

THE CROSS OF CHRIST

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Chapter 1

Crucify Him!

The greatest event that has ever taken place in the history of mankind is the death, burial, and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. As one well-known writer put it, “The sacrifice of Christ as an atonement for sin is the great truth around which all other truths cluster. In order to be rightly understood and appreciated, every truth in the word of God, from Genesis to Revelation, must be studied in the light that streams from the cross of Calvary.” (Gospel Workers, Ellen G. White, p. 315.)

The cross of Christ and the events surrounding it are recorded for us in the first four books of the New Testament, known as the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Approximately one third of these writings are concentrated on what is called the passion week.

The preaching of the cross was also the central

message of the New Testament. Listen to what the great apostle Paul had to say about the cross of Christ: “For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect. For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God.” (1 Corinthians 1:17, 18; see also 2:2)

Please note that to Paul the preaching of the gospel is synonymous to the preaching of the cross; and it is the cross of Christ that is the power of God unto salvation. No wonder Paul refuses to glory or boast in anything else but the cross of Christ. (Gal. 6:14) This being the emphasis of the New Testament writers, we must likewise put as much emphasis on the cross of Christ as they did.

Since the birth of the Christian Church there have been several views or theories presented to Christianity concerning the atonement or the cross of Christ. Accordingly, we have the substitution theory, the satisfaction theory, the ransom theory,

the moral influence theory, the governmental theory, and so on; each claiming to be the truth concerning the cross of Christ. But the cross is too big an event to fit into any one theory. All these theories have an element of truth. However, some of these theories become heretical not because of what they teach but what they deny. A good example is the moral influence theory, which denies the legal or forensic necessity of the atonement.

To appreciate the full significance of the cross of Christ, we will divide our study of this crucial and vital topic into three chapters. In these three chapters we will look at the cross from three different angles, each of them extremely important to us as Christians. In this first chapter we will look at how the crucifixion of Christ exposed Satan as a murderer and how it reveals to us the true character of sin; that even the smallest sin, at its very core, is crucifying Christ.

In the second chapter we will look at the cross in terms of what Paul said in Romans. 5:8—how it

demonstrated the unconditional and self-emptying love of God. The third chapter will deal with the cross as the power of God unto salvation; how it redeemed humanity, not only from our sins (plural, i.e., our acts of sin which condemn us), but also from sin (singular, i.e., the law or principle of sin in our members).

Finally, after we have taken a good look at the cross of Christ, we will consider the resurrection. The resurrection of Christ does not only play an important part in our redemption but is also the source of our blessed hope as Christians. It is the greatest proof that Christ has conquered sin and the grave, both of which are crucial to our salvation.

As mentioned above, in this chapter we will turn to the cross of Christ and look at how it demonstrated, revealed, and exposed Satan as a murderer, and at the same time how it reveals to us the true nature of sin. In John 8:40-44, Jesus made a statement to the Jews. He said: “You are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do.” By this He simply meant that, “You are

controlled by the devil and his desire you will perform.” Then Jesus added, “He was a murderer from the beginning.”

The question we must ask ourselves is what did Jesus mean by, “He was a murderer from the beginning.” In order that we come to grips with the full import of this statement, we must answer two further questions: 1. Who did Satan murder? 2. What did Jesus mean by the word “beginning”? Did He mean from the time Lucifer was created or from the time Lucifer became Satan?

Before we can answer these questions we first need to define the word murder. To human beings murder is the act of killing somebody. But in God’s eyes murder begins with a cherished desire or unwarranted hatred, as shown in the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus made it clear, if you are angry with somebody without a cause, or if you hate somebody without a reason, you have already committed murder in your heart. (Matt. 5:21, 22) So, according to God’s law, murder doesn’t have to be an act. Murder is a cherished hatred against

somebody else.

With this in mind, turn to Ezek. 28:15. In verse 14, Lucifer is described as “the anointed cherub.” In this chapter, the fall of Satan is linked with the fall of Babylon, because Babylon represents Satan’s kingdom. In verse fifteen we read these words concerning the anointed cherub, which is Lucifer: “Thou was perfect in thy ways from the day that thou wast created, till iniquity was found in thee.” Now the Hebrew word, “iniquity” means “crooked” and when applied spiritually means “to be bent towards self.” Sometime in the history of Lucifer his mind became perverted. Instead of his love going toward God and toward his fellow angels it made a U-turn towards himself.

In Isaiah 14:12-14, the prophet Isaiah describes to us what was the essence of that iniquity. Summarizing these verses, this is in effect what Lucifer said in his heart, “I am going to get rid of God and take His place.”

Now you cannot take the place of God unless

you first get rid of God. It is in this sense Lucifer, turned Satan, was a murderer from the beginning. I remember when we were in the mission field it was quite an experience traveling by taxi. Taxies here in the United States give individual service, but in some countries taxies are more like mini buses and they can squeeze more people into one taxi than you can imagine.

For example, if the middle seat can accommodate three people comfortably, they will squeeze in nine people. They put three people on the seat and three people on top of them and three more people on top of them and that's a full seat. I remember one day traveling in one of these taxies and we were packed. Being the top person, it was not too bad in terms of no weight on me, but I could not sit properly because of the number of people and my head kept hitting the roof every time we hit a bump. As the taxi driver sped along, there was a person who wanted a ride and the taxi stopped. I said to the driver, "There is no room." The driver replied, "Move closer, we will make room."

Now Satan did not say to God, “Move, I want a place with you.” That is not what Satan desired. He desired to get rid of God that he could have His place instead. It is because of coveting the place of God in his heart that Lucifer, turned Satan, desired to murder God.

Addressing the Jews, who were victims of Satan, Jesus one day told a parable, recorded in Matthew 21. In this parable there was a man who had a vineyard and he went off to a far country. He left his vineyard in the care of his servants. Every year he would send a man to collect the profits. Each time the person he sent was either stoned or kicked out, and so the owner got nothing.

Finally the owner said, “I will send my son. At least they will respect him.” But, as it turned out, they did the very opposite. Instead they said, “We will get rid of him. Then we can take all that he will inherit for ourselves.” So they decided to kill the son. Jesus, of course, was talking about Himself and the Jews. Remember that the Jews were to do

the lust of Satan. Satan wanted the place of God. He had never told anybody this. That would be foolish. What he probably told the angels was, “If I was in the place of God I would make life wonderful for you. You can have anything you like, enjoy anything you want without any restrictions. You can eat, drink, and be merry.”

Unfortunately, one-third of the angels fell for his lies. Satan thought that was enough to begin a revolution. Then the first war took place in heaven and is described in Revelation 12:7-9. If you read this passage in Rev. 12, you will discover that Lucifer, or Satan, was defeated in that war. But God did not destroy him at that time, for the simple reason that nobody knew what was in the heart of Satan. The only means by which God could expose Satan was to let him have his own way.

So, instead, God cast him out of heaven. Following this incident, Satan came to this world and deceived Eve, and through Eve he brought about the fall of Adam. Since God gave our first parents dominion of the world (Psalms 8:4-8), by

defeating Adam and Eve Satan gained control of this whole world. Satan then established his kingdom here on earth, under his own system, the system of self.

Everything, therefore, in this fallen world is based on three fundamental drives found in 1 John 2:15,16, “the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.” Underlying these three basic drives of sinful man is the principle of self, the very essence of Satan’s kingdom.

But one day, many centuries later, Satan heard some beautiful singing. It was, “Glory to God and peace to men on earth.” (Luke 2:14) The Son of God, his bitter enemy, had come to this world to redeem the human race from his hands. In response, Satan said, “I am not going to wait till you grow up.” Satan doesn’t believe in fair play. “I’m going to get you the first chance I have.”

Recorded in the New Testament are many incidents of how Satan’s many attempts to kill Christ failed. The first attempt recorded was the

destruction of the babies in Bethlehem by Herod's army. Herod the great was a victim of Satan who was simply using him as a tool. This familiar story, as we all know, ended in failure as far as getting rid of Christ. Incidentally, all of Satan's agents are "great." That is what he promises, "If you follow me, I will make you great." But remember, he is a liar. What he really desires is that by following him you will join him in the lake of fire.

We read this in Matthew 25:41. Christ will say to the those who took Satan's side, the unbelievers: "Depart from me into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels." The eternal fire was not prepared for mankind but Satan has deceived many. They believed him, chose his way, and now will have to join him. I hope nobody reading this is in that condition.

In Luke 4:9-17 we have recorded another attempt of Satan to murder Christ. It is in connection with the temptations of Christ in the wilderness. In one of them the devil took Christ to the top of the temple tower. He said, "It is

wonderfully high here. Why don't you jump?" That was one way of getting rid of Him. That is what Satan had in mind but he failed again.

Again, in John 10:31-59, we see how the devil used the Jews to try to stone Jesus to death. The word "again" in this passage indicates that this was not the first time he tried it. As we read these verses we will discover that Satan failed again. We must ask ourselves why. Why did Satan fail? Here are two texts that will help us realize why all these attempts of Satan failed. The first one is in John 7:30, which records one of the instances where Satan tried to destroy Jesus through human beings. "Then they sought to take Him: but no man laid hands on Him, [John tells us why] because His hour was not yet come."

Keep that in mind because God is sovereign and nobody ever touches us if our hour has not yet come. In chapter eight, verse twenty we find the second text: "These words spake Jesus in the treasury as He taught in the temple: and no man laid hands on Him; for his hour was not yet come."

In other words, God would not allow anyone to touch Him until His hour was come. His hour did come in Gethsemane.

In Luke 22:53, when Jesus was in Gethsemane, the priests brought the soldiers and they took Jesus captive as if He was a criminal. Listen to what Jesus tells them: “When I was daily with you in the temple, you stretched forth no hands against me: [we know why—his hour had not yet come] but this is your hour, and the power of darkness.”

This “power of darkness” is Satan. In other words, God said to His Son at Gethsemane, “Son, I am going to remove my protection from you and let Satan do with you what he wanted to do to us from the beginning.” This was the only way that God could expose the secrets of the hidden heart of Satan to the universe.

On one occasion, we had a problem in the mission field that clearly illustrates the exposure of Satan’s heart. Some of our workers had turned against the denomination over the policy book.

They had taken us to court and we were facing some serious problems. Two of them were ministers and their credentials were removed. Naturally, they lost their jobs. They went back to their homeland and one of them told the church members in his home area that he was mistreated by the brethren.

He spread all kinds of terrible lies about the brethren. Having convinced the church members, he turned them against the leadership of the church. They stopped sending their tithe and offerings. They said, “We will now be an independent Church.”

But some of the elders and leaders of that church insisted, “Before we do that, let’s be fair and give the brethren a chance.” So they wrote to the union office and said, “We want the president to come here and explain to us why they removed the credentials of this man.”

The president came to me and said, “You know the language and the people. Can you join me?” I

said, “Yes.” What we did not know is that some of the members, who were sympathetic towards the defrocked minister, had gathered a whole pile of stones to stone us with after they had caused a stir among the rest of the members. However, we had a president who was very meticulous and very deliberate about explaining the events that took place. Some sympathizers who were in the back tried to stir up the members but this president wouldn’t allow it and continued in his slow and deliberate way, saying, “Wait a minute, I am not finished.” When it was all over they had failed to stir the people to throw the stones at us. Instead they said, “We will evaluate what you have told us and we will make a decision.”

So we went back home in one piece. Soon after the church board had a committee meeting and they decided that they should at least write a letter of appreciation for our coming there. They wrote a very nice letter thanking us for coming. They gave it to the pastor and said, “Please take this to the union president.” They were located about a hundred and fifty miles away from the union office

and the postal system was not very good at that time.

The pastor was a friend of the defrocked minister and told him of the letter. He in turn said, “What did the board write?” It so happened that the pastor was not present at this board meeting and therefore did not know the contents of the letter. So they took the letter and, by placing it over a steaming kettle, opened it up to see what the contents were. They were unhappy to discover it was such a nice letter. So they rewrote the letter, making terrible statements about the brethren, and forged the six signatures of the officers of the church. They sealed it and the pastor brought this letter to the president.

The president was very hurt that they would write such nasty things after he had gone out of his way to show them the problem. He showed the letter to one of the men from the union office, who belonged to the same area where this church was. He naturally was upset that his people would write such a letter. He got into his car and drove all the

way, one hundred fifty miles, to the head elder's house and placed the letter on his table, and demanded, "What's the meaning of this letter?"

The head elder was surprised at that remark. "I thought we wrote a nice letter," he said. The union man replied, "Really, do you call this nice?" The head elder read the letter and you can imagine his horror. He said, "These men are of the devil. They are liars. They have written this letter and forged our signatures." Their pastor and his defrocked friend were exposed now. The union president did not have to convince the church any more why they had fired this minister.

In the same way, the cross has exposed Satan. No longer does anyone in the universe, the heavenly angels or the unfallen worlds, have any more sympathy with Satan; because on the cross he revealed his true heart. He's a murderer of God. Satan had kept his hatred for God so long hidden in his heart that when the opportunity was given him he could not help himself but, through the Jews, did what he really intended from the time iniquity

entered his mind. Thus, that which was hidden in his heart was now brought out in the open.

With regards to Satan using the Jews, a very important truth to remember is found in 1 John 5:19. There John divides the human race into two camps. John says the believers belong to God but the rest of the world, the human race, “are all under the evil one.” The KJV says “under wickedness”; the Greek actually says “under the wicked one” or “the evil one.” What John is telling us is that there is no human being that is truly independent. Either you are controlled by God or you are controlled by Satan. These are the two forces that are in our world.

It was because the Jews rejected Christ that they came under the power of the evil one. They listened to his deception and his lies and they rejected the Messiah. Now Satan was going to use them.

When he discovered that the Father had removed His protection from His Son by hearing

the words of Jesus Christ in Luke 22:53, he said to himself, “I am not just going to kill you. I am going to give you the worst kind of death that has ever been invented in this world—crucifixion.”

You need to read some of the Roman historians’ accounts of the cross. It’s the worst kind of death ever invented by men. It is not only a very shameful, but also a very slow, painful, lingering death. Some years ago a BBC commentator wrote a book on the cross of Christ from the Roman point of view. The book, *Watch With Me*, gave a most graphic description of Roman crucifixion. It is hard to imagine how men could stoop so low in their inhumanity to their fellow men.

Books by the historians Cicero and Celsus also describe the cross to us. In reading their accounts of the cross, it is amazing that anyone could go through it. It takes between three to seven days to die on the cross. Gangrene is formed in your hands and your feet where the rusty nails have pierced. You have splitting migraine headaches. Every joint of your body feels torn apart and the pain is

excruciating. You have cramps everywhere. In the night you are exposed to the cold and in the daytime you are exposed to the heat, and you were always crucified naked. So when our wonderful artists put a loin cloth around Christ they are being kind. I believe Christ was crucified naked, too, because that was the custom. And behind all of this was Satan.

As Christians we must remember that we belong to Christ. We are citizens of heaven but still living in enemy territory, a territory where Satan has much control, even though he's a defeated foe. There are five important lessons that we Christians can learn from this truth that exposed Satan and sin. Here are the lessons:

(1) The hatred that Satan and the world manifested against Christ on the cross will be repeated when the world sees Christ manifested in us. This hatred, instigated by Satan, will be projected on the Christian who is living for Christ. In John 15:18,19 Jesus says to his disciples: "If the world hates you, know that it hated me before it

hated you.” Christians are part of Christ. If the world hates Christ, it will hate us. Verse nineteen goes on to say: “If you were of the world the world would love his own: but because you are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.” Remember that Christ went about doing good. There was no reason for them to hate Him. Yet the hatred that was revealed at the cross against Him was unbelievable. The same will be true of every genuine Christian.

Now you may say, “But the world doesn’t hate us today,” and that is true. We have no real persecution in America or much of the western world. The world around us—the unbelievers—don’t hate us. Have you ever asked the question, “Why?” Is it because Satan has changed or that the world has changed? No. Let the Bible tell you why. The world will hate us only when they see Christ in us. If they don’t see Christ in us, then we are still one of them. “Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus [not “may” but “will”] shall suffer persecution.” (2 Tim. 3:12)

In John 7:7 Jesus told the Jews why they hated Him. His works proved that their works were evil. When you let Christ live in you, Christ will do something in you that can never be done by the world. That's the problem. As long as you are doing good things that they can do, there's no problem; but the moment you love your enemies and you are revealing Christ's unconditional love in you, something that they can't generate, they will get mad because you're putting them to shame. So Paul tells us, "If you live godly in Christ, the cost of that is being persecuted."

Don't be surprised if you have to suffer persecution. Don't say, "Why should they persecute me. I've been a good person." They will persecute you because you are a Christian. "Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you." (1 John 3:13) When you see this in reality, it's terrible. When you see father and mother give up their children, hand them over to the Marxist government because their children are Christians and they are not, or visa versa, you will realize that it is possible for the devil to divide the family into

believers and unbelievers, and hand one over to the cross of Christ.

In Gal. 5:11 Paul calls this “the offense of the cross.” What Satan and the world did to Christ they will do to you, and this is called the offense of the cross. In other words, if you preach Christ, if you stand up for Christ, if you let Christ live in you, be prepared to face the offense of the cross. The disciples counted it a privilege to suffer for Christ. (Acts 5:41) May the same thing be true of us.

(2) As God’s children, Satan or the world cannot touch us unless God permits it. All power is given to Christ. “Greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world.” (1 John. 4:4) If God says, “No,” nobody can touch you. They tried to touch Christ, but as long as His hour had not yet come, nobody could touch Him.

Now, I’m saying this because God has a work for each one of us. That work may take you into places of danger. Remember this, if God doesn’t want you to die nobody can touch you. If He wants

you to die, thank Him, for all your worries will be over. You will go to sleep until He comes. Hence, we can say with Paul, “For me to live is Christ and to die is gain.” (Phil. 1:21)

When I was in Ethiopia, during the Marxist revolution, one of the Marxists said to me: “You will leave this country in four days without your children.” Wouldn’t that scare anybody? He threatened to kill my children. They were just small, helpless children at that time. I said to him, “Go and find somebody else to scare. If God doesn’t want my children or me dead, neither you, nor your government can touch us.”

He said, “You will see.” I did see. I left five years later with my children. Apparently God did not want me or my children to die then. Remember, nobody can touch you if your hour has not yet come. This is our victory, even our faith, for Jesus said, “I have overcome the world. I have overcome the evil one.”

(3) The cross revealed something that, humanly

speaking, is impossible. Satan took the Jews who were divided into two camps—Sadducees and Pharisees. He then took the Jews combined, whose bitter enemies were the Romans, and he joined all of them together into one camp against Christ. If you were living in those days you could never dream that the Romans and the Jews would be united or that the Jews would say, “We have no other king but Caesar.”

The United Nations has failed to unite this world of ours, and every human effort will fail. Our world today is divided into all kinds of camps with racial and political barriers. We have all kinds of divisions today. We speak of east and west and the two shall never meet. But Satan has the power of uniting this world against God’s chosen ones when he wants to, and when God allows it. Revelation 13:2 and 3 tells us that the whole world will be united and will follow the beast who has been given power by the dragon, who is Satan. The cross proves that Satan can do that. What will you do when the whole world is united against you? At that time, please remember that you are a Christian

and that you belong to Christ and that He has defeated Satan.

(4) When given a choice between the worst criminal and the most insignificant Christian, the world will always choose the criminal. Remember the statement in Matthew 27:21. Pilate brought the worst criminal, Barabbas, from the Roman jail and he said to the Jews, “It is our custom to release one of them. Here is Barabbas, the worst criminal that I can find in my jail and here is Jesus, King of the Jews, who has done nothing wrong. Which one do you want me to release?”

This is one time that the Jews did not have a committee meeting. They did not say, “Well, we need to discuss this.” At that time the people who claimed to be the children of God were under the control of Satan and their choice was immediate. “Give us Barabbas. He’s one of us. Yes, he may be a terrible criminal but he is still one of us. This man doesn’t belong to us.”

And that’s exactly what will happen in the last

days. It is not because you have done something bad but it is because you are a Christian that the world will release the criminals and put you in their place. Are you willing to die for Christ? That's the offense of the cross. Read Mark 15:6-15 and notice the choice the people made. Peter, preaching in the name of Christ, about his own nation says: "The God of Abraham and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, hath glorified his Son Jesus; whom you delivered up, and denied him in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let him go. But you denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you." (Acts 3:13-15) That will take place again in the great tribulation, but Jesus says, "Fear not, I am with you, unto the end of the world."

(5) The final point is that the unconscious sin behind every sin is crucifying Christ. This needs clarification. We usually look at 1 John 3:4, to define sin: "Sin is the transgression of the law." The problem is that we look at the text at its face value and make the same mistake as the Jews. We look at the law in terms of rules and when we break

a rule we call that sin. We need to go further and look at the spirit of this text because Jesus did not define the law in terms of rules. He defined the law in terms of an attitude, a relationship; the spirit of the law. He said, "Love for God and love for man." That is the law. The fundamental principle of the law of God is love.

1 John 4:8,16 tells us that God is love. Therefore, sin is transgression against God, who is love. Therefore, sin is putting Christ on the cross. In Romans 8:7, Paul tells us that the carnal mind, the mind controlled by our sinful nature, the flesh, is enmity with God, therefore it is not subject to the law of God which is love. Now what do you do with your enemy? If you hate somebody without a cause, what do you do with him? You murder him.

Then how does every sin become an act of crucifying Christ? How many sins do you have to commit for the law to condemn you? Just one. It doesn't have to be a big sin. Therefore, in order for Christ to save us, He had to bear every single sin that you and I have committed and will commit.

Without the cross, even the smallest sin would condemn us. In other words, under the law, the law condemns the sinner. But we Christians are not living under the law. We are living under grace. It is grace that took the punishment of our sins. Do not look at a small sin and say, “What’s wrong with that?” If you allow that sin to develop to its full fruition it will end up crucifying Christ. At the heart of every sin is self. When is self satisfied? It is not satisfied until it gets to the top, to the very place of God.

Before I entered the ministry I was an architect. I was working for an Italian architect, on the sixth floor of Mansion Building there in Nairobi, the capital of Kenya. At the entrance of the building was a leper. He was always there in rags, begging day in and day out. His family brought him there in the morning and took him back home in the evening. His job was begging.

When you are working as an intern you don’t get too high a salary. I was getting approximately two hundred dollars a month when I began, which

in those days was not too bad. I said to myself, “When I get rich, I’m going to buy him a suit.” Of course, my idea of “rich” was getting five hundred dollars a month. Three months later, my salary jumped to five hundred. Did I buy him the suit? No. Not that I broke my promise. My definition of richness changed to nine hundred dollars a month. A few months later it jumped to a thousand a month. Did I buy him the suit? No. Two months later it jumped to two thousand dollars a month. Now I was really rich, but did I buy him a suit? No. Not that I broke my promise but my definition of richness had changed even then. You ask Rockefeller, “Are you satisfied with all the money you have or are you still trying to make some more?”

Man is never satisfied. He always wants to climb up and up, until he reaches the top. If God had put no restrictions to sin, man would want to take the place where God is, because that is the highest point. To reach that point you have to get rid of everyone who is in your way. So the smallest sin allowed to develop to its ultimate fruition will

end up crucifying Christ. That is what God revealed on the cross. It is true that every time you fall you don't become unjustified, but remember that sin was implicated on the cross of Christ. Therefore, we must hate sin not for what it does to us but for what it did to our Savior.

If I told you sin is breaking a rule, that's not so bad. But if I told you what the Old Testament told the Jews in the sanctuary service, that sin is putting a knife into Christ the Lamb, sin becomes murdering God. In the Old Testament, every time a sinner brought the lamb to the sanctuary, the priest gave him a knife and the sinner had to kill that lamb! Every time that you and I sin it is implicated in the cross of Christ. Therefore, we must hate sin for what it did to our Savior and what it does to Him.

Sin is saying "Crucify Him!" and that is what was revealed on the cross. That is why I hate sin; not because I become unjustified or am pulled out of Christ. The Bible does not teach that. But I hate

sin because it crucified my Savior. And if I sin deliberately then I am doing what Hebrews 6:4-6 says: “If you Christians give up Christ and go back to the world, you are doing two things. You are now deliberately crucifying Christ afresh and you are putting Him to open shame willfully.” May God forbid that we will ever do that.

It is my prayer that you will know the truth about the cross in terms of Satan and sin, and that it will do two things for you:

It will cause you to realize that Satan is a murderer from the beginning. Not only did he murder Christ on the cross but he wants you to join him in the lake of fire to die with him. Misery loves company. Don't you ever believe his lies when he offers you the trinkets of this world.

Do not treat sin lightly any more. Don't say, “This is such a small sin.” There is no such thing as small sins and big sins. That is Roman Catholic theology which teaches venial and mortal sins. Every sin, the “smallest” sin, given the chance, will

end up crucifying Christ.

May God bless us that this truth of the cross will give us a new view about sin, and about Satan, and that we will be loyal to Jesus Christ who loved us and endured the cross for us (Heb 12:2,3).

Chapter 2

Forsaken of God

What is it that makes Christ's death the supreme sacrifice above all other human deaths? Many martyrs have suffered horrible deaths, some in ways that at least outwardly appear more agonizing than the death of the cross. Again, have you ever wondered why the cross made such a tremendous impact on the disciples and the early Christians? The disciples spent almost three years with Christ. They traveled with Him, slept where He slept, and heard Him preach. They were taught by Christ and they witnessed His tremendous miracles. In spite of all this, three years later, at the Lord's supper they were still a group of greedy, self-seeking men.

Then came the cross and it completely transformed them. They gave up all self-interest. Now they were willing to be spent and to die for Jesus Christ. Why? Look at the early church. They turned the world upside down because of what the

cross meant to them. Why did Paul say, “I want to glory in nothing else but Jesus Christ and Him crucified” (Gal. 6:14). And, “For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus and Him crucified” (1 Cor. 9:9). What is it that made the cross the central theme, and the central subject of New Testament preaching?

I believe that if we find the answer to that question the church will never be the same again. The problem is that the devil knows that too and he has done his best to enshroud the truth of the cross in darkness. He is quite happy to have our churches, our books, our bodies, decorated by crosses. He is even quite happy for us to spend hours discussing which day Christ died, Wednesday or Friday. Or he is even not one bit concerned if we get involved in a discussion about whether the cross was two pieces of wood or a stake. He doesn't even care if we preach about the cross, as long as our eyes are not opened to the truth of the cross.

If we are to experience Pentecostal revival, we

must remove the darkness that has enshrouded the cross of Christ since the dark ages. We must look at the cross as the disciples did, as the early Christians did, and as the New Testament writers did. The question is, “How did they look at the cross?” They looked not with Roman eyes but with Jewish spectacles. The cross meant something very different to the Jews than to the Romans. The devil has the Gentile Christian Church looking at the cross from the Roman perspective and, by doing that, he has robbed the cross of its true glory.

Let us put ourselves in the shoes of the disciples and look at the cross, not as we see it today but as they saw it. This means that we have to think like the Jews. To do that we need help because we are not naturally Jews. But first, here are just a few facts about the Roman cross.

The cross was invented approximately 600 B.C. by the Phoenicians who are the modern day Lebanese. The Phoenicians believed in many gods and one of their gods was the earth. When they executed a criminal they did not want his body to

touch the earth when he died because they believed it would desecrate the earth. They invented the cross so that the criminal would die above the earth.

Then the Egyptians borrowed the idea of crucifixion from the Phoenicians and the Romans took it from the Egyptians. The Romans refined it and used it to execute their runaway slaves, which were in abundance in the days of Christ. They used it also to execute their worst criminals. It was a very slow, painful, lingering death. As mentioned in the previous chapter, there are many historical records of the cross by the Roman historians Cicero and Celsus.

One day, on the way to the prison ministry, I turned on the radio and heard a sermon on the cross by a well-known theologian. He was very accurately and graphically describing the terrible pain that results from hanging on the cross: gangrene in the hands and feet, the body exposed to extreme temperatures, cold at night and hot in the daytime. And he mentioned how it takes

normally three to seven days for a crucified one to die. The main problem that eventually kills the person is suffocation. You can't breathe out or exhale without raising the body. So the body has to be heaved up to keep exhaling, and so every time you do it terrible shocks of pain go through your body. It was a true and terrible account of the cross this preacher was describing yet it was no different from that of the thieves that were crucified with Christ. What then made Christ's death on the cross—which, incidentally, lasted approximately only six hours—the supreme sacrifice?

Why are we making such a big issue over this matter? Because the devil has enshrouded the truth of the cross in darkness and so the only thing we can emphasize is the agony of the cross, which was not unique to Christ. In fact, the thieves on the cross suffered longer than Christ, plus they had the added pain of their legs being broken while they were still alive. During the Jewish revolt in 70 A.D., the Romans were crucifying anywhere between fifty to seventy Jews a day. So what is there about the crucifixion of Christ that makes it

unique?

Let's go to the Bible and see how the Jews looked at the cross. This, in turn, will help us to realize why the death of Christ on the cross was very different. Turning to John's record of the crucifixion in chapter 19, we discover that Pilate, who represented Rome, realized that as far as the Roman law was concerned Jesus did not qualify for crucifixion. He was neither a runaway slave nor was He a criminal.

However, to please the Jews he had Christ flogged. "Then came Jesus forth, wearing the crown of thorns (which the Roman soldiers put there out of mockery), dressed in a purple robe." And Pilate said to the Jews, "Behold the man!" (As much as to say, "I think this is as much as He deserves.") "When the chief priests therefore and officers saw Him, they cried out saying: 'Crucify Him, crucify Him.' " And Pilate responded, "Take you Him and crucify Him, for I find no fault in Him" (John 19:5,6). What he was saying was simply, "As far as Roman law is concerned, this

man does not deserve crucifixion.” But the Jews had to give a reason, so they responded: “The Jews answered him, ‘We have a law, and by our law He ought to die, because He made Himself the Son of God’ ” (John 19:7).

They were referring to the law of blasphemy. It was God who gave them that law through Moses. If Pilate had known the law Christ may not have been crucified. The law does not only condemn a blasphemer to death but it also stipulates how that person should die. In the book of Leviticus we are going to look at the law as God gave it through Moses. Remember that Jesus claimed to be the Son of God. The Jews rejected Him as the Messiah and, therefore, when He claimed to be the Son of God, to them it was blasphemy. This is what the law of blasphemy says: “And he that blasphemeth the name of the Lord, he shall surely be put to death, and all the congregation shall certainly stone him” (Lev 94:16, emphasis mine).

Crucifixion was not a Jewish method of execution. The Jews did not practice crucifixion;

on the contrary, they detested it. The stipulation in the book of the law was that a blasphemer should be stoned to death by the congregation. Didn't the Jews know that part of the law? Yes. Were they ignorant about that part? No. If they knew, why did they insist on crucifixion? Were they afraid that Pilate would have said, "No, you can crucify Him but you can't stone Him"? The answer to that questions is also no. Because crucifixion is a far worse way of dying. It is, in fact, the most painful, the most shameful, the most cruel death that man had ever invented and practised. Pilate would have been happy to say, "You can take Him and stone Him." Then why did the Jews insist on crucifixion?

I want to make it very clear that the Jews knew what the law said in regard to how a blasphemer should die. In John 10:30, Jesus makes a statement that to the unbelieving Jews was blasphemy: "I and My Father are one." Listen to what the Jews did in verse 31: "Then the Jews took up stones again to stone Him" (emphasis mine). Look at the word "again." This was not the first time they had done it. Why did they take up stones to stone Him? In

their thinking, they were obeying a law given by God. They thought that what Jesus had said was blasphemy. Why then did they cry out to Pilate, “Crucify Him. Crucify Him”? Why were they adamant about His crucifixion, especially when we realize crucifixion was not the Jewish method of execution? There was a reason and it is important that we know that reason.

We will find the reason in Deuteronomy 21. The Jews did not want Jesus just to die, when they insisted that he be crucified. They had something worse for Him than simply dying on a Roman cross. And they had this passage from Deuteronomy 21:22, 23 in mind when they cried out, “Crucify Him.” What does this text say? “And if a man have committed a sin worthy of death, (and blasphemy is one of them) and he is to be put to death, and thou hang him on a tree: his body shall not remain all night upon the tree, but thou shalt in any wise bury him that day (for he that is hanged is accursed of God).”

Do you know what that meant to the Jew, that

statement in brackets? If a Jew had committed a crime worthy of death and the judge sentenced him to death, that man still could go on his knees before he died and say, “God, Jehovah, please forgive me for what I have done.” He would have forgiveness and hope. But if the judge said, “After you die you are to be hung on a tree,” that meant to the Jews the irrevocable curse of God, which to us would be the unpardonable sin or the second death, “good-bye” to life forever.

Remember, the Jews did not believe in an immortal soul. That is a Greek concept that crept into the Christian church and which unfortunately has robbed the cross of its glory too. The reason is that, if you believe in an immortal soul, then death only means the separation of body and soul. That’s all it is. But to the Jews death was good-bye to life. The unpardonable sin or the curse of God was good-bye to life forever, because in the curse God abandons you, and when God abandons you, He who is the Source of life, the Source of hope, the Source of security is gone. That is what the curse means, and the Jews knew it.

When they cried out “Crucify Him,” they were not only asking for Christ to be killed; more than that, they were asking God to bring His curse down upon Him. Maybe they were thinking of a text in Isaiah 53:4. This, of course, is the chapter on the cross in the Old Testament: “Surely He hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted” (emphasis mine).

Yes, God afflicted Christ on the cross. Look again at verse ten of Isaiah 53: “Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise Him.” This has nothing to do with what the Romans did, nor has it anything to do with what the Jews did. It has nothing to do with even what the devil did. We saw how the cross exposed Satan as a murderer. It exposed that sin, at its very core, is crucifying Christ. Now look at the cross from a different angle; turn to Romans 5:23: “While we were yet sinners God demonstrated His love toward us, that Christ died for us.”

There are many texts in the Bible giving us

examples of the curse of God mentioned in Deuteronomy 21. A good example is Joshua 10. Read the whole chapter to get the full picture. However, this chapter must be read in the context of Genesis 15:13-16, because it is in this context that we see the real reason why God commended the destruction of the Canaanites. If you don't have that context you get the idea of God being a very revengeful and merciless God.

God called Abraham out of Ur of the Chaldeans and said to Abraham, "I want you to leave your country. I want you to leave your people and I want you to go to the land I give you for your own and for your family, your children." That land we know was Canaan, modern day Israel.

But we must not forget that Canaan was already occupied by what we call the Canaanites. The people in those days called themselves Amorites. The word "Amorites" is just an ancient word for Canaanites. What was God going to do with the Amorites? Was He going to destroy them so that He could give the land to the Jews? No.

That was not God's plan. God's plan was for Abraham to witness to the Amorites that they, too, may be part of God's kingdom.

God said to Abraham in Genesis 15: "Abraham, I'm going to take your children out of Canaan after you have witnessed Me, the true God and creator of all the earth, to the Amorites and I'm going to take your children to Egypt where they will be slaves. I'm going to give the Amorites four hundred years of probation. In that period they will have time to accept or reject me."

We read in Gen. 15:16: "But in the fourth generation (at the end of the four hundred years) they (your children) shall come hither again (back to Canaan): for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full." In other words, "When you come back and all of the Canaanite tribes still deliberately, or willfully, reject Me, then probation has closed for them. They have reached the point of no return."

When the Jews returned under Joshua (Moses died before they entered the promised land), any

tribe of the Amorites who attacked Israel, fighting in the name of their god, were saying, “We reject your God.” Remember that the greatest nation at that time was Egypt. God had liberated the Jews from Egypt. His victory over Pharaoh and his army was the greatest evidence He gave to the other nations that He was greater than the gods of any other nation.

In Joshua 10 we are told that when Israel entered the promised land the king of the Gibeons agreed that the God of Israel is the true God and they joined hands with Joshua and the Jews. Five other kings refused and said among themselves, “If we join hands together we are stronger than those two nations, the Gibeonites and Israelites.” So they attacked Joshua and Gibeon. Naturally, the Jews won the war because God was on their side.

Notice what Joshua did to the five kings that were captured. He took them and presented them first before the congregation, both the Jews and the Gibeonites. He made this statement to them. Notice that it is in harmony with what God had told

Abraham, that the probation of the Amorites would be closed when his descendants returned. These five kings had reached the point of no return. They had willfully turned their backs to God. And Joshua said to the congregation: “Fear not, nor be dismayed, be strong and of good courage: for thus shall the Lord do to all your enemies against whom ye fight” (Joshua 10:25,26). Those who were attacking Israel were fighting against Jehovah. This is what God will do to them.

“And afterward Joshua smote them, and slew them, and hanged them on five trees: and they were hanging upon the trees until the evening” (Joshua 10:26). This was what the law in Deuteronomy 21:23 said would symbolize the irrevocable curse of God.

What was Joshua telling the people? “Anyone who attacks Israel now has deliberately and ultimately rejected the God of heaven, and therefore willfully reached the point of no return. The curse of God is upon such a person.” Now the Jews wanted that same curse to come upon Christ.

That is why they cried out, “Crucify Him,” for crucifixion in Christ’s day was synonymous with hanging on a tree, the equivalent of the second death.

The question is, did God comply? Did God fulfil their request? Did He bring His curse upon His Son? And the answer is “Yes.” Romans 8:32 says, “God spared not His own Son.” But God did not bring His wrath or curse upon Christ for blasphemy but for another reason.

Here it is. In Galatians three we have recorded the New Testament interpretation of the cross. Remember that the New Testament writers were Jews, except for Luke. See how the Apostle Paul defines the cross, not with Roman eyes, even though he was a Roman citizen, but from a Jewish perspective. “For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse” (Gal. 3:10). The phrase, “works of the law,” in the New Testament is equivalent to our English word, “legalism.” There was no Greek word equivalent to our word “legalism” so when you come across the phrase

“works of the law” it always means, keeping the law in order to be saved, not as the evidence of salvation or the fruits of salvation but as a means of salvation. Keep that in mind.

So Paul is saying to the Galatians, “Anyone who tries to go to heaven by keeping the law is under the curse.” Why? Because the law says this: “Cursed is everyone that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them” (Gal. 3:10). In other words, if you want to go to heaven through the law you have to observe it in every detail and continually. You miss on one point and you come under the curse.

But the fact is that “all have sinned” (Romans 3:9-23). There is not a single person who has kept the law perfectly—not one, apart from Christ. All Christians are sinners saved by grace. Why? Because “Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law being made a curse for us” (Gal 3:13).

Who made Him a curse for us? It wasn't the devil, because the devil can't punish sin, he's a

sinner himself. It wasn't the Jews, even though they demanded God to curse Him. Who then made Him a curse for us? It was the Father. He "spared not His own Son."

Three times Jesus pleaded with the Father: "Father, Father, if it is possible remove this cup." What was the cup to which Jesus was referring? It was certainly not the cross. He hardly felt that pain. Not because it was not there, but because there was another pain far greater than the pain of the cross. It was the curse of God against your sins and mine. That is what Jesus pleaded to God for. He knew what it meant to be cursed by God.

And God said, "No. I cannot remove the curse from you." Do you know why? Because He loved us. "He spared not His own Son but delivered Him up for us all." "Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written: (now he quotes Deut. 21:23) Cursed is everyone that hangeth on a tree" (Gal 3:13).

Whenever you read in the New Testament

about the cross being equated with the tree, remember: those Jews did not mean a stake. When the Jews mentioned that he hung on a tree they were not referring as to whether it was a stake or two pieces of wood. That was not the issue in their thinking. They had one thing in mind — Deut. 21:23. To them hanging on the cross was equivalent to hanging on a tree, which was equivalent to the curse of God.

In Acts 5:30 the disciples were taken by the Sanhedrin. They were punished, flogged, and told to no longer preach in the name of Christ. Notice what Peter said in verse 29: “Then Peter, and the other apostles answered and said, ‘We ought to obey God rather than men.’ ” Here are the disciples willing to die for Christ. The same Peter who denied Jesus before the cross now is willing to die for Him. That is how much the cross transformed him. Now consider verse 30: “The God of our Fathers raised up Jesus, whom you slew and hanged on a tree.”

What did Peter mean by that phrase? He was

thinking of Deut. 21:23. “You brought God’s curse on Him, but God raised Him up because he did not commit blasphemy; He did experience the curse for our sins. Christ died that He may save us from our sins. He rose that He might justify us.” Romans 4:25 is a good example: “Who (Jesus) was delivered for our offenses, and was raised again for our justification.”

Peter explains what he meant when he said He hung on a tree for us in 1 Peter 2:24: “Who his own self bare our sins in His own body on the tree.” Why did he use the word, “tree” and not the “cross”? Because he was thinking about the curse of our sins and not simply the sleep death that every one dies.

But some will argue, “How could Christ die the second death? He predicted His resurrection, and He actually rose the third day. How could He experience it?” First of all, the Bible says so. Heb. 2:9: “He tasted death for all men.” It could not be the first death because believers who accept Christ still have to die the first death. Then look at what

Paul says in 2 Tim. 1:7-10. He says that Christ, through the cross, has “abolished death.” If He abolished death why do Christians die? Because He abolished only the second death, not the first death. Rev. 20:6 tells us that those who have part in the first resurrection, i.e., the believers, on such the second death has no power. Why? Because there was One who was willing to go through it for us, to taste it.

The thing that we need to realize is what we call in theology, “the kenosis doctrine,” based on Phil. 2:6-8. When Christ became a man in the incarnation He had to give up not His divinity, but His divine prerogatives, in other words, the independent use of His divinity. Even His God-consciousness had to be given up. Jesus discovered He was God only by revelation. He was not God-conscious as a baby. He had to grow up in knowledge. He had to grow up in everything because He had given up the independent use of His divinity and was made in all things like unto us (Heb. 2:17).

Therefore, He was totally God-dependent all through His earthly ministry. John 5:30 says, “I can do nothing of myself.” John 6:57 says, “I live by the Father.” See also John 8:28 and John 14:10. All these texts state very clearly that Christ was totally God-dependent. Then read Rom 6:4; Acts 2:24, 32; Eph. 1:20. All of these texts clearly tell us that it was the Father who raised Christ from the dead. Keep these two things in mind: Christ was God-dependent, and He was dependent on the Father for the resurrection. Don’t ask me what happened to His divine consciousness when He was in the grave. Where was His divine life? I don’t know. It’s a mystery. We will spend eternity studying that, but I do know one thing, it was the Father He was depending on for the resurrection just like everything else.

Do you know what the Father did on the cross? Christ cried out: “Father, Father why have you forsaken me?” What He meant is not “Why are you leaving me for three days?” but, “Why have You abandoned Me?” Do you know what that meant to Christ? It meant that the hope of the resurrection

went with that abandonment. When the Father forsook Him in terms of Christ's feeling, then the hope of the resurrection went with it. Jesus was now "treading the winepress alone." He could no longer look on the Father with hope and assurance as far as His feelings were concerned. He felt the agony of God-abandonment, exactly what the wicked will feel when mercy no longer pleads with the guilty race.

Here is a key passage from *Desire of Ages*, by E.G. White, p 753: "He could not see through the portals of the tomb. Hope did not present to Him the coming forth from the grave a conqueror or tell Him of the Father's acceptance of the sacrifice. He feared that sin was so offensive to God that their separation was to be eternal." Do you realize what Christ was tempted to do on the cross as He hung there? The Father had forsaken Him. But remember, He was still God. He could have taken hold of His divinity independent of the Father, against the Father's wishes, and come down from the cross to save Himself.

That is exactly what the devil tried to get Him to do. In Luke 23:35-39, at least three times the devil approached Christ—once through the Roman soldiers, once through the priests, and once through the thief on the left-hand side. Then, in Matt. 27:35-46, the people also added to that temptation. The temptation was the same, “Come down from the cross and save yourself.” Can you imagine what that temptation was like? We can’t. I’m glad Desire of Ages makes that clear: “The temptation that Christ experienced can never be fully understood by men.... The withdrawal of the Divine Countenance from the Savior in this hour of supreme anguish pierced His heart with a sorrow that can never be fully understood by man.” Ibid.

Do you know why? Because there has been no human being in this world who has really, fully, experienced the wrath of God as Christ did. He is the only man who has experienced the fullness of God-abandonment, which is the equivalent of the second death. Christ was tempted to come down from the cross and save Himself. Can you understand the temptation? The issue He faced was

not to screw up His will power and say, “I’ll hold on for a few hours or for three days.” That is no sacrifice for a God who lives in eternity. The issue was good-bye to life forever, never again to see His Father, never again to go back to heaven. It meant to give up His glory, to give up His life. That was the issue. That is the curse of God.

As He hung on the cross experiencing God’s curse for our sins, Jesus had to make a choice. He could not save Himself and the world at the same time. And He did make the supreme choice. He chose to die eternally that you and I may live in His place. That is what transformed the disciples. They were so shocked! They had not understood such love before as this. It is this concept of agape that turned the world upsidedown, that God not only came down for thirty-three years, but Jesus their Savior was willing to say good-bye to life forever that they may live in His place. “But God demonstrated His love that while we were still sinners Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8).

In other words, the supreme sacrifice is that

Jesus was willing to accept our curse and give us His life in exchange. It was not a question of saving Himself and the world. He could not do that. He had to make a choice between the world and Himself. Do you know what Christ was saying on the cross? I hope you will never forget this; He was saying that He loves us more than Himself. That is God's agape. When you realize that is how much God loves you, can you be the same again? We talk of giving a little money for the needs of others. But God emptied heaven for us! How can we hold back? Look at the early Christian Church. They did not hold on to anything, land or houses. They gave it all to the body of Christ, the church. That is what will happen in this church when we see Christ crucified, as the early Christians saw it; and then we won't need any more promotional programs. I get tired of promotional programs. I am sorry that we have to do it because if we don't promote nothing gets done. It is terrible that we have to keep on this egocentric approach for raising funds. Why can't the love of God constrain us? In 2 Cor. 5:14, Paul says what the cross did to him and to the Christian church and what it should

do to us. When we reach this condition; when the church manifests the love of Christ because of what the cross means to them, then our 20th Century world will be turned upside down, too.

We read in 2 Cor. 5:14, 15: “For the love of Christ constraineth us because we thus judge that if one died for all, then were all dead. And that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again.”

In Heb. 2:9 we read, “He tasted death for every man.” The Greek doesn’t say “every man.” It goes beyond that, it actually says “everything.” Jesus tasted death for everything. When Adam sinned, not only did the curse come on the human race but on the plants and on the animals and everything: “And unto Adam he (God) said, cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee” (Gen. 3:17, 18).

When the Roman soldiers put that crown of

thorns on Christ's head, they were doing it out of mockery. But God takes the foolish things of man and converts them into the truth. For God said to Adam after he sinned, "Cursed is the ground." Those thorns and thistles which were placed on the head of our Savior symbolized sin's curse on this world.

"And He died for all, (says Paul) that we which live (because of the cross) should not henceforth live unto themselves but unto Him which died for them and rose again." Back in 1961, while I was studying at Newbold, the college took the choir to Scotland for a program. My wife-to-be, Jean, was part of that choir. The choir sponsor was kind enough to include me on that trip, even though I did not sing. While there, we went to visit the birthplace of David Livingstone, the greatest missionary Africa has ever seen. The people of that area had built a chapel, constructed like an African hut, in honor of David Livingstone. As you entered in, your eye immediately noticed two inscriptions on the bare walls. On one side was the inscription of Paul from 2 Cor. 5:14: "The love of Christ

constraineth us.” On the other side was an inscription from the diary of David Livingstone, “The love of God compelled me.”

Having caught a glimpse of God’s self-emptying love, Livingstone could no longer hold onto his lucrative profession as a doctor in Blantyre, Scotland. He gave that all up to be a missionary in Africa. And in those days there was no freight allowance, no missionary outfit allowance, and there were no furloughs. He went there as a missionary ready to die for his Savior. And he did die there. The British government gave him a hard time when he was alive but when the British discovered he had died they said, “Well, he deserves a decent burial.” We always praise people after they die. So they decided to bury him in Westminster Abbey where the great British people are buried.

But he died four hundred miles inland in Africa. The problem was how could they bring his body to the coast from four hundred miles inland. There were no planes, trains, or cars in those days.

The only way was to carry him on a stretcher. They couldn't do it themselves, so they asked the Africans "Will you do it?" And the Africans said, "Yes, he deserves a great burial, but you cannot have his heart." So they cut him open, pulled out his heart and buried it in Africa where he gave it. Then, after embalming him, they carried him on a stretcher four hundred miles, through swamps, facing wild animals, disease, and hostile tribes. They carried him to the coast so the British could take him by ship and give him an honorable burial in England. That is how much appreciation they had for the greatest missionary in Africa. It is my prayer that you and I will appreciate Jesus Christ to the point that we will give everything for Him. Then God will use us to turn this world upside down with the glory of the cross of Christ.

Chapter 3

Born Crucified

As already mentioned, the cross of Christ was at the heart of New Testament preaching. This is especially true of the greatest preacher, evangelist, and theologian of the New Testament, the apostle Paul. As an introduction to this chapter, let us look at one of those sublime statements he made about the cross: “For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel; not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect. For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God” (1 Cor. 1:17, 18).

I want you to notice two things that Paul says in this passage just quoted:

To Paul, preaching the cross and preaching the gospel are synonymous. We need to remember this, because we preach many things in the name of the gospel that are really the fruits of the gospel or the

hope of the gospel. Important as these things are, the gospel is Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

Paul teaches here in this passage that the cross is where the power of God is. In Romans 1:16 he said: “I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation.” The power is in the cross. “But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling block, and unto the Greeks (the philosophers) foolishness; but unto them which are called (those who have accepted Christ, those that are being saved in Him), both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God” (1 Cor. 1:23, 24). Again, “For I determined not to know anything among you save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified” (1 Cor. 2:2). Turning to the book of Galatians, we read: “God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Gal. 6:14).

So far we have covered two vital truths concerning the cross of Christ. In our first chapter we saw how the cross exposed Satan as a murderer. Every Christian needs to know that, so that we are

not deceived by him. He is a murderer and a liar. We also saw in that first study that sin, every sin, even the smallest sin, at its very core is crucifying Christ. This means that we need to look at sin and hate it for what it is—putting Christ on the cross.

In the second chapter we looked at the cross as it demonstrated to us the self-emptying, self-sacrificing love of God. “While we were yet sinners God demonstrated His love toward us in that Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8). Never forget that. There will come times that you will be discouraged, especially when Satan has knocked you down and he tells you that God doesn’t love you because you are a sinner and a failure; remind him what took place on the cross “while we were yet sinners.” You may quote to him what Paul says in Romans 8:35 and onward: “I am persuaded that nothing in heaven, nothing on earth, nothing in my experience, nothing in the world, nothing in the devil’s kingdom can ever separate me from the love of God which was demonstrated in Christ Jesus and Him crucified.”

Now we will look at the third important truth of the cross. We read in Corinthians that the cross of Christ is the power of God to save us from sin. The New Testament teaches that the cross is where God saves us from sin. It is in the cross that we have redemption from sin. But in order to appreciate this truth fully we must first of all come to grips with sin.

Sin to many is limited to “the transgression of the law.” Yet in Scripture sin is more than that. In fact, it is not a single problem but a dual problem.

The first definition of sin is that it is an act. The act may be defined as “missing the mark,” which is the New Testament word for sin. Or the act may be defined as violation of God’s law, which the Bible defines as transgression: the deliberate, wilful violation of a law. Sin begins with the mind consenting to a sinful desire and is followed by the act. The devil or the flesh comes to you in terms of a temptation and your mind says, “Yes.” That’s sin conceived in the mind. Then follows the act (James. 1:14, 15). Looking at sin as an act, in the

light of the law of God, results in two things: guilt and punishment.

In the New Testament sin is also a power, a force, a principle that dwells in your nature and mine. We were born with it and we will die with it. In Romans 7, Paul defines that as “the law of sin.” This is what most Christians are ignorant of. Hence, when they struggle in their Christian experience and they fail they say, “Maybe I’m not a Christian.” We need to be aware that sin is not only an act, it is a force and a power that has you and me in its grip.

Here are two statements that will help us to understand this problem. One is from the Lord Jesus Christ and the other from the Apostle Paul. In John 8:32; Jesus is talking to the Jews who had failed to see that sin is a power, a force, that had them in its grip. This is how Jesus explained this to the Jews: “You shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free.”

If you are questioning what Jesus meant by the

word “truth,” read verse 36. By the word “truth” He meant Himself for he says: “If the Son, therefore, shall make you free, you shall be free indeed.” What kind of freedom was Christ talking about? He made this statement to the Jews and the Jews failed to understand Him. In verse 33 they answered Him: “We be Abraham’s seed and were never in bondage to any man.” They thought Christ was talking about political freedom, but they themselves were lying because they knew that they were under the yoke of Rome. They said, “We are Abraham’s seed. How can you say we shall be made free? What do you mean?”

“Jesus answered them, ‘Verily, verily (which simply means truly, truly) I say unto you, “Whosoever committeth sin (that is the act) is the servant of sin.’ ” The KJV says “servant” but the Greek word is “slave.” There is a world of difference between a servant today and a slave. A servant today is somebody who has a certain amount of freedom. We have civil servants. If they don’t like the job they’ll give it up. But a slave has no freedom. It is this that Paul is discussing in

Romans 7.

The issue that Paul is dealing with in Romans 7 is the incompatibility between the flesh or sinful nature and the law. Incidentally, the nature of a believer and the nature of an unbeliever are identical, so that the question that is often raised about whether Paul is referring to his preconverted or postconverted experience is really meaningless. No change takes place in your nature when you accept Christ. It is one hundred percent sinful and still a slave of sin. That is what Paul is discussing. He makes this statement in Romans 7:14: “For we know the law is spiritual but I am carnal, sold under sin (i.e., sold as a slave to sin).” Then he proves it in verses 15 to 23 which state: “I see another law in my members (he’s talking of sin as a law, as a principle, as a force) warring against the law of my mind and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.”

Everyone of us, believers or unbelievers, have the law of sin in us. This is the problem that makes it difficult for us to live the life that we want to.

Paul says, “I want to do good but I find that I can’t.” Why? In the last part of verse 25 Paul is using a very strong statement which unfortunately our English Bible does not quite bring out. What he really said is, “left on my own, apart from grace, apart from God, apart from the Holy Spirit, on my very own the best I can do is serve God and His law with my mind. But with my nature it is impossible. I serve the law of sin.” Then in desperation he cries out: “Who will set me free from this slavery?” And the answer is: “I thank God through Jesus Christ.”

Now God does not hold you guilty for the law of sin that dwells in your members. You were born with it. You are not guilty of it. So the force of sin, the power of sin doesn’t involve guilt, but it does disqualify you and me from heaven. In 1 Cor. 15:50 we read, “Flesh and blood,” and by that Paul means: “sinful human nature cannot inherit the kingdom of God.” Why? Because “corruption cannot inherit incorruption” (1 Cor. 15:50).

Now, what solution does God have for the dual

problem of sin? Does He have only half a solution for the sin problem? The answer is no. God has a dual solution for the dual problem of sin and we need to know that. What is His solution for our sins (plural, i.e., acts) which bring guilt and punishment? His answer for that is the blood of Christ. In Heb. 9:22 we read that: “Without shedding of blood there is no remission of sins.”

In Matt. 26:28, Jesus is in the upper room where He instituted the Lord’s supper. He takes the cup and says to the disciples: “For this is my blood of the new testament (or the new covenant) which is shed for many for the remission (forgiveness) of sins.” In other words, my death on the cross will pay the price for your sins and becomes the basis of forgiveness that will be acceptable to the law.

Now what does the New Testament mean by the word “blood”? Please remember that the New Testament was written by Jews, except for Luke. The Jews understood blood to symbolize life. Shed blood is life that is laid down in death for our sins, because the blood of Christ represents the justice of

the law met at the cross in the death of Christ. 1 John 1:7-9 says: “If you walk in the light the blood of Christ will cleanse you from all sin.” That is good news! But while God can forgive us for our acts of sins because of the blood of Christ, sinfulness, which is the principle of sin, cannot be forgiven. You can’t forgive sinfulness. God can forgive what you have done, but God can’t forgive you for what you are. There is another solution for that. That is the cross of Christ.

Let me explain the difference by an illustration. In my backyard there is an apple tree. It was there when I came. When it produced its first apples I picked one ripe apple to eat. It was sour and unfit for eating. So I picked all the apples and threw them into “Yellow Creek,” which flows through my backyard. Now, had I solved the problem? Yes, for the time being, but next year the tree will produce sour apples again. As long as the apple tree is not dealt with the sour apple problem is not really solved. If before the next season comes I dig around the roots and I feed it with six pounds of sugar, hoping that the tree will absorb some of that

sugar and produce sweet apples, will the problem of sour apples be solved? You know as well as I do, the answer is no. Why not? What is the problem? It is not in the soil. It is not in the nutrients that it absorbs. The problem is in the tree itself.

We need to realize the real sin problem of man. Sin and crime are increasing in this country and in the world. What is the solution to the problems? If the gospel only removes the fruits of our sin problem, which are sinful acts, through forgiveness, I have solved the problem only for a season. My sinful nature will produce sins again. Forgiveness, wonderful as it may be, is not the full solution to my sin problem. Forgiveness is wonderful; I thank God for it because it gives me peace. But, at the same time, I am unhappy with the vicious circle of sinning and forgiveness, sinning and forgiveness. Is forgiveness the only hope of Christianity? Is that the limit of the power of the gospel?

Modern man has tried all kinds of human

solutions to solve our sin problem. Education, stringent laws, incentives—all have failed to curb sin and crime in this country. There is no solution in humanistic ideas. Take Marxism, for example. It claimed to be a scientific solution to man's sin problem. It sounds good and wonderful, but it was a hypothesis that needed confirmation. Russia tried it for some 75 years and has failed miserably, and so has China failed. No human solution can solve our sin problem.

The question therefore is, “What is the solution to our sin problem?” Is it changing the political and economic environment? If I pluck an apple tree and plant it in an orange grove, will it produce oranges? No. Some years ago a movement tried to do that very thing. It was called “The Moral Re-armament.” In other words, arm yourselves with love, purity, and honesty, and the world will change for the better. It promised we would have no more wars. That movement is dying out because it hasn't worked.

The reason why the Christian church also has

failed is because it has failed to see the dual answer of the gospel to the sin problem. The power of the gospel is not only in the blood of Christ but also in the cross of Christ. Sinful acts God can forgive because of Christ's shed blood, but sinfulness cannot be forgiven; it must go. One of the mistakes we make when we become Christians is that we think that through the help of God we can change our sinful natures. Well, I have bad news for you. Jesus said to Nicodemus in John 3:6: "That which is born of the flesh is (always) flesh." God's answer for the sinful flesh is not making it better.

Do you know what God's answer is to the flesh? Do you know what God's verdict is on the flesh? Crucifixion. The flesh must die. That is His solution. God forgives you for your acts through the blood of Christ but for sinfulness He doesn't forgive you. He strikes the tree down. The apple tree that produces sour apples must be cut down and a new apple tree must be planted. 2 Cor. 5:17 tells us what the cross does: "If any man be in Christ he is a new creation, the old has passed away." The formula of the gospel is not changing

the environment. The formula of the gospel is not making you good. The formula of the gospel is “NOT I, BUT CHRIST!”

That is why a French theologian in the 19th Century made this statement: “Every Christian is born crucified.” The famous modern martyr who died in Germany at the age of 39, Dietrich Bonhoeffer said, “When God calls you, He calls you to die.” If you have not died, if you were buried alive by your pastor when you were baptized, you are not a Christian; because the gospel demands that you die in exchange for the life of Christ. That is God’s answer to our sin problem.

The death of Christ was not one man dying instead of all men. The Bible doesn’t teach that. Yes, Christ did die for us, in the sense that He tasted death instead of all men. You and I as Christians will never have to experience the second death which Christ tasted on the cross. Thank God for that. But when He died it wasn’t just one Man dying instead of all men. That is illegal. No law, God’s or man’s, will allow it. According to the

New Testament teaching, it was all men that died in one Man. The death of Christ was a corporate death.

When an American wins the Olympics, who is happy, who rejoices? Not just one person but the whole nation rejoices because that one man represents America. So when Christ died, He died as “US.” 2 Cor. 5:14 (NIV): “Because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died.” Just as all men sinned in Adam, so also all men died in Christ, the second Adam.

What did Christ say concerning the cross in John 12:31? “Now is the judgment of this world.” When Adam sinned his condemnation came upon all men because all men were implicated in his sin (Romans 5:12, 18). Since the human race is the multiplication of Adam’s one life, we were all in him when he sinned. Likewise, the same human race was put into Christ at the incarnation so that when He died, we died in Him. This is the truth of the cross in which the whole world was judged in Christ.

Hence, when you accept this truth by faith, the cross of Christ becomes your cross. Jesus says, “When you follow me you must deny self and take up your cross daily” (Luke 9:23). The problem is that many have defined the Christian cross as individual crosses separate from the cross of Christ, because Jesus said, “Take up your cross.” So we say that God has given every one of us individual crosses.

And because we have identified the believer’s cross with the hardships of life, each of us have different crosses. Some have big crosses and some have small crosses. Some have heavy crosses and some have light crosses. Consequently, when we go through difficult times we say, “The Lord has given me a very heavy cross.”

Nowhere in the Bible does it teach that. God doesn’t give each of us individual crosses. There is only one cross that saves. It is the cross of Christ, and that cross is a corporate cross. When you become a Christian, the cross of Christ becomes

your cross. Hardships of life is not the cross since unbelievers also have to face hardships of life. Christians are not the only ones who have to face problems in this life. The cross of Christ is what you have received as your cross when you accept Christ and Him crucified. The cross of Christ becomes my cross and your cross the moment we join ourselves to Him by faith.

The thief on the cross, who will be saved, literally carried his own cross but that cross won't save him. It is the cross of Christ that saves him. Remember that the believer's cross is the cross of Christ which means that His death is your death and He died to sin (Romans 6:10, 11).

After illustrating our sin problem in the seventh chapter of Romans the apostle cries out in Romans 7:24, "Who will deliver me from this law of sin and death, this body that is pulling me down to the grave because of the law of sin in me." His triumphal answer is, "I thank God through Jesus Christ." Then in Romans 8:1 he says, "There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ." Even

though you still have the law of sin in your members you are qualified for heaven because in Romans 8:2 Paul says: “The law of the Spirit has set me free from the law of sin and death.”

In Christ I have freedom from not only sin’s condemnation, but also its power. That is Paul’s statement in verse two of Romans eight. Then in Romans 8:3, he tells me how this was accomplished: “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.”

Notice two things in this statement. First, Christ identified Himself with our sin problem by being made in all points as we are (see also Heb. 2:14-18). Secondly, he solved our sin problem by condemning sin (singular) in the flesh. The word “sin” is not referring to our acts of sin but the principle of sin that resides in our flesh. In John 1:29, John the Baptist, in introducing Christ said: “Here is the lamb of God who taketh away the sin of the world.” Here the word “sin” is in the

singular. Jesus did not come simply to forgive you. He came to take away the sin of the world. And, on the cross, according to Romans 8:3, “He condemned sin (singular) in His flesh.” He condemned the law of sin. He executed the law of sin that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in you and me who walk no longer after the flesh but after the Spirit (Romans 8:4).

In other words, the solution that God has for us in regard to the dual problem of sin is found in Christ and Him crucified. Because He accepted the wages of sin, our sins, His blood cleanses us from all sins. But because we died in Him, God struck at the very foundation, at the very root of the sin problem—the power or principle of sin. According to 1 Peter 2:24, “He (Christ) bore our sins on the cross that we being dead may live unto God.”

Now let us sum up this glorious truth of the cross. Our death in Christ is essential for two things because sin is a two-fold problem. In the first place, our death in Christ is essential for justification to be legally acceptable. It is true that

objectively all men died in Christ; but if you reject that death as yours, if you refuse to identify yourself with the cross of Christ you are refusing your death in Christ, and that means the blood of Christ cannot lawfully forgive you. That is why 1 John 1:7-9 says: “If you walk in the light, which is the truth of the cross, then the blood of Christ will cleanse you from all sins.” But, secondly, our death in Christ also strikes at the root of our sin problem. It brings to an end the law of sin which is in my members.

Have you ever taken a can of beer to a funeral of an alcoholic? As you pass by his casket at the funeral service you take this can of beer and say, “Look, why don’t you have one for the road?” Would he accept it or has he finished with alcohol? Because he is dead he is no longer alive to alcohol. God’s solution for the sin problem is not making you better. God’s solution for the power of sin is to strike it at its very roots by the cross of Christ. The cross of Christ, therefore, becomes the power of God unto salvation.

In Gal. 5:24 we read: “We who belong to Christ have crucified the flesh.” That’s where the flesh belongs with all its desires. Romans 13:14 says: “Put on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will make no provision for the flesh.” Gal. 5:16 says: “Walk in the Spirit and you will not fulfil the desires of the flesh.” Do you want victory over the power of the flesh? It is in the cross of Christ, not in your promises, not in your resolutions. They are like ropes of sand. Christ says in John 12:24: “Verily, verily, (verily means “truly” and said twice indicates emphasis) I say unto you, except a kernel of wheat fall to the ground and dies it abideth alone (a seed cannot bear fruit until it falls to the ground and dies), but if it die it bringeth forth much fruit.”

That is the message of the cross in agriculture. I enjoy gardening but I know that keeping the packet of seeds on my shelf will not produce anything. That seed has to fall on the ground and die. When it dies it sprouts up, not as a seed but as a shoot and it grows and produces life. When I chop that sour apple tree down and plant a new sweet one, it may

take five years to produce apples but it will produce sweet apples because it is the right tree.

When you and I die in Christ and accept His life of righteousness in exchange for our life of sin, we shall bear fruits. As Jesus declared in the parable of the sower—some thirty fold, some sixty fold, and some one hundred fold. The amount doesn't matter. That is the message of the cross for today. It is the power of God unto salvation from sin.

We conclude this chapter with John 12:25: “He that loveth his life (i.e., the life of sin) shall lose it. (If you cling to your Adamic life you will lose it one day forever and you will get nothing in exchange.) But he that hateth his life in this world (the life of the flesh) shall keep that life that Christ has given him for eternity.”

The greatest truth the world needs to know is that Christ shed His blood for their sins. That's what the unbeliever needs to know. The greatest need of the Christian who is already forgiven, who

has peace, who is standing justified, who is standing before God as if he had never sinned, is not that Christ shed His blood for him. He knows that already. He needs to know that he died in Christ that he might bear fruit. God's method of bearing fruit is not making you better. God's method is doing away with your life and giving you the life of His Son in exchange, a life that is well-pleasing to God.

It is my sincere prayer that you will accept the cross of Christ now. The cross of Christ says, "I am crucified with Christ but I am still living. It is not I but Christ who lives in me" (Gal. 2:20). Christ was willing to go anywhere His Father sent Him, do anything He said, even go to the cross for our salvation. May His love constrain us so that we may be willing to die in order that He may live in us; so that no longer does the world see us but "Christ in you the hope of glory."

Chapter 4

The Resurrection

Any study on the Cross of Christ is incomplete without touching on the resurrection. Not only was the resurrection of Christ everything to His disciples, but it plays a vital part in our redemption and, in this concluding chapter on the Cross of Christ, we will see four important reasons why the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ is significant to Christians in terms of our salvation.

But first let us look at the resurrection through the eyes of the disciples. Remember, these disciples were Jews. They were victims of Judaism. They were raised up with the idea that the Messiah was not to be a suffering servant but a conquering king. He would destroy the Roman Empire, establish His kingdom. The disciples had this hope as they accepted Jesus Christ as their Savior.

In spite of the fact that the disciples were told more than once by Jesus Christ Himself about His

death and resurrection, they were so much engrossed in their preconceived ideas of the Messiah that they failed to see the significance of His death and His resurrection until after the event.

After Christ arose from the dead, you will notice that the first disciples to see Him besides Mary were the two men walking to the village of Emmaus recorded in Luke 24. Beginning with verse 13, we are told that these two men traveling to Emmaus, which was approximately seven miles from Jerusalem, were very discouraged men. They were so discouraged that when Jesus joined them, they did not realize who He was. When He asked them the question, “What is this communication all about? What is this discouraging talk I hear from you?” they responded by saying, “You mean to say you don’t know what has happened? This man, Jesus of Nazareth, we thought He was the one, the Messiah, the One that the prophets spoke about. But our rulers crucified Him and our hopes have been dashed to pieces. And indeed, what has happened has taken place about three days ago.”

Then Jesus, as they drew towards the village, began to expound to them. Listen to what He says to them in Luke 24, verse 25-27: “Then He [that is, Jesus] said to them, ‘O foolish ones and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken. Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?’ And then, beginning with Moses, going through all the prophets, Jesus expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.”

In other words Jesus was telling these two disciples: “Look, it’s all there in Scripture. Why haven’t you seen it?” And the reason they had not seen it was because they were blinded by their preconceived ideas, a problem that we also face today in terms of learning about truth. Later on at the table, when they were having their supper, when Jesus raised His hands to bless the food, when they realized who was talking to them, they became extremely excited.

We are told in Luke 24:23-33 that they rose up that very hour and returned to Jerusalem. They

returned back seven more miles and found the eleven and those who were with them gathered together, saying: “The Lord has risen indeed and has appeared to Simon.” Then they told about the things that had happened on the road and how He was known to them in the breaking of the bread. Imagine these discouraged, disappointed disciples, their hopes dashed by the Cross, and suddenly the resurrection changed the situation. They realized that this was the Messiah, that Jesus had come not to conquer the Romans but to conquer sin and to deliver them from the grip of death.

With this in mind, let us now turn to the four important reasons why the resurrection is extremely significant, important, vital, and crucial to Christians. The first one is that the resurrection of Christ vindicated Christ’s righteousness which He obtained for us so that we may be able to be qualified for heaven. In Romans 1, in his very introduction, see what Paul has to say about the gospel and about Jesus Christ. Having introduced himself in Romans 1:1 as the apostle called by God, separated to preach the gospel to the Gentiles,

in verse two he tells us this gospel was promised beforehand through their prophets, through the Old Testament, but now it is no longer a promise because it is the reality. And the reality concerns Jesus Christ, the Son of man according to the seed of David and the Son of God according to the life of holiness he lived. In other words, Jesus Christ was both man and God so that He might be the Savior of the world. By his humanity He joined Himself to us, the human race that needs redeeming, and through His divinity He joined us to the Father who is in heaven.

Then, having declared the righteousness of Christ in verse four, he gives the reason of the proof of that righteousness. Romans 1:4 says: “And declared to be the Son of God with power according to the spirit of holiness by the resurrection from the dead.” Now what did Paul mean by that? What has the resurrection of Christ to do with the spirit of holiness or righteousness which was revealed in the life of Christ? If Jesus in any form had sinned either in thought, word, or deed, the Father would have had no right to raise

Him up from the dead. The ultimate power of sin is death. In Romans 6:23 Paul says: “The wages of sin is death.” The law says the soul that sins, it must die. Christ did bear the sins of the world but He Himself had no sin.

When He died, when our sins put Him into the grave and He paid the price for our sins at the Cross, sin could not keep Him in the grave because He Himself had lived a perfect, sinless life. He rose from the dead to prove that He had obtained perfect righteousness in His earthly mission. If Christ had sinned in any way, thought, word, or deed, God would have no right legally to raise Him up. But the fact that God raised Him up from the dead proved that the righteousness that Christ had obtained in His earthly mission, in His humanity during those 33 years that He was here before the cross, was perfect.

For example, Paul, speaking about Christ in Romans 4:25 says: “Who [that is, Christ] was delivered up because of our offenses.” On the cross He bore the guilt and punishment of our sins and

was raised because of our justification. In other words, God delivered Christ to bear the wages of our sins so that we could be justified from our sins. Then He raised Christ up as evidence that that justification was perfect. He was raised because of our justification. The price for sin was totally paid on the cross and, therefore, God had the perfect right to raise Him up from the dead since He Himself had no sin.

Number 1. The resurrection of Christ vindicates Christ's righteousness which He obtained for the sinful human race.

Number 2. The resurrection of Christ guarantees our resurrection. You know, it is important that we become very clear that every subjective experience that we Christians will experience in this world and in the world to come is based on a perfect and finished work in Jesus Christ. In other words, there is nothing that you and I will experience as Christians, whether we think in terms of the new birth, or our standing before God as justified, that brings us peace and joy and hope

and assurance. Whether we think in terms of Christian living, holy living, all the blessed hope which is the resurrection from the dead and the ascending into heaven where Christ is, all of this is based on the fact that we have already received this in the holy history of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In other words, in Christ Jesus, God has redeemed the whole human race. We were in Him by the incarnation. Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 1:30 that it was by His [God's] will that He put us into Christ and made Christ to be our wisdom, our righteousness, our redemption, our sanctification, our everything. Therefore, since Christ is the source of our Christian experience, His resurrection guarantees our resurrection. In other words, we shall experience the resurrection because in Christ we have already been raised from the dead. In fact, Paul tells us in Ephesians 2:6 that we are already sitting in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.

But now turn to 1 Cor. 15:12 and notice Paul's argument in this passage. In verse 12 Paul exposes a theological problem that was being experienced

by the church members in Corinth. There were some in the Corinthian church who questioned the resurrection of the believers. This is how Paul puts it: “Now if Christ is preached that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?” Can you imagine believers without a hope of a resurrection? But listen to Paul’s argument. He does not defend the resurrection of the believer by using the proof text method. His proof that the Christian has the hope of the resurrection is the resurrection of Christ Himself.

Look at verse 13 onwards: “But if there is no resurrection of the dead then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen then our preaching is vain and your faith also in vain.” In other words, if the source of our resurrection, which is Christ, did not rise from the dead, then there is no hope for us. But if Christ rose from the dead then we have a hope. To go one step further, Paul goes on to say: “If Christ did not rise from the dead, then our preaching is a lie, but if Christ rose from the dead then our preaching is true and the Christian has

hope.”

In fact, in 1 Cor. 15:19 Paul says: “If in this life only we have hope in Christ we are of all men the most miserable.” Why? Because the Christian hope is not in this world, it is in the world to come. And the beginning of the world to come is the resurrection of the believers.

“But now,” says Paul in verse 20, “Christ is risen from the dead and has become the firstfruit [or the prototype] of those who have fallen asleep.” And then in verses 21,22 he makes those tremendous statements about in Adam and in Christ. “For since by man came death, by man also came the resurrection of the dead.” Please notice that the word man, used twice in this verse 21, is in the singular. Who are these two men, one bringing you death and the other bringing the resurrection? The answer is found in verse 22: “For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive.”

Now please remember the context. Here Paul is not discussing the whole human race in Christ. In

other words, he is not dealing with the objective truth of the gospel. He is dealing with the subjective experience of the believer. Do Christians who have accepted the truth as it is in Christ have a hope of a resurrection? And the answer is Yes. Why? What is the guarantee of our resurrection? The resurrection of Christ. Look at verse 23: “But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterwards those who are Christ’s at His coming.”

The resurrection of Christ is the guarantee of the resurrection of every believer. To bring this out, listen to 1 Thess. 4:14 where Paul tells the believers in Thessalonica, “For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again....” Paul is not using the word “if” as if to doubt the resurrection of Christ. What Paul is really saying is: “In view of the fact that we believe Jesus Christ died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus.” In verse 15 onward he goes on to explain that the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are living will be transformed by the twinkling of an

eye from corruption to incorruption.

But the fact is that, because Jesus conquered the grave, we believers have a hope of the resurrection. Just one more text, 1 Peter 1:3: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who, according to His abundant mercy, has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.” In other words, the resurrection of Christ is our hope. Our hope is not in this world. Our hope is in the world to come. Yes, we stand perfect in Christ today but because we have a mortal body all of us are subject to death—what the Bible calls the first death. But, to the Christian, that death is not the grim reaper, it is simply sleep and sleep means resting.

A Christian who dies is resting in Christ and when Christ comes from heaven and He makes the tremendous cry at the trump of God and says “Let the dead in Christ be raised,” all the believers who have died in Christ will conquer the grave because their victory is the result of the victory of Jesus

Christ who conquered the grave.

And so, Peter is saying, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who, according to His abundant mercy, has given us a hope through the resurrection of Christ.”

Number 3. This brings us now to our third position, a third reason why the resurrection of Christ is important to us. The resurrection of Christ makes Christ’s intercessory ministry in the heavenly sanctuary possible. When you and I accept Christ we still are sinners saved by grace. The acceptance of Christ, the new birth experience, does not change our nature one iota. We are still potentially 100 percent sinners. Therefore, as long as we are living in this world, as long as we are in this world, condemned by sin, we need a mediator, we need an Advocate, Christ the righteous. As long as we are sinners, we have a Mediator, because Jesus conquered death, went to heaven, and is now sitting at the right hand of God interceding for us.

Notice what Paul says about this wonderful

gospel in Romans 8. Paul spends several chapters in Romans discussing the gospel from every conceivable angle. He begins in chapter 3, verse 21, and he ends in chapter 8 verse 30. Then, having done that, he concludes this exposition of the gospel in chapter 8, verse 31, by asking a question: “What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?” Oh, what a tremendous statement. If God is on our side, it doesn’t matter who is against us.

Yes, the devil can accuse us day and night as Revelation 12:10 says, but we have an Advocate, the righteous. Look at Romans 8:34: “Who is he who condemns?” Yes, it is the devil who condemns, but listen to the good news: “It is Christ who died.” Remember, He died to remove our condemnation, “And, furthermore, is also risen who is even at the right hand of God who also maketh intercession for us.” Jesus was raised for our justification, says Paul in Romans 4:25. In Romans 8:34 he says: “Christ who conquered the grave is now sitting at the right hand making

intercession for us.”

In 1 John 2:1 the apostle John says the gospel is good news but please don't allow the good news of salvation, which is a free gift to sinners, lead you to cheap grace to condone sin because the gospel does not give us license to sin. But John realizes that we are still living in a sinful world; we still have sinful natures.

Because of our inability to have learned to walk fully in the Holy Spirit, we will fall, and so he says in 1 John 2:1: “My little children, I am writing this good news to you not that you may condone sin [he uses the word sin in the present continuous tense the first time] but if anyone sins [this is in the aorist tense, the past historical tense] then we have an advocate, Christ the righteous.” So the resurrection of Christ makes it possible for us to have an intercessor, Jesus Christ, at the right hand of God who is representing believers.

One more text regarding this is in Hebrews 7. Now Hebrews was written or was addressed

primarily to Jewish Christians who were in danger of turning their back to Christ and returning to Judaism. The writer of Hebrews, whom I believe is Paul, is making it very clear in this wonderful epistle that Christ is the reality of everything that was foreshadowed in the Old Testament. And because He is the reality, He is better than all that was given to the Jews in the Old Testament, the old covenant.

Now look at Heb 7:24, 25 in this context: “But he, because he continues forever, has an unchangeable priesthood. Therefore, He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him since He ever lives to make intercession for them.” The Levitical priest in the Old Testament could not really intercede for the Jews in the true sense of the word. Why? Number one, because they themselves were sinners. You remember on the day of Atonement they could not enter the Most Holy Place without first offering a sacrifice for themselves and for their family. Jesus did not have to offer a sacrifice for Himself because He had overcome sin. He had not even

sinned by a thought and, as we saw earlier, it is because of this God had the legal right to raise Him up from the dead. But Jesus Christ is a priest who has never sinned, who has conquered sin and conquered the grave.

The second difference is that the Levitical priests were limited in their intercession because they were human beings that were not only sinners but who were also mortal. That means their life span was no different from the life span of the average human being at that time. But Christ, when He rose from the dead, rose never to die. And because He is now an everlasting Savior, He is able to intercede for us from the time of His ascension right up to the time of His Second Coming. We have an Advocate; we have a Priest Who is able to save us to the uttermost not because we are good but because He is our Righteousness and He is at the right hand of God, vindicating, defending His believers.

Jesus Christ is our Advocate, our Savior, and He is able to save to the uttermost, anyone who

comes to God through Him because there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ. In Christ, as Jesus Himself said in John 5:24, we have already passed from death to life.

Number 4. And now this brings us finally to the fourth important reason why the resurrection of Christ is crucial to the believer. The resurrection of Christ proved once and for all that God's power manifested in Jesus Christ is greater than all the power of sin that Satan can muster through sinful flesh. We have a tremendous passage in the book of Romans that expounds our sin problem: Romans, chapter 7. In Romans 7:14, Paul tells us our predicament. He says the law is spiritual but we human beings, believers or unbelievers, are carnal, sold as slaves to sin and, because of this, it is impossible for human beings, irrespective of whether they are believers or unbelievers, in and of themselves, to live a holy and righteous life. Yes, they may desire to do that which is good. They may choose to do the will of God, they may delight in the law of God, but how to fulfill that desire, how to perform that which they have chosen—

impossible.

Remember, in Romans 7:14-25 Paul is not discussing the Christian controlled by the Holy Spirit. It is clear he is talking about the believer but he is talking about the believer who is trying to live a holy life in and of himself. How do we know this? Because at the very end of Romans 7:25, the second part of this verse, Paul makes it very clear: “I myself.” The Greek is much stronger than the English translation. What he actually said is, “Left on my own, independent of God’s Spirit, I can serve the law of God only with my mind. I can choose to obey the law of God, I can choose to make resolutions, I can make promises to the law of God but my flesh will not allow me to do what I have chosen to do.” That is why every promise we make to God is like ropes of sand. Why? Because the law of sin is in my members and I am a slave to it.

Is there no hope of conquering the flesh? Paul says in the beginning part of verse 25, after crying out his wretchedness in verse 24: “I thank God

through Jesus Christ.” Oh, what a wonderful Savior we have. Not only do we have a Savior Who saved us from our sins, but we have a Savior Who saved us from sin itself—sin as a power; sin as a force. Jesus Christ not only bore the sins of the world but, as Paul says in Romans 8:3, He condemned sin in the flesh.

What is the greatest proof that He condemned sin in the flesh? The resurrection. When Christ rose from the dead He proved that His power over sin is greater than the power of sin in us. Let me explain how this is true. Turn in your Bibles to 1 Cor. 15. We looked at it a few moments ago but now we will turn to verses 55 onwards. What does it say here? “O death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory? The sting of death is sin and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, Who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

What Paul is saying here is that the ultimate power of sin is to put you and me into the grave. If you or I can conquer the grave that is evidence that

we can conquer sin. And no person apart from Christ has conquered the grave in and of himself. Yes, Moses was raised from the grave and many at the resurrection of Christ were raised from the dead, but none of them were raised because of their own righteousness. They were all raised because they were believers in Christ. They were raised by the power of Christ Who is the conqueror of the grave. Let me put it this way. Sin, our sins, your sins and my sins, were allowed by God to put Jesus into the grave. It was not His sin that put Him into the grave because He had none. It was our sins that put Him into the grave. But our sins could not keep Him down. And thus Jesus manifested His power against sin.

Let me read 1 Cor 15:58: “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.”

Here is an illustration that may help you to understand what I am saying here. When we were in the mission field there were times when my

family was isolated from society. I had to spend quite a bit of time with my children so that they would not feel left all alone. One of the games we played was this. I would lie on the floor and I would make my son hold my feet down and my daughter my hands down. And I would say to them, “Let us see who is stronger. If you are stronger you will keep me down here. If I am stronger I will conquer you and get up.” And of course they were determined to keep me pinned down on the floor. So I would say, “Are you ready?” and they would say, “Yes.” You could see them exerting themselves with every bit of strength they had to keep me down. But I would push my son to one side, push my daughter to the other side, and get up.

That was many years ago, but recently my son said to me, “Dad, why don’t we play that game?” Now, of course, he is taller than I and young and very muscular and my daughter is also quite strong and I said to them, “Remember, those were childish games; now you are grown up you should put childish games aside.” And, of course, they

laughed, knowing that I could not conquer them now that they are grown up.

Well, our sins pinned Christ down into the grave but our sins could not keep Him down there. Through the Spirit of Christ He was raised from the dead. Thus, through the Spirit that dwelt in Him is revealed the power of God against the power of sin. In Romans 8:2, Paul tells us that the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus has set me free from the power of the law of sin and death. In other words, in Christ these two forces met, the Spirit of Life in Christ and the spirit of sin that was residing in our humanity that He assumed. These two forces met in Christ and God allowed our sins to take Christ to the grave but our sins could not keep Him there. The Spirit of life raised Him up from the dead.

In view of this, Paul makes a very wonderful, powerful statement in Romans 8:11 which we must apply to our Christian living: “But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead (or, in other words, the Spirit of Christ that conquered sin from the grave) dwells in you, He who raised Christ

from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.” That is why Paul says in Romans 8:4 that when a Christian walks in the Spirit, the righteousness of the law will be fulfilled in us not because we are able to do it in ourselves but because the Spirit of life which proved its power against sin through the resurrection of Christ dwells in you. It is able to mortify your sinful body and, in exchange, produce the righteous character of Christ.

Therefore, a Christian has not only the hope of a resurrection and a ticket to heaven but the Christian, through the indwelling Spirit, has a hope of reproducing in his and her life the righteous character of our Lord Jesus Christ. But this, of course, is realized only as we learn to walk in the Spirit.

One of the last letters Paul wrote was Philippians and in chapter 3:10-14 of that book Paul makes a very interesting statement concerning himself and this should be the goal of every believer who is struggling with the flesh and with

the sinful nature. First of all, Paul has told the Philippian Christians in verse 9 that he is resting in the righteousness of Christ for his salvation. That is what every believer should do. Then in verse 10 he goes on to say, “That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His suffering being conformed to His death if by any means I may attain to the resurrection from the dead that [what does he mean by that?] I may attain the victory of Christ in my life.” And then he goes on, “Not that I have already attained [He is not claiming to have totally overcome the flesh or is already perfected] but I press on that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. In Christ I am victorious. I have already conquered sin in Christ.” Now, in experience, Paul is saying: “That is my mark, that is my goal.” “Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended but one thing I do; forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press towards the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.” One of those prizes, one of those upward calls is victory over the flesh.

But having said this, I need to say a couple of words of warning. Victory over sin or victory over the sinful nature is not the same as sinless perfection. You see, God gives us victory over sin while we still retain our sinful nature. It is only at the second coming of Christ that we will experience sinless perfection when this corruption puts on incorruption. In other words, we will always remain sinners on this earth until we die or until Christ comes. Therefore, we must never look at our subjective experience for peace and for assurance. Justification is by faith alone in the doing and dying of Christ.

Victory over the flesh—the purpose of it is witnessing to the world the power of the gospel in our lives. When the world sees in us the character of love that Jesus manifested on this earth, this unselfish self-emptying love, unconditional love; when the world sees that, then they will realize that the gospel is not just a theory but a power of God unto salvation. Jesus Himself said in John 13:35: “By this shall all men know that you are My

disciples when we have love one for another”—the kind of love that He manifested towards mankind. This He brings out in verse 34.

Secondly, victory over sin or holiness of living does not contribute one iota towards my justification or towards my ticket to heaven. We stand complete, we stand perfect only in Jesus Christ. That is the basis of our assurance of salvation. We must never look at ourselves or our experience or our victory through the power of the Holy Spirit for our assurance of salvation. Because even though the Holy Spirit gives us victory, we will never know it fully.

This brings us to point number three. Victory over sin is God’s part because you and I still have sinful natures and in and of ourselves, as Paul brings out in Romans 7, we cannot overcome the flesh. When God gives us the victory we may not know it all the time. Our part from beginning to end is faith and this is our battle. Paul, at the end of his life, told Timothy, “I have fought the good fight of faith.” That is the battle that you and I have to

fight.

In Luke 18:1-8 Jesus is describing a parable concerning those people who are weak in faith. He says, “Men ought not to faint but to remain persevering in their faith.” He then gives the parable of the unjust judge. In verse 8 He ends up with this question, “When the Son of man comes will He find faith on this earth?” Can God produce a people whose faith is unshakable, whose faith in the Word of God is immovable, whose faith in Jesus Christ cannot be shattered even though the heavens fall? Because when that takes place, when God produces a people who are walking by faith alone, then the door is opened for Him to produce a people whose lives will perfectly reflect the character of Christ.

So we rejoice in the resurrection of Christ because it vindicates Christ’s righteousness which justifies us; it guarantees our resurrection; it makes it possible for Christ to be our Intercessor so that even though we are sinners we can look men and ourselves in the face and know in Whom we

believe; that He is able to save us to the uttermost.

Finally, the resurrection of Christ gives us the hope of conquering the flesh and living a life that is pleasing to God. And this is my prayer for each one of you. Amen.