



**CROSS:  
GOD DIES**

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*God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*

ROMANS 5:8

**W**hat kind of suffering are you experiencing in your life lately? Relationally, is there a conflict with someone you care about, or even a breaking of a relationship you value? Financially, are you struggling to make ends meet? Emotionally, do you find yourself anxious and overwhelmed, grieved and saddened, or angry and hurt? Spiritually, does it feel like you are under attack or that God is distant in this season? Politically, are you beat down by the constant attacks over every issue with no end or hope in sight? Physically, are you battling some injury or ailment or just feeling worn down and tired?

Imagine, for a moment, how wonderful it will be in the eternal Kingdom of Heaven when all your relationships there are reconciled, you have no financial needs, you are fully emotionally healed, God is close continually, politics are over forever as God alone rules and reigns over all, and you are in perfect health once and forever! How amazing will that be? For Christians, the hope of leaving this fallen world that is falling apart to go to a new and perfect forever Home is our great goal.

For Jesus, the opposite is true. While ruling and reigning in Heaven, Jesus was experiencing our dream and left it all to enter our nightmare. Everything we want to get off of us is what Jesus put onto Himself by entering this world. Like a firefighter running into a burning building that everyone else is running out of, Jesus chose to put Himself in harm's way to pull us out of harm's way. He did not have to do this, and in doing it He showed us what love really is.

Not only did Jesus suffer throughout His life, He suffered death in the most painful, shameful, and damnable ways.

### **CRUCIFIXION**

The Bible gives few details about crucifixion. This is likely because the original audience had witnessed them often and knew all too well what it was. However, since few people in the modern era have personally witnessed a crucifixion, it is important for us to

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examine it in detail so as to fully appreciate the suffering of Jesus Christ.

Imagine a long wooden stake being run through a person's midsection, and that stake then being driven into the ground, with the impaled person left to die slowly over the course of many days. It is believed that this kind of barbarous torture may in fact be the earliest form of crucifixion, occurring as early as the ninth century BC.<sup>1</sup>

In the sixth century BC, the Persians commonly practiced crucifixion, especially King Darius I, who crucified three thousand Babylonians in 518 BC. In 332 BC, Alexander the Great crucified two thousand people whom he conquered in Tyre. The transition from impalement to crucifixion occurred under Alexander, as he was a master of terror and dread. In 71 BC the former gladiator Spartacus and 120,000 prisoners fell in battle to the Romans, which resulted in six thousand men being crucified along the shoulder of the highway for 120 miles.

The Romans perfected crucifixion; they reserved it as the most painful mode of execution for the most despised people, such as slaves, the poor, and Roman citizens guilty of the worst high treason. The crucifixion methods varied with the sadism of the soldiers. They tried to outdo one another and experimented with various forms of torture. They grew and learned in ways to prolong the pain and agony.

The Romans are believed to be the first to crucify on an actual cross. The Tau was a capital T cross and the Latin was a lowercase t cross. Both had the stipe (the vertical post) and patibulum (the crossbar). The stipe was probably permanent while each man carried his own patibulum.

As a young boy, Jesus may have viewed crucifixions in Judea, because there was a Jewish uprising against the Romans that resulted in a mass crucifixion of about two thousand Jews in AD 4 at the time of the death of Herod.

The pain of crucifixion is so horrendous that a word was invented to explain it—excruciating—which literally means "from the cross." The victim was affixed to the cross with either ropes or nails. The pain of crucifixion is due in part to the fact that it is a prolonged and agonizing death by asphyxiation. Crucified people could hang

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on the cross for anywhere from three to four hours or for as long as nine days, passing in and out of consciousness as their lungs struggled to breathe while laboring under the weight of their body.

In an effort to end the torment, it was not uncommon for those being crucified to slump on the cross to empty their lungs of air and thereby hasten their death. Further, there are debated archaeological reports that suggest sometimes seats were placed underneath the buttocks of those being crucified to prevent slumping, thereby ensuring a lengthy and most painful death.

None of this was done in dignified privacy, but rather in open, public places. It would be like nailing a bloodied, naked man above the front entrance to your local mall. Crowds would gather around the victims to mock them as they sweated in the sun, bled, and became incontinent from the pain.

Once dead, some victims were not given a decent burial but rather left on the cross for vultures to pick apart from above while dogs chewed on the bones that fell to the ground, even occasionally taking a hand or foot home as a chew toy, according to ancient reports.<sup>2</sup> Whatever remained of the victim would eventually be thrown in the garbage and taken to the dump unless the family buried it. Furthermore, the wooden crosses and nails were considered more valuable than the bodies of the deceased, and those resources were kept and reused.

As a general rule, it was men who were crucified. Occasionally a man was crucified at eye level so that passersby could look him directly in the eye as he died and cuss him out and spit on him in mockery. In the rare event of a woman's crucifixion, she was made to face the cross. Not even such a barbarous culture was willing to watch the face of a woman in such excruciating agony.

The ancient Jewish historian Josephus called crucifixion "the most wretched of deaths."<sup>3</sup> The ancient Roman philosopher Cicero asked that decent Roman citizens not even speak of the cross because it was too disgraceful a subject for the ears of decent people.<sup>4</sup> The Jews also considered crucifixion the most horrific mode of death, as Deuteronomy 21:22-23 says: "If a man has committed a crime punishable by death and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree, his body shall not remain all night on the tree, but you shall bury him the same day, for a hanged man is cursed by God."

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The Roman emperor Nero was so cruel to Christians that he had some of them crucified. Their number included Peter, who, it is said, was crucified upside down at his own request because he did not feel worthy of dying exactly as Jesus did. Roman crucifixion continued until Emperor Constantine reportedly saw the vision of a cross and the next day won a historic battle and overtook the Western Roman Empire. Following his victory, Christianity was no longer outlawed but instead became a state-sponsored religion. Historians have debated whether he experienced a true conversion or simply practiced political expediency. Either way, he abolished crucifixion around AD 300.

In light of all this, perhaps most peculiar is the fact that the symbol for Jesus, which has become the most famous symbol in all of history, is the cross. The church father Tertullian (155–230 AD) tells us of the early practice of believers' making the sign of the cross over their bodies with their hand and adorning their necks and homes with crosses to celebrate the brutal death of Jesus. In so doing, the early Christians turned a symbol of terror and intimidation into a symbol of salvation and hope.

### **HOW CAN JESUS' CRUCIFIXION BE GOOD NEWS?**

When someone tells us that they have good news to share, we expect them to tell us that they got married, are pregnant, earned a promotion at work, or got a clean bill of health from a doctor after a medical scare. Perhaps the last thing we'd expect to hear in the context of good news is to hear that someone who loved us was murdered.

Among the scandals of the cross is the fact that Christians have called it their gospel, or good news, and celebrate it every year on Good Friday. To understand the good news of Jesus' death we must first examine how he died. Then we can examine why he died.

In the days leading up to his death, Jesus was a young man in his early thirties. He was in good health due to his job as a carpenter and his constant walking of many miles as an itinerant minister. Jesus began speaking openly of his impending death, including at the Passover meal he ate with his friends as the Last Supper. There, he broke with fifteen centuries of protocol. In so

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doing, he showed that the Passover meal, which God's people had been eating annually, found its ultimate fulfillment in him. The Passover memorialized the night in Egypt when in faith God's people covered the doorposts of their home with blood so that death would not come to the firstborn son in their home but would rather pass them over.<sup>5</sup> Jesus, the firstborn Son of God, likewise had come to die and cover us with his blood so that God's just wrath would literally pass over us sinners as the essence of the new covenant.<sup>6</sup>

During the Last Supper, Satan entered one of Jesus' disciples, Judas, who had been stealing money from Jesus' ministry fund for some time and had agreed to hand him over to the authorities to be crucified. After Judas left the meal to lead the soldiers to Jesus, Jesus went to the garden of Gethsemane, where he spent a sleepless night in the agony of prayer. Meanwhile, his disciples failed to intercede for him in prayer and instead kept falling asleep. At this point, Jesus was fully aware of his impending crucifixion and was so distressed that, as the Bible records, he sweat drops of blood, a physical condition that doctors report is rare because it requires an elevated level of stress that few people ever experience.

After an exhausting, sleepless night of distress, Judas arrived with the soldiers and betrayed Jesus with a kiss. Jesus was then arrested. He was forced to walk through a series of false trials where contradicting false witnesses were brought forward to offer false testimony. Despite the absence of any evidence supporting the false charges, Jesus was sentenced to be murdered. He was eventually blindfolded as a mob of cowardly men beat him mercilessly. He was then stripped in great shame, and the Bible simply says that they had him scourged.

Scourging itself was such a painful event that many people died from it without even making it to their cross. Jesus' hands would have been chained above his head to expose his back and legs to an executioner's whip called a cat-o'-nine tails or a flagrum. Two men, one on each side, took turns whipping the victim. The whip was a series of long leather straps. At the end of some of the straps were heavy balls of metal intended to tenderize the body of a victim, like a chef tenderizes a steak by beating it. Some of the straps had hooks made of glass, metal, or bone that would have

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sunk deeply into the shoulders, back, buttocks, and legs of the victim. Once the hooks had lodged into the tenderized flesh, the executioner would rip the skin, muscle, tendons, and even bones off the victim. The victim's skin and muscles would hang off the body like ribbons as the hooks dissected the skin to the nerve layers. The damage could go so deep that even the lungs were bruised, which made breathing difficult. Some doctors have compared the damage of flogging to the results of a shotgun blast.<sup>7</sup> The victim would bleed profusely and would often go into shock, due to severe blood loss and insufficient blood flow near and through the heart.

Jesus' bare back and shoulders, though bloodied and traumatized, were then forced to carry his roughly hewn wooden cross to his place of crucifixion. If Jesus carried the entire cross, it would have weighed a few hundred pounds, and many think it is more likely he carried just the crossbar (patibulum), which would have been about one hundred pounds.

Despite his young age and good health, Jesus was so physically devastated from his sleepless night, miles of walking, severe beating, and scourging that he collapsed under the weight of the cross, unable to carry it alone. Doctors have said that the trauma from the heavy crossbar crushing his chest into the ground could have caused a bruised heart, similar to the chest trauma caused by a car accident without a seatbelt where the driver is violently thrown against the steering wheel.<sup>8</sup> Understandably unable to continue carrying his cross on the roughly one-mile journey to his execution, a man named Simon of Cyrene was appointed to carry Jesus' cross. Upon arriving at his place of crucifixion, they pulled Jesus' beard out—an act of ultimate disrespect in ancient cultures—spat on him, and mocked him in front of his family and friends.

Jesus the carpenter, who had driven many nails into wood with his own hands, then had five-to seven-inch rough metal spikes driven into the most sensitive nerve centers on the human body, through his hands and feet. Jesus was nailed to his wooden cross. His body would have twitched involuntarily, writhing in agony.

In further mockery, a sign was posted above Jesus that said, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews."<sup>9</sup> A painting later discovered from a second-century Roman graffito further shows the disrespect of Jesus at his crucifixion. The painting depicts the head of

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a jackass being crucified, with a man standing alongside it with his arms raised. The caption reads, "Alexamenos worships his god."

At this point during a crucifixion, the victims labored to breathe as their bodies went into shock. Naked and embarrassed, the victims would often use their remaining strength to seek revenge on the crowd of mockers who had gathered to jeer them. They would curse at their tormentors while urinating and spitting on them. Some victims would become so overwhelmed with pain that they would become incontinent and a pool of sweat, blood, urine, and feces would gather at the base of their cross.

Jesus' crucifixion was a hideously grotesque scene. Hundreds of years in advance, the prophet Isaiah saw it this way:

He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted.<sup>10</sup>

Crucifixion usually kills by asphyxiation in addition to other factors—the heart is deeply stressed, the body is traumatized, the muscles are devastated, and the blood loss is severe. Doctors have thought that Jesus likely had a chest contusion and possibly a bruised heart from falling with the cross on top of him, which caused an aneurysm.<sup>11</sup> Subsequently, Jesus' heart would have been unable to pump enough blood and his lungs would have filled up with carbon monoxide. Jesus not only lived through all of this, but he even spoke lucidly and clearly with enough volume to be heard by those present.

From the cross he announced forgiveness for those who crucified him, assured the criminal crucified next to him that they would be together in paradise, commended his mother to John, cried of forsakenness showing his spiritual death and separation from the Father, and expressed his agonized thirst.<sup>12</sup>

At last Jesus said in a loud voice of triumph, "It is finished."<sup>13</sup> At this moment, the atonement for sin was made and the holiness, righteousness, justice, and wrath of the triune God were satisfied in the crucifixion of Jesus Christ.

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Jesus then said, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!"<sup>14</sup> Jesus reserved his final breath from the cross to shout his triumphant victory to the world by confirming that he had been restored to God the Father after atoning for human sin.

The Bible then simply records that Jesus breathed his last and died.

Jesus hung on the cross for at least six hours—from the third hour to the ninth hour, when the darkness ended.<sup>15</sup> How long thereafter that he breathed his last and died is not clear in Scripture. What is more clear is the fact that if a victim remained alive on the cross for too long so that it interfered with another event like a major holiday, it was customary to break the victim's legs, disabling him from pushing himself up on his cross to fill his lungs with air and thereby prolong his life. However, in accordance with the promise of Scripture, Jesus died quickly enough that his legs were not broken.<sup>16</sup>

Furthermore, to ensure Jesus was dead, a professional executioner ran a spear through his side, which punctured his heart sac, and water and blood flowed from his side. This is further evidence that Jesus died of a heart attack; the sac around the heart filled with water until the pressure caused Jesus' heart to stop beating. Thus, Jesus possibly died with both a literal and metaphorical broken heart.

For many years, the most sacred place on earth had been the temple, where the presence of God dwelled behind a thick curtain. Only one person each year, the high priest, was allowed to pass by that curtain and enter the presence of God on one day, the Day of Atonement. At the death of Jesus, however, the temple curtain was torn from top to bottom, signifying that God had opened his presence to the world through the cross of Jesus.

The most succinct summary of the gospel in Scripture provides insight into this theological meaning: "that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures."<sup>17</sup> In this packed section of Scripture, Paul appoints the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus as the most important event in all of history and the verification of the truthfulness of all Scripture.

He then explains why this is good news with the simple word "for," showing that Jesus died "for our sins." The word "for" can

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mean either “for the benefit of” or “because of.” Jesus did not die “for the benefit of” our sins. He did not help them at all! Rather, he died “because of” our sins. So it was our sins but his death. From the beginning of sacred Scripture<sup>18</sup> to the end<sup>19</sup>, the penalty for sin is death. Therefore, if we sin, we should die. But it is Jesus, the sinless one, who dies in our place “for our sins.” The good news of the gospel is that Jesus died to take to himself the penalty for our sin. In theological terms, this means that Jesus’ death was substitutionary, or vicarious, and in our place solely for our benefit and without benefit for himself. Therefore, we find the cross of Jesus to be the crux of good news because it was there that Jesus atoned for our sin according to the promises of Scripture.

Jesus’ work for us on the cross is called atonement (at-one-ment); Jesus our God became a man to restore a relationship between God and humanity. The concept of Jesus’ dying in our place to pay our penalty for our sins has been expressed in theological shorthand as penal substitution. Scripture repeatedly and clearly declares that Jesus died as our substitute paying our penalty “for” our sins.<sup>20</sup>

One theologian has called the cross the great jewel of the Christian faith, and like every great jewel it has many precious facets that are each worthy of examining for their brilliance and beauty.<sup>21</sup>

Therefore, you will be well served to see each side of this jewel shining together for the glory of God in complementary, not contradictory, fashion. Most poor teaching about the cross results from someone denying, ignoring, or overemphasizing one of these facets at the expense of the others, often due to an overreaction to someone else’s overreaction.

Many of these facets were foreshadowed in the Old Testament, specifically by the annual celebration of the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur) according to the regulations of the book of Leviticus. The Day of Atonement was the most important day of the year and was often referred to simply as “the day.” It was intended to deal with the sin problem between humanity and God. Of the many prophetic elements on this special day, one stands out. On that day, two healthy goats without defect were chosen; they were therefore fit to represent sinless perfection.

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The first goat was a propitiating sin offering. The high priest slaughtered this innocent goat, which acted as a substitute for the sinners who rightly deserved a violently bloody death for their many sins. He then sprinkled some of its blood on the mercy seat on top of the Ark of the Covenant inside the Most Holy Place. The goat was no longer innocent when it took the guilt of sin; it was a sin offering for the people.<sup>22</sup> Subsequently, its blood represented life given as payment for sin. The dwelling place of God was thus cleansed of the defilement that resulted from all of the transgressions and sins of the people of Israel, and God's just and holy wrath was satisfied.

Then the high priest, acting as the representative and mediator between the sinful people and their holy God, would take the second goat and lay his hands on the animal while confessing the sins of the people. This goat, called the scapegoat, would then be sent away to run free into the wilderness away from the sinners, symbolically expiating our sins by taking them away.

These great images of the priest, slaughter, and scapegoat are all given by God to help us more fully comprehend Jesus' work for us on the cross, which we will now examine in depth.

### **HOW DOES GOD SATISFY HIMSELF THROUGH THE CROSS?**

#### *New-covenant Sacrifice*

Today, most people don't raise or butcher the animals they eat. We pay someone else to do those things and buy our groceries at the store. We don't like to see blood or death, and when we do many people feel nauseous. In the ancient world, and in many places on the earth today, people lived on farms where they ate the crops they grew and animals they raised for food. As a result, they were a lot more familiar with blood and death.

One scholar says that blood is mentioned some 362 times in the Old Testament and some ninety-two times in the New Testament and even more often than the cross or death of Jesus; thus, it is the most common means by which the Scriptures refer to the death of Jesus.

Throughout Scripture, blood is inextricably connected with sin for two primary reasons. First, shed blood reminds us that sin results

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in death. Second, God is sickened by sin, which causes death, a connection first made in Genesis 2:17 and repeated throughout the Bible. So, when God sees blood, it points to the sickening reality of sin and death. Leviticus 17:11 says it this way: "For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it for you on the altar to make atonement for your souls, for it is the blood that makes atonement by the life." Blood is sacred, epitomizing the life of the sacrificial victim given as substitute for the sinner's death. Practically every sacrifice included the sprinkling or smearing of blood on an altar, thus teaching that atonement involves the substitution of life for life.

The Old Testament often used the theme of blood to prepare people for the coming of Jesus to die for our sins. In fact, it was God who shed the first blood in human history in response to sin. In Genesis 3 when our first parents, Adam and Eve, committed the original human sin, it was God who slaughtered an animal to make clothes to cover their nakedness. From then on, blood sacrifices were the standard way to worship God.<sup>23</sup>

One of the bloodiest books of the Bible is Exodus. The people were given two choices. (1) They could repent of sin and place their faith in God, demonstrated by slaughtering an animal and covering the doorposts of their home in blood. If this was done, then God promised to pass over (hence the related feast of Passover) their house and not kill the firstborn son in the home but rather accept the substitution of the life of the sacrificial animal. (2) They could fail to repent of their sin and not place their faith in God and see death come to their home. On that night in Egypt, much blood was shed and death came to every home as either the blood of a substitute animal was shed for the sinners, or the firstborn son in each home was put to death by God.

One of the major functions of the Old Testament temple was the slaughtering of animals, as seen by the stream of blood that often flowed out of the temple. Blood is in fact a major aspect of Old Testament religion. There were some eleven different sacrifices that fit into one of four groupings (burnt, peace, sin, or guilt) and sacrifices were made both in the morning and evening, all of which involved blood.

Despite all of this bloodshed, the Old Testament sacrificial system was never meant to be something sufficient in itself. When Israel

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misunderstood the purpose of the sacrifices, putting their faith in the sacrifices themselves, there were major problems. The first problem was that the bloodshed of a substituted animal did not forgive human sin.<sup>24</sup> The second problem was that it enabled hypocrisy; people could undergo external rituals such as offering a sacrifice without having truly repented of sin and trusted in God internally.<sup>25</sup> The third problem was that it was only preparatory, prophesying the death of God's promised Messiah, and therefore incomplete until the coming of Jesus, who made the better new covenant possible.<sup>26</sup>

This theme of blood, like every theme of Scripture, finds its fulfillment in the coming of Jesus Christ into human history. Early in Jesus' life, his cousin John saw Jesus coming and declared, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"<sup>27</sup> This, of course, would be accomplished when Jesus was slaughtered on the cross where his blood flowed freely.

The results of Jesus' shed blood are staggering. Hebrews 9:22 says, "Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins." Also 1 Peter 1:18–19 says, "You were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot."

In the Bible the word covenant appears more than three hundred times and is therefore essential to our rightly understanding how God relates to us. Both the Old and New Testaments speak of the new covenant.<sup>28</sup> The Bible tells us that a new epoch in human history has arrived with the coming of God into human history as the man Jesus Christ. In the new covenant, all of the prophecies, promises, foreshadowing, and longing of the old covenant are fulfilled. In the new covenant it is Jesus Christ who serves as our covenant head.<sup>29</sup> Jesus went to the cross to shed his blood in our place for our sins so that we can have a new covenant relationship with him.

Today, in the new covenant, we no longer need a priest because we have Jesus, who is our Great High Priest.<sup>30</sup> We no longer need to offer blood sacrifices because Jesus is our sacrifice for sin.<sup>31</sup> We no longer need to visit the temple to be near to God because Jesus is our temple.<sup>32</sup> We no longer need to celebrate the Passover because Jesus is our passover.<sup>33</sup> Finally, we no longer need to live

in habitual sin because through Jesus we have been made holy and have been given new life.<sup>34</sup>

### *Propitiation*

In our day of camera phones and the Internet, we get to see more evil, and injustice, than any other generation that has lived on the earth. When something is posted showing the clear abuse of another human being, the immediate global response is anger that demands justice. Because we were made by God with a conscience, when God's eternal laws that rule over us all, we cry out for justice appealing to a fixed standard of right and wrong whether we know God or not.

When is the last time that you felt this kind of moral outrage at evil? What category of evil most quickly makes you angry and want justice?

The more we know what is going on in this world, the angrier and more frustrated we become. Imagine, for a moment, what it must be like to be God? Every moment of every day God sees, hears, knows, and feels all of the evil and injustice occurring constantly across our entire planet. God getting angry at evil is not a bad thing; in fact God gets angry at evil precisely because He is good.

The Bible is filled with examples of God getting angry at sinners and of His anger as hostile, burning, and furious.<sup>35</sup> Because God is holy, good, and just, He not only feels angry about sin but also deals with it in ways that are holy, good, and just. Because God is perfect, his anger is perfect and as such is aroused slowly<sup>36</sup>, sometimes turned away<sup>37</sup>, often delayed<sup>38</sup>, and frequently held back.<sup>39</sup>

God's anger is not limited to the Old Testament. Even Jesus got angry, furious, and enraged.<sup>40</sup> Also, Revelation 19 reveals Jesus coming again as a warrior riding on a white horse to slaughter evildoers until their blood runs through the streets like a river.

Furthermore, God feels angry because God hates sin.<sup>41</sup> Sadly, it is commonly said among Christians that "God hates the sin but loves the sinner." This comes not from divinely inspired Scripture but instead from the Hindu Gandhi who coined the phrase "Love the

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sinner but hate the sin" in his 1929 autobiography.

The Bible clearly says that God both loves and hates some sinners.<sup>42</sup> People commonly protest that God cannot hate anyone because he is love. But the Bible speaks of God's anger, wrath, and fury more than his love, grace, and mercy. Furthermore, it is precisely because God is love that he must hate evil and all who do evil; it is an assault on who and what he loves.

Additionally, God's anger at sin and hatred of sinners causes him to pour out His wrath on unrepentant sinners. This doctrine is not as popular among professing Christians in our day as it was in past times, but the fact remains that in the Old Testament alone nearly twenty words are used for God's wrath, which is spoken of roughly six hundred times. The wrath of God also appears roughly twenty-five times in the New Testament.<sup>43</sup> Not only does God the Father pour out wrath upon unrepentant sinners, but so does Jesus Christ.<sup>44</sup>

God's wrath is both active and passive. When people think of God's wrath, they generally think of God's active wrath, where people are swiftly punished for their sin with something like a lightning bolt from heaven. God can and does enact his active wrath upon occasion.<sup>45</sup> Still, He seems to also frequently work through His subtler passive wrath. Passive wrath occurs when God simply hands us over to our evil desires and allows us to do whatever we want.<sup>46</sup>

The truth is that everyone but the sinless Jesus merits the active wrath of God. None of us deserves love, grace, or mercy from God. Demons and sinful people who fail to repent will have God's wrath burning against them forever.<sup>47</sup> The place of God's unending active wrath is hell.

However, God's active wrath is diverted from some people because of the mercy of God. This is made possible because on the cross Jesus substituted himself in our place for our sins and took God's wrath for us. Two sections of Scripture in particular speak to this matter pointedly:

- 1) Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him [Jesus] from the wrath of God.<sup>48</sup>
- 2) You turned to God from idols to serve the living and true

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God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.<sup>49</sup>

Scripture also has a single word to designate how Jesus diverts the active wrath of our rightfully angry God from us so that we are loved and not hated. That word is propitiation, which summarizes more than six hundred related words and events that explain it. The American Heritage Dictionary defines propitiation as something that appeases or conciliates an offended power, especially a sacrificial offering to a god. Propitiate is the only English word that carries the idea of pacifying wrath by taking care of the penalty for the offense that caused the wrath.

Because so many Christians are not familiar with this word, various Bible translations use different words in an effort to capture its meaning. For example, the New International and New Revised translations use "sacrifice of atonement," and the New Living Translation uses "sacrifice for sin" in such places as Romans 3:23–25, Hebrews 2:17, 1 John 2:2, and 1 John 4:10. But this obscures the appeasing of wrath facet of the original hilaskomai word group.

The Revised Standard Version and The New English Bible deny appeasing of wrath by using "expiation" instead of "propitiation." These latter two translations change the entire meaning of the verse, because propitiation deals with the penalty for sin whereas expiation deals with the cleansing from sin. The English Standard Version, New American Standard, Holman Christian Standard Bible are translations which have retained "propitiation". This term includes the other facets of meaning of hilaskomai: mercy seat, the place where atonement was made and God revealed, and expiation, the removal of sin. There are four primary occurrences of the word propitiation in the New Testament:

- 1) For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness.<sup>50</sup>
- 2) Therefore he [Jesus] had to be made like his brothers in

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every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.<sup>51</sup>

- 3) He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.<sup>52</sup>
- 4) In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.<sup>53</sup>

These magnificent passages teach us that the Father and the Son partnered together, both agonizing, to perform the substitutionary sacrifice to appease the wrath of the Father and the Son. Revelation 6:15-16 says:

Then the kings of the earth and the great ones and the generals and the rich and the powerful, and everyone, slave[a] and free, hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains, calling to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb."

Furthermore, God's wrath will remain on those who reject this propitiatory offering. John 3:36, says, "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him." Romans 5:9 says, "Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God." And, Ephesians 5:6 says, "Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience."

At the cross, justice and mercy kiss; Jesus substituted himself for sinners and suffered and died in their place to forgive them, love them, and embrace them, not in spite of their sins, but because their sins were propitiated and diverted from them to Jesus. Jesus did this not by demanding our blood but rather by giving his own.

### *Justification*

When something wrong is done to us, be it illegal or immoral,

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the conscience God placed within us cries out for justice. If someone stole our car, we want the police to find it so we can have it back. If someone breaks into our home and steals our belongings, we want the insurance company to compensate us. If someone tells some awful lies about us on social media, we want them to delete what they have said. However, when we are the villain and not the victim, the person who did wrong rather than the person wronged, we tend to want grace for ourselves instead of justice. The same is true of how many people relate to God. We want God to give justice to our enemies, but grace to us even though we have acted as His enemies. Through the cross of Jesus Christ, God made a way for Him to receive justice and us to receive grace.

Like us, God deserves justice. Because of our sinful condition and ensuing sinful actions, though, our impending day in God's proverbial courtroom seems utterly hopeless for anything other than a guilty verdict and a sentence to eternity in the torments of hell. In light of our obvious guilt, if God were to declare us anything but guilty, he would cease to be a just and good God. God himself says that he "will not acquit the wicked."<sup>54</sup>

Guilty sinners would likely prefer that God simply overlook their offenses against him. To do so, however, would by definition render God unjust, unholy, and unrighteous, which is impossible because he is always just, holy, and righteous.

Clearly, God does not owe us anything. If we were to spend forever in the torments of hell as guilty and condemned sinners, we would have simply gotten what we deserved. Pondering this same point, Job asks, "But how can a man be in the right before God?"<sup>55</sup>

Thankfully, God is merciful, gracious, slow to anger, loving, faithful, and willing to forgive.<sup>56</sup> Thus, the dilemma is this: how could God justify us and remain just?

The answer is the doctrine of justification: guilty sinners can be declared righteous before God by grace alone through faith alone because of the person and work of Jesus Christ alone. Justification is mentioned more than two hundred times in various ways throughout the New Testament alone.

The penalty of sin is death. God warned Adam in the garden that "in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."<sup>57</sup> Paul confirms this: "they know God's decree that those who practice such

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things deserve to die.”<sup>58</sup> The amazing truth is that God himself, the second person of the Trinity, paid our debt of death in our place.

Additionally, not only did Jesus take all our sins (past, present, and future) on the cross, but he also gave to us his perfect righteousness as a faultless and sinless person.<sup>59</sup> This is why Paul says that Jesus alone is our righteousness.<sup>60</sup> Therefore, justification through the work of Jesus Christ in our place for our sins on the cross is only possible by grace from Jesus Christ alone, through faith in Jesus Christ alone, because of Jesus Christ alone.

There is absolutely nothing we can do to contribute to our justification. When Jesus said, “It is finished” on the cross, he was declaring that all that needed to be done for our justification was completed in him. For this reason, Titus 3:7 speaks of “being justified by his grace.” Furthermore, Romans 5:16–17 says:

The free gift is not like the result of that one man’s [Adam’s] sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brought justification. For if, because of one man’s trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ.

To be justified means to trust only in the person and work of Jesus and no one and nothing else as the object of our faith, righteousness, and justification before God.<sup>61</sup>

### *Gift Righteousness*

On the day I was working on this chapter, I went in to get my haircut. The barber started talking a lot about the girlfriend he lives with, all the marijuana they smoke and alcohol they drink, and other nefarious hobbies. About halfway into my haircut, he asked what I did for a job.

Whenever this happens, there is an awkward silence as I know that my answer will be the equivalent of throwing a cold glass of water on the face of a person taking a nap. So, I took a deep breath and said, “I am a Christian pastor.”

His countenance suddenly changed, it was obvious he felt bad for all the bad behavior he was bragging about, and he changed the conversation to tell me about all the good things he had done in his life. Like a defense attorney for his own life, he presented the case for his goodness while I just sat there quietly getting my hair cut. His closing statement was, "I believe in God and I try to live a good life as a good person."

He is not alone. We all want to be perceived as good people. Why?

Because we were created for righteousness, people continue to yearn for righteousness. However, we sinfully pursue it through self-righteousness.<sup>62</sup> Self-righteousness exists in both irreligious and religious forms.

Irreligious self-righteousness includes the attempts to justify one's decency through everything from social causes to political involvement and being a good steward of the planet. Religious self-righteousness is the pursuit of personal righteousness through our own attempts to live by God's laws in addition to our own rules. Regarding such vain attempts at self-righteousness, Jesus said, "Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."<sup>63</sup> No one has been more religiously devoted than the Pharisees who, for example, actually tithe out of their spice rack in an effort to be certain that they gave God a tenth of literally all they had. Still, our attempts at self-righteousness are simply repugnant to God.<sup>64</sup>

On the cross what Martin Luther liked to call the "great exchange" occurred. Jesus took our sin and gave us his righteousness. Second Corinthians 5:21 says, "For our sake he [God] made him [Jesus] to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." Unlike the self-righteousness of religion, gift righteousness is not something we bring to God to impress him, but rather something that God does in us and we receive as a gift by personal faith in him alone. It gives us a new identity as child of God, a new nature through new birth, a new power which is the indwelling Holy Spirit of God, and a new community, the church. The goal and final outcome of his working will be the full Christ like righteousness of the people of God individually and as a Spirit unified community.

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The greatest things we have in life tend not to be things earned by us, but instead gifts given to us. Examples would include the love of a spouse or friend, or birth of a child or grandchild.

The gifted righteousness of Jesus is imparted to us at the time of faith, simultaneous with our justification. Not only does God give us family status, but he also gives us new power and a new heart through the indwelling Holy Spirit. This is what theologians call regeneration. Therefore, we not only have a new status by virtue of being justified, but we also have a new heart from which new desires for holiness flow and a new power through God the Holy Spirit to live like, for, and with Jesus.

Finally, in saying that righteousness comes from Jesus alone and by virtue of none of our good works, we are not advocating a kind of lawless Christianity where we are permitted to live in unrepentant and ongoing sin, unconcerned about whether we are living righteously. Rather, we are saying that only by understanding the righteousness of Jesus Christ in us can we live holy lives out of his righteousness as our new status as Christians.

### *Ransom*

For most people, the worst thing each month is sitting down to pay all the bills. To see in total all the debt we have accrued is, frankly, discouraging. Compounded interest, late fees, and other financial penalties feel like an ongoing avalanche that we are constantly shoveling out from under. Even if we try our best to keep it, it seems like there is always something we missed that damages our all-important credit score which is altogether frustrating.

Most people are well aware of their financial debt to lenders. What most people are not nearly as aware of is their financial debt to the Lord.

God made us to love, honor, and obey him in thought, word, and deed. Every time we fail to do that perfectly, we accrue a debt to God. Every person has sinned against God, and hell is the eternal prison for spiritual debtors who have stolen from God by living sinful lives. Like all debtors, we need a plan if we hope to pay this debt off.

First, we need a mediator to stand between us and God to

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establish our total debt and come up with a resolution that God the Father, to whom we are indebted, will find acceptable. The Bible repeatedly speaks of Jesus as our only mediator: "For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus."<sup>65</sup> Our spiritual debt is to God, and there is only one possible mediator between God and us to work out the dangerous mess we are in.

Second, we need a redeemer willing to intercede for us and pay our debt to God the Father. A redeemer is a person who pays the debt of someone else. Paul speaks of "our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works."<sup>66</sup> He also says that "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree [Deut. 21:23].'"<sup>67</sup> Because our sins are against God, only God can forgive our debt of sin. Jesus is God who paid our debt on the cross in order to forgive our sin.<sup>68</sup>

Third, we need a ransom, which is a repayment sufficient enough to erase our debt to God the Father. The problem, though, is that our sins are against a completely holy and perfect God and therefore require a perfect payment. Since all human beings are sinful, we cannot be a ransom for another. There is no way that any other sinful human can ever repay God for our spiritual debt. Psalm 49:7–8 says it this way: "Truly no man can ransom another, or give to God the price of his life, for the ransom of their life is costly and can never suffice." Referring to himself in Mark 10:45, Jesus said, "For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." Paul also speaks of "the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom."<sup>69</sup>

Consider, for a moment, how happy you would be if someone paid off all of your past and current debts in full with no cost to you? Additionally, imagine how much happier you would be if they also said that they would also pay off any debts you were to have in the future no matter what! Spiritually speaking, this is precisely what happened when Jesus Christ died on the cross to pay your past, present, and future debt to God in full!

## HOW DOES GOD REDEEM US THROUGH THE CROSS?

### *Redemption*

My wife Grace and I really enjoy watching suspenseful action movies. Our favorites are the ones where the bad guys capture some defenseless folks, holding them captive until some good guys show up to shoot the bad guys and set the captives free. The leader of the good guys is always the fearless and selfless hero and the storyline for this entire genre of movies is borrowed from the Bible where Jesus takes down Satan and sets us free.

To use a very biblical word, sinners are captives or slaves held in bondage. Second Peter 2:19b explains it this way: "For whatever overcomes a person, to that he is enslaved." Like a prisoner locked in a cell who cannot escape, so sinners too are locked in a prison of sin and cannot get free. This includes self-selected slavery, such as addictions and sin patterns that are habitual.

In the book of Exodus, God's people were enslaved to a king named Pharaoh who ruled over the most powerful nation on the earth, Egypt. He was worshiped as a god and brutally mistreated the people whom he enslaved. God raised up a man named Moses to speak on his behalf to the pharaoh, demanding that the slaves be set free in order to live new lives in worship to the real God. God graciously, but authoritatively, called him to righteousness. Pharaoh became hardhearted under God's provocation, just as God said he would, and he refused to release the people from their brutal slavery. As a result, God sent a succession of plagues as judgments and warnings upon the pharaoh, kindly giving him many opportunities to repent and do what God demanded.

The pharaoh repeatedly refused to repent of his ways and release the people, so God sent a terrible series of judgments upon the entire nation. The wrath of God was eventually poured out on the firstborn son of every household, each killed in one night. As we have noted, the only households spared from death to their firstborn son were those families who, in faith, took a young, healthy lamb without blemish or defect and slaughtered it as a substitute and then took its blood and covered the doorposts around the entry to their home with it. As a result, the wrath of God passed over them and

was diverted because of the lamb.

Like the people in Moses' day, we sinners are completely unable to free ourselves from slavery. As slaves we need to be redeemed from our slavery. Redemption is synonymous with being liberated, freed, or rescued from bondage and slavery to a person or thing. The word and its derivatives (e.g., redeemer, redeem) appear roughly 150 times in the English Bible, with only roughly twenty occurrences in the New Testament.

Sadly, it has been commonly taught by some Christian theologians since the early days of the church (e.g., Origen) that the concept of redemption was adopted from the pagan slave market where a price was paid to free a slave. This led to wild speculation that Jesus died to pay off Satan, which is preposterous because Jesus owes Satan nothing.

The prototype for redemption is not the pagan slave market but rather the exodus. There, God liberated his people but in no way paid off the satanic pharaoh. God simply crushed him. Exodus 6:6 is one of many Bible verses that present the exodus as the prototype of redemption: "Say therefore to the people of Israel, 'I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from slavery to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment.'"<sup>70</sup>

The theme of God the Redeemer echoes throughout the Old Testament.<sup>71</sup> Even before Jesus' birth it was prophesied that he was God coming into human history to redeem sinners from slavery.<sup>72</sup> At the birth of Jesus, it was prophesied that he is God the Redeemer.<sup>73</sup> Paul often spoke of Jesus as our redeemer: "Jesus Christ . . . gave himself for us to redeem us" and "Redemption . . . is in Christ Jesus."<sup>74</sup> Many more examples of Jesus being offered as the redeemer of slaves are scattered throughout the New Testament.<sup>75</sup>

When Jesus was crucified and his blood was shed, he suffered and died in our place for our sins so that we could be redeemed.<sup>76</sup> Jesus has redeemed us from and to many things. Jesus has redeemed us from the curse of the law<sup>77</sup>, Satan and demons<sup>78</sup>, our sinful flesh<sup>79</sup>, and sin<sup>80</sup>. Furthermore, Jesus has redeemed us to eternal life with God<sup>81</sup>, the return of Jesus<sup>82</sup>, and a glorified resurrection body<sup>83</sup>.

## **FOR WHOM DID JESUS CHRIST DIE?**

### *Unlimited Limited Atonement*

Every Christmas, families gather to open presents. To prepare for the gift opening, someone has to go through and read all the tags to determine who gets each present. If the wrong person gets the gift, the person whom it was intended for runs the risk of missing out on what was intended for them by the gift giver.

What is true of Christmas presents is also true of the greatest gift ever given – the salvation of Jesus Christ. Who gets this present, and does not get this present, is vital to understand correctly.

The question, for whom did Jesus Christ die? has generated some of the most heated and varied answers in church history. To help you understand the different answers to this question, we offer the following chart:

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	<b>Heresy of "Christian" Universalism</b>	<b>Heresy of Contemporary Pelagianism</b>	<b>Unlimited Atonement</b>	<b>Limited Atonement</b>	<b>Unlimited Limited Atonement</b>
<b>View of Sin</b>	We are born sinful but guilty for our sins, not Adam's.	We are born sinless like Adam but follow his bad example.	We are born sinful but guilty for our sins, not Adam's.	We are born sinners guilty in Adam.	We are born sinners guilty in Adam.
<b>Who Jesus Died For</b>	Jesus took all the sin and pain of the world onto himself.	Jesus lived and died only as an example for sinners.	Jesus died to provide payment for the sin of all people.	Jesus died to achieve full atonement for the elect.	Jesus died to provide payment for all, but only in a saving way for the elect.
<b>How Atonement is Applied</b>	God's powerful love in Jesus will overcome all sin.	Anyone can follow the example of Jesus by living a good life.	God will apply the payment to those who believe in Christ.	God designed the atonement precisely for the elect.	While God desires the salvation of all, he applies the payment to the elect, those whom He chose for salvation.
<b>Heaven &amp; Hell</b>	Everyone will be saved and will go to heaven. There is no eternal hell.	Those who live a Christlike life will be saved and go to heaven. Those who reject goodness will go to hell.	All who accept the gift go to heaven. Everyone else gets to follow their free will and choose to go to hell.	God does not need to save anyone from hell, but chooses to save some.	God does not need to save anyone from hell, but chooses to save some.

The first two conclusions (universalism and Pelagianism) are unbiblical and therefore unacceptable. Universalism erroneously contradicts the clear teachings of Scripture on human sinfulness and hell.<sup>84</sup> Pelagius denied human sinfulness and taught that people begin their life morally good (like Adam), and through the decision of their own will can live a holy life that would obligate God to take

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them to heaven upon death. Pelagius was condemned as a heretic at the Council of Carthage in AD 418.

We are left with three options for Christians regarding the question of who Jesus died for. All three positions are within the bounds of evangelical orthodoxy.

First, some Christians believe that Jesus died for the sins of all people. This position is commonly referred to as Arminianism (after James Arminius), Wesleyanism (after John Wesley), or unlimited atonement. Arminians appeal to those Scriptures that speak of Jesus dying for all people<sup>85</sup>, the whole world<sup>86</sup>, everyone<sup>87</sup>, and not wanting anyone to perish.<sup>88</sup> Arminians then teach that to be saved, one must make the decision to accept Jesus' atoning death and become a follower of Jesus. Furthermore, it is said that anyone can make that choice either by inherent free will (Arminians) or by God's universal enabling, so-called prevenient, or first, grace (Wesleyans). Subsequently, election is understood as God choosing those he foreknew would choose him, and since people choose to be saved, they can also lose their salvation.

Second, some Christians believe that Jesus died only for the sins of the elect. Election means that before the foundation of the world, God chose certain individuals to be recipients of eternal life solely on the basis of his gracious purpose apart from any human merit or action. He calls them effectually, doing whatever is necessary to bring them to repentance and faith.<sup>89</sup>

This position is commonly referred to as five-point Calvinism (after John Calvin), Reformed theology, or limited atonement, which is also sometimes called particular redemption. These Calvinists commonly appeal to those Scriptures that speak of Jesus' dying only for some people but not all people<sup>90</sup>, his sheep<sup>91</sup>, his church<sup>92</sup>, the elect<sup>93</sup>, his people<sup>94</sup>, his friends<sup>95</sup>, and all Christians.<sup>96</sup> They disagree with unlimited atonement, pointing out that if Jesus died for everyone, then everyone would be saved, which is the heresy of universalism. They also teach that people are so sinful that they cannot choose God, and so God regenerates people before their conversion and ensures they will be preserved until the end because salvation cannot be lost.

One vital point of debate is the intent of Jesus when he died on the cross. Did Jesus intend to provide payment for all sins of all

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people, opening the doorway to salvation for all? That would be unlimited atonement, or what the Wesleyans and the Arminians believe. Do we accept it at face value when Paul said that Christ Jesus “gave himself as a ransom for all” in 1 Timothy 2:6? Or did Jesus die to complete the purchase of our pardon on the cross? That is limited atonement, or what five-point Calvinists believe. Do we accept it at face value when Jesus said, “It is finished” in John 19:30?

At first glance, unlimited and limited atonement appear to be in opposition. But that dilemma is resolved by noting two things. First, the two categories are not mutually exclusive; since Jesus died for the sins of everyone, this means that he also died for the sins of the elect. Second, Jesus’ death for all people does not accomplish the same thing as his death for the elect. This point is complicated but is in fact taught in Scripture. For example, 1 Timothy 4:10 makes a distinction between Jesus’ dying as the savior of all people in a general way and the Christian elect in a particular way, saying, “For to this end we toil and strive, because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe.”

Additionally, 2 Peter 2:1 speaks of people for whom Jesus died as not being saved from heresy and damnation by Jesus: “False prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction.” Simply, by dying for everyone, Jesus purchased everyone as his possession, and he then applies his forgiveness to the elect—those in Christ—by grace and applies his wrath to the non-elect—those who reject Christ. Objectively, Jesus’ death was sufficient to save anyone, and, subjectively, only efficient to save those who repent of their sin and trust in him. This position is called unlimited limited atonement, or modified Calvinism, and arguably is the position that John Calvin himself held as a very able Bible teacher.<sup>97</sup> Christ died for the purpose of securing the sure and certain salvation of his own, His elect.

This is the intentionality the five-point Calvinists rightly stress. Christ died for all people. This is the universality the Arminians rightly stress. If the five-point Calvinist is right and no payment has

been made for the non-elect, then how can God genuinely love the world and desire the salvation of all people? There is a genuine open door for salvation for anyone who believes in Jesus, and this makes the rejection of Jesus completely inexcusable. Jesus' death reconciles "all things" to God.<sup>98</sup> [ENDNOTE #98] God will overcome all rebellion through Jesus' blood. In this sense, all those in hell will stand reconciled to God but not in a saving way, as the universalists falsely teach. In hell unrepentant and unforgiven sinners are no longer rebels, and their sinful disregard for God has been crushed and ended.<sup>99</sup>

## HOW DOES GOD TRIUMPH THROUGH THE CROSS?

### *Christus Victor*

From video games to blockbuster movies and bigger than life sporting events, people never grow weary of heroes who rise up to lead their team to victory. Something in us wants to see someone step onto the field of battle to defeat a foe so that everyone on their side of the fight wins.

Scripture clearly says that there is a very real war between Jesus and the angels and Satan and the demons; sinners have been taken as captives in war.<sup>100</sup> Jesus himself confirmed this fact at the beginning of his earthly ministry when he said he had come to set captives free.<sup>101</sup> Jesus said this because there is no way that Satan would release us from his captivity and no way that we could liberate ourselves. Therefore, Jesus came as our triumphant warrior and liberator.

The first promise of Jesus as our victor over Satan came to our first parents. In Genesis 3:15, God preached the first good news (or gospel) of Jesus to our sinful first mother, Eve. God promised that Jesus would be born of a woman and would grow to be a man who would battle with Satan and stomp his head, defeat him, even as the serpent strike his heel killing him, and liberate people from their captivity to Satan, sin, death, and hell through Messiah's substitutionary death.

Leading up to the cross, Satan entered one of Jesus' own disciples, Judas Iscariot, and conspired with him to betray Jesus

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and hand him over to be crucified. Through the cross, Satan and his demons thought that they had finally defeated Jesus. However, crucifying Jesus was the biggest mistake the Devil ever made. Had he understood what was happening, he would never have killed Jesus.<sup>102</sup>

An essential portion of Scripture on the victory of Jesus over Satan, sin, and death is Colossians 2:13–15:

You, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.

Thus, the authority of the Devil and his demons has already ended. Matthew 28:18 makes it very clear that Jesus has all authority now, which means that Satan has no authority over Christians. As a result, we can now live in accordance with Colossians 1:10–14 and “walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God...He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.” The Bible uses the word grace to explain the victory Jesus achieved for us on the cross because there is no logical reason that God would love us and die in our place to liberate us from captivity to Satan, sin, and death, other than his wonderful nature.

### *Expiation*

Consider, for a moment, all of the time and energy you put into cleaning yourself and the things in your life. For starts you bath your body, brush your teeth, wash your windows, clean your dishes, vacuum your house, wash your clothes, change your sheets, and detail your car. If you are a germ freak, the list is much longer. What is true physically is also true spiritually as our souls also need to be cleansed.

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The typical gospel presentation is that we are all sinners and that if we confess our sins to Jesus, He will forgive our sins through his sinless life, substitutionary death, and bodily resurrection. This is clearly true according to Scripture. However, this gospel only addresses the sins that you have committed (as a sinner) and neglects to deal with the sins that have been committed against you (as a victim).

Throughout the Bible, some dozen words are used frequently to speak of sin in terms of staining our soul, defiling us, and causing us to be filthy or unclean.<sup>103</sup> The effect of sin, particularly sins committed against us, is that we feel dirty. The Bible mentions a number of causes for our defilement, such as any sin at all, as well as involvement with false religions and/or the occult<sup>104</sup>, violence<sup>105</sup>, and sexual sin<sup>106</sup>.

Thus, souls are stained and defiled by the filth of sins that people commit and that are committed against them. In Scripture, places<sup>107</sup>, objects (such as the marriage bed)<sup>108</sup>, and people are defiled by sin. Subsequently, the Old Testament and the Gospels are filled with people who were ritually unclean and not to be touched or associated with. The commandments for ceremonial washings and such foreshadow the cleansing power of the death of Jesus.

The predictable result of defilement is shame, including the fear of being found out and known, and our deep, dark secret getting revealed. This pattern was firmly established with our first parents, who covered themselves in shame and hid from God and one another after they sinned. Shame exists where there is sin, and so feeling ashamed, particularly when we sin, is natural and healthy. Therefore, shame is not bad, but unless the underlying sin that causes the shame is properly dealt with through the gospel, then the shame will remain, with devastating implications.

Jesus forgave our sins at the cross and cleanses us from all sins that we have committed and that have been committed against us. Through the cross, Jesus Christ has taken our sin away forever, as was foreshadowed by the scapegoat on the Day of Atonement. This goat was sent away to run free into the wilderness, symbolically taking the people's sins with it. Theologically, we call this the doctrine of expiation, whereby our sin is expiated or taken away so that we are made clean through Jesus, who is our scapegoat.

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The Bible uses words such as atonement, cleansing, and purifying fountain that washes away our defilement and shame to explain that our identity must be marked only by what Jesus Christ has done for us and no longer by what has been done by or to us. The Bible clearly teaches that dirty sinners can be cleansed.

- For on this day shall atonement be made for you to cleanse you. You shall be clean before the LORD from all your sins.<sup>109</sup>
- I will cleanse them from all the guilt of their sin against me, and I will forgive all the guilt of their sin and rebellion against me.<sup>110</sup>
- On that day there shall be a fountain opened...to cleanse them from sin and uncleanness.<sup>111</sup>

Jesus not only went to the cross to die for our sin, but also to scorn our shame. As Hebrews 12:1–2 says, “Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.”

As a result, we can walk in the light with others who love us in authentic community. On this point, 1 John 1:7–9 says:

If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Jesus does “cleanses us from all unrighteousness.” This means that because of Jesus’ cross we can be cleansed and made pure. The beauty of this truth of the expiating or cleansing work of Jesus is poetically shown in symbolic acts throughout Scripture, including ceremonial washings<sup>112</sup>, baptism<sup>113</sup>, and the wearing of white in eternity as a continual reminder of the expiating work of Jesus.<sup>114</sup>

## HOW DOES GOD INSPIRE US THROUGH THE CROSS?

### *Christus Exemplar*

When I was a little boy, my grandpa was a diesel mechanic and my dad was a construction worker. I remember they both wore steel toed work boots, carried a lunch box and thermos, and wore overalls and jeans respectively. As a little boy, I looked up to them and so I followed their example. I had my own jeans and boots I wore, and thermos and lunch box that I would bring when I would ride in their trucks to help them with projects. The truth is, we all have people we look up to as role models and examples. Since Jesus Christ is perfect, it makes sense that He would be our perfect role model to follow.

Jesus died for our sins, thereby enabling us to experience new life. Jesus lived as our example showing us what it means to live a truly holy human life.

Throughout Jesus' life he repeatedly stated that the purpose of His life on earth was to glorify God the Father, or to make the Father's character visible. Jesus' glorifying God the Father included dying on the cross.<sup>115</sup> Practically, this means that there is joy not only in our comfort and success, but also in our suffering and hardship, just as there was for Jesus.<sup>116</sup>

At the cross of Jesus, we learn that to be like Jesus means that we pick up our cross and follow him as he commanded.<sup>117</sup> Practically, this means that we glorify God by allowing hardship, pain, and loss to make us more and more like Jesus and give us a more credible witness for Jesus. As Christians we should neither run to suffering as the early Christian ascetics did, nor run from it as some modern Christians do. Instead, we receive suffering when it comes as an opportunity for God to do something good in us and through us. We rejoice not in the pain but rather in what it can accomplish for the gospel so that something as costly as suffering is not wasted but used for God's glory, our joy, and others' good.

In order to suffer well—that is, in a way that is purposeful for the progress of the gospel both in and through us—we must continually remember Jesus' cross. Peter says:

## CROSS: GOD DIES

What credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.<sup>118</sup>

### **WHAT DOES THE DOCTRINE OF THE CROSS REVEAL ABOUT GOD'S LOVE?**

When all is said and done, a lot more is said than done. People talk a lot about their love and concern for others. Social media is flooded with hashtags and likes for good causes. Yet, little action ever happens. As an elderly man, John was a bit sick of this trend to say a lot but do a little. After seeing Jesus not just say He loved us, but dying and rising to show He loved us, John wrote in 1 John 3:18, "let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth." Some of the time, love is what you say. Most of the time, love is what you do.

On the cross, Jesus revealed to us the love of God. The following verses state how the love of God is most clearly revealed at the cross of Jesus:

- For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.<sup>119</sup>
- Greater love has no one than this, that someone lays down his life for his friends.<sup>120</sup>
- But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.<sup>121</sup>
- In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that

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he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.<sup>122</sup>

At the cross we see that the love of God is not merely sentimental but also efficacious. When people speak of love, they usually mean an emotional love that feels affectionate but may not do anything to help the beloved. Thankfully, God does not merely feel loving toward us; His love actually compels Him to act on our behalf so that we can be changed by His love.

God has lovingly worked out a way for our friendship with Him to be reconciled. Through the cross, Jesus took away our sin so that we could be reconciled to God.<sup>123</sup> Thankfully, God not only graciously takes away our sin, but mercifully extends Himself to us, knowing that we desperately need Him.<sup>124</sup>

The cross is something done by you. You murdered God incarnate. The cross is something done for you. God loves you and died to forgive you.

Through the cross and empty tomb of Jesus Christ, there are at least nine ways that God has loved you by Jesus taking your place and putting you in His place.

1. Jesus died so you can live!
2. Jesus paid the ultimate price for your debt to God!
3. Jesus was cursed so you could be blessed!
4. Jesus became unrighteous so you could become righteous!
5. Jesus endured God's wrath so you could experience God's grace!
6. Jesus was rejected by the Father so you could be reconciled to the Father!
7. Jesus was shamed so that you could be unashamed!
8. Jesus became unclean to make you clean!
9. Jesus was hated so you could be loved!

**QUESTIONS FOR PERSONAL JOURNALING AND/OR  
SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION**

1. Was there anything new from this chapter that most impactful to you personally? What? Why?
2. What would it have been like for you to be standing with John and Mary at the feet of Jesus on the cross?
3. Do you completely and confidently believe that, because of your faith in Jesus Christ, all of your sin and debt to God is paid in full?
4. Do you truly believe that Jesus has made you completely clean from all that you have done and all that others have done to you?
5. How does understanding Jesus' sacrifice on the cross help deepen your understanding of God's love for you?
6. What self-destructive patterns in your life has Jesus died to set you free from by dying so that you could put them to death?
7. How does Jesus' example help you know how to love and forgive those who have sinned against you? Who do you need to forgive as God has forgiven you through the cross?
8. Who do you know that needs to hear more about what Jesus has done for them to either help them become a Christian, or help them grow as a Christian?
9. What are some ways you can follow Jesus' example by serving someone else in love?
10. What do you think it will be like in the Kingdom of God when you see the nail scars in Jesus hands as he wipes every tear from your eyes and welcomes you to heal from the past?

# NOTES

## CROSS: GOD DIES

1. Much of the following historical overview of crucifixion is from A&E Television and The History Channel's two-hour special called *Crucifixion* (March 23, 2008).
2. Suetonius, *The Lives of the Caesars*, Vesp. 5.4.
3. Josephus, J.W. 7.203.
4. Cicero, *Pro Rabirio Perduellionis Reo* 5.16.
5. Exodus 6–12.
6. Luke 22:19–21.
7. *Crucifixion*, A&E Television and The History Channel.
8. *Ibid.*
9. John 19:19.
10. Isa. 53:3–4.
11. *Crucifixion*, A&E Television and The History Channel.
12. Luke 23:34; Luke 23:43; John 19:26-27, Psalm 22:2, Matt. 27:46 cf. Mark 15:34 as this is the only statement from the cross appearing in more than one gospel, John 19:28-29. It is possible that the sponge and wine vinegar were part of the military kit used by soldiers to clean themselves after going to the bathroom in the field, the ancient version of both toilet paper and disinfectant.
13. John 19:30.
14. Luke 23:46.
15. Mark 15:25, 33.
16. Ps. 34:20; John 19:36.
17. 1 Cor. 15:3b–4.
18. Gen. 2:17.
19. Rev. 21:8.
20. Isa. 53:5, 12; Rom. 4:25; 5:8; Gal. 3:13; 1 Pet. 3:18; 1 John 2:2.
21. To learn more about each facet of the cross, see our book *Death by Love: Letters from the Cross* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008).
22. Lev. 16:15.

23. Gen. 8:20; 12:7-8; 13:4, 8; Job 1:5; 42:7-9.
24. Ps. 51:16; Mic. 6:6-8; Heb. 10:4.
25. 1 Sam. 15:22; Prov. 15:8; Hos. 6:6.
26. Heb. 7:22; 8:5-7, 13.
27. John 1:29.
28. E.g., Jer. 31:31-34; Matt. 26:28; Luke 22:20; Rom. 11:27; 1 Cor. 11:25; 2 Cor. 3:6; Heb. 7:22; 8:8-13; 9:15; 12:24.
29. Eph. 1:10, 22; 4:15; 5:23; Col. 1:18; 2:10, 19.
30. Heb. 2:17; 4:14-15.
31. John 1:29.
32. Rev. 21:22.
33. 1 Cor. 5:7.
34. Heb. 9:26; 10:10.
35. Lev. 26:27-30; Num. 11:1; Deut. 29:24.
36. Ex. 34:6-8.
37. Deut. 13:17.
38. Isa. 48:9.
39. Ps. 78:38.
40. Mark 3:5.
41. Prov. 6:16-19; Zech. 8:17.
42. Ps. 5:5; 11:4-5; Hos. 9:15; Rom. 9:13 cf. Mal. 1:2-3.
43. John 3:36; Eph. 5:6; Col. 3:6; 1 Thess. 1:9-10.
44. Rev. 6:16-17.
45. Genesis 38; 1 Cor. 11:28-29.
46. Rom. 1:18, 24, 26.
47. Deut. 32:21-22; John 3:36; Eph. 5:6; 2 Pet. 2:4; Rev. 14:9-11.
48. Rom. 5:9.
49. 1 Thess. 1:9-10.
50. Rom. 3:23-25.
51. Heb. 2:17.
52. 1 John 2:2.
53. 1 John 4:10.
54. Ex. 23:7.
55. Job 9:2.
56. Ex. 34:6-7.
57. Gen. 2:17.
58. Rom. 1:32.
59. 2 Cor. 5:21.

60. 1 Cor. 1:30.
61. Acts 13:38; Rom. 4:3-5; 5:1.
62. Rom. 10:3.
63. Matt. 5:20.
64. Isa. 64:6.
65. 1 Tim. 2:5; see also Heb. 9:15; 12:24.
66. Titus 2:13-14.
67. Gal. 3:13.
68. Matt. 26:63-65; Mark 2:5; John 6:41-58; 8:46, 58-59; 10:30-33; 11:25; 14:6, 8-9; 16:28.
69. 1 Tim. 2:5-6.
70. See also Ex. 15:1-18; Deut. 7:8; 15:15; 2 Sam. 7:23; 1 Chron. 17:21; Isa. 51:10; Mic. 6:4.
71. Ps. 78:35; Isa. 44:24; 47:4; 48:17; 63:16; Jer. 50:34; Hos. 7:13; 13:14.
72. Luke 1:68; 2:38.
73. Ibid.
74. Rom. 3:24; Titus 2:13-14; see also 1 Cor. 1:30; Gal. 3:13-14; 4:4-5; Eph. 1:7.
75. 1 Cor. 1:30; Gal. 3:13-14; 4:4-5; Eph. 1:7.
76. 1 Pet. 1:18-19.
77. Gal. 3:13.
78. Col. 1:13-14.
79. Rom. 6:6-12.
80. Gal. 6:14-15.
81. Ps. 49:15.
82. Job 19:25.
83. Rom. 8:23.
84. E.g., Dan. 12:2; Matt. 5:29-30; 10:28; 18:9; 23:23; 25:46.
85. 2 Cor. 5:14-15; 1 Tim. 2:1-6; 4:10; Titus 2:11.
86. John 1:29; 3:16-17; 1 John 2:2; 4:14; Rev. 5:9.
87. Isa. 53:6; Heb. 2:9.
88. 1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Pet. 3:9.
89. Isa. 55:11; John 6:44; Rom. 8:30; 11:29; 1 Cor. 1:23-29; 2 Tim. 1:9.
90. Matt. 1:21; 20:28; 26:28; Rom. 5:12-19.
91. John 10:11, 15, 26-27.
92. Acts 20:28; Eph. 5:25.

93. Rom. 8:32–35.
94. Matt. 1:21.
95. John 15:3.
96. 2 Cor. 5:15; Titus 2:14.
97. E.g., see his commentaries on Romans 5, Galatians 5, Colossians 1, and Hebrews.
98. Col. 1:18–20.
99. On this point, Dr. Bruce Ware has been very helpful to both Gerry and me as we studied this doctrine together.
100. Col. 1:13; 2 Tim. 2:25–26.
101. Luke 4:18.
102. 1 Cor. 2:6–9.
103. E.g., Ps. 106:39; Prov. 30:11–12; Mark 7:20.
104. Lev. 19:31; Ezek. 14:11.
105. E.g., Lam. 4:14.
106. Gen. 34:5; Lev. 21:14; Num. 5:27; 1 Chron. 5:1.
107. Lev. 18:24–30; Num. 35:34.
108. Heb. 13:4.
109. Lev. 16:30.
110. Jer. 33:8.
111. Zech. 13:1.
112. Ex. 19:10.
113. Acts 22:16.
114. Rev. 19:7–8.
115. John 12:23, 27–28; 13:30–32; 17:1.
116. Heb. 12:1–6.
117. Matt. 16:24.
118. 1 Pet. 2:20–24.
119. John 3:16.
120. John 15:13.
121. Rom. 5:8.
122. 1 John 4:9–10.
123. Isa. 59:2; Hos. 5:6.
124. 1 Tim. 1:15–16; Titus 3:4–5.

# MARK DRISCOLL

**W**ith Pastor Mark, it's all about Jesus! Mark and his wife Grace have been married and doing ministry together for over twenty-five years. They also planted The Trinity Church with their five kids in Scottsdale, Arizona as a family ministry ([thetrinitychurch.com](http://thetrinitychurch.com)) and started Real Faith, a ministry alongside their daughter Ashley that contains a mountain of Bible teaching from Pastor Mark as well as content for women, men, pastors, leaders, Spanish-speakers, and more.

Mark has been named by Preaching Magazine one of the twenty-five most influential pastors of the past twenty-five years. He has a bachelor's degree in speech communication from the Edward R. Murrow College of Communication at Washington State University as well as a master's degree in exegetical theology from Western Seminary in Portland, Oregon. For free sermons, answers to questions, Bible teaching, and more, visit **RealFaith.com** or download the **Real Faith app**.

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