

The Importance of Christ's Death and Resurrection

A common, popular view of how Christ's death on the cross justifies sinners says that God imputed the sins of the whole world (or for those who believe in limited atonement, the sins of the elect) to Christ at the cross; that when a sinner believes in Christ, God imputes the righteousness of Christ to the believer by doing an accounting procedure in the books of heaven and simply crediting the alien righteousness of Christ to the believer's account in heaven; that going to heaven is based solely on the faith that justifies and on forgiveness; that justification and forgiveness is something entirely external, is located wholly in God himself, and involves no change at all in the heart or personality of the one forgiven; and that the manner of life of the justified person has nothing to do with one's eternal destiny, because to add following Christ in obedience to faith is to add works to grace. Some form of these beliefs is common among professing Christians today.

One's view of whether or not a professing believer's conduct (obedience) relates to his eternal destiny is directly related to one's view of what Christ's work on the cross accomplishes *in* and *for* the believer. The Protestant formula of imputation of the alien righteousness of Christ to the believer, apart from any or little work of Christ *in* the person, makes it possible to protect justification from depending in any way on something humans might contribute. The Protestant position explains the value of Christ's work on the cross in terms of what Christ did on the cross *for* believers and *outside of* believers. For some people, this view then carries over into the post-justification views of the person because it allows the person to believe that he will go to heaven when he dies, even if he lives in blatant sin after conversion, because he believes God will accept the imputed righteousness of Christ to his account in heaven as a substitute for the holiness of life God desires of believers.

By contrast, the Anabaptist understanding of justification, conversion, and post-conversion sanctification 1) connects justification and sanctification; 2) connects justification and regeneration; 3) views conversion as accomplishing a profound and radical remaking of one's person (an "experiential justification"); 4) views salvation as also radically transforming the life (a "resurrectionist sanctification"); 5) emphasized *Gelassenheit* (abandonment, resignation in

faith); 6) emphasized *Gerechtmachung* (to make just or right) and minimized *Gerechterklärung* (to pronounce as just or right).

One way to summarize the previous paragraph is to say that Anabaptists viewed salvation as being incarnational, substantial, and experiential. They emphasized an indwelling atonement and an indwelling Christ. They believed that Christ's atonement, (Christ's death and resurrection), is reproduced in the one believing; that conversion or regeneration of the heart changes a person from a sinner to a saint and creates a new person; that God delivers the sinner from the condition of being a sinner; that God rescues the sinner from the dominion (authority) of the devil and translates (transplants) the sinner into Christ's kingdom; that God makes the new believer intrinsically righteous (not just righteous outside oneself on the books of heaven); that the power of the Holy Spirit through the risen Christ empowers believers to live the Sermon on the Mount; that through the believer's union with the risen Christ, God makes available to the believer all that Christ is and everything that Christ possesses (His life, righteousness, faith, hope, and love).

Anabaptists believed that the path to salvation requires ongoing **discipleship**. Discipleship begins at conversion when in faith and repentance one abandons or yields to Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. This requires acknowledging one's sinfulness, dying with Christ to one's independent spirit (his compulsion to run or control or take care of his own life), and repenting of living out of one's carnal nature. Discipleship continues throughout life when in faith and repentance one follows Christ as Savior and Lord by dying to one's independent spirit (one's "I will be my own god" spirit), by turning from temptation and sinful habits (Rom. 6; Heb. 12), and by turning away from trust in anything or anyone other than Jesus Christ. Christ was baptized into death (identified with death by entering into it fully) (Rom. 6:4). We are baptized into Christ and into his death. We identify fully with Christ and all He experienced. Discipleship requires following Christ as Lord as one intends to become the kind of person who learns to do the things Jesus would do if He would be living my life.

Anabaptists have traditionally believed that faith is dead if it does not produce good works (James 2:17-20). The Anabaptist understanding of the relationship between faith and works corresponds to Christ's view that only those who humbly trust Christ and follow Him in life can know His will and have eternal life (Luke 18:9-14; John 7:17; 8:17, 18). This understanding of the relationship between justification and sanctification, and between faith and works, agrees with Christ's words at the end of the Sermon on the Mount: "Not everyone that saith unto me,

Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven" (Matt. 7:21).

How is Christ's resurrection related to our obedience? According to Romans 8:5-13, the same Holy Spirit that dwelt in Christ dwells in believers. The Holy Spirit raised Christ from the dead, and this same Holy Spirit will quicken our mortal bodies. In the context, this statement refers to the Holy Spirit quickening our earthly bodies and raising us from the grave at Christ's second coming. "There is . . . now no condemnation" (Rom. 8:1-4), and there will be no condemnation when Christ returns to "quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you" (Rom. 8:11). And the reason there is now no condemnation and will be no condemnation on that future day when Christ returns is that the same Spirit that empowered Christ to live a holy life and raised his body from the grave lives in and empowers the believer to "mortify the deeds of the body" in this life (Rom. 8:13), and those who are mortifying the deeds of the body are walking on the path that leads to the resurrection of their bodies when Christ returns. This final resurrection of the body by the Spirit is the result of Christ's personal death and resurrection and the believer's personal death and resurrection with Christ as described in Romans 6:4.

God's purpose in the death and resurrection of Christ was not merely to deliver the sinner from guilt through forgiveness of sins so the person can go to heaven. God's purpose in the death and resurrection of Christ also included the intention to regenerate the heart and spirit and mind, to bring each person into an ongoing interactive living relationship with the risen Christ, and through the power of the Holy Spirit to empower the believer to participate in Christ's life, death, and resurrection.

The result of this ongoing, interactive, living faith relationship of the believer with Jesus Christ is ongoing participation in the actual life of Christ, death to sin and resurrection to new life, and growth in faith, love for God, and obedience. Christ's past work on the cross is, therefore, the basis for His present work in our life, and His resurrection makes it possible for Him to work in us today. Any past or present work of Christ on the cross, in our lives, or on our behalf that does not bring us into a living interactive relationship with Christ and produce His life in us, does not satisfy God, and therefore, does not justify us in God's eyes.

This reordering of one's whole existence goes far beyond simply being delivered from guilt for past sins. Rather, Paul is speaking about a condition in which one's whole existence is brought into harmony with God's purposes, and this depends not only on forgiveness of past sins but

also on the "in Christ" person's mind, heart, and will being surrendered to God in the midst of the daily events of life.

Biblical faith is more than "historical faith," or more than faith in the historical death and resurrection of Christ for my sins. Biblical faith is active participation of the mind, heart, and will in the promise or truth of which one is persuaded. The key to developing this kind of faith is developing an interactive relationship with Jesus Christ that fosters deep conviction out of which one lives. More than anything else, God's people need to develop the habit of prayer and meditation in the midst of life as it happens.

In Christ the believer can maintain faith, hope, and courage in the midst of this evil world. We live in a fallen world, a world filled with evil people, depressing news, and humanly hopeless situations. The Bible's view of reality is that Jesus Christ offers the believer faith, hope and peace in the midst of evil and tribulation. This is the message especially of Romans 5 and 8. I believe God's intention is to sustain the faith and hope of believers in the midst of evil and I believe God can sustain the faith and hope of believers as believers allow themselves to be drawn by God's love into an ever-deepening dependence on and experience of the presence of Jesus Christ (Rom. 5:5-8).