

The Festival of Good Friday
21 March 2008
Concordia Lutheran Mission
Terrebonne, Oregon

**“God Died on the Cross on Good Friday
to Abolish Death for All Men.”**

**“For he hath made him *to be* sin for us, who knew no sin; that we
might be made the righteousness of God in him.”**

II Corinthians 5:21

Introduction

How can God die? God in and of Himself as God cannot die.¹ But because God has now become man in Jesus Christ He can and did die.²

But why would God die a human death³? Obviously, God would not die a human death for Himself. God has no need of a human death.

¹*“For in His nature God cannot die; but now that God and man are united in one person, it is correctly called God’s death, when the man dies who is one thing or one person with God.” The Formula of Concord, Thorough Declaration, **Article VIII. Of the Person of Christ.**44.*

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³Christ suffered a truly human death because His body and soul separated. “When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished: and he

God, therefore, died not for Himself but for someone else.⁴ God died for all men in order to vanquish death for all men.

God accomplished this by becoming man and assuming the guilt for our sins. The wages of sin is death.⁵ And so God died a human death because He assumed the guilt of our sins.

St. Paul, therefore, writes, “For he hath made him *to be* sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.”⁶ By assuming our guilt and paying the penalty in His death on the Cross⁷, God abolished death for all men and established all men in righteousness pleasing to God.

By the death of God on the Cross, then, God has atoned for the sins of all men, established perfect human righteousness pleasing to God, abolished death for men, and given to them the life everlasting and the resurrection of the body.⁸

bowed his head, and gave up the ghost.” **St. John 19:30** “Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.” **Ecclesiastes 12:7** “Bodily death is nothing less than a tearing asunder of man, the separation of the soul from the body, the unnatural disruption of the union of soul and body which have been created by God to be one.” *Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. II, p. 536.

⁴“And after threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off, *but not for himself...*” **Daniel 9:26**.

⁵**Romans 6:23**.

⁶**II Corinthians 5:21**.

⁷“And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.” **I John 2:2**.

⁸“... the resurrection of the righteous.” **St. Luke 14:14**

I. God Dies Because God is Now a Man and has Assumed the cause of Human Death, the Guilt of Sin.

A. God can die because God is now man.

When we consider the death of Christ on Good Friday for what it is, the death of God, we must be clear about what has happened. When God died on the Cross for our sins, He did not cease to exist. God in and of Himself as God cannot die because God is eternal⁹. The Lutheran Church states:

*“For in His nature God cannot die; but now that God and man are united in one person, it is correctly called God’s death, when the man dies who is one thing or one person with God.”*¹⁰

God can die and in fact did die on the Cross on Good Friday because God is now man. Consequently, Scripture speaks of killing the Prince of Life and God’s blood being shed when it speaks of the death of Christ. St. Peter says:

But ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you; And *killed the Prince of life,*

⁹Lord, Thou hast been our Dwelling Place in all generations. Before the mountains were brought forth or ever Thou hast formed the earth and the world, even *from everlasting to everlasting*, Thou art, God.” **Psalm 90:1, 2.**

¹⁰*The Formula of Concord, Thorough Declaration, Article VIII. Of the Person of Christ.*⁴⁴.

whom God hath raised from the dead; whereof we are witnesses.¹¹

St. Paul says:

Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which *he hath purchased with his own blood*.¹²

The Lutheran Church, therefore, states:

*We Christians must know that if God is not also in the balance, and gives the weight, we sink to the bottom with our scale. By this I mean: If it were not to be said [if these things were not true], God has died for us, but only a man, we would be lost. But if “God’s death” and “God died” lie in the scale of the balance, then He sinks down, and we rise up as a light, empty scale. But indeed He can also rise again or leap out of the scale; yet He could not sit in the scale unless He became a man like us, so that it could be said: “God died,” “God’s passion,” “God’s blood,” “God’s death.” For in His nature God cannot die; but now that God and man are united in one person, it is correctly called God’s death, when the man dies who is one thing or one person with God.*¹³

¹¹Acts 3:14, 15, emphasis added.

¹²Acts 20:28, emphasis added.

¹³*The Formula of Concord, Thorough Declaration, Article VIII. Of the Person of Christ.*44.

God, then, died on the Cross on Good Friday because God is now man.

B. God died because He assumed the guilt of the sins of all men.

And God died a truly human death because He suffered the separation of body and soul. St. John the Apostle writes:

... and he bowed his head and gave up the ghost.¹⁴

The Rev. Dr. Francis Pieper writes:

The death of Christ was a true death because in Christ's death occurred the very thing which constitutes the nature of death, namely, the separation of body and soul. This separation is recorded by all Evangelists, though in somewhat differing terms. Matt. 27:50: [yielded up the ghost]; Mark 15:37 and Luke 23:46: [gave up the ghost]; John 19:30: [gave up the ghost]. ... Christ's death is the death of the Son of God, and, accordingly, not merely the departed soul, but also the entombed body remained in personal union with the Son of God....¹⁵

But why did God suffer a human death? Clearly, God did not need to suffer a human death for Himself; He's the eternal God; He has no need of a human death. The prophet Daniel, therefore, writes that Christ's death did not come about for His sake:

¹⁴**St. John 19:30.**

¹⁵*Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. II, p. 313, translations added.

“And after threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off,
but not for himself...”¹⁶

Plainly, Christ did not suffer death for His own sake.

Rather, Jesus suffered death for the sake of all men. God suffered a human death because the guilt of the sin of all men had been reckoned to Him. St. Paul, therefore, writes in today’s epistle:

For he hath made him *to be* sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.¹⁷

“for us,” St. Paul writes, “for us” He was made to be sin, He who was without sin, in order that we might become righteous by being purged of our sin. In other words, our sin was reckoned to Him. St. Paul writes elsewhere:

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...¹⁸

God passed over human sin until He punished it in the God-man Jesus Christ. Jesus, therefore, speaks of His death as the judgment of this world:

¹⁶**Daniel 9:26.**

¹⁷**II Corinthians 5:21.**

¹⁸**Romans 3:25.**

Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all *men* unto me.¹⁹

C. Christ suffered eternal damnation for men.

And because death is not temporary but eternal, Christ suffered the eternal consequence of sins of men, namely, the settling in of God's abiding and eternal wrath²⁰. For this reason Christ cried out from the Cross that God had forsaken Him:

My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?²¹

The *Catechism* states:

He suffered the tortures of the damned in hell.²²

The Rev. Dr. Francis Pieper writes:

When we inquire into the essence of this abandonment, in what it really consisted, we face the very core of the

¹⁹**St. John 12:31-32.**

²⁰“Neither is there now in the death of the believer, since by faith he has overcome the terrors of death, that sting and sense of wrath of which Paul speaks I Cor. 15, 56: *The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the Law.* This strength of sin, this sense of wrath is truly a punishment as long as it is present; without this sense of wrath, death is not properly a punishment.” *The Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Article VI.56, 57.*

²¹**St. Matthew 27:46.**

²²*Catechism*, question 138 B.

redemptive work of the Mediator between God and man, namely, as Isaiah calls it, “the travail of His soul” (Is. 53:11). Luther says very well: “This matter no man can so well depict in words as it is here stated in frank, terse, and plain terms. It does not treat of Christ’s bodily suffering, which also was great and heavy, but of His deep spiritual suffering... In what this consisted no man on earth can understand, nor has any man the vocabulary adequately to describe and depict it. For to be forsaken of God is much worse than is death. Those who have tasted and experienced a little of it can somewhat sense it. But such as are secure, carnal, and have not endured or experienced such suffering neither know nor understand anything about it... From Job’s example we can somewhat understand what it means to be forsaken of God... And Christ has truly been forsaken of God, not in such a way that the deity was separated from the humanity, but that the Deity withdrew into Itself and hid Itself... So the righteous and innocent Man had to tremble and fear like a poor, condemned sinner and in His tender, innocent heart had to feel God’s wrath and judgment over sin, taste for us eternal death and damnation, and, in short, suffer all that a condemned sinner has deserved and must suffer eternally... He had to quench and put out in His soul the extreme agony that is called ‘being forsaken of God’ and the devil’s fiery darts, hell’s fire and terror, and all that we had deserved by our sins. By this heaven, eternal life and blessedness, has been purchased for us, as also Isaiah says: ‘He shall see of the travail of His soul and shall be satisfied.’”²³

²³*Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. II, pp. 311, 312.

II. God's Death Vanquishes Death for All Men and thereby Abolishes Death for All Men.

A. Christ vanquishes death for all men.

But plainly, according to Isaiah, Christ did not continue in the travail of His soul, but was satisfied because He was successful. How can this be? How could Christ overcome the eternal wrath of God and vanquish death? Christ can do it because He is Himself the Almighty God in the flesh. While indeed death is powerful, holding in its grasp all men, it cannot hold in its grasp the Man who is the Almighty God. St. Peter, therefore, writes:

Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain: Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it.²⁴

Death could not hold Him because Christ is the Almighty God able to atone for all sins. The Rev. Dr. Francis Pieper writes:

The full weight of His deity, ... which was attached to His death, made it infinitely meritorious.²⁵

And because Christ suffered death for all men, His vanquishing of death means the abolition of death for all men. St. Paul, therefore, writes of Jesus and His resurrection from the dead:

²⁴**Acts 2:23-24.**

²⁵*Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. II, p. 282.

But now is Christ risen from the dead, *and* become the firstfruits of them that slept.²⁶

God, therefore, by His death on the Cross abolished death for all men.

B. Christ gives this victory over death in the Ministry of Reconciliation, the Gospel.

And Jesus gives this victory over death to us through the Ministry of Reconciliation, the Gospel. St. Paul writes in today's epistle:

To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation.²⁷

Through the “word of reconciliation”, i.e. the Gospel, God forgives our sins. And, moreover, through the Gospel, the Ministry of Reconciliation, God reckons to us Christ's righteousness. This righteousness is the same righteousness Christ fulfilled throughout His life, even when He was dying on the Cross. The Rev. Dr. Francis Pieper writes of Christ continuing to fulfill the commandments and the love of God on the Cross even in the midst of God's forsaking Him:

... Scripture expressly bears witness that Christ, while forsaken of God, continued to trust in God (Ps. 22:1, 19 ff.; Luke 23:46). While He was forsaken of God, He still cried to God

²⁶**I Corinthians 15:20.**

²⁷**II Corinthians 5:19.**

as His God, saying: “My God, my God!” Gerhard writes of this: “Other men cannot, without sinning, feel the wrath of God deserved by their sins, because of the utter corruption of their nature; for secretly in their hearts they become impatient, and at times they also murmur against God in words, as the examples of Job and Jeremiah testify. But Christ bears these tortures without any sin, persists in holy obedience to God, and retains filial trust in His heart. For these are by no means the words of one despairing when He exclaims: ‘My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?’ But they are the words of one giving notice that He is enduring extreme agony of the soul and pains which are truly of hell. And so Christ, by wrestling with the power of the devil, with the horror of death, and with the agonies of the damned, brought back from them a glorious triumph for our salvation ...”²⁸

This astonishing obedience of Christ even right down to the pit of suffering God’s eternal wrath is reckoned to us by the Gospel through faith, the Ministry of Reconciliation. Consequently, in the Ministry of Reconciliation, i.e. the Gospel, sin is no longer imputed and Christ’s perfect obedience and righteousness is reckoned to us. St. Paul, therefore, continues in today’s epistle:

For he hath made him *to be* sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.²⁹

²⁸*Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. II, 312

²⁹**II Corinthians 5:21**

Through the Gospel, then, comes the resurrection from the dead because Christ gives to us the benefit of His atoning work on the Cross. St. Paul, therefore, writes of the Gospel:

Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall also be *in the likeness of his* resurrection.³⁰

Being made the righteousness of God in Christ by the Gospel, then, we look forward to the resurrection of the righteous, as Jesus Himself calls it.³¹

Conclusion

God, then, died on the Cross on Good Friday because God is now truly man in Jesus Christ.

And God died a human death because the wages of sin, namely the guilt of our sins reckoned to Him, is death.

And because death could no longer hold Him because God is able to pay the eternal debt of sin, He rose from the dead on the third day, vanquishing death.

And because God suffered death for us, His resurrection from the dead can mean nothing else than the abolition of death for us, the life everlasting, and the resurrection of the body.

Amen.

³⁰**Romans 6:4-5.**

³¹**St. Luke 14:14.**