

INTRODUCTION (Romans 3:21-26)

There is a scientific law found in the universe called “Cause and Effect.” That’s why every garden has a gardener; every house has an architect and builder; and every book has its author. We saw “Cause and Effect” in action, when just a year ago this month we all watched the awful devastation and death caused by the tsunami that hit Japan. The cause was an undersea earthquake off the coast of Japan with a magnitude of 9.0. Such tragedy however, has not only opened the door for relief efforts, but has also opened the door for evangelism, in which our own Free Will Baptist missionaries have been engaged.

But have you ever considered “Cause and Effect” when it comes to the cross? Many people view Christ’s death on the cross from a mere human perspective. Some think He was a victim of circumstance. Others focus on the mere physical aspects of Christ’s Passion Week. Even among evangelicals, there are those who self-centeredly think Christ’s death on the cross was all about them and their own well-being and welfare.

But was Christ’s death a mere accident? Was He a victim of circumstance? Did He die as a mere martyr? Was His death only a moral example? Did He die only to show God’s love for us? Was His death all about us? Were we the center of attention when He cried, “My God, my God why have you forsaken Me?”?

Only when we look into the Scriptures can we truly discover the cause of Christ’s death. We find that God did not simply turn over His Son into the hands of sinful man, hoping that fate or chance would take over in order to accomplish His will. Although there were the physical and visible aspects of the cross, there were also the spiritual and unseen. Although there is the manward side of Christ’s death as our substitute, there is also the Godward side. Why *did* God require death—even the death of His own Son on the cross? Why *was* it necessary for God to go to such extreme measures to provide man’s salvation?

THE HOLINESS OF GOD DEMANDED IT

The primary purpose of the cross was to glorify God—to vindicate His glory and His honor which man had violated by sin—to uphold and satisfy His holiness. The holiness of God is the theme of the seraphim song in the Old Testament, as one cried to another and said:

Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts;
The whole earth is full of His glory! (Isa. 6:3)

It is the theme of the heavenly creatures in the New Testament:

And they do not rest day or night, saying,
“Holy, holy, holy, (some manuscripts have holy nine times)
Lord God Almighty,
Who was and is, and is to come!” (Rev. 4:8)

Paul closed 1 Timothy praising God with this doxology:

He who is the blessed and only Potentate [Sovereign], the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality *dwelling in unapproachable light*, whom no man has seen or can see, to Whom be honor and everlasting power. Amen. (1 Tim. 6:15-16; italics added)

John wrote, “That God is light and in Him is no darkness at all” (1 Jhn. 1:5b). He is not “the” light, or “a” light,” He *is* light. God as to His very nature and character is light. This is not a reference to physical light, but spiritual light. However, light is often the means of God’s *visible* revelation to men.

Light represents God’s glory.

Upon completion of the tabernacle, “The glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. And Moses was not able to enter” (Ex. 40:34-35).

It was upon completion of the temple and the priests had brought the ark of the covenant into the Most Holy Place, “When the priests came out of the holy place, that the cloud filled the house of the LORD, so that the priests could not continue ministering because of the cloud; for the glory of the LORD filled the house of the LORD” (1 Kings 8:10-11).

In heaven, there will be “no need of the sun or the moon to shine in it, for the [very] glory of God illuminates it. The Lamb is its light” (Rev. 21:23).

Intellectually, “light” refers to absolute truth. Morally, it refers to holiness.

In all that God is, there is absolutely no error, falsehood, sin or evil; not even the least bit! “God is in Himself the Holy One, Separate One, beyond and above this world, true light, spotless purity, the Perfect One” (Keil & Delitzsch). However, man is sinful. And sin is contrary and offensive to holy God.

But man feels pretty good about himself and his accomplishments. He believes that as he climbs the evolution ladder (no pun intended)—gets smarter, stays healthier and gets richer, he will one day cure all the ills and evils of society and the world. And when he finally reaches the top, a master race—a utopia.

I’m all for better education, better health, and a stronger economy, and in most cases we’ve seen and experienced this, at least in America. But has it subdued evil in America? Is there a decline of wickedness, poverty, crime, hatred, and murder around the world? Simply by observation, we know that isn’t the case at all.

Beginning in Romans 1:18, the apostle Paul described the downward (not upward) spiral of mankind. When you come to the end of the chapter, there’s only one conclusion that can be made: man is totally and absolutely depraved—altogether sinful.

As we come to Romans 2, we enter God’s divine courtroom, where all the previous evidence is presented. The verdict? There is indisputable evidence that man is guilty of sin; guilty, beyond reasonable doubt!

When we come to Romans 3:10-18, God performs a spiritual autopsy on man (by the way, autopsies are performed on dead people). What is the divine Examiner's report? These are the findings:

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| 1. <i>There's nobody living right, not even one,</i> | 8. <i>Their tongues are as slick as mud slides.</i> |
| 2. <i>There's nobody who knows the score,</i> | 9. <i>Every word they speak is tinged with poison.</i> |
| 3. <i>There's nobody alert for God.</i> | 10. <i>They open their mouths and pollute the air.</i> |
| 4. <i>They've all taken the wrong turn;</i> | 11. <i>They race for the honor of sinner-of-the year,</i> |
| 5. <i>They've all wandered down blind alleys.</i> | 12. <i>They litter the land with heartbreak and ruin,</i> |
| 6. <i>No one's living right;</i> | 13. <i>They don't know the first thing about living with others.</i> |
| <i>I can't find a single one.</i> | 14. <i>They never give God the time of day.</i> |
| 7. <i>Their throats are gaping graves,</i> | (Taken from <i>The Message</i> , by Eugene Peterson) |

The autopsy is conclusive: man is sinful from head to toe! The whole world stands guilty before God (without exception); Jew and Gentile alike. There's no acquittal and no appeal. The divine Judge's verdict stands. The divine Examiner's report is complete and the cause of death is sin.

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. (Rom. 3:23)

[Man is] dead in trespasses and sins. (Eph. 2:1)

[He] walks according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air [Satan himself], the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience. —Eph. 2:2

[Apart from God man conducts himself] in the lusts of [his] flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and [is] by nature [a child] of wrath [under God's judgment]. (Eph. 2:3)

[We] were without Christ, aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. (Eph. 2:12)

His spiritual understanding is darkened; alienated from the life of God, and spiritually blind. (Eph. 4:18)

But you might say, "I'm a pretty good person. I love and take care of my family. I don't cheat or lie. I'm honest in all my business affairs. I grew up in church and I know about the Bible and Jesus. I bring my family to church and faithfully give my time, talents, and treasures to the Lord."

The problem is, you can do all these things and still miss heaven. In-and-of themselves, they are no guarantee that you're a true believer. The Scriptures are clear:

The heart is deceitful above all things,
And desperately wicked;
Who can know it? (Jer. 17:9)

Because of sin, we cannot give a fair and honest assessment of our hearts, but God can. Only He can give an accurate assessment, because only He can penetrate and examine the human heart and mind (Jer. 17:10). And please remember, morality and salvation are not the same. Mere religion and a relationship with God are not the same. The Scriptures are clear: "All have sinned" (Rom. 3:23). John said, "If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him [God] a liar, and His word is not in us" (1 Jhn. 1:10)

But we are all like an unclean thing,
And all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags. (Isa. 64:6a)

For 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. (Eph. 2:8-9; italics added)

Not by works of righteousness which we have done [not by merit] but according to His mercy He saved us. (Titus 3:5a; italics added)

So we are sinful. And sin is contrary and offensive to holy God. In fact, it's so offensive that God requires penalty and payment. When Adam and Eve disobeyed God in the garden, the result was just as God said it would be: spiritual death (separation from God), which eventually led to physical death (separation of the soul from the body). The first thing they did was try to cover their nakedness. So they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves coverings. But it was more than their nakedness they tried to cover up—it was their sin, shame, and guilt. They even tried to hide from God's presence.

The fig leaves may have covered their bodies, but couldn't cover their sin. The fig leaves were of their own doing, *their* own works. But in Genesis 3:21, we see *God at work*. He took an innocent animal, killed it, and blood was shed. He then made tunics of skin and clothed them.

What is the penalty of sin? Death (Gen. 1:17). What is the wages of sin? Death (Rom. 6:23). "The soul that sins shall die" (Ezek. 18:4). What did Adam and Eve deserve? Death.

But rather than God eternally banishing them to hell, forever separated from Him, He provided as sacrifice, a substitute, to symbolically bear their sin and die their death. A helpless, harmless, innocent animal was killed, and its blood was shed for helpless, sinful, and guilty man. God's holiness demands penalty and payment. His holiness, justice, and righteousness must be upheld and satisfied (without question and without exception). If he allowed sin to go unpunished, He would cease to be infinitely holy, which would be no holiness at all, and therefore cease to be God.

Because sin entered the human race through one man, and if sin is to once-for-all be dealt with, then only one man could provide atonement for sin (cf. Rom. 5). But there's a problem, all men are sinful, unholy, unrighteous, and guilty. And the only righteousness and holiness God will accept is His own. So what man could it be?

That little animal in Genesis 3 that gave its life is but a symbol and shadow of the ultimate sacrifice that would be given, as promised in Genesis 3:15. God Himself would provide a lamb. When John the Baptist came preaching he "saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, 'Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!'" Jesus, the God-Man, is holy, harmless, innocent, undefiled, and separate from sinners (Heb. 7:26). He is the pure, precious Lamb of God, without blemish and without spot (1 Pet. 1:19).

Christ on the cross displays the awfulness of man's wickedness and sin. It shows the extent that man will go, in order to try and rid himself of God. But it also displays the absolute holiness of God, and the extent He will go in order to fully satisfy and uphold His righteousness, in order to redeem and reconcile sinful man back to Himself.

All the wrath and holy fury that God should have poured out on us, was poured out on His Son. "The LORD laid on Him the iniquity of us all" (Isa. 53:6b). "For He made Him Who knew no sin to be sin for us" (2 Cor. 5:21a). He "Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree" (1 Pet. 2:24a).

Jesus bore all the sins of all humanity—past, present, and future. Therefore, God treated Him as if He committed all the sins of all humanity—past, present, and future, though He was sinless. All this great multitude of sins and its divine punishment fell upon the Son of God that day. No wonder that during those final three hours God draped the sun and total darkness covered the earth. It's no wonder Jesus cried out with a loud voice, "My God, my God, why have You forsaken Me?" God was accomplishing something beyond the physical. It was something the human eye could not see.

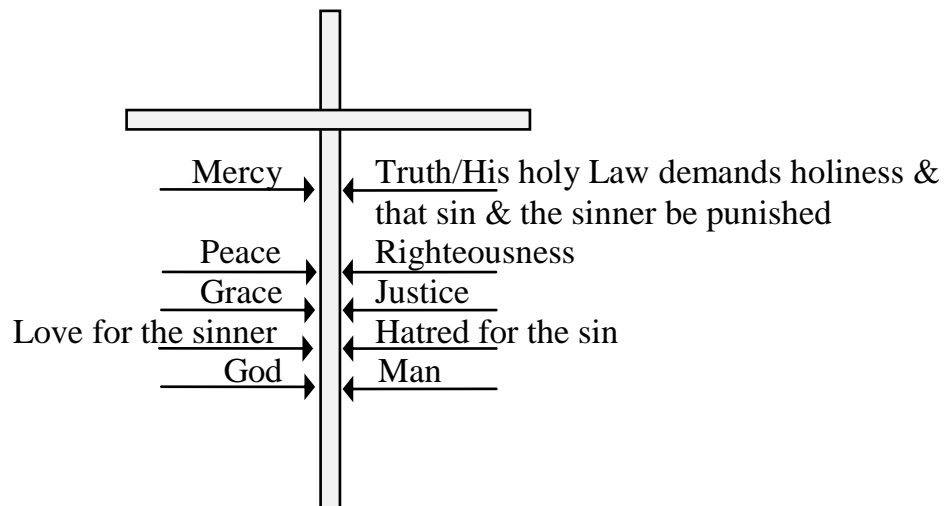
There we see the Holy One dying for the unholy;
The sinless One dying for the sinner;
The innocent One dying for the guilty;
And the righteous One dying for the unrighteous.

Think of it!
The Creator of the universe became the Crucified.
The Sovereign over the universe became the Sacrifice.

CONCLUSION

The only way the great gulf between sinful man and holy God could be bridged is through Christ's death on the cross. It's only there that sinful man can be reconciled and have peace with God. The writer of Psalm 85 clearly described the results of the cross:

Mercy and truth have met together;
Righteousness and peace have kissed. (Ps. 85:10)



It's only through Christ's death on the cross, that God can demonstrate His holy hatred for sin, and yet at the same time show His love for the sinner. It's only where His justice can be met, and at the same time justify the believing sinner who has faith in Jesus (Rom. 3:26). So the believer can humbly say:

Therefore, having been justified [declared righteous] by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. (Rom. 5:1)

There is therefore now no condemnation [we are pardoned, forgiven] to those who are in Christ Jesus. (Rom. 8:1)

*“Man of sorrows!” What a name for the Son of God Who came
Ruined sinners to reclaim! Hallelujah, what a Savior!*

*Bearing shame and scoffing rude, in my place condemned He stood,
Sealed my pardon with His blood; Hallelujah, what a Savior!*

*Guilty, vile, and helpless we, spotless Lamb of God was He;
Full atonement! Can it be? Hallelujah, what a Savior!*

*Lifted up was He to die; “It is finished,” was His cry;
Now in heaven exalted high, Hallelujah, what a Savior!*

*When He comes our glorious King, all His ransomed home to bring,
Then anew this song we'll sing, Hallelujah, what a Savior!*

—Philip P Bliss, 1875