

Extravagant Grace
Indispensable Cross

-FIVE STUDIES

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INTRODUCTION

'The Cross! Let it not once be named in the ears of a Roman', was a saying in the ancient world.

To bind the horrible indignity of crucifixion with the luxurious goodness of God is preposterous for pleasure-seeking humans of the twentieth century.

These studies will attempt to reveal the lavishness of God's grace upon His enemies in the Cross of Jesus Christ. Surrounded by the venom of human hostility, God outstrips us to exhaust the evil done to Him, and pour out His goodness on those who deserve exclusion from His presence. Paul says that where sin increased more and more, grace overleapt it and supra-abounded.

God's work of grace in the Cross is as indispensable as the air we breathe. No grace means no Cross. No Cross means no hope. The grace of the Cross is all sufficient.

The Cross is indispensable from the Gospel and from the reality of a moral, purposeful universe. The areas nominated below are those covered in the studies showing the cruciality of the Cross:

- i) That the plan of God can be fulfilled:
- ii) To satisfy the holiness of God:
- iii) For the defeat of God's enemies:
- iv) To arrest ingrained rebels'
- v) The moral regeneration of believers.

STUDY ONE

GOD PLANS THE CROSS**1. For Christ The Cross Is The Divine "Must"**

In Mark 8:31 we are to see Jesus' death not as the inevitable consequence of human evil, but as indispensable in the purpose of God. Here Jesus is teaching the nature and goal of his Messianic vocation. This is a turning point in his ministry.

Mark 9:30–32 infers that God will hand Jesus over, which is a great puzzle for the disciples with their Messianic expectations. The same picture is drawn in Mark 10:32–34, but Jesus must *tell* them, so uncomprehending were the disciples.

Jesus is resolute, Luke 9: 51, cf. Isaiah 50: 7. He is constrained by God's call. His will is only to do his Father's will, John 5: 19f. ,30, 6:38, Hebrews 10:4–10, etc. Christ's death is the great necessity, as he does only what the prophets declare of the will of God, Luke 24: 25–27, 44ff.

Clearly, Jesus does not see his death as 'fate', nor must we misconstrue it as man offering his best to God, but as God giving His best to man, I John 4:10.

2. The Cross Repels Us

Peter is scandalised, Mark 8: 32f., but his superior reaction is anti-grace. I Corinthians 1: 18–25 says the Cross is a grotesque offence to Greeks as intellectually stupid, and to Jews as a sign of God's

curse. Deuteronomy 21:23. Galatians 3:13, Hebrews 12:2. The same revulsion applies today, the grace of the Cross rules out the last vestige of human egotism, Galatians 5:11.

The Cross is the one thing we miss. The last grief we will face. Hence we sanitise the Gospel, carry on a kingdom of God business perhaps with the Cross as our sign, but not in our centre.

3. The Cross Has Always Been In The Mind Of God

Christ's death was according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, Acts 2:23. It was planned in eternity, I Peter 1:20, Revelation 13:8. Therefore it is not 'Plan B' to deal with the failure of 'Plan A'.

God's plan is His grace plan with its origin in eternity, not in time, II Timothy 1:9, I Corinthians 2:7, Ephesians 1:3–8. God is no man's debtor, He does as He pleases, anti accomplishes what He wills, Psalm 115:3, Acts 17:24f., Romans 9:15. Isaiah 14: 26f.. 64:8.

The destination God has set is the glorification of His family and the rehabilitation of the entire creation, Hebrews 2:10, I Corinthians 2:7, Ephesians 1: 4– 5,9 10, Revelation 21 – 22.

That God should predestinate to save the world infuriates man in his stress to master history for his own ends. This has tragic consequences.

4. The Full Revelation of God Is In The Cross

Jesus shows us unmistakably who God is, John 1:16–18. Matthew 11:27. Yet he asks for all of his

Father's glory to be given to him for the work of the Cross, John 17: 1–5. The prime doer in the Cross was the Father. Only in the Cross do we know who Jesus is, Galatians 1:15–16, 2:20, II Corinthians 5:16. By his forgiveness we are reconciled to God. To be united with Christ is to be united with God, and in Christ's Cross we see not merely what God became, but what He has always been. Grace is the outworking of God's holiness, sin is its defiance. but the Cross is its victory.

In the big picture, the revelation of God takes us beyond personal piety to see that in the Cross God has reconciled 'all things', Colossians 1:15–20, II Corinthians 5:19, Romans 8:19–25. This foregone salvation becomes ours by repentance and faith.

STUDY TWO

THE GOOD NEWS OF GOD'S WRATH

1. The Gospel Of Grace Is The Gospel Of Judgement

Repeatedly we are told the action of God's love is seen in the giving of His only Son, John 3:16, Romans 5: 6–8.

Simultaneously we are told that the Father loves the Son for laying down his life, John 10: 17–18, and that God's judgement falls upon the Son, Matthew 26: 31, of. Zechariah 13:7. God's striking of His peer, His equal, is His insistence to judge, Deuteronomy 32:39ff., Ezekiel 7: 9.

It is not by escaping judgement that we are saved, but by going through judgement, John 5:24, Romans 8:14. Redemption is by judgement. Isaiah 1:27, 5:13–17, 17:7f.. 26:7–15, Matthew 3:7–12, etc.

The judgement is the action of God's grace against evil, Romans 3:23–26, I John 4: 10. We are acquitted of all guilt according to law and the righteousness of God. This is founded upon 'propitiation' the averting of wrath. Christ is the propitiation in bearing our sin, he bears the wrath of *God* against sin.

2. A Word To The Sensitive and The Sentimentalist

Moses reputedly asks, 'Who considers the power of thy anger, and thy wrath according to the fear of thee?' (Psalm 90:11). To so consider is to gain true wisdom.

Some have let themselves be victimised by a loveless wrath. It must be considered that according to our state, or conscience, we perceive, Matthew 5:8, Titus 1:15, cf. II Samuel 22:27. Psalm 18:26. The guilty are fearful, I John 4:18, and God's anger terrifies the presumptuous, II Samuel 6:1–17.

Grace is not sentimentality. It cannot be divorced from God 'the Holy One'. Rather, holiness goes out as passionate grace brimming and overflowing in its reaction to all sin and all which destroys the creation. Isaiah 6:1ff., Habakkuk 1:13, I John 1:5–7. True love cannot be neutral to sin.

3. The Principle Of Wrath Is God Personally Giving Us Over To Our Sin

This is most clearly seen in Romans 1:18ff, of Psalm 7:11, 50:6, 90:9. We cannot escape the love of God—we can only live against it, and bear its offence.

Wrath as the experience of sin is seen in Isaiah 64:7. Jeremiah 14:10, Hosea 7:2, I Thessalonians 2:16, cf. Psalm 107:17, Proverbs 5:22f.

4. Where God's Covenant People Give Way To Idols, They Know The Severity Of His Judgement

This is explicit in the blessing and curse of Deuteronomy 28. The Lord judges Israel, Amos 3: 1–2, the Church, I Peter 4:17, I Corinthians 11:27–32, those who hide their sin, Psalm 32, and those who in refusing grace, justify themselves by law, Romans 4:15, Galatians 3:11, of. Psalm 38, Hosea 14:4.

5. The Judgement of Grace Is Enforced At The Cross

Jesus sees his death as a judgement. Matthew 26:31. Paul says he becomes 'curse for us'. Galatians 3:13. We have seen Christ is the propitiation God provides. In bearing our sin, he takes its death. destruction and anguish, I Peter 2:24, II Corinthians 5:21. Our conscience becomes his, with its dreadful darkness, and Jesus drinks the bitter cup of God's wrath, Matthew 26:29, cf. Jeremiah 25:15f. ,27, Psalm 75:7f., Luke 22:42f., John 18:11, Hebrews 5:7. We perceive Christ's cry from the depths is 'the cry of all lost men and women', Matthew 27: 46, cf. Psalm 22.

We are taken up into the Cross and with our sin. judged, Romans 6: 5–11, Galatians 2: 19–20, II Corinthians 5: 14. Being justified through judgement forever, we see the love of God, our conscience is satisfied. and we believe, Hebrews 9: 14, I John 4: 18. The people of God are healed of their backsliding, Hosea 14: 4. and know the peace of confession, Psalm 32, Isaiah 57:19–21.

STUDY THREE

WE HAVE ANOTHER KING**1. Jesus Is King**

Acts 17:3 and its context tell us that Paul's message was focused on the necessity of Messiah's death and resurrection. Jesus is the one and he is King. The message of the synoptic gospels is the kingdom of God. The apostolic preaching is the same theme but now in light of Christ's triumph on the Cross – it is that this man is King of the Kingdom, Acts 8:4,12, 10:36,42, 20:24–25, 28:31.

The Cross and Resurrection are bound together in an indissoluble unity. Jesus is the risen Lord, Acts 2:24,36, 3:15, 4:2,10,33, 5:30f., etc. by reason of his defeat of death and all the enemies of God.

The Gospel is the action of Christ's lordship, freeing the slaves and bringing them under a new Master, I Corinthians 12:3, Romans 10:9f. II Corinthians 4:5, Revelation 19: 16. Romans 6: 16– 23.

2. Christ's Kingship Confronts The Kingdom of Man

In Acts 17:1–8, the charge brought against Paul was trumped up – making it a distortion of the central truth. The confusion made the message appear seditious.

The truth is that Christ's Kingship is over all the idols of statism. The Church faced this in the area of religious freedom. The Empire allowed its

people to worship their own gods, and for the most part did not require Christians to worship pagan gods. But the Empire required Christians to recognise the right of the State to grant this freedom, whereas the Church would not recognise the *supremacy* of the State saying both Church and State are under Christ's Kingship, and the law of God.

Statism is the corporate kingdom of man taking over the role of God, eg. Genesis 11:1ff., Daniel 4, Matthew 20:25, Revelation 17–18. Babylon is 'our father the state', Matthew 23:8–11. Law-making is a divine act. Saving by legislation is statism's attempt at unity and Utopia. Democracy becomes the voice of God. Only the State can secure us from disaster.

The State holds man in its power by fear, guilt, insecurity, terror and promise, Hebrews 2:14f., I John 4:18, I Corinthians 15:56, Revelation 12:11.

3. Jesus Is The Crucified King

We preach not a political Christ, Acts 17:3, I Corinthians 2: If, 1:18ff. Temptation for power is conquered by Jesus, Luke 4:1–12, John 6:1–15, Mark 10:45, John 18:36, Matthew 26:52. His is the way of grace, not numbers, economic supremacy, manipulation, religion, violence, syncretism etc., – it is this which attacks God and must be finally overcome if man is to be free, and God's reign secured forever.

4. The Cross Is The Battle Ground Where

Christ Defeats The World System For Ever

The prophets announce the Day of the Lord, Psalm 2, 110, Isaiah 11:1–10, 9:1–8, 26:1 15. Daniel 7:13–14,18,22. Jesus knows his vocation, Mark 8:31. He is resolute to do his Father's will. He is the

stronger than the strong man, Luke 11: 21f. Bearing our sin as the Lamb of God, Jesus confronts the world powers of darkness, Luke 22: 53. He overcomes the world, John 16: 33, by engaging all the anti-powers of Satan and man's system, Matthew 27:37ff., Psalm 69. At the Cross their judgement takes place, John 12:31, where Christ exhausts the negativity of evil, not with 'bald power', but the grace of holiness. John 19:30, Luke 23:46, Colossians 2:15~ Ephesians 4:8f., I John 3:8.

The Resurrection of Jesus demonstrates the power of his death and declares him Lord, Acts 2:23-24,36, Philippians 2:8-11.

5. We Have Another King

By his victory of grace, we are freed to serve. Christ, Galatians 1:4, 6: 14, I Thessalonians 1: 9. Grace has broken the grip which the world has on us by reason of our guilt, Romans 4:25, Acts 13:28f.

To serve Christ as King is to live under His rule. Ephesians 4: 17~ 24, Colossians 3:15, and note verses 13,15-17,23~ 24, Matthew 5 7, etc. This is to be in the new world of Messiah, living in the life of grace, Romans 6: 14, and the power of the Spirit, Galatians 5: 22- 26.

STUDY FOUR

ARRESTED BY THE CROSS

1. The Love Of Christ Compels Habitual Rebels

II Corinthians 5:14 gives the principle of constraint. For people created in God's image with great power to reverse that image, and use those powers with intransigent will against God, it will take Christ's love poured out in the Cross to melt the will into willing' submission. Our anti-God is resolute, deceitful, and hostile, Romans 3:10ff., Ephesians 2: 1-3, Jeremiah 9:5, 13:23, 17:9. Hosea 6:4, 7:2, 8,14, Colossians 1: 21.

Self pitying, needs centred, angry, victimised by the world and God, fearful, self securing, etc., neither hardship, calamity. threatening. or stroking will melt the chronic hardness of man.

To constrain is to hem in, Luke 19: 43, to have no alternative, Luke 12:50, to be gripped, Luke 4:38. The love of Christ forces us to capitulate, confines us to obedience, giving us no choice, I Corinthians 9: 16.

2. Grace Obligates Us To Obedience

II Corinthians 5:14-15 refutes sentimental needs centred grace, showing how the love of the Cross reverses the deadly process of being curled into our selves, cf. Galatians 2:19-20. The egoist is cut back to size, not mystically rubbed out, or pietistically repressed in pride, but made weak, made dependent and renewed to willing obedience, Romans

6:12–14, cf. Mark 8:34–38. No painless conversions here!

God saved His people out of unilateral grace, it was not a mutual agreement – rather as the covenant people of God, Israel was to keep the Covenant, Exodus 34:3–8, Psalm 111:5,9, Romans 1:1–6, Deuteronomy 10: 12–16. Keeping the law was not the source of life. but its condition, and salvation from moral chaos. 1 Corinthians 6: 9–11.

God promises to bring His people to obedience. Deuteronomy 30:6, Colossians 2:11, Ezekiel 36:22 Jeremiah 31:34, Hebrews 10:12–18. Titus 2:11f.

3. The Life Of Grace Must Not Be Perverted To Defacto Grace

Grace can never stand in any *competing* relation ship with it, Romans 3: 28. Defacto grace applies to the person who formally acknowledges he lives by grace alone, but whose life is lived in terms which leave no room for grace as sovereign and triumphant.

We do not volunteer to serve God. This is not a challenge to which the ego commits itself. It is not opening our hearts to the Lord. It is not voting for God. Constraint is not motivation, nor is our love for Christ but his sure love For

The love of the cross grasps us, arrests us, holds us responsible for actions, judges us, frees us and brings us to the obedience of faith

II Corinthians 5:14 says our love of Christ is founded upon a conviction. It takes the Spirit of truth to convict us of this, John 16:8–11, cf. Acts 2:36ff. We are taken up into Christ's death and

doomed, Romans 6:5–11, Galatians 2:19–20. The charge against our disobedience is executed; we are, not acquitted. With horror and shame we concur the judgement is just, cf. Psalm 51:3–5. Our sin is brought to a head, expressed and nailed to the Cross, Colossians 2:11–14. We have no rights to love these we forfeited, but grace goes beyond our rights, and

Christ dies for us while we are still sinners, Romans 5:8.

The judgement took place on the Cross. The word of the Cross brings us to it, and lays hold of us all defiant, and we know ourselves plunged into the Cross and raised from death to life.

STUDY FIVE

BAPTISED IN THE SPIRIT OF THE CROSS**1. Christ Baptises Us In The Holy Spirit**

The promise of John in Matthew 3: 11, Mark 1:8, Luke 3: 16, John 1: 26f., 33f., is reiterated by Jesus in Acts 1: 1–8. The coming of the Spirit is in terms of the Kingdom of God. Israel, consistent with the prophets, would be restored, yet the Kingdom of God is not limited to Israel.

Christ is the baptiser – the doer, the giver, we do not have ‘the baptism’, but are recipients of an act of Christ.

All who were baptised, received the gift of the Spirit, Acts 2:1–4, 8:17, 10:44, 19:6, of. Romans 8:9, John 3:5. And we will see that the Spirit brings to us the objective events of the Cross and dynamically applies them to our lives, Luke 12: 50.

2. The Spirit Is The Spirit Of Holiness and Fire

John realises the securing of the kingdom is the judging of sin, the forgiveness of sin, and the regeneration of the Spirit, Matthew 3:2,6,10–12. John 1:29.

The Spirit of holiness is the Spirit of burning. Isaiah 4:2–6, cf. 10:17, 27:4. God is ‘the Holy One’, Isaiah 5:16, 6:lff., 40:25, 57:15, Exodus 15:11, Leviticus 11:44, Matthew 6:9, John 17:11, etc. is a consuming fire – by His purity He burns the rubbish, Exodus 3:1–6, Hebrews 12:28–29.

David, struck by the ugliness of his sin, cries to be cleansed, and for God not to take away the Spirit of holiness, Psalm 51:6 12, of. Isaiah 1: 18. Jeremiah 6:14, 8:18–22, 13:23,27, Ezekiel 36:25–27, Zechariah 13:1.

3. The Spirit Is The Spirit of The Cross

Hebrews 9:14 speaks of Christ offering himself to purify the conscience through the eternal Spirit. What we must see is that the incarnate Son of man is anointed with the Spirit for ministry as Messiah, and accomplishes his work by the Spirit, Matthew 3:16f., John 3:34–36, Luke 4:14,18ff., Matthew 12: 28.

Christ makes purification for sin by the Spirit of holiness, Hebrews 1:3, 10:14, I John 1:7. It would need all of the Spirit’s power to neutralise sin. All sin is sympathetically and obediently borne by Christ, who by his obedience resists sin to the shedding of his blood, but by his purity cleanses it in the fire of the Spirit of holiness.

The cleansing of sin is confirmed by Jesus being raised by the Spirit of holiness, Romans 1:4, I Peter 3:18.

4. Christ Baptises Us In The Spirit of The Cross

He pours out the Spirit, Acts 2:33. This is the moral power which defeated evil, Romans 8: 11, Ephesians 1:18ff.

On the day of Pentecost, the Spirit comes with cleansing power, Acts 2:lff. By the Spirit, the cleansing of our actual sins in the Cross is applied to us, I Corinthians 6:9–11, Titus 3:3–7. The Spirit of Christ is sent into our hearts, Galatians

4: 6, and the power of the Cross flows as the harvest of the Gospel, Galatians 5:22–24.

5. The People of The Cross Are Empowered By The Spirit of The Cross

Acts 1:8 gives the scope of this ministry of witness, which is to proclaim Christ as Lord; Christ crucified, II Corinthians 4:5, I Corinthians 2:1ff. We share in the scandal, I Corinthians 1:23, Luke 9: 23, and bear the backlash of the world, I Corinthians 15:31, II Corinthians 4:10, Revelation 11:4–13, overcoming it by faith in the triumph of grace, I John 5:4f., II Corinthians 12:9f., 4:7, 10:3–6, Zechariah 4:6–7.

These are the people of grace, having gone through the fire of the Cross, who pray for boldness to speak the word of God, Acts 4: 29f.