

The Cross the Great Confessional

by P.T. Forsyth

The sermon emphasizes the importance of the Cross in understanding Christianity's position and prospects in the future, and the significance of Christ's sacrifice as a penal sacrifice that confesses God's holiness in His judgment upon sin.

Scripture: Romans 5:8, 1 Corinthians 1:18, 2 Corinthians 5:21, Hebrews 9:14, 1 Peter 2:24, 1 John 2:2, Revelation 1:5, Revelation 5:9, Revelation 21:5

Topics: "Christ's Sacrifice", "Church Reformation"

Description

P.T. Forsyth preaches about the challenges Christianity faces today, emphasizing the need to address dangerous challenges within those who claim the Christian name. He highlights the importance of looking ahead to the future impact of certain changes on Christianity, stressing the duty of the Church to focus on fundamental truths that may not have immediate effects but will impact future generations. Forsyth delves into the deep revelations of God through the Holy Spirit, emphasizing the central role of Christ's sacrifice in reconciliation and the confession of God's holiness.

Transcript

In the days of our fathers Christian belief was more solid within the Church than it is now; and the defending and expounding of Christianity, more especially the defending of it, had to concern itself with outsiders - outside the Church, and outside Christianity very often. Today our difficulties have changed; and a great part of our exposition must keep in view the fact that some of the most dangerous challenges of Christianity are found amongst those who claim the Christian name.

There are those who have a very real reverence for the character of Jesus Christ, and they can speak, and do speak, quite sincerely, with great devotion and warmth and beauty, about Christ, and about many of the ideas that are associated with apostolic Christianity. All the same, they are strongly and sometimes even violently, antagonistic to that redemption which is the very center of the Christian faith; and they make denials and challenges which are bound to tell upon the existence of that faith before many generations are over.

We do not take the true measure of the situation unless we realize that the thing which is at stake at this moment is something that will not affect the present generation, but is sure to affect two or three generations hence. Those who are concerned about Christianity on the largest scale today are concerned with what may be its position and its prospects then. The ideas at the center of the Christian faith are too

large, too deep and subtle, to show their effects in one age; and the challenge of them does not show its effect in one generation or even in two.

Individuals, society, and the Church, indeed, are able to go on, externally almost unaffected, by the way that they have upon them from the past; and it is only within the range of several generations that the destruction of truths with such a comprehensive range as those of Christianity takes effect. Therefore it is part of the duty of the Church, in certain sections and on certain occasions, to be less concerned about the effect of the Gospel upon the individual immediately, or on the present age, and to look ahead to what may be the result of certain changes in the future.

God sets watchmen in Zion who have to keep their eye on the horizon; and it is only a drunken army that could scout their warning. We are not only bound to attend to the needs and interests of the present generation; we are trustees for a long future, as well as a long past. Therefore it is quite necessary that the Church should give very particular attention to these central and fundamental points whose influence, perhaps, is not so promptly prized, and whose destruction would not be so mightily felt at once, but would certainly become apparent in the days and decades ahead.

That is why one feels bound to invite attention, and to press attention, upon points concerning which it may very easily be said, "These are matters that do not concern my faith and my piety; I can afford to let these things alone." Perhaps A, B, and C can, and X, Y, and Z can; but the Christian Church cannot afford to let these things alone. The Church carries the individual amid much failure of his faith; there is a vicarious faith; but what is to carry the Church if its faith fail?

Remove concern from these things, and the effect of the collective message of the Church to the great world becomes undermined. Then the world must look somewhere else than to the Church for that which is to save it. That is some apology for dwelling upon points which many people would say were simply theological and were outside the interest of the individual Christian. Theology simply means thinking in centuries. Religion tells on the present, but theology tells on the religion of the future and the race.

Moreover, there are always natures among Christian people who refuse, and properly refuse, to remain satisfied with superficial experiences or current views of their faith. They are bound by the spirit that moves within them - by the kind of temperament God has given them they are bound to penetrate to the heart, to the depths of things. Their work does not immediately pay; and while they grind in their mill the Philistines mock and the libertines jeer. But it would be a great misfortune if the whole of the work of the Church were measured by the standard which is so necessary in the world - the standard of what will immediately pay, or promptly tell.

It is, of course, a great thing to go back upon the history of Christianity, and to point out to ourselves and to our people the great things that Christianity has done in the course of history. But you cannot rest Christianity upon that. You can only rest Christianity upon Christ Himself, and His living presence in the New Humanity. You can put the matter in this way. You can ask, On what did the Christianity rest of those who believed in the very first years of the Church's life?

They had no results of Christianity before them. They had no history of the Church before them. They had not the glorious story of Christian philanthropy before them, nor the magnificent expansion of Christian doctrine, nor the enormous influence of the Christian Church and its effect upon the course of the world's history. On what did they rest their faith? That upon which they rested their faith must be that upon which we rest our faith when we come to a real crisis, and are driven into a real corner.

It thus becomes necessary to go into the deep things of God as they are revealed to us by the Holy Spirit, through His inspired apostles, in Christ and His Cross. From what I have said you will be prepared to hear me state that reconciliation is effected by the representative sacrifice of Christ crucified; by Christ crucified as the representative of God on the one hand and of Humanity, or the Church, on the other hand. Also it was by Christ crucified in connection with the divine judgment.

Judgment is a far greater idea than sacrifice. For you see great sacrifices made for silly or mischievous causes, sacrifices which show no insight whatever into the moral order or the divine sanctity. Now this sacrifice of Christ, when you connect it with the idea of judgment, must in some form or other be described as a penal sacrifice. Round that word penal there rages a great deal of controversy. And I am using the word with some reserve, because there are forms of interpreting it which do the idea injustice.

The sacrifice of Christ was a penal sacrifice. In what sense is that so? We can begin by clearing the ground, by asking, In what sense is it not true that the sacrifice of Christ was penal? Well, it cannot be true in the sense that God punished Christ. That is an absolutely unthinkable thing. How could God punish Him in whom He was always well pleased? The two things are a contradiction in terms. And it cannot be true in the sense that Christ was in our stead in such a way as to exclude and exempt us.

The sacrifice of Christ, then, was penal not in the sense of God so punishing Christ that there is left us only religious enjoyment, but in this sense. There is a penalty and curse for sin; and Christ consented to enter that region. Christ entered voluntarily into the pain and horror which is sin's penalty from God. Christ, by the deep intimacy of His sympathy with men, entered deeply into the blight and judgment which was entailed by man's sin and which must be entailed by man's sin if God is a holy and therefore a judging God.

It is impossible for us to say that God was angry with Christ; but still Christ entered the wrath of God, understanding that phrase as I endeavoured to explain it yesterday. He entered the penumbra of judgment, and from it He confessed in free action, He praised and justified by act, before the world, and on the scale of all the world, the holiness of God. You can therefore say that although Christ was not punished by God, He bore God's penalty upon sin. That penalty was not lifted even when the Son of God passed through.

Is there not a real distinction between the two statements? To say that Christ was punished by God who was always well pleased with Him is an outrageous thing. Calvin himself repudiates the idea. But we may say that Christ did, at the depth of that great act of self-identification with us when He became man, He did enter the sphere of sin's penalty and the horror of sin's curse, in order that, from the very midst and depth of it, His confession and praise of God's holiness might rise like a spring of fresh water at the bottom of the bitter sea, and sweeten all.

He justified God in His judgment and wrath. He justified God in this thing. So the act of Christ had this twofold aspect. On the one hand it was God offering, and on the other hand it was man confessing. Now, what was it that Christ chiefly confessed? I hope you have read McLeod Campbell on the Atonement. Every minister ought to know that book, and know it well. But there is one criticism to be made upon the great, fine, holy book. And it is this. It speaks too much, perhaps, about Christ confessing human sin, about Christ becoming the Priest and Confessor before God of human sin and exposing it to God's judgment.

The horror of the Cross expresses the repentance of the race before a holy God for its sin. But considerable difficulties arise in that connection, and critics were not slow to point them out. How could Christ in any real sense confess a sin, even a racial sin, with whose guilt He had nothing in common? Now that is rather a serious criticism if the confession of sin were the first charge upon either Christ or us, if the confession of human sin were the chief thing that God wanted or Christ did I think it is certainly a defect in that great book that it fixes our attention too much upon Christ's vicarious confession of human sin.

The same criticism applies to another very fine book, that by the late Canon Moberly, or Christ Church, "Atonement and Personality." I once had the privilege of meeting Canon Moberly in discussion on this subject, and ventured to point out that defect in his theory, and I was relieved to find that on the occasion the same criticism was also made by Bishop Gore. But we get out of the difficulty, in part at least, if we recognize that the great work of Christ, while certainly it did confess human sin, was yet not to confess that, but to confess something greater, namely God's holiness in His judgment upon sin.

His confession, indeed, was not in so many words, but in a far more mighty way, by act and deed of life and death. The great confession is not by word of mouth - it is by the life, in the sense, not of mere conduct, but in the great personal sense in which life contains conduct and transcends death. Christ confessed not merely human sin - which in a certain sense, indeed, He could not do - but He confessed God's holiness in reacting mortally against human sin, in cursing human sin, in judging it to its very death.

He stood in the midst of human sin full of love to man, such love as enabled Him to identify Himself in the most profound, sympathetic way with the evil race; fuller still of love to the God whose name He was hallowing; and, as with one mouth, as if the whole race confessed through Him, as with one soul, as though the whole race at last did justice to God through His soul, He lifted up His face unto God and said, "Thou art holy in all Thy judgments, even in this judgment which turns not aside even from Me, but strikes the sinful spot if even I stand on it."

The dereliction upon the Cross, the sense of love's desertion by love, was Christ's practical confession of the holy God's repulsion of sin. He accepted the divine situation - the situation of the race before God. By God's will He did so. By His own free consent He did so. Remember the distinction between God's changeless love and God's varying treatment of the soul. God made Him sin, treated Him as if He were sin; He did not view Him as sinful. That is quite another matter.

God made Him to be sin - it does not say He made Him sinful. God lovingly treated Him as human sin, and with His consent judged human sin in Him and on Him. Personal guilt Christ could never confess. There is that in guilt which can only be confessed by the guilty. "I did it." That kind of confession Christ could never make. That is the part of the confession that we make, and we cannot make it effectually until we are in union with Christ and His great lone work of perfectly and practically confessing the holiness of God.

There is a racial confession that can only be made by the holy; and there is a personal confession that can only be made by the guilty. That latter, I say, is a confession Christ could never make. In that respect Christ did not die, and did not suffer, did not confess, in our stead. We alone, the guilty, can make that confession; but we cannot make it with Christian effect without the Cross and the confession there. We say then not only "I did this," but "I am guilty before the holiness confessed in the Cross."

The grand sin is not to sin against the law but against the Cross. The sin of sins is not transgression, but unfaith. So also of holiness, there is a confession of holiness which can only be made by God, the Holy. If God's holiness was to be fully confessed, in act and deed, in life, and death, and love transcending both, it

can only be done by Godhead itself. Therefore we press the words to their fullness of meaning: "God was in Christ reconciling," not reconciling through Christ, but actually present as Christ reconciling, doing in Christ His own work of reconciliation.

It was done by Godhead itself, and not by the Son alone. The old theologians were right when they insisted that the work of redemption was the work of the whole Trinity - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; as we express it when we baptize into the new life of reconciliation in the threefold name. The holiness of God was confessed in man by Christ, and this holy confession of Christ's is the source of the truest confession of our sin that we can make. Our saving confession is not merely "I did so and so," but "I did it against a holy, saving God."

"I have sinned against heaven and in thy sight," sinned before infinite holiness and forgiving grace. God could not forgive until man confessed, and confessed not only his own sin but confessed still more - God's holiness in the judgment of sin. The confession also had to be made in life and action, as the sin was done. That is to say, it had to be made religiously and not theologically, by an experience and not an utterance. A verbal confession, however sincere, could not fully own an actual sin.

If we sin by deed we must so confess. It is made thus religiously, spiritually, experimentally, practically by Jesus Christ's life, its crown of death, and His life eternal. The more sinful man is, the less can he thus confess either his own sin or God's holiness. Therefore God did it in man by a love which was as great as it was holy, by an infinite love. That is to say, by a love which was as closely and sympathetically identified with man as it was identified with the power of the holy God.

So we have arrived at this. The great confession was made not alone in the precise hour of Christ's death, although it was consummated there. It had to be made in life and act, and not in a mere feeling or statement; and for this purpose death must be organically one with the whole life. You cannot sever the death of Christ from the life of Christ. When you think of the self-emptying which brought Christ to earth, His whole life here was a living death. The death of Christ must be organic with His whole personal life and action.

And that means not only His earthly life previous to the Cross, but His whole celestial life from the beginning, and to this hour, and to all eternity. The death of Christ is the central point of eternity as well as of human history. His own eternal life revolves on it. And we shall never be so good and holy at any point, even in eternity, that we shall not look into the Cross of Christ as the center of all our hope in earth or heaven. It is Christ that works out His own redemption and reconciliation, from God's right hand, throughout the course of history.

I would gather that up in one phrase. Christ is the perpetual providence of His own salvation. Christ, acting through His Spirit, is the eternal providence of His own salvation. The apostles never separated reconciliation in any age from the Cross and blood of Jesus Christ. If ever we do that (and many are doing it today) we throw the New Testament overboard. The bane of so much that claims to be more spiritual religion at the present day is that it simply jettisons the New Testament, and with it historic Christianity.

The extreme critics, people that live upon monism and immanence, rationalist religion and spiritual impressionism, are people who are deliberately throwing overboard the New Testament as a whole, deeply as they prize it in parts. They say that the apostolic views and interpretations of Christ's work may have been all very well for people who knew no better than men did at so early a period, but we are now a long way beyond that, and we must re-edit the New Testament theology, especially as to Christ's death.

I keep urging, whatever we do let us do it frankly, let us do it with our eyes open and with eyes competent to take the measure of what we are doing. The trying thing is that tremendous renunciations should be blandly made, without, apparently, any sense of their appalling dimensions, and of the huge thing that is being so ignorantly done. (See note at the end of this lecture.) The apostles, I say, never separated reconciliation from the Cross and the blood of Jesus Christ. The historic Church has never done so, with all its divisions.

And what the Cross meant for the apostles as Jews, with their history and education, was something like this. If you go back to the Old Testament, you find that the whole kingdom of God and destiny of man turns on the treatment of sin. And either the sin was atoned or the sinner was punished. But there were some sins that never could be atoned for, what are described as sins with a high hand, presumptuous sins, deliberate, defiant sins, as distinct from sins of ignorance or weakness, when a man so identified himself with his sin that he became inseparable from it.

The man guilty of them was put outside the camp, his communication was cut with the saved community of Israel. He was committed to the outer darkness. There remained only punishment and death. The punishment was expulsion from the covenant, and so from life. And as there is little about immortality in the Old Testament, it was death for good and all. But in the Cross of Christ there is no sin excluded from atonement. I know of course what you are thinking about - the sin against the Holy Ghost.

That is far too large a subject to enter on. I can only say that I am not keeping it out of my survey. And I repeat, there is no sin excluded from atonement. Death as punishment of sin was absorbed in Christ's sacrifice. Such was its atoning work that the judgment due to all mankind was absorbed, and the sin of sins now was fixed refusal of that Grace. The Cross bought up all other debts, so to say. To return to my old point. The objection to speaking of Christ's death as penalty is two-fold.

God could not punish One with whom He was always well pleased. Consequently Christ could not suffer punishment in the true sense of the word without having a guilty conscience. If the bearing of punishment were the whole of Christ's work, there was something in that way which He did not and could not do - He could not bear the penalty of remorse. But the whole of His work, was not the bearing of punishment; it was not the acceptance of suffering. It was the recognition and justification of it, the "homologation" of God's judgment and God's holiness in it.

The death and suffering of Christ was something very much more than suffering - it was atoning action. At various stages in the history of the Church - not the Roman Catholic Church only but Protestantism also - exaggerated stress has been laid upon the sufferings of Christ. But it is not a case of what He suffered but what He did. Christ's suffering was so divine a thing because He freely transmitted it into a great act. It was suffering accepted and transfigured by holy obedience under the conditions of curse and blight which sin and brought upon man according to the holiness of God.

The suffering was a sacrifice to God's holiness. In so far it was penalty. But the atoning thing was not its amount or acuteness, but its obedience, its sanctity. There are pathetic ways of thinking about Christ regard Him too much as a mere individual before God. They do not satisfy if Christ's relation with man was a racial one and He represented Humanity. Especially they do not hold good if that relationship was no mere blood relationship, natural relationship, but a supernatural relationship - blood relationship only in the mystic Christian sense.

We are blood relations of Christ, but not in the natural sense of that term, only in the supernatural sense, as those who are related to Him in His blood, in His death, and in His Spirit. The value of Christ's unity and sympathy with us was not simply that He was continuous with the race at its head. It was not a relation of identity. The race was not prolonged into Him. The value consists in that life-act of self-identification by which Christ the eternal Son of God became man.

We hear much about Christ's essential identity with the human race. That is not true in the sense in which other great men, like Shakespeare, for instance, were identical with the human race, gathering up in consummation its natural genius. Christ's identity was not natural or created identity, but the self-identification of the Creator. Everything turns upon this - whether Christ was a created being, however grand, or whether He was of increate Godhead. As Head of the human race by this voluntary self-identification with it, Christ took the curse and judgment, which did not belong to Himself as sinless.

And what He owned was not so much the depth of our misery as the depth of our guilt; and He did it sympathetically, by the moral sympathy possible only to the holy. Nor did He simply take the full measure of our guilt. His owning it means very much more than that His moral perceptions were so deep and piercing that He could measure our guilt as a bystander of acute moral penetration could. He carried it in His own moral experience as only divine sympathy could. And in dumb action He spread it out as it is before God.

He felt sin and its horror as only the holy could as God did. We learn in our measure to do that when we escape from the indifference of our egotism and come under His Cross and near His heart; we learn to do as Christ did as we enter into living union with Christ. And we then rise above purity - for purity is only shamed by sin - we rise to holiness, which is burdened with sin and all its load. How much more than pure Christ was! How much fuller of meaning is such a word as "holy" or "holiness" than either "pure" or "purity".

Purity is shamed by human sin. Holiness carries it as a load, and carries it to its destruction. In the great desertion Christ could not feel Himself a sinner whom God rejects. For the sinner cannot carry sin; he collapses under it. Christ felt Himself treated as the sin which God Recognizes and repels by His very holiness. It covered and hid Him from God. He was made sin (not sinful, as I say). The holiness of God becomes our salvation not by slackness of demand but by completeness of judgment; not because He relaxes His demand, not because He spends less condemnation on sin, lets us off or lets sin off, or lets Christ off ("spared not"); but because in Christ judgment becomes finished and final, because none but a holy Christ could spread sin out in all its sinfulness for thorough judgment.

I have a way of putting it which startles some of my friends. The last judgment is past. It took place on Christ's Cross. What we talk about as the last judgment is simply the working out of Christ's Cross in detail. The final judgment, the absolute judgment, the crucial judgment for the race took place in principle on the Cross of Christ. Sin has been judged finally there. All judgment is given to the Son in virtue of His Cross. All other debts are bought up there. It is not simply that in the Cross of Christ all punishment was shown to be corrective.

A favorite theme on the part of many of those who challenge the apostolic position about the death of Christ is that it was only the crowning exposition of the great principle that all punishment is really corrective and education. We cannot say that. There is plenty of punishment that hardens and hardens. That is why we are obliged to leave such questions as universal restoration unsolved. Even when we

recognize the absolute power of God's salvation, we also recognize that it is in the power of the human soul to harden itself until it become shrunk into such a tough and irreducible mass as it seems the very grace of God could do nothing with.

Certainly there are people here, in this life, who become so tough in their sin that the grace of God is in vain. And I am not sure that among those who are toughest are not some who are much comforted by their religion. You can do something with a hardened sinner. He can be broken to pieces. But I do not know what you can do with a viscous saint, with those who are wrapped in the wool, soaked in the comfort of their religion, and tanned to leather, soft and tough as a glove, by its bitterest baptisms.

I once used an expression of these people which was somewhat criticized. I called them "moral tabbies." Is there anything more comfortable, and selfish, and hopeless than a really accomplished tabby? When religion becomes perverted to be a means of mere comfort and dense self-satisfaction, it becomes an integument so tough that even the grace of God cannot get through it, or a substance so flaccid that it cannot be handled. I find it convenient, you observe, to distinguish between punishment and penalty.

A man who loses his life in the fire-damp, where he is looking for the victims of an accident, pays the penalty of sacrifice, but he does not receive its punishment. And I think it useful to speak of Christ as taking the penalty of sin, while I refuse to speak of His taking its punishment. I would avoid every word that would suggest that He was punished in connection with His salvation. It robs the whole act of ethical value to say so. Penalty is made to honor God in the Cross of Christ, and thus it becomes a blessing to us.

Not that our punishment is turned to good account in its subjective results upon us, but that Christ's judgment has objective value to the honor of God's holiness. He turned the penalty He endured into sacrifice He offered. And the sacrifice He offered was the judgment He accepted. His passive suffering became active obedience, and obedience to a holy doom. He did not steel His face to the suffering He had to endure, as though it were a fate to which He had to set His teeth and go through it in a stoic way.

He never regarded it as a mere infliction. For Him, whoever inflicted it, it was the holiest thing in all the world - it was the will and judgment of God. All the Old Testament told Him that the Kingdom of God could never come without the prior judgment of God; and He was prepared to force that judgment in His impatience for the Kingdom. * He answered the judgment of God with a grand affirmative act. The willing acceptance of final judgment was for Jesus the means presented by God for effecting human reconciliation and the Divine Kingdom.

The essence of all sacrifice, which is self-surrender to God, was lifted out of the Old Testament garb of symbolism, and was made a moral reality in Christ's holy obedience. In the Old Testament we have the lamb and the various other things brought for offering; but where did their essential value lie? In the obedience of the offerer; in the fact that those institutions were given and prescribed by holy God, however their details were due to man. And the presentation of the victim was valuable, not because of anything in the victim, but because of the obedience and surrender of the will with which the offerer presented it.

This is the bearing of sin - the holy bearing of its judgment. This is the taking of sin away - the acknowledgment of judgment as holy, wise, and good, and its conversion into blessing; the absorption and conversion of judgment into confession and praise, the removal of that guilt which stood between God and man's reconciliation - the robbing sin of its power to prevent communion with God. I should, therefore, express the difference between the old view and the new by saying that one emphasizes substitutionary expiation and the other emphasizes solidary reparation, consisting of due acknowledgment of God's

holiness, and the honoring of that and not of His honor.

Now let me pass as I close today to two or three points I want specially to emphasize. There is one quotation which I wanted to make at a particular point and did not. The Reformers are still on the whole, the masters of the great verities of experience in connection with the work of Christ. They had an amazing insight into the morbid psychology of the conscience. They did understand what sin meant, and they said this - the sinner, beginning with indifference, must keep flying from God until he actually hate God as a persecutor, unless he grasp the pursuit as God's mercy.

Indifference could not stop at indifference, but goes on through aversion to hate. Even if a man die indifferent in this life, he comes into circumstances where he ceases to be indifferent. If we believe about a future at all, it will be impossible for an indifferent man to remain indifferent when he has passed on there. Indifference is an unstable position. It changes either upward or downward - downward into antagonism, into deadly hate against God, something Satanic; or upwards it passes into acceptance of God's mercy by faith, and all its blossom and fruit, its joy and peace in the Holy Ghost.

The Reformers were perfectly right. It is only our dull experience and preoccupied vision which prevent us seeing that it is so. Then I should like to call attention to this value in such a cross. It is only the judgment sacrifice of the Son of God that assures the sinner of the deep changelessness of grace. Forgiving is not forgetting. Popular theology too often tends to pacify us by reducing the offense. But the Reformers put the matter quite otherwise in saying that a justifying faith only goes with a full sense of guilt.

You cannot get a full, justifying faith without a full sense and confession of guilt. We always have mistrust in the background of our own self-extenuations. When conscience begins to work and you begin to extenuate, when you try your hand earnestly at justifying yourself to yourself, you have some idea of how much more vast must be God's justification of you before Himself. You cannot cease to ask what charge conscience has against you. Then you magnify that to God's charge.

If your heart condemn you, His condemnation is greater than that of your condemning heart. Do you consider His conscience? His conscience has to be pacified as well as His heart indulged. And if His conscience be not met, ours is not sure. Has His conscience been met? Conscience has always mistrust in the background if grace is mere remission. Mere remission of sin does not satisfy even us. If conscience witnesses, against our extenuations, to the holy majesty of moral claim, is it to be less severe and less changeless than the claim of God Himself?

Conscience has in trust God's law and its majesty, which must be made good, as mere remission does not make it. Suppose I transgress and I hear the message of grace, does it tell me the accusing, irrepressible demand of conscience, the haunting fear of judgment, was an illusion? It is doing me very ill service if it does. True, there is now no condemnation for faith; but if the message of grace ever teaches us that the judgment of conscience is exaggeration, is illusion, it is not the true grace of God.

If a message of grace tell us there was and is no judgment any more, and that God has simply put judgment on one side and has not exercised it, that cannot be the true grace of God. Surely the grace of God cannot stultify our human conscience like that! So we are haunted by mistrust, unless conscience be drowned in a haze of heart. We have always the feeling and fear that there is judgment to follow. How may I be sure that I may take the grace of God seriously and finally, how be sure that I have complete salvation, that I may entirely trust it through the worst my conscience may say?

Only thus, that God is the Reconciler, that He reconciles in Christ's Cross that the judgment of sin was there for good and all. We are judged now by the Cross, and by the Cross we stand or fall. The great sin is not something we do, but it is refusing to make ourselves right with God in Christ's Cross. We are judged in the end by our relation to the Cross of Christ. It is the principle of our moral world. All judgment is committed to that Son. We stand before God at last according as we are owned by Christ.

We are confessed by Him according to our confession of Him. Nemesis on us is hallowed as a part of the judgment on Him to whose death we are joined. There is no such thorough assertion of God's holy, loving law anywhere as there, where in the Cross it was given its own, and was perfected in judgment in Him who became a curse for us. His prayer for His murderers, or the closing sigh of victory in the midst of that judgment, vouches for ever to this, that it is the same holy will which judges man's wickedness and also loves us and gives His Son for a propitiation for us.

Only that holiness which is changeless in its judgment could be changeless also in grace. His grace was so little to be foiled that He graciously took His own judgment. Thus the severity of conscience becomes the certainty of salvation. But changeless in judgment! Does that mean exacting the uttermost farthing of penalty, of suffering? Does it mean that in the hour of His death Christ suffered, compressed into one brief moment, all the pains of hell which the human race deserved.

We cannot think about things in that way. God does not work by such equivalents. What is required is not an equivalent penalty, but an adequate confession of His holiness. Let us get rid of that materialist idea of equivalents. What Christ gave to God was not an equivalent penalty, but an adequate confession of God's holiness, rising from amid extreme conditions of sin. God's holiness, then, was so little to be mocked, that He actually took His own judgment to save it. He spared not His own Son - His own self.

His severity of conscience becomes at the same moment our security of salvation. And the more conscience preaches the changelessness of the judging God, the more it preaches the same changelessness in the grace of Christ. There is another consequence. Only the eternal Reconciler, the High Priest, can guarantee us our full redemption. "Take, my soul, thy full salvation." You cannot do it except you do it in such a Cross. It is not enough to have in the Cross a great demonstration of God's love, a forgiveness of the past which leaves us to fend for ourselves in the future. Is my moral power so great after all, then, that, supposing I believe past things were settled in Christ's Cross, I may now feel I can run in my own strength?

Can I be perfectly confident about meeting temptation? Nay, we must depend daily upon the continued energy of the crucified and risen One. We must depend daily upon the action of that same Christ whose action culminated there but did not end there. His death is as organic with His heavenly life as it was with His earthly. What is the meaning of His perpetual intercession if it does not mean that - the exhausted energy of His saving act? It is by His work from heaven that we appropriate His work upon earth.

He guarantees our perfection as well as our redemption. The last step. It is only the atoning reconciliation of a whole world that guarantees the final perfecting of that world by its Creator. How do we know that creation is going to be perfected? How do we know that it is to be to the glory of God who made it and called it good? How do we know the world will not be a failure for God with all but the group of people saved in an ark of some kind? We only know because we believe in the reconciliation of the whole world in Christ's Cross.

There is a great deal of pessimism today, much doubt as to whether perfection really remains for the whole world; and you find people in the burdened West drawn to the Buddhistic idea of the human soul's extinction. Some Christians content themselves with individual salvation out of a world which is left in the lurch, or they are satisfied with personal union with Christ securing their own future. But the gospel deals with the world of men as a whole. It argues the restoration of all things, a new heaven and a new earth.

It intends the regeneration of human society as a whole. Christ is the Savior of the world, who was also the agent of its creation. The Creator has not let His world get out of hand for good and all. That is to say, our faith is social and communal in its nature. We must have a social gospel. And this you cannot get upon the basis of mere individual or sectional salvation. You can only have a social gospel upon one basis, namely, that Christ saved, reconciled the whole world as a unity, the whole of society and history.

The Object of our faith, Jesus Christ, is what our fathers used to call a federal Person, a federal Savior, in a federal act. All humanity is in Him and in His act. It is quite true every man must believe for himself, but no man can believe by himself or unto himself. The Christian faith fades away if it is not nourished and built up in a community, in a Church. And the Church fades away if it do not hold this faith in trust for the whole world. Each one of us is saved only by the act and by the Person that saved the whole world.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/pt-forsyth/the-cross-the-great-confessional/>

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