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Flattening the Curve and Being Flattened By the Curve (Sin)

The death and resurrection of Christ and the eradication of the curve (sin)

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Saturday is the day of silence for Christians, the day between remembering the death of Jesus Christ on the cross and his resurrection. It is referred to as Easter Eve. It is not silent as if God is removed, or is absent, or not doing something. Rather, it is referred to as silent because there is not much recorded in the Scriptures about this day (cf. Matt 27:62-66). But God's work of salvation continues. The tomb is a reminder of sin and its effects, it has the stench of death. And yet, it is also a *sanctus*.

This day is often more somber for Christians as they live between the tension of the ignominious death of Jesus, God the Son, and the glorious resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. We know we will celebrate his resurrection because it has happened.

There is tension, because even though sin and its curse have been removed in the person and death of Jesus Christ, we await the permanent and complete destruction of sin and its effects in the second coming of Christ.

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Sunday is the day we remember and celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and we worship him (Matt 28; Mark 16; Luke 24; John 20). This is the day “death is swallowed up in victory” (1 Cor 15:54) and we exclaim “thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor 15:57). Discouragement, despair and death were transformed into a “living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (1 Pet 1:3).

What we experienced between Good Friday and Resurrection Sunday is reflective of living between the first and second comings of Jesus. We live between the times, and there is tension, because even though sin and its curse have been removed in the person and death of Jesus Christ, we await the permanent and complete destruction of sin and its effects in the second coming of Christ. But the certainty that he will return and make all things right gives us hope.

Flattening the curve

Though Saturday may have been silent and somber for Christians, the implications and results of COVID-19 shouted. In consulting the data from **Johns Hopkins University of Medicine** (<https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/map.html>), we were informed that globally, the total confirmed cases were 1,754,457, with total deaths numbering 106,469. In the U.S., total confirmed cases were 506,188, with total deaths numbering

19,701. We also learned that the 2,100 deaths on Friday were the highest daily death toll during the pandemic, and that the U.S. now has recorded the most deaths due to COVID-19 of any country.

This COVID-19 pandemic has affected all of us. We are hearing and learning a whole new list of words: social distancing, isolation, self-quarantine, flattening the curve, the RO number, shelter in place, among others. And as we know, these are not abstract terms, but they reflect a certain way of life and living in order to love our neighbor.

Because of our love for God and love for neighbors, we are committed to flattening the curve.

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Since we are now all living under “shelter in place” orders and practicing “social distancing,” we are engaging in behavior of “flattening the curve.” This term “refers to using protective practices to slow the rate of COVID-19 infection so hospitals have room, supplies and doctors for all of the patients who need care.” (You can read more about this [here \(https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2020/world/corona-simulator/\)](https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2020/world/corona-simulator/) and [here \(https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5837128/figure/F1/\)](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5837128/figure/F1/).)

Because of our love for God and love for neighbors, we are committed to flattening the curve.

Flattened by the curve (sin)

This pandemic also graphically reminds us of the truth that sin and its effects flatten us all. We have all been flattened by the curve, the virus of sin has affected us all. Affirming God’s revelation of sin and its effects (Gen. 3; Rom. 5), sin is often described

as *homo incurvatus in se*, man/woman curved in on oneself. And since this is true of each individual person, it is also true for humanity. Each individual person and all of humanity have been flattened by the curve of sin.

This is one of the effects of the sin committed by Adam and Eve against God in the Garden of Eden. They defied and rebelled against God, and the consequence was the fall and the implication was original sin, and the punishment was permanent and death was eternal (Job 4:17; 14:4; 25:4; Ps. 51:5; 130:3; 143:2; Eccl. 7:20; Jer. 13:23; 17:9; Rom. 5:12, 19; Eph. 2:3). Although Adam and Eve were created in a state of being both “able to sin” and “able not to sin,” all those now born in Adam, which is true for all of humanity after the fall, are born “not able not to sin” (Rom. 5:12–21; 1 Cor. 15:22). All are under sin (Rom. 3:9) and fallen short of God’s glory (Rom. 3:23), and all are accountable to God (Rom. 3:19), and are under his wrath (Eph. 2:3). That is now our nature – flattened by the curve of sin. This means we are guilty and corrupt, and our corruption results in total depravity, which means every aspect of our human nature is infected with sin, and total inability, which means we cannot save ourselves, that our salvation is dependent on God, spiritually dead and under God’s wrath (Rom. 3; Eph. 2).

God addresses sin and its effects, these curves, through the Son, God the Son.

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The fruit of sin is manifest in our relationship with God and in our relationships with others—all are curved or bent in on self. One writes, humanity is “deeply curved in on itself that it not only bends the best gifts of God towards itself and enjoys them (as is plain in the works—righteous and hypocrites), or rather even uses God himself in order to attain these gifts, but it also fails to realize that it so wickedly, curvedly, and viciously seeks all things, even God, for its own sake.”

Not only are our relationships curved or bent in on self because of sin, so is all of creation. In fact, creation “groans” (Rom. 8:22) because of sin, and “creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God” (Rom. 8:19). Because of sin, we live in a fallen and broken world, one that is not the way it was supposed to be. As a result we get sick, we suffer, we die. Specifically, we suffer from COVID-19. Of course, for Christians, these griefs, this sadness, these pains and sorrows are intermixed with trust and joy, because the fall and sin and groaning do not have the final word. God does, and he addresses sin and its effects, these curves, through the Son, God the Son.

The death and resurrection of Christ and the eradication of the curve (sin)

Death

“But God” . . . makes all the difference. Being in Adam or being in sin or being in a state spiritual death or being under God’s wrath or being curved is not the complete story. It is an accurate description of the story, but it is incomplete. There is more to the story, the good news, the gospel.

In our curved state, apart from Christ, we are weak and ungodly. We were not left in that state. Although there was no reason for God to act in and through God the Son, Jesus Christ, because of his love, his grace, and his mercy, he did. Paul writes, “For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person-- though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die--but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” God’s love is manifest in Christ’s death. Jesus Christ, the God-ly died for the ungodly. And he died this death on our behalf even while we were still guilty sinners

Christ’s death is the heart of the gospel, the heart of the story of redemption. It is not all there is to the work of Christ, since there is also a burial and a resurrection that vindicate the person and work of Christ (Rom. 1:3-4) and validate the story. These works of Christ and of first importance to the gospel: “For I delivered to you as of first

importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures” (1 Cor. 15:3-4).

Through Christ’s death and resurrection, the universal curve of sin is absorbed and that curve is made straight.

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The profound truth is captured in the text of Scripture that addresses the great exchange, a double imputation (I speak personally, because making it true personally is the ground of this being true corporately): my sin (and death) is imputed to Christ, i.e., he bears my sin as my substitute and dies the death I deserve, and Christ’s righteousness is imputed to me, i.e., not only are my sins forgiven, but Christ’s perfect righteousness is imputed to me and my account before God, meaning my Judge is also my Savior. Here is this way this doctrinally dense truth is stated: “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Cor. 5:21). And this righteousness of God comes “through faith in Christ” (Phil. 3:9).

Resurrection

Through Christ’s death and resurrection, the universal curve of sin is absorbed and that curve is made straight (Matt. 28:1-10; Mk. 16:1-8; Lk. 24:1-12; Jn. 20:1-10). By faith, the individual curve in each human heart is made straight, made right, justified. In Adam we are all curved by and in sin, and in Christ and through faith in him we are declared right with God, we are justified, the curve has been absorbed and made straight. Here is how this contrast is stated: “For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive” (1 Cor. 15:22; cf. Rom. 5:14-18).

Christ’s death, burial and resurrection are truths that comprise the essence of the gospel (1 Cor. 15:3-4). Although they focus on different aspects in the life and ministry of Jesus, they are of one piece: they address the means by which God’s righteous

requirements are met and the curse or spiritual deadness is overcome. It was through dying that God the Son, Jesus overcame death – God raised up Christ Jesus, “freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him” (Acts 2:24). It is in Christ Jesus’ resurrection that he “was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom. 1:4).

And contrastively, if Jesus had not been raised from the dead, we misrepresent God (1 Cor. 15:15) and our preaching is in vain (1 Cor. 15:14), our faith is futile and vain (1 Cor. 15:14, 17), we are to be pitied (1 Cor. 15:19), we are still in our sins (1 Cor. 15:17), and those who have died have perished with no hope of life with the Lord (1 Cor. 15:18). This is bleak. That is what life would be like if the resurrection were not true.

“But in fact,” Paul assuredly affirms, “Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep [i.e., died] (1 Cor. 15:20). Even though the resurrection of Christ Jesus has occurred, not all receive the life he came to give. Paul’s description of what life would have been like if Christ had not been raised is what life is like for those who remain “in Adam,” and who do not by faith live in union with Christ.

Response

We worship Jesus Christ, the resurrected and living Lamb who was slain for us (Rev. 5:6), the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (Jn. 1:29, 36). And as we worship, we also give thanks. Ponder these profound truths.

1. Sin and death have been overcome (1 Cor. 15:54-58), so that even when we die, yet shall we live (Jn. 11:25-26), thus removing the fear of death (Heb. 2:14-15).
2. Christ died for our “trespasses and [was] raised for our justification” (Rom. 4:25).
3. Through our union with Christ, we have been “born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading” (1 Pet. 1:3-4), which entails a whole new act of creation (2 Cor. 5:17).

4. Jesus Christ's resurrection has cosmic implications in that it addresses the fall and fallenness of the world (Eph. 3:10; Col. 2:15), such that even though creation "groans," it has been and will eventually be liberated from this groaning (Rom. 8:20, 22).
5. Christ's resurrection is the firstfruits, which means we too will be raised (1 Cor. 15:20, 23; cf. Rom. 6:5; 2 Cor. 4:14), and we will experience the ultimate end for which God created and redeemed, presence with him in the new heavens and the new earth (Isa. 65:17; 66:22; 1 Pet. 3:13; Rev. 21:1, 2.), at which time "death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away" (Rev. 21:4).

With all the people of God, the church of Jesus Christ we confess "thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 15:57). And following our confession, we corporately sing, and not just on Easter Sunday, Jesus Christ is risen today, Alleluia!



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