

Where Wrath and Mercy Meet

by Don Carson – 1999



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Introduction: what's the problem?

Open your Bibles at Romans 3: I shall be coming to that passage in due course. For the last twenty-five years or so, I have been engaged in university missions, which have changed their shape a great deal. Nowadays, when one preaches the gospel in most universities in the western world, there is one particular area that is very hard to get across. It's not the doctrine of the Trinity: I have no trouble explaining that to university audiences, not because it is such an easy thing, but because most of them are so ignorant about the Christian faith that they don't know the tough questions! It's not the deity and the humanity of Jesus Christ – the really tough area to get across is the doctrine of sin. It's the hardest part of my job as an evangelist. This is partly because of a rising post-modern epistemology which drives many people, especially from the arts sides of the universities, to the conclusion that all notions of right and wrong are, finally, culturally dependent. They're either dependent on the individual, or the social unit, but there is no absolute right or wrong. The only absolutely wrong thing is to say that there is such a thing as a wrong thing.

This eventually has a bearing on gospel preaching, because if we cannot agree as to what the problem is, we cannot possibly agree on the solution. The result in many evangelical circles in the western world today is a kind of diluted gospel. Precisely because there is no longer any sort of universal understanding of the nature of sin, there is an increasing temptation to trim the gospel so that it is primarily given to meet your felt need. If your felt need is alienation, then Jesus is the gospel that gives you integration; if your felt need is loneliness, Jesus loves you and you will no longer feel lonely; if your marriage is on the rocks, Jesus' gospel puts together your marriage – and so on. There's a modicum of truth in all of those things but it's only a

modicum. Biblically speaking, all of those things are tied to the far more central issue. How shall men and women be reconciled to God when, by their nature and by choice, they are rebelling against their Maker and alienated from Him? If you do not have that analysis of the fundamental human problem, you cannot possibly arrive at a biblically faithful understanding of the cross.

If you begin with contemporary analyses of contemporary problems, you will always domesticate the gospel. You may begin with a contemporary analysis of a human problem, and then trace it back to a biblical analysis of the human problem, and then come to the gospel without losing the gospel. But if you don't have, somewhere or other, the biblical analysis of what is wrong with human beings, you cannot possibly remain faithful to the biblical gospel.

Back to the beginning

Let me begin by telling the Bible story in brief. In the beginning God made everything. He made human beings in His own image and likeness. He made everything good. The nature of evil is not that it is the flipside of good. It does not have the same ontological status as good, so there's a good principle and a bad principle and they sort of duke it out in the universe. In the Bible, sin is bound up with the sort of self-centredness that dethrones God.

The first question is: did God really say? And the first doctrine to be denied is judgement: you will not surely die! With the fall came an entire perversion of the created order; everything changed. In the next chapter is the first murder – fratricide. The sin becomes so appalling in the multiplying human race that God sends drastic judgement – the fall, followed by the flood. But God in His mercy does save Noah, his wife, three children and their spouses. Noah promptly gets drunk. In His mercy, God does promise never to send similar judgement again, but it is not long before the race is full of violence and evil. Some are still trying to build towers to heaven to escape floods and make themselves gods (in Genesis 11). But God humbles human arrogance there and intervenes to find one man, Abraham, and then a whole nation to come from him. Abraham is a great man, but he can be a liar. Isaac is a bit of

a wimp. Jacob is the deceiver. The twelve – one of them is sleeping with his daughter-in-law; another is sleeping with his father's concubine. Ten of them are trying to figure out whether it's better to murder one of them or sell him into slavery – talk about a dysfunctional family!

Eventually they go down into Egypt, and are enslaved, and when God raises up Moses to bring them out, they have to be talked into it, quite frankly! When God does bring them out, with wonderful displays of God's control over evil, over the created order, it only takes a matter of months before the propensity of their hearts displays itself again, in the horrible incident of the golden calf. While God is graciously giving His words to Moses on the Mount, the people are in an orgy of paganism down below. Finally they enter the promised land after the first generation has died off. God gives them more miraculous signs; He preserves them through the forty years of wandering, He takes them across the Jordan river – Jericho falls, whereupon the people are already so stuffed with pride, that they make all kinds of mistakes, with respect to the Gibeonites and Ai.

Do we need to track it all out to the period of the Judges, endless cycles of rebellion and sin, followed by judgement? Eventually, there's so much judgement they cry to God for mercy, God raises up a judge, someone who leads the people in repentance yet again, delivers the people from all of their suffering. But it's only a generation or two before there's another spiral down of the cycle: horrendous paganism, the kind of paganism where you offer up your children as burnt offerings to the god of Moloch. The cycles are so appalling that by the end of the book of Judges, it's hard to read chapters 19, 20 and 21 in public. Again the refrain, 'In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did that which was right in his own eyes.' But when the people asked for a king, they didn't ask for a king so they could be God-like and well-governed, they asked for a king so that they could be like the surrounding pagans! Saul was the result, with horrendous implications.

David, division and exile

Then God raises up a king after His own heart, David. He commits adultery and murder. One wonders what a king not after God's own

heart would have done! It only takes two generations of kings before the nation splits: Israel in the north and Judah in the south. In the north, no dynasty lasts more than three or four generations, usually less than that, before it's bumped off by some new dynasty, with endless cycles of perversion and corruption, until the people are carted off into exile. And in the south, the remnant thinks that it is secure, but eventually Jerusalem falls, and in his powerful visions, Ezekiel sees the glory of God leaving the temple, and leaving the courtyard, leaving the city, parking, as it were, in a movable chariot in the mountain on the east of the city; a symbol of the judgement to come. God had abandoned His people, and they would be dispersed!

As you read through the prophets, you hear these thundering judgements from a God Who is always saying 'I am slow to anger, plenteous in mercy'. The Lord is not quickly angry; he's forbearing, and yet the threats are horrendous precisely because the sin is so appalling! This is the Bible storyline. It's how we are to understand sin. It's not because the Jews are worse than others, but because they're typical of all of us. And until we see this pattern of human rebellion against God, recycling again and again, until we see that apart from God's intervening grace, there is no enduring fidelity anywhere, we really aren't ready to see just what it is that God accomplished in Christ Jesus.

The nature of sin

Before we get to Romans 3:21, this wonderful atonement passage, we have chapter 1:18 to 3:20. The whole burden of these chapters is that God's wrath is against the entire human race, Jew and Gentile alike, because of our sin. And to get that across believably in our generation is extremely difficult. I read recently the testimony of Budziszewski in an article called *Escape from Nihilism*. Budziszewski was a moral relativist, he did his PhD to prove that all moral systems are entirely relative to their own culture, and therefore there is no absolute right or wrong anywhere. Then he eventually he was converted. He writes

I have already noted in passing that anything goes wrong without God. This is true even of the good things He has given us, such as our minds

One of the good things I've been given is a stronger than average mind; I don't make the observation to boast. Human beings are given diverse gifts to serve Him in diverse ways. The problem is that a strong mind that refuses the call to serve God has its own way of doing wrong. When some people flee from God they rob and kill, when others flee from God they do a lot of drugs and have a lot of sex. When I fled from God I didn't do any of those things. My way of fleeing from God was to get stupid. Though it always comes as a surprise to intellectuals, there are some forms of stupidity that one must be highly intelligent and educated to achieve. God keeps them in His arsenal to pull down mulish pride and I discovered them all. That is how I ended up doing a doctoral dissertation to prove that we make up the difference between good and evil, and we aren't responsible for what we do. I remember now that I taught those things to students – now that's sin! It was also agony. I believed things that filled me with dread. I thought I was smarter and braver than the people who didn't believe them. I thought I saw an emptiness at the heart of the universe, that was hidden from their foolish eyes. But I was the fool. How then did God bring me back?

Then he begins to explain then the nature of his conversion.

We must understand the nature of sin. Last autumn I went to spend a day in Auschwitz. I didn't see anything in the camps that I hadn't read about, and yet there was something peculiarly powerful, as many of you doubtless know, about seeing the camps for the first time. As you walk up to Auschwitz one, you see written above the gate, *Arbeit Macht Frei* – work makes you free. The place was full of vicious ironies. In one little courtyard between the buildings where tens of thousands of people were lined up against a wall and shot, you could see the place for torturing prisoners: that was the building most commonly used. And in one stone cell you could see where a figure of Christ on the cross has been etched into the stone by the fingernails of successive generations of Christians in that little chamber. You can still see the piles of human hair waiting to be shipped back from the east into Germany to make fibre; and children's clothes, glasses and shoes all ready to be recycled. You can see it all

In Auschwitz two, most of the shacks have been burned down, the ovens have been blown up, but in Auschwitz one there wasn't time, so you can still see its gas chamber, where they could get rid of over two thousand people in about twenty minutes, using Cyclon B, a cyanide derivative. I think we in the west have often misunderstood the significance of Auschwitz. I don't want to relativise its horror. In some ways the horror was unique, in part because it was so efficient, because it combined this sort of horror with immaculate record keeping – you can still see a lot of the records. By contrast, for example, when Pol Pot was murdering, he kept no records. It was out in the jungle, and it wasn't quite as efficient. Moreover, we haven't read most of the stories of Cambodian survivors.

In this bloody twentieth century, we have not only killed six million Jews in the ovens, we have killed seven millions others; that is gypsies and other people perceived to be enemies of the German state; at least twenty million Ukrainians and others, an estimated fifty million Chinese, then the Armenian Holocaust, approximately a third of the population of Cambodia, plus the regional instances of genocide; half a million to a million – some estimate as high as a million and a quarter – Hutus and Tutsis, plus the smaller things like the Balkans. This has been the bloodiest of all human centuries so far as we can estimate. At least a hundred million people butchered, apart from the wars! And in our wisdom in the west, we have concluded that there is no such thing as evil. Now that's evil. I wish I could push this point home hard, because we are simply not ready to grasp the significance and depth and magnificence of the grace of God and the gospel until we see how deeply odious is our sin.

One of the significances, of course, of the Holocaust is that it was done by Germans. Not because Germans are the worst but because before the Holocaust, just about everybody in the western world thought of them as the best! The Germans had the best universities, the best technology, producing some of the best scholarship in the world. The nation at the technological and philosophical peak of western enlightenment values, in fact, led us into genocide. We are not better! It is of the Lord's mercies we are not consumed.

A rebel breed

If you were to read, without recreating the Bible's whole storyline, these verses from chapter 3, the average university undergraduate would think you were right over the top!

There is no-one righteous, not even one; there is no-one who understands, no-one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no-one who does good, not even one. Their throats are open graves; their tongues practise deceit. The poison of vipers is on their lips. Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood; ruin and misery mark their ways, the way of peace they do not know. There is no fear of God before their eyes.

I'm not for a moment denying the common grace in our hearts enables faulty, bruised, broken, rebellious sinners like you and me to do some good. But we are a rebel breed. Unless we come to terms with that sort of thing, and re-cloak it in contemporary forms so that we can get it across to people, we simply can't make the gospel clear. We simply can't.

It takes only a few hours of fast reading of the Old Testament to recognise all of this horrible sin in the Bible elicits God's wrath as its appropriate response. You just cannot read many pages of the Old Testament without coming across the wrath of God. It is always presented as God's last resort, He is forbearing, but yet there are pages and pages and pages in Isaiah, Jeremiah, Amos and Ezekiel, where there is threatened judgement, and it is threatened as a function of God's wrath. The judgement that follows is not pictured in the Bible as a kind of independent result of some bad choices – you do some naughty things and there are social entailments. It is pictured, rather, as the consequence of God's wrath. But God's wrath is not portrayed as a vile temper, as an arbitrary burst of anger outside of God's control. It's pictured rather as a function of His holiness. His sheer holiness demands that those who have been made in His image, and who are but creatures, and who defy Him to His face, meet for the judgement that He Himself has already told them that they would meet. It is personal.

The cross of Christ

Now, we come to the argument in verse 21 that we Christians are justified because of the cross of Christ. The controlling expression in this paragraph is 'the righteousness of God', which occurs four times in these verses, and the word 'to justify' cognate with it, twice. I think that we shall get at the heart of the issue if we reflect on four elements.

First, in verse 21, Paul establishes the revelation of God's righteousness and its relationship to the Old Testament. 'But now,' he says, 'a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known to which the Law and the Prophets testify.' The 'but now' is not a logical 'now' – it is a 'now' at this point in redemptive history. In the past there has been this, but now God is doing a certain thing. That is made clear once we understand that the expression 'apart from the law' is not connected with 'righteousness of God' but 'is made known'. In other words, we are not to read 'but now a righteousness from God apart from law has been made known'. We are to read, 'but now, a righteousness from God has been made known apart from law', that is apart from the law covenant. The law covenant prescribed its own sacrificial system by which men and women could know the righteousness of God and be justified before Him, but now, at this point in the sweep of redemptive history, with the coming of Jesus Christ, the coming of the new covenant; a righteousness from God has been made known apart from the law covenant. But it is not so independent from the law covenant that it has nothing to do with it. No. It has been made known now, apart from law, yet it is that to which the law and the prophets testify (verse 21). That is to say the law and the prophets prefigured it, announced it and modelled it. But the law and the prophets did not provide it. That has happened now at the end of the age. And this righteousness is bound up with the death of Jesus Christ, with His atonement on the cross, and has been made known now at the end of the ages. That's the argument.

Judgement and grace

It is a common mistake to think that 'then there was judgement and now there's grace'. In the Old Testament God is the God of

judgement, and of grace, and in the New Testament He's still the God of judgement and of grace. I would argue that you ratchet up on both fronts. As you move from the old covenant to the new, you see the grace of God progressively disclosed in all its clarity and beauty until you see it climaxing in the cross. And if you look at the theme of judgement, yes, there's horrible judgement in the Old Testament, but it climaxes in the new with the teaching of Jesus, the apostles and Paul on hell. The only reason why we don't see the judgement likewise reaching its climax is precisely because we have relegated hell from our thinking. We do not read Revelation 14 in all its horrific imagery and say that all of the pictures of divine judgement in the Old Testament are tame compared to that. And do you know who introduces most of the innovative metaphors regarding hell in the New Testament? Jesus.

As you move from the old covenant to the new, it is not that you move from wrath to grace. You move in fact from a ratcheting up of the pictures of wrath, to wrath, and a ratcheting up of the pictures of grace, to grace! The significance rather is that now a righteousness from God has been made known apart from the law covenant. It's come in a new covenant, sealed with Jesus' blood. The old covenant did predict this. It had its lambs, its sacrificial system, its priestly system and ultimately they would find their fulfilment in the ultimate temple and the ultimate priest and the ultimate sacrifice. They bore testimony to the great sacrifice that was to come.

Faith

The second point that Paul establishes is the availability now of God's righteousness to all human beings without racial distinction but on condition of faith – verses 22 and 23. In the previous two and a half chapters, Paul has been establishing a universal guilt: both Jews and Gentiles are under condemnation. Now he says that this righteousness from God is also for all without racial distinction; Jew or Gentiles. There is a logical connection between this paragraph and the preceding chapters. 'This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.'

In recent years, there has been a new interpretation of the phrase rendered in the NIV 'faith in Jesus Christ'. It could be taken to mean, 'faithfulness of Jesus Christ'. The Greek could be understood that way. The word faith can mean either faith or faithfulness, it depends on the context. So it's possible to read this: 'this righteousness of God comes through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ'. After all, that is a biblical theme; the faithfulness of Jesus Christ takes Him to the cross. That's one of the great themes of John's gospel, and of the epistle to the Hebrews; He obeys even unto death. This righteousness now from God comes through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ to all who believe. Some who argue for this position say that it is clearer yet in Greek than in English, because in English, we have two different words here – faith and believe, whereas in the original it's the same root. If I were paraphrasing, it might sound a bit like this: this righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who have faith. That seems a bit redundant, doesn't it? If we take it in the traditional sense, isn't that what you're forced to believe? This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who have faith; but if faith really means faithfulness, then there's no problem, they say.

I think that's profoundly mistaken. I've gradually come to the conclusion that the point of the additional phrase 'to all who believe' is precisely to establish the fact that it is not for a particular racial group as in the old covenant which was focused on the Israelites. We are to read it like this: 'this righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who have faith'. In other words, you have the repetition precisely because you're stressing the 'all'. That fits the context superbly: 'this righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who have faith. For there is no difference, for all have sinned and now it comes to all who have faith' – do you see? That's the point of the argument. Paul establishes this righteousness from God is available to all men and women without racial distinction but on condition of faith.

Propitiation and expiation

The third point that he establishes is the source of God's righteousness in the gracious provision of Jesus Christ is His propitiation for

our sins. We are 'justified freely through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.' Christ's death buys us back. We are justified now freely by God's grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. 'God presented Him as a (older versions) propitiation in His blood received through faith.' 'God presented Him as a sacrifice of atonement' (NIV). What is at issue here? Expiation has as its object, sin. You expiate sin, you cancel sin. Expiation cancels sins. Propitiation has as its object, God. You propitiate God. You make God favourable. So the argument in the past has been: Christ's sacrifice was a propitiation, in that instead of God standing over against us in righteous wrath, His wrath was turned aside since Christ absorbed it, as it were. Christ is now favourable toward us; He's propitious toward us. He's favourable toward us, so that Christ's sacrifice is an act of propitiation which makes God favourable toward us.

Most Christians in the West believed this until the 1930s. However, in the 1930s there was a Welsh scholar by the name of C.H. Dodd. He was a brilliant scholar, known nevertheless not to be a great lover of confessional evangelicalism, and according to him, this can't be propitiation because it's so different from what propitiation means in pagan circles. In pagan circles, you propitiate the gods by your sacrifices in order to make the gods favourable. We, that are the subjects, propitiate the gods to make them favourable; the gods are the object. But that's not the way it is in Christian circles, God says. After all, God so loved the world that He gave His Son; if He was already so favourable toward us that He gave His Son, in what sense does He still need to be propitiated? He's already so propitious that He doesn't need to be propitiated! So therefore this can't be propitiation, it has to be expiation. This is not turning away the wrath of God; it's just the way God cancels sin.

Then the question becomes: why do you have two and a half chapters about the wrath of God? Start with 1:8, you see; why do you have all this stuff on the wrath of God? And he says, the wrath of God is not really wrath, it's just sort of an outworking of what goes wrong. You do naughty things and naughty things happen to you; it's a kind of moral principle in the universe. This really won't work at all; for in fact the Bible has disclosed the wrath of God throughout Scripture in

both Testaments in exceedingly personal terms. If you can depersonalise God in His wrath, why not also depersonalise Him also in His love? And then you retreat to a kind of deist perception of God; so distant and absent that He doesn't have much bearing on the present state of play. God's wrath is a function of His holiness. God is not necessarily wrathful. He is wrathful only as a function of His holiness: when His holiness confronts sin, He responds with judgement. But God's love is a function of His very character; God is love. He cannot be anything other than loving.

An example I sometimes use in this: picture Charles and Susan, walking down a beach, hand in hand and Charles turns to Susan and says, 'Susan, I love you, I really do.' What does he mean? He might simply mean that he wants to go to bed with her. But if we assume for a moment that he has a modicum of decency, let alone Christian virtue, then the least that he means is that he finds her utterly lovely. He is saying, 'Your eyes transfix me; you smile and you poleaxe me from about fifty yards. Your personality is wonderful, I love to be with you, it's hard for me to imagine life without you! I really do love you. I want to marry you!' He does not mean something like, 'Susan, quite frankly, your manners are grotesque. Your halitosis would frighten a herd of unwashed garlic-eating elephants. Your knobbly knees would put a camel to shame. Your personality rivals that of some mix of Genghis Khan and Attila the Hun. But I love you!' He doesn't mean that, does he?

God is love

When we proclaim our love, in part, we are proclaiming our estimate of the loveliness of the loved. But when God says 'I love you' to us, is He saying, 'You people, your smile transfixes me. I can't imagine heaven without you. Eternity without you would be just boring, I can't imagine it. Your personality is so brilliant, your education is so charming, really I love you because you're so loveable!' Is that what He means?

The fact of the matter is that God's love toward us is self-

we're so loveable. That's why wrath and love can co-exist in God. It's hard for love and wrath to co-exist in us, because most of the time, love and wrath in us are in some measure a function of how we're reacting to externals. If I get angry with one of my kids because they haven't come in on time, some deep part of me says, 'I love you anyway; no matter what you do, I'll still love you', but on the other hand, the reason I'm upset is because they said they'd be in at such a time and they're not there!

The closest we get to seeing something of this mix of righteousness indignation, wrath and love is, perhaps, when we're rearing our kids. But sometimes we just lose it and we shouldn't: that's just wrath that is ungodly. And we don't want to get in the position of those parents who start withholding their love because the kids aren't doing what we want – 'If you don't do that, I'm just finished with you!' Isn't there a sense in which Christians will always love their kids, no matter what they do? So we can begin to glimpse what's going on in the mind of God. God stands over and against us in wrath because His holiness demands it and we are sinners, but He stands over against in love because He's that kind of God. Morally speaking, He says to us, 'You are the people of the halitosis, the horrible personality, the knees like a camel, and I love you anyway, just because I'm that kind of God.'

So in that sense, God loves us so much He gives his Son, but His wrath must still be satisfied, or God becomes an amoral being. So God presents His Son, in such a way that His Son's death removes the wrath of God. In the pagan way of things, human beings offer sacrifices and the gods are propitiated. In the Bible, God is the subject Who sends the Son, to bear our sin in His own body on the tree; to absorb the curse, to satisfy God's demands for justice; and the just dies for the unjust, and removes the wrath of God, so that God is both the subject and the object. It is in that sense that propitiation – unlike pagan propitiation – is a biblical doctrine. This notion is bound up on word study grounds with propitiation. The word that is used here is often used for the ark of the covenant, where blood was poured out on the Day of Atonement, to offer a sacrifice both for the sins of the people, and for the sins of the priest, to set aside the wrath of God before the

covenant community. And here Christ shed His blood on our behalf because God presented Him, as the propitiation in His blood.

There's one more thing that I need to say about this. Sometimes we hear this illustration in Christian circles: 'It's a bit as if a judge pronounces sentence on some criminal, and then steps down off the bench, takes off their robes, and offers to take the place of the criminal.' Have you heard that sort of illustration? I'll tell you what's the matter with it.

In our justice systems, the judge is merely an administrator of justice. That's all. The judge is not personally offended by the crime. But in the case of God, the offence is against Him. There is no system of justice bigger than God. God is not an independent administrator of justice. It is His justice system, and sin, in its essence, is not merely against a system of which He is the arbitrator. It is against Him. That is precisely why He's wrathful, why He's offended. And it's precisely why – unlike our judges, who couldn't conceivably have the authority to take the place of a criminal – He can step off the bench, as it were, and provide a propitiating sacrifice that satisfies His own justice while at the same time reconciling rebellious men and women to himself.

The righteousness of God

I don't have time to cover this last one. Paul establishes the righteousness of God through the cross of Jesus Christ. God does this, we are told, to demonstrate His justice, because in His forbearance in times past under the old covenant, He had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished; they faced temporal punishments but the final handling of the sins of Abraham, or of Isaiah, or of Jeremiah, were not handled by the temple sacrifices. The final handling of those sins is what takes place in the death of Christ, so that God might be just, and the One Who justifies those who have faith in Jesus. This view of the atonement is not the only model used in the New Testament. There are other complementary models of what Christ did on the cross. But this understanding of the cross lies at the heart of all the rest of them. And if you lose this one, you lose the gospel.

I know that this point is widely disputed. Take the theme of reconciliation. Many people today say that the heart of the Pauline doctrine of the atonement is not propitiation; it's reconciliation, sinners and God being brought back together. There's no doubt that reconciliation is an important theme in Paul. The question is, why is there a need for reconciliation? The reason why we need reconciliation is because we're alienated. What has alienated us? Our sin. Why doesn't He just accept us? Because His holiness demands that He condemn us. How is it that we are reconciled to God? Christ pays for our sin, He absorbs our guilt, He takes our punishment, and you're back to wrath and substitution and propitiation as the very grounding of reconciliation. I think that you can demonstrate those sorts of points exegetically and theologically. One could treat other models of the atonement in similar ways, they all come back to this fundamental issue – what is sin? What is God's response to it? How does He deal with it? What is the purpose of the cross? And if we cannot see how ugly, how death-dealing, how God-defying sin is, we shall not see how utterly satisfying the cross is – by which alone men and women are reconciled to God.

Long have I pondered the curse of the cross;
 sinless, the Christ bears my guilt and my pain.
 Thundering silence, a measureless cost,
 God in His heaven lets Christ cry in vain.
 Now I can glimpse sin's bleak horror and worse;
 Christ dies and bears the unbearable curse.

Long have I pondered the Christ of the cross –
 gone is the boasting when I'm next to Him;
 loving the rebel, redeeming the lost,
 Jesus, pure goodness, exposed as my sin.
 Self is cast down by this triumph of grace.
 Christ's bloody cross is the hope of our race.