

# The Forgotten Cross

*Some neglected aspects of  
the cross of Christ*

Lee Gatiss



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Darlington  
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web: <http://www.epbooks.org>

e-mail: [sales@epbooks.org](mailto:sales@epbooks.org)

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# Endorsements

Here is a steady flow of down-to-earth insights into cross-shaped living. Thank you, Lee Gatiss, for your wisdom.

—*J. I. Packer, Board of Governors' Professor of Theology at  
Regent College in Vancouver*

This book of expositions by Lee Gatiss is an important reminder that, in our warranted zeal for the truth of penal substitution, we must not downplay or ignore the rich and full range of the achievements of the Cross, and its many applications to our lives. An important and edifying volume!

—*Tim Keller, Redeemer Presbyterian Church,  
New York City*

In the business of proclaiming the meaning of the cross there have been major battles to protect the key elements of the gospel of Christ crucified. Lee Gatiss is no stranger to the battle to maintain, for example, the significance of the cross as a penal sacrifice for sin. But sometimes the fog of war obscures other landmarks which tie the cross to the life of the church and the experience of the Christian. Without diminishing the major truths of the cross he skillfully unpacks the message of the cross for the church and the believer in the struggles of daily life. What he has

written will warm the heart and strengthen the nerve of God's people as we join Christ 'outside the camp' where He was crucified and we will be encouraged to bear our own 'cross' as we follow after Him.

—*Liam Goligher, Senior Minister, Tenth Presbyterian Church, Philadelphia*

'Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures' lies at the heart of the gospel. But what exactly are these sins (plural)? Not only many, surely, but diverse, subtle, deceitful, harmful. If so, Christ's death must be multivalent, deeper, richer, more adequate than merely a kind of mathematical exchange. If so, where do we begin? 'At Calvary's cross is where you begin.' And like John Bunyan's Evangelist, Lee Gatiss and his book *The Forgotten Cross* will be good and reliable guides to help us do just that. I hope this book will be a real beginning of a larger view of Christ and his work for many readers.

—*Sinclair B. Ferguson, Senior Minister of the First Presbyterian Church in Columbia, South Carolina*

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## Preface

# The Heart of the Cross

**T**he one thing I'm most passionate about as a Christian and as a minister is Christ. And right at the heart of what it means to know Christ is the cross—his death. That's what thrills me as a believer and as a pastor—God's love for us shown in the death of his Son in our place.

One of the first parts of the Bible I committed to memory as a Christian was Isaiah 53:5–6.

*He was pierced for our transgressions;  
he was crushed for our iniquities;  
upon him was the chastisement that brought us  
peace,  
and with his wounds we are healed.  
All we like sheep have gone astray;  
we have turned—every one—to his own way;  
and the LORD has laid on him  
the iniquity of us all.*

I remember how excited I was when I first saw the New Testament writers applying this Old Testament passage to Jesus, and realizing what it meant.

This vital and pivotal teaching of the Bible must lie at the heart of all we believe about Jesus and his death. 'Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, by becoming a curse for us,' said the Apostle Paul (Galatians 3:13). Jesus took my place, and was cursed by God so that I will not be. Or as Peter says, 'Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God' (1 Peter 3:18). 'In my place condemned he stood, sealed my pardon with his blood' as an old hymn puts it.<sup>1</sup>

Modern people, even many modern Christians, don't like to think of God as angry at sin. Talk of his 'wrath' scares or horrifies them, as if it were some primitive barbarism to be eradicated from our memory and replaced by something 'nicer.'<sup>2</sup> But as Leon Morris once wrote, "Those who object to the conception of the wrath of God should realize that what is meant is not some irrational passion bursting forth uncontrollably, but a burning zeal for the right coupled with a perfect hatred for everything that is evil."<sup>3</sup>

Surely we want a God who loves what is right and hates what is wrong? We don't want an apathetic God who just lets us get on with it, wrecking ourselves, each other, and his world in the process. But as Morris concludes, "The Scripture is clear that the wrath of God is visited upon sinners or else the Son of God dies for them."<sup>4</sup> Either we are punished, or someone takes our place. Either we die,



or he dies, but the option of just forgetting about our sin is not a biblical one.

Some people have pejoratively called this ‘cosmic child abuse’. They wince at the idea of singing ‘on that cross, as Jesus died, the wrath of God was satisfied’,<sup>5</sup> and they try instead to change the words to fit their own more liberal understanding. They are full of wrath against the idea of God’s wrath, and the thought that Jesus has borne the full brunt of it for us.

As so often, John Stott put it brilliantly. He said, ‘in and through the person of his Son, God himself bore the penalty which he himself inflicted.’ The mysterious unity of the Father and the Son made it possible for God to both inflict punishment for sin and endure that same punishment for sin at the same time.<sup>6</sup>

This is not mechanistic or impersonal. As Garry Williams rightly says, ‘in bearing the punishment of sin on the cross, the divine Word as a man endured the consequences of the personal confrontation between God and sinful men and women. The punishment involved the very being of God himself.’<sup>7</sup> Or as Jim Packer summed it up in his magnificent essay, *What did the cross achieve?* ‘The penalty due to me for my sins, whatever it was, was paid for me by Jesus Christ, the Son of God, in his death on the cross.’<sup>8</sup>

This way of understanding the cross is sometimes called ‘penal substitution’. That is, it is about punishment (the Latin for which is *poena*) being taken *in my place* (substitution). I want to affirm with all my heart that

God the Son's punishment-taking, in-my-place death is a magnificent centrepiece for all Christian theology. As I've read more and more church history over the years it has also become clear to me that this way of looking at things is not just something taught by the great evangelical scholars and preachers over the last century. As Steve Jeffery, Mike Ovey, and Andrew Sach have nicely demonstrated, 'the doctrine of penal substitution has been affirmed from the earliest days of the Christian church, and has continued to find a place in the mainstream of historic Christian theology throughout the last two thousand years.'<sup>9</sup>

Without penal substitution, I would be nowhere as a Christian. I wouldn't have a hope. So I'm passionate about it, and utterly committed to it theologically and pastorally. How else can I stand before a holy God on judgment day or come to him in prayer even, if I myself have to bear the punishment for my sins?

But the problem is, Morris, Stott, Packer, Williams, Jeffery, Ovey, Sach, and many others have done such a good job persuading many of us that this is a true and biblical perspective on the cross, that we might think we've got the atonement sussed now. We may delude ourselves that we know all about the cross. We're sorted on that.

But I wonder. I wonder, have we missed something in the midst of all the debates about penal substitution that have raged in recent years? Have we forgotten, perhaps, about other aspects of the death of Christ which the Bible also speaks of? Has fighting in one corner left us blind

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to some of the important things God has to say to us elsewhere in his word?

Well, the more I've delved into the Bible's teaching on the cross, the more I've been left with the feeling that there are indeed some forgotten or at least neglected dimensions to Christ's death that we would do well to recover.

That should *not* be taken as a criticism of the heroes and friends who have written so compellingly on penal substitution. It is simply to say that we haven't exhausted it yet. The cross demonstrates the *manifold* wisdom of God, and we can't say everything there is to say about it in one small book or even a whole shelf load.

The Bible explores and applies what Jesus did on the cross in a multitude of different ways. Penal substitution is one of them—indeed, it's the most important one, I think, because without it other ways of looking at the cross end up being inadequate for my salvation. But that's not to say that penal substitution alone is fully adequate to meet my needs.

Without penal substitution we don't understand the cross at all. But that's not to say it is comprehensive. On the cross, Christ exhausted the punishment due to sinners. But even if we know that, and revel in it, we have not exhausted the depths of glory in that spectacular act of sacrificial love.

On the cross, God did more than punish Jesus in our place. So much more. And that's what I want us to explore together in this short little book: *The forgotten cross*, some aspects of the death of Christ that are opened up for us in

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the Bible but which, with very good excuses perhaps, we may have neglected in evangelical circles of late.