

The Present Values of the Cross to the Unsaved

by Lewis Sperry Chafer

The death of Christ is a universal provision of salvation, where every individual can be saved by believing on Jesus Christ.

Scripture: Isaiah 53:5, John 1:29, John 3:16, John 19:30, Romans 3:25, 2 Corinthians 5:14, Ephesians 1:7, 1 Timothy 2:1, Hebrews 2:9, 1 John 2:2

Topics: "The Cross", "Salvation"

Description

Lewis Sperry Chafer delves into the profound mystery of Christ's death and resurrection, emphasizing that the sinless Son of God willingly allowed Himself to be crucified as a substitute for all mankind, as evidenced in Isaiah 53:5-6, John 1:29, John 3:16, 2 Corinthians 5:14, 1 Timothy 2:1, Hebrews 2:9, and 1 John 2:2. The Scriptures reveal that Christ's death was a complete transaction regarding the judgment of sin and the grounds of salvation for every individual, as declared in John 19:30. The sermon explores the concepts of Reconciliation, Redemption, and Propitiation, highlighting the divine provision made through Christ's sacrifice, as explained in 2 Corinthians 5:14-21, 1 Peter 1:18, Ephesians 1:7, Romans 3:25-26, and 1 John 2:2.

Transcript

EVERY thoughtful person is compelled to assign some reason for the death of Christ. The problem consists in the fact that the sinless, harmless Man Who most evidently was able to defend Himself against all human strength, and being very God could have dismissed the universe from His presence by one word; nevertheless allowed Himself to be crucified in seeming weakness, and afterward appeared in resurrection life and power. Since both the death of Christ and His resurrection are fully established facts of history, the question demands solution. Why did He suffer Himself thus to be put to death? It is certain He did not need to die either because of His own sinfulness or weakness. This problem does not remain a mere abstract riddle. The death of Christ is explained in the Scriptures and the personal acceptance or rejection of that divine explanation is declared to be the point which determines the destiny of each individual. Men are said to stand, or fall, not by their moral, or religious standards, but by their personal choice in relation to the death and saving grace of Christ. The question is as important, therefore, as the destiny of man.

The Scriptures know but one solution to the problem of the death of Christ--one, and only one, whether it be in type in the Old Testament, or in the exact unfoldings of the history and doctrine of the New Testament. The Bible lends no sanction to differing human theories on this point. Such speculations are but shadows of the divine revelation and their promulgation is, like any counterfeit, a misleading substitute for the real Gospel of saving grace.

Almost every passage related to the cross could be called into evidence in determining the divine reason for the sacrifice on the part of the Son of God. In these divine records two great truths are evident: He died as a substitute for some one else, and that some one else is each and every individual in all the lost world of mankind. "But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all" (Isa 53:5, 6); "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (Jhn 1:29); "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (Jhn 3:16); "Because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead" (2Cr 5:14); "Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth" (1Ti 2:1); "That he by the grace of God should taste death for every man" (Hbr 2:9); "And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world" (1Jo 2:2). In the clearest terms this death is here said to be a substitution. He did not die to show men how to die gracefully, or bravely: He died that they might not die. What He did, therefore, does not need to be done again. It is something accomplished for every person and in such perfection as to be fully satisfying to the infinite God. In like manner these passages are characterized by such universal words as "all," "every man" and "the whole world." From this it must be believed that the death of Christ has already provided a great potential and provisional value for every guilty sinner, which is now awaiting his personal recognition.

Preceding the dismissal of His spirit as He hung upon the cross Jesus said, "It is finished." This could hardly have referred to the fact that His own life or sufferings were at an end. It was rather the divine announcement of the fact that a complete transaction regarding the judgment of sin and the sufficient grounds of salvation for every sinner was accomplished. It is important to consider what, according to the Scriptures, was then finished.

To know the meaning of three Bible words which relate the cross of Christ to the sinner will throw some light upon the character and extent of the work that is said to be "finished" for the whole unsaved world.

First--Reconciliation: This word, or the doctrine it represents, does not directly appear in the Old Testament. There the thought is always of an immediate and personal atonement by shedding of blood. In the New Testament its meaning is that of a complete and thorough change accomplished by the actual removal of the cause of enmity, so making reconciliation. The most illuminating passage on this truth is found in 2Cr 5:14-21 R. V. "For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that one died for all, therefore all died; and he died for all, that they that live should no longer live unto themselves, but unto him who for their sakes died and rose again. Wherefore we henceforth know no man after the flesh: even though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now we know him so no more. Wherefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature: the old things are passed away; behold, they are become new. But all things are of God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and gave unto us the ministry of reconciliation; to wit, that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not reckoning unto them their trespasses, and having committed unto us the word of reconciliation. We are ambassadors therefore on behalf of Christ, as though God were entreating by us: we beseech you on behalf of Christ, be ye

reconciled to God. Him who knew no sin he made to be sin on our behalf; that we might become the righteousness of God in him."

The subsequent truth in this passage grows out of the primary statement of verse 14, wherein it is said that the death of Christ was for all, and, therefore, in a legal sense, all have died in that death. The logic is irresistible. If it be admitted that He died for all (and the Scriptures know no limitation in the universal provision in that death), then the value of that death has been secured and provided for all, and since this is an undertaking which began in the councils of God and was ordained to meet the righteous requirements of His own Being, these values have been secured on a plane which answers the highest demands of the Infinite.

That Jesus died for an individual constitutes the greatest thing that can be said of that person, and, to a truly spiritual understanding, the minor classifications of the human family cease before the overwhelming revelation. "Henceforth know we no man after the flesh." He is only to be known as one for whom Jesus died. In like manner, on the ground of the perfect divine provision and accomplishment in the cross it is added: "If any man be in Christ he is a new creature (creation): old things have passed away; behold, all things are become new. But all things are of God, who reconciled us (or thoroughly changed us in relation) to himself through Christ." The Apostle then adds, "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not reckoning unto them their trespasses." The world is thus thoroughly changed in its relation to God by the death of His Son. God Himself is not said to be changed: He has thoroughly changed the world in its relation to Himself by the death of Christ. God Himself has undertaken the needed mediation between His own righteous Person and the sinful world. The provision of a Mediator and the grounds of mediation for the whole world does not save the world, but it does render the salvation of the individual possible in the righteousness of God.

Those who are thus saved have received a ministry from God. "We are ambassadors, therefore, on behalf of Christ, as though God were entreating by us: we beseech you on behalf of Christ, be ye reconciled to God."

From this Scripture we may conclude that there is a two-fold aspect of reconciliation: first, that which God hath already wrought in Christ by which He has thoroughly changed the relation of the whole world to Himself so that He does not reckon their trespasses unto them, and, second, a reconciliation for which we may plead and which must take place in the attitude of the unsaved individual through the revelation given to him in the Gospel concerning the sacrifice of Christ. Salvation is made to depend upon such a personal response to this appeal from God. Blessed indeed is the one who can say, "the love and grace of God, in removing forever my judgments and doom by the sacrifice of His Son, are wholly satisfying to me and I rest only in the Saviour thus given." The fact of the universal divine reconciliation may remain unappreciated and unconsidered, but when its eternal riches dawn on a sin-blinded soul that one, in his attitude and experience, is thoroughly changed toward God and finds a wholly new joy and peace through believing what God has already done in His boundless grace.

Second--Redemption: Divine redemption, whether in the Old or the New Testament, is to deliver by paying the demands of the offended righteousness of God against sin. The price of such redemption is always blood alone. "When I see the blood, I will pass over you" (Exd 12:13); "It is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul" (Lev 17:11); "This is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins" (Mat 26:28); "Ye were not redeemed with corruptible things * * * but with the precious blood of Christ" (1Pe 1:18); "The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin" (1Jo

1:7); "Thou wast slain, and hath redeemed us to God by thy blood" (Rev 5:9).

The full redemption by blood has been paid in the death of Christ and so in a provisional way has affected the estate of the whole world. "Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time" (1Ti 2:6); "Even the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many" (Mat 20:28); "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (Jhn 1:29).

Redemption is also by power. This was seen in the redemption of Israel from Egypt and is equally true of all redemption. The price may be paid for the slave, but he must be taken out of the slave position and set free. This is individual and such redemption by blood and power is the blessed experience of all who put their trust in the divine Redeemer.

Forgiveness, which in the Scriptures is individual, is made possible through the blood of redemption. "The priest shall make an atonement for his sin that he hath committed, and it shall be forgiven him" (Lev 4:35); "This is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins" (Mat 26:28); "Without shedding of blood is no remission" (Hbr 9:22); "In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins" (Eph 1:7). Redemption, then, may also be considered in these two aspects: that which has been already accomplished through the blood of the cross, and that which may yet be done for the one who believes, through the immediate power of God. The ransom price has been paid for all; yet for the one who believes there is a further work of redemption which is manifested in the transforming and sanctifying power of the Spirit.

Happy is the individual who believes what God has written, and rests in the redeeming work of Christ as his only deliverance from the hopeless estate of the lost.

Third--Propitiation: The meaning of this word is inexpressibly sweet. It refers to a divinely provided place of meeting, a place of propitiation. The mercy-seat of the Old Testament is spoken of in Hbr 9:5 as a place of propitiation. There, covering the broken law, was the blood-sprinkled mercy-seat, and there was the Shekinah light which spoke of the presence of God. There, too, because of the blood and what it typified, a holy God could meet a sinful man without judgments and, in turn, a sinful man could meet a holy God without dread or fear. So we find in Rom 3:25, 26, that Christ was "set forth" by His Father God to be a propitiation through faith in His blood. So, also, in 1Jo 2:2, "And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but for the sins of the whole world." The very blood-sprinkled body of the Son of God on the cross has become the divinely provided place of meeting where now a guilty sinner can come to God without fear, and the righteous God can receive that soul apart from all judgments and condemnation.

The publican who went up to the temple to pray, according to Luk 18:9-14, would not so much as lift up his eyes to heaven, but smote on his breast, and said: "God be thou propitiated to me the sinner." The significance of the Greek text is not "God be merciful to me a sinner," but is more correctly expressed by the R. V. marginal rendering, "God be propitiated to me the sinner." There is a most vital distinction here. It is one thing to call on God for an exercise of immediate mercy: it is quite another thing to ask to be covered by atoning blood. How different the issue is before the unsaved now since the atoning blood has been shed! Certainly it is not a matter with them of securing some special leniency from God: it is rather a matter of believing that every needed grace has been already exercised. On the ground of a divinely provided propitiation the publican went down to his house justified, which was vastly more than being forgiven. In like manner, every soul has been as freely justified who has believed. It is a question of intelligently electing to receive and stand in the saving work of Christ which is simply to receive the Christ

as a personal Saviour. The sinner thus acknowledges Christ as the divinely appointed propitiation and there in confidence rests his case before the righteous throne of God.

From these three Bible words we may conclude that there is a work now fully accomplished in the cross for every unsaved person. Such have been thoroughly changed in their relation to God by His great act of reconciliation, and He is said to be waiting for them to be thoroughly changed by the message of the Cross in reconciliation toward Him. He has redeemed them by the blood of Christ Who was "the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world," but is now awaiting their act of faith toward the Christ that He might with the power of the Spirit transform them into the very sons of God. He has been propitiated toward "the whole world," but must await the willingness of the individual to stand only on the fact that the righteous judgments for sin have already been accomplished in the cross of Christ. That cross was a propitiation toward God; a reconciliation toward man; and a redemption toward sin. And this in relation to every member of the fallen human race. If men go to perdition it will be because every possible mercy from God has been resisted.

"God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son"--this much is universal and so is true of all--"that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life"--is individual and personal. No one is saved by these universal things alone; but because of these universal things anyone who believes may be saved.

To every unsaved person, therefore, the message may be given in the full confidence in its truth that God has already completed the grounds of salvation, and they are but to believe on Him through Whom all this grace has been so perfectly wrought.

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