

The Controlling Power of the Atonement

2 Corinthians 5:14-15

March 31, 2013

Dr. David Harrell

It is once again my great joy to be able to ministry the Word of God to you. I believe that the Spirit would have me speak to you concerning the controlling power of the atonement. In light of that, I would encourage you to take your Bibles and turn to 2 Corinthians 5:14-15. There we read, "For the love of Christ controls us having concluded this that one died for all, therefore all died. And He died for all that they who live should no longer live for themselves but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf."

Resurrection Sunday is the perfect time to reflect upon the most amazing event in human history, and that is the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ the Son of God. To think that our Savior voluntarily offered Himself up as our substitute, that He would suffer an ignominious and excruciating death on a Roman cross—the just for the unjust—that He would pay the penalty for our sins is absolutely astounding. To think that my name and your name was written in the book of life of the Lamb that has been slain according to Revelation 13:8. That in eternity past He chose those who would believe by His uninfluenced sovereign grace to become a love gift to His Son. To give Him a spotless bride, the one who would bear our sins specifically in His body. To think that our holy God would stoop to love sinners like us. Those of us who have an innate inability to conform to the moral character and desires of God, because we have violated His law we stand guilty, condemned before God's bar of justice, and yet by His grace, through His Son we can be reconciled to Him when we place our trust in Him.

We might ask the question, how can a Holy and just God just forgive sins and leave them unpunished? If sin is left unpunished, then His justice would be called into question. But God, for His own glory, remedied that very thing. Because of His great love for sinners, He sent forth His Son to this earth to live a perfect life. Then according to His plan, the Lord Jesus Christ voluntarily bore the guilt and the curse of the sins of all who would trust in Him. So at the cross there was a great exchange that took place. *He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf that we might become the righteous of God in Him.*

So friends, we have good news here today, the good news of the gospel. Free grace. Sinful man can be reconciled to a Holy God through faith in Christ alone. This is utterly astounding to me, I hope it is to you. But I would have to say, unfortunately, that very few people that call themselves Christians really understand this. I believe there is a thick fog of deception that now covers the earth. Seldom are these truths even preached in churches that call themselves evangelical.

One of the most influential pastors in all of history, a man by the name of Rick Warren, builder of the Purpose Driven Network, the author of "The Purpose Driven Life", which is said to be one of the best selling Christian books in the history of the world, he doesn't

The Controlling Power of the Atonement

2 Corinthians 5:14-15

March 31, 2013

Dr. David Harrell

believe any of this. You can listen to him speak, you can read his works and you will never hear any of these central truths of the gospel. This is true of many others we would call “seek-sensitive” pastors. I want to be crystal clear on this so that you do not have any ambiguity when you leave here today.

For example in a video series that he did, one that millions have seen across the world called "40 Days of Purpose", he concludes a lecture and nowhere in that lecture does he mention the cross, or repentance, why Jesus died, or anything about God's wrath. But then he invites people to come to Christ, to get their relationship right with God. At the end of the first session in his video series here is what he says. He asked them to repeat this prayer:

"Dear God, I want to know your purpose for my life. I don't want to waste the rest of my life on wrong things. Today I want to take the first step in preparing for eternity by getting to know you. Jesus Christ, I don't understand at all, but as much as I can, I want to open up my life to you. I ask you to come into my life and make yourself real to me. And use this series in my life to help me know what you made me for. Thank you, Amen."

Then after that he says this: "Now if you just prayed that prayer for the very first time, I want to congratulate you. You have just become part of the family of God."

Sadly millions of people have prayed that prayer and have been deceived into thinking that now they have been reconciled to a Holy God. My friends that is the wide gate gospel that puts people on the broad way to destruction, it's not the narrow gate. God doesn't save us *in* our sins; He saves us *from* our sins. That is the gospel. If you want to know God's purpose for your life it is very clear in scripture. His purpose for your life is to live to the praise of His glory, to present yourself as a living sacrifice. Therefore He calls all men everywhere to repent, to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.

Well, this Resurrection day morning I want to stir your affections. I want to stir your heart by focusing on the true gospel of Jesus Christ, especially as it relates to Christ's love for us that was so dramatically displayed on the Cross of Calvary. I want to fan the embers of your love for Christ into full flame especially this day as we think about the resurrection. I want you to become more in love with the Savior, if I can put it that way.

This morning I would like to begin by having you ask yourself these questions, what does Christ's death mean to me? Secondly, how does it shape and motivate my life?

As we come to our text this morning let me give you the background. The theme of 2 Corinthians is Paul's defense of his integrity as an apostle of Christ, as a preacher of the true gospel. It was important for him to guard his character because it was under attack by false teachers. They had infiltrated the church, they were trying to destroy him, assassinate his character and therefore destroy his credibility, undermine the authority of the Word of God, and in particular the message of the gospel.

The Controlling Power of the Atonement

2 Corinthians 5:14-15

March 31, 2013

Dr. David Harrell

Here in 2 Corinthians 5:14-15 we discover one of several motives that Paul has for defending himself, namely his all-consuming sense of gratitude for Christ's love for him. He didn't want anything to jeopardize his opportunity to glorify the One who loved him so freely, so magnanimously. In this text and others the Spirit of God will reveal another fascinating aspect of God's love for us. One that motivated His life and should motivate ours. Namely that Christ was our personal substitute and sacrifice. That He died for us specifically. This is something that I fear few truly understand, but it's at the heart of the gospel.

So I wish to draw your attention this morning to three great theological themes that are crucial for understanding the gospel. I will look at some other supporting texts and then come specifically to this text. But we are going to look at:

1. The Essence of the Atonement. Why did Christ die? That will introduce the text for this morning.
2. The Extent of the Atonement. Here we will answer the question for whom did Christ die?
3. The Effect of the Atonement. What actually happened to sinners when Christ died?

My prayer this morning is that the Holy Spirit will soften your heart to hear these profound truths. Truths that are central to the gospel, foundational to the gospel of Christ.

First of all let's look at *the essence of atonement*. Why did Christ have to die? Well here we must first understand this word that we seldom hear used, and that is the word atonement. What does that mean? That speaks of Christ's sacrificial death. Technically the term means "covering guilt by means of a substitute." The life of a sacrificial animal in scripture (symbolized by His blood) was required in exchange for the life of the worshipper. An innocent life given for a guilty life. Of course this symbolism was dramatically highlighted when the guilty worshippers literally placed their hand on the head of the sacrifice and confessed their sin as it was put to death.

We see the death of Jesus foreshadowed in various Old Testament types and symbols. For example, we see it in the coats of skin in Genesis 3. Remember when God came to Adam and Eve and He covered their guilt by killing an animal and covering their shame with a substitute. The death of Christ is also foreshadowed in:

- The animal offering of Abel in Genesis 4.
- The offering of Isaac by Abraham in Genesis 22.
- We see it in the sacrificial system in Leviticus 17.
- We see an example of it in the brazen serpent erected by Moses in Numbers 21.
- The Passover Lamb in Exodus 12.

The Controlling Power of the Atonement

2 Corinthians 5:14-15

March 31, 2013

Dr. David Harrell

Moreover the death of Christ can be seen in the Old Testament prophecies. We saw it in Genesis 3:15 with respect to the promise concerning the "seed of the women".

- We see it in Psalm 22 where He is described as the Sufferer.
- He is the Suffering Servant in Isaiah 52-53.
- He is the "cut off" Messiah in Daniel 9.
- He is the Smitten Shepherd of Zechariah 13.

As we come into the New Testament the death of Christ was proclaimed by John the Baptist. You will recall in John 1:29, John the Baptist saw Jesus coming to him and said "behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world." Jesus Himself clearly announced His death and explained it in His teachings. For example in John 3:14-15 we read: "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up; that whoever believes may in Him have eternal life."

The death of Christ was the central theme of the writings and the preachings of the apostles. In fact, it was mentioned 174 times in the New Testament. One out of every 44 verses in the New Testament alludes specifically to the atoning death of Christ. You would think therefore it would be central in the preaching of a gospel minister instead of ignored.

His death and the amazing truth of the gospel was foreshadowed in the sacrificial system. The Lord clarified this when He stated in Exodus 25:21, 22: "You shall put the mercy seat (hilasterion- Greek translation, remember that term it is very important) on top of the ark and in the ark you shall put the testimony which I will give you. There I will meet with you; and from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim which are upon the ark of the testimony."

You will recall that the Ark of the Covenant contained within it the violated law and that violated law was separated by a golden lid called the Mercy Seat. Then above that were the outstretched wings, the golden cherubs that symbolically guarded the holiness of God. The Shekinah glory of the presence of God hovered between the wings and above the mercy seat. Once per year on the day called Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, the sins of Israel were temporarily forgiven and they were reconciled to God. Their sins were temporarily appeased. For it was on that lid that divine justice and grace would come together symbolically. The mercy seat was the place where the just wrath of God was symbolically propitiated. Where divine fury was temporarily appeased. Where His righteous anger was symbolically satisfied. This was the sacrifice of atonement. The same term was used in 1 John 2:1 to describe "Jesus Christ the righteous; and He Himself is the propitiation (hilasmos) for our sins." It comes from that same term from the mercy seat, the hilasterion. So He became the one that would provide mercy.

The Controlling Power of the Atonement

2 Corinthians 5:14-15

March 31, 2013

Dr. David Harrell

Likewise, we read in 1 John 4:9: "God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation (the hilasmos) for our sins."

Now when we study the atonement we see that it requires two things.

- There must be satisfaction for the offended holiness of God.
- There must be substitution for the guilty party.

As sinners we stand liable to punishment but God, in His grace, provided a substitute. Jesus has been judicially accounted a sinner in our stead, and the infinite offering that He made suffices in our stead to satisfy the righteous demands of God's offended holiness. My friends, this is why Christ had to die!

When by faith we place our trust in Jesus Christ as our only hope of salvation, our sins are forgiven and we are declared righteous. So why did Jesus have to die? Real simply, to reconcile sinful men and women and boys and girls to a Holy God. This is the gospel. And you will never embrace the gospel until you first see the transcendent holiness, the utter otherness of God. In light of that, you will see your sin for what it is. You will recognize a chasm between your sin and His holiness that you could never possibly bridge on your own.

So we come to our text in verse 14 where Paul says, "For the love of Christ controls us, *sunecho* in the original language, it speaks of a force that propels; a pressure that results in action. In other words Paul is saying he was compelled by an overwhelming reality, "having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died." He was overwhelmed and compelled to ministry by the atoning work of Jesus Christ.

Think about this, here is a man who was a Rabbi, he understood the sacrificial system. He understood that at Passover, hundreds of thousands of animals were killed. Down through history millions of animals had been sacrificed. There was a steady stream of blood that would run down on the gutters of the temple when it came time for sacrifice. Millions of sacrifices in the past. But he understood that they could never fully atone for sin. Hebrews 10:4: "for it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins."

The sacrificial system under the Old Covenant only pointed to our desperate need for a Savior. Then came Jesus! In Hebrews 10:14 we read, "by one offering, He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified." Free grace, no more law. My friends, this was the love of Christ that overwhelmed Paul, that motivated him to a life of sacrificial service. What about you? Ask yourself, does it have that same affect on me today? Because my friends, I will tell you that there is nothing more important in life than the gospel. Your eternal soul depends upon it.

The Controlling Power of the Atonement

2 Corinthians 5:14-15

March 31, 2013

Dr. David Harrell

It's because of this that Philip Bliss would write: "Man of Sorrows! What a name, For the Son of God, Who came, ruined sinners to reclaim. Hallelujah! What a Savior!"

Verse 14: "For the love of Christ controls us having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died." Next we must understand:

2. *The Extent of the Atonement.* For whom did Christ die? As we look at the text it says, "...one died for all". The term "for" in the original language, *hyper*, could be translated "in the place of all". So He was the substitute and satisfaction who died for all. Again God, "made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." (2 Corinthians 5:21)

Now the question is, who are the all? Some say all, everybody that has ever lived. Well if you believe that then you believe in a heresy called universalism where everybody goes to heaven. Otherwise, you would have to say, "well if He died for all; it must have been a rather deficient and impotent atonement. Because most people reject Christ as Savior, as substitute. Therefore they will be required to pay for their sins in an eternal hell and will still never be able to satisfy the justice of God." So who are the all? Well Paul answers that question here and in other places. They are the all who died in Him. Notice "one died for all, therefore all died." In other words all who trust in Him as Savior.

He elaborates on this, for example in Romans 6 in the first four verses. There He speaks of how "we died to sin". Died is in the aorist tense, (past tense in the original language). So it speaks of something that happened once and forever. An event took place where we died to sin, where we ceased to exist in Adam and we became alive in Christ. He goes on in verse 4, "we have been buried with him through baptism into death so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life."

So Christ is only the substitute for those who by grace, through faith died in Christ. Now we must look at some other texts to understand this further. Paul describes this even more in Romans 5:6:

"For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. But God demonstrates His own love towards us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life." Romans 5: 6-10

Now we must ask the question, who is He talking about? Who are these people for whom Christ died? Everybody in the whole wide world? Well the answer is found in the salutation. He is writing to "the called of Jesus Christ" chapter 1:6. Those who are

The Controlling Power of the Atonement

2 Corinthians 5:14-15

March 31, 2013

Dr. David Harrell

"beloved of God, called as saints," verse 7. In other words, these are specific individuals. He goes on to describe them in his epistle in Romans, "...those whom God foreknew, He predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son" chapter 8. He is speaking here of the elect of God, of those in chapter 9 "...those on whom He chose to have mercy and compassion."

You see, Paul understood another aspect of the atonement that few understand today. Christ knew specifically each person for whom He would suffer and die. Even at the end of our text here this morning in verse 15 it says He "died and rose again on their behalf." Whose behalf? The elect of God.

Ephesians 1:4: "He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world... verse 5: "He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will."

If you ask the average Christian, "For whom did Christ die?" The answer is typically, "for everybody in the whole world." So the idea is that Jesus paid the debt of sin for everyone when He died on the cross. Now the problem is, unless you believe in universalism, you have to answer, "well then why is anyone in Hell?" Why would Jesus speak more of Hell than Heaven and warn people to repent or you will die in your sins if their sins were already paid for? A rather unsuccessful atonement wouldn't you say?

Most Christians will say, "well yes, He died for the whole world, for everyone, but His death did not really guarantee the salvation of anyone in particular, it only removed the obstacle and made salvation possible for all men in general." Now if that is true, then Jesus' death on the cross was merely an act whereby He accomplished a *potential* salvation, not an *actual* one. Sinners have had their sins atoned for potentially, but it is not actual until they activate it by their faith.

Now if this is true then both heaven and hell are filled with people for whom Christ died, the only difference is those in heaven somehow made the right choice. So some would assert that Jesus was only a potential substitute and satisfaction, not an actual one. Is that what you believe? Is that what scripture teaches?

I would ask, are you telling me that God intended nothing specific at the cross, nor was anything accomplished (effected by Christ)? That there was no real benefit in His death for anyone in particular, only for people in general? Are you telling me that the creator, the sustainer, ruler, redeemer, and consummator of all things is therefore dependent upon man to activate so great a price? Are you telling me that man, that scripture describes as spiritually dead, at enmity with God, alienated from God, man that does evil continually, whose heart is darkened, who is blinded by sin and Satan, who desires only to serve his father the devil, none of whom understands or ever seeks after God, that considers the things of God foolishness, that has absolutely no capacity to understand spiritual truth,

The Controlling Power of the Atonement

2 Corinthians 5:14-15

March 31, 2013

Dr. David Harrell

that it's up to him to activate what Christ did on the cross? Man who is utterly unable and unwilling? That just doesn't square with scripture.

In John 1:12: "To as many as believed (received) Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, *who were born not of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.*"

Ephesians 2:8-9: "By grace are you saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God."

1 Corinthians 1:30: "But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus."

In 1 Timothy 4:10 Paul says, "God is the Savior of all men, especially of believers." The all men refers to Him saving all men in terms of common grace, He has compassion on all men, He offers them the gospel, He temporally and physically saves them from instant death because the wages of sin is death. But He eternally and spiritually saves all believers for whom He died.

But then some will argue, no His was a general ransom. Salvation does not depend on a divine decree and subsequent act of God, but on man who can independently exercise his free will in believing. So again I would say, "you are telling me that the atoning work of Christ is ineffective unless a spiritual cadaver activates His grace? You're telling me that the Lord Jesus Christ is a forlorn, frustrated, impotent Savior knocking on the door of a man's heart, knocking, hoping that he will answer and let him in? So you are telling me that God somehow paces the throne room of heaven biting his nails hoping that the spiritually dead will somehow cause themselves to be born again? Therefore evangelism is nothing more than a political campaign where we try to get people to "decide for Christ" who merely offers Himself as a passive candidate?" My friends that is just not the God of the Bible. That is not the gospel; it is not the true gospel. It is a new gospel.

J.I. Packer said it well, "The old gospel is proclaimed in the sure confidence that the Christ of whom it testifies, the Christ who is the real speaker when the Scriptural invitations to trust Him are expounded and applied, is not passively waiting for man's decision as the word goes forth, but is omnipotently active, working with and through the word to bring His people to faith in Himself. The preaching of the new gospel is often described as the task of "bringing men to Christ" as if only men move, while Christ stands still. But the task of preaching the old gospel could more properly be described as bringing Christ to men, for those who preach it know that as they do their work of setting Christ before men's eyes, the mighty Savior whom they proclaim is busy doing His work through their words, visiting sinners with salvation, awakening them to faith, drawing them in mercy to Himself."

Beloved, this was the exhilarating life-dominating truth that propelled Paul's life and ministry. Sadly the popular new gospel is the product of what I believe is a grievous and errant doctrine of salvation commonly known as Arminianism. It basically says:

The Controlling Power of the Atonement

2 Corinthians 5:14-15

March 31, 2013

Dr. David Harrell

- That His death did not secure the gift of faith, in fact there really is no such gift.
- Faith is man's responsibility not God's.
- Man can and must cooperate with God in order to believe and that he is not so corrupt that he can't believe.
- Nor is he so compelled by God that he can't refuse to believe. In other words he is able to resist the Father's drawing.
- God's election is based purely on his ability to foresee who would believe on their own accord.
- Moreover, it is the responsibility of the saved to maintain their state of grace by keeping up their faith lest they fall away and lose their salvation.

My friends, I would humbly say, that is a man-centered gospel, it is not a God-centered gospel. It is a distorted gospel that I believe fails to produce deep humility and reverence for God. Because it fails to understand the work of God. Instead it is a system that greatly diminishes the work of God.

They would have us believe that the atonement is unlimited in extent, but limited in power. When in fact the opposite is true, it is limited in extent, but it is unlimited in power.

Under Armenian theology, the atoning work of the Lord Jesus Christ is incapable of saving you, unless you allow Him to do so by cooperating. So you've got to do something to complete it. But how can a dead sinner do that? Again, I would argue that this is not the Jesus of the Bible.

What did Jesus say before He yielded up His life on the cross? Did He say, "It has begun!", "It is now potential", "The option has now been made available", "The obstacle has been removed", now it's up to you?! I've done my part now you do yours? No, my friends, He said "It is FINISHED!" What was finished? He satisfied the wrath of God for those that He had called in eternity past! Friends please hear this: something actually happened at the cross!

Wesley had it right and therefore we can sing: "Long my imprisoned spirit lay Fast bound in sin and nature's night: Thine eye diffused a quickening ray; I woke; the dungeon flamed with light; My chains fell off: my heart was free: I rose, went forth and followed thee."

My friends at the cross 2,000 years ago, if you have placed your faith in Christ, you know what happened? He satisfied the wrath of God on your behalf and He was your substitute specifically.

This moves us to the third point that we need to examine.

The Controlling Power of the Atonement

2 Corinthians 5:14-15

March 31, 2013

Dr. David Harrell

3. *The Effect of the Atonement.* Again, something actually happened at the cross. May I remind you of what Jesus said in John 10:11: "I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep. I am the good shepherd and I *know* (the term means to have an intimate relationship with someone) . . . I know My own, and My own know Me. Verse 15b "and I lay down my life for the sheep. Verse 26 and following Jesus went on to tell the unbelieving Jews, "you do not believe because you are not of My sheep. My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. And I and the Father are one." And at that point the Jews picked up the stones and stoned Him.

But beloved this is the love that motivated Paul. He understood what we know from scripture and that is, "that the names of the elect were written from the foundation of the world in the Book of Life of the Lamb who was slain." Revelation 13:8. There is no ambiguity here.

We must understand Jesus as our great high priest. The priestly work would always include the offering of a sacrifice as well as intercession on behalf of the people. If the Lamb was slain before the foundation of the world, then certainly Jesus' sacrificial death and intercession began before He was slain in actual time. So therefore it is contrary to reason to assume that our priest would offer himself for those for whom He had not interceded both before and after His actual sacrifice, those that He knew by name. He would not offer Himself for those for whom He is not their priest and He is certainly only priest for those whom He intercedes.

In 1 John 2:1-2: "we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, (referring to the church there in John's day) but also for those of the whole world."

Some people would say, "there it is, He died for the whole world." Well no, the context and meaning here is that He died for this Satanic cesspool of sin from which He will call out His elect for His name. Revelation 5:9: "from every tribe and tongue and people and nation."

According to Hebrews 9:15 on the basis of His death, Christ intercedes for the inheritance of the elect, an inheritance which has been actually purchased for those whom the Father had given Him. It was not a potential possession for no one in particular. "And for this reason he is the mediator of a new covenant, in order that since a death has taken place for the redemption of the transgressions that were committed under the first covenant, those who have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance." No ambiguity here.

The Controlling Power of the Atonement

2 Corinthians 5:14-15

March 31, 2013

Dr. David Harrell

Colossian 1:12 "we give thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance." This speaks of a specific people and a specific inheritance.

1 Peter 1:4: "an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you." Well who is he writing to? He tells us in the very first verse of 1 Peter. He is writing to "those who are chosen." Verse 3: "those who according to His great mercy He has caused to be born again."

Beloved, we must understand that Christ volunteered for the work of redemption with the full knowledge of those whose names had been written in the Lamb's book of life, and would therefore be the reward of His ransom.

In John 17, before His death, Jesus prayed to the Father "for all whom the Father had given Him" that through His death all those who had been chosen would be granted eternal life.

According to Hebrews 9:24, Christ has now entered into the holy place to appear in the presence of God for us specifically, the redeemed. In John 2:25 we read that: "He knew from the beginning what is the heart of men." Also in 6:64, "Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe." (and by implication He knew who did).

Matthew 20:28, "He gave His life a ransom for many." But not for all of humanity. Not to those whom He will one day say, according to Matthew 7:23: "I never knew you, depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness."

Again the atonement is not a potential salvation for all, it is an actual salvation for the many, the elect. It is limited in extent for those whom God in His love has chosen, but unlimited in power to save to the uttermost those He has chosen by His uninfluenced grace.

Paul understood this in Romans 8:29-30: "For whom He foreknew, (literally, "foreloved") He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son"...Verse 30, "and whom He predestined, these He also called; and whom He called, these He also justified, and whom He justified, these He also glorified."

We know that justification is by faith whereby we are declared righteous because of the righteousness of Christ that is imputed to us at the Cross.

Ephesians 1:11, "we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will."

We even see this in Israel's future sorrowful confession in Isaiah 53:4: "Surely our grief's He Himself bore, and our sorrows He carried.. Verse 5 He was pierced through for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities."

The Controlling Power of the Atonement

2 Corinthians 5:14-15

March 31, 2013

Dr. David Harrell

Verse 10: "But the Lord was pleased to crush Him, putting Him to grief; if He would render himself as a guilt offering, He will see His offspring" (i.e. His seed). The idea is that God rendered His Son Jesus as a guilt offering with full confidence that He would see His offspring. Verse 11: "My servant will justify the many, as He will bear their iniquities." Verse 12: "He Himself bore the sin of many, and interceded for the transgressors." Again, who are these people, well it is His offspring, His seed, the people born out of sacrifice.

We see it again, for example, in Isaiah 6:13. Remember God said to Isaiah, "who will go for Me?" Well he said, "I will go," and God told him that most people are not going to listen to you, "but there will be a tenth portion," a holy seed. A holy seed that will be regenerated and believe in the gospel. That of course will be the remnant of Israel at the end of the age.

Acts 13:48: "...and as many as had been appointed unto eternal life, believed." There are specific people, specific individuals.

Acts 18:9, the Lord comes to Paul in a vision, "Do not be afraid any longer, but go on speaking and do not be silent; for I am with you, and no man will attack you in order to harm you, for I have many people in this city." There are unconverted people here. By the way, there are probably some here in this room. He knew them by name. These were the ones that were promised to the Son in eternity past before time began. Titus 1:2

So for whom did Christ die? For His chose possession, His holy offspring. Those who were bought with a price, 1 Corinthians 6:20. Surely He knew who He was purchasing?

John 17:9: "I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which though has given me; for they are Thine...Verse 19 "For their sakes I sanctify myself." You see, He didn't die for no one in particular, but for those the Father had specifically given to Him.

Ephesians 5:25 we read how He gave Himself for His bride, the church. Do you really think that Jesus didn't know who He was going to marry? It just makes no sense.

Beloved, God's plan of redemption is not subject to man. He does not yield His will to the will of man. But God had a plan to redeem specific people. In eternity past the Father ordained a plan to demonstrate His infinite love whereby His Son would be given a bride that He had chosen for Him. He chose them by name; He recorded them in a book of life. An elect group of sinners hostile to Him, in desperate need of forgiveness and transforming grace. A vast humanity that was pledged to the Son as a love gift from the Father. A pledge that was sealed by the Holy Spirit. In due time, in the miracle of salvation, the Father would then irresistibly compel sinners to voluntarily exercise their will and repent and believe on the Son.

The Controlling Power of the Atonement

2 Corinthians 5:14-15

March 31, 2013

Dr. David Harrell

We will never, ever be able to, at least this side of glory, understand the inscrutable mystery of God's sovereignty and man's responsibility, but God understands it perfectly. Where reason fails, faith must prevail.

Central to God's whole plan of inter-Trinitarian love and glory was the Son's death. Whereby He would become the perfect substitute for each specific sinner whose name was written in the Lamb's book of Life. In some sense, Christ has appeased the wrath of God temporarily for all human beings, thus allowing them to live even though the wages of sin is death. But His death is only efficacious—in other words, it will only do what it is intended to do—for those who trust in Christ as Savior. And according to His eternal purposes; only the elect will respond and be saved.

So as we look at scripture we see that it teaches an actual satisfaction and atonement that was made for all those that the Father had given the Son. Those who before the foundation of the world were given to Him, not for those of whom He will say in Matthew 7, I never knew you.

- Not for those, according to Romans 9 whom He hates and hardens those on whom He will have no mercy or compassion; not for those vessels of wrath prepared beforehand for destruction.

- Not for the "world" for which Jesus even refused to pray in John 17:9.

Now, this is where I am going with this, and this is the marvelous news of it all: never ever think of the Cross in terms of some vague, general thing that happened. Think of the death of Christ in specific personal terms; that He went to the Cross knowing your name, knowing your face, knowing the color of your eyes, knowing the sound of your voice, knowing your life-dominating sins. He knew who you were and fore loved you with an intimate love, because indeed, "we are His workmanship created in Christ Jesus which God prepared beforehand."

He died for you personally. This is what moved Paul in such a profound way as it does me.

My friends, the cross actually saves specific sinners. So don't say, "I could not have gained my salvation apart from the cross." Instead you need to say, "Christ gained my salvation for me at the cross." There is a big difference. What should be our response? Verse 15: "and He died for all, (elect of God) that they who live should no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on our behalf." Again, be reminded of Romans 6:2 where Paul says we have "died to sin", an event took place at the cross of Calvary, we became alive in Christ, an actual substitutionary atonement took place for you personally. We cannot glory in any of it. Salvation is grace from beginning to end.

For this reason Paul said in Galatians 6:14: "But may it never be that I would boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world."

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It was for this reason that Paul went on to say in Philippians 1:21: "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain," and "I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus."

Dear Christian, as we close this morning, may I challenge you to once again get lost in the wonder of what happened on your behalf at the cross, especially on this resurrection Sunday. Paul was absolutely overwhelmed with gratitude because Christ paid the penalty for his sins specifically.

I would encourage you sometime today in the privacy of your own room to fall down on your face and to say, "Father thank you that before I ever came into existence, according to Your sovereign plan and uninfluenced will, You determined that Your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, would bear my sins in His body on the cross. That He would lay down His life for His sheep, and by Your grace I happen to be one of them."

Dear friend if you have no love for Christ, I pray that God will grant you the grace to repent of your sins and trust in Him today. After today you will never be able to say, "I didn't understand the gospel." Today you have heard it with sufficient clarity to reject it or to embrace it. I plead with you to embrace it with all of your heart. You say, "well how do I know if God chose me?" You believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and He did; you reject Him, and He didn't. It's as simple as that. I pray that you will cast yourself wholly on Him for pardon and peace and by His grace He will exchange your natural enmity and rebellion against Him and He will give you a new heart, new mind, new disposition. He will forgive your sins, He will declare you righteous because of the imputed righteousness of Christ, you will be hidden in Him and you will have eternal life. That is the good news of the gospel. We give God the glory for it. Amen.

Let's pray together, Father thank you for these glorious truths. Like Paul we are overwhelmed by them, they control us, they control our life, ministry. There is nothing more important than the gospel. Lord I pray that we will get lost again in the wonder of the atonement, and I pray especially for those that may be here today that really know down deep, they don't love You. They play the religious game that is so typical of our culture. They are self-deceived; maybe there are even some that are hostile, maybe some that even think the gospel is foolishness. Lord that is just indicative of the fact that You have not yet set Your grace upon them, and we pray that You would do that today. Overwhelm them with the reality of their sin and the wrath of God that abides upon them, that today they might repent and believe and experience the miracle of the new birth. I ask all this in the precious name of Jesus, our Savior, our substitute, Amen.