

GOSPEL TEACHING SUMMARY TWELVE: THE PIVOT OF FAITH

(An Overview of the Causes and Consequences of Christ's Death)

The Director of YES-NOW Publications, April 1988

Romans 3:25

Jesus, "*whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in His blood, to declare His righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God.*"

Contents

	Page
Aims	2
Definitions	3
SECTION ONE: The Main Causes of Christ's death	4
SECTION TWO: The Main Consequences of Christ's death	5
SECTION THREE: Concluding Comments	7

Appendices

APPENDIX ONE: The Main Causes of Christ's Death	8
APPENDIX TWO: An Over-Simplistic Views of Christ's Death	9
APPENDIX THREE: A Complete View of Christ's Death	10

Aims

By the end of this study the reader should be able to: -

- 1) Gain a broad overview of the practical and spiritual causes of Christ's death.
- 2) Gain a broad overview of the practical and spiritual consequences of Christ's death.
- 3) Appreciate the suffering He endured on behalf of sinful humanity.
- 4) Realise that Christ's death presents a very important choice.
- 5) Draw comfort from Christ's death.
- 6) Gain a greater appreciation of divine love and divine wrath.
- 7) See the need to believe in Jesus Christ as Saviour, Lord and God
- 8) Avoid incorrect and simplistic ideas about Christ's death.

Definitions

1) **CESSPITTS Analysis**, a tool, which attempts to present both the causes and consequences of Christ's death in terms of cultural, economic, social, structural, political, individual, technological, traditional and spiritual factors.

2) **Divine Attributes**, the unlimited number of characteristics and qualities belonging to God alone. Some examples include unlimited duration (eternity), extent (infinity), knowledge, love, power, presence, purity (Holiness) wisdom and wrath against sin.

3) **Expiation**, the removal of sin through Jesus Christ's sacrificial death upon the cross.

4) **Propitiation**, the pacifying of God's justifiable wrath against sin, through the offering of an unblemished sacrifice.

5) **Redemption**, Through Jesus Christ's death, people are given the opportunity of enjoying a new life, free from the dominance and slavery of sin. Redemption allows for a gradual progress toward personal holiness.

6) **Sanctification**, a lifelong process, whereby the Holy Spirit works in the life of a Christian to weaken sin and to strengthen personal holiness. The aim is for the Christian become more like **Jesus** in his or her personality.

7) **The Fundamental Choice of Life**, the choice facing those with any knowledge of Christianity; namely to accept or reject the work Jesus accomplished upon the cross. The former option leads to forgiveness of sins and salvation, the latter to judgement and eternal loss.

8) **The Network View of the Atonement**, this regards the death of Jesus as having a network of causes and consequences influencing both the spiritual and temporal realms of existence.

9) **The Invisible Realm (known also as the Spiritual or Supernatural Realm)**, the largely invisible realm of existence, which includes God, Satan, Angels, Demons, Heaven and Hell. In a strict sense, it does not constitute part of the Visible Realm; nevertheless it both encompasses and bears a strong influence upon it. In contradiction to Western Materialism, it cannot be dismissed as being in any sense less real or less important than the Visible Realm.

10) **The Visible Realm (known also as the Temporal or Natural Realm)**, the largely visible realm of existence, which includes all created objects, living creatures, human beings and all of the cultural, economic, social, structural, political, individual, traditional and technological forces operating within human society. It can be strongly influenced by the Invisible Realm. In contradiction to Eastern Philosophy, the Visible Realm cannot be dismissed as being in any sense less real or less important than the Invisible Realm.

11) **The Total Scope**, teaches that Christ's atoning death should positively affect every single area of a person's life. Included are such things as culture, education, employment, family life, finance, justice, leisure, politics, social relationships as well as religious devotion.

12) **The Wonderful Exchange**, the process whereby, at the cross, believers receive Christ's righteousness in exchange for all of their sin.

N.B: a full definition of '*atonement*' can be found prior to Section One of Gospel Teaching Summary Ten.

Section One: The Main Causes of Christ's Death

CESSPITTS Analysis is used to understand the main causes of Christ's death, and is categorised as follows: -

1. The Cultural causes – arising from the cultural values and norms of the society in which Christ lived

One Biblical example was popular nationalism the main reason why the Jerusalem mob preferred Barabbas to Jesus (Mark 15:6-15 & Luke 23:18-25)

2. The Economic causes – arising from the market forces of '*supply and demand*'

One Biblical example was the threat Jesus posed to the financial corruption of the Temple (Mark 11:15-19 & Luke 19:45-48)

3. The Social causes – arising from peer pressure, the influence of leaders and the interaction of relationships within a group

One Biblical example was the fearfulness of secret believers who preferred the approval of men rather than the approval of God (John 12:42-43)

4. The Structural causes – arising from large organizational, institutional, governmental or non-governmental hierarchies

One Biblical example was the temple hierarchy in Jerusalem who put their own self-interest before obedience to God (John 11:48)¹

5. The Political causes – arising from the distribution of power and factional conflicts within large or small social groups

One Biblical example was the domineering influence of unworthy religious leaders – like the High Priest Caiaphas, who was bent on Jesus' destruction, (John 11:45-53)²

6. The Individual causes – arising from personal psychology, including particular attitudes, beliefs, capabilities, emotions and behavioural proclivities belonging to an individual – as well as the act of decision-making itself

Biblical examples of such individual causes were: -

6.1 Jesus' personal willingness to lay down his own life in order to redeem people from sin (Matthew 16:21-28, 17:22-23, 20:17-19, 26:53, John 10:17-18 & 12:44-50)

6.2 The determination of influential people to murder Jesus (Matthew 26:1-5, Mark 14:1-2, 10-11 Luke 22:1-6, John 18:22 & 18:14)

6.4 The malice of Judas and the cowardice of the other disciples in failing to adequately protect Him (Matthew 26:47-56 & John 18:1-18)

6.4 The willingness of ordinary people and low ranking soldiers to obey unjust orders in carrying out Jesus' arrest and humiliation (Matthew 26:4, 27:27-20, Mark 14:43, Luke 23:11, John 18:22 & 19:1-4)

6.5 The moral weakness of Pontius Pilate and King Herod, both of whom sanctioned the death of an innocent man (Psalm 22:1-3, Mark 15:1-5, Luke 23:8-9, John 18:28-38 & Acts 4:27-28)

6.6 The Roman soldiers, who first tortured and then crucified Jesus (Mark 15:16-25 & Luke 23:32-36)

6.7 The sinfulness of every single human being, necessitating a perfect sacrifice to cover over this sin and to restore an harmonious relationship with God (Genesis 3:1-19, 6:1-7, Psalm 90:9-12, Isaiah 64:6-7 & Romans 3:9-20)

¹ On an even larger scale was the Roman Empire itself, which allowed corrupt officials like Pontius Pilate to exercise the power of life and death (John 19:12-16)

² The political vulnerability of Pontius Pilate was also an important factor – one readily manipulated by Jesus' enemies, (John 19:12) who were only too aware that his superior, the Roman Emperor Tiberius was an astute and suspicious man

7. The Technological causes – arising from human inventiveness and problem solving abilities

Biblical examples were the Roman scourge used for whipping prisoners, the nails, the wooden cross and the spear thrust through Jesus' side (John 19:34 & 20:25)

8. The Traditional causes – consisting of custom, traditional practice and historical experience

One Biblical example was the adherence to a particular religious tradition, which encouraged self-righteous pride amongst such groups as the Pharisees and Temple Priesthood (Mark 7:5-8, Romans 10:1-4 & Philippians 3:2-11)

9. The Spiritual causes – arising from either satanic activity or divine judgement, (both can be found in any of the above-listed causes)

One Biblical example was the foreordained plan of God to save a portion of humanity from the consequences of sin (Psalm 22, Isaiah 52:13 –53:12, Ephesians 1:9-11 & Colossians 1:18)

These spiritual causes of Christ's death can be further subdivided into: -

9.1 The Demonic causes – arising from Satan or his demons

One Biblical example was Satan's malice when thrown into confusion by the ministry of Jesus,³ (Matthew 16:23, Luke 22:1-6, John 13:2 & 13:21-30)

9.2 The Divine causes – arising from God's determination to save both Jewish and Gentile people from their sin

One Biblical example was (and is) God's love for the whole World (John 3:16)

Section Two: The Main Consequences of Christ's Death

CESSPITTS Analysis can also be employed to gain further insight into the main consequences of Christ's atoning death and is categorised as follows: -

1. The Cultural consequences – positively influencing the cultural values and norms in any given society

One Biblical example was the truth and viability of the Gospel message, encouraging Christians to be '*salt and light*' in their immediate society, (Matthew 5:13-16)⁴

2. The Economic consequences – influencing the market forces of '*supply and demand*'

One Biblical example was the greater concern for the poor and for their right to fair treatment at the hands of the powerful (James 5:1-6)⁵

3. The Social consequences – as evidenced in peer pressure, the influence of leaders and relationships within a group

One Biblical example was the priority given to healthy family relationships (Ephesians 5:20)⁶

³ At times Satan would desperately want Christ's death and then just as vehemently oppose it, possibly fearing that Christ's death would rob him of his own power

⁴ An interesting historical example of this consequence was the stimulus given to learning throughout the Renaissance period, (C.1453-1660)

⁵ An interesting historical example was the concern for the poor shown by medieval charitable Institutions

⁶ An interesting historical example was the growing value given to the role of women during the revivals of eighteenth and nineteenth century Protestantism

4. The Structural consequences – affecting large organizational, institutional, government or non-governmental hierarchies

One Biblical example was how a slave began to be accepted as an individual human being in his own right, despite the dehumanising nature of Roman slavery, (Philemon)⁷

5. The Political consequences – influencing the distribution of power within large structures or small social groups

One Biblical example was the way in which the early Church became an alternative centre of authority to the Jerusalem Temple, (Acts 4:1-22)⁸

6. The Individual consequences – affecting personal psychology, and all aspects of human personality

One Biblical example was the spectacular conversion of Paul whilst travelling to persecute the Church in Damascus (Acts 9:1-22)⁹

7. The Technological consequences – affecting scientific and technological development

One Biblical example will be the future development of a sophisticated technology, whereby the Gospel will be able to be preached to the entire World and how technology will help ensure 'every eye' will see Christ upon His return (Matthew 24:14 & Revelation 1:7)¹⁰

8. The Traditional consequences – affecting custom, practice and historical experience

One Biblical example was the fading away of the Old Covenant and the abolition of animal sacrifices (2 Corinthians 5:17 & Hebrews 8:13)¹¹

9. The Spiritual consequences – having an effect upon either satanic or divine activity, (either of which may be present in any of the above-listed consequences)

One Biblical example was the way Christ's death allowed for His descent into Hades (the place of the dead) in order to identify with the most awful of human experiences and to announce Satan's defeat (Psalm 139:8-12, Ephesians 4:8-10 & 1 Peter 3:18-20). Christ had experienced death on behalf of everyone (Hebrews 2:9).

These spiritual consequences of Christ's death can be further subdivided into: -

9.1 The Demonic consequences – affecting Satan and his demons

One Biblical example was the restraint placed upon the amount of satanic temptation facing the believer (1 Corinthians 10:13). Also, Christ's death upon the cross meant Satan's total and utter defeat – (Hebrews 2:14).¹² Another consequence was how effective Gospel preaching encouraged people to make a decisive break with all forms of sorcery (Acts 19:18-19).

9.2 Divine consequences – affecting God's determination to save both Jewish and Gentile people from their sin

⁷ Interesting historical examples were the moral and political challenges given by the Church to despotic rulers like the Roman Emperor Diocletian and Ivan the Terrible of Russia

⁸ Interesting historical examples were the positive alternatives provided by the Church to counter the oppressive regimes found in places like Eastern Europe under the Communists and in South Africa under the apartheid regime of 1948-1994

⁹ Interesting historical examples were the conversion of major figures throughout Church history, *i.e.* Augustine of Hippo (354-430) and Martin Luther (1483-1546) being two notable figures

¹⁰ An interesting historical example has been the development of rapid forms of communication throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries

¹¹ An interesting historical example was the establishment of Creeds (during the fourth Century), which summarised important Biblical teaching

¹² This is something about which the Devil is very sensitive

One Biblical example was how the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost, established the Church and gave new life to people from every nation and social background, (John 16:17 & Acts 2:1-4). Another was the variety of ways in which the Holy Spirit manifested Himself through the different spiritual gifts, (1 Corinthians 12:4-11).

Section Three: Concluding Comments

In summary, the consequences of Christ's death were: -

1. The atonement He made for sin (Romans 5:9-11)
2. His demonstration of God's love (John 3:16, Romans 5:8 & 1 John 4:9)
3. The provision of deliverance, healing and protection for believers (Isaiah 53:5, Mark 16:15-18 & 1 Corinthians 12:9)
4. The provision of a perfect propitiation for God's justified wrath against sin, (Romans 3:25-26 & 1 John 2:2)
5. The accepted ransom for our sin (Matthew 20:28 & 1 Timothy 2:6)
6. Our redemption from the slavery of sin (Ephesians 1:7 & Hebrews 9:12)
7. His perfect substitution – Christ dying in our place (2 Corinthians 5:21)
8. The best exchange ever, wherein Christ received our sin and gave us His righteousness in return, (Isaiah 53:5, Romans 3:22)
9. Eternal life (John 3:16)
10. Forgiveness of sin (Ephesians 1:7)
11. Justification before God (Romans 3:20-28)
12. The means to resist the 'World,' the 'Flesh' and the Devil (Romans 12:2, Ephesians 6:10-19, Hebrews 2:18, 1 Peter 5:8, James 1:12-15, 4:7 & 1 John 2:15-16)¹³

Through His death believers became true descendants of Abraham, receiving the blessings of a 'covenant people' and enjoying a right relationship with God as Father¹⁴ Consequently the promises made to Israel apply also to Christians because they have been 'grafted' onto the people of God, (Romans 11:17). However, one should note that Christ's atoning death poses a clear and definite choice; to believe or not to believe upon Jesus as Saviour. Choosing to believe in Christ will grant us eternal life but choosing not to believe in Him will result in eternal death.

Simplistic explanations of the atonement (as illustrated in Appendix Two) are to be avoided because they obscure important aspects of the person and work of Jesus, (and violate Revelation 22:19 by 'taking away' from the teaching of scripture.) The diagram in Appendix Three shows the death of Jesus having many causes and effects in both the spiritual and temporal realms. Furthermore, His atoning death presents a definite choice to each person having heard about it. Their choice is to believe or not to believe on Jesus as their Saviour. Choosing to believe in Christ will lead to benefits because of all He achieved on the cross. However, choosing not to believe will only result in divine judgement and eternal exclusion from God's presence. If a sense of genuine belief is lacking it is always possible to ask for the gift of faith, (Mark 9:24.)

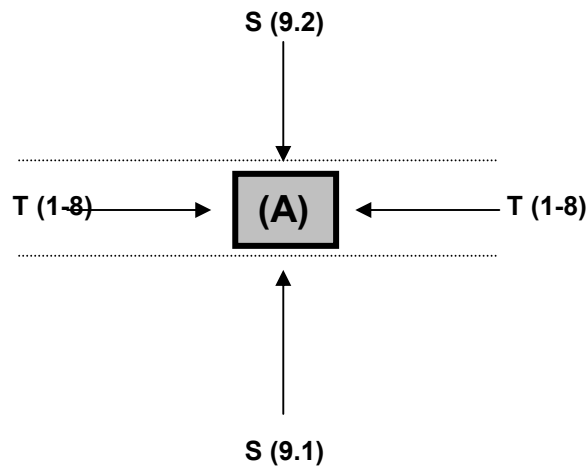
Before closing this article, one vital qualification needs to be made. When choosing to believe in Jesus it is important not to fall into the trap of thinking one is doing God some big favour, as if He in any way depended upon our goodwill. In reality, the ability to choose Jesus can only ever come about after a prior work of the Holy Spirit has softened the stubborn human heart and enlightened the unbelieving human mind. Therefore, it is not possible to obtain any credit for choosing to believe in Jesus. Ephesians 2:8-9 underlines this point by stating "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast."

To obtain greater clarity about this and other related issues please look up all previously cited Bible passages. These will give a general idea of the many positive things Christ accomplished through His death.

¹³ The margin numbers 1-8 outline the visible and 9.1-9.2 the invisible consequences

¹⁴ Bishop Tom Wright's article 'The Cross and the Caricatures' (Wright 2007) was of great assistance in helping the writer to understand this point.

Appendix One
The Main Causes of Christ's Death



Key

(A): The Atoning death of Jesus Christ

S: Spiritual Realm (existing in both time and eternity)

T: Temporal Realm (existing only within time)

1-8: cultural, economic, structural, social, political, individual, technological and traditional causes of Christ's death.

9.1: Demonic causes

9.2: Divine causes

Comments

The above diagram depicts the main causes of Christ's death, each cause having arisen from the spiritual as well as the temporal realms. It also shows the atonement having more than one cause, and that simplistic explanations (as in Appendix Two) are to be avoided as they serve only to obscure the person and work of Christ.

Appendix Two **An Over-Simplistic View of Christ's Death**

Anselm advocated this particular view in his book '*Cur Deus Homo*' ('*Why God became man,*') written in the 1090s. Throughout his book he employed human reason as the main basis to argue for the truth of Christianity.

Cause: the need to satisfy God's honour



Event: the death of Jesus Christ



Consequence: man given the ability to satisfy God

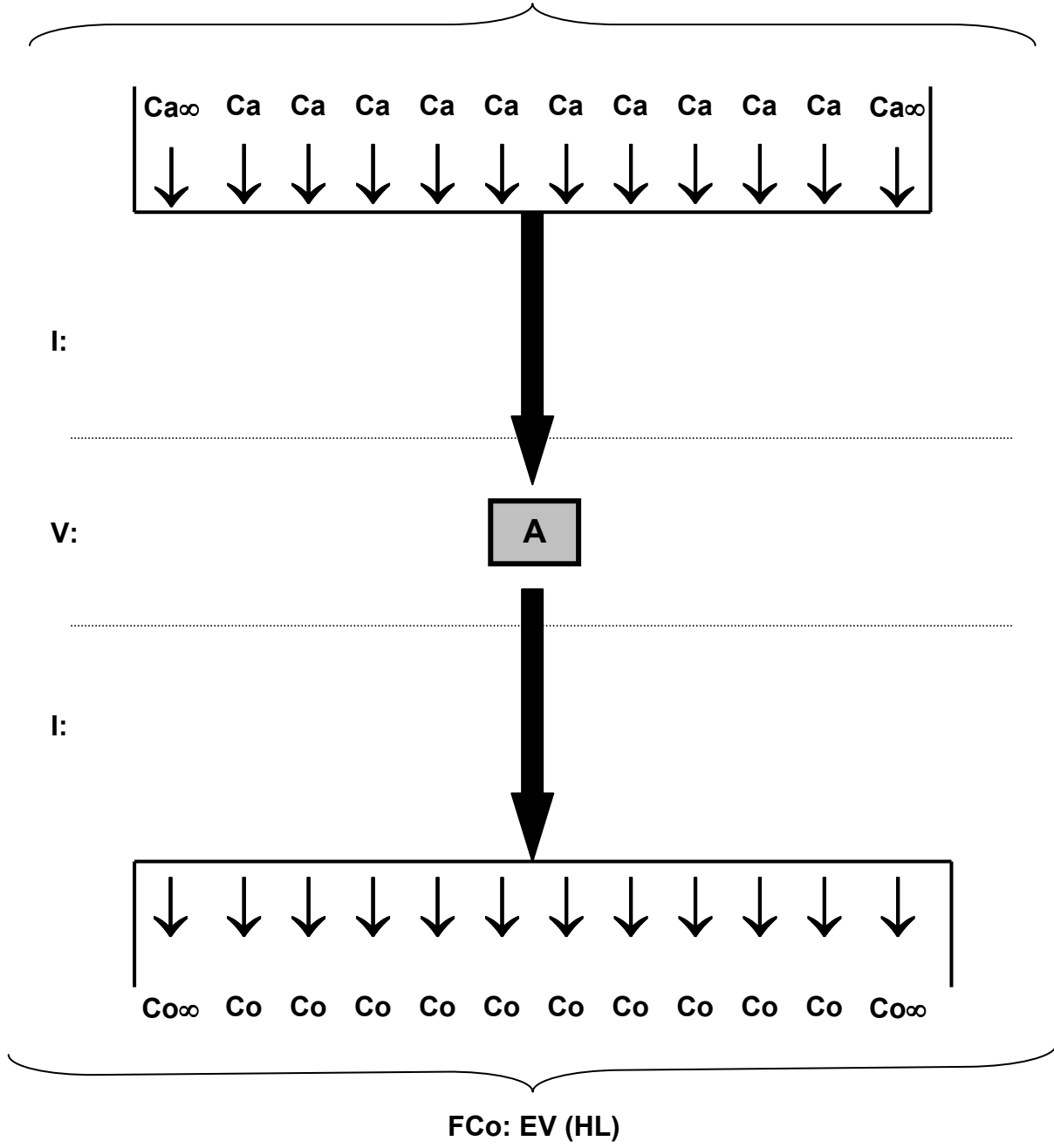
Comments

The above diagram illustrates an over simplistic view of Christ's death. It attributes it to one cause, and wrongly perceives it as having only one major consequence. This type of view leads to a narrow perspective and an unbalanced theology. Anselm (c.1033-1109), who became Archbishop of Canterbury in 1093, provided one instance of this unbalanced view. Firstly, he believed God needed to satisfy His own honour. This subsequently led to Christ's death, the main consequence of which was man being given the ability to satisfy God through his own good works.

The best that can be said about this view is that '*it may be true up to a point*' – (which itself is disputable.) Anselm believed that God had the attributes of a feudal monarch. His outlook was very much influenced by the medieval culture in which he lived.

Appendix Three
A Complete View Of Christ's Death

FCa: DV (HL)



Key

FCa: DV (HL): the fundamental cause of Christ's death: God's eternal desire to vindicate His Holy Love

Ca ∞ : Unlimited number of causes, each originating in eternity

Ca: One cause of the atonement

I: Invisible Realm (existing in both time and eternity, known also as the Spiritual Realm)

V: Visible Realm (existing only within time, known also as the Temporal Realm)

(A): The Atoning death of Jesus Christ

Co ∞ : Unlimited number of consequences, each lasting for eternity

Co: One consequence of the atonement

FCo: EV (HL): the fundamental consequence of Christ's death: God's eternal vindication of His Holy Love

Comments

This complex diagram shows that the atoning death of Jesus Christ: -

- Was fundamentally caused by God's eternal desire to vindicate His Holy Love.
- Was also caused by God's eternal desire to vindicate His limitless number of other divine attributes.
- Was caused by a mixture of invisible and visible factors.
- Produced a mixture of invisible and visible consequences.
- Totally vindicated God's limitless number of divine attributes throughout eternity.
- Totally vindicated God's limitless Holy Love throughout eternity.

Editors Note: In somewhat cruder form, much of this material (including the diagrams) was initially prepared for the first Theological Seminar conducted by the author. Entitled '*The Pivot of Faith,*' it was held in a friend's cottage on Saturday, 9th April 1988. About several people attended.