

# drulogion

thursday theological thoughts

THURSDAY, MARCH 29, 2007

## Probing the Problem Jesus Solves

As Holy Week creeps closer and closer, I've been thinking about our problems. Not generally observable problems (though those are on my mind), but the deep problem that Jesus deals with in his life, death and resurrection. What is wrong? What is at stake? What makes Jesus' work so important?

I don't want to focus so much on the bad news as much as I want to understand the good news of Jesus Christ which casts light on our problems. A particularly poignant passage in this regard is Romans 5:6-11. What is interesting here is that Paul make three parallel statements indicating what we were when Christ died for us. So, for a moment, I want to zero in on these three different aspects of our problem in order to come to a greater appreciation of Christ's work.

### (1) When we were still *powerless* ... [v. 6]

First of all, we are powerless. We are weak. We lack the power to overcome the death and disease and trials of life. We have fallen short. We are deprived of the best of life. Nobody's perfect. The language of powerlessness reminds us that we need help. We are weak, but God is strong. Lent and Holy Week is as good a time as any to contemplate our weakness in light of God's strength.

This is all true, but our weakness is not the whole story. If our problem is only that we are weak, then Jesus need only help us out, give us a hand. As Paul's language shows, there is more to our problem than our weakness.

### (2) While we were still *sinner*s ... [v. 8]

We are not only weak, but we are sinners. We are unrighteous. We are not right. We have broken God's law and so have broken God's heart. Not only are we not perfect, having fallen short; we are also sinners, people who have turned away from God and endangered our relationship with him. The language of sin is important to bring out

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our culpability in our problem. We are not just faulty; we are lawbreakers. Lent and Holy Week is as good a time as any to contemplate how we have sinned in light of God's righteousness.

This talk of sin certainly deepens our understanding of our problem beyond that of mere weakness. But even the language of unrighteousness is not the whole story. If our problem is reduced to sin, then God need only forgive. God in his everlasting faithfulness can uphold our relationship with him. But, once again, Paul's language reveals that there is even more to our problem than unrighteousness.

### (3) When we were God's *enemies* ... [v. 10]

We are not only weak. We are not only sinners. We are God's enemies. We have not only damaged our relationship with God by breaking his law. We have twisted our relationship into one of enmity. We have not only turned away from God; we have turned *against* God. We are not just slipping into unintentional sin, or falling short because of weakness. We are in a state of rebellion. We do not want to live in obedient communion with God. We want to follow our own way. And so we need radical reconciliation, which has been achieved in Jesus Christ. Lent and Holy Week is as good a time as any to contemplate how we have rebelled against God and made ourselves into enemies.

Of course, even the talk of enmity alone would not do. It is the most extreme of the three terms and therefore a helpful corrective to our excuses. But because it is so extreme, it needs to be clarified by the first two terms. We are not enemies of God because God hates us and God is a mean-spirited tyrant. No, the problem is not with God but with *us*. We have set ourselves up as enemies by our willful disobedience. Our unrighteousness is the content of our enmity. Our powerlessness in the face of death breaks us off from eternal communion with God.

#### ... Christ died for us.

Of course, all this talk of our problems is not an end in itself. In each case, Paul brings up our problem in order to draw attention to the solution. When we were powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. When we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son. So, even as we probe our problem, we are drawn to celebrate the solution won in Jesus Christ.

#### Any thoughts?

Do these three terms help to enrich our account of the human

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problem:

What aspects are not accounted for by these three terms?

Do we tend to focus on one of these to the exclusion of the others?

Is it appropriate to contemplate our problem in order to appreciate the solution all the more? Is there another way?

—

Posted by JohnLDrury at [8:55 AM](#) Labels: [Atonement](#), [Sin](#), [Soteriology](#)

## 5 comments:

[Ben Robinson](#) said...

I'm currently finishing up Moltmann's 'The Crucified God', in which he describes the 'for us' as being fundamental to the meaning of Christ's death. Your post has caused me to continue to contemplate the death of Christ on our behalf. Do you have any thoughts on what Moltmann does in his book?

[9:56 AM, March 29, 2007](#)

[Keith Drury](#) said...

Thank you for this reminder. Where and with whom I live and move and have my being... there is little movement beyond the first point--and thus primarily a "helping God" for ordinary life--tests, boyfriends, and coping with stress. Thank you for this post.

[1:22 PM, March 31, 2007](#)

[David Drury](#) said...

*This post has been removed by the author.*

[5:41 PM, April 02, 2007](#)

[David Drury](#) said...

Great thinking here, John. I love the use of this text... I hope you have a Good Friday gathering to preach it in.

Oh, and Ben, I HOPE John can answer your question about Dr. Jurgen.

-David

P.S. Sorry, Monday is Mess-With-Ben-Robinson-Using Stupid-Seminary-Jokes-That

Don't-Make-Sense-Day. Tuesday is Make-Fun-Of-Ben's-Eyebrows-Day. I love Tuesdays.

[5:42 PM, April 02, 2007](#)

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[JohnLDrury](#) said...

Ben,

I only have short comments in this context regarding Moltmann's Crucified God. I think overall he is on the right track to locate the cross as an event in God's triune life. How to do that precisely may require different conceptualities than those employed by Moltmann. (I would suggest checking out Jungel & Jenson as well as Balthasar, and Barth). The best thing about Moltmann is to use him as a door to pass through. His footnotes are not just window-dressing; they will point you in the right direction. As he quarrels with Cyril of Alexandria and Luther in particular in Crucified God, one would be wise to join in that wrestle and read these theologians for oneself.

4:00 PM, April 05, 2007

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