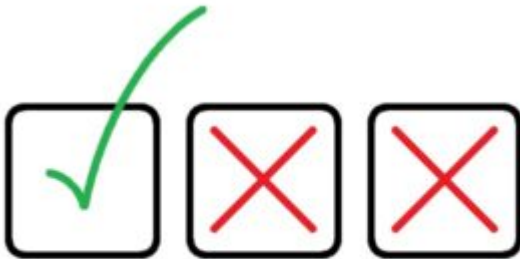


The Two Most Important (and Ignored) Reasons that Jesus Died

Description



If you ask a typical (*thoughtful*) Western Christian why Jesus

died or what the gospel is, you'd get an answer something like the following. There might be slight nuance differences, but this will be the gist:

Every man has sinned and thus deserves God's righteous wrath. However, because of God's great love, He sent his Son (*Jesus*) to die on a cross for our sins so we might escape God's righteous judgement for our sins and live eternally with Him, which is called eternal life.

Now, this article won't ask you to change that basic explanation of the gospel. Rather, I'm hoping to expand your understanding of the gospel instead of replacing it. The way that most Christians present the gospel is complete in the same way that saying "*Football is a game about moving a ball around*" is complete.

It's not.

In fact, it leaves so much out that it's *almost* misleading. **The Gospel presentation above is like that because it ignores two of the most important and fundamental parts of the Gospel.** The explanation above ignores some explicitly stated reasons that Jesus died, pushing them aside to highlight the (*wonderful*) side effect that appeals to us most: avoiding judgment.

We'll look at those two reasons after a quick disclaimer.

A Quick but Important Disclaimer

First, I want to point something out that might seem obvious, but it needs to be said anyway: **You can do something for more than one reason.** For example, you might pay your bills on time not only because it's the right thing to do, but also because not doing so can cause major problems.

The same is true of the cross.

Just because I say that "Jesus died for ___ reason", doesn't mean I'm saying that He only died for that reason. Thus, I'm hoping to **add to your understanding of why Jesus died, not replace your understanding of why Jesus died.** Please keep that in mind while you read this article.

That said, we'll begin.

The first ignored reason that Jesus died

Why did Jesus die? This is stated clearly in many places, including when God revealed what our savior's name would be.

Jesus's name

Matt 1:21

"And she will bear a son, and **you will call His name Jesus** for He will save His people from their sins.

Now, here's something you might not know about the name "Jesus". The Greek word is "??????" and here's what it means:

2424 **I?soús – Jesus**, the transliteration of the Hebrew term, 3091 /L?t ("Yehoshua"/Jehoshua, contracted to "Joshua") **which means "Yahweh saves" (or "Yahweh is salvation").**

The name of Jesus literally means "Yahweh saves". Now, the obvious question is: "From what?"

From what does Yahweh save us through Jesus? That's answered in the second half of the verse:

Matt 1:21

“And she will bear a son, and **you will call His name Jesus for He will save His people from their sins.**

Notice the word “for” that I’ve highlighted. It’s the Greek word “???” ([gar](#)) and it gives the reason for what follows. The very reason that Jesus’s name is “Yahweh saves” is because God will save them... but from what? Did you notice what the people are saved from?

From their sins.

Most Christians I’ve heard discuss this passage automatically and subconsciously change the wording in their minds to “He will save His people from the punishment for their sins”. However, that’s not what the text says.

Not even remotely.

Of course you can list that as a reason, but that’s not what this particular verse is saying. According to this verse, it’s also not why His name means “Yahweh saves”. He came to save us from the sins themselves. He didn’t (*only*) come to save us from the penalty, He came to save us from the sins themselves.

Please, think about that for a moment and then we’ll move on to the next verse.

No, really. Think about it for a moment.

...

...

...

Okay, we’ll move on.

The reason

2 Cor 5:21

He made the One who did not know sin *to be* sin for our sake, **so that we might become God’s righteousness in Him.**

Again, notice the “why” phrase there, which is “so that”. That gives us the reason; the purpose. The Greek word translated “so that” here is “???” ([hina](#)), and it makes this even more clear.

2443 hina (a subordinating conjunction) – **for the purpose that (in order that)**, looking to the aim (intended result) of the verbal idea. 2443 /hina (“for the purpose that”) is “**the semantically marked (dramatic) way of expressing purpose in Greek** (as compared for example to the plain infinitive)” (G. Archer).

The reason that Christ went to the cross was “*so that we might become God’s righteousness in Him*”. That’s the reason stated in this verse, not the avoidance of punishment. (*And again, keep in mind that you can do something for more than one reason.*) Notice that the focus is righteousness, not the avoidance of punishment.

The clearest place to see this is in the famous marriage passage in Ephesians 5. Now, we’re going to completely ignore the application to marriage in this article so we can focus on why Jesus died. Again, notice the “why” word; it’s the Greek word “???” ([hina](#)) that we just looked at.

Ephesians 5:25-27

25 Husbands, love your wives, just **as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her,**

26 so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word,

27 that He might present the church to Himself in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless.

Now, the word translated “sanctify” is the Greek word “???????” ([hagiazó](#)), and here’s the definition from a few places, starting with Strong’s.

Definition: **to make holy**, consecrate, sanctify

And now HELPS Word Studies:

Cognate: 37 hagiáz? (from 40 /hágios, “holy”) – to regard as special (sacred), i.e. holy (“set apart”), sanctify. See 40 (hagios).

[37 (**hagiáz?**) means “**to make holy, consecrate**, sanctify; to dedicate, separate” (Abbott-Smith).]

And now Thayer’s Greek lexicon:

??????; 1 aorist ??????; passive (present ?????????; perfect ?????????; 1 aorist ?????????; a word for which the Greeks use ???????, but very frequent in Biblical (as equivalent to ??????, ?????????) and ecclesiastical writings; “**to make ??????, render or declare sacred or holy, consecrate**”

“. Hence, it denotes:

1. to render or acknowledge to be venerable, to hallow: ?? ????? ??? ?????, Matthew 6:9 (so of God, Isaiah 29:23; Ezekiel 20:41; Ezekiel 38:23; Sir. 33:4 (Sir. 36:4)); (Luke 11:2); ??? ????????, 1 Peter 3:15 (R G ?????). Since the stamp of sacredness passes over from the holiness of God to whatever has any connection with God, ????????? denotes

2. to separate from things profane and dedicate to God, to consecrate and so render inviolable;

3. to purify (??? ??? ????????????? is added in Leviticus 16:19; 2 Samuel 11:4); and

In the context of Ephesians 5, it means: “to make holy”, or “to purify” (*and those two are basically the same thing in this passage/context*).

Did you catch that?

The reason Jesus died was to make us holy; to purify us.

Having been purified, we’re no longer subject to judgment for our impurities (*our sin*). **However, that’s a side effect of Jesus’s true purpose in dying: Jesus died to make us holy, to purify us.**

That is explicitly what the text says.

(Note, I’ve changed all instances of “???” ([hina](#)) to read “so that” for clarity, and changed “sanctify her” into “make her holy”, in accordance with what we’ve just seen.)

Ephesians 5:25-27 (Modified)

25 Husbands, love your wives, just **as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her,**

26 so that He might make her holy, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word,

27 so that He might present the church to Himself in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but so that she would be holy and blameless.

Again, I’m not denying the traditional interpretation of Christ’s work on the cross and what it accomplished. I’m saying that God’s focus in scripture isn’t on us avoiding judgment, but rather it’s on “making us holy” (*sanctifying us*).

That’s God’s focus.

Perhaps it should be ours as well.

Hebrews

I would love to go verse-by-verse through Hebrews chapters 9 and 10 and show this, but that would take a lot of time and space. However, I will recommend that you read all of those two chapters to get the full effect. You can do that in the [NASB here](#) or [NKJV here](#) (*links open in a new tab*. And *BTW, I wouldn't recommend any other translations, especially the ESV as this passage contains some heinous and intentional mistranslation by the ESV. Details in [my article on Bible translations](#).*)

As you read Hebrews 9 and 10, please notice all of the content about purification and cleansing. Also notice the complete absence of a discussion on wrath or judgment. Plenty of other places in the Bible discuss those things, but here **where Hebrews is explaining what Jesus did on the cross, the focus isn't salvation from wrath or judgment; it's about purification and cleansing.**

I won't quote the whole thing because of space, but I will quote a section. Again though, please read all of Hebrews 9 and 10 to get the full effect and context.

Hebrews 9:13-14

13 For if the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer **sprinkling those who have been defiled sanctify for the cleansing of the flesh,**

14 **how much more will the blood of Christ,** who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, **cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?**

Again, the focus isn't on escaping punishment for sin, despite that being the way that most Christians present the Gospel. The focus is on us being cleansed from sin and living holy lives. Not so we can earn something from God — because you can't; it's literally impossible to earn something from God — but because that's why Jesus died and gratitude is the proper response.

And there are yet more passages like this.

1 Peter 2:24

and **He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that (hina) we might die to sin and live to righteousness;** for by His wounds you were healed.

1 John is in the same vein.

1 John 2:1

My little children, **I am writing these things to you so that (hina) you may not sin.** And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous;

Need I go on?

If the cross itself doesn't convince you how serious God is about us avoiding sin, perhaps this verse will:

Hebrews 12:4

You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in your striving against sin

God is deadly serious about us living holy lives. Again, not so that we can earn something from Him — that's 100% impossible — but because that's why Jesus died.

The number of verses calling Christians to holiness is vast and I would need to copy/paste large portions of the Bible to get them all. I'm not asking you to jettison the understanding of the cross stated at the beginning of this article. However, that was never the main focus.

- It's about being saved from our sins as Matthew 1:21 says.
- It's about becoming God's righteousness through Jesus as 2 Cor 5:21 says.
- It's about Jesus making us holy as Ephesians 5 says.
- It's about God cleansing us from our sins as Hebrews chapters 9 and 10 say.
- It's about dying to sin and living in righteousness as 1 Peter 2:24
- It's about not sinning as 1 John 2:1 says.

Yes, avoiding punishment is a wonderful and happy side effect — and we should thank God for that! — but that was never the main point.

Modern Christians have taken God's gospel — His Good News — about avoiding sin/being cleansed from sin and effectively turned it into a "get out of hell free card"!

Seriously!

That's how the gospel is presented these days.

Again, those two things aren't mutually exclusive; it can be both. But only focusing on the one thing subtly distorts the gospel and can lead to complications down the road. We'll talk more about those complications after we look at the second ignored reason that Jesus died.

The Second Most Ignored Reason that Jesus died: To glorify God

Again, I want to remind you that you can do something for more than one reason. You might have 2 (or more) equal reasons, and perhaps some reasons are more major than other reasons, but you still count all of them. Thus, **when I say that Jesus died to glorify God, I'm not saying that was the only reason.**

With that in mind, let's look at the other most ignored reason that Jesus died:

Ezekiel 36:22-27

22 “Therefore say to the house of Israel, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD, “**It is not for your sake**, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, **but for My holy name**, which you have profaned among the nations where you went.

23 “I will vindicate the holiness of My great name which has been profaned among the nations, which you have profaned in their midst. Then **the nations will know that I am the LORD,**” declares the Lord GOD, “when I prove Myself holy among you in their sight.

24 “For I will take you from the nations, gather you from all the lands and bring you into your own land.

25 “Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols.

26 “Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.

27 “I will put **My Spirit within you** and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances.

God opens a prophecy about the work of Jesus (*Spirit within us, changing hearts of stone into hearts of flesh, cleansing from sin, etc.*) by saying that He’s doing it for His holy name. **Not for us, for His holy name.**

Keep that in mind as you read the next two passages.

John 17:1-5

1 Jesus spoke these things; and lifting up His eyes to heaven, He said, “Father, **the hour has come**; glorify Your Son, that the Son may glorify You,

John 12:27-28

27 “Now My soul has become troubled; and **what shall I say, ‘Father, save Me from this hour’? But for this purpose I came to this hour.**

28 “Father, glorify Your name.” Then a voice came out of heaven: “I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again.”

Jesus went to the cross to glorify God, which includes Jesus Himself because of the Trinity. Hebrews tells us something of this.

Hebrews 12:2

fixing our eyes on **Jesus**, the author and perfecter of faith, **who for the joy set before Him endured the cross**, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God

Yes, Jesus went to the cross to make us holy as we've just seen. He also died to glorify God. Those two things aren't in competition with each other, and in fact they compliment each other because He is glorified when we live holy lives.

If this was controversial, I would spend more time building a case for it. However, I doubt any Christian will have a problem with the idea that God does everything to glorify Himself, and rightly so because He is God. (*Which doesn't mean it's the only reason He does something; again, you can do something for more than one reason.*)

He even created man for his glory.

Isaiah 43:6-7

6 "I will say to the north, 'Give them up!'
And to the south, 'Do not hold them back.'
Bring My sons from afar
And My daughters from the ends of the earth,

7 **Everyone who is called by My name,**
And whom I have created for My glory,
Whom I have formed, even whom I have made."

Again, we were created to glorify God. Is it any surprise that part of the reason Jesus died was to glorify God?

One consequence of ignoring these things

Throughout Church history, Christians have repeatedly said that Jesus died for our sake, and that's true. However, having a wrong focus in theology can lead to serious problems, and one modern-day problem is the self-obsessed mindset that this presentation fosters. There's a modern worldview that's subconsciously propagated in many Christian groups that changes the focus of the gospel from God to us.

Instead of thinking that Jesus died to glorify Himself, we think that He had such enormous emotional affection for us (*erroneously read into the word "love"*) that He died so we could avoid the punishment for our sins.

Think about that for a moment.

Really think about it.

That basically boils the gospel down to “Jesus died so we wouldn’t be judged or punished”.

*That in turn boils down to “Jesus died so we could be more comfortable” (by avoiding judgment/punishment), which is categorically **false** on so many levels.*

For starters, the only time a Greek word that means “love” in the sense of warm feelings of affection is used of God’s love towards us is in Revelation 3:19

Revelation 3:19

Those whom I love (*phileó*), I reprove and discipline; therefore be zealous and repent.

The word is “?????” (*phileó*) and it means:

properly, to show warm affection in intimate friendship, characterized by tender, heartfelt consideration and kinship.

So if you want God to have warm feelings of affection for you, recognize that it must necessarily come with discipline. I’m not making this up either because it’s explicitly stated in Hebrews. (*Notice that we saw the opening verse earlier.*)

Hebrews 12:4-8

4 You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in your striving against sin;

5 and you have forgotten the exhortation which is addressed to you as sons, “MY SON, DO NOT REGARD LIGHTLY THE DISCIPLINE OF THE LORD, NOR FAINT WHEN YOU ARE REPROVED BY HIM;

6 FOR THOSE WHOM THE LORD **LOVES** (*agapaó, the verb form of agapé*) HE DISCIPLINES, AND HE SCOURGES EVERY SON WHOM HE RECEIVES.”

7 It is for discipline that you endure; *God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline?*

8 But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons.

The word translated “love” there is “?????” (*agapaó, again, it’s the verb form of agapé*) and here’s the best definition I’ve found for it:

pursuit of that which is most beneficial to a person or object in a self-sacrificial manner regardless of the type of response received from the person or object.

([source](#))

It's not about emotion; it's about what's best for us... and Jesus. Remember, the Father loves (*agapao*) the Son too. God wasn't so "overcome with emotion" that Jesus died for our sake; it's that God wants what was best for us and Himself and accomplished both of those at the cross.

God didn't – and doesn't – make His life all about us, as it is written:

Colossians 1:16

16 For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him.

It's not about us because we exist for Him.

It's about Him.

It always has been, it always is, and it always will be because He is God and we are not.

Many Christians rightly believe that the focal point of the entire Bible and most of man's history is the cross. It's foreshadowed from early in Genesis and it was continually foreshadowed throughout the entire Old Testament. The Gospels record it and the events leading up to it in stunning detail. It continues to be the focus of the rest of the New Testament and it has shaped the world in innumerable ways.

Now, consider the effect this has since the modern day gospel preaching makes the cross all about us.

Subconsciously, it's easy to start thinking that God arranged the whole arc of history because His entire being is wrapped around His *love* "great emotional want/need" for us. That tends to foster a more "me centered" Christianity where sin is minimized because it's not such a big deal. **IF** Jesus died purely so we could avoid the punishment for sin and not for the sin itself, then sin becomes less important to us because it matters less. It becomes "no big deal".

We're seeing that in Christianity now.

Conversely, if we have a fuller and more proper understanding, we realize that the cross was primarily about God's glory and making us holy (*because we couldn't do it ourselves and needed Him*.)

This approach tends to foster a more God-centered Christian who tries harder to avoid sin. Not so we can earn something from God — because again, that's absolutely impossible — but because that's part of the reason Jesus died: so we would sin less.

I'm not saying we should stop mentioning punishment for sins in evangelism. I'm not saying that *at all*. **I'm saying that we need to stop focusing on it so much that it becomes the only part of the gospel that gets preached**

. God's righteousness and His just wrath on sin is part of the gospel because you can't have the good news without first having the bad news. Thus, it should be preached.

However, it shouldn't be the only thing that's preached.

Okay, I'm stepping off the soap box now.

Conclusion

Jesus went to the cross for more than one reason. The reason scripture repeatedly states that He died was to make us holy and save us from our sins themselves. Modern Christians focus on saying "*He died to save us from the punishment for our sins*", but the Bible clearly focuses on Jesus dying to save us from the sins themselves so we could be righteous. (*Again, not to earn something from God because we can't*)

Jesus also died to glorify God, including Himself (*because of the Trinity*). Hebrews even says that the joy set before Him was the reason He endured the cross. Though again, He had more than one reason for going to the cross.

Changing our focus to a more complete picture of what the Bible says about the cross will likely result in more committed Christians who take both their faith and their avoidance of sin more seriously. It also protects against the anemic, self-centered Christianity that pervades the West these days and is eroding Christendom.

Thus, when you talk about why Jesus died, remember that there are (*at least*) two very important reasons He died that aren't usually talked about. I suggest making them a topic of conversation with both Christians and non-Christians since the Bible seems to consider it important.

P.S. How very like mankind to hear "*I'll make you righteous so you can sin less than you do*" and change it into: "*I won't be punished when I sin*". The Fall looms large here, changing our focus from righteousness and turning it into "getting away with it". To quote a famous author: "Lord, what fools these mortals be." (*Bonus points if you get the reference without Googling it. ?*)