

The Supreme Sacrifice

of

Jesus Christ

by Donald Clink

Chapter One

The Purpose of Christ's Sacrifice and the True Gospel

"Jesus Christ is the sacrifice for our sins!" Perhaps the majority of Christians would affirm this to be the central truth of the Christian faith. But what is the meaning and purpose of Christ's sacrifice?

Did Christ die in order to appease the wrath of an angry God and through a legality which the Father Himself established, in order to make us positionally righteous so that we could go to heaven and escape hell? Or did Christ die in order to enable us in the process of living righteously and overcoming sin?

Let's consider what the apostles Peter, and Paul, and the author of the New Testament letter to the Hebrews gives as the reason for Christ's death.

I Peter 2:24 He himself endured our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.

II Corinthians 5:15 And he died for all, that those who live might live no longer for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.

Romans 14:9 For to this end Christ died and lived again, that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living.

Titus 2:14 who gave himself for us to redeem us from all iniquity and to purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds.

Heb 9:26 ...he has appeared once for all at the end of the age to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself.

Each of these reasons is essentially the same. Jesus died in order that we might come under His authority and thereby, through His enabling grace, become righteous persons. God wants people to be reconciled to Himself and gave His Son to make this possible. The reconciliation of the individual entails taking on the characteristics of God ---- righteousness, holiness, love, and compassion. Christ began His work by His own proclamation of the gospel of the Kingdom. He accomplished on the cross the means of making righteousness possible, and proclaimed from the cross that this aspect of His work was completed. Through His people, He continues His work in the hearts of people, reconciling them to Himself, enabling them to overcome wrongdoing, and giving to them the ministry of reconciliation. Christ's work will not be complete until He has eliminated sin from the universe!

2 Cor 5:17-19 Therefore, if any one is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the

world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.

Does the fact that Jesus died to make people righteous imply that regenerated persons can be righteous now? Unequivocally — yes! But doesn't Isaiah proclaim that all of our righteous deeds are as filthy rags? Yes, OUR righteous — OUR self-righteous deeds, but not the righteous deeds which God enables us to do. And God's righteousness through Christ, by whom He enables us, is not a positional righteousness thrust upon us — a cloak of righteousness wrapped around us which covers our sin, so that when God looks at us, He is blinded to our sin and sees only Christ's righteousness. It is a REAL righteousness which is available to us through the grace of Christ. It is a growing and developing righteousness. Paul describes it, and the way to obtain it in Philippians 3:8-14:

Indeed I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as refuse, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own, based on law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith; that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that if possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Brethren, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but one thing I do, forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

John made clear that this righteousness of God is a real righteousness which we now possess, and not a mere covering:

1 John 3:7, 8 Little children, let no one deceive you. He who does right is righteous, as he is righteous. He who practices sin is of the devil...

Are we going to let someone deceive us into believing that it is impossible to be righteous? Will we be deceived by Martin Luther who, in his [A Treatise on Christian Liberty](#), wrote concerning the commandments of God, "It is equally impossible for us to keep any of them"? Is this idea in keeping with the character of God? Will He ask people to do that which is impossible to do? John made clear, in the passage quoted above, that some people are indeed righteous, just as God is righteous.

Is it possible to be holy? Peter referred to Leviticus 19:2 when he wrote:

1 Peter 1:15,16 ... as he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct, since it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy."

So we are to be righteous like God, and we are to be holy like God. And God does not require of us the impossible. This is the very purpose of Christ's death.

But surely we can't be perfect? Or can we? Jesus Himself required of His disciples—

perfection:

Matthew 5:48 You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

So we are to be righteous, holy, and perfect like God. But surely no one is perfect! Do you know anyone who is perfect? No? Perhaps no one is yet complete or perfect, but it is God's plan for everyone of His children to be complete. We are to be conformed to the image of Christ:

Romans 8:29 For those whom he foreknew he also pre-appointed to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the first-born among many brethren.

Jesus Himself, though sinless, was not perfect or complete until He finished His course on the cross:

Heb 2:10 For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through suffering.

Jesus knew no sin, (2 Cor 5:21), not because His Deity precluded the possibility of His sinning, but because His absolute unity with His Father made it possible for him to always choose righteousness. He deliberately chose the right and eschewed the wrong. It was a process; He learned obedience through what He suffered and He made the right choice every time.

Heb 5:8 Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered;

The apostle Paul as indicated in the Philippians passage, knew that he, too, was still imperfect; yet he expected perfection at his personal resurrection. Paul wanted to be among the many brethren of the resurrection! But he didn't expect this to happen automatically. He believed he had to press into it.

Philippians 3:12 Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own.

Salvation from sin is a process which will continue until we are completed as Christians at our resurrection. Jesus was the first-born of the resurrection! Those whom Christ will save from sin through His enabling grace, will be born into the first resurrection, and thus, complete, will become Christ's brethren! We must now be generated again (John 3) with the seed of Christ planted in us, but at the resurrection we will be born again, and will be manifested in the earth as the full-blown sons of God.

Romans 8:19 For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God;

Yes, God sacrificed His beloved Son for our benefit, and Jesus sacrificed Himself for the same reason. Both the Father and the Son agreed about this, as they agreed on everything they ever did.

John 8:28 So Jesus said, "When you have lifted up the Son of man, then you will know that I am I, and that I do nothing on my own authority but speak thus as the Father taught me.

The Father and the Son have always had a total unity, a unity that no two human beings have ever had. Thus Jesus was able to say to Philip, "He who has seen me has seen the Father." John 14:9. Jesus is the exact expression of the Father (Heb 1:3), or as the RSV puts it, "bears the very stamp of the Father's nature". For this reason, if you see the Son, you see the Father. Though they are two different divine Individuals, they are identical. So, by agreement, the Father sacrificed His Son for us, and the Son sacrificed Himself for our benefit, in order that we might live righteous, holy lives before God.

However, since Martin Luther's day, and even earlier, there has been a different explanation of the sacrifice of Christ, and consequently a different gospel. It has been stated that the death of Christ was a sacrifice to appease the wrath of an angry God, a God filled with rage about sin. Without this appeasing sacrifice, or propitiation, God in His anger would send everyone to eternal torment. But since this appeasement has been made, there is a way out. So the presentation of a different gospel approximates the following excerpt from Derek Flood's article "Christus Victor":

You have broken the law because it is impossible to keep it, and so you must have broken it. And because you cannot keep this impossible to keep law you will be charged with death because "the penalty for sin is death" and those are just the rules. God must have blood because the law requires it; there must be a penalty paid. The only payment that would have been enough is sacrificing someone who was the "perfect law-keeper", someone who could live a perfect life without sin. So God decided to kill his own Son on the cross to appease his legal need for blood. Now that Jesus has been sacrificed God is no longer mad at us for not doing what we can't do anyway, so we can now come and live with him forever - as long as we are grateful to him for his "mercy" to us.

We may be told that we need to "accept Christ as our personal Saviour" (a phrase that we do not find in scripture), or pray the sinner's prayer, "God be merciful to me a sinner", or pray some other prayer of an evangelist's composition, such as, "I realize I am a sinner, and that Christ died in my place, and took my punishment for me. Father, I am very sorry for my sins (though I couldn't have done otherwise), and I hereby accept the finished work of Christ as alone sufficient for covering my sins, so that when you look at me, You will no longer see my sins, but Christ's righteousness, and I will become righteous in your sight and thereby qualify to go to heaven and avoid hell. Amen".

"After praying this prayer," you may be told, "you may not feel any different. But nevertheless, you have been saved from hell. Just accept that fact by faith, and it will be true for you."

This gospel, so-called, does not require repentance, does not require a change of mind and heart concerning the way we are living, and does not require a turning away from our former way of life. Sometimes, we hear the word "repent" in the presentation of this "gospel", but it is used to mean "feeling sorry for" our sins, rather than changing our minds about them and turning away from them. Implicit in this "gospel" is the concept that we cannot live consistently righteous lives even after we get saved from hell. Oh, it is thought to be a good idea to obey Christ, but it is not a necessity as far as salvation goes, because we are covered by His blood and thus delivered from the wrath of God through Him, and because it has nothing to do with works. By contrast, the true gospel tells us that through Christ, we are delivered primarily from sin. The angel said to Joseph, "You shall call his name 'Jesus', for He shall save his people from their sins." One might call deliverance from hell a side-effect of this process.

Is the Gospel All About Forgiveness?

A short "devotional" I once read contained the statement:

"Jesus Christ shed His blood to forgive our sin, not to remove our sin".
The author had it exactly backwards. Jesus shed his blood to remove our sin, not to forgive our sin. This is obvious from the statement already quoted from Hebrews 9:26

...he has appeared once for all at the end of the age to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself.

Throughout the Scriptures from Genesis to Revelation, it is obvious that God wants righteous people. We may well be satisfied merely with forgiveness so as to escape the Lake of Fire, but not God. He wants the very best for us, and He knows that we cannot dwell in total joy and health of soul until sin is removed from us. At this point, some may object that it is obvious that salvation is all about forgiveness of sin. And they point out scriptures such as these:

Acts 13:38 Let it be known to you therefore, brethren, that through this man forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you...

Colossians 1:14 ...in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

There is reason to doubt that the Greek word ἀφεσις (aphesis) should be translated as "forgiveness". This becomes obvious in the words of Jesus in quoting Isaiah 61:1

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed..."

The word translated as "release" to the captives ("deliverance" in the Authorized Version) is none other than ἀφεσις. Indeed, the word is used again in the phrase "set at liberty those who are oppressed." This last phrase is literally "send away in deliverance the ones having been shattered". Surely, Christ was not sent to forgive the oppressed, but was sent to deliver them from their oppression. Surely Christ was not sent to proclaim forgiveness to those who were unjustly imprisoned, but to proclaim their release from prison. So in addressing the men of Israel in Acts 13:38, surely Paul was saying that through Christ deliverance from sin, or release from sin was being proclaimed to them! Indeed, other than Jesus' quote from Isaiah 61, all other instances of ἀφεσις in the New Testament relate to being delivered from sin.

Did John the Baptizer preach forgiveness of sins? According to most translations he did.

Mark 1:4 John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

Looking at the record of John's dealings with people, do we ever find that he mentioned forgiveness — even once? How did he deal with the multitudes that came to be baptized by him? Did he ever tell them, "Repent and be baptized, and your sins will be forgiven?" No. He warned them to bear fruit that is consistent with repentance. Here is Luke's record:

Luke 3:7-16 He said therefore to the multitudes that came out to be baptized by him, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruits that fit repentance, and do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father'; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire."

*And the multitudes asked him, "What then shall we do?"
And he answered them, "He who has two coats, let him share with him who has none; and he who has food, let him do likewise."
Tax collectors also came to be baptized, and said to him, "Teacher, what shall we do?"
And he said to them, "Collect no more than is appointed you."
Soldiers also asked him, "And we, what shall we do?"
And he said to them, "Rob no one by violence or by false accusation, and be content with your wages."*

As the people were in expectation, and all men questioned in their hearts concerning John, whether perhaps he were the Anointed One,

John answered them all, "I baptize you with water; but he who is mightier than I is coming, the thong of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie; he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor, and to gather the wheat into his granary, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire." So, with many other exhortations, he preached good news to the people.

In examining further the true message of salvation, we may ask ourselves how we become regenerated. What do we actually do to appropriate the sacrifice of Christ so that we may have the enabling grace to do right and avoid wrong? If we repent of our way of living, submit ourselves to Jesus as Lord of our lives, and become baptized into Christ, then we shall enter the Kingdom of God now, and Christ's enabling grace will become available to us. John the Baptizer and Jesus proclaimed the same message concerning the Kingdom of God:

The Gospel According to John the Baptizer

According to John the Baptizer in the words we just read, there were two requirements necessary to become a member of the Kingdom:

1. Repent
2. Be baptized. The end or purpose of baptism was the affirmation of one's decision, the entrance into the door of salvation, and the beginning of the process of sending sin out of one's life, and thus the bearing of fruit that is worthy of repentance.

The Gospel According to Jesus

Matt 4:17 From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

John 4:1-3 Now when the Lord knew that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John (although Jesus himself did not baptize, but only his disciples), he left Judea and departed again to Galilee.

Jesus proclaimed the same requirements! Repent and be baptized.

The Gospel According to Peter

After Peter had addressed the men of Judea, showing that God had raised Jesus from the death, and that they had crucified Him, the following exchange took place:

Acts 2:36-39

"... Let all the house of Israel therefore know assuredly that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified."

Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brethren, what shall we do?"

And Peter said to them, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the sending away of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children and to all that are far off, every one whom the Lord our God calls to him."

What were Peter's requirements to appropriate the benefits of the Gospel? Repent and be baptized! The only difference was that now that Jesus had been raised, the gift of His Spirit was given.

Now some claim that John the baptizer and Jesus preached the gospel of the kingdom, but that the apostle Paul opened the new order of the Church by preaching the gospel of grace. C.I. Scofield, in his notes on Matthew 5:5 went so far as to affirm

"...the Sermon on the Mount in its primary application gives neither the privilege nor the duty of the Church." ---- Scofield Reference Bible, 1917 edition.

In other words, it is neither the duty nor even the privilege of the Christian to obey the laws of Christ expressed in those chapters.

Scofield taught that Christ's teachings in the "Sermon on the Mount" were the laws of the kingdom offered to the Jews, but that since the Jews rejected the kingdom it was to be postponed. Such teachers declare that now that we are under grace, we should listen to Paul, for the words of Christ no longer apply to us who live in the age of grace.

But as Paul made abundantly clear, there is only one gospel. That one gospel is the gospel of the Kingdom and Paul himself preached it!

The Gospel According to Paul

Acts 28:30,31 And he lived there two whole years at his own expense, and welcomed all who came to him, preaching the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ quite openly and unhindered.

But did Paul declare the necessity of repentance, as did John the Baptizer, Jesus, and Peter? Or did he teach that all that is necessary is to believe in the atoning work of Christ? In recounting to King Agrippa, his experience with Jesus on the road to Damascus, he concluded by saying,

Acts 26:19,20 "Wherefore, O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, but declared first to those at Damascus, then at Jerusalem and throughout all the country of Judea, and also to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God and perform deeds worthy of their repentance.

Does Paul's gospel not resemble that proclaimed by John the baptizer? Yes, Paul preached repentance, and doing deeds worthy of repentance. But did Paul proclaim the necessity of baptism? We read:

Acts 18: 8 ...many of the Corinthians hearing Paul believed and were baptized.

It was after they heard Paul that they were baptized. The necessity of baptism must have been implicit or explicit in Paul's message. Otherwise, why would they get baptized? So Paul's gospel not only "resembled" that of John the Baptizer; it was identical! But is baptism really necessary in order to get right with God? Let's look at the life of Paul himself. When were his sins washed away? Was it on the road to Damascus when Jesus spoke to him, and he submitted? That experience certainly turned him around. He was blinded, and was then ready to do what the Lord Jesus told him to do. But later, it was Ananias who counseled him to be baptized. From Paul's own account of the matter, Ananias said:

Acts 22:16 And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized, and wash away your sins,

calling on his name.'

So it was not when Jesus appeared to him on the road to Damascus, but at his baptism that Paul had his sins washed away.

Jesus taught:

John 3:5 Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I tell you, unless one is generated of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God."

Although there is much controversy about the meaning of "generated of water", many understand it to be baptism. This view is consistent with Justin Martyr's explanation of the ways of Christians to Augustus Caesar and to his son. Justin was born in 110 A.D. In chapter 61 of Justin's "First Apology", we find his explanation of Christian baptism:

I will also relate the manner in which we dedicated ourselves to God having been made new through Christ; lest, if we omit this, we seem to be unfair in the explanation we are making. As many as are persuaded and believe that what we teach and say is true, and undertake to be able to live accordingly, are instructed to pray and to entreat God with fasting, for the remission of their sins that are past, we praying and fasting with them.

Then they are brought by us where there is water, and are regenerated in the same manner in which we were ourselves regenerated... For Christ also said, "Except ye be generated again, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven."... And how those who have sinned and repent shall escape their sins, is declared by Isaiah the prophet... he thus speaks: "Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from your souls; learn to do well; judge the fatherless, and plead for the widow: and come and let us reason together, saith the Lord. And though your sins be as scarlet, I will make them white like wool; and though they be as crimson, I will make them white as snow. But if ye refuse and rebel, the sword shall devour you: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it."...that he may obtain in the water the remission of sins formerly committed, there is pronounced over him who chooses to be regenerated, and has repented of his sins, the name of God the Father and Lord of the universe..."

What About John 3:16 and Acts 16:29-31...?

Acts 16:29-31 And he (the Philippian jailer) called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas, and brought them out and said, "Men, what must I do to be saved?" And they said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household."

Do these passages contradict the requirements Jesus and Peter gave for becoming right with God? Do they require something less to be saved? So often today, we hear that all you have to do to get right with God is "accept Christ as your personal saviour". That's a phrase we don't find in any New Testament or early Christian writing. Or all you have to do is pray "God be merciful to me a sinner", or "I realize I'm a sinner, Jesus, and that you died to save me. I hereby accept your finished work to make me fit for heaven." Or some other prayer. I recall a woman from my local area who affirmed that she would not become a Christian, because she just didn't want to have to come to the front of a church and weep and cry. Some time later, she told me that she found out from her Christian friend that a person doesn't have to come forward, weeping and crying. "All you have to do," she explained, "is say a little prayer, and you'll be a Christian." That's the way the woman understood the "gospel" which was presented to her. One wonders how many people have "said the little prayer" and remained unchanged, but are under the delusion that they are now "saved", that they can go on living their lives as usual, but with the expectation that they'll go to heaven when they die, or when they are raised again to life.

So, it is said that all we have to do is believe in Jesus. However, the whole crux of the matter lies in that little word Πιστεω (pisteuō) which has been translated "believe". Indeed, the word does mean "believe" in many contexts. But another meaning is given in John's account of Jesus' life:

John 2:23-25 Now while he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many people saw the miraculous signs he was doing and believed in his name. But Jesus would not entrust himself to them, for he knew all men. He did not need man's testimony about man, for he knew what was in a man.

Is not "entrust" also the way the word is used in John 3:16 and Acts 16:29-31? If we entrust ourselves to Jesus, this includes repentance and baptism. "For God so loved the world ... that whoever should entrust himself to Him would have lasting life."

Identification With Man

Luke 13:5 I tell you ... unless you repent you will all likewise perish."

*John 3:5 Jesus responded, "Truly, truly, I tell you, unless one is **generated** of water and Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.*

Then how is the death of Christ connected with salvation? For years I had no idea. Yet I believed the words of Paul that the Saviour's death makes possible His enabling grace to help us live a life of righteousness before Him. More recently, I began to understand how Jesus' death relates to our salvation from sin. Jesus began to identify with man when He was born as a human being. He was truly a human baby who cried and wet himself like any other baby. He lived the life of an ordinary man here on earth, becoming hungry and thirsty like other men, and being tempted to wrongdoing like other men, though through His relationship with His Father, He always chose the right over the wrong. And finally He died as a human being. The identification was complete. After He was raised, He and His Father came to dwell within His people. Christ in us — infiltrated through our entire being, and we in Christ — infiltrated through His entire being. Christ has put on humanity, and we have put on Christ.

Galatians 3:27 For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

God prepared a building made without hands, which is His Church. In the Father's house (again the Church) are many dwelling places (John 14). The Body of Christ of which He is the Head is a single organism — we in Him and He in us. This magnificent unity has been made possible through Christ's identification with us, the great finished work that Christ accomplished on Calvary's tree.

Father, enable each one by your grace, who considers your great salvation to understand its wonder, its depth, and its expression of your magnificent LOVE! Show them that the easy way that is being proclaimed today is deceiving people and leading them into death. It is falsely portraying your character.

