Lesson 4 - The Supreme Sacrifice of Christ



At the very heart of the gospel message is the supreme sacrifice of Christ. However, it is Satan's determined purpose to engulf this truth of the cross in darkness. In this, he has had some measure of success. By convincing the Christian church to believe the lie that humans possess immortal souls, he has robbed the cross of its glory. The idea that humans possess immortal souls is not Biblical but a Greek concept introduced into the Christian church by the Church Fathers.

If man possesses an immortal soul then death is no longer goodbye to life but simply the separation of the soul from the body. In that case, that which constitutes Christ's supreme sacrifice has to be limited to the shame and torture of the cross, which was no different than that of the two thieves who were crucified with Him as well as countless others who met the same end.

Another factor that has robbed the cross of its glory is the fact that Christ was crucified on a Roman cross. While this is true, it was not the Romans who demanded His crucifixion but the Jews. Crucifixion was not a Jewish method of execution; on the contrary, the Jews detested the cross because it had a very special meaning for them.

It is only as we perceive the cross of Christ from the Jewish

perspective, as did the New Testament writers, that we can

begin to grasp the meaning of His supreme sacrifice that demonstrated God's infinite and unconditional love for mankind. In this study, as we look at the cross of Christ with Jewish spectacles, we will be amazed to discover the selfemptying agape love of Jesus and what He was willing to give up in order to save the world.

1. In what condition were we when Jesus died for us? Romans 5:8

God commended or demonstrated His unconditional love towards us in that while we were still sinners Jesus died for us. This unconditional love, as we saw earlier, is the basis of our salvation.

2. How did the death of Christ change man's relationship to God? Romans 5:10

The good news of the gospel is that God no longer looks upon the human race as His enemy. Instead, He has reconciled the entire world to Himself through the death of His Son.

3. What does the law require for our sins to be forgiven? Hebrews 9:22

The word "purified" (NKJV) or "purged" (KJV) means cleansed and "shed blood" means life laid down in death. The law demands death in order for sins to be forgiven. When Christ died on the cross, He paid the price for the sins of the world.

4. Through what means does God justify sinners? Romans 3:24

To be justified means to be declared righteous in the sight of God's law. To be redeemed means to be bought back. By His death on the cross, Christ has removed the barrier between sinful man and a holy God.

5. What did the death of Christ accomplish? Romans 3:25, 26

Legally, sins cannot be forgiven without the shedding of blood (see Hebrews 9:22). Therefore, God forgave the sins of the Old Testament believers out of kindness, or forbearance. But since Christ met the just demands of the law on the cross, God is just in forgiving all who believe in Christ. This is what Christ meant at the Lord's Supper when He said: "This is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission (forgiveness) of sins" (Matthew 26:28).

6. Since the cross, what can God lawfully do to believers? Romans 3:26

This is how the Amplified Bible translates Romans 3:26, "It was to demonstrate and prove at the present time in the now season that He Himself is righteous and that He justifies and accepts as righteous him who has true faith in Jesus."

7. In contrast to the wages of sin, what is the gift of God? Romans 6:23

8. What is Christ engaged in since His ascension into heaven? Romans 8:34

At the cross God's mercy and justice met. Because Christ legally paid the price for the sins of the world on the cross, He is now able to defend believers from Satan's accusations. For additional material on Christ's activities as our High Priest in heaven, see Lessons 20-22. That is why "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1).

9. What did Christ taste for every man on the cross? Hebrews 2:9

The death humans die today is a sleep death (see John 11:11-14). But the death Christ tasted for every man was what the Bible calls the second death (see Revelation 20:14) - the wages of sin or good-bye to life. We will study about this second death in Lesson 17: Questions 4, 9-12, and 23; and in Lesson 24: Question 22.

10. Why did the Jews demand that Christ should be crucified? John 19:5-7

Pilate, who represented Rome, found no fault in Jesus. So, the Jews had to give a reason why they were demanding Jesus' crucifixion. They accused Jesus of blasphemy, and by their law, this was punishable by death.

11. What method of death was stipulated by the law of blasphemy? Leviticus 24:16

The law against the sin of blasphemy demanded death by stoning. In John 10:30, 31 we read that the Jews took up stones "again" to stone Jesus when He said, "The Father and I are one." This proved they were aware that stoning was the method of death for blasphemy.

12. Why then did the Jews demand that Christ be crucified? Deuteronomy 21:22, 23

Hanging on a tree signified the curse of God - death without the hope of a resurrection. Crucifixion in the days of Christ was synonymous to hanging on a tree (see Acts 5:30, 10:39, 13:29; 1 Peter 2:24). Since Jesus predicted His resurrection (see John 2:19-22), the Jews wanted to make sure God would curse Jesus so that He would not rise again. That is why they demanded His crucifixion.

13. What does the law do to all those who disobey it? Galatians 3:10

The curse of the law is good-bye to life forever. This is the wages of sin which each of us deserves as sinners.

14. How did Christ redeem us from this curse of the law? Galatians 3:13

On the cross, Christ was treated as we deserved. God "made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him" (2 Corinthians 5:21). On the cross Jesus tasted the wages of sin, the curse of the law, for all humanity on the cross. That is why He cried out "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Matthew 27:46). Yet, He was willing to die forever so that we might live in His place. That is the supreme sacrifice that demonstrated God's self-emptying love for us.

15. What satisfied the Father that Christ had paid the price for our sins? Isaiah 53:6, 10, 11

We can only faintly understand the agony that our Heavenly Father must have suffered as He Himself allowed the curse of our sins to fall on Jesus, His beloved Son. Through this supreme sacrifice on the cross, the Father was satisfied that the just demands of the law were met in Christ. It is on this basis He can legally justify sinners who believe in His Son (see Romans 4:5).

16. How should this supreme sacrifice affect us? 2 Corinthians 5:14, 15

Not the fear of punishment nor the desire for reward but the love of God demonstrated on the cross of Christ must motivate Christians to live for Him. The hymn writer was correct when he penned these words: "Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all." This is what the cross of Christ did to His disciples, and this is what it must do to all who believe in Him.

17. What did Christ do to demonstrate God's selfless love for us? 1 John 3:16

Jesus laid down His life for us so that we might live in His place. That is why He said, "And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself" (John 12:31-33). This is how the cross demonstrated God's selfless love for us sinners. By this supreme sacrifice, Jesus was telling us sinners that He loves us more than Himself. As you contemplate the supreme sacrifice of Christ may you not only be drawn to God, but willingly accept His indescribable gift.

Conclusion

The following statement, by one who so clearly understood the supreme sacrifice of Christ, is worth your contemplation:

“Upon Christ as our substitute and surety was laid the iniquity of us all. He was counted a transgressor, that He might redeem us from the condemnation of the law. The guilt of every descendant of Adam was pressing upon His heart. The wrath of God against sin, the terrible manifestation of His displeasure because of iniquity, filled the soul of His Son with consternation. All His life Christ had been publishing to a fallen world the good news of the Father's mercy and pardoning love. Salvation for the chief of

sinners was His theme. But now with the terrible weight of guilt He bears, He cannot see the Father's reconciling face. 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. So great was this agony that His physical pain was hardly felt.

Satan with his fierce temptations wrung the heart of Jesus. The Savior could not see through the portals of the tomb. Hope did not present to Him His 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 eternal. Christ felt the anguish which the sinner will feel when mercy shall no longer plead for the guilty race. It was the sense of sin, bringing the Father's wrath upon Him as man's substitute, that made the cup He drank so bitter, and broke the heart of the Son of God.” (Desire of Ages, p. 753)

Notes

My Response to Lesson 4

• On the cross Jesus demonstrated that His love for sinners is greater than that for Himself (Romans 5:8). Do you believe this supreme sacrifice, that on the cross Jesus was willing to say good-bye to life forever in order that you may live in His place?

Response: _____

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