

Atonement and the Cross of Christ ***Metaphors of Salvation***

Lesson #9 for November 29, 2008

Scriptures: Romans 2:1-29; 3:19-26; 2 Corinthians 5:18-21; 1 John 4:7-11.

1. The purpose of this lesson is to summarize the ways the writers of the New Testament and people in subsequent generations of Christians have interpreted the death of Christ. Could you give a concise answer to the question, "Why did Jesus have to die?" God must accomplish two things through the life and death of Jesus. **First**, He must win the great controversy by giving full and complete answers to the accusations and questions raised by Satan. **Second**, He must "win back" our confidence, our trust, and our faith in Him.
2. What is the relationship between winning the great controversy and saving human beings? What needs to happen for us to be saved? If you and your guardian angel could trade places as your name comes up before the courts in heaven, what would "you" want to know about you before "you" voted to admit you into heaven? Is your primary need forgiveness and justification? Or do you need to be healed and changed? Will we be safe to save if we have only been forgiven and no real change has taken place inside of us? Hitler, Stalin, and Idi Amin have been forgiven. Would you want to live next door to them for eternity?
3. We will be considering some of the metaphors of salvation: 1) Ransom; 2) A transforming revelation of God's love; 3) An expiatory sacrifice which removes sin as a barrier between us and God; 4) A reconciliation; and 5) A declaration of acquittal. Do we need more than one of these "metaphors"? If yes, why? Why do you suppose that those metaphors say nothing about how God wins the great controversy?
4. As you see the answers that God has given to Satan's accusations and questions through the life and death of Christ, do you find that God can be trusted? Do you have any question about God's trustworthiness? Are you willing to trust Him to know what is the best plan for your life and your eternal salvation?
5. The earliest popular explanation of the plan of salvation was that Christ's death "paid the ransom" for our sins. In its simplest form, that metaphor suggests that by sinning, human beings sold themselves into the control of Satan. But God responded by offering to buy us back "in exchange for" the life of Christ. Because Satan wanted more than anything else to take the place of Christ, he accepted the offer. After Satan had handed over the souls of all humanity and received Christ into death, he discovered that he could not "hold on to" Christ, and so, Christ escaped. In effect, God won the great controversy and accomplished our salvation by tricking the Devil. Does the Devil deserve to be tricked? This metaphor was fairly widely accepted even in New Testament times. Does that method of saving sinners sound right to you? (Matthew 10:45; 20:28; Galatians 3:13; Ephesians 1:7; 1 Peter 1:18,19)
6. Some of those verses suggest that we are "redeemed" from the curse of the law. (Galatians 3:13) The only thing that the law can do is to point out our sin. (Hebrews 10:3,11) As you understand it, does redemption necessitate a change in those being redeemed? About sixty percent of the people living in the Mediterranean world in those days were slaves. Sometimes, one or more of those slaves would kidnap a child from one of the rich families and demand as a payment enough money to purchase their own freedom. (And presumably, enough to move far away from the law!) But the children who were "redeemed" did not have to do anything to be

redeemed. Do we have to be sanctified in order to be redeemed? If a ransom was paid for us, what was the ransom? And to whom was it paid? Did God “owe” anything to the Devil?

7. Another metaphor involves “reconciliation.” Is it possible to be “reconciled” without a mediator? Who was the first mediator mentioned in the Bible? (Exodus 20:18-21) Who asked for that mediator? Are you “scared to death” of God? Do you need Someone to stand between you and God? Who is our Mediator today? If Jesus Christ is our Mediator, is He not God? Was there a mediator between Jesus and Judas as Jesus washed the feet of Judas in the upper room?
8. Read 2 Corinthians 5:17-21, *GNB*.

¹⁷Anyone who is joined to Christ is a new being; the old is gone, the new has come. [Doesn't this seem to suggest change?] ¹⁸All this is done by God, who through Christ changed us from enemies into his friends and gave us the task of making others his friends also. ¹⁹Our message is that God was making the whole human race his friends through Christ. God did not keep an account of their sins, and he has given us the message which tells how he makes them his friends.

²⁰Here we are, then, speaking for Christ, as though God himself were making his appeal through us. We plead on Christ's behalf: let God change you from enemies into his friends! ²¹Christ was without sin, but for our sake God made him share our sin in order that in union with him we might share the righteousness of God.

9. Is it truly possible that God wants to make us His friends? Look at the evidence:
 - 1) God “stepped up to the plate” and took the initiative to reach out to us. (John 3:16)
 - 2) For the benefit of those whose picture of God is “distant” and “scary,” God reaches out through His Son to win us back to friendship and trust with Himself.
 - 3) God takes the necessary steps to “bring us back” and to make us His friends. (The Bible)
 - 4) By demonstrating His unmeasurable love for us, by giving His life for us, and by disproving all of Satan's unfair accusations against His character, God seeks to convince us to be willing to be His friends once again. The barrier of sin and especially distrust will “melt away” if we can recognize how much He truly loves us.
10. While we are considering these various metaphors, remember that God is speaking first and foremost to the onlooking universe; and only secondarily, He is speaking to us. If God failed to win the trust and confidence of the rest of the universe, there would be no point in trying to save any of us. The whole universe would fall apart. Nevertheless, by the same means that He uses to reach out and convince the universe of His trustworthiness, He reaches out to us.
11. Romans 3:19-24 is a very significant passage about salvation. There, Paul tried to differentiate clearly between obedience to the law—*as a means of salvation*—and justification by faith. The word “justification” is a translation of the Greek word *dikaioo* which means simply “to set something right which has been wrong.” If I am convinced by God's love as demonstrated through the life and death of Jesus that He can be trusted, God promises that He will treat me “just as if I had” never sinned. Notice the steps involved in the legal transaction known as justification.
 - 1) The Bible clearly states in many places that we are all sinners. We agree that we are sinners as charged. If we do not recognize our sin, the whole exercise is useless.
 - 2) Many people have more or less equated justification with forgiveness. If we are able to ask

for forgiveness, that is an action on our part, and we feel that we have done something to accomplish our salvation. Unfortunately, most of the Christian world is still at the foot of Mt. Sinai, and they are very concerned about what will happen to them if they are not forgiven. We need to remember that God is “forgiveness personified.” No one needs to ask Him to forgive us. Jesus forgave those evil men who were nailing Him to the cross, and they had not asked for forgiveness or even thought of asking for it. (Luke 23:34) Therefore, confession is not a necessary prerequisite for forgiveness. The story of the prodigal son is really the story of the forgiving Father. He forgave His son even before the son left home. The Father did not even accept the speech requesting forgiveness. (Luke 15:11-32) Forgiveness—or the lack of forgiveness—is not the problem. These stories suggest that all our sins were “forgiven” before we were born.

We need to confess our sins because of what it does for us, but God does not need our confession. So, what is necessary for God to treat me “just as if I had” never sinned? I cannot do anything about my past sins because they are a permanent part of the history of sin. (See GC 671) I must recognize that God's plan for my life is better than anything I could have ever dreamed of myself. Therefore, I must trust Him to guide me in the future. That trust—commonly known as faith—is the only requirement for salvation. (Acts 16:31) Faith is the opposite of sin. (Romans 14:23) Someday, a group of people will be so focused on Jesus and how they can become like Him, and the Holy Spirit will be working so closely with them, that their sins will “melt away.” Then, Jesus will be able to come back.

Think of the woman taken in adultery. (John 8:1-11) After all of her accusers had gone, Jesus said, “Neither do I condemn you, go and sin no more.”

- 3) All three members of the Godhead are just waiting to assist anyone who is willing to “reach out” in faith. (Romans 8) The Holy Spirit is the One who specifically is charged with the task of working closely with us in the transformation of our characters. (Romans 6:4; Galatians 3:2,3) Every human being—no matter where he has come from or what has been his previous experience—is eligible for that kind of relationship.
- 4) The transformation that takes place from being a flagrant sinner to being a faithful follower of Jesus is called “conversion.” Is that a real change? Or is it just a pretend change? Is it a legal change? Did Jesus have to die on the cross to make such a change possible? If so, why? Or, if not, why not? If we are truly guilty of the crime of sin, then a second-party “Payer” cannot step into our place. Those who believe that Someone else can “pay” for their sins, are trivializing sin, suggesting that it is no more than a civil offense instead of a criminal offense.

12. Read Romans 3:25,26 in several different translations.

²⁵⁻²⁶God offered him, so that by his blood he should become the means by which people's sins are forgiven through their faith in him. God did this in order to demonstrate that he is righteous. In the past he was patient and overlooked people's sins; but in the present time he deals with their sins, in order to demonstrate his righteousness. In this way God shows that he himself is righteous and that he puts right everyone who believes in Jesus. (*GNB*)

²⁵God showed His Son publicly dying as a means of reconciliation (an answer to questions) to be taken advantage of by faith. This (death) was to demonstrate God's own righteousness, for in His divine forbearance He had apparently

overlooked men's former sins. This death was to show that God himself is righteous and, therefore, can set right those who have faith in His Son. (*Maxwell*)

²⁵God sent Jesus into the world, and by dying on Calvary, Jesus met the demands of the law. By this, God showed us His justice and mercy, as well as His patience with sinful man. ²⁶In Jesus Christ, God showed the world how just He is; therefore, He has a perfect right to justify anyone who accepts Jesus Christ as his Savior and Lord. (*Clear Word*)

The *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* says, "The specific use of the word *sacrifice* (*NIV*; "propitiation," *KJV*) to designate the death of Christ is not symbolic or metaphorical but expresses the reality of what happened; Christ *sacrificed* Himself for us." (Wednesday, November 26, 2008) Where did the study guide get that information? Why would this not be a metaphor also?

This passage has nothing to do with the pagan idea of "propitiation." The Greek word that is translated here is *hilasterion* which means to be reconciled. In the Old Testament translation into Greek known as the Septuagint (*LXX*), it was the word used to describe the "mercy seat" in the most holy place in the sanctuary. That "lid" "sat" between the broken claims of the law and God's presence hovering over the ark. Luther was the first one to call that lid a "mercy seat."

13. Notice carefully that in Romans 3:25,26, God's righteousness is mentioned three times before anything is said about His dealing with our sins. Does that tell us anything about the great controversy? **The great controversy is not about whether or not I am a sinner. There is no question about that. The great controversy is about whether God and Christ can be trusted!** If I look at the answers that God has given to Satan's accusations and I realize—as the angels have already realized—that God is more than trustworthy and that the questions have been more than fully answered and I am convinced to trust Him, then nothing more needs to happen to accomplish my salvation. That trust, of course, must be a growing trust resulting in a more careful following of God's plan for my life day by day.
14. So, what does it mean that Christ offered an "expiatory sacrifice"?
 - 1) Once again, we note that God takes the initiative and reaches out to us. There is absolutely no way we can deal with our sinful condition by ourselves.
 - 2) By coming to live and die on our behalf, Christ accomplished "what needed to be done." That is sometimes called a "substitutionary act." (Romans 8:3; 2 Corinthians 5:21; 1 Peter 2:21-24)
 - 3) Is it therefore necessary for Christ's sacrifice to be "propitiatory" if He is to liberate us from the "wrath" of God? Remember that the "wrath" of God is simply His turning away in loving disappointment from those who do not want Him anyway, thus leaving them to the inevitable and awful consequences of their own rebellious choice. What needs to happen to deal with God's "wrath" against sin? As you understand things, does the cross not only reveal God's love but His "wrath" against sin?
 - 4) The forensic explanation of why Jesus had to die suggests that Christ's sacrifice provides the legal foundation for our salvation.

Our redemption and reconciliation would not have been possible without the sacrificial blood of Christ (*Acts 20:28; Col. 1:20; Rev. 5:9*). . . By condemning sin in Christ, God demonstrated that He is righteous when justifying those who believe in Christ (*Rom. 3:26*). *Adult Sabbath School*

In what way does condemning Christ make it possible for God to “set us right”? Is our sin a criminal offense? Or is it a civil offense? Is this problem very real? Or is it just something that needs to be dealt with in the books of heaven?

15. Some have suggested that the primary metaphor of the cross is a display of God’s love. Hopefully, we do not need to be reminded of all the texts in Scripture that talk to us about God’s love. (John 3:16; 13:1; 14:31; 1 John 3:11; 4:8; etc.) In what way does the setting of the great controversy help us to better understand God’s love? What charges has Satan brought against the character and government of God? Is God truly loving, self-sacrificing, and willing to pay almost any price to win us back? Or, is He, as Satan claims, really selfish, not willing to sacrifice, ultimately sovereign, omnipotent, and eager to punish those who get “out of line”?
16. How does the life and death of Christ tell us the truth about Himself and His Father?

By presenting Jesus as the representative of the Father, we shall be able to dispel the shadow that Satan has cast upon our pathway, in order that we shall not see the mercy and inexpressible love of God as manifested in Jesus Christ. Look at the cross of Calvary. It is a standing pledge of the boundless love, the measureless mercy of the heavenly Father.—Manuscript 154, 1897. Ellen White, *Selected Messages*, Bk.1, p. 156.

17. How should we respond to God’s love? Clearly, He intends for us to practice that love on those around us. (1 John 4:7-11) If we have come to experience and understand God’s love for us, it will be impossible for us not to love others. What does Ellen White say about the “wrath” of God?

Christ was to take the wrath of God which in justice should fall upon man. He became a refuge for man, and although man was indeed a criminal, deserving the wrath of God, yet he could by faith in Christ run into the refuge provided and be safe. In the midst of death there was life if man chose to accept it. The holy and infinite God, who dwelleth in light unapproachable, could no longer talk with man. No communication could now exist directly between man and his Maker. {Ellen White, *Review and Herald*, February 24, 1874 par. 29}

18. So, why couldn’t God just “forget” about sin? Did God have to “pour out His wrath” on something or Someone? Did God’s justice have to be satisfied? Do these ideas scare you?
19. If we fully understand—as far as we are humanly capable—what God did through the life and death of Jesus to answer the accusations of Satan in the great controversy, it would be fair to say that God has done more than necessary to win us back. Are we prepared to allow Him to be Lord of our lives?

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