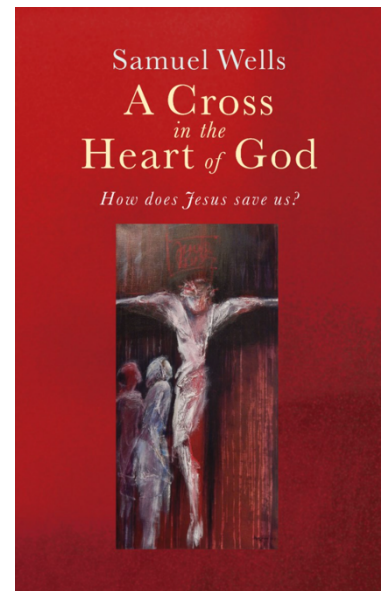


A Cross in the Heart of God Session 3:

The Cross in the Epistles

Based on: Samuel Wells: *A Cross in the Heart of God* (Norwich, Canterbury Press 2020) –pp 57- 85



Key Bible passages:

“And when you were dead in trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive together with him, when he forgave us all our trespasses, ¹⁴erasing the record that stood against us with its legal demands. He set this aside, nailing it to the cross. ¹⁵He disarmed the rulers and authorities and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in it.

Colossians 2.13-15

⁵ Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,
⁶ who, though he was in the form of God,
did not regard equality with God
as something to be exploited,
⁷ but emptied himself,
taking the form of a slave,
being born in human likeness.
And being found in human form,
⁸ he humbled himself
and became obedient to the point of death—
even death on a cross.

⁹ Therefore God also highly exalted him
and gave him the name
that is above every name,
¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus
every knee should bend,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
¹¹ and every tongue should confess
that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

Philippians 2.5-11

¹⁸ For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. ¹⁹ For it is written,
'I will destroy the wisdom of the wise,
and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.'
²⁰ Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? ²¹ For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, God decided, through the foolishness of our proclamation, to save those who believe. ²² For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, ²³ but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling-block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, ²⁴ but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. ²⁵ For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength.

1 Corinthians 1.18-25

²¹ For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you should follow in his steps.

²² ‘He committed no sin,
and no deceit was found in his mouth.’

²³ When he was abused, he did not return abuse; when he suffered, he did not threaten; but he entrusted himself to the one who judges justly. ²⁴ He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that, free from sins, we might live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed.

1 Peter 2.21-24

¹⁴ For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. ¹⁵ He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, so that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, ¹⁶ and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it. ¹⁷ So he came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; ¹⁸ for through him both of us have access in one Spirit to the Father. ¹⁹ So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, ²⁰ built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone.

Ephesians 2.14-20

¹⁴ May I never boast of anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. ¹⁵ For neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is anything; but a new creation is everything! ¹⁶ As for those who will follow this rule—peace be upon them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God.

Galatians 6.14-16

Key Book Quotations:

‘Forgiveness is not so much a grande gesture of reconciliation as a recognition of the interdependence of all our lives, the flaws in all our characters, the complexity of all our motives and the surprises that luck, chance and accident can bring.’

A Cross in the Heart of God, p58

We talk of Jesus’ agonizing death in the most vivid terms possible, because we assume God is angry with us, and that anger can only be appeased by a sacrificial lamb.

A Cross in the Heart of God, p59

So, we need to turn the cross round, so it faces in the opposite direction. It’s not just our word to God, the word of a holy man to say, ‘We’ve ruined the garden and stolen the fruit, we’re sorry, can you forgive us, will this sacrifice of the best-ever man be enough? Today the cross faces the other way, as God’s word to us, and says, ‘Will you believe this is my face? I am not the ghastly Goliath, the belligerent bully, the suffocating, micro-parenting passive-aggressive judge. I am the one who comes across the acres of eternity (...) with a precious piece of paper, that says, ‘You were made for me, to be with me, to flourish and frolic and desire and dance. (...) If I or my representatives ever suggested anything else, I’m here to say “sorry”’. Our question is, will we forgive God?

A Cross in the Heart of God, p60

God isn’t a busy deity, taking a break from constructing Milky Ways and filling black holes in order to set us free for everlasting life. God is utterly consumed by the longing to be with us and dwell eternally with us in Christ.

God has no other plans. We are God's desire. Jesus is God's heart walking around in front of us.

A Cross in the Heart of God, p65

God in Christ is a slave because God is wholly owned by one desire above all else: to be our companion. The cross shows us that this desire costs God everything. (...) God is weak and vulnerable because in Jesus we've seen what it is that means everything to God. We know God's secret. That makes God naked before us.

A Cross in the Heart of God, p65

We often concentrate on the physical anguish of the cross, but perhaps the heart of the cross is this sense of a breaking point between equal loyalties. The heart of our faith is that, when Christ was breaking apart in agony, he never let go of us. Which tells us that, in the heat of our agony, God will never let go of us.

A Cross in the Heart of God, p80

Questions:

1. Do you agree with the author when he asks us if we can and are willing to forgive God?
2. What was the essence of Jesus' suffering on the cross? What was going on there?
3. Can God be a slave to us?

