

The Cross Of Christ

Galatians 1:3-5

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In Galatians 1:3-5, Paul says, “Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father...”—and then notice this doxology—“...to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.” In verse 3, you have a prayer; in verse 4, you have a statement of the doctrines of the Cross; and in verse 5, you have a doxology. But it all centers around the statement in verse 4 about the Cross.

Someone said, “The Cross of Christ is the centerpiece on the timetable of God’s redemptive plan.” Everything in redemptive history centers on the Cross of Jesus Christ. And the Cross of Jesus Christ is on what Paul says, “I glory.” Paul said, “I determine not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.” The Cross of Christ was for Paul the center and circumference of his life and of his preaching.

I believe that for us as believers—we may not be an apostle like Paul—the Cross of Jesus Christ should be the center and circumference of all our lives. Many of the great theologians, writing about the Cross, said that you cannot understand Christianity if you misunderstand the Cross. You cannot understand Christ or His mission if you misunderstand the Cross. It is absolutely essential to orthodox Christianity that we understand the purpose and the plan of the Cross in redemptive history.

Perhaps nowhere is this seen more clearly in the Cross than in Paul’s letter to the Galatians. All through Galatians Paul mentions the Cross or alludes to the Cross, more than in any other epistle Paul wrote. Why in Galatians does Paul refer so much to the Cross of Christ? It was because the Galatians were beginning to be influenced by false teachers, who did not see the Cross as significant, important or sufficient.

They were Judaizers, so they were Jews who were telling Christians who were Gentiles that in order to be saved, you must become Jews. They said that you must be circumcised, you must obey the Law of Moses, you must follow dietary laws, you must worship on certain holy days, new moons and on the Sabbaths. So the Galatians were in danger of falling from the grace of God into the concept that we can earn, merit or deserve our way to heaven.

All religions, apart from Christianity, believe that we have to do something to earn our salvation; that we must at least cooperate with God and work with God. But Christianity teaches that salvation is all of God, from beginning to end. God saves us by His grace, He sanctifies us by His grace, and one day, by the grace of God, we will be glorified. So what begins in grace ends in glory. Read Romans 8; it’s a marvelous truth.

Paul, in opening his letter to the Galatians, said that he didn’t want the Galatians to fall from grace by setting aside the splendor and the glories of the Cross. So we must come to the

Cross, understand the Cross and glory in the Cross.

Let me give you five facts about the Cross of Christ. Number one, Jesus died on the Cross of Christ voluntarily. Jesus' atoning, sacrificial work on the Cross was voluntary. Jesus gave Himself. Verse 4 says, "...who gave Himself." Who "gave Himself"? At the end of verse 3, it says, "our Lord Jesus Christ."

So the "who," of verse 4, is the Jesus Christ, of verse 3. Jesus Christ our Lord, or "Kurios," is the Son of God, the Savior, Jesus Christ. God uses Jesus to save us. And He is Christ, which is "Mashiach" or "Messiah." And Jesus is the Second Person of the Godhead. The Bible teaches there is one God in three Persons. God the Son left heaven and came to earth voluntarily. God the Son came willingly and voluntarily. He "gave Himself." Jesus said, in John 15:13, "Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends." And we're going to see that all three Persons of the Godhead are involved in our salvation.

Philippians 2 is one of the great chapters on Christ giving Himself for our sins. Verses 5-7 say, "Let this mind..."—or "attitude" or "outlook"—"...be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form..."—which is "morphe" in the Greek, which means "essence," not shape—"...of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form..."—again, "morphe"—"...of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men." He then "gave Himself" up to the Cross, and He died for our sins.

Verses 9-11, "Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord..."—or "Kurios"—"...to the glory of God the Father." So this describes Christ leaving heaven, coming to earth and taking on humanity.

Jesus did not lay aside or empty Himself of His deity. He laid aside and emptied Himself of His glory, His splendor, His majesty. So He came incognito. He was God in flesh on earth. We couldn't see this by looking at Him, but He was God veiled in flesh. What a marvelous truth!

He came from heaven, stepped down to earth and entered the world through the womb of the Virgin Mary. He was the perfect God-man; fully and truly God and fully and truly man at the same time in one person, Jesus Christ. So Jesus, in love, "gave Himself" for lost sinners. Where it says in verse 4, "who gave Himself," it literally means "once and for all." He "gave Himself" once and for all for our sins in order to rescue us.

So this is a picture of God's love, demonstrated in Christ, in that He "gave Himself" voluntarily or willingly. Jesus wasn't coerced, He wasn't pressured, He wasn't sent against His will; He came voluntarily. So when we take the bread and drink the cup, meditate on the fact that Jesus left heaven voluntarily. He left heaven for you and for me. When you hold that piece of bread and hold that cup, remember that He came for you and me. He volunteered for this rescue mission, to save us from our sins. He came willingly.

Why would Jesus give Himself for us? Number two, the Cross of Christ was substitutionary. Notice the phrase in verse 4, “for our sins.” He “gave Himself” voluntarily and substitutionarily “for our sins.”

There are a lot of words to describe the Cross: reconciliation, propitiation and redemption. But the main, central word which tells of the essence of the Cross is that it was a substitutionary death. Don't let anyone ever tell you otherwise. The Bible is very clear that Christ's death was a substitution, that He literally took our place, bore our sins and He died in our stead.

So the Cross was not primarily to display His love—although it did display that—and it wasn't primarily to show that we should sacrifice for others—although it did display that—but it was primarily to pay for sin. The Bible says, “The wages of sin is death.” And the Bible also says, “The soul who sins shall die.”

What do we mean by “sin”? Let me give you a word study about sin. The word “sins” in our text is a common word in the Greek. It is the word “hamartia,” which means “to miss the mark.” It means that we can try, we can do our best, but we all sin.

Last week we had our granddaughter over to spend the night. My wife was concerned that she might be bored hanging out with Grandma and Grandpa with nothing to do. So I took her out in the backyard and created a target, took our son's BB gun that had been left in the garage for years and we shot at the target. The first couple of shots missed the target, the cardboard box, completely. But eventually we hit the target. She enjoyed it. She asked to spend the night again. So if your grandkids get bored, get a BB gun.

The idea here is that when you miss the target, God says you are “hamartia,” or you've missed the mark or “fall short of the glory of God.” We try but we miss the mark.

There is another word for sin, and translated into the English it means “transgression.” The word “transgression” means that God draws a line and we willingly, deliberately, intentionally step over the line and break God's law. So Jesus came to pay for our sins.

So the point is that it was Jesus' death, but it was our sins. Our sins caused Him to die. He was not a sinner, He did not sin, He was the pure, sinless Son of God. But He took our sins upon Himself, and in some mysterious way we cannot comprehend, “He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.” Jesus, the sinless Son of God, became sin as He bore the sin for us.

It's hard to explain, but Jesus didn't become a sinner. He was always the pure, sinless Son of God. But our sins were placed on the sinless Son of God. He took our place and paid the penalty for our sins.

When Jesus was on the Cross during those three hours of darkness, He cried out, “Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?” That means, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” That was a quote from Psalm 22, a Messianic psalm describing the Cross.

I am convinced that when Jesus died on the Cross and took our sins upon Him, the Father had to turn His back on His only Son. And Psalm 22:3 tells us why: “But You are holy, enthroned in the praises of Israel.”

Jesus took our sin, and for a moment—it’s something mysterious—there was a separation between God the Father and God the Son. There are theologians who disagree with this, but I’m convinced that Jesus had to taste death for every man, which brought a separation with His Father. That is why Jesus cried out, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?”

Know this: Jesus was forsaken by His Father so that you and I would never have to be forsaken.

So Jesus came willingly and voluntarily, and number two, He gave Himself as a substitution for our sin. He was separated from God the Father so we would never have to be forsaken. Jesus also cried, “Tatelestai,” or “It is finished” or “Paid in full.” So the debt has been paid.

Jesus’ substitutionary suffering occurred only on the Cross. John the Baptist pointed to Jesus and said, “Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” That’s what it means that Christ bore our sin; He carried it away in Himself. So we trust Him; only He can save us from sin.

And number three, Jesus’ death was a rescue mission. Verse 4 of our text says, “that He might deliver us...”—or “rescue us”—“...from this present evil age.” So Jesus gave Himself voluntarily, substitutionarily that He might rescue us or deliver us “from this present evil age.” Jesus didn’t die to improve us; He died to deliver us.

You won’t understand Christ, you won’t understand Christianity, you won’t understand the Bible unless you see and understand the Cross of Christ. He came to rescue us. Salvation is a rescue mission undertaken for people who are living under the bondage of Satan’s kingdom. Notice that verse 4 says He rescues us from “this present evil age” or “world.”

This world is very evil. I am sickened every day when I watch the news. Who wants to even watch the news anymore? The Bible says the world is under “the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience.” He is also called “the god of this age.”

The word “world” is the Greek word “aiónios,” which means “age” or “period of time.” So our present period of time is called “evil.” It’s a period of darkness. But it’s always darkest before the dawn. There is coming a new age, the kingdom age, when Jesus Christ the King comes back in His Second Coming in power and glory. He will set upon His throne and reign as King of kings and Lord of lords.

I don’t look for the world to get better. I know that post-millennials—and more people are going toward post-millennialism than premillennialism—believe that Jesus comes back after the millennium. Good luck with that! Even though the world isn’t going to get better, that doesn’t mean that we shouldn’t be involved, that we shouldn’t pray, that we shouldn’t vote, that we shouldn’t take a stand for truth because we are “the salt of the earth.” Our hope is not in this

world. We're just strangers and pilgrims passing through. Let's do all we can to be salt and light, but still realize that we're looking for the kingdom of God.

When we get born again, we're taken out of Satan's kingdom and placed in the kingdom of God. But we are going to live in the natural kingdom of 1,000 years with Christ reigning. There will be peace and righteousness on earth, and that will flow into the new heaven and the new earth called "the eternal state." So we look for Christ the King to come. But right now, as Christians, we have been rescued or delivered from "this present evil age."

The same word for "rescued" is used in Acts 7:34, where Stephen was preaching a sermon and said that the children of Israel were taken out of Egypt. And it's used of Peter in Acts 12, when he was in prison and was going to be beheaded by Herod. An angel came and awakened him and took him out of the prison.

This is one of my favorite stories in the Bible. Peter was going to be executed the next day, but he was sound asleep in the jail the night before. Think about that! If you were in jail waiting to be executed the next day, would you be sleeping? I doubt it. But Peter was resting in the Lord. He knew the Lord was in control. God sent His angel, who opened the door to the prison, woke Peter up, said, "Gird yourself and tie on your sandals." Peter walked outside and thought he was dreaming but realized it was real. So the same Greek word used for "rescued" or "delivered" is used here. The word literally means "to lift up and out."

In 1 Timothy 2:5-6, it says, "For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all." So come to the Cross of Christ and He will set you free from "this present evil world."

The fourth fact about the Cross of Christ is that it was planned by God the Father. Verse 4 says, "according to the will of our God and Father." So Jesus gave Himself voluntarily for our sins, that He might deliver us from "this present evil world" and it was all "according to the will of our God and Father." The Father planned the Cross from all eternity past.

And all three Persons of the Godhead—God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit—were involved in our salvation. God the Father planned it from eternity past, God the Son purchased our salvation in history and time when He died on the Cross and God the Holy Spirit applied it when He convicted us, when He regenerated us, when He indwelt us and when He sealed us with Himself.

In the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus said, "Father, if it is Your will, take this cup..."—the Cross—"...away from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done." There was no other way; Christ had to go to the Cross and become sin for us. It was all planned this way.

God knew Adam and Eve would sin in the Garden of Eden, so He had a master plan, a master design, to be able to redeem mankind back to Himself and get greater glory. God's plan of salvation is all that is needed for the glory of God. When we get to heaven, we're going to be amazed to see that God had it all planned out for His glory. It was according to the

predetermined counsel and foreknowledge of God that Jesus would die on the Cross. Ephesians 1:11 says that the salvation plan was “according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will.” What a wonderful truth.

The fifth fact about the Cross of Christ is that it was all for His glory. Salvation is all for His glory. Verse 5 says, “to whom.” Who is this “whom”? At the end of verse 4, it spoke of the Father, so verse 5 is talking about the Father “to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.” “Amen” means “so be it.”

So salvation is theocentric, or God-centered. In the book of Jonah, we learn that “Salvation is of the Lord.” When I make a statement like this, someone is going to accuse me of being a Calvinist. You can do that, but this is Biblical. Whatever the Bible teaches, that’s what I believe and that’s what I preach. I’m convinced that salvation—from beginning to end—is God’s work. God saves us by His grace. We can’t earn it, deserve it or merit it; it’s all by God’s grace. It doesn’t bring glory to man, but it brings glory to God, verse 5.

Note in verse 3 that it says, “Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.” So we are saved by God’s unmerited, unearned, undeserved grace or favor, and when we are saved, we have peace with God and we have the peace of God. The only way to have peace with God and the peace of God is by the grace of God. You can’t earn it, or merit it or deserve it; it all comes to you by grace. Grace and peace come “from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Ephesians 2:8-9 say, “By grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.” The Greek word for “grace” is “charis.” We get our word “charismatic” from it. It means “all that is beautiful, charming and lovely.” I thought that would be a beautiful name for a girl: Charis, which means lovely, beautiful and charming.

So God’s grace was demonstrated by God’s love. God loved us, showed grace to us and saved us not by our good works or good deeds. This is so prevalent in the book of Galatians, because they were falling from grace. They were going back to the Law. But no one can be saved or justified by the deeds of the Law. But we have grace, peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. So we are saved by grace alone, through faith alone in Christ alone to the glory of God alone.

If you didn’t get anything I’ve said to you, at least get this: our salvation humbles the human pride and glorifies the grace of God. God’s grace is greater than all our sin. In Ephesians 1, after Paul described the work of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, three times he said, “to the praise of the glory of His grace.”

This is why Paul said, at the end of the letter to the Galatians, in verse 14, “But God forbid that I should boast...”—or “glory”—“...except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.” When Paul uses the word “boast” or “glory,”

it means “to revel in, to live for or to be obsessed with.” Paul was reveling in and obsessed with the Cross of Christ. He boasted in, was proud of and glorified in the Cross of Christ. He said that it was through the Cross that “the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.”

We used to sing in an old hymn,

“Content to let the world go by,

To know no gain nor loss,

My sinful self my only shame,

My glory all the Cross.”

So we should be consumed with the Cross of Christ and the glory of God and His salvation by grace.