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The Cross and God - Part 2

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The Bible for Today with John Stott - Premier

John Stott explains that God's love is shown to us by the action he took in giving the most valuable gift possible in the person of His son Jesus.

Transcript

If God were not to judge sin, He would destroy both Himself and us. He would cease to be God and we would cease to be human. He would destroy Himself because He would contradict His character of holy love.

And He would destroy us by contradicting our dignity as morally responsible person. Welcome to The Bible for Today with John Stott. Time Magazine ranked John Stott as one of the 100 most influential people in the world.

During his lifetime he impacted the evangelical church on every continent and was author of the landmark Lausanne Covenant on Evangelism. John Stott's ministry was centered on five priorities - prayer, expository preaching, regular evangelism, careful follow-up and systematic training of new leaders. But for all his global influence, he had an unassuming demeanor preferring to be known as Uncle John and living in a small apartment above a gallery of a rectory in London.

Indeed, the rectory of all souls laying in place which was his home church for almost 60 years. We are privileged to be marking John Stott's centenary by bringing you just some of his timeless teaching.

[Music] Last week John Stott showed us why the cross is central to the purpose of God and how that through the cross God shows, demonstrates, displays and proves His love for us.

John's message is based on Romans chapter 5 verse 8 which tells us that when Christ died for us, He was demonstrating God's love for us only because it was God's own son who died on the cross. Today John Stott concludes this message and you'll find it helpful to have your Bible open to Romans chapter 5. 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 true 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 arch-angel from heaven. He was not even sending the Christ if by that you are thinking of a human messiah, in sending Christ. 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 earth, 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, that 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.

Because you love the girl or a woman, your girlfriend, your fiancé, your wife, you give her in so far as you can, expensive presence. 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. Why, 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 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. Don't 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 "heaven 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 "heaven 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 "heaven" 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 "heaven religion", who brings sweets or toffices 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. Now, in recent years, I have not come across a better exposition of that than Charles Cranfield gives in his remarkable two-volume commentary on the letter to the Romans in the new International Critical commentary series.

Listen to what he says. It's a very carefully phrased sentence. God, because in His mercy He willed to forgive sin for men, and being truly merciful willed to forgive them righteously, that is without in any way condoning their sin, He purposed to direct against His own very self in the person of His Son the full weight of that righteous wrath that they deserved.

There is God sentencing the sinner to death and bearing the sentence in His own innocent person. The love of God and only the love of God can propitiate the wrath of God. Now, because of this, when you get hold of this biblical doctrine, you see in the cross not only a propitiation of the wrath of God, but a demonstration of the justice of God.

In His forbearance, Paul says, "He passed by for my sins." New international version, "He

left them unpunished." In His forbearance, "But in His justice, although He could delay the punishment, He could not postpone it indefinitely, let alone cancel it altogether, because sin, guilt and judgment are inexorably linked to one another in the moral order of God." Listen, if God were not to judge sin, He would destroy both Himself and us. He would cease to be God, and we would cease to be human. He would destroy Himself because He would contradict His character of holy love.

And He would destroy us by contradicting our dignity as morally responsible persons. It's inconceivable that God would do either. He will never destroy Himself, and He will never destroy us.

And so, though in His forbearance, He temporarily left sin unpunished in our testimony days. Now in the cross, in His justice, He has punished sin, condemned it, and borne the condemnation Himself in the person of His Son. And as He did it publicly, He did it not only in order to be just, but in order to be seen to be just.

Nobody can ever accuse God of injustice, of condoning evil. The cross demonstrates with equal vividness God's just judgment of human sin and His merciful forgiveness of the sinner. For now as a result of the cross, God is both just and the justifier of those who put their trust in Jesus.

He is able to accept unrighteous sinners as righteous in His sight without compromising His own righteousness. Now let me recapitulate for a moment and then conclude. The cross of Christ is a demonstration of the love of God and the cross of Christ was a demonstration of the justice of God.

So it was a true instinct of the new international version to use the same English verb in both Romans 3, 25 and Romans 5. They are different verbs in the Greek. They mean the same thing and therefore the new international version is translated them both to demonstrate. As we look at the cross we can't see which shines them more brightly, whether the justice of God in condemning sin or the mercy of God in pardoning it.

For love and justice, justification and condemnation are both to be seen in the cross. How then shall we conclude? Well since the cross reveals the kind of God God is, it should affect of course our attitude to Him. We should worship Him as the God He is.

We should trust Him as the God He is, a God of holy love. Not of holiness all only, not of love only, but of holy love. But I don't want to concentrate on that as I conclude.

I want to concentrate rather on this, that when we perceive who God is as He is revealed in the cross, it will greatly affect our attitude to other people. For this reason, the people of God are called to be imitators of God. He is holy, so we are to be holy as He is holy.

He is love and we are to love others as He has loved us, because He is a God of holy love. We are to be a people of holy love. Now let me give you one or two examples of

that so that you see the kind of thing that is in my mind.

First, it will affect our family life. Many of your parents, some parents are much too harsh with their children, and some are much too lenient. But children, created in the image of God, have an unborn sense of love and justice.

They know when their parents love them, even when their parents are punishing them. And they know what is just and what is unjust, which is why they so often complain, it isn't fair. They have an unborn sense of love and justice, and the two need to characterize our family life.

Next, second, they need to characterize our personal relationships. When we offend one another and sin against one another, we must avoid the birth extremes. We must never refuse to forgive, insisting instead on taking vengeance on somebody who has done us wrong, but we mustn't go to the opposite extreme either.

We must never cheapen forgiveness by offering it to people who have never repented. God doesn't forgive us if we don't repent, and we should not forgive others if they don't repent. We have a forgiving spirit.

We don't harbor any resentment, but to forgive is to restore people to relationship. How can you do that if they've never acknowledged their offense and repented? You know what Jesus said, "If your brother sins against you, now fill in the blank." I know what most of you would write. If your brother sins against you, forgive him.

He doesn't say that. He says, "If your brother sins against you, rebuke him." And if he repents, forgive him. We are not to cheapen forgiveness.

Any more than God has done, God's forgiveness involved the cross. Our forgiveness involves costly pain. Thirdly, we see the same principle in church discipline.

All done, it's long and check it history. The church has oscillated between extreme severity, excommunicating everybody in sight, and extreme laxity, excommunicating nobody, which is our position today. When did you last year of an excommunication in the Church of England? I'm not sure if it will be 300 years as the records of the heat of July, but it's probably not almost not in living memory.

But there is a place for discipline in the Church, but only as a last resort when people refuse to repent, because our longing is to restore people and not just to judge them. My fourth example concerns the administration of justice by the state. Christians who think publicly insist that there is a thing as retributive justice.

People who are criminals and have broken the law deserve to bear the penalty of their law-breaking. C.S. Lewis, in his famous essay on the humanitarian view of punishment, has put it excellently in the simple way. The concept of "desert" is the only connecting

link between punishment and justice.

It is only as deserved or undeserved that a sentence is just or unjust. Robert People who sin and break the law deserve punishment. That is a clear teaching of the Bible.

In all these fears, family life, personal relationships, church discipline, the administration of justice by the state, in all of them, we should desire neither justice without mercy nor mercy without justice. The cross is a revelation of the holy love of God. It is a demonstration of the love of God and of the justice of God.

And since our God is holy love, his people should be holy love as well. Let us pray. A moment of silence to pray that we may be people of holy love that the cross may mark our behavior, that we may seek to be holy as he is holy and loving as he is loving.

Heavenly Father, write your word in our hearts and in our lives that we may not be forgetful heroes but doers of your word. Increase our understanding and our obedience and make us people of holy love. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior, our name.

We should desire neither justice without mercy nor mercy without justice. You've been listening to the conclusion of a message by John Stott on the cross and God, which is just one of a series of messages that John preached on the cross and also is laying in place. And you can hear the rest by visiting their website.

John Stott also read many books, including one on today's topic entitled "The Cross of Christ." It's one of John's most famous books which you'll 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 premierchristinradio.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 bookworlds to support this ministry through Langham Partnership.

To find out about this at 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.

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(buzzing)