



# Bible Student's Notebook™

## *The Herald of His Grace*

Issue 141

# *Why Jesus Died*

## The Undoing of Adam

by – C. Baxter Kruger

**T**he first thing to be said about the death of Jesus Christ is that He died because God the Father Almighty loves us with an implacable and undaunted and everlasting love, a love that absolutely refuses to allow us to perish.

The second great fact that established the necessity of Jesus' death is what the Bible calls "sin" – the profound spiritual disease that infiltrated the human race in Adam. Sin threatened the destruction of creation and of God's eternal purpose for us. Jesus died because God the Father refused to give up His dream for us, and because the only way for those dreams to be fulfilled, in the context of sin, was by recreating the human race through death and resurrection.

### **OUR MYTHOLOGY: THE LEGALIZATION OF GOD**

In the development of Western theology, things have never been so black and white. The revelation of God in Christ has not been allowed to exercise its proper judgment upon our mythology. Again and again, alien notions of God have been left unlocked – as if the final revelation of God in Christ was only one among several revelations ...

In the Western tradition the Christian conversion of the idea of holiness ... was ... reconceived within the world of Roman jurisprudence. It was revisioned through Roman concepts of law and order, crime and punishment, blind and cold

justice. Reconceived within the stainless steel world of pure law, "holiness" came to mean "legal perfection" or "moral rectitude." This notion of holiness then crept in the back door of the doctrine of God and shaped our entire understanding of God's relationship with humanity and our understanding of the work of Christ Himself ...

We allowed the holiness of God to be legalized ... When that happened, the logic of the universe changed. The framework within which we understand God, creation and the relationship between God and humanity shifted into an alien legal gear. It became "natural" to think legally, to frame the question of God's relationship with human beings in terms of law and guilt and punishment. But this line of thought betrays the fact that there is something much more ancient about God's relationship with human beings than the law ...

### **THE ECLIPSE OF THE GOSPEL**

The Western tradition, and within it, modern evangelical theology, translated God and God's relationship with human beings through the meat grinder of legal categories ... A legal notion of holiness infiltrated the doctrine of God and rewrote the logic of God's relationship with humanity. The fall of Adam, the calling of Israel, and the person and work of Jesus Christ, especially His death on the cross, were all then perceived through this alien legal logic. Legal holiness, law and justice,

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This weekly publication (52 times a year) is dedicated to:

- the proclamation of the riches of God's abundant, exceeding grace (Romans 5:20; 11:6; Ephesians 1:7)
- the affirmation of God's purpose to save all mankind through the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (I Timothy 2:3, 4; 4:10; Titus 2:11)
- the "preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began" (Romans 16:25)
- true freedom and liberty apart from the law (Galatians 5:1)
- the organic nature of the church, the body of Christ (I Corinthians 12)
- the distinct ministry of Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles (Romans 11:13)
- the importance of receiving all whom Christ has received (Romans 14-15)
- the recovery of rich Biblical truth that has too long remained hidden under the veils of traditionalism, prejudice, misunderstanding, and fear (Mark 7:7, 13).
- the completeness of the believer in Christ (Colossians 2:10), with ...
  - total forgiveness of sins (Colossians 1:14)
  - identity in His death, burial, and resurrection (Romans 6)
  - adult sonship position (Galatians 4)

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This publication is not connected with any "church," "denomination," "movement," "organization," "mission," "creed," "meeting," "school," "conference" or "fellowship."

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guilt and punishment, figured as the supreme hermeneutical law through which even God was interpreted – or reinterpreted. This was a fundamental error and the chief sin of Western Christianity, out of which all manner of disaster has come. The price tag on such a blunder is an unspeakably perverse vision of God that is now etched into the psyche of the Western mind, a perverse vision that not only fuels our ingrained anxiety, but produces empty religion that wears us out and bores us with the idea of the "gospel" itself, and leaves us more hopeless than ever.

The gospel typically preached by modern evangelicals begins with the statement that God is holy (holy in the legal sense). The human race has fallen into sin and it is guilty before God. Since God is holy, He cannot allow sin to go unpunished – justice requires punishment. But since God is also loving, He sends Jesus Christ to take our place. On the cross, the guilt of the human race is placed upon Jesus Christ, and Jesus suffers the just punishment of our guilt. The cry of Jesus, "*My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken me?*" is interpreted as the moment of moments when the Father, being too holy to look upon evil, turns His back upon His Son in utter abandonment. The Father forsakes His Son. That forsakenness, that abandonment and its unsearchable agony, is then interpreted as the punishment for our sins that satisfies God's justice – in this legal or Evangelical model.

### **CHRIST'S WORK TURNED ON ITS HEAD**

The first disaster of this interpretation is that the work of Jesus Christ is turned on its head. The New Testament nowhere says that God was being reconciled in the work of Jesus; it says that

*"God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself"* (II Corinthians 5:18-19).

As Paul insists, it was while we were utterly helpless, while we were sinners who had sold ourselves irretrievably into bondage and unwittingly set our-

selves in opposition to God, that God acted to save us (Romans 5:6-10). But here, in the legal model, the order has been reversed, such that Jesus has come to save us not from ourselves and the catastrophe of Adam, but from God. Changing God has become the object of Christ's work. If we ask the question, "Why did Jesus die?" then the answer that flows out of the legal framework is that He died so that God the Father would be different ... The legal model leaves us with a Jesus who comes to convert God! In the legal view, the result of the death of Jesus Christ is a fundamental change in God's attitude towards humanity and in His relationship with us. The Father, not fallen humanity, is what gets altered on the cross, in the legal view.

The clear message imbedded in the way the legal view frames the gospel is that there is a side of God that is not "for us" at all, a side that needs to be changed, that needs to be conditioned into being gracious, a side that needs to be converted ... However, we see clearly that God is eternally "for us," and thus there is no part of God that needs to be changed or converted or conditioned. Before the foundation of the world, the Father ... set [His] determined love upon us and set [His] hand to the plow to bring us into the circle of [His] life. This purpose stands. Adam's sin did not alter God or God's purpose in any way. The Fall constitutes a problem, to be sure. For in the Fall the human race, which God has determined to bring to glory, became corrupt, estranged, fundamentally alien to God. Thus the problem ... is that the human race stands in need of a radical conversion to God.

Punishment has never been the point. It has never crossed God's mind, and even if it did, it would not do a thing to overcome the real problem of our estrangement and so fulfill God's purpose and dreams for us. The Father's passion is to get His children back and to bless us with all the treasures of heaven itself. Unto that end the Son was sent into our existence to undo *our* estrangement, not God's, to convert our fallen human existence to God. This love of God in action ... is the wrath of

God, the fiery and complete opposition of God's love to our destruction.

## SCHIZOPHRENIC GOD

The second disaster of the legal interpretation is that it leaves us with a God divided into two opposing parts ... The legal message drives a wedge between the love of God and the holiness of God. On the one side, there is the love of God, and with this love, His mercy and grace. On the other side, there is the holiness of God, and with this holiness, His justice and wrath. Whereas the one side of God loves us, that love "cannot" accept us until the other side is "satisfied" by proper suffering. It is as if there are two wills of God vying for control of God's relationship with the human race. Are we to believe that the Father has such a division within Him, such a split personality? Are we to conclude that the loving side of the Father sends the Son to suffer punishment demanded by the holy side of the Father, so that the Father can then be whole, single minded toward us? Are we to believe that only one side of God sends Jesus to save? Are we to believe that Jesus Christ heals the Father's split personality and brings Him into one mind towards us? Does Jesus actually make the Father whole?

Jesus Christ is the revelation of God, not of a part of God or of one side of God, but of the very being and character of God. What we see in Jesus is that the Father has never once forsaken us or even considered such a thing. Jesus is the proof that the Father's love is utterly unwavering and that His eternal dreams for us stand. The Son was sent by the Father to find us. He was sent as the living expression of the fire of love in the Father's belly ... and He was sent to search us out in the far country, to cleanse us of all alienation and bring us home at all costs. For the Father will have it no other way. If we must speak of the death of Jesus Christ as "satisfaction," we must see that what is satisfied in His death is the Father's utterly single-minded devotion to us and His relentless determination that His extravagant plans for us

would be fulfilled – even at the cost of His own beloved Son’s life.

When the doctrine of God is legalized, we end up with a perverse vision of the Father who is of two minds about us. One side of the Father loves us, while the other side couldn’t care less; in fact, the other side could not possibly tolerate such love and certainly could not allow it to embrace us and accept us freely. This leaves us with a Jesus who comes to suffer the punishment required by His Father’s holiness so that the hands of the Father’s love can at last be untied and He is free to embrace us.

## AN ANGRY GOD

This picture, already horrendous and destructive enough, is plunged into greater darkness when wrongheaded notions of wrath are added. If we put this scenario into the language of Jonathan Edwards’ famous sermon, *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God*, then that moment of moments when Jesus takes upon Himself our sin is the moment when He suffers not merely justice or the consequences of sin, but *anger*. The holy God who requires strict justice on the legal model, is now translated into an angry executioner who demands that His anger be spent.

Edwards’ notion of the profoundly angry God pushes the problem from God “cannot,” to God “will not,” accept us. It is not simply a matter of holiness requiring sufficient punishment before forgiveness can be allowed; it is now a matter of God breathing fire and spitting nails and demanding that His brooding vengeance be vented and His untold righteous anger be satisfied.

“The bow of God’s wrath is bent, and the arrow made ready on the string, and justice bends the arrow at your heart, and strains the bow, and it is nothing but the mere pleasure of God, and that of an angry God, without any promise or obligation at all, that keeps the arrow one moment from being made drunk with your blood.”<sup>1</sup>

1. “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God,” in *The Works of*

[Yet] the Fall of Adam is met by the same God and by the same overflowing love and determination to bless that called forth creation in the first place. The passion of God in creation becomes the fire that sends the Son to save. It is God’s dreams for us that are threatened in Adam’s plunge. For Edwards, on the other hand, the Fall of Adam is met by cold justice, so cold that it is heartlessly unmoved by the destruction of humanity ... The passionate love ... especially in response to the Fall, is strangely absent in Edwards. In its place we have pure anger.

The legalization of God reaches its purest expression right here in the unmoved indignation of Edwards’ God, a God who cannot accept us and is not interested in even considering such a thing. Until the arrow has struck its mark and is drunk with blood, the vengeance, the fiery wrath of the legalized God, remains unrelieved. And until that wrath is vented and appeased, there is no possibility that this God will accept guilty sinners, or even consider it. Legal justice is one thing: divine anger is quite another. Jesus Christ, in this scenario, goes to the cross not to undo the Fall of Adam and bring us to His Father, or even to suffer the consequences of our sin; He goes to the cross to suffer the anger, the holy rage, of God the Father.

To make the point, as the punishment theorists are quick to do, that the Father sends the Son out of His love for sinners only confirms the dreadful split in the personality of the Father. For strictly speaking, it is not the Father who sends the Son, on this model; it is *one* side of the Father. The loving side of the Father sends the Son, while the holy side of the Father is not in the least interested in such mercy; indeed, the dark side of God is utterly opposed to such a gratuitous action.

## REREAD THE BIBLE

It is our Christian duty, and the highest of all privileges, to reread the Book in this light and to

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*Jonathan Edwards*, Vol. 2, p.9

rethink everything in the universe, including what we think we know about God, in sheer faithfulness to the full and final revelation given in Jesus Christ. Anything less is neither Christian nor Evangelical.

The legal model sets before us a gospel that is powerless to produce assurance. How is it possible for human beings to experience even a modicum of assurance when God is so divided, so double-minded? Whatever assurance may arise in our hearts when we hear of the love of God in Jesus Christ is immediately poisoned when we hear that this love flows out of only one side of God. Even if we do not buy into Edwards' picture of the angry archer, the legal model still leaves us with a God of ambiguity towards the human race. The framing of the gospel itself, in the legal model, teaches us that there is a side of God that does not like us at all, a side that would just as soon have us miserable and broken and enslaved to darkness as it would to see us whole and complete and living in joy. Such ambiguity on the face of God does not heal the lethal rous simmering in our souls; it fuels it.

### **THE FATHER'S SOLUTION**

In the fullness of time, the Son of God was sent by the Father into the far country of fallen Adamic existence. There, born into Adam's darkness and into Israel's fiery conflict with God, He stepped into human history – and thus into the violent contradiction between fallen man and God. There, inside Adam's skin but refusing to live in Adam's mythology, He took His stand as the Father's beloved Son, steadfastly loving His Father with all His heart ... and sharing all things with Him in fellowship of the Spirit. He bore the contradiction in Himself and resolved it through 33 years of fire and trial and suffering, walking not in the way of Adam but in the way of the true Son. He penetrated to the core of human estrangement and alienation and experienced it fully, but did so as the One who knows and loves the Father, thus denying His Adamic flesh and crucifying it on the cross of Calvary, and therefore healing the terrible breach between God and lost humanity in Himself. What

emerges on the other side of the cross is a *human being* from the lost world of Adam who sits at the Father's right hand in real and abiding fellowship with Him. Jesus has not only overcome the Fall of Adam; He has exalted human existence into ... the life of God.

The very essence of the gospel lies right here in Jesus Christ Himself, in His ... relationship with the Father, and in the ... way in which He included us in this relationship. For the great conversion of His humanity to His Father, wrought out through 33 years of fire and trial, and decisively accomplished in His death and resurrection, was a vicarious event. The miraculous and wonderful truth is that we were included in His baptism, in His life and death, in His resurrection and ascension. When He died, we died. When He rose, we rose. When He ascended to the Father, He took the whole human race with Him to the right hand of God the Father Almighty ...

It is to be emphasized that Jesus Christ did not change God the Father, and neither does our faith. Before the creation of the world, the Father ... set [His] lavish and determined love upon us and has never wavered ... The catastrophe of Adam ran into His passionate love that birthed creation in the beginning, and therefore into an intolerable divine, "No!" The Father ... was opposed, passionately and utterly opposed, to our destruction and ... out of eternal love, Jesus was sent to find us in the far country, to lay hold of us, cleanse us of all alienation and bring us to His Father ... Our faith does not alter God in the least. Faith is first and foremost a discovery of the heart of the Father ... a discovery [or unveiling] of the astonishing dreams of God for our blessing, and of the fact that those dreams have now become eternal truth in Jesus Christ. Such a discovery cannot help but take our breath away and fill our hearts with hope and peace and assurance ...

Faith does not change God; it changes *us*. It delivers us from our mythology and its spiritual agony – and from the way this spiritual agony

poisons our lives. Without faith in Jesus Christ, our souls – and thus our relationships, our work and play – are already afflicted with anxiety. The only cure in the universe is to see Jesus Christ seated at the Father’s right hand and ourselves seated with Him.

**A NOTE ON  
“My God, My God, Why Hast Thou  
Forsaken Me?”**

Psalm 22:1 begins with the most haunting cry in the Bible: “My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?” Both Matthew and Mark tell us that Jesus took up this cry when He was dying on the cross. It is very natural for us, steeped as we are in the Western framework, with its fundamental legal orientation, to see this cry of Jesus as the supreme expression of His suffering. With the dark side of the Father in the background, the Son takes upon Himself our sin and the Father unleashes the fury of His eternal wrath upon His own Son. In that horrible, unspeakable moment, Jesus cries out, “My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?”

Why is it that we are so prone to zero in on this statement of Jesus from the cross? There are other statements from Jesus in that hour; why does this one get so much press? Why not focus on “It is finished” or “Father into Thy hands I commend My spirit”? Is it an exaggeration to say that more ink has been spilled on “My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?” than on all the other statements of Jesus from the cross put together? ...

Why did Jesus quote the opening verse of Psalm 22? In His day, to hear the first verse of a Psalm was like hearing the beginning of the tune of a favorite song. The tune jump-starts the tape in our heads and sends us singing the rest of the song. I suspect that when Jesus quoted the first of Psalm 22, He was jump-starting the memory of the whole Psalm in the minds of the people around Him. For they all knew it by heart. In doing so, He was interpreting the event of His suffering and death for them. He was telling them what was happening.

On the cross, Jesus surely identified with the suffering of the Psalmist, but He also identified with the whole Psalm. What is happening on the cross? What is the meaning of this event? Jesus is answering all these questions. He is saying, “Here it is, right here in Psalm 22. It looks as though all is lost. It looks as though the ‘dogs’ are winning and as if God has abandoned Me, utterly forsaken Me to the abyss. But this is not the case.”

*“For He hath not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; neither hath He hid His face from Him; but when He cried unto Him, He heard” (Psalms 22:24).*

Indeed, the very opposite is the truth, and all the world will come to know it as the Lord’s salvation.

In the greatest of ironies, the cry of Jesus, “My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?” actually sets in motion a line of thought that completely reinterprets what is happening on the cross. Far from being a perverse moment when the angry God pours His wrath out upon the Son and utterly rejects Him, the cross is the moment of moments when He does not hide His face, or turn His back upon Him in disgust. Here, according to the Psalm and its interpretation of the event, there is no forsaking at all. In fact, the Psalm tells us that the coming generations will see this event not as divine rejection, but precisely as divine presence and rescue and salvation.

Is it accidental that ... Psalm 22 is followed by the great Shepherd Psalm? What if we were to read on from Psalm 22 into Psalm 23? What would we find?

*“The LORD is My shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh Me to lie down in green pastures: He leadeth Me beside the still waters. He restoreth My soul: He leadeth Me in the paths of righteousness for His name’s sake. **Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no***

**evil: for Thou art with Me;** Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort Me. Thou preparest a table before Me in the presence of Mine enemies: Thou anointest My head with oil; My cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow Me all the days of My life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever” (Psalms 23:1-6).

Far from being a moment when the wrath of God is vented upon the Son, the cross is the moment when the relationship of the Father and Son is most triumphant in the greatest darkness. On the cross, Jesus penetrated to the core of Adamic estrangement, where everything shouts that God has rejected us and abandoned us to the abyss. But it was precisely there, precisely in the experience of that estrangement and horror, that the fellowship of the Father and Son ... stood fast. “Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for You are with Me.”

[Then] suppose we read on from Psalm 23 into Psalm 24 and to that magnificent shout:

*“Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in”* (Psalms 24:7).

If we take these three Psalms together, we are face to face not only with the suffering of Jesus on the cross, but also with His resurrection and ascension ... There is not forsaking by the Father. Even when Jesus walked through the valley of the shadow of death, the Father did *not* forsake Him: He *saved* Him! ...

### **JESUS CHRIST – OUR MEDIATOR**

*“For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus”* (I Timothy 2:5).

At this very hour, a *man* sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. At this moment, a human being lives and dwells and abides inside ... the

fellowship of the Father ... He was predestined to be the mediator between God and humanity ... The reality that drives the coming of Jesus Christ, and pushes Him even to the cross is the relentless and determined passion of the Father ... He will not abandon us. It has never been the Father’s mind to forsake His plan for us. Jesus is the proof ...

Sin, the profound spiritual disease that infiltrated the human race in Adam ... refers not only to the original act of treachery on the part of Adam and Eve, but to the whole quagmire of human brokenness and darkness, alienation and estrangement that took root inside human existence through Adam’s false believing. The Bible tells us that Adam and Eve were created as the apex of all God’s work and stood before God as the objects of His personal affection and great delight. They were created to walk with God, to participate in God’s work, and they were given a real place within God’s unfolding drama. *But* they listened to and believed the lie of the serpent, and in believing the lie, distrusted God ...

Through the unbelief of Adam and Eve, *darkness* infiltrated the scene of human history. [W]ith that darkness, loneliness and fear, isolation and loss, guilt and sadness and sorrow set up shop inside the human soul, and within no time at all, brokenness and estrangement and frustration, anger and bitterness and depression, envy and jealousy and strife, gossip and slander and murder began to overtake human existence. Anxiety became the poisonous roux which permeated the whole dish of human life and relationships, and indeed of all creation. Darkness snatched the soul of man and began dragging Adam and Eve down into utter misery ...

### **GOD’S NO! AND YES!**

What was God’s response? What was the reaction of ... God to such a disaster? The response of the Father ... to Adam’s plunge into ruin can be put into one word: *NO!* In that *NO!* echoes the eternal

Yes! of God to us ... The will of God for our blessing in Christ, that determined Yes! to us, translates into an intolerable No! in the teeth of the Fall. God is “for us” and therefore opposed – utterly, eternally and passionately opposed – to our destruction.

That opposition, that fiery and passionate and determined No! to the disaster of the Fall, is the proper understanding of the wrath of God. Wrath is not the opposite of love. Wrath is the love of God in action, in opposing action. It is precisely because ... God has spoken an eternal Yes! to the human race, a Yes! to life and fullness and joy for us, that the Fall and its disaster is met with a stout and intolerable No! – “This is not acceptable. I did not create you to perish in the darkness.” ...

There are those who want us to believe that on the day Adam fell, God the Father was filled with bloodthirsty anger that demanded punishment before He would even consider forgiveness. [T]hey want us to believe that when Jesus Christ hung on the cross, the Father’s anger and wrath were poured out upon Him, instead of us. But that is to assume that the Father was changed by Adam’s sin, and that His heart is not divided toward His creatures. I say to you, God does not change. Adam’s plunge was met by the same God, and the same determination to bless, and by the same passionate love that birthed creation in the first place. The love of the Father ... is as tireless and unflinching as it is determined and unyielding.

## WHY DID JESUS CHRIST DIE?

Why did Jesus Christ die? What happened in His death? Jesus Christ died because the Father would not forsake us, because the Father has a dream for us that He would not abandon, because the love of the Father for us is endless and unflinching. ... Jesus died because the only way to get from the Fall of Adam to the right hand of the Father was through the crucifixion of Adamic existence.

Jesus Christ did not go to the cross to change God; He went to the cross to change us. He did not die to appease the Father’s anger or to heal the Father’s divided heart. Jesus Christ went to the cross to call a halt to the Fall and undo it, to convert fallen Adamic existence to His Father, to systematically eliminate our estrangement, so that he could accomplish His Father’s dream ...

The price tag on His mission was 33 years of fire and trial, 33 years of temptation, with loud crying and tears ... What we see in Gethsemane, when Jesus falls on His face, the gut wrench of it all, the pain and overwhelming weight, the struggle, the passion, the agony, all of this is a window into the whole life of Christ. His whole life was a cross. From the moment of His birth, He began paying the price of our liberation. His whole life was a harrowing ordeal of struggle, of trial and tribulation and pain, as He penetrated deeper and deeper into human estrangement.

On the cross, Jesus Christ made contact with the Garden of Eden, contact with Adam and Eve hiding in fear, contact with the original sin, with the original lie and its darkness. There the Son of the Father plunged Himself into the deepest abyss of human alienation, into the quagmire of darkness and human brokenness and estrangement. He baptized Himself in the waters of Adam’s fall.

There on the cross, He penetrated the last stronghold of darkness. There He walked into the utter depths of our alienation. There the intolerable No!, shouted by God the Father at the Fall of Adam, found its true fulfillment in Jesus’ Yes! “*Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit,*” as He took His final step into Adam’s disaster. Jesus died – and the Fall of Adam died with Him.

– Taken from *Jesus and the Undoing of Adam* (2003)

