

Discussion: John Stott's Cross of Christ

In overview, we have studied the biblical teachings concerning human beings, sin, and the person of Christ. Our schedule for this lesson calls for us to conclude the work of Christ before we begin next class with the application of salvation. Let us grade the quiz, first of all. I have questions, but I am sorry I will not be able to give you the page numbers. These are true or false according to John Stott.

1. Crucifixion was regarded with horror in the ancient world. True, it was certainly the case. We have misunderstood the cross. It is not wrong to use it for jewelry, but we need to understand the horror and then do that. It is like wearing a guillotine or an electric chair around your neck. It is a little symbol of a terrible instrument of torture and death, as John Stott accurately pointed out.
2. Jesus did not die of His own choice. False, of course He did. He died willingly, thus we have to view His death both in terms of God's sovereign control and human responsibility. It was terrible, but it was also the plan of God unfolded.
3. Because Judas' betrayal of Jesus was foretold in Scripture, he is not to be regarded as responsible for the betrayal. False, of course. It was foretold but he is also responsible. How can we hold these things together—both God's sovereignty and human responsibility? I can just tell you we have to. In fact, Luke 22 has them both together. “The Son of Man will go as it has been decreed”—there is God's control—“but woe to that man who betrays Him”—there is real human, not only responsibility, but culpability at the same time. So my thesis, following D.A. Carson and a couple of his writings, is that divine sovereignty and human responsibility are woven into the very fabric of both the Old and New Testaments. Those writings are Carson's book, *Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility*. A simpler way to get into that book is the chapter entitled, “The Mystery of God's Providence” in Carson's book, *How Long, O Lord*. It is a good chapter, introducing this concept of compatibilism. First read “The Mystery of God's Providence” in *How Long O Lord*, and then read the bigger one, *Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility*.
4. We must attribute Jesus' death simultaneously to the plan of God and to the wickedness of human beings. It is true, indeed. The Roman soldiers were guilty. The officials, both Jewish and Gentile, were guilty. The Jewish leaders at the time were guilty. Any occasions that Gentiles have taken throughout history to base anti-Semitism upon the death of our Lord is a terrible mistake, and sadly it has been done. It is certainly the leaders. Part of it is the expression in John's Gospel: “the Jews,” which ordinarily means the Jewish Leaders, the Jewish authorities and not the people as a whole, because Jesus, of course loved the people and died for Jew and Gentile alike.
5. Human death is not a natural, but a penal event. True, Adam and Eve were not made to die. Death was a result of sin, as Romans 5:12 teaches.
6. It is exaggerating that in the Last Supper Jesus viewed His death as a divinely appointed sacrifice by which the new covenant with its promise of forgiveness would be ratified. False, it is not exaggerating. The first three Gospels do not teach a full-blown doctrine of the atonement, but the raw materials are there. Mostly the event of Jesus' death and resurrection are there, but the seeds of the teaching are already planted. And that is both in the saying of Jesus, “The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and give His life as a ransom for many” of the so-called Ransom Saying and then the sayings at that Last Supper, the so-called Eucharist Sayings of Jesus. Both of those lay a foundation that Paul, John, Peter, and the writer to the Hebrews built upon.

7. The cup from which Jesus drank in Gethsemane was the emotional and physical trauma of crucifixion. False, it was the cup of the wrath of God. It was far more than just this emotional and physical trauma, which was real and terrible. It was much more the prospect of dying and paying the penalty for sins. We have talked about the legal picture of the atonement.
8. The cross of Christ shows the gravity of our sins. It is true, because the cross was necessary. It shows what God needed to do in order for us to enjoy forgiveness. In light of his opponents arguing it was not necessary for God to become a man and die, Anselm said, "You have not yet considered the seriousness, the severity of sin." That is exactly the problem. It is certainly the problem of modern men and women who conceive of God along the lines that Packer called, "A Santa Claus theology." God is the great grandfather in the sky who loves everybody and certainly is not holy and just and would never judge anyone. The Bible's picture is far different. God is both holy and just—and also loving—and He bears in Himself the brunt of the punishment that our sins deserve. The cross shows many things, the love of God, the Justice of God, the wisdom of God, and so forth. It also shows the depth of our need. It shows our sins, offense to God who did not spare His own Son to save us.
9. Scripture consistently treats human beings as morally responsible agents. True.
10. An acknowledgement of human guilt before God diminishes the dignity of human beings. False, it is just the contrary. It is the first step toward the kingdom of God. It magnifies God's own holiness. It is the beginning to our regaining our dignity, for our dignity is not found in rebellion against God, but in the humility of faith and in seeing our utter need of the grace of God given in Christ.
11. Because human anger is so often tainted by sin, it is wise never to speak of God's anger or wrath. False, because we do not go from below and project human emotions on God. We start above and the Bible speaks of God as loving, hating, and being jealous. We must be careful not to read human distortions of those emotions into God, but to accept the Bible's picture of the way God is. He is a God of wrath in the face of sin and rebellion. Not out-of-control human wrath, but indeed a controlled, divine, holy hatred of sin. In light of this we need to be careful that we go from the top down and not from the bottom up.
12. All inadequate documents of the atonement are due to inadequate doctrines of God and man. True, according to Stott. I do not disagree. Perhaps somebody could find an exception, but that is a general rule, especially inadequate doctrines of God. Any doctrine of God that would result in people holding that there was no need for the atonement is most inadequate indeed. And as we saw last time when we surveyed the history of the doctrine of the atonement, that has often times been the case. I told you a couple of ways to take the temperature of somebody's understanding of the cross. First, ask where it is directed. Is it merely directed toward human beings to change our minds and to bring us to repentance or to change our feelings, or is it directed toward God Himself? Second is the question of the necessity of the cross. Was it necessary for God to become a man and die in our place? Those views that hold that it was not necessary are certainly sub-biblical and sub-Christian.
13. Anselm taught that the major effect of Christ's death was to move the hearts of sinners to love God. No, that was Abelard. It is false. The major effect of Christ's death was to satisfy the offended honor of God, the great feudal Lord in Anselm's picture of the atonement in his famous work, *Cur Deus Homo* translated *Why God became a Man* or *Why the God-Man*.

14. For God to be able to forgive sinners, He Himself needed to be satisfied in His inner being. It is true. This is a little different nuance than in Anselmic's satisfaction. It is in His inner being in terms of His justice and especially His holiness applied, which is His justice.

15. There are a few things in God Himself that are incompatible with His true deity. False, of course. That would mean an illogical God. No, He is super-rational, if you will. He goes beyond our ability to understand, but He is not self-contradictory. He is truth and there is nothing in God incompatible with God. That is nonsense. There are many things in God that far transcend human ability to understand. Amen. The Bible itself affirms it.

16. Christ's death is rarely presented as a sacrifice in the New Testament. Some have claimed that, but it is certainly false. It is commonly presented as a sacrifice in the New Testament. Already, there are hints of it in the Last Supper sayings. We have it presented that way in the Gospel of John where John the Baptist says, in chapter one of John's Gospel, "Behold the lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world." Paul does it that way in a number of places and Hebrews is loaded with sacrificial terminology, as is the book of Revelation. First Peter 1:4-16 shows it is certainly false.

17. Theologians have *successfully* retained the vocabulary of substitution while rejecting penal substitution. They did it, but not successfully, in Stott's estimation. He is right. Thus it is false. Number seventeen is false. There was and it still continues an anti-legal atmosphere whereby the legal notions of the biblical faith were attacked: God as Judge, sin as violation of the law of God, the atonement understood in penal terms, and a notion of the Last Judgment and God as Judge. Now, it would be unfair, it would be a misrepresentation of the Christian faith, to say anyone of those is the only way of looking at God, sin, the cross, or the Last Judgment. But it is also wrong to try to purge that element out. That actually constitutes creating our own religion and making the Bible answerable to our own likes and, in this case, dislikes. I give Louis Berkhof a lot of credit. He has the legal-penal dimensions all the way through his theology book—although he overplayed it a little bit—but for the most part he has a richer and fuller treatment, whereby those things do not dominate. He does not define sin only as breaking the law. In his day, it would be easy to do it because of the attacks on the legal aspects of the Christian faith. Law is one of the ways God presents Himself as Law-giver, as our need, as Christ meeting our need, and as salvation in terms of justification. You take law out of justification and it is meaningless. Justification is God the Judge declaring guilty sinners righteous because of the Son of God. And likewise, there is a big last judgment motif in Scripture in which God's people will be publicly justified and declared righteous and the wicked will be publicly condemned. God will settle accounts; He will do things right.

18. Jesus applied Isaiah 53 to Himself. It is true.

19. The Father and Son should be separated when we are thinking about the atonement. False, according to Stott, and I agree. They are to be distinguished, but the Trinity can never be separated.

20. In the cross, divine love triumphed over divine wrath by divine self-sacrifice. I can see people answering true or false. It is a quotation from the book, so it is true. Some have said, "What do you mean by triumphed over? It seems like God is against Himself and it sounds like question fifteen, which is about contradiction within a divine essence." It is open to the possibility of misinterpretation. But he does it well. In the cross, divine love triumphs over divine wrath—not unjustly, but justly—by divine self-sacrifice. I confess to you the cross of Christ alone, viewed exactly from this perspective, is an apologetic for the Christian faith. No human being would make up this way of salvation. Human religions talks about human beings earning God's favor or have little concern for the after life and say

that we are all okay. There is no such thing as a man-made religion that has a notion of God becoming a human being and doing for the human race what sinners cannot do for themselves. No, that theory was made up, if you will, in heaven and was accomplished on earth.

21. It is impossible to hold to the historic doctrine of the cross without holding to the historic doctrine of the person of Christ. It is true. Questions 21 and 12 both point in the direction of the coherence of the Christian faith. John Stott is very biblical. He works with the Bible, but he is also theological and sees connections between teachings. In both of those questions, he relates the doctrine of the cross, the doctrines of God and human beings, and now in 21 the person and work of Christ. His instincts are good. If you have a defective doctrine of Christ, you necessarily have a defective doctrine of the atonement. If we reject the fact that God became a human being, then what Jesus did on the cross is not able to rescue us—as we see in the cults, in liberal Protestantism, and even liberal Catholicism.

22. There is no sense in which God needed to be propitiated. False, there is a godly sense in which God needed to be propitiated, not in the pagan sense of propitious, of God demanding His pound of flesh or some notion of a blood-thirsty deity, but in the fact that God is holy and just and is unable to forgive without satisfying His own holy anger. Does it not make you just very thankful for the cross and for what the Savior did? When you look your sin in the face you see the punishment that you deserve, namely hell, and then see Jesus taking the equivalence of hell. Obviously, if He was still suffering eternal conscious punishment on the cross, He could not save anybody so there was a substitution. In three hours, the God-man suffered the equivalent of eternal punishment. It is because of who He is, the infinite-finite one, the Creator-creature, the God-man, that He was able to make that substitution. I am not pretending to understand the divine mathematics in the matter, but there was a substitutionary atonement. There is a sense in which God needed to be propitiated, as seen in Romans 3, and which He was propitiated. There is, of course, a sense in which He did not need to be propitiated, and that would be pagan notions of propitiation.

23. The New Testament never presses the imagery of redemption to the point of telling us to whom the ransom was paid. I would answer true. Some concluded that it is paid to God. I know he rejects the notion of any ransom paid to the devil. The New Testament never presses that imagery. It is true. One could conclude and not be outside the bounds of orthodoxy that it was paid to God, but the Bible does not say. And if you make that step or any step beyond what the Bible says, my own method would say, label that step. It is a deduction. It is not bad to make deductions. Everybody makes them, in fact. Do you think that everything you hold is of equal weight and equally biblical? Then you are fooling yourself. But label your deductions as “deductions” because if you make deductions from your deductions, that is less reliable than the first order of biblical teachings. I am nervous about big superstructures and the ninth story of the building when only the foundation was actually based upon the Bible. In those cases it is “this was based upon this” and then “this upon this,” rather than ideas based on principle. Pretty soon, you are eight steps removed from Scripture and sometimes we fight as fiercely for the superstructure as we do for the foundation, and that ought not to be.

24. Christ's blood does not stand for His death, but for the release of His life. False. Stott correctly disagrees with a couple of his fellow Brits who taught this and influenced many people. Leon Morris in *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross* showed that the biblical metaphor of blood in this context speaks of a violent death, of sacrificial victims in the Old Testament, and even of the Son of God in the New Testament.

25. Justification is the opposite of pollution. False. It is the opposite of condemnation. Sanctification is the opposite of pollution or corruption.

26. Since the publication of Hans Kung's book, *Justification*, there has been widespread proclamation of justification by grace alone through faith alone in the Roman Catholic Church. False. As a matter of fact, I commend to you a wonderful book, *Twentieth Century Theology*, if you want to be apprised of the major developments of theology in the Western world in the twentieth century from the Enlightenment to the present day. Stanley Grenz and Roger Olson's book is outstanding. There is a chapter on Roman Catholic developments; the two representatives are Karl Rahner and Hans Kung. Grenz and Olson are models at treating people fairly from their own writings, so they say some good things about Kung, but in the very end, they end with Rahner's assessment of Kung—that he ended up, to all effects, a liberal Protestant. That is really true and it was true on his doctrine of justification. Rome did not follow Kung in his adoption of Barth and the Reformers concerning justification. We give him credit for being teachable of God's Word, but as you probably know, his credentials were taken away and, because of this and other teachings, he is no longer licensed to teach as a Roman Catholic theologian. Until his recent retirement he was a professor of ecumenical theology at Tübingen and he was portrayed in the book, *Give Some Local Color*. He was on vacation when the pronouncement came from Rome that he was no longer an official teacher of the church. He came home from vacation; he rushed home afraid he might be losing his job. He had no reason to fear because his classes doubled overnight. It seems he was more popular than ever. Students wanted to learn from a renegade. Now it was standing room only in his lectures. He did not seek that and did not intend to rebel against the church, but indeed he had sufficiently rejected the Pope's authority, for example, and taught almost a Protestant doctrine of justification to get himself disenfranchised by Rome.

27. Justification should not be separated from union with Christ. It is true. Any aspect of the doctrine of salvation should not be separated from union with Christ: sanctification, glorification, or any other action you want to put in there.

28. Christ reconciled the cosmic powers by disarming them. I will say true. This has been variously handled. It is a very difficult thing in Paul's writings. F.F. Bruce calls it "The notion of the pacification." The reconciliation of the cosmic powers is difficult because there is no notion in the Bible of angels being saved, being forgiven. "Cosmic powers" means the demons—the evil angels.

Stott understands this reconciliation not to be salvation, but rather disarming those powers. So there is peace in that sense. There is peace in the conquering army taking away the weapons of the other army. Not that there is salvation. It is an enforced peace, if you will. I admit it is difficult and I am not perfectly satisfied with any explanation I have seen. It is easier to criticize other people's explanations than to offer a better one.

29. God did not need to be reconciled to us. False, there is a sense that God needed to be reconciled and that was the ground of our being reconciled—that is, things were not right between Him and us. It is true that Scripture never says it exactly in those words, but it is implied. Scripture says we were reconciled to Him. But do you mean to say that there was perfect peace between Him and us? The problem was only on our side? That sounds like a subjective view of the atonement, and it is. Objective views of the atonement say that something took place outside of us. Purely subjective views say that the work of Christ is only directed toward us to change our attitudes, our thoughts, and our feelings—something within us. Objective means outside of us. Something happened outside of us, whether we believe it or not. For example, orthodoxy traditionally says that the Bible on the table unopened is the Word of God, whether I believe it or read it or not. Neo-orthodoxy pretty much said that it is the Word of God as the instrument of God apprehending me, and even a few times the writers used what has become a cliché that it becomes the Word of God as the Spirit uses it as His chief medium. This is a subjective view of

revelation. It is revelation as encounter. There is some truth to that. But it is first of all true that the Bible on the table, open or unopened, is the Word of God, and then it is true to say that God uses it as His instrument of encountering us. But you do not deny objectivity in the name of subjectivity, likewise, the cross does influence the people of God, but at its base, it accomplished something outside of us, even in the life of God Himself. Because that is true, then it does change us and because God reconciles Himself in the work of His Son, then He reconciles us too. Because God is propitiated in Christ's sacrifice, then we are forgiven and we can enjoy peace of conscience and mind, but it is not because the cross is chiefly designed to change our minds or to give us peace. That is a wonderful by-product of the divine direction of the cross.

Reconciliation is peace-making. It assumes that for each of these biblical metaphors there is a background that illustrates the need. For justification, it is condemnation. For redemption, it is bondage or slavery. For reconciliation, it is enmity, alienation, and estrangement, and it is true that we were far away from God. Now it is not true in the same sense that He was far away from us. He did not sin against us, but it is true that there was no peace between us and Him and it is also true that He did not look favorably on us altogether. Of course, He did or He would not have sent His son. But the background for the sending of the Son is that we were in trouble with a holy God. There was enmity coming from His direction too. It is not equivalent to ours. Ours is unjustified. We were rebels against our maker. His was entirely justified. In fact, if He did not have a holy hatred of sin He would not be God; He would not be the morally perfect being that He is. So reconciliation is two-fold. Fundamentally, the work of Christ in reconciliation is directed to make peace toward a holy God Himself. Secondarily and very importantly for us, it makes peace with us. So Romans 5:1 is so wonderful. It says, "Therefore having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through the Lord Jesus Christ." This has been misunderstood by many moderns and even Evangelical Christians are kind of duped by psychology and psychological categories just permeating the Church. Lots of pastors are at fault for substituting those for biblical categories. I am not against all psychology, but to understand guilt as primarily feelings of guilt is to severely hamper ourselves. The peace that is spoken of in Romans 5:1, which says, "We have peace with God," is not the same thing as Philippians 4:6-7—a heartfelt peace—which is important and wonderful. If you could put it in a bottle and sell it, you would be a millionaire overnight. That peace of heart is a byproduct of peace of relationship. Romans 5:1 does not mean that primarily we have peace in our hearts. It primarily means there is now a state of peace between a holy God and us sinners. He has made peace between Himself and us and us and Himself in the work of His Son. Christ is our peacemaker. God is no longer mad at me because of my sins, because I am now reconciled to Him. Then I can have peace in my heart all day long, as long as I walk with Him. But the miracle is the obstacle has been taken away and the obstacle is not just my own unbelief, hard heart, indifference toward God, or insensitivity to spiritual things. The problem is that there is a holy God in heaven who is angry at sinners and the miracle of grace is that in Christ, God bore the brunt of His own wrath so that He could remain as holy as He has ever been and we could be forgiven. That is viewed in different ways biblically. In terms of reconciliation, it is viewed that God takes the aliens and makes them into His daughters and sons through His Son who made the peace. The biblical metaphor extends to the first-century racial antagonism between Jews and Gentiles. Christ broke down the wall of partition. We think it was the wall in the synagogue or the temple that kept the Gentiles out. Now the "dogs," the Gentiles, can enter into the holy place, know the holy things of God, and can know God even as Jews can know God. All this is through the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ.

30. In the book of John, the cross is a manifestation of God's Glory. Ironically, it is true. It seems to contradict question number one, that crucifixion was horrific in the ancient world. Roman citizens were exempt. Runaway slaves were crucified as examples. Seeing them hanging naked on a cross, expiring or expired, was such a stigma in the ancient world. Crucifixion was a terrible, terrible thing. Now how

could John possibly see the cross as a demonstration of God's Glory? Is he morbid? What is going on here? Paul does the same thing when he talks about "Glorifying in the cross." Do not miss the shock of it. It would be like saying, "glorifying in the guillotine"—"glorifying in the electric chair or the hangman's noose." What is going on here? Because of the one who died on the cross, the cross indeed means not glory for Him, but glory for us. "Through His stripes, we are healed," as Isaiah said long ago. I read so many things today that I lost track of the names, but in a publication of a gentleman with a Jewish background who was really hostile toward Christianity. When his friend read Isaiah 53 to him, the guy really got mad. He did not know where the passage was from and he said, "Anybody sitting at the foot of the cross could have written that." He was just angry because he thought it was a Christian writing. His friend said, "Let me show you where this is from." When he saw that it was from Isaiah 53 he was converted at that point. God read his mind, as it were. God just opened him up. It was an incredible thing. This mention of Isaiah triggered that. So the cross is both in John: horror and glory. That is its wonder. It was a terrible thing for the Son of God, but His suffering is our glory.

31. Although in His forbearance God had temporarily left sins unpunished, now in justice He has punished them in Christ. It is true; this is what Roman 3:25-26 is all about—and the doctrine of propitiation—in Old Testament times and in New Testament times right up until the cross. This is how Joseph and Mary could be called righteous people. Not because they kept the law and earned God's favor—nobody ever did—but because God in His forbearance had temporarily left, in this case their sins, unpunished. Now God sets matters straight. Now He settles accounts. Now He demonstrates His justice in punishing His Son with the punishment that our sins deserved.

32. Peter Abelard is the father of the moral influence theory of the atonement. It is true.

33. Gustav Aulén, in *Christus Victor* argued for the importance of the moral influence theory of the atonement. False, indeed. I did not talk about this before. This is the most influential book on the cross in this century. Gustav Aulén is from a Scandinavian thematic school of theology and the theme that he picked up was that of victory. He correctly saw that Christ's death was presented as victory in the New Testament. He set that against the reigning liberal notion of his time, which was the moral influence theory. He also, unfortunately, set it against the reigning conservative view at the time that Christ died to pay the penalty of our sins and in terms of a legal picture. He was right in seeing victory, and the words "Christus Victor" mean "Christ the Champion." Those words have come into Christian theology. We talk about a Christus Victor—Christ the Champion—motif. They have just come in, and as the blurb on the cover of the book says, "This is a theological modern classic." It has problems as well. The good thing is he emphasized a theme that had been neglected by liberals and conservatives alike. The bad part is he said it was the only theme in Irenaeus, in Luther, and in the New Testament. He says that Hebrews is mainly about Christ the Victor. No, Hebrews is mainly about Christ the Priest and the Sacrifice. So there is a reduction in his method, but still there is a lot of good and it is a very important book. He certainly did not argue for the importance of the moral influence theory. He argued for the importance of the Christus Victor theory. He called it the dramatic theory in which Christ in His death, and especially resurrection, conquers the powers, the world, Satan, the grave, hell, the law, and any other enemy you could name—and he is right. He simply overemphasizes one correct idea to the disparagement of other correct ideas.

34. In the cross, the conquest of our enemies was achieved and consummated. False, the consummation awaits the second coming of Christ. I could see you answering this as true. This is the other one that could be confusing. The conquest was achieved, but the conquest was not consummated in its final, in its fullest, sense. I have used the imagery before of D-Day and V-Day from World War II. The cross is like D-Day when the Allies landed on the beaches of Normandy. The war was won, but lots of lives

were lost in between that day and the Japanese surrender on VJ-Day. Likewise, let us picture the chess image of a stubborn opponent. You have just captured his queen. Any reasonable person would flip over his king and give it up. He makes you play on and he is tricky enough to make you play on for hours and take every pawn. The devil is like that. He has lost the war, but the battles go on and he forces a cleanup operation, if you will. The imagery is not perfect. The devil is not God's equal. He is a renegade servant of God and God will win, but there is something in those pictures of an already and not yet. Already, the devil has been vanquished, but not yet has he been cast into the lake of fire.

35. We ought not to ascribe saving efficacy to both Christ's death and resurrection equally. If I understand him correctly, he says true. I disagree with him. He downplays the resurrection of Christ. The book is wonderful. I feel like a humming bird pecking at an elephant's ear. I mean, he is the giant, I am the little guy here. It is a really great book. It is easy to criticize this great book. But Richard Gavin's book, *Resurrection and Redemption*, shows that the resurrection of Christ is, if possible, equal to and almost as important as the cross. Maybe he is technically right—the cross is more important. But Calvin was right, too; they are inseparable. So I would fault him at least here for emphasis.

36. Because Christ has set us free from the law, Christians have no obligation to obey God's law. False. They do have obligation. They have a greater obligation because they are now sons and daughters of God; they want to please Him, do His will, and honor their Father.

37. Because Christ died for our sicknesses as well as for our sins, there is healing in the atonement. I do not mean to be funny but I have forgotten what he says. I could answer true, speaking ultimately. He says false; He is thinking penultimately. There is healing in the atonement. Ultimately we are going to be resurrected, but immediately it is false to say that you can claim it. So question 37 is false according to Stott.