The Cross – The Eternal Passion of God

by David Bolton

Have you ever woken up from a vivid nightmare in a cold sweat, your heart beating out of your chest, and your mind and emotions reeling from the intensity of the ordeal you just “lived” through? I have, and it is one of the worst experiences in life.

For some people who have lived through real traumatic life experiences, this can happen somewhat regularly. The nightmares they tend to have, however, relate not to some subconscious fantasy but to what they have actually lived and suffered through. This is especially traumatic as they emotionally and mentally “relive” actual events they had previously endured. How powerful dreams can be in creating and recreating experiences, and to bring us into genuine emotional and mental engagement with them as though they were real.

Memories also work this way, though often they are not quite so clear and vivid. (At least mine don’t tend to be!) The more clear and vivid they are, however, the more we can “relive” an experience. Some memories are powerfully etched on our minds, and as we revisit them, the feelings and emotions of the moment all come rushing back.

In reality, all that we experience in our natural life is experienced in the mind. Our conscious and subconscious parts of our brain process all of the vast quantities of information supplied from the physical body, and this is how we experience life. Sights and sounds, tastes and smells, pain and pleasure, are all mental phenomenon that become our experience of reality.

The Eternal Mind and Heart of God

Now all of this has relevance to our comprehension of our glorious God. If these things are true for us, how much more so are they true for the eternal, omniscient God.

Consider for a minute the following attributes of His:

Our God is “eternal”. He, therefore, stands outside of time, beholding all things, past, present and future in the comprehensive NOW. All things in time are simply part of God’s eternal PRESENT. He is the “I AM” who inhabits eternity.

A. W. Tozer in His book “The Knowledge of the Holy” says, “God dwells in eternity but time dwells in God. He has already lived all our tomorrows as He has lived all our yesterdays.” (Pg. 45.)

Secondly, our God is “omniscient”; “…His understanding is infinite.” (Psalm 147:5) He is perfect in knowledge. All that can be known is presently and perfectly “visible” within His infinite mind. Nothing past, present or future can be added to His knowledge, and nothing can be diminished, lost or taken away. The “past” and the “future” are as clear in His mind as the “present” is, for they are all “present” in Him.

This is almost incomprehensible to us who are hedged in by time. We can recall the past in part through memories, and can dream and imagine fancifully into the future, but only the present is vivid and “real” to us. This is not so with the I AM. God perfectly experiences all things that have ever existed, do exist, or shall exist in His creation, from beginning to end, simultaneously and presently.
Stephen Charnock, the Puritan pastor and theologian, in His classic work, “The Existence and Attributes of God” says, “God, therefore, knows no more now than He did before; and at the end of the world, He shall know no more than He doth now; and from eternity, He knows no less than He doth now, and shall do to eternity. Though things pass into being and out of being, the knowledge of God doth not vary with them, for he knows them as well before they were, as when they are, and knows them as well when they are past, as when they are present.” (Vol. I; pgs. 460-461)

In addition to this, our God is also “Love”. Along with the infinite, eternal knowledge that fills His Mind, there is also a corresponding emotional reality that fills His Heart. The God who is perfect in knowledge, is also perfect in LOVE. His Heart feels, His Heart cares, His Heart longs, His Heart rejoices, His Heart sorrows, His Heart is satisfied, His Heart breaks. All that is present in His Mind, is infinitely and inextricably connected to His Heart, and He experiences the fullness of both perfectly in the eternal NOW.

There are many ramifications to this truth about God, but I would like to focus in on one of the most significant of them all; one that stands at the center of God’s eternal purpose:

The Cross

I remember being on a long trip a number of years back and musing on the cross as I was driving. Part of my meditation was that I was wondering how the eternal justice of God was fully satisfied for all men, and for all time, by Christ’s sufferings and death on the cross. I wondered how the temporal sufferings and death of Christ actually “balanced the scales” of the eternal judgment of God for sin. When sin is judged with eternal punishment, how could Christ’s temporal punishment for sin suffice as just payment? Honestly, it didn’t fully add up in my mind.

Then I felt the Lord open my understanding and speak to my heart, “It is not the duration of the sufferings in hours or days, but the depth of the sufferings that needed to be accomplished. The duration of the suffering is not measured by time, but by eternity.”

I realized at that moment that the cross, from God’s perspective, is an eternally present reality to His Mind and Heart, outside of the limitations of time. I realized that whatever the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit experienced in the sufferings and death of Christ on the cross are as present a reality to them now as they were then. God does not even have to “remember” them, as if they are something in the past to recall, for they are as present to Him now as they were when they took place.

Likewise, before time even began, before creation was spoken into being, the vivid reality of the nails piercing Christ’s hands and feet, the bloody sweat dripping from His brow, the agonizing breaths, the parched dry lips, the sword piercing His side; the weight of sin and the forsakenness of Christ by the Father were as experientially real to God as the day Christ hung on the cross.

Even into “eternity future”, the infinite perfection of God’s knowledge of the holocaust of the cross shall never dim. Such a thing would be impossible.

Steven Charnock again says, “All things are past, present and to come in regard of their existence; but there is not past, present and to come in regard of God’s knowledge of them, …” (Vol. I; pg. 285)

Such “knowledge” of God, furthermore, is not merely technical, sterile, dispassionate, factual “head knowledge”, but rather infinitely real, experiential knowledge that is inextricably connected with God’s Heart as well as His Mind. Whatever God experienced in the moment of Christ’s sufferings, He fully experiences in the Moment of His eternal Now.

When God in His eternal counsels, therefore, established His eternal purpose, knowing that it would include the cross, He did so knowing that the sufferings of the cross would be an irrevocable, immutable
present reality within Him forever.

This was something I had never considered before. The cross took on a significance for me at that moment that became exponentially, exceedingly far greater than anything I had ever conceived of it to be. I realized that the sufferings of Christ on the cross, and of the Father and of the Holy Spirit (spiritually, relationally, and emotionally), were not merely a temporal event, but an eternal reality perpetually known and experienced without diminishment. It could be no other, given the infinite nature of the Triune God.

**The Eternal “Passion” of God**

I initially titled this post, “The Cross and the Eternal Sufferings of God”, but I changed it to “The Cross – The Eternal Passion of God” because I wanted to not merely focus on the sufferings aspect of this eternal reality of the cross, but also to include a greater fullness of its meaning as it relates to the infinite desires and emotions of the Heart of God. The word “passion” communicates both of these meanings.

“Passion” originally and literally means “suffering”. This is why the sufferings of Christ leading up to His death are called “the passion of Christ.” As we have already touched on, all that the Father suffered in His Heart as He poured out His wrath for the sin of mankind upon His very own Son, and all that rent His Heart as He experienced the separation between Himself and His Eternally Beloved, as Jesus drank the Cup of Judgment to its very dregs, is forever experienced, without diminishment, in the Heart of the Father. All that the Son endured and experienced, both in His divinity and in His humanity, leading up to the cross, on the cross, and whatever He experienced in soul and spirit as His body lay in the grave, is permanently present to His infinite Mind and everlasting Heart. The same is true for the Holy Spirit, who was not only present on that day, experiencing the infinite details of the horrors of Calvary, but also eternally knows them by the same Divine attributes of the Father and the Son.

Because of the immutable perfections of God’s knowledge, the temporal sufferings of Christ, are in reality the eternal sufferings of God, the eternal “passion” of God.

“Passion” not only means “suffering”, however, but is also is used to describe intense, ardent, and even vehement emotion. It is used of overwhelming feelings of both love and anger, desire and hate. Our God is a God of intense, ardent and vehement emotions. He is a God of infinite Love, a jealous God, a consuming fire. He is a God of anger and wrath against sin, corruption and death. He is a God of unspeakable joy, pleasure, glory and satisfaction. These are the ardent Passions of God’s infinite Heart, and all of them are gathered up and come to bear full force upon one central point: the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ. Here the fullness of God’s Love is manifest and displayed. Here the fullness of God’s anger and wrath are likewise unleashed. Here all that God desires finds its hope of fulfillment. Here all that God hates finds its ultimate demise. Here unspeakable joy, glory, pleasure and satisfaction are released as the Lamb of God cries out His triumphant shout, “It is finished”. Herein is the summing up of all Passion, infinite and eternal. The vortex of God’s emotions eternally whirl around this central point, for it is the unceasing and unfading reality of the One whose Name is “I AM”.

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I began this post talking about how dreams can cause us to both mentally and emotionally experience things as if they were real, which are not presently happening to us. This is the closest human analogy that I can think of to help us connect with God’s experiential knowledge of all things at all times. His knowledge, however, is not a dream, it is real, and it is present with and in Him always.

In contemplating these things, therefore, I believe it is without exaggeration to say that the cross, and the passion of God that is bound up with it, are more immense and profound than anything we have ever imagined them to be.
May we take time to think on these deep mysteries of our glorious God, and ask Him to give us greater wisdom and insight into them by His Holy Spirit.

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