

The Cross and The Sinner

By Paris Reidhead*

Will you turn, please, to Philippians the second chapter. I would like with to read, beginning with the 5th verse and concluding with the 11th. Our theme for today is "The Cross and the Sinner". We understand that the sinner alone is the best able to judge the importance of the Cross. We recognize that he has the personal interest in the cross that will give him the perspective that is needed to understand it.

Have you been lost, were you ever lost? I asked a congregation some years ago how many had ever been lost. There were about 100 people there. Four of them raise their hands, and then I asked, "How many of you have ever been saved?" And all of them raised their hands. That seems so strange to me, because the Lord Jesus came to seek and to save that which was lost, and only lost people can be saved. Have you ever discovered your lostness? Have you ever stood hopeless and helpless and bankrupt at the foot of the cross? Only there can you rightly understand it, and if you have, these words will have real meaning to your heart.

"Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Php. 2:5-11).

The cross becomes the frame of reference by which we can measure God's attitude towards sin. The Scripture makes declaration from the earliest pages that God is decidedly opposed to sin. Great penalty is attached to it. We find in the Garden that He declares the day they eat they shall surely die, and from Sinai He declares, "The soul that sinneth it shall surely die", (Eze. 18:4). And in Psalm, 7:11 He declares that "He is angry with the wicked every day." We this manifested in God's dealings with men in the pages of the Book we discover that because of their wickedness and the imaginations of their hearts, which were only evil continually, God visited the world with a flood, and as you see the door of the ark slide closed and locked by the hand of God, and as you see the waters begin to gush from the fountains of the deep, and the rain begin to fall and then rise until the highest summit is covered and the last hand slips from the topmost branches of the tallest tree, you have in this an evidence of God's attitude towards sin, that God is angry with the sinner. God hates sin.

Come down a little further, and you see people living in two neighboring cities that prided themselves upon their sin - Sodom and Gomorrah. And the extent of their iniquity has come down until today a legal term is associated with one of those two cities. And then the hour comes when God is finally through dealing with the city, and the heavens open. This time it is rain of fire that falls upon the inhabitants and obliterates the towns and - all that are in them save one family that in part escaped.

Then you came a little further and see His beloved people Israel, that He has drawn out of Egypt with so great power and mercy and grace and in wisdom, now in the wilderness, wandering until they shall have fulfilled the period by which the unbelieving generation shall pass away. We see this people begin to murmur and complain against Moses and indirectly against God, and the camp is visited with a scourge of serpents. As they languish in the fever that results from the poison and die, a large company of them, you have in their death a picture of God's hatred for sin and anger with sinners.

You come to a king, and he is anointed and chosen, sent on an expedition to punish God's enemies. The prophet comes and says, what is the bleating of the sheep and the lowing of the cattle that I hear? Oh, we've obeyed the Lord, said the king. But he hadn't, He'd been moved with selfishness and pride and disobeyed. The time comes when Saul calls for someone to finish the death that has already begun, and as he in shame and ignominy dies, you have a little picture of God's anger with sinners and His hatred of sin.

Thus we could multiply instances when God's attitude is shown, but no place does God so eloquently and vividly and perfectly reveal and convey to men His attitude to sin as at Calvary. I submit to you, that many of our conceptions of the cross are rather wrong. We've had an idea that there at the cross the Son appeased the wrath of the Father. I submit to you, I say, that it wasn't an appeasement of God at Calvary, it was the revelation of the wrath of God against sin with which the Son fully and completely concurred. He willingly went to the cross because His attitude towards sin was identical with that of His Father, and because He is God came in the flesh, this idea that some have acquired through sentiment rather than through Scripture, that the Father is vengeful and angry, the Son is compassionate and loving, and that the Son is appeasing the Father is, I say, without foundation in the Word. The Lord Jesus Christ hated sin. He was angry with the wicked of His day and pronounced dire judgment upon those who refused to repent and forsake their sin and their uncleanness. But it is at Calvary that God the Father through the Son reveals the hatred for sin on the part of the Godhead, for the Lord Jesus Christ recognizes that the justice of God must be satisfied. I do not, cannot express your attitude in this matter, but mine is this. I would rather go to Hell than to have God save me at the expense of His character. I would rather never have a prayer answered than to have it answered at the expense of the character of God. God must remain though all other things pass away, and if God ever has to stoop in any way to besmirch Himself to answer my prayer, whatever it may be, I'd rather it not be answered, I'd rather go to Hell, I say, than to be saved at the expense of the character of God.

And therefore our Lord Jesus Christ was moving in those steps that were necessary if the character of God was to be preserved. God can never act in any single attribute. He can only act in what He is. In all that He is. You must understand the attributes of God in some measure if you understand the actions of God. He never acts in one facet of His character. His sovereignty is never exercised at the expense of His justice. His love is never manifested at the expense of His holiness. But whenever God acts, He acts with His justice and His sovereignty and His love and His holiness all perfectly agreed and perfectly focused in that action.

So at Calvary you have the revelation of the hatred of God for sin and sinners, his anger with sinners, for there the justice of God and the holiness of God must be publicly vindicated. God who cannot lie, has said, "The soul that sinneth it must surely die." He has said, that every sin must come into judgment, and therefore He cannot forgive sin at the expense of His truth, His justice, His holiness and His majesty. It is therefore imperative that sin be punished, because God can never make peace with men. Any kind of sin, anybody's sin.

Now I want to say something which I hope will draw all of you in to think with me. God cannot forgive sin. I say it again, listen. God cannot forgive sin. He has said every sin shall be punished, and every sinner shall be condemned. Therefore, it is imperative that He do it. Now I am going to parenthesize, I'll dwell on it later, lest some of you should go away and give a half quotation. I'm grateful that every message is being recorded upstairs so that I won't be - I'll have that measure of protection. It's amazing how quotations get twisted between the pulpit and the door, but this is one that I insist that you think through. Here, God can't forgive sin. He can forgive a repentant sinner of his sin because that sin has been punished in the person of the believer's substitute, the Lord Jesus Christ. Sin as such cannot be forgiven. If there had never been a cross, if God's holiness hadn't been vindicated, if God's justice had not been exalted, if his majesty had not been upheld and His truth had not been kept, it would have at the cross, it would have been impossible for God to have ever forgiven sin. He couldn't do it. If He had it would have destroyed the foundations of moral government in the universe. Therefore, at the cross we see the measure of the malignity God's hatred for sin, for here His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ out of love for you, a love which the Father shared for you, and the Spirit shared for you, the triune God loved you, but He could not love you at the expense of His character, and so the only way that His love could ever reach you, was for the Lord Jesus Christ to take upon Himself your form and your likeness, submit Himself to every temptation and test, that you'd ever experience and then make His way to the cross as your representative, laden with your guilt and your sin, and there satisfy the Law in your behalf, there die your death. And He did that. And as you see the Lord Jesus hanging between heaven and earth and hear Him cry with a smitten, wounded, broken heart, "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken Me", in that hour when the Son, laden with my sin, knew that the eyes of the Father had been turned away and the wrath of God was being poured upon Him for sin, I say, you have the most dramatic, eloquent explanation of God's attitude for sin the universe has ever seen. He wouldn't look at His Son, and His Son was laden with your sin.

Now do you feel for a moment, my friend, that there is some way whereby you could by some mechanics you would employ or some methods you would use or ceremonies you would follow that you feel that there is some way by efforts you would exert and attempts that you would make, that you could satisfy this holy God? Never, never! He showed it when He turned His face away from His Son, when His Son simply bore your sin. There is no ground other than the shed blood of Jesus Christ.

But we move quickly. We not only see at the cross the revelation of God's attitude towards sin, but at the cross we have this same frame of reference by which we can measure the immensity of man's hatred towards God. Now I must insist upon a definition of sin which is commensurate with its malignity. I feel that we have made the mistake of telling our unconverted neighbors about their sins and leaving it go at that, as though the sins were the thing God is primarily concerned about. Now He is, but the thing that must be discovered by the sinner is not the fact that he has committed things which God calls sin, but that he is himself immeasurably sinful and totally sinful. He must see himself. He must move from the known, the deeds he has committed to the unknown, which is his own heart attitude towards God, and I'm afraid that there are many people in our churches that have never seen themselves. And I say this, even though you are born of God and do not see yourself, you will not make spiritual growth and progress until God brings you face to face with yourself.

There are those in this congregation who as little children put their faith in Christ and were certainly saved, but before there could be spiritual progress made, God had to bring them down into the valley of revelation and unveil their hearts. Why? Oh, they've come to trust Him, yes; they'd seen Him in love manifested, and they received Him and God counted their faith for righteousness. But, God wasn't simply concerned with taking them or keeping them out of Hell, He was concerned about taking the (heart) part of Hell out of them. Therefore, they had to see it. God had to reveal it. It had to be disclosed to them.

It will be that way with everybody. You must come sometime to see yourself, and there must be some light that converged into the deep caverns of your heart and disclosed to you what you are. You must soon, my dear, if you haven't already done it, you must come to the place where you recognize that the reason you did what you did was because you were what you were. What were you? God says you were a traitor, that it wasn't just an act of treason, but that it was an attitude of treason, it was a policy of treason you were a confirmed traitor. And then He said that you were a rebel, that in your treason, your heart had engaged in persistent, continued, intentional rebellion against God. Then He proceeded to say you were an anarchist, with no government that you would consent to or recognize, save the whim and fancy of your own selfish heart. He then said you were an enemy of God because God governs the universe by a law of benevolence in which He sought to insure the greatest happiness and highest good of everybody, including Himself, and you had committed yourself to a government to insure your own happiness and pleasure at the expense of God and everybody else. And you were a transgressor because when the will of God got in the way, you transgressed it. Now I am afraid that frequently we begin with the transgression and never move back to the anarchy, the enmity, the rebellion and the treason that's in the human heart. We say you lied, therefore you're a sinner.

My dear, let's move beyond that, let's move back; that the reason a person lied was because he wanted to please himself, and the reason he wanted to please himself was because he was reigning as god of his life and he was offering the sacrifice of his transgressions at the altar of his own pleasure. It's the cross that shows it. You come to Calvary and there you see the proud, religious leaders, and governmental authorities, when their little thrones have the whisper of something that they can't control blown against them, as in the case of Pilate and his ambitions, and in the case of Peter and his betrayal - at the cross as you analyze it and study it, you get a glimpse into the caverns of the human heart, and you see you. My friend, there wasn't a thing that Pilate did that you haven't done. There wasn't a thing that Peter did that you couldn't have done. There wasn't a thing that one of these calling, hooting savages that danced, as it were, around the stake where He were held, there wasn't a thing that they did that you couldn't have done.

I want to submit to you today that you do not know yourself until you have discovered that, there is not a sin that anyone ever committed that you couldn't have done. Do you hear me! There is no sin that anyone ever committed of which you were not potentially able. The reason that you didn't was because you didn't have the opportunity and the incentive and the background that these and others have had. It wasn't that you were made of different stuff. You come to the cross, and the world gathers at the cross, and at the cross you see man's fathomless, bottomless ocean of hatred against God that bubbles

and boils and writhes. Could man have chosen what he is? There it is at the cross. It was your hand that drove the nail, it was your hand that drove the spike, and it was your tongue that taunted.

You say, I wasn't there, I wasn't born. I understand that. But when you've once gotten a glimpse of God, you've seen yourself. You know, isn't it marvelous that the Christian life begins where the psychiatrist ends. Isn't? The psychiatrist will take your time and money to get you to the place where he can't do anything else for you, but it is that very place where God can do something for you. You see, He wants you to be honest with yourself, and He wants you to unveil what's there, He wants you to disclose what's covered. Then when you have done that he hasn't any answer for it. He says, well, that's just the land of a wretch you are now go ahead and live with it. But it only the grace of God that will press a man until he's stripped and broken, and crushed and open and lies there, and he takes sides with God against himself and says, that's what I am, Lord. What do you do about it?

Then He says, "I was made to be sin for you that you might be made the righteousness of God" (II Cor. 5:21). Made the righteousness of God. Aren't you glad that God had to know, insisted that He know the worst about you before He did for you. You see, most of us, most of our friends like us because of the best they know about us. If they ever knew the worst about us they wouldn't talk to us. You see. And when God insisted that He know the worst about you before He'd do anything for you, because He loved you, knowing the worst, and it put you at ease with Him. It takes away the strain. Why, if you had to come to God all slick and powdered and polished, and then had to walk like that, if you ever relaxed He'd throw you over as quick as that. But no, no. He knows the worst; He saw the worst and He wanted you to see it, so He gave you to see where you could see yourself, at Calvary. He put you in a place where you could see, there am I, brutal and cruel, hating God, licentious, that's me! It's all I am, and God loves me.

You have at the cross not only the revelation of God's hatred of sin, and the revelation of man's immeasurable hatred towards God, but you also have the revelation of God's love for such sinful man. For there it is, there it is, the place where everything comes to focus - God's hatred towards sin reaches its highest peak; man's hatred towards God reaches its highest and peak; and then comes the love of God in Jesus Christ. Where everything is at its worst, no place that it ever could be worse than that, and it's there, at the ultimate, that the Lord Jesus Christ loved you. It was your sin. And when He looked down and saw these people whooping and howling and calling for His death, slaying Him, you know what? He saw you right there. You were there in the mind of the Son you were there. You were as bad as they. He looked across history in the past and saw all of the monsters and brutes that had reigned and ruled and ravaged, and He looked down across history and saw all the Stalins and Hitlers and Mussolinis that the earth could produce and spawn, and He saw them all there, and they weren't any better than the others and they weren't any worse than the others, and they were sinners and all worthy of death, and He saw you right there. Oh, you wouldn't think that you could ever be up next to Stalin, but the only difference between you and Stalin was opportunity and incentive, not character. The Lord Jesus saw you there, and He was made to be sin for you.

Can you see now why perspiration like drops of blood burst from His brow? You thought you were pretty nice, didn't you? You thought you just committed a few little things, just a few. You thought that you maybe hadn't prayed as much and hadn't done this - you'd lied once or twice. Oh dear, did you ever see yourself? Did you ever have the thin talcum powder of self-righteousness rolled away? Have you ever had it open, have you ever looked into your heart and seen the cavern in which all the monsters of the ages writhe. Have you seen yourself, have you? The Lord Jesus saw you, and there He loved you, and he reached out and drew you to His breast. And He drew all men everywhere and He took your sin and was made to be sin for you, and then He submitted not only to have your sin lay upon Him, but He submitted to having the wrath of God laid upon Him because He now had your sin. And He hung there, suspended between the wrath of Hell and the wrath of men and the wrath of God, and He hung there in love for you. The revelation of the wrath of God can only be the means by which you can see the love of God. These people who say God is too loving to send a soul to Hell wouldn't have a God at all if they had their way. He'd submit to their operation and trimming. Why they'd have turned Him into a monster that would be a scourge to the universe. They want to have Him so loving that He's not going to send anybody to Hell, but He is going to send Hell to everybody, because whenever at law, governor, whenever the law courts release the criminal out of sentimental desire for him to escape from punishment, they are scourging the righteous. Do you see, they are scourging the righteous?

That's what some people would do with God. They'd have Him turn the whole universe into Hell. No, God couldn't do that, He couldn't do that. He could manifest His love for sinners and then He could say, Now look, if you will see yourself the way I see you, if you will take the attitude towards yourself the way I take with you, if you will come on the only ground that I can meet you; if you will stand here with me and agree with my judgment of you, and if you will renounce this course of treason and enmity and rebellion and anarchy and transgression, then my blood was shed to wash away your sin and my righteousness shall become your robe and my spirit shall be put within you and you'll become a new creature. Oh the marvel of the grace of God! It's at Calvary that the love of God is seen in its most beautiful lines, no place else. There at Calvary.

But something else. If you have come to Christ, to the Lord Jesus Christ, broken, crushed, hopeless, helpless, at the end of yourself, and if you have cast yourself on the mercy of God if you have been washed in the blood of God's dear Son and born of His Spirit, then I know one thing that has happened. I know you! I know you from God's Word, I know you from experience in my own heart, I know you from what I heard from others, and you're not difficult to understand. If you've been born of God there are certain things which are standard equipment with every Christian. You have an inborn hatred for sin. You see, you couldn't be here without the impartation of the divine nature, and when He imparts the divine nature, He imparts with that nature the same attitude towards sin that He has. If you're a child of God, then I know this about you. You may be tempted, you may have appetites which yearn for satisfaction illegally, but as far as the set of your sails is concerned, as far as the course to which your rudder is fixed is concerned, you're set to please God. Now that is settled. But it is not the question as to which way your rudder is pointed and the way your sails are trimmed. The question is, are you able to please Him, are you pleasing Him. And you say, no. I hate sin (some of you do anyway), I hate sin, and I want to be delivered from this, but I don't know where, I don't know how. How can I have victory?

A lad came to see me this week, He said, how can I have victory over this sinful heart. How can I have victory over these things which are tormenting me, tempting me and chaining me? How can I have victory over this?

There is victory, and the victory is at the same place - the Cross. For it is at the cross for you who once were a rebellious sinner had deliverance you from the penalty of your sin and also from the power of sin over you. Because since He was your representative, your Substitute dying for you, you were with Him when He died. That's the whole story. You were there. He was your representative dying your death. That's the reason why God can forgive you of your sin, because Christ died for you, and since He died for you, you were buried with Him at the time. The Scripture puts it in these words. "Knowing this that our old man is crucified with Christ, in order that the body of sin might be destroyed and henceforth I should not be the servant of sin" (Rom. 6:6). You must see this; you must see this, my dear. You must recognize that it was there when Jesus Christ died for you on the front of the cross; you were on the back of the cross with Him, crucified with Him. And it's there, since God saw you die with His Son, it remains therefore for you to see yourself crucified with Him. When you by faith reckon yourself to be dead indeed unto sin, your reckoning releases the victory of Christ into your heart for that time of testing and pressure.

So I came again. The Cross and the Sinner. It's there that you have the revelation of God's hatred of sin, every sin. Child of God, God hates your sin just as much as He hates the sin of the vilest rebel. Did you know that? You say, well, God isn't particularly angry about my jealousy. No, that doesn't bother Him. I don't get drunk. Someone else says. Well, God isn't particularly angry about my vicious backbiting, gossiping tongue. I don't steal. My friend, God hates sin. He hates everybody's sin. He hates all sin. He's going to have to hate it as long as He stays God. If God ever makes peace with the sin in my life as a child of His, then He is no longer worthy of my worship. God hates sin. What are you going to do about it? If you are here today and have never been born again, come to the cross. You come to the front of the cross. You come and see Christ dying for you, your Representative, Your Substitute, satisfying the Law on your behalf, taking your sin, dying your death. You receive Him; you open your heart to Him. Your sin is counted to Christ; the righteousness of Christ is counted to you and God gives you a new heart and makes you a new creature. Then you go through the cross into the Christian life. Will you do that my friend without Christ today. Come! There's life for a look at the crucified One.

But then if you are a child of God and you have turned your back on the cross. You say, back here I was saved, but now you're stumbling and falling. You are no longer to be the servant of sin, and turn around and look at the cross from the inside and

there you see yourself crucified with Christ, and reckon yourself to be dead indeed unto sin. And oh the deliverance that His love will bring. Shall we pray.

Look well, now. God has been speaking to some heart here today. Someone came in that said, "I'm just as good as the church members; I'm just as good as the Christians." I don't know why you came, but you came anyway; perhaps because your wife or some friend wanted you to. And your argument is then you know, you saw some people that were pretty bad, and you said, "I'm as good as they are," no use for me to go. Well, that's maybe true, but that isn't the truth, that isn't all of it. The fact is that you and they are so vile too that Hell is too good for all of us, and the Lord Jesus Christ knew it; He knew how bad you were, and of course He won't mean anything to you until you see how bad you were. Oh, won't you take a look at Calvary and hear Him cry, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" (Mat. 27:46) You know why God turned His face away from His Son? because He had your sin on Him, and if you turn your face away from the Lord Jesus, then that sure day He'll turn His face away from you. Oh, won't you come today? Won't you come and throw yourself at the foot of the cross, accept God's judgment of you, take sides with God against yourself, open your heart, receive the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now Christian friend. Let this word came to you. You had a failure this week; you've sinned. You haven't had victory. But there is victory. There's no excuse for us not to have victory. He provided victory. He said, "Sin shall not have dominion over you" (Romans 6:14) and if it's had dominion over this week it's because you have not availed yourself of His victory. Come on, now. Turn around. Look at the cross from the inside. Christ crucified for you, yes, but you crucified with Christ. Reckon yourself to be dead. Take your place. Stretch out the hands of your heart. Let Him bind you there, and let the victory of Christ be wrought out in your life this week.

"Now unto Him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His Glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Savior, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen" (Jud. 1:24-25).

* Reference such as: Delivered at The Gospel Tabernacle Church, New York City on Sunday Morning, December 14, 1958 by Paris W. Reidhead, Pastor.

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