

1 John 4:10 - Doctrine of the Cross

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[0 : 0 0] Good morning everyone. Good morning. The reading is taken from 1 John chapter 4 verse 7.

! It's on page 1227.! Dear friends, let us love one another for love comes from God.! Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God.

Whoever does not love does not know God because God is love. This is how God showed his love among us. He sent his one and only son into the world that we might live through him.

This is love. Not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us we also ought to love one another.

No one has ever seen God but if we love one another God lives in us. And his love is made complete in us. Well keep your Bibles open at 1 John chapter 4.

[1 : 0 7] Let me pray and ask for the Lord's help as we come to his word. Let me pray. Lord we do pray and ask for your help now as we come and look at your words. We're very conscious of the slowness of our hearts to trust you, to listen to you.

And so we pray please that you would be at work by your spirit. Please help me in the words that I say. Help all of us in our hearts to trust you, to listen carefully and respond in obedience and faith.

In Jesus name. Amen. Amen. Amen. So as Louise pointed out, it is Palm Sunday today. We are in the build up to Easter weekend.

And what we've been doing the last couple of weeks is taking a pause from our regular working through a passage of the Bible to have a think about the doctrine of the cross. So what does the Bible say in greater detail about the work of Christ on the cross?

What is happening as Jesus dies? And if you were with us last week, we considered the idea of substitution. That Jesus died in our place.

[2 : 2 0] And at the heart of the cross is this exchange, isn't there, between Christ and us. You know, our sin for his righteousness. So on the cross, Christ the innocent son is made sin for us.

Our sin is transferred onto him so that we in him might be made righteous. And if you weren't with us last week, I'd encourage you to listen online if you can. And this week I want to see how the New Testament builds on the idea because I want us to see the fact that substitution means that Jesus necessarily on the cross is paying the penalty that my sin deserves.

He is facing the punishment that I deserve. Now, my hope is, and maybe this is an unrealistic hope, that, you know, preaching is the art of unrealistic hopes. You know, that's why I'm standing here.

I want you to be beginning to put those two things together and see that to a certain extent the message of the cross can be summarized like this, that Jesus is facing my penalty in my place, right?

That's the summary of the message of the cross. It's what theologians have called penal substitution. Penal to mean penalty and substitution to mean in our place.

[3 : 43] Sometimes it's lengthened to mean penal substitutionary atonement. That is the idea that through Jesus on the cross facing our penalty as our substitute, we are made at one meant with God.

We are reconciled to God through the cross as Jesus faces our penalty in our place. Now, there might be some of you here, I don't know who you are, and I'm not going to look at anyone particularly as I say this, but you might be thinking, oh, well, Steve, this is all a bit nerdy, isn't it?

I mean, who uses words like penal substitutionary atonement other than doctrine nerds? Is it really necessary? I mean, maybe if I was taking A-level theology, you might expect to have a lesson like this, but why would we really need to do that in church?

Why are we doing this? Why not just go through the stories of the Bible? Well, let me try and answer that really quickly, because I think it's a really important question. So turn to 1 Corinthians 1, verse 18.

It's on page 1144. It's also on the screen behind me, if you don't have time to find it. Let me read it to you. 1 Corinthians 1, verse 18. We're told there by Paul, for the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God.

[5 : 00] Now, let me ask you a trick question as you look at that verse. What is the power of God according to 1 Corinthians 1, verse 18? What is the power of God? Well, notice that it's not the cross itself, yeah?

Notice that that's not exactly what it says. I think that's what we would be inclined to think, but it says that it is the message of the cross which is the power of God. In other words, the power of God, God's saving of his people, is seen in the message of the cross, the logos, of what Christ has done at the cross, because the power is in understanding what has happened there.

Of course, the message would have no power if the cross itself didn't happen, right? It requires the cross to have happened, but it is the explanation of what Christ has done and achieved on the cross that is the power of God for salvation for those who believe.

So, of course, we want to take time to make sure that we get this right. You know, if we are not clear on the message of the cross, then we, well, the power of God is gone, isn't it?

The power is in the truth. I think you could probably say with a fairly high level of certainty that the death of a local church is almost always preceded by a loss of the doctrine of the cross.

[6 : 19] If we don't get this, we will cease to exist. And to be honest, rightly so, because this is the power of God for salvation for everyone who believes.

Now, with that in mind, and hopefully you persuaded that it's worth listening for the next few moments, turn back to 1 John chapter 4, and I want to spend most of our time in just verse 10, and I want us to ask it four different questions.

So let's read the verse again. 1 John 4 verse 10. This is love. Not that we love God, but that he loved us and sent his son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

Let me ask four questions. And the first question is this. What is the penalty for sin? What is the penalty for sin? Really, you'll notice if you look down at the verse that it is captured in those two words towards the end of the sentence in the words atoning sacrifice.

Now, the NIV there is using two English words to translate one Greek word. The Greek word literally means to deal with anger or to satisfy judgment.

[7 : 23] If you've got a different translation, maybe an ESV, I think it uses the word propitiation. But that's not a word that we regularly use. So the NIV picks up this kind of temple sacrifice language where an animal is sacrificed in the place of someone else, their life in place of others.

Now, think what this means. It means, doesn't it, that the penalty for sin, the price of forgiveness is a sacrificial death, right?

Not just a physical death, but a sacrificial death, a death offered to God to face justice and wrath at sin. And John is saying, that is what Jesus is doing as he dies on the cross.

Jesus didn't die just because he kind of miscalculated the hostility of the Jewish leaders. Oh, whoops, I kind of got that wrong. No, it's not that at all, isn't it? It's not even just that he died to show you that he loves you, although he does, and that's going to come out in this passage.

It's not just that, is it? Rather, he died because the price of forgiveness is the shedding of blood. Blood is life in the Bible, and God's wrath has to be dealt with, and the price is life, a blood sacrifice.

[8 : 38] Now, I don't know how you feel about that. I think for some people, they think, well, you know, sure, I don't really like the idea of an angry God. I don't really like the idea of an angry God punishing his son as a substitute for our sin.

I mean, demanding blood, that sounds kind of gross, doesn't it? That sounds sort of medieval. It's the kind of thing that you put on stained glass windows to scare people into giving money to the church. Doesn't our passage say that God is love, not angry?

Well, of course, you're right. God is love, and the passage does say that. God is the definition of love, the source of all love. But it's important to notice here in this passage that John doesn't seem to think that God's love and God's anger are opposite to one another or exclusive of one another, not least because God's anger is not the rage of a man or woman out of control.

It is the holy response of a holy God, a loving God, to sin and wickedness. And it's the satisfaction of this godly anger on the cross that uncovers his love.

We'll think more about that in a moment. But what we need to see and understand is forgiveness is never very easy. Right? I know we think forgiveness is easy.

[9 : 51] Perhaps you think, oh, I'm a forgiving kind of guy. You know, I have no problem forgiving others. Let me suggest to you, if you think like that, that's because no one's really wronged you very seriously yet.

And that will happen. As soon as you've been wronged properly, you know that forgiveness is very complicated and a lot more costly. And when you've been betrayed or let down or deserted by those who you thought loved you, then you will be shocked at the emotional pain that you will feel.

The subtle ways that you'll find yourself trying to get back at them to make yourself feel better. And that's because forgiveness comes at a price. Let me try and illustrate what I mean here to show you by an example.

Imagine that I came round to your house and you were very kind and you offered me a cup of tea as I came into your house. And we were chatting with one another and then sort of inexplicably as I finished my cup of tea, I threw my cup at the television and broke it.

Imagine that the TVs aren't actually broken, Nick. Don't worry. Now, what does that mean if I do that? It means I owe you a television, right?

[11 : 00] Yeah? I broke it. My debt to you is to replace the TV. But if you choose to forgive me, if you say, don't worry, Steve, I forgive you for breaking my television, what are you doing in that moment?

What you are saying is, I take on myself the cost of that. I will replace it. Don't worry. I forgive you. And if you don't replace the TV, then you have the suffering of living without a television.

In other words, my sin of throwing the teacup at the television incurs a debt that must be dealt with for forgiveness to take place and for reconciliation to come about.

And that is always how forgiveness works. There is always a cost. It's not often one tangible like a television. It is rare that someone comes around to your house and throws a cup at the TV. If you know that story and it's happened to you, tell me, I'll be intrigued.

But it's more often than not something like you break one another's happiness and the cost of forgiveness is that we have to voluntarily suffer the sadness for a period of time.

[12 : 05] The opposite of forgiveness in that is to inflict unhappiness on the person who has wronged you to make them pay the debt. But you can't ignore it.

It's more likely perhaps that someone's damaged your reputation and the cost of forgiveness is for you to live through the misunderstanding and misrepresentation that will come. Choosing not to slander them, not to get back to them in like manner.

But whatever it is, forgiveness is never free. And to offer someone forgiveness is in effect to say, I will suffer for your sin so that I can forgive you.

And if that's true between you and I, it's even more true between God and us, isn't it? You know, think about this. What is our offense before God? We were talking about this with the children, weren't we? We've not broken God's television.

We've not slandered him in the workplace. We've not jeopardized his happiness. What have we done? Well, the Bible will tell you that you and I have stolen something that belongs to God. What is that?

[13 : 08] Our lives. God graciously and generously gives us life to live for him and his glory. And yet we steal it back and live it for ourselves and for our own glory.

We've disobeyed his law. We've run the other way. And of course, God can't just say, oh, do you know what? Just forget about it. There's no debt there. Yeah, let's just pretend that never happened.

You know, if God were like that, he wouldn't be God or he wouldn't be good. You'd have no reason to trust him. There's a debt and it needs to be paid. And the debt for stealing life is life itself.

I know this is obvious, but let me just rub this in if I can for a moment. Imagine back in that scenario that I threw that cup at the television and broke the TV and it incurs this debt of needing to replace the television.

And I said, you don't worry. You don't have to forgive me. I'm going to repay it myself. And I turn up the next day at your house and I've got a brand new notebook. I said, you don't worry about the television.

[14 : 12] I bought you a notebook. And if you like, you can draw pictures in the notebook. And if you flick through the notebook really fast, it looks like they're moving.

And that will be an adequate replacement for your television. What do you say? Well, I've added to my offense, haven't I really? I've offended you that I thought that I could buy and replace your TV with a notebook.

But that's what we do with God, isn't it? All the time. Nothing less than the sacrifice of a life in the place of a life could pay the debt that we owe to God.

It's underlined over and over in the Bible. It's why God does not delight in the animal sacrifices of the Old Testament. Why? Well, because really they're just the drama of what will come in the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus.

A blood of a lamb can never swap in for the life of a person. And our good works, our religious observance, the idea that I can buy forgiveness from God by my diet, by my attendance at a special place of worship, by my observation of particular spiritual days or seasons, that massively underplays the nature of my debt before a holy God.

[15 : 24] It's offering a notebook for a TV when I owe him life, my life. And so God the Son, in human flesh, the perfect one in the place of sinful ones like you and me, sheds his blood, lays down his life, breathes his last to pay the payment that our sin deserves.

And of course, the death of the perfect son is payment not just enough for the salvation of one other person. He is the author of life itself. His death is of infinite value.

Salvation sufficient for all who would turn to him. I want to move on. There's other things I need to say, and I'm probably running over time already, but let's just pause and just consider this for a moment.

Can I say to you, have you considered that the cross of Jesus Christ says to you really loudly, you matter, and what you do matters.

Your life is a serious business. God cares about what you do. Sin is serious. Punishment is real. You know, the Christian message is not a message about self-improvement.

[16 : 41] It's a message about rescue and escape from the wrath of God that we deserve. Because either we turn to the son and the infinitely valuable of the cross of Christ pays for our sin, or we spend eternity under the just judgment of God paying ourselves the debt that we owe to God.

Here, forgiveness is being extended to you. I will pay, says God, but you must receive it. Can I ask you if you've received it? Have you received it from the Lord?

Second question, who is it paid to? Now, I know, these are obvious questions, aren't they? And you're probably thinking, I know the answer already, but let's just slow down and make sure we've thought about this carefully.

In the temple language that John is using here, Jesus, God the Son, is the sacrifice. Yeah, he is the atoning sacrifice. And it would also be right to say from the verse that it is God who is making the sacrifice.

So God is both the priest and the sacrifice. Yeah, you get that. The Roman soldiers might have been the people who drove the nails into the hands and feet of Jesus. But if you look down at verse 10, it's God who sent the Son.

[17 : 51] God made the sacrifice. He was the priest. And he made the sacrifice to himself, right? Because he was the one to whom the debt was owed.

It is before God that we owe the debt of life. In other words, what you've got here in these verses is God making the sacrifice of himself to himself for the satisfaction of himself.

Do you get that? It's incredible, isn't it? God is satisfying his own holiness with his own sacrifice. Do you just see just how God-centered the cross is right now?

This is not us asking God for forgiveness and him going, okay, let me see whether I can make the way for that to happen. It's not even God building a bridge or opening a door for us to kind of walk across.

No, this is God coming down in the person of the Son, taking the initiative, sending, coming, dying, paying before we did anything. I wonder whether you really thought about this.

[18 : 51] You know, the cross isn't really about you. I mean, I know it is about us and in a way and we'll get to there in a moment, but it's really about who God is first. It's about God's holiness, his just, right, wrathful response to sin, satisfied in himself.

You know, the cross tells you if you didn't know it from anywhere else, the cross tells you God is absolutely consistent with himself. He is unflinchingly holy. God will not, even at the price of his own Son, for a moment compromise his holy goodness.

He won't. He can't. And he is now able to forgive sinners with joyful liberty and without any compromise of his righteousness or his goodness because of the cross.

You know, the cross of Christ means that the forgiveness that we've got from God is not some kind of back alley deal, you know, where God sort of agree, I'll turn a blind eye to that for the people I like. It's not that, is it?

No, sin is always paid for. And here it's paid by Jesus on the cross instead of us in the judgment of hell. And so because the cross we can cry, holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty and salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne.

[20 : 09] It means, doesn't it, if you're a Christian this morning that the holiness of God is no longer a danger to you. In fact, it's a joy to you. Do you know that? When you, when you think of the holy otherness of God, the fact that God cannot even look on sin, it's kind of scary, isn't it?

How awesome he is. But actually, when you understand the cross, that everything about his holiness is satisfied in the sacrifice of his son in our place, that means his holiness is no longer terrifying for you.

It's a good thing for us. The cross means that the goodness of God is now wonderfully attractive to us. Thirdly, why does he pay it?

Why does he pay it? It does beg the question, doesn't it, why? Why would God choose to go to such lengths to make a way to save his people without compromising his character? I have to say, if you smash my television with a cup, that might be the last time you came round to my house, right?

Why does God go to such lengths? Well, read the verse and let's see. This is love. This is love. Not that we love God, but that he loved us and sent his son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

[21 : 27] Verse 11, dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. I think of all the aspects of this, this is both the simplest to understand, but the most astounding.

God pays the price of our forgiveness in the death of his son because he loves us. That's it. In other words, God's love is not a response to our love for him.

He loves us first. It's not even a general response to the loveliness of humanity. No. Rather, God's love is not that we loved God, but that he loved us.

So here, John says that God pays for our forgiveness in the death of the son because he loves sinners, people who don't yet love him in a way that's completely beyond our understanding.

This is so important. Let me try and prove it to you with another passage. It's going to come up on the screen. You might want to turn to it. Romans chapter 5, verse 6. It's page 1132 if you want to turn to it. Paul writes this.

[22 : 34] You see, just at the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person, someone might possibly dare to die.

Oh, they're good enough. I might give my life for them. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this. While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

It's exactly the same, isn't it? God demonstrates his love by Christ's death while we were still sinners. I said last week that substitution means, the doctrine of the substitution of Jesus Christ at the cross, means that my contribution to salvation is my sin, right?

Because that's been counted over to the Lord Jesus. Well, here, if you like, it's exactly the same story. What is my contribution to the love of God? What is it that I have done that's made myself so attractive to God?

Well, nothing really. I'm a sinner. But God loves sinners. He loves sinners. Not because he approves of their lifestyle choices. Not because he doesn't judge sin.

[23 : 42] Not because sin itself doesn't arouse his righteous anger. It's not because God has no standards. No, the cross screams the moral justice of God. Rather, the point is that the God who is love, freely, for reasons only understood by him, freely chooses to love sinners like you and me.

Incredible as that might be. In fact, according to John, this is the very definition of God's love. God is love, he says, and the overflow of his character is as it overflows onto the undeserving.

God's love is by its very nature not deserved or earned or merited. Anything it is, it's spilling out from God's very character. And so he lovingly doesn't compromise his justice or act as if sin doesn't matter.

He upholds the holiness of his character while in love saving the lost by paying the price for their sin. Again, can we just pause there and can I ask you the question whether you've seen that God really loves you?

God loves you. And that's not because he has a gushy feeling welling up inside of him when he thinks about you. It's way better than that. God loves you even in the depths of your sin and so provides a way through the atoning sacrifice of the Son to save you.

[25 : 06] And you do know, don't you, as I say to you that God loves you, you know that no one else in the world loves you like that. No one else loves you like that. There is not a person in your life that if you didn't, if you shared with them exactly what was going on in your head at every single moment that they would still feel the same way about you.

Maybe you're married. You know that's true, don't you? You know that's true of your parents. And so, to some measure or other, we are always going about this process of kind of hiding ourselves from one another in order to make sure that we don't compromise people's love for us.

Because we're afraid if they really saw what we were really like, they wouldn't want anything to do with us anymore. But God knows all about you. He knows everything you've done.

He knows everywhere you've been. He knows the thoughts of your heart. He knows what you're thinking right now. He knows where you're going this week. He knows what you will do. And He loves you.

He loves you. There's no one else like that. Finally then, what difference does this make? What difference does this make? Just as we finish, I want to look just a little bit outside of verse 10 to see what difference this penalty-paying love makes to us.

[26 : 22] Just have a look down at verse 7. Dear friends, let us love one another for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God.

Whoever does not love does not know God because God is love. This is how God showed His love among us. He sent His one and only Son into the world that we might live through Him.

This is love. Not that we love God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

No one has ever seen God, but if we love one another, God lives in us and His love is made complete in us. Notice what John is saying here about this love of God in Christ's sacrifice.

Notice that he's saying it changes us. In verse 7, he says that encountering this love is like being reborn into someone who then loves others in the same way that God has loved us.

[27 : 23] He says, verse 7, everyone who loves has been born of God. The logic here is that if we are able to love like God, it is because we, not because we're good people or because we're particularly good at this kind of thing, it's because that love has not come from us, it's come from God Himself.

We have been born of God into these kind of lovers. It's not so much that, sorry, so much so that the loveless are those who haven't encountered this love.

Those who are unable to love like this is because they haven't been loved like this by God. Verse 9 pretty much repeats the same point, but here the image is not birth but life. So we live through the one and only Son who was sent into the world to lovingly pay the penalty for our sin.

The verses are really dense, aren't they? There's a lot going on here but the big idea is really simple, that encountering the love of God in the wrath-bearing penal substitution of the cross remakes us.

It remakes us. John is like, it's like saying encountering Christ's cross is as significant as being created in the first place because you are being remade.

[28 : 36] You are being given a new life to live and you are now living it not in that old way but you are living it now through the love of God seen at the cross bringing a life that we've not experienced before that's capable of loving others in a way that we were not capable before.

You know, we sometimes experience this, don't we, on a human level. You know when you've fallen out with a friend and then you are able to sit down together and have a conversation and you agree that the debt will be paid and that forgiveness will mean reconciliation for the two of you and as you walk out from that kind of meeting there's a new kind of freshness, isn't there?

It's like you've been reborn again in your relationship. This is that but on a whole new level that through the cross we are reconciled to the God who made us. The death sentence that was hanging over us has been lifted through Christ's atoning sacrifice and we are remade to live new lives.

Coming to Christ, trusting in him, receiving the forgiveness of the cross is nothing less significant than being made completely new, says John, and new in a way that is able to love and forgive others.

A life that is even able to do that to the extent to which it reveals God to other people. A love that can't generate itself but comes from the power of the cross.

[29 : 57] The cross, if you like, is the kind of moral capital that pours into us and flows out of us to those around us as Christ dies facing my punishment in my place.

Let's pause and have a moment for quiet prayer and then I'll pray for us. Heavenly Father, we thank you so much that you love us.

As unlovely as we are, you love us. And not with a kind of sentimental, gushy love but with a committed, active, saving love that you sent your son, the Lord Jesus Christ to face our punishment and die in our place.

How we praise and thank you for Jesus. Give us, we pray, just even this morning a fresh grasp on what he has done that we might love one another as he has loved us.

In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen.