08

Cross

God Restores

Thirteen points every follower of Jesus should know. A study by Pastor Andy Cisneros.

Cross: *God Restores*

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

Romans 5:8

The Bible gives few details about crucifixion. This is understandable because the original audience had witnessed them. However, since few people in the modern era have personally witnessed a crucifixion, it is important for us to 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. 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 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 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. 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." 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. 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."

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?

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.

Jesus was a young man in his early thirties. In the days leading up to his death, He began speaking openly of it, including at the Passover meal he ate with his friends. There, at the Last Supper, he broke with fifteen centuries of tradition. He showed that the Passover meal, which God's people had been eating annually, found its ultimate fulfillment in him (Matt. 26:20 – 30). The Passover memorialized that night in Egypt when in faith God's people covered the doorposts of their homes with the blood of a lamb so that death would not come to the firstborn sons in their homes, but would pass them over (Exodus 11:1 – 7; 12:1 – 13). In a similar manner, Jesus, like the Passover lamb, had to die to cover us with his blood so that God's just wrath would literally pass over us sinners. This is the essence of the new covenant.

During the Last Supper, Satan entered one of Jesus' disciples, Judas, who had been stealing money from Jesus' ministry fund for some time (John 12:4 – 6) 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 but, 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 (Luke 22:39 – 46), a physical condition that doctors report is rare because it requires an elevated level of stress that few people ever experience.

After Jesus had spent an exhausting, sleepless night of distress, Judas arrived with the soldiers and betrayed Him with a kiss. Jesus was 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 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 pieces of glass, metal, or bone intended to tenderize the body of a victim, like a chef tenderizes a steak by beating it. These pieces would have sunk deeply into the shoulders, back, buttocks, and legs of the victim. Once they 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 deeply 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. 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 continue carrying his cross on the roughly one-mile journey to his execution, Jesus had to have help. A man named Simon of Cyrene was appointed to carry Jesus' cross the rest of the way. 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, 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.

In further mockery, a sign was posted above Jesus that said, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." 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 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 breath 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 earlier 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 grief's and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted"* (Isaiah 53:3 – 4).

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. 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. Likely sensing he was having a heart attack, Jesus used his final moments to declare his victory over sin. In an effort to silence Jesus,

the soldiers took a sponge soaked in vinegar—possibly used in the public restroom as the ancient version of both toilet paper and disinfectant—and put it on a stick and tried to shove it in his mouth (John 19:28 - 30).

At last, Jesus said in a loud voice of triumph, "It is finished." At this moment, the atonement for sin was made and the holiness, righteousness, justice, and wrath of God were satisfied in the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. *"And Jesus, crying out with a loud voice, said, 'Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.' Having said this, He breathed His last."* (Luke 23:46).

Jesus hung on the cross for at least six hours - from the third hour to the ninth hour, when the darkness ended. How long thereafter that he breathed his last and died is not clear in Scripture. What is 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, making it impossible to lift himself up on his cross in order 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. Further-more, 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 the wound (John 19:31 – 37). 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 probably died with both a literal and a 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, the high priest, was allowed to pass through that curtain and enter into the presence of God, and, that could happen only once each year, on the Day of Atonement. At the death of Jesus, however, the temple curtain was torn from top to bottom (Matt. 27:50 – 51), 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, and that He was buried, that He was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures" (! Corinth. 15:3b – 4). In this passage 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 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 <u>our</u> sins, but <u>his</u> death. Paul continues in that passage with the "*good news*" that, because of Jesus' death and resurrection, "*those who belong to him"* will also be raised when He returns (v. 20 – 23) to reign with Him in the Millennial Kingdom (1 John 3:2 and Rev. 20:6).

From the beginning of Scripture to the end the penalty for sin is death (Rom. 6:23). 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 upon 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 dies 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 another theological term as *penal substitutionary atonement*. Scripture repeatedly and clearly declares that Jesus died as our substitute paying our penalty "for" our sins.

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.

Substitution in the Old Testament

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 (Chapter 16). 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. The first goat was an atoning, or satisfying, 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. 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 removing their sins by carrying them away. These great images of the priest, the slaughtered goat, and the scapegoat are all given by God to help us more fully comprehend Jesus' work for us on the cross.

An interesting sidelight: In the tabernacle (later the temple) where all these sacrifices took place there was a lampstand and right across the room a small golden table. On that table were placed twelve loaves of bread called *shewbread* (KJV) or *bread of presence*, and gold jars and cups for the drink offering. Each week the bread was eaten and the drink offering (wine) consumed by the priests, then immediately replaced with new. Jewish scholars have never understood the purpose of this ritual. Most think it had

something to do with the harvest. Its purpose is pretty obvious to Christians. The lampstand, the light of the world, illuminates that which represents the body and blood of our Lord. It's a beautiful *"type"* of what was to come.

How is God Satisfied Through the Cross?

A new-covenant Sacrifice

One scholar says that blood is mentioned some 362 times in the Old Testament and some ninety-two times in the New Testament, even more often than the *cross* or the death of Jesus; thus, it is the most common means by which the Scriptures refer to the death of Jesus. Throughout the Scriptures blood is connected with sin for two primary reasons. First, shed blood reminds us that sin results in death. Secondly, God is sickened by sin which causes death. A connection was 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 by reason of the life that makes atonement."* Blood is sacred, epitomizing the life of the sacrificial victim given as a 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 (Heb. 9:22).

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.

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. (2) Or, 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 that was shed for the sinners, or the firstborn son in each home that 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.

However, despite all of this bloodshed, the Old Testament sacrificial system was never meant to be something sufficient in itself. When Israel 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. The second problem was that it encouraged hypocrisy. People could undergo external rituals, such as offering a sacrifice, without having truly repented of sin or trusted in God internally. The third problem was that it was only preparatory and therefore incomplete until the coming of Jesus, who made the better new covenant possible.

This theme of blood, like every theme of Scripture, finds its fulfillment in the coming of Jesus Christ. Early in Jesus' life, his cousin John saw Jesus coming toward him and declared, *"Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"* 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. The Bible tells us that a new time in human history has arrived with the coming of 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. 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 (Heb. 3:1; 5:1 – 10). We no longer need to offer blood sacrifices because Jesus is our sacrifice for sin. We no longer need to visit the temple to be near to God because Jesus is our temple. We no longer need to celebrate the Passover because Jesus is our Passover. Finally, we no longer need to live in habitual sin because through Jesus we have been made holy and have been given new life.

Satisfied Often Called Propitiation

The Bible is filled with examples of God getting angry at sinners and of his anger as hostile, burning, and furious. 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, sometimes turned away, often delayed, and frequently held back. Furthermore, God feels angry because God hates sin. Sadly, it is commonly said among Christians that, "God hates the sin but loves the sinner." This phrase does not come from the Scriptures, but, from the Hindu Gandhi who coined the phrase, "Love the sinner but hate the sin" in his 1929 autobiography. The Bible clearly says that God both loves and hates some sinners. 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 it does of 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 His 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. The fact remains, however, that in the Old Testament alone nearly twenty words are used to describe God's wrath, which is spoken of roughly six hundred times. The wrath of God also appears about twenty-five times in the New Testament. Not only does God pour out wrath upon unrepentant sinners, but so does Jesus Christ. In Revelation 19:11 - 19 it says that Jesus is coming again as a warrior riding on a white horse to slaughter evildoers until their blood runs through the streets like a river.

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 on occasion. Still, He frequently seems to work through a more subtle, passive, wrath. Passive wrath occurs when God simply hands us over to our evil desires and allows us to do whatever we want (Romans 1:18-26), then, to suffer the consequences of our action. The truth is that everyone except 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 poured out against them. The ultimate place of God's wrath is the lake of fire (Rev. 20:14 – 15). 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 upon Himself God's wrath for us.

Two verses of Scripture that speak in particular to this matter are:

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* (Romans 5:9).

2) *You turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come* (1 Thessalonians 1:9-10).

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. Many Christians are not familiar with this word though because 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 where the original word was “propitiate.” Worse still are the Revised Standard Version and The New English Bible, which use “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 has thankfully retained the original word “propitiation” from the Greek text of the New Testament. 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.”* Romans 3:23-25

2) *Therefore he (Jesus) had to be made like his brothers in 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.* Hebrews 2:17

3) *He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.* 1 John 2:2

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.* 1 John 4:10

At the *cross* justice and mercy came together. Jesus substituted himself for sinners and suffered and died in their place in order 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 Himself. Jesus did this not by demanding our blood, but rather, by giving his own.

Justification

God deserves justice. Because of our sinful condition and ensuing sinful actions, our impending day in God’s proverbial courtroom seems utterly hopeless for anything other than a guilty verdict and a sentence to the lake of fire. 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.” (Exodus 23:7)

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 be thrown into the lake of fire 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?”*

Thankfully, God is merciful, gracious, slow to anger, loving, faithful, and willing to forgive. 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."* Paul confirms this: *"they know God's decree that those who practice such things deserve to die"* (Rom. 1:32 NIV). The amazing truth is that Jesus, our Messiah, 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 (2 Cor.5:21). This is why Paul says that Jesus alone is our righteousness (1 Cor.1:30). 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 5:15–17 says: *"But the free gift is not like the transgression. For if by the transgression of the one* [Adam] *the many died, much more did the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abound to the many. And the gift is not like that which came through the one who sinned; for on the one hand the judgment arose from one transgression resulting in condemnation, but on the other hand the free gift arose from many transgressions resulting in justification. For if by the transgression of the one, death reigned through the one, much more those who receive the abundance of grace and the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, 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.

Righteousness

Because we were created for righteousness, people continue to yearn for righteousness. However, we sinfully pursue it through self-righteousness. 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"* (Matt. 5:20). No one had been more religiously devoted than the Pharisees who, for example, actually tithed out of their spice rack in an effort to be certain that they gave God a tenth of literally all they had (Matt. 23:23). Still, our attempts at self-righteousness are simply sin to God (Isa.64:6).

Jesus took our sin and gave us his righteousness. 2 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 passive; it is not something we do, but rather something that Jesus does and we receive as a gift by personal faith in him alone. 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 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

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 the lake of fire is for spiritual debtors who have stolen from God by living sinful lives.

First, we need a mediator to stand between us and God to establish our total debt and come up with a resolution that God, 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."* (1 Tim. 2:5; see also Heb. 9:15; 12:24). 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. A redeemer is a person who pays the debt of someone else. Paul speaks of *"our great God and our 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"* (Titus 2:14). 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). Because our sins are against God, only God can forgive our debt of sin. Jesus has paid our debt on the cross in order for us to receive forgiveness for our sins.

Third, we need a ransom, which is a repayment sufficient enough to erase our debt to God. 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"* (1 Tim. 2:5-6).

How Does God Redeem Us Through the Cross?

Redemption

To use a very biblical word, sinners are slaves. Second Peter 2:19 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, a 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 the death of their firstborn son were those families who, in faith, took a young, healthy lamb without blemish or defect, slaughtered it as a substitute and then took its blood and covered the doorposts around the entry to their homes 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'."*

The theme of God the Redeemer echoes throughout the Old Testament. Even before Jesus' birth it was prophesied that he was begotten to redeem sinners from slavery. Paul often spoke of Jesus as our redeemer: *"Jesus Christ . . . gave himself for us to redeem us"* and *"Redemption . . . is in Christ Jesus"* (Titus 2:14; Rom.3:24). Many more examples of Jesus being offered as the redeemer of slaves are scattered throughout the New Testament. 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 (1 Peter 1:18-19).

Jesus has redeemed us from, and to, many things. Jesus has redeemed us from the curse of the law, Satan and demons, our sinful flesh, and sin. Jesus has redeemed us to a glorified resurrected body and eternal life with God upon the return of Jesus.

For Whom Did Jesus Christ Die?

John 3.16 says that God *"loved the world."* Hebrews 2:9 tells us that Jesus *"tasted death for everyone."* And, 1 John 2:2 says that he is the propitiation for *"the whole world"*. So in light of this how can anyone say that Jesus Christ did not die for everyone? First, let me start off by saying that *everyone* limits the atonement. Everyone, that is, with the exception of the Universalist (the view that all will be saved). The Arminian limits the power of the atonement, saying that the cross did not definitively *save* anyone, but made redemption possible for all. The Calvinist, on the other hand, limit the extent of the atonement, asserting that it does not save every person, but only the elect.

Before going any further let me say, in respect to the value of the atonement of Christ, *it is infinite*. You could not add value to what Jesus did on the cross. Jesus is the begotten Son and Messiah, who offered himself to the eternal and infinite Father, as an eternal and infinite sacrifice through the Holy Spirit in order to obtain eternal redemption for us. What we have to deal with is a choice. As B.B. Warfield said, *"The things we have to choose between are an atonement of high value, or an atonement of wide extension. The two cannot go together."* Jesus Christ either died for everyone, nobody, or the elect.

It is without much dispute that the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus has an Old Testament flavor. The OT sacrifices were patterned after their ultimate prototype, the supreme sacrifice, the Lamb of God (Heb. 9:11-14; 13:10-13). So, what we see in the OT, specifically in a passage like Leviticus 16, are innocent animals being imputed with the sins of the people, then, being slaughtered or cast out into the wilderness, in their place. The priest would go in and offer the animal and then come out and the people's sins were dealt with on this Day of Atonement. You do not see them walking away from the bloody temple rejoicing in the potentiality of atonement, but with the accomplishment of atonement.

Jesus' sacrifice is substitutionary. This is one of the main points of our Christian faith. The reality that the Savior actually suffered in the place of sinners is in the forefronts of our beliefs. We see this pictured beautifully in the New Testament:

2 Corinthians 5:21 "He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." (Note the type in Numbers 21:6 – 9)

Galatians 3:13 "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us"

1 Peter 3:18 "For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit;"

John Murray, in his book "*Redemption Accomplished and Applied*," wrote: *"If we concentrate on the thought of redemption, we shall be able perhaps to sense more readily the impossibility of universalizing the atonement. What does redemption mean? It does not mean redeemability, that we are placed in a redeemable position. It means that Christ purchased and procured redemption. This is the triumphant note of the New Testament whenever it plays on the redemptive chord. Christ redeemed us to God by his blood (Rev. 5:9). He obtained eternal redemption (Heb. 9.12). "He gave himself for us in order that he might redeem us from all iniquity and purify to himself a people for his own possession, zealous of good works" (Tit. 2.14). It is to beggar the concept of redemption as an effective securement of release by price and by power to construe it as anything less than the effectual accomplishment which secures the salvation of those who are its objects. Christ did not come to put men in a redeemable position but to redeem to himself a people."*

The real question comes down to did he or didn't he? Did Jesus Christ satisfy divine wrath upon that cross or didn't he? If he didn't then who will? And when? But, if he did, then for whom?

The Intent of the Atonement

What was Jesus intention? He said that he was to lay his life down for his sheep and his sheep alone. "*I am the good shepherd, and I know my own and my own know me, even as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep."* (John 10:14-15). It is the sheep of Jesus that are on his mind as he approaches the cross. He does not go to the cross with the sheep of Joseph Smith, the sheep of Muhammad, or the sheep of Buddha on his mind. No, he goes to the cross with HIS sheep on HIS mind. Those who will accept his atoning sacrifice. Reading further you see his point. *"I have other sheep, which are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will hear my voice; and they will become one flock with one shepherd."* (John 10:16).

Do you see His point? *"I must bring them…they will hear my voice"* Or if we may shorten it… *"I must…and they will"* Jesus Christ is going to the cross with the certainty that HIS sheep will hear his voice and come to him. If Jesus has not already shown his hand in terms of his view on the atonement, he does so in verse 26. The Jews were questioning him and he tells them that the atonement is not for them. Look for yourself: "*But you do not believe because you are not of my sheep."* (John 10:26).

Who did Jesus say he was dying for? His sheep. Are these guys part of his fold? No! Jesus just limited the atonement.

He also applies this limitation when he prays for His followers in John 17. *"I have given them the words which you gave me, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you did send me. I am praying for them. I am not praying for the world but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours. All mine are yours and yours are mine, and I am glorified in them"* (John 17:8 - 10). Jesus prays for his sheep, that is, those who will believe upon his word. *"I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word"* (v. 20).

The nature of the atonement is substitutionary, it is vicarious. Jesus lived, died and was raised for our sins (1 Cor. 15.3-5). It also happened at a point of time never to be repeated again (Heb. 10.10). Therefore, Jesus accomplished the necessary redemption for all of his sheep. He fully satisfied and removed divine wrath while earning divine favor for his people. Therefore, when we speak of a limited atonement we are referring to a limited scope, not a limited value or power.

How Does God Triumph Through the Cross?

VICTORY IN CHRIST

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. Jesus himself confirmed this fact at the beginning of his earthly ministry when he said he had come to set captives free (Luke 4:16 – 21). 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 a son would be born of a woman and would grow to be a man who would battle with Satan and stomp his head, defeat him, and liberate people from their captivity to Satan, sin, death, and the lake of fire. We now know that that son was Jesus.

Leading up to the cross, Satan entered one of Jesus' own disciples, Judas Iscariot, and conspired with him to betray Jesus 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 (1Cor. 2:6-9). 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."*

The authority of the Devil and his demons has already ended. Matthew 28:18 makes it 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 allow His Son to die in our place to liberate us from captivity to Satan, sin, and death, other than his wonderful love.

Restitution

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 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. 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, violence, and sexual sin. People are stained and defiled by the filth of sins that other people commit and that are committed against them. In Scripture, places, objects (such as the marriage bed), (Hebrews 13:4) and people are defiled by sin. Subsequently, the Old Testament and the Gospel 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 results.

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. We call this restitution, whereby our sin is taken away so that we are made clean through Jesus, who is our scapegoat. 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. (Leviticus 16:30)

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. (Jeremiah 33:8).

On that day there shall be a fountain opened . . . to cleanse them from sin and uncleanness. (Zechariah 13:1)

Jesus not only went to the cross to die for our sin, but also to scorn our shame. As Hebrews 12:1–3 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 "cleanse 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, baptism, and the wearing of white in eternity as a continual reminder of the restitution Christ has done for us.

How Does God Inspire Us Through the Cross?

CHRIST'S EXAMPLE

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 life. Throughout Jesus' life he repeatedly stated that the purpose of his life (and ours) was to glorify God, and to make the Father's character visible. Jesus' glorifying God included dying on the cross. 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 (Hebrews 12:1-6).

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 (Matthew 16:24). 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 Him. 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:

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 (1 Peter 2:20-24).

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" (John 3:16).

"Greater love has no one than this, that someone lays down his life for his friends" (John 15:13).

"But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8).

"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 he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (1 John 4:9-10).

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 relationship with Him to be reconciled. Through the cross, Jesus took away our sin so that we could be reconciled to God. Thankfully, God not only graciously takes away our sin, but mercifully extends himself to us, knowing that we desperately need him (1 Timothy 1:15-16, Titus 3:4-5)

The cross is something done by you. The cross is something done for you.

JOURNAL

Notes & Reflections

What stood out to you in this study? Write down questions, verses to look up, and what God is teaching you.