people, who are warm and attractive in their goodness.

Somebody might possibly dare to die. But what is unique about the love of God is that he gave himself to die neither for the righteous nor for the good, but for sinners. For people like us who are cold sinners because we fall in short of the glory of God, who in verse 6 are called ungodly because we have never given to God the glory that is due to his name, who are called in verse 10, his enemies because we have rebelled against him and are called again in verse 6 weak or helpless because we cannot save ourselves.

You know, my friend, the value of a love gift is seen partly in what it costs the giver and partly in the degree to which the recipient deserves it. I'm sure there are many young men here, maybe older ones too, who are in love. And because you love a girl or a woman, your girlfriend, your fiancé, your wife, you give her in so far as you can, expensive presence.

Ah, but she deserves them, you say to me, you don't know my girl, my woman. She deserves them and more if only I could give them because you have a clear understanding of her worth. Well, Jacob was willing to serve seven years for Rachel because he loved her so much that God demonstrates his own love for us in that while we were sinners, ungodly enemies, and helpless he died for us.

So you see, in giving his son he was giving himself to die for his enemies. Let me sum it up very simply like this, in giving his son he was giving everything he had for those who deserved nothing at his hand but judgment. He gave everything in giving himself for those who deserve nothing.

Friend, unless you perceive that, until you perceive the everything that he gave, giving himself in the person of his son unto death for our sins, and until you perceive our own unworthiness. We're not without worth in the sense that God has made us in his own image and there is an intrinsic dignity that human beings have. We shall come to that next week when we talk about the cross and ourselves, that we have an unworthiness because we're sinners and ungodly and enemies and helpless to save ourselves.

How can you doubt the love of God when you see the cross? But that's not everything. The cross is a demonstration of the love of God, but secondly the cross is a demonstration of the justice of God. For this we turn back to chapter 3. Now I want to read you if I may, verses 25 and 26.

Romans 3, 25, Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as I believe it should be a propitiation by his blood to be received by faith, and this was to demonstrate God's justice because in his divine forbearance he'd passed over for my sins. It was to demonstrate at the present time that he himself is just and that he justifies him who has faith in Jesus. So here the new international version puts it that God presented Jesus as a sacrifice of atonement.

It's a pity that it's translated "expiration" because "expiration" is dealing with the defilement of sin that propitiation has as its object not sin but God himself. So God presented his son as a sacrifice of atonement or a propitiatory sacrifice by the shedding of his blood. Now I think again I feel the hackles of some beginning to rise.

There are many people today, not least theologians in the church, who are rejecting as what they call a heathen notion, the idea that God needs to be propitiated or placated. I want you to ask you to listen carefully. There is a Christian notion of propitiation.

True, it is quite, quite different from the heathen notion, but God does need to be propitiated. The difference is that these, the wrath of God that needs to be propitiated, is not capricious, it's not arbitrary. It isn't that God is bad-tempered, and it isn't that he is vindictive or spiteful as heathen deities may be.

The wrath of God is his holy antagonism to evil. But wherever evil is, the wrath of God is upon it because God's reaction to evil is judgment. Because of his holiness.

But the person who does the propitiating of God is not the sinner, as in heathen religion, who brings sweets or toffees or candies or other foods in order to propitiate an angry or bad-tempered deity. We cannot possibly propitiate God. There is nothing that you and I can do to propitiate the wrath of God.

Only he himself can do it. God propitiates God. The love of God propitiates the wrath of God, and nobody can do it but he alone.

And he himself propitiates himself by giving himself as a substitute for our sins on the

cross. You have been listening to the first part of a message by John Stott on the cross and God, which will be concluded at the same time next week. We have seen that the cross is powerful not just as a symbol, but because of what it represents.

The Cross of Christ is also the title of one of John Stott's most famous books, which you will find particularly helpful in the light of today's message. You can also watch videos of John Stott preaching at venues around the world by visiting premierchristenradio.com/JohnStott. The legacy of John Stott lives on and is growing, touching every level of society across the world. Today Christian leaders throughout the majority world are being equipped to provide pastor training and resources in their own countries thanks to the vision of John Stott, who donated all his book royalties to support this ministry through Langham Partnership.

To find out about this and other ministries, John Stott founded, go to premier.org.uk/JohnStott. Join us at the same time next week for more from The Bible for Today with John Stott.

[Music]

(buzzing)