

# *Jesus*

*God's Gift  
of Himself*

*John H. King*

# JESUS: GOD'S GIFT OF HIMSELF

John King

*"...stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is near." - Jesus. Luke 21:28*

*"For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: On the night when he was betrayed, the Lord Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, broke it, and said, 'This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.'" - Paul. 1 Corinthians 11:23-24*

Copyright © 2026 John King

All rights reserved. This book or any portion thereof may not be reproduced or used in any manner whatsoever without the express written permission of the publisher except for the use of brief quotations in a book review.

Printed in the United States of America

Second Printing, 2022

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2

ISBN: paperback 978-1-7948-5915-9

ISBN: Hardcover 978-1-7948-4825-2

Dedicated to my granddaughters: Carrie, Abbie, Kayda, Leah and Ellie

## *Supplemental*

Jesus's crucifixion was an act of penal justice, but was it a punishment designed to appease God's sense of justice? This book belabors this question. First, as a supplement to this work (added here so as not to be included in the index) is my personal view (to which you may, upon review of all the arguments, disagree).

A study of the word "punishment" suggests to me that English is weak in offering this word as a reasonable explanation why Jesus' crucifixion was required as the means of our salvation. Yes, punishment can be a judicial term and those who by faith accept Jesus as their Savior, thanks to Calvary, will not be "condemned" Romans 8:1. Jesus bore our punishment in our place. But is "punishment" the word?

And most certainly, the mystery of godliness is great: He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated in the Spirit, seen by angels, preached among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory. [CSB] 1 Timothy 3:16

## *Debt*

Punishment is a criminal judgment as opposed to a civil one or, as an example of a civil judgment, a fine included in the repayment of debt [Leviticus 27:13]. When Jesus spoke of "debt" was He not talking about His forgiveness and our forgiving others. Forgiveness does not suggest punishment (Matthew 18:21-35). In fact, for some, they are mutually exclusive.

The understanding that "Tetelesthai (John 19:30, It is finished) meant "paid in full" as well as the interpretation of Colossians 2:14 that the "handwriting of ordinances" was a certificate of debt—as scholars argue—does not point to our Savior's crucifixion as a penal substitution ...even though we know it was.

We sing "He paid the debt He did not owe, I owed a debt I could not pay." This reminds me of Anselm of Canterbury in Church Tradition who spoke of Jesus' death in terms of debt, liability, compensation, satisfaction, honor, price, payment, merit. Jesus' calling Himself God's "Ransom" makes sense here (Matthew 20:28) Anselm was arguing for the truth that Jesus was both God and man:

*"Our situation is compounded by the fact that in order to compensate God we need to give back more than we owed originally and ... the debt we have incurred is of infinite proportion. So no one but God could pay a debt of such magnitude, but no one but man is obliged to pay it. It follows that our salvation requires God become man."* (Cur Deus Homo 2.6)

Amen!!!!

### *Conscious of Guilt*

We also understand that repentance needs a consciousness of sin. Many believers ask God to forgive them of—they know not what—just in case. They might be gently compared to the Athenians on Mars Hill that Paul preached to who erected a statue to "the unknown God." Many recognize the unknown sins of their past. A dearest friend now with Jesus felt this way; so, it is beyond me to speak ill of it! But think of our word punishment in light of this.

Early theologians argued that we were *liable* for *original sin* but not guilty of it, but Evangelicals see no such distinction (Romans 5:14; 1 John 1:9). C.S. Lewis argued,

*"Punishment, however severe, is deserved if the offender is to be treated as a responsible (conscious of sin) human person made in God's image."<sup>1</sup>*

Yet, from the Cross Jesus forgave those who did what *they did unknowingly* (Luke 23:34). The "guilt offering" was the offering for sins done in *ignorance* (Leviticus 5:15) This word is used in Isaiah 53:10.

This doesn't say that it wasn't a penal substitution for our sins. It was! Had Jesus not gone to Calvary, we all would be destined for a lost eternity without Him. But what is the word for this?

For some believers there are a few more concerns worth mentioning:

### *Retribution*

---

<sup>1</sup> John Stott sees this as human responsibility which justifies a discussion of punishment for sin. C.S. Lewis in his essay, "The Humanitarian Theory of Punishment." cp. Stott, John. The Cross of Christ Centennial Edition. Downers Grove, IL:InterVarsity Press. 2021) pages 103-104.

Some concluded that Jesus' wholehearted submission to the Cross had, at least, to imply something other than punishment, that His death was *restorative* also, that there was something more happening at Calvary than assuaging an angry God.

Augustine believed, "*Christ's human attitude in proximity to his death is exemplary. He is a fitting and pleasing sacrifice on account of his obedience even in the face of death. This is what propitiates God.*"

It is this debate that consumes us, the theories of the Atonement abound, because elements of Jesus crucifixion suggest so. To start with: as retribution, punishment does not require the cooperation of the offender, but Jesus went to the Cross *willingly* (John 10:18; Titus 2:14; Hebrews 10:9).

A. W. Tozer reminds us, "*When Jesus died on the Cross the mercy of God did not become any greater. It could not become any greater, for it was already infinite. We get the odd notion that God is showing mercy because Jesus died. No--Jesus died because God is showing mercy. It was the mercy of God that gave us Calvary, not Calvary that gave us mercy. If God had not been merciful there would have been no incarnation, no babe in the manger, no man on a cross and no open tomb.*"<sup>2</sup>

The International Dictionary of New Testament Theology<sup>3</sup> concludes, "*The law nowhere indicates that in sacrifice...an act of punitive punishment is executed; it in no way asks us to look on the altar as a place of punishment. ...sacrifice in the Bible is concerned with expiation rather than propitiation.*"

## *Capital*

Punishment is final. Romans 3:23 the wages of sin is always death. Punishment, biblically speaking, is a sentence of death—spiritual and eternal (Hebrews 10:29 KJV) but what is evident to faith if not to reason is the our Savior *rose* from death—a point unaccountably overlooked by some.

It is, perhaps, of some interest that neither the apostles nor Jesus nor the writers of the Old Testament books ever referred to Jesus' crucifixion, theologically, as a "punishment." Our verse in Isaiah is

---

<sup>2</sup> A. W. Tozer *The Attributes of God: A Journey Into the Father's Heart*

<sup>3</sup> Brown, Colin. ed. al. *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House. 1986 4 Vols..

better translated "chastisement." [It is Hebrew for discipline, correction]

Notwithstanding any theological doubt, Christendom still endears herself to the old hymn, "Rock of Ages, Cleft for me...Be of sin the double cure, Save *from wrath and make me pure.*" Or in the words of John Stott,

We may not know, we cannot tell,  
What pains he had to bear;  
But we believe it was for us  
He hung and suffered there.

*"If the Cross of Christ is anything to the mind, it is surely everything – the most profound reality and the sublimest mystery."* John Stott<sup>4</sup> reminds us.

### *God's Vengeance*

But there is a Biblical path through the labyrinth of theories. The focal point, for me, on which all theories teeter is the Biblical meaning of *vengeance*.

*"Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord"* [KJV Romans 12:19].

When the Lord talked in Leviticus 26:25, of executing "*the vengeance of the covenant*" little doubt He knew that to keep His word according to the covenant He would have to indict a nation now guilty of breaking their word, breaking covenant. This has to be what Jesus meant in Matthew 5:17 in fulfilling the Law and not abolishing it. To discard or nullify the covenant He made through Moses, which included the commandments, would mean not to honor His own Word and God cannot lie (Numbers 23:19). To bring about a New covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-33) He had to first honor the Old one by recompensing disobedience—someone had to make payment for sin. Scholars call this a punishment and because it is God's decision, He recompenses the sins of the world accordingly, and He did that through His Son on the Cross..

---

<sup>4</sup> Stott, Page 80

## *Appeasing God*

Did Jesus' crucifixion appease God's wrath (John 3:36)? In Romans 12:19 vengeance in human terms is the wrathful act of paying back, getting even, whereas with God it speaks more of retribution or paying the penalty for wrong done. Unlike the pagan idea of an enraged and dangerous deity, the word vengeance in our Old Testament is linked more to God's justice (divine judgment). Vengeance with God is final judgment intended to bring an end to sin (Daniel 9:24; Hebrews 9:26).

In one sentence: God's vengeance was against the *sin* not the sinner!

God is not someone with an enraged and offended self-interest that wants to inflict pain on someone who had inflicted pain on them. Punishment that only focused on the offended who takes pleasure in seeking to return pain for pain (*lex taliones*) does not answer to the biblical idea of vengeance. God's vengeance does duty for a number of Old Testament terms: judgment, a divine visitation, and rebuke, correction, and chastisement. If we want our word punishment to say all this, so be it.

## *Paul*

An overjoyed Paul wrote to a repentant Corinthian church, "*Just see what this godly sorrow produced in you! Such earnestness, such concern to clear yourselves, such indignation, such alarm, such longing to see me, such zeal, and such a readiness to punish wrong* (vengeance). *You showed that you have done everything necessary to make things right*" [2 Corinthians 7:11].

Perhaps, unintentionally but under inspiration, Paul also gave God's vengeance a context in this verse when he put it in the neighborhood of words (using the NLT) like: earnestness, concern to clear or vindicate oneself, indignation (a passion to deal decisively with all sin), alarm, longing, and zeal—all pointing to a "readiness to *punish* wrong," or to make things right. If we use this to interpret Leviticus 26:25 God vowed in conversing with Moses to make things right between Himself and His people and not by tossing the Covenant to the curb. He would keep His word in fulfilling the Old Covenant in

judgment and then replace it with a New one, written on the hearts of His people.

We are still left asking: Why did the Savior need to suffer and die? What happened at Calvary? What was the Father thinking?

To apply Paul's commendation to God, let me use his words about the Savior:

*Behold, Jesus, you were in pain for God's Work. What sense of urgency you exhibited, what an apologetic, what indignation for what is right to do, what respect of God's will, what passion and zeal and vindication of God's Word [vengeance]. In every way without sin you presented yourself Your Father's Servant at Calvary.*

### *Reconciliation primary*

To reconcile us to God, Jesus had to deal with the sin in our lives that broke the first covenant by not only forgiving us [He would not annul the covenant] but by making restitution [He would fulfill it]. Some say He did this through His perfect obedience in His incarnation and death. Others see Jesus satisfying divine justice. After this in His resurrection He could bring into being the New covenant now written on the heart.

Love displayed—we might add—with a vengeance!

Is it possible that English is weak in explaining the Divine intention? Vengeance with God was an act of judgment directed always at God's enemies. To think that somehow God's intention was to return pain for pain, blow for blow against someone with whom He was displeased suggests that such a punishment [which is another word for vengeance] was merely intended to give God some satisfaction as the more powerful or the victor in such an exchange. It is to suggest that God was not particularly conscious of how His opponent felt or to what degree they were experiencing the pain of His divine blows. It suggests uncontrolled rage on an infinite level without any further thought about the offender turned victim. It suggests that when Jesus was receiving our punishment He was victimized by a God, His Father, who wanted a sense of satisfaction that His offended justice or holiness was at long last answered—appeased? We need to revisit this interpretation.

What we do know for sure is that through the unfaithfulness of God's people [me and you included, Galatians 3:22 "concluded all under sin,"] they—we—were estranged from His fellowship, and it is reasonable to add that God was jealous. To get us back Jesus willingly submitted to the Cross. Would this not mean that on the Cross Jesus was engaged in a battle with our sin but, as regards you and me, He wanted to be reconciled? (John 3:16)

*"The LORD is a jealous and avenging God; the LORD takes vengeance and is filled with wrath. The LORD takes vengeance on his foes and vents his wrath against his enemies" [Nahum 1:2].*

### *Am I right .. Or wrong?*

We teach and sing that Jesus at Calvary paid our debt in full and we found a couple scriptures that support this interpretation. In Colossians 2:14 we may interpret "handwriting of ordinances" as a certificate of debt as well as have Jesus' words from the Cross, "It is finished" (John 19:30) mean "paid in full."

Even though, I think this less likely the meanings of these terms regarding Jesus' crucifixion, the Lord instructs me not to disturb the peace but allow the matter to remain open—and perhaps, unsolved by our logic. A presumption on my part that I am correct would be pure arrogance that suggests I know something which the Lord has not yet shared. We see through a glass darkly (1 Corinthians 13:12) but when we arrive in Glory, the fog surrounding this central truth, "Jesus died for me" will lift and we will "know as we are known."

## CONTENTS

Preface.....	1
The Problem.....	7
Introduction.....	12
The Chapters In Overview.....	21
The Mystery of Godliness.....	34
Theories of Atonement.....	46
Three Theories.....	61
The Dogma.....	62
Distinctives.....	69
The Simplicity of God.....	87
The Incarnate God.....	97
Provisions of God's Grace.....	110
More Provisions.....	134
God's Suffering Servant.....	155
Christ, Our Passover.....	166
Christ, Our Representative.....	173
Christ, Our Righteousness.....	178
Christ, Our Healer.....	188
Christ, Our Redeemer.....	195
Christ, Our Brother.....	200
The Power of Christ's Forgiveness.....	208
Christ, Our Message.....	214

## PREFACE

*Keep Jesus your Lord and your heart's sole passion, being prepared always to give answer to anyone who persists in asking: why you have such hope. - 1 Peter 3:15*

It is my sincere hope that reading this book you might develop a deeper appreciation for Jesus' death and resurrection. His life and death—and resurrection—are not just Bible stories that we tell children. Jesus needs to be at the center of our thoughts, the God we pray to, an ever present help, when the challenges of this life overwhelm us and somehow outlast our emotional and intellectual resources to meet them. What the Savior did for us that memorable afternoon, dying on a Roman cross, is meant to provide us with a healing peace of mind and heart that will—to use a nautical metaphor—help us navigate the stormy seas of this existence and provide safe harbor until that eternal day arrives when dark clouds will no longer fill our sky.

Paul, one of the Apostles of Jesus (there were twelve of them), writing to a young friend, Timothy, who was like a son to him, encouraged him to keep trusting the Lord, take Jesus' death and resurrection seriously, and not become, like some Paul knew, who rejected the Savior. They became shipwrecked, he warned (1 Timothy 1:19). Paul went on to caution the young pastor about some common opinions about Jesus' death that are made up fiction (1 Timothy 4:7). We need to get our information from the Bible.

I must admit, it is hard to explain the Bible without using stories: parables, metaphors, and a few other ways of explaining things in simpler terms. I shall try my best. [If something sounds like it belongs in a footnote, I will place it in brackets.] Jesus' death, His crucifixion—He died on a Roman cross—was no metaphor, no story, to represent truth. He really did die, was buried, and then rose from the grave three days later. Here is where faith comes in. God works with those who simply believe this or trust Him to make Jesus' death and resurrection

meaningful to them [This book is intended to explain all this in more detail].

It has been said of some people that they believe that they believe—they think it might be true but they are not sure—because someone they respect keeps saying that it's so. Hopefully, this is not us. We want to “own” our faith in Christ. We accept by faith that God has revealed to us the true meaning behind Jesus' death and resurrection. I hope you take this journey with me through some Scripture in the Bible to look behind the story of Christ's crucifixion and learn what it all means for us.

This book is all about what happened when Jesus died. History records what happened over the course of those few hours when Jesus was tried, convicted, and executed, but that's not enough. Why did He, an innocent man, suffer and die? We want to take a look at the circumstances surrounding His death. We want to ask the prophets (especially a man called Isaiah) and try, as best we might, to understand what God, the Father, was up to and why He allowed this to happen. Trust me when I say that this is a study worth our time. But it is not all answers and no questions. There is much still we do not know but what we do know about the Savior's death can be supported by our experience as believers. Let's look at a few terms just to get a “feel” for the task at hand.

## **Atonement**

I want to introduce you to one big word which I don't even plan to use in this book but which others like to use—the word, *atonement*.

What does it mean?

I don't know. My guess is that no one really does.

A man named, William Tyndale, who lived in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, while translating the Bible into English, was at a loss to explain how the Savior's death on the Cross brought us back to God. Tyndale, like others since him, had found that the Bible doesn't always make sense to the people of other cultures and languages.

[Actually, that's why I am writing this second book to say what I said in the first book on “The Cross” only in plain language easier to understand.]

The word, *atonement*? Originally, Paul, the Apostle, wanted to explain the symbolism behind the “lid,” (yes, lid), the top, of the box that contained the ten commandments, which Moses, God’s first prophet in the Bible, made, overlaid in gold and kept in a very sacred place. It all sounds so mysteriously off-limits—and was. Only one Jewish priest, one time each year, could go in that room that held that box to perform a prescribed ritual. He was dead if he got this ritual wrong, it was believed, though that never, to our knowledge, happened. This box was called “The Ark of the Covenant.”

Well, that lid had meaning to Paul which He said symbolized God’s desire to have us, His creation, back (friends again). It also symbolized forgiveness because it “covered” the commandments which the people broke.

## Sacrifices

God had been friends with Adam and Eve before they ate that “apple” that He told them not to even touch! [I assume everyone knows the story.] After they bit into that forbidden piece of fruit, God decided to withdraw. The friendship was seriously damaged. Until Jesus came, according to plan, to restore such a friendship with us through His death and resurrection, God would develop a system of sacrificing sheep and goats, among other animals, to remind people of the estrangement.

Sacrificing is a ritual killing of an animal being prepared for eating. Some animals were burnt to a crisp and consequently not for food. They were said to be given wholly to God. It was a good idea for primitive peoples whose entire lives were built on traditions and no one really questioned why they did things the way they did them. When Jewish people sacrificed animals in Moses’ day, for example, [1400 years before Christ] they understood that this appeased God’s anger. Whenever they did something to displease Him, somehow this was intended to calm Him. But the truth was that God’s love already mitigated [lessened the severity] of any rage He might have felt. The sacrifice was intended only to remind them that what they did must not go unpunished. [Any parent knows what this means.] Punishment was an inevitable consequence of disobedience but since God’s punishment is so severe—even death—God just wouldn’t exercise it.

Instead, the sacrifice foreshadowed the crucifixion of Jesus in God's mind (Jesus would take the punishment for them and us) while, as Paul taught, God overlooked their disobedience (Acts 17:30). When Jesus came and died, everything changed. Sacrifices ceased to have meaning to God according to another Bible writer (Hebrews 8:13). Now we need to accept Jesus into our lives through repentance. God's forgiveness now, since Calvary, is more than words. It is life changing, as we will look at soon.

## **MercySeat**

Well, that lid of the "Ark of the Covenant," of which I spoke, maybe because it hid the ten commandments from view, was known as the "Mercy Seat." It was called a place of mercy because God was not focusing His attention on the sin caused by His people, their blatant disobedience of those ten commandments. He patiently restrained Himself from getting too upset with them.

Punishment is often a synonym for God's judgment in the Bible but not the result of God losing His temper [That's a heathen or pagan idea]. We will look at this later in this book; but, for now, understand that there is something in the nature of God, called His attribute of justice, [a feature of God's character] that simply cannot endure blatant disregard for His love as if overlooking it will minimize His hurt or somehow the offender will, by chance, seek His forgiveness, and vow never to be that way again. There is something in our nature (and we will talk about this, too) that makes this course of events impossible. We are like a pet that we repeatedly shoo off our brand new sofa. They never seem to learn, but the solution is not the "pound." What if you, as a parent, who loved your child, came home to find your teenage son or daughter high on some life threatening drug to which they were addicted. Would you or could you ignore it for love's sake or might you try anything, no matter how severe, to rescue them from themselves? You begin to see how God feels about us, whom He loves, but, you and I had no interest in a relationship with Him. He wants us back in His life. He still loves us.

God was going to wait until Jesus went to the Cross to provide a solution to His dilemma with people He actually loved but who, at times, enraged Him because of their indifference to His feelings toward them.

If you want to look up “Mercy Seat” in a Bible dictionary or encyclopedia, it will say, “see atonement” which just brings us back around to where we began. Some Bible teachers try to explain atonement to mean “at one ment,” a fancy way of talking about being friends (reconciled) with God. I still think Tyndale should not have invented the word.

## Theories Galore

And about atonement: if you were to go to a College specifically to learn to interpret the Bible, you might study “atonement” as a “theory.” There are many theories of the atonement which is a fancy way of saying that many explanations have been offered as to why Jesus died on a cross. The goal is to sound more reasonable to satisfy the objections that modern thinkers might raise.

Peter, another of the Apostles, talked about giving a reason for the hope we have in our Lord (1 Peter 3:15). The word hope has a specific meaning, Hope in the Bible is living in a state of expectation. And what are we expecting or looking for? Jesus’ return. And when Peter, the Apostle, talked about giving an answer to anyone asking about our eager anticipation of our Savior’s second visit to this earth, he had to be thinking also of defending the reason for that hope which has to include His first coming. “Defend” just means to stand our ground when someone argues that our belief is just misguided opinions, because it is not!

Theories of atonement have been developed to explain Jesus’ death in some reasonable way. Calvary was the place, the Hill, outside the city of Jerusalem in Israel, where He died. There is so much here to unwrap and this book is burdened with the task of doing just that:

- ◆ Calvary shows how much *God loved us* because He was willing to die for us. He inspires us, in turn, to love on a higher level. We were apathetic when it came to His love for us. Calvary offers us a new life in Christ (John 3:16).
- ◆ Jesus had to die if we were to be forgiven because sin against God *is punishable only by death*. He died *in our place* because we were, indeed, guilty. Calvary satisfies God’s justice (Isaiah 53:11).
- ◆ Jesus’ death had something to do with some unseen, spiritual, *war* being fought between God and Satan. In some mysterious

way, difficult at best to understand, this war had to be fought for the souls of humankind. When He overcame the evil one to whom we were in bondage (we all surely know how strong temptation can be to do or say something regrettable or indiscreet) we were set free to serve God by doing or saying the right thing (Romans 6:6; Colossians 2:15).

The discussion of the atonement that we detailed in the first book, “The Cross,” was by its very nature philosophical. That work probably seemed quite muddled with big, technical, and philosophical terms used to explain things. Some of this is Paul’s doings, who spoke of crucifying the “old self.” (This has engendered no small debate over its meaning.)

[When we fall in love with Jesus, it changes us. Our perspective and outlook changes and we find Jesus’ attitude toward life to be more how we wish to be also. Paul called us “new” persons. Who we were, “the old self,” Paul called us, is said to have died on the Cross with the Savior.]

And, as already noted, he used the idea of the Mercy-seat, along with the sacrifices Moses instructed Israel to practice—all of which somehow—I like to say—symbolized Christ’s crucifixion.

### **King John Translation**

So, let’s proceed to rewrite each chapter of the previous book without footnotes and without the big words. I want to quote some Scripture using what I call, King John translation—my own. I tend to offer more an interpretation than a translation. (But no worries: I always check with the scholars.) My desire is that this book will read like a story of God’s grace. I pray you, too, if you have not already, will come to a like conviction to cherish what our Lord did for us when He died for our sins.

## FAIR

*But it is an impotent idea with which God could not possibly be pleased: to approach Him, the King of Kings, in our urgency for His mercy, thinking Him an unfair Potentate, when we know He treats all His faithful servants fairly, kindly, and with great generosity.- Hebrews 11:6*

ENGAGING a non-believer in conversation about our belief in Jesus' death and resurrection is, on occasion, confrontational. And there is reason why this is. Many persons in our orbit have yet to catch that spark of enthusiasm for God that has set us ablaze with a love for the Savior. They serve a different view of life, a modern one. In a word: *postmodernism*. (I promised no big words; so, let's chop this one down to size.) Have you noticed that society is characterized by a sense of hopelessness? The new social view of things is that although God might not be dead, He is uninvolved, distant, and disinterested. To them, the Church is nothing more than outdated ritual that offers no happiness, only a sense of guilt over everything the Church says they are doing wrong.

Additionally, evolution has taught them that all species are of equal value, and a human being is no more important than an ant. Happiness is what you make of your own life. We live in the age of "eat, drink, party and live as sumptuously as you can" (Luke 12:19). This is the new road to happiness (Luke 16:19).

The social constructs: the morals that esteemed monogamy, the nuclear family, along with a commitment to duty, to family and a devotion to God are tossed aside, deconstructed, in favor of a self-reliance that seeks happiness at any cost. Greed not God is king.

King Solomon, the wisest in his day, cautioned his sons to "trust God," first and foremost—not out of fear or shame or obligation but "with all their heart," out of a passion or love for God. And they must not depend solely on their own knowledge which might be surprisingly limited and even incorrect. "Trust *Him*; you cannot go wrong"

(Proverbs 3:6). This is our mantra, our slogan, our formula for happiness. But it is not theirs.

We speak a different language from our unbelieving family and friends. The word "sin" is not in their vocabulary but it is of major importance in ours (Romans 3:23). There is a moral code, a right from wrong, that God has set, that applies to all equally which we have not faithfully kept. We need a salvation provided through Jesus' death and resurrection in order to get to happiness. And even the word, happiness, for us, speaks more of a contented joy than an excited adrenalin rush. Love, even in romance, is not self-gratification for us as it often is for them.

The Church's message of sin is, they believe, intended to inflict guilt on people who respond by dutifully attending and giving money. They, as well, in error, maintain that we are motivated by fear of an eternal hell and a vengeful god. This isn't so. "There is no fear in love" (1 John 4:18).

But the primary problem in sharing the message of Calvary in a postmodern age is their aversion to violence which is what they see happened if, as we say (and we are correct) that the Savior in His innocence took upon Himself our punishment. Our message is: Jesus hanged upon a cross. But crucifixion is seen as barbaric, the height of a cruel, and perhaps, sadistic, punishing, and inhumane act.

God's act of crucifying an innocent son is the very definition of such a violence in the name of justice. Modern theories of Calvary renounce violence. They renounce Christianity as a "bloody religion." But, as the songwriter wrote, "Our hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness." Giving a reasonable explanation, however, to postmodern thinkers is a task best left to the Wisdom of God. It, therefore, is incumbent upon us to study what the Bible has to say and stay true to that message not just in our reasoning but, more importantly, in our living. There are, however, some honest inquirers who will want to learn what is so central to our faith.

Nonetheless, an entire generation has been educated in the current cultural climate that since WW2 and the Holocaust has questioned allegiance to all law codes. They are re-evaluating what society expects of them in terms of their own quest for happiness.

A legal person, to their way of thinking, is therefore, a repressed person whose personal happiness or well-being is in bondage to a

guilt-generating social norm or moral system that makes them liable for offenses of which they, personally, as a free and liberated person, would otherwise never have been guilty. Where there is no law, there is no offense. Even Paul understood this principle: “no law, no sin” (Romans 7:8).

A divine law, nonetheless, is a law, and law applies to everyone equally. Justice is blind. This suggests that everyone’s happiness is dependent on the same obedience. One’s happiness is no longer an individual pursuit, an individual interest. Happiness, for Christians, is living a righteous life as God sees it.

Jesus bore the complete inventory of human failure against God’s will. Jesus’ death and resurrection consequently provided a freedom from a bondage to these sins (a reconciliation) and to please God we must live in compliance with His will—not our own. Individual happiness, what I want for myself, seems to them to be censored in the name of the higher good—God’s interest. Here, too, they are wrong (Psalm 37:4,5). I interpret this verse to say, “Fall deeply in love with the Lord like a school-girl’s first crush. Long to be near Him! And whatever you ask for, if it is truly your heart’s desire, He will give it!” Herein lies the believer’s happiness.

Christianity promotes a liberty in terms of *righteousness* not happiness, per se, in terms of a forgiveness from sin. Happiness is a product of that righteous living, not its goal. Postmodernists see this as confrontation to their chosen life-styles which are not subject to religious law. Postmodernists feel church teachings are repressive, trying to discredit who they are or who they want to become ...(always) to be happy. [Consider this while conversing with postmodernists that their happiness is the key to understanding them and, perhaps, opening a way for God to speak to their hearts.]

Part of the problem is a postmodern disbelief in the possibility of a personal God, who in the first place defined sin. In their understanding: they are not sinners; they are victims of a religious order that imposes on them inhumane standards of conduct that they cannot fulfill, and that, therefore, impose on them a psychologically crippling guilt. “The logic of sin-punishment,” they would argue, “is nothing but a human construct, intended perhaps to control the escalation of crime or (cynically) to form docile subjects.” Listen to some of

their arguments [I got these from Adonis Vidu. *Atonement, Law, and Justice*, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing, 2014]:

### **Andrew Sung Park (1952 - )**

The problem, says Andrew Park, a Methodist theologian, is that Christian theories, in emphasizing the sinner, failed to consider those who are victims of sin. He calls them “improper theologies” that “marginalize” others. Treating everyone as a sinner, promotes the impression that a victim’s suffering is their fault. Mr. Park maintains this is not what the Savior taught: that a victim’s suffering is the consequence of their own sins (John 9:3). Sin, for Park, is an offense against humanity, not against God. His theology devolves into an insightful piece of psychology, nonetheless, failing to address what to do about sin against God.

### **Feminist Rosemary Radford Ruether**

Feminism maintains that talk of sin “turns women into scapegoats.” The very idea that we cannot “save” ourselves stifles our freedom. Post-modernists are libertarians. Postmodernists are self-reliant individuals. “What is the point of the cross?” one might ask. We are helpless in a victimized condition, if we maintain that someone else must show mercy to rescue us. To them: Jesus on the Cross as their substitute becomes an offensive idea. The power to elicit guilt from them puts them in His debt [Christians find this a welcome truth].

Rita Nakashima Brock, an American feminist scholar and theologian, fulminated, “It’s telling people you don’t have a right to protest when terrible things happen to you. It short-circuits the legitimate expression of tragedy and grief that is fundamental to our psychological health. We ought to be outraged that the Roman empire crucified Jesus, not grateful, not happy that he died for us, but outraged at this travesty of justice.”

### **A Shrinking Morality - Sinfulness**

And if sin is out of the question, what about morality as a universal principle? Let me borrow from my own work, “Challenged: Living Our Faith in a Post Modern Age.”

Guilt is the unhappy child of the union between a code of morality and an individual's conscience. And so much of this self-blame is painfully unwarranted. It leads some to believe the code should be scrapped. Instead we should focus on the question: "What makes you happy?"

Today much of what was sinful a hundred years ago is becoming more and more common practice—even for believers. The list is shrinking. Responsibility, guilt, blame, and such like are becoming illusions.

Postmodernism contends that the ten commandments have been part of our humanity long before Moses. They do not object to morality, *per se*, but to the imposition of a religious code that painfully and unnecessarily denies a sense of well-being in the name of a self-sacrifice that is always on the edge of self-reproach or guilt.

Postmodernists maintain that the do's and don'ts and the guilt encased in our failures to comply as religious persons are non-essentials to happiness or well-being! "If we didn't have to pretend allegiance to religious thought," they maintain, "we would be in ignorance legitimately happy."

It is time the church reminds itself that the only recourse we have in a postmodern age of preaching the Cross and have listening ears attentive to the message is through our lives: "We always have something important to say if it is about "the blood of the Lamb and the word of our testimony;...." (Revelation 12:11)

We are not winning an argument or debate. Our interest is still souls!

## INTRODUCTION

*Then starting in Moses' writings and through all the Prophets, he explained ... all the things written about himself. - Luke 24:27*

MOST Christians see Christ's death on the Cross as simply providing for us eternal life. His death did provide eternal life for those who seek Him, but have we understood what this "eternal life" encompasses? Maybe, as a consequence of being centuries removed from the last reformation or revival in the Church, many have settled into the comfortable mode imagining faith as mental assent or endorsement of a church creed, even if they don't really know the creed or live it.

Few are even curious if there was something more to Jesus' death or if God expected more from us in recognition of the Savior's crucifixion than attendance at the Christian church of choice. Attending church for many seems sufficient to assure them that they are persons of faith. For others it is a lifelong membership card, which is considered by them bonafide proof of their salvation—even in their persistent absence from church.

If Jesus' death did not mean any more to us than to agree with the church that it happened as the preacher or priest said, is this all God wanted of us to restore our relationship with Him? Is this what *faith* means? We should take an honest look, a bold inquiry, into what the Scripture actually says about Jesus' death and our part in all of this.

Religious scholars have complicated the learning experience for most believers, requiring a college degree in theories and other languages, like Greek and Latin; so much so, that most believers are too busy with life to care. Some feel overwhelmed, too dumb, to seek a deeper or fuller knowledge. So, to comply, some pastors have recognized the benefits of Calvary, of Jesus' death, by promoting nothing more than a believer reciting a sinner's prayer or attending Holy

Communion. Unfortunately many believers have been lulled into acceptance of an ignorance of the Scripture.

As to the value of Jesus' crucifixion, of Calvary, granted, it is never enough to learn it from books or college courses. In point of fact, the word "know" in the Bible means "to know by experience." God paid a high price in the crucifixion of His Son. There has to be more to it than a college level discussion or a weekend hour in our best clothes in church. Perhaps, this is a stinging rebuke but hopefully I have your attention since I want to take you on a journey to Calvary that begs the question: Are you up for a closer look at what really happened the day Jesus died?

### Faith

Jesus' death, indeed, as we already pointed out, provides eternal life, but the word we should emphasize here is not "eternal" but "*life*." Later God will expand our minds on what "eternal" means. But, plainly, what Calvary offers is a way of life, to be *lived*! Paul explained this by contrasting the person we were *before* Calvary became important to us and the person we became *after*. The *before* person Paul called the "old" self (Galatians 2:20); the *after* person he referred to as "new" (2 Corinthians 5:17). Regardless what reason religious scholars propose, God sent Jesus to the Cross to die and He will make us accountable for our reaction to that simple fact. Can we view His death with disinterest anymore and still call ourselves Christian?

If we see His death as our opportunity to draw closer to God, the cross changes us, something undeniable, in the way we see life or how we perceive our circumstances. Our view of things has changed because God now is in the picture. But the biggest change is—I like to say it in human terms—we have fallen deeply in love with the Savior and cherish the fact He is now in our lives.

This is what "*faith*" is all about, trust in God to restore the way for us to get close again, to come to know Him, to sense Him in our lives, and to help us to live a life that pleases Him and supports a developing relationship with Him. Faith makes God real again. Faith is not just a belief in something written down, a creed or religious doctrine. Faith is trust in someone—in this case, God, whom we are getting to know and love. None of this would be possible without Jesus, His death and resurrection.

Said simply, then: faith, trusting God, means a changed life. But so much remains to be done to make us into the kind of person God would be totally pleased to befriend. Temptations are always here to lead us astray. Many Christians argue that the change in their lives that I speak of here is not evident. They still want Jesus in their lives but old habits die hard. What's the explanation?

## Salvation

Consequently, we might claim that God must rescue us from our "old" self, the person we were that didn't give a thought about His interest in us. We want to be totally "new" because we want God to be in charge of our lives. Different Christian religions see this challenge in different ways. Some see it as a process, that God over time rehabilitates us or, they speak of God purifying us, or—here is a word, though "big," we cannot avoid—*sanctifying* us. God sanctifies every believer, even if we are not clear as to how He does it. Some think God saves us first and then begins the process of sanctifying us. They see salvation, not as a gradual change but, as a status, God calling us saved and then over the course of our life proving it true. However we imagine it, God has the challenge of changing us from old to new. That's salvation. I had one teacher who gave us a very good illustration or simile to explain what's happening when we accept Jesus into our lives as our Savior. The person we were is like a tree that has been girdled.

## Girdling the Tree

My college teacher shared a story from his past that may encourage us as we endeavor to follow Christ. Hobart was a young lad who observed his dad "ring" a tree in the back yard. Ringing a tree, went the explanation, is cutting into the bark deep enough into the cambium layer to prevent the sap in the tree from flowing back down into the root system when Autumn comes. Hobart saw his dad ring the tree and he expected the leaves to wither and drop off but the Summer went into Fall and the leaves were still there. Hobart thought to correct his dad, an excited boy about to prove himself right and dad wrong, "The tree is still alive, dad."

"The tree is dead, son." His dad spoke with unwavering confidence in what was happening to that tree.

Winter turned to Spring and small new leaves broke out on every branch of that tree, giving Hobart renewed confidence that the tree was not dead. He alerted his dad, who again reiterated in fatherly tones the lesson of the rung tree.

“Hob, the tree is dead.”

Dad didn’t need to look. The leaves turned brown and fell off. The tree was indeed ...dead.

Reverend Grazier shared that story of his life to explain that even if we sin from time to time, the old nature, like the old tree, has been disconnected from any source of strength that would feed its ways. As we follow Christ and serve Him in relationship expect old habits, old ways, old thoughts, old feelings to drop off, that are not representative of God and His kingdom that is now very much a part of who we are becoming in Him (Romans 8:29).

There is another tree with good fruit, the new you, which Paul explained using the comparison of wearing clothing to depict our behavior: “Wearing the new man who is created by God in right living, faithful to God’s will” (Ephesians 4:24). The point of interest here is that this new life is a direct provision of Jesus' death and resurrection.

## **Five Things Jesus Did**

Jesus did five things by dying on Calvary’s Cross. We will look closer at these in the following pages. Here are some Scripture that records them. [The translation is my own to avoid copyright issues.]

### **1. Jesus died to deal finally and decisively with sin.**

- I Peter 2:22-24. Peter, who witnessed Jesus’ trial and crucifixion wrote, “Jesus, who had never committed sin nor could anyone ever catch Him in a lie or being deceptive, while being verbally abused, mocked and falsely accused, never lashed out in kind. He suffered their threats in silence, unjustly delivered over to the authorities. He, Himself, carried our sins in His body upon the Cross in order that by removing our sins, we might live right in relationship with God.”

- Hebrews 9:28. Another writer of the Bible wrote, "Christ Jesus (and He did this only once ever) offered Himself in His death to God to provide for the removal of our sins. He will return for us, not to die again but, to rescue from this present world those of us who have been faithfully looking for Him."

## **2. Jesus freed us from a bondage to sinning**

- Matthew 20:28 & Mark 10:45 recorded: "just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life to free many, who accept it, from slavery to their sins."
- I Timothy 2:5-6 "For there is only one God, even one peacemaker between God and us, the man, Christ Jesus. Who gave Himself (to death) in our place at the time appointed by His Father to free us from slavery to our sinning."
- Revelation 5:9 "And they sang a song never before sung: "You are declared worthy to take the scroll and break its seals, because ... with your blood you bought a people for yourself from every ancestral line and language and nation and race."

## **3. Jesus took our place: (Our substitute)**

- Isaiah 53:4-6 "Surely he endured the wounds of our sin and carried a heavy load of our pain (mental and physical), yet we concluded God struck Him down for His own sins because God was punishing him. But not so! He was being wounded because of our rebellion, he was crushed, shattered, in pain spiritually, emotionally, physically, from the waywardness for which we were liable; His discipline brought us peace with God, and from the stripes, the whipping He bore, healing for our souls and bodies. Yes, we all, like sheep, all of us, strayed from the fold, each of us went our own way; and the Lord punished Him."

- Romans 5:18-19 "Indeed, therefore, as by one act of disobedience (Adam's) the sentence of death was passed on all of us, likewise, through the obedience of one man, Jesus, all of us can live aright before God. Let me explain it this way: because of one man's unwillingness to listen (regarding the forbidden fruit) many were declared liable (sinners), and likewise through one man's obedience (in His sinlessness and innocence going to the Cross), many are declared in right standing with God."
- 2 Corinthians 5:14 "For the love of Christ has us in its grip; we concluded this, that He died for all, in their place."
- Romans 5:7-8 "You will seldom if ever hear of a just man taking the penalty for someone criminally liable. For a good person's cause, perhaps, someone might consider risking their life. But God proved His love for us because while we were still sinners, Christ died in our place."
- I John 2:1-2 "My dear children, I write these things to you to discourage you from sinning; but, on the outside chance you might displease God, doing your own thing and ignoring His wise counsel, don't lose heart. That's why He sent Jesus who always knows what is right, who comes from the Father to do His bidding. Concerning our sins, He went to Calvary for this very reason, to deal with everyone's sins."

#### **4. Jesus satisfied God's Justice.**

- Romans 8:1 "Therefore, there is now no one judged worthy of punishment for those in Christ Jesus."
- Romans 5:9 "Therefore much more now rather being declared just by His death on the Cross, we will be spared His anger, which is coming."

## 5. **Jesus restores our relationship with God**

- Romans 5:10-11 “If, to explain, while we were enemies of God, we were restored to friendship and relationship—this through the death of His Son—so much the more, we can conclude that now having been restored to friendship, our being rescued from being enslaved to sin, is assured through His resurrection from the dead.”
- 2 Corinthians 5:19 “God was in the person of Christ Jesus (He is God) restoring our relationship with Him, not keeping the record anymore of our sin (rebellion or waywardness).
- Colossians 1:20 “God, through Jesus, restores all things, both on earth and in heaven (as He made them before Adam and Eve disobeyed). Said another way: He made peace through the blood of His Cross (Jesus’ death on the Cross).”

### **What All Christians Believe**

I am indebted to a college history professor for sharing in a simple way the truth that defines Christianity, that all Christians have in common. It might still seem difficult to understand because some things still need to be explained but there are only five:

1. Jesus was born of a virgin —Mary— [The reference to a ‘virgin’ in Isaiah 7:14 is really the word “young maiden.” ] and therefore,
2. Jesus is God —God’s Son — [Jesus is actually God come in the flesh or as a human. The Christian faith maintains that Mary carried Jesus to term before she was married to Joseph which made Jesus, God’s Son] and therefore,
3. Jesus is, therefore, a member of the Trinity—the Father, Son and Holy Spirit— [Ephesians 4:4-6 Paul spoke of “one Spirit..one Lord.. one God and Father of all.” Also see I Corinthians 12:4-6 “same Spirit..same Lord..same God.” Also: May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God,

and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. 2 Corinthians 13:14 ] and therefore

4. When He died on Calvary, God died for our sins—He died on the Cross, that we might live forever with Him in heaven — [It is important to note that it was God, in the person of Christ, that died there. A mere human could not satisfy the punishment for the sin of the whole world] and therefore,
5. The Bible IS God’s Word. -The message of the Bible is all about the Cross and our Lord’s resurrection. Anyone who discredits the account saying it isn’t God’s Word discredits the need for the Savior, in the person of Jesus Christ, to be crucified for the sins of the world.

### **The Fulcrum of The Cross**

The question of grace on God’s side and believer responsibility (faith with or without works) on the believer’s side is a doctrinal seesaw. The weight of grace for John Calvin put the fulcrum (what Jesus did in His death) so close to where the Christian sits on this seesaw that no weight of responsibility on the believer’s part (free will) decides the balance (the will of God). For Calvin, there was no prevenient grace, no proclivity (tendency) to choose God. As Jesus reminded His disciples, “You did not choose me, but I chose you” (John 15:16). Wesley (Methodism) envisioned the balancing point more central, so that, it took also the Christian’s faithful obedience in response to God’s grace to bring balance, to effectively realize all Jesus provided there. “Therefore, my dear friends, just as you have always obeyed, so now, ... work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.” (Philippians 2:12)

Sadly, church doctrine must define faith (set the fulcrum) in order to establish the tenets of faith often in distinction from other Christian groups. The seesaw that depicts a Christian’s relationship to grace—and therefore, to God—is theologically set, even if it doesn’t adequately represent all Scripture, or the real experience of the child of God astride that seesaw.

Does it matter which approach to faith we take? It matters only that our faith owns our doctrine. Jesus’ death and resurrection is truth that we appropriate by that faith. “Everything that is not from faith is sin.” (Romans 14:23) Little children somehow know that when daddy is on

the other side of that seesaw, it joyously works. They just need to climb on and most playground seesaws have moveable fulcrums. Is there a lesson here?

Stripping away all the theological phylacteries, the big words and deep philosophical analysis (in fulcrum terms: the mathematical calculations that best determine a fulcrum's location for balance), we can agree that a child-like faith or trust in Jesus is all He expects of us. A prayer of repentance and for mercy is our part that He might mediate on our behalf before the Father. His mediation is the fulcrum point (1 Timothy 2:5). In theological terms, the point where our free will and God's determinism (predestination) balance to bring about His will in our lives. The Cross is pure grace but how we appropriate its provision—yes, by faith alone, nonetheless—is a question of obedience.

## THE CHAPTERS IN OVERVIEW

*...the most private truth shared only with intimate friends, regarding the Savior's mission, His life, Death, and Resurrection kept hidden for all time past and generations of scribes and scholars but now manifested only to those who are His. -  
Colossians 1:26*

It seemed appropriate here to do what many writers do, that is, to give a brief synopsis or annotation of each chapter. These are Cliffs Notes, if you will, that hopefully will wet your interest in the most important subject you will ever study.

### Theories of Atonement

Theories that try to explain why the Savior died on a cross have developed out of much study over the centuries. Earlier explanations, known as Church traditions [These generally are now part of Catholic doctrine], gave way to later proposals after the printing press was used to print bibles [1452 AD. - AD means Anno Domini or year of our Lord, after Jesus was born on the first Christmas]. You might be surprised to learn that the Bible writers never wrote in terms of theories and, as already noted, this word "atonement" was introduced in the 1500's by William Tyndale.

There were theories floating around that were rejected by the Christian Church at the Councils of Nicaea (325 AD) and Chalcedon (451 AD) when the Church decided what was considered truth and what they saw as heresy [Scholars still debate their conclusions]. But these theories attempted to "look beneath the hood" of what happened on Calvary even though Jesus' Apostles were only concerned with teaching us the *benefits* from Jesus' death and resurrection. I am reminded when I needed my son, who wrote computer programs for a living, to help me get a program I was writing to work. He told me what to write, but when I asked him to explain why it worked, he simply said, "Dad, you don't need to know that." It was obviously over my head. I

think someday God will explain all to us, but for now, Paul and Peter and others only cared to point out how Jesus' death and resurrection works—works to enable us to life in harmony and peace with God.

## The Dogma

What's a "dogma"? It comes from a Greek word meaning "what seems good." We use it to explain what we believe as Christians. We mentioned already five of them that all Christians have in common but each Christian religion can add to this list. We also use the word "faith" or "beliefs" or doctrines or church teachings. Christianity has divided into "denominations," each one claiming the whole Christian truth, each one being identified by what we might call their "directives," another word for dogma we might use. We might also refer to them as "tenets" of faith or, a word I like to hold in reserve, the church "creed." The Apostles spoke of "traditions" which simply meant what they taught regarding the Savior, but I keep this idea separate from a study of dogma because the Apostles' traditions did not include the theories which have found their way into much of the dogma.

One does not have to be Christian to be dogmatic in one's opinions. But for us, *dogma* is a general term often used in discussing the principles by which Jesus ordered His own life. I think, if that's our goal, we best study the Beatitudes [the beautiful attitudes, I call them] that Jesus taught, but that's another book. So, for our purposes here, we focus on His death and resurrection (even though, as Martin Luther, a well known Lutheran from the 16<sup>th</sup> Century, would agree: how Jesus lived and how He died were very much connected).

So the chapter of "Dogmas" will include, among other things, something about: original sin, God's satisfaction in Jesus' death, something called the Simplicity of God, and, finally, some beliefs which separate Christians, sadly, into denominations. Dorothy Sayers, who was known for her crime novels but who is one smart Christian lady, in her book "*Creed or Chaos*," [page 50] observed, "The question 'What think ye of Christ?' lands the average man at once in the very knottiest kind of dogmatic riddle." But notwithstanding we maintain with Ms. Sayers [page 51], "If the 'average man' is going to be interested in Christ at all, it is the dogma that will provide the interest."

## The Simplicity of God

What is the Simplicity of God? We might have always thought of God as complex, mysterious, unsearchable, beyond our ability to figure out—and we would be right (Isaiah 55:9; Romans 11:33). In a nutshell: everything God is at one moment He is at all times or, said another way, when God administers justice, He does it lovingly. Unlike we, who compartmentalize our feelings and thoughts and even contradict ourselves or, at times, show favoritism, God is who He is always the same, always consistent, never disingenuous, never deceiving us (Numbers 23:19; Hebrews 13:8). Why look at this truth? A study of why Jesus died can only be answered in terms of God's actions. Jesus' Father was very much a part of everything that happened to Him.

## The Incarnate God

The "incarnation" is a major principle of the Christian faith which we need to look at more closely: Jesus was not just human; He was also God. Jesus referred to Himself as God's Son (John 3:18) and in the city of Chalcedon the Church wrote in its Creed (belief) that Jesus is "the same Son, ... the same perfect in Godhead and also perfect in manhood; truly God and truly man...." As they said at Nicaea "same in being" or "same in essence" with God the Father." I like the way Dorothy Sayers said it [page 11], "One thing is certain: if (Jesus) really was both God and man (and He was!), then when the man Jesus died, God died too, and when the God, Jesus, rose from the dead, man rose too because they were one and the same person." The exciting news here is that, in order to provide eternal life for us, two things needed to be accomplished:

1. *God* had to die, not just another human being, even a sinless one. "Laws unable to make sinful men obedient to God, God sent His own Son as a human being, Who took upon Himself the sentence of death for sin. Justice is satisfied and we, who believe, are now free to obey God" (Romans 8:3).
2. *Man* needed to rise again from the dead. "Now is Christ raised from the dead, having become the first of them who have died" (1 Corinthians 15:20).

- a. to show that resurrection from the dead was real. “We now have an earthly body made of dust, but we shall have a heavenly (an eternal) one” (1 Corinthians 15:49).
- b. to show that what Jesus’ death was suppose to accomplish, did, in fact, accomplish, that is, providing a new life in Christ for all who believe “He was delivered over to die for our sins and resurrected to show we were now free from the bondage to that sin.” (Romans 4:25).

### **Perspectives On the Cross**

Let’s take a walk around the Savior’s crucifixion in our study as a person might walk around something they wanted to inspect closely and note what it is composed of or what features it might have. We often are encouraged to take such a walk around some circumstance in our experience in order to alter how we view it, our perspective. Sometimes what appears as discouraging news might prove the best thing that could have happened. We might look back and even by employing introspection, reconsider how our choices in life might have impacted our lives for good or bad.

The question here for believers is how does our salvation, how does the Cross, impact us? In what practical ways, might we testify of its provision? What did Jesus do for us, provide for us, on Calvary? That’s the question behind this inquiry regardless of how little we might understand why He had to die to provide it.

There is a sense in which this chapter represents a new perspective in studying Jesus’ death. It is introduced here so that talking about Jesus’ suffering and His ministry to us from the Cross becomes less theoretical and more real. We become less concerned with why He died and more interested in how our life changed when we accepted His death for us by faith.

### **God’s Suffering Servant**

Isaiah was a prophet who lived hundreds of years before Jesus came but he seemed to know so much about the Savior and His reason for coming. Isaiah spoke at length about God’s “Suffering Servant,” which

we believe was Jesus. Isaiah also described Him as ordinary in some regards, marginalized as a nobody in others. (We might think such a person would stand out from the crowd as a superhuman, but we would be wrong.)

There is much here to see that goes a long way in supporting the Christian belief that the Bible must be God's book, because, how else could Isaiah have known so much about Jesus?

The prophet's writing was very different in the way He used words or how He described things. God's Suffering Servant, according to Isaiah, for example, became an offering, a *sacrifice*, for sin. Offerings are not unusual but what is different is that Isaiah prophesied that this offering would not be an animal but a *person* dying for, or being punished for, sins others committed. (Jewish ritual only used sheep and goats and a few other animals, but never a person.) In 45 other references to sin offerings, Isaiah stands alone where the offering is a *person*. This could only be the Savior.

Isaiah explained that this person's death would satisfy—yes, he used the word “satisfy”—God, in some way, in the matter of humanity's rebellion against Him (Isaiah 53:10). Yes, this generated centuries of discussion.

It is no surprise that when God shared this prophecy with him, Isaiah questioned, “Lord, no one will believe me and to whom else, Lord, will you reveal that the Savior, as an ordinary man, will come to be a sacrifice for sin. (Isaiah 53:1-2).”

### **Christ, Our Passover**

Our thoughts immediately go to Paul explaining, “For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed.” (1 Corinthians 5:7) and both John and Peter, two more Apostles, agreed (John 1:36; 1 Peter 1:19).

The Jewish Passover was a feast celebrated once each year. This Jewish festival occurs sometime around our Easter. Jesus ate His last passover meal with His disciples the night before His death. Luke, who was a physician and an amateur historian, recorded that Jesus told His disciples [These are now called Apostles], “I will not eat the Passover with you again until all prophecy is fulfilled and we can eat it again in the Kingdom of God” (Luke 22:16).

Christians don't celebrate Passover but our Communion tradition, which Catholic believers call "The Eucharist," is based on what Jesus said and did at that final Passover with His disciples. We call this meal His "Last Supper." Jesus took some bread to represent His body. He passed it around for each disciple to break off a piece and eat. Then, He took a chalice of wine representing His shed blood on the Cross and passed it around for each to drink from, calling it a new agreement between them and God. (Luke 22:20). [Their Jewish rituals would now be replaced by a new and more personal relationship with God.] He told them, according to Luke, "This is the last time I will drink of the fruit of the vine until I come into the Kingdom of God" (Luke 22:18). This became for us a memorial service each time we repeat this simple act (Luke 22:19). Paul explained "Whenever you eat bread and drink wine [some cultures substitute another drink] in memory of Jesus' crucifixion, you publicly celebrate and observe the Lord's death *until* he comes back" (1 Corinthians 11:26).

The Passover was originally a celebration of Israel's (The Jewish) *deliverance* from Egyptian slavery in Moses' day. Celebrating Jesus' death is, likewise, a celebration of freedom to serve God. Freedom is a restored relationship with God (reconciliation). Deliverance is forever free. This is a joyous occasion of the believer's eternal deliverance from all sorrows, all temptations, and all evil, typified in Scripture by a "feast" (Revelation 19:9).

Herein is not just the celebration of the Savior's death but the clearest indication of His subsequent resurrection from the dead. For, how else would He renew a meal with them—and us—otherwise than glorified with us in His Kingdom (Luke 22:18). "You shall eat and drink at my table," Jesus promised, "in my Kingdom" (Luke 22:30).

### **Christ, Our Representative**

What was happening in God's mind while Jesus was dying is something many Christians want explained. Perhaps, Paul began this inquiry when he wrote to one church, "Christ Jesus' love for us gives us no other choice but to share with all that they can have a restored love relationship with God. This we say, 'When Jesus died on the Cross, everyone of us died with Him! Being dead, then, we, too can be raised from death as different persons. We no longer rely on our own efforts for happiness and peace. Our happiness and peace comes from

Christ. We now can live for Jesus, Who died on the Cross and rose again (three days later).” (2 Corinthians 5:14-15). Paul could have added, “*as our representative.*”

You own stock in a company that is hundreds of miles across the country. They call for a meeting of all stock holders, but you can't make the meeting. If you own stock, you have a vote in the corporate actions decided by the company. But you don't need to go if you allow a “proxy” to represent you at the meeting. When your proxy votes, they record *your* vote, not their own. They represent you. They vote in your stead.

When Jesus was punished for sin, we were punished. He was our proxy. He was punished in our stead. Paul explained, “To explain, if we were together: His death, in our place, was our death, and it is true also with His resurrection.” (Romans 6:5).

### **The Righteousness of God**

The word *righteousness* is a very important term when talking about the Cross and Jesus' death. To be righteous can mean simply to do what is right but that begs the question, “according to whom?” Well, according to God.

If we are talking about God (He is a righteous God) we mean that He is just. Righteousness with God is justice. Paul tried to explain, “God delayed punishment for sin (during ancient times) that, now, through faith in Jesus' shed blood, He might demonstrate His justice (His righteousness) by reconciling with anyone who believes in Jesus” (Romans 3:25-26).

Righteousness is a quality or trait. We are talking about someone who genuinely does what is right because it is a principle that they live by. So when we talk about the righteousness of God, we mean He always does what is right and just. God always judges fairly. All this is a reasonable interpretation of the word, *righteousness*.

Paul proclaims the exciting news, “The righteousness of God, God's justice, has nothing to do with all the laws the Jews should have followed in Moses' day. God has shown us, who believe, that, in a totally different sense, *justice was satisfied when Jesus died.* God did the right thing by His justice, holiness, and love in Jesus dying for our sins” (Romans 3:21-22).

But how about our ability to do what is right in God's eyes. In the language of the Bible, when talking about us, as Christians, it means either to be "*made*" right, shown "*righteous*," or to be "*pronounced*" right.

If we, as Christians, always did the right thing, we could maintain that we were made righteous, proven or shown to be righteous. Or being made righteous could mean *becoming* righteous, evident in our getting better and better at obeying God. These ideas are debated within Christian circles.

Some say we are only *pronounced*, or *declared* to be, right—even though we aren't. Who gave us this honorary certificate of righteousness we never earned? Well, God. Of course we didn't earn it! Anything God gives us or does for us is believed to be free. [This is what God's *grace* is about.] He did this by sending Jesus to Calvary and then inviting us to belief or trust Him. He, then, declares us righteous.

Righteousness might also mean *justification*. Someone said, "just as if I had not sinned."

Never be in a hurry to understand all this. God is revealing His truth in lessons, one by one, as we trust Him. "God pulls back the cover on this mysterious idea, His righteousness, as we live for Him and trust Him, a little bit at a time." (Romans 1:17) You can only appreciate God's justice and the gift of His righteousness (these come together) by experiencing them. When God saved us, He made us new persons, forgiving us was the only "right" (righteous) and loving thing for Him to do.

We can only be righteous in the same sense God is righteous (1 Peter 1:15-16). He can call us righteous because He is conforming us into righteous persons (Romans 8:29).

## **Christ, Our Redeemer**

It is not uncommon for God in the Bible to use examples from life to explain deeper truths. Hosea became such a lesson (Isaiah 20:3; Hosea 1:2; 3:1). The story behind Hosea's marriage to his wife, Gomer, is actually God's story with Israel. Gomer had been a prostitute, whom God asked Hosea to marry, knowing all along the similarities that would surface between their relationship and His with Israel.

In those days married women were not called “wives” but property. The men who “owned” them were known as masters not husbands. There are still places in the world where this remains true. I mention this to clarify God’s intention for Hosea and, in fact, His intention with Israel. Hosea was to be a husband, not a master, to Gomer as a symbol of God’s interest in Israel (Hosea 2:16). God loved Israel (Hosea 11:1) and wanted Hosea to love Gomer (Hosea 3:1). God made it clear to Hosea that he was not to treat Gomer like property but as a husband loves a wife—in that society, a rather uncommon relationship.

During the course of their very rocky union, Hosea and Gomer had 2 sons and a daughter. They struggled to make a success of their marriage. God’s intent in instructing Hosea to marry Gomer was to give Hosea a sense of God’s relationship with Israel, who worshipped “other gods.” God’s unrequited love now became Hosea’s unrequited love. God’s pain became Hosea’s.

During their marriage Gomer had another affair. But God instructed Hosea to take her back. This wouldn’t be an easy visit to ask her to come home. Hosea found her being auctioned as a slave. Now the prophet needed to buy her back. Hosea paid 15 silver coins and bushels of barley for her release.

Buying her was known in Biblical terms as *ransoming* or *redeeming*. These ideas are not the same but can be aspects of the same transaction. To ransom simply means to purchase a slave. Their new owner does not need to free them. Hosea, in ransoming Gomer, did not mean her freedom. In fact, God didn’t want Hosea to divorce her. For a ransom price, she became his property. Since Hosea purchased her, she belonged to him. But no. God wanted Hosea to love her as a husband (Ephesians 5:25). God still wanted Hosea to know His heart toward Israel.

God’s intent for Hosea was not to ransom her alone but to redeem her. To redeem someone means to set them free. Hosea, in redeeming Gomer, even though she belonged to him, would now set her free to be his wife and he her husband.

When Jesus redeemed us, for the price of His shed blood on the Cross, two things happened: First, He bought us and we now belong to Him and second, we are now free from sin to obey or follow Him. Martin Luther, in his *Epistle to the Galatians*. [63-64], allegorically wrote, “The Law growls, ‘All right. If Your Son is taking the sin of the world, I

see no sins anywhere else but in Him. He shall die on the Cross.' And the Law kills Christ. But we go free."

The "other gods" in modern times, according to Paul, is greed, the love of money. A relationship with God and our love for Him keeps us from wanting to waste our lives in riches (Colossians 3:5). "You have been purchased for a price." Paul exclaimed, "Indeed, glorify God in all you do" (1 Corinthians 6:20). We are His own possession (Titus 2:14). We are in a love relationship: As Solomon spoke of his girlfriend, "My beloved is mine, and I am his" (Song of Solomon 2:16) The story of Hosea is worth looking into.

### **Christ, Our Brother**

A Christians is a part of a family of believers who share in common a love for Jesus. This sense of community is not a minor thing. Christians should, merely by getting together, become a vital support for each other in serving and following Jesus with renewed vigor and enthusiasm. We need each other in a very real sense. The Bible uses different terms of relationship. One of them is that we are God's children which makes Jesus our "brother" (John 1:12). In the language of Scripture, we have been adopted, which means, God's love for us is no accident of circumstances but a genuine choice on His part (2 Thessalonians 2:13). He wants us! When Paul thought of our redemption, he thought of our adoption into God's family (Romans 8:15, 23). He could not separate these. Salvation is not an 'I' but a 'we.' Christianity is a community who share in a common relationship with our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, God's Son.

About 2 percent of the U.S. population, we are told, are adopted. That's probably the number of hands that would be raised (if people are honest and open about it) if you asked of the average church congregation by show of hands to reveal who had been adopted. *And they would be wrong!* Ask them, how many loved the Lord? That's the true number! And this is an exciting revelation!

### **The Power of Christ's Forgiveness**

Jesus' death on Calvary for our sins in our place became a powerful proclamation of forgiveness—a message God wants every Christian everywhere to carry with them into their world. Forgiveness is not a word psychologists use or are comfortable with. The Church owns this

idea. It is a Biblical concept. It is God's creation even though it is basically a simple idea. When someone holds on to such negative feelings and thoughts as hate, grudges, revenge, and bitterness, they do themselves harm. To forgive means literally, in the language of Scripture, "to let it go." It completes a redemption because it supports the outward action with a corresponding inward one. When Hosea, who we spoke of already, bought back his wife to become her husband, he still needed to forgive her ... and, no doubt, she, him.

God paid a huge price in the death of His Son to free us from all the evil that was systemic in our nature and create in us a new heart, as another prophet, Ezekiel, explained it (Ezekiel 11:19). This is redemption (Ephesians 1:4) and forgiveness is a necessary part of it. Paul echoed the message. "The price of our freedom, our redemption," Paul taught, "was Jesus' shed blood which includes our forgiveness; these are two provisions of a multifaceted grace" (Ephesians 1:7).

I have chosen in this work to use this upcoming chapter to talk about our forgiving others. Like Hosea's experience, nothing exemplifies, nothing teaches the lesson of, divine forgiveness like God using us in our circumstances to demonstrate it. When we affirm Jesus' death as an act of God forgiving us alone, we have found a dogma but not the inspiration of that dogma that brings it to life. Unforgiveness coming with lingering hurts robs us of a future. When we forgive those who are, otherwise, unforgivable for things we accuse them of having done to us—when we let it go, for real—we not only get our future back but we could not preach a louder more emphatic message of God's love.

## **Christ, Our Message**

Paul resolved, "I have made up my mind not to participate with you in any discourse, unless we are discussing Jesus' crucifixion" (1 Corinthians 2:2).

All Scripture to be correctly interpreted must be understood in terms of The Cross. This even explains why Jesus, talking about His return at the end of time, referenced His work on the Cross. He summed up all history with this, the only thing of consequence, when all things are seriously considered, "When ...all these things (great tribulation) begin, lift up your heads, because your redemption, the full provision of the Cross, all the grace, freedom, and peace, is near." (Luke 21:28) Our completed freedom from all pain and suffering, our

completed redemption, is itself thanks to Calvary! [A lowering of the head is a sign of despondency, of expecting the worse. While an uplifted gaze is one of excited anticipation of something long prayed for, finally on the way!]

The Missionary Council meeting in Jerusalem in 1928 [*Classics of Christian Missions*. Page 339] concluded “Our message is Jesus Christ. He is the revelation of what God is and of what man through Him may become. In Him we come face to face with the Ultimate Reality of the universe; He makes known to us God as our Father, perfect and infinite in love and in righteousness; for in Him we find God incarnate, the final, yet ever-unfolding, revelation of the God in whom we live and move and have our being. ...Jesus Christ...through His death and resurrection...has disclosed to us the Father, the Supreme Reality, as almighty Love, reconciling the world to Himself by the Cross...”

It is basic to Christian thought to herald the Savior’s death as a substitute for ours. He died in our stead. Had He not died, there would have been no eternal life for you and I. This much we can accept as an irrefutable and basic truth. Jesus’ death was a requisite for our salvation—a necessary part of the divine plan to provide for that salvation. Mark records, “Then he began to teach them that it is right and proper for the Son of Man to suffer many things and be disapproved by the elders, chief priests, and scribes, be killed, and three days after that, rise.” (Mark 8:31)

The answer to the reason why Jesus felt compelled to go to His death is to be found within Him: His sense of justice, the driving force of His love for us, the unyielding desire to satisfy an internal want for our friendship, and the need to change us as well as forgive us to make it all happen. According to the theologians, then, Jesus’ death becomes a study of the nature of God: His love and holiness; His mercy and justice. Scholars call this God’s “inner necessity.”

And His death had to be public, and in that time, there was no louder voice, echoing across the world, than Jesus’ crucifixion. “For God loved the world...” (John 3:16) He must tell the world.

It has also been said that if He was sentenced to death (as He was) it couldn’t be the night raid of a mob; it had to be a criminal court—even if it only feigned legitimacy. And this, especially since He was dying for our sins to satisfy divine justice.

## The Chapters In Overview

Nor can He die in secret, in a quiet and peaceful death in old age in His own bed. When God gave His Son, He offered Him to a depraved and hateful creation. His death became a public event burned into our memories forever. The fact that dozens of prophecies foretold it only discloses the Divine heart while He, hanging there, proclaimed to fallen man what must inevitably come to pass because He couldn't "un-love" us. (John 3:16)

## THE MYSTERY OF GODLINESS

*And most certainly, the mystery of godliness is great: He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated in the Spirit, seen by angels, preached among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory. - 1 Timothy 3:16*

SINCE Ancient Israel's religious ritual was centered around animal sacrifice, an explanation as to why Jesus was sacrificed for sin wouldn't have sounded that unreasonable. The only difficulty would be: why not kill an *animal* instead of a man. This, in the Old Testament world, had always been sufficient to merit God's forgiveness. Or so they thought. But, as we already noted, according to Paul and the writer of the book of Hebrews in the New Testament, the animal sacrifices merely showed the *need* for God's forgiveness and reconciliation, but couldn't provide that restoration to friendship with God. Only the Son of God dying could actually provide such a reconciliation with God.

The writer to the Hebrews spoke more loudly than he knew because it was not just to his generation. The Old Covenant, the sacrificial system, of animals and other offerings, is now obsolete and although it is still cherished for its symbolism [what Christians call a "type;" The ritual still speaks to believers], it was going to "soon disappear" (Hebrews 8:13).

Most Christians are not of Jewish background. Most of us prefer logic and feigning enough smarts to reason an answer to some puzzling question. So, why *did* Jesus die? Did He *have to*? Our thinking is said to be *occidental* [That's with an 'O' - relating to the countries of the West]. The sacrifice of a Savior, to many Christians, still needs to be interpreted—even, justified. This became an ongoing dialogue through the centuries among Church leaders to, in some way, "clothe" the Savior's incarnation [God in human form] in a logical garb; so, when we looked at it, it appeared less oriental (Jewish) and more reasonable. We now live with a plethora of [many] theologies [explanations of

God's dealings with man]. But in this work, I will offer the line of reasoning that best suits me. [A chef should always cook to his or her own taste.]

### François Turretini

It makes sense to consider an idea proposed by François Turretini [17 October 1623 – 28 September 1687; also known as Francis Turretin], an Italian scholar, who believed that Jesus' death was *necessary* (the only way) to satisfy God's justice. (The word, righteousness, you recall, can mean, among other things, justice.) God felt, somehow, that it was the right thing to do to satisfy His sense of justice in having Jesus crucified. But Jesus didn't need to be punished; He didn't commit a single sin against God. This could only mean: He was crucified **in our place**, since we sinned, not Him.

This becomes a punitive measure [a punishment] which Jesus took for us, which we deserved but wouldn't have survived since the punishment was—well—death. The argument *against* this view maintained that this wasn't real justice, because a dead Savior is no Savior. (They forgot that the resurrection is a vital part of God's justice.)

Some might argue that this was vengeance, and vengeance is no justice. The Greeks advanced the idea of a social justice built on rehabilitating criminals not killing them. But the Bible is explaining a *divine* justice, and we should not always compare what God does with what we might think is proper. Stay with Scripture.

What Turretin did was provide five reasons why Jesus' death was true justice—why we can call it a righteous act of God. Turretin was seeing divine justice from the underside of the tapestry. He offered five reasons showing that Jesus' death was *not unjust*, because:

1. ***Jesus was human, too.*** He was God but also *human*. Sin was punished *in the same nature* in which it was guilty. "Now since we are human, He also likewise shared (in our humanity) in order that through His death, then, he might destroy the devil's power over us in our being all our lives enslaved to a fear of death, afraid of God's punishment. ... For this reason it was *necessary* that He was, also, human" (Hebrews 2:14-15, 17).
  - ***The law was not ignored or violated.*** Jesus crucifixion was not unjust as regards the divine law, for its honor

has been maintained by the perfect fulfillment of all its demands, through the righteousness of the Mediator; and by our legal and mystical union, he becomes one with us, and we with him. "The goal of the law was fulfilled in Christ to provide a justification for all those who believe" (Romans 10:4).

2. ***Jesus voluntarily went to the Cross.*** He took the burden on himself. "I have come to do your will" (Hebrews 10:9).
  - ***Christ's crucifixion was not in contempt of God's Judgment.*** Jesus willed Himself to go to the Cross.
3. ***Jesus had power over his own life,*** so that he could rightfully determine the circumstances that affect His own life. "I have the authority to appoint it to death, and again, the authority and right to raise it up again from the dead." (John 10:18 )
  - ***Jesus was not involuntarily, unjustly, mistreated,*** though, His trial was a mockery. Jesus voluntarily took the punishment upon himself, and had the right to decide concerning his own life and death, and also power to raise himself from the dead. "No one can take my life from me, contrarily, I give it voluntarily." (John 10:18).
4. ***Jesus was resurrected.*** He could not be held in death. If Jesus could be held by death, then he could free no one from its dominion, but He ***rose from the dead*** (1 Corinthians 15:17). "Concerning His Son, who came from the lineage of David, who took on humanity, He was powerfully restored to His place in Glory as God's Son, according to His divine nature, ***by His resurrection*** from the dead" (Romans 1:3-4).
  - ***No universal moral law or principle was violated*** by depriving an innocent person of life, for Christ, freed from death, ***lives forevermore.***
5. ***Jesus was sinless.*** He did not die for His own sins because He ***was sinless.*** Not being polluted by sin, he would not have to offer sacrifice for himself, but for us only. "For Jesus is eminently qualified to be our High Priest: godly, sinless, blameless, never a sinner, and now exalted above on God's Throne." (Hebrews 7:26)

- *There can be no cry of injustice claiming His death did not deal effectively with sin.* The sinner who accepts Christ is converted and made holy by Christ. (John 3:7).

Turretin looks back from the resurrection and the newness of life we share as believers and concludes that what happened at Calvary is thereby (by the power of the resurrection) to be thought of as *justice satisfied* because, simply put, God's plan worked! No injury is done to anyone by His substitutionary sacrifice. Hence he may justly take upon himself our sin and sorrows, and impart to us his righteousness and blessings. So there is no repeal or circumventing of the divine law, no derogation or relaxing its claims, because what we owed is transferred to the account of Christ, to be paid by him.

### A Medieval Transition

Why did Jesus turn Himself over to be crucified? There are four basic ideas church scholars offer which are possible from what Isaiah said: "God looked upon Jesus, His agony of soul, and was satisfied. By His knowledge, God's righteous servant will make many righteous. He bore their punishment." (Isaiah 53:11).

- ◆ Jesus' death was a *satisfaction befitting God's* nature. Jesus' death was an answer to something in God's character, who He is, how He rules in the Kingdom of Heaven, His sense of Justice. "God looked upon Jesus, His agony of soul and was satisfied."
- ◆ Jesus' death was *an example of the extreme love* of God for His creation. "By His knowledge" means "knowingly, fully aware of what He was willingly experiencing."
- ◆ Jesus' death was a sacrifice to ransom and *redeem mankind* [free them and us] from the bondage to sin. "God's righteous servant, will make many righteous."
- ◆ Jesus' death was a *punishment for our sins*. "He bore their punishment."

### Original Sin

God's issue with us begun with Adam. His sin, biting into forbidden fruit, was the original sin. St. Augustine, a Church Father who lived in

the 4<sup>th</sup> Century, coined the phrase, “original sin” to mean not Adam’s sin alone but a sinfulness that all of us since him were born into. The thought is that when God and Adam were estranged, their relationship severed, all of us lost that friendship with God. What I think happened was that God knew that just instructing someone to obey wouldn’t work; we needed new hearts (Ezekiel 36:26), transformed minds (Romans 12:2), and a new nature (2 Corinthians 5:17). So, God decided to call all of us sinners because He wanted to be merciful to all of us and send Jesus to die for all of us. (Galatians 3:22). As far as being called sinners, we lived up to the label (Romans 3:23).

You might think: that explains it. But, no.

Later Anselm, a scholastic and the Archbishop of the Church who lived in the 10<sup>th</sup> century, got into a discussion with Peter Abelard, a contemporary, who was, himself, a scholastic. Abelard taught that it wasn’t our fault that Adam sinned—which sounds quite reasonable, since I don’t recall being there. But he was saying that though Adam did the sinning, you and I got the blame.

Anselm, who believed in “original sin,” taught that there is a difference here between the proclivity [the tendency] to sin and actually sinning. We can thank Adam for the first but not the second. We have to own the blame—we are liable—for what we do that displeases God.

Abelard didn’t see a difference here between the tendency to sin (which we refer to as our “fallen” nature) and our freedom to obey or not obey God. In one swift move,...Abelard removed Anselm’s traditional understanding of original sin. Abelard did not see original sin as a state of fallen humanity. To him intention is required (you can’t sin by accident or ignorance). if we sin against God we do it willfully and for that act we alone are liable.

Abelard was a nominalist—I know, what’s with the big words! I mention it because he was influenced by the philosophy of his day, just like some scholars today believe what they believe because it is popular or taught in the schools. What is nominalism? Abelard taught that we shouldn’t be lumping all mankind, all peoples, in one group (an idea Paul would have disagreed with: “for *all* have sinned” Romans 3:23).

To Abelard, sin was not yet a moral debt but simply a disorientation of desire which needed to be mended, by Jesus’ death. Adam’s free-will together with his desire for the forbidden fruit needed correcting.

Then Thomas Aquinas, a Dominican friar of the Catholic Church, came along in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. He taught a divine justice, a punishment for sin, but not as a necessity, only as “fitting.” God could have saved us in any way He wished as long as it was in accordance with His love. The common opinion among the orthodox... is that “God neither has willed, nor could have willed to forgive sins, without a satisfaction made to his justice.”

It wasn't until Christianity, in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, splintered into different denominations that leaders like John Calvin saw Jesus death as a punishment for all sin, Adam's and everyone else's, committed knowingly or in ignorance—all of it—dealt with by the Savior's death on Calvary,

### **Who Talks about an Atonement?**

I asked my brother, who teaches religion in a Catholic high school what would be the best publication to read about the Catholic view of atonement. He professed there is no such term in Catholic theology. [Though I have since heard the word used on a Catholic religious radio station]. He directed me to research the “Sacrament of Reconciliation/ Penance,” the Catholic idea. Penance [confessing that what we did bad was bad] for Catholics is a practical approach dealing with temporal sin ( sins actually committed by the penitent), repentance [reaching the decision to never do it again], forgiveness, and sanctification [a change in behavior to guarantee it will never happen again]. This all comes through contrition [sorrow for sin], absolution [the priest affirming forgiveness from God], and repentance.

[You should be able to ask any Catholic for greater details as to why Penance is one of the Seven Sacraments. There is great value in seeking out a member of the clergy who is a trained listener to share with him (or her) your fears, griefs, and most of all your feelings of guilt or regrets, and, in strictest confidence with God's Word, come to a place of emotional and spiritual health through good counsel and something God came up with which we will look at later: *forgiveness*.]

There are a lot of religious terms here worth looking into. So, whether we are talking about atonement or penance, we are wanting to formulate a dogma about the Cross of Christ that explains the plan of Salvation and the path to eternal life. The logic of an atonement is a Protestant idea [a Protestant is a Christian who isn't a Catholic or of

the Greek or Russian Orthodox Faiths]. I am a, so-called, Protestant; I currently attend a Baptist congregation, but I am not protesting anything. William Tyndale, however, who first used the term, was indeed, protesting. Doctrinally, I am somewhat different from my brother, with whom, regardless, I have a solid and blessed relationship. Atonement, then, represents a line of reasoning intended to explain why Jesus had to die on the Cross.

The primary reason given, why Jesus had to die, was to, satisfy the “law” of God and thus, *justifiably*, reconcile to Himself all who seek Him. I prefer to use a natural illustration as an example, even if it is somewhat weak in comparison with God’s wisdom.

Each of us can find something about some persons that makes them ineligible to become our friends. It might be that they are heavy alcohol drinkers or their incessant use of illegal drugs or they might be abusive. What makes them so objectionable [the Bible word is “abominable”] is that our relationship with them would be defined by these characteristics. We would become mere enablers, reinforcers, of behavior that for us is not natural. The seeds of friendship and love do not germinate and grow in such soil. We can seek their friendship, but unless they change, that friendship is impossible.

In terms of God’s nature, Peter said it best, “We must become holy as He is.” Jesus’ death and resurrection somehow in the plan of God became our path to a new life. That’s the beginning of making us *like* Jesus. Paul explained, “God has determined to change us on the inside, not only in appearance, but in actuality, to be like Jesus” (Romans 8:29). What was so repulsive about us that God couldn’t stomach? “Sin.” Sin, like a spiritual cancer, is known more by its symptoms, than an actual diagnosis. Living in sin is living a life with no interest in God’s friendship. It is living outside His will.

### **The Mystery of God**

God’s approach to dealing with our estrangement from Him, and His plan through Jesus’ death to restore that relationship, Augustine referred to as *mysterious* and *profound* [Augustine’s “*On The Trinity*” 4.12.15]. Some scholars argue that a study of what we might think is moral or just, doesn’t really help explain God’s mind. They see God’s reasoning for Jesus’ death on a Cross for our sins as logically *elusive*, something which *escapes* us. Paul agreed, affirming, “God considered

all of us as sinners; so that, He might then be merciful unto us (in Jesus' crucifixion for our sin). God's wisdom is a treasure store of knowledge about Him, too deep to explain fully. He did things in a way we could never have even imagined" (Romans 11:32-33).

### **A Faith Inspiring Message**

I promise not to start quoting deep religious thinkers, but they did agree that God had His reason for Jesus' crucifixion. One of them called it "...a powerful display of both God's love of people and His hatred of sin, which has proved powerfully attractive throughout history in drawing people to faith in Christ. [Dr. William Craig's work, *"Atonement and the Death of Christ"* page 181]

### **What We Do Know**

Paul shared seven details that we might reasonably believe are needed to explain what really happened on the Cross. These are like clues to "the mystery of godliness" (1 Timothy 3:16).

- ◆ Jesus was God incarnate. "Though He was deity ... he became a human ... so that He might die —on a cross" (Philippians 2:6-8).
- ◆ Jesus volunteered freely to go to Calvary. Jesus told us, "No one takes my life from me, but I lay it down on my own. I lay it down by myself, and I am authorized to take it up again" (John 10:18).
- ◆ Jesus was sinless. "...being human, He was tempted in every way, yet without sin" (Hebrews 4:15).
- ◆ Sin leads inevitably to death. "The wages of sin is (always) death" (Romans 5:23; James 1:15).
- ◆ Jesus died for sin in our place "God shows his own love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). We could not become friends with God unless and until Jesus went to the Cross.
- ◆ Without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness (Hebrews 9:22). God's forgiveness became real to us after Jesus died on the Cross.
- ◆ The Provisions of Calvary are available only through repentance. "...God now commands all people everywhere to

repent" (Acts 17:30). In Ancient times God overlooked all the bad things people did but since Jesus died for our sins, He, now, wants us to repent.

### **Jesus' Substitutionary Death**

Taking these seven scriptures together, we cannot help but believe that the primary reason for Jesus' crucifixion had to do with our sinfulness, our need to be reconciled to God. If Jesus died *for* us, it is not a reach to say that He died *in our place*. In religious terms: if He died for us, His death is said to be *vicarious*. Because He died in our place, His death is said to be *substitutionary*.

In calling Jesus' death a sacrifice or offering for sin (Isaiah 53:10), we are describing His crucifixion in terms of the ancient ritual of sacrifice in which the animal's blood was poured out resulting in death [Leviticus 4 is more detailed]. So, His crucifixion can be spoken of in terms of His shed blood. The ancient sacrifices, as already pointed out, spoke to the *need* for forgiveness; Jesus' death *provided* that forgiveness.

The only question remaining to ask is: If Jesus' death was substitutionary, was it as a punishment or was it for some other reason? As a punishment, religious scholars called His death a *penal* substitution. But, as God was providing more than just forgiveness, there may have been other reasons why Isaiah said that God was "satisfied" with His death (Isaiah 53:11). Two other reasons are proposed which we must look into: God's love for us and His dealings with the evil introduced into the world through Adam's disobedience.

### **A Retributive Justice**

Turretin remarked, "God neither has willed, nor could have willed to forgive sins, without a satisfaction made to his justice" [Institutes of Elenctic Theology 110.14]. If you think about it, this makes sense to us. We also endorse reasonable punishment for wrong-doing. When Jesus died to endure our punishment, we call that kind of justice, a *retributive* justice.

But beyond this: We, also, are more prone to forgive someone who has not only felt sorrow for what they did to us but who has taken steps to move beyond the offense, never to do it again, and to seek a restored relationship with us. Jesus' death and resurrection provided

this for us, who believe. John described is as a “life in the Son” (1 John 5:11).

### **A Restorative Justice**

For Paul, Calvary was not just retributive but *restorative*. He was more poetic than John, but the truth is just as real, “I am alive,” Paul exclaimed, “but it is not the old me; my life now is all about Christ. I am still human, but what Jesus’ provided me through His death and resurrection, now, motivates and inspires me; it has given me purpose and direction, meaning and happiness. His faithfulness to me is life to me now! His love is, oh so, real to me! His crucifixion to me is everything!” (Galatians 2:20).

So, in a sense, we can agree with Augustine [Augustine’s Confessions, 10] who referred to Jesus as both *Victor* and *Victim*. Christ’s death was both restorative and retributive. As the Victor, He dealt decisively with sin and restored us to friendship with God. As the Victim, He endured our punishment and proclaimed God’s forgiveness. Simplifying this wonderful truth, Christians with unwavering faith herald the message: “saved by the blood.”

### **A Coherent and Plausible Way**

Sounds right but, now, there has arisen an academically savvy generation ‘x’ along with many millennials who ask, “How can this be?” They want more of an explanation. The connection between the death of a sinless Savior and our punishment for sinning against God is a gap their logic can’t seem to leap over!

So for logic’s sake and to explain our Savior’s crucifixion in the most reasonable way, many religious minds have thought up various ideas, some of which are clearly not biblical. They argue that Jesus’ death was

- ◆ a ransom paid to Satan,
- ◆ an outstanding debt paid to God,
- ◆ a way of appeasing God’s wrath
- ◆ an expression of love
- ◆ the risk of encountering evil men

Sacrifices from time immemorial have been an ubiquitous [found everywhere] practice which made it, until modern times, the perfect

explanation why Jesus had to die to save us from our sins. It still inspired our faith because, even if we did not realize how meaningful sacrifices once were in Old Israel in ritualizing true repentance and healing the spirit from an emotionally crippling guilt, we found them reasonable as an explanation for Calvary. But some still fumble at understanding why He had to die to provide such a forgiveness.

Augustine reasoned—a thought shared by many early Church Fathers—that Christ’s incarnation and death were not necessary for man’s redemption.” Gregory of Nyssa, who wrote a couple decades later, questioned, “... why does he [God] not affect his purpose by the mere exercise of His will, instead of working out our salvation in such a roundabout way, by being born and nurtured as a man, and even, while he was saving man, tasting death; when it was possible for Him to have saved man without subjecting Himself to such conditions?” [Catechetical Oration 17]. The short answer, obviously, is that it wasn’t possible for this cup of suffering to pass from Him (Mark 14:36).

Humanity was in bondage to sin, and couldn’t serve God until Jesus died and rose again. Basil the Great, another early Church Father, thought Jesus had to be God come in human body to be an unrefusable ransom offered the devil to purchase the release of his human captives.” We know now this is not correct.

The challenge we have is to explain the Savior’s death in what Dr. William Craig called, “a coherent and plausible way.”

### **Change the Story**

Sharon Baker in “Executing God” suggests changing the metaphor. We have sought to explain Calvary in terms of the animal sacrifices in Ancient Israel. We have used the metaphor of the market place and ransoming someone out of slavery. We have used legal language to explain Calvary in terms of, what we imagine to be, God’s judicial system. We have even saw Calvary in economic terms of a debt that needed to be paid and forgiven.

A major point Ms. Baker makes is that metaphors are culturally understood and this might mean changing the way we represent or describe some truth, in a story form that better explains that truth to our understanding. Describing God’s love or His free gift of Salvation, paid for by the Savior’s blood, is a story, perhaps, that can only be told by the personal witness of those whose lives are changed by it.

My thoughts went to Don Richardson's *"Peace Child."* His autobiography is the story of sharing the message of the cross—but not through sacrifice—with the Sawi people of the Netherlands New Guinea [now Indonesia]. To reconcile with a neighboring tribe a treaty of peace was expressed in the offer of an infant son that was by ceremony and agreement adopted into the warring clan. They called him their "peace child," which brought all conflict between the tribes to an end. Don Richardson spoke to them about Jesus, God's peace child, and we know God used the story to bring salvation to the Sawi people.

We can agree with Dr. Baker that "an educated faith is a stronger faith." [I mention Dr. Baker with some reserve.] She makes a point of emphasizing our current understanding of Calvary is not to be discarded. She is simply asking us to "consider the strengths and weaknesses and determine if there might be alternative ways that contribute to being the peacemakers that God calls us to be." I agreed that there is more to Jesus' death and resurrection than we have already discovered. We will be forever learning of, what Paul called, "the riches of His grace" (Ephesians 2:7).

## *THEORIES OF ATONEMENT*

As a young adult, I developed an insatiable craving to know all I could about the Word of God. This hunger is now just as strong, if not more so. But throughout the years my interest was in what Paul, and the other Apostles, understood about Calvary. Admittedly, Church Traditions and the dogmas that would become the teachings of various Christian denominations never interested me. Perhaps, this was a misguided oversight on my part since now I have to reconsider these teachings and, perhaps, glean some valuable insight as to the reason, or reasons, Jesus, on my behalf, surrendered Himself to such a cruel death.

The theories—and that is just what they are: still to be proven but thought as reasonable explanations of Calvary—are many and varied. They keep changing as cultures come and go. As society changes, some church teachings change with them. We already mentioned Peter Abelard, a medieval philosopher, who bought into a, then, popular idea that people should not be grouped or classified together, as example: all men are ignorant and all women are smart. [is this similar to modern profiling?]. Consequently, he couldn't imagine how all humanity could be legitimately sentenced to death because of Adam's sin. He couldn't describe our sinful behavior in terms of "original sin" or a "fallen nature." We also spoke of Rita Brock, an American Bible teacher, who doesn't appreciate the Church's worldview of suffering as a divine opportunity to learn more about a loving God. She was outraged at our expressing gratitude for Jesus' crucifixion. She is a modern teacher in a time in which self-expression, even rage, is preferred over silent prayer to a personal God, as an approach to psychological health. We believe healing is in the "atonement," something we will study later.

Our ability to interpret Biblical Truth that tells us about Calvary is very much dependent on how we interpret life and, in that regard, the language by which we explain things. To stay close to the message of

Scripture, while all around us are shifting views, takes a strong biblical faith. Perhaps, this might help simplify for us the following interpretations—theories—on the Cross.

### **The Governmental Theory**

The Government Theory of the Cross says that because God is the Supreme Being, He can do what He wants, and He, simply, wanted to send Jesus to the Cross. There can be no injustice in this because God is the Judge of all the Universal. He makes the rules! Hugo Grotius, a judge in the 17th century during the Enlightenment, a time when reason was replacing traditions in learning, argued that God wanted to use Jesus' suffering and death as a serious example to us what sin does. And then Grotius, being a judge, referred to Jesus as a "suretyship" [Defense 4.23]. In other words, Jesus assumed the responsibility for our sin. It was as if to say that God granted our bail with His Son's death as surety. The resurrected Savior now is responsible for us. So we go free.

The Bible does call Jesus our "mediator" (1 Timothy 2:5). His reason for going to the Cross was to represent a new arrangement—a new contract—between God and us, which was made possible by His death (Hebrews 12:24). The old arrangement was the system of sacrifices Moses introduced into ancient Israeli ritual. The new one, that now replaced it, was a one time death of the Savior, Jesus, Himself, for all sin (Hebrews 10:10).

The only problem with this idea was that most scholars were not or are not jurists. Most of us do not think in terms of contract law.

### **Jesus Ransomed Us From Satan (Cristus Victor Theory)**

Even Greek thought became part of the discussion around the Savior's death. The predominant thought among early church religious leaders was that Jesus' death was somehow an act of divine justice but not to appease God's wrath. Greek thinking based on Plato's Society, along with the works of a couple epic poets, Homer and Hesiod, thought that justice was best served by *rehabilitating* criminals, not punishing them. (This is called a *restorative* justice since it restores a prisoner to society.) This is not unlike the way today's judicial system works. The thought was that to punish for punishment's sake is vengeance not justice. Peace through forgiveness was the goal of

Plato's Society. Roman law joined Greek thought in the ancient world. They did not follow Moses' law which saw justice served by "an eye for an eye" (Leviticus 24:20).

And what does this have to do with Jesus' death? The early Christian theory of a "ransom" was at home in this kind of social order. To ransom mankind, in keeping with such reasoning, we are told, God had to pull off an ingenious deception. Wresting His creation by force from the grip of a devil who stole it in the Garden incident was not thought in keeping with His divine character: With violence being excluded as an option, some bargain had to be struck with the devil.

Continuing this line of reasoning: Gregory of Nyssa in the 4<sup>th</sup> Century surmised that Satan was being tricked by God into accepting the body of Christ in return for the souls of human beings, which he held under his control. Satan accepts the ransom and kills Christ, oblivious to the fact that he had no right to kill a sinless person. Having thus committed the ultimate sin, and having overextended his authority, with Jesus' resurrection, Satan was rightfully deprived of humankind.

This theory survived with little serious criticism until Anselm in the eleventh century disassembled it. Until then variations on this common theme were proposed. Augustine reasoned that Satan's power was delegated by God (As in Job 1:12). Augustine advanced the idea arguing that: "If ...the commission of sins ... subjected man to the devil, doubtless the remission of sins through the merciful reconciliation of God rescues man from the devil" {Augustine: On The Trinity 13.12.16}. Then there was also the view of the devil as a usurper. On the whole, however, the devil was regarded as having some rightful dominion over us.

Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons, who lived in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, subscribed to this position, and so did Athanasius in the 4<sup>th</sup> century. These were Church Fathers who are credited with promoting the Traditions of the Church which come down to us as dogma; so, such teaching should not be taken lightly.

Matthew 4:9 seems to suggest that Satan owned this world; for, he argued with Jesus in the wilderness, "I will give you all these things if you will fall down and worship me." Jesus never debated the point because Satan was self-deceived and a liar (John 8:44).

Origen, also took the metaphor of ransom literally. He reasoned that a transaction with Satan took place, in which Satan, unaware of

Christ's divinity, asked for the blood of Christ and therefore was deceived into committing the ultimate suicidal act. Origen thought that Christ's human soul was a ransom payment made to Satan in order to gain our release. "But to whom did he give his soul a ransom for many?" Origen questioned. "Certainly not to God," He thought. He reasoned, "The evil one had the power over us until the soul of Jesus was given to him as our ransom" [Origen: Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew XVI.8].

For Gregory of Nyssa, it would not be justice for God to disregard Satan's right over man. Adam freely gave himself to the tempter and sold himself into sin. "Satan's right over man must be respected," he maintained [Catechetical Oration 22].

But Gregory Nazianus (329 - 390) would sharply denounce the notion that Christ's death was a ransom paid either to Satan or to God. Gregory believed that Jesus was not a ransom but a victim of Satan's unjust attack. Christ offered Himself as a sacrifice to God "so as to snatch us from him who had us in his power..." [Against Apollinaris 69-72].

The biblical idea of Jesus being a ransom is well established in Scripture, as we have already noted. No other than the Savior, Himself, said so (Mark 10:45). But the idea behind Jesus' words is that nothing less than His death would "earn" our freedom from sin. There was no transaction implied. But another analogy is suggested in all of this: the payment of a debt.

### **Jesus Paid our Debt (Divine Command Theory)**

Anselm of Canterbury in his work "*Cur Deus Homo*" [Why God Became Man] reasoned "Sin, as a failure to render to God what is his own, incurs a debt. This debt has to be repaid to God, without there being any possibility of gratuitous forgiveness of this debt." Indebtedness is another word for liability. If we are guilty of sinning, we are liable, and if liable, we are indebted to God for His mercy toward us.

Anselm explained why Jesus had to be divine *and* human, "Our situation is compounded by the fact that in order to compensate God we need to give back more than we owed originally and by the gravity of our offense, having dishonored God, so that the debt we have incurred is of infinite proportion. So **no one but God could pay a debt** of such magnitude, but **no one but man is obliged to pay it**. It follows

that our salvation requires God become man" (Cur Deus homo 2.6) [emphasis added].

Anselm went on to say, "...this particular debt cannot be paid." That is, sinful humanity cannot afford to repay this debt. God requires a sinless holiness before He would expunge the record of our sins—before He could reasonably forgive us. Would we continue to forgive the debt of an eternal borrower? Isn't it reasonable to assume that at some point we go from getting deeper into debt to paying it off. Likewise sinning incessantly, while presuming to borrow from an infinite source of God's mercy, makes God's forgiveness gratuitous. Anselm, astutely, contended this unreasonable and unscriptural. Anselm argued, "If anybody imagines that God can simply forgive us in the same way we are to forgive others, he has not yet considered the seriousness of sin." [1.21]

So Anselm proposed, "...there are two options left for the sinner: either punishment or satisfaction." To many, this is a distinction without a difference, since, our freedom from the bondage to sin was paid for with the Savior's blood. But the language suggests a difference. What is that difference between these two notions: a punishment for sin or a satisfaction for sin?

Punishment is inflicted on the debtor; satisfaction addresses the debt. When Jesus died He brought an end to sin in order to set the sinner free from its bondage, as we have been saying, "The Lamb of God has taken away the world's sin" (John 1:29).

Jesus told the parable of the "Unmerciful Servant" (Matthew 18:21-35) which we must study in detail later when we discuss forgiveness. In raising the subject of God's forgiveness, Jesus uses this parable to talk about debt. It was not the Jewish practice to maintain a debtor's prison, since repayment in such cases was highly unlikely. The same is true of capital punishment. They can't repay if they're dead. So, the term "satisfaction" has to imply a form of discipline, an arrangement, that allows for a debt to be paid without destroying the debtor. [We will explain in detail later the word "punishment"]. But for now, we can say that Jesus' crucifixion was a precision [a coup de grâce] strike against evil, taking out the sin, satisfying the debt, but freeing the sinner to live now reconciled to God.

What's being said here—and you must put on your thinking caps—is the difference between a retributive justice and a restorative one.

Jesus' death is said to be *retributive* [a punishment] in that His death paid the penalty for our sins. It is said to be *restorative* because through His death and resurrection, we can reason that, regarding sin, we are dead with Him and now in Christ we are alive in a vibrant relationship with God." (Romans 6:11)

### **The New Testament Word for Debt**

The word *debt* is another word for liability. Jesus died accepting the liability (the responsibility and the punishment) for our sins. This can be explained in terms of the debt of sin we owed God which Jesus took upon Himself. The one verse that has been used to explain Jesus' crucifixion in terms of our indebtedness to God is in Paul's letter to the church at Colossi. One translation reads, "Jesus canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness...." This translation is very popular [five other English translations say the same thing]. One scholar, famous for his knowledge of the language, called this "a signed confession of indebtedness" because the word *indebtedness* is literally a handwritten note of something owed—an I.O.U. In other words, we might say, "Jesus paid our debts on the Cross." The idea of a debt of sin is obvious in Jesus' teaching (Matthew 6:12 compared with Luke 11:4). The concept of debt, scholarship reasons, is based on God's own nature. The character of God himself necessitates a punishment for sin.

But there are other possible interpretations, less known, for this verse, that might be considered. One of the earlier translations read, "*the handwritten dogmas that condemned us.*" This verse reminds us of something Paul told another church, "Jesus, through His death, made the body of regulations (dogmas) no longer meaningful (effective)" (Ephesians 2:15). In other words, all those animal sacrifices that symbolized Jesus' crucifixion, now, since He died and rose again, are no longer important as they once were. Jesus clarified what Paul was really saying. In substance He declared, "I did not come to invalidate Moses' instructions. I came to fulfill them, since they represented my work on the Cross" (Matthew 5:17).

What was Jesus talking about?

- ◆ Was this the many instructions concerning the sacrifices that only emphasized humanity's need of a reconciliation with God but didn't provide it? OR

- ◆ Was it the punishment owed us for breaking the moral code (sinning), including breaking any of the ten commandments?  
OR
- ◆ Both?

I think, both.

I told one girlfriend, back in my early teens years, that I loved her. Her reaction was classical: her countenance went blank. She didn't know how to respond to that. The Old Testament is the story of a broken hearted God whose love for His creation went unrequited. Until Jesus came to provide a way to restore our friendship with God, His love didn't make sense to them, either. Moses' instructions [over 600 of them], some ceremonial and religious, some practical and moral, were all expressive of God's heart, what was important to Him, His principles by which He governed, and ultimately, His love for us. But it all seemed to some like a fairy tale; to others, just another religion. But Christians now are beginning to understand and to sense that the estrangement between them and a loving God was on them and that Jesus addressed the problem of our reconciliation with the God Who, simply, wanted our love.

[Just a note that some might find interesting: the actual word for "debt" is used sparingly in the Bible (Romans 8:12) and never about the Cross. This doesn't mean that what we have already said is incorrect. The Bible doesn't use the actual word to symbolize Christ's crucifixion but, nonetheless, we are indebted to the Savior for His faithfulness and love.]

Speaking about "the Law," all those do's and don't's in the Bible, Paul saw them as something "good" for us (Romans 7:16) because they reminded us of our sinfulness and our need of a Savior.

### **Jesus Appeased God's Wrath (Substitutionary-Satisfaction Theory)**

Thomas Aquinas, one of the leading voices in the Church in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, spoke of God's "severity" [*Summa Theologiae* 3.47.3 cf. 3.48.4]. God will not forgive, Aquinas maintained, without some form of penalty. Does this mean when God is enraged at sin, heads are always going to roll!? Many times, in the story of the Bible, God displays intense anger. An example? God warned Israel whom He rescued from

Egyptian slavery, that they should be considerate toward strangers [another way of saying this: “God accepted you; you accept the strangers among you, too! God took care of you; you take care of the widows and orphans, also!] Otherwise, God exploded, “I shall be so enraged, you are all dead men” (Exodus 22:24).

The idea of wrath depicts God breathing rapidly, puffing air out through His nostrils—hot air. We would say, He was hot with rage!. One scholar called it “like setting fire to straw” which indicates not only how angry He got but how spontaneous, “flying off the handle,” was His fury. None of this suggests that God is reckless, but rather, that He is passionate. His feelings are always in sync with His wisdom; yet, that does not mean He acts in some mechanical, disinterested way. No, His heart, as well as His head, is in the game!

God has strong feelings; He has infinite feelings! When it comes to His love, we like the sound of that. “His mercy endures forever” is a phrase found 41 times in the Bible. God is always wholehearted in all He does and He has a big heart!

But Gregory, the Bishop of Nyssa, cautioned [in his *Enchiridion* 10.33], “Wrath is a term borrowed from the language of human feeling.” Israel making images of animals as religious relics to worship used to make God furious—mad with rage. And God doesn’t “pull His punches,” something we need to consider. The story of the “Golden Calf” is one of the clearest records of this (Exodus 32). The Hebrews [The Jews were called “Hebrews” at the time] built this image while Moses was detained in a nearby mountain getting the ten commandments. To say this upset God is an understatement. Think about it. How would you feel if your spouse or your best friend was always thinking of you, judging you, interpreting what you said and did, in terms or comparison with, someone they idolized whom they read about in a magazine? Why aren’t you more like ....? What if they never got to know the *real* you because they were always fantasizing about someone else! Can you begin to understand how God felt about idol worship?

The “Message,” one of the translations of the Bible, has God saying to Moses, who was trying to calm the great heart down (Exodus 32:10), “Let me alone now, give my anger free reign to burst into flames and incinerate them. ... I’ll make a great nation out of you.”

Now, before we think this too severe. Tell me how you might react if you caught your spouse, whom you would die for (see where we're going here?) in an affair! That's how God saw it. In fact, God warned His people that they should call Him, Mr. *Jealous* (Exodus 34:14). To say that sin makes God dangerous is somewhat an understatement. Moses, while praying for the Hebrews, after he ground that statue to powder, reminded God of His reputation with the Egyptians. Then Moses begged God not to do this. Moses called it "evil" [The word, evil, speaks of a catastrophic event].

If this is a picture of God—and it is—we need not wonder why some theologians [these are scholars who study God] saw Jesus' death as *appeasing* God. Someone had to be punished for our sins!

Did you ever burn with anger, so much so, that, you needed more than an "I'm sorry" from whoever offended you? Not to get ahead of ourselves, but, "I'm sorry" is a sign of penance but not repentance. To deal affectively with sin, more needs to be done. Justice needs to be not just retributive but also restorative, like we already talked about [We'll be saying more about all of this later]. God needs some guarantee that we will not do it again—at least not in His kingdom when we get there. That guarantee, Paul spoke about (2 Corinthians 1:22). He called it God's pledge that what His Spirit is doing in us will reap the full benefit when we get there. The writer to the Hebrews (Hebrews 6:5) said we have tasted [very poetic] of God's goodness, promised in the Bible, and there is far more to come.

So when Jesus died on the Cross, God's unrequited love, His broken heart, His moments of anger, were somehow answered. God was satisfied with what His Son did there for us, and that is possible not just because Jesus took the punishment (retributive justice) for our sins in our place but because, through His death and resurrection, He provided a way to guarantee that sin could be brought to an end in our lives, that our friendship with Him could be restored (restorative justice) forever.

### **Jesus Took Our Punishment (Penal Substitution Theory)**

I want to quote, Henry Wace, the Dean of Canterbury from 1903 to 1924, in his work, *The Sacrifice of Christ: Its Vital Reality and Efficacy*, page 16. He argued, "A law which can be broken without an adequate penalty, is no law at all; and it is inconceivable that God's moral law

can be violated without entailing consequences of the most terrible kind. ... And can it reasonably be supposed that the most flagrant and willful violation of the highest of all laws—those of truth and righteousness—should entail no such results?"

Jesus being punished because of us is an idea we, therefore, should not avoid, if we are serious about the truth about Calvary.

### **Punishment**

There are two words in the Greek for *punishment* in the Bible. One, means to defend the honor of the punisher who receives satisfaction in afflicting pain on an offender. Although akin to the idea of vengeance, punishment need not be vindictive, especially if it is required by law. The other word is corrective. The first is retribution for evil inflicted. The second, discipline.

Aristotle [sorry for not offering you an aspirin for your headache] tried to explain this difference: The question is hidden away in the mind of the punisher. Is he doing this to satisfy his rage and defend his honor? Aristotle called this retribution. Or is he punishing someone to deter recidivism [enough pain that makes them think twice about doing it again], as a correction?

From pagan inscriptions, we learn that *only retributive justice* is spoken of. Violation of cultic law brings retribution and only confession of the offender's guilt can bring back the deity's gracious favor. Sacrifices are intended to appease the deity's wrath, to fulfill (Aristotle's word for "to satisfy") their outrage over being dishonored or disobeyed.

The word the theologian likes to use is "propitiation." The use of this term says that Jesus *pleased* God by dying for our sins. The suggestion is a retributive justice. [I don't like the word, propitiation, even though it has been in use at least since the 4<sup>th</sup> century. Nor am I interested in using it.]

Let's speak of punishment as retribution, and "chastisement" as correction or a restoration of order, friendship, right from wrong. Now, let's ask the Bible. The Bible does speak of a severe punishment, torment, but the words used never refer to the Cross. Scriptural silence, however, does not mean that this isn't true; for, Isaiah's 53rd chapter is

the message of a *vicarious* [for us] affliction Jesus took on our behalf. This might be viewed as a punishment.

But Isaiah preferred to use the word “chastisement.” He prophesied that “the *chastisement* of our peace was upon Jesus” (Isaiah 53:5). This term is primarily associated with the proverbs of Solomon where he addresses parental instruction and the need of children to be taught which sometimes means discipline—but never, hopefully, death.

Punishment in the Bible is eternal and has nothing to do with those who love Jesus (Matthew 25:46). The word punishment went from chastisement to retribution because it lost its use as a corrective force and became more a final solution; so, the New Testament only uses it in the context of final judgment. It might be said that Jesus' crucifixion was a final judgment (“it is finished”) on our sins and the “old us” (Romans 6:6) but it would have been somewhat clearer had the word been used in that context—it was not.

Our faith was never dependent on our knowing exactly what this all means, anyway, only that it was Jesus who was that sacrifice for our sins. Nevertheless, let's be cautious about comparing God's reason for doing what He does with what sounds natural and reasonable to us. Getting back to what Henry Wace said, we need to proceed with an open mind and heart when talking about the “law of God.” Some form of punishment or correction was required because of who we were without Jesus, and Jesus took that punishment and correction for us. We are merely recipients of such a mercy. Later we will talk about this as the “Wondrous Exchange.” It's awesome!

## **Jesus Displayed Unwavering Love (Moral Influence Theory)**

It might surprise a lot of Christians to learn that Jesus' death as a punishment for sin was not an early explanation. That God would *not* forgive unless Christ bear the punishment for our sins was proposed by the scholastics of the 11<sup>th</sup> century. Forgiveness leading to a peace with God was deemed more reasonable than the idea of submitting the Savior to a punishment equal to the sum of our sins. Augustine thought that Christ's death was a *demonstration* of how greatly God loved us. “God's love is proved,” he wrote [in *On the Trinity* 13.10.13:] “in that Christ should, without any evil ... of his own, bear our evils. “ Jesus' own words may have suggested this to some theologians, “A

greater love than this no one has that a man would purpose to give his life for his friend .... I have called you friends..." (John 15:13, 15). Even the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11–32) has led some to maintain that God forgives without punishment.

You might recall earlier we spoke of the Greek's idea of justice, not through punishment, but through forgiveness and restoration to peace and harmony with others. Jesus' example of a love that would lead Him to His death, was thought to stir the soul of the penitent and lead them to peace with God. Peter Abelard taught, in his study on the book of Romans, "Such a demonstration of love has the power to evoke in us a similar love." The ground upon which God forgives sins was, according to Abelard, not a matter of penalty for sin but a love aroused in us when we contemplate our Lord's death.

So where are we today? Does the love of God seen in the death of His Son, at all, impact our decision to, at least, *want to* reconcile with God? Many believe so, but this alone doesn't adequately explain Calvary. Jesus still *did* die *in our place* for our sins. Perhaps, in an effort to stay as far away as possible from any pagan idea, of appeasing a wrathful God through sacrifice, some have decided to herald the Cross only as an act of forgiving love, forgetting that Jesus' death was also a penal [punishment] satisfaction answering to divine justice, both retributive and restorative. Both in the name of justice and love, Jesus died *in our stead*.

A word about "love." Love is merciful. In fact, the Biblical words for love carry both meanings. But, and here's the disconnect, if Jesus' death was only a display of love, how is it merciful? To show mercy, He had to die *in our stead*. We could argue that: notwithstanding His display of love, some form of 'punishment' remains a necessary condition of the full manifestation of divine mercy.

### **Postmodern Moral Theories**

The language of today in which words achieve new nuances, and even new meanings, has reinterpreted Calvary. Nothing is more symptomatic of this change than what has happened to the meaning of *sin*—the *sole reason* why Jesus came and died in the first place. In today's world, Jesus' crucifixion reflects a sympathetic support on God's side and no longer a discipline or punishment for sin. The sciences have embraced social and psychological explanations for an

immorality in terms of human frailty, genetic deficiencies, and illness, weakening any theological definition of sin.

Dr. Sharon Baker in her work, *“Executing God,”* had a lot to say about the current generation’s endless (and I might add, frustrated) search for meaning and happiness. In my opinion, they have forsaken a true understanding of the rift between God and us and how Jesus’ death brings us back together again. Modern thinkers label Christian dogma as “rigid” [page 148]. The modern way of seeing Christ’s “vicarious” death is to think He suffered *with* rather than *instead of* humanity. His death was God’s way of experiencing human suffering—we might say, on our level to bring us up to His level. The final conclusion (are you sitting down?): “The true sacrifice of Jesus lies not in the literal shedding of blood but the inward condition of his heart of love revealed by the outward giving of his life (and only) symbolized by his blood” [Page 160].

Postmodernists are repulsed by violence (so they say). God does not need to punish Jesus. Retribution is a human invention based on an understanding of justice which is—by postmodern thinking—a tool of those in power more than “fairness” in protecting society.

Postmodern thinkers have brought back the word “scapegoat” to explain Jesus’ death. Christ became God’s scapegoat, through Calvary, wherein God mimicked the evil He wished to end, to satisfy a social need for ultimate justice and to reestablish social order.

### **Liminality**

What a word! It speaks of occupying a position on both sides of a boundary, which Jesus did because He was totally human and also God.

To explain: Jesus lived during His sojourn here as an outsider, an illegal, “He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him.” (John 1:11 ) Liminality says that Jesus, the God-man, both God and man, dwelled in the place between the Father’s absolute holiness and our sinful humanity. Jesus was able to accept us as outsiders: non-judean, publicans, sinners, and—yes, in a public sense— women, even those of ill-repute, *because He was an outsider*. His kingdom accepts all (who accept Him). This is the message in the parable of the marriage supper, “Then the master told the servant, ‘Go out into the highways

and hedges and make them come in, so that my house may be filled.” (Luke 14:23)

As God incarnate, Jesus is also called a hybrid, i.e. both God and man. It is His hybridity that postmodernism imagines God used to mimic evil.

How so?

It is in keeping with this line of reasoning, God is called a trickster. This is ingenious logic (though wrong): God tricked us into thinking He was offering His Son, when it was really *Himself* in human disguise. “As the Father’s love moves him to give himself (while also remaining himself) to the Son, the Father moves into a liminal place by letting go of his divinity and his divine status (while also retaining them).”

Don’t you love philosophy! I needed to simply this by an example. Let’s say, I took 20 million dollars and set up a charitable trust to meet the needs of the poor. The money would be invested and the dividend or gains would be distributed yearly, maintaining the principle as seed. Then, I quit my job, sell my house and find low rent housing. I am then eligible for assistance from *my own fund*. Let’s say, that even though I leave the management of this fund in the hands of others, the trustees, I retain ownership (as a revocable option) of the fund. At any time, I can grab my millions and go on a world cruise or whatever. Am I a trickster? You decide. Is not my charity real? Do I genuinely care about the poor or is this to be seen as a game to flaunt a pretend generosity—peacock style—and feed my pride?

So what about Jesus? It is said, He could have called 10,000 angels to rescue Him. Heck! He didn’t need angels, He was *God*. He willingly gave His life and on His own took it back through His resurrection from the dead. We don’t know, at all, how Jesus felt and thought, being God in His humanity—no more than I really know how it would feel to be a poor millionaire. What we do know is that it is true that God came down and donned the cloak of our humanity in order to die for our sins.

### **Christ, a Scapegoat**

Scapegoating is historically something that works, though ethically, it shouldn’t. Scapegoating is deceptive. Jesus’ death, according to an erroneous postmodern thought, was a form of scapegoating. Before explaining, if possible, how this works, let’s look at some examples.

Blaming Christian's for the burning of Rome and killing them took the spotlight off the Emperor Nero, who really did it. The Germans during World War 2 could get away with an attempted genocide of the Jewish nation by blaming them for undermining the German interwar economy—thus providing a scapegoat as a sacrifice for the good of the society.

If this doesn't sound reasonable, it's probably a good sign that you are not a postmodernist. The simple universal truth about a scapegoat is that society will accept their sacrifice for the good of the society. So, when the Union during the U.S. Civil War, lost at the second battle of Manassas or Bull Run, morale was tanked. President Lincoln needed a scapegoat, someone who could be shamed and punished for the defeat. General Pope was that man even though history would exonerate him. He was banished far from the Eastern Theater into the Dakota's. The point of a scapegoat is offering a reasonable explanation that people will accept. Control the narrative by finding someone else to blame.

Postmodernists imagine that "God disguised the murder (of a Savior) so that it would appear as a Messianic event." S. Mark Heim wrote [in *Saved from Sacrifice: A Theology of the Cross.*], "Jesus didn't volunteer to get into God's justice machine. God volunteered to get into ours. God used our own sin to save us."

Since violence is a non-starter in a postmodern world, justice is better served through scapegoating. Christ in this context became a victim of Roman and Jewish fear of losing their power. He wears the martyr's crown of an overcoming, forgiving, love that those who follow Him proudly herald as true justice.

God didn't use our own sins to save us. He saved us *from* them.

## The Work Of Christ

Theory	Christ's Work	View	Purpose	Reason	Aspect	Christ is Made Unto Us (1 Co. 1:30)	The Spirit's Work John 16:9
Substitution/ Satisfaction	Savior	Objective	Penal: Satisfies Himself	guilty	Satisfaction	Justification	Sin
Cristys-Victor	Victor	Classic	Overcomes the devil	in bondage	Triumphant	Redemption	Judgment
Moral Influence	Teacher	Subjective	inspires us New Life	apathetic	Regenerative	Sanctification	Righteousness

All three of the major explanations of the death of Christ contain biblical truth and can to some extent be harmonized, especially if we observe that the chief difference between them is that in each God's work in Christ is directed toward a different person. - John Stott. p. 226

It is from him that you are in Christ Jesus, who became wisdom from God for us — our righteousness (justification), sanctification, and redemption. - I Corinthians 1:30

## THE DOGMA

*Perhaps the greatest sin in the world today is that men have begun to lose the sense of sin. - Fastiggi*

THE dictionary defines a dogma as “a principle or set of principles laid down by an authority as incontrovertibly true or not able to be denied or disputed.” And the dictionary uses as an example: *The Trinity*. Historically, traditions, like the Trinity, have been considered dogmas because the authority supporting them has been the Church. But dogmas must be supportable by biblical sources as well. The trinity is clearly referenced in Paul’s letter to the church at Corinth (1 Corinthians 12:3-4). What we should not support is the use of analogy simply because it resonates with how we live, or something is more reasonable to our way of thinking because we can relate to it by experience. God is clearly wiser than us (Romans 11:33). Biblical scholars are forever trying to recognize all the details of God’s wondrous and eternal plan to rescue us from ourselves and prepare us for His heaven. No one, however, yet knows all the details, and thus, we have been inspired by God’s wisdom to live by faith. Let’s look at the dogmas which relate to the Savior’s crucifixion, what the theologians are labeling: *undeniable*.

### Divine Justice

In Romans 3:25 Paul concluded that God did what He did on the Cross “to be just.” Calvary had something to do with God’s justice. We can affirm this in Paul’s comment to the believers in Rome when he used the word “condemnation” (Romans 8:1) to refer to a judgment, a judicial pronouncement, a sentence issued from a judge at the end of a trial. The only other place Paul uses this word is earlier in his letter, chapter five, where he began to talk about the law and to explain Jesus’ death in terms of the Law which Moses promoted. For us, who are not at home in lawyer talk, Paul’s language here is messy and maybe a bit

cryptic [puzzling] because he describes what happened to Jesus on the Cross in dealing with the sins of the world in terms of the law. (Perhaps, it should be said that God's courtroom works a bit differently from ours.)

While Jesus was on the Cross, He was on trial—or more accurately our sins were on trial. And God was seated on the bench (the Bema)—I can see Him wearing His judicial robe. Then, Romans 5:20 in our language means, “The charges were read.” Paul uses a word for “sin” meaning all sinful acts (here might be cause for appeal because the word used included all sins committed even *before* the law was written—*ex post facto*.) But we don't want to appeal it. Actually we can't. In verse 16 Paul, reading the transcript of this case, exclaimed that we were acquitted of every charge. (The word, “acquitted” isn't quite right.) There was some kind of “plea deal” made between Jesus who represented us in mediation with God, the Judge, (Hebrews 9:15) and He let us off.

Did He drop all charges? No. Not exactly. Verse 19 informs us that Jesus faithfully followed some instruction(s) which brought our freedom. Some Christians see this life as probationary. Others say we are totally free! Free to go. We are encouraged to live free from sin, though. (That's the 6<sup>th</sup> chapter of Romans).

But what if going forward we break the law again—after all, we are only human? (That's the discussion in chapter 7).

Christ's mediation is ongoing. I think I see it, now. We were released into His care! (Romans 8).

A very interesting legal note here: Paul called us “justified” not acquitted. Justification is the opposite of being sentenced. It is the same word translated “righteousness” in most places. This will prove an interesting study later.

This has been called “The Paschal Mystery.” It makes sense to say the provision of a divine grace could be explained as a divine justice that is reasonable to the heart of God. As Paul explained, “...from many trespasses came the gift, resulting in justification” (Romans 5:16).

### **A Penal Substitution**

If Jesus was punished, since He had done nothing wrong to warrant such a punishment (Hebrews 4:15), He must have been punished *in our*

place. The word, punishment, as we have already discovered, is not the Biblical term used to explain Calvary; so, is there no other way to interpret Peter's thought (1 Peter 2:24) or the writer to the Hebrews explanation of God's self-sacrifice (Hebrews 9:28) or Isaiah's prophecy (Isaiah 53:12)? All of them voiced the same refrain, "Jesus bore our sin."

Isaiah, as we know already, used the term "*chastisement*" (Isaiah 53:9) instead of "punishment." His reason, we might guess, was simply that there was in his language no word for "punishment." Perhaps, the idea of a punishment was hidden in the language. A person was, at times, considered guilty of something terrible because the consequences usually associated with sin were self-evident in their circumstances. (When Cain killed his brother Abel, he became a wanderer. He was in a constant search for peace which alluded him. Genesis 4:13). This is how the ancients understood life.

A better choice of words to indicate punishment might be the phrase already used by both prophet and apostle: "to bear sin." But only on rare occasion when someone is liable for some wrong they have done, are they said "to carry" their *own* sin (Numbers 18:1).

A *sinless* Savior carried our sins. One person carrying the sin's of another is a euphemism for *forgiveness*. There is an interesting verse that references the Jewish priest "carrying" the sins of the congregation and allowing God opportunity to show them mercy (Leviticus 10:17). Even then, thousands of years before Jesus came, God was thinking of His Son and a cross. "Christ became both our High-priest" (Hebrews 9:11) and the offering (Ephesians 5:2).

But to see Jesus' death as a punishment, as "penal," shouldn't we be asking what law required it so? Where in God's Word, or in a covenant agreement, or as a requirement of justice, is the decree that Jesus must be punished for our sins? Recall that, for Jesus and Paul, punishment is spoke of as an eternal judgment at the end of time (Matthew 25:46).

I don't mean to suggest Jesus did not have to die. He made it clear that He had to, how else would Scripture be fulfilled? He alerted His disciples, "This *must* be!" (Matthew 26:54). The very words Jesus spoke, "I have to; it must be, my death on the cross is necessary" are not the voice of despair or being resigned to circumstance [that's another word not used here] but words that speak of obligation in obedience to God. So, we can say with a biblical confidence that God

did require (decree) Jesus' death on Calvary and since He was bearing my sins and your sins—even if we call it “forgiveness,” He died and we can describe it as a punishment.

There is another reason we interpret all this as Jesus taking the *punishment* for our sin upon Himself on the Cross. (Got your thinking cap on?) Jesus was reconciling us to God (2 Corinthians 5:19). There is so much more to say about this but for now: The Bible is talking about our *relationship* with God. While we were yet enemies with Him, God approached us with this gift of His friendship (Romans 5:10). Paul made it clear that it was God's plan, God's idea, God (in Jesus, who is Himself deity) who was providing the means for us to be reconciled with Him. He did this for Himself! God wanted you and me back, talking to Him, living in His peace, etc.

Well, here is the thought I wanted to get to: *no other theory takes God to be the object of the work of Christ on the Cross*. God, in the person of our Savior, received our punishment for our sin. Explaining Calvary in terms of a punishment for our sins (penal substitution) which God in Christ is taking upon Himself puts Him at the very center of His plan to rescue us from sin. God has become the sole provider of our forgiveness.

Let's pause here in order to allow the next thought to sink in. Of all the theories out there as to why the Savior had to go to a cross, the idea that He went to pay a penalty for sin is *the only one* that makes *Calvary about God* and not just us. (We should read this many times.) The Cross is about the heart of God, about the Holiness of God, about Him ... not us! All the other theories out there as to why the Cross, somehow explain everything in terms of our hearts, our nature, our sin. Be that as it may be (and it is true), Calvary is about Christ! Calvary is all about God!

### **Satisfaction**

But can we call Jesus' death a “satisfaction” for sin and still call it a matter of divine justice? Satisfaction does not have to speak of punishment or retribution. Whenever the law sentences anyone to death, it is penal by definition but to be a punishment it has to be in retribution (some say: vengeance) for some crime committed—in Jesus' case, our sin. Punishment is thought of as *deserved* which is often associated, as a

vengeance would, with anger or rage. Satisfaction is a sense that one is pleased with something finished, something restored.

Let's say this in plain language: A satisfactory spanking for an incorrigible child is intended to correct them, to reinforce a painful experience to discourage the misbehavior from happening again. We reserve the word, punishment, for a parent spanking the child out of a sense that they deserve it because of what they did. That's retribution not satisfaction but both could be called penal, in the sense, that mom's word is law and junior broke it!

If Jesus' took our punishment, this must mean that He received for us what we *deserved* to have because the sin was ours—not His. We might add that God was angry at the sin. Jesus' brother wrote, "sin leads to death" (James 1:15). So, Jesus had to die.

But God's satisfaction provides another perspective. Some like to say that the way Jesus conducted Himself through life and finally on the Cross, fulfilling a plan of God to get us back as friends, *pleased* God immensely—that's satisfaction, something Jesus did on more than one occasion (Matthew 12:18; Mark 1:11; Luke 3:22). A pleased God is a satisfied God. God was pleased to crush Jesus (His death)—yes—but also to prosper Him (His resurrection) according to the Prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 53:10).

Augustine argued [in *De Trinitate*. 14.12.15] that "Jesus demonstrates perfect obedience ...what humanity was originally meant to be. In this he satisfies God. ...It is precisely His attitude to His death that satisfies [pleases] ... God."

The idea of a justice being satisfied keeps surfacing in our study. How might Jesus' death satisfy *justice*? Simply: He didn't sin and didn't need to be crucified. His Father knew all this, but Jesus willingly and lovingly gave Himself to the lash and death. [As we study Calvary and what Jesus bought us on that Cross, these ideas of a satisfaction and a punishment for our sin will continue to be in focus.] It was as if God's feelings were at war within Him. He was both pleased with Jesus but enraged at the sin that brought the Savior to this place. But this is no contradiction. There is something called "The Simplicity of God" worth studying.

## Divine Simplicity

The story goes that little Johnny wrote his ex girlfriend from camp: "Sussie, I hate you." And then signed it: "love, Johnny." Some see this as ambivalence [mixed feelings]. God hated Esau, so said the prophet Malachi and Paul, the Apostle (Malachi 1:3; Romans 9:13), while at the same time according to the Apostle John: God is love (1 John 4:8). How can this be? The bigger question is: How can there be punishment for sin with God if He is forgiving?

Is this the boulder an omnipotent God created too heavy to lift? The phrase "cognitive dissonance" [inconsistent attitudes as regard behavior] comes to mind. It characterizes anyone claiming to live by one principle but doing things outside their professed character. And this is *not* God!

Only deceivers are complicated. "Oh what a tangled web we weave/When first we practice to deceive," Sir Walter Scott wrote. Genuineness and spontaneous responses—established of love, gentleness, and mercy—are simple, and that is why we say God shows simplicity. There is a sense in which He judges mercifully, He administers justice for the sake of His creation whom He loves.

There is a well-known verse that profiles God, "God is not a liar like some men might be; He does not deceive; He is transparently honest; He is not a human being dealing with regret over mistakes and bad choices. What He promises, He does; do you think otherwise!? When does He speak and it doesn't happen just as He said? " (Numbers 23:19).

The doctrine of simplicity, teaches, then, that

1. **God is unlike any other** being; "The Lord's mercy and love exceed far beyond our expectations." (Psalm 145:3) and that
2. **God is perfect**, that is, God's actions do not share in the limitations of human actions. God's intentions, what He purposes to do, He does. "My word that comes from my mouth will accomplish what I please and will prosper in what I send it to do" (Isaiah 55:11). There is no difference between what God intends to do and what He accomplishes. We, however, see these two ideas as distinct.

Understanding God, though, is another matter. Our knowledge of God is on a pre-heaven level. It will be important later to dive into

some terms used to describe God because they explain His simplicity. Irenaeus [*Haer* 2.13.3] calls God an “**uncompounded Being**, without diverse members, and altogether like, and equal to himself, since he is wholly understanding, ... spirit, ...thought, ...intelligence, ...reason, and wholly hearing, ...seeing and light and the whole source of all that is good.” In simple language: “It is an utter impossibility for God not to be all He is: both merciful *and* just.”

Looking at God through a single lens (of divine love), interpreting all His actions in terms of His love for us, not only inspires our understanding of God’s Word but it explains everything about our relationship with Him as believers. “I, indeed, know exactly what I will for you,” the Lord shares His thoughts, “plans for your peace and spiritual prosperity, not misfortune or ruin, but ultimately what you have longed for all along.” (Jeremiah 29:11)

It is our limited reasoning, limited by how we experience life and what we have learned about our own humanity that we endlessly compare our reasoning with God’s and ask so many questions about Calvary that may be above our current comprehension.

Simplicity shows how God could be merciful and at the same time exact a penalty for sin, how His justice could be both retributive and restorative. The doctrine of a divine simplicity for God attempts to show that when God is exercising one attribute of His nature, He is exercising all attributes of His nature. His justice is always merciful. When He displays His anger, He is fierce, but it is a feature of His jealous love for His people. “The LORD is jealous....” (Nahum 1:2; Joel 2:18)

Simplicity teaches that He does all things as an expression of His love. “He loves righteousness and justice; the earth is full of the LORD’s unfailing love”(Ps. 33:5; 89:14). All this can be said in one sentence: A study of Calvary is really a study about the love of God, that is, a study of the nature of God.

## *DISTINCTIVES*

DOGMAS or doctrines peculiar to one or more Christian denominations, but not to all, may be designated as *distinctives*. There are differences in interpreting what Jesus' death and resurrection means, that is: how Jesus' crucifixion affects worship, how to live the Christian life, and what is required of us to obtain eternal life. These distinctives may give a believer a denominational identity that adds a sense of assurance to faith. There's nothing wrong with this.

Christian unity is not affected by these differences, or shouldn't be, since the Lord allows us to have a faith that rests on Himself and not on the totality or even accuracy of our knowledge. Jesus is the center of our Christian experience and faith—not some degree of knowing. In fact, during the early days of Christianity there were those, called Gnostics, after the Greek word for “knowledge,” that equated their salvation and spirituality with what they knew, or thought they knew, about the mysteries of Godliness or the Cross. Paul condemned this view (Galatians 1:8-9).

One Christian mantra goes: It's not *what* you know but *who* you know that matters. Paul encouraged each believer to continue to seek a closeness with God even while their understanding of truth was incomplete (1 Corinthians 13:12). Believers are characterized by a hunger for truth (Matthew 5:6) but not a spirituality based on head knowledge.

It is faith or trust in God that defines our relationship with Him and eternal life—not some academic pursuit. There is even a sense in which general truths may have a number of more personal applications. After all, God's Word must be experienced to be understood and much depends on how we are maturing in the Truth (Ephesians 4:13). In short: Whatever is not coming from a trust in and reliance on God does not draw us closer to Him (Romans 14:23).

## **Christian Commonality**

In the most general sense, all Christians have this in common, that, Calvary must mean something more than a story of Heavenly things to come. This chapter is only an introduction to some of the several paths Christian thought has gone down in the quest to understand what Jesus' death and resurrection should mean to us in this life. Calvary is more than a lesson in overcoming temptation. What happened there to the Savior provides us, who believe, with authority over temptation, a revelation of God with whom we are reconciled and an empowerment to follow in Jesus' footsteps in how we can live above sin.

Salvation is not a ticket that admits one into God's Heaven. Salvation is a way of life that includes God. Godliness, as a Christian characteristic, can be defined as "living your life with one eye on God." The Apostle Peter's understanding of how our faith or trust in Christ leads to love and Heaven is introduced to us in His second letter. The undeniable message here is that an active trust in Christ (2 Peter 1:1-3), as we implement God's Truth in our lives, leads to virtuous living (verse 5a) which, in turn, gives the Christian life more meaning (verse 5b), so, we are able to recognize right from wrong (verse 6a) and are empowered to choose God's will (verse 6b) with conviction (verse 6c). Brotherly love (verse 7a) becomes the centerpiece of our social relations [fellowship] which blossoms into an unconditional love that is the summit of our Christian experience (verse 7b). These are the Christian traits that show that our assurance and hope of entering Heaven are real (verse 11).

## **Denominationalism**

In my work, "*The Cross: Why Jesus Had to Die*" I attempt an outline of some of the differences between Orthodox believers and Evangelicals, between the followers of John Calvin and Martin Luther, regarding Jesus' death as it relates to life and worship. Here, in an interest in sharing my heart, not my head, I will summarize some major areas of distinction leaving the grunt work to your personal inquiries. I, also, want to honor the wisdom of friends who asked me to share my understanding of these truths and not just outline denominational differences. With your permission, I shall do just that.

There is a clear difference in teaching on *justification* [*righteousness* is the same word] between the Orthodox Churches and the Evangelicals.

So, we are interested in the possible meanings this word supports in our Bible. An entire chapter, "*Christ Our Righteousness*" is set aside to learn more. However, to begin, Evangelicals and Orthodox Believers do share the following four aspects of the Biblical message. Peter called it (2 Peter 1:1) "Our most esteemed faith in Christ which we have in common."

1. Jesus is the only Savior of sinners, "There is salvation in none other nor is there another named being, anywhere introduced to humanity, in whom is the necessary means to save us." (Acts 4:12)
2. We cannot find a way back to God without Him, "We are stray sheep, having lost our way" (Isaiah 53:6). "No one is able to come to me," Jesus affirmed, "unless the Father goes and gets them" (John 6:44).
3. The death of Jesus Christ alone made reconciliation with God possible. There is nothing we could do or say to reunite us in friendship with God because at the time we were considered hostile; we knew not how to please Him. "If while we were hostile toward God, He sought our friendship by such a great sacrifice, His Son, indeed, this friendship is forever" (Romans 5:12).
4. His sacrifice, Jesus' death, is the ultimate cause of our *justification*. "Jesus Christ was God's appointed instrument of His mercy through His blood, His death ... that God might show Himself just and also justify those who trust in Jesus Christ." (Romans 3:25-26).

Here's the "but." **But** precisely what *justification* is, how it relates to other aspects of salvation and how it takes place—these are areas of continuing ... debate.

### **An Introduction to Justification**

Anyone already acquainted with either may see the distinction in the use of the term *justification*. The differences in meaning between these two branches of the Christian Faith can be reduced to what each means by being *justified by faith*. The Evangelicals teach that "faith alone," on our part, makes us candidates to be justified ("just as if we had not sinned") Paul asserted, "...we hold that one is justified by faith..." (Romans 3:28) But Catholicism might be more inclined to

quote James who taught good works as an outward sign of a true conversion by faith: “a man is justified, and not by faith only” (James 2:24). Justification for Catholics is another word for “cleansed from sin” or “*made* righteous.”

Three points are worth noting:

1. For Evangelicals, as myself, the emphasis is on a faith or trust in God, who alone can perfect His work in us. He alone makes us righteous. “Our confidence is in God’s work in us” (Philippians 1:6). We look to Jesus to complete what He has begun in us as “the author and finisher of our faith” (Hebrews 12:2). Our Catholic brethren call this a *fiduciary* [trust alone] justification. We mean that nothing we can do *before* salvation would bring us *to* salvation.
  - Orthodox Christianity maintains that we never lost our freedom to choose God’s salvation. Since, for them, justification is being *made* righteous, good works are expected to follow. This makes sense. Apple trees produce apples; Christians should somehow demonstrate their Christianity.
2. Catholicism says that our understanding of sanctification, that is, living a godly life, is based only on a *declaration of God’s intent*. We use the term “imputed” meaning that God declares us righteous before we are righteous. “To those who do not work at earning their salvation but for salvation they trust Jesus who justifies the ungodly, our faith is considered enough to provide that justification” (Romans 4:5).
  - Our Catholic friends, which includes some family members for many of us, would not say “declared righteous” but “*made* righteous” which is, again, for them, another way of saying “sanctified.” Grace, which speaks of the free gift of salvation, is in Catholic teaching, the gift of *God Himself*. Grace is *sanctifying grace*. *If we are genuinely saved, God’s grace is at work sanctifying us, cleansing us from our sinfulness.*
  - Romans 4:5 says both: As Evangelicals remind us, “To those who do not work at earning their salvation but for salvation they trust Jesus who sanctifies the ungodly; [and as the Orthodox faith reminds us] true faith

sanctifies, or makes righteous, manifesting itself in works of righteousness.”

3. Most Evangelicals teach that *justification* (not to be punished for our sins) and *sanctification* [being cleanse or changed so as not to commit the sin again) are *two separate acts* of God. Justification, to Evangelicals is a *declaration*, made by God at salvation (God foregoes the punishment even though we are not sanctified, cleansed, yet, and might sin again). Sanctification is a life long process. In Catholic teaching, forgiveness is not sufficient since the sin must be cleansed or purged.
  - Let me illustrate the Evangelical idea: A parent may decide *not* to punish a child who has disobeyed (that's declared justified) knowing that the child will someday, through parental guidance and learning the value of discipline through experience they will learn the value of obedience as they grow (sanctification).
  - The Catholic idea is that punishment has value to teach a child right from wrong. Once sufficient punishment is satisfied, further discipline is unnecessary (these are indulgences or the remission of further punishment) only after a further act of obedience shows that the child has indeed learned their lesson. Forgiveness does not eliminate the need for punishment, nor more than it might in a parent's wisdom with a disobedient child.

Much here is a distinction without a difference, since both Catholics and Evangelicals see the life long need to be cleansed from sin. John the Apostle assures us, “If, as the need exists, we are honest within ourselves and confess, agree with God, that we need to be cleansed from the sin that has been brought to our attention by the Spirit, God is faithful and just; His whole purpose here is to forgive us and cleanse (purify) us of that sin” (1 John 1:9). True repentance is now moving beyond the sin and living more righteously—right in God's eyes.

To understand the value of any teaching on justification or righteousness, we need to discover within ourselves an appreciation for God's conviction, and distinguish this from guilt. Jesus told us that the Holy Spirit is the author of conviction and He will reveal the truth to

us about real sin in our lives and the way to pleasing God, righteousness. We need to learn to listen.

Church teachings may get muddled for some Christians, especially for those who fret about their faith. Often God must simplify all this by giving *livable* directives that make sense only after we follow them. I recall the story shared by a clergyman who pastored a fairly large congregation—a man highly involved in ministry and respected in his community. He felt a need to draw closer to God but struggled to find the secret how. He studied His Bible endless hour after hour and prayed unceasingly seeking to hear from God. Finally a thought from God dropped into His heart and conscience that was as real as any voice, “Love your wife!” (This is a biblical directive which deserves emphasis: Ephesians 5:28.). He loved his wife already, but he was somewhat neglectful. But, more to the point, he was jealous of the peace of mind and heart she lived with. But in obedience to the divine instruction, he began to practice his love in more appreciable ways. He began to sense God was pleased. Righteousness was suddenly more than a religious term.

### Why a Punishment?

The belief that Jesus was punished for sin was introduced centuries later in Christian thought. This becomes evident in studying Anselm (Catholic tradition in the 11<sup>th</sup> century) contrasted with the earlier Reformers (16<sup>th</sup> Century, the Ana-Baptists and Lutherans).

1. The Reformers called Jesus’ crucifixion a *punishment* for sin: Anselm taught that God’s honor was offended; it was not a question of being punished for our law-breaking. What Jesus did became a *satisfaction*, an act that restored divine honor. The reformers maintained it was an act of *retributive* justice.
2. The Reformers saw Jesus’ crucifixion as a *necessary offering* for our sins: To Anselm the emphasis was on Jesus’ life *freely given* (not required) for our salvation. Anselm saw Christ’s death as a sacrifice, but not, as a punishment.
3. The Reformers saw Jesus’ death in *fulfillment of covenantal law*: For Anselm, Christ was the perfect sacrifice because He, being sinless, offered Himself *voluntarily* to God. To the reformers Christ’s death satisfied a *legal* requirement that “it was

expedient that one man should die for the people.” (John 18:14)

4. The Reformers, in calling His death a punishment, understood it **covered all sin**, both original and temporal: For Anselm, Christ’s death satisfied God’s honor in connection with *only original sin* since only the liability for Adam’s disobedience needed to be dealt with. Our sins must be purged through indulgences.

A friend of mine surprised me with his concept of a punishment: The one being punished must submit unwillingly to it or it isn’t punishment, he informed me. In some sense, he believed, Jesus’ death could not have been a punishment for sin since He willingly went to the Cross.

I have been naively using words that hopefully explain the truths surrounding Jesus’ crucifixion, not realizing how these words are being understood. My brother, a deacon in the Catholic Church, informed me that some Catholics do not practice their faith with a clear understanding of the doctrines the Church teaches. This is not uncommon even in Evangelical circles.

Christianity should be united because the various shades of belief we represent only demonstrate our desire to know truth—not that we have a corner on that Truth. As Paul reminded us, “We know in part; our knowledge is incomplete” (1 Corinthians 13:12). The irrefutable message of Scripture is that Jesus died for our sins to reconcile us to God. But how His death brings reconciliation remains part of the mystery of Godliness, no matter how much Bible we study.

It is in this spirit of this unity that I mention the distinctives that are so important to our faith.

### **The Wondrous Exchange**

For Martin Luther, the ministry of Jesus to reconcile us to God began at Jesus’ birth. The road began in Bethlehem in a manger and led to Golgotha and a cross. Jesus’ suffering, learning obedience, and being tempted—His humanity—was a necessary part of the struggle. “The key issue for Luther was that Christ underwent temptation and suffering because He was human. And He did this voluntarily. Jesus’ dealings with a sinful world, and the political machinery that wanted Him dead, were never limited to the last hours of His life. Martin Luther

has a point. Jesus endured the mocking of His opposition throughout His ministry. And before that, He must have been aware of the spiritual degradation around Him. Even as a young man, discussing matters of personal interest (we can only surmise what) with the religious leadership in the Temple (Luke 2:46) He revealed a life emptied of self interest and consumed by a passion for His Father's plan for our salvation.

For Luther, most scholars of the time failed to grasp the extent and significance of Jesus' identification with our sins. Luther saw Jesus' entire life as a "wondrous exchange:" Jesus experienced *our* world in order that you and I might experience *His* world, the Kingdom of God. Paul wrote, "Jesus represented us, who had broken God's law, by accepting the blame, Himself, and paid the penalty on the Cross" (Galatians 3:13). Commenting on this verse, Luther wrote, that Christ became "Peter, the liar; Paul, the persecutor, David, the adulterer; Adam, the disobedient; the thief on the cross..." He became sin.

For Luther, this truth is to be taken literally. (The Church has always maintained that some truth is far more than what symbolism could explain, John 6:56.) "He made the one who did not know sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." (2 Corinthians 5:21) Luther saw that the Cross of Christ was at once the place of Satan's demise (Satan's influence over us no longer an excuse for sinning) and what made faith and trust in God real to us.

For Luther, it was precisely this identification, captured by the concept of a great exchange, that silenced his fears. For Luther, the victory of Christ consisted precisely in this, that, sin and death are defeated. Luther, writing to a monk in distress over his sins [in *Letters of Spiritual Counsel*] admonished, "Learn to know Christ and him crucified. Learn to sing to him and say 'Lord Jesus, you are my righteousness, I am your sin. You took on you what was mine; yet set on me what was yours. You became what you were not, that I might become what I was not.'"

Jesus experienced what we experience: our anxiety, our fears and all that belongs to the human condition. This indeed is the punishment Jesus underwent, according to Luther, exchanging our sins for His righteousness.

### **The Law's Fulfillment**

Martin Luther and John Calvin, both reformers from the 16<sup>th</sup> century, concluded that the law in the Bible played a role in Jesus' crucifixion. All the laws that Moses introduced (the required ceremonies, the sacrifices, the ten commandments, and all the rules associated with living in Ancient Israel) were important to God. The moral law pointed out what sinners people were every time they broke it, which was inevitable. The ceremonies and the sacrifices were symbols of Jesus' coming death on Calvary. Jesus was sinless, always obedient, which Luther called "active" obedience, since Jesus lived the life the Father intended for Him. His death or submission on the Cross was called a "passive" obedience because He willingly surrendered to His own crucifixion.

Luther and Calvin, however, were not in total agreement over the reason for our Lord's crucifixion. To John Calvin, Jesus bore our punishment which was necessary for our redemption. Jesus' death is what saved us by accepting the punishment. For Luther, the fundamental point was not Jesus' death but rather His resurrection. For Luther, Jesus, by His resurrection, defeated death, and in the process, He defeated the devil, sin, and the law. For Luther, anything that highlights our sin, but can do nothing about it, needed to be replaced. This is how he read Paul when Paul said "We are not subject to the law but we are living now by God's grace" (Romans 6:14). Luther's view was that the law was somehow against us, an enemy of sorts. Calvin did not see the law as an enemy of salvation to be defeated. The law, for him, represented the truth about our need for a Savior and that law was *fulfilled* at Calvary.

For Calvin, if Jesus hadn't died on the Cross there could have been no forgiveness for sin (Hebrews 9:22). This meant the Savior's death was *necessary* for Salvation. Again, Jesus' death satisfied the penalty for sins by fulfilling the law (Philippians 2:8). John Calvin believed in a penal substitution [that Jesus took on Himself our punishment for our sins]. This abated God's wrath. Calvin believed that a retributive justice is a message that moves the sinner to repentance. Calvin (in *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. 2.16.2) asked, "Will not these considerations move him (the sinner) the more deeply, the more striking they represent the greatness of the calamity from which he was delivered?" Calvin furthermore saw a difference between a "gratuitous love" and a

“final love.” He died for all, but only those who accept His offer of salvation through repentance will finally realize His love.

For John Calvin, Jesus’ death appeased God’s wrath, but perhaps, Calvin misinterpreted God’s roar for rage? God yelled out, according to Hosea, the prophet, “I will not vent the full fury of my anger!” (Hosea 11:10). And then Hosea added, “When he roars, his children will come trembling” (Hosea 11:11). But then again, perhaps God’s change of heart is merely our perception, what one scholar called our “experience of redemption.”

### “It Is Finished”

When Jesus, from the Cross, cried, "It is finished!" What was finished? What did He mean by these words just before He expired on the Cross? There are two possibilities that can be accepted together.

- ◆ **Paid in full:** Financial receipts are often introduced by this phrase," according to the Biblical dictionary. In general the word means: “to fulfill obligations, to pay in full.”
  - Charles Swindoll, whose teachings many Evangelicals follow, explained: "It was a Greek expression most everyone present would have understood. It was an accounting term. Archaeologists have found papyrus tax receipts with this phrase in Greek written across them, meaning "paid in full." With Jesus' last breath on the cross, He declared the debt of sin cancelled, completely satisfied. Nothing else required. Not good deeds. Not generous donations. Not penance or confession or baptism or...or...or...nothing. The penalty for sin is death, and we were all born hopelessly in debt. He paid our debt in full by giving His life so that we might live forever."
- ◆ The simplest meaning of "finished" Jesus spoke on the Cross is "All is fulfilled, All is accomplished!"
  - This, to me, fits better in the context since Jesus was not talking about an unpaid bill but the fulfillment of all prophecy. We read in another Bible dictionary, “Everything God commissioned Jesus to do has been ‘completed.’ Another well respected clergyman wrote, “It has been and will forever remain finished,” This

might explain what Jesus meant in Luke 12:50 since He spoke these words in reference to the Cross: "But I have a baptism to undergo, and how it consumes me until **it is finished!**"

It is really a question of what the Savior meant and we must not presume to know beyond doubt. With an open mind, consider the following possibility: The phrase "It is finished" is one word in the original and may carry the three meanings:

- Jesus finished the Work **FINALLY**. "When the circumstance of history were right, Jesus came" (Galatians 4:4).
- Jesus finished the work **COMPLETELY** "Beginning at Moses's writings and all the books of the prophets, Jesus went through the entire record explaining how it all predicted His crucifixion and resurrection" (Luke 24:27).
- Jesus finished the work once **FOR ALL TIME**. "the offering of the body of Jesus Christ happened once for all time" (Hebrews 10:10).

### **Different Traditions**

The Early Church Fathers, who authored many of the Church Traditions held by Orthodox believers, saw Calvary as God's provision against *only original sin*. Sins we commit as Christians, known as temporal sins, they taught, need to be purged through an act of penance, which is recognized in four steps:

1. Contrition or **sorrow for sin** (not attrition—sorry you got caught),
2. Confession or agreeing with God's Word and Church Tradition that what **you did** was a **sin**,
3. Absolution or the priest's **pronouncement** that you are **forgiven**. (These are called the "keys" which Jesus gave to the Apostle Peter. Matthew 16:19),
4. Indulgences or a **remission** before God **of the punishment** due to temporal sins which have been forgiven. The punishment cannot be remitted unless the sin has been purged through sanctifying grace. Sanctification is a cleansing from sins. Reconciliation includes, then, both forgiveness for sins and purification from the effects of sin. This puts the penitent

on the mystical path of purgation, illumination, and union with God.

Penance and repentance are not the same in Catholic doctrine unlike Evangelicalism. Repentance in the Catholic Faith is a “coming to one’s senses,” a desire to do something finally about the misery or harm temporal sin is causing, as in the parable of the lost or “prodigal” son (Luke 15:17).

Repentance of sin to Evangelicals includes contrition, confession, and the desire (the emotional decision) to turn one’s life around and asking the Lord for His mercy to help them move past it. True or real repentance, for Evangelicals, is all inclusive, the elixir, if you will, that cures all spiritual ills. It is the one act every believer, everywhere, regardless of their circumstance, is now identified by, as a believer. Repentance is now natural and spontaneous for believers. Believers are confessors; they are self-truthful and always desirous of God’s mercy in their lives. The believer’s heart in humble dependence on grace is ceaseless in its quest for divine mercy. Repentance recognizes a need for God’s mercy and seeks it ardently.

The main differences for Evangelicals are

- ◆ Jesus died for **all sin**, original and temporal, and we must repent to appropriate His work on the Cross (1 John 1:7).
- ◆ Forgiveness is granted through Christ. **All believers hold the keys**, though I must affirm this cautiously, since only those who can recognize the move of the Spirit in a particular instance and have identified the Lord’s directive, can speak to the remission of another’s sins. “Only true believers have membership into this unique priestly class that they might serve, as priest, in the Lord’s Kingdom” (1 Peter 2:9).
- ◆ **Indulgences** are **not** considered a Biblical **necessity** since Jesus, as our representative, took the punishment for all sin already (1 John 1:9).
- ◆ Most Evangelical scholars see **sanctification** as **separate from salvation**. Salvation is a completed act of God; sanctification is a process. Catholic dogma sees salvation in terms of sanctifying grace. The Catholic position is: faith actively demonstrates good works. Evangelicals see faith as trust in Christ performing His work in us. Both are good Bible.

## Religious Words

I have found it increasingly difficult to explain the dogmas of any Religious Group or denomination in plainer, simpler, common English. The word “salvation” which I have been using is a good example. It signifies an escape from some dangerous situation. When talking about God doing the rescuing, we tend to mean being delivered from the consequences of our sinfulness. But this begs the question: what is sin? Sin, in clearer language, is any act or thought that God finds objectionable, anything we do or say that can't be done or said in God's Kingdom or heaven. The Bible explains all this better.

Then there is the word, spiritual or spirituality. The basic meaning has to do with our relationship with God. Since He is a Spirit [incorporeal; we used to call Him the Holy *Ghost*] communicating to Him or hearing from Him is a spiritual act. When He does something for us, it is said to be spiritual [Catholics say *sacramental*].

Throughout this book, I am obligated to use some technical terms (spiritual terms because they involve God) such as, *righteousness*, doing what is right in God's eyes; *justification*, which means God considers us now no longer subject to a final judgment. We have come to trust Him for His mercy and are said to be “saved,” rescued from sinfulness. In plain language: we have begun a friendship with God—on His terms—wherein we desire to follow and serve Him. The sign that this is real is that we have begun conversing with Him. We call this “prayer.”

## The Keys

This brings me to “the Keys” which Jesus gave the Apostle Peter. The story begins one day when Jesus was asked to heal a paralyzed man who was carried to Him on a stretcher (a bed or cot) by four friends. Jesus not only healed him (the man got up, rolled up his cot and walked home) but Jesus forgave his sins. The religious leaders were aghast at such an irreverent act. They thought it highly disrespectful of God because, as they said, only “God can forgive sins” (Mark 2:7). How sad they didn't know who Jesus was, the incarnate Son of God.

Then one day on some peaceful hillside Jesus informs Peter, that he, too, would be able to forgive sins. (Matthew 16:19), But this was not offered “out of the blue.” Jesus asks Peter, if he, Peter knew who He, Jesus, was and Peter, responded, “You are the Messiah, the Son of

God.” To which Jesus replied, “Peter, no person told you that, My Father in Heaven told you that” (Matthew 16:16). Peter had a spiritual awareness of God, a communion with God, that made him aware of Who Jesus was. This, in turn, qualified him to be authorized to talk to others about God’s forgiveness as a powerful provision of Calvary. (That authority is represented by the symbol of a “key.”) In other words, Peter was able through his communion with God to know what God wanted to share with someone about their relationship with Him.

In the Catholic faith, this authority is relegated only to the priesthood. Evangelicals agree with Luther that all believers are part of the priesthood. Any believer can, in theory, share this beautiful revelation of forgiveness with anyone who is struggling with sin but is now repentant. The Lord [another title for Jesus] inspires any believer and commissions them in turn to share this good news with any repentant person.

### **What About Me?**

A friend asked me about my view as I write this book. I am not a philosopher nor a theologian. I am a child at heart that simply wants to know what the Bible says. The scholars may go beyond the simple message of Scripture to give a sense of reasonableness for modern thinkers to something an Apostle or a prophet might have said. That’s not me. I only want to know the language of Scripture as I labor under the proposition that this sacred Book was written to us and for us.

If I may say it this way: we may travel to the outer edge of the universe of what is knowable only to discover more mystery. God was very wise in revealing to us Himself and His salvation through Christ. We are still children when it comes to His universe of Truth, the vast expanse of what is knowable.

The Bible never was intended to be a “tell all” book, but the simplest of narratives to encourage us to trust a loving God for all He offers us through His Son, Jesus Christ. He based all knowledge of our salvation, our redemption, and our freedom to love Him—not on an academic exercise, but—on a love relation with Himself. This is where our adventure in truth must start and this is where it will go on forever.

There is nothing written here in this book by me that does not have merit for me. Even the confessional in Catholicism—though I am not

catholic—is a golden opportunity for the clergy to counsel someone chained to temptation and then use those keys to unlock those chains (Matthew 16:19). Such an opportunity should be cherished by priest and parishioner, alike, to experience the love of Christ, to appropriate the provisions of Calvary, to recognize and experience freedom from such bondage. This should be a time when pronouncing someone's forgiveness becomes a new beginning, a new adventure into Truth.

As psychologists have forfeited the idea of “forgiveness” to the Church, Christians outside Catholicism have forfeited *the keys*—yes, that, I believe, should be the privilege of all believers, but must be held in trust to the church leadership, the keys—that should be unlocking a lot of imprisoned souls for whom freedom has become only a promise and a hope but not a reality.

### Liability

Who is to blame for these troubles? Adam or me or both of us? It is by one scholar's reckoning, a “deep anxiety.” It makes some sense to me when Jesus called Himself a ransom in our stead (Mark 10:45). He did pay an eternally significant—for want of a better word—*price* on the Cross, and (yes, Luther) also in Jesus' humanity, because all of us wandered away (Isaiah 53:6) and couldn't find our way back.

We can assert with John, the Apostle, that such a perfect love, as God had in sending Jesus to a Cross for us, should drive out the fear of meeting God someday as the Judge of the universe. Fear involves punishment (1 John 4:18) and now, for us, who trust in Him, there is no sentence of punishment (Romans 8:1). This is *justification*.

My belief in “justification by faith alone, supports my confidence in God's grace to work on me and help me to be who He wants me to become in our relationship. We, who have accepted God's provision of salvation, no longer live in fear of judgment. Because of a belief in justification by faith *alone* there is a hope filled confidence in God's ability to keep us safe “... preserved in Jesus Christ, and called:” (Jude 1; 2 Thessalonians 3:3; Philippians 1:6).

The Catholic understanding of hope depends on a sense of duty, pious devotion, to God. A faith that works! (James 2:18). The virtue of hope demands fulfillment sometimes, because one has to discharge certain Christian duties, such as prayer and worship, and simply living the Truth of God's Word. As Paul reminded us, “Rejoicing in hope;

patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer" (Romans 12:12). A verse often referred to by evangelicals (a verse which emphasizes both aspects of our justification) and which serves all believers: "Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience" (Hebrews 10:22).

Some believers may need to hear the more Catholic emphasis that living below God's provision of sanctifying grace is not faith. If you are resigned to living as if temptation is a reasonable part of your humanity and sin will only be at an end in the hereafter, you are pretending to serve God, the reality of the Cross has not dawned yet upon you and, perhaps, a justification by faith alone is not something you need to emphasize.

But other believers seem to struggle with conviction; they live under a cloak of guilt, and they need to know that God is far more real in their life than that. They need to know that trusting Him alone is all that is required. God will see to the rest. Later, when somehow their experience balances out and they are more comfortable in their Christian experience and they are thanking the Lord for forgiveness and the beautiful gifts of repentance and mercy, then they might be ready to talk Christian duty.

### **The Cost of Freedom**

Perhaps one of the peskiest controversial issues raised thanks to a discussion of retributive justice is: How can something be called a "free" gift of grace if it "cost" Christ His life? If we say He purchased a salvation to give to us for free we must assume God was *not* the One who died on the Cross. It was His Son. If I gave my son in exchange for anything of value to give away, it still was not free. The Father offers His Son in payment for our salvation; then, He turns around and offers us that same salvation, it was not free. It cost Him His Son.

But if God was *in* His Son, then, we can say, God was crucified! He "gave himself for our sins" (Galatians 1:4; Titus 2:14). In our understanding of law, if someone offers themselves to die in order to allow another to go free, in every sense, it becomes the ultimate price paid—the ultimate free gift. "No one has greater love than this: to lay down his life for his friends." (John 15:13) This explains the subtitle of this work: God's Gift of Himself.

### **The T. U. L. I. P. Doctrine - Eternal Security**

The tulip is an acrostic that, perhaps, was ingeniously created arguing that our salvation cannot be taken from us. We must credit some future student of John Calvin with this piece of ingenuity, also known as “eternal security.” The doctrine has five points:

**Total Depravity.** “All have sinned.” (Romans 5:12). This is a belief that mankind is unable by free will to seek a relationship with God. If this is true, we have not chosen God but He chose us (John 15:16). God first called us, but not because He favors us for our achievements or goodness. There is or can be nothing we can do to gain God’s favor to persuade Him to pick us. Some Christians, including Catholics, believe that we are always free to seek God for mercy (Deuteronomy 4:29).

**Unconditional Election.** “After God picks us, He adopts us as His children” (Ephesians 1:5) This suggests Christ’s death on the Cross had to be limited to those whom God wanted to save. Why God might say, “Yes” to one person but “No” to another, would be a matter for the counsel of His wisdom. What we can be sure of is that no one who seeks God will be refused by Him (Romans 10:13).

**A Limited Atonement (Salvation).** Jesus didn’t die for everyone. “Only those persons God chooses, he also declares righteous” (Romans 8:30). This suggests to some Christians that only some are chosen because not everyone is eventually declared righteous. Jesus clarified “Many are invited to come to me, but only a few will respond” (Matthew 22:14). “God does not make promises He has no intention of keeping.” Peter taught, “But He is so patient, waiting, for all who will come to Him... He just doesn’t want anyone, who will eventually come to Him, to be excluded from His Heaven. He will wait until every last person who might seek Him is collected” (2 Peter 3:9).

**An Irresistible Grace.** Paul, in his enthusiasm for what God was capable of doing in the Corinthian Church, wrote, “God is able to make every grace overflow to you, so that in every way, always having everything you need, you may excel in every good work.” (2 Corinthians 9:8) This has been understood by some to mean that what God intends to do with you, He will do. Your life is planned out and not your right to choose otherwise. Paul, for example, knew that God knew from Paul’s birth that He, God, would pick him (Galatians 1:15). Grace (I like the Catholic definition) is the gift of God Himself. Grace speaks of our reconciliation with God, our friendship with Him, our

relationship with Him. Some do choose not to seek Him. Jesus said something scary—scariest still when we misunderstand what He meant. “If one uses abusive language to slander the Holy Spirit, there is no hope of forgiveness and reconciliation for them with God.” (Mark 3:29). The reason Jesus gave this warning is because it is self-evident. The Holy Spirit is the source of our conviction (not guilt) when we sin; to reject His warning, to silence that inner voice of the Spirit, which is above conscience or any gut feeling, is to silence God’s call to come to Him (Isaiah 1:18). Say what you will about the Savior; He has broad shoulders, but listen to the Spirit’s calling. Sadly He can be resisted (2 Corinthians 6:1; Galatians 2:21).

**The Perseverance of the Saints.** This teaching is based on the belief that who is reconciled to God will never again become estranged from Him [BBF]. Jesus promised, “My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all. No one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand.” (John 10:29) The belief is that a person cannot return to the person they were before they accepted Jesus by faith. There is some truth here, but it does not need the support of the above four bullet points. Reconciliation is a relationship with God, Grace given is a growing relationship with God, and a growing relationship is more and more secure with time.

### **My Thought on the TULIP**

My personal belief includes a couple points from this acrostic and excludes others. I believe in a total depravity or necessarily God must choose or draw us (convict us) if we are to want a relationship with Him (John 6:44). Christ died *for all*. Some resist God’s grace (conviction) and the saints who persevere find that their relationship with the Lord is strengthened. I am not sure someone cannot lose their salvation (Matthew 13:20-21).

I am glad this chapter has mercifully come to an end. Now, let’s talk “simplicity.”

## *THE SIMPLICITY OF GOD*

*God does one thing and that is to be himself. - Adonis Vidu*

THE Simplicity of God is a dynamic truth that is not difficult to accept since the goal is not to figure God out but, rather, to be able to identify Him in our lives in accordance with the Scripture. The Simplicity of God is a practical study. It is more than a logical explanation of what we can expect of God as if we have finally figured God out. We have not because we cannot. He is God. The God we love and Who loves us must be more personal than a lesson in theology. We should be able to affirm in our experience, especially our salvation, that the Simplicity of God has relevance, that the God so described is indeed at work in our lives, even though in unexpected ways.

In terms of the Cross: God is a God of Justice, and we know God's incarnation, His death on Calvary, and His resurrection from the dead, could not have been something He did just to impress us with His abilities as a superpower. We know that Jesus' adventure in humanity could not have been God showing off or simply wanting to try something new or different. We know in the make-up of His personhood, His character, somehow, because He is a *holy* God, He was constrained by Who He is to lay aside those regal robes and give the archangels the week off so He might die alone for us. The Cross, as we already tried to emphasize, is all about Him not you, not me.

I am married and I know my wife, how she reacts to confrontation, how she enjoys shopping, and so forth. And most of all I know the love relationship I have with her, which has four aspects: I know that I love and am loved, and she knows that she loves and is loved. So, even when we argue or disagree or misunderstand each other or I guess wrong about her interest in something, our relationship continues to grow; the marriage does not come to an end.

Because "love" was the goal, I have quit trying to figure her out. She is the mystery that keeps on giving, because when I am sure of her

response, she invariably says, “No, that’s not what I’m saying.” But she contends that after all these years together, I should know what her likes and dislikes are, what’s important to her and what isn’t. Alas, I am still forever learning. The simplicity of my wife is being able to recognize her love for me and, in turn, know that I love her and to discover better ways to show that love in a way she can appreciate. I found it wise to cease trying to figure her out either as a woman or as herself. When a man, for example, in his own imagination, defines the Bible word “submission” and attempts to apply this to his wife’s response to him, he will discover the meaning of frustration instead.

And do we not do this with God? We thought the Bible said God is suppose to answer all our prayers in some miraculous way but, at the very least, His timing is off, or, as some explain it, He must have said, “No.” We are trying to figure Him out rather than just love the God who loves us and allow Him to be who He is in our lives. Our interest should be to appreciate God’s love in our lives, not pre-suppose how He should show it. We want to identify His directives, His voice, to be able to follow Him. This has nothing to do with an academic exercise in figuring God out.

I know who made last night’s dinner for me, my loving wife. Generally, we eat around four (old people eat earlier) and Joyce suggests ahead of time possible menus. I don’t try to figure out why she choose hot dogs over spaghetti or why she wanted sea food salad instead of hamburgers and fries. Can you possibly imagine where our conversation might go if I went psychological on her to determine why she picked to eat what she picked to eat and why she didn’t splurge a little on lobster or feed me stuffed chicken breast, for once. If she loved me, wouldn’t she consider a nice rib-eye once in awhile? The answer is: none of this has anything to do with love other than the fact that I know that she fed me good food! I know it was she, and that’s the goal of relationship. Stop the analysis!

So, in talking about the simplicity of God, we want to be able to pray and know—not God’s answer—but only that He heard us, that He’s listening, that He knows and cares. This is huge with Joyce, that I am listening while she is sharing concerns. I have to put down the book I am holding and close it. My wife wants my undivided attention. Sound familiar? Of our Lord, John the Apostle wrote, “This is why we can talk to Him about anything bothering us; we know He is listening

when we have things to ask of Him" (1 John 5:14). And when He does respond, we know it was He!

### Walk and Chew Gum

Bible scholars and Church Fathers came up with this simple idea after discussing God's mercy and justice, as if God could not do both at the same time. If he forgives, how could He punish? (Anyone with an incorrigible child knows the answer to this mystery.) But somehow, logic is as useful with God as with a spouse. A mother, we are told, can hold an infant and stir the soup at the same time—and if the phone rings, do that, too. But God's ability to show love and anger, mercy and rage, suggested to some that He must have two sides to His nature—and you best get on His good side.

No! His simplicity is His unity of purpose and vision in all He does. Like the trinity is three in one, always ONE, so His feelings and thoughts, His heart and mind, His many attributes or the quality of His character, who He is in relation to us, will never be in conflict, never contradictory or ambivalent. His responses may appear, at times, in our misdirected logic, to be one thing for one person but something else for another, but He is always and only—and here's the word we use to describe Him—a *HOLY* God.

Here's a paragraph from my other book, *"The Cross:"* St. Anselm, Archbishop of Canterbury, proposed that God is characterized by simplicity. There is no attribute or expression of His being that is not demonstrated in every act. We can say that God's counsel is one and the same as His good pleasure (Philippians 2:13). He does not have nor would He ever need a "plan B." A theology that proposes that God has anything less than His perfect will for us (Jeremiah 29:11) is an invention of our despondency over our failures—nothing more. His wisdom has always been unchanged and unchanging: "pure, then peace-loving, gentle, compliant, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without pretense." (James 3:17) "God is love" (1 John 4:8) does not so much reveal the essence of God, but rather, the nature of His love. We have a new word for this, for God's actions—we call it ...*grace*. Grace is God's Holiness expressed.

## The Holy Love of God

God forgiving sinners while punishing sin is fully consistent with His holiness. It has been argued with varying focus on God's honor according to Anselm, God's law according to John Calvin, or a moral order according to others, that Christ's crucifixion was unavoidable to satisfy His holiness. There was a lot to accomplish for Jesus on Calvary, but in doing it, God must satisfy Himself. The "holy love of God" brought together what might appear as conflicting aspects of His divine character. His holiness required satisfaction for sin; His Love argued for forgiveness. Yet, it is altogether in error to say that God acts at one time according to one of His attributes, and at another time according to another. Simplicity teaches that He acts in conformity with *all of them at all times.*"

We spoke of God's grace. Grace is an expression of the generosity of His holiness and love irrespective of the achievements or trophies or the goodness of any individual. Grace is the perfect and consistent demonstration of His infinite and eternal goodness toward us who by faith accept it.

Have you heard about the elderly couple, who were taking a drive through the country—something they did over the years, regularly, just enjoying nature and each other. He was behind the wheel and she sat shotgun in the front seat close to the window. Reminiscing, as she looked out the window at the country side speeding by, she remarked how they used to sit much closer together on this ride when first married, but through the years, romance seem to lose some of its passion. Then he, still looking straight ahead, still, with both hands on the wheel, responded, "I haven't moved!"

The Lord, too, answers us "I, the LORD, have not changed..." (Malachi 3:6) Simplicity is a Scriptural look at the God who does not change. For this we take a look at the Westminster Confession.

## The Westminster Confession

In the Westminster Confession of Faith, God is described as the "one only living and true God, who is **infinite** in being and **perfection** ... **without ... parts... immutable** ... **eternal**, incomprehensible, almighty ... most holy...**most absolute**..."

A. W. Tozier [in "*The Attributes of God: A Journey Into the Father's Heart*"] wrote, "When Jesus died on the cross the mercy of God did not

become any greater. It could not become any greater, for it was already infinite. We get the odd notion that God is showing mercy because Jesus died. No--Jesus died because God is showing mercy. It was the mercy of God that gave us Calvary, not Calvary that gave us mercy. If God had not been merciful there would have been no incarnation, no babe in the manger, no man on a cross and no open tomb."

We can describe The Holy love of God in terms of His immutable (unchanging), eternal, and infinite, without parts, and perfect attributes and actions.

1. **God is immutable; God will not change.** He cannot be other than Who He is. God cannot compromise, be compromised or deny the full expression of His holiness. He cannot be disingenuous or contradict Himself. He cannot be anything other than what He always is. Whoever God is, He cannot improve on His perfection, decide to reevaluate or redefine His attributes or to set His principles aside, by which He governs His actions and His dealings with mankind. When God "repents" He doesn't change His mind or His plans or His actions. Repenting is God's heart of love hurting for His creation. "'His heart was in pain" (Genesis 6:6).
  - Jesus' crucifixion did not produce a change in God—from wrath to love. Jesus' crucifixion, resurrection, glorification, as well as our adoption as God's children are all elements of a single work of God, whose success does not depend on anything we need do or anything that would somehow escape His control.
2. **God is infinite;** God cannot be or do or give less than Who He is - the size of His compassion. Divine self-expression must be always nothing less than infinite, infinitely wholehearted, infinitely real, infinitely impassioned. The Augsburg Confession (1530) calls God an **immeasurable** power. Westminster Confession of Faith calls Him "most absolute." God does not because He cannot "pull His punches." His love is infinitely intense. God's wrath cannot be measured. His grace cannot be exhausted. He brings the riches of heaven with Him.
  - Paul made our point for us: "To God who is able to do for us what will far exceed anything we might request

## The Simplicity of God

or even imagine according to what He is able to accomplish in us." (Ephesians 3:20).

- And in speaking of the grace of God, every believer should know that Jesus' resurrection made possible ours: "in order that in the coming ages of forever He might demonstrate that immeasurable riches of his grace through his gentle kindness to us in Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 2:7).
  - "If God did not spare his own Son but instead sacrificed Him in our place, what else would He not grant us" (Romans 8:32)?
  - The wealth of God's wisdom and knowledge are beyond our understanding! His decisions are beyond reason and what He does on our behalf we could never presume to know (Romans 11:33).
3. **God is eternal;** He cannot be more than Who He is. He cannot grow or learn or develop or become better.
- All God's thoughts, actions, His purposes are eternal , not subject to time, have only and always eternity in view and eternal value.
    - Paul spoke of "His eternal purpose accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Ephesians 3:11).
  - Since God is eternal perfection, and His plans eternally perfect, He fulfills His promises. What God starts, God always finishes, Nothing God purposes becomes an incomplete task.
    - Paul encouraged by the love of the believers at Philippi exclaimed, "I am confident of this, that he who is doing such a good work in you will finish it when Jesus' returns." (Philippians 1:6)
  - God's Word always has the end result in view, the final consequence; a completed plan which is a single event, "single, all encompassing, utterly uncontradictable action"

- “My word that comes from my mouth will accomplish what I please and will prosper in what I send it to do” (Isaiah 55:11).

4. **God is without parts;**

- The Augsburg Confession (1530) calls God an indivisible power. (1530) All of his attributes are in the background of all of his actions; His role as Creator, Judge, and Savior is indivisible.
  - It is the **Creator** who has **saved** us; Our salvation through Jesus’ death changed us because He is also the Creator. “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.” (2 Corinthians 5:17)
  - It was our **Savior** who **created** the universe and made us new creatures in Him; “All things were created through him (the Word), and apart from him not one thing was created that has been created.” (John 1:3)
  - It is the **Judge** of all the universe who exercises perfect justice in Christ **on the Cross** declaring us righteous by faith. “There is reserved for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give me on that day,” (2 Timothy 4:8)
- What God *did* God *does*. The Bible is not the record of what God did; the Bible is the record of what God does. The record of God’s actions toward His creation are expressions of **His unchanging holiness**. The underlining will and council of God are foundational to every act. He is no respecter of persons. God’s activity is perfection, that is, coherent, united and consistent.
  - “The Lord GOD has sworn by his holiness:” (Amos 4:2)
  - “The nations will know that I am the LORD — this is the declaration of the Lord GOD —

when I demonstrate my holiness through you in their sight." (Ezekiel 36:23)

- The doctrine of simplicity says that God never displays certain attributes more than others. God simply *is* all his attributes at all times.
  - The Westminster Catechism adds, "...working all things according to the counsel of his own immutable and most righteous will, for his own glory; most loving, gracious, merciful, long-suffering, abundant in goodness and truth, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin; the rewarder of them that diligently seek him; and withal most just and terrible in his judgments; hating all sin, and who will by no means clear the guilty."
  - "He has promised to accomplish great things in our lives in order that we might be brought into fellowship (an eternal relation) with Him and that we will no longer live like those who live, only for such a brief time, to please themselves" (2 Peter 1:4).

### God Is Holy

Perhaps, the most striking divine attribute—the dictionary defines "striking" as "attracting attention by reason of being unusual, extreme, or prominent," is God's *holiness*. The word in the language of Scripture means apartness [someone who is distinct and different from all others]. Holiness is an attribute of God. Holiness is the divine personality; it is how God acts and thinks and works. Holy is who God is. His holiness makes Him unique. Deuteronomy 6:4, the Shema', was a lesson in God's holiness: "Hear, Oh Israel, the Lord, our God is One Lord." The next verse enjoins Israel to love God with all their mind, soul, and strength. Solomon acknowledged, "LORD, there is no God like you anywhere..." (1 Kings 8:23).

R. C. Sproul [in "*The Holiness of God* "] admits that he had to—using his term—'grapple' with this: He confessed, "I was ... bothered by the stories ... that seemed to reveal a brutal side to the character of God. How could I ever come to love such a God? The one concept, the

central idea I kept meeting in Scripture, was the idea that God is holy. The word was foreign to me. I wasn't sure what it meant. .... Today I am still absorbed with the question of the holiness of God. I am convinced that it is one of the most important ideas that a Christian can ever grapple with. It is basic to our whole understanding of God and of Christianity."

The Psalmist admitted, "No one can fathom his greatness!" (Psalm 145:3). His holiness, as an aspect of His being, is mysteriously glorious, and we are presumptuous in a mental haze of prideful ignorance to think otherwise. The Westminster Confession of Faith correctly described Him as the "one only God, ... *incomprehensible ... most holy.*"

The best example of God's holiness is His Son, Jesus. "The Son is the radiance (reflection) of God's glory," said the writer to the Hebrews, "and the exact expression (representation) of his nature." (Hebrews 1:3).

### God's Dilemma

How does a God, who must honor the justice His holiness requires, deal with the sin He abhors while rescuing the sinner He loves? How would you? How would you invite back into your life an incorrigible progeny who hates everything you represent, who disavows every principle by which you govern your world? How do you love them back into the family they have publicly disowned? How might you let them back into your life, without compromising the principles that define who you are, your personality?

God's pain is enhanced because He is an eternal being; His love is infinite, therefore the pain of His unrequited love is infinite. And He will not change. He has spend the millennia warning and roaring, chastising and showering His people with affection and blessings—nothing seemed to make any difference. His prophets went from forewarning to forecasting, from seeking their affection to prophesying of the consequence of their ways.

God longs for them to accept Him; to become like Him. He commanded, "...be holy because I am holy" (Leviticus 11:44), a command that couldn't have made a lick of sense to them.

Then God sent Jesus to the Cross and the command to be Holy becomes the promise of what is now possible through faith in His Son.

## Dealing with Sin

We might gain some insight into why Jesus' crucifixion for sin in our stead was God's plan from the beginning (Genesis 3:15). God cannot allow sin into His heaven because He is holy. But He wants us! While suspended on the Cross, Jesus seem to sense the Father's difficulty with what was happening (Mark 15:34). "God ... condemned sin in the flesh by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh as a sin offering." Paul explained (Romans 8:3).

But how to separate the sinner from his or her sin was the delicate operation grace needed to perform. Salvation had to be more than a word of forgiveness. It had to make provision for sinners to be transformed into saints; for believers to be able to follow Christ; to make us holy as He is. "Christ in us, all our hope..." (Colossians 1:27) God cannot allow us into His heaven—as greatly as He longs to—unless we, too, are holy. That is simply Who He is and how it must be!

We have analyzed our Savior's mission; we have studied His words and watched Him respond to His humanity but in a perfectly sinless way. We admired His compassion as something beyond our ability to love so completely and became breathless to hear His wisdom. We puzzled over His parables; they were more than parables to us.

But more than all this, we have theologized every possible cultural, spiritual, and natural reason that might supply us with a sound and consistent logic as to why a Cross. Even though Scripture is dedicated wholly to this divine task we felt it important to have a reasonableness to support faith.

But we have wept and rejoiced because of Him; we have hungered to know more of Him—all the while seeming to sense that our faith was all we ever really needed and then let Him do the rest in us (Philippians 1:6). "You believe in God," Jesus encouraged us, "believe in me" (John 14:1). That's all there is for us to do.

## *THE INCARNATE GOD*

*Truly this man was the Son of God! - Mark 15:39*

CHRISTIANS believe that Jesus was God Incarnate [in the flesh]. Beyond the record of Christmas day (Luke 1:35), we have Jesus' own acknowledgement of His divine sonship (John 10:36). G. K. Chesterton wrote the no great moral teacher ever claim to be God, not Moses, not Mohammed, not Plato, not Buddha, no one ... except Jesus. This point should not go unnoticed, since, skeptics must believe Him to be either purely mortal or having not existed at all. If God, indeed, came to earth, for any reason, we must know: why? We must agree with Lewis, "If Jesus' statement is false, Christianity is of no importance. If true, it is of infinite importance. The one thing it cannot be is moderately important." Why would God want to don the garb of humanity? The straight forward answer: so He could die (Philippians 2:7-8). But here the mystery begins.

### **A Myth?**

Unlike the many mythologies of dying gods [The Egyptian Osiris, the Mesopotamian Tammuz, the Phrygian Attis, or the Greek Dionysus or Adonis], a story about God coming to earth as mankind's Savior didn't follow the standard allegory to explain the cycle of the seasons or harvest times.

Myths were always a primitive look at science, explained, however, in terms of the movements or decisions of the gods. Based on a mythological tradition, the Mayan deity, Itzamna, for example, is credited with bringing the knowledge of the Mayan calendar, scientifically accurate within 45 seconds per year.

So, caution is advised: there is a definition of the word "myth" that calls it "a false idea or misrepresentation of truth" but that is not our understanding. Though I am hesitant going forward to speak of Bible

stories as myths, in the sense God was involved in the affairs of man, they are mythological. "The story of Christ [a story about God coming to earth] is a myth," C. S. Lewis acquiesced, "working on us in the same way as other myths, but with one tremendous difference: it really happened."

We consent to the word "myth" because we are now more at liberty to accept this foundational truth by faith instead of logic. Our faith is only asking us to accept the idea that the God of miracles, who often involved Himself in history, now chooses to "make" history by becoming what early Church tradition called "The God-Man."

Logic is a great servant of the mind but a poor master. Beware these eight false conclusions which, however, center on the Cross. These eight conclusions were rejected by the Early Church Fathers because the Scripture, in perhaps the simplest of language, explained Jesus' coming in both Divine and human terms.

- ◆ Jesus had to be created as the Son of God. He couldn't just 'be' God. Not so!
- ◆ Jesus couldn't be God because He was obviously human. Not so!
- ◆ Jesus was God's mind in a human body. Jesus had one nature not two. Not so!
- ◆ Christ had a human nature but it was unlike the rest of humanity. Not so!
- ◆ Jesus' body was an illusion. Not so!
- ◆ God was not three persons in one but three characteristics in one. Not so!
- ◆ Unlike Jesus, the God of the Old Testament was vengeful. Not so!
- ◆ Christ's divine nature didn't suffer, only His human nature. Not so!

### **The God-Man**

So, why must God die on the Cross? Christianity can argue: when Jesus died for our sins, God died. He "gave *himself* for our sins" (Galatians 1:4; Titus 2:14). In simple terms: God had to provide for our salvation; no one else was capable. Anselm [in *Cur Deus Homo*—Why

God Became a Man. 2.7], regarding Jesus' death, reasoned, "No one can do it except one who is truly God, and no one ought to do it except one who is truly man."

He needed to be incarnate to die. He shared in our humanity. He needed to experience our humanity in its fullest sense. The writer to the Hebrews explained, "We do not have a High Priest, in Jesus, who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, having been tested in every way we are, yet, without sin" (Hebrews 4:15).

Dorothy Sayers, as already noted, wrote, "When the man Jesus died, God died too, and when the God, Jesus, rose from the dead, man rose too because they were one and the same person." Jesus had to be God to bear the chastisement for the sins of the world, for the sin of all time, but He must be human when He rises again to become the first among many at the end of time.

Yet, the irrefutable argument that all believers embrace, contending that Jesus, God's Son, died for our sins, is the origin of this truth: a *revelation* from God. When Peter recognized Jesus' true identity, the Savior exclaimed, "You are blessed, Simon; no person shared this insight with you, My Father in Heaven told you this" (Matthew 16:17). C.S. Lewis relates the account of a trip he made with his brother to the zoo. When Lewis left, he confessed he was no Christian. He believed in God but not the God-Man, not the incarnation. When he arrived at the zoo, he did. He said it was like a man who awoke from a deep sleep and finally realized he was awake.

### **The Second Adam**

But perhaps, the teaching of Athanasius of Alexandria is the place to begin, "For in speaking of the appearance of the Savior amongst us," he began, "we must needs speak also of the origin of men, that you may know that the reason of His coming down was because of us, and that our transgression called forth [His] loving-kindness, that the Lord should both make haste to help us and appear among men. For of His becoming incarnate we were the object, and for our salvation He dealt so lovingly as to appear and be born even in a human body."

If the first Adam got us into this mess; the second Adam, Christ, would get us out!

An argument from simplicity might proceed thus: Because He is eternal, and all of God's actions are done with a unity and consistency

of purpose, God could never leave humanity in a fallen condition. The completion of His eternal plan in creating us brought Him to the Cross. Calvary was His answer to returning us to the Garden. From a Divine perspective, simplicity maintains that what God does is always a single event that cannot fail. God said of His Word, “it will accomplish what I please.” (Isaiah 55:11). There can be nothing God envisions or purposes that is not, in His eyes and thoughts, at the same time, completed. So Adam and Eve’s fall triggered a plan—planned before the earth was called into existence (Revelation 13:8; 17:8)—as an act of extreme and necessary mercy, to send Jesus to the Cross. For this, His incarnation was a reasonable act of Divine justice and love.

### Adam And Eve

Then God said, “Let us make man in our **image**, according to our **likeness...**” (Genesis 1:26) Athanasius argued, “God made man for incorruption, and as an image of His own eternity.” We relate to Him, to God, on a spiritual—not a physical—level ( John 4:24).

Adam was not God but he was godlike, godly. He and Eve, and all of us, were made for fellowship [relationship, friendship] with God, so on, some intimate level, Adam might know God. God equipped Adam with a “reasonableness,” or the ability to have such fellowship. “Why did God make [us] at all,” reasons Athanasius, “if He did not wish to be known by us?” This also supports the idea that the chastisement we deserved, Christ endured. Chastisement is justified when the offender is conscious of their wrongdoing, when the evil was known to be evil. Punishment, however severe, is deserved if the offender is to be treated as a responsible (conscious of sin) human person made in God’s image. What did I just write? Well, say it this way: we wouldn’t punish Fido for ripping apart a sofa cushion because he is just being a dog. We don’t fault animals for being animals. Fido can be corrected, chastised, but it seems most inappropriate to torment Fido, in the name of punishment, for doing something he had no conscious awareness that it was wrong. Humans are above—or should be above—brute impulses. Self-discipline is a human trait.

Adam and Eve were capable of apprehending a knowledge of good and evil. (Genesis 2:9) We, who are made spiritually “like” God, are conscious of righteousness, the concept of judgment, and sin (John 16:8). Some animals may experience attrition, like Fido, the dog, when his master catches him tearing apart a sofa cushion. But Fido doesn’t

feel contrition nor can Fido repent. There is something about us that has a built in consciousness of right and wrong even if we deny it. Adam was made in God's image in order to make him (and Eve and humankind) capable of perceiving, understanding, and appreciating God's holiness, His moral goodness. There is no mystery here as to why they hid themselves from God after disobeying (Genesis 3:8). Their shame was more about being morally undressed before God.

We have an innate consciousness of God's holiness—perhaps, not so much *who* God is as much as knowing that He is different, morally different. This is why salvation must include a transforming of the mind (and the heart) to once again appreciate God's interest in us (Romans 12:2). It is as if God is returning us to—what I might call—His Garden. Athanasius argued, “For there would be nothing to distinguish [us] even from brute creatures if [we] had knowledge of nothing but earthly things.”

Adam and Eve, sadly, wanted to know what evil was, even though, there was no such property in their makeup, spiritually or intellectually. They had to go on the say-so of a snake in the grass that pushed the narrative that somehow knowing evil was an important piece of knowledge. He lied! “And, in a word,” said Athanasius, “everything was full of irreligion and lawlessness, and God alone, and His Word, ... unknown.”

We needed to be rescued from an evil which was now systemic in a depraved nature. Even our basic physiological needs became addictions; feelings overwhelmed sense; the joy of knowing God gave way to a search for mere pleasure; happiness, as a consequence, was redefined, redirected from relationships to—what I like to euphemistically call—shiny objects of personal interest. We were only one generation from our first homicide (Cain killing his brother, Abel).

We needed to be rescued from a spiritual death, an eternal separation from God. So, Jesus went to the Cross. And for this to happen, He came as the incarnate Son of God. So when Paul affirmed, “We preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to the Greeks” (1 Corinthians 1:23) Paul was saying far more than just a reference to the hanging of a good man. Jesus was, according to Paul's teaching, the Jewish King and He was first and foremost deity. Both ideas stirred much scorn and mocking.

### **A Unique Gospel**

It is worth noting that Jesus' divinity shocks the academic sensibilities of the worldly scholar. God coming in the flesh seems too wild or crazy a religious notion to be believable. Yes, Christianity is unique. The plan of salvation and its execution were both the result of divine agency. From beginning to end, the plan of our salvation, through the Savior's death on a cross, was all God: created in the mind of God and implemented step by step by Himself. "He saw that there was no man—he was amazed that there was no one interceding; so his own arm brought salvation, and his own righteousness supported him" (Isaiah 59:16).

I like to quote Dr. Gregory Boyd, a professor at Bethel College, St. Paul, Minnesota, who wrote:

"There is no other belief which does this... Only the Gospel dares to proclaim that God enters smack-dab into the middle of the hell we created. Only the Gospel dares to proclaim that God was born a baby in a bloody, crap-filled stable, that He lived a life befriending the prostitutes and lepers no one else would befriend, and that He suffered firsthand, the hellish depth of all that is nightmarish in human existence."

### **A Unique Faith**

Believing that Jesus is God's Son, sent by His Father to save us, comes only by divine revelation. Such a commitment to a creed or a truth about God is, itself, unique to Christianity. That's why we refer to it as the Christian Faith. Professor Stephen Prothero, Professor of Religion at Boston University, tells us that even our concept of 'a faith' is unique to Christianity:

"It is often a mistake to refer to a religion as a 'faith,' or to its adherents as 'believers.' As odd as this might sound, faith and belief don't matter much in most religions. Often ritual is far more important, as in Confucianism. Or story, as in the Yoruba religion. Many Jews do not believe in God, and the world's Hindus get along quite well without any creed. ...to be a Christian has typically been to care about both faith and belief. ... As the term Christianity implies, this faith revolves around the person of Jesus, whom Christians have traditionally regarded as the Son of God, Savior, and Christ ...the coming king who will remake the world."

### Form or Fashion?

Christ, according to Paul, is “the *image* of the invisible God” (Colossians 1:15). How are we to explain this? Jesus explained “image” for us: “Whoever has seen me,” Jesus corrected Philip, His disciple, “has seen the Father.” (John 14:9). Jesus was also said to be in the *form* of God, as well as in the *likeness* and *fashion* of a man. It is little wonder controversy surrounded this “mystery of Godliness” (1 Timothy 3:16).

Jesus was, indeed, the manifestation of God in the flesh (incarnate). Paul taught, “Christ Jesus... being, [in the *form* of God] in every way, God, the Son, did not hold tightly unto His equality with the Father. On the contrary, he deprived Himself of His omnipotence, accepting a servant’s heart and role, [the *form* of a servant] in all its human weaknesses. And because He was now flesh and blood, [found in *fashion* as a man] He learned through obedience to depend on His Father even to the Cross ” (Philippians 2:6-8).

*Form is not fashion. Form is to fashion as character is to reputation or “who someone really is” compared with “how they act in public,” or nature compared to behavior, or “what is permanent” contrasted with “what is only the latest style, social change. ...or fashion.”*

Even the words that contain these words follow the same truth. God is *conforming* His children, the believers, to the image of His Son (Romans 8:29; 2 Corinthians 3:18; Galatians 4:19). He is actually changing us in a permanent way, getting us ready for our eternity with Him. Our minds are being *transformed* (Romans 12:2). God’s will and interest in us, as we love and serve Him, makes more and more sense, and has more and more meaning, to us. Our new birth is *not* a behavioral change but an *eternal transformation*, a new creation, now capable of developing deep and eternal fellowship with God.

But Paul explains fashion: “the *fashion* of this world is passing away” 1 Corinthians 7:31; Romans 12:2). Fashion is temporary and changing or as an external feature (like the clothes we wear) serve a “for now” purpose, later to be discarded (boxed and off to the Good-will shops).

Jesus’ *form* was God. Jesus was and is *God*. But when He came as Mary’s child, He was also in the *form* of a servant. He didn’t pretend to be a servant. He was the quintessential [representing the most perfect] servant of all time. Jesus called John the Baptist, His cousin, the “greatest” in the Kingdom of Heaven because he served God in such perfect

harmony. John the Baptist was the “greatest” servant (Matthew 11:11). The only one greater would be one who was “below” him or who served John. He could be called “greater.” Could Jesus be talking about Himself!? Jesus served John, clearly, in dying for him—as well as you and I.

### **Mortality or Immortality**

Jesus came in human *likeness* (incarnate *but* sinless) but Paul tells us that He was in the *fashion* of a man (Philippians 2:7-8). One translation uses the terms, *likeness* and *appearance*. His body was mortal and would serve the plan of God in His suffering and death [which we call His “Passion”]. For those scholarly minds that wish to meditate further on this, consider that “being in the likeness of man” could also reference the weaknesses and suffering of this life, the need to learn through trial and error and pain—to experience all that the gift of mortality became when Adam bequeathed it to us on leaving God’s Garden.

Jesus was God living in our humanity. There is more here than just two arms, legs, eyes, ears, etc. [That’s the fashion]. The likeness is the totality of our human experience along with the joys and sorrows, the highs and lows, which Jesus, as we, experienced. He partook of our humanity with all its challenges and temptations. This mortality—remember the word *fashion* means passing away—we will someday “put off” and be clothed with immortality (1 Corinthians 15:54).

The idea is an exciting one worth pondering: our immortal bodies will be bodies, but bodies that will never grow old or die. Our glorified bodies will satisfy our need for those external expressions of who we will become as citizens in the image of Christ in God’s kingdom. If I want to hug you, how do I do that? In Heaven we will have glorified bodies like Jesus’ fashioned after His. The *fashion*—let us imagine—gives us the arms but the *likeness* gives us the joy. God will give us bodies capable of that embrace.

### **Passibility**

This begged another question: Did Jesus, only in His humanity, suffer or did God, the Father, suffer, too, while Jesus was dying on the Cross? The dictionary defines *passible* as incapable of feeling pain. It adds, “only the humanity of Jesus is regarded as passible.” The early Greek fathers maintained that the incarnate Son suffered on the Cross

... but *not God*. Ignatius, a Church Father, thought, “[God] cannot suffer, except suffering (in Christ).” Irenaeus affirmed that through the incarnation the impassible was made possible.”

Believing that God could not repent because He could not lie or change His mind, feelings of love, pity, sorrow, jealousy, or wrath were, by the reckoning of some early scholars, only anthropomorphisms [the attribution of human traits, emotions, or intentions to non-human entities] and not *real* emotions. God was said to be changeless and nothing could disturb Him. The difficulty with this logic, that denies God negative feelings, is to deny Him *any* feelings. But “God is love.” How are we to understand love and mercy? Are these not alive with emotion?

The Biblical record describes a God Who is personable, Who is called transcendent [not subject to the limitations of the material universe] which means not a predictable or measurable force but in every sense an individual being, self-reliant, and free. We can admit that an epiphany (appearance) of Christ to an Abraham at Mamre (Genesis 18:1) or Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in exile (Daniel 3:23 & 25) were anthropomorphic but these are physical manifestations of God, which say nothing of how God “felt” at the time.

God cannot be tempted (James 1:13) or mocked (Galatians 6:7) or deceived (Jeremiah 11:20; John 2:24). He is never unwillingly coerced into any action. He is free from what one scholar called “gusts of feelings.” But to say that God is incapable of suffering (for me) misrepresents the Old Testament message of His dealings with Israel. To say God’s feelings are not human—we can accept—but not that they are not *real*. Martin Luther’s phrase “God striving with God” is a realistic description of His pain, especially while His Son hung in silent agony on the Cross. We need to confess that our language is weak in explaining Heaven’s truths, but we have a glimpse (Exodus 33:21-23)—“we know only in part” (1 Corinthians 13:12) which is sufficient for us to believe that the Father, God, and the Son of God were in absolute and complete unity on the matter of His death for our salvation. To believe that Jesus, the man, felt pain but not Jesus, as God, goes—and I must add, unnecessarily—beyond simple faith.

### Philippians 2:7-8

If I may add something, with which I had not intended to trouble you: why the natural mind finds all this unreasonable. It is because in Jesus going to the Cross for our sins, God did three things we never concluded would ever be done. When Jesus lowered Himself (Hebrews 2:9) He became a servant. "God cannot be anyone's servant because He is God!" says the logic. The logic was wrong. He was made like you and me which meant He, God, in the person of Jesus, grew and learned. We always were told that God is omniscient, all knowing. But He—as a man, Paul said—emptied Himself, relinquished that ability, set it aside to not act human but *be* human. And on the Cross God died! How can God ...die! Logic is confused. The logician is outclassed by a divine Wisdom.

Here, (Philippians 2:7-8) Paul offers us the miracle of the incarnation that explains why no Greek philosopher or Persian magus, or Roman student of Mithraism, or any other ancient intellectual, ever imagined God dying on a Roman cross for our sins. As already mentioned, no religion on this earth heralds this message of faith. I like to see this scripture as God doing three things that fault human logic and showing how unnatural it would have been for human reasoning to draw up such a plan.

Being in *the form of God*, Jesus took upon Himself the form of a servant. Though being God He lowered Himself to serve the Father's plan for our Salvation. God, in the person of Jesus, becomes a servant not as a superficial act of service but to give His life. God, a servant! This is most illogical, since God is above all [See Matthew 22:42-43 for the Jewish confusion over Jesus being King David's Son]. God is above all but not while incarnate which defies our logical understand of the order of things. The word "emptied" must mean that to be man, *God* relinquished His omnipotence and, other than on the Mount of Transfiguration, gave up the glories of heaven to suffer the scorn of sinful man.

He was *like a man*. He grew up (Luke 2:40). He learned obedience through suffering (Hebrews 5:8). He was tempted (Hebrews 4:15). Jesus' incarnate life was filled with all the drama associated with being a member of humanity. But our understanding of God—to this point—was of a being above human suffering, weakness, and temptation—and some add, human feelings. God growing, learning, suffering! Such

an idea is illogical because it contradicts our very definition of God as infinite and eternal.

*Fashions as a man, He died.* God is eternal! God cannot die. But Athanasius correctly argued, “For if He took a body to Himself at all, and—in reasonable consistency, as our argument shewed—appropriated it as His own, what was the Lord to do with it? or what should be the end of the body...? For it could not but die, inasmuch as it was mortal, and to be offered unto death on behalf of all: for which purpose it was that the Savior fashioned it for Himself.” Paul stood up one day, interrupting the speaker—even if it may have been himself—and enraptured exclaimed “Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom ... of God!”

### The Dialogue

**The Believer:** Jesus was both God and man. He is our God-man who died on the Cross. He was not only human.

**The Unbeliever:** Had they really believed Him divine, wouldn't they have stood there in tears, perhaps, frightened? What does this mean that God took form, appeared human, and is now dying? God cannot die—not because it is not logical—but because we have always believed in Him. God promised us the Messiah! 150 Psalms, all those prophecies, 2,000 years of prayers for deliverance, and here He is ...*dying!*

Oh the horror of such a Passover eve while the sky turned dark and the earth shook almost off its axis; how much more does this take on the ghostly atmosphere of a nightmare? Though they, who were there that afternoon, were never more wide awake.

And then it was over, and God was dead?

**The Believer:** This prompts the simplest question, “Do we need a reason to believe?” Jesus was human! But Jesus could not have been a mere human since there was too much drama for such an explanation. But, we knew his parents, the town he grew up in, and many followed him, watching him do incredible things that couldn't be denied—miraculous things that—at the very least—God was at his side. Ask His disciples!

**The Unbeliever:** But why imagine Him both God *and* man? How would such a thing be? What kind of person does that make Him?

And what if I don't believe! What if reason refuses to support the idea that God was in some way on that Cross dying because of me! Because of *me!* *Me!* That's another matter. When did I even imagine such a thing, let alone being accused of it! *Me!* I would want God dead!? Are you *crazy?*!

So what if I don't believe that something important happened that day—that somehow, on some level, it involved God ... does that matter? Are you starting a religion? This is a vision of a church no one should attend because your God is dead!

**The Believer:** Paul, the Apostle ...

**The Unbeliever:** Oh yes, Paul!

**The Believer:** Paul tells us that the Torah spoke of this moment. And he warns that if you won't believe, it is your loss. He pushed this idea! He discarded his pharisaic education to herald this single message of Jesus' death on that Cross (1 Corinthians 1:17).

Well, whatever happened on the Cross, according to Paul, meant something to God; so, we best figure it out. "What then? If some were unfaithful, will their unfaithfulness nullify God's faithfulness?" He argued, "Absolutely not" (Romans 3:3-4a).

**The Unbeliever:** So I don't need a reason to believe other than believing that what happened that day on Golgotha's Hill [Calvary] was God's doings and He wants us to accept Jesus' death as a sacrifice for sin. We know what that means. Now you are saying something that those who stood there can understand. There is one problem, though. The Torah called for animal sacrifices and never a human sacrifice.

**The Believer:** Yes. And since this Jesus was God's Son as He claimed to be (Luke 22:70), even if our logic fails us, we should not walk away disinterested. Even the devil knew (Luke 4:41). We should pause awhile like the centurion [Roman military captain] who, overseeing the event, stood there for hours pondering what it all might mean. He called Jesus "God's Son"! (Matthew 27:54). I think that makes Jesus, *God*. Peter, also, was excited to learn of Jesus' true identity (Matthew 16:16).

**The Unbeliever:** So, He *was* Deity?

**The Believer:** He was ...*God!* The Bible says so ..and not just Paul!

**The Unbeliever:** So, He was both human and divine?

**The Believer:** Uh-huh! We don't need a reason to believe this other than to trust the Bible record. Perhaps, a search for reasons is an overreach since God's thoughts are never ours (Isaiah 55:8). When our faith needs the support of a home-made science, we are less likely to "own" that faith, to accept God's Word simply because it is God's Word.

When Jesus died, God died, since no one else could do what God alone could do in dealing with the sin that separated Him from us. "I searched for a man among them," the Lord argued, "who would repair the wall and stand in the gap before me on behalf of the land so that I might not destroy it, but I found no one" (Ezekiel 22:30). No one to do what God must do! And Job once painfully noted, "I need someone to mediate between God and me, as a person mediates between friends" (Job 16:21). No man could do this, but Jesus could (and does). "For there is one God and one mediator between God and humanity, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 2:5).

Another point to consider: When Jesus rose again, man rose. Jesus is proof of the reality of our coming resurrection. "But as it is, Christ has been raised from the dead, the (first) of those who have fallen asleep [This is the general resurrection of *all* the saints]" (1 Corinthians 15:20).

Better to just trust Jesus, since He is the one who hung there for us. God, in His Son, hung there to "bear our sins" (Isaiah 53:12) and reconcile us to Himself (Ephesians 2:16). As Jesus comforted His followers on the eve of His death, "I have told you now before it happens so that when it does happen you may believe" (John 14 :29).

Why did my Jesus have to die?

Was I the reason? Was it I?

That hung Him there! Oh! Wondrous grace

That bore the shame of my disgrace.

## *PROVISIONS OF GOD'S GRACE*

*And he said, Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God: but to others in parables; that seeing they might not see, and hearing they might not understand. - Luke 8:10*

JESUS' death is not an allegory [a story told to present a moral truth]. *Pilgrim's Progress*, for example, is an allegorical account of a Christian's journey from Salvation to the gates of Heaven. Some think that Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden didn't really exist, that this is simply a fable to explain the origin of sin. We believe that Adam and Eve were real persons, our very first parents. Paul taught, "God made all the nations of the world from one man [Adam]" (Acts 17:26). The effect of their sin on the human soul caused all of creation to become estranged from the Creator, to corrupt the design for which God made them—and us.

God needed a way to reclaim us from ourselves, to bring us back to where Adam and Eve were before that fatal bite of forbidden fruit. When Adam and Eve strolled out of the Garden, God had to grieve their absence. The intimacy they knew with God on cool evening Garden walks (Genesis 3:8) was very dependent on Adam honoring God's desire that he, and his bride, show no interest in evil, no wanting to learn anything about it. Evil, personified in angels who incited a coup to overthrow God's sovereignty, was the absolute opposite of God's holiness, of everything God was and is and will ever be. The Armies of Heaven drove them out (Isaiah 14:12) in a pitched battle in a war which would later resume here on earth among men (Revelation 12:7). Now Satan, possessing a creature of the night that slithers about, would seek to get even (Genesis 3:1).

Sin requires punishment—or at least, chastisement, some way of correcting what went so terribly wrong in the heart of mankind (Ezekiel 36:26). We should agree with Athanasius that "If sin is left unchecked, it will be the same with God, the guilty and not guilty."

Worse still, God wants our fellowship but in our alienation—we call it a *fallen* state—what was He to do?! What would *we* do, if a child that was the source of all our joy when they were born (Hosea 11:1), now as a teen lives at such an emotional distance that we, in our pain, even imagined briefly what life would have been without them (Exodus 32:10). But then we know that our love would never let us release them (Hosea 11:8) to the ravenous wolves of an evil age (Ezekiel 22:27). Something must be done to bring them back. But what!

Jesus' death on the Cross was God's solution to the problem. Calvary was an historical event, not a symbol. Dorothy Sayers captured the heart of God in her play "*The Man Born to be King*" calling the Savior's death "the only thing that ever really happened," and in her Christian work, "*Creed or Chaos*" she correctly described the Cross as "miraculous and unfathomable." Calvary was not a metaphor for love. Calvary was, though, pure genius beyond our comprehension.

There were witnesses. Jesus dealt resolutely, completely, and effectively with the sin that separated us from a Holy God (Colossians 1:22). The task of inspiration through the writing of the apostles and prophets was to share with us the event that God, in the person of His Son, was going to die on a Roman cross and this single event would have eternal significance. It would become the moment by which all history would hereafter be interpreted and judged. Trying to understand the reasoning behind the Divine plan in story form is not what faith is about. Faith is accepting or recognizing that, through His death, Jesus offered us eternal life and reconciliation with God.

We know we are forgiven (Ephesians 1:7). We know, thanks to Jesus' death and resurrection, we have newness of life (Romans 6:5), a new birth (John 3:3), a new beginning in our relationship with God and one another (1 John 1:2-3). We know that had Jesus *not* bled and died on Calvary, none of these would have been true (Romans 5:9). We know if there had not been a Calvary, we would have died in sin (1 Corinthians 15:17) and been "lost" for eternity. (John 3:16). But the Bible sometimes explains things in cultural terms, in a way more familiar to Jewish, but not non-jewish, ears.

### **What Calvary Provided.**

I prefer describing Calvary in terms of provisions of God's grace. We are like the blind men, in the Indian tale, walking about and feeling the

elephant, trying to describe what it is we are touching. Calvary provided many things which we can appropriate in this life. We may walk around this truth and, using this metaphor of the elephant, feel our way to comprehend, as the Apostle John put it, "All about Jesus, the eternal and living Son of God, whom we have heard teach, of whom we were eyewitnesses of His death and Resurrection, whom we willingly followed about observing Him love others, heal the sick and raise the dead, with whom we enjoyed the closest and personable of friendships; He is the living Word of life!" (1 John 1:1).

"Here," Professor Trench [writing in *Synonyms of the New Testament*] reminds us, "as in other similar cases, what the Scripture does is to approach the central truth from different quarters; to exhibit it not on one side but on many, that so these may severally supply the deficiencies of one another, and that moment of the truth which one does not express, another may."

### Jesus bore our sins.

I Peter 2:24 He himself *carried away our sins* in his body on the Cross that we being alienated from sins might live a righteous life.

To understand the use of a phrase, sometimes, we need only find a straight forward example that can be interpreted only one, obvious, way. What does it mean to "bear another's sin"? As an example, consider the time the people of Israel failed to appreciate God's ability to give them military victories once in the land of Canaan [Palestine or modern day Israel]. God considered their fear of battle a lack of trust in Him for the victory. God called it "unfaithfulness." Then God said, "Your children will live as shepherds in the wilderness for forty years ... **bearing ... your acts of unfaithfulness**" (Numbers 14:33). An entire next generation would experience the nomadic life of wilderness dwellers as a consequence of their cowardly fathers' failure to trust God's leadership.

It seems easy to use the word punishment here when explaining someone carrying or bearing the misdeeds of another—suffering or enduring the consequence of their misdeeds. But is bearing another's sins taking their *punishment*? All but two soldiers were frightened into thinking that no such battle was winnable, even though, it was God who was drafting them into His service. These men, we might correct-

ly say, were punished, because God was planning, now, to wait on the next generation to muster. But do we say that their children now were being punished in the waiting?

A scripture worth noting records the disobedience of two religious leaders during that wilderness time. Moses' nephews, Eleazar and Ithamar, in Ancient Israel, were given specific instructions as Jewish priests to use part of a sin offering for food but they burnt it to a crisp instead. This provoked Moses to ask, "Why didn't you eat the sin offering in the holy place?" It is most holy! He has given it to you to **bear the sin of the congregation** and to provide a covering for them before the Lord" (Leviticus 10:17). Moses was wanting to impress on the priesthood, as well as all Israel, the importance of distinguishing what is for God's service from what is considered for general use, what is holy and unholy. Even here, God has Calvary on His mind. An offering given to "bear the sin of the congregation" is to God a most holy thing.

It must never be viewed as just another ritual, some mundane service to race through because other things are more important. The sin offering to God was a precursor, a type, of His Son's coming crucifixion for sin. And God's Son would be most holy—sinless. Nothing in God's mind would ever be as serious, as solemn, as important, as momentous, as God's Son dying for Adam's sin and all sin! So when He was said to "bear our sin" He clearly experienced the consequence of our sins. This to John Calvin in his *Institutes* could mean nothing other than a punishment, "This is our acquittal" Calvin attested, "the guilt that held us liable for punishment has been transferred to the head of the Son of God (Isaiah 53:12)."

When Peter, the Apostle, taught that Christ bore our sins, he was quoting Isaiah, who prophesied that Jesus would "*carry their iniquities*" (Isaiah 53:11). Isaiah added "Jesus was pierced [a clear reference to the spear that pierced the Savior's side while on the Cross, John 19:34] *from* our rebellion; he was crushed *from* sins for which we were liable; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace." (Isaiah 53:5).

The word "from" means: "as a consequence of" or "on account of" or simply "for your sake." The language doesn't do justice to the meaning here. More correctly God sent Jesus to deal with our unfaithfulness, our rebellion against Him. It wasn't a natural consequence like getting wet standing in the rain; it was a Divine plan to deal effectively

and finally with sin. Daniel the prophet wrote, "To bring an end to sin" (Daniel 9:24). The writer to the Hebrews concurred, "to put away sin," adding, "by the sacrifice of himself" (Hebrews 9:26).

We were clearly guilty of insubordination. We are euphemistically called "sheep" in Isaiah 53:6. "We wandered off." [Sheep cannot find their way back into the fold on their own, which, speaks to God's need to come and rescue them—and us, John 6:44.] The prophet saw Jesus' Passion [suffering and death] as a consequence of our sinfulness, our waywardness, but the good news is: He was chastised (as a father chastises a son), to reconcile us to God. Jesus took our whipping.

Jesus did not only experience the pain of our sin. Neither does "to bear our sin" mean to sympathize with sinners, nor to identify with their pain, nor to express the sorrow we should be feeling instead., nor to be persecuted on account of human sinfulness (as others have argued), nor even to suffer the consequences of sin, the victim of an evil age. What Jesus experienced on Calvary were not sympathy pains or some form of empathy, nor was it simply the consequence of living among us. "To bear sin" means specifically to endure its penal consequence [penalized]. Could this mean anything other than: to undergo the punishment that is required? No!

In Isaiah 53:4 God's suffering servant carries a burden of pain and sin that He took off our backs and put on His own. That's what *vicarious* means. Isaiah went on to prophecy, "...he bore the sin of many..." where it means He was "accepting of suffering of the guilt of others" to which Peter added—clarifying who God's suffering servant was and when Isaiah's prophecy was finally fulfilled, "in His body on the cross." Peter then pulls back the curtain revealing God's plan. "So that,.... we might live for righteousness." (1 Peter 2:24) In Paul's words, "...in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too may walk in newness of life" (Romans 6:4)

Non-believers question the logic behind a purposeful God requiring the crucifixion of His Son. Nonetheless, our faith recognizes God's authority over sin in our lives thanks to what Jesus did on the Cross. It is more than forgiveness. There was a dynamic at work in those hours of darkness on Golgotha's hill [Calvary]: The Temple veil, or curtain, that covered the doorway to the most holy place in the Temple, through which the High Priest alone and only once yearly could enter,

to commune with God and to pray for forgiveness for all the people—when Jesus died—was torn in two, signaling that once again a threshold was opened, through prayer, for all who would enter into communion with God! Jesus' death dealt with sin and, thus, made a way for us to be reconciled to God.

### **Jesus Became Our Ransom**

Mark 10:45 For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.

A *ransom* is a payment in exchange for someone's freedom. Like so many words that are nuanced, having differing shades of meaning, a *ransom* and a *redemption* [a relationship with God] are similar and often overlapping in meaning. Whereas redemption emphasizes our freedom, Jesus as our ransom emphasizes the price paid for that freedom. Our redemption through Jesus' death and resurrection frees us to serve God. The ransom, or price of that freedom, was Jesus' death on the Cross.

In Ancient Israel a person might negotiate the price for a family member's freedom from slavery, but it was always in terms of gold, silver (money), or food. [Hosea purchased his wife at auction for fifteen silver coins, and an homer and half of barley—maybe 9+ bushels full, Hosea 3:2]. What was *not* done was purchasing one person's freedom with the *life* of another. In ancient Israel people were not sacrificed. [Enemies killed in battle were said to be given to God in victory but this was not a negotiated ransom].

### **God's Possession**

King David once prayed: "Remember your congregation, which you *purchased* long ago and *redeemed* ... for your own *possession*" (Psalm 74:2). David introduced a third synonym: *possession*. Usually, when someone purchases something—even by a ransom—they can say that they bought it and it is now theirs. "You were bought at a price," Paul exclaimed, "Jesus has purchased us with his own blood.." (Acts 20:28). "You were bought for a price...your body and soul are God's" (1 Corinthians 6:20). So, being ransomed, being redeemed, and becoming God's special possession (1 Peter 2:9) are all part of a single divine act. We must see it like the blind men examining the elephant.

### **Atonement: A Covering for Sin**

One more word is used among the Ancients, which doesn't translate readily into English [That's why theologians invent new words]. The Scripture in some places speaks of a *covering* for sins instead of bearing our sins. The word used in most translations is *atonement*—a word I am not using because it tends to be overused in translations. To me, *atonement* is a catch-all word. To atone, says the dictionary, is to make reparations for wrongs done, to reconcile (2 Chronicles 29:24). We have euphemistically interpreted atonement as at-one-ment emphasizing our reconciliation with God (Romans 5:11).

Reconciled or made friends again with God is how Paul, the Apostle, finally understood the term. Very often in Ancient Israel, and especially during Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, (Leviticus 23:27), sacrifices were made as well (Leviticus 23:36). In fact it is hard to think of atonement in ancient Israel without sacrifices. Since Jesus came, He became our sacrifice, so we now just use the word primarily to talk about reconciliation.

### **Atonement: Cleansing, Purification, from sin**

Atonement also speaks of forgiveness but with a condition attached—the person doing the forgiving must be appeased, pacified, conciliated, or in some way made satisfied first (Leviticus 4:26). The best way to encourage forgiveness is through true repentance. The result of all this is *reconciliation*. This word, which I am simply referring to as a *covering*, but you may translate it *atonement*, speaks of ritual purification. When Moses prophesied that God “would *cleanse* the land for his people” (Deuteronomy 32:43), the basic idea was that God would *cover* them. This is a euphemism for showing mercy—forgiving them. Some interpret this to mean that God giving Israel a victory over their enemies was a clear sign that He forgave them for all their rebellion, that is, He and they were reconciled.

So, we have one word that seems to mean all kinds of things: a covering, an appeasement or (have you ever heard this word) a propitiation, a cleansing or purification, and a reconciliation. Are you thinking about the Indian proverb again of the elephant and the blind men? I am. Only, it's not an elephant; it's an *atonement*. [Want another big word? *Expiation*, a word that means God repaired our relationship

with Him through the Cross. The dictionary calls it—you guessed it—an atonement.]

### **Atonement: Need for Forgiveness**

Now one more step and we're there: forgiveness was not thought gratuitous [forgiveness cost God His Son's life]. Forgiveness was based on some sacrifice that satisfied God on some level (some say *appeased* God). On a special day each year (usually in our September) offerings of purification were made. This was a ceremonial cleansing to represent God's forgiveness, "purified in the LORD's presence from all their sins." (Leviticus 16:30). Animals were sacrificed for sin on that occasion and the High Priest would go into the inner chamber in the Temple known as the Holiest Place where he would burn incense above what is called "The Mercy Seat" (we'll look at this shortly.)

This was an elaborate ritual with specified garments for the priests; in fact, every detail was specified. The Mercy Seat was the lid of the box, affectionately called "The Ark," that contained a copy of the 10 Commandments which itself represented a covenant made between God and Israel. Why mention this? That "lid" was, in reality, a *covering* (this is our word) that "covered" that covenant from view.; so, instead of calling it a cover or lid, it became known as "The Place of Atonement."

And why must God put them through their paces with such an elaborate tradition? Could not God have said "You need to repent and be forgiven if you want to become friends again with me" and let it go at that? Words are easily forgotten. But not even you will forget this now, if you understood it. As all Jews understood at the time, "without blood being shed, there can be no forgiveness" (Hebrews 9:22). And since this would someday be God's Son dying for our sins, God's love for Israel made it of crucial importance, and to do that, He made it elaborate and ornate. [Read Leviticus chapter 16.] Are there not here hints, at least, that God has His Son on His mind? The price of our salvation was the sacrifice of God's Son.

Keep in mind that ancient cultures were into sacrificing all kinds of things; so, this wouldn't have seemed out of the ordinary for Israel at the time. It played right into God's plan. Almost makes you think that God was behind the evolution of sacrificial systems from the beginning.

### **Freedom from Bondage**

As Jesus' death was necessary to redeem us, God did what He had to do to free ancient Israel from Egyptian slavery. For those not familiar with the story: Back when Jacob lived in Canaan (Palestine or Israel, today) because of a seven year famine, he moved his entire family to Egypt. Four hundred years later, after His family grew into the hundreds of thousands, the Pharaoh of Egypt decided to enslave them to build him a city for his namesake. If you think of it: Israel's freedom from slavery parallels our freedom from sin. Well, God sent Moses to lead them out, but it would take more than diplomacy.

God's explanation as to how He freed Israel from Egyptian bondage was in terms of a ransom. He did not use the usual word but the word "covering" we described above. God told His people that He, God, gave Egypt as a covering instead of them! Scholars translated it "ransom" and we have no academic right to disagree. [In I Samuel 12:3 and Amos 5:12 this word is translated a *bribe*, money transacted for criminal reasons.]

Take a step back from over-analyzing the Bible here and notice that in all these cases the common meaning is that some price was paid that was agreeable to satisfy some requirement or interest. "Underlining all these offerings there is the conception that the person's offering covers some requirement and is regarded as sufficient and satisfactory by God. Somewhat like the English colloquialism: "I got you covered..."

God said, "I gave Ethiopia and Egypt, your ransom, instead of you." (Isaiah 43:3). We might have said, "I had to send the death angel or Pharaoh would not have let you go."

God went on, through Isaiah's prophecy. The language suggests a close relationship between God and the people of Israel, "I see you as family [I am your kinsmen redeemer!], buying your freedom. (Isaiah 43:1), "You, now belong to me." I call you by name ... I love you!" (Isaiah 43:3-4).

God reminded Israel that He got them out of Egyptian slavery by sending the death angel to kill every first born in Egypt, man and cattle and all. He called this a ransom (Isaiah 43:3). Israel's redemption (Isaiah 43:1) brought Egypt to an unspeakable grief, but it was the price required to purchase their freedom (Deuteronomy 7:8).

This language in Isaiah, repeated elsewhere, as well, in the Bible narrative, is peculiar because ransoms were paid in coin (Numbers

18:16) not human life, except here, where God repeatedly reminds Israel that He bought their freedom from slavery by killing Egyptians (Deuteronomy 24:18; 2 Samuel 7:23; 1 Chronicles 17:21).

It was no small matter, God sent Jesus as a ransom for us. ...Something this word study should have taught us.

### **Jesus Was Made Our Redemption**

1 Corinthians 1:30 "God's plan was ingenious! Through Jesus' death and resurrection, we, too, now, with Him in our lives, can be free...."

Paul emphasized *redemption* in his epistles and not a ransom. Paul wants to talk about "What God did to redeem us in sending Jesus." He had no interest in talking about payments of any sort. The only reference by him to a ransom is in his letter to Timothy (1 Timothy 2:6) and he might simply be saying that Jesus' death liberated many from the misery and penalty of their sins.

'To set free for a ransom' does not occur in the NT [the New Testament which contains the writing of the Apostles]. Atonement or ransom is not redemption! Atonement and ransoming are sacral acts, formally tied to a Jewish ceremony that would not serve Paul's message to non-Jewish people, to whom He went as a missionary.

There is a difference between being ransomed and being redeemed. Redemption carries no payment! Redemption, in distinction, is solely the act of freeing one from bondage, slavery, or sin. Israel's freedom from Egyptian bondage was an act of redemption. But I just got through saying it was a ransom!

God did not pay a ransom to anyone. Recall discussing the "Christus Victor Theory" of Atonement and Origen's idea that God paid a ransom, Jesus, to Satan, to free us? You don't remember! Neither did I. I had to look back to the chapter on "Theories of Atonement." Gregory Nazianus eventually denounced the notion. Jesus was a ransom only in the sense that—as we say in the vernacular—He paid such a high price for our salvation. But there was no transaction, monetary or otherwise.

God acts in His own power (Deuteronomy 9:26). He owns all and owes no one. God's act of freeing His people from slavery to sin on

Calvary was an innate loving response to their need. The legal idea of buying back from an alien power is missing.

The emphasis in redemption is freedom. God did not buy us back from Satan or any other power. God did not negotiate our release from sin's prison. The price for our redemption was a personal matter within God. The Psalmist warned, "In the day of disaster should I put my trust in my bank accounts or thank God that I am wealthy? Mark this! Mark this! A man will never ever be delivered by these. What might a man possibly give (bribe God) to be rescued." (Psalm 49:6-8; Mark 8:37). There was a ransom price, indeed, the Savior's shed blood, but this was somehow an arrangement between God's love and His justice alone—yes, something we need to talk about.

### Redemption or Redeemed

Paul never spoke of Jesus redeeming us or God redeeming us through Christ. Paul spoke of Jesus *as* our redemption (1 Corinthians 1:30). Is there a difference? I think so. God did not just provide for our redemption; He *became* our redemption. He redeemed us through the sacrifice of Himself. It cost Him, not just what He had to offer but the offering of Himself, not what He had but Who He was ["in the form of a servant" Remember? In His incarnation.] to set us free from sin. Paul clarified, "In him we have redemption, through His blood, the forgiveness of sins according to **the riches of his grace**" (Ephesians 1:7; Colossians 1:14).

"The riches of His grace" is not incidental but a critical aspect of truth. Grace, as we know, is any free gift *from God*. Here I appreciate the Catholic understanding, which is the subtitle of this book: God's gift is the gift of *Himself*. This is, by our ability to interpret truth, the only way we could understand the idea of the gift of God's salvation being free. Recall in the chapter, The Dogma under *The Cost of Freedom*: "If I gave my son in exchange for anything of value to give away, it still was not free." But if I gave of myself, it would be a free gift because what something costs me to give away is a personal choice, not requiring anything of anyone else.

I know this sounds like so much philosophy but since the Trinity (the Father, Son and Holy Spirit) are in every sense One, we can say that God was *in* His Son on Calvary. There is only one God and Jesus is God. He indeed gave Himself.

Grace is God's involvement in our lives that comes with no other condition than we allow Him to impact us, that we trust Him in the matter of what is best for us, that we honor a conviction He instills in us as a warning if we attempt to misstep, and that we love Him.

Paul, now, instead of talking ransoms, spoke of our redemption. Everything we said about the *atonement* now applies to our redemption, but the sacrifices have been replaced by Jesus' crucifixion. The writer to the Hebrews wrote, "He (Jesus) entered the most holy place once for all time, not by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood, having obtained **eternal redemption.**" (Hebrews 9:12) Redemption is—as only it can be—a free gift of God's grace. All aspects of our freedom in Christ have come by way of Jesus' death and resurrection. Redemption is not only forgiveness (freedom from guilt, the liability for sin) but freedom from being enslaved to the sin itself. The writer to the Hebrews corroborated, adding, "...displaying how powerful His promise, cleansing, purifying, us of sin" (Hebrews 1:3b, c). We can live now a new life with the Lord Jesus Christ giving us the zeal, the eagerness, to live above temptations, to do what we know is morally responsible. Living a life in which happiness depends now on our love of God. That's redemption!

There is an eternal component to our freedom in Christ (Romans 8:23). Redemption, in a total and absolute sense, is freedom from pain, sorrow, temptations, and all evil. This describes what Heaven will be like (Ephesians 1:14).

But the question is still brought forward: Why did it take the Savior's death to provide our freedom from sin and guilt. There is no payment to be made, no law to be followed, no promise of commitment to be honored. The very word "redemption" forgoes all these! This is *grace*. Should not God's provision have been possible without a crucifixion? No. Now thanks to His death for sin, the writer to the Hebrews adds "Therefore, he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called might receive the promise of the eternal inheritance, because **a death has taken place for redemption...**" (Hebrews 9:15)

## Jesus Took Our Place

I Timothy 2:6 God, our Savior, gave Himself for everyone.

\* \* \*

Paul wrote to Timothy, his disciple, "God's desire is that everyone is saved." (1 Timothy 2:4). So, when he also wrote, "God, our Savior, gave Himself **for** everyone" (1 Timothy 2:3, 6) Paul was presenting a two-fold truth. First, as mentioned earlier, God *in the person of* Christ (who was Himself, God) was crucified, and secondly, He did this for His whole creation, "for everyone."

When we say God gave Himself to die on the Cross, we mean, as Jesus said, as a *ransom* for us. The word ransom, that Jesus used, of Himself, (Mark 10:45) is not Paul's word but the meaning is the same with one notable difference: Whereas Paul said "all," Jesus spoke of "many." Using the analogy of a wedding (Heaven is often in Scripture spoken of in terms of some feast or celebration, a wedding between Christ and us being one of them) *all* have been invited to join Him in His kingdom, but only *some* will RSVP back (Matthew 22:14).

But here is where we begin to question what the Savior and the apostle were saying. If He died for everyone, why isn't everyone going to go to Heaven? Why isn't everyone saved? The quick answer is: everyone doesn't want what God is offering; not everyone wants to be reconciled to God or to enjoy His friendship.

Why? For those of us who want God in our lives, it makes no sense. Maybe because sin is offensive to Him and some are not ready to give it up. God, however, is willing to work with us in that area. All He wants of us now, is that we seek Him, request His involvement in our lives. That doesn't seem too much to ask. Paul told another of his students, Titus, "Jesus gave himself **for us** to free us from immorality and clean up our living so that we may be known as His people, eager to do what is right by Him." (Titus 2:14).

This leads us into the heart of the matter: two words, *for all*. Scholarship translates this to mean, *in our stead*. This is more than a *vicarious* death. This is *substitutionary*. If Jesus' death were only a vicarious act, it would mean that His death benefited us—a noteworthy thought. Jesus' death provided more benefits than many lifetimes could experience. In fact, Paul tells us, God plans to utilize eternity to share with us the manifold gift of all Calvary meant for Him and us (Ephesians 2:7).

A substitutionary redemption or ransom is an *exchange*: He took our place on the Cross. The exchange is: He takes our sin and gives us His righteousness. As Paul taught, "Jesus **gave himself for our sins** to rescue us from this present evil age" (Galatians 1:4).

Some question the reasoning behind such a idea since it does not leave any theoretical wiggle room. If He died as an expression of love or simply because the Father allowed it to happen as a consequence of Judean hatred at the time, we might find the historical account more reasonable. But an argument that the divine plan required for our Savior a Roman cross, and three hours of darkness in agonizing loneliness, bears no resemblance to human experience and leaves us abandoned of reason.

So we argue from law or we surrender to the logic of debt we get from our own financial transactions. We even learned that Jesus' cry, "It is finished" possibly means "paid in full." We know a little something about law or finance but God dying *for us* adds a whole new paradigm for which we have no parallel experience. Other than soldiers in battle, no one sacrifices their life willingly for another, but what Jesus did was more than that. If Jesus had not died, we would have been eternally lost with no future heaven to enjoy.

We appeal to the sacrificial system, which foreshadows the Truth but the sacrifices Moses instituted are now dead ceremony—and that by God's design (Colossians 2:14). Beside, how many Christians really know and understand the law of Moses and the sacrificial system enough to explain this most sacred of historical events!

No! Reason is not a friend here. Grace and faith are!

### **Jesus Is The Mercy Seat**

Romans 3:25 God's purpose was to give Jesus as our Mercy Seat, the Place of Atonement [a means of propitiation], which we believe He was when He shed His blood on Calvary demonstrating God's justice because up to this moment He overlooked sins that He only tolerated.

My uncle purchased a larger cage for his parakeet. The cage required some assembly with inserted glass panels as well as the many items, roosts and toys, his parakeet needed to enjoy in its new home. My uncle then needed to fill the various cups for seed and water, which we forgot about until now. These were secured inside the cage and we didn't know how to get at them to fill them. We didn't recall any instruction for this, so we set our mind to solving the unsolvable—how to feed the parakeet. Frustrated and concluding we might have to disassemble the cage, start over again (filling the cups first) my uncle

went to work and I to school, leaving the problem to grandma. When we returned, we discovered the bird's cups filled and grandma—of all things—apologetic for doing it. She knew she couldn't take the glass panels off the cage and whatever else might be required to get at the cups; so, as she, rather sheepishly, confessed, she simply reached through the cage door and lifted each one out, filled it, and then put it back the same way—all without removing any part of the cage itself. Uncle and I were mildly embarrassed, admitting grandma was right. It should have been obvious but somewhere along our academic training, genius seemed to require a more complicated approach to life. I am reminded of Festus' warning to Paul and a discussion over the Cross, "You study too many books, Paul; I don't think you are in your right mind" (Acts 26:24).

I thought of this story from my childhood when I read what Paul, the Apostle, said to the believers at Rome, "God's purpose was to give Jesus as our Mercy Seat, the Place of Atonement, which we believe He was, when He shed His blood on Calvary." (This was my free translation to capture the meaning.) If you read commentaries, the meaning becomes, "Whom God hath set forth to be a *propitiation*--or "propitiatory sacrifice," through faith in his blood."

By translating the phrase "The place of atonement" by "a propitiatory sacrifice" scholars have disconnected entirely, what Paul said, from the Jewish practice or the Day of Atonement. Perhaps, Grandma would have seen through the fog of big words and complicated ideas and understood the place of atonement to be the Cross on Golgotha's Hill.

One reason given, among others, for assuming Paul was not referencing the actual Mercy Seat, is that Jesus' death was public; Aaron's descendants did what they did in strictest privacy. It would have been better—forgive the apparent correction—had Paul used John's wording: "God sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (1 John 4:10). John actually said, "propitiation." I need grandma because faith is not complicated.

A propitiatory sacrifice makes it about God's justice. Scholarship correctly informs that Paul's word here, which we are translating as "Mercy Seat" ends with letters that indicate either "the place of" (that's why it is called a "seat") or it might as easily mean "that which serves to produce a certain result." The word *propitiation* says that Jesus'

death “served to make” [God] favorable. Paul could be saying that the Cross served to show God merciful. The place of atonement, now has become “the Cross,” the place where God dealt with sin. Jesus shed blood *served to* reconcile us to God as persons of faith. So, I like to translate the word “Mercy-Seat” as the place which served to show God merciful. And His mercy reconciled us to Himself.

How might I know that Grandma would agree with me? Grandma, though not proficient in theories of the Cross, was no dunce. One day I read in the Bible that God was a jealous God (Exodus 20:4) and in my excitement I told Grandma. She scolded me for saying such a thing. She told me that jealousy is a sin and God would never be that way! The word “propitious” sounds like a jealous God needs to be placated but if I told Grandma God was merciful, she would have smiled approvingly. And “mercy” is what faith anticipates (Hebrews 11:1, 6). Propitiation is, indeed, a term that has earned its spot in the theological sunlight because a final judgment does await all those who do not accept what Jesus offers through the Cross, but for us, believers, it is acceptable to me to stay with the idea that God is merciful.

Paul said clearly, The object of (our) faith is Jesus crucified and risen. It is important to note that faith germinates in the heart only when God reveals this simplest of truths that Jesus died to restore in us a love relationship with God. God does not want us to depend on reasoning to understand how the Cross provides such a restoration. We need not disassemble the bird cage when all we need know is reach in and take hold of the cup. God lights the flame of faith in the heart and suddenly I know that Jesus blood was shed for *me*.

The next verse, Romans 3:26, concludes, “this clearly proves God just because he separated the sin from the sinner and found a way to rescue us from ourselves without destroying us. He could operate to remove the cancer without killing the patient. “And,” Paul added, “He makes us righteous, too, who believe in Jesus Christ.”

This is the ultimate restoration of our relationship with God through accepting Jesus’ work on the Cross. Shortly in this same letter to the Romans, Paul will remind us, that we, as believers, are being “conformed into the image of His Son, Jesus” (Romans 8:29). We are discovering that the more like His Son we become, the closer in relationship we grow to His, and now, our, Father.

What was the reason for the story of my uncle's parakeet? True story, incidentally. It has served me as a reminder that—God's Word was never intended solely for the intellectuals but is the story of a divine love that can be embraced by children..

Not everyone is capable of navigating the deep and somewhat treacherous waters of ideas. Not everyone is impassioned with an intellectual insight to grasp the salient points, to steer the ship past the rocks of an unfamiliar term or some complex theology without crashing against misplaced logic. Not everyone knows the Biblical languages or are amateur savants of linguistics or the etymology of Bible words [Did you have to look up any of the words in the last few sentences; or you should have looked them up but didn't?] It's Okay because the gospel message of Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection is for everyone, children, persons of a lower I.Q., the elderly whose minds think simpler thoughts, and those whose sorrow and pain has robbed them of any interest in such debates. The message for me, too, is one of simple faith. In the TV Series, "Downton Abbey" (my wife and I have seen it, now, 5 times and counting) Lady Sybil, played by Jessica Findlay, remarked, "I don't know if the vicar knows any more about God than I do." There is some truth here, if we accept by faith the message our heart is telling us as we get to know Him.

Christ is our Mercy Seat as He is our redemption, our wisdom and our righteousness. Romans 3:25 will come up again when we discuss "justice" in "Christ Our righteousness."

### **God in Christ Forgave Us**

Hebrews 8:12 For I will forgive their wrongdoing, and I will never again remember their sins.

Just about now, the "what if's" like so many buzzards circling a carcass in the desert, may begin to fly around in your head. What if there are other inhabited planets, does Jesus have to die there, too, for them? What if someone from some lost tribe along the Amazon River never heard of Jesus, they have no chance at getting to know God for real? What happens to someone who is just as dedicated, just as devoted to God, only, in another religion, where Jesus isn't believed to be God's Son—like Judaism—does God not invite them, too into His heaven? What if....

Don't let your faith depend on answers you do not have to questions that are open to conjecture, based on incomplete information. Worse, don't deny your faith on the basis of a "what if" that might never be a valid question. Most "what if's" in our lives are made up scenarios or pictures we paint with our logic that can't happen or we do not have proof that they ever did happen. We often create "What if's" about our own choices in life, saying what if I had chosen 'A' and not 'B'. We will never know, because this is a personal history that cannot happen because it did not happen.

By faith in Jesus Christ we can begin to cherish a life-long—and eternity long—love relationship with God, that makes all "What if's" moot arguments, having no relevance to us anymore. It all starts with having a faith that knows that whatever we might have done, or whatever we might have been, that kept God at a distance from us, is now forgiven. Forgiveness is a huge word, a powerful word, that like dynamite is used to blow away boulders and mountains of rock, where a new road must go, we can find a clear path, through forgiveness, back to God and each other.

The forgiveness I am talking about is not a psychological tool; it is a gift from God. It all begins because He forgave us. Jesus' death, then, empowered us to forgive one another. Think about it: This gift of Calvary, alone, is worth the journey. Notice that God forgave us (you might be wondering: why?) and now He expects us to be forgiving toward others. This we discuss in the chapter "The Power of Christ's Forgiveness."

Love is like forgiveness. The ability to love others is only as effective as the corollary [the direct outcome] to being loved. People who are loved as children and then as young adults are able to innately recognize that need in others better—and patiently administer the same. Love—or, sadly, its absence—impacts who we all become.

Forgiveness follows the same path when we experience God's forgiveness. It is as if a billionaire discovered you living in abject squalor, emaciated from little nourishment, begging to just stay alive, and they gave you one million dollars to get your health back and live more comfortably than just subsisting on Ramen noodles. You didn't need one million dollars; so, why might you think they gave you such a sum? Certainly not to buy a Lamborghini. You would now be in a position to feed many friends—maybe invest most of the money and

continue with the dividends to care about others like yourself. You would be very capable of doing such a thing and, no doubt, your benefactor would expect as much. This is how God's forgiveness works in our lives.

### **Forgiveness**

Why did God forgive us? Why did He think that He had to? Whatever did we do that needed His forgiveness? We parted ways when Adam and Eve changed things between God and us, His creation. And I think you would agree, it wasn't God's fault. The world needed to be made ready in a number of ways: The books of Moses and the prophets needed to be written, God's letters to us announcing His coming; Roman roads eventually needed to be built crisscrossing the known world, so, the Apostles could bring the message of Jesus' coming and crucifixion (and resurrection) everywhere; a common language needed to be developed. (Call it evolved if you want but God had to oversee its production because it had to be able to say what God wanted said—what we are looking into now in this book). It needed to be a time of relative peace—no major wars, which, in itself is amazing, since some cultures live for war. God is an eternal Being; the length of time has no meaning to Him. Our salvation He would provide in His time. Peter, the Apostle, told us that with God this is the same as two days. (2 Peter 3:8).

Jesus' death and resurrection qualified Him in His Father's eyes to replace the Jewish priesthood. His sacrifice replaced animal sacrifices—and without animal sacrifices, the Jewish priesthood would be reduced in importance. The sacrifices had been a constant reminder, back in ancient times, of our need to be forgiven. Now, that Jesus died for our sins, the appropriation of God's forgiveness is finally available to all who seek it. Did we argue that God was unforgiving up to this time? Not at all! It was God who sent Jesus. His forgiveness has always been the quest of His divine heart and will. Now, at last, we can accept it by faith.

### **Mercy**

The word used here in our verse of interest (Hebrews 8:12) is actually "mercy," a word only spoken of God. God's mercy says, "Your sins? I don't recall!" Forgiveness is a catalyst [a stimulus or an encourage-

ment] that grows close relationships. God's forgiveness serves Him to draw us closer to Him. Jeremiah confirmed, "We do not need a friend or family member to tell us about God, because, we are all the Lord's people, now, from the youngest to the oldest. From the least important to the most important, we, all, will know Him personally, because He has mercifully forgiven our wandering and sins, never to be remembered or recalled ever again" Jeremiah 31:34).

### **Free and Forgiven!!**

God's forgiveness is not just an act of grace but an act of the *riches* of His grace (Ephesians 1:7), which is to say that forgiveness is a multifaceted provision; we will be reaping its benefits throughout eternity. God through forgiveness brings us into brand new relationships, not just, with Himself but each other as well. Forgiveness is the nourishment that feeds a healthy redemption.

Some contend that forgiveness is just words. Even if it is genuine, they say, how should it take a Savior's life to provide it?

God's forgiveness was not just words! The Bible says that Jesus is the author of our freedom to love God, our deliverance from hate and bitterness that can tear relations apart (1 Corinthians 1:30). Forgiveness and freedom from sin understood separately is unimaginable. "We are free because Jesus shed His blood and forgave us all our disobedience" (Ephesians 1:7). Our eternal inheritance, now, in God's kingdom, is guaranteed. We applaud Him—because He has bought us, ransomed us, and freed us from the evil that imprisoned us. We belong to God, now! And, when we believed, the Holy Spirit affirmed all this as God's unswerving promise! " (Ephesians 13-14).

### **Jesus' Death Was Propitiatory & Expiatory**

Hebrews 2:16-17 To rescue the Children of Abraham, Jesus considered it necessary to be totally human in order [by taking Aaron's place] as a merciful and trustworthy High Priest before God He would purge the people's sins.

The most interesting thing about the Biblical account, unlike other writings of the time, is that the desire to reconcile (or some say, seek God's favor) originates with *God* not the suppliant, not the penitent, not the seeker of it. We know, God, sent Jesus to deal with the alienation between Himself and us, but we don't know exactly why He had

to die to accomplish this. We may begin with what Moses gave us. Jesus' crucifixion in Jewish religious terms was a *sacrifice* for sin—His Son's sacrifice for our sins.

### A Propitiation

Was Jesus sacrificed to *appease* or pacify the *wrath* of God? After all, our disinterest in worshipping Him and finding other interests in His place, according to Moses, made Him enraged with jealousy (Exodus 20:5). Paul called it “wrath” (Romans 1:18). Isaiah the prophet wrote, “God was willing to beat Jesus painfully, for only then He can make Him the sin offering for our sin and guilt ” (Isaiah 53:10) And then in the next verse (verse 11) “God will see Jesus’ anguish and say “enough!” I’m satisfied.” The word *propitious* is used, here, meaning *favorable*. Scholars take this word from the Latin calling Jesus’ sacrifice of Himself a “*propitiation*.” We now can find favor with God or—we say—we are back in His good graces, thanks to Jesus.

But hold on a minute! If God sought us and not we, Him, how is that “rage” or “wrath”? This is a very astute observation (Luke 19:10). This means that a sacrifice in the Bible held a different meaning from sacrifices in pagan rituals. In the Biblical account, Israel often went generations without sacrificing to God for their sins. The “Day of Atonement” lost most of its meaning while they were intermarrying with the people of other nations and worshiping all kinds of made-up gods. God continued to seek them to get them back.

Although, God appeared driven almost to this mindset (rage or wrath) with His people in the wilderness, He always left, no matter how narrow, a path to the merciful side of His nature. The Lord, grieving over an unrequited love for His people, blurted out, “I will smite them with the pestilence, and disinherit them.” (Numbers 14:12) but, as we know, Moses interceded in a prayer that had to be inspired by the very God, Who, seemingly, sought Israel’s demise. “But Moses replied to the LORD, “The Egyptians will hear...If you kill this people ... the nations that have heard of your fame will declare, ...the LORD wasn’t able to bring this people into the land he swore to give them” (Numbers 14:13-16). Moses’ argument worked. God backed off, but does anyone really think that God in His omniscience didn’t know this conversation was going to take place!

Most convincingly is what Paul told us, "If, indeed, while we were yet enemies, Jesus died to reconcile us with God, it makes sense, that that reconciliation and friendship will last forever." (Romans 5:10).

Usually the offender (that would be you and I) out of fear of retribution, would go to the offended (that's God)—as we say—to make peace. This is what Jacob did when he returned home, after running away, having deeply offended his brother, Esau, by stealing his inheritance. Jacob, planning a reunion, sent many gifts on ahead (Genesis 32:13-15) to make this meeting with his estranged brother *favorable*. His gifts were a propitiuous offering to Esau to pacify Esau's anticipated rage. Esau, as it turned out, never retained his rage. He hugged Jacob and wept on his neck to see him. He was very happy to once again have his long-lost brother home (Genesis 33:4).

Many different English translations of the Bible use this word rather liberally to describe "atonement." Jesus *atoned* [paid the penalty] for our sins and God was *propitiuous*. But, *God*, initiated our meeting with Himself through Jesus. We may say, Jesus *mediated* a reunion between God and us (1 Timothy 2:5). If this were the case between Jacob and his brother, Esau, it would have been *Esau* leaving home in search of Jacob—not the other way around, as it happened. This point is very important: God, the Father, loved us—though we didn't know or care. His unrequited love gave Jesus to a Cross, to get us back (John 3:16). Perhaps, we have confused His roar with rage (Hosea 11:9-10).

Many scholars believe that Jesus' death had to be a *propitiation* for sin because this is the only explanation that makes the Cross all about *God* and not us. The word, *propitiation*, led some scholars to call Jesus death a *punishment* for sin. That's our word that a reasonable student of the Bible concludes. Why else would Jesus have to suffer as He did? *Propitiation* raised the question of punishment. Is the sacrifice in the Old Testament intended as a punishment administered to a lamb or other animal in place of the sinner? [We will talk more about this in the chapter, "Christ Our Representative"]. But in *The International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* we read, "The law nowhere indicates that in sacrifice...an act of punitive punishment is executed; it in no way asks us to look on the altar as a place of punishment."

Well, the debate goes on: at least some of the sacrifices described in the Bible [the Old Testament] were clearly propitiatory. A premier example is the sacrifice of the Passover lamb (Exodus 12: 13).

### **An Expiation**

Was Jesus death also *expiatory*. Was this on God's mind when He sent Jesus? To expiate means simply to repair or make reparation for something that was wrong. To some, reparations means compensation for wrong done. This idea is in the Bible, in Israeli law, "If a man shall steal an ox... and kill it, or sell it; he shall restore five oxen..." (Exodus 22:1). But this is not what we mean here. To *expiate* is to take the necessary steps to deal with the sin that caused our broken relationship with God. That might be best accomplished by giving us a new heart after God (Ezekiel 11:19; Joel 2:13; Romans 6:17). Forgiveness is expiatory. Or as Daniel understood, "to put an end to their sin" (Daniel 9:24). The International Dictionary of New Testament Theology concedes, "God's action is directed towards that which has caused the breakdown in the relationship." This dictionary continued, "Sacrifice in the Bible is concerned with expiation rather than propitiation."

Well, I think that is overstated, as if it must be one or the other. Why not both?

### **The Blind Man's Elephant**

The word used by Paul, here, which we translated "purged" was translated in Hebrews 2:17 in different English versions: twice as *reconciliation*; seven times as *propitiation*; only two times as *expiation*; not even once as *purification* (purging); and in a surrender to ignorance as to why God really had Jesus die [what was/were God's purpose(s)] we find four translations that say simply, *atonement*. Our word here is used only eleven times in the Prophets and always ... with the Lord (God) as the subject and, in general, meaning *to forgive*.

There is obviously no single reason we can give for Jesus' crucifixion. Scholarship calls propitiation and expiation the "twin fundamental purposes."

### **Purification**

Did not Jesus' death provide also for our purification from sin? Answer: Yes. Paul told Titus, "Jesus gave Himself in our stead in order that He might release us into God's custody [ransom us] from every unlawful act and *purify* for Himself a people, that are His own, who are dedicated, impassioned, and committed to living for Him" (Titus 2:14).

[When we discuss Jesus as our Redeemer, we will look closely at this verse.]

Notwithstanding any theological doubt, Christendom still endears herself to Augustus M. Toplady's old hymn, 250 years and counting, "Rock of Ages, Cleft for me...Be of sin the double cure, Save from wrath and make me pure." Jesus' provision from the Cross was for a multitude of reasons which we sum up by the all inclusive truth : He died to *save* us.

## ***MORE PROVISIONS***

WE belonged to God. But we wandered away and got involved in things offensive to Him. Through Adam and Eve we thought it smart to investigate evil, to eat forbidden fruit, to discover what else was out there that God seemed intent on keeping from us. We were created into an undisciplined curiosity, an unlearned innocence, that was determined to raise the lid on Pandora's box, that, according to the Greek myth contained physical and emotional curses. And life became a toilsome effort. Even the divine command, which was by itself a good thing, to replenish the earth, now, would be painful for the woman beyond a man's comprehension.

### **Jesus Purchased a Peoples for Himself**

Revelation 5:9 .And they sang a new song: You are worthy to take the scroll and to break its seals, because you were killed, and you have purchased for God by your blood out of every race and language and culture and nation.

But the good news is that God never gave up on us. He couldn't rip up the design of a Paradise for a creation He loved. It wasn't in His nature. Beside, His investment in us was no small thing. This should be obvious with even a casual reading of the Bible. We belonged to Him and He would have us back. It is as if God wanted a family. No! Not "as if." That's exactly what He wanted! He envisioned us after an eternity dealing with angelic beings that did His bidding almost robotically. He wanted conversation, fellowship, a willing and spontaneous love, that only we could offer Him. Angels that did not do His bidding were thrown out of His heaven, but we are given opportunity to grow and learn and contribute to a relationship with Him.

Dare I suggest that if God knows excitement, the day He made Adam and Eve must have been worth celebrating. But, if God can know loneliness, that high was followed by deep grief when He went

looking for them, calling out to them, while they hid from Him in the shame of their disobedience. They were physically naked, but that's not important. Clothes represent a desire to hid a lot more than the body. They were stripped of their purity, their moral integrity, a righteousness that found pure pleasure in serving God. All gone. They were naked and in hiding, hoping, perhaps, that God would leave on His own without finding them.

Remember Gomer, Hosea's wife. We pointed out already how Hosea, had to buy Gomer back, even though she belonged to him. He would set her free to be his wife and he her husband. How very like God and us. We belonged to Him, but through Jesus death, He would buy us back from a self-imposed slavery to our sinfulness and make us His family.

### **Genesis, Chapter One**

That final stroll God took in His Garden, He took alone. Adam and Eve were in hiding. Perhaps, we might dispute the possibility that God could feel lonely. John Milton in *Paradise Lost* [Book IX. Line 104ff] had God saying, " I miss thee here,/ Not pleased, thus entertained with solitude,/ [God called out] Come forth."

To complete this sad picture, Milton wrote: "He came, and with him EVE, more loathe though first / To offend, discountenanced both... / Love was not in their looks, either to God / Or to each other.

It is unreasonable to assume God's interest in Adam and Eve was not very personal. They were more than just the final step in His creation. A deistic view of God [belief in the existence of a Creator who does not intervene in the universe] does not go far enough to explain what we are reading in the opening chapter of our Bible. God is spoken of as cherishing His creative work, like a bird sitting on its eggs, brooding over them. This is how the story of man and God begins. A number of English translations use the word "hovered" but this is exactly what it means.

There is great interest, even affection, in such language, like a man assembling a ship in a bottle. As each piece was assembled: the clouds, the oceans, the mountains, the greenery, the fish, then animal life, birds, and finally Adam and his Eve, God paused long enough to admire His work as sheer perfection. Each piece was spoken into place as God considered His move and then said [the form originally betrays

great desire and interest] enthusiastically, "Let's do it!" (Genesis 1:3, 6, 14). And it was perfect (Genesis 1:10, 11, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31), a perfect ecology, a perfect temperature, a perfect universe for Adam's descendants to inevitably ache to explore.

Why tell this story here? Seeing God at the dawn of time, helps explain what we are learning about Him at its twilight. [Time begins in Genesis 1:1 "In the beginning" and ends in Revelation 22:5 "sunlight ceases."] In Revelation 22:13 Jesus explained, "I was there at the beginning and I will be here at the end, as Creator, Judge, and Savior." This was God's masterpiece, God's creation, God's perfection; God's! Adam belonged to Him and through faith in Jesus, His Son, God, the Father, will have us back in His family. (There is so much here to discuss.)

Here are the two mysteries of Scripture that frustrate logic: A forbidden tree with a tempter in a place where danger does not exist and innocence discovers evil is for real, ... and a Roman Cross. This first is the mystery of iniquity in its embryonic form (2 Thessalonians 2:7). The second, the mystery of Godliness, when the Jewish Messiah, God incarnate, was dying on a Roman Cross (1 Timothy 3:16).

We belong to Him, now. In saying we are "purchased for God by His blood," we are not referencing a payment. The word is used instead to indicate *private ownership*. We do indeed, belong to God (Malachi 3:17; Acts 20:28; 1 Corinthians 7:23; 1 Peter 2:9). God's Word spend no small effort in heralding this good news. We are God's sons and daughters (John 1:12).

What are we trying to say? Only this: A God whose Word cannot return void cannot see His Garden walk interrupted without planning how He will bring that perfection back. He did this through Jesus, through His death and resurrection. And what about the heavens and earth God made in the beginning? John in vision saw a new Heaven and Earth to replace the old (Revelation 21:1). The Tree of Life will be there but no Tree of the knowledge of ...evil (Revelation 22:2, 14).

### **Jesus Canceled the Old Covenant**

Colossians 2:13-14 While you were dead in your transgressions of the Jewish Law and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made us alive in Him, forgiving us of every transgression, Having wiped clean what was handwritten in Mosaic Law against us, which was only condemning us, and this he has most intentionally carried off nailing it to the Cross.

\* \* \*

The first five books of our Bible credited to Moses, by Christian tradition, represented a covenant or arranged relationship that was verbally agreed to between God and the people of Israel of the time. “Moses told the people what the Lord commanded of them, and the people responded, in unison, ‘everything you said, we will do.’ ... [The priests in agreement, exclaimed] ‘Anyone who does not obey this Law will be cursed.’ And the people yelled back, ‘Amen! [be it so]’” (Exodus 24:3; Deuteronomy 27:26). This was the Old Covenant consisting of required rituals and sacrifices as well as a moral code, hard to impossible, to keep (Romans 7:19). This covenant agreement was only intended to alert the people to their need of a Savior, a need to be forgiven, and an ongoing awareness of how far they had drifted from God (Hebrews 2:1).

When Paul explained the old agreement this way, many religious leaders bucked. It sounded like Paul had called the Old Covenant a temporary document intended only to shame and inflict guilt. To the contrary, it was their life as priests and religious teachers. To them it had perennial significance. But to Paul, it only foreshadowed the coming of the Savior to replace it.

To Paul, the Old Testament [our Old Testament contains the Law, this covenant, plus what the Prophets thought of it— all good] was more a school master, a stern teacher, but one, nonetheless, who loved their students (Galatians 3:24). Once faith in Jesus, as our Savior, became reality, through His crucifixion and resurrection, the school-master was out of a job. (Galatians 3:25).

“Is the Mosaic Law a bad thing?” Paul formed their objection as a question, “Absolutely not! To the contrary, if it wasn’t for the Law, this Covenant God gave us, I wouldn’t have had any idea that I wandered away from God. I wouldn’t have known, for example, that lusting after another person, not my spouse, was wrong, had not the law said, don’t lust!” (Romans 7:7; Exodus 20:17).

### **The New Covenant**

On the Cross, the Jewish rituals and sacrifices, were being given a celebratory and final farewell while a new and eternal covenant was being drawn up. The reason for this thankful sendoff was because the law had served God’s purpose well but now the moral aspects of it

would be inscribed upon the heart and mind of every believer, while the rituals, which were symbols only of Christ's death, now that He has come and given His life for sin, would no longer be needed.

The obligations or dogmas Paul was thinking of where the 600 plus ceremonial laws or injunctions which symbolized in biblical type the Savior's death on the Cross but now were no longer, in terms of worship, of any ritualistic importance. True worship would instead be in spirit and truth, Jesus foretold (John 4:23).

There is more here. Even non-Jews can accept the Savior. The body of Christ would now be made up of individuals from every clan, tribe, race, culture and nation. "Having purposely nullified the law of required regulations," Paul taught, "to create of both the Jew and the Gentile one new person in relation with Him making peace, and in order to reconcile both in one body to God through the Cross, killing the hostility that existed between them" (Ephesians 2:15-16).

Elsewhere Paul said it this way: "He made (in His flesh) of no effect the law consisting of commands and expressed in regulations, so that he might create in himself one new man from the two [Jew and non-Jew], resulting in peace." (Ephesians 2:15)

If Jesus' death did nothing more, this alone serves such a divine calling. Jesus put an end to racism. Jesus put an end to sin in every way it could be conceived: plotted, planned, crafted, lied about, in every form of abusive language or action or thought. Anything that didn't pass the standard of God's holiness, that wouldn't be allowed into God's heaven, was now put to death in Christ on the Cross!

### **Jesus Represented Our Crucified Self**

Romans 6:6-7 Knowing this that the person we were is now dead; the purpose in Jesus' crucifixion was to render evil ineffective in our new life. You no longer are slaves to sinning (like the old you was).

Salvation is more than status in Christ; it is more than a declaration of right standing with God. Salvation is a fundamental change—what we called a transformation—in a believer's way of viewing life (Romans 12:2) and how they live it (Romans 8:29). Paul tried to explain this to the Christians at Rome by calling it a crucifixion of the person we used to be (Romans 6:6), and a resurrection of the person we are now (Romans 6:8) as believers. He used words like crucifixion and

resurrection to make it clear that this change in us is thanks to Jesus dying on the Cross and being raised from the grave three days later.

Paul knew He was getting in the weeds—as they say. He was introducing grace to Jewish minds that relied on a dedication to the Mosaic Law, which we already noted was not applicable to believers, whether Jewish or non-Jewish. What Paul meant was that thanks to Jesus, we are not the persons we once were. The code of God’s holiness is written on our hearts now. It is something we now are passionate about and as we follow what truth we have, we learn more and follow it. The law code Moses gave them is no longer needed.

Then, Paul brought water baptism into the conversation, saying that it was like being buried (after we were crucified with Christ). This leads us to believe that Paul was probably meaning baptism by immersion, being submerged in a lake or river or some other body of water. When a believer comes up out of the water, it is like being raised again from the dead, like Jesus did (Romans 6:3).

There is a lot of symbolism here that has real meaning to Christians. So, Paul proceeds to highlight the difference between us before and us after salvation. Once our lives were consumed with personal interests that left God out; now, all we want is to please Him. Once we loved things that had no lasting or eternal value, now we treasure our new relationship with Jesus. Once our goals were temporal but now we want our accomplishments to have eternal value. Once we were restricted by laws and a desire to achieve salvation by a dedication to ritual—religious and cultural (if this makes sense). But now Paul said we are *free* to serve God (Romans 6:18). And Paul chalked it all up to God’s grace, that is, changes in us that God made, in our hearts and minds, when He saved us. We are not who we used to be!

### **But I Still Do Sin At Times**

But I still sin! We know. Remember the “Tale of Two Trees”? But here’s the beauty of our salvation at work. Paul affirmed that things that used to come natural to us, we are now ashamed of (Romans 6:21). That’s a good thing. You see, the Holy Spirit’s job is to teach us what ways, or habits, need to be discontinued, what righteousness is—living right and pleasing to God—and all about Satan’s demise and how powerless he really is in our lives now (John 16:8). The Spirit’s favorite tool is “conviction.” This is not guilt. This is not conscience or a gut

feeling. This is the Spirit guiding you away from temptation and to represent in your actions what is true to your new nature.

Give Him time. There is a simple secret to how this works which Peter discovered. “Add to faith, virtue” (2 Peter 1:5). Trust Jesus to fulfill in your life every promise to enable you to live for Him and free from sinning (2 Peter 1:3-4). Here’s the secret—by stepping out (that’s your faith in action) and doing what you know now is right to do (that’s your virtue). Do the little things that are clear to you to be right. Should you pray? Of course. Should you fellowship with other believers? Of course. Some things are obvious and easy to do on a regular basis. Do these and before long you will notice yourself growing in the knowledge needed to recognize what is right from what is wrong for you and finding the strength to do the right. It will get easier.

When Paul said, “Consider yourself dead to sin” (Romans 6:11) he was asking us to recognize the change in us as we live it. Consider something else, you are now, as a child of God, living on God’s mercy. So, if you sin and find yourself once again crying out to the Lord for His help, that, too is a very good thing. God’s patience is infinite and beside nothing about you surprises the omniscient One.

### **Jesus Won a Threefold Victory**

John 12:31-32, 46 “Now this world is judged, and the ruler of the world is thrown out. And I, If I am lifted up on the Cross, I will win over hearts. I am the Light that has come into the world, in order that all who believe in me will not remain in darkness.”

When we think of Jesus being victorious on the Cross, we generally are pointing out His victory over Satan [Satan in the language of the Bible means *enemy*]. But this is one part of a threefold victory. Jesus won a victory over sin and unbelief, over spiritual ignorance of the Truth of God’s Word as well as over the devil and his minions. This has been represented in Christian theology as the three predominant theories as to why Jesus was crucified. These theories are already outlined in “Theories of the Atonement.”

When talking about Jesus’ accomplishments from the Cross, we are studying the spiritual battle He waged against evil—on three fronts: unbelief, ignorance, and deception.

## Sinfulness

The victory that immediately impacts our experience, is Jesus victory over our sinfulness. When we discuss our faith or trust in Jesus' death and resurrection, we are talking about a work He did to give us a new life in which we can follow Him. It is here that we have been discussing punishment for sin, a well accepted interpretation of Scripture among all Christians. Our Catholic friends talk about indulgences and purification, *sanctifying grace*, instead of the word punishment, but, however we explain it, Jesus died to deal effectively and finally with our sinfulness. In so doing He needed to address three other areas where evil lurked in the darkness: Unbelief, ignorance, and Satan, himself.

## Unbelief

Unbelief is not a small matter; in fact, we might say that for us it is all that matters. "Believe upon the Lord Jesus Christ [put your trust in Him] and He will save you and your family" (Acts 16:31). Paul shared with the Church at Rome how faith in Christ Jesus leads to salvation: "If we admit our need of a Savior [not just words] but a heart felt assurance that Jesus died and rose again to save us—we are saved. [How come?] Your heart would not be so convinced, nor would you be admitting your need for Jesus, were you not saved [Confessing Jesus as Savior is the expression of real faith]. You see, you will never be shamed by trusting Jesus. He, as our Savior, comes through every time" (Romans 10:9-11). Faith is that huge.

A neighbor once , who drove an 18 wheeler rig, told me that in order to get your license to drive one of these trucks, you need to get the truck, have the job guaranteed to you, but no one would hire you without the license. Is this like the chicken and egg question on Creation week? It seems each is required to have the other. This is the interesting thing about faith: it is God given (2 Peter 1:1). Faith came because God told us that Jesus died to save us. It came by revelation (Matthew 16:17). God gives us faith to trust Him, and this, very much, thanks to Jesus.

## Ignorance

Here, too, those who are saved are distinguished from those who are not, those who believe from those who do not believe (1 Corinthians

2:14). The Holy Spirit is not someone we learn about in school. He is unknown as He is unseen by anyone who does not believe. We, who are saved, have Him with us at all times. In fact, we are learning so much about Jesus because the Spirit is doing the teaching! Jesus sent Him. And what He teaches us is life changing, transforming, helping us live more faithfully for God (John 14:17; 15:26; 17:17).

### **Deception**

The “dominion of darkness” is real (Luke 22:53). Words used to describe Satan: a murderer, a liar by nature, the original liar, the inventor of lies, (John 8:44). Moses called him, crafty, shrewd, reasonable sounding but lying (Genesis 3:1). Another name for Satan is our word “devil” which comes from a word meaning accuser. Satan spreads gossip, his lies, to sell a narrative that discredits God and our salvation.

The Church at Corinth in Paul’s day was having a problem reaffirming their love and forgiving someone who shamed the church when the public learned of their immoral behavior. (I get it: now everyone in the church is labeled a hypocrite (the devil’s work) because of one man’s indiscretion.) Paul, encouraged them to take the repentant man back into fellowship. And then added, “so that we may not be taken advantage of by Satan. For we are not ignorant of his schemes” (2 Corinthians 2:11). God, declawed this beast! He cannot, so He should not, threaten our harmony any longer!

Jesus “bore” our sins, but it was equally necessary for Him to destroy the source of evil, the evil *one*, Satan. God told the snake, Satan, back in the Garden that the time would come when a descendent of Eve, Jesus, would go after his head and destroy him (Genesis 3:15).

### **Threefold Provision of the Cross**

Jesus’ threefold ministry, taught in the three major theories brought forward to explain Calvary [see the chart on page 61], is repeated over and over in Scripture. Below are only a few examples. What may somehow bypass us concerning Jesus’ work on Calvary is the connection between His dealing with our sins and the creation of faith in our hearts. These are two sides to the same coin, because the revelation of Jesus’ death to save us and the faith to live now for Him are inseparably linked together. Without faith in our hearts Jesus’ death has no

meaning. And a religious faith that does not embrace Calvary's provision is a dead belief. There is no sin that keeps us from God—nothing we do is so bad that God would lose His interest in us—except one: if we cannot trust Him.

### John 12:31-32, 46

The Spirit's curriculum centers on Jesus and is three subjects which parallel the three leading theories of the atonement. If this be true (and it is) we do not need theories, only God's Spirit guiding our thoughts and actions. Perhaps, here a note about the Spirit's ministry might be in order.

Jesus never condemned persons who mocked or ridiculed him but He spoke a stern warning to anyone who treated the Spirit's drawing (conviction) with disinterest (Luke 12:10). This is what makes unbelief so final. The key to faith is allowing the Spirit to speak conviction to the heart. Never reject Him.

- ◆ Over sin and **unbelief**: As Savior, **The Penal Substitution Theory**. "And I, If I am lifted up on the Cross, I will win over hearts." (John 12:46).
- ◆ Over **ignorance** to Truth, lack of knowledge of Truth: As Teacher, **The Moral Influence Theory**. "I am the Light that has come into the world, in order that all who believe in me will not remain in darkness" (John 12: 32).
- ◆ Over the **devil**: As Victor, **The Christos - Victor Theory**. "Now this world is judged, and the ruler of the world is thrown out." (John 12:31 ).

### John 16:8

Sharing this threefold truth with us is what the Holy Spirit does (John 16:8). *He has come to convince us of sin, righteousness and judgment to come.* Jesus continued (John 16:9)

- ◆ As Savior, His quest was our **sinfulness**: He died for our sins.
- ◆ As Teacher, His quest was our **righteousness**: He sent the Spirit to guide us into all truth.
- ◆ As Victor His quest was to **defeat Satan**: Satan and those who are his must be **judged**."

### I Corinthians 1:30

Jesus was made unto us: *Justification, Sanctification, and Redemption* (1 Corinthians 1:30).

- ◆ As Savior, He **justified** us because we were guilty.
- ◆ As Teacher (Through the Spirit) He **sanctified** us because we were apathetic in our ignorance.
- ◆ As Victor, He has **redeemed** us because we were in bondage to Satan's power.

### Isaiah 53:4, 5, 11, 12

Let's use the New International Version to explain: "Surely ... bore our suffering, ... he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the **punishment** that brought us peace was on him. ... After he has suffered, ... by his knowledge my righteous servant will **justify** [make righteous] many. ... Therefore I will give him a portion among the great, and he will divide the **spoils** [of war in His victory] with the strong" (Isaiah 53:4, 5, 11, 12).

If you studied the chart of Three Theories you might have also observed what the Savior's threefold challenge was. It was important to Christian scholarship to point out that one challenge that Jesus dealt with was focused on God's interest; one on us and one directed at Satan.

- ◆ As Savior, His challenge was His own offended Holiness. Jesus' focus was on **God**. He took our punishment to satisfy the justice of God.
  - ◆ As Teacher, His challenge was our need to be led aright. Jesus' focus was on **us**. He justified [provided righteousness] for us satisfying His Holiness.
  - ◆ As Victor, His challenge was defeating Satan. Jesus' focus was on our enemy, **Satan**. He divided the spoils of a spiritual war [and expression of absolute victory of His enemy, Satan].

### Summary

Jesus had to deal on Calvary with three problems: Our unbelief in accepting the miracle of Calvary, our ignorance of Truth, and Satan's

ability to deceive. These became the three major accomplishments from the Cross:

- ◆ As **Savior**: Jesus became a trusted Savior when He accepted the punishment for our sin. He mediated a reconciliation between God and us. “He was disciplined to obtain for us Peace with God” (Isaiah 53:5).
- ◆ As **Teacher**: Jesus addressed our ignorance by sending the Spirit to lead us. “Whenever the Spirit of Truth comes, He will lead you into all truth.” (John 16:13).
- ◆ As **Victor**: Jesus in His resurrection defeated Satan. “Jesus disarmed the rulers and authorities and celebrated His victory over them in public procession” (Colossians 2:15).

### Jesus Instituted A New Covenant

Hebrews 9:15 And for this reason He is a mediator of a new covenant—in like manner, as was true of the first covenant—that by a death having taken place to provide freedom from transgressions that those who are called unto the eternal inheritance might receive the promise.

When the writer to the Hebrews [Jewish Christians] called Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, he was referring to Jesus as the one who intervened between God and us to restore friendship. This happened through the Savior’s death. The covenant he spoke of is not—as it might be between two people—a compromise of differences to bring about peace. God doesn’t compromise. A *covenant* with God in the Bible is an agreement made between God and us that defines or—we might say, governs—our *relationship*. The Old Covenant was based on the Law which Moses received from an angel God sent to establish the terms of His relationship with Ancient Israel (Galatians 3:19). The New covenant is a relationship based on a change in us, becoming children of God in heart. This was based not in law but on a promise God made through the prophet Jeremiah (Jeremiah 24:7) that God would give us a heart to love Him. Our writer to the Jewish believers called Jesus “the master of a surpassing ministry to what is a so much better covenant mediated by Him, a covenant, enacted through better promises” (Hebrews 8:6).

It would be shortsighted to say that this is only a legal arrangement. I have a retirement fund that is managed by the terms of an agreement

between an insurance company and myself but I haven't viewed this as a relationship between the fund managers and me. I never went to dinner with them; we don't play golf together or attend any functions together. Their relationship is with the money that we actually share. I get monthly checks and they get a fee.

A covenant with God, however, involves our entire life. It speaks to how we relate to God—a holy God—which means wandering away like stray sheep (Isaiah 53:6) and sinning cannot any longer be overlooked behavior (Acts 17:30-31).

We should add that God not only draws up the agreement but He subjects Himself to it in relationship with us. The Scripture calls Him our heavenly *Father* (Galatians 4:5-6) and we, who believe, as His *children* (John 1:112; Romans 8:15; ). This is a familial relationship that has a lot of meaning to God.

Nothing says this clearer in the Old Testament than when Moses reviewed God's covenant with Ancient Israel. "You have said this day that the Lord is God to you and to live accordingly, to guard devotedly what He instituted in ceremony and sacrifices as well as any thing else He instructs you to do as just and right, and always to listen to Him. And the Lord, in turn, says that you will be His cherished people [you belong to Him] as He agreed to, but only if you obey in all things" (Deuteronomy 26:17-18).

With the insurance company, I can live any kind of life I want. I can spend or invest the check they send me any way I want. I could burn it if I were crazy enough. They have my original sum until I surrender the agreement (break it by taking my money back). Meanwhile, I get to live on that money any way I want. This is not true about God and His covenant agreements. Our covenant speaks of our relationship.

I have made a covenant with my wife when we were wed, called marriage vows. Affairs are not an option. Living single, going out every night with the "boys" is not an option. Marriage is a life-long covenant that defines my relationship with the woman I love. This is more like the covenant we have with God.

### **A New Covenant**

God's people under the Old Covenant (in the Old Testament) didn't honor this relationship; so, God would change things when He drew up the new covenant through Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection.

Jeremiah's prophecy is the best record of God's New Covenant with us and central to any discussion about the provisions of Calvary. To understand what Jeremiah wrote is to understand what *covenant* means to God. In fact, some scholars maintain that our words "testament" or "covenant" do not explain God's great thoughts and heart. They would rather refer to God's *disposition*, God's temperament or nature or turn of mind. God wants our friendship so passionately that He was willing to die on the Cross to obtain it. Here's Jeremiah's interpretation:

"The Lord declared [sharing His most intimate thoughts], 'Mark this! The time will come when I will make a new covenant (in relation) with my people. Unlike the covenant, which they violated, which I made with them when I delivered them from bondage, strong arming the Egyptians. I—I— led them out!'

'Here is the covenant [the new covenant] I will make with my people afterward in those days [it is an everlasting covenant],' the Lord continued, 'I will have engraved my covenant within them and I will write it on their hearts. Then, I will be their God and they will be my people! No one will ever again need to teach his friend or his family saying, 'I shall teach you about our Lord' because everyone will know me from the least to the greatest. I have forgiven their wanderings, and I will never again make mention of their offenses.'" (Jeremiah 31:31-34 ).

This was fulfilled in Christ on the Cross.

### **The Lord's Supper**

Jesus, during His final meal with His disciples before His crucifixion, took a cup of wine and called it His "blood of the covenant poured out for many" (Mark 14:24). Matthew's recollection of that evening remembered Jesus saying, "poured out for the forgiveness of sins." (Matthew 26:28). The new covenant that Jesus mediated is the plan for our salvation and reconciliation with God which He validated with His shed blood on Calvary.

"He is a mediator of a new covenant" (Hebrews 9:15). This covenant, again, provides for our transformation into the kind of persons that can have a friendship with God, that are a holy people, and who can understand Him, and genuinely worship Him. It is an

everlasting covenant because we will live forever with Him in His kingdom.

### **The Covenant vs The Law**

It is also important to note that God made a covenant initially with Abraham, making it obvious that Israel's relationship with God—as later ours would be—was *not* based on Jewish Law (Genesis 15). Abraham was simply trusting God and God then called him righteous. God asks only that we trust Him to save us. The Law came with Moses many years *after* Abraham. A relationship with God would not (could not) be build on or, somehow, defined by, obeying the 600 plus legal injunctions of the Mosaic Code.

One believer, in a church I pastored, argued against this idea. He wasn't satisfied in saying that our relationship with God is built only on faith and prayer. This can become a very tender subject for some believers who think they hear me saying that it doesn't matter how we live. Obviously, it does matter, and especially to God (something we already pointed out). But this was not this believer's issue. If I may say so: sometimes, it is easier to obey the church than to follow Jesus. The Sunday service is less demanding than a God who wants us to love and forgive everyone.

His emotional—and yes, spiritual—stability was dependent on a structured experience, a set of do's and don't's laid down by the church. He lacked a sense of security he derived from faithfully adhering to what the church believed was right. Not smoking cigarettes, as an example, turns out, is not a sign of spirituality or closeness to God, although many think so. Notwithstanding a believer's struggle with insecurity and fear, the new covenant which Christ would mediate is not written down in so many words (even though sin is *not* a vague idea in the Bible). Because sin is a *spiritual* reality, God gave us a changed heart to give us discernment (2 Corinthians 3:6).

### **Sacral Assurances**

In the Bible, covenants are validated by what are called "sacral assurances," oaths and sacrifices (Genesis 15:8-9). In our culture, a simple handshake will do, or, with a legal document, a notarized signature at the bottom of such an agreement suffices. But God, looking ahead to His own Son's death on the Cross, often had animals

sacrificed in a religious service to bring home the seriousness of the occasion.

Some scholars say that the word *covenant* should be understood as a “last will and testament” and the death the writer is talking about is the death of the person who draws up the will. When Jesus died, we, His benefactors, stood to inherit His estate, heaven. This might make sense in our culture but it is not clear in Scripture.

### **To Summarize**

Jeremiah was talking about God providing a New Covenant made possible through Jesus’ crucifixion and resurrection. In simplest terms, the Old Covenant wouldn’t work. God taught us, something He knew all along, that you cannot make people righteous by threatening punishment through writing laws. The law only points out how “bad” we are, unless God changes us. The New Covenant did just that. To be born again, as Jesus told Nicodemus (John 3:3), is to be transformed into a different person. I like Jeremiah’s thought: “a new heart.”

The New is far better than the Old.

1. First, the New was made possible through Jesus’ death and resurrection, and,
2. Secondly, the promises are better (Hebrews 8:6):
  - an eternal inheritance with Jesus, and
  - God’s holiness becoming a part of each believer’s life.

The Old Covenant was: obey or else! The New is based on *grace* and *love*. Jesus’ blood became the “blood of the [New] Covenant” (Hebrews 13:20).

### **Rewards?**

This has been called by the writer to the Hebrews “our eternal inheritance.” Calvary provided for us an “eternal inheritance” as Jesus promised, “I bestow on you a kingdom, just as my Father bestowed one on me” (Luke 22:29). This sounds like Jesus’ last will and testament which the children—you and I—inherit upon His death. But scholars admit that this is just our way of understanding the word “inheritance.” Somehow, this illustration lends reasonableness to Jesus’ death on Calvary but it is not, in and of itself, explanatory. But there is a larger issue with the word than explaining God’s disposition. Paul

wrote, that we “share [Not won or earned, but have been given a share or an allotment] in the saints’ inheritance in the light” (Colossians 1:12). It’s a matter of God’s grace, the free gift of Himself. Lest we think in terms of material things like mansions and crowns, David reminded us about the relationship this covenant represents, “LORD, *you* are my allotted portion” (Psalm 16:5).

We might stop here but the clergy keep talking about rewards which are earned or trophies of achievement. If heaven is *inherited*, how could it be called “a reward” (Matthew 6:1; 10:41) or “in payment” (Matthew 20:13)? Jesus and the Apostles did speak of heavenly rewards, which, I for one, admit was unexpected. I came to chalk such language up to a Jewish metonym [a word used as a substitute for something closely associated] for all the good things heaven offers.

On the parable of “The Great Banquet,” Jesus concluded, “you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous” (Luke 14:14). You will benefit then from living for Jesus now. Even in the Beatitudes which describes the purity of a servant’s heart in following Jesus, walking in holiness, and lovingly serving the Father’s interests, Matthew recalls Jesus saying, “Be glad and rejoice, because your reward is great in heaven” (Matthew 5:12).

Believers are “rewarded” with crowns: of righteousness, of life, of glory, and of rejoicing. (2 Timothy 4:8; James 1:12; 1 Peter 5:4; 1 Thessalonians 2:19) Nothing in the language suggests that God plans to distribute trophies of grace based on degrees of success or achievement in this life. God’s grace rewards faithfulness. The greatest reward is the honor to serve Him (Matthew 23:11).

Rewards, then, become another perspective on an inheritance. It is the promise of love (Matthew 10:42) which includes forgiveness. As Paul taught, “Whatever you do, do it from the heart, as something done for the Lord and not for people, knowing that you will receive *the reward of an inheritance* from the Lord” (Colossians 3:23-24).

The relationship between God and man is a personal one. Those faithful to the Lord are rewarded with the glories of heaven. Those who did not serve Him but reject Him will be *rewarded* (recompensed, compensated) in kind (Matthew 10:33). The summary of the matter is this: Salvation is more than a position in Christ; it is a relationship with Him as Lord. The inheritance *is* the reward.

## **Christ Provided Justification From Sin**

Romans 4:25 He was delivered up for (because of) our trespasses and raised for our justification.

The reason our Savior was crucified is summed up in this verse: The sins we commit were the cause; our justification or forgiveness (Jesus took the punishment in our place) was the goal. Jesus' resurrection from the dead became vindication of our now being justified (just as if we had not sinned). One scholar wrote, "His resurrection was God's decisive demonstration that he had not died in vain." Paul said it another way in a letter to some who struggled with a belief in the resurrection from the dead: "if Christ has not been raised, ... you are still in your sins." (1 Corinthians 15:17). Our trespasses slew Him on Good Friday, God declared us friends again on Resurrection (Easter) Morning. His resurrection is evidence that His sacrifice for our sin was accepted. So, if we wish to understand what justification means we need to understand what the resurrection is all about. If the proof of the pudding is in the eating, the proof of our salvation is in the living Savior's ministry to us.

### **Resurrection**

Lazarus had died according to John's Gospel account and four days later, Jesus brought him back to life (John 11). When Jesus sought to comfort Martha, Lazarus' sister,, telling her, Lazarus would "rise again," Martha, the intellectual, theologized that He was talking about an end time event, something all informed theologians speak of (John 11:24). Jesus took the opportunity to expand her understanding of what resurrection means for a believer, saying "I am the resurrection ..and if you trust me, you will never die." In saying this, the Savior was telling all of us that He is the source of eternal life. "Whosoever believes in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). In the same way, He encouraged His disciples, overwhelmed with grief and confusion, on the eve of His crucifixion, (John 14) that He would be returning for them. He is, indeed, our resurrection. His resurrection, and also ours, is proof of our justification!

Paul spoke also of the "power of the resurrection" to the church at Philippi (Philippians 3:10) and his desire to get to know all he could about it. He taught that living a life pleasing to God is only possible because we have been empowered to do so. Paul used the illustration

of a seed being planted in the ground which dies but then the plant breaks through the soil and flowers. It was as if the plant was “resurrected” because the seed was said to have “died” (John 12:24). Using this idea, Paul said, the person we were before was put to death. And then, out of that death there arose this beautiful new person who loves Jesus, a person who now will no longer live a life displeasing to God (Romans 6:5-6). Jesus’ resurrection is at work in us now, in this life, as believers.

### **Born of God**

Living for Jesus, or for God, is living without sinning. In the language of Scripture there are two ideas behind the word “to sin.” One references our *sinfulness*, how naturally and thoughtlessly without conviction or conscience we can live a life *not* pleasing to God. Other words for sin reference the actual act, the sin, itself. We might say that we committed the act because it was in us to do so. Salvation deals with the sinfulness within by transforming us into persons that are now capable of befriending God and living to please Him. As the Apostle John said, “God not only forgives us but He works on us on the inside to remove all unrighteousness, the source of sin. He purifies us (1 John 1:9). John boldly asserted that anyone who has been transformed by God will find sinning to be a most unnatural thing because they are not anymore who they were; they are, John proclaimed, “born of God” (1 John 5:18) The phrase “born of God” was one of John’s favorite explanations (1 John 3:9; 4:7; 5:1, 4, 18).

Paul referred to the “old us” as one living in “the realm of the flesh” and in that condition we could not please God (Romans 8:8). When I think of the “flesh” I think of being motivated—and at times tempted—by hormones, feelings and thoughts that as part of our humanity control our actions and words in regrettable ways (James 1:14). As believers we should be inspired and encouraged to enlist our humanity in God’s service instead (1 Corinthians 6:20). Paul’s point was that when we were transformed, born again, and God made us new persons capable of appreciating and understanding Him, we ought to be passionate about the things that concern Him and not only personal interests (Philippians 2:4). We show an interest in heavenly things not just our present human condition—spiritual things and not just things tied to this life only.

All this sounds so mystical to anyone who has not experienced God's forgiveness, who is not aware of how the love of God can impact their lives. Paul described salvation as "Christ in us" (Romans 8:10; Colossians 1:27). There is here a closeness in relationship that King Solomon described (probably without knowing he was writing about Jesus) as "a friend, who loves us, who stays closer to us than a brother would (Proverbs 18:24).

### **Our Glorification**

None of this would be possible without the resurrection—both Jesus' and ours! Paul told us—and it is, for once somewhat logical and reasonable—that whoever God justifies, He will next glorify (Romans 8:30). Our glorification is our resurrection in new immortal and incorruptible bodies (that will not grow old or decrepit).

It is not reasonable to say that God goes through all this, sending Jesus to suffer and die and then working on us and in us to transform us into someone like the Savior whom God could fellowship with ... and then let us die off like so many annual blooms in Autumn! Here's how Paul put it, "God, who did not decline or refuse His own Son but allowed Him to be betrayed and crucified, how could He not with His Son give us everything else His grace offers" (Romans 8:32).

We might say that the King, whose right it is to free us from punishment, has pardoned us. A pardon restores full rights: adoption (Ephesians 1:5), an eternal inheritance (1 Peter 1:4), citizenship in Heaven (Philippians 3:20), access to the Father (Romans 5:2), and ...much more. If you think of it: an eternal God needs us to live forever if He wants our fellowship.

### **Jesus Reconciled Us to God**

2 Corinthians 5:19 God was making His friendship possible again in Christ, deciding not to hold the world's sins against them.

If there is a simple way of looking at Calvary, here it is: Jesus died to reconcile us to God. If we sought for one overarching reason why Jesus had to be crucified, it would be to reconcile us to God. Paul called his ministry in introducing Jesus to his generation as a "ministry of reconciliation" (2 Corinthians 5:18). I could not help but appreciate one definition of "reconciliation" found in the Greek dictionary discussing

an estranged married couple, "let them return to harmony." Is there not a dynamic at work here in which we have returned to harmony with God!

This word in the Bible speaks of an exchange. The one real significance occurred within us when we believed. We no longer have an "unbelieving heart" (Hebrews 3:12) but a "sincere" heart (Hebrews 10:22). Our faith is real and not a religious opinion because God has changed our hearts to love Him.

"There is a change, not merely in our disposition but, as one scholar put it, "in the total state of life." We have been changed! We are new creatures in Christ. "The old is gone; the new is here" (2 Corinthians 5:17).

## GOD'S SUFFERING SERVANT

*... you make him a guilt offering - Isaiah 53:10*

ISAIAH'S work is known as the fifth Gospel because of his prophecies regarding "God's Suffering Servant," Jesus. We are all the Ethiopian eunuch "sitting in his chariot on his way home, reading the prophet Isaiah" (Acts 8:28) and needing someone like the Apostle Philip to explain to us what we are reading. We continue to enquire, "who is the prophet saying this about — himself or someone else" (Acts 8:34)? Luke narrated his testimony (Acts 8:35). "Philip proceeded to tell him the good news about Jesus, beginning with that Scripture"(Isaiah 53:7-8).

C. R. North writing in *The Interpreters Dictionary of the Bible* opined, "On all hands, it is agreed that whoever was the original of the servant, none except Christ was its fulfillment."

### Isaiah 53

[Isaiah, upon receiving the revelation of the death of an unnamed suffering servant of God, exclaimed]

**Isaiah 53:1.** *"No one will believe us! Whom else, Lord, have you told?"*

[Isaiah, then, proceeded to share the prophecy.]

**Isaiah 53:2.** *He was not born into royalty, a homely lad, who came from no place important. He was a nobody among nobodies (John 1:10).*

**Isaiah 53:3.** *His life was a life of pain. Sorrow and grief were his companions. Talk was that he must have done something evil that God would punish him so. We treated him like a leper, keeping our distance, looking away. He was nothing to us. He would probably amount to nothing. No one cared, anyway (John 1:11).*

[Then Isaiah began to prophesy in detail, of things that described suffering on another level. Jewish scholars gave up trying to find out who the prophet was talking about.]

**Isaiah 53:4.** *His suffering was not his fault but we blamed him, else why would God afflict him? (Matthew 27:43).*

**Isaiah 53:5a.** *He was beaten repeatedly. He bore wounds meant for us (Luke 20:11).*

[Then Isaiah said something that cannot be explained by mere reason.]

**Isaiah 53:5b-6** *Though our rebellion caused his suffering, his affliction brought us healing. We rebelled and God chastised him, instead (Matthew 8:17)!*

**Isaiah 53:7.** *He said nothing in his own defense when they dragged him before a judge, mistreated and humiliated him (Matthew 27:28-31).*

**Isaiah 53:8.** *No one considered what was happening. He was innocent. He was like the passover lamb led to his death because of the rebellion of God's people, who were worthy of the punishment he took. He was arrested, convicted of a capital crime and sentenced to die (Mark 15:2-5; John 1:29; 1 Corinthians 5:7).*

**Isaiah 53:9.** *But one wealthy patron of justice, after his death, saw the injustice of it all and had the suffering servant's body laid in his own tomb (Matthew 27:57-60).*

*He was treated as a common criminal though he had done no one any harm; he tricked no one; he took advantage of no one; he bribed no one. No one was as truthful, as ethical, as moral, as principled, as virtuous and as honest as he (Matthew 27:38)!*

[Isaiah's explanation]

**Isaiah 53:10.** *It was all in God's plan that this happen to him, that he suffer so. The reason God was pleased to cause him pain was to make him an offering for our sin, of which we were guilty (Mark 10:45). But the Lord extended his life [raised him up again] because he fulfilled God's good pleasure in what he endured (Romans 4:25).*

**Isaiah 53:11.** *God was satisfied when He saw his soul's agony. God's suffering servant by his experience [by dying] will make many righteous (Luke 24:25-27).*

**Isaiah 53:12.** *Then he will be exalted above all others, since, he was killed, was counted among the rebels and he offered himself as an offering for the sins of many, interceding with God on their behalf (Philippians 2:8-9).*

### Isaiah 53:6

Did Isaiah prophesy that Jesus' suffering was a punishment for our sins?

We can explain such a question with a modern example. Not far from where I live there is a maximum security prison which is called a "correctional institute." But are the men incarcerated there being corrected, rehabilitated or reformed or in anyway changed for the betterment of themselves or society, if and when they are released? Or are they simply being locked away for a set time as a punishment?

Is the word "correctional" just a polite word for punishment that sounds more pleasing to the public's ear? Is prison really a punishment [we can use the phrase *retributive justice*], or is it what some call a *restorative justice* (designed to discipline them into good citizens)?

Some ancient philosophers—but not in Isaiah's day—thought that the goal with bad people should be to discipline them "straight." We are here having a discussion that Isaiah never would have had. There wasn't even a word in his language for *punishment*.

There are a couple of reasons why this word may or may not sound right to some scholars.

1. A punishment is given to satisfy or appease the anger of the one with the whip [the punisher]. Their feelings are in focus. If God punished Jesus, this means God's anger was being addressed on Calvary. This is important to note because the Cross was God's idea. He authored it and, therefore, we should regard His feelings in the matter. God is in focus, even though truthfully, Jesus' crucifixion is an act of love toward us (John 3:16). This suggests He was dealing with His own feelings of anger, jealousy, hurt—something—which God had to deal with within Himself in order to reconcile us to Himself. God had to, first, satisfy His own sense of justice before He could see clear to love us openly as He wanted to.
  - *Chastisement*, on the other hand, is directed toward the one being corrected, usually to discourage them from

doing it ever again. Catholics use the word penance in this sense, a purging of sin [purgatorial]. Chastisement is not punishment.

2. Secondly, and most importantly, when God punishes, the sinner is dead! "The wages of sins is death," Paul informed us. Punishment with God is so final! Since Jesus *died* on the Cross, many call it a punishment for our sins.

Either way, can we say that God's forgiveness was not gratuitous (free and cost nothing to give)? Jesus suffered too much to say this. God's forgiveness *to us* was freely given. But it cost Him, personally, the death of His Son.

All this to explain what one professor called "the mechanism by which God saves us." Scholarship then confirms what we, in this work, have been maintaining all along that there is a "scholastic drive ... to probe the depth of this mystery for its reasonableness."

But if you are like me, you will enjoy Isaiah's straight-forward description: Isaiah prophesied, "Our sins fell upon him." Jesus encountered such suffering because we, like so many sheep, wandered off to do our own thing (Isaiah 53:6).

## Sheep

Isaiah not only called you and I sheep, but *wayward* sheep. Our wandering is defined here as rebellious, a word meaning our inclination [what we were prone to do]. Sheep would not survive long without a shepherd. Sheep are not only dependent creatures; they are also singularly unintelligent, prone to wandering and unable to find their way back to a sheep fold even when it is in sight.

Jesus, in the Gospel story, saw the people of Israel as sheep in distress, scattered here and there, weak from lack of food because they had no shepherd (Matthew 9:36). He cautioned His disciples just hours before His trial and crucifixion that when He, their Shepherd is killed, as the prophet warned, they, the sheep will scatter in distress (Zechariah 13:7; Mark 14:27). But He, earlier explained God's ultimate will for Him, "I am the good Shepherd, the good Shepherd will sacrifice His life for the sheep."

There is much scriptural truth wrapped in this metaphor that beautifully describes our relationship, as believers, with Jesus. Believ-

ers have learned to recognize His voice and they follow Him (John 10:4). There is more here than this current work is intended to cover, except to say that a relationship with Jesus, and, therefore, with God (John 14:9), is because the Good Shepherd went to Calvary for us.

### **Isaiah 53:10**

The Lord took *pleasure* in causing him such pain, in that, Isaiah's suffering servant was appointed the guilt offering for the sins of God's people. Isaiah's language must have surprised the ancient scribe. God was *pleased* to see someone *suffer*!? This was not expected! God *saves* who delights or pleases Him! David testified, "He *rescued* me, because He delighted in me" (Psalm 18:19). But is it possible we have here another argument for using the word "punishment." The use of the word "pleased" suggests God's own feelings were in view. God's justice required such an action on His part. Can we not say that Calvary was as much about God as it was about Satan or about us?

### **Christ, Our Sin (Guilt) Offering**

A guilt offering had to be a *lamb*! Human sacrifice was taboo, strictly forbidden, in Israel (Isaiah 66:3). But Isaiah prophesied that the suffering servant of God would become the sacrifice for sin!

Jesus did not just bare our sins (forgive us), "he *became* sin" and thereby making it possible, for those who accept it by faith, to be free from its bondage, to live in harmony and friendship with God. This is where God's pleasure resided. Paul explained, "Jesus who never sinned, who didn't know disharmony or estrangement from God, on our behalf, was made a sinner, that we might become righteous by Him. He was rejected [Matthew 27:46] that we might be accepted; He was punished that we might go free [Romans 8:1]; He died that we might live forever. Paul said that Jesus was "made" sin (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Some say, Jesus was made the sin offering which is Isaiah's language here. What happened on the Cross was not symbolism nor an object lesson into God's thoughts. It happened for real. Believers in Jesus and His provision on Calvary are indeed new persons reconciled to God. The guilt offering in ancient Israel was a type of what happened for real on the Cross. Both Paul and Isaiah are saying the same; Paul in legal terms, Isaiah in terms of the sacrifice.

"We were like sheep wandering off to do our own thing instead of following the Shepherd's voice, God's will; and God made Jesus the intercessor for all our waywardness." (Isaiah 53:6). God's servant "met up with" punishment. This is the Suffering Servant becoming God's sacrifice for our sins. As scholarship states it, "Israel ... has sinned, and the Servant of God is punished."

### The Guilt Offering

When Jesus on the Cross interceded before God for us, He was not the defense attorney but became the criminal, even though, we committed the crime. The Lord caused our guilt (our punishment) to fall on him. One trusted translation of verse 8b adds, "...because of the iniquities of my people he was led to death."

I must quote J. P. Lange [in his "Commentary on the Holy Scriptures"], who concluded that Jesus took our punishment for us. Lange attempted to see Isaiah another way and then decided that there can be no other meaning!

"Now if the object of this ...was not to make the... punishment strike the Servant ...with the same ... necessity with which it would have struck the actual guilty ...and these guilty ones ...might be free from punishment," he affirms (if this is not the meaning)," then, I see not how the prophet would say "Jehovah laid on him the iniquity of us all." As Lange translated the Hebrew thought: The Lord "gave up his servant that he might take on himself the **guilt and punishment** of the sinful people."

Verse 10 makes this undeniably clear: "... the LORD makes his life an **offering** for sin" The offering spoken of here is the **guilt** offering. Here is the keystone [the central stone at the summit of an arch, locking the whole together] of Christian theology, the primary truth that provides for us an entrance into a relationship with God. The accent on this amazing account is Isaiah's choice of words for an offering. He speaks of the *guilt* offering. There were other offerings Isaiah must have known about. Why not the burnt offering or sin offering or peace offering? All these other offerings are object lessons about Jesus to explain what He did for us on the Cross, but Isaiah wanted us to know that the guilt offering should be particularly noted.

One clear meaning of the word "guilty" is to be culpable [deserving of blame] which does not presuppose any sense of blame. The police

can give you a ticket for parking in a loading area or speeding in a residential neighborhood even if you claim you didn't see the sign. Maybe you didn't; maybe it was hidden behind a tree or blown down in a hurricane. Guilty is guilty. I raise this matter because a penitent heart is one that knows it offended God. But Jesus' death had to deal with *all* our sins because it dealt with how *God* felt about them, not how we felt about them.

But for 3 additional reasons the "guilt" offering correctly describes what Jesus provided on Calvary.

### **Restitution**

The guilt offering was a means by which restitution could be made for damaged and broken relationships. The guilt offering made restitution for injury or sin against God (Leviticus 5:16). Forgiveness was conditioned on this offering. Jesus restored our relationship to God and God to us. And he gave forgiveness a divine power to erase the pain of sin as well as the sin, itself.

### **A Lamb**

Poor people could substitute less expensive offerings for the burnt and sin offerings but not the guilt offering. It had to be a lamb (Leviticus 14:21-22). "Jesus was led like a **lamb** to the slaughter" (Isaiah 53:7). It was important to specify here that a lamb would be sacrificed. The prophet spoke of God's suffering servant as a lamb because lambs are docile. God's suffering servant was submissive. His silence in the face of an out-of-control vitriol and tortuous evil speaks to the closing hours of the Savior's life before the Cross (Acts 8:32).

### **No Festivals**

The guilt offering was never offered as part of one of the great Festivals, unlike the burnt offering and the sin offering [See Numbers 28: The Sabbath Offerings, The Monthly Offerings, Passover, The Festival of Weeks]. The guilt offering was not a celebration. It was a personal encounter with God for forgiveness. If in ancient Israel there was a moment to simulate the mourner's bench where the sinner experiences the Savior's forgiveness, or where the Savior restores joy to the guilty, it is when they presented a guilt offering.

### God was Pleased

"The Lord was **pleased** (willing) to beat him painfully" (Isaiah 53:10). This would not be the only time God expressed pleasure in what Jesus was doing (Mark 1:11; Matthew 17:5). What pleased God, according to Augustine, one of the Early Church Fathers, was the Savior's attitude and resolve to face a Roman cross. But Isaiah told us that the Father's pleasure was not only in Jesus' willingness to die but the unprecedented success of his mission. He brought salvation to many. We can learn so much from one word:

- "Pleased" The language of this prophecy suggests God was as motivated, as passionate, as He was on creation day; only here. there is a more solemn tone to His wisdom.
- "Pleased" Is this only God's desire (how He feels at the moment) or also the wisdom of His counsel? Recall what the writer to the Hebrews said about Jesus at this time, "**For the joy** set before him he endured the cross" The word "for" can also mean "instead of," suggesting Jesus set aside any thought of more joyous or happier times with His Father to endure this moment. The translators all seem to support the idea that Jesus knew that this was the path to ultimate joy! (Hebrews 12:2). Did God look beyond the moment deeming this pain necessary to achieve a greater joy of or pleasure in our pending reconciliation with Him?
- "Pleased" Whatever else we conclude: God was passionate, actively participating in His plan for His Suffering Servant. "For *God* so loved the world....." (John 3:16)
- An interesting note: What was Jesus asking in the garden when He used this word? "Father, if you are **willing**, take this cup [of sorrow] from me; yet not my will, but yours be done." (Luke 22:42) But this *was* necessary (Acts 17:3). "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

### Isaiah 53:11

God saw what Jesus did. Isaiah called it laborious and toilsome. Indeed Jesus carried the sins of the world with Him to the Cross. His physical suffering alone was a sorrowful travail, but He bore a spiritual burden as well. The Early Church Father's knew this as Jesus'

*passion*. At some point God was *satisfied*. For God, the Savior's agony was measured because it had been determined ahead of time (Galatians 4:4).

Pain, for us, might require an instant answer to prayer; for, suffering is most unpleasant. But God's wisdom sometimes deems a certain period and intensity of suffering might be designed to accomplish some great unseen, eternal plan, of which in heaven, we will no doubt be grateful to learn (2 Corinthians 12:7; Hebrews 5:8).

### **Judicial Language**

This becomes a reasonable explanation of Isaiah's word "satisfied." Justice required punishment. Punishment is a necessary part of God's justice. God's anger against sin was appeased [propitiated] by Jesus' suffering on the Cross. God's satisfaction was complete at the Savior's death, when He cried, "It is finished!" (John 19:30).

Punishment is intended to explain God's justice or how God would satisfy His justice. Judicial language, granted, is everywhere in Paul's writings. "...from ... sin came the judgment, resulting in condemnation, but from many trespasses came the gift, resulting in justification. (acquittal)" (Romans 5:16). Paul proclaimed, "He was delivered over to die because we sinned" (Romans 4:25). Perhaps, one of the most revealing verses in legal language is Paul's declaration regarding those who love God as His followers, "Therefore, there is now no *condemnation* [a case decided against them] for those in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1). Condemnation is a legal judgment or sentencing, a judicial pronouncement.

### **Isaiah 53:12**

Parents used to discipline children in a way that introduced an experience painful enough to the child to bring about behavioral reform. Sometimes discipline can be less severe (a child loses TV viewing privileges for a time). This is theologically called "satisfactory" because the goal is to reform, to provide a lesson in self-discipline.

How would Jesus' crucifixion reform us? Could not God find a less painful approach to provide our salvation? Our analogy of disciplining

children isn't working here: we do not, in the name of reform, beat children to death!

Whether Jesus' death was a punishment for sin or a chastisement, whether it was retributive or restorative, whether propitiatory or expiatory, whether intended to appease God's anger or to reconcile us to God—or both—we will leave for now, because this is a question Isaiah did not ponder over.

Isaiah offers us, instead, a summary of what God's suffering servant accomplished (Isaiah 53:12). There are many different English translations. One closest to the language of the verse is the NASB [New American Standard Bible]: "Therefore, I will allot Him a portion with the great, And He will divide the booty with the strong; Because He poured out Himself to death, And was numbered with the transgressors; Yet He Himself bore the sin of many, And interceded for the transgressors."

Let's interpret the verse in a diagram form:

"All this being so [the preceding 11 verses],

1. he became one of the greatest victors to whom God rewards the gifts of conquest (Colossians 2:15)

in exchange for what he endured when:

4. he died with rebels, (Luke 23:33) when

3. he bore the sins of many, (1 Peter 2:24) when

2. he met with God on behalf of a rebellious people"

(Galatians 3:20).

It is almost as if Isaiah is drawing circles within circles, a bull's eye, in which the reason for Calvary is specified in the center target. The outer ring, #4, Isaiah explains, is his crucifixion with rebels. Even Isaiah's words must be understood as a crucifixion because that's what Romans did to rebels.

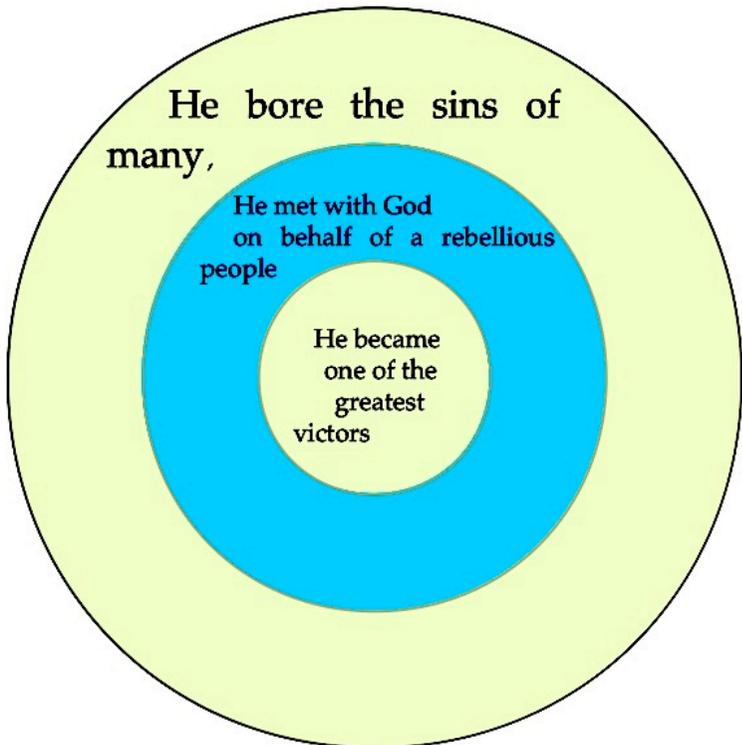
Why so? Why did He die like a common criminal? He was carrying the burden of the sins of the world with Him, #3. He was putting an end to sin in the lives of all those who by faith accept His death for what it truly was, God's answer to our sinfulness.

And why did He do this? In order to mediate a reconciliation between us and God, #2, Who wants us back.

Was He successful? Most assuredly! He became greatest in the kingdom of God, #1. His name is exalted above every other. But more than this, we are the spoils of war. He ransomed and redeemed us from the death grip of this present evil world (Galatians 1:4).

The writer to the Hebrews wrote of Jesus, "For a short time, made inferior to the angels that he might suffer ... in order that, by God's grace, he might taste death for all, we see Jesus [now] gloriously crowned with honor. It was the right thing for Him, the author and leader of ... salvation, to complete the work through suffering, since [thereby] He has led many sons and daughters to glory " (Hebrews 2:9-10).

## He died with rebels



## CHRIST, OUR PASSOVER

*Christ our Passover lamb has been sacrificed. - 1 Corinthians 5:7*

It is not coincidental that Isaiah's word for a lamb is Moses' word, as well (Exodus 12:3). But Moses was referencing the Passover. You recall, the Israelites lived in Egypt for multiple generations (400 years) during which time they became slaves to the Pharaoh. Now God wanted them to return home, to Palestine. The lamb was to be sacrificed and eaten the day before they left. But in addition to the lamb, they must bake their bread without yeast.

In his letter to the Church at Corinth, Paul thought of this Feast. He is using the analogy from a Jewish Feast in a serious talk to a church which, one must assume, was primarily comprised of Greeks. To appreciate Paul's analogy of the Passover, however, we must consider his admonition to some of the Corinthians, who attended that local Church.

"Bread without yeast" had nothing really to do with bread to the Corinthians. For Paul, yeast symbolized sin. Paul then proceeded to gently berate the Corinthians for cringe-worthy behavior that would even appall a non-believer. "We do not celebrate the Feast of Passover with yeast," he admonished them, "we do not worship God with "the yeast of" evil and immorality in our congregation. We celebrate truthfully and with sincerity" (1 Corinthians 5:8).

Putting this truth in modern terms, we attend church as an act of worship to God. We must cherish our worship by keeping it *worship*. Whether intended or not, every church will broadcast the message which it stands for to its community (Matthew 5:14). Every church symbolizes something to the local people.

This church suddenly had a reputation it didn't want because the community heard about one attendant having an affair with his dad's new wife. We kid ourselves if we think the local grapevine won't pick

up on this opportunity to label the entire congregation as a group of hypocrites. We also kid ourselves if we think this does not impact our worship as a congregation.

We are fooling ourselves if we bend the rules of biblical propriety, morality, and Christian love, compromising our witness to the world and think this will be inconsequential. It not only smears the good name of the church; it smears the good name of our Lord. We are called now to worship God in *spirit* and *truth*, according to the Savior, who died to make this a possibility (John 4:24) and glorify Him in how we present ourselves as Christians to our world (John 16:11, 21). What might someone think if I claimed to love my wife while regularly visiting my girlfriend. [Oh, I have no girlfriend, in case you wanted to know.] But how can one claim to live one kind of life while actually, secretly, living something else.

Paul then wrote in a gentler tone, "I know you have to get along somehow in this world. I am not saying walk on the other side of the street." The people in our lives cannot be—nor should be—avoided, but there needs to be a clear understanding in the minds of the persons in our lives as to who we are as Christians. Like the preacher once said, "We are not *with* them; we are *after* them" (1 Corinthians 5:10). We must not live like them, condone what they do or make comparisons between them and us to give us a puffed up sense of how good we are, which is just what the people in this church were doing. We are here to bear witness to the Savior's love.

The Greek word for fornicator is *porno* and it really needs no translation. Paul reminded the Corinthians that they should address all forms of porno among themselves. They must keep their witness to their world pure. In the context of his observations of, and what he was told about, this church, Paul reprimanded them for their greed and pride as well. He used words like "malicious" and "wicked" to describe their lack of "truth and sincerity" when they gathered for worship. Sincere worship is pure worship—from the heart and out of a love for God. In some ways, in the public's mind, they were playacting (hypocritical). Worship should never become a ritualized mime, a performance for the religious, for whom pretending to be something, that they are not, works to give themselves a *false* sense of how good they are and how pleased God must be with them. God is not pleased with disingenuous worship, a pretend faith (1 Peter 2:1)!

The Corinthian Church was attended by Greeks. And they were, probably, not that familiar with the Jewish Passover. What non-Jew is? But Paul used it as an object lesson. This church often socialized and fellowshiped around a meal, which scholars called “Love Feasts.” And, as it was with the Passover Feast, it most certainly was with the Love Feast. With the Passover, bread must be baked *without* yeast. For Moses, and the Israelites of his day, old yeast kneaded into a batch of bread dough would affect the entire batch—as we, no doubt know. For the Corinthian Church, the analogy had to immediately strike a note in their collective conscience. Paul was talking about that man who sits in the back row. Everyone knows what he and his step-mother are doing—everyone, probably except his father! One sinner turning an entire congregation’s testimony to an example of religious hypocrisy. That’s how yeast (sin) always works.

“Jesus was our Passover lamb.” Paul, probably spoke with unparalleled passion for the Truth. After all, this was a church group used to hearing prophecies and admonitions. I surmise he clarified, “Jesus is the Lamb at your Love Feast!” The Love Feasts were intended on celebrating the Death of the Savior to free us from sin, from porno and greed and all kinds of wickedness. How can someone celebrate their freedom from something they are still involved in? The Passover speaks of freedom, freedom from a slavery to sin, a freedom to honor and participate in a relationship with God, a freedom of the heart opened now to fervently worship God for real and not just in ritual .

### **The Passover**

The Jewish passover, the most important of all their feasts, began on the first day (Joshua 5:10) of the first month (Exodus 12:2; Ezekiel 45:21). It celebrated Israel’s exodus from Egypt. Isaiah recognized this as a ransom (Isaiah 43:1, 3) from Egyptian slavery because it cost the lives of every firstborn in Egypt.

It would be incorrect in saying that Paul was speaking metaphorically when he called Jesus “our Passover lamb.” As John-the-Baptist already announced, Jesus *was* the “Lamb of God” (John 1:29, 36) He was the ransom paid for our freedom from the sin that alienated us from God. The Passover was an act of redemption, a point God reminds us of more than 20 times throughout the Biblical history. The Scriptures regarding the Passover tell a story about Calvary. Hopefully,

at this point in our study, the Scriptures will speak for themselves without too many additional comments from me.

- ◆ The Passover was a military victory against the gods of Egypt: “I am the Lord, God! I will execute judgments against all the gods of Egypt” (Exodus 12:12).
  - In like manner, Jesus' death was a spiritual victory over Satan. “He stripped the rulers and authorities of their power publicly exposing them in glorious celebration. as utterly defeated.” (Colossians 2:15)
- ◆ The Passover was all God. He even took credit for Pharaoh's recalcitrance: “I will harden Pharaoh's heart [I will provoke him into] bringing his armies against Israel. Then I will show myself glorious against Pharaoh and his armies. The Egyptians will know that *I—I*—am the Lord God and that *I* did this” (Exodus 14:4)!
  - Calvary is all about what God through Jesus did and not about our effort or any accomplishments. “For you are saved by grace through faith, and this is not from yourselves; it is God's gift” (Ephesians 2:8).
- ◆ God claims those delivered as belonging now to Him “I carried you on eagles' wings, and brought you to myself” (Exodus 19:4).
  - Jesus gave Himself in our stead in order that He might ..purify for Himself a people, that are His own” (Titus 2:14).
- ◆ God's work in instituting the Passover was three-fold according to David (2 Samuel 7:23): “And who is like your people Israel? God came to one nation on earth in order
  - (1) to redeem a people for himself,
    - “He gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness... eager to do good works” (Titus 2:14).
  - (2) to make a name for himself, and
    - “He [God] was most effective regarding [Jesus] Christ when He raised him from the dead and set him at His right in the heavens

above every ruler and authority and power and any who claim any kingdom or everyone who has a name [a title among men] not just those current but any in the coming age" (Ephesians 1:20-21).

- The writer to the Hebrews wrote of Jesus, "For a short time, [Jesus was] made inferior to the angels that he might suffer ... in order that, by God's grace, he might taste death for all, [but now] we see [Him] gloriously crowned with honor." (Hebrews 2:9).
- "so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow —in heaven and on earth and under the earth" (Philippians 2:10).
- (3) to perform for them great and awesome acts, driving out nations and their gods before your people you redeemed for yourself from Egypt.
  - "For the kingdom of God is not an idea, a matter of talk, but a powerful reality" (1 Corinthians 4:20).

### **A Greater Deliverance**

The blood of a one year old lamb or goat was brushed on the doorposts and the upper post (the door header) of the home of each Israelite in Egypt (Exodus 12:5, 7). When the Lord saw the blood applied there, the angel would bypass that home when the plague of death came (Exodus 12:12,13). Nothing could speak, in a symbolic way, more loudly of the Savior's shed blood on Calvary. In Jesus' day thousands, tens of thousands, came to Jerusalem for Passover. They came early to purify themselves (John 11:55). They came to separate themselves from their daily tasks and the grind of everyday life in a humble remembrance of God's deliverance those many years ago. The people, who were in Egypt, purified themselves, as some maintain, by the blood smeared on the doorposts or entrance of each home. Christian sees the Savior's shed blood in a similar way, as representing the Savior's suffering and crucifixion to free us, purify us, from our sins. "... to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

The primary significance of the Passover was not to appease God's wrath (though, some see even this here) but an act of divine deliverance for His people. God, in an act of mercy, brought them out of their bondage (Exodus 3:7). In like manner, Jesus' death frees us from the bondage to sin. This is *expiation*. "The way the Spirit who gives eternal life works is: by Jesus' [crucifixion and resurrection] He has set you free from the way sin [before brought] death." (Romans 8:2).

There would be coming a greater miracle of His power and love! Passover shall be replaced with a far more significant and relevant act of deliverance. The Miracle of the Passover will not be as noteworthy as Calvary. By way of the Cross, the saved of the nations of the world will be gathered into His Kingdom. "However, look, the days are coming" — the Lord declared — "when it will no longer be said, 'As the LORD lives who brought the Israelites from the land of Egypt'" (Jeremiah 16:14; 23:7-8). When Jesus informed His disciples that the next time they would share a chalice of wine would be in God's Kingdom after this life was over (Matthew 26:29), many maintain that, He was talking about celebrating Calvary and not the Passover.

### **A Word about Love Feasts**

It is believed that the Love Feasts, Christian fellowship around a celebratory meal, were originally associated with our Lord's Supper as a proclamation of His death on the Cross "until He comes" (1 Corinthians 11:26). These were designed as a practical expression of Christian community, "a joyous declaration of faith" from a thankful fellowship for Calvary while looking, with great anticipation, for their Lord's soon return. If I may borrow a Catholic idea: there is nothing more sacramental than this. When Christians began to celebrate the Eucharist or participate in Communion, it was a "holy" communion, a true thanksgiving. We must take care not to marginalize the Spirit's role in the Church in the name of doctrinal purity. Whether we view the communion elements as symbolic or literal, they must always be significant.

With time, these feasts ceased, for some, to inspire a sense of spiritual awe, a sense that Jesus was indeed in their midst, as He promised (Matthew 18:20). In our day, is it possible that, the old hymns like "The Old Rugged Cross," that used to bring tears of gratitude, are never sung ...or if they are, they merely embellish the phylacteries of a now

meaningless ritual? Even during the early centuries of the Church, for some, love feasts were less love and more feast, a splintered assembly, eating apart from the poor, cliques of the more wealthy “who feed only themselves.” [to entertain sumptuously in company with friends]—a fellowship in name only. They began to eat apart, ignoring others who came from poverty and need. Jude called it now “...dangerous blemishes at your love feasts as they eat with you without reverence.” (Jude 12) The message of the Cross was now—if I may imagine—lost in a haze of discussions over the dinner and good times without true thanksgiving. Paul described such a person as one who “eats and drinks without recognizing the body [the poor Christians who are there].” “(He) eats and drinks judgment on himself” because this is a sacred gathering that has degenerated into something horribly disrespectful of what the Spirit of God is doing there! (1 Corinthians 11:29). Lest we think this overstates the seriousness of the occasion, Paul explained, “This is why many are sick and ill among you, and many have fallen asleep [a euphemism for “dead”].” (1 Corinthians 11:30)

I might think myself correct in calling the elements “symbols” of Jesus' passion (and I do. Sorry to all my friends of faith who disagree), but I would be wrong to see them as only an object lesson in something that happened 2,000 years ago. Jesus' crucifixion, for a believer, should be the only thing that really matters and upon which hinges every hope, every promise, and every blessing from God.

## CHRIST, OUR REPRESENTATIVE

*Just as through one man's disobedience the many were shown to be sinners, so also through the one man's obedience the many will be shown righteous. Romans 5:19*

ADAM made us sinners, but now, by faith in Christ, through Jesus' death, we can be made righteous. This is more than saying Adam introduced evil into the world and Jesus was punished for it. This is more than saying Jesus' death was vicarious [for our benefit] or even substitutionary [in our stead].

### Exclusionary

If we maintain that the Savior's death was simply His taking our place, so we would not suffer any punishment for our sins, we would be espousing [supporting] Jesus' death as a vicarious or *exclusionary* substitution. He was punished; we were excluded from being punished. We're "off the hook." If this was true of the Savior, it had to be true as well of Adam: Adam, alone, was to blame for disobeying God in the Garden. We were not there. You and I might be punished, but we are not to blame! This argument has flummoxed generations of theologians (but I digress).

### Inclusionary

But Paul—and we can believe Isaiah, too—saw Jesus' death as *inclusionary*. He wrote to the Corinthians, "In Adam all died, likewise in Christ are all made alive." (1 Corinthians 15:22). "One died for all, indeed, all died" (2 Corinthians 5:14b-15). If this be true: when Adam sinned, you and I, also, sinned ...*in him*. And when Jesus rose from the dead on Easter morning, we rose, too ...not in a physical sense (although this will also happen), but the power that raised Him is now available to help us to do right by God, to live a righteous life.

### **Christianeze**

This is exciting news even if it sounds a bit cryptic. Many words used by preachers and expounders of Bible truth appear to talk in a foreign language; I know. I call it “christianeze.” In fact, the Bible itself was once thought to be a spiritual language until archeologists began to find the writings of ordinary people using the same words with the same meanings. The Greek philosophers, had they lived during the time of Jesus and the apostles, would not have used many Bible terms the way Jesus or Paul used them.

Let’s review some words, which I, for one, never liked using because they seemed too scholarly for ordinary me. We have already introduced these terms. They must be explained like a coin. Each one had two sides: two ideas that contribute to their meaning that are descriptive of what God provided through Jesus’ death. They are the proverbial Indian elephant which has both a trunk and a tail—depends on by which side of the animal you approach it.

*Atonement*, at-one-ment: The “head” is reconciliation with God, friends with God, through Jesus’ death. The “tail” is forgiveness. Think about it; when you receive the one side of this coin, you get the other side.

*Expiation* is both God dealing with our sins and God dealing with our sinfulness. He wiped clean the record of our offenses against Him and then He made us new persons capable of living righteously—how He wants us to live.

*Propitiation* is God being both appeased and satisfied. I like the word *pleased*. Both His head and His heart were pleased. Both His counsel and His good pleasure (feelings) were pleased, because His anger now had a release valve. He no longer needed to stomp off, grieved and offended. He has written His law on our hearts (a Bible way of saying that we are now a people that want to get to know Him and love Him). But He was pleased with Jesus, too, for what He did on the Cross for us.

### **A Lock Down**

So, how can we explain this idea, that you and I sinned in the Garden, in Adam? How can we explain Jesus’ death as your death and my

death? And when He rose again, how is His righteousness now ... yours and mine? How is Jesus' death and resurrection inclusionary?

Well, the simplest explanation is: this is how God saw it. Paul explained, "God locked us up, all of us, as unfaithful non-believers; His plan was to be merciful unto all of us [no exceptions]" (Romans 11:32).

### **Proxy**

But we have another word that works for the philosophers ..and it isn't a big word: *proxy*.

Jesus not only took our place; we, too, were crucified with Him. His death became an inclusionary substitution. Some scholars like to think of it as a proxy vote. Whenever the shareholders meet to discuss any action to be taken over the funds I have investments in, I elect to sign my vote to a proxy. I do the same when the condo board calls for a meeting of the residents in our complex. I allow someone else to vote in my place. But it is still on the record as my vote. It is not my proxy's vote, but mine because they represent me. I am included. In this way, consider the possible explanation that Adam in the garden was our proxy. "...in Adam all die..." (1 Corinthians 15:22).

We can say the same of Jesus' death and resurrection. "If one died for all, then all died." Paul reasoned—why? "... he died for all so that those who live should no longer live for themselves, but for the one who died for them and was raised" (2 Corinthians 5:14b-15).

### **Representation vs Substitution**

A substitute is one who acts in place of another in such a way as to render the other's action unnecessary. That's exclusionary. A representative is one who acts on behalf of another in such a way as to involve the other *in* his action. Christ did for us as our substitute what we could never do for ourselves; He bore our sins in judgment. But as a representative He did what we by being united to Him have also done; we have died and risen with Him.

Jesus' victory over sin became ours! What was true of the first Adam, is true of the second Adam, Jesus. This is deductive reasoning, but it makes sense. The benefits originating with and arising from Jesus' death that believers now experience can best be explained:

Christ was our proxy or *representative*. So, when Jesus died to sin and gloriously rose again, He provided for us a new life in Him. The gift of an eternal life with the Father was not something His death brought Him ...but us. That's representation!

Paul's logic concluded that everyone violated the law of God, even, post-facto [even sins committed before it was codified—written down as a moral code—in Scripture]. He reasoned, "...just as through one man [Adam] sin came into the world and through sin, death, and thus, death came upon all mankind, on this basis, everyone is deemed a sinner" (Romans 5:12).

When Adam sinned, he "laid human life open to the power of sin." By sin, we agree with those scholars who maintain that it is neither a particular sin (I was not actually, physically, present to bite into forbidden fruit) nor sinfulness as a proclivity or tendency to sin [God might have created Adam and Eve "temptable" but not evil!] but as a "principle of revolt."

Huh!?

Maybe the best way to explain this is with infants. We are born into the "Kingdom of Self." We are born monarchs in our own minds, undisciplined and entitled. All we need do is scream a while and no adult would endanger their sanity and peace by ignoring us for long. We even have the law on our side, if any parent wants to tempt fate by abusing the privilege of giving us just what we want—even though, we don't say exactly what it is; we make them guess. And even when we hug an adult, we didn't give them one (we give no one anything, intentionally). No, we stole a hug from them because we wanted someone to grab hold of or cling to. Even infants—especially infants—need the emotional security of being loved. And no grownup could imagine a baby being any other way. But what does this mean when we are describing an adult! What does this tell us about a son or daughter of Adam?

My mother used to complain, "You kids are all alike ...spoiled rotten!" And then she proceeded—as grandma used to say—to "learn" us. Somewhere buried in all this psychological mishmash is the "principle of revolt" scholars talk about.

Make sense? But even if not, trust the Scripture. "The Scripture, Paul concluded, "imprisoned ... everyone as sinners so that the promise which Jesus fulfilled could be gifted to all those who believe (Galatians

3:22). Adam, in a sense, perhaps, known only in the heart of the Creator, represented or in some way, spoke for, all humanity, in that moment. When Adam sinned, a tsunami of sinfulness swept all humanity in its wake. When Adam revolted in the matter of the tree that was said to introduce us to something called “evil,” which Adam was suppose to avoid but didn’t, God decided—or in His omniscience already knew—that He needed another way, the way of faith in His Crucified Son (John 14:6).

### **Inclusion, not Exclusion**

It is reasonable to take Isaiah’s Servant of the Lord to be a representative of the many for whom He became the sin offering ... and so, to *include* them representatively in his suffering. Indeed, this is precisely the move that Paul made. This much, therefore, can be said, Christ did not simply die in our place; rather, as our proxy, *we* did. Christ’s death was representatively *our* death.

### **The Coin Analogy**

Thinking in terms of one coin with two sides is the best way of seeing this truth because it requires us to realize that there are two aspects to this one truth. We cannot proclaim the one without the other. No coin is just “heads” or “tails.” Adam I lose, Christ I win. Or Paul offers one final explanation. What is the ultimate truth here? “We died with Christ,” Paul concluded, “we believe that we will live with Him ... thus, we reason, we are, on the one side, dead to sin, and, on the other, alive to God in Christ Jesus” (Romans 6:8, 11).

## CHRIST, OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS

*It is from him that you are in Christ Jesus, who became wisdom from God for us — our righteousness, sanctification, and redemption, - 1 Corinthians 1:30*

WHAT is *righteousness*? The universal meaning of righteousness is the quality of rightness, doing what is right for a right reason in the eyes of God. In ethics it represents: integrity, virtue, purity, or correctness in action, feeling, and thought. The writer to the Hebrews tells us that infants do not yet understand the meaning of such terms. “Unweaned infants live on milk still, they have not experienced enough of life to know right from wrong” (Hebrews 5:13). This is the meaning of the word in Paul’s letters to Timothy and Titus. Paul was talking about living a virtuous or moral life. In keeping with his entire premise that before Jesus came, mankind didn’t. “God didn’t save us because of how moral and honest and just we were but simply because He is merciful” (Titus 3:5).

Righteousness ends up having two meanings—another coin. On the one side, to be righteous, is to live right or a just life. On the other side, it speaks of God’s justice when we don’t.

So, the simplest explanation as to what Paul meant in saying that Jesus *became* our righteousness: What Jesus did on Calvary was *a demonstration of God’s justice* in order to provide for us *a way to living a righteous life* that was right in God’s eyes. Perhaps, this is a round about way of saying, Jesus died to reconcile us to God and nothing could be more fair and just in dealing with our sins. Fair to us because we are no longer eternally separated from the God who loves us, and definitely fair to God because He wanted us as friends but couldn’t have us with the sinfulness. I recommend reviewing, in the chapter on “The Mystery of Godliness,” Turretin’s five reasons why Jesus’ death was truly just [pages 35-37].

## Justice

Paul said it this way, “Jesus Christ was God’s appointed instrument of His mercy through His blood, His death ... that God might show Himself **just and** also **justify** those who trust in Jesus Christ. ” (Romans 3:25-26).

In an honest quest to know God’s righteousness in relation to Jesus’ death, it seems proper to look into Romans 3:25-26 which has been called “the marrow of theology.” Scholarship argues that justice was satisfied when God’s wrath was appeased [propitiated] by Jesus experiencing on the Cross the punishment for our sins. And since we are no longer subject to being indicted (judged) for these sins, we are not only forgiven but we are now “legally” justified, acquitted, by God’s verdict of no longer guilty—no condemnation to those in Christ (Romans 8:1). Thus we are, in the language of the Scripture, said to be *declared* righteous. The next step is for God to transform us into the persons He just declared us to be. And, indeed, He will (Romans 8:29-30).

## Wrath

Scholarship argued: “God, because in His mercy He willed to forgive sinful men, and, being truly merciful, willed to forgive them *righteously*, that is, without in any way condoning their sin, purposed to direct against His very own self in the Person of His Son the full weight of that righteous *wrath* which they deserved.”

And another added, “When God justifies sinners, he is not declaring bad people to be good, or saying that they are not sinners after all, he is *pronouncing* them legally *righteous*, free from any liability to the broken law, because he himself in his Son has born the penalty of their law breaking.”

Thinking of Calvary in terms of God’s wrath, which must be appeased, suggests, incorrectly, that Jesus’ death was required to mitigate His rage, to provide God with a change of heart from wanting to destroy us to loving us. This line of reasoning doesn’t explain why God was the one who *initiated* a way to reconcile with us. Pagan religions, in error, understood that the penitent took the initiative to appease an angry god by sacrifice. Our God took that first step in dealing with our sinfulness. Paul affirmed, “Everything is from God, who has reconciled us to himself through Christ” (2 Corinthians 5:18).

God authored the plan of salvation and God carried it out. Jesus' death did not procure grace; it flowed from grace. John Calvin agreeably contended that Jesus' work on the Cross derives from God's love, therefore it did not establish it.

The word "wrath" used in Scripture in relation to our disobedience and need of salvation, was indeed a display of God's excited anger, His impassioned jealousy, but against our sin, our disobedience, our lack of trust in Him. For Paul, God's anger was primarily set against mankind's *rejection* of that salvation, of the good news that Jesus provides reconciliation for us. God's anger is God's punishment reserved for those who reject His offer of reconciliation through Jesus (John 3:36; Romans 9:22).

We already noted that the Father sent the Son. He did this out of love not rage. The "false" idea is that God now displays a different attribute to us than before Calvary, that He went from wanting us dead to a compassion and a pardon for us in our need of His salvation. Hopefully our talk about the simplicity of God successfully rebutted this view.

### Through Faith

It is very important to note that we accept this truth "through faith." Faith means accepting what God did for us without having all the whys and hows explained. Salvation is not a signature on a membership card nor is it church attendance, per se, nor the magic in a written prayer of repentance (unless we really mean it). Salvation is believing and confessing with the testimony of our lives (Romans 10:9) that the death of God's Son was for our pardon and reconciliation with Him and by faith we have reached out and grasped hold of it (Philippians 3:13).

### Romans 3:25-26

Let's look closely now at Romans 3:25-26. The New American Standard Bible translates, "[Jesus] whom God **displayed publicly** as a **propitiation in His blood through faith**. *This was to demonstrate* His righteousness, because in God's *merciful restraint* He let the sins previously committed go **unpunished**; for the **demonstration**, *that is*, of His **righteousness** at the present time, so that He would be **just** and the **justifier** of the one who has **faith** in Jesus."

## Propitiation

Scholarship called Jesus a *piacular* victim. In other words: Jesus' death was in the plan and wisdom of God *required to repair* a wrong. He shed His blood to repair our relationship with God. In this sense, we say His death was *expiatory*. But did Jesus' death assuage or satisfy God's interest in justice? In this sense, we might say that Jesus' death was indeed propitious [an appeasement]. But does this mean that Jesus' death assuaged the wrath of God? Granted, as we already observed in Scripture, Israel's disobedience often enough enraged Him (Hosea 11:9). But, as we also said, it was God, Himself, in the person of His Son, that hanged there for our sins. Sounds like love to me (John 3:16). We can rightly say that God was enraged at sin but sought to rescue the sinner from the error of His ways and restore their relationship. This sounds biblical (Ephesians 2:5; 1 John 3:1).

In what sense could we call His death a *punishment* or judgment for sin? [No where in the writings of the apostles is the word judgment or punishment used to refer to Jesus' crucifixion. Punishment is the alternative for those who reject God's salvation offered in Christ!]

The word used here for propitiation is found only one other place in the New Testament writings, in Hebrews 9:5, where it refers literally to the covering or lid of the Ark of the Covenant in the Temple in Ancient Israel [This is another study]. Scholars labored hard and long over this singular use in Paul's writings and finally decided that the word is a term used to describe a votive offering to God. Jesus gave His life on Calvary as an offering to God in fulfillment of the plan love drew up before the creation of the world (Romans 16:25; Ephesians 4:1; 2 Timothy 1:9; Titus 1:2). This brings us back to Isaiah's prophecy, in which Jesus was called "an offering for sin" (Isaiah 53:10). So, we can explain "a propitiation in His blood through faith" to mean "His life was an offering for our sin which we appropriate (accept) by faith."

So, why do we say God's wrath was appeased or propitiated? Well, because those who do not accept God's offer of His Son's death by faith will, indeed, come under the final judgment of God. That judgment has been theologically described as a punishment. But whether or not Jesus, Himself, was "punished" on the Cross is left to our reasoning to ascertain. Our reasoning goes this way: If Jesus died in our stead—and He did—and if those who do not accept Christ by faith will be eternally judged for their unbelief—and they will—we can

rightfully conclude that Jesus must have taken our punishment upon Himself on the Cross.

In saying “Christ ... became ... from God for us — our righteousness” we teach that Paul is telling us that Jesus, through His death, endured our punishment for sin. This includes our current sins [for Evangelical believers] as well as original sin [all believers agree]. He died in our stead and so God called it done, He declared us righteous. There is, now, for those who accept this provision by faith “no condemnation” (Romans 8:1), no day of Divine wrath (1 Thessalonians 5:9) awaiting them.

### **An Equitable Righteousness or Justice**

Jesus was, then, *just* and the *justifier* of those, who accept Him by faith. Another translation reads, “He, being righteous, and declaring him righteous who is of the faith of Jesus.” This is one word meaning both *righteous* and *just*. Both words, in English are defined as “morally right.” “In the inspired Scripture,” A. W. Tozer, correctly noted, “justice and righteousness are scarcely to be distinguished from each other. The same word in the original becomes in English justice or righteousness, almost, one would suspect, at the whim of the translator.” Each commentator has taken the term as expressing the special attribute which for them best explains God’s work of redemption [Jesus’ dying to free us from sin].

In most basic terms we could say that when Jesus died to free us from sinning and reconciled us to God, God considered Jesus’ crucifixion a “fair” and equitable exchange. Jesus is declared a sinner; we are declared righteous. Jesus becomes our sin; we become righteous through His death and resurrection. “Equitable” also suggests that the price paid for the sins of the entire world could only be met in Jesus’ death because He was both a sinless man and God’s Son.

The argument says that the weight of our sins, the sins of the world, could not be carried by any mere human, even a perfect one. God had to carry this spiritual cross on His own shoulders to be crucified. Jesus had to be deity. Jesus, also, had to be human, a sinless human, because this was humanity’s rebellion against God. Recall, Anselm saying, “no one but *God* could pay a debt of such magnitude, but no one but *man* is obliged to pay it.”

Is this argument biblical? It is, only in the sense that Jesus was both totally God and totally human, and we can confidently assert the nothing is incidental [of minor or no importance] with God. This becomes a judicial argument that for many best explains why the God-man had to die?

What we can say is that God's idea to save us from our sinfulness and make us capable of doing what is right in His eyes is most just. As Abraham inquired of God, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" In Romans we are using the word *just* and *justifier* but we might have just as well said "It was fair of God to reconcile us to Himself, in making us righteous" because this provides God the opportunity to restore our relationship with Him, which was His purpose.

### **God our Justifier**

In English we often distinguish between a person's character and their reputation. The first is who we really are and the second who people think we are—even if they are wrong. We might say character is what you are being made into but reputation is what you declare yourself to be. We could view righteousness this way. Righteous is what God is making us into but it is also what Scripture claims us to be (Romans 5:19; 6:18).

In making us new persons and given us a new heart to love Him, we might say that God *made* us righteous. If this be true, Jesus' death and resurrection turned us from sinners into righteous persons, but the things we still do wrong have argued against this simplistic interpretation (Romans 7:15). This meaning is understood to be extremely rare, if not altogether doubtful. When David confessed, "Surely in vain have I kept my heart pure" (Psalm 73:13) did he really mean to say "I purified my own heart; I made sure I was righteous"? This is why scholars keep looking at nuance or some subtle shade of meaning that makes more sense in interpretation. Let's keep looking.

This leads to another possibility: We were not made righteous but could we have been *shown* to be righteous [our reputation as Christians]? David, in the verse just mentioned could have meant, "I have *shown* my heart upright." This suggests that we *exhibit* righteousness. But the Bible, at times, uses sarcasm. For example, while comparing Israel's unfaithfulness to Judah's, Ezekiel sarcastically

grumbled, “your sister [next to you] *appears* righteous” (Ezekiel 16:51). This doesn’t fit Paul’s use of the words, since he could never have meant that Jesus only appeared to justify us. Our salvation is real!

Scholars, then, suggested another possible nuance. Maybe Jesus *evinced* [gave evidence] or *proved us* righteous on the Cross. An example of this use was when Jesus concluded: “Wisdom *is proved right* by all her children” (Luke 7:35). Paul used the word righteous once in this way also. He proclaimed Jesus “*justified* in the Spirit” (I Timothy 3:16). Jesus was *proven just* in dying for the souls of mankind. But to say that Jesus’ death gave evidence of *our* righteousness! I think not. It gave evidence of the opposite—our *need* of salvation because we were sinners. The idea “to prove righteous” doesn’t fit I Corinthians 1:30. We certainly could not mean to interpret this, “Jesus became the *proof* of our righteousness.”

### **Paul’s use of Righteousness**

*Righteousness* for Paul has a “peculiar meaning.” For Paul we are not immediately made perfectly righteous, nor do we faithfully demonstrate how righteous we are, nor do we faithfully give clear evidence to our world that we are righteous. For Paul, God *declared* us righteous. For Paul, the hope of salvation was not dependent on keeping the Mosaic law, which proved impossible, nor living in harmony with nature, or according to some social order (A Greek cultural idea). Declaring us righteous—and never forget the words: *by faith*—brings another word into our discussion: *imputed*. A declared righteousness is an imputed righteousness.

Paul revisited the Old Testament concept of God *imputing* righteousness, declaring us justified by a faith in Christ’s death on the cross. “The righteousness of God is through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe,” Paul taught (Romans 3:22). This idea is not Paul’s alone but it reaches back into the writings of Moses, “Abram believed the LORD, and he *credited* [imputed] it to him as righteousness” (Genesis 15:6). And in the Psalms we read, “It was credited to him as righteousness throughout all generations to come” (Psalm 106:31).

### **On Imputation**

Imputation is a legal concept. It represents a new legal status. This means that by faith, as with Abraham, so with us, our trust in God’s

provision through Christ “is credited ... for righteousness.” (Romans 4:23-25). Needing to say this simply for my young readers, let me reword it. To be righteous there is nothing more we have to do than to trust Jesus to make us so. Our faith in Him makes His declaration of us as righteous a reality because God knows how to make good His promise to make us like Jesus (Romans 8:29-30; 1 Peter 1:3).

Martin Luther wrote, “Believe in Christ and your sins will be pardoned. His righteousness will become your righteousness, and your sins will become His sins.” (Our sins imputed to Him.) “Christ was, in God’s eyes, legally liable for our sins.” Luther called this the wondrous exchange. Jesus took our sin and He made us righteous. Think of it: this is the imputation coin: our sin becomes His (He is punished in our place), God’s righteous in the form of a new life in Christ becomes ours.

Righteousness is an attribute of God. So said the Psalmist, “Your righteousness reaches the heights, God, you who have done great things; God, who is like you?” (Psalm 71:19) Now we can become like Christ (1 John 3:2). His righteousness, redeems and saves. In the truest sense of a redemption, God declared us free from sin, and through Christ’s resurrection provision was made as an empowering grace to walk in newness of life. God can say to us, as Paul pointed out, “as those who are alive from the dead, offer yourselves to God ... offer yourselves as righteous servants ... you have been set free from sin and have become servants to God” (Romans 6:13, 18-19, 22) Said more succinctly: “Righteousness ... is not a matter of ... conforming to a given set of ... legal standards, but of behavior which is in keeping with a relationship with God.

### **Righteousness is also Relational**

“Righteousness is a term of relationships” Think of it this way: you are all alone on a desert island living on coconuts and bananas. If you are not a believer, if you mistakenly think God could not be there, does it really matter what you do by yourself? What defines right from wrong? How do you determine morality? Righteousness must mean doing right by God in relation to Him and each other.

Righteousness, as such, denotes a covenant relationship between the Lord, our Redeemer, and us. God proclaimed, “Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth. For I am God, and there is

no other. ... It will be said about me, 'Righteousness and strength are found only in the LORD.' " (Isaiah 45:22-24)

So, our righteousness, which is solely imputed by faith and not earned by merit, is more than a status or a declaration of forgiveness of sin. Righteousness is godly living. "...training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16-17) "to live in a ... righteous, and godly way in the present age" (Titus 2:12) .

The righteous are those who, in humility and faithfulness, trust in the Lord, who seek to live uprightly and without pride of heart, depending on the Lord for His salvation. Righteousness here is not ethical perfection, but that obedience and uprightness of the faithful who seek Him.

Righteous living here is not a social construct, living in social harmony according to norms society dictates, nor is it compliance with law, as it might have meant in Ancient Israel. One commentator wrote, "Righteousness ... has absolutely nothing to do with works of the law. It is about trust." He recognized righteousness as a "...horizontal dimension of grace. I am reconciled to God. But it also means we are reconciled to one another." "Fellowship with Christ necessarily leads to fellowship with other Christians."

Paul's close to his second letter to the Corinthian believers sums up so much for us. Not only is the trinity evident in his teaching but the provision of a righteousness that has united us in common faith and hope: The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all" (2 Corinthians 13:13).

### **A Demonstration of Justice**

A final thought here: Paul spoke in Romans 3:25-26 about God publicly demonstrating His righteousness. This should be obvious to us as Jesus once encouraged His disciples, "What I tell you in private, herald it from the house tops" (Matthew 10:27).

1. Jesus' death had to be on public display. "He disarmed the rulers and authorities and disgraced them **publicly**; he triumphed over them in him" (Colossians 2:15).
2. "From His cross there rose the most perfect homage rendered to the righteousness of God." How could His death for our

salvation not be public!? “not willing that any should perish, but that **all should come** to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9).

3. The Jewish law is now replaced by a new life in Christ. This needs to be heralded as a public proclamation in the town square. “For Christ is the **end** of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.” (Romans 10:4) “The law, then, was our guardian **until** Christ, so that we could be justified by faith” (Galatians 3:24).
4. “For four thousand years,” in the words of one commentator, “the spectacle presented by mankind to the whole moral universe was, so to speak, a continual scandal. With the exception of some great examples of judgment, divine righteousness seemed to be asleep, ‘God passed over the sins .’” But now, Hear ye! Hear ye!! He that hath an ear , let him hear! “Therefore, having overlooked the times of ignorance, God **now commands all people everywhere** to repent” (Acts 17:30).

## CHRIST, OUR HEALER

*He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree; so that, having died to sins, we might live for righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. - 1 Peter 2:24*

Is physical healing in the Atonement? A friend, John Lathrop, responded to our discussion over this question. "This is a question I struggled with at one time." He admitted, "I have since come to the conclusion that all that humanity lost in Eden Jesus brought back through the cross. The ultimate physical healing is the resurrection but healing can take place before that time—it did in the New Testament."

I must admit, I didn't expect to read Isaiah say, "he himself bore our sicknesses; we are healed by his wounds." (Isaiah 53:4-5) and if I want to equate this only with spiritual healing, i.e. salvation and not physical healing, I need to explain Matthew, witnessing Jesus' earthly ministry, "When evening came, ...He ... healed all who were sick, so that what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled: He himself took our weaknesses and carried our diseases" (Matthew 8:16-17).

I remain a bit perplexed for a few reasons:

### Seven Questions

1. Is this the sole portion of Isaiah 53 that was *not* fulfilled on the Cross? We maintain that Jesus' death on Calvary was required for our salvation but physical healing was already part of Jesus' ministry *before* His crucifixion. How can we say that Calvary was necessary to provide for it? "He...spoke to them about the kingdom of God, and healed those who needed healing." (Luke 9:11)
2. Didn't Peter see this as a spiritual healing? "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree; so that, having died to sins, **we**

might live for righteousness. By his wounds **you** have been healed" (1 Peter 2:24).

3. Whoever wants to be saved, God saves, but why is it not that way with physical healing? Calvary's provisions are otherwise universal, that is, whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved (Romans 10:13). The Cross represents the vehicle by which God provided forgiveness for sins and the opportunity by faith for us to be reconciled to God. "we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, then how much more, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life" (Romans 5:10). When we seek salvation, He saves us. Is physical healing available for the taking (in seeking the Lord for it) as is true of salvation? And if not, why not?
4. Is physical suffering different? T. J. McCrossan, whose teaching on bodily healing formed the basis of one branch of Evangelical teaching, claimed that "All Christians should expect God to heal their bodies today, because Christ died ... for our sicknesses as well as our sins." But Pauline teaching suggests otherwise, "though our outer person is being destroyed, our inner person is being renewed day by day" (2 Corinthians 4:16).
5. Is it appropriate to think of faith for salvation but not for healing? Would the Lord give us faith to trust Him for the one and not the other. Could we ever say God can be trusted to save but not heal? Then why aren't all believers always well?
6. Why is Jesus ministry toward sickness different than His ministry toward sin? In healing the body, it was not necessary that Christ should himself become sick; it was only necessary that he should exercise his power. But for spiritual healing, God "made him to be sin for us" (2 Corinthians 5:21).
7. Is sickness the result of sin? Does tying physical healing to the Cross tie it to our *sins*. Is the victim to blame or implicated in some way for his or her own sickness (John 9:1-2).

### **8. Uncommon Divine Healing?**

There might be reasons why physical healing is not more apparent in the church in so-called civilized countries.

- ◆ Perhaps, we lack a certain “faith” to trust God for healing being dependent more so on science or the medical professionals. “He was not able to do a miracle there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and healed them. And he was amazed at their unbelief.” (Mark 6:5-6a)
- ◆ Perhaps, we are not serious about wanting a healing. “Do you want to get well?” (John 5:6).
- ◆ Perhaps, life is complex in which the spiritual and physical inseparably intertwine; healing is never a simple matter of only physical well-being. “The prayer of faith will save the sick person, and the Lord will raise him up; if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven” (James 5:15).
- ◆ The complexity of life in which the spiritual and physical inseparably intertwine, healing is never a simple matter of only physical well-being. “The prayer of faith will save the sick person, and the Lord will raise him up; if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.” (James 5:15)
- ◆ Perhaps, we need to ask again, “Which is easier: to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Get up and walk?’” (Matthew 9:5) Our Lord’s interest is always the spiritual. Does He utilize physical healing for spiritual growth?
- ◆ Perhaps, physical malady, like other forms of suffering, may teach obedience and faith. Paul confessed, “Therefore, so that I would not exalt myself, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to torment me so that I would not exalt myself” (2 Corinthians 12:7).

### Uncommon Wording

There is also something noteworthy about the language. Isaiah used an interesting form for the word “healed” in Isaiah 53:5. Perhaps a better translation might be “with His stripes healing is provided us.” This adds to the difficulty in understanding the prophet’s words. Physical healing is provided in the Savior’s Suffering. As Matthew observed, this was undeniable, but it appears in a different light than the other provisions from the Cross: peace, forgiveness, etc. The New Living Translation (NLT) reads “He was whipped **so we could be healed.**” Young’s translation (YLT) says, “by his bruise **there is healing** to us.”

### Lazarus

There is an interesting story in John's recollection concerning Jesus and His friends, Lazarus, Mary and Martha. Lazarus had died from some illness and even though word reached Jesus in time to prevent His friend's death, the Savior's delay, four days late, made it apparent to every one, including Lazarus' sisters that it was too late. The community was in Shiva and Martha's disappointment bordered on ridicule, tempered only by her overwhelming sorrow, "Jesus, if you had been here, my brother would not be dead."

What's interesting about this account is the doctrinal exchange between the Savior and Martha.

Martha was not ignorant of what God would do if the Savior only asked Him (John 11:22), but Jesus was late. This would prove neither here nor there, for, as Jesus, reassuringly promised her, "Lazarus, your brother, will rise again." (Jesus knowing what He was about to do.) Lazarus' demise was quite temporary (John 11:23). Martha knew the doctrine of the resurrection of the just and unjust. Jesus taught it. She didn't want a lesson on the end times. She had hoped for a healing, not realizing that in the Savior's mind there can be no distinction in time between what God would have done four days earlier or what He plans to do now or in the future.

It would be as wrong to accuse God of negligence or disinterest in our pain due to a delay in His response to our prayer as it would be insensitive if we were, in turn, accused, in our sickness, of losing patience with the God Who loves us. This whole idea of a "delay" has no relevance to an *eternal* God. From an eternal perspective even calling one of His servants "Home" to be with Him *is* a healing, and an interval of pain or hurt, perhaps, serves some purpose only He in His wisdom knows for now. It certainly did in Lazarus' case. Jesus' delay was quite intentional, as those who are familiar with the story already know.

Perhaps, less reasonable, but just as valid and true, is C. S. Lewis' explanation: "Almost certainly God is not in time. His life does not consist of moments one following another. ... Ten- thirty -- and every other moment from the beginning of the world-- is always present for Him. If you like to put it this way, He has all eternity in which to listen to the split second of [your] prayer."

John Stott maintained that there might be here a confusion between the “already” and the “not yet” of prophecy. So God could say, “I am your healer thanks to the Cross; however, “not yet.” There is little consolation in such an idea, as Habakkuk discovered (Habakkuk 1:2). But even he came to trust God *in* his pain, like Job did (Job 13:15).

The land is parched. There is no bill of fare,  
The fig tree without bud, the empty vine,  
The branches of the olive trees are bare,  
No fruit to eat, no oil and no wine.  
The shepherd's watch is on an empty pen,  
No cattle lowing, vacant is the stall,  
No sacrifice to make for sinful men,  
No offerings to give to God at all.  
And yet it is of worsen times no sign  
For all my hope rests in His promise given  
Upon His Word let all the faithful dine.  
We'll feast anew someday with Him in heaven.  
I'll sing aloud His mercies and applaud  
The joy of my Salvation and my God.  
Habakkuk 3:17-18

They call this proleptic [in anticipation of] regarding the promises of God. That's probably what Matthew meant when he saw Jesus' healing ministry in Isaiah's prophecy. It is the undeniable substance (reality) of things hoped for [coming at Calvary] (Hebrews 11:1).

To Martha, Jesus was seemingly referring to the resurrection “at the end of time” (John 11:24) when He meant to raise His friend now! Did Martha understand Jesus when He, looked into her sad, tear washed, eyes and whispered, “Martha, this is *me!* I *am* the resurrection” (John 11:25).

The rest of Jesus' thought serves all of us when He washed away not just the sorrow in her eyes but the sadness in her theology, “Physical death is such a short blip in the experience of a believer with life following. We, who have faith, will never die (John 11:26). What might we learn from this exchange?

1. Isaiah saw physical healing in Jesus' death and resurrection because we are not just spirit. We are *body*, soul, and spirit. No where in Scripture does God speak of changing this. Not to

argue absurdity, but, we cannot imagine ourselves without bodies, nor does God in Scripture want us to. We await new incorruptible bodies to replace these mortal frames we currently sport (1 Corinthians 15:40). When Jesus was resurrected and appeared to His disciples, the prove of His being alive was evidence in His having a body. He showed them the scars and ate fish (John 20:19-29). Our new bodies will represent that final and complete healing we so long to have.

2. Our physical well being matters to God. The time we imagine between our prayer and our healing is never incidental, much less an indication of God's disinterest (John 11:5). Jesus' love for Lazarus was suddenly visible in the Savior's glistened eyes. John would observe the tears wetting the Savior's cheeks (John 11:35).
3. Everything God does and doesn't do in answer to prayer is always and only a matter of faith (John 11:15) intended to glorify God (John 11:4).
4. We often selfishly fail to see the larger picture, how God is going to use this moment to do something far greater than we could imagine (John 11:40). Lazarus' death would become the talk of the town. Lazarus became God's unwitting servant that played a vital role in those final days before Jesus' death (John 12:9-10, 17).
5. There might be a fifth idea worth mentioning. Christians believe unreservedly that many of the persons who lived in Old Israel in the days of the prophets will be numbered among the redeemed even though they lived *before* the Cross, because they, like we, are only asked to "trust God" for our salvation. An eternal God can reach back to heal the soul, why not the body, too (Psalm 42:11; 130:5).

### A Theology of Miracles

Power for healing, is found in the manifested Presence of God. "On one of those days while he was teaching, Pharisees and teachers of the law were sitting there who had come from every village of Galilee and Judea, and also from Jerusalem. And **the Lord's power to heal was in him.**" (Luke 5:17) Waiting on the presence of God in the person of the Holy Spirit to heal, who He would, represents, on our part, a humble

submission to God, which exclusively glorifies Him and denies us a basis for claiming any credit for what God is doing.

And what about faith? Is faith required for healing, which seems implied in Jesus' ministry while He sojourned here? It was never faith for healing but a trust or faith in the healer, Jesus. This difference is critical to appreciating the dynamic of physical healings as a provision of the Cross. The purpose behind Jesus' death was spiritual, the salvation of the soul. But the soul and body have a necessary union. That God would somehow care about the one without the other isn't scriptural. (Luke 5:23-24; James 5:15; 1 Corinthians 15:44).

We should not ignore Matthew's explanation that physical healing is mentioned in Isaiah 53, that physical healing was important to God while His Son was dying for sin. The overwhelming burden of Isaiah's prophecy is, indeed, of a spiritual concern. Calvary deals decisively with our sins, our sinful nature, our sinfulness, a depraved or fallen humanity and the Devil's advantage over it. Calvary is a divine coup de grâce against an enemy that would strike the Savior with a mortal blow: wounded, pierced (Isaiah 53:5). The Devil would strike at God's heart, hurt Him deeply, if he could, and that means that no part of God's cherished creation, God's children, were beyond his reach—as Job found out (Job 2:4-5). One translation reads, "Satan answered the LORD and said, "Skin for skin! Yes, all that a man has, he will give for his life. However, reach out with Your hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh; he will curse You to Your face!" But Job never did.

Perhaps the early Church Fathers were right: the Devil was tricked! His masterful plan, working seamlessly through Judas Iscariot, came back on him. Oh the prophetic metaphor of innocence when Job cried out, "... (The Lord's) hand pierced the fleeing serpent!" (Job 26:13). Job was restored to full health among other blessings (Job 42:12). And so will we in God's time.

## *CHRIST, OUR REDEEMER*

*"It is from him that you are in Christ Jesus, who became ... from God for us — our ... redemption." 1 Corinthians 1:30*

FAMILY was everything in ancient Judean [Israelite] society. Cultural norms as well as laws or policies were inaugurated by God through Moses to safeguard a family's inheritance from abject and austere poverty where a family had to sell the homestead and their land or even, become another's servant to pay off debt.

But there was a "Year of Jubilee," every fifty years, when all property had to be returned to its original owners (Leviticus 25). Neither death nor poverty were recognized as reasons to forfeit a family member's possessions. The Mosaic law (Leviticus 25:25-34) allowed for a near relative, a brother or uncle or cousin, to repurchase what might have been sold to pay off family debts and thereby rescue the property and maintain the original property rights. This is a legal arrangement (Leviticus 25:25-27). Money was also loaned interest free (Leviticus 25:36).

If a poor family were indentured as servants, to whomever the debt was owed, on Yom Kippur (10 days after the new moon on the seventh month, September-October) in the year of Jubilee, they were free to return to their own home debt free. Any remaining debt would be forgiven (Leviticus 25:13, 28).

Such a restoration, returning to your own home as a free man (Leviticus 25:40), had great significance in Judean culture (Joel 2:25). The Year of Jubilee was an entire year of celebrating the blessings of God's provision (Leviticus 25:11), not only the return of a family's inheritance, but it had the benefit of strengthening family relations. In short: the Judean economy was not driven by greed, by personal wealth, but by an underlining respect for the family unit culturally and the family's wealth to be handed down to the next generation. Family was everything. Individual interests served the greater interest of the

family. In simple terms, relationships were far more important to God than anyone's personal success. This is something to underscore later in the chapter on "Christ, Our Brother."

There was even a special provision for a man to marry his brother's widow, if no son had been born to them. This provision was intended for a man to sire a son for his deceased brother to inherit his dead brother's estate (Genesis 38:8). [There is in their language a special word for marrying one's brother's widow.] Family possessions and unity were to be rescued. Every disruption of that unity was regarded as intolerable and as something that had to be restored or repaired.

### Ruth

A most noteworthy example of this arrangement is the story of Ruth (Ruth 2:20) in which Boaz, a kinsman of Naomi, Ruth's mother-in-law, fulfilled the law in marrying Ruth (Ruth 4:4-5, 9-10). Ruth was not Jewish but she was the widow of one. The idea behind this legal provision was to restore a family's wealth, rescue a family member from poverty or slavery, or to repurchase their possessions to maintain the inheritance and preserve the legacy of another family member. Another interesting example is Jeremiah purchasing his uncle's field, knowing that in 70 years, they will be able to re-own it (Jeremiah 32:6-8).

The language of the Bible had a special word for this arrangement not found in other cultures of the time. The word is *redeemer*. Clearly, this right of a kinsman [a blood relative], who had the resources, the money, to repurchase the homestead of a family member, who has fallen on hard times, is peculiarly *scriptural*. One could argue that God had another redemption in mind in giving us such a culturally outspoken and unique Old Testament covenantal idea. "I, the LORD, am your Savior and **Redeemer**" (Isaiah 60:16).

Every Sunday morning, in the church I attended as a lad, we closed the AM service with Psalm 19:14. It was an older translation back then: "Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and **my redeemer**." At the time, I had no idea how sacred, how special, how very biblical, were these words, "Lord, my *kinsman* redeemer." It is not enough to say, as we have been, Jesus' death and resurrection redeemed, freed, us

from the slavery of sin. He did this as our elder brother (Romans 8:29). He did this as *family* (Matthew 12:50).

This inspired term is rich in meaning. When God rescued (redeemed) Israel from Egyptian bondage, (Exodus 15:13) they became His people. In delivering them, he purchased them for His own. "I have **redeemed** you; I have called you by your name; *you are mine.*" (Isaiah 43:1) A broken covenant relationship has been restored. "And the **redeemed** of the LORD will return and come to Zion with singing, crowned with unending joy." (Isa 51:11)

### Our Redemption

"In Israel, family members were redeemed from a variety of social situations such as debt, captivity, slavery, exile and liability to execution. Redemption becomes, for us, a synonym for forgiveness of sins. (Ephesians 1:7) Also, we are redeemed, freed, from the curse of the law (Galatians 3:13). Any law seems cursed if we could not find a way to follow it. [You recall, God's law was never intended to be perfectly obeyed but to alert us to our need of a Savior.]

Many theologians today like to talk about the Covenant God drew up with us when Jesus died and rose again. Somehow, God's Word and His promises, which are the same thing in Scripture, sounds more binding or real in legalese. [There is no Old Covenant, Old Testament, word for 'promise.' Prophets were comfortable saying, The Lord *said*....] But the language of Scripture written in the garb of a legal parlance sounds so official and might support faith.

In the New Covenant [The new agreement/arrangement that was validated in Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection] Jesus is not called our redeemer but our *redemption* because reference is being made to the *method* by which He purchased our salvation. "He (Jesus) entered the most holy place once for all time, not by the blood of goats and calves, but **by his own blood**, having obtained eternal redemption." (Hebrews 9:12) He purchased us with Himself for God! Again, we are family, which explains why through the writings of the apostles we are repeatedly called His brethren, brothers and sisters. [Evangelicals have carried this theme to the present day. I am not Mr. King but Brother King to many.]

He is our redemption. Paul called us, God's family (Romans 8:15). Peter called us, collectively, a special race of people, a special nation of

saints, the kids of the King of kings. We are His possession, His family! “But you are a chosen race [of people], a royal priesthood [saints all, members of the Royal family of heaven], a holy nation, [citizens of heaven], [God’s] people, belonging to Him, so that you may spread far and wide how glorious a redemption He gave, [of Him] who called you out of [spiritual] darkness into the incomprehensible light of His glory” (1 Peter 2:9). He has freed us from a spiritual bondage to sin. “that we may no longer be enslaved to sin” (Romans 6:6). We didn’t free ourselves, no more than Israel of old delivered themselves from Egyptian bondage (Romans 3:21-28).

### Titus 2:14

Paul offers this simple overview, “He [Jesus] gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to cleanse for himself a people for his own, eager to do good works” (Titus 2:14).

Let’s take the space to review this key scripture that Paul wrote Titus. No Scripture more clearly, simply, and emphatically explains redemption, freedom from the bondage to sin to serve the Lord. Yet, what keeps getting lost in conversation is the fact that our word “redeemer” is a kinsman, a family member, those who are redeemed are called “His” because we are family! A closer examination of this verse, perhaps, shares all we really need to know about the efficacy of Jesus’ death—until He shares more with us in His Kingdom (Ephesians 2:7).

- **He gave Himself.** His crucifixion was voluntary. As He said, “No one takes it from me, but I lay it down on my own” (John 10:18).
- And He did this “**for us.**” This is not only voluntary but vicarious, not only vicarious, but substitutionary. Some interpret the word “for” to mean “for our benefit” or “for our good,” a meaning worthy of the word, but within the language of the New Testament it means “in our stead.”
- He did this [the translation simply reads] “**to**” meaning “in order to.” Jesus’ death did not provide our freedom from sin’s bondage as an unintended consequence of a unfortunate death of a good prophet. Jesus, God’s Son, submitted to the Father’s plan and gave Himself willingly to the lash and the cross knowing that this was the means to our freedom from sin’s

grasp! ...And we understand our redemption, also, in terms of "the forgiveness of sins" (Ephesians 1:7).

- To **redeem us**. set us free via a ransom in His blood. Everything in the language of the New Covenant, what Jesus provided by way of the Cross, follows the Ancient prescription, that, He is our *Kinsman* Redeemer.
- **from all lawlessness**. He freed us from unrighteousness to live for Him. As the Father praised the Son: "You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness" (Hebrews 1:9) and
- **to cleanse**. to make us like Christ free from all sin (1 John 1:7). "Blessed are the pure in heart" (Matthew 5:8). Not just forgiven but God created in us a new heart. He not only calls us saints, He is cleaning up our lives, purging us (Psalm 51:7).
- **for himself a people**. We are His Family! (Song of Solomon 6:3). We are His people.
- **for his own possession**. We belong to God, as Paul repeated elsewhere, "the redemption of the purchased possession" (Ephesians 1:14)
- **eager**. We should be most eager and excited to be a member of His family and want to do all we could to show Him our love by serving Him!
- **to do good works**. How simple a phrase but deeds that by definition "give glory to [our] *Father* in heaven" (Matthew 5:16).

### The Final Days of Time

"There is also an eschatological thread (in the last days) in which full redemption is yet to be accomplished." Jesus disclosed to us that our redemption is eternal in ways yet to be realized by us (Luke 21:28). The Holy Spirit confirms this message (Ephesians 1:14) and Paul also taught that there will be a day when all of creation will rejoice in a total freedom from not just sin but the suffering it causes (Romans 8:22-23).

## CHRIST, OUR BROTHER

*Blessed is the ... Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who ... chose us ... to be holy and ... predestined us to be adopted as sons (and daughters) for himself. - Ephesians 1:3-5*

WHEN God chose to be reconciled, Jesus became the agent of that reconciliation. "God, in the person of Christ," Paul made clear, "was reconciling the world to himself (2 Corinthians 5:19). It was love not wrath that sent Him to a cross. I have met vengeful people in life. They never initiate reconciliation. We were the cause of our estrangement from God (Romans 5:10). We needed to be reconciled to Him (2 Corinthians 5:20; Colossians 1:21). He did not need to be reconciled to us, as if He needed to be coaxed or pressured somehow in given us another chance.

He restored our friendship on Calvary. Jesus called it, "finished" from the Cross (John 19:30). God failed to ask our opinion, let alone our co-operation, in His interest in restoring our friendship. The writer to the Hebrews called Jesus "the author and [not just] the finisher of our faith" (Hebrews 12:2).

Reconciliation means a restored relationship. Reconciliation means we are back in the family, accepted and loved. And everything the family is or does as a family, we are and we do with them. Reconciliation means what they inherit, we inherit (Romans 8:17). What the Father shares with them, He shares with us, too. Paul concluded "Everything is from God, who has reconciled us to himself through Christ" (2 Corinthians 5:18). Said another way, Paul affirmed, "He did not hold back but willingly gave His own Son [to die] for us; how would He not with Him give us everything else [He plans to give us]" (Romans 8:32).

### Adoption

Reconciliation means family and family means *adoption*. Paul reminded us, "God was so excited when He decided to adopt us as His

own children ... when Jesus [died]" (Ephesians 1:5). About 2 percent of all parented children in the United States are adopted (1 out of 50). That's probably the number of hands that would be raised (if people are honest and open about it) if you asked of the average church congregation by show of hands to reveal who had been adopted. *And they would be wrong!* Ask them, how many love the Lord? That's the true number! And this is an exciting revelation!

### **The Family of God**

We have learned four "images" of salvation each illustrating an achievement of the Cross.

1. Christ as a sacrifice for sin paints the picture of the Temple precinct were the sacrifices were a type of Christ's crucifixion (Hebrews 10:1).
2. Christ ransoming us depicts the market place as, for example, the story of Hosea buying back his wife, Gomer, from the slave auction block (Hosea 3:2).
3. Christ our justification recalls the court room because justice is a legal term and Christ in His death paid the penalty for our sin (Romans 5:9).
4. And now *reconciliation* adopts us into God's family. Tom Wright in his work, "Justification: The Biblical Basis" is surely correct emphasizing that "justification is not an individualist's charter, but God's declaration that we belong to the covenant community [to the family]."

Calvary transforms our way of thinking about this life, about priorities and what is important, about suffering, about our relationships: with our enemies (Matthew 5:44), and friends (3 John 1:5), our family thru adoption (Romans 8:15) and above all, God (1 Peter 2:9). Jesus redefined for those who follow Him what is reasonable (Matthew 19:21) and what brings happiness (Matthew 5:3-12). He took us out of ourselves and placed us inside a community of like-minded believers and, although we don't live together, we are spiritually connected and impact each other's life through fellowship around God's Word, the Bible, and prayer (1 John 1:3, 7).

Heaven is *community*, perfect unity (John 17:21); no one is alone; no one is marginalized; no one is uninvolved. There is no separation, no

racism, no segregation or class distinctions in heaven. "After this I looked," John, the Apostle, tells us, "and there was a vast crowd [and yet not a crowd for they were of one heart], unnumbered, from every ethnicity, nation and culture, [every] tribe, clan, or family group, people of every language and dialect, wearing white, standing, before the throne and before the Lamb, [all] waving branches of the palm tree [celebrating what He, the Lamb of God, did through Calvary]" (Revelation 7:9). And how to describe the celebratory atmosphere; I have not the language. John witnessed, "And they in unison with raised voices, loudly, cheering and praising [God], 'Salvation belongs to our God, who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb'" (Revelation 7:10).

### Community

Christian life is Christian community. The Biblical record of our salvation is a "We" not an "I." As difficult as it might be to describe this difference, it is important while interpreting the Biblical idea of reconciliation. In western cultures there is a particular emphasis on individual rights and opportunity for advancement. We define happiness in personal terms: *my* happiness. When interpreting Scripture we tend to see God's relationship with "me" as a personal spiritual encounter that impacts "my" life irrespective of all others. Living a godly life is a solo endeavor as if "I" lived alone on an island and there was only the Lord and me.

But the Bible explains spiritual life in terms of the *community* of believers, the Church (Matthew 18:20). Reconciliation is not merely reconciled to God but reconciled to one another as well. When God saved us He introduced us to His family expecting us to "get along" (Ephesians 4:2). Jesus sent His disciples out by "twos" in ministry. *We* means—not alone.

By the same token, sin is never a personal matter but something that impacts relationships. Did any scholar imagine what life would have been like in the Garden for Adam alone had he not followed Eve in the matter of the forbidden fruit? Of course not! And not because Adam had a choice to go it alone but because Eve was not a stranger in his world. She was his *wife*. The two were one. When a relationship grows, it grows together and inevitably inseparable. (The ease with which divorce is provided in today's society hides this truth.) Understanding the people of God as *family* is an important Old Testament theme ...

The New Testament writers took up the kinship image ... to help Christians to see that we are part of the *family of God*.

In declaring us righteous, God declared us family. Here is where the common term “fellowship” takes on deeper meaning. The dictionary of Bible words calls it “the closest of all human relationships.” It is not surprising at all to see this term featured at the birth of the Church through the move of the Spirit of God (Acts 2:42). Nor is it surprising to learn that God’s faithfulness toward us is defined in terms of our fellowship within the family of God. “God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord” (1 Corinthians 1:9).

### Sharing

“[God is a God],” Peter expounded, “[of] very great and precious promises so that through them you may share in the divine nature” (2 Peter 1:4). *Share!*? Yes, “share.” This word has the same root word as our word, “fellowship.” Fellowship is only possible because we share a common faith (2 Peter 1:1) and the same new nature, being made in the image of Christ (Romans 8:29; 1 John 3:2). Jesus is centric to our interest together. Jesus is primary in our lives.

### Sin

Sin, on the other hand, isolates us. Sin marginalizes and divides us. Sin challenges our unity because it harms the relationships we have in the family we are members. As we study the idea in Scripture this is the definitive characteristic of all sin. There is no clearer description of any action, thought, or spoken word that identifies sin than by observing how our action, thought, or spoken word has impacted our relationship with God and one another. If we are drifting away from the very people we love and who love us, something is wrong that must be revisited in the spirit of reconciliation before we drift so far apart, we are no longer in each other’s life at all.

### 1 John 1:7

The Apostle John said it succinctly, “If we live in the light as Jesus himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin” (1 John 1:7).

**“If”?** *If* is more like “whenever” John is probably saying, “from time to time, even believers sin but, oh, may it never be!”

**“live in the light”** Live in this truth! John is sometimes poetic as he wrote elsewhere “Jesus is that light” (John 1:9). Learn to follow Jesus’ leadership (John 10:27).

**“We have fellowship with one another.”** John didn’t say that we “will” have fellowship. He said we “do” have fellowship. He is not saying that our fellowship is a consequence of living like Jesus (though that, no doubt, is true). He is saying that living like Jesus and fellowship with each other is somehow linked—dare I say, like two sides of the same coin.

Fellowship is more than social contact or sharing stories, or banquets or fund raisers. [And fellowship is always in person, not on social media.] Fellowship can happen in the dinners and fun times together but all these are the cultural conventions—the outward attractions that might surround a real moment of fellowship. Fellowship teaches us what living in the light means as much as living in the light [like Jesus] makes our fellowship real to us. In living God’s truth, and in appropriating God’s provision through Jesus’ death and resurrection, believers encourage each other in living for Christ. We learn together how this all works, And how do we know that we are on the right path? Sin becomes easier to identify in our lives and like so many shriveled up and dead habits the sins start dropping off.

**“the blood of Jesus, God’s Son, cleanses us from all sin.”** In simple words, we are discovering, as believers, that Jesus’ death not only forgave us but from the Cross He made it possible now, empowered us, to live free from all things that would endanger our new found relationship in Christ and His family; we are free to serve God. Sharing and fellowship with the Family of God is God’s answer to emptiness, and superficiality, to meaningless living or a search for significance and christian love.

I visited a young believer once after his rather evident absence from church. He was not sick but felt despondent over what church, he felt, had become, a well orchestrated presentation of some ritual instead of, for him, an opportunity to worship God. He felt his real interest in church had been interrupted by something programmed. Not intending to discourage you from church, let me continue: My friend didn’t want me to leave after an hour or so of fellowship over God’s Word

together. He missed it, terribly. I think you see my point. Salvation is, again, not *me* but *we*. Salvation is a believer's introduction to God's family, which means that without other believers, we are unfulfilled and disoriented, unable to find (ourselves). As believers, we will never feel totally "at home" again until, or unless, we come to an unmistakable appreciation for the family of God.

### **Everything in Common**

When the Church was very young, in its beginning months, it displayed, what might be thought of now as, an uncommon expression of God's love for one another. I have called this the "one another" principle. "Now the entire group of those who believed were of one heart and mind, and no one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but instead they held everything in common" (Acts 4:32).

While a local church board member (many years ago) I knew a young couple who sold their house and gave the money to "our" church. Actually "he" did it without the approval of his wife. Long story, short: I argued on the board that we should return it ...and we did. But we might take a closer look at "his" heart that brought him to this decision. Another man (single), I knew while I was pastoring, sold his business to his brother and gave the money to another church (not ours). He then went to work for his brother. I couldn't change his mind on this. This second man (a young believer), who attended the church I pastored at the time, was in a meeting in which I mentioned the ministry's financial need. (This was after his business was sold, and that's not all he gave away!) He stood to his feet, pulled out his wallet, grabbed a wad of bills, and asked, "How much do you need?" There is a spirit here reminiscent of those very early days in Acts 4. And I think some would squelch it as immature or unwise, but don't tell Barnabas (Acts 4:36).

Here is not the place for a sermon on widows, orphans and the poor, but this early spirit of generosity, this passionate concern about others more needy, was in Acts 6 organized, codified, and assigned to spiritual leadership to make sure no one was left out.

Generosity is a biblical word worth studying (2 Corinthians 9:13). Here, it is worth noting that this aspect of God's love had infused the passions, the enthusiasm, the emotions and thoughts of an entire church that now as a community caught a vision that defined them

culturally and spiritually. And, I must add, I would have ‘loved’ to be a part of it!

### **“Allelous” - One Another**

Fellowship is intimacy or closeness— a common burden, a common heart, a common prayer as well as working and worshipping together. I like to call this the “allelous” principle after the New Testament Greek word for *one another*. It is because of Calvary that we experience in this life a taste of the richness of fellowship with one another that will be ours in its fulness in the Kingdom to come: “comforted together” (Romans 1:12); “kindly affectioned one to another” (Romans 12:10); “same mind one toward another” (Romans 12:16); “edifying another” (Romans 14:19); “likeminded” (Romans 15:5); “Wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received us to the glory of God” (Romans 15:7); “admonishing one another” (Romans 15:14); “having the same care one for another [without partiality or favoritism]” (1 Corinthians 12:25); “by love serving one another” (Galatians 5:13); “Bearing ... one another’s burdens, and so fulfilling the law of Christ” (Galatians 6:2) ...and more.

“The gospel was plowing new ground.” The professor exclaimed, “Understanding ... kinship ... makes us better able to understand the responsibility of Christians to ...live in harmony with one another.” Being a Christian is not just “me and Jesus. I am ... part of God’s household. ... I become part of His *we*.” It is not surprising to hear, then, that sin “...alienates from God’s community.” And that God “... doesn’t want to save me as an individual, God saves us into ... a community.” Unwillingness to share our Christian experience, disinterest in assembling with other believers, disunity on any level, is not a mark of a believer who is fully appreciating and appropriating Christ’s death and resurrection (Hebrews 10:25).

### **Heaven**

I once wondered if our hope was just a fond thought that we would be reunited with so many loved ones and dear friends that have preceded us to glory. When I get there, I will be one of countless millions of others who will be called to an awesome worship service at the Throne. That’s spelled out in the Revelation Jesus gave John.

But will I find my mom in the crowd?

There are two things wrong with this question. One, my mom is no longer my mom. Old relationships will be replaced with new—and far more meaningful and dynamic—ones. [I was thinking about giving my beloved wife a “Christian” hug since I can’t hug her romantically.]

The second thing wrong with that question is this cold term “crowd.” When I am with family, regardless the size, I am never in a crowd, a nameless throng of bodies pushing and shoving me as if I were in the way. I will belong here ...in every sense.

The closest I can come to giving this thought a biblical base is Philipians 1:27, “our citizenship is in heaven.” In the Epistle of Diognetus, Christians are said to be “passing time in this life but will be citizens in heaven.” It will be different than this life, for sure! And it will be “family.” I will be reintroduced to so many saints, some who might have once lived in my own neighborhood, even in my house. I think I will remember mother even if she is sweeter and younger and however God designs our glorified bodies. I’ll leave it there ....only keep in heart the truth that when God saved us, He introduced us into His larger family and we have been welcomed as one of them.

All this because God’s Son, Jesus, is my brother.

Let me say it once more to every person of faith, “Welcome to the family!”

## THE POWER OF CHRIST'S FORGIVENESS

*For this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. - Matthew 26:28*

THE Cross itself is an act of the Father's forgiveness. "God exalted this man to his right hand as ruler and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins." (Acts 5:31) Now, give this some thought: If someone punches you in the nose, I cannot forgive him because it was not my nose. God was offended by our sin— only He could forgive. He could forgive us through Christ's death because Christ is God. The One who was offended paid the price for our forgiveness. If Jesus did pray for God's forgiveness, it would have been an announcement of what the Father was doing at that moment (John 11:41-42). It was God, the Father, Who forgave us.

It would be impossible to interpret God dealing with our sins in any way that would not include His forgiveness (Ephesians 1:7). What is less obvious is the demand this places on believers in turn to forgive others. When Jesus taught us to pray He enjoined us to recognize His forgiveness *in ours!* "And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors." (Matthew 6:12) It is, therefore, because we are forgiven of our sins that we think of our sins as a debt that God forgave.

### Being Forgiven

For those who still think that forgiving someone is just a matter of words, consider how *we* are asked to forgive. Actions must follow the words or forgiveness has no substance. We need to forgive in deed if we have forgiven indeed. Forgiveness when possible must be an act of reconciliation.

Forgiveness is a powerful friend. It can melt hardened hearts, disarm a defensive stance, defuse anger, heal relationships, and for

those who want it, forgiveness has provided eternal life—and herein lies its greatest value.

Christians are asked to emulate God in this matter, to be ministers of reconciliation. Forgive as you have been forgiven (Matthew 6:12). And, to be sure, this is happening, thanks to Jesus' night of suffering. To the believer, the abuse of friendship may indeed be given a proper burial through forgiving tears and repentant hugs—or most definitely should. We have been given new birth and a new hope through Christ that is confirmed in every act of forgiving. Our lives should bear witness to a spirit of reconciliation and healed relationships. Love should be the message of the Cross spoken in every action and every word of every believer.

Perhaps some hurts seem unforgettable. Perhaps, there is a distant memory that shows up in dreams unannounced and uninvited. Perhaps some offense requires, we reason, a vigilant watch to warn us lest it dares besiege us again. Perhaps, something too painful to remember clearly, nonetheless, still haunts us in unexplainable fears, moments of uncontrollable rage, orphaned desires that are not who we want to be—yet, they somehow show us who we have become! (Oh, how it hurts to be human!) And forgiveness is not just forgiving others, but forgiving one's self... *me*—the one who hurts in the solitude of my thoughts, in the heaviness of my spirit, in the regrets of a long ago that should have nothing to do with who I am now, but somehow seem to. The work on Calvary needed to address all this pain and hurt. "the chastisement of our peace was upon him" (Isaiah 53:5).

There is here, at least, a hint at the size of the work God had to and continues to have to perform on the human soul to bring us to His peace! The words "Forgive them" He spoke from the cross were the ultimate vindication that something real was happening the day He died. And thus began His ministry to us. Today He sits at the Father's right hand praying for you and me, praying that what He provided that day on Calvary will have the full benefit of His grace in us. He sent the Holy Spirit to remind us.

It is on our own road to Emmaus when He speaks to the heart that all this begins to make sense. The truth in that moment, as to why He had to die, is revealed in such clarity as to never again need to be proven:

He died ...for me!!

### **The Unmerciful Servant**

The Lord's prayer in Matthew's recollection calls sin a debt, forgive us our debts, a penalty owed [after a Chaldean euphemism]. The dictionary interprets that to be saying of our sins "... God can demand punishment as something due," But on Calvary that debt was paid completely. We have been forgiven (1 John 1:9). In turn the Lord is requiring us, who have been forgiven, to forgive. To bring this truth home with undeniable clarity, Jesus told the parable of the "Unmerciful Servant" (Matthew 18:21-35)

Peter suggested that there has to be a limit to how many times we should be required to forgive someone (70 times 7). Professor Trench understood Peter to be assuming that we have a right to some limit, but there is no such "right" in Scripture! Professor Trench [in Notes of the Parables of Our Lord. 121-122] spoke of the parable of the "Unmerciful Servant," which we must hear:

"...it was evidently assumed, that a man in forgiving, gave up a right which he might still, under certain circumstances, exercise. In this parable the Lord will make clear that when God calls on a member of his kingdom to forgive, he does not call on him to renounce a rate, but that he has now no right to exercise in the matter; for having himself asked for and excepted forgiveness, he has implicitly pledged himself to show it! And it is difficult to imagine how any amount of didactic instruction could have brought home this truth with all the force and conviction of (this) parable."

In the parable, Jesus tells the story of a monarch who called in a 10,000 talent loan [1.125 million dollars] owed him. To get an idea of how much that is consider that all the gold used in building the Tabernacle in the wilderness amounted to only 29 talents (Exodus 38:24). When David gathered the resources to built the Temple (Solomon's Temple) it amounted to 3,000 talents. He then passed the plate and collected an additional 5,000 talents of gold for the service of God's house (1 Chronicles 29:4-7). Such an immense debt could only be acquired by some high, well paid, official in the king's service—maybe, the administrator of the royal revenues. "Perhaps," Prof Trench imagines, "a satrap who should have remitted the revenues of his province to the royal treasury." (He embezzled.) In short, it was beyond any servant's ability to repay.

The servant was taken into custody, “was brought before him” (Matthew 18:24) and since he could not pay, the king gave orders to have the man’s family sold into slavery, in payment, “that he, his wife, his children, and everything he had be sold to pay the debt” (Matthew 18:25). In the parable the man was thrown into prison. This practice never formed part of Jewish law, as well as, selling family members into slavery until a debt is paid in full. These were considered harsh and superfluous. Subsequently, the reference to tormentors in verse 34, “handed him over to the jailers to be tortured until he could pay everything” suggests an oriental monarch not Jewish.

If we are understanding what the Savior is saying here—and we have only one way to see it—our debt owed God due to sin is beyond anyone’s ability to make restitution (Romans 3:23). The punishment is everlasting destruction. “And you were dead in your trespasses and sins” (Ephesians 2:1).

So this servant “fell down and began begging.” Mercy is our God’s soft spot. We best learn that! “But from there, you will search for the LORD your God, and you will find him when you seek him with all your heart and all your soul” (Deuteronomy 4:29).

This servant began to promise full payment of his debt, either driven by a desperate appeal or just one more deception that probably got him into this difficulty in the first place. We should think both. Such words on a sinner’s lips “testify that he has not yet attained to a full insight into his relations with God.” Without repentance and a cry for mercy one shows that he knows nothing about grace. A sinner knows no theology, no doubt, nor even if there is such a thing, but he knows mercy if He knows anything about God.

God reads the heart. It took some prison time, perhaps, but this servant’s cry became genuine and his monarch “had compassion, released him, and forgave him the loan” (Verse 27). How brilliant is God! There can be no forgiveness in secret, that is, that the sinner does not know he or she is forgiven (Isaiah 1:18). He knew.

The lesson in this parable pivots on the next verse: “That servant went out and found one (went in search) “of his fellow servant who owed him a hundred denarii (a small amount, one dollar, easily repaid). He grabbed him [It is evident, isn’t it, who is who here?] and started choking him, and said, ‘Pay what you owe!’” (verse 28).

When the king is informed, he is enraged and not without good reason that we, too, can understand: "Shouldn't you also have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?" (verse 33). God's holiness is offended (verse 34) and more so at the blatant disregard for not showing to others a kindness shown to him. What all Christians need to learn is that God shares his love often *through* us, the righteousness/justice must be done *by* us, having been done *to* us. Our relationship with Him is represented by our fellowship with one another (1 John 1:7).

The informants, the fellow servants, on the other hand, are saddened, "they were deeply distressed (grieved)" (verse 31). Prof Trench reminds us, "In man, the sense of his own guilt ... the deep consciousness of whatever sin he sees (in another)... exists in its germ ... in his own heart." Our anger toward another's act of injustice tends to stir us to drag them before the judgment seat of popular opinion if we can. We imagine ourselves rejoicing in that day of reckoning when God finally gets around to avenging wrong. But hear Paul out, "Brothers and sisters, if someone is overtaken in any wrongdoing, you who are spiritual, restore such a person with a gentle spirit, watching out for yourselves so that you also won't be tempted" (Galatians 6:1).

Forgiveness!! It is impossible not to get the message here: You have been forgiven much; it is incumbent upon you to forgive others the small debt owed you. In no small way, if we might speak in the vernacular, this unmerciful servant had hell to pay. "tortured until he could pay everything ... owed" (Verse 34) which we know for us would be an infinite debt.

Then Jesus says plainly something we probably never wanted to hear, "So also my heavenly Father will do to you unless every one of you forgives his brother or sister from your heart. ...if you don't forgive others, your Father will not forgive your offenses" (Matthew 6:15).

### **Forgiveness**

Perhaps, we need to ask, "What is forgiveness exactly?" Is it possible for a believer to be unforgiving? Some scholars argue that we should not ... think of our sinful condition primarily on the analogy of the debt owed by a creditor nor of forgiveness in terms of a debt; rather, our condition like that of a condemned criminal before the court and

divine forgiveness like a legal pardon. The Psalmist declared, "As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us" (Psalm 103:12). God, in Christ, initiates this act of reconciliation by first forgiving us and then extending to us the authority to be forgiving toward others. There is, in other words, a divine mercy, a divine love, that only He can give which rescues us from the pain of shattered relationships and the guilt it brings.

Any study of forgiveness has to address the sin that needs to be forgiven. There are many Greek words for sin—all which carried biblical meaning as aspects of the broken relationships we suffered: missing God's glory, disobedient, lawless, failing God, ungodly, sinful ignorance, out of harmony, transgressing the Word of God, trespassing God's will. We were spiritually dead (Ephesians 2:1) needing to be—not just forgiven but—resurrected. We must emphasize that walking in "newness of life" (Romans 6:4) includes a forgiving spirit.

### **An Afterthought**

Oh! You say. But you didn't go through what I went through! Mine is not a spiritual but an emotional condition. I have been physically damaged! You don't really know what abuse is! Don't preach at me! I am not bitter. I have a right to my anger!

I wrote a book I titled "I Forgive You: A Personal Journey into Forgiveness." In its annotation I commented, "Whatever hurt others have supposedly or in reality inflicted on another (the hurt, nevertheless, being real) we all need to learn to recognize real forgiveness." My story is a stroll through the past, revisiting the monuments to forgiveness along the battlefield where conflicts happened. I added, "Forgiveness is still the keystone of the entrance into all my relationships from God to family to church to society to forgiving myself." I still believe this.

## CHRIST, OUR MESSAGE

*If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, a curse be on him! - Galatians 1:9*

IN the late seventies while pastoring in Western Pennsylvania, I was invited to meet Reverend “Chuck” Smith of Calvary Chapel fame from Long Beach, California. One of my elders and I drove to this small farm upstate—north of Pittsburgh—where we would attend an evening gathering in a good-size barn converted and filled with seats for that purpose. During this visit I met Reverend Earl Taggart, who then in his early 70’s was showing a marked disinterest in what I, a young minister in my 30’s was into—the Biblical languages. At an evening service, in which Chuck Smith taught, filled to the rafters with young adults, “Brother” Taggart walked to the microphone with a hand full of octagonally shaped stickers, like small stop signs, which he urged his hearers to obtain—as many as desired—for distribution. “Stick them everywhere,” he admonished. The sticker had one word on it, “Jesus.” He proceeded to explain that nothing else anymore for him was of any importance. The sole message of the believer is: Jesus. I have never forgotten.

“I decided to know nothing among you,” Paul vowed to the Corinthian Church, “except Jesus Christ and him crucified” (1 Corinthians 2:2). The Holy Spirit’s entire ministry revolves around Jesus: His life, death, resurrection and intercessory ministry. “When the Spirit of truth comes he will guide you into all truth.” Jesus comforted eleven disillusioned followers, who were unsettled by His talk of crucifixion. Then the Savior explained, “For he will not speak of *Himself*, ... He will glorify me.” (John 16:13-14a)

The missionary council meeting in Jerusalem in 1928 [Francis M. DuBose, ed. *Classics of Christian Missions*, p 343] expanded, “The Gospel is the answer to the world’s greatest need. It is not our discovery or achievement; it rests on what we recognize as an act of God.” As

believers, the Savior in our life is beyond question our trumpet call, our motive for living. "Herein lies the Christian motive;" states the Council, "it is simple. We cannot live without Christ and we cannot bear to think of men living without Him. Christ is our motive."

In the Preface of his work "From Christendom to Apostolic Mission" Bishop Kagan, the Bishop of Bismarck, North Dakota, sees the necessity for the Church to once again don the mantle of the missionary since we are no longer living in a Christian culture. Archbishop Fulton Sheen in 1974 said "We are at the end of Christendom. Not of Christianity, not of the Church, but of Christendom. Christendom is ... social life as inspired by Christian principle. That is ending—we've seen it die." We are, in simple truth, missionaries to cultural change. And we must let that missionary side of our love realize more its potential in the hand of God.

Jesus—yes—offends a world that does not know who He is, but His life is what our lives are all about. "in him we live, and move, and have our being..." (Acts 17:28). The ultimate test of a disciple's commitment and dedication to the Lord is their ability to represent the Good News—as only good news can be represented—with an undying hope, an enduring peace, an unconquerable love, an unquestioning faith, and an unquenchable joy.

### **The Rough-edge of Christianity**

But Jesus, Himself, cautioned that, there is nothing we can do or say that will make more palatable a truth that confronts society on the most basic of levels—its morality or lack thereof. If there is talk of a "hell" (and Jesus did speak of it) it aggravates the offense. No wonder our Lord unabashedly admitted, "You will be hated by all nations because of my name" (Matthew 24:9). If the Spirit gets us into trouble, He will get us out (Luke 12:11).

And where can we run and hide in God's Word? Where are the words that only console the sinner, that suggest there are many roads to God, that somehow what we called "sin" isn't that at all but just a faltering part of our humanity, a genetic defect, an illness? Is there nothing in the Good Book that supports cultural change, that sees social evolution as simply different from what it once was? Must grandma still be relevant? Can we not find a biblical position that allows us the liberty to be different, to be living a new morality? To

seek pleasure in new ways for pleasure's sake? To re-evaluate the sanctity of marriage in the light of a free and casual relation. Surely in a book the size of the Bible there has to be some thread of truth that supports social change; so, we can welcome into the family of God all LGBTQ+ persons as we have the divorcees. Who has the right to universally define sin anyway!

### **One Continuous Message**

The Bible is one continuous message. We can argue that God's Word has continuity, that is, God doesn't get sidetracked on tangents or peripheral issues. The Bible is not a text book on science—though some would feign it so in order to argue against it. Yes, some believers would have more information about heaven or the end of time, but God has been content in simply letting us know these are the future, for both saint and sinner.

Some see the Bible as a culture in support of the Christian religion to be followed or disavowed. And yet, as any Christian missionary knows, the Bible transcends culture. The sole purpose in God mobilizing prophet and apostle and others to write it was to highlight the Cross. Before the Cross, God's Word shows our need for such a salvation. Afterward, the Bible spotlights its provisions.

The Bible reflects on the broken relationship we have with the God Who created us and still loves us though we rejected and ignored that love. It is the message of reconciliation, forgiveness, and redemption through the ultimate act of selfless, divine, love on a Roman Cross. It was never about social change.

Everyone of us (cisgender and transgender) stands before Him guilty of walking away, of seeing no value in loving God back—something God called sin. "...all have sinned" (Romans 3:23). A relationship always takes two but how to transform the heart of a humanity that had no passion for Him, was the gargantuan task God undertook. We simply didn't want God!

Whether we want to admit it or not, the entire Bible is God's way of telling us this simple but profound truth. The Bible is all about Him, our need of redemption and how God would provide it. As Jesus explained to two disciples one day along a country road as they walked: "...beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he (Jesus) interpreted for them the things concerning himself in **all** the

Scriptures" (Luke 24:27). 'All' is the operative word. The Biblical record offers nothing else to us than our salvation thru Christ. There is no other path back into fellowship with God. "Jesus (said), "I am the way... No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). Jesus is the only way and that, too, is an abrasive and impertinent attitude toward other religions that think to hold a claim on spiritual or moral truth.

There is only one message within its pages! Discussions around topics, like a nuclear family or infanticide, that appear peripheral and less important have been dragged into dialogue because we cannot escape certain conclusions about the God we are getting to know and to love. Somehow, we have discovered, that our faith, our love for God, our salvation, is a wisdom crying in the streets (Proverbs 1:20) pleading with us not to be lured in by fancy phrases or ensnared by notions of compromise with otherwise worldly concepts that ultimately lead to denying who we are or who we want to become in Christ.

### **It's All About The Blood**

"We were reconciled to God through the death of his Son" (Romans 5:10). Christianity is, indeed, a bloody religion, an idea, perhaps, in and of itself, offensive (I'll give you that) to logical minds, to academicians who reason from a scientific perspective, and who, therefore, see no value in the death of a Savior.

But with an unapologetic conviction, this is what our faith is all about! This is our living hope: the glorious return of the great God even our Savior, Jesus Christ (Titus 2:13) who shed His blood on a cross on our behalf, in our stead, to reconcile us to God. "We have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses" (Ephesians 1:7). This has become our trumpet call as believers. Paul unambiguously declared "... through him to reconcile everything to himself ... by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross" (Colossians 1:20).

The Savior's shed blood is the believer's mantra. The writer to the Hebrews agreeably wrote, "How much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, cleanse our consciences from dead works so that we can serve the living God" (Hebrews 9:14). This is redemption, freedom from sin's hold on us. In Peter's words, "For you know that you were redeemed

from your empty way of life ..., not with perishable things like silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ" (1 Peter 1:18-19).

Our God sent His Son to wrest death from Satan's hand. Death is no longer weaponized against our fears since we now have eternal life (John 11:25-26; 1 John 4:17-18). The writer of the book of Hebrews explained, "Now since we are human, He also likewise shared (in our humanity) in order that through His death, then, he might destroy the devil's power over us in our being all our lives enslaved to a fear of death, afraid of God's punishment. ... For this reason it was *necessary* the He was, also, human" (Hebrews 2:14-15, 17).

The Old Testament is replete with references to sacrifices because sacrifice means shed blood. All along, the Father had His Son's death on His mind and heart. There can be no other explanation worthy our theology (Leviticus 17:11). "Without the shedding of blood," the writer to the Hebrews affirms, "there is no forgiveness" (Hebrews 9:22). "We have redemption through his blood" (Colossians 1:14). What is eternal life to a believer, is philosophical garble to the unbeliever until through conviction the Spirit of God reveals it. It is every believer's privilege to herald the message for the sake of those who will listen.

### **The Confrontation**

Our worldview as well as our faith defends the deity of Jesus as well as the trinity, the virgin birth, and ultimately the death of our Savior, all as central to our message, but all of which, sounds like mythological nonsense to the non-believing heart. "We preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to the Gentiles" (1 Corinthians 1:23).

Make no mistake about it: The Bible is the promise of Salvation offered thru Christ's death—a message that counters today's evolutionary worldview of an eventual utopia, a self-made heaven for mankind. The Cross represents a miracle of grace that science cannot confirm or deny because it is outside the realm of natural inquiry. The resurrection from the dead and what it means for believers has broken out of the confines of natural history. Our message continues to stand out in bold relief in an age of *wokeness*. As Jesus prayed to the Father, "I have given them your word. The world hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world" (John 17:14).

Now on the eve of Christ's return, this makes our voice as necessary as it is unwelcome. The church needs to consider the danger of compromise like playing the "sleight-of-definition" game with words like "faith is just opinion" or "love is just a feeling" designed only as a palliative approach to mitigate the pain of confrontation. Sin is sin and needs to be dealt with if we care anything at all about meeting God someday without fear.

Our faith is not an aspirin, a cognitive dissonance that denies reality. Christian faith is the boldest move we can make. Instead of denying or projecting blame, admitting what we had become and our estrangement from God, we ask God to forgive us—to appropriate the forgiveness of God, if you prefer—and show how to live above our past rebellion against Him.

### **God's Involvement with Mankind**

Let's go back to Genesis 1:1. God was not first our Savior. He was first our Creator and the new birth is His work. He is the Creator. But there's the rub! Creationism is not evolutionary theory. Evolutionary theology suggests God made man in the same fashion and for the same reason as the rest of His creation—and that simply is not true. We are uniquely made in His image.

Evolutionary theory suggests we are heading toward a utopian world where "survival of the fittest" is a natural process leaving the best of the best—instead of, as we believe, the work of a divine providence that plans an end to sin and corruption. Postmodern thought, evolutionary theory, counters what Christian eschatology and the Apocalypse is all about.

Weakening the idea of God as our Creator weakens the reason why He made us, for His glory. And if not for His glory, then Romans 3:23 ("all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God") is nonsense, since we cannot fall short of a relationship that didn't exist. In other words, no Creator God means no reality to the concept of sin. Sin and God's judgment is now mocked by a postmodern relativism. Relativism, like existentialism, argues that knowledge, truth, and morality exist only in relation to a culture or a society. There is, for them, no absolute moral truth. And need I warn the Christian where this leads? Jesus' death for sin becomes a moot point. It has been replaced with a materialistic

understanding of reality. Materialism has two definitions. Take your pick.

- a tendency to consider material possessions and physical comfort as more important than spiritual values. This is a familiar trap that Jesus addresses in the first beatitude. "Blessed are the poor in spirit" (Matthew 5:3). Believer happiness is not invested in possessions but in a dependence on God for all things.

- the doctrine that nothing exists except matter and its movements and modifications. Science is god?

### **A Powerful Message**

The fifth chapter in The Acts of the Apostles is an historical reference to possibilities when the church learns to unite behind the Gospel. In verse 12 Luke tells us, "Many signs and wonders were being done among the people through the hands of the apostles." We read this as if this were a one-off event instead of the possibilities for which the Church was commissioned. Verse 14, no surprise, testifies, "Believers were added to the Lord in increasing numbers..." Governments of the world, take notice!

When the sick were carried on cots out into the streets hoping that Peter might pass by, believing that just the apostle's shadow was enough to heal them, the earthly authorities knew that God was getting out of hand. The theology in Jesus' day was: touch Him to be healed (Mark 6:56). But for the apostles, their shadow was sufficient. What a parade! Touch or no touch, it is not a question of theology but of faith, and the crowds were there, swept up in the assurance that God was there and God would heal. They came—I dare say—by the hundreds, and now whoever saw themselves in office were under immense social pressure to put a stop to it.

Verse 17, Luke noted, they were "filled with jealousy." You see—just saying—God gets in the way of the would-be powerful, famous and rich, and they don't like it! "So," verse 18, "they arrested the apostles and put them in the public jail." That is that!

No that wasn't that. The following morning, the political leaders, had to check it out for themselves. Peter and the apostles with him were in the public area, the Temple court, (verse 21) teaching. Teaching

what? Verse 28: teaching "in this name" (Jesus' name, i.e. The message of the Cross).

And how did they get out of prison? Who let them out!?

I can imagine the soldiers being asked and replying, "Don't ask, sir!"

So now what should they do?

An official statement with the force of law should be issued. It should work to silence them.

It didn't. Peter and the others were re-captured and brought before the religious leaders. They're in serious trouble now! Jesus warned them, "You will even be brought before governors and kings because of me" (Matthew 10:18). He gave them a heads-up, "You will be hated by everyone because of my name" (Matthew 10:22). So, here we are!

"Didn't we strictly order you (Peter and those with you) not to teach in this name? (Freedom to speak has limits. Talk about anything or anyone you want, Peter ... but not "Him," not Jesus, not the Cross!) "Look, you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us guilty of this man's blood." They whined.

This verse is psychologically rich. Peter's message was not one of guilt but it was the Spirit's opportunity to convict (John 16:8). Sad, when someone doesn't see the difference, not knowing that "godly grief produces ... repentance that leads to salvation without regret" (2 Corinthians 7:10). Peter didn't fill Jerusalem with anything ... God did!

But what interests us here is the official executive order that was issued against teaching the Gospel message of the Cross and Peter's response: He asserted, "We must obey God rather than people." (Acts 5:29)

Make no mistake about it: "the offense of the cross" (Galatians 5:11) is real. We must not be "...ashamed of the gospel, because it (alone) is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes" (Romans 1:16). If our message were the misinformed ramblings of a few unrealistic visionaries, we would be more entertaining than threatening (perhaps, an SNL parody in the U.S. we might laugh at). But this is not the case. The Gospel is empowered to change the world, to bring a sweeping spiritual revival that, subsequently, has political consequences for governments that find God somewhere between a nuisance to a genuine providential force that cannot be ignored.

We must agree with Dorothy Sayers who in her way wrote [in *Creed Or Chaos*, page 8], “It (is) a grave mistake to present Christianity as something charming and popular with no offense in it. Seeing that Christ went about the world giving the most violent offense to all kinds of people, it would seem absurd to expect that the doctrine of His Person can be so presented as to offend nobody. Nobody need be too much surprised or disconcerted at finding that a determined preaching of Christian dogma [the Cross] may sometimes result in a few angry letters of protest.... At the risk of appearing quite insolently obvious, I shall say that if the Church is to make any impression on the modern mind She will have to preach Christ and the Cross.”

“Jesus took our place on Calvary” is the heart of the Gospel message. Ours is to expound it with conviction, not dress it in logic to make the message less offensive or less unreasonable to the natural mind. We do not use it to goad opposition, to, as they say, poke the hornet’s nest. Of course not! Ours is a message of salvation, peace, and love. It just isn’t man-made. To paraphrase our Lord, “Society disapproves of what God is doing, though, to us, it is worthy our lives” (Matthew 21:42).

### **The Motif**

In parables, analogies, metaphors—and yes, motifs—the story of our redemption is told. But the complete picture awaits our arrival in God’s eternal presence when all that Jesus accomplished on Calvary will be finally and fully realized.

We enjoy discussing the Cross—and we ought to. ... at finding a reasonable explanation in contemporary terms not *what* happened on Golgotha’s hill that Friday (we know what happened) ...but *why*. Why His death? Why a sacrifice? Was it a legal agreement God made with Himself to satisfy His holiness or justice? What was He willing to accept or give up to restore our relationship? What satisfies Him when He is grieved by our sin?

We asked specifically: Why did Jesus have to die? We seek a story that explains Calvary. But the Cross is not a message in logic. It is a message in *grace*! We are so used to being rewarded, honored, recognized: we understand earning our way, accepting and returning favors, or avenging wrong. It feels so good to see someone get their com-upins—what goes around, comes around and some call it karma (Galatians

6:7). “Surely,” we say, “there must be something we can do, or at least contribute, in order to make amends.”

No! Jesus dying in our stead, His life for ours, is a message on *grace*, an unmerited gift of salvation. This idea of a substitution lies at the heart of our salvation. We need to take care not to—as I spoke of in the preface—theologically distance ourselves from this.

And yes, we come under strong influences of reason whether

- ◆ Occam’s nominalism as Abelard did that we cannot be held responsible for Adam’s sin or
- ◆ The search for a non-violent justification based solely on God’s wondrous love melting our cold, cold hearts as postmoderns want to believe or
- ◆ A justification that satisfies without punishing as Greek influences suggested or
- ◆ The logic of the courts that seemed to explain justice best, in legalese, which the reformers of the 16<sup>th</sup> century promoted or
- ◆ The language of finance because Satan deserved justice, too, as Gregory of Nyssa in the 4<sup>th</sup> Century surmised or
- ◆ The payment of a debt because it explains things in simplest terms, as Anselm of Canterbury argued.

Maybe these are all true. But Paul, himself, warned us not to get entangled in explanations that lead nowhere good. What sounds reasonable is not always a revelation from God. What is logical to our way of thinking might not be of faith. “See to it that no one carry you away with philosophical jargon that has no substance and purpose other than to deceive you [gaslight you into disowning your faith] after the latest theory, after sheer human reasoning, and not after Christ” (Colossians 2:8).

There is much, however, we do know. Jesus has procured salvation for us, established a new covenant between God and human kind, and made available the chief covenant blessing, the forgiveness of sins. ... The curtain of the temple for centuries (which) had symbolized the alienation of sinners from God was torn from top to bottom in order to demonstrate that the sin barrier has been thrown down by God and the way into his presence opened.

### **The Gift of God Himself**

The theological truth here is that The ...Father humbled Himself to become our Savior in and through His only Son. This is one Christian understanding of grace: God's gift of Himself. This is a grace (a gift of God) that God will continue to share with us for an eternity because it is His story, His love, His fellowship with us (Ephesians 2:7).

What happened that Friday—we think it was a Friday—on Golgotha's Hill was horrific, earthshaking (literally so) and carried the weight of an eternal burden of sin out to sea and tossed it into the deep. "He will again have compassion on us; he will vanquish our iniquities. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea" (Micah 7:19). Now, if we accept His death for what it meant to God, we will live above that past sin. "For we know that our old self was crucified with Him so that the body ruled by sin might be rendered powerless so that we may no longer be enslaved to sin, since a person who has died is freed from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him" (Romans 6:6-8).

We must appropriate that message, live the provisions Jesus provided through His death and resurrection. "Therefore we were buried with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too may walk in newness of life" (Romans 6:4).

Well, speaking of simple: the sum of all history is recorded in those few short hours on Calvary. Someday, we will all meet this Savior in the glorified flesh. Someday "every tongue (every person who ever lived) will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Philippians 2:11), if I might add "whether they had planned to or not." All will then realize that what happened on that sacred brow was all that ever really happened and everything else—all achievements, all treasures, all trophies, all, so-called, inventions of man's ingenuity, will lie in the ashes of all things forevermore forgotten.

Calvary is a story still being written on the believer's hearts and into their lives (Romans 8:29). Until there are more answers we rest only in this promise in John 20:31: "But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."

### **How To Know I Am Saved**

When Jesus asked Peter to identify whom Peter thought He, Jesus, was, Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." Then Jesus responded, "Blessed are you, Simon, son of Jonah, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but my Father in heaven" (Matthew 16:15-17). Paul agreed, "This is the message of faith that we proclaim." He, no doubt, sought to herald this trumpet call in every town and hamlet between Antioch and Rome (1 Corinthians 2:2).

Faith? Christ death on Calvary and resurrection for our salvation must be believed—better, believable. But it is only believable when it is revealed by God. Paul then explained, "If you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved" (Romans 10:8-9). This is not a formula, as if, verbalizing anything will make it so. It is admitting now what we know to be gloriously true. The confession is the natural response of the heart. What we believe we confidently speak of. As Jesus said elsewhere, "the mouth speaks from the overflow of the heart" (Matthew 12:34). "We confess that 'Jesus is our Lord,' because we believe unequivocally God raised him from the dead. That's how we know we are saved" This is something God told us and we heard Him clearly!

Recall the centurion at the foot of the Cross who confessed Jesus as God's Son?

This sacred truth is never known,  
Except it comes from God alone—  
As Peter learned, you must recall—  
Else no one knows. No, not at all!  
So when we read the centurion  
Confessed the Savior God's own Son  
If I might be so bold to say  
This was his soul's salvation day!