

Sin and the Christian Life
The Cross and Freedom from the Penalty of Sin

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 Title: “What Happened to Sin when Jesus Died on the Cross?”
 Text: 1 Corinthians 1:17, 18; Galatians 6:14; Ephesians 2:16
 Theme: Freedom from the Penalty of Sin

Who am I targeting?

If you have ever felt or believed that somehow you needed to work to measure up to God’s standard or earn His favor, then this study is for you.

Why study this idea?

There are two applications to this truth. The first is in the area of your justification and the second is in the area of your sanctification. The first addresses the question, “How can you be right with God?” The second addresses the question, “How can you live in daily freedom before God?” As we work through the idea I will make application to both.

Why study this idea?

If you do not understand this, then you will always live in experiential bondage to your sin. In 1517, Martin Luther nailed to the church doors of Wittenburg, Germany his 95 statements concerning the selling of “forgiveness” by the church. His 36th statement reads as follows:

36. Any truly repentant Christian has a right to **full remission of penalty and guilt**, even without indulgence letters.

The idea of being freed from the penalty of sin by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone was considered a challenge and a threat to the church as it existed at that time and it is still a threat to many who claim the name Christian.

Perhaps you are a persistent liar or thief? Perhaps you have stolen something that you cannot repay? Perhaps you had an abortion and the weight of that sin is destroying you? Perhaps you are living in bondage to your inability to conquer a besetting sin? Whatever your sin was or is you will never find deliverance from it until you find your freedom from the penalty of sin.

The purpose of this study is to . . .

The purpose of this study is to . . .

- Help you understand the power of the cross and its impact against the penalty of sin
- Help you choose the victorious cross instead of defeated sin
- Help you love the sufficiency of Christ more than the deceitfulness of sin

The desire of the text is to set the people of God free. God wants you to live in the freedom in which He has set you free and not to go back into bondage (Gal. 5:1). This is the biblical ideal.

“It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery” (Gal. 5:1).

The freedom you and I crave is only possible in the cross of Jesus Christ. There is no truth I would rather teach and celebrate than the enormity of who Christ is and what He has done for His people.

If I could speak only one thing to a dying person, this is the truth I would communicate.

Introduction:

For even the most casual reader of the New Testament the cross of Jesus Christ is an unavoidable object.

¹⁷ “For Christ did not send me to baptize, **but to preach the gospel**, not in cleverness of speech, so that **the cross of Christ** would not be made void. ¹⁸ **For the word of the cross is foolishness** to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved **it is the power of God**” (1 Cor. 1:17, 18).

“But may it never be that I would boast, **except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ**, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world” (Gal. 6:14).

“and might **reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross**, by it having put to death the enmity” (Eph. 2:16).

“And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of **the cross**” (Phil. 2:8).

“For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, [that they are] the enemies of **the cross** of Christ” (Phil. 3:18).

“Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of [our] faith; who for **the** joy that was set before him endured **the cross**, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Heb. 12:2).

The cross is not a subject we can afford to become complacent about. The cross is what makes our manner of life possible. Ultimately the cross is what frees us from the penalty of sin.

ILLUSTRATION:

Everything I read regarding the modern day church speaks of her intention to become relevant to meet the needs of the people. I am all for having classes that address marriage, and parenting, and single parent homes, and divorce, and alcohol abuse, and addictions, but there is no problem that can be

addressed in the absence of this truth being set forth. To treat your problems in the absence of laying down this foundation is to strain at the gnat while swallowing the proverbial camel.

Romans 6:23 speaks of sin's wage. The word "wage" can refer to a soldier's stipend or pay (Luke 3:14; 1 Cor. 9:7). The text tells us that sin's wage or what sin earns is death. Death is the penalty for sin. You sin and you die.

"Sin pays its wages in full with no cut." (A.T. Robertson's Word Pictures)

In order for us to be freed from sin as a Christian it is necessary to understand three aspects of the topic.

- First, "What happened to sin when Jesus died on the cross?"
- Second, "What does it mean to be 'freed from sin'?"
- Third, "What happens to my sin when I die?"

Each of the above questions deals with a specific area of sin and the Christian life. The first question looks at the believer's **freedom from the penalty of sin**. The second question looks at the believer's **freedom from the power of sin**. And the final question looks at the believer's **freedom from the presence of sin**. It is only as we consider these three ideas that we can rest in the victory that is already ours in Christ Jesus.

Romans 6:2 asks a question that is rhetorical in nature, "How shall we who died to sin still live in it?" The answer is we cannot as believers still live in sin. This answer is based on a biblical truth. This biblical truth forms the foundation for the entire Christian life. Believers are dead to sin. This begs the questions, "How did this take place?" and "How have we died to sin or when did this take place for us?"

We have died to sin only because of our union with Christ. His work against sin has been imputed to us. His work is attributed to us. In His death to sin we died to sin.

It is in light of this enormous truth that we must look at two primary thoughts. First, what are the consequences of the cross against sin?

I. The consequences of the cross against sin

There are three initial thoughts that will unpack this question. First, what is sin?

A. What is sin?

Sin is creation in rebellion against God. Sin is a denial by the creation that their Creator is enough in this life and in the life to come.

ILLUSTRATION:

Gentlemen, if you came home after a long day at work hungry and your wife had prepared a delicious meal for you, only to have you reject the meal and to either go eat something else or go out and buy fast-food, to put it mildly “you would be in the dog house.” Why? Because you are saying by your actions that what she made was inadequate. You were by your actions rejecting her love.

This is no less true when you and I choose sin. We are rejecting God’s provision for the satisfaction of our souls.

Sin is what separates the created from its Creator. The idea of sin might not be politically correct, but it is biblically non-negotiable. Everyone everywhere at all times has sinned and will sin. There is not only the sin of Adam that has been “imputed” to everyone’s account, but there is also the personalized and individualized transgressions through acts of commission and ignorant omission of God’s unchanging laws that places everyone everywhere at all times in open rebellion against Him.

It is this sin that makes you and I “feel” lousy at our ineptness. It is this sin that “fills” you with feelings of guilt when you breach known law. It is the twinge of conscience at your own blatant hypocrisy and righteous self-deception. You might live in a world of your own making and deny sin, but you can never escape its penalty.

This leads us to our second thought that will unpack our initial question. Second, why the incarnation?

B. Why the incarnation?

The incarnation is the Creator’s response to the creation’s rebellion against Him. With the incarnation God who is not created would take upon Himself the nature of the created. God would become what He had created. This was necessary for two reasons.

1. As God the sacrifice was of infinite worth
2. As man the sacrifice was race representative

This leads us to our third thought that will unpack our initial question. Third, “why the cross?”

C. Why the cross?

The cross creates the greatest possible means to accomplish the highest end of glorifying God the most. Everything about the cross shouts grace. God acted without restraint to save those who stood in rebellion against Him.

The penalty is what sin incurs. It is the inherent or intrinsic demerit that all sin carries with it. There is a horizontal consequence that happens in time and is temporary and then there is a vertical consequence that awaits everyone everywhere at all times who faces God in the absence of the Lord's wrath-placating sacrifice.

This penalty creates debt and guilt. It causes a breach in a relationship that is humanly incapable of being mended. The penalty for sin makes us so repulsive and vile that nothing known to man can wash us clean. God's response to sin is undiluted wrath. The enormity of God's wrath against sin has yet to be measured and is perhaps incapable of being measured. The wrath of God against sin has been seen at Calvary and attempts have been made for finite minds to wrap around a biblical definition, but in the end we can still not fathom the sheer horror of God's wrath against sin.

Every feeling you have that undermines your sense of self worth, every time you feel woefully inadequate and apathetically complacent and entirely empty, that feeling is part of the penalty of sin. Your inability to measure up as a spouse, parent, employee, friend, and all-around guy is the penalty against sin.

Yet even this, all this, is a consequence of the penalty, but it is not the actual penalty. Let us explore this idea for just a moment. While reading through the book of Numbers, I encountered multiple statements concerning the judgment of God against sin. I want us to place ourselves in this context. Let us take just a moment and note the following thought.

“the anger of the LORD was kindled against the people, and the LORD struck the people with a very severe plague” (Num 11:33), (cf. v. 20).

“so the anger of the LORD burned against them and He departed. But when the cloud had withdrawn from over the tent, behold, Miriam was leprous, as white as snow” (Num. 12:9, 10).

²⁷ “How long shall I bear with this evil congregation who are grumbling against Me? I have heard the complaints of the sons of Israel, which they are making against Me. ²⁸ Say to them, ‘As I live,’ says the LORD, ‘just as you have spoken in My hearing, so I will surely do to you; ²⁹ your corpses will fall in this wilderness, even all your numbered men, according to your complete number from twenty years old and upward, who have grumbled against Me’ ” (Num. 14:27-29).

³² “Now while the sons of Israel were in the wilderness, they found a man gathering wood on the sabbath day. ³³ Those who found him gathering wood brought him to Moses and Aaron and to all the congregation; ³⁴ and they put him in custody because it had not been declared what should be done to him. ³⁵ Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘The man shall surely be put to death; all the congregation shall stone him with stones outside the camp.’ ³⁶ So all the congregation brought him outside the camp and stoned him to death with stones, just as the LORD had commanded Moses” (Num. 15:32-36).

³¹ As he finished speaking all these words, the ground that was under them split open; ³² and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up, and their households, and all the men who belonged to Korah with their possessions. ³³ So they and all that belonged to them went down alive to Sheol; and the earth closed over them, and they perished from the midst of the assembly. ³⁴ All Israel who were around them fled at their outcry, for they said, ‘The earth may swallow us up!’ ³⁵ Fire also came forth from the LORD and consumed the two hundred and fifty men who were offering the incense” (Num. 16:31-35).

⁴¹ “But on the next day all the congregation of the sons of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron, saying, ‘You are the ones who have caused the death of the LORD’S people.’” ⁴⁹ But those who died by the plague were 14,700, besides those who died on account of Korah” (Num. 16:41, 49).

¹⁰ “and Moses and Aaron gathered the assembly before the rock. And he said to them, ‘Listen now, you rebels; shall we bring forth water for you out of this rock?’” ¹¹ Then Moses lifted up his hand and struck the rock twice with his rod; and water came forth abundantly, and the congregation and their beasts drank. ¹² But the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, ‘Because you have not believed Me, to treat Me as holy in the sight of the sons of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them.’” (Num. 20:10-12).

⁵ “The people spoke against God and Moses, ‘Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we loathe this miserable food.’” ⁶ The LORD sent fiery serpents among the people and they bit the people, so that many people of Israel died” (Num. 21:5, 6).

This is what the penalty against sin looks like in the absence of Jesus Christ. God’s wrath against people is a horrible thing. This is what stands against the sinner. It is for this reason Hebrews 10:31 says, “It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God.” The penalty against sin is God being against you. The place of torment we call hell is not the “real” hell. Hell is simply the location where the penalty of sin is carried out. Hell is having God against you and you being eternally separated from Him. That is the penalty against sin.

Now, this is what God took care of for us when He sent His “Son to be the propitiation for our sins” (1 John 4:14).

These three initial thoughts now allow us to answer our question, “What are the consequences of the cross for sin?”

D. What are the consequences of the cross for sin?

We will only consider four consequences of the cross against sin.

1. The debt incurred by sin has been paid/cancelled (i.e. redemption)
2. The wrath against sin has been placated (i.e. propitiation [1 John 2:2; 4:14]).

3. The gap between God and man has been removed (i.e. reconciliation)
4. The charges against sin have been dropped (i.e. forgiveness/not guilty [Col. 2:13])

ILLUSTRATION:

- What if all your debt was cancelled and you could never create any more no matter how hard you tried?
- What if no one would ever be mad at you again?
- What if every relationship you have is perfect? There is no tension and no misunderstandings.
- What if no matter what you did you would never be held accountable in a court of law?

- And what if all of this existed because someone who you did not even know paid off all your debt and made sure you had an inexhaustible supply of wealth.
- And what if all of this existed because someone who you did not even know made sure that everyone with whom you have a relationship was always satisfied with your actions and words.
- And what if all of this existed because someone who you did not even know was always pleading your case before the judge and always winning.

This is what it means to be freed from the penalty of sin. Freedom from the penalty of sin is what we have as His people. Foolishly someone might ask, “If this is true, then why do I not go out and sin with abandonment?” The reason why you would not go out and transgress the law is because your love for the person whom you did not know is greater than your desire for sin.

Commentators Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown make the following observation concerning the phrase “and for sin” in Romans 8:3.

The expression is purposely a general one, because the design was not to speak of Christ's mission to atone for sin, but in virtue of that atonement to *destroy its dominion* and *extirpate it altogether* from believers (emphasis theirs).

There are four expansions on this idea that must be noted.

First, the cross was the work of Christ. The Father sent His Son to be the Savior of the world (1 John 4:14). This is the work given to Him by His Father that He came to fulfill. It was His work. It was not a work that we could do for ourselves.

Second, the work of Christ on the cross was the outworking of the Trinitarian eternal purpose. The entire Godhead was involved in the freeing of His people from the penalty of sin. It was not done in isolation. It was done in counsel

within the eternal Godhead. The redemptive activity of Christ in behalf of His people was no accident. It was not a response prompted by man's fall.

When the Father sent His Son to be the Savior of the world this action on His part was intentional and certain. He would secure for Himself a people called by His name. The enormity of His actions in behalf of His people has huge ramifications for everyone everywhere at all times, but as it relates to His redemptive activity it is singularly focused on His people.

Third, the redemptive activity of Christ negates the penalty of sin. There is an effectual element to the cross. It destroys the penalty of sin. Everything noted earlier has been negated by the cross. We are free from the penalty of sin.

Finally, the work of Christ as the outworking of the Trinitarian eternal purpose in behalf of His people against sin is finished. Nothing more can be done and nothing more will be added. When you and I accepted by faith the work of Christ we entered into a reality that no longer acknowledged the penalty that existed because of sin. We are free from that world. As slaves we have been emancipated from the tyranny of sin. The grasp of sin has been forever broken.

We do not have to live in a world of rejection, failure, guilt, unrest, coupled with feelings of inadequacy and breakdown. The penalty against sin has been fully met in the provision of Christ. This is what we have and this is what we are to enjoy.

Conclusion:

Sin has zero authority in the life of the believer. The presence of sin still exists, but the penalty against it has been eradicated and the power of sin has been broken.

Transition:

The second primary thought concerning our freedom from the penalty of sin that must be considered is this, "How can I become a recipient and participant in His work against sin?"

II. How I became a recipient and participant of His work against sin

How does what He has done benefit me now and forever? How do I transfer what He has done to my account?

- A. All of the necessary actions on God's part have taken place. Nothing more can be added and nothing will ever be subtracted.
- B. The gracious activity of God moves Him to make us respond to His provision. Our response is simply one of faith. We accept the record of the account as accurate.

- C. This simple act of faith moves the provision, resources, and consequences of the cross into my personal account.
- D. I now live in the consequences of the cross against sin. The provision, resources, and consequences of the cross have completely and forever broken the penalty of sin against me.

ILLUSTRATION:

What if someone out there threw a “We love Pat Party?” I did not even have to show up. They came to me. Everything needed was provided. In fact everyone who came brought a gift just for me. The party was not thrown because of who I am but because of who they were. Because those who were throwing the party were so gracious and loving they simply wanted to do this for me. My response to the party can be one of several. First, I could get upset because I did not earn it. Second, I could get upset because it makes me a debtor (although those who throw the party assure me that nothing I do can repay them). Third, or I could simply accept the gracious activity of others in my behalf.

With respect to all of the gifts, I did nothing to earn them; they are mine. All I have to do is accept them and unwrap each one. Although the gifts are mine, until I take them and unwrap each one they will do me no good.

The same is true with my freedom from the penalty of sin. Everything has been done by God, not because of anything I did, but because of who He is. He has given me everything, but until I take it and unwrap it, it will do me no good.

Are you ready to take the gift of God and unwrap it?

Conclusion:

I am gloriously and deliciously freed from the penalty of sin.

Application: (Where do we go from here? What is **the next action step**?)

If you know Jesus Christ as your personal Savior, then . . .

1. Stop beating yourself up for your inability to measure up to another person’s selfish ideals.
2. Stop hoping for something other than what you have thereby robbing yourself of the moment in which you currently live.
3. Begin to believe that right now God is smiling upon you for who you are in His Son.
4. Begin to believe that what Jesus Christ did on the cross for your sins is truly enough in this life and in the life to come.
5. Homework - Consider your feelings. Write them down. Then evaluate how you feel against the cross and the freedom you have from the penalty of sin.

6. Once you find release from the bondage you have placed yourself in, before God you will be free to love other people as unconditionally as God loves you.
7. It is only when this happens that you can be the spouse, parent, neighbor, and child that you desire to be.

If you do not know Jesus Christ as your personal Savior, then . . .

1. You are still under the penalty of sin
2. Unless you accept Christ as your Savior you will die separated from God forever.
3. Will you accept Him today?
4. I am here to help you understand this incredible offer.