



# Christ Crucified

*A Puritan's View  
of the  
Atonement*



Stephen Charnock

*Introduced by J.I. Packer*

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## INTRODUCTION

*by J.I. Packer*

The central fact in Christianity is the reality, historical, eternal and inescapable, of Jesus Christ, who is the Son of God in the trinitarian sense of being God the Son, who is the future Judge of all human beings everywhere, and whom the gospel proclaims as Saviour, Redeemer and Friend to all who become his followers. Let us be clear that where Jesus is not acknowledged as God incarnate, crucified, risen, reigning and returning, there is no Christianity, whatever liberals in and outside the churches may say to the contrary. Again, the central focus in Christianity is the knowledge, conceptual and relational, objective and personal, of Christ crucified. This is a knowledge that involves both the head and the heart, and that begets a new loyalty, a new love, and a new life. It is the theme with





## CHRIST CRUCIFIED

which the Puritan Stephen Charnock is dealing in the work that I am here introducing. Let us be clear that apart from this knowledge there are no Christians, and it is mere confusion not to recognise this. Charnock, ministering in nominally Christian Britain three centuries ago, could count on general assent to the positions I have just stated. But that is something no Christian communicator today dare do. The man in the street, as we like to say (and the woman in the street, as feminists would like us to say) sees Christianity as a moral code rather than as good news of salvation, and Jesus as a dead teacher rather than a living Saviour, and spiritual life as New Age-type meditation for self-improvement, and religious commitment as a hobby for those who care about that sort of thing. That we all live in God's presence and under his eye, and that we must one day answer to him for the lives we have lived, and that our humanity is so out of shape through sin that we need a Saviour as urgently as persons with brain tumours need a surgeon, are truths that never enter most people's minds. In this climate of opinion it is no wonder if Christians themselves become unclear and uncertain about central elements in their own faith. If we do, however, that is all the more reason why we should listen to Charnock, who of all the Puritans is the most brisk and businesslike when it comes to saying things straight. Charnock assumes that those he addresses are interested in his themes, and so are willing to concentrate on his unfolding of them. In his day many were: "able ministers" (so his first editors tell us) "loved to sit at his feet, for they received by one sermon of his those instructions which they could not get by many books or sermons of others." Popular communication today, however, rarely confronts us with anything so concentrated as a paragraph of Charnock, and unless his readers are seriously concerned they will flag. Perhaps I can do something to generate or reinforce a concern in the hearts of you who read this that will ensure that you don't flag when you get to Charnock - let us see. I may fail, I know - but it will not be for want of trying! First, however, a further word about Charnock himself.





## INTRODUCTION

Stephen Charnock, 1628 - 80

Born in London, and born again at Cambridge University some time in the 1640s, Charnock was seen as a coming man, and was sent to Dublin as chaplain to Oliver Cromwell's son Henry, governor of Ireland, in 1655. There he gained a great reputation as a preacher. The Restoration, however, ended his Irish ministry, and he had no stated charge thereafter till he was called to share with Thomas Watson the pastorate of an elite nonconforming congregation that met in London at Crosby Hall. That lasted five years, from 1675 to his death in 1680. A passionately studious man, apparently a bachelor, he ordinarily put in five 12-hour days per week in his study, and wrote out everything he proposed to say in public. It seems that he conceived the idea of preaching a complete systematico-practical theology (as we needs must call it) at Crosby Hall, and that his massive unfinished Discourses on the Existence and Attributes of God (over 600,000 words and 1,000 pages of smallish print in the 1864 edition of his collected works) were the start of it. (He died, we are told, while "looking what to say next of the mercy, grace, and goodness of God"<sup>2</sup>) These Discourses are giant-size Puritan sermons, each built on a text and laid out with doctrine, reason (exposition and defence), and use (application) in the standard Puritan manner, and each of them, given in full, would have occupied several hour-long preachments. Perhaps Charnock actually delivered them this way; and perhaps this, plus the fact that his failing memory and eyesight obliged him to read his sermon scripts through a magnifying glass, word for word, instead of speaking extempore without notes as in Dublin, helps to explain why many, even in that theological age, found him both heavy and over their heads, despite the easy handling of ideas that is one of his chief strengths. His smaller-scale treatment of Christ's death, however, flows very simply and will not baffle today's attentive reader in any way.

The Cross of Christ

I said at the outset that where the Lord Jesus is not confessed as God incarnate, crucified, risen, reigning and returning, and where



## CHRIST CRUCIFIED

there is no focus on the personal knowledge of Christ crucified, there is no Christianity. When I said that, bold as it sounds, I was defining Christianity in New Testament terms. For in the New Testament the cross of Christ is highlighted as, so to speak, the hinge and fulcrum of the gospel, the event that opened for us sinners a path to peace with God, power from God, and a prospect of glory through God that exceeds our wildest dreams. The gospels, as is often noted, are precisely passion stories with detailed introductions, telling us what led to the crucifixion so that we understand it when it comes. The vivid detail and calculated poignancy with which Matthew, Mark, Luke, John and four skilful authors, tell the story of the cross exceed in intensity all that precedes, and the resurrection reports that follow, and thus identify the passion of Jesus as the true climax of each gospel. The theme of the book of Revelation is the twofold triumph of the crucified Lord, the slain Lamb, namely that which was at his first coming when he shed his blood for us and that which will be at his second coming when all is made new. And in the epistles, which are sermons about discipleship in letter form, the cross is central and basic to all the formative teaching that is given with regard to both faith (that is to say, belief and trust) and conduct (that is to say, motivation and action). To be specific. The cross is the burden of the apostolic gospel ("We preach Christ crucified", I Cor. 1:23, cf. 1:18, 2:2). It is the centrepiece of God's eternal plan of grace ("you were redeemed . . . with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb . . . chosen before the creation . . . revealed in these last times for your sake," I Pet. 1:18-20, cf. Jn. 3:16 f., 10:14-18; Gal. 4:4 f.). It is a sacrifice for sins ("Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures," I Cor. 15:3), quenching the divine wrath against sinners ("making peace through his blood, shed on the cross," Col. 1:20; cf. Eph. 2:18-20), securing our present justification and adoption and guaranteeing our future hope as God's heirs ("Since we have now been justified through his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him!", Rom. 5:9; "He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all - how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?" Rom. 8:32). It is the



## INTRODUCTION

mediatorial initiative (for Christ's passion was truly his action) that established him in his saving role, as the author of salvation and so the proper object of saving faith ("the life I live . . . I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me," Gal. 2:20; "through faith in his blood," Rom. 3:25). It is the reality signified by the two sacramental ordinances that Jesus imposed ("baptized into his death . . . buried with him through baptism into death," Rom. 6:3 f.; "This is my body, which is for you" . . . "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me," I Cor. 11:24-26). It sets us standards of self-giving love and self-denying humility ("live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us," Eph. 5:2; "Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers," I Jn. 3:16; "he humbled himself and became obedient to death - even death on a cross," Phil. 2:8). It calls for, and calls forth, consecrated service and devotion ("You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honour God with your body," I Cor. 6:19f.; "Christ's love compels us . . . one died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves, but for him who died for them," 2 Cor. 5:14 f.). It models endurance in face of hostility and pain ("Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps," I Pet. 2:21; cf. Heb. 12:2 f.). So we might go on, but surely the point is clear enough by now. Trusting, loving and following Jesus necessitates keeping the cross in view at all times. Our living Lord calls for what we may call cruciform discipleship, clear-headed, open-eyed, and whole hearted. "May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world" (Galatians 6:14). The cross must shape our faith, and thereby reshape our entire lives.

### Celebrating Christ Crucified

Charnock's expositions, though clear and deep, sometimes seem cool and dry. This is because his style is intensely analytical, and his mind moves fast and verbalises itself economically, as if he were



## CHRIST CRUCIFIED



writing notes for an exposition rather than composing the exposition itself. His power of boiling down and compressing excites admiration, but can leave the wisdom and truth he sets forth still at a distance from our inner being. As his portrait depicts him as having bony features,<sup>3</sup> so his writing reveals him as a man of bony thoughts who sees it as our part rather than his to put flesh on the bones and warm up the thoughts so that they gain heart-piercing power. The Puritan ideal was to be a "practical affectionate divine," meaning one who cleared heads, strengthened hearts, and settled consciences with equal skill; Charnock is as strong as any in clearing heads, but is less able than some to stir the imagination and touch the heart. It must have been this distancing of himself as a communicator from the affectional side of life that led some to complain that his sermons had in them only 'morality or metaphysics'<sup>4</sup> - for they contain, not too little evangelical doctrine, but, if anything, too much, packed too tight. Evidently he thought that the dramatizing and interiorizing of gospel truth was for his hearers to do by personal meditation, rather than for him to attempt by pulpit rhetoric. Here, he deals with the theme of Christ crucified by dwelling successively on the sovereignty, love, and justice of the Father who ordained the cross, the dignity, willingness, and agony of the Son in enduring it, the transformed relationship with God that flows from it, and the gratitude, delight, and enlarging of repentance, faith, boldness in approaching God, holiness as a life-goal, and 'comfort' (encouragement) as a life-support, that knowledge of Christ crucified should engender in us. The Reformed and Puritan understanding of penal substitution at Calvary is expressed with plain and simple precision. But it is a cool, bony treatment, which it is left to us to warm up for ourselves. How shall we do that? I offer the following suggestion. Before you start to read Charnock, spend time with the following three lyrics, each of which embodies some knowledge of Christ crucified in meditations that touch the depths of the Christian heart. Let them search you, and move you, as they are well calculated to do.<sup>5</sup> The first is by the latter-day Puritan, Isaac Watts. It is well known.



## INTRODUCTION

When I survey the wondrous cross  
On which the Prince of glory died,  
My richest gain I count but loss,  
And pour contempt on all my pride.

Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast  
Save in the death of Christ my God:  
All the vain things that charm me most,  
I sacrifice them to his blood.

See from his head, his hands, his feet,  
Sorrow and love flow mingled down;  
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet,  
Or thorns compose so rich a crown?



Were the whole realm of nature mine,  
That were an offering far too small;  
Love so amazing, so divine,  
Demands my soul, my life, my all.



The second is also by Isaac Watts. It is less familiar, and more heart-wrenching.

Alas! and did my Saviour bleed  
And did my Sovereign die?  
Would he devote that sacred head  
For such a worm as I?

Was it for crimes that I had done  
He groaned upon the tree?  
Amazing pity! grace unknown!  
And love beyond degree!

Well might the sun in darkness hide,  
And shut his glories in,



CHRIST CRUCIFIED

When God, the mighty Maker, died  
For man, the creature's sin.

Thus might I hide my blushing face  
While his dear cross appears;  
Dissolve my heart in thankfulness,  
And melt my eyes to tears.

But drops of grief can ne'er repay  
The debt of love I owe:  
Here, Lord, I give myself away;  
'Tis all that I can do.

The third is by Augustus Toplady, an eighteenth-century evangelical, author of 'Rock of Ages.' It is not at all well known in the modern Christian world. It deals with the self-doubt and inner dread that all regenerate persons face sooner or later.



From whence this fear and unbelief?  
Hath not the Father put to grief  
His spotless Son for me?  
And will the righteous Judge of men  
Condemn me for that debt of sin  
Which, Lord, was charged on thee?

Complete atonement thou hast made,  
And to the utmost thou hast paid  
Whate'er thy people owed;  
How then can wrath on me take place,  
If sheltered in thy righteousness,  
And sprinkled with thy blood?

If thou my discharge procured  
And freely in my room endured  
The whole of wrath divine,



## INTRODUCTION

Payment God cannot twice demand,  
First at my bleeding Surety's hand  
And then again at mine.

Turn then, my soul, unto thy rest!  
The sorrows of thy great High Priest  
Have bought thy liberty;  
Trust in his efficacious blood,  
Nor fear thy banishment from God,  
Since Jesus died for thee.



Now, with the preciousness of the cross to you firmly fixed in your mind and heart through meditating on these lyrics, read Charnock, looking for the full-scale theology that underlies, and justifies, the low thoughts of yourself, and the high thoughts of God the Father and God the Son, with which your broodings have left you. I think you will find that sentence after sentence in Charnock's ordered march lights up and glows in your heart, as illuminating and undergirding things you are feeling. End by working through the lyrics again, elaborating to yourself in God's presence what they say about what has specially struck you in Charnock's presentation. This is only a suggestion, and you are free to ignore it. But please don't accuse Charnock of being dry till you've tried it! That's all I ask.



J.I. PACKER

### NOTES

1 Works of Stephen Charnock (Edinburgh: James Nichol, 1864), I.xxiv.

2 I.xxv.

3 I.xxiv.

4. I.xxiii.

5. Quoted from *Christian Hymns* (Bridgend: Evangelical Movement of Wales, second ed., 1985), nos. 203, 197, 540.

Christ Crucified is a 1632 painting by Diego Velázquez depicting the Crucifixion of Jesus. The work, painted in oil on canvas, measures 249 Å— 170 cm and is owned by the Museo del Prado. During his stay in Rome, Velázquez made various nude studies he used in later paintings, such as Apollo at the Forge of Vulcan (1630) and Joseph's Tunic (1630). Art critics assert that the nude study for this painting is exceptional and masterly in its fusion of serenity, dignity and nobility. It is a life-size frontal Christ Crucified (Goya) â€” Cristo crucificado Artist Francisco de Goya Year 1780 Type Oil on canvas Location Museo del Prado, Madrid Christ Crucified (Cristo crucifi â€¦) Wikipedia. Crucified â€” Crucify Cru ci\*fy ( f?), v. t. [imp. & p. p. {Crucified} ( f?d); p. pr. & vb. n. {Crucifying}.]Â The Collaborative International Dictionary of English. The Crucified â€” Infobox Musical artist Name = The Crucified Img capt = The Crucified in 1991. From left to right: Mark Salomon, Greg Minier, Jeff Bellew (bottom), and Jim Chaffin.