

GOSPEL LOGIC

(1 Corinthians 1:18)

Last week the world was reminded about the events of Calvary. But those events (bare facts) need to be correctly interpreted. The gospel message is not simply a recital of the bare facts. It is an explanation of their *logical* connection. That's the idea behind the text before us today ... *"the logic of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God"* (1 Corinthians 1:18).

Some English translations have *"the word of the cross"* (RSV & NASV) or *"the preaching of the cross"* (KJV) or *"the message of the cross"* (NIV & NKJV). But the more precise term - *logic* - embraces them all, namely the proper explanation of Calvary. The facts of the cross demand a *logic* of the cross. Notice the contrasting responses to Calvary. Some people hear about it but they just *'don't get it'* ... they think it is trivial. They don't necessarily dispute the facts but they don't see the significance. They just shrug it off as no big deal. But others are profoundly changed. They are powerfully affected by the theology (logic) of the cross. To feel the impact of this text, consider ... 1. The bare facts, and 2. The interpreted facts.

1. The bare facts

The scene at Golgotha involved many facts, but three of them stand out:

Fact #1: The Person on the cross

The man on that cross is God's Son! He is *"all the fullness of God dwelling in bodily form"* (Col 2:9). They crucified incarnate deity! What an astonishing fact! How can that be *good news*? This gospel fact needs gospel logic to explain it.

Fact #2: The Penalty on the cross

Jesus not only suffered on the cross, he suffered a *penalty!* How do we know that the death of Christ was penal? Just ask what death is? The Bible answers that death is the penalty for sin: *"The wages of sin is death"* (Rom 6:23). Death is the penalty that God justly imposes upon sinners. *"The soul that sins shall die."* But here is the only man who never sinned, so why did he die? He never earned those wages so why is he being paid out? He was *"tempted in every way, just as we are--yet was without sin"* (Heb 4:15). We are facing a moral dilemma here that should agitate every thoughtful human. This fact demands a logical explanation.

Fact #3: The source of the penalty

From what source did Christ's terrible penalty come? The staggering answer makes the dilemma complete. It was God the Father who inflicted Christ's bitter agonies upon him. *"He was stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted ...it was the Lord's will to crush him, putting him to grief"* (Isaiah 53:4, 10).

That was the most horrible aspect of Calvary, drawing a cry of dereliction from Jesus: *"My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?"* Why have you abandoned me? I can cope with earth's men all being against me, and all hell's demons, but why is heaven's God against me? Why has my own Father turned his face away?

When Jesus was baptised God the Father said *"This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased"* (Matt 3:17). Later God the Father spoke from heaven again ... *"This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!"* (Mark 9:7). But now at Calvary we have this reality: *This is still my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased ... but now I am crushing him, abandoning him, penalizing him, putting him to grief. I am pouring out my wrath upon him. I am treating him as anathema.*

The bare facts of Calvary are very disturbing facts. They seem to impugn the holiness of God. How can these awful facts be "good news"? How is this a demonstration of *"Love divine all loves excelling"*? If you saw a good father bruising his innocent son, cursing, crushing, and rejecting him for deeds they both agree he is not guilty of ... would you conclude 'here is the supreme exhibition of love'? No! You would conclude from the bare facts that here is proof of malignancy. This is not 'love' ... or merely the absence of love ... it is the very antithesis of love!

Logic demands that we ask God 'Why treat your son like that?' Indeed the question is stronger ... 'What **right** did God the Father have to treat his innocent Son like that?' Decency demands an answer. Conscience demands an answer. The very nature of God demands an answer. How can he remain God if there is no satisfactory resolution to these massive facts? Is there such a thing? Yes ...

2. The interpreted facts

The Bible says one little word solves the problem ... "for". *"He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities ... He was cut off from the land of the living for the transgression of my people to whom the stroke was due"* (Isaiah 53:5, 8). The word "for" means Jesus stood in as the innocent substitute of his guilty people. The stroke was due to us, but our substitute bore it for us. There are at least two senses in which Christ acted "for" us.

First, Christ was our representative ('for' u`pe.r = 'on behalf of'). *"At just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly ... while we were still sinners, Christ died for us"* (Rom 5:6, 8). In this sense Christ played the same role as a solicitor does for his client in a court of law ... he acted on our behalf, in our interests ... **for** us.

Second, Christ was in our place ('for' avnti. = 'in place of'). Thus *"the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many"* (Matt 20:28). In this sense Jesus does far more than any solicitor ever does. What normally happens in court is that the legal representative pleads before the judge on behalf of his client. But when the guilty verdict is declared and the penalty is imposed it never falls upon the solicitor, but upon the guilty criminal he represented. The advocate withdraws to his private freedom and the culprit pays for his own offences. But not in the gospel.

Our advocate (Jesus) stood in for us to the fullest possible extent. Our penalty was suffered by him. Our crime became his. Instead of us being abandoned by God, Jesus was abandoned 'in our place'. He paid out our bankruptcy. There was a thorough exchange of places at Calvary.

"God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Corinthians 5:21). Christ took the place of his guilty people and suffered what they deserved, and they now stand in his place to receive all that Christ deserved.

All the logic of the cross hangs on this word "for"! *"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep"* (John 10:11). This is the gospel, the good news of substitutionary atonement. Now all the problems of the bare facts fall away. Now we can see why it was not mysterious or malignant for God the Father to so severely treat his innocent Son on the cross. **Jesus was not there as a private person.** He was the substitute for all his people. God the Father was not simply dealing with Christ but with you and me and all the sinners who will ever be saved. At Calvary we were all there in Christ our substitute. All our evil godless rebellion was imputed to him. All our guilt, curse, and condemnation ... he took it on himself.

Once Christ became sin for us (not inherently but officially) it was a *necessary* act for God the Father to punish him without mercy. The Father had to pour out his wrath and indignation. He cannot be indifferent to our sins. They had to be judged. *It would have been intolerably unrighteous if the Father had not crushed the Son once he took our guilty place at the hour of judgement.*

What a thrill this is for all who love Jesus. When we look at the horrors of the cross and the terrible penalty for sin, do not merely say 'there but for the grace of God go I'. No, it is much stronger ... 'there by the grace of God am I'! There I really am in my blessed substitute. There on that cross is nailed all my sin and all my guilt. There is all the hell I deserve. There God poured out all the holy wrath and retribution I deserve. And there it all ends with Christ's triumphant cry: *"it is finished."* There the wages of my sin are paid in full. *"Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus,"* (Rom 8:1).

Conclusion

Only two possible responses are indicated in the text. *"For the logic of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God"*. Which one applies to you? Do you believe the

substitutionary atonement? Is Calvary the power of God to you because you see Christ standing in your guilty place? Do you see there the greatest demonstration of love, where God was prepared to abandon his only Son rather than abandon his people? Is that what you boast in? Then you are "being saved".

Or is the gospel message something that has never really had an impact on you? Perhaps you have accepted the facts of the cross but have never been moved by the logical connection of those facts. So the message of the cross is no big deal to you. That is a dangerous state to be in ... "those who are perishing". But this is still a day of grace. God is still willing to open blind eyes. The Holy Spirit still quickens people from spiritual death to newness of life. Take Jesus at his word. *"Seek and you shall find. Knock and the door shall be opened to you. Ask and you shall receive"*. I have shared with you today a wonderful truth ... *The Doctrine of Substitutionary Penal Atonement*. May God bless each one of you with eyes to see this gospel logic.