



# THE CROSS-CENTERED FAITH

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# THE CROSS-CENTERED FAITH

## A METAPHORICAL HYPOTHESIS

(Imagine with me for a moment. Just a moment to look into a hypothetical conversation in eternity. It could have taken place before the creation of the world between the Father, Son and Spirit. After all, something gave birth to the idea of our creation. And in trying to discover that something, be patient as we imagine an awesome conversation that possibly took place between the three eternal existences of Deity before the creation of the world.)

At the eternal planning table, the Father brought up the subject, *“We three are love. Is it not the nature of true love to express itself toward others? Must we dwell in eternity without objects on which to lovingly express ourselves? How can true love exist without expression? How can we be defined as love without having in our eternal presence those who must have our love showered upon them through our grace and mercy?”*

*“It is truly our nature to be expressive,”* responded the Son. *“It is our nature to manifest ourselves to the existence of something other than ourselves. If we are who we say we are, then we must love. We must create something upon which we can pour out our love.”*

The Spirit added, *“But if we bring into existence those who are not after our nature, then there will be problems, a lot of problems. In order to bring into existence that which can truly be an object of our love, there must be conditions. And the conditions might not justify the act of cre-*

*ation. Are we really willing to take this risk?”*

*“I know,”* lamented the Father. *“But if we are who we say we are, then we have no other choice. Love must be expressed. It must have an object upon which the most profound nature of its essence can be showered. Otherwise, we do not exist as true love.”*

*“Therefore,”* replied the Son, *“We must do the act. Regardless of all the risks, we have no choice because of the nature of who we are. We are love, and love must love. True love cannot exist without the existence of that which is frail and finite.”*

*“But for the act to be real,”* interjected the Spirit, *“We cannot hold back in what we create. What we seek to create must also have volition as we. Our created creature must be able to make choices, and because of their wrong choices they will become broken. If we create, but do not give the right and freedom of our creation to make choices, then they will judge us to be hard, fiend-*

ish, ... even unloving for sending into destruction those who cannot live perfect before us. In the midst of the results of their bad choices, they will question why we even created them in the first place.”

“And if we create such beings,” continued the Spirit, “most will simply rebel against us. In fact, because most will rebel they will think that we have destined many of them to a destruction concerning which they had no choice. They will then judge us to be fiendish, something that is totally contrary to who we really are. Is this a risk that we are willing to take? Because so many will reject our love, some will even deny that we exist because our creation will appear to have all gone wrong.”

“Regardless of the risks,” sighed the Father, “we all want to bring into existence those on whom we can eternally shower our love. We cannot be loving without expressing love. It is a truth about us that we cannot ignore, and thus, we must do what must be done.”

“But I want to remind all of us,” cautioned the Spirit. “If we go through with this plan, we will bring upon ourselves all sorts of grief. We will mourn with pain as our creation goes wrong. Since in our creation there must be the freedom of the created to make choices, then we know what will happen. Those who make all the bad choices will bring great pain and suffering into the lives of those of ours who will respond to our love. We

know that no preprogrammed robots can be created, for no robot can truly respond to us by saying, ‘I love you too.’ And because no robots can express a reciprocal love, most of the creation will go wrong because the majority will move away from who we really are.”

“I know. I know,” replied the Son. “But we cannot just sit here and allow love to go unexpressed ... idle in eternity. We must do something. Therefore, I am willing to make the move regardless of the consequences. I will create the object of our love and I will take ownership of what I create, including doing whatever is necessary to bring our creation into eternity with us.”

“If you do that, my Son, it will cost you dearly,” grieved the Father.

“I know, but what else can we do? I know that if we truly create those who can truly respond to us with their love, there are risks, tremendous risks. In fact, most of those we create will simply deny through their behavior that we even exist. But again, what else can we do to unleash our love? It is simply not in the nature of who we are to sit idle. So because we are the true eternal existence of love, we must do what we have to do. We must create.”

The Spirit again cautioned, “Must I remind everyone here that this cannot be a one-man show? We are one, and because we are one any one existence of ourselves must act as the whole. If we go ahead with this plan,

everyone will be involved. I will take the part of hovering over what we create. Since we are about to create those in whom we will invest the power to make choices, I will make sure that they are not left without direction. We simply cannot allow our creation to wander in obscurity in the environment for which we will create for them. They must know what we expect of them, and they will always need a road map back to us.”

The Father also volunteered, “I will assume the totality of control, and thus be the occasion and object for love to be revealed to those who are created. In order for love to be illustrated, we must be as that which we desire of our creation. But Son, again, do you fully understand that if you go through with this plan the personal cost to you will be overwhelming?”

With a tear in His eye, the Father continued to remind the Son, “If you go through with this, you will never again be as we are now. We will all continue to be one, but your existence will change forever for the sake of those whom you are about to create. Can you eternally drink of this cup of sacrifice?”

“I will take ownership of what I create,” the Son confidently affirmed. “I know the sacrifice will be humiliating and eternal, but being in eternity

without reflecting our love on others is worse than giving up that which I am in order to identify with our creation. The benefits far outweigh the eternal sacrifice.”

“But you know the risks,” the Spirit also reminded the Son. “If you create a being that has the right to make choices, you will be bringing into existence moral chaos that will result in untold suffering and evil. Because of so much suffering and evil they will accuse us of being both cruel or fiendish, if not deny our existence altogether because of so much suffering and evil that will result from their freedom to make choices. Are you willing to be overwhelmed with the suffering that will result from this sacrifice that you are about to make in order to bring our creation back to us into eternal dwelling?”

“I am!” the Son confidently responded. “What else can we do? We have no other option. We are love, and love can do nothing else. I am willing to create what will become a moral mess and I am willing to clean up the mess, regardless of the extreme sacrifice that is necessary to make it so.”

“So then,” the Father sighed, “Let it begin.”

“In the beginning God created ....”

(Genesis 1:1)

All that has existed throughout history, and into the future of mankind, centers around the atoning sacrifice of the incarnate Son of God on the cross. The destiny of the obedient in the loving eternal arms of God depends on a planned offering that happened two thousand years ago outside Jerusalem. From the seed promise to Eve, through the call of Abraham, to the birth and existence of national Israel, and finally to the very foot of the cross, all of God's struggles with man in human history was to bring His Son to an atoning sacrifice on a cruel cross. The community of God since the cross is the result of that event, for the cross was more than an historical event. It was the pinnacle of a preexistent "table plan" to bring those of faith into the eternal dwelling of a loving Deity. Without our focus on the centrality of the cross, we can never fully understand and appreciate the work of God throughout history. We can never understand God Himself. We would conclude, therefore, that without the Spirit explaining through revelation the six-hour cross event, we could never understand the meaning of our lives and the reason for our existence. The cross is the explanation for all things. It is the foundation upon which we discover why we are here, and God's intended destiny for us who believe

## Chapter 1

### Nothing But The Cross

Have you ever wondered why the apostle Paul made this statement: "***For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified***" (1 Co 2:2)? If you have, then you, as we, are on our way to restoring again our focus on the cross. Now to what extent did Paul believe what he said in this statement? If what he just stated is true, then it is possibly time to reconsider our legal outlines on "church" and look again at what should be the central message of our preaching. It is time to rethink our faith and regenerate our commitment to God, for we may have strayed from the very foundation upon which all history exists, and the answer to our very existence.

It was the eternal plan of the infi-

nite God that a mediator between God and man be offered for His creation. This plan was established before the creation of those whom He sought to deliver from this world in order to bring into eternity (Rv 13:8). To accomplish this plan, there had to be a divine link between God and man. That link was the incarnate Son of God. "***For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus***" (1 Tm 2:5).

The message of a crucified mediator is unique with Christianity. It is contrary to the hero worship of man-made idol religions and revered icons. For this reason, the concept of a faith based on a cross does not appeal to the rich and famous. It is repulsive to the proud and arrogant. "***For the preaching of the***

**cross is foolishness to those who are perishing.** *But to us who are being saved, it is the power of God*” (1 Co 1:18). The wise men of the world will always consider “cross Christianity” a scandalous religion. But those who come to understand the awesome beauty of the Suffering Servant of God on the cross will have a life-changing experience.

Even in the early days of Christianity the warning went out to the rebellious. In the context of Acts 13:38-41 Paul quoted Habakkuk 1:5 concerning the prophesied astonishment of people at the mystery of God. It would be unbelievable by those who were consumed in their own religiosity. Paul warned the Jewish audience of Antioch of Pisidia, “*Beware therefore, lest that come on you which is spoken in the prophets*” (At 13:40). Habakkuk had prophesied, “*Behold, you despisers, and marvel and perish! For I work a work in your days, a work that you will in no way believe, though a man declare it to you*” (At 13:41; see Hb 1:5).

So why would the concept of the cross be so difficult to believe by most of the world? The concept of a crucified incarnate God was contrary to the nature of arrogant men and man-made religions. Men conceive of gods who crush and punish. But the one true and living God gave out of Himself on behalf of His creation. And in this giving, there was incredible sacrifice. It all began with the lowest death the Son of God could have experienced in His incarnate flesh. When the text says, “*He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross,*” (Ph 2:8), there was

no accident about the foreplanned event of the eternal God. Our Savior knowingly sought to bring on Himself shame and humiliation, even cruelty, in order to give us hope and the opportunity for eternal dwelling. It was an incredible plan of suffering. It was one that would manifest the core nature of a true God who created man, but not with predestined punishment because of man’s fallibility. It was a plan of hope to come into the presence of our eternal loving Father.

The cross defines the God who is beyond the definition of any word in our dictionaries. And because it does, it was a mystery to men throughout history until its revelation two thousand years ago. In some ways, it is still a mystery as we struggle to look through the metaphors that explain the event in order to comprehend the sacrifice that took place on the “old rugged cross.” If we would understand God, therefore, we must open the “dictionary” of the cross. We must step through the doors of metaphors in order to understand in some way this God who allowed Himself to be crucified by those He created. Rousseau was right when he said, “Socrates died like a philosopher, but Jesus Christ died like a God.” Therefore, we seek to understand the God on the cross in order to understand the God beyond the cross.

#### **A. The shame and humiliation of the cross:**

The Greek word for “cross” is *stauros*, though the word *skolops* is used as a Greek synonym in some texts.

Throughout early church history crosses were portrayed as upright beams upon which a cross beam was attached to either nail or tie the arms of the condemned. To the Romans, the cross was a cruel instrument to humiliate the criminal in order to bring about his death. It was meant to strike terror in the minds and hearts of the beholders. Throughout their early history, the Jews considered hanging on a tree a thing only the cursed should suffer (See Dt 21:23; Gl 3:13). Because of their repulsion of such a form of death, many Jews rejected the crucified Jesus as the Messiah of Israel.

Cicero, in *Pro Rabirio*, spoke of the cross in reference to Roman culture, "Let the very name of the cross be far away not only from the body of a Roman citizen, but even from his thoughts, his eyes, his ears." Since crucifixion was such an abhorrent form of execution in Roman culture, one can only imagine the extent to which the Jews rejected the crucifixion of the One who was truly their Messiah. But at the same time, we consider in awe those early Jews who looked past the abhorrence of the cross in order to discover the Christ of the cross, and thus, the fulfillment of the prophecies concerning the Suffering Servant of God.

The cross was an ancient form of execution that was meant to terrorize any who would oppose a conquering army or violate the law of a dominant government. Alexander the Great crucified 2,000 Tyrian captives after the fall of the city of Tyre. Greeks, Romans, Egyptians, Persians and Babylonians all crucified the rebellious. Because crucifixion was

considered by the Romans to be the means of death and punishment of rebellious slaves and hardened criminals, they exempted any Roman citizen from the indignity of such a death.

But when an angry mob was asked what to do with Jesus, they cried out, "**Let Him be crucified!**" (Mt 27:22). Their cry for Jesus' crucifixion was the worst possible means of death that could be brought upon the one they opposed. The Jews considered the cross a means of death for the cursed, as well as a means to subject Jesus to the most indignant manner of death possible. The religious leaders of Israel wanted Jesus to suffer the death of a common criminal, the death of one who had rebelled against their traditional religiosity (See Mk 7:1-9). And thus Isaiah's prophecy was fulfilled. "*And He made His grave with the wicked, and with a rich man in His death .... **Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise Him***" (Is 53:9,10).

And all this "pleased the Lord"? Isaiah's prophecy startles us! Why would God resort to the most humiliating and cruel means of death for Himself in order to redeem by sacrifice those He had created from the dust of the earth? Why would God incarnate and die for clods of dirt in which there is a spirit in order to bring them into eternity? The message of the cross is a message of shame and humiliation on our behalf. Nevertheless, it is a message that reveals the true God of heaven. There is a grandeur in the thought of a God who would come so far and go so low in order to lift so high those He had created out of the dust

of the earth. It is such an incredible concept of love. It is so incredible that those of the world simply reject such as foolishness. But for those who see the cross as a manifestation of the God of love, they are overwhelmed to the extent that they are willing to sacrifice their total being in response to that love.

## B. The public spectacle of the cross:

Jesus was not allowed to die a quiet death in some obscure place. He was taken outside the city of Jerusalem and put on open display before thousands of onlookers (Mt 27:27-31). Those who cried out for His blood rejoiced in His public display on a cross before all to mock and ridicule. *“Then they spit on Him, and took the reed and struck Him on the head again and again. And after they had mocked Him, they took the robe off Him and put His own garments back on Him, and led Him away to crucify Him”* (Mt 27:30,31). *“Likewise the chief priests, with the scribes and elders, were mocking Him, saying, ‘He saved others; Himself He cannot save. He is the King of Israel, let Him now come down from the cross and we will believe in Him’* (Mt 27:41,42).

If we were theologians in a room planning the development of a new religion, then the event of a crucified leader would certainly not be the foundation upon which we would establish our movement. The public display and picture of a bleeding leader on a cross would not be appealing to those whom we would lead in our new faith. In fact, the

concept would be repugnant, if not repulsive. Adherents would not be drawn to our new faith, but repelled. How could our new faith be built on the shame of a crucified leader? It could not unless there was something Divine about the event.

As we seek to discover the indignity of the cross, we are led to believe that God planned something that was so incredible that it would be difficult to believe. But He had a plan. And the plan was first indicated from the mouth of a man who wore animal skins and ate grasshoppers. *“Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world?”* (Jn 1:29). That crucified “Lamb of God” would draw out of humanity all the “animal skinned clothed and grasshopper eating” believers who could identify with the Lamb Himself who was worthy to be their leader into eternity.

## C. The innocent victim of the cross:

Isaiah had prepared the minds of the faithful in Israel in reference to the coming Messiah. *“He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so He did not open His mouth”* (Is 53:7). *“He had done no violence, nor was any deceit in His mouth”* (Is 53:9). If Jesus were a common criminal, He would have been justly punished under Roman law. But he was found innocent. Even the Roman official Pilate reminded the people who cried out for His crucifixion, *“I have found no reason for death in Him”* (Lk 23:22). If Jesus were innocent of any crime, then the cross was a scandal. It was a misno-

mer of justice. Would such a “misnomer of justice” be considered the foundation upon which a new faith could be founded and continued throughout history?

If Jesus were only a man, then certainly no one would be so naive as to sacrificially dedicate his life to such a victim of injustice. We are almost led to believe that God intended that the cross be so humiliating, so repulsive, and such a miscarriage of justice, that it would attract only those who would be willing to suffer the same in their own lives. It would appeal only to those who have been abused and used, exploited and unjustly spoken against, even those of society who have had to scrape a living out of their environment by wearing only animal skins and eating bugs to survive. If this is the “way of the cross,” we cringe, but we are also held in awe at its appeal to the poorest of the poor. We then wonder at the God who would have conceived and planned such a lowly appeal to the lowest of humanity. What God is this in which we believe? If the “way of the cross leads home,” then do we really want to be at home among the poorest of the poor, the most humble of society? We most certainly do since it will be in the presence of our Creator! So we cry out to the innocent victim on the cross, “Take us there! Take us home!”

#### **D. Political victimization of the cross:**

We must keep in mind that the Jews had no power of capital punishment since Palestine was an occupied land by the Romans during the days of Jesus. Only

the Roman government had this power, and thus, if Jesus were to be crucified, only by the authority of the Roman government could this happen. And such was the case.

The times were volatile, and thus, Pilate, the Roman representative of Palestine, sought to pacify the mob of Jews by reasoning with them concerning the innocence of Jesus (Lk 23:22). However, he had to succumb to their pleas to crucify Jesus. He did so in order to prevent what appeared to him to be a potential uprising of the Jews on this most volatile occasion of the Jewish Passover and Pentecost feasts when the most radical Jews were in town. It was the Romans, therefore, who nailed Jesus to the cross. Jesus was crucified according to the laws of Rome, but at the wishes of the angry Jewish mob. The rebellious Jews bore the guilt, but the Romans did the act.

From the viewpoint of the Romans, therefore, the cross was a result of the politics of the times. Jesus was a victim of a political struggle between Rome and the Jews. Nevertheless, Pilate’s efforts were only temporarily successful as the resistance of the Jews continued to grow to the point of rebellion against Roman occupation. It grew to the point that in A.D. 70 Rome rendered a final crushing blow to Jewish nationalism by the destruction of the Jewish state and Jerusalem. In all this political turmoil in the last years of national Israel, to the Romans the crucifixion of Jesus was simply just another execution of a supposed “king” of Israel who would seek to lead the Jews in rebellion against Rome (Compare At 21:38).

But in the plan of God, the occasion for the event in history was right. *“But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son ...”* (Gl 4:4). There is more in this statement than a simple fulfillment of prophecy. The prophecy was fulfilled because the time in history was right to redeem the broken. Throughout the millennia, the political landscape had been laid by God for the crucifixion of the incarnate God.

We must never assume that the cross was an accident, and thus, an unplanned work of God. Some have been so mistaken concerning the foreplanned event of the cross that they have affirmed that because the Jews rejected Jesus, God postponed a supposed earthly kingdom reign of Jesus. He postponed the kingdom reign on earth and then supposedly established the church as an after thought. Such an insidious teaching strikes directly at the heart of the eternal plan and purpose of the cross in history for the salvation of man. Such a theology nullifies all prophecy concerning the suffering servant who would give Himself in order that the people be healed. Such theologies minimize the importance of the cross in reference to God’s eternal plan to bring His creation into His eternal presence. And for this reason, it is almost impossible for those who maintain such theologies to understand fully the predestined fate of the Son of God on the cross of Calvary.

#### **E. Fulfilled destiny of the cross:**

At the time of the cross, the dis-

ciples had lost all hope that Jesus would be their expected earthly king (See At 1:6). Their hopes were dashed, and subsequently, they went their way. Two of the disciples on the road to Emmaus said to Jesus, whom they did not recognize, *“But we were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel”* (Lk 24:21). In a similar emotional state, Peter despondently said, *“I am going fishing”* (Jn 21:3). The point is that the disciples were looking for no martyrs for their faith. Death by the cross was a complete surprise. The One they thought would be a conquering leader who would lead them in the restoration of national Israel was hanged on a cross outside Jerusalem, just like the false messiahs that had previously risen in Israel.

Martyrs are the result of the hopes of followers whose faith in them motivates the continuation of a movement based on the thinking of the martyrs. But Jesus was to be no martyr. What the disciples did not understand at the time of the crucifixion, and even after the resurrection, was the fact that destiny was fulfilled in Jesus. They did not at first understand that the cross was the foreplanned mystery of God for the salvation of mankind. They did not understand this until Jesus explained all the prophecies concerning the event. He rebuked them by saying, *“O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken. Was it not necessary that the Christ suffer these things and to enter into His glory?”* (Lk 24:25,26). They needed to be taught, even though they were standing right

there in the presence of the resurrected Redeemer. Jesus continued, “*And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, He explained to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself*” (Lk 24:27). It was as Paul later wrote, “*He made known to me the mystery*” (Ep 3:3). And now we have that mystery revealed and written for our learning. “*Therefore,*” Paul continued, “*when you read you can understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ*” (Ep 3:4). The cross was a mystery until it was revealed, and thus Jesus’ death was not an accident. It was His destiny.

#### **F. Betrayal and the cross:**

If we view the cross from a strictly human standpoint, then its event was simply the result of a plan gone wrong. On the night of betrayal when Judas “*drew near to Jesus to kiss Him*” (Lk 22:47), what was in his mind was more than thirty pieces of silver. We would assume that Judas had in mind a scheme to force the earthly kingship of Jesus, for such was an erroneous hope of all the disciples (At 1:6). To the time of the Last Supper in the upper room, “*there was also a dispute among them as to which one of them should be considered the greatest*” (Lk 22:24). This was the last hour Jesus was with His disciples, and yet, they were disputing among themselves as to which one should be considered the greatest in a supposed earthly kingdom. They were looking forward to something in the future, which thing Judas possibly thought he could expedite by his betrayal actions.

But the actions of Judas all went wrong when the riotous mob in Jerusalem took control of the situation by taking control of Jesus. In remorse, Judas threw down the thirty pieces of silver and hanged himself. Jesus went to the cross. And the disciples simply lost all hope and either went home or went fishing. This is not a planned foundation upon which to develop a new religion. And this is simply not something in which followers would take pride. Who would preach a faith that was based on a betrayal scheme that went wrong? Who would give his life to preach a message that was started by eleven disciples who sought to rewrite a betrayal scheme of their crucified leader?

The fact is that the betrayal scheme was part of God’s eternal plan. And because it was, history changed by the changing of lives. The evidence of the changed lives of the disciples clearly reveals that the cross message became so deeply embedded in their very souls that they were able to stand up before all opposition and confidently proclaim, “*Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you more than to God, you judge. For we cannot but speak the things that we have seen and heard*” (At 4:19,20).

#### **G. Shame in defeat at the cross:**

Now view the cross from the standpoint of all the supposed failed promises that were made by Jesus. “*And whoever lives and believes in Me will never die*” (Jn 11:26). “*... upon this rock I will build*

*My church and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it” (Mt 16:18). “I am the door of the sheep” (Jn 10:7). “And I give to them eternal life. And they will never perish, neither will anyone snatch them out of My hand” (Jn 10:28). “And no one has ascended to heaven except He who came down from heaven, even the Son of Man” (Jn 3:13). We could go on.*

Throughout His ministry, Jesus promised victory. But at the cross, His enemies seem to have won the battle. From the viewpoint of the bystanders at the cross, therefore, Jesus would be shamed in all His false hopes and promises that He had stated throughout His ministry. There had to be more to the cross than promises. From the viewpoint of man, the cross meant shame and embarrassment. What intellectual would be drawn by such a One who reneged on all His promises?

Jesus knew that many would mock Him for all the supposed failed promises He made. *“He saved others,”* they mocked. *“Himself He cannot save. He is the King of Israel, let Him now come down from the cross and we will believe in Him” (Mt 27:42).* Jesus was willing to take the risk of being mocked for His supposedly failed promises. He was willing to be mocked for the sake of those who were sincere and honest of heart. The supposed shame of the cross, therefore, actually became the occasion and opportunity for the sincere and honest to reveal themselves. Those who would accept the shame of the cross of their Savior would later declare through their

faith in the cross, ***“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one who believes ...” (Rm 1:16).***

## **H. Failure in discipleship at the cross:**

Judas was with Jesus for over three years. He listened to and sat at the feet of the Son of God. He was in the company of great men who would go on to be world-changing personalities. And yet, Jesus seemingly failed in His efforts to truly disciple this person. But David foretold this part of the eternal plan. *“Even my own familiar friend in whom I trust, who ate my bread, has lifted up his heel against me” (Ps 41:9).*

If the encounter of Judas with Jesus was viewed simply from a human standpoint, then the cross would mean embarrassment for Jesus in that He went to death having been unsuccessful to disciple all those who were closest to Him. If we view Jesus as simply an innocent Jewish teacher who suffered execution as a common criminal, then certainly He failed. But the story never began with Jesus as simply a man and good Rabbi of Palestine. He was the incarnate Son of God who came with eternal redemption. But from the viewpoint of unbelievers, the fact that Jesus could not keep all His disciples faithful to His cause was a sign of failure. Would the cross, therefore, have any appeal to the wise of this world who value accomplishment and success? If Jesus on the cross were viewed from the eyes of the successful of worldly leadership principles, then the

world at the time of the cross event viewed Jesus as a failed leader. If the story of the gospel stopped at the cross, we might come to this conclusion. But it did not. What followed was an empty tomb. The empty tomb validated the work of God on the cross, for we remember what Paul wrote, “*Now if Christ has not been raised, then your faith is vain. You are still in your sins*” (1 Co 15:17). Jesus not only died for our sins, He was raised for our sins. The event of the gospel was successful, regardless of the thinking of the world.

The cross is repulsive to the wise of this world who have no concern for the eternal plan of redemption by God. Even the first disciples turned away because they did not understand the meaning of the cross. The two men on the

road to Emmaus expressed it well: “... *we were hoping ...*” (Lk 24:21). The eleven disciples returned home to Galilee. Their initial understanding of the cross was simply earthly, and thus, there was at first no salvational joy in the event. Those who are wise of this world consider the cross foolishness, and therefore, they often pity those who understand that the cross is the centrality of all history and the focal point of eternal redemption for all men. However, because God revealed the eternal plan of the cross, we who believe rejoice in the marvelous work of God. And because we rejoice, “*we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God*” (1 Co 1:23,24).

## Chapter 2

### The God Revealed At The Cross

As we venture further into our cross-centered faith, we begin to understand that the cross is the lens through which we look in order to build the world view of our faith. It is the gyroscope that keeps us level in times of turmoil, and the cornerstone in which we find a measuring rule to judge all the false philosophies of misguided men. When Paul reminded the Corinthians that we “**stand**” on the event of the death of Jesus for our sins and His resurrection for our hope, his metaphor pointed to mental and emotional stability (1 Co 15:1-4). The cross

brings to our inner most soul an unmovable rock of hope that will keep us focused on Christ through the greatest turmoil that life has to offer. The Spirit said it through David. “*The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, my God, my strength in whom I will trust, my shield and the horn of my salvation and my high tower*” (Ps 18:2). What a statement! **And David said that without any knowledge of the cross.** So when Paul said that we stand on the gospel, he meant just that. If our faith is not cross based, then it is a faith that is sim-

ply built on our own will to believe, not the power of the death, burial and resurrection of the incarnate Son of God.

### A. The heart of God revealed at the cross:

*“For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, so that we through patience and encouragement of the Scriptures might have hope”* (Rm 15:4; 1 Co 10:11). These were things that were written in the Old Testament. In this statement, Paul refers us back to the Old Testament Scriptures in order that we learn and understand those things upon which we can rest our hope. And in our context of inquiry, we seek to understand the longsuffering of God. In our mourning over our sin, we need a very longsuffering God, which God is revealed as He patiently worked through a rebellious people in order to bring the cross plan into reality.

In His enduring patience with Israel, we understand the hurt of God in Israel’s rejection of Him. He mourned over the spiritual adultery of His people with whom He was in a covenant relationship. Of His covenanted people, God charged, *“But you were as a wife who commits adultery, who takes foreigners instead of her husband”* (Ez 16:32). The apostasy of Israel to the gods of foreign powers was extreme. And so God’s hurt for His people was extreme. Jeremiah’s metaphor (anthropopathism) of God is vivid. *“When I would comfort Myself against sorrow, My heart is faint in Me”* (Jr 8:18). *“For the hurt of the daughter of My*

*people am I hurt. I am mourning. Astonishment has taken hold of Me”* (Jr 8:21).

We learn the heart of God as He patiently remained with Israel through times of rebellion, even to the foot of the cross. However, our understanding of God’s loving heart was still limited until we come to the cross. Our understanding of the heart of God through the Old Testament Scriptures was based on knowledge and historical events, not on the reality of the incarnation and crucifixion of God Himself by those of His own people who were misguided. We never truly understand the loving heart of God until we find ourselves at the foot of the cross looking up to the suffering incarnate God whose blood dropped on our sin-ravaged souls. It was there that we heard the awesome heart of God speak from His lips, “Forgive.” And so the crucified God did what no man is able to do. *“Their sins and their iniquities I will remember no more”* (Hb 8:12).

The Israelites before the cross could never fully understand the nature of a loving God until God was on a cross outside Jerusalem. When God made Himself vulnerable to His creation, shaming Himself even unto death, yea, the death of the cross, then we begin to comprehend somewhat the nature of His loving heart we could never have imagined after our own emotional inventions. Religions that bypass the cross, therefore, are grossly inadequate in understanding the one true and living God. They are guilty of creating gods after the corrupted imaginations of men who have hidden

agendas or ulterior motives. The God of heaven makes men, but religions make gods. And when we come to the cross, no religion of man has ever been able to create the God that we see there. Never!

## B. The true God revealed at the cross:

Men have throughout millennia created gods after their own imagination. However, they could never have conceived of a God who would be and behave as the one true and living God that we experience on the cross. To conceive of a God who humbles Himself to weakness in order to become the victim of His creation, is simply beyond the invention of human minds. We just do not conceive of gods behaving this way. The cross, therefore, exposes the true loving heart of God for His creation. If He were not truly love, then He would never have been there in the first place.

It is for this reason that the cross is our road map to the God of heaven. Such was the message of Paul's poetry of Philippians 2:5-11. This text is not simply an outlay of historical facts. Paul is talking about our minds identifying with the mind of a humbled God. He is not giving a simple history lesson on the incarnate God. "*Let this mind be in you*" (Ph 2:5) means to "*be transformed by the renewing of your mind*" (Rm 12:2). The mentality into which we must be transformed was the humbling journey of the Son of God from the form of God to the form of the cross. It involves knowing that which we have to sacrifice. It is knowing and willing not to live for our-

selves, but for Christ Jesus (Gl 2:20). Jesus was before "*in the form of God*" (Ph 2:6). The cross, therefore, means transformation from one state of mind to another. "*He made Himself of no reputation ... being made in the likeness of men*" (Ph 2:7). The cross means humbling oneself to being vulnerable to humiliation. "*He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross*" (Ph 2:8).

If we are willing to take this journey of transformation with the Son of God, then we will reign in life with Him. "*God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name that is above every name*" (Ph 2:9). And for those who are willing to take this transforming journey with Christ, there is also reign. "*For if by one man's offense death reigned through the one, much more they who receive abundance of grace and the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the one, Jesus Christ*" (Rm 5:17). "*For if we died with Him, we will also live with Him. If we suffer, we will also reign with Him*" (2 Tm 2:11,12). The only way for the incarnate Son to reign in heaven was through the death of the cross. Likewise, our only way to "reign in life" with Him is through the cross of Jesus. Jesus knew this, and thus, He was willing to lead the way for us to discover our reign with Him through the bearing of our cross. So when He said, "*And whoever does not bear his own cross and come after Me, cannot be My disciple*" (Lk 14:27), He meant that we must look for a cross in this life, not for crowns. And until we find the cross of

Christ and take ownership of it as our means of being transformed to the mind of Christ, we will never understand the God of the cross. This is the God we can never understand if we do not go to the cross with His Son.

Now could any man in his wildest imagination come up with a “theology” as this in order to start a new religion? The one true and living God is as this. The imagined gods of men urge us to seek crowns before crosses. They encourage us from pulpits throughout Christendom to buy and wear silk-skin suits, not animal skins of goats. They sit us at the

tables of fine cuisine, not to search around for grasshoppers to eat. They encourage us to build mansions on earth for ourselves, not to find fox holes in which to dwell. Our created gods move us to buy and lavish ourselves with gold. But those who have the mind of the One who went to the cross sends forth His disciples to say as Peter and John, “Silver and gold have I none.” Could we have imagined the God of the cross as depicted by some unknown writer in his words below when he compared Alexander the Great of the Greek Empire with Jesus?

### **JESUS AND ALEXANDER**

Jesus and Alexander died at thirty-three;  
 One lived and died for self; one died for you and me.  
 The Greek died on a throne; the Jew died on a cross.  
 One's life a triumph seemed; the other but a loss.  
 One led vast armies forth; the other walked alone.  
 One shed a whole world's blood; the other gave His own.  
 One gained the world in life, and lost it in death.  
 The other lost his life, to win the whole world's faith.

Jesus and Alexander died at thirty-three;  
 One died in Babylon; the other on Calvary.  
 One gained all for self; and one Himself He gave.  
 One conquered every throne; the other every grave.  
 The one made himself God; the God made Himself less.  
 The one lived but to blast; the other but to bless.  
 When died the Greek, forever fell his throne of swords.  
 But Jesus died to live forever, to be Lord of Lords.

Jesus and Alexander died at thirty-three.  
 The Greek made all men slaves; the Jew made all men free.  
 One built a throne on blood; the other built on love.  
 One was born on earth; the other from above.  
 One gained all the earth, to lose all earth and heaven.  
 The other gave up all, that all to Him be given.  
 The Greek forever dies; the Jew forever lives.  
 He loses all who gets and wins all things who gives.

### C. Drawn from far away by the cross:

We can never understand how far away from God we were because of our sin until we understand how far God had to come to reconcile us again unto Himself. When Isaiah said that our sins separate us from God (Is 59:2), we can never comprehend the magnitude of that separation until we realize that the Son of God became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross, in order to restore our fellowship with Him. When we begin to comprehend the God who became flesh on our behalf (Jn 1:14), then we begin to understand the tremendous ransom price the Son had to pay for us. This is the foundation of John's self-reflective statement, "*If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us*" (1 Jn 1:8). How can the truth be in one who is not moved to mourn over the cost of the cross? Our entire emotional being is wrapped up in the truth of the cross, for the cross reveals how far God had to send His Son from the "form of God" in order to bring us back into His fellowship. The more we understand these things, the more life-changing they become.

The cross not only reveals the God of love, it reveals ourselves to ourselves. Paul wrote, "*For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men*" (Ti 2:11). Paul was speaking of the revelation of the God of grace in Jesus. Through Jesus, God was reaching out for us through the cross. The apostles were privileged to experience Jesus personally. John reflected on his early experience with Jesus by explain-

ing, "*And we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth*" (Jn 1:14). Jesus means more than a set of teachings, as was characteristic of the Old Testament law of Moses. "*For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ*" (Jn 1:17). The coming of Jesus was about Him and what He brought for our problem of sin. He brought Himself as our Deliverer in order to deliver us from that which we could not deliver ourselves. Through Him we understand what He meant in Matthew 5:4. "*Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.*" When we understand how distant the One on the cross was from "*being in the form of God,*" then we begin to comprehend the statement, "*For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son ...*" (Jn 3:16). Who would not be driven to mourn over his sins when understanding the loving grace that was revealed on the atoning cross by the incarnate Son of God? John was right. Whoever does not confess his sins, has no truth in him because the cross does not move him to mourn over his sin.

It is hard for those with too many success stories in their lives to confess up to failure in sin. It is almost impossible for the overconfident to turn from gazing at their shelves of trophies and awards to gaze upon an old rugged cross. It is for this reason that the self-confident and earthly awarded find it difficult to confess failure to God at the foot of the cross. On the other hand, it is easy for those who have been wrecked by a

cruel world to confess their fallibility. They have few success stories for which they have been awarded trophies. Their character, therefore, has not been hardened by much glory and self-proclaimed accomplishments. To those who have been humbled by the struggles of life, the cross is an opportunity to confess their failures and claim the crown of victory. The cross appeals to those who find it easy to confess their sins.

The revelation of the extent to which God had to go in order to reconcile us unto Himself, magnifies the ugliness of our sin and its dire consequences. Self-realization of our sin should humble us to confession. The cross manifests the total inability of man to reconcile himself unto God. The cross reveals this sickness in ourselves. It humbles our arrogance, our narcissistic confidence that “we are the man.” In all of our ego, arrogance, and selfishness, we are shocked by the cross. We are “*cut to the heart*” by its message (At 2:37). We are driven to our knees and cut to the very inner being of our existence. The cross digs out of our inner soul those corrupted lusts on which we have depended so much in a life of individualism, competition and awards. The cross helps us understand why “few that are in high places are called.” But many do respond to the message of the suffering Savior. It is these who can write, “*I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God unto salvation ...*” (Rm 1:16). It is these who have cried out and thanked God, “*Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from the body of this death? I*

*thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord*” (Rm 7:24,25). As Paul, we all thank God for delivering us from our brokenness in sin.

#### **D. A new community order of love from the cross:**

“*A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this will all men know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another*” (Jn 13:34,35). How else would we identify those who have responded to the loving heart of God? Since God is love, those who are His would be signaled before the world by their behavior of love. Because He “so loved” them (Jn 3:16), they show His love before the world. “*He who does not love does not know God, for God is love*” (1 Jn 4:8). Any faith, therefore, that does not manifest the heart of the loving God must be suspect. We know those who are of the way of the cross because of their love for one another. Paul wrote, “*... for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another*” (1 Th 4:9). We are taught this love by the love of the cross. It is an ongoing teaching as the love is ongoing in the community of God.

The loving community of the cross was described by Jesus with hyperbole. “*If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple*” (Lk 14:26). Matthew’s record of Jesus’ statement serves as a commen-

tary to Luke's hyperbole. "*He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me*" (Mt 10:37). Those of the community of God love as they have been loved. John stated, "*We love because He first loved us*" (1 Jn 4:19). But the extent of this love is not fully defined in John's brief statement. The new commandment involves the intensity of the love the disciples have for one another. "*Seeing you have purified your souls in obeying the truth in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart*" (1 Pt 1:22). Our love for one another is as the loving Father so fervently loved us that He gave His Son for us. The cross, therefore, is the definition of the love by which the new commandment is taught to the disciples of Jesus.

When we thus come into the community of God, we come into a community of slaves who seek to serve one another out of love (See Mk 10:42-44). We come into the ekklesia (church) wherein we are directed, "*But love your enemies,*

*and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return ...*" (Lk 6:35). "*You will then be the children of the Most High, for He is kind to the ungrateful and to the evil. Therefore, be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful*" (Lk 6:35,36). When we lose grip of ourselves, the loving Father grabs hold of our hearts through the cross. We thus give of ourselves as He gave to us. We give our time. We give our possessions. We discipline our lives in order to bring ourselves into the subjection of one another's love. This is the direction to which our understanding of the cross will lead us. Many people, therefore, walk with caution when they come to the cross. They are fearful that the cross will call out of them more than they are willing to give. But we remember what the apostle of love said. "*Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another*" (1 Jn 4:11). "*If we love one another, God dwells in us and His love is perfected in us*" (1 Jn 4:12). Therefore we also remember, "*There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear ...*" (1 Jn 4:18).

### Chapter 3

## Restoring The Appeal Of The Cross

The world has moved into a "You Tube" generation where our emphasis has been placed on "broadcasting ourselves." We have our pockets full of smart phones in order that others can contact us at any moment. And when the cell phone rings when we are in a personal conversation with another, we take

the call first, ignoring our personal conversation. We have a generation of people who have grown up in front of their own Facebook cameras, and thus, a generation that is focused squarely on itself by inventing electronic media devices that make us feel important. Pictures of ourselves are pasted everywhere

in our environment. We crave to build our “followers” list to which we can tweet ourselves. We are narcissists by training from childhood. We are a generation of people who have been awarded trophies from youth for every minor accomplishment, and thus, our self-esteem that our parents were so cautious to insure has turned us inward into ourselves. We are “winners” in every aspect of a life where there are no losers. The result has been that we have changed our religion to a narcissistic faith where we are concerned about ourselves more than our neighbor.

Our assemblies have changed from worshiping God to being concert encounters during which we seek to motivate ourselves for the coming week. We have thus conveniently brought our egocentric behavior into our faith. Our faith, therefore, “is all about us.” The result of this itching-ear (narcissistic) generation is that it has heaped upon itself every sort of “feel good” preachers who have long since given up preaching Bible. If the behavioral function of our faith does not make us feel good, then we move on to one that will. In all of this self-oriented religiosity, there is little appeal from a cross that means sacrifice, slavehood and self-denial. The cross is totally about others, and none of self. Those who are all about themselves create religions that make them feel that they are the center of the universe.

Nevertheless, we must not allow ourselves to believe that the appeal of the cross is hopeless to those of self-oriented cultures, for the inhabitants of such cul-

tures often feel quite lonely in their competitive relationships with one another. When the apostle Paul stepped into a city that was not much different than a typical modern-day city of self-centered hedonistic religionists, he brought the most important message of history. “*For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received, that Christ died for our sins ...*” (1 Co 15:3). Is there room for this message today among the assortment of religionists who claim some stake in Christianity? Does the suffering servant of the cross have any appeal to a self-centered, narcissistic generation?

Let’s see. We wear golden crosses around our necks, but can we say as Peter, “*Silver and gold I do not have ...*” (At 3:6). We wear a cross as a symbol of our faith, but in a culture of entitlement, we shun the call, “*And whoever does not bear his own cross and come after Me, cannot be My disciple*” (Lk 14:27). We take pride in our Christianity, but often confuse it with churchianity. We love the blessings of a loving social fellowship, but we revolt at the principle, “*Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ*” (Gl 6:2). Have we not created a “churchianity” that is convenient, one that allows us to live at a distance from the needs of humanity? Have we come to the point in our faith, or religion, that “missions” is a word that will be lost in our vocabulary. Or maybe our definitions have digressed to what *Time Magazine* referred to as “vacationaries”? We are confident to do “missions” for two weeks, but not as long as a lifetime of cross-bearing and cross-cultural sacrifice.

Is the era of the “missionary” gone? Have we generated a generation of too weak missionaries who are good for only two weeks?

There is something about the message of the cross that strikes squarely at the pride of the self-oriented person who is inbred with the curse of entitlement. The cross is a message that says we are entitled to nothing but to give ourselves to others. It is a message that cannot be comprehended by the human reasoning of both materialists and the exploited. In fact, we would state that in this life where we are confined to the finiteness of our powers of human reason that we will never be able to comprehend the full meaning of the sacrificial Deity on a cross outside Jerusalem. For Deity to incarnate into the form of His creation, and then go to the cross for the salvation of dust and spirit, is somehow beyond human comprehension. If we think we have figured out this God who would do such a thing, then we have probably come up with the wrong god. We not only worship a God who can give up His entitlement of being in the form of God in order to wash the feet of His creation (Jn 13:1-17), we worship a God of what we would conclude to be extremes, the extreme of the cross. What God would do this? Surely, no god we could create after our imagination could or would do such a thing for His creation. A totally selfless God has little appeal to a narcissist.

There would be no Christianity if there were no cross. The cross is the epitome of the revelation of the love of

the God we cannot fully comprehend. He is the God who is beyond the definition of the words of our dictionary. It is the mystery of this lack of total definition and comprehension that draws us. It is a mystery that draws us to know this God who loved us so much in spite of ourselves. We seek to conceive, to understand, to experience something so wonderful as a God who existed in eternity, but was lovingly willing to incarnate for the purpose of transforming us into eternal beings in His presence. If this is not life-changing stuff, then we cannot be changed. It is a message that has awesome power in the transformation of lowly creatures who have been confined to an environment that seems to have gone wrong. However, the environment is the best of all possible environments for the habitation of truly free moral agents. The environment did not go wrong. The free-moral inhabitants of the environment did. And maybe this is the very beginning of our urge to change, for we reason that this world is not all there is. We are thus willing to make whatever changes that are necessary in our lives in order to become as the One who came to fetch us from this harsh environment of existence. We view the cross, therefore, as a means of escape.

When we begin to understand that the cross was a manifestation of love, then we are on our way. Love generates love. “*We love because He first loved us*” (1 Jn 4:19). The Son of God did not invade earth for the purpose of holding back the wrath of a God who was ready to mash us like flies. The atonement of

the cross was not to fend off a God of wrath, but to reconcile a wayward, and often rebellious child of creation, back to a God of love. We thus study the cross, not to understand the Scriptures, but to understand the God of love revealed in, but beyond, the Scriptures. The objective of our search of the Scriptures, therefore, is to somehow understand this God who can affect and change our lives so much. The more we understand this God of love, the more the aroma of His love is reflected to others through us as His love was poured out on us through the cross.

In our religious heritage we may have been the result of catechisms and rituals, doctrines and commandments. The validation of our faith may have been in the correctness of an outline of statutes that were claimed to be “biblical” by a listing of “out-of-context” scriptures under every point. But is it possible that we have been sidetracked into thinking that our faith is unmovable because of our doctrinal correctness? We would suggest that our plea for restoration is not to restore a correct doctrinal outline by which we would validate our faith. Our plea is to restore the cross to the centrality of our faith and behavior. Only when this restoration is begun can we truly begin to understand the outline of His teaching. We thus start with the man Jesus in order to understand what He said, for His teaching means little without understanding who and what He did as an atoning sacrifice.

The gospel is the historical event of the death of Jesus on the cross, His burial,

and His resurrection. But our understanding of the cross must go beyond our faith in an historical event. If we cannot get beyond the event, we cannot get to the One who died there and was resurrected. The message of the cross is more than an event of history. It is a life-changing transformation by One who eternally changed from God to us on our behalf. Most people fail to experience the life-changing experience of the cross because they fail to move beyond the facts of an historical event.

And such is the curse of legal-oriented religiosity and literalistic interpreters. The legalist is infatuated with the validation of his faith through correct facts, that is, understanding the Scriptures correctly. He thus manufactures a correct outline in order to define who we are as God’s people. In struggling to create a consistent outline of interpretations, he often suffers from the same twisting of the Scriptures as the literalist. The literalist struggles to interpret the profound metaphors that take us as close as possible with human reason to the essence of the meaning of the cross. Being confined to the facts of Bible statements, however, he struggles to imagine beyond the hermeneutic “it means what it says and says what it means ... literally.” And thus, the literalist often has an idol god with eyes and a nose that he is ready to carve out of a piece of wood.

The legalist is ready to argue his outline with the correct proof texts. The literalist is still trying to create a god after his own image. The literalist cannot get beyond the wood and the legalist can-

not get beyond the outline in order to understand what the Spirit is trying to reveal through the metaphors of the cross. Both the legalist and literalist are held up by human deductive reasoning or childish interpretations.

One of the primary shortcomings of the legalist and literalist is that it is very difficult for both to understand the profound depth of the meaning of the cross. As a result, there is only intellectual change and not behavioral transformation. We affirm that there is information about the cross that we must intellectually perceive and understand, which things are revealed in the Scriptures. However, unless we move past an intellectual knowledge of the cross, we will never experience the life-changing profoundness of the cross. We will not be able to experience the adventure of the mystery of the cross that goes far beyond facts and figures, far beyond words and paper. We would confidently assert, therefore, that when Paul walked into town, his message was not about facts and historical events alone. What he

brought to the people was life-changing. There is no other way to answer the results he had in places like Philippi when a small group of two wage-earners with their dependents continued to support him sacrificially once and again as he carried the message of the cross to other cities (See Ph 4:10-18). There is no other way to explain why the Thessalonians broadcasted the message they received in every place only a short time after Paul left their presence. *“For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith toward God has spread abroad, so that we do not need to speak anything”* (1 Th 1:8). What makes pagan idolaters drastically transform into being and doing things as this? When we discover what makes such a radical personality transformation, then we are on our way to understanding the life-changing message that the early evangelists took from one city to another. We can be sure that the life-changing motivation was not an outline of Scriptures, but a message of the cross.

## Chapter 4

### Metaphors Of The Cross

There is mystery in metaphors. A metaphor is using something that is earthly and physical in order to convey a truth of something that is greater and often spiritual. When we say, “He runs like a rabbit,” we are not saying that a particular person is a rabbit. Our metaphorical meaning is that the particular person about whom we are speaking is very fast.

David said, *“The Lord is my rock...”* (Ps 18:2). This does not mean that the Lord is a literal rock. It means that He is immovable and solid as a rock. David wrote concerning the “face” and “eyes” of God (Ps 34:15,16). But God does not have a face and eyes. He is spirit (Jn 4:24). In David’s use of metaphors, we are challenged to ponder what he meant.

This is the mystery of metaphors, and often, one of the most difficult areas of revelation for the literalist to understand. Because it is difficult for him to conceive of a God without eyes and ears, so it is difficult for him to think beyond the wood of the cross, the iron nails, and blood dripping from the brow of Jesus. We are often so held up by our Mel-Gibson-*Passion*-movie scene of the crucified Son of God that we cannot see the Son of God beyond the cross.

The Bible is loaded with metaphors. This is why it is often difficult for the literalist to think beyond the physical or earthly figure of the metaphor of the cross in order to comprehend the spiritual significance of what the Holy Spirit is trying to convey to us through the cross. We have found it interesting that in many languages of the world there is no word for metaphor. Though the people speak daily in common language by using metaphors, their schooling is sometimes quite elementary in explaining what they are actually meaning through the use of metaphorical figures of speech. When understanding the Bible, especially the spiritual significance of those truths that are illuminated through metaphorical figures, it is sometimes challenging for some to grasp the full meaning of various important texts. For this reason, this difficulty has led many to be literalists in understanding the Bible. This is particularly true in reference to understanding the Psalms and those apocalyptic books that are saturated with metaphors. In our study of the cross, we often rob ourselves of the full significance of the cross by

having a shallow understanding of the metaphors that are used to reveal the “atoning sacrifice”—that is a metaphor—of the cross.

Because we fail to see the beauty of metaphors that are used in reference to the cross, we restrict our understanding of what God did for us through Jesus. The cross was more than an historical event. Its significance is more than wood and blood. Because we minimize our understanding of the cross, we often relegate our response to the cross to obedience of facts only. We conclude that Jesus historically died on a cruel cross. From here the sermon progresses into explaining the gore of the cross and the tremendous physical suffering that Jesus endured while nailed to the cross. He subsequently died, was buried, and then was historically and victoriously resurrected from the dead. We then move on to encourage our audience to obey these facts. They are subsequently buried with Jesus in baptism in order to be raised with Him from the tomb of water. Our message, therefore, settles around knowing the facts and “getting baptized” as a simple act of obedience to the facts. All is conveniently outlined and charted in order for us to affirm confidently that we have obeyed the historical event of Jesus’ death, burial and resurrection. All the facts of the event have been learned and obeyed and we move on, forgetting that the event of the cross was an historical event around which all creation exists and its destiny will be terminated.

But the gospel cannot be reduced to precise actions in obedience to histori-

cal facts. Metaphors take our understanding of the gospel into the realm of mystery. Through the metaphors of the cross the Holy Spirit seeks to move our minds beyond what we can historically perceive. He seeks to move our thinking to a higher level of understanding in order to determine the teleology of the cross. Once He has “inspired” our thinking, then He has brought us into the reality of metaphorical mysteries by which we begin to comprehend the nature of the one true and living God whose eternal sacrifice was revealed through the cross.

Though we have connected the fact of the gospel with the fact of our baptism into Christ, the Holy Spirit wants to take our minds far beyond the events and facts of history. He seeks to do this through the richness of metaphors over which we meditate day and night in order that we be held in awe at the wonder of God who desired to reconnect us to His loving presence. We would not, therefore, cheat ourselves. We must not by relegating our understanding of His wondrous work through the cross by our resistance to step through the doors of metaphors by which the Spirit has revealed the atoning sacrifice of a loving God. We will thus take this journey to step through the doors of metaphors in order to see a greater reality. It is only when we take this step that we can appreciate the transcendent God who is seeking to break through into our cocoon of the physical. If on our part we can

release our minds from the confinement of our physical environment, then we will discover in amazement the essence of a God who is truly loving. He is not a god who would arbitrarily create souls, and then predestine them to destruction. On the contrary, He is a God who seeks to lovingly reach down from His eternal realm of existence in order to offer an invitation to all His creation to come and join Him in eternal bliss.

Since the audience of the New Testament letters was primarily a Jewish audience, our first “dictionary” to understand the metaphors that are used in reference to the crucifixion of the Messiah would naturally come from the Old Testament. The metaphors do find some of their meaning in their use in the common language of the day when the letters were written. However, **we would assume that God laid the foundation for Israel’s understanding of the cross by His work with Israel throughout their history.** Our search for an understanding of the physical and literal foundation of the metaphors of the cross, therefore, must find their primary definition in God’s work with Israel (See Rm 15:4; 1 Co 10:11). The Old Testament, therefore, is our first dictionary to understand the metaphors of the cross. The following chapters explain some of the beautiful metaphors used by the Holy Spirit in order to explain from God’s viewpoint what took place at the cross.

## Chapter 5

### The Redeemer Of The Cross

From the Old Testament, the word “redemption” is used in reference to property or people (See Lv 25:25-27; Rt 4:4-12). The one who sought to “redeem” something had to sacrifice something of his own in order to acquire that which was desired (Nm 3:51; Ne 5:8). Throughout the Old Testament, the meaning of redemption was deliverance or purchase. That which was purchased was delivered to the one who paid the redemption money. In this sense, God redeemed Israel out of Egyptian captivity (Dt 9:26; 2 Sm 7:23; 1 Ch 17:21; Is 52:3). Israel’s redemption was based on the fact that they could not redeem themselves because they were in captivity. Redemption, therefore, carries with it the meaning that the one who pays the redemption price desires that which he seeks to redeem or purchase. It also assumes that the one redeemed could not of himself pay his own redemption price.

In reference to God’s deliverance of Israel from captivity, the nation of Israel belonged to God as His claimed people because they were the descendents of Abraham to whom God had made a promise that He would make a great nation of his seed (Gn 12:1-4; Dt 15:15). He had established a covenant with Abraham, and at the time of their deliverance, He desired to establish a covenant with the descendents of Abraham as a nation. And thus, God obligated Himself to redeem Israel out of captivity because of

His own promises to Abraham and His desire to make a covenant with the seed of Abraham (1 Ch 17:21; Ps 25:22). Because He had created the nation He desired to covenant with the nation in order to bring the Israelites into the rest of the promised land (Compare Hb 4).

Since God had promised Abraham that through his seed all families of the earth would be blessed (the cross) (Gn 12:2,3), God’s work to redeem Israel set the metaphorical stage for His redemption through the One who would come to be a blessing to all people. God’s redemption of Israel was something the Jews could not do for themselves. God had to step in and do the deed. This story of redemption was subsequently recorded for a future redemption when people would be purchased and delivered out of the captivity of sin. Israel, as we, desired to be free. But only when One came to their rescue could they, as we, be delivered to freedom.

At the cross, Jesus obligated Himself to redeem us as His created people. “*In Him we have redemption through His blood ...*” (Ep 1:7). Since Jesus was the Creator (Cl 1:16), He obligated Himself as our Creator to deliver us from that which we could not deliver ourselves. He redeemed us from our separation from God because of our rebellion (Is 59:1,2). Since we were in the captivity of our own sins that separated us from Him, the Son of God had to come for His creation

through the cross. We could not deliver ourselves through the keeping of law, for none of us could perfectly keep any law by which we could redeem ourselves, “for by works of law no flesh will be justified” (Gl 2:16). Therefore, “**Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us, for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree’**” (Gl 3:13).

Zacharias was right in reference to his announcement of Jesus being the fulfillment of the promise to bless all nations through Israel. “**Blessed is the Lord God of Israel, for He has visited and redeemed His people**” (Lk 1:68). And Paul concluded, “**He redeemed us in order that the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith**” (Gl 3:14). Jesus redeemed “those who were under law, so that we might receive the adoption as sons” (Gl 4:5). He “gave Himself for us so that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself a special people who are zealous for good works” (Ti 2:14). The payment of redemption, however, was costly. “You were not redeemed with corruptible things ... **but with the precious blood of Christ ...**” (1 Pt 1:18,19; see Rv 5:9; 14:3,4). The church, therefore, is the family of God who is redeemed from all

the nations of the world (Rv 14:4).

“*All things were created through Him [Christ] and for Him*” (Cl 1:16). Since Christ created us for Himself, then because we were created free-moral individuals, through law He could only direct our lives. No system of law could bring us into His eternal fellowship since all sin is against law (Rm 3:23). Our redemption, therefore, could only be accomplished through an incarnate offering that would atone for our inability to demand eternity based on our keeping of law. Law kept us in bondage. Grace through our Redeemer set us free. There was, therefore, only one option in reference to the salvation of those who were created. Jesus had to do something, and that something cost Him dearly, for He had to eternally sacrifice being on an equality with God and in the form of God in order to bring His creation back into the presence of God (Ph 2:5-8).

While we busy ourselves with concern over bearing our own cross, we should take another look at the eternal sacrifice of the One who bore a cross in order that we have the privilege of bearing our crosses. Our lifetime cross bearing seems to pale in view of the cross that Jesus had to bear, and still does, for we assert, therefore, that the cost for our redemption went far beyond Jesus’ death on the cross.

## Chapter 6

### The Ransom Paid At The Cross

In order that something be redeemed, a ransom price had to be paid.

Something was given for something. With the metaphor of redemption, there-

fore, there also comes the ransom payment. Ransom assumes the inability of the redeemed to deliver themselves. The Psalmist wrote that even the wealthy could not pay a ransom for their own deliverance. *“They who trust in their wealth and boast themselves in the multitude of their riches, none of them can by any means redeem his brother or give to God a ransom for him—for the redemption of their soul is costly and money can never suffice ...”* (Ps 49:6-8). The metaphor of ransom sometimes indicates a price that is too high to be paid. The picture of ransom that is often used in the Old Testament sometimes focuses on one’s inability to settle his debt with another (See Pv 6:35). Atonement money was to be given as a ransom for souls so that they would not be touched by a plague (Ex 30:12). If one was deserving of death, however, no ransom could be paid for his deliverance (Nm 35:31). If one would flee to a city of refuge, no ransom was to be given to deliver this person from his punishment (Nm 35:32).

Isaiah was specific in identifying the foundation of the metaphor of ransom for Israel. In Isaiah 43, Isaiah focused the minds of the apostate Israelites on the day when they were created as a nation when God redeemed them from Egyptian captivity. *“But now thus says the Lord who created you, O Jacob, and He who formed you, O Israel, ‘Do not fear, for I have redeemed you.’”* (Is 43:1). In order to be redeemed from Egyptian captivity, the Israelites passed through the waters of the Red Sea on dry land (Is 43:2). But their deliverance from captivity came at

the price of other nations. *“For I am the Lord your God, the Holy one of Israel, your Savior. I gave Egypt for your ransom, Ethiopia and Seba in your place”* (Is 43:3). The ransom paid for the redemption of His people was **the death of the firstborn and armies of Egypt**. God took the firstborn of the Egyptians in death for a ransom payment to deliver the children of Israel from captivity.

God wanted Israel to remember that their birth as a nation did not come at a small price. Their birth cost the price of the lives of many firstborn sons and daughters of other nations, as well as the army of Egypt, Ethiopia and Seba. Isaiah then spoke of a time when the faithful remnant would remember the high ransom for Israel’s redemption from Egyptian captivity. He reminded the Israelite remnant of their day of redemption. *“Was it not You who dried up the sea and the waters of the great deep, who has made the depths of the sea a way for the ransomed to pass over?”* (Is 51:10). Jeremiah added, *“For the Lord has redeemed Jacob and ransomed him from the hand of him who was stronger than he”* (Jr 31:11). And then Hosea looked into the future to a day when God would pay the ultimate ransom price for His people. *“I will ransom them from the power of the grave. I will redeem them from death”* (Hs 13:14).

The cross is a picture of a ransom paid, the high cost of the ransomed firstborn and only begotten Son of God. We have been ransomed by the blood of the eternally incarnate and crucified Son of God. Jesus came into the world in order

to pay this high ransom. *“For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many”* (Mk 10:45). Jesus gave Himself as a ransom to provide all people with the opportunity to be delivered from sin (1 Tm 2:5,6). *“For He has made Him who knew no sin to be sin on behalf of us ...”* (2 Co 5:21).

The metaphor of ransom paid at the cross is not a picture of arrogance and selfishness. It is a picture of a lowly sacrifice of self on behalf of others who could not pay the price for their own deliverance through meritorious works of law or good deeds. And since we could not work ourselves out of captivity into which we had given ourselves through sin, God had to pay the ransom. It was an unselfish gift of grace.

The cross does not have much of an appeal to a narcissistic generation that is consumed with broadcasting itself through a collection of self-portraits on the internet. The selfish find little appeal of the selfless ransom paid at the cross. The behavior of the cross is about broadcasting a ransomed servant and exalting others before oneself, just as Jesus. To a self-centered generation of people, the Holy Spirit would say, *“For if anyone thinks himself to be something when he is nothing, he deceives himself”* (Gl 6:3). *“... God resists the proud and gives grace to the humble”* (1 Pt 5:5). We must be cautioned, therefore, that if we follow the ransom metaphor to the cross, we will end up as slaves.

Central to the nature of true Christianity is the example of its Founder as a

ransom price on the cross for all who would respond. *“The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many”* (Mt 20:28). Paul goes further in explaining the sacrifice of Jesus by saying that Jesus gave *“Himself a ransom for all”* (1 Tm 2:6). The ransom price was not offered for a few chosen. If any teaching strikes at the heart of the false doctrine of individual predestination it is the ransom of Jesus on the cross for all people. God is not willing that any of His creation should perish (2 Pt 3:9). Therefore, Jesus was given as full payment for the sins of all who would respond to His offering from the cross.

We must always keep in mind that God ransomed the firstborn of Egypt for Israel. But this was not a guarantee that many Israelites would not later rebel at Mount Sinai. Though delivered from captivity, the ransom price did not cover the latter rebellion. Those who gave themselves over to the rebellion of Korah, Dathan and Abiram were destroyed (Nm 16). Those who lacked faith to enter immediately into the land of promise fell in the wilderness. The point is, one can be delivered by responding to the ransomed price of Jesus, but if he does not walk in the light as Jesus is in the light, the ransomed blood of Jesus does not cleanse him of his rebellion in sin (See 1 Jn 1:7,8). If we sin willfully after being ransomed, then the blood of Jesus will not redeem us from destruction, *“for if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins”* (Hb 10:26).

Therefore, we must make a choice to remain faithful, and thus, stay in contact with the blood of Jesus.

## Chapter 7

### The Sacrificial Offering On The Cross

Redemption necessitates sacrifice. And sacrifice necessitates death. In the Old Testament, a living animal was given as a sacrifice for the deliverance of the people. Throughout the history of Israel, all their blood sacrifices reminded them of the first blood offering of the Passover lamb whose blood was poured out to protect each household from the death of their own firstborn in their deliverance from Egyptian captivity (Ex 12:22,23). Israel's firstborn lived, but the Egyptians' firstborn were given as a sacrificial ransom for their deliverance (Is 43:1-3). A lamb of the Passover was sacrificed for the protection of Israel's firstborn, but the protection of their firstborn meant the death of the firstborn of all unbelieving Egyptian households.

Sacrifices were also used to ratify covenants. When God established His covenant with the nation of Israel at Mount Sinai after they came out of captivity, life was again given in order that the people be sprinkled with a blood offering for the covenant (Ex 24:3-11). A living covenant was thus established by the death of that which was sacrificed. Moses said to the people, "**Behold the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you concerning all these words**" (Ex 24:8).

Throughout the history of Israel,

once a year on the Day of Atonement, an unblemished animal gave its life on the altar as a sin offering of blood for the people (Lv 4:1-35; 16:1-34). God reminded Israel, "***For the life of the flesh is in the blood. And I have given it to you on the altar to make atonement for your souls. For it is the blood that makes atonement for the soul***" (Lv 17:11). In the atonement (meaning, "the covering of sins") life was sacrificed for the sins of the people. Year after year, therefore, the minds of the people of Israel were being prepared for a final blood sacrifice that was to come in their future. It would not be the sacrificial blood of animals, but the blood of life from the incarnate Son of God. It would not be a Passover offering to save the firstborn, it would be the offering of the Firstborn of God for all those who would choose to be born again. Once this blood was poured out as an offering, never again would an animal be killed as a blood offering. Such was what the Hebrew writer wanted us to know when he spoke of Jesus being our high priest "*who does not need daily as those [Old Testament high priests], to offer up sacrifice, first for His own sins, and then for the people's, for this He did once for all when He offered up Himself*" (Hb 7:26,27).

In establishing the foundation for the metaphor that would eventually lead to the flesh and blood sacrifice of the incarnate Son, we must keep in mind that the animal sacrifices that were brought to be offered in Israel were eaten, both by the Levites and those who participated in the offering (Lv 6:16,18,26,29; 7:6,15). This opens the window for understanding our eating of the flesh and blood of Jesus. Jesus spoke metaphorically of such during His ministry. *“Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood, has eternal life”* (See Jn 6:52-56). This was a difficult saying for the disciples to comprehend, but a simple statement laid on the background of their knowledge of the sacrificial offerings of Israel (Jn 6:60). At the time Jesus made the statement they did not understand the atoning sacrifice of the cross that was yet in their near future. And they knew nothing at all about the Lord’s Supper that would come after the sacrifice. In John 6 Jesus was speaking metaphorically of eating His sacrificed flesh and blood in the Lord’s Supper. We do not eat literally of the fleshly body of Jesus, nor drink of His literal blood. But in the institution of the Supper meal, Jesus took the bread of the Passover meal and said, *“This is My body”* (Mt 26:26). Of the cup of the fruit of the vine, He said, *“This is My blood of the covenant”* (Mt 26:28). Through the institution of the Supper on the eve of His betrayal, therefore, Jesus was preparing the minds of the disciples for His sacrificial offering, as well as their remembrance of it through the Supper until He comes again (See Lk 22:18; 1 Co 11:26).

When we venture to the cross, the minds of the people had been prepared for the concept of the atoning sacrifice of the Lamb of God. Sacrifice is the message of Philippians 2:5-8. Jesus gave in and gave up in order to give for His creation. He gave up *“being in the form of God”* in order to give into being an obedient sacrifice. He became our sacrificial sin offering. *“For He has made Him who knew no sin to be sin on behalf of us ...”* (2 Co 5:21). *“For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh”* (Rm 8:3). *“Whom God has set forth to be an atoning sacrifice by His blood ...”* (Rm 3:25). Therefore, *“Christ our Passover was sacrificed”* (1 Co 5:7; see Hb 9:6-14; 10:15-18).

It was impossible for the blood of that which was created out of nothing to be a sufficient sacrifice for that which would be eternal. For this reason, it was impossible for the blood of animals to be a sufficient sacrifice for those whom God would bring into eternal dwelling (Hb 10:1-4). Only that which had eternity could be a sufficient sacrifice. However, in order for this sacrifice to be sufficient, there had to be a sacrifice on the part of the One who would give Himself for us. There was the necessity, therefore, for the eternal to become as those for whom He would choose to make a sacrificial offering. And for His sacrifice to be more than a brief thirty-three years in a state of incarnation on earth, it had to be eternal. A thirty-three year sac-

rifice would not be a true sacrifice if the incarnation could be reversed. There is no revelation in all of Scripture that speaks of any reversal of the incarnation.

So what sacrifice did Jesus actually make that made Him worthy to be our Passover sacrifice? By the time of Jesus' coming into the world, thousands of rebellious Jews had already been crucified on crosses throughout the Roman Empire. Numerous insurrections had been put down, resulting in the crucifixion of rebels across the Empire, specifically in Palestine. The Jews knew the horror of crucifixion. Many had personally witnessed the crucifixion of criminals. On some occasions, they had witnessed the crucifixion by Roman authorities of friends and family who had participated in various insurrection plots. They knew the agony of death on a cross. Sometimes death would not soon deliver the crucified victim, and thus, the authorities would break the legs of the crucified. It was an agonizing death that would linger on for hours. But eventually, death would release the condemned from life, and thus bring to an end hours of suffering on a cross. The Jews were not unfamiliar with crucifixions.

So we reconsider the crucifixion of Jesus. According to the timeline of Jesus on the cross, the length of time was about six hours before He gave up the life of His fleshly body (See Jn 10:17,18). We know the death was agonizing. We know the excruciating pain that must have ravaged His body. But when life on a cross would go on for hours, if not a day, we wonder if the sacrifice for eternity was

only for six hours. We think not. We must consider that Jesus' sacrifice for us was more than six hours of pain on a cross outside Jerusalem two thousand years ago. We must consider the possibility, or reality, that when He humbled Himself, and was born into the likeness of men, **it was forever**.

John alerted his readers to this reality in 1 John. John was writing many years **after** the cross and resurrection. He wrote, "*And we know that the Son of God is come ...*" (1 Jn 5:20). He uses the Greek present tense. It was not that the Son of God had come, but "is come." The Son appeared on earth, but there was something about His coming that continued to exist by the time John wrote 1 John. In 1 John 4:2 John revealed this truth in another sentence structure. "*Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God ....*" The obvious conclusion to this statement is that Jesus had come in the flesh for His earthly ministry, but He was still in the flesh for His heavenly ministry that was taking place at the time John wrote. He was in some way **still in the flesh**.

In 2 John the apostle looks to the future in reference to the coming of Jesus. "*For many deceivers have gone out into the world who do not confess that Jesus Christ is coming in the flesh. This is the deceiver and the antichrist*" (2 Jn 7). John is emphatic in this statement about Jesus still being in the flesh, aligning a denial of such to mark one as antichrist. His statement refers us to the "going" of Jesus from this earth at His ascension. At the ascension, the two angels said to

the apostles as they watched Jesus bodily ascend into heaven, “*You men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus who was taken up from you into heaven will come in like manner as you have watched Him go into heaven*” (At 1:11). Now relate this thought with what John revealed in 1 John 3:2. “*Beloved, now we are the children of God, and it has not yet been revealed what we will be. But we know that when He appears, we will be like Him, for we will see Him as He is.*” Jesus bodily ascended into heaven. He will bodily be coming again from heaven in the future.

Now consider seriously the conclusion to the above statements. When Jesus was resurrected, His body was changed, but it was the same body. His incarnation was into a natural body. But in death “*it is sown a natural body. It is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body and there is a spiritual body*” (1 Co 15:44). Jesus’ natural body was raised a spiritual body. The apostle John handled the body of Jesus after His resurrection. However, he did not understand the nature of this body (1 Jn 3:2). But it was a spiritual body that the apostles could handle, one with which Jesus ate (Lk 24:39-42). When Jesus comes again, He “*will transform our lowly body so that it may be fashioned according to His glorious body*” (Ph 3:21). In order for us to be fashioned according to His “glorious body,” He must still have a body in which He will be revealed from heaven.

We are now beginning to somewhat comprehend the totality of the sacrifice

that Jesus made for us. When He gave up being on an equality with God in order to be fashioned in the body of man (Ph 2:5-8), **it was forever**. His sacrifice was not for what would be a momentary period of thirty-three years in the flesh in comparison to eternity. **His suffering for six hours on the cross was not the finality of all His sacrifice for us**. The sacrificial offering on the cross was made, but the eternal sacrifice of His existence in our likeness was forever. He gave His form as God and being on an equality with God in order to pay the ransom that was necessary in order to deliver us from sin and the bondage of this world.

When the New Testament speaks of “believing in Jesus,” therefore, it is commanding more than a simplistic “sinner’s prayer” of mourning. It is commanding a total life-changing obedience in response to the God who transformed to be as us in order to dwell together with us in eternity. Therefore, let us never again try to get by with a cheap “faith only” response to His eternal incarnate sacrifice. Such is a mockery of what the Son of God humbled Himself to be in order to go to the cross for our sins. It is a weak response to what the Son of God gave up in order to forever be our high priest.

We thus view the sacrifice of Jesus to be more than the cross offering. The Hebrew writer shed some light on this. “*Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren, so that He might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make an*

*atonement sacrifice for the sins of the people*" (Hb 2:17). The cross was a moment in time for the atoning sacrifice. However, being made "like His brethren" exemplifies the sacrifice beyond our comprehension. Could the Son of God give up forever being on an equality with God in the very form of God? He came in the flesh (Jn 1:14). He lived in the flesh (1 Jn 1:1). His flesh died on the cross, was buried, and subsequently raised to be victorious over death. His natural body was raised a spiritual, glorious body. And in this body He ascended on high. In this same glorious body He

will come again for His people, with whom He will dwell as His brethren for eternity. When we consider this awesome sacrifice of the Son of God in order to bring us into eternal dwelling, we faint to our knees ... speechless. His was a sacrifice that is simply beyond our comprehension. We can never fully understand this because we can never take this journey with the Son of God. In view of this sacrifice that was to come, the Old Testament prophet Isaiah rightly described our Savior as the coming Suffering Servant.

## Chapter 8

### The Suffering Servant On The Cross

In order to carry out the eternal purpose of creation, that is to bring created beings into eternal dwelling with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, someone had to come from the infinite to the finite. One of Deity had to make the eternal sacrifice in order to bring into the presence of the Eternal Love those who would be gifted with eternity by being in His presence. This Mediator would not only bring reconciliation between the eternal and mortal, but would immortalize the mortal for eternal dwelling.

As human beings, we would expect a glorious entrance of God into the environment of man. We would expect a spectacular invasion with a galactic display of heavenly bodies. We would then look for angelic knights in shining armor. But such was not the case. Such a heav-

only entrance into our world would not provide the opportunity to draw out of creation proper candidates who were fit for eternal dwelling in the presence of a God. Only those who would follow His example of humbling Himself unto death, even the death on a wooden cross, would be qualified to eternally dwell in His presence.

As free-moral individuals who often choose ourselves first, we needed an example of someone who chose Himself last. We needed a messenger of humility, meekness, one who could show kindness and mercy to our fallibility. We needed a servant, but not only a servant. We needed a servant who in all things would be "*tempted as we are, yet without sin*" (Hb 4:15). Through such a One we could thus "*come boldly to the throne*

of grace, so that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Hb 4:16). And so, the picture of the coming Messiah of Israel that was painted by the prophets was a picture of a suffering servant, one who would suffer just as those He sought to deliver into eternal dwelling. It was only logical that He be such.

Isaiah paints the greatest metaphorical pictures of the coming suffering servant (See Is 42:1-9; 49:1-6; 50:4-11; 52:13 – 53:12). He introduced the coming servant of the Lord with these words: “Behold My *servant* whom I uphold. My elect in whom My soul delights. I have put My Spirit upon Him. He will bring forth judgment to the Gentiles” (Is 42:1). “He will not fail nor be discouraged until He has set judgment on the earth” (Is 42:4). Until He would die on the cross, the suffering servant would endure great pain and suffering in order to accomplish His mission. The suffering servant would say, “I gave My back to those who struck Me and My cheeks to those who plucked off the hair. I did not hide My face from shame and spitting” (Is 50:6). Isaiah continued to paint the picture of this servant. “Just as many were astonished at you, My people, so His appearance was marred more than any man, and His form more than the sons of men” (Is 52:14). We are sure Isaiah’s hand became weak as he was led by inspiration of the Holy Spirit to write these words concerning the coming servant: “He is despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him. He was

despised and we did not esteem Him” (Is 53:3). “He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows. Yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God and afflicted” (Is 53:4). “He was wounded for our transgressions. He was bruised for our iniquities. The chastisement of our peace was upon Him. And with His stripes we are healed” (Is 53:5).

The inspired writers who recorded the ministry and gospel of Jesus wanted us to understand that Jesus fully realized His mission. There were no surprises as He led Himself to the cross (See Jn 10:17,18). Jesus identified Himself as the servant who was anointed by the Lord to come to His people (Compare Lk 4:16-21 with Is 61:1,2). As was pictured by the words of Isaiah, Jesus’ ministry as the servant of the Lord was one of healing (Compare Mt 8:16,17 with Is 53:4). Through the records of the ministry and gospel of Jesus are revelations of Jesus knowing that He was the One who was to suffer for the people of God (See Mk 8:31; 9:12; 10:33,34; 14:21).

Contrary to the expectations of the religious elite of Israel, the servant of the Lord who would heal the spiritual wounds of the people was not the military hero they expected. He was the lowly servant of God who was despised, rejected, spat upon and crucified by those to whom He came. The suffering servant, therefore, became the opportunity for individuals to determine their own eternal destiny. “He came to His own and His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become the children of God,

*even to those who believe in His name”* (Jn 1:11,12). If one would accept as God the One who was crucified as a common criminal on a cross, then it would be this one who had a right to be a child of God. The picture of the Redeemer as a suffering servant on a cross exemplifies the right of any individual to make a choice to reveal whether he or she is of a character that is fit for eternal dwelling.

Jesus reminded His disciples, “... *the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many”* (Mt 20:28; see Mk 10:45).

As the incarnate Son of God, Jesus came to serve our sin problem, and to do such, He had to suffer the cross of humiliation. Jesus was truly our servant who suffered on our behalf. Those who submit to the cross by taking up their crosses, are of a like-minded character, and thus worthy because of the cross to be considered sons of God. Paul reminded the Galatians, “*For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ”* (Gl 3:26,27).

## Chapter 9

### Reconciliation At The Cross

The sin offering of Israel laid the foundation for understanding the reconciliation that would come through the offering of the suffering servant. In the sin offering, the blood of the sacrificed animal was not to be eaten (Lv 6:30). When reconciliation was accomplished, animals died in order “*to make reconciliation”* for the people (Lv 8:15). For example, when Israel was reconciled again unto God, animals had to die. “*Then the priests killed them and they made reconciliation with their [animal] blood on the altar, to make an atonement for all Israel”* (2 Ch 29:24; see also Ez 45:15-17). Reconciliation came at a price, the price of a sacrificed life. Through the cost of the sacrifice of animals year after year in Israel the stage was being set for the coming of the One who would offer the price of His blood

as the medium by which God’s people could be reconciled unto Him. It was a coming sacrifice that would terminate all animal sacrifices.

The Son of God intervened in the history of humanity in order that broken souls might be able to approach unto their Creator. Reconciliation was the initiative of a loving God to reach out to His creation. The cross, therefore, was God’s signal to His creation that all who would come to Him have a way home. Reconciliation at the cross was Jesus opening the door throughout which the broken could find their way to the One who could heal their brokenness. When Jesus was lifted up to the cross, the drawing power of reconciliation was awesome to those who mourned over their sin-ravaged souls.

If we view God from the perspec-

tive of who He is, the God of love, then reconciliation was an initiative on the part of God to bring man again into His fellowship as it was before the sin of Adam. *“God was in Christ **reconciling the world to Himself**, not counting their trespasses against them”* (2 Co 5:19). In order for God to bring man into His fellowship, something had to be done for man’s broken soul because of sin. We would conclude this because creation was also the initiative of God. He created a free-moral individual He knew would exercise his free-moral right to rebel. But since God is love, He needed to stand as a just God by offering man an opportunity to be reconciled to His fellowship through the blood of Christ.

If God did not offer the opportunity for reconciliation, then He would not stand as a just God if He separated anyone unto eternal condemnation. But because God is a God of love and justice, He did not create with the intention of judging His creation without an opportunity for reconciliation. If He had, then He would be judged a fiendish God for creating man in the first place. And if He intentionally predestined some of His creation to eternal punishment, it would correctly be concluded that He was a fiendish and unjust judge for creating individuals who were destined to punishment.

Depending on one’s version, translations use words as “atonement” and “appeasement” to render the Old Testament Hebrew words that refer to reconciliation. In atonement, or propitiation, sins are covered by the blood of sacri-

fices in order that we may approach God. In appeasement, the wrath of God (judgment) is calmed in order that man be reconciled to God without being condemned because of sin. Some have viewed the foundation for reconciliation to be based on the necessity that God’s “anger” or “wrath” be appeased before men could approach Him. Those of this thinking contend that in some way God’s wrath had to be appeased in order to make it possible for Him to enter into a covenant relationship with man. But basing reconciliation on the concept of appeasing God’s anger or wrath seems to stand against God’s effort of reconciliation in the New Testament. It also seems to be contrary to the very nature of a loving God. If God is love, then He is not seeking to condemn or unleash His wrath upon His creation. He is lovingly seeking to reconcile His creation to Himself. It would be as Jesus said, *“For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved”* (Jn 3:17). God is not willing that any should perish, but that all should respond to His pleas to be reconciled again to His fellowship. But in order for a loving God to justly bring those tarnished with sin into His fellowship, something had to be done about their sin-blemished souls.

We would view **Romans 5** as the dictionary to define the work of a loving God to reconcile His creation unto Himself. *“Therefore, having been justified by faith,”* Paul introduces his argument, *“We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ”* (vs 1). It is through

the cross of Jesus that we have access to God because it was our own sin that took us away from God (vs 2). Paul turns to the initiative factor that **“because of the love of God”** the Spirit has been poured out for the believer (vs 5). All that Paul discusses in this chapter is based on this truth: “Because of the love of God.” The fact that God is love, He took the initiative to reach out to man. *“For when we were still without strength, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly”* (vs 6). Here is the point: *“But God demonstrates His love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us”* (vs 8).

The cross did not happen because of the plea of man to be reconciled with his Creator. It happened because of God’s love for His creation. God was active in reconciliation and man was passive. Now that Christ died for the undeserving, and we have responded by faith, Paul continued, *“Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we will be saved from wrath [judgment] through Him”* (vs 9). We would understand the “wrath,” not as the character of God toward man, for if such were the case, then the cross would never have happened. The wrath refers to justice, for we cannot be reconciled to God with the blemishes of our sin. Sin (rebellion) cries out for justice, judgment and punishment. Love answers with grace and mercy.

In Romans 5 Paul then brings into the picture the resurrection. *“For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we will be saved*

*by His life”* (vs 10). Our confidence, therefore, is in the power of the cross to bring those of faith unto the throne of God. So Paul concludes our rejoicing. *“And not only this, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation”* (vs 11). *“Therefore, as through the offense of one [Adam’s sin separated himself and all humanity from God], judgment came on all men to condemnation, even so through the righteousness of one [Jesus did that which was just by going to the cross], the free gift came to all men to justification of life”* (vs 18).

The means of reconciliation with God has already been accomplished. It is past tense in that Jesus poured out His blood in order to clean us of sin. Our cleansing was for the purpose of Him presenting us without blemish before the Father. The washed are presentable to the Father because **“they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb”** (Rv 7:14). The blood was poured out at the cross. The Father has now sent out the invitation to all to be immersed in the blood of reconciliation. So when the Scriptures say that *“in Him we have redemption through His blood”* (Ep 1:7), then we need to search the Scriptures in order to discover how we can come into Christ wherein the blood of Christ flows freely from Calvary (See Rm 6:3,4; Gl 3:26,27). (It is now that we are beginning to understand what happens at the point of baptism into Christ. The next time you witness someone being baptized, envision them going

down into a pool of the blood of Jesus in order to be “washed in the blood of the Lamb.”)

God is light and in Him is no darkness at all (1 Jn 1:5). And because there is no darkness in God, then no darkness of sin can come into His presence. Since the very purpose for the creation of man was to bring mortal beings of love into the eternal presence of love, then something had to be done for the sin of a truly free-moral individual who was blessed with the opportunity to say, “I love you too.” Thus when the Scriptures speak of the wrath of God being revealed, reference is to just judgment of those who have not been qualified by obedient faith to come into the eternal light of God’s love. Sin separated us from God, and thus, there needed to be a means by which sin would be washed away so that we could approach God (See At 2:38; 22:16).

Paul wrote, “*For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness*” (Rm 1:18). The wrath of God is revealed by the revelation of the righteousness of God through Jesus. Jesus is the way, truth and the life (Jn 14:6). But for those who would rebel against His way and ignore His truth, they have no opportunity for His life. “*But we know that the judgment of God is according to truth against those who practice such [evil] things*” (Rm 2:2; see 2 Th 1:6-9). In order that men have the opportunity to escape the coming just judgment of God, the gospel was revealed, for in the gospel is “*the righteousness of God re-*

*vealed from faith to faith, as it is written, ‘The just will live by faith’*” (Rm 1:17).

In order to bring His creation into eternal dwelling, those who were separated from God by their rebellion in sin had to be brought back into the fellowship of Deity. The mission of Jesus, therefore, was a mission of reconciliation. It was a mission that the suffering servant accomplished by paying the ransom of His blood for our sin. Through the cross, He “*disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public display of them, triumphing over them in it*” (Cl 2:15). The power of sin was disabled at the cross. Through the resurrection, Jesus was exalted “*far above all principality and power and might and dominion and every name that is named, not only in this age, but also in that which is to come*” (Ep 1:21). Through the resurrection and ascension, the Father “*put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church*” (Ep 1:22). He did so in order “*that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father*” (Ph 2:11). The cross and resurrection, therefore, changed history because the sacrificial work on the part of Jesus draws out of the hearts of men the true image in which they were created after God. And so the prophecy of Jesus of Himself was fulfilled. “*And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Me*” (Jn 12:32). So now, all those who have responded to the outpouring of the love of God on the cross have also assumed the responsibility of the ministry of reconciliation (Read 2 Co 5:11-21). We go

forth to preach the good news of reconciliation, therefore, in order to find those who seek to be restored unto their Creator.

## Chapter 10

### Justification At The Cross

The word “justify” is a legal term. It was a term used in the Roman court system to refer to the legal proceedings of judicial law. Understanding its meaning must be determined in the context of the work of an advocate (lawyer). The advocate pleaded the case of the defendant. He sought to argue the case of the defendant in order that the defendant be given mercy from the grace of the court. If mercy was granted, then the defendant was acquitted (justified) of his crime.

When we bring this metaphor into our state of condemnation in sin, the crucified Savior works as our advocate to plead our case before the eternal court of justice. He not only pleaded our case at the cross, He actually stood in to take the blame for our crime. Taking our broken soul upon Himself was so great that He cried out from the cross, “*My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?*” (Mt 27:46).

John reminded his readers, “*And if anyone sin, we have a Counselor [advocate] with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous*” (1 Jn 2:1). Not only did Jesus bring justification for all sin through the cross, John indicates that the representation before the Father in reference to our sin is continuing. “*Therefore, He is able also to save those to the uttermost who come to God through Him, seeing He*

*always lives to make intercession for them*” (Hb 7:25). Through the resurrection and ascension, Jesus is able to do this because He has now entered “*into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us*” (Hb 9:24). Justification was a onetime work of God in the past, but intercession on the behalf of the justified is ongoing. It is continuing because He lives.

What exemplifies continued intercession for us is the justification for us in the past that took place at the cross. To a great extent, the religious world has distorted the teaching of justification by focusing on man, rather than the work of Christ. This distortion has gone to the extreme in many religions because adherents are led to believe that there is no justification except that which is validated by the merit of man. They fail to see that **justification was something that God did for us, not what we do for ourselves**. It was the work of God through His Son to justify, for our sin was against Him. It is the work of the redeemed to obediently walk with Jesus because they have been justified. We walk by faith, but our faith does not minimize the justifying work of Jesus that took place on the cross. We are cleansed by His blood through obedient faith as we walk in the light as He is in the light.

*“But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another and the **blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin**”* (1 Jn 1:7). Our walk is an obedient walk because we have been justified, not in order to be justified. It is because we have been justified that the blood of His Son continues its work in our lives.

The story of justification is explained in God’s covenant relationship with Israel. God established a covenant relationship with Israel at Mount Sinai. With any covenant of the Old Testament, blood was offered to ratify the covenant. But with the establishment of covenants, there were conditions for the maintenance of the covenant. God established conditions for Himself, and He established conditions for Israel to maintain their part of the covenant. Within the covenant with Israel God made promises. His keeping of these promises defined His faithfulness to the covenant. He is a righteous (just) God because He keeps His promises. The righteousness of God, therefore, moved the faithful to remain committed to keep the covenant because they desired to receive the promises of God. By faith they trusted in the righteousness (faithfulness) of God to keep His promises. It is for this reason that Israel had to walk obediently by faith in God who keeps His promises.

Israel’s history is a testimony of the fact that though God is righteous (He is just by keeping His promises), Israel’s walk was often rebellious. They were disobedient to the law that came as their conditions for keeping the covenant.

Whenever we speak of God’s righteousness in the New Testament, therefore, and our trust (faith) in Him to keep His promises, we must think of an obedient faithfulness to His will. It is not simply a “faith only” walk, but an obedient faith that moves us to keep our conditions of the covenant we have with God. However, we know we cannot keep the conditions perfectly. We sin, and thus, we need the continuing blood of Jesus in order to remain in a covenant relationship with God. But if we rebel by turning away from the covenant, then there no longer remains a fulfillment of the promises on our behalf. The Hebrew writer reminded us of this. *“For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins”* (Hb 10:26).

This thought is summed up in the words of Micah 6:1-8 who pronounced judgment on Israel for their unfaithful walk in turning away from their covenant with God. Micah wrote that *“the Lord has a complaint with His people”* (vs 2). God had fulfilled His part of the covenant by delivering the Israelites from Egyptian captivity and bringing them into the promised land. He did this so that they might *“know the righteousness [faithfulness] of the Lord”* (vs 5). But many centuries later when Micah prophesied to the nation, they had faulted on their responsibility to remain faithful to God. So what would God require of them in order to restore their covenant relationship with Him in view of the fact that He was faithful (righteous) to fulfill His promises of the covenant? *“He has shown you,*

*O man, what is good and what the Lord requires of you, but to do justly and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God*" (vs 8). They must renew their faith by renewing their commitment to the covenant.

Any discussion in reference to the justification of God must be defined in the context of God's covenant relationship with Israel. Through His righteousness (faithfulness to keep promises), God delivered on His covenant promises. Except for the faithful remnant that He restored from captivity, the majority of Israel turned away from the covenant when they ran after idolatrous gods. Nevertheless, God fulfilled His promises to the faithful remnant. Justification at the cross did not depend on their righteousness, for they were dead in sin when the Advocate pled their case before the Judge at the cross (Rm 5:8). The righteousness of God, however, was manifested at the cross for God fulfilled all His promises concerning the Seed that would bless all mankind.

This profound subject is introduced by Paul in Romans 1:16,17, but is often misunderstood. Paul first speaks of the gospel. According to his definition of the gospel in 1 Corinthians 15:3,4, the gospel is the justifying work of God in the death of Jesus for our sins on the cross. It is Jesus' death and resurrection. This good news event is the power of God unto salvation. In order to be this power unto salvation, two things had to take place. First, the righteousness of God must be revealed to those with whom God seeks to bring into a covenant rela-

tionship. This was accomplished through the cross. "*For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men*" (Ti 2:11). Second, there must be a faith response by those who seek to come into this covenant relationship with God. The faith response would be obedience to the gospel (See 2 Th 1:6-9; 1 Pt 4:17).

In reference to the gospel, Paul continues to explain that "*it is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith ...*" (Rm 1:17). The sending of His Son to die for our justification was God's faithfulness to bring His creation into a covenant relationship. The cross, therefore, revealed the faithfulness of a just God to His creation that could not be saved by their own righteousness. He would not allow those who seek Him to go without a covenant. He so loved the world that the general invitation was made to all men through the cross to come into His covenant that He sought to establish with those who choose to obey the gospel. The righteousness of God was revealed by His faithfulness to His creation in order to establish a covenant that would in turn require faithfulness on the part of man (Rm 1:17).

The gospel was a manifestation of "faith to faith," (God's faithfulness connected to man's faithfulness). Here is where so many have missed the point in reference to justification that is based on God's faithfulness that inspires our faithful response. This is also where many of the Protestant world have based their theology on a misunderstanding of justification that was brought out of the Reformation Movement. Experiential religion-

ists assumed that justification relied on a meritorious experience whereby one justifies himself before God. Seeing the futility, and rightly so, of any meritorious works of law or deeds being able to justify oneself before God, “faith only” theologians have run in the opposite direction. They have concluded that since we cannot be justified by meritorious works, then justification must rest solely on our faith. John Calvin corrupted this theology even more. He unfortunately based his understanding of justification on the foundation of a concept that God predestined some to eternal destruction regardless of their choice in the matter. Since Calvin could not make everyone righteous before God through obedient faith, he assumed, therefore, that God had created some for eternal destruction regardless of their choices. He destroyed the free-moral obedience of all men, and thus imagined a fiendish Creator who would unjustly condemn to eternal hell those He predestined to such a fate. But all these theologies of men have made something simple so complex. And in reference to the theology of Calvinism, they have the created a god who was a respecter of those who were supposedly unconditionally elected to eternal salvation, and fiendish to those who were unconditionally predestined to eternal damnation in a fiery hell.

The righteousness of God was revealed at the cross. It was there that our justification was initiated by the faithfulness of God to keep His promises to the fathers of Israel. Paul revealed this faithfulness of God in Galatians 2:16, a pas-

sage that is often obscured by some translations. The *International King James Version* has the correct reading. “*Knowing that a man is not justified by works of law, but by the faith of Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus so that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by works of law, for by works of law no flesh will be justified.*”

At the cross, **justification resulted from the faithful work of Jesus Christ**, as opposed to the futile meritorious efforts of men to keep law perfectly in order to justify themselves. Some translations have unfortunately been influenced by their thinking that places justification on the shoulders of men. They translate the phrase “the faith of Christ Jesus” in Galatians 2:16 to read “by faith in Christ Jesus.” But the reading in Greek is “faith of Christ.” It was because of the faithfulness of Christ to accomplish the eternal plan of redemption on the cross that God was able to reconcile the world unto Himself. Through the cross, God “*has reconciled us to Himself through Christ*” (2 Co 5:18). Through His Son, the Father was justifying those who were dead in sin because of their inability to keep law perfectly in order to justify themselves.

God was faithful to fulfill His promise that He originally made to Adam and Eve in Genesis 3:15. He was faithful to fulfill His promise to Abraham that in his seed all nations of the world would be blessed (Gn 12:3). God was faithful through the faith of Christ to take Himself to the cross in order to call all men to join Him in a covenant with the Father. The justification of the cross was

not simply a blanket declaration that all men are now unconditionally justified. It is a call by the gospel message to all men to come with obedient faith into this covenant. Through the appeal of His righteousness revealed on the cross, God pleads to all men for “*obedience to righteousness*” (Rm 6:16). He is “*not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance*” (2 Pt 3:9).

The gospel is power unto salvation from “faith to faith” (Rm 1:17). It was initiated and executed on the cross because of God’s faithfulness to keep His promises. God now calls on those who seek to come into a covenant relationship with Him to act on their faith. If God were willing that no one should perish, but did not offer the cross, then He would not have been faithful to keep His promise that was made two thousand years before to Abraham (See Gn 12:1-4). Israel was called by God to be faithful because He was faithful to keep His promises to the fathers. But if we think we can respond to the faithful actions of God that were revealed at the cross with a simple “sinner’s prayer” that does not move one to do anything in response to the faithfulness of God, then we are asking God to respond with His atoning work at the cross to an unresponsive faith.

Inactive faith was the core to James’ thought when he wrote, “*What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him?*” (Js 2:14). James gave the example of obedient Abraham. “*Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on*

*the altar? You see that faith was working with his works, and by works was faith made perfect*” (Js 2:21,22). Now listen to James’ conclusion to the actions of Abraham. “*And the scripture was fulfilled that says, ‘Abraham believed God and it was credited to him for righteousness’*” (Js 2:23). Abraham acted on his faith. It was not a dead faith. And because he had an active faith, he was credited to be righteous, that is, justified. One is not righteous (justified) before God without an active response to God’s action on the cross. It was for this reason that the eunuch asked Philip, “*What hinders me from being baptized?*” (At 8:36). It was for this reason that Ananias asked Saul, “*... why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized and wash away your sins ...*” (At 22:16). And it was for this reason that in the same hour of the night the active faith of the Philippian jailor moved him to take action in reference to his new knowledge of the saving power of the cross. “*And immediately he was baptized ...*” (At 16:33).

Therefore, when Paul made the statement, “faith to faith,” he meant from God’s faithfulness to take action at the cross for our justification, which faithfulness should draw the same active response out of those who come to the cross. There must be a faith response to God’s faithfulness, otherwise, our faith leaves us in death at the foot of the cross until we do what Jesus said to do in reference to our sins. “*He who believes and is baptized will be saved*” (Mk 16:16). It cannot be more simple than that (See At 2:38; 22:16).

Must we remind ourselves of 1 Peter 4:17. “*What will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God?*” If one comes to the cross with faith only, without obedience to the gospel of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus (Rm 6:3-6), he is not justified simply because his faith has not moved him to faithfulness. Salvation by the gospel is by “faith to faith.” God has been faithful in offering to His creation an opportunity to be justified before Him. Unless one reciprocates with faith in action, the cross will accomplish nothing in reference to one’s justification that is freely offered at the cross.

The cross is the revelation of the righteousness of God toward His creation. “*But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested ... even the righteousness of God that is by the faith of Jesus Christ to all those who believe*

...” (Rm 3:21,22). Jesus was faithful in taking Himself to the cross for those He had created (See Jn 10:17,18; Cl 1:16). The cross now calls on all who would believe to respond to the cross. Because all have sinned (Rm 3:23), the call of the cross is to respond to the justification that is offered there for our sins (Rm 3:24). When one responds to the cross by obedience to the gospel, he has access to the redemption that is in Christ Jesus (Rm 6:3; Gl 3:26,27). Through the cross, God “*has set forth [His Son] to be an atoning sacrifice by His blood through faith in order to declare His righteousness for the remission of sins in the past because of the forbearance of God*” (Rm 3:25). Therefore, “*as through one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of one [Jesus] will many be made righteous [justified]*” (Rm 5:19).

## Chapter 11

### Crucified With Him On The Cross

Paul wrote the well-known statement, “*I have been **crucified** with Christ. And it is no longer I who live, but **Christ lives in me***” (Gl 2:20). “Crucified” in this statement is the Greek passive, and thus at some time in the past Paul was **acted upon** by being crucified with Christ. The tense of the verb does not indicate something that Paul personally did, **but something that was done for him**. That something was the work of Christ at the cross. Because Paul was acted upon by the work of Christ on the

cross, there was power in his life to live the cross-bearing life. “*And the life that I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God ...*” (Gl 2:20). When Paul wrote to the Philippians, we now understand what he was saying when he wrote, “*I can do all things through Him who strengthens me*” (Ph 4:13). It was not Paul of himself who was able to lead the crucified life. It was the crucified Christ who lived within him. His “can do” was not “I can do myself.” Paul wrote, “*But in all these things we are more than con-*

*querors through Him who loved us*" (Rm 8:37). Our power to conquer is not within ourselves. It is "through Him" who loved us on the cross.

Paul's continued walk under the power of the cross was maintained by his obedient faith. This would be the lifestyle that Jesus indicated when He stated, "*Whoever wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me*" (Mk 8:34; Lk 9:23; 14:27). The joy of bearing our crosses for Christ, therefore, is in our knowledge of and faith in what Jesus did on the cross. This is certainly behind the statement of James when he encouraged his readers, "*My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials ...*" (Js 1:2). Cross-bearing disciples are full of joy because they realize that it is the crucified Christ who is working in them for the glory of God.

Paul's crucifixion with Christ takes us back to the cross of Christ. Paul wants to remind us that our old man of sin was crucified with Christ at the time Jesus died on the cross. He wrote in reference to our problem of sin in Romans 6:6. "... *knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him so that the body of sin might be destroyed, that we should no longer be bondservants to sin*" (Rm 6:6). In using the word "knowing" (Gr. *ginosko*), Paul wanted the Roman Christians to understand, grasp and comprehend something that was very important concerning their salvation. He wanted them to realize that they were who they were in Christ because of what Christ did on the cross for them. The word "cruci-

fied" in his statement is the Greek passive, that is, the object (us) was acted upon by another. In the Romans 6:6 statement the "old man of sin" was acted upon by Christ at the cross. The "old man of sin" was taken to the cross **with** Christ. So in answer to the question of when the old man was crucified, it was when Jesus was crucified.

There is no such thing as self-crucifixion. Though our crucifixion with Christ will motivate us to take up our cross and follow Jesus, we are not crucifying our old man of sin, for such would be impossible. In crucifixion, someone was always acting upon the victim to nail him to the cross. And when we are discussing the problem of sin, only the One against whom we sin has the authority to forgive that sin. While on earth, the Son of God had the authority to forgive sin directly, immediately and personally (Mt 9:6). And while He was on the cross, the Son of God was there to forgive our sins by allowing Himself to be crucified for our old man of sin. As a reminder that He had the power to forgive while on earth, in His last moments on the cross He personally forgave another by saying to the thief on the cross, "... *today you will be with Me in Paradise*" (Lk 23:43).

We could not of ourselves crucify our old man of sin. The cross was about forgiveness and crucifixion. If by faith we come to the cross, realizing that the Son of God has taken care of our old man of sin, then in thanksgiving we go to the grave with Him in order to enjoy newness of life when our sins are washed away in the waters of baptism (At 22:16).

We are thus born again as a new creature in Christ. *“Therefore, if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature. Old things have passed away. Behold, all things have become new”* (2 Co 5:17).

On the cross Jesus was active in taking our old man of sin with Him to be crucified. Through the obedient faith of Christ to go to the cross, we can have faith that our old man of sin was crucified. But as His faith was active in taking our old man of sin to the cross for crucifixion, our faith must also be active in doing that which is necessary in order to have life. Through obedience to the gospel (baptism) our faith is active in taking the crucified old man to the grave. We were passive in Jesus’ work to crucify the old man of sin. However, we must be active in burying the old dead man. Therefore, **through the power of the cross our old man of sin was crucified with Jesus. But by faith, we choose to have the old man buried with Christ and raised to walk in newness of life** (Rm 6:5).

We must keep in mind that though the old man of sin was crucified with Jesus when He went to the cross, we are all as dead men walking. We have no life before resurrection, as Jesus was in a tomb before life came after the resurrection. There is *“no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus”* (Rm 8:1) because those in Christ have buried the old crucified man (See Gl 3:26-29). However, outside Christ he is in condemnation. But when one is *“baptized into His [Christ’s] death,”* that is, *“united in the likeness of His death,”* it is then that

he can be raised with Him *“in the likeness of His resurrection”* in order to walk as a new creature in Christ (Rm 6:3-6; 2 Co 5:17). Once the old man of sin is buried, a new man is born who has been blessed with eternal life in Christ. John reminds us, *“And this is the testimony, that God has given us eternal life and this life is in His Son”* (1 Jn 5:11).

Paul brings out the above meaning in Ephesians 2:8. *“For by grace you are saved through faith, and that **not of yourselves**, it is the gift of God.”* The grace of God appeared on the cross on our behalf (Ti 2:11). It was grace that brought salvation, both through the faith of Jesus and the faith of ourselves. Our salvation could not be accomplished on our own. It had to come only as a gift of God, which gift we accept through faith. This is the power of the gospel that is from *“faith to faith.”* God did what we could not do for ourselves. Paul continues his teaching on this matter in Romans 6 by reminding the Roman disciples, *“Therefore, do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you should obey the lusts of the body”* (Rm 6:12). On the contrary, he exhorted, *“present yourselves to God, as those who are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God”* (Rm 6:13). Herein is the power of grace. We know that we are under grace, and not under the necessity of performing law perfectly in order to save ourselves. Therefore, *“sin will not have dominion over you, for you are not under law, but under grace”* (Rm 6:14). The power of the cross is that we know that our insufficient performance

of law will not separate us from the love of God. Since God gave His only begotten Son in order to crucify the old man of sin, then there is nothing that can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rm 8:39).

The curse of experiential religion is that the adherents of such faiths have little faith in our total justification by Jesus on the cross. The power of the gospel is minimal in the mind of the one who questions his salvation by the grace of God. The experientialist seeks to cleanse his conscience of guilt through the performance of emotionality, and often, meritorious good works. It is difficult for him to step aside and get out of the way of Jesus who has taken care of the old man of sin. Some fail to realize that we are “*created in Christ Jesus for good works*” (Ep 2:10). We are not created in Christ **by** good works. When we understand that God saved us at the cross of grace, that realization moves us into action. It

is that grace that causes thanksgiving (2 Co 4:15). Paul’s life was an example. ***“But by the grace of God I am what I am. And His grace toward me was not in vain, but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me”*** (1 Co 15:10). That is a very powerful statement! God’s grace took Paul far beyond what he could ever have accomplished by his own self-will to work meritoriously in obedience to law. When Paul said, “*for you are not under law, but under grace*” (Rm 6:14), he meant that we are not under the motivation to keep law meritoriously in order to be saved. On the contrary, we are under the motivation of grace to live for Jesus. By being motivated by faith in God’s grace, we understand Romans 3:31. “*Do we then make void law through faith? Certainly not! On the contrary, we establish law.*” Under faith we cry out to our Father to instruct us concerning the right way.

## Chapter 12

### Refocusing On The Cross

Throughout the centuries there have always been efforts to relegate the cross to a subpoint on a theological outline. The more a religion was based on the traditions of the fathers, the less emphasis there was place on the significance of the cross in the theology of the religion. The more organized a religion focused on the authority of men on earth within the organized structure of the religion, the less adherents focused exclusively on King

Christ and His leadership through the cross. The worst scenario is a religion that sets up its own church head on earth. Add to all this religious chaos the fact that the more legalistic a church becomes in its theology, the less the mystery of the cross fits into its systematic theology.

Salvation, it was presumed by the traditionalist and the legalist, was based on faithfulness to “the church” and its established doctrine. It was faithfulness

to the church, and subsequently, the church would get one into heaven. Regardless of one's response to the cross, "faithfulness," which meant faithfulness to the church, would determine one's destiny. The result of this obsession with traditional church structures and legal theological outlines, was that church and doctrine were highlighted, with the message of the cross being relegated to a subpoint at the conclusion of the sermon. The result was that campaigns and crusades alike were organized efforts to promote one's church in contrast to the supposed error of all other churches. Preaching church became the center of our "evangelistic" sermons, and the cross was added only at the conclusion of a theologically engineered presentation of "church doctrine."

Those who were more legally oriented in their theology viewed the cross simply as the back drop of their focus on a manufactured "plan of salvation." Acts 2 became the center of reference to their preaching, and subsequently, they were able to bring people to baptism without even mentioning the cross. Some realized the error of this legal approach to salvation, and then ran through Jerusalem to focus exclusively on Jesus alone. They walked with Him and His disciples down the roads of Palestine, but they lost their emphasis on the incarnate God who was nailed to the cross to ransom their souls. Jesus became a folk hero, good teacher, a personal friend, someone with whom we sought to identify as our personal Savior. But in our listing of the teachings of Jesus, the atonement of the

cross was marginalized for a simple conversation with Jesus as a good friend. Jesus became our personal Savior, but not to the extent of being our "personal God" before whom we will be judged. The emphasis in reference to Jesus having an impact on our lives changed from what Jesus did for us to what we could do for Him. The result of this change in focus led some to a works-oriented faith whereby they sought to justify themselves before God. The result was that we never really felt good about our salvation because we never really felt good about our works, for we knew that our works were never enough to merit our intended yearning for eternal life.

Then those who fell under the persuasion of John Calvin simply gave up works altogether. In their fear of a faith that would manifest itself through an obedient response to the incarnate and crucified God of the cross, they simply affirmed that salvation was by faith only on the part of the predestined. No works required! They forgot that what Calvin used as his primary text (Romans) was introduced and concluded by "obedience of faith." "*We have received grace and apostleship, for obedience of the faith ...*" (Rm 1:5). And lastly, Paul concluded, "*... the mystery ... has been made known to all nations for the obedience of faith*" (Rm 16:25,26).

Add to a "faith only" response to the cross the doctrine of individual predestination, and the Calvinistic religionist seems to have a religion that appeals to the carnal nature of man. It appeals to the materialist who would consume the

world upon himself. Regardless of what one did morally, or how much he consumed upon himself, he was still predestined to heaven, and thus, he could live without endangering his soul. What one preacher said to one of the young members of his group emphasizes the point. The young man confessed to the preacher that he was struggling with moral temptations in his life. The preacher reassured the young man by saying, "That's fine. As long as you understand that you have been predestined personally to eternal life, it doesn't matter." Individual predestination moves one to divert his life from the cross. If one believes that he or she is individually predestined, then there is no fear of losing one's soul. One person recently called us and stated, "I have never heard of apostasy. What does it mean?" The cross has little appeal to the religiously arrogant. It has little motivation for those who believe they cannot fall from the grace of God. After all, who would really want to bear the cost of the cross when he believes that he is already individually predestined to eternal life? The faith of the individual predestinationist, therefore, is not in the work of the incarnate Son of God on the cross, but in his individual predestination. Once one believes that he is individually chosen by God, then there is no need for faith in the work of the Suffering Servant on the cross.

What Calvin and those who followed his teaching actually did was to make senseless the atoning sacrifice of the cross. Calvin negated any love response to the love act revealed on the

cross. If one was predestined at birth to eternal glory, then what need would there be for any eternal atoning sacrifice? If certain individuals were already destined to glory, why pay any ransom? Why would God even need to incarnate in the flesh of man in order to make a redemptive offering? If the Calvinistic doctrine of individual predestination were true, then we would question why the Son of God even showed up at the cross. If God predestined individuals to eternal glory, then certainly He could have just taken them on to heaven without all the intervening scandal of the cross. He could have taken them without all the suffering and salvational planning throughout the centuries for the sake of a free-moral individual who really was not free in the first place to take ownership of his own eternal destiny.

The shocking reality about this theology is that a vast number of religionists throughout the world today believe in the Calvinistic theology of individual predestination. It is an appealing theology because it makes God a respecter of specific people, not because it draws individuals to the cross of love. We must not underestimate the theology of individual predestination to a narcissistic generation that is consumed with adding individuals to their Twitter follower list as they have presumed that God unconditionally added them to His Twitter family before they were born.

But we would base our faith on the fact that because a loving God was not willing that any of His creation should be lost, His love was revealed at the cross

through His Son. We thus seek a restoration of emphasis on the atoning sacrifice of Jesus as our primary message to the world, a world in which “*whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life*” (Jn 3:16). The message of the cross is “Him.” God sent Him into the world as an opportunity for every person to have access to everlasting life. The reward of believing in Him is being a part of the covenanted people of God.

Jesus brought more than a set of doctrines to “establish” churches. He brought Himself, and thus our message to the lost must not be a simple set of outlined doctrines to “identify the church.” Our message to the world is the atoning sacrifice of the incarnate Son of God. Our message is not only on a crucifixion event outside Jerusalem two thousand years ago. Jesus came in the flesh for the cross. He was resurrected to stay in the flesh. And He is coming again in His glorified body in order to dwell with His brethren in His glorified body. We thus look beyond the six hours of suffering on the cross in order to see the God who eternally gave up being on an equality with the eternal God in order to be made in the likeness of His brethren with whom He has chosen to dwell forever. Our message, therefore, is not a law of condemnation, but a message of deliverance from the bondage of sin through the ransom that was paid for our redemption.

We must keep in mind that the message we preach is not a catechism of teachings. The gospel, the good news, is

not a system of law. Law only infers duty and discouragement, for we cannot keep law perfectly in order to save ourselves. The covenant that God seeks to establish with us is more than a contract of duty. If the gospel is simply a contract that is based on obligations to keep the laws of the contract, then we have brought ourselves again into the bondage of our inability to keep law perfectly. On the contrary, the gospel is a message of joy and hope. It is a message of deliverance and freedom from the bondage of law. If our covenant with God were simply a contractual agreement, then we would be subjugated to a set of obligations that we must keep perfectly in order to preserve the contract. And we know we cannot do such in order to save ourselves.

God’s covenant with us is different than a contract. God reaches out through the cross to covenant with us, though in our rebellion we seek to turn from Him. As in Israel, God continually sought to turn Israel from her wayward rebellion (See Hs 2:9-23; 8:14; 11:5-9). God’s covenant with us today is a covenant of grace. He seeks to nurture us into eternity through the drawing power of His love and grace (See 1 Co 15:10; 2 Co 4:15). Through the cross, He manifested Himself as a loving God who is reaching out to the wayward in order to bring them again into His eternal fellowship.

The cross is a manifestation of God’s love that suffers with us through His Suffering Servant. Therefore, when one in repentance seeks to return to God, he does not come to God pleading on the basis of his works, but pleading that what

he could not pay through works of law would be paid by the ransomed blood of the incarnate Son. When God grants forgiveness, which He always does, it is a grant that is given regardless of our imperfections. This is grace and mercy. This is the good news of the cross. Upon the basis of our mourning over our sins, God grants righteousness regardless of our imperfections. He considers us faithful (righteous) regardless of our inabilities. The righteousness of Jesus, therefore, becomes the imputed righteousness of the believer. It is for this reason that the believer does not have to depend on

his own righteousness, for he knows that all sin, including himself. We must depend on the righteousness of Jesus at the cross, “*knowing that a man is not justified by works of law, but by the faith of Christ Jesus ...*” (G1 2:16). We need to remember the words of Paul to the Jews in the synagogue of Antioch of Perga. “*Therefore, let it be known to you, brethren, that through this Man [Jesus] is preached to you the forgiveness of sins, and by Him all who believe are justified from all things which you could not be justified by the law of Moses*” (At 13:38,39).

*On a hill far away stood an old rugged cross,  
The emblem of suffering and shame;  
And I love that old cross where the Dearest and Blest,  
For a world of lost sinners was slain.*

*So I'll cherish the old rugged cross,  
Till my trophies at last I lay down;  
I will cling to the old rugged cross,  
And exchange it some day for a crown.*

## A Metaphorical Epilogue

*“Are they all here?” the Father joyously asked the Son.*

*“Every last one!” the Son reassured the Father. “I did not leave one behind.”*

*“Oh, this is so wonderful. They’re so glorious, as white as snow,” the Father added. “Son, you have to thank yourself for this.”*

*“He surely does,” added the Spirit. “You wouldn’t believe the mess they were in at the time He arrived to clean them up. They needed a real scrubbing. And once they were cleansed, it was sometimes a challenge to keep them drawn in the right direction by our love. The deceiver was constantly roaring in their faces. But, he is gone and it is all over.”*

*“Was it worth all the struggle, My Son?”*

*“It was, Father. Just look at them. They are truly a loving community of people who reflect our nature. Though I gave up so much to go get them, they went through so much to follow Me here. We need to thank the Spirit for being with them in every struggle along the way.”*

The Spirit added, *“It was easy after they responded to our grace that was poured out for them at the intervention. They were so thankful that all they needed was a little protection here and there to keep them safe. Because of their love for us, they were so willing to follow our instructions of the book.”*

Then the Father concluded, *“So now, it’s time to move them on into eternity. Our love has been fulfilled and forever we have those in our presence who have reciprocated our love. Their presence in our company is proof that We are Who We are.”*

**“Then the King will say to those on His right hand,  
‘Come, you blessed of My Father,  
inherit the kingdom prepared for you  
from the foundation of the world’.”**

(Matthew 25:34)