

# Sin, the cross and the 95

As Christians, we talk about sin and the cross regularly. The cross is the central symbol of our faith – of course there are others (a fish, a boat, a dove), but none of them comes close to the recognition of the cross. The importance of the cross as a symbol reflects its centrality to our faith itself. And behind that is the concept of sin.

Understanding sin and the work of the cross is not always straightforward. Wide-ranging theological debate and discussion around these themes has been taking place for centuries and will likely continue long into the future. So, how then do we go about introducing these deeply significant but challengingly complex ideas to children who have never heard of them before?

This deserves some thought, prayer and discussion, so it's important that your whole team at **Deep Sea Divers** has reflected on the issues that are likely to come up. Even the most mature of Christians can be surprised by the Spirit as they interpret and reinterpret the mystery. A continuity of message is key, so as not to confuse children for whom these are brand new ideas.

There are two things we need to remember when we discuss the cross and sin:

- God loves the world. John focuses on this in John 3:16, and in 1 John, we hear over and over that 'God is love' (1 John 4:8,16). Throughout all of his dealings with people in the Bible, from Adam and Eve onwards, we see God's unending love for his people, even when they turn their backs on him.
- We don't deserve God's love and yet he gives it to us anyway. We have turned our backs on God and gone our own way. We have lived selfish lives. We have fallen short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). To repair our broken relationship with the loving God, we need a Saviour.

## Sin

Often, when we talk about sin, we focus on what we do or think. To make it easier to understand for children we use words like 'wrongdoing' or being 'naughty'. However, to describe sin simply in terms of good or bad behaviour turns it into a moralistic, transactional process. We do wrong, God is sad; we say sorry, God is happy. And while it is true that God grieves when we turn our backs on him, sin is about our very nature, not just about the things we do or think.

In Genesis 3, the snake doesn't really tempt Eve with a piece of fruit, but with what the fruit might give – knowledge, wisdom and parity with God. Verse 6 says, 'The woman stared at the fruit. It looked beautiful and tasty.

She wanted the wisdom that it would give her, and she ate some of the fruit. Her husband was there with her, and he ate it too' (CEV).

And whether you believe this story is literally or figuratively true, it demonstrates the human condition clearly – we desire to be in charge, to make ourselves God and be the final word on all things. This is sin. The story of the Bible is full of humans finding other things to put in place of God, from the golden calf of Exodus 32 to the Pharisees, in the Gospels, believing in religiously (!) following the rules. When we put ourselves in place of God, wrongdoing and wrong thinking are the symptoms of a much deeper issue.

When we ask God for forgiveness, yes, we are asking for forgiveness for the things we do and think that are wrong. But, more importantly, we are asking for forgiveness for our disregard of God as Lord of our life, our rejection of his love and our abandonment of his friendship.

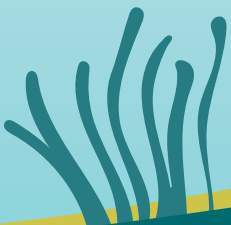
## The cross

There are many ways to interpret the cross – as sacrifice, as victory, as rescue – but perhaps the easiest interpretation for the 95 to start to grasp is the concept of the cross as reconciliation. Our sinful nature, our rejection of God, shatters our relationship with him.

Children (and adults) will be familiar with the idea of relationships being broken. The need to forgive (or ask for forgiveness) for the rejection of love and friendship is common in the lives of people of all ages. And they will hopefully know the joy of relationships being restored, and the delight and relief of that renewed friendship.

Strained relationships are obvious in Paul's dealings with the church in Corinth. Through the two letters we have in the New Testament, we see Paul trying to reconcile this deteriorating friendship and teach the Corinthians what they needed to know. It's against this background of a relationship in peril that he writes:

'Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: the old has gone, the new is here! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God' (2 Corinthians 5:17–21, NIVUK).



The relationship between God and humanity has been broken by sin and when Jesus was crucified, a loving God was bringing people back to himself as friends. Jesus acts as the reconciler in this broken relationship.

Instead of the transactional process we described earlier, a more relatable description might be: 'We push God away and put ourselves in charge, God is heartbroken and calls us back to him. We turn back to God, remembering how much we love him and he loves us, we ask for his forgiveness and our relationship with God is restored.'

## The empty tomb

Any discussion about sin and the cross would be incomplete without the resurrection. Jesus did not stay dead – he wasn't a martyr or a tragic hero. The tomb was empty, and Jesus appeared to hundreds of people in the 40 days before he went back to heaven.

In 1 Corinthians 15:17, Paul states: 'And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins' (NIVUK). Without the resurrection, we would be putting our faith in a dead person, not a living God. The resurrection is the triumph that completes the work of the cross and makes it possible for us to be confident in the unfailing love of our forgiving Father.

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