

# THE CROSS

*Christ's Priceless Substitutionary  
Death For Sinners*



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## INTRODUCTION

A cross. Look around and you will find crosses adorning most anything, from the steeple of a church to the gyrating chest of a rap musician. Gold crosses. Silver crosses. Simple crosses. Ornate crosses. At your local jeweler there is probably a cross for every occasion. However, if everyone wearing a cross really understood what the symbol represented, would we continue to see such a prevalence of the cross within our culture? Probably not. If they did, then they'd know it would be like wearing a miniaturized guillotine or hangman's gallows about their neck. For a cross had only one purpose. *Execution!* Only, the intent for the cross was to produce a very slow excruciating death!

However, for anyone who has experienced God's grace in Jesus Christ, there is a wondrous attraction to the cross. *His* cross! "Where the dearest and best for a world of lost sinners was slain!"<sup>1</sup> Regarding his own esteem of Christ's cross, the Apostle Paul exclaimed,

For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God (1 Cor. 1:18).

Similarly, crack open a hymnal and you will find songs that rejoice in Christ's cross in the most heartfelt of terms. For example, in the refrain of his hymn, "At the Cross," Isaac Watts wrote,

At the cross, at the cross, where I first saw the light,  
And the burden of my heart rolled away.  
It was there by faith I received my sight,  
And now I am happy all the day!

But what is meant by the “the cross of Christ?” By it, we certainly mean much more than the two rough-sawn beams and spikes that affixed Jesus to the wood. What is meant by “the cross of Christ” is the sum total of several things. First, the identity of the One who died on the cross is involved. Second, His cross entails all the suffering Jesus endured leading up to being crucified, in being crucified, and in His death. And third, all the benefits Jesus secured through His suffering, death, and resurrection are bound up “in His cross.” Basically, “the cross” represents the totality of what the Lord Jesus Christ went through and achieved in His sacrifice for sinners!

These days we might speak much of Christ crucified, but how much of the depth of what He achieved through His cross do we really grasp? As John MacArthur states,

Every true Christian knows that Christ died for our sins. That truth is so rich that only eternity will reveal its full profundity. But in the mundane existence of our daily lives, we are too inclined to take the Cross of Christ for granted. We mistakenly think of it as one of the elementary facts of our faith. We therefore neglect to meditate on this truth of all truths, and we miss the real richness of it. If we think of it at all, we tend to dabble too much in the shallow end of the pool, when we ought to be immersing ourselves in its depths daily.<sup>2</sup>

Dear reader, if you will, why not shove out for a few minutes with me over the deeper end of the pool of Christ’s cross and ponder some of its wonders.

## WHY THE CROSS?

To begin, we must first answer the question, “Why the cross?” In other words, why was it necessary that Jesus suffer and die for sinners? Now, the tendency of many is to think, “I’m not so bad and God is not so mad.” Either they assume God gives them very wide margins for error and/or they believe their good deeds will outweigh their bad in the end. R.C. Sproul recounts the humorous story of a little boy who was asked by his mom, “Suppose you were to stand before God, and He looked you straight in the eye and said, ‘Why should I let you into my heaven?’—what would you say to God?” The little boy thought for a second and then looked up at his mother and said, ‘Well, if God asked me that, I would say, ‘Because I really tried hard to be good.’ Then a puzzled look came over his face for a moment, and he said, ‘Well . . . , not that good.’”<sup>3</sup>

The truth is, apart from Christ, we are all very bad and God is very mad (Ps. 7:11; 85:5). You see, God doesn’t grade on the curve. The standard is perfection—Himself! In Psalm 50:21, the Lord says, “You thought that I was just like you!” But, He’s not just like you or me. In Him there is no shadow or impurity or any such thing (Ja. 1:17). He is perfectly holy (Isa. 6:3). And, because He is perfectly holy and ourselves sinful, He tells us that no person can see His face and live (Ex. 33:20)! Because He is holy, He must judge sin. “The soul who sins will die” (Eze. 18:4). The frightening thing is that wrath, eternal fiery wrath, is the forecast for those who do not have their

sins forgiven them in Christ (Jn. 3:36).

Perhaps we think, “Now hold on! That’s a bit extreme, isn’t it?! I mean, why can’t God just let bygones be bygones—just let things slide—just let me go my own way?” The answer is, “If God were to pardon sin without upholding His righteousness He would cease to be God; merely to waive the penalty that sin deserves would be to deny His perfection.”<sup>4</sup>

This, brings us, of course, to the cross and the need for a *substitutionary sacrifice*. “Substitutionary,” because, if anyone is going to dodge the bullet of God’s eternal wrath, they need someone else, a qualified substitute, to bear that penalty for them. As Keith Green sang, “You can pay it yourself. Ha! Or, let someone else. But who would be that nice—to pay a debt that isn’t his? Well, I know someone like that.”<sup>5</sup> Jesus, the chosen one, was God’s substitutionary sacrificial offering for sinners. As the Apostle Peter said, “For Christ also died for sins once for all, *the just for the unjust*, so that He might bring us to God” (1 Pet. 3:18). So, if Jesus had not come and gone to the cross, we’d all be forever lost—every last one of us! But, because He came, became a man and died a substitutionary death, those who trust in Him as their Savior can sing,

He paid a debt He did not owe.  
I owed a debt I could not pay.  
I needed someone to wash my sins away.  
And now I sing a brand new song,  
“Amazing Grace” the whole day long.  
Christ Jesus paid the debt that I could never pay!<sup>6</sup>

## THE QUALIFIED SAVIOR

However, unless we understand something of the majesty and worth of Jesus, we will miss seeing how He could qualify to be our Savior. You see, even the Bible expresses the impossibility of one person to be the substitute payment for another.

No man can by any means redeem his brother or give to God a ransom for him—for the redemption of his soul is costly, and he should cease trying forever (Ps. 49:7-9).

The way Jesus overcame this impossibility, of course, was through His being so much more than a mere man. As Scripture tells us,

In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God (Jn. 1:1).

For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form (Col. 2:9).

What these verses and so many others emphasize is that Jesus is most certainly God—the eternal almighty Son of God, the second member of the Trinity. He personifies the glorious majestic attributes of God (Jn. 1:18; 14:8-9). As C.H. Spurgeon declared,

Truly the revelation is by no means scant, for there is vastly more revealed in the person of Christ than we shall be likely to learn in this mortal life, and even eternity will not be too long for the discovery of all the glory of God which shines forth in the person of the Word made flesh. Those who would supplement Christianity had better first add to the brilliance of the sun or the fullness of the sea. As for us, we are more than satisfied with the revelation of God in the person of our Lord Jesus.<sup>7</sup>

At the same time, Jesus was and is fully man, “born



of a woman, born under the Law” (Gal. 4:4; cf. Lk. 1:35). Had He not been fully human, Jesus could not have identified with us and become *our* Savior. He had to be fully one of us to die for us. The gospels clearly show us that, not only was Jesus divine, He was also human. We see His humanity, amongst other things, in His becoming wearied (Jn. 4:6), hungry (Mt. 4:2), thirsty (Jn. 19:28), and ultimately in His death (Mt. 27:50). However, unlike us, in His humanity Jesus was entirely sinless. He never acted outside the will of God—not once (Jn. 8:29,46)!

Therefore, because Jesus was the perfect Godman, He was eminently qualified to be the substitute sacrifice for sinners. He is also perfectly suited to be the believer’s best friend and High Priest, a present help in times of need (Heb. 2:17-18; 4:15). Thus we sing,

Fairest Lord Jesus, Ruler of all nature,  
O Thou of God, and man the Son,  
Thee will I cherish, Thee will I honor,  
Thou, my soul’s glory, joy and crown.<sup>8</sup>

So, being the qualified Savior, what did Jesus accomplish for sinners by His cross? Please read on.

## REDEMPTION

Anyone who has seen the movie, *Braveheart*, knows that at the climax of the film, with his dying breath, William Wallace (the hero played by Mel Gibson), yells, “FFRREEDDOOMM!!!!”. Similarly, but in a vastly more significant way, Jesus Christ gave up His life on the cross in order to gain freedom for His people. As Jesus Himself said, “If the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed” (Jn. 8:36).

This subject of freedom is directly related to several interrelated terms in the Bible: redemption, redeem, redeemer, and ransom. These terms have the basic idea of “to purchase,” “purchase price,” etc. For example, in ancient Israel, if a person was a slave and he came to have the means to *redeem* (buy) himself out of slavery, or if a relative would pay his *redemption* (purchase) price, he was to be set free (Lv. 25:47-55).

The person who purchased a relative’s freedom was known as “a kinsman redeemer.” As the eminent scholar Leon Morris states, “the basic idea is that of promoting the interests, the welfare of the family.”<sup>9</sup> In order to be ‘a kinsman redeemer,’ one had to meet three requirements: 1) you had to be a family member to the person; 2) you had to have the ability and means to redeem; and, 3) you had to have a willing heart. Perhaps the most beautiful Old Testament story of “a kinsman redeemer” is found in the Book of Ruth. There we read of the prosperous gentleman, Boaz, redeeming a widowed Moabitess, Ruth, in order that she might become his wife.

Coming into the New Testament, such backgrounds shed tremendous light on what Jesus accomplished by His cross. Think of it. Apart from Him, we are slaves to sin (Jn. 8:34); we are held captive by Satan (2 Tim. 2:26); and, worst of all, the terrible wrath of God hangs over us. But, because Jesus 1) became our family member (taking up humanity in His incarnation); 2) possessed the ability to redeem us (being the sinless Son of God); and, 3) was willing to redeem sinners, He was wholly qualified to be our “kinsman redeemer.” As He Himself said, “The Son of

Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give up His life a *ransom* for many” (Mt. 20:28).

How did Jesus accomplish redemption? What was the price He paid? The answer is . . . His own life! Titus 2:14, “Who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed . . .” Specifically, Jesus achieved redemption through His shed blood which is representative of His sacrificed life.

In Him we have redemption through His blood (Eph. 1:7).

Knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold . . . but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ (1 Pet. 1:18-19).

Now, question arises at this point as to whom Jesus made this payment. Wayne Grudem makes the following helpful comments,

Though we were in bondage to sin and to Satan, there was no ‘ransom’ paid to either ‘sin’ or to Satan himself, for they did not have power to demand such payment, nor was Satan the one whose holiness was offended by sin and who required a penalty to be paid for sin. . . . The penalty for sin was paid by Christ and received and accepted by God the Father. But we hesitate to speak of paying a ‘ransom’ to God the Father, because it was not he who held us in bondage but Satan and our own sins. Therefore, at this point the idea of a ransom payment cannot be pressed in every detail. It is sufficient to note that a price was paid (the death of Christ) and the result was that we were ‘redeemed’ from bondage.<sup>10</sup>

“Redeemed from bondage!!” What a thrilling reality for all those who trust Him! Purchased to God from captivity to the devil, to sin, and to judgment. I ask dear reader, are you redeemed? If you are, then you

certainly can sing with Fanny Crosby,

Redeemed, how I love to proclaim it!  
Redeemed by the blood of the Lamb!  
Redeemed thro' His infinite mercy;  
His child, and forever, I am.<sup>11</sup>

### *PROPITIATION*

Another essential reality achieved through Christ's cross is "propitiation." Now, in order to understand how this word is used we must first begin with the subject of anger. Ask the average person today whether God becomes angry and they will probably respond, "Certainly not!!" Many churches today simply ignore or refuse to teach that God can be angry or wrathful. What shall we say to this?

At least several facts need to be clarified. Fact one: There are more than 580 references to God's wrath in the Scriptures. Therefore, this is a main topic, not an occasional one. As A.W. Pink writes, "A study of the concordance will show that there are more references in Scripture to the anger, fury, and wrath of God, than there are to His love and tenderness."<sup>12</sup>

Fact two: God's anger toward sin and sinners is deeply personal, not impersonal. Sometimes the impression is given by others that, when God judges someone for sin, His sentiment basically is, "Oh, I'm awfully sorry I have to do this, but I'm bound by principles outside myself that must govern my actions. Therefore, please don't take this personally!" Such a view simply does not square with Scripture where we find God saying such things as,

Now I will shortly pour out My wrath on you and

spend My anger against you; judge you according to your ways, while your abominations are in your midst; then you will know that I, the LORD, do the smiting (Ezek. 7:8-9).

Sound impersonal to you? I didn't think so. So, rather than God's anger/wrath being impersonal, it is intensely personal!

Fact three: God's anger/wrath is always righteous! In other words, it isn't anger for the wrong reasons. It isn't capricious or random. It isn't petty, as ours often is. Rather, it is always anger for the right reasons, expressed in the right manner and at the right time. And, Scripture is careful to tell us ten times that God is slow to anger,

The Lord, the Lord God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth (Ex. 34:6b).

However, please keep in mind that the very next verse states, "Yet, He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished" (v. 7b). Therefore, God's anger and wrath are truly grim and sobering realities clearly seen in Scripture. Dear reader, you do not . . . I repeat . . . you do not want to experience God's fiery wrath! He is not like having another person angry at you. He is all-powerful, eternal, and unchanging. Therefore, His wrath is indeed a frightening prospect and reality!

This, though, brings us to Christ's work of *propitiation* on the cross. While "propitiation" is certainly one of those biblical terms we don't often use in our normal vocabulary, it is one of the most important

concepts you will ever ponder. Why? Because, for God to be “propitiated” means His anger and wrath have been turned away from the guilty person. More than that, it means His wrath has been satisfied!! Let me illustrate. Let’s say someone murdered a loved one of yours, and, the murderer, being caught and convicted, was ordered to compensate you with a huge sum of money for your loss. As you can imagine, your anger and wrath would never be satisfied (propitiated) through such a payment. It might only be *propitiated* (satisfied) when the murderer made payment by their own death.

Amazingly, even though they had committed the most heinous crimes imaginable (disobeying and failing to give the perfectly worthy God His place in their lives), God’s own wrath toward His beloved people is not *propitiated* through their making payment with their own lives, but through God the Father pouring His wrath out upon His own Son on the cross! When Jesus cried out from the cross, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken Me?” (Mt. 27:46), He was experiencing the radical unfathomable fulfillment of what Isaiah the prophet predicted,

But the Lord was pleased to crush Him, putting Him to grief; . . . He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the chastening for our well-being fell upon Him (Isa. 53:10a, 5).

You see, in some inexplicable yet heartbreakingly real way, God the Father punished Jesus as sin upon the cross!! Who killed Jesus Christ? Ultimately, God the Father did! The clearest and best declaration of this truth is found in Romans 3:23-26 which John

Piper rightfully calls “the most important paragraph in the Bible.”<sup>13</sup>

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; *whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood* through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; for the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

While there are many things we can say about these verses, please observe just a couple things. First, notice how Paul says in v. 25 that God previously passed over sins. In other words, in times past, forgiveness was granted while God’s wrath was not yet truly satisfied. How so? Well, for example, after King David had committed adultery and murder and was rebuked by Nathan the prophet, David confessed, “I have sinned against the Lord” (2 Sam. 12:13). In the same verse Nathan immediately replied, “The Lord also has put away your sin; you shall not die.” Just like that David was granted full forgiveness—for such terrible sins as adultery and murder! However, please get this, while God forgave David, His wrath toward David’s sin was not truly satisfied at that time. In other words, God passed over his sin.

But why would this have posed a problem for God if He had just left it at that? What would have been wrong for God to simply forgive David without His wrath *ever* being satisfied, or, for that matter, for Him to similarly forgive any other person? In the opinion of many, there would be absolutely nothing wrong

for God to do this. “He’s God. He can do what He wants, right?!” Dear reader, what do you think? Does not such thinking reflect a very low view of the worth and honor of God? This is no small thing! As John Piper says so well,

When sin is treated as though it is inconsequential, then the glory (worth) of God is treated as inconsequential. When God passes over sin, it looks as though he is agreeing that his glory is of little value. But if God acts in such a way as to deny the infinite value of his own glory, then he commits the ultimate outrage; he desecrates what is infinitely holy and he blasphemes what is infinitely sacred.<sup>14</sup>

But God will not do that. He will not go off silent in the night toward those who have attacked His worth through their sin. He will “go to bat” for Himself. Either He will address their crime eternally in hell, or, as Paul shows us in Romans 3, He would defend His worth another way—by putting Christ forward “publicly as a *propitiation* in His blood.”

Therefore, please get this, God’s anger and wrath toward those Christ came to save was propitiated fully in Christ on the cross. In His suffering and death, Jesus affirmed the radical infinite worth of God—that God’s value merited such a substitutionary payment on behalf of those who had defamed God’s worth. By Christ’s blood, their offense was atoned for—that is, it was *covered*. “The blood of the sacrifice is interposed between God and the sinner, and in view of it the wrath of God is turned aside.”<sup>15</sup> Therefore, by Jesus satisfying God’s wrath, then and only then could God be both “just (true to Himself) and the justifier



of the one who has faith in Jesus.” I ask you, can there be any better news than this?! Only God could satisfy and remove the wrath we rightfully deserved! What love! In view of such love, might we sing with Isaac Watts,

Was it for sins that I have done He suffered on the tree?  
Amazing pity! Grace unknown! And love beyond degree!<sup>16</sup>

## RECONCILIATION

So, having accomplished redemption through His death as the payment for His people, and having propitiated the wrath of God by bearing that wrath on the cross, the third major thing Jesus achieved through His cross is the *reconciliation* of God toward those Christ came to save. Most of us know what it is to have been at odds with one person or another in the past—to have had anger and tears, yet, to have been later reconciled toward them. “Reconciliation” entails the removal of hostility and ill will. The war is over. More than that, *full* reconciliation means the restored joyous harmony of persons. This is why many see a close connection between “atonement” and “reconciliation.” Get it? “At—one—ment!”

Looking in the New Testament, two primary texts tell us of the reconciliation Christ accomplished:

For if while we were enemies we were *reconciled* to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been *reconciled*, we shall be saved by His life. And not only this, but we also exult in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the *reconciliation* (Rom. 5:10-11).

Now all these things are from God, who *reconciled* us to

Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of *reconciliation*, namely, that God was in Christ *reconciling* the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of *reconciliation*. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be *reconciled* to God (2 Cor. 5:18-20).

From these verses, notice first how God Himself is seen as “the Great Reconciler.” I’m not the reconciler. You’re not the reconciler. God is the reconciler! “Man never makes reconciliation. It is what he experiences or embraces, not what he does.”<sup>17</sup> What a wonderful thing! Do you realize that unless God was the one who makes reconciliation, absolutely no one would be reconciled to God! Our war against Him would have stretched on for eternity. To say that God is the reconciler is to affirm that He is the one with the heart of a Savior. He is the Great Shepherd who goes out looking for that lost lamb, not the lamb looking for Him.

Also, we see in these verses that sin was the great obstacle preventing God from having a relationship with us. It was “while we were *enemies*” that God was “reconciling the world to Himself, not counting *their trespasses* against them.” Not just sin in theory, but *our* sin was the obstacle to be overcome. As Paul says in Colossians 1:21, “(We were) alienated (a word that pictures a broken relationship) and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds.” The thought that people are, by nature, neutral toward God is totally foreign to the biblical picture. Rather, by nature, people hate God. They don’t want anything to do with Him.

They're running in the opposite direction from God. So, sin was the great obstacle to be addressed in order for us to be reconciled with God.

But third, how was this obstacle overcome by God? As Paul tells us, it was "through the death of His Son" (Rom. 5:10; cf. 2 Cor. 5:18). This is essentially the same thing as what Paul wrote in Colossians 1:19-20,

For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him (Christ), and through Him to *reconcile* all things to Himself, having made peace *through the blood of His cross*.

As you can see, it was His Son's cross that removed the barrier to His being able to be reconciled to us. If God had been reconciled toward us without removing that barrier, He would, in essence, have been cozying up to our ungodliness and rebellion. Something He would never do. Therefore, through Christ's cross, and only through His cross, is God reconciled to His people.

But this raises an important question. Is this reconciliation an *objective* matter or a *subjective* one? David Clotfelter gives us a good answer,

The answer is that it is both. When we come to faith in Christ, our enmity toward God is ended; and we find that we are, in our own hearts and minds, at peace with God. This is subjective reconciliation. But the emphasis in the New Testament is not on the reconciliation toward God that occurs subjectively in us. Rather, the Bible places stress on the truth that God is now reconciled toward us. The death of Jesus has opened the way for God to embrace those from who He was previously estranged by their sin.<sup>18</sup>

This is very important to remember. God was reconciled toward lost sinners far *far* before they were ever reconciled to Him. His warfare toward those Christ came to save was over at the cross! An illustration of reconciliation achieved while not presently enjoyed by both parties is found in the story of Hiroo Onoda, the last Japanese soldier to officially surrender from WWII. When Japan surrendered to the United States on August 15, 1945, Hiroo Onoda still manned his post on Lubang Island, 75 miles southwest of Manila. Despite the efforts of the Philippine Army, letters and newspapers left for him, radio broadcasts, and even a plea from his brother, Onoda refused to believe the war was over. Finally, on March 9, 1974 (28 years later), upon orders from Major Taniguchi, Onoda emerged from the jungle. When he accepted that the war was over, he wept openly.

So it similarly is for those Christ came to save. God's war toward them was indeed ended at the cross, but, they must come out of the jungle and end their war towards Him! That's what Gospel representatives plead for. Thus, when we are reconciled to God, we discover what it is to have a harmonious relationship with the lover of our souls. And, we can join Charles Wesley in singing,

No condemnation now I dread; Jesus, and all in Him is mine!  
Alive in Him, my living Head, and clothed in righteousness  
divine; Bold I approach th' eternal throne and claim the  
crown, thro' Christ, my own. Amazing love! How can it be  
that Thou, my God, shouldst die for me?<sup>19</sup>

## FOR WHOM DID JESUS *ULTIMATELY* DIE?

At this point it should be abundantly clear that Jesus

achieved stupendous things through His cross. The question needs to be asked, though, “For whom were these things intended?” Or, “For whom did Jesus *ultimately* die?” Now, when we consider the answer to this question, we have only a limited number of potential answers before us. Either,

1. Jesus died for all the sins of all men,
2. Or, all the sins of some men,
3. Or, some sins of all men.<sup>20</sup>

It seems, does it not, that we can immediately dismiss the third of these options (“some sins of all men”), because, the Bible is absolutely clear that no one will go to heaven who has not had all of their sins paid for by Jesus (Heb. 10:14; Rom. 4:4). So, not just some, but all the sins of a person must be paid by Jesus for them to be saved. That leaves us with either of the first two options. Either Jesus died for all the sins of all men, or He *ultimately* died for all the sins of some men. In the opinion of this writer, it is the second of these views that the Bible puts forward to us. Maybe you ask, “How can you believe that?” Please bear with me as I make the following points.

First, when we look at what the New Testament tells us Jesus accomplished through His cross, we must ask whether it describes these things in *potential* or *actual* terms? In other words, did Jesus achieve the *potential* for redemption, or did He achieve *actual* redemption? Did He achieve *potential* propitiation for sinners, or did He achieve *actual* propitiation? And so forth. The difference between the Lord’s work achieving the potential for such things versus actual is monumental! If *potential*, then His work can be met with potential failure. If *actual*, then His work

cannot be anything other than a complete success, achieving the ends for which it was intended. May I suggest to you that, rather than potential, the Bible emphasizes the *actual* accomplishment of these things. For example, consider the underlined emphases found in the following texts:

- Luke 1:68, (even before Jesus died, Zacharias announced) “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for He has visited us and accomplished redemption for His people.”
- Titus 2:14, “(Christ) gave Himself *for us* to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession . . .”
- Hebrews 2:17, “He had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.”
- 1 John 4:10, “In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.” Now, John also said in 2:2, “He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world.” The best explanation of that verse, this writer believes, is that Jesus achieved propitiation not only for the sins of the immediate readers of John’s epistle, but also for all the sins of all believers everywhere, of all time, i.e., the whole world!
- And, what could be more clear as to *actual* accomplishment than 2 Corinthians 5:19, “. . . God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them . . .”

We could certainly cite more references, but these are sufficient to show that what Jesus achieved on the cross was *actual* redemption, *actual* propitiation, and *actual* reconciliation. He didn’t accomplish the mere *potential* for these things. HE DID IT!! That is

exactly the emphasis in His last words from the cross—"IT IS FINISHED" (Jn. 19:30)!! So, in view of the *actuality* of His work, it seems unlikely it was *ultimately* intended for all the sins of all men, otherwise, all people, without exception, would be saved.

A second reason why it appears Jesus ultimately died for all the sins of some men is seen in Scripture's own specification for whom Jesus did these things. For a moment, look back at the italicized portions in the verses on the previous page. Notice for whom Jesus work was intended: "for His people," "for us," "for the sins of the people," "for our sins." Along with such things, we have the definitive declarations of Jesus Himself,

I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life *for the sheep*. . . I am the good shepherd, and I know My own and My own know Me, even as the Father knows Me and I know the Father; and I lay down My life *for the sheep* (John 10:11,14-15).

Who are the sheep to whom Jesus is referring? In John's gospel, they are those people whom the Father has sovereignly chosen to give to the Son as a love gift—I.e., the elect (see 6:37; 10:16; 17:9).

*For their sakes* I sanctify Myself (Jn. 17:19a).

Jesus' sanctifying of Himself referred to His setting Himself apart for the cross. I.e., Jesus is saying, "For their sakes (that is, for the beloved chosen people of God) I set myself apart unto death."

Therefore, such clear declarations from Jesus surely show us that it was His beloved sheep whom He had in His heart as He went to the cross. He laid down His life for them and for each and every one of their sins! Now, does this mean the Lord does not have a

true genuine heart of compassion and love for all people in general? Certainly not. He demonstrates His general love and grace toward all people, without exception, in untold numbers of times and untold numbers of ways every single day (Eze. 18:32; Mt. 9:36; Acts 14:17). But, He has a *particular* redemptive love for His own. As a man should have a general heart of compassion and love toward all women, you would not begrudge him a particular special love for his own wife, would you? So it is with Christ's love toward His sheep. While His sacrifice was certainly sufficient to pay for all the sins of every person who has ever lived, its intent and efficacy (effectiveness) is *ultimately* for His sheep.

Finally, a third point is found in an answer to those who charge that, "To say Christ died *ultimately* for all the sins of some men, is to limit Christ's atonement!" C.H. Spurgeon turned this charge around and argued that those who see Christ's cross as being for all the sins of all people are really the ones who limit the Lord's work. Spurgeon said,

We are often told that we limit the atonement of Christ, because we say that Christ has not made a satisfaction for all men, or all men would be saved. Now, our reply to this is, that, on the other hand, our opponents limit it: we do not. The Arminians say, Christ died for all men. Ask them what they mean by it. Did Christ die so as to secure the salvation of all men? They say, "No, certainly not." We ask them the next question—Did Christ die so as to secure the salvation of any man in particular? They answer "No. Christ has died that any man may be saved if"—and then follow certain conditions of salvation. Now, who is it that limits the death of Christ? Why, you. You say that Christ did not die so as infallibly to secure the salvation of anybody.



We beg your pardon, when you say we limit Christ's death; we say, "No, my dear sir, it is you that do it." We say Christ so died that he infallibly secured the salvation of a multitude that no man can number, who through Christ's death not only may be saved, but are saved, must be saved and cannot by any possibility run the hazard of being anything but saved. You are welcome to your atonement; you may keep it. We will never renounce ours for the sake of it.<sup>21</sup>

In his typical direct manner, Spurgeon didn't pull any punches. But, as he countered the attack on the view that Christ died for all the sins of some men, C.H. Spurgeon wonderfully highlighted the work of Christ on the cross—which will not fail in achieving the ends for which it was intended. As Isaiah the prophet predicted, "If He (Christ) would render Himself as a guilt offering, He will see His offspring, . . . as a result of the anguish of His soul, He will see it and be satisfied" (Isa. 53:10b,11a). Therefore, we praise God that He has provided a Savior whose work will not fail!

Bearing shame and scoffing rude, in my place condemned He  
stood—  
Sealed my pardon with His blood: Hallelujah, what a Savior!  
Guilty, vile and helpless we, Spotless Lamb of God was He;  
Full atonement! Can it be? Hallelujah, what a Savior!  
Lifted up was He to die, 'It is finished,' was His cry;  
Now in heav'n exalted high: Hallelujah, what a Savior!<sup>22</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Dear reader, if you are a believer in the Blessed Lord Jesus and have experienced His life changing power, please know for certain that you were in His heart as He endured the scourging, mocking, and blows! You were in His thoughts and prayers as He trod the

path to Golgotha, experienced the agony of crucifixion, and had His heart broken by the Father's rejection! It wasn't the sins of a nameless, numberless, potential humanity He carried with Him on the cross, but all the sins of His beloved people whom He came to save—to redeem them from their sin; to propitiate the wrath of God toward them; and, to reconcile them to God! As the Apostle Paul said of Jesus, “Who loved *me* and gave Himself up for *me*” (Gal. 2:20). But, what if you are not presently a believer in Jesus Christ? What if you have some sense of your sin and need for salvation, but wonder if you can lay claim to what Christ has accomplished? What if you are hesitant to repent of your sins and believe in Him because you are thinking to yourself, “What if I am not one of those for whom Jesus specifically died?” What then? Please hear J.I. Packer's answer to this concern,

The fact is that the New Testament never calls on any man to repent on the ground that Christ died specifically and particularly for him. The basis on which the New Testament invites sinners to put faith in Christ is simply that they need Him, and that He offers Himself to them, and that those who receive Him are promised all the benefits that His death secured for His people. What is universal and all-inclusive in the New Testament is the invitation to faith, and the promise of salvation to all who believe. . . . The gospel is not ‘believe that Christ died for everybody's sins, and therefore for yours,’ any more than it is, ‘believe that Christ died only for certain people's sins, and so perhaps not for yours.’ The gospel is, ‘believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, who died for sins, and now offers you Himself as your Savior.’<sup>23</sup>

So, I ask you, dear reader, “Are you a sinner?” Christ Jesus died for sinners (1 Tim. 1:15). If you desire to be saved, don’t look to yourself! Think of yourself as the most unreliable undeserving creature there is. Instead, look to Jesus and trust Him for all the Bible promises to those who believe. Cast yourself on Him entirely, with abandonment! Do that and you will be saved! Do that and you may well imagine yourself having the following conversation with Jesus pictured by Lewis Bayly :

*Soule.* Lord, why wouldest Thou be taken, when Thou mightest have escaped Thine enemies?

*Christ.* That thy spiritual enemies should not take thee, and cast thee into the prison of utter darkness.

*Soule.* Lord, wherefore wouldest Thou be bound?

*Christ.* That I might loose the cordes of thine iniquities.

*Soule.* Lord, wherefore wouldest Thou be lift up upon a Crosse?

*Christ.* That I might lift thee up with Me to heaven.

*Soule.* Lord, wherefore were Thy hands and feet nayled to the Crosse?

*Christ.* To enlarge thy hands to doe the works of righteousness and to set thy feete at libertie, to walke in the wayes of peace.

*Soule.* Lord, why wouldest Thou have Thine arms nayled abroad?

*Christ.* That I might embrace thee more lovingly, My sweet soule.

*Soule.* Lord, wherefore was Thy side opened with a speare?

*Christ.* That thou mightest have a way to come near to My heart.<sup>24</sup>

## NOTES

1. “*The Old Rugged Cross*,” written by George Bennard, 1<sup>st</sup> stanza
2. John MacArthur, *The Murder of Jesus*, Nelson Books Pub., pp. xiv-xv
3. Story as quoted in R.C. Sproul, *Saved From What?*, Crossway Books, p. 32
4. Iain H. Murray, *The Old Evangelicalism*, Banner of Truth Pub., p. 108
5. A line from Keith Green’s *Altar Song*
6. “*He Paid A Debt*,” author anonymous, 1<sup>st</sup> stanza
7. Charles H. Spurgeon, *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, Vol. 25, p. 506
8. *Fairest Lord Jesus*, anonymous German hymn, 1<sup>st</sup> stanza
9. Leon Morris, *The Atonement: It’s Meaning & Significance*, IVP Press, pp. 110-111
10. Wayne Grudem, *Bible Doctrine*, Zondervan Pub., p. 255
11. “*Redeemed*,” written by Fanny Crosby, 1<sup>st</sup> stanza
12. Arthur W. Pink, *The Attributes of God*, Baker Pub., p. 82
13. John Piper, *The Pleasures of God*, Moody Press, p. 162
14. John Piper, *Ibid.*, p. 164
15. Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, Eerdmans Pub., p. 374
16. “*Alas! And Did My Savior Bleed?*,” written by Isaac Watts, 2<sup>nd</sup> stanza
17. Charles Hodge, *Commentary on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, Eerdmans Pub., p. 142
18. David Clotfelter, *Sinners In The Hands Of A Good God*, Moody Press, p. 196
19. “*And Can It Be?*” written by Charles Wesley, 4<sup>th</sup> stanza
20. These options were put forth by John Owen in his classic treatise, *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ*
21. C.H. Spurgeon, quoted by J.I. Packer in his “Introductory Essay” to John Owen, *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ*, Banner of Truth Pub., p. 14, note 1
22. *Hallelujah, What a Savior!*, written by Philip P. Bliss, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, and 4<sup>th</sup> stanzas
23. J.I. Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*, InterVarsity, pp. 68-69
24. This segment from Lewis Bayley’s 17th century devotional handbook, *Practice of Piety*, is quoted as found in R. Kent Hughes, *Mark*, Vol. 2, Crossway Books, pp. 198-199