

The Meaning of the Cross

by Paul Washer

The speaker argues that most people miss the point of the cross, and that the true meaning of the cross is that God's justice demands that sinners be punished, and that Christ's death satisfied God's law and provided forgiveness for sinners.

Duration: 38:09

Scripture: Proverbs 17:15

Topics: "The Cross", "Biblical Interpretation"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker begins by asserting his right to critique the church's understanding of the gospel based on historical context. He distinguishes between theologians and 'pop theologians,' comparing the latter to pop music that is superficial and short-lived. The speaker then criticizes a preacher he heard on the radio who discussed the cross of Jesus Christ without emphasizing its true meaning. He emphasizes the importance of interpreting the Bible grammatically and not just subjectively, and expresses frustration with the idea of multiple interpretations.

Transcript

Today we're going to look at, it's actually prompted yesterday while I was working on the yard, I was also listening to a preacher on the radio. And it struck my attention that when he began his sermon, he says, you know, I'm going to tell you about the meaning of the cross. And I was surprised that he spent a lot of time talking about the cross of Jesus Christ, but did not put the emphasis where emphasis was due.

And did not truly explain the meaning of the cross. And he did something that is so common today. Let me just give you a little bit of background.

As you know, and I've said this before, wisdom was not born with anyone, nor will it die with anyone. Now if I stand up here today and I say that the church at large is basically missing the point about the gospel of Jesus Christ, you can look at me and say, well, who are you? Are you Billy Graham? Are you this guy or that guy? What gives you the right to stand up here and say the church at large is missing the point? Well, here's the point. History gives me that right.

You see, one of the things that you have to understand is this. There is a difference between a theologian and a pop theologian. You ever heard of pop music? It's the music that is popular, music given to the populace.

It's music that, for the day, kind of just jumps up, doesn't last very long. And one of the reasons is it's pretty superficial. You know, like Sonny and Cher, you know, I would die for you.

I would even climb a mountain for you. I never could figure out how climbing a mountain was more than dying for someone. But pop music is very superficial.

Well, also there's what we call pop theology, which is very superficial. Theology is the study of God, and there's a lot of what we call pop theologians on the radio. They're not truly trained theologians.

They just have a following. They haven't given themselves the study. They give themselves more to preaching.

And their preaching deals more with illustrations and stories and antidotes and cute little sayings. But as far as theology, no. Now, whenever someone comes to you and says, like I said this morning, the church by and large has missed the point with regard to the cross.

The first thing you need to ask them is this, why do you say that? The answer better be this, not only because I have found these things in the Bible, but because history backs me up. You see, if you take a look at 2000... If you say, for example, I believe a certain thing. If you stick Benny Hinn right here and me right here, if you can pull both of us apart, and if you ask Benny Hinn why he believes that all the stuff he does and the fact that he makes millions of dollars and he'll only stay in five-star hotels and all these different things, if you ask him why he does that, he will tell you, because that's what the Bible teaches.

And if you ask me, I'll say, he is completely wrong. And if you ask me why, I'll say, because this is what the Bible teaches. Now, the question is, both of us are using the Bible as our authority, so who's right? You know, that's the big question.

Who's right? Well, there's two things that you need to look at. One of them is called context, and the other is called history. First of all, I want you to understand something.

If the Bible says, or if I make a statement, the barn is red, it means the barn is red. I am so tired of speaking on university campuses and hearing students say, well, that's just your interpretation. And I say, well, here, interpret it grammatically.

Not according to the Spirit, not according to... Just grammatically, like you would in an English class. What is it saying grammatically? That's the first point. The second point is this.

We have 2,000 years of Christian history, okay? 2,000 years of Christians writing thousands and millions of books. Now, if I teach something on the cross, and you compare what I teach to 2,000 years of Christian history, and you don't find it anywhere in 2,000 years of Christian history, then you've got to decide who's right. 2,000 years of Christian theologians and writers or Paul Washer? Well, obviously, 2,000 years of Christian history and teachers are right.

Whenever someone teaches you something, one of the good things to do is to compare what they're saying to 2,000 years of Christian history. If nobody agrees with them, they're probably wrong, aren't they? And if we as Americans come up with some new theology or new way of doing Christianity, yet it disagrees with 2,000 years worth of Christians from all over the world, who's probably wrong? We are. You see, and so that's why I say today that on the teaching on the cross, most people are completely missing the point.

And when you hear a teaching on the cross, when someone preaches about the suffering of Jesus, what is it that you usually hear about? Physical suffering, right? Isn't that what... And I mean, the preacher... And we need to talk about physical suffering. But I mean, the preacher will talk about physical suffering and what will happen. I mean, he'll start crying, everybody in the congregation starts crying.

He talks about how the nails went through a certain part of the wrist because that was the only thing that would hold up a man. And how the nail went through both the feet at a certain place, and that in order to keep alive, the person would have to push up on the nail in order to take a breath. Because when you died of crucifixion, you died of suffocation.

They'll talk about the spear in the side. They'll talk about the crown of thorns on the head. They'll talk about all these different things.

The beating with the whip, and how he drug his cross, and the blood flowing down, and everything else. And then they'll tell you, by this we are saved. Now, that draws you to a certain conclusion.

How is it that the physical sufferings of Jesus caused by men somehow pay for our sins? It doesn't work out theologically. Are our sins paid for because the Romans and Jews rejected Jesus? Are our sins paid for because they whipped Him and beat Him? I was in a German Mennonite Bible camp in the mountains, the Alps in Romania. And I walked into their theological, they had a theological library.

And I walked in there and I saw a thing on the cross of Christ. So I pulled it out, and praise the Lord it wasn't in German. And the only book in there, I think, that wasn't in German.

And I started looking through it. And this is what the man said. God sent His Son who lived a perfect life.

Now this is a theologian. God sent His Son who lived a perfect life. And then, according to the plan of God, men rejected Him.

They beat Him. They crucified Him. They mocked Him.

They put a crown of thorns on His head. They stuck a spear in His side. And all these different things.

And God looked at that suffering that Jesus suffered at the hands of men. And He considered that to be payment for all our sins against Him. Now, a lot of people say, well, yeah, that sounds good.

Actually, historically, that's heresy. The deepest form of heresy. I mean, you can be wrong about a lot of things.

But if you're wrong about the cross, you're in trouble. Now here's what I want you to do. I want you to put two things together.

How is it, what happened on that cross that would cause God to forgive us of our sins? Now, the first question, though, is this. Why does the Son of God, God in the flesh, why is it necessary that He die? Why can't God just forgive everybody? You ever thought about that? Why can't He just... I mean, we're called to forgive people, aren't we? If you sin against me, I'm called to forgive you. And I'm not called to require a sacrifice or anything.

I'm just told to forgive you. So why can't God simply forgive? That's the first question you need to answer. And I'll show you a verse.

I want us to go to Proverbs. I'm going to condense about a week worth of lectures into one thing. So I just want to go to one text.

Go to Proverbs 17.15. Now look what it says. He who justifies the wicked and he who condemns the righteous, both of them alike are an abomination to the Lord. Now let's just consider this one phrase.

He who justifies the wicked is an abomination to the Lord. Now we've got a big problem. Most of the songs we sing today are going to be about God justifying the wicked.

That's what we sing about all the time. Man, God justified us. Even though we were sinners, God declared us to be right.

That's what justification means. God declared you to be right before Him. And you praise God for that.

But there's a big problem here. Do you see what it is? God says that anyone who declares the wicked to be right when they are not right, they are an abomination before Him. So if God declared you to be right when you were not right, it's an abomination.

He has made Himself an abomination. If God forgives the wicked, He Himself becomes an abomination. In the same way that if a judge forgives a murderer and lets him go, he's no longer a just judge.

It's so amazing to me how so many people when I speak at a university, the students are just furious because I say that God throws men in hell. They're furious when I say that. But you know what bothers heaven? Heaven has a problem with what God has done.

Heaven's problem is this. If God is a just God, He cannot forgive. He must punish the wicked.

That is the thing of the whole Bible. Have you ever wondered why God's got all these animals dying in the Old Testament? It's a symbol and a type. But the whole point is, if the sinner sins, he must die.

He must die. And if God justifies someone who is wicked, if He declares a wicked person to be innocent, then God is an abomination. God has become wicked.

Now we're beginning to see why it was necessary for God the Son to die. God cannot simply forgive. The law, the righteous law demands that the sinner die.

Demands it. You just can't push that away. You just can't say, okay, well, we're going to let them slide this time.

If God does that, He is unjust, He is wrong, He is sinful, He becomes just like the devil, and the devil's accusations against Him now are correct. Can you imagine the devil standing before God? Hey God, remember when we sinned against You? You were just then, weren't You? Cast us all out of heaven. Yeah, where's Your justice now, God? Huh? Where is it? These men, these balls of dirt, sin against You? You let them go.

Guess what, God? You've become like me. Congratulations. You see the problem? That's the problem.

Now, the only way that God can forgive sinful men is if God who made the law and God who demands satisfaction, if He Himself comes down and pays the penalty. That's why the doctrine of the Jehovah Witnesses is so blasphemous. Look at what they're saying.

They're saying that when the world fell, God created an innocent being, the Son, created Him, and then took this innocent being, independent from God, and put Him on a cross to die to fix the problem. See, that's not what happened. The Son of God is not a created being.

He is God. You see, the only way the law of God can be satisfied is by God. And you can use that against the Jehovah Witness.

If Jesus is not God, then everybody's going to hell because what was done on that cross is not enough. God made the law. God has to satisfy it.

It has to be God. The Jehovah Witness comes to the door and says, Jesus wasn't God. I said, just sit down like that and just start weeping.

I said, what are you crying for? Well, then we're all going to hell. Why? Because only God can satisfy God's law. Only He can pay the price.

And if Jesus is not God, then we're going to hell. Me and you and the rest of us. But you see, God, in order to forgive the wicked and still be just, He must die in the wicked's place.

That's the only way He can forgive is to die in the place of the wicked. Now, here comes the important point. How does He die? What is it about the death of the Son of God that leads to our forgiveness? How does His death satisfy the law? Now, here's something I want you to understand.

When someone says they've been saved... Now, I never do this to a young Christian, but if they're a seminary student or something, they're going to get this. If they say, I've been saved. And I go, from what? From what have you been saved? People usually say, sin.

Nope. Nope. Say, what do you mean, nope? Sin wasn't after you.

Sin wasn't going to throw you in hell. You have sinned, but the sin caused something else. Sin isn't going to throw you in hell.

Sin is not even a person. It's not a living being that's going to judge you and grab you and throw you in hell. From what have you been saved? This is going to really rock your boat.

I'll tell you from what you have been saved. From what you have been saved is not a what, it's a who. You have been saved from God.

You see, here's what you need to understand. God is the judge of all the universe. You have sinned.

Since you have sinned and made yourself an enemy of God, before the just judge, when you stand before Him, He will throw you in hell. Now, I hear a lot of people say, God doesn't throw anybody in hell. Well, that's really nice if you want to write that on the back of a Christian t-shirt or sing it in a contemporary Christian song, but it's not in the Bible.

Jesus said, you do not be afraid of men who can kill your body, but be afraid of God who can kill your body and throw you in hell. You see? Again, this God of ours is not very politically correct. He's not a tame lion.

Have you ever heard the statement, we see it in Romans 5, we also see it in Romans 1, enemy of God and hater of God? Have you ever heard that word? Enemy of God. You know what the problem is?

Contemporary Christianity interprets it differently than historical Christianity. You'll hear preachers say, when the Bible says we were an enemy of God, it means that we were an enemy against God.

That we were in rebellion against God. That we were against God. But it doesn't mean that God was against us.

That God was our enemy. And then they'll usually say something like this. It's like you're holding a gun on God.

God wants you to put that gun down. And then you'll be friends. That's not true.

All throughout historical Christianity, when it says that enemies of God, you know what it really means? Not only were you God's enemy, holding your gun on Him, God was your enemy holding His gun on you. You put your gun down, fine. He's still got His gun on you.

You're a criminal. You've broke the law. You deserve to die.

You put your gun down, surrender if you want, but you're still going to hell. Because not only are you His enemy, He's yours. God says things in the Bible like I will hate them.

I will come against them. I will fight against them. I'll raise up a standard.

Again, this God of 21st century Christianity is a lot different from the biblical one and a lot different from the one who's been preached throughout 2,000 years of Christian history. So you see, not only were you making yourself an enemy against God, God was your enemy. And the one from whom you need to be saved is God because He is coming.

Remember what Amos said? Be prepared to meet thy God. Remember what Revelation says? It talks about, I mean, He's coming and the captains and the great men of the world will cry out for the rocks to fall upon them to hide them from the wrath of the Lamb. He's not coming back with His hands like this going, oh, I just want to save you, but now you have to go to hell.

No, He's coming back. It says sword of His Spirit. I mean, everything else is going on here.

He's coming back and He's going to fight somebody because He's mad. Now, the problem that you have to see, there is punishment. We have broken God's law.

So now, we deserve to be punished. From where does that punishment come? Ask yourself that question. From where does the punishment come? We have grown up under preaching that tells us, well, if you sin and something bad happens to you, that's not God.

That's just the consequences of sin, just like the law of gravity. You jump off of a roof, you're going to get hurt. You sin, you're going to get hurt.

It's not that God's doing it, it's just that's the way things are. That's not true. God talks about coming in judgment all the time against people's sin.

He does. Just read the Bible all the time. I will come against you.

I will set My face against you. Okay? So, we realize that we have to be saved from God and His punishment. So, how is that punishment to be done away with? When Jesus, the Son of God, was dying

on the cross, it is not the spears of Romans or the crowns of thorns or the nails in His hands that save you.

It is not that that pays for the crime. The suffering that men heaped upon Jesus, God doesn't look at that and say, okay, good enough. That's not what paid for your sin.

What paid for your sin? Look in Isaiah 53. This is what paid for your sin. Isaiah 53 and verse 10.

But the Lord was pleased to crush Him. Now, you've all read 53 and you've heard gazillions of sermons on the radio and everything about Isaiah 53. But isn't it funny that when you hear a sermon on Isaiah 53, it's always verses 3, 4, 5, and 6 talking about the sufferings heaped upon the Christ by men.

But very rarely do you hear Isaiah 53.10. It pleased the Lord. Who's the Lord? The word here is not Adonai. It's Yahweh.

Or as some of you may pronounce it, Jehovah. I mean, it's God. It pleased God to what? Crush Him.

This is the Messiah. It pleased the Lord to crush Him. This word crushed, it refers to like... The best illustration I could give you is, imagine, you know what a millstone is? A millstone is what they used to have was a big stone, usually about this big, round, maybe about that tall, I mean a huge stone.

And then they placed another stone on top of that that actually rotated, okay? It turned. And what you would do, as you can imagine, you put grain, corn, and everything in between those two stones when they made their way through there. That stone would ground them to powder.

That's the terminology being used here. That's what it refers to. It pleased God the Father to crush His own Son and to ground Him into powder.

Now, another illustration would be this. Imagine you're standing at the foot of a dam that's a thousand miles high and a thousand miles wide. And you're standing right there at the foot of this thing.

It's filled with water. And in one second, the wall's pulled out of the way. What do you think's going to happen to you? I mean, it's over.

Your body's never going to be found. Or imagine you're standing there walking along one day and a star 6,000 times larger than the sun crashes to earth right on your head. What are we talking about here? How is it that that cross saves you? It's because on the cross, all the sin that God hates... You know, have you ever heard someone say the love of God is so great, you can't describe it? And that if you were to even get a glimpse of how great it is, it would drive you mad.

It is so great, it would literally drive you mad. And the only way you're ever going to be able to know more of the love of God is if God supernaturally strengthens you and glorifies your body because to stand in His presence and to know His love would be too much joy for you. You'd explode.

I mean, you just wouldn't be able to handle it. You'd go mad. Well, in the same way, God's hatred is so great, it goes beyond description.

And that if you were to even catch a glimpse of it, it would drive you mad. It would be like a little wax figurine this tall. You know, that has a nuclear bomb explode three inches from it.

I mean, you have no idea. The sin that evokes God's hatred, and I mean that word, hatred, okay? God hates. The sin that evokes God's hatred was placed on His Son.

Now, you take all the sin of God's people from the first man ever saved on the face of the earth to the last person ever saved on the face of the earth. All of God's people, all of their sin is placed on the Son. All of God's justice, just punishment, but also all of God's just hatred, His just loathing.

Everything that should be poured out on these sinful creatures throughout eternity, God throws down on His only begotten Son. Crushes Him under the weight of His own justice. You say, brother Paul, could you kill your son for me? I'm sorry.

You can argue theologically whether I should or shouldn't. I couldn't. And I'm evil.

The Bible says if you being evil can give good gifts to your children, if you being evil can love your children. Now, here's God. Perfect love manifested towards a perfect Son who never did anything but bless His Father and crushes Him under the weight of His holy hatred.

When those preachers, you know, the cup, Jesus says, let this cup pass through Me. And they say, yeah, it's going to the cross. He didn't want to go to the cross.

No, they're wrong. And yes, they're right. They just don't know what they're saying.

Listen to me. There have been martyrs who have gone. Followers of Jesus Christ who have been burned at the stake and while they were burning, they lifted their hands and praised the Lord.

Okay? Now let me ask you a question. Do you think they're greater than our Lord Jesus? There have been Christians... I have a picture in my office. I keep it right in front of my desk, a huge picture of all these Christians crucified in a Roman theater.

And they're being burned after they've been crucified and then lions are being set free on others. I keep that in front of me all the time to remind myself this is still happening today. And there were many of those who were crucified and sang out with joy as they were pounding the nails.

Do you think they're greater than Jesus? Do you think Jesus would actually cower and fret and cry under a punishment that even some of His followers were able to endure with joy? Do you think Jesus is weaker than them? What you need to understand is Jesus wasn't thinking when He was in that garden, save me from this hour, let this cup pass from Me. He wasn't thinking about nails in His hands. He wasn't thinking about a wooden cross.

He wasn't thinking about a spear in His side or Romans or anything else. What He was thinking about is this. Father, I have never been out of Your bosom.

I have always been in the most perfect, wonderful, beautiful relationship with You. I have all throughout eternity. God didn't create this world because He needed something, because God was always content with His Son.

You take everybody in this world, throw them straight into hell, God would still be happy because He's got His Son. I don't want to offend your humanism, but that's just the way it is. God's perfectly happy.

He created us not because of His need, but because of the overflow of His abundance. And here His Son is separated from Him. I remember after my little boy was born, I had the monitor up there in his room, and I was outside, I had the other monitor just right within the door, and we were working up on a ladder, probably about 15 feet in the air, nailing some things, and he cried.

I didn't even think. I threw the hammer and leaped. Went right off the ladder.

Hit the ground running. I was a new father, but I'd still do the same thing today. I mean, hit the ground running.

If we being evil could love our children. And here's the Son thinking, I'm going to be ripped out of the heart of the Father. The Father is going to turn His face away from me.

Now you think, oh yes, He turned His face away because He didn't want to see His Son suffering. No, you've got it all wrong. He turned His face away because His Son had become detestable.

His Son had become sin. All of you who are fathers and those of you who are mothers know. I mean, your kid, after he gets a certain age, he does something and it's, is Dad looking? Is Mom looking? I mean, it can't do anything unless Mom or Dad is looking.

I can't even worship anymore. He grabs my face and goes like this. The Father turns His face away.

He says, no. He became the abominable thing. An abomination.

You and I are an abomination before God. In order for us to be forgiven, God has to die as an abomination in our place. You and I deserve to be crushed under God's wrath.

In order for God to save us and forgive us, He was crushed under His own wrath. That's what the cross is. That's what it means.

And now you can see why if you ever get a heavenly vision of truly what happened on that cross, it will affect you for the rest of your life. You'll become a prisoner to that thing. You won't be able to get away from it.

Let me give you an idea. I've used this illustration. I love to use it because of the shock value of it because it makes people so mad.

A kid said one time, well, when I go to hell... You know, he was taking joy in the fact that if he went to hell, at least there'd be people on the outside who'd be suffering because they loved him so much and knew he was going to hell. You know that mentality? Well, I'll hurt myself and it'll hurt everybody else who loves me. I said, I noticed this tendency in him.

And I said, young man, let me just give you an idea of what's going to happen on the day you stand before God. He said, okay, I'm not afraid. I said, you will be.

I said, this is what's going to happen. I said, on the moment you stand before God, everything that your parents loved about you, it wasn't you. Did you know that? It was the common grace of God on you.

That's what caused them to love you. Now, on the moment he declares your judgment, that grace is going to be pulled off of you. And what your parents are going to see are a seething monster who would make

Hitler look like a choir boy.

And do you want to know something? I said, when you take your first step into hell, the last thing you're going to hear is all of creation along with your parents standing up and applauding and worshipping God because God has rid the earth of you. So don't think that anybody's going to be mourning up here in heaven and somehow you're going to get vengeance on at least somebody as you suffer there in hell. You will find no satisfaction there.

He said, that's horrible. I said, more horrible than you could ever imagine. Repent and believe.

Flee from the wrath to come. I was speaking at a university last week and some students were in visible protest against me. They came in, sat down in the front rows, crossed their arms, pulled their hats all down, and pretended to be sleeping.

And this was their big protest, I guess. I just walked over to the corner and I said, listen, listen. And I began to tell them about hell.

And I said, I want you, I'll give each of you a quarter so you can go back to your room and call your mom and tell her that all of you are going to hell and that she needs to pray for your soul. You see, sometimes in universities, you know the biggest argument they will use against me? They'll say a loving Jesus would never send anyone to hell. Do you want to know something? If it were not for the loving Jesus, we wouldn't even have a doctrine of hell.

Did you know that? You look in the Old Testament. It's there, but there's hardly any passages in the whole Old Testament about hell. You look in the writings of Paul.

There's almost nothing about hell. Really? Do you know where everything we know about hell, do you know where it comes from? From Jesus. Really? Almost everything we know about hell comes from Him.

The loving Jesus who died to save men spoke more about hell than everybody else in the entire Bible put together. Why? I think there's one reason. This is just my opinion.

Hell is so horrible that man cannot even comprehend it. So the only one who can truly comprehend how horrible hell is, is God Himself. And only God is able to communicate the horrible nature of hell in any way.

So remember now, when you hear about Jesus dying for you, you know now it's more than just some whips. Those whips were nothing. I don't want to depreciate His physical suffering, but folks, the cross is about the Son of God being crushed by His own Father.

And when He cried out, it is finished. That meant paid in full. Do you know why God can never pour out His wrath on you? If you're a Christian, He can never, never pour out His wrath on you.

Never! His judgment, His wrath, He can never pour it out on you. Never! It's impossible. He can't do it.

He can only act towards you now with the greatest of love, the same love with which He loves His dearly begotten Son, is the love He loves you. He cannot love you with anything less. Do you want to know why He can't pour His wrath out on you? I'll tell you why.

Because His Son drank it. It doesn't exist anymore. It's gone.

He drank it. There's nothing left for you. There's no more punishment for you if you're a Christian.

But if you're not a Christian, well, dear friend, you don't even want to know. You don't even want to know what awaits you. Let's pray.

Father, we thank You for this day. We ask, Lord, Your blessing and Your help. And dear God, help us to appreciate what You have done for us in giving Your Son.

Not an angel did You give us. Not gold. Not a piece of the throne did You throw away.

But You gave us Your only begotten Son. And for that, we'll worship You throughout all eternity that we have an older brother. And He is not ashamed to call us brothers and sisters because He has died for us, He has taken away our sin, and He has given us His own righteousness.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

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