

To What Ends Did Christ Die?

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For the past six years, I have been working—with some interruptions!—on a Ph.D. in Scottish history, focusing on the political thought of the seventeenth-century Covenanters, forefathers of today's Presbyterians. One of the verses from the Bible that Covenanting ministers were most apt to cite was 1 Corinthians 9:16: "For though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of: for necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!" Thus did those who, refusing to bow to King Charles II's claim to supremacy in matters ecclesiastical, and thus declining his indulgence to non-conforming ministers, justify their persistence in preaching despite the Crown's withholding license from them.

My head has been immersed in old-fashioned times, and so I propose to preach in an old-fashioned way, in a manner as like to that of seventeenth-century Scottish Presbyterians as I can attain—except that I promise not to preach for more than two or three hours!—setting clearly and simply before you what Scripture says, and trusting the Spirit of God to use the Word of God to accomplish His ends, as He promised in Isaiah 55:11 always to do.

What is the gospel? It is the good news of what Christ set out to do, and did do, by His death on the cross for those whom His Father had given Him. If I would proclaim the gospel to you, I must tell you what Christ purposed and accomplished in His death. John Owen, in *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ*, first published in 1648, summarized the purposes and effects of the death of Christ by saying that Jesus died ". . . to save us, to deliver us from the evil world, to purge and wash us, to make us holy, zealous, fruitful in good works, to render us acceptable, and to bring us unto God; for through him 'we have access into the grace wherein we stand.'" But let us not be satisfied with a mere summary. Let us look to the details of these rich and startling gifts, these great spiritual blessings that Christ procured for, and that consequently belong to, every believer. Certainly there are more than these, but I call your attention to twelve intents and effects of Christ in dying for His sheep:

1. Christ came and died *to save those who were lost*. In the parable of the lost sheep, Jesus tells us, "For the Son of man is come to save that which was lost," He said (Matthew 18:11), and when He visits the home of Zaccheus, he answers those who condemn Him for consorting with a sinner, "For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10). Now these words do not tell us of something hypothetical, something that Christ might or might not accomplish. They tell us of a sure achievement. ". . . as Zaccheus was recovered by conversion," says Owen, "by bringing [him] into the free covenant, making him a son of Abraham, or as the lost sheep which he lays upon his shoulder and bringeth home; so unless he findeth that he seeketh for, unless he recover that which he cometh to save, he faileth of his purpose." And the Son of God does not fail, for He prayed to His Father, "I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do."
2. Christ came and died to save *His people from their sins*, as the angel told Joseph in Matthew 1:21: "And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins." The purpose of Christ's death is not only to pay the penalty for His people's sins, but also to free them from their former bondage to sin. This, and nothing less, is true freedom. It is the true freedom of the faith that is the alone instrument of our justification. Consequently, it is impossible for the true believer to think, "I will let my sin abound that grace may abound" or "I will continue in sin because I am not under law but under grace," for in truth the one who receives Jesus, that is, who believes in His name, as the phrase *in His name* connotes, embraces Christ as his new Master, sees himself ransomed from a tyrannous master by

a new and good and loving Master who will not allow him to continue under the dominion of his former master. As Dr. Lamerson taught us Tuesday when he preached on slavery in the New Testament, becoming a Christian means becoming a slave of Christ. “Do you not know,” Paul asks in Romans 6:16, “that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one’s slaves whom you obey, whether of sin to death or of obedience to righteousness? But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness. I speak in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves of uncleanness, and of lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves of righteousness for holiness. For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. What fruit did you have then in the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life.”

3. Christ came and died to save *sinners*. Paul tells us in 1 Timothy 1:15, “This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief.” Notice that the Scriptures do not tell us that Christ came only to offer salvation to sinners, but that He came to *save* sinners. As Owen said, He came “not to open a door for them to come in if they will or can; not to make a way passable, that they may be saved; not to purchase reconciliation and pardon of his Father, which perhaps they shall never enjoy; but actually to save them from all the guilt and power of sin, and from the wrath of God for sin: which, if he doth not accomplish, he fails of the end of his coming; and if that ought not to be affirmed”—if we ought not to call Christ Jesus, the King of kings and Lord of lords, the One to whom the Father gave all authority in Heaven and on Earth, who finished all the work the Father gave Him to do, a failure—then surely He actually achieved the salvation of sinners.
4. Christ came and died *to destroy the devil and deliver those who through fear of death were in bondage to him*. Hebrews 2:14-15 says, “Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.” Our increasingly secular age once looked askance at the notion that there is a real, personal devil, an enemy of God and men, but as C. S. Lewis so aptly pointed out in *The Screwtape Letters*, it was one of the devil’s best tricks to convince men that he did not exist; then they became complacent and easy targets for his wicked devices. We should not be surprised, therefore, at the great resurgence of witchcraft and devil worship throughout the Western world—indeed, there are universities in the United States now that offer courses and even degrees in witchcraft. This devil goes about, Scripture tells us, like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. But the children of God need never fear him, for Christ through His death ruined him and delivered us from him.
5. “. . . the Son of man came . . . *to give his life a ransom for many*,” Jesus said in Matthew 20:28. A ransom is the price paid to release a slave or a prisoner from bondage, and once paid, the one who presented the ransom has every right to require the release of him for whom he paid it. Just so did God the Father promise to His Son, in Psalm 2:8, “Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession.” Just so, in His high-priestly prayer recorded in John 17, Christ prayed for His disciples then and now: “For I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came out from thee, and they have believed that thou didst send me. I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine. And all mine are thine, and thine are mine; and I am glorified in them. . . . I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil. . . . Sanctify them by thy truth; thy word is truth. . . . Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are

one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me. Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world.” Because the Father always hears the Son (John 11:42), and because the Son prays only according to the Father’s will, since He came to do not His own will but the will of Him who sent Him (John 6:38), and because God promises to give whatever His servants ask according to His will (1 John 5:14-15), it is absolutely certain that Christ’s prayers for His people are granted: that they are kept from the evil one, sanctified by the Word of God, united with God and with each other, and will indeed be where their Master is, forever beholding His glory.

6. Christ came *to justify those for whom He should die*. In 2 Corinthians 5:21 Paul explains, “For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.” Taking our sins upon Himself, He suffered the punishment due to them; and giving us the gift of His righteousness, He made us perfect in the sight of God the Father. “Those whom God effectually calleth,” the *Confession* explains, “he also freely justifieth: not by infusing righteousness into them, but by pardoning their sins, and by accounting and accepting their persons as righteous; not for anything wrought in them, or done by them, but for Christ’s sake alone; nor by imputing faith itself, the act of believing, or any other evangelical obedience to them, as their righteousness; but by imputing the obedience and satisfaction of Christ unto them, they receiving and resting on him and his righteousness, by faith; which faith they have not of themselves, it is the gift of God.”
7. Christ came and died *to sanctify and cleanse the Church, and to redeem believers from iniquity and purify for Himself a people*. “Christ . . . loved the church, and gave himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish” (Ephesians 5:25-27). He “gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works” (Titus 2:14). Surely to anyone who knows himself a sinner, who knows as Scripture tells him that even all his righteousnesses are no better than filthy rags in God’s sight, this is good news!
8. Christ came and died *to deliver us from this present evil world and from the curse of the law and our guilt, that we might be adopted as sons of God*. The Apostle Paul tells us in Galatians 1:4 that Christ “gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father,” and in Galatians 4:4-6, “But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father.” Therefore the Christian is no longer a citizen merely of this world but of another world; his citizenship is in Heaven, and to it he looks all his life as his destination, where one day he will join with all the saints who have gone before him in sinless adoration of the Lamb of God who took away his sins.
9. Christ came and died *that all His people should die to sin and thus be freed from its dominion*. Listen again to the great Apostle: “Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. For he that is dead is freed from sin” (Romans 6:6-7).
10. Christ came and died to glorify His people, that is, *to present us holy in God’s sight*. “And you,” Paul says, “that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled in the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unreprouvable in his sight” (Colossians 1:21-22). It is true that Paul immediately adds a condition: “. . . if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard” (verse 23). But Christ prayed to the Father for just such perseverance of the saints when He said, “Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are. While I was with them

in the world, I kept them in thy name: those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition; that the scripture might be fulfilled” (John 17:11-12). Dare we think that the Father denies anything that the Son requests? Certainly not, for the Son is our righteous Advocate (1 John 2:1).

11. Christ came and died *to reconcile us to God and to one another*. In Ephesians 2:13-16 Paul writes, “But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace; and that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby.”
12. Finally, Christ came and died *to make us who were dead in trespasses and sins, sons of disobedience, by nature children of wrath, fit for God, and to bring us near to Him*. Listen one more time to Paul: “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: by whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. . . . For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life. And not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the [reconciliation]” (Romans 5:1-2, 6-11).

Such are some—not all—of the blessings that belong to those for whom Christ died. True, some of these are conditioned on faith. But faith itself is, as we read earlier in Ephesians 2:8-9, a gift from God, as we learn also from Philippians 1:29: “For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, . . . to believe on him.” And it is a gift that comes *after* the gift of regeneration, of new life in Christ, for Jesus said, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life” (John 5:24). Think carefully about the verb tenses in this verse: “He that *heareth* my word”—present tense; “and *believeth* on him that sent me”—present tense; “*hath* everlasting life”—present tense; “and *shall not come* into condemnation”—future tense; “but *is passed* from death unto life”—perfect tense. Jesus here makes passing from death unto life the prerequisite, the condition, for hearing and believing. We do not believe in order to be born again; we must be born again in order to believe. And thus this verse gives glorious, blessed assurance to all who *do* believe, for it tells them that their faith is indeed the evidence of something not seen (Hebrews 11:1)—of their new birth.

In closing, let me quote Paul one more time. In Romans 8, he tells us, “For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit [himself] beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: and if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together” (Romans 8:14-16). And to all who through regeneration have received the gifts of faith and repentance, to all who are thus adopted as children of God, he gives this mighty guarantee: “And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified. What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us? He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God’s elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or

sword? As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:28-39).

“Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Savior, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen.” (Jude 1:24-25)