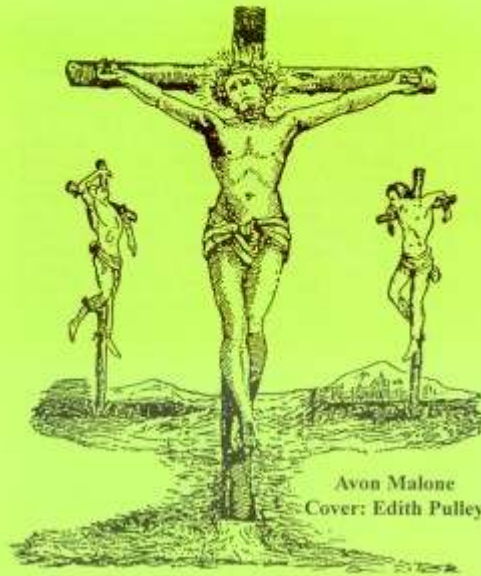


THE CROSS OF CHRIST



Front Cover

THE CROSS OF CHRIST

Paul writes in one of the great classic texts: "I determine to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified." That is our purpose. The words of Paul stand in sharp contrast to some of the attitudes in the ancient world. Cicero said, "Crucifixion is a most cruel and disgusting punishment." In his successful defense of accused murderer Gaius Rabbarias, Cicero said, "Crucifixion must be removed from the thoughts, the eyes and the ears of all Roman citizens. To bind a Roman citizen is a crime, to flog him is an abomination, to crucify him—we have no words for so horrible a deed." You must remember the stench, the stigma, the shame that attached itself to crucifixion in the first century world. Lucilius, a second century satirist, lampoons Christians, because they worshipped what he called "that crucified sophist."

Paul continues to say in I Corinthians 2:2, "For I determined not to know anything among you, except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified," and in Galatians 6:14, "God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ." The two attitudes already expressed are seen in scripture. Turn to I Corinthians 1:18ff: "For the message of the cross [the preaching of the cross] is foolishness to those that are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written: I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, And bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For since, in the wisdom of God the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those that believe." That's not the method; that's the message. In the American Standard Version, the thing that was preached was Christ crucified. "For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom: but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block [a scandalon—to the linguist, it means a snare, a trap that causes one to fall], and to the Greeks foolishness."

The Greeks saw in their deity a total inability to feel. They could not conceive of deity incarnate, and they couldn't conceive of him dying on a Roman cross. What a monstrous irrelevance

from the vantage point of the Greeks. The Jews asked for signs, the Greeks seek after wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified. Unto them that are called, both Jews and Greeks, lies the power of God and the wisdom of God. From that time to this, you have on hand your Lucilius, your Cicero, the learned Greek inebriated with their own psychological attainment, we have those who would cling simply to the cross. He writes to the Philippians; he builds up a mountain of human achievement religiously, and then he strikes it all to the ground with one mighty stroke: "I have given up all to gain everything—I suffered the loss of all things and count them but refuse that I might gain Christ." The great apostle Paul simply clings to the cross. We sing, "Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to Thy cross I cling." That needs to be the reality among those of us who preach. Let us get back to the Bible and the message centered in the cross.

The centrality of the cross. The consequences of the cross. What has been accomplished? Contacting the cross. There is just no substitute for blood. There is a song I shall ne'er get sight of the gates of light, if the way of the cross I miss. We have missed it all if we miss the way of the cross. No way to enjoy heaven, no way to escape hell.

This is God's eternal purpose—the centrality of the cross in the perspective of Jesus, in the preaching of the early church, in the evidence in the New Testament, in the letters, and in Revelation. The centrality of the cross is God's great "eternal purpose" (Acts 2:23). Paul tells us the church is "according to the eternal purpose which He purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Ephesians 3:10–11).

Peter preached this eternal purpose on Pentecost and he later wrote it. In Acts 2:23, referring to Jesus, he said, "Him, being delivered up by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God." Peter linked together God's determinate purpose and foreknowledge. God's overriding purpose was human responsibility. Underscore those words: "the purpose and foreknowledge of God." The cross was central in the mind of God from before the foundation of the world. The cross lies at the very heart of His eternal purpose. Before the foundation, before the creation, in the mind of God, there is a plan for human redemption. At the heart of that plan, there is the cross.

Peter writes this in I Peter 1:18–20: “Knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers. but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot. He indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you.” The cross is central in God's eternal purpose. The cross is central in the perspective of Jesus. Early in His life, it was apparent that this One—the God–man Immanuel—has a great sense of mission. He is concerned with the Father's business, the Father's house.

In Mark's gospel, Mark 8:31ff, right after Peter's confession “Thou are the Christ” and in Mark 9:31–32 and Mark 10:32–34, there is a triad of statements from our Lord with regard to the cross. Mark 8:31 says, “He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again.” Peter's reaction to this was to take the Lord aside and rebuke him. Jesus sees something Satanic in that. He cannot evade, He cannot avoid the cross—that is central to His mission; that is what it is all about. He says it again in Mark 9:31ff in almost the same language and mentions the fact that He will be killed and the third day rise again; and in Mark 9:32, you have the statement: “They did not understand this saying.” This may refer particularly to resurrection, but it may also refer to the cross. They don't understand it. In Mark 10:32, they are going up to Jerusalem and in each of these passages it uses this expression, “Son of man.” Remember that mighty, majestic, sovereign figure of Daniel, chapter 7? The Son of man—a Messianic title. The Son of man will be betrayed under the Jews; He will be delivered under the Jews; they will deliver him to the Gentiles and He will be spat upon; He will be scourged; He will be killed; and the third day He will rise again.

All of us are born to die. Jesus, in a sense uniquely His, was born to die, and He anticipated a premature, violent, purposeful death that was looming on the horizon, and he moved toward that with certain tread. In John's gospel, that was the hour. Seven times in John's gospel, the hour is used, and sometimes the phrase, “My hour is not yet come.” In John 7:30, they sought to take Him, but they couldn't take Him because “His

hour was not yet come." In John, chapter 12, we come into the final week. We have the triumphal entry. Someone has said the book of John is a book of signs and the book of the passion. Almost half of the book is given over to the last week. All the accounts should be called passion narratives with an introduction, because that is what consumes them. In John 12:27, "Now my soul is troubled, and what shall I say? Father, save Me [deliver Me] from this hour? But for this purpose I came to this hour. Father, glorify Your name. Then a voice came out of heaven, saying, 'I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again.'" It becomes apparent that while the hour is an hour of glorification, it paradoxically begins with His death. In fact, in reality, that is the main emphasis of John's gospel. Look, then, at the cross in the perspective of Jesus. Why do Christians cling to it so doggedly? Why this tenacity? Why this determination to preach the cross, to hold to the cross? Surely, it must reflect something of the perspective of our Lord. He moved toward an hour. There is a triad of passages in Mark pointing to the cross; that is the crucial thing; that is the central thing.

On the Lord's Day, we participate in that great commemorative feast. Listen to His words when He institutes it in Matthew 26:28, "This is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins." "This is My blood of the new New Testament" is found in one translation. "The New Covenant is my blood which is shed for many unto the remission of sins" is another translation. The New Covenant is ratified by blood. In a figurative and spiritual sense, it is a blood drink covenant—that is, made valid, or ratified by the blood. What about this New Covenant? Jeremiah 31 is quoted in Hebrews 8:8ff: "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a New Covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah; not according to the Covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them forth out of the land of Egypt." He goes on to say, "I will put my laws in their mind, and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. None of them shall teach his neighbor, and none his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them." Then, hear the words of Jesus in Mark 14:24, "This is My blood of the new covenant." What about the Covenant? Here is the blessing of the Covenant: "I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and

their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more" (Hebrews 8:12). What a tremendous claim! Lord, what do you want us to remember in your death? "My blood is shed for the remission of your sins." And this is the blood that ratifies that Covenant under which God forgives sins; and He forgets the sin forgiven through "the blood of the Covenant."

I am concerned about those who do lip service to the blood. This depreciates those great spiritual realities related to the blood. They do lip service to the blood, and yet Paul said, "the church of God which He purchased with His own blood" (Acts 20:28). The church is blood bought—purchased by the blood. The Covenant is ratified by the blood. It is a blood ratified, a blood drink Covenant by which we have forgiveness of sins. Disparage not the body, the church; He bought it with His blood and through that blood and under that Covenant, we have forgiveness and, on God's part, forgetfulness of sin.

We read in Acts 20:7, "Now on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread." Wouldn't you have loved to have heard Paul on that occasion? "Paul, ready to depart the next day, spoke to them." Wouldn't that have been wonderful? But, hearing Paul was not the primary purpose of that assembly; it was the church bought with the blood, the covenant ratified by the blood, the great commemorative feast that called them, and us, back to the sacrifice. That act of faith brings us into contact with the cross. We are "baptized into His death" (Romans 6:3). This must not be depreciated. Be sure and bring to mind that all of these are related to the blood of Christ, to His death, and we can see our Lord's perspective about the cross. The Lord's Supper is not some kind of sentimental forget-me-not. It is a great spiritual feast of rich significance. In John 6, while there is an idea that it might embrace the Lord's Supper, the Lord's Supper is not exhausted. It is bigger and broader than that. Jesus said, "Most assuredly I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you" (John 6:53). We must spiritually assimilate the sacrifice of our Lord. We must feast upon that One who died for us and upon His sacrifice. When He gave us that great memorial feast, it was not a kind of active parable to dramatize. His birth, His life, His word, His work call attention to His death. Don't misunderstand. His words are important. His signs are important.

All of that has its place, but the thing that He wants remembered is His death. Sometimes I wonder about the emphasis in our preaching, about the way we try to stir up enthusiasm and zeal, about the very people who talk about going back to the Bible. Have we not missed one of the most obvious things in the Bible? The cross is central in the purpose; it is central in the perspective of Jesus.

We have already seen something of the centrality of the cross in the early preaching of the apostles. In that great Acts 2 sermon, note this emphasis: "Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God" (Acts 2:23). Ask the modernist, "Why did He die?" They will answer, "He was a rank martyr. He become so enmeshed with His enemies that He couldn't extricate Himself. He showed the sincerity of His cause." That's not it! God planned that death before the foundation of world and that is what was preached on Pentecost. When Paul came to the synagogue in Thessalonica, Acts 17, he affirmed "and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and demonstrating that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying 'This Jesus whom I preach to you is the Christ.'" (Acts 17:2-3) What is the integral part of the message? It is that He is to suffer.

It is interesting how the cross is presented in Acts. Peter will say, "The God of our fathers raised up Jesus whom you murdered by hanging on a tree" (Acts 5:30). Again, before Cornelius, in Acts 20:39, Peter will use that every same expression, "whom they killed by hanging on a tree." Have you ever thought about that? Have you ever wondered why the cross was a scandalon to the Jews? Well, for one thing, they wanted a Messiah coming with the pomp and power of David, driving out Roman occupational forces. They didn't want one dying on a Roman cross. But, for another thing, they had problem right in the Law, for Deuteronomy 21:23 clearly stated, "he who is hanged is accursed of God." Galatians 3:13 says, "for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree.'" "

The body of the one executed in that way is removed before nightfall because the one that hangs upon a tree is accursed of God. And, rather than hushing that up, the Jewish mind would make no distinction hanging and crucifixion and they would see that as tension with something in their Law; but they

don't hush it up; they put it in the forefront. Paul, in Galatians 3:13, takes up the subject in these words: "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, 'cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree')." The apostles preached that; they emphasized that; they don't hush it up. They put it in the forefront of their preaching. They see this One—the God man, sinless, guileless—as somehow under a curse of God, but not deserving to be. How is it? He took the curse that was mine and yours. He paid the price that I could not pay. He paid my debt; He died my death. Somehow, that in our heart of hearts ought to be the thing that holds us to Him; that binds us to Him and that motivates us. All of this is central in the preaching, central in the letters, central in the gospel. One of the very first statements we have recorded in John's gospel with regard to John the Immerser, is: "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29). Then, he repeated a part of the statement the next day, "Behold the Lamb of God!" (John 1:36).

When we come finally to the last book in the New Testament, Revelation, twenty-eight times our Lord is called the Lamb. Not primarily because of his character—meek and mild—, but because He is the sacrificial Lamb. "You are worthy to take the scroll, And to open its seals; For You were slain, And have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, And have made us kings and priests to our God; And we shall reign on the earth." (Revelation 5:9–10). And, thus from the Genesis of God's word, the predictive statement about the blow struck to the head of the evil one is found right on through the Revelation, the very close of that great apocalyptic book. A crimson cord binds it all together and poets and prophets, singers and seers of Israel, the apostles and prophets of the New Testament point to the cross as central in God's eternal purpose. In the perspective of Jesus, in the preaching in the early church. Centrally throughout the letters we are going to notice more and more of that.

This means that it ought to be central to us, central in our preaching. It is possible for a man to occupy a conspicuous position in the pulpit and never have seen the cross. It should cause us to engage in serious introspection. What is the crux and core of my preaching? I told students who are preparing to preach, don't go preach in a meeting unless you

preach on the cross. If you have been there a dozen times, the people should have heard at least a dozen sermons on the cross! I want to urge that we look at the emphasis of the New Testament on the subject of the cross.

We had a fellow at Oklahoma Christian College in the Staley Lectures not long ago who said some things that were very challenging to me. He had been making a study of some restoration literature. I believe that some of those great restorers had much to say about grace and much to say about the cross of Christ, but I think we would be surprised if we examined our own preaching and teaching. I think we would find a certain dearth in this area. I have looked at books on great Bible themes. I picked up a very fine book on Jesus Christ—talking about various aspects of his nature—but I didn't find one lesson devoted to the cross. Now, this may be a very limited sampling. It may not have been an accurate sample of the preaching of the brother who came to our campus. But we need to be challenged as we get back to the Bible to call Bible things by Bible names; let's restore, let's make it a living restoration.

Let's keep preaching the cross because it is at the heart of it all. That is the message! The preaching of the gospel and the sinner's response to it ought to center in the cross. When we respond to that—the death of the innocent One for me, freeing me from a debt that I could not pay, knowing that I couldn't begin to supplement the payment of that debt—when I understand that, then I will serve Him and I will love Him. This, I believe, is the answer to our apathy and the answer to our lethargy, and it may be the answer to our lack of a sense of mission and message. How can we possibly lack that? This is the message our world so desperately needs.

We need to look at some of the consequences of the cross. There are three great consequences or blessings. If you don't enjoy these great blessings, you are wasting the blood of Christ. A young lady said, "There is no need for Jesus to die for me. I am already perfect, as I am the reflection of the divine ideal." She had embraced a system, the nature of which science is the key to the system. The statement, "The material blood of Jesus as no more efficacious when it was shed on the accursed tree than when it actually flowed within His veins as He walked about the earth doing the Father's business." But that is tragic

error! That young lady had accepted that. You wouldn't verbalize what she did, I am sure. You wouldn't say that, but if you have not obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine, or if you are a member of the body and are not walking in the light, in effect you are saying what that young woman, and many others, said. I am urging you to change that.

The first blessing of the cross is the remission of sins. In Matthew 26:28, our Lord said, "For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins." The apostle Paul stated in Ephesians 1:7, "In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace." Forgiveness of sins, remission of sins, comes through the blood. In Revelation 1:5, at the close of the verse, we have a brief doxology: "To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood." In Revelation 7:13, an elder asked a question, "Who are these arrayed in white robes and where did they come from?" The answer is: "These are the ones who came out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb" (Revelation 7:14). That is the only thing that washes robes.

We could come on Sunday and other times, stiffly starched, but the only thing that washes robes is His blood. Look at Romans 5:6–9: "For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him." The word remission is not there; the word forgiveness is not there. The word is justified. It is a court term that means "just as I had never sinned," and that comes only through the blood. That kind of cleansing can be yours continually through faith in Christ. Day by day, you can be continually cleansed by the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. The passage in I John 1:7 declares, "But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin." We need to hug this to our hearts if we walk in the light. What does this involve? Continued action? This doesn't mean we never make a misstep; it doesn't mean a perfect performance. There is an ethical thrust to what John says, but

the grammar of it is continuous action. "If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth" (v.6). A sincere effort to keep from sinning characterizes walking in the light, but it is not a perfect performance, without a misstep. It is continuous action! Walking in the light includes loving our brethren. In I John 2:9–10, the inspired apostle states, "He who says he is in the light, and hates his brother, is in darkness until now. He who loves his brother abides in the light, and there is no cause for stumbling in him." This great blessing can continue to be ours.

Many years ago when severe corrective discipline, corporal punishment, was common in the classroom—it has gone out of style today—a teacher dealing with a class of unruly boys said, "Here is the law: no stealing. Every theft will be punishable by a sound beating." The very first boy found breaking the law was a pale, frail, sickly looking young man. He looked as though he could hardly endure the beating. But the teacher understood the nature of law. The price must be paid, or the dignity of the law is dissipated. That is true with regard to civil law and law of any kind, that is true with regard to God's law. Remember that God is holy and immaculate and sin-hating in His holiness (Isaiah 6:3). In Romans 3:23, the statement is made, "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Sin separates us from God—sin being what it is, God being who He is, and man being the sinner he is, the bootstrap method is not going to work. We can't saunter into His presence in immaculate garb of our own attainment. Isaiah knew better, and stated in plain terms, "And all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags" (Isaiah 64:6). The teacher to whom I referred understood the nature of law. He said, "Boys, the law is no stealing, and every theft is punishable by a sound beating." And now a boy who is pale, frail, weak, and sickly looking has broken the law. The teacher made ready to administer that beating when suddenly, back in the room, a tall, vigorous, young man came forward saying, "He took my lunch, but he is not able to take that beating; so I'll take it for him." His back was bared and he became the substitute for the other. Now, look at Isaiah 53:5–6, "But He was wounded for our transgressions. He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way; And the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all." Remission of sins through the blood. Don't waste that blood!

Another great blessing that comes through the blood is reconciliation. Have you ever thought about how that word really applies? Reconciliation means to make friends again, to restore to a right relationship, to conciliate. This implies that once there was a right relationship. He is the Father of our spirits (Hebrews 12:9). He is not the Father of a totally depraved spirit. The Psalmist tells us we have not been here long before we go astray, speaking lies. And now we need to be reconciled; now we need to be brought back to God. Go to Romans 5:6–11 and read carefully this statement, “For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly” (v. 6). “Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if when 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” (v. 9–10). We are reconciled to God, brought back to God, by the death of His Son.

In Ephesians 2:11ff, Paul talks to the Gentiles about their condition before and without Christ, “Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh—who are called Uncircumcision by what is called The Circumcision made in the flesh by hands—that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who were once far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity. And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near.”

The late R.C. Bell once said, “If there had ever been a time when seemingly plausible arguments might have been made for two churches, one for the Jews and another for the Gentiles, because of the ageless antagonism, that bristling belligerence; had there ever been a time when a seemingly plausible argument might have been made for two bodes, the first century would seem to be the time.” But God said, “No.”

There is one redeeming, reconciling sacrifice: the cross of Christ; and there is one body; the church. That means that whoever— regardless of place or race, tongue or tribe, class or caste— is reconciled to God through Christ and His cross is also reconciled to one another in one body. One of the things that ought to stop the fragmenting, the divisiveness, the tendency to fracture, to break off, to look toward others with a lack of love and a spirit that is not unifying, is an awareness of the cross. He reconciled both unto God in one body by the cross.

A little boy was right at death's door. On one side of his bed was his Mommy and the other side his Daddy. They had been estranged. Mommy and Daddy had been alienated, separated, estranged. It was breaking the heart of that little fellow. With the last surge of strength that he could muster he reached out and grabbed Daddy's hand and he reached over and grabbed Mommy's hand and he brought those hands together. In his death, he made the effort to bring about reconciliation. Jesus Christ, the God-man, hangs suspended at Golgotha. He reaches up to the Father who, in His holiness, has been offended by the anarchy and rebellion of man; and He reaches down to man, deeply marred and scarred by sin, and by His death He brings about reconciliation. The church is the body of the reconciled.

One more great blessing I would like to discuss is that of redemption. Go to Ephesians 1:7 and read, "In Him we have redemption through His blood." Redemption means to ransom, to buy back. In New Testament usage, it means to emancipate, to liberate, to free. We have redemption through His blood. Look at I Peter 1:18, "knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers." How have captives and kidnapped persons, who have been taken through the centuries, been redeemed? It has been accomplished often by monetary means. Peter says you weren't redeemed that way, with silver and gold, but with precious blood, as a lamb without blemish and without spot—even the blood of Christ who was foreknown indeed before the foundation of the world and manifest at the end of time for your sake. By the blood we are reconciled to God. By the blood we are redeemed, brought back and thus released from sin; we are His. This is familiar language. "Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you

are not your own? [underscore this] For you were bought at a price" (I Corinthians 6:19ff).

Redemption could revitalize and renew the church, because redemption means we are not our own but we have been bought with a price. That means mind, muscles, money, time, tongue, talent, head, hand, heart; because we have been ransomed; we have been redeemed; we have been bought back from slavery and servitude to sin. The cross speaks to our needs. There is a tendency toward divisiveness and fragmenting and fracturing, even with the body of Christ. The Word says, "He has reconciled both unto God in one body by the cross." That is one reason why in Ephesians 4:3ff, Paul says, "endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, There is one body and one Spirit." There is one reconciling sacrifice. The cross speaks to our pride and our pettiness. "God forbid that I glory save in the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ." The cross speaks to the apathy and the lethargy that we sometimes see in ourselves, because here is One who gave His life for me. In the very passage where Paul said, "I have been crucified ... but Christ lives in me," he goes on to say He, "loved me, and gave Himself for me" (Galatians 2:20).

Very quickly we want to talk about contacting the cross. Read Romans 6:1-4, 17-18. We want everyone to understand clearly exactly how we contact the cross of Jesus Christ. Draw a circle in your mind. The circle represents Christ's death. Every Bible believer knows that "without shedding of blood there is no remission" (Hebrews 9:22). There is no substitute for blood. The blood of the New Covenant is shed unto the remission of sins. The remission of sins, reconciliation, a right relationship with God, redemption—all come through the cross of Christ.

Now, we must wonder how and when we contact the blood. Paul is writing to Christians, to the saints at Rome. He is telling Christians that they must not "continue to sin that grace may abound," and he explains that a death has taken place. Near the close of Romans 5, he said, "Where sin abounded, grace did abound more exceedingly." Now, Paul knows what his opponents will do if they just keep sinning that grace may abound. He takes that up in Romans 6:1, "What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly

not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?" We can understand that. You see a body lowered into the earth; you

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don't expect to see that person in that body walking the streets the next day. Paul is talking to saints, to Christians, to people in Christ, reminding them of the implications of the death they died. "How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? Or do you not know [are you ignorant] that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?" "Paul, you say we are dead to sin. When did that death take place. . .? Don't you know that so many of you as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into His death?" In the context, he is telling Christians there is a certain way you must live because a death has taken place. He answers our question and everyone can see that answer. "Do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?"

You can see what Romans 6 says. Your Bible tells you that we are baptized into His death, and that answers a lot of questions. Jesus said that His blood "is shed from many for the remission of sins" (Matthew 26:28). Peter said in Acts 2:38, "Repent and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins." If the blood is for the remission of sins, how could Peter say "be baptized...for the remission of sins?" The answer is quite clear and it is very simply stated in your Bible: "We are baptized into His death." We sing, *What Can Wash Away My Sins—Nothing But The Blood*. Ananias said, ".;Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins" (Acts 22:16). How can that be? The answer is quite clear and it is very simply stated in your Bible. We are baptized into His death. It is in that act of faith that we appropriate the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Because of its relation to the death of Christ, baptism is and must be "for the remission of sins" (Acts 2:38). You ask, "You mean to tell me that all I have to do to be washed in the blood of the Lamb is have my body buried in water, and that, apart from all other considerations, means I am washed in the blood of the Lamb?" No, not apart from all other considerations. Hear the apostle Paul in Romans 6:17-18, "But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness." Then, when were you made free from sin? "When you obeyed from the heart

that form of doctrine"—the message, the gospel, the teaching centered in the death, the burial, the resurrection of Christ.

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These people had obeyed the form, the mold, or the pattern of the doctrine. We see that as a trusting penitent is buried in the liquid grave, but notice, "you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine." The heart of you is the part of you with which you think. "For as he thinks in his heart" (Proverbs 23:7). "My heart's desire" (Romans 10:1). "For with the heart one believes unto righteousness" (Romans 10:10). Obedience from the heart is intelligent, willing obedience on the part of a trusting penitent. What happens? This is something that the infant couldn't do and the infidel won't do. This is not just a man trying to get into the same church with his wife. What happens when one, in an act of willing, intelligent obedience, believing in Jesus as the Christ, the Saviour, the God-man, repents, turns from sin, confesses His Lordship, and is Biblically baptized? What happens? That one is baptized into His death.

Thereafter, as we walk in the light, the blood continues to cleanse us from all sin. For just a moment, let's cut across the centuries. Let's go back to the halls of Pilate, to the unrelenting chant, "Crucify Him, Crucify Him," and the cowardly governor asks, "Why? What evil has He done?" Pilate has Him scourged with the Roman flagellum—with bits of bone and metal in end of this extension—which cuts into the back of our Lord, lacerating it, leaving it a torn mass of human tissue. A crown of thorns is pressed onto His head—one of the most vascular sections of the body. See the copious bleeding as that reed scepter is placed in His hand; and, in derision, caustically they cry, "Hail, King of the Jews." Finally, after that mockery, after that travesty of the trial has gone on for a time, finally, sometime in the morning, He leaves the fortress of the Praetorium and begins to make His way out of the cobbled via doloroso, some 600 or 650 yards to Golgotha, the Place of the Skull, bearing on His back—already cut and lacerated by a Roman scourge—a heavy Roman cross. He is assisted part of the way by Simon of Cyrene. The cross was a literal, visible burden that He bore that day, but there was another burden unseen by the eyes of men. That day "the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all" (Isaiah 53-6).

The summit outside the city wall is wreathed in wrought-iron Roman spikes. They pierced His hands and the insteps of His feet and that

cross was lifted and dropped into its socket and He hangs suspended between heaven and earth—that one which “ All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made

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that was made” (John 1:3). He cries in the language of the 22nd Psalm: “ ‘Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani’ that is, ‘My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?’ ” (Matthew 27:46). I would remind you of the agony in the garden. I would remind you of this cry and I would press upon you a truth that Paul states, “For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (II Corinthians 5:21). He died my death; He paid my debt; He came out of the curse of the Law for us, and He drank of the cup of wrath against sin, though He did not sin.

There was much more in that death than just the stench, stigma, and shame of that ignominious, humiliating crucifixion—more than the agonizing pain, the torture, the torment of that death. From 12:00 noon to 3:00 in the afternoon the sun refused to shine and the earth shook like a bubble on the bosom of the deep, and a mighty earthquake occurred, and the veil of the temple was rent. There is a time when the Father's face is turned, and as much of the horror of the cup must have been the fact that He was made sin for us. He who did no sin was made sin for us and He drank the cup of wrath of that very divine nature that He himself possesses. He did it. Why? Paul said He “loved me and gave Himself for me” (Galatians 2:20), and in your heart of hearts this is what makes the difference. Isaac Watts has put it well:

When I survey the wondrous cross on which the Prince
of Glory died, my richest gain I count but loss
and pour contempt on all my pride.
Were the whole realm of nature mine; that were a present
far too small. Love so amazing, so divine, demands
my soul, my life, my all.

Don't you think it is time you came to the cross? That you obey from the heart that form of doctrine and resume that walk in the light? May we all put the cross at the center; may we preach the cross; may our lives be cross-centered; may we be known as a people who hold up

the Christ of the Cross. "And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself."



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