

ROME  
& THE BIRTH OF  
CHRISTIANITY



## Part 8: Introduction

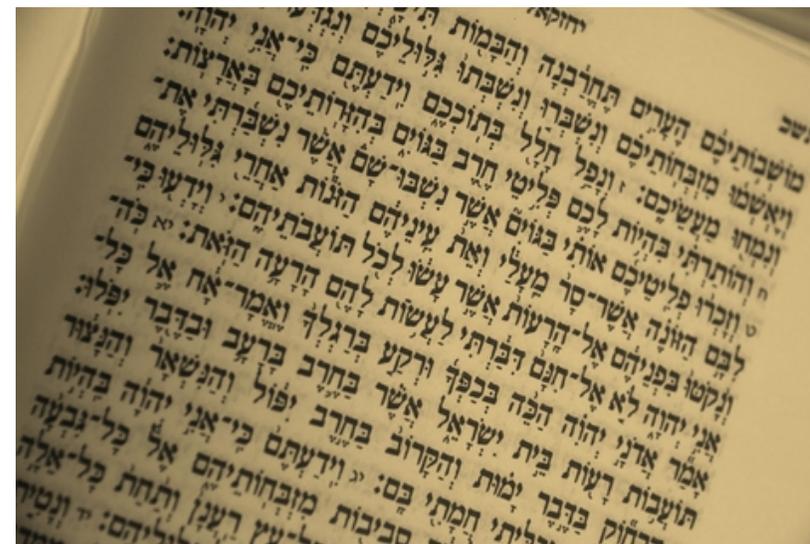
It is one thing to demonstrate, historically, that the Romans crucified thousands of criminals, political insurrectionists, disobedient slaves, and enemies of the Republic and the Empire. This information, as we have shown, is easily accessible to any inquiring mind with access to the ancient histories. However, in the case of Jesus Christ, it is quite another thing to see the connection between His physical death on a Roman cross and “its consequences, from what happened on the cross to what was achieved by it” (Stott). Is there warrant to believe that Jesus offered Himself as a sacrifice for our sins? If so, as John Stott asks, “Why did God take our place and bear our sin?” If not, doesn’t the symbol of the cross become little more than vain sentimentalism?

# Introduction

There is only one sure way by which we may be assured that there is, indeed, a connection between Jesus' death and our salvation. It is contained in three words: God has spoken. From the beginning of the Old Testament to the end of the New, God has revealed His plan for the salvation of His people and for the restoration of all things through His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. While we were helpless, sinners, godless, and enemies of the cross, Christ died in our place (substitutionary atonement) as a sacrifice so that we could be reconciled, redeemed, justified, and have the wrath of God propitiated. These words express the ultimate meaning of the cross of Jesus Christ that point far beyond the agonizing physical torture that He endured.

# Carl F.H. Henry (1913-2003)

“Revelation is a divinely initiated activity, God’s free communication by which he alone turns his personal privacy into a deliberate disclosure of his reality. All merely human affirmations about God curl into a question mark. We cannot spy out the secrets of God by obtrusive curiosity. Not even theologians of a technological era, not even Americans with their skill in probing the surface of the moon, have any special radar for



Hebrew Bible



# Carl F.H. Henry (1913-2003)

penetrating the mysteries of God's being and ways. Apart from God's initiative, God's act, God's revelation, no confident basis exists for God-talk. 'The thoughts of God no one knows, except the Spirit of God' (1 Cor. 2:11). If we are authorized to say anything at all about the living God, it is only because of God's initiative and revelation. God's disclosure alone can transform our wavering questions concerning ultimate reality into confident exclamations. Human beings know only what God has chosen to reveal concerning the spiritual world."

# The Disambiguation of Words



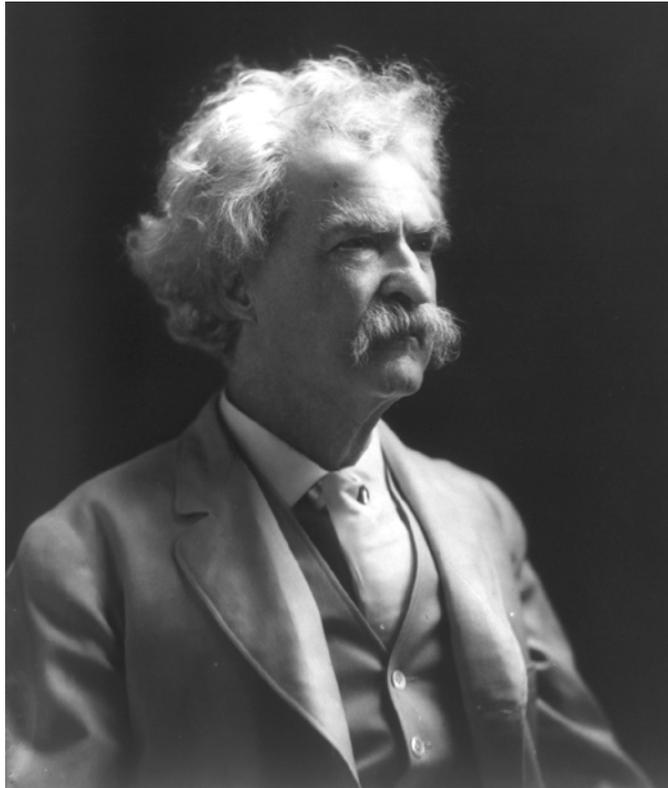
**Gustave Flaubert**

1821-1880

Author of *Madame Bovary*, etc.

“Whatever the thing you wish to say, there is but one word to express it, but one verb to give it movement, but one adjective to qualify it; you must seek until you find this noun, this verb, this adjective....When you pass a grocer sitting in his doorway, a porter smoking a pipe, or a cab stand, show me that grocer and that porter....in such a way that I could never mistake them for any other grocer or porter, and by a single word give me to understand wherein the cab horse differs from fifty others before or behind it.”

# The Almost Right Word



**Mark Twain**  
1835-1910

“The difference between the *almost right* word and the *right* word is really a large matter - 'tis the difference between the lightning-bug and the lightning.”



# The Language of the Cross

Princeton theologian B.B. Warfield lamented, “It is sad to witness the death of any worthy thing – even of a worthy word. And worthy words do die, like any other worthy thing – if we do not take good care of them. Sadder still is the dying out of the hearts of men of the things for which the words stand.” It is important that the following words should not die:

- Sacrifice
- Atonement
- Reconciliation
- Redemption
- Propitiation



# Sacrifice

- “For the bodies of those animals whose blood is brought into the holy place by the high priest as an offering for sin, are burned outside the camp. Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people through His own blood, suffered outside the gate” (Heb. 13:11-12).
- Christ offered Himself as a sacrifice and also as a priest.
- The work of Christ is expiatory (making satisfaction for an offense).
- Our sins and guilt were transferred or imputed to Jesus Christ, i.e., He offered Himself as a sacrifice for us.
- In offering Himself, He expiated guilt and purged away sin so that we may draw near to God. “Jesus wiped our slate clean” (Frame).



# Atonement

- “The theological name for that sacrifice is *atonement*. Jesus’ atoning sacrifice fulfills the OT sacrifices of bulls, goats, lambs, doves, flour, wine, and oil.” (Frame).
- It is the condition of being *at one* with others (at-one-ment); unity of feeling, harmony, concord, agreement (OED).
- In theology, it is the reconciliation or restoration of friendly relations between God and sinners (OED).
- Two great objects: (1) the removal of the curse; and (2) the restoration of the image and fellowship of God.

# Reconciliation

- Reconciliation places our attention on our **alienation** from God and the divine method of restoring us to his favor.
- Reconciliation presupposes **disrupted relations** between God and man.
- It is not our enmity against God that comes to the forefront in the reconciliation, but God's alienation from us – caused by our sin.
- “For if while we were **enemies**, we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life” (Rom. 5:10).
- What we have received is reinstatement in the favor of God.

# Reconciliation

- “For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups (Jews and Gentiles) into one, and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances, that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace, and might **reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross**, by it having put to death the enmity” (Eph. 2:14-16).
- “For if while we were enemies, we were **reconciled to God through the death of His Son**, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life” (Rom. 5:10).

# Reconciliation

- “For it was the Father’s good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, and through Him **to reconcile all things to Himself**, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven. And although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds, yet He has now **reconciled you in His fleshly body through death**, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach” (Col. 1:19-22).
- When we are **reconciled with God**, we have peace with Him (Rom. 5:1; Col. 1:20), we are adopted into His family (Rom. 8:15), and have access into His presence (Eph. 2:18).

# Reconciliation

- “And not only this, but we also exult in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the **reconciliation**” (Rom. 5:11).
- “Now all these things are from God, who **reconciled us to Himself** through Christ, and gave us the ministry of **reconciliation**” (II Cor. 5:18).
- “Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were entreating through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, **be reconciled to God**” (II Cor. 5:20).