

## What the Cross of Christ Destroys

Sola Fide: Justification By Faith Alone – Part VI

Romans 3:29-31

### Introduction

Several years ago, a university professor was teaching a class on rappelling. This sport involves securing a stout rope on top of a cliff and lowering yourself to the bottom of the cliff. The instructor took her class to the roof of a campus building, secured the rope to a large steel grid, grasped the rope, stood on the edge of the roof, and leaned out over the edge. To the horror of the class, the grid popped out of the roof and the professor plunged to her death. She had faith in her rope; she had faith in her ability to rappel, and she had faith in the steel grid to which she had tied her rope. The problem was not her lack of faith, but one of the objects of her faith. The anchor to which she had entrusted her life was faulty.<sup>i</sup>

I read, some time ago, about an executive in a downtown office building. He loved to scare new staff members when they were in the board room of their suite, which was on the twentieth floor. He would suddenly leap against one of the large, floor-to-ceiling windows in the board room. Of course, the windows were made of very strong, thick glass, which was strong enough to withstand incredible pressure and wind force. One day, he was initiating another new staff member that he wanted to startle and impress with his bravado. Shoulder first, he rammed into the window, as he had done many times before. This time, however, to the shock and horror of his staff, the window suddenly shattered. He plunged out of the window to his death. Was it foolishness on his part? Without a doubt. However, he was exercising faith in an object that was weaker than he thought – and he died because of it.

One author tells the true story of something that happened in the nineteenth century. It is the story of Sam and his wife Bessie, who lived on the west bank of a wide river. Across the half-mile river was a small trading post that sold everything, from tools and supplies to medicine. Because there were no bridges, they crossed the river by rowboat in warmer seasons and in winter, they crossed on the ice. One winter, they briefly shared their cabin with a traveler who, unknowingly, shared something with them – a highly contagious disease. In a matter of weeks, Bessie had developed a high fever. Sam recognized the symptoms and knew his wife had only a few days to live. The antidote, which would kill the bacteria, was available at the trading post.

It was early winter and the nights were cold. Although the river lay frozen, Sam was confident that the ice was neither thick enough to support his weight nor thin enough for his boat. But he dearly loved Bessie and determined he would rather die trying to cross the ice than live without her. He kissed her fevered brow and went down to the river.

Sam had never tried to cross the river on foot this early in winter. So, he pushed a large plank of wood in front of him, as he stretched his body on the ice, hoping that distributing his weight might keep him from breaking through. In his heart, however, he believed that the ice was not going to support him. Slowly, he inched out onto the ice, praying as he slid the board before him. Things went well for the first twenty or thirty minutes and he went far out on the river, but then, the ice began to groan. Slowly he scooted forward, to the sound of more groaning. He said more prayers and, after sliding a few feet further,

the ice began to creak. Then, there was a roar, with a terrible crashing sound – the ice was breaking up! Sam clamped his eyes shut, bracing for the icy waters to engulf him. The roaring grew louder and louder. What was happening?

Sam turned and looked behind him. A man was racing a team of horses and wagon across the ice. The horses galloped past him, drove up the other bank, and stopped at the trading post. Sam leaped to his feet, threw his arms in the air, and shouted, “Hallelujah!” – now a Pentecostal. He ran across the ice to the store, got the medicine, hitched a ride back on the wagon, and raced home to his wife.<sup>ii</sup>

He had no more fear – just confidence.

He did no more crawling – but running.

He had no more thoughts of perishing – but assurance that the ice would hold.

Now, there is another part to this story that I particularly love. John and Nancy were friends of Sam and Bessie. They lived in a cabin on a high bluff that overlooked the river. John had been watching, through his binoculars, and had seen Sam’s predicament clearly. Nancy called him away for a few minutes, and he missed seeing the wagon race by. When he returned to the window, he saw Sam leaping for joy and then, running without reservation across the frozen ice. What had happened? What had turned Sam from a creeper into a leaper?

In some way, God must have given Sam more faith, right? Not at all. Sam now had a deeper understanding of the object of his faith.

In I Corinthians, chapter 2, verses 1 through 2, Paul writes,

***And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.***

In Philippians, chapter 3, verses 8 and 9, he writes,

***More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in***

### ***Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith.***

In other words, Paul said, “I want to deepen my understanding of Jesus Christ and His cross work; that which forms the basis and foundation of my faith. So, give me a deeper appreciation and a fuller understanding of Christ’s sufferings; His redemptive act of dying; the death and dying passion and work of Christ on all those who place their faith in this truth, this divine Substitute.”

For several weeks, we have been discussing the issue of faith in Christ alone. We have tested the rope of our salvation; we have crawled out on the ice of our faith in Christ; we have pressed against the window of divine revelation, and all of them have held strong.

Like Sam, on that frozen river, true faith changes the way we think. It also changes our behavior. Faith in Christ, who died for us on the cross, establishes, strengthens, enlivens, regenerates, redeems, and then, strengthens us with resolve for holy living.

## **What the Cross of Christ Destroys**

The cross also destroys some things, however. Not only does the cross work of Christ build some things in us that change our lives, but the cross work of Christ also destroys some things that radically change our lives as well.

In the gospel of Matthew, chapter 10, verses 34 through 36, the Lord warned that the cross would divide families like a sword. The cross could very well destroy your ability to enjoy family and friends. Why? Because the cross of Christ is foolishness to those who do not believe.

Paul warned that the cross would invite mockery and disdain. He wrote to the Galatians, in chapter 6, verse 12, that there would be those who would not want to be identified with the cross of Christ. Why? Because identifying with the cross of Christ could very well destroy a peaceful, passive existence.

And, at the close of the great third chapter of Romans, the apostle Paul informs us that the cross of Christ destroys three things. They are:

- pride,
- prejudice, and
- presumption.

**The cross destroys the right for personal pride**

1. First, the cross destroys the right for personal pride.

We have already covered this subject, but Paul summarizes, in verse 27, of Romans, chapter 3,

***Where then is boasting? It is excluded. . . .***

Literally, boasting, or pride, is locked out! It has no place in the picture of justification.

Boasting is an uninvited guest in the heart of the true believer. Why? Since believers had nothing to do with earning their salvation, which was a gift from God through Christ, then they have nothing to brag about.

The only thing we could ever do is brag about Jesus Christ. He is the subject of our highest thoughts. He is the object of our deepest love. He is the theme of our music.

John's revelation unfolds the future scene in heaven, in chapter 5, verses 12a, and 9 through 10 of the book of Revelation, where believers are singing that great chorus,

***. . . Worthy is the Lamb that was slain . . . for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth.***

This says of the Lord our God:

- You were slain;
- You redeemed us;
- You purchased us with Your blood;
- You made us priests unto God;
- You placed us in the kingdom;
- You allow us to reign with You in the new heaven and the new earth!

What did we do to deserve any of that? Nothing!

No wonder Paul exclaimed, in Galatians, chapter 6, verse 14a,

***But may it never be that I would boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ .***

..

The cross of Christ destroys any misguided right to personal arrogance and pride.

### **The cross destroys the root of personal prejudice**

2. Secondly, the cross work of Christ destroys the root of personal prejudice.

Look at verses 29 through 30, of Romans, chapter 3,

***. . . is God the God of Jews only? Is He not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, since indeed God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith is one.***

In other words, this is back to the idea that, surely the Jew has a special connection with God; surely God views the way in which the Jewish people get into heaven differently from the Gentile. During the days of Paul, the Jewish man would rise every morning and pray a prayer that included thanksgiving that God had not made him a Gentile.

The problem with the Jew in Paul's day was not so much in considering themselves as belonging to God, but believing that God belonged only to them! This is dramatically illustrated in the life of the prophet Jonah.

God told Jonah to go and hold a city-wide crusade in Nineveh. He was to warn them that, if they did not repent and follow after God, they would be destroyed. So, what did Jonah do? Instead of running for God, he ran from God, by boarding a boat that was heading the other way. While on the boat, God sent a storm and then, a big fish or whale. Jonah eventually gets pitched overboard and the whale swallows Jonah. Jonah survives in the belly of the whale for three days, until he personally repented and said, in the last line of his prayer, in chapter 2, verse 9b,

***. . . Salvation is from the Lord.***

That is the lesson God wanted to teach him. Salvation is from the Lord; that is, the Lord decides, not man.

A true preacher does not target his audience based on race or color or standard of living. There are pastors and professors today, who teach how to plant a church by the principle of prejudice. Scores of seminary graduates are actually planting churches in neighborhoods, based on demographic studies of the resident's education, race, and income levels.

Ladies and gentlemen, the gospel is colorblind – and the church should be too! The gospel is classless and raceless. In fact, the gospel creates an entirely new race of everyone who believes, as we are told in I Peter, chapter 2, verse 9.

The problem of prejudice has a deeper problem that the world does not know how to fix. The reason the African American and the Hispanics do not like each other has nothing to do with race. The reason

white people do not like brown or black people has nothing to do with color. The reason the Japanese do not like the Chinese and the Chinese do not like the Taiwanese has nothing to do with language or geography.

Prejudice, ultimately, is a problem of the heart! When God redeems and reforms your heart, prejudice becomes a thing of the past!

Jonah wanted God to stay on his side of the railroad tracks. He wanted God to stay in the Jewish neighborhood. He was thinking, "Lord, I don't want you in the Gentile neighborhood . . . You belong to us."

Furthermore, Jonah was afraid that the Ninevites would repent, which they did, from the King of Nineveh to the last person in the city. The last thing Jonah wanted was a Gentile for a brother. That was asking way too much.

Jonah, and the rest of the nation, said it like this, "Salvation belongs to the Jew."

That is different than saying, "Salvation belongs to the Lord."

I find the fact incredibly amazing that it took Jonah three days in the belly of a whale before he finally gave in and said, "Okay, salvation belongs to the Lord."

As soon as he prayed that, according to Jonah, chapter 2, verse 10, God had the whale spit Jonah onto dry ground.

Now, if I had been thrown overboard during a storm and saw a huge whale coming toward me with its mouth open to swallow me, by the time I tumbled down into its stomach, I would be saying, "Okay, okay, salvation belongs to the Lord, salvation belongs to the Lord!"

Jonah took three days?! Why was Jonah so stubborn? He believed not only that the Jew belonged to God, but that God belonged to the Jew.

Paul is teaching about this principle in Romans, chapter 3. The question would arise, for those who come to Christ by faith alone, is there any special connection or claim for the Jews who come by faith? Paul answers, by saying, in effect, in verse 30, "There's only one God and if that one God accepts both Jew and Gentile by faith alone, then the ground at the foot of the cross is level."

Jew and Gentile alike are welcome. There is no special connection; there is no special favor – when a person comes to Christ, they are equally precious to God the Father.

The cross destroys the root of personal prejudice.

### **The cross destroys the rationale of personal presumption**

3. There is one more thing that the cross of Christ destroys. Not only does the cross destroy the right to personal pride and the root of personal prejudice, but, finally, the cross of Christ destroys the rationale of personal presumption.

Paul writes in Romans, chapter 3, verse 31,

***Do we then nullify the Law through faith? May it never be! On the contrary, we establish the Law.***

In other words, since we are saved by grace through faith, apart from the works of the Law, do we then presume upon the grace of God by violating the law?

That is the question that Paul will answer more thoroughly in chapter 6, verses 1 through 2, saying,

***What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase? May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it?***

The question could honestly be asked, "Since the Law does not matter as far as getting anyone into heaven, the Law is then, essentially meaningless, right?!"

No. Paul says, in chapter 3, verse 31b,

***. . . On the contrary, we establish the Law.***

## **Ways in Which the Cross of Christ Established the Law**

What does Paul mean that, effectively, the cross work of Christ established the Law? He gives two ways.

### **The cross upheld the standard of the Law**

1. First, the cross established the Law by upholding the standard of the Law.

At the cross of Christ, the essential nature of God's justice and holiness triumphed. The standard of God's holiness was not abolished by the crucifixion, it was upheld. The cross was absolutely necessary because the Law is not negotiable.

James Montgomery Boice illustrated this with a couple of very good thoughts.

Suppose God had declared that the cross of Christ was unnecessary. Suppose He had said, “I do not think it will be necessary for Me to send My Son to die for sinners. By grace I will allow them to be saved in the way they want to be saved; that is, by their own attempts to keep the Law. Since they cannot keep the Law perfectly though, I will set a certain standard that they will have to attain. We will call it a ‘passing grade.’ If they reach that, I will save them. If not, they will be lost.”

Suppose God set the passing score at seventy percent of the just requirements of the Law. Would He then have diminished or nullified thirty percent of the Law? And what if, in that thirty percent, the commands to not steal or commit adultery were violated? What if God put the passing score at fifty percent? Would not half of the Law have been set aside?

If the cross were unnecessary and God saved us on the basis of whatever we could do, since we do not keep even one part of the Law perfectly, God would actually be setting aside the entire Law. Instead, the cross of Christ revealed that God took the Law seriously – seriously enough to require the life of a Substitute, who, in this eternal case, was His own son.<sup>iii</sup>

That leads me to the second thought.

### **The cross fulfilled the verdict of the Law**

2. Secondly, the cross established the Law by fulfilling the verdict of the Law.

In the words of William R. Newell, “The cross of Christ established the Law by having its penalty executed.”<sup>iv</sup>

Robert Haldane wrote, “Can there be any greater respect shown to the Law, than that when God determines to save men from its curse, He makes His own Son sustain its curse in their stead, and fulfill for them [the depths of its verdict] – for the wages of sin is death?”<sup>v</sup>

God could have:

- loved us into heaven,
- looked the other way,
- graded us on a curve (yea, you’re better than other people),

- graded for sincerity; that is, God is at the top of a mountain and there are many paths up the mountain, but they all lead to God.

That sounds intelligent, until you realize it makes God a fool. If there are many paths to God, why send His Son to die? If other ways exist to God, why do all that He did at Calvary; why have the Son of God go through the humiliation and suffering of the cross?

There is no curve; there is no passing grade for sincerity; there is no seventy percent passing score. The cross of Jesus Christ established the need for a perfect score, and the fact that we would never earn a perfect score. But then, through Christ’s atonement on our behalf, God erased the failing grade of those of us place our faith in Christ. By God’s grace, He writes, into that column, the perfect score of Christ – attributed to our account. That allows us entrance into heaven.

I read, recently, about an advanced philosophy course being taught at a university. The professor was legendary for failing students. The time for the final exam was approaching and the professor announced that each student could bring one 8 1/2 by 11 inch sheet of paper, with everything they could fit onto it, to help them on the exam. The students, of course, crammed every bit of information they could on that one sheet, writing very small, from one edge of the paper to the other.

The day of the exam arrived. The students filed in with their pencils and their one piece of paper each. One student sat down in the front and simply placed his sheet of paper on the floor. It was blank. He then, brought in a graduate student, who was about to earn his doctorate in philosophy, and had him stand on top of the paper. The others protested, but this student reminded them, and the professor, that they had all been told that they could use anything they could fit onto the sheet of paper. The professor nodded his approval. This student was the only one who passed.

Not one of us will ever pass the test of the Law. God has established the Law. He upholds it and requires the verdict of the Law to be carried out. Only those who bring Christ in, the One who has kept the Law perfectly and died to stand in for all of us who have not kept the Law, will pass through the gates of everlasting life in heaven.

So, as we leave our study on the subject of “sola fide,” or “faith alone,” we do not leave it glorying in our faith, or worshipping our faith. Instead, we glory in the object of our faith; we worship the strong One

in whom we have placed our faith; we worship the  
Man of sorrows who took our place on that cross; we  
worship the Lamb of God who died to establish our

faith; we honor and worship the Author and Finisher  
of our faith, the Wonderful Counselor, the Mighty  
God, the everlasting Prince of Peace.

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<sup>i</sup> Bill Gillham, "Do You Have Enough Faith?," in Lifetime Guarantee, (June, 1992), Vol. XVI, Number VI, p. 1.

<sup>ii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>iii</sup> James Montgomery Boice, Romans: Volume One (Grand Rapids, MI, Baker Book House, 1991), p. 422.

<sup>iv</sup> William R. Newell, Romans Verse by Verse (Chicago, Ill, Moody Press, 1938), p. 128.

<sup>v</sup> Boice, p. 423.