

The Cross

And Why The Saviour Had To Die

Evangelist Sam R. Ensor, June 2009

“But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.” (Galatians 6: 14)

“For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God.” (1 Corinthians 1: 18)

The cross is the bedrock of Christianity. Without the cross there is no sacrifice for sin, no substitute for man condemned, no divine justice against the reprehensibility of sin, and no means by which the righteousness of a Holy God can extend mercy and forgiveness.

The great British preacher Charles H. Spurgeon, the “*Prince of preachers*,” put it this way, “Preaching which leaves out the cross is the laughingstock of hell!” When asked the secret of his power in preaching, he responded, “No matter which Scripture text I read, I pray for the power of God and make a beeline for Calvary!” His advice on successful living was, “Christians should live with one eye on Calvary and one eye on eternity!”

To understand the need for Calvary, we must go back to man’s beginning.

“And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.” (Genesis 1: 26)

Who was this “*us*” and what was the “*image*?” The use of the plural pronouns “*us*” and “*our*” refers to the triune nature of the Godhead, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Man was created as a triune being, also: body, soul, and spirit. Paul alludes to this in the apostolic benediction:

“And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.”
(1 Thessalonians 5: 23)

Adam’s home was Eden, the beautiful garden paradise. The Lord provided everything man would need to enjoy life to its fullest. And to make a distinction between man and the animal world, God also gave him a mind to reason and a heart to love. The Creator also made man a free moral agent, with the capacity to make his own choices.

While reading the Genesis account of creation, did you ever wonder why God would put such a thing as the “*tree of the knowledge of good and evil*” in the garden and then forbid Adam to eat of its fruit? Did not God want Adam to love Him? Most assuredly so, but what kind of love would it be if man had no choice, no alternative?

“And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.”
(Genesis 2: 16-17)

At first thought, this might seem unfair or unreasonable; indeed, that is the precise argument the serpent (Satan) used when he enticed Eve:

“Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the

field which the LORD God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden? And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die. And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die: For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.” (Genesis 3: 1-5)

First, Satan cast doubt about what God said, since Eve had heard only what Adam told her and not directly from God. Then, the devil accused the Lord of not loving them, wanting to withhold something of benefit to them. Finally, he deceived her, saying that eating the forbidden fruit would “*open their eyes,*” and transform them into gods. Deceit, doubt and accusation are his methods today as well.

But the truth is, the ability to reason, to think for oneself, to make choices is the crowning achievement in the creation of man. True love is that which is born of a man’s own heart, his own reason and his own choice. That was the love and worship which God wanted. But after Eve succumbed to temptation, Adam, in order to maintain fellowship with his wife, disobeyed God and also ate of the forbidden fruit.

Perhaps you are thinking, “Didn’t God tell Adam the day he disobeyed that he would *surely die?*” Yes he did. And yet the Bible records that Adam lived for nine-hundred, thirty years (Genesis 4: 5). But the moment he disobeyed God, he died *spiritually!* Remember, man is a trinity: body, soul and spirit. The part of Adam which could commune with God died. That Adamic nature is passed on to all men:

“Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and

death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.” (Romans 5: 12)

“For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” (Romans 6: 23)

“And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins.” (Ephesians 2: 1)

We are all born with the fallen nature of Adam: a living body, a living soul, but a spirit that is dead in sin. This is why our Lord told Nicodemus, “*Ye must be born again*” (John 3: 7). The new birth is the operation by which the Holy Spirit quickens, or brings to life that spirit! But how does God accomplish this *new birth*, and why did Jesus have to die on the cross? If God is a God of love (and He most certainly is!), and if a man is sorry for his sins, why can’t God just say, “Okay, you’ve sinned and you’re sorry, so I forgive you.” Calvary must be seen through God’s eyes and not man’s:

“But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.”
I Corinthians 2: 14)

The reason God does not and will not forgive sin by simple divine fiat is that His righteousness and holiness demand justice! Every sin is, first and foremost, a sin against God. The wages of sin is death. God has already judged our sins. There can be no divine forgiveness without divine justice. The sin question must be dealt with. But how? If you could vow to quit sinning from this day forward you would still be lost because of the sins in your past. Remember, we are not sinners *because* we commit sin; we commit sin because *we are* sinners! No one can turn back the clock and undo his sinful past. Righteousness is not possible without a full cleansing of the sins of his past:

“Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.” (Romans 3: 25-26)

So, how does the Lord reconcile His great love for fallen man with the demand for justice against sin? Does He require, as some cults teach, that sinners atone for their sins with their own blood? How can that possibly be, since ungodly men could never approach a holy God? Since the blood sacrifice for sin must be without spot and without blemish, such a notion is not only theologically impossible but an affront to the righteousness of God Almighty. Then, there must be a way for God, who loves sinners, to execute the death sentence against sin and also extend mercy and forgiveness to repentant sinners. Jesus Christ is the way:

“Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.” (John 14: 6)

The Lord Jesus is the mediator between a holy God and sinful man. A mediator is one who is equal to both parties.

“For there are one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.” (1 Timothy 2: 5)

For Christ to be equal to man, He had to become a man, which He did in His incarnation. But His birth could not be after the order of Adam, for then He would have inherited the fallen Adamic nature and would have been born a sinner Himself. He would have to be conceived, not by Adam, but by the Holy Ghost:

“Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as

his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost. Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not willing to make her a publick example, was minded to put her away privily. But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost.” (Matthew 1: 18-20)

So, Christ came into the world without Adam’s sin nature. The virgin birth is absolutely essential to the plan of salvation. Christ is equal to man in every sense, yet without sin. Jesus Christ lived a perfect, sinless life, satisfying every statute of the Law, so that on our behalf the Law is satisfied in Him.

The Saviour was in every respect equal to the Father. He did not lay aside His deity, nor did He leave the attributes of the Godhead in Heaven when He came into the world. He was altogether God and manifested the attributes of God while He was in the world. Yet, He was altogether man in the sense that He could take man’s place under the penalty of death for sin. Jesus Christ was indeed equal to both parties!

Three elements comprised the work of reconciliation. In the Garden of Gethsemane, the Saviour was reconciled to sin. He who was holy agonized at the thought of becoming sin:

“And he went forward a little, and fell on the ground, and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. And he said, Abba, Father, all things are possible unto thee; take away this cup from me: nevertheless not what I will, but what thou wilt.” (Mark 14: 35-36)

On the cross, sin was reconciled to justice. The Father would execute the full measure of judgement against sin. In

the garden tomb, death was reconciled to life everlasting!

In sober contemplation of the crucifixion of the man whom Pontius Pilate himself confessed three times that “*I find no fault in this man*” (Luke 22: 4), the normal reaction would be that Calvary was the greatest *travesty* of justice ever. However, theologically, the cross was not a travesty but the greatest instrument of *majesty* ever!

One of my most prized possessions is a needlepoint given me by two of my close friends, Rena and Debbie Shepherd, which reads, “*I asked the Lord how much he loved me. This much, he said, and he stretched out his arms, and died!*”

The cross was a fourfold manifestation of the glory of God. First, there was a *divine substitution*. He went to the cross and died in our stead, the sinless Son of God bearing our sins:

“*For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.*” (2 Corinthians 5: 21)

“*Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed.*” (1 Peter 2: 24)

“*For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit.*” (1 Peter 3: 18)

Second, there was a *divine sacrifice*. Jesus Christ shed His precious blood as payment for our sin debt:

“*Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain*

conversation received by tradition from your fathers; But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.” (1 Peter 1: 18-19)

The shedding of blood constituted the acceptable sacrifice for sins:

“*For the life of the flesh is in the blood: and I have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement for your souls: for it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul.*” (Leviticus 17: 11)

“*And almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and without shedding of blood is no remission.*” (Hebrews 9: 22)

But the blood of the Old Testament sacrifices could *never* take away sins but were for *atonement* only, whereby God withheld His wrath in judgement:

“*For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins.*” (Hebrews 10: 4)

Consider the offering of Christ’s blood. It was *innocent*; the virgin birth established that. Those foolish teachers who, in ignorance of Bible doctrine, declare that it doesn’t matter if you believe in the virgin birth, teach a sacrifice that *would not* and *could not* be accepted, because Jesus would have had the sinful Adamic nature and the Father could not have accepted His death as the perfect offering for sin. His blood was *shed*, as John Baptist testified, “*Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.*” (John 1: 29). His blood was *applied* upon the altar in Heaven (Hebrews 9: 24) and upon the altar of the heart (Hebrews 9: 14).

The third glory was the manifestation of *divine satisfaction*.

When Christ died, His shed blood *satisfied* the judgement against man's sins:

“My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.” (1 John 2: 1-2)

What does this “*propitiation*” mean? In the Old Testament it was a reference to the mercy-seat on the Ark of the Covenant. In the New Testament it is the place where justice was satisfied and where mercy and forgiveness are found:

“For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.” (Hebrews 4: 15-16)

The events at the cross bear unmistakable testimony that Christ's blood satisfied the sin debt. When our Lord died, the *veil* in the temple was rent from *top to bottom* (Matthew 27: 45-51). God thus signified that a new way was opened for man to approach Him in repentance and faith:

“Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, By a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh.” (Hebrews 10: 19-20)

The fourth glory manifested was *divine sufficiency*. Christ's shed blood was altogether sufficient for the forgiveness of sin:

“But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his

Son cleanseth us from all sin. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” (1 John 1: 7, 9)

Taken together, these manifest *glories of the cross* bear evident testimony that Jesus Christ was both *able* and *willing* to save. The lack of either would have doomed lost mankind!

“Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.” (Hebrews 7: 25)

“The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.” (2 Peter 3: 9)

The cross was where God offered the greatest gift of the ages to man. There, He executed the death sentence against sin: His only begotten Son died in our place. There, He shed His perfect blood, which redeems us from the curse, guilt and penalty of sin. There, God was justified in righteousness and thereby extends His love, mercy and forgiveness in salvation:

“In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace.” (Ephesians 1: 7)

“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.” (Ephesians 2: 8-9)

These are the reasons that Jesus Christ died on the cross. He did for sinners what we cannot do for ourselves and do not deserve. That is divine grace. He paid our sin debt with the shedding of His own blood. He suffered and died in our place

to provide the free gift of salvation and everlasting life. But remember, this free gift, though it has been purchased at great price, is only an *offer* until it is accepted.

Now that you understand why Christ had to die and what His death accomplished, the question at the close of this study is, have *you* accepted the free gift of salvation through Jesus Christ? This is not a gift that can be accepted on your behalf by anyone else. Your parents cannot do it for you. Your church cannot do it for you. Dr. Melvin Vaughn has warned in preaching, “God has many children, but no grandchildren!” You must decide for yourself. If you are not saved, will you now accept God’s free gift of everlasting life? Call upon Him in prayer; He will save you now. Here is what you need to know, and what you need to do:

First, understand that you are a sinner and that the wages of sin is death, or eternal separation from God in hell:

“As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.”
(Romans 3: 10, 23)

“For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” (Romans 6: 23)

Second, know that you cannot save yourself:

“Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost.” (Titus 3: 5)

Third, you must repent (confess and turn away from) sin:

“I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.” (Luke 13: 3)

Fourth, God loves you and wants to forgive your sins and give you life everlasting:

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” (John 3: 16)

Finally, ask Christ to come into your heart, forgive your sin, and save you:

“That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.” (Romans 10: 9-10,13)

If you have prayed and asked to be saved, there are some immediate steps to take. First, find a Bible-believing, Christ-honoring local church and start attending faithfully. Tell the pastor that you are a new Christian. Ask about following the Lord in believers baptism. If you do not have a good King James Bible, get one. It doesn’t have to be expensive, but get the best one you can afford. The Nelson King James Study Bible is available at most Bible book stores. Do not accept any other translation. Develop a personal prayer life and pray faithfully and regularly.

My prayer is that you grow in grace, learn to love Christ more each day, and enjoy your salvation with a vibrant fellowship of like-minded believers.