

Religious Mysteries 101 – The Crucifixion, Part 2



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But, hey, Christians tell us Jesus had to die for our sins. A typical conversation might go something like this:

Monotheist: Oh. So you believe God died?

Trinitarian: No, no, perish the thought. Only the man died.

Monotheist: In that case, the sacrifice didn't need to be divine, if only the man-part died.

Trinitarian: No, no, no. The man-part died, but Jesus/God had to suffer on the cross to atone for our sins.

Monotheist: What do you mean “had to”? God doesn't “have to” anything.

Trinitarian: God needed a sacrifice and a human wouldn't do. God needed a sacrifice big enough to atone for the sins of humankind, so He sent His only begotten son.

Monotheist: Then we have a different concept of God. The God I believe in doesn't have needs. My God never wants to do something but can't because He needs something to make it possible. My God never says, “Gee, I want to do this, but I can't. First I need this certain something. Let's see, where can I find it?” In that scenario God would be dependent upon whatever entity could satisfy His needs. In other words, God would have to have a higher god. For a strict monotheist that's just not possible, for God is One, supreme, self-sufficient, the source of all creation. Humankind has needs, God doesn't. We need His guidance, mercy and forgiveness, but He doesn't *need* anything in exchange. He may desire servitude and worship, but he doesn't *need* it.

Trinitarian: But that's the point; God tells us to worship Him, and we do that through prayer. But God is pure and holy, and humankind are sinners. We can't approach God directly because of the impurity of our sins. Hence, we need an intercessor to pray through.

Monotheist: Question—did Jesus sin?

Trinitarian: Nope, he was sinless.

Monotheist: How pure was he?

Trinitarian: Jesus? 100% pure. He was God/Son of God, so he was 100% holy.

Monotheist: But then we can't approach Jesus any more than we can God, by your criterion. Your premise is that humankind can't pray directly to God because of the incompatibility of sinful man and the purity of anything 100% holy. If Jesus was 100% holy, then he's no more approachable than God. On the other hand, if Jesus *wasn't* 100% holy, then he was himself tainted and couldn't approach God directly, much less be God, the Son of God, or partner with God.

A fair analogy might be that of going to meet a supremely righteous man—the holiest person alive, holiness radiating from his being, oozing from his pores. So we go to see him, but are told the “saint” won't agree to the meeting. In fact, he can't stand to be in the same room with a sin-tainted mortal. We can talk with his receptionist, but the saint himself? Fat chance! He's much too holy to sit with us lesser beings. So what do we think now? Does he sound holy, or crazy?

Common sense tells us holy people are approachable—the holier, the more approachable. So why should humankind need an intermediary between us and God? And why would God demand the sacrifice of what Christians propose to be “His only begotten son” when, according to Hosea 6:6, “I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.” This lesson was worthy of two New Testament mentions, the first in Matthew 9:13, the second in Matthew 12:7. Why, then, are clergy teaching that Jesus had to be sacrificed? And if he was sent for this purpose, why did he pray to be saved?

Perhaps Jesus' prayer is explained by Hebrews 5:7, which states that because Jesus was a righteous man, God answered

his prayer to be saved from death: “In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission” (Hebrews 5:7, NRSV). Now, what does “God heard his prayer” mean—that God heard it loud and clear and ignored it? No, it means God answered his prayer. It certainly can't mean that God heard and refused the prayer, for then the phrase “because of his reverent submission” would be nonsensical, along the lines of, “God heard his prayer and refused it because he was a righteous man.”

Hm. So wouldn't that suggest that Jesus might not have been crucified in the first place?

But let's back up and ask ourselves, why do we have to believe to be saved? On one hand, original sin is held to be binding, whether we believe in it or not. On the other hand, salvation is held to be conditional upon acceptance (i.e., belief) of the crucifixion and atonement of Jesus. In the first case, belief is held to be irrelevant; in the second, it's required. The question arises, “Did Jesus pay the price or not?” If he paid the price, then our sins are forgiven, whether we believe or not. If he didn't pay the price, it doesn't matter either way. Lastly, forgiveness doesn't *have* a price. A person can't forgive another's debt and still demand repayment. The argument that God forgives, but only if given a sacrifice He says He doesn't want in the first place (see Hosea 6:6, Matthew 9:13 and 12:7) drags a wing and cartwheels down the runway of rational analysis. From where, then, does the formula come? According to scripture (the aforementioned anonymous scripture lacking manuscript uniformity), it's not from Jesus. Furthermore, the Christian formula for salvation hinges off the concept of original sin, and we have to ask ourselves why we should believe that concept if we can't substantiate the rest of the Christian formula.

But that is a different discussion.
Signed, Anonymous (Just Kidding)