

The Dignity of Christ's Person informs the Power of His Blood

By Jay Wegter

Truth, total truth, universal truth, absolutizing truth, is a human and divine Person, for Jesus said, "I am the truth" (Jn 14:6). Christ is *Logos*, the Word of God, the eternal utterance of the Godhead, which means that the origin, the order, the beauty, the structures, the fixity, the rationality, the predictability, and the upholding of the universe finds its absolute source in a human and divine Person (Jn 1:1-10). The Lord of the cosmos is a human and divine Person which means that He is the focal point, the goal, the aim, the destiny, and the unifier of reality. All things are summed up in Him (Eph 1:9-10), and all things find their existence and sustenance in Him (Col 1:16-17), and all things are reconciled in Him and find their meaning in Him (Col 1:20).

He is preeminent, He has first place in all things, by the Father's will (Col 1:18). So fully did Christ the God-man enter our existential situation that He came as a mortal, weak, under the curse, capable of suffering (2 Cor 13:4). He humbled Himself in accordance with the Father's plan to the point of being pierced and put to death on a Roman cross (Phil 2:5-11). The human dimension of His God-man existence experienced death and wrath on behalf of His people. And then He was raised and glorified on behalf of his people, so that they might possess complete solidarity with Him by His substitutionary work (Rom 6:1-13).

This work was planned in an eternal covenant within the Godhead, so that all the benefits that Christ gained might accrue to His people, as if they had fully atoned for their sin and died under the maximum penalty. Christ's rising and glorification is why they will be raised and glorified. My question for the reader is, *have you dwelled upon these spiritual realities recently?* Have you meditated upon the fact that the God-man, the *Logos*, the Creator, plunged Himself into depths of suffering that He might remove the sting of death, stripping off its terror and shameful horror (Acts 2:22-24; 1 Cor 15:50-58; Is 25:6-9).

We must know why the dignity of His Person as God and man gives incredible power, efficacy, and scope to His shed blood. It is wonderfully devastatingly, to ponder Christ's fitness, the fitness of His Person and His work, to completely answer the sinner's ruin, dilemma, and predicament. Believers are called to a daily faith-driven appropriation of Christ and Him crucified. This practice ought to be habitual. The sinner became a believer because of the Holy Spirit's work. Under the Spirit's conviction and illumination, he came to terms with

the reality that only in Christ does a sinner have life in God, favor with God, righteousness, adoption, acceptance, and covenant cleansing. So daily, repeatedly, it is not a small thing or minor paradigm to be faced with what we call *the scandal of the cross*. In fact, feeding upon Christ in His work is very much akin to our body's need to drink and eat daily for our physical life to be sustained.

But there is a great scandal in connection with what took place at the cross—namely that the pure eternal Son of God was put to death for the enemies of the Godhead. He was put to death to reconcile defiled rebels and traitors. This is why nothing humbles like the cross. And yet, when we consider our pollution, our depravity, our defiled state, the piercing of the Son of man on our behalf sends a probing lance into our own hearts. We are smitten by the depths of our unworthiness when by faith behold our suffering Substitute. Thus, we can identify with the experience of the lead apostle, Simon Peter. He felt a withering humiliation; he was chagrined and abashed at the thought of Christ serving him. He utters in John 13:8, "You'll never wash my feet!" And then after the miraculous drought of fish, he says to the Savior of the world, "depart from me for I am a sinful man" (Lu 5:8). In other words, he is wracked by the incongruous—what possible fellowship could a cursing, vile fisherman have with the pure, divine Son of God?

It is the mystery of Christ (Col 2:2); namely as the Lamb of God, He draws all men to Himself (Jn 12:32), but also as the transcendently holy One He repels the sin-conscious transgressor. This is but a tiny look at the scandal of the cross. There is a kind of work to be done in meditating on the work of Christ which involves a fresh appropriation and renewed grasp of this central plank of God's free grace. For this renewal involves a 'reset', a revitalized consent to be stripped of all imagined merit, a clearing out of dependency upon all legal supports of the soul, a renewed reclining upon the pardoning and cleansing mercy found in the blood of Christ.

This fresh appropriation of the blood of Christ entails amazement at the fitness of the blood and flesh of the Son of God to answer my ruin definitively, and to reverse my hopeless case. So, diving further into this appropriation by faith in the blood and flesh of Christ—it is a wonderful, beautiful experience to be knocked off balance, to have the seismic waves of the atonement course through us. To be beautifully shocked at the propitiation; namely how perfectly appropriate the Person work of Christ is for our case. That is why it says in Hebrews chapter 7:26-27, "For it was fitting for us to have such a high priest, holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens; who does not

need daily, like those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the *sins* of the people, because this He did once for all when He offered up Himself.”

This appropriation by faith of the Person and work of Christ involves an ever-new grasp of how perfect a medicine the suffering of Christ is. His suffering, His blood, His flesh, His atoning death combined to make the perfect healing medicine for the terminal sinner. Faith feeding upon Christ and His work is a very consolidating action for our faith. It keeps our faith from being spread out over things that are not centered in the gospel. We affirm that there is only life, and cleansing, and right-standing in Christ alone. But this affirmation that all is found in Christ means we must also repudiate all false supports of the soul. And by false, we mean this, *are we looking to anything besides Christ's flesh and blood to gain God's favor?* Divine favor is not the same as seeking to please God (2 Cor 5:9).

God's favor by which we have fellowship and communion with him, is not a function of my sanctification, nor a function of my service. Ministry does not mediate fellowship with the Lord. No, the basis of my communing with the Lord is supplied by the Lord. The source of my communion with Him is the giving of his flesh and blood for me. To appropriate this daily by faith so as to feed upon Christ, is spoken of very summarily by our Lord in John 6:56. “He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him.” As we abide in Him and partake of his flesh and blood by faith, feeding upon our soul's true food, we are abiding in Him, remaining in Him, having fellowship with Him, having joy that He owns and possesses us down to the very core and depths of our being.

What our Lord has done with our sin in the guilt-exchange of Calvary is the source of our fellowship with Him. And the overflow of communing with Him is the mutual edification of the members of His Body in His church. This is the life of the Body. This begs the question, how does Christ animate and energize and empower the life of the Body? How does the Son of God move our fellowship from somewhat mundane socializing to life-giving, mutually edifying fellowship? Another way to ask the question is, how does our Lord assist us in moving the vertical of fellowship with Himself to the horizontal fellowship with our brethren? What would need to take place for this building-up of one another and laying our lives down for one to be regarded as normative, desirable, and characteristic of life in His Body?

Thus, the celebration of our shared life in Christ means that the Lord's Table ought to communicate both the reality of our vertical fellowship with the

Lord and the reality of our horizontal fellowship with our brethren. If this all-important truth were a more indispensable part of our sermonizing, I believe we would see how our vertical communion with the Lord produces horizontal communion with our brethren. We would not be content for a moment to perfunctorily down a thimble of grape juice. And we would insist on framing this ordinance of the Lord's Table by preaching the concomitant identification truths so that the spiritual nourishment our Lord intends of this ordinance is not missed.

Like an oyster coating an irritating grain of sand with insulating nacre, the ordinance of the Lord's Table has been sealed off from its sharp application.

As the years go by, the Communion Table seems to have less of a living, teaching, rectifying interface with the Lord and His Body. There is little effort made to unfold its practical implications for Body life. Should we not be asking, *what does this mean that the members of Christ's Body, are joined together as members of one another?* (Eph 4:25). Is it not that they together possess shared life in Christ? And so much so that the reality of being members of one another ought to completely shape the way we do church? For our solidarity with our Savior is meant to translate into the reality of solidarity with one another—our Lord binding us to one another as a new lump, a new loaf (1 Cor 5:7). Now returning to cross-centered Christianity.

Let us not miss why the message of the cross and Christ crucified is scandalous. There is a certain scandal attached to substitutionary penal substitution. The Holy One, laying His life down in place of the unholy. What follows are eight reasons why the message of the cross is a scandal, and continues to be a scandal at times, even to the born-again Christian. **1)** there is no solution to your sinful ruin before God but by the humbling and agonizing death of the Son of God in your place. That is a scandalous thought to natural moral reasoning. **2)** Next, that God would take pleasure in bruising His Son for the sake of sinners and God's glory is a scandal (Is 53:10). **3)** next, that it is my personal sin for which the Son of God is suffering, that He might answer for my sin as my High Priest, pleading the merits of His blood. That is a scandalous thought, and incredibly humbling. **4)** that the cross destroys every single instinct of natural religion. All the carnal instincts about gaining divine favor, earning acceptance, obligating the divine, and racking up merit, are overturned by the cross. **5)** next, the cross destroys the value of even the most sacrificial works done prior to regeneration. **6)** It is scandalous that the infinitely righteous eternal One should die for the unrighteous, that He should die for the undeserving, for the enemies of God, for those that have merited

only wrath. **7)** the cross is a scandal because, by the cross of Christ, God's wisdom and power are NOT accessible to the world's wisdom (1 Cor 1:21). Man's wisdom will not find that the cross is powerful and wise, instead, by the world's wisdom, the cross can only produce a conclusion that it is foolish and weak (1 Cor 1:22-25). And this is a scandal as well to the natural man's intellect. **8)** The message of the cross is a scandal because it destroys preparationism. It destroys the whole idea that by moral striving and sincerity, the sinner may attract or even qualify himself for God's grace.

The natural man seeks to make himself a candidate for God's grace by his seriousness, his moral striving, and by his 'seeking'. What a scandalous thing that we cannot prepare ourselves for our relationship with God. And thus, how scandalous it is that the guilt-exchange at the cross was an actual verdict in God's courtroom of a finished atonement—the only verdict 'of innocent' on the sinner's behalf which God recognizes. And so, the cross continues to generate scandal even for the church, for the cross tells us that there is no way we can obligate God, and therefore our 'worship services' do not merit or increase His favor—but rather be gatherings which honor God by horizontal edification.

And yet the cross obligates us as those who received the benefits of Christ's blood. For we are not our own but are bought with a price (1 Cor 6:19-20). Now, some would say the most scandalous thing of all about the cross is that the cross continues to exercise a needed, corrective, realigning power in the life of the believer, so that you never outgrow the cross's power to search you, cleanse you, calibrate you, rectify you, and reveal God to you. As such, the cross can offend the believer as much as the cross offends an unbeliever, only in a different way. Consider that the cross continues daily to cancel out my imagined few shekels of merit I have earned to 'spend' on heaven's favor. And the cross claims to be the indispensable source of putting sin to death (Rom 6:11-13).

And the cross offends because it tells us that we are not done with its benefits, but utterly dependent upon them. The cross is essential in our progress in sanctification, for we are indeed leveraged upon our co-crucifixion with Christ to keep putting sin to death and mortifying what remains of indwelling iniquity (Rom 6:1-13). And so, you will not outgrow your need for the cross. You will not graduate from its tendency to be a scandal, which is why its ability to neutralize and counter our flesh and hold it in place and crucify it is so important (Gal 5:24). There is no means superior to the cross to keep beating down our proud religious flesh, and in displaying the glory of Christ to the beholding believer.