

Christ Alone

Colossians 1:11-20

Prayer...*Lord Jesus, You alone are strong enough to stand upon. In You alone do we find salvation. You alone fulfill every part of us. In this time we come to You seeking deeper understanding into this truth. To You alone do we come, so that You may plant hope deep in our hearts. Amen.*

When we graduated from seminary

we had to go through a series of interviews

to make sure we had received the training necessary

to begin searching for call.

One of the interviews involved

finding a local pastor,

one of the professors on staff at the seminary

and the denominational director overseeing your journey,

and they would ask questions about

your final theological paper.

When it came time for my interview

the main professor I wanted to ask

had recently been named principal of the seminary.

I figured he had a lot on his plate

so I picked another professor
(one I didn't really know,
but she was Presbyterian and I figured
I'd be safe with that).

During the interview

the discussion of Christology came up
and I was asked to expand from the paper
what I believed about Jesus Christ.

In short, I said that He was perfectly human

and perfectly divine;

that He died the death we deserved

and forgives us of our sins.

That He wraps us up in His righteousness

and through his sacrifice,

He restores the relationship

we have with God.

I confess the next statement I heard

surprised me to no end.

“Ya, I don't particularly like the theology of Atonement.

It makes me feel like everything is my fault.

Can you share what else the cross means?"

I don't know for sure

if this statement was more of a role play

(suggesting this could be a comment I'd hear

when working in a congregational setting)

or if this was this professor's actual understanding,

but part of me looks back on that moment

and says, "But it is our fault."

The Bible takes seriously the reality of sin.

Throughout the Bible we see case after case

that sin is a problem for God.

We hear countless verses

describing God's wrath toward sin.

But the idea of sin

makes some Christians uncomfortable.

It's not nice thinking about sin.

It's not nice being told you're a sinner

or it's not nice to point out to others

that they're sinners.

Many Christians also struggle with the concept
that God could be wrathful.

Often these Christians spend all of their devotional time
in the New Testament,

believing that the God of the New Testament

is preferable to the God of the Old Testament.

We can't lose sight of the fact

that the First and Second Testaments

share of the same God.

The same God who's wrath is displayed against sin.

The same God who became human to die on a cross.

The same God who equipped His people with His Holy Spirit.

The same God we come to worship each Sunday.

As hard as it might be to fathom,

the God we worship is big enough

to be both wrathful toward sin

and loving toward a sinful people

at the same time.

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When the Reformers taught about *solus Christus* (Christ Alone)

it was within the context of the Roman Catholic Church
teaching that authority came from the leadership of the church.

As they taught about Scripture Alone
they pointed out that Scripture points to
the only authority the Church needs: Jesus Christ.

As we explore this theme from the Reformation
(a central theme of Christianity)
we recognize the context of the 16th Century
is a bit different from today's.

Whereas the Reformers fought
from inside a corrupted system,
today we find ourselves as outsiders
living in a context of consumerism.

As we move forward,
we'll explore the theology of atonement
and touch on the idea of God being wrathful toward sin.
This will help us understand what it means
to declare Christ Alone
in our context of consumerism.

THEOLOGY OF ATONEMENT

Obviously we don't have enough time

to do an exhaustive exploration of the bountiful theology

that can be discussed on the cross of Jesus Christ,

but a central idea of the cross is that of Atonement.

Another word scholars like to use is Propitiation:

that is the action of appeasing a deity.

We'll come back to this word propitiation later on.

THEOLOGY OF GOD'S WRATH

But now we already have a particular theology of God.

Because now we understand that God needs to be appeased.

If the cross was a sacrifice of Atonement

that means God needed to be appeased.

Wait a minute...

Isn't God all loving, gracious and forgiving?

Isn't He compassionate, slow to anger

and abounding in love?¹

Why then, would God need appeasing?

Couldn't God just forgive us and be done with it?

All throughout the the Bible

¹ Psalm 145:8-9

we learn that God cannot live in the presence of sin.²

He is too holy and just to allow it.

God's very being cannot coexist with sin.

So when His chosen people sinned,
something had to be done.

Otherwise God couldn't dwell
with His chosen people.

God could not simply forgive and forget

because to forget would deny God's infinite nature.

God doesn't forget.

He forgives, but the reality of sin
still needs to be dealt with.

And so God's wrath needs to be appeased.

So God initiated the sacrificial system

as a temporary means of covering Israel's sins.

Theologian James Boice

draws attention to the ark of the covenant

which was kept in the Holy of Holies in the Temple.

The ark of the covenant was

² Psalm 5:4; Isaiah 59:2; Habakuk 1:13

a wooden box covered in gold
and contained the tablets Moses received from God
outlining the 10 Commandments.

On the top of the box were two cherubim
whose wings stretched upward and outward
forming a seat like shape.

This was called the “mercy seat.”

Every year the high priest
would enter the Holy of Holies
to make a sacrifice on behalf of all Israel.

This day was the “Day of Atonement.”

The high priest would offer a sacrifice for his own sins,
then enter the Holy of Holies with the blood of a second sacrifice
and sprinkle the blood on the mercy seat.

This sacrifice was to cover all the sins of Israel;

it was propitiation (the Greek word for “mercy seat”)

James Boice comments,

*“Now, as God looks down from between the outstretched wings of
the cherubim, he sees not the law of Moses which we have broken
but the blood of the innocent victim...Propitiation has been made,*

and his love goes out to save all who come to him through faith in that sacrifice.”³

God cannot tolerate sin,
and so established a system
that would appease His wrath toward sin,
so that the relationship between
God and His people could continue.

We cannot stress this enough:

God has a problem with sin...

God establishes a solution.

The downside to this system
(and the reason why it was a temporary fix)
is because sacrifices were required regularly.

Every year they had the Day of Atonement
but throughout the year
Israel would come to the Temple and offer sacrifices

³ Boice, James M. *Whatever Happened to the Gospel of Grace?* (Illinois: Crossway, 2001), 99.

for various sins committed.

The cost of sin was blood.

When Adam & Eve disobeyed God in the garden

it says they used fig leaves to cover their nakedness/shame.

When finally confronted by God,

God makes garments of skin.

In other words,

something had to die

in order to cover their shame.

The sacrificial system

meant a nation could have their sin and shame covered...

but a lot of blood had to be spilled for that.

This is because **finite sacrifices weren't enough**

to cover the sins that stirred God's infinite wrath

So the only way God's infinite wrath

could be appeased

is with an infinite sacrifice.

So God Himself would need to provide such a sacrifice.

“For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.” Colossians 1:19-20

Jesus Alone was that infinite sacrifice.

He alone could live the life we couldn't.

He alone could be that atoning sacrifice, once for all.⁴

It's no wonder the cross of Jesus

is the centre of Christianity.

I know we highly value Christmas

and the moment God became human,

but all of it is precursor to the climax of the cross.

At the cross

Jesus (the God-Man)

becomes our substitute (dies the death we deserved),

becomes our atoning sacrifice

(covering our sins with His blood),

⁴ c.f. Hebrews 10:1-18

and satisfies God's wrath toward sin
once and for all.

That's typically how many Christians understand the cross.

But that's just half of the picture.

The first half is Jesus took our place, covered our shame,
forgave our sins and restore our relationship with God.

Boice says,

*"This doctrine is of fundamental importance. Yet it is only one-half of what is necessary. It is the negative side. The positive side is the **imputation of Christ's righteousness to us**, so that we are now able to stand before God clothed in that righteousness; for that to happen, Jesus needed to live a life of perfect righteousness...**his perfect, active obedience was necessary for our salvation.**"*⁵

Jesus' sacrifice doesn't simply deal with our sin.

Because of His own righteousness,

our sins are dealt with

and now we can be presented before God

and seen as righteous.

⁵ (Boice, 102).

No matter how bad we feel,
no matter what we've done,
we are seen as righteous
because we are covered in Christ's righteousness
before God.

CONTEXT OF **CONSUMERISM**

So what does it mean

to declare Christ Alone in our culture now?

In our consumerist culture

it means the only thing we need to fulfill us is Christ.

We're constantly being told what we need.

Advertisers say what's necessary to live.

Governments are formed based on

promises they give that will benefit us.

We are conditioned to view everything around us

asking the question, "How does this help me?"

And Christians aren't immune to this.

We pick churches this way:

does this church make me feel this,
does this church feed me like this,
does it fit my time schedule/convenience,
does it fulfill my preferences?

We also pick friends this way:

do they fill this need within me?
do they share *my* views?
do they resonate with where I'm at?

But at the heart of consumerism

(what goes on deep within our souls)

is a **yearning for something more.**

There is a part of us that has to believe

that there's more to life than this.

There has to be more to life than

go to school, get a job, buy stuff, retire, and die.

There has to be more to life

than constantly trying to fulfill this longing in us

only to still feel empty after attempting to satisfy it.

That something *more* we're craving is JESUS CHRIST!

The Reformers fought to uphold *Christ Alone*

because the Roman Catholic Church

had placed authority elsewhere (i.e. leadership of the church).

The truth applies to us today,

but the battle line starts elsewhere.

To declare CHRIST ALONE is to say,

I find all fulfillment in Christ

which means everything I say and do is in response

to everything I have in Christ.

It means I don't need more;

I don't need to put the pressure on others to fulfill me;

I don't need things to be done a certain way...

what I need is **Christ**.

Nothing we can do, say or think

will add to the improvement of our lives, our faith, our salvation.

All we need Christ alone!

In Christ alone my hope is found; He is my light, my strength, my song;

This cornerstone, this solid ground, Firm through the fiercest drought and storm.

What heights of love, what depths of peace, When fears are stilled, when strivings cease!

My comforter, my all in all— Here in the love of Christ I stand.