



The formatted edition uses two parallel columns, arranged paragraph by paragraph, to make it easier to compare the original text with the easy-reading version.

Left Column

Original Source

Right Column

Easy Reading Edition

[Fourth Grade Reading Level]

Chapter 1

WHY SEARCH FOR THE CROSS?

If you have a new Rolls-Royce, you want to keep it polished like new. You may not say a word, but you are proud of your possession. Your incessant polishing says you "glory" in it.

Others show off fine clothes, a house or ranch, or revel in a brilliant career. Their music, art, science, or other hobbies and achievements are all they can talk about.

The apostle Paul had an obsession, which is the subject of this book. According to one version, he says: "God forbid that I should glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ." Galatians 6:14.

That strange word "glory" eludes us, for we have no word in modern English that fully covers what it means. Combine all the will to attain, the pride of possession, the passion to know and appreciate, the charm of beauty, the yearning for thrills that we moderns know in our endless quest for life's pleasures, then you can begin to sense what Paul meant when he said: "I ... glory ... in the cross." "I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified." 1 Corinthians 2:2.

WAS THIS MAN A FANATIC?

What did he see in the cross of Christ that inspired in him a life-long passion such as Michael Jordan had for basketball, Picasso for painting, or Yo Yo Ma for Bach? Is there something vital and compelling in the Bible that we are missing?

Scientists tell us that there are vast untapped resources of energy in ocean water, enough to meet mankind's needs for power for generations to come. There are also vast untapped resources of spiritual energy in the cross that Paul tells us about so enthusiastically. Most of us make our faith into a toilsome and agonizing ordeal. We are simply ignorant of the gospel's largely untapped capacity for changing people—a power that Paul plugged into.

If you had a brand-new Rolls-Royce, you would want to keep it clean and shiny. You might not say anything, but you would feel proud of it. By polishing it all the time, you show how much you love it.

Some people like to show off nice clothes, a big house, or land. Others talk a lot about their job, music, art, science, or hobbies. These things are very important to them.

The apostle Paul cared deeply about one thing. This book is about that one thing. Paul said, "I will not be proud of anything except the cross of Jesus Christ" (Galatians 6:14).

The word "glory" is hard to explain. It means being very proud and loving something a lot. It includes wanting it, enjoying it, and caring about it more than anything else. When Paul said, "I glory in the cross," he meant that the cross of Jesus was the most important thing to him. He also said, "I decided to know only Jesus Christ and that He died on the cross" (1 Corinthians 2:2).

WAS THIS MAN TOO EXTREME?

What did Paul see in the cross of Jesus that made him care so much about it? He cared the way Michael Jordan cared about basketball or Picasso cared about painting. Is there something very important in the Bible that we are missing?

Scientists say the ocean has a lot of hidden energy—enough to give people power for many years. In the same way, the cross has a lot of hidden spiritual power. Paul knew about this power and was excited about it. But many of us make our faith feel hard and painful. We do not understand how powerful the good news really is or how it can change people, like it changed Paul.

His very conversion came as the result of a vision of Christ as the **crucified** One. He had been deeply immersed in hateful prejudice, but in one brief hour he saw that the cross where Jesus died proved His claims to be the long-awaited Messiah. That flash of insight on his way to Damascus invested the cross with an irresistible charm that never dimmed for him. Henceforth the cross was the sun shining in his sky, the gem itself of gospel truth—not a mere facet of it. It was the center and heart of Paul's message from then on.

Our modern world knows little or nothing about that cross. To the ancient world it was a focal point of attention: "foolishness" to many, or a "stumbling block," and always an "offense." 1 Corinthians 1:23; Galatians 5:11. But to the world today it is blah, a boring puzzle. "The offense of the cross" has not ceased, but the cross cannot be an offense if it is not understood.

It's no wonder that the world today is apathetic. Rather than fighting it as Paul's world did, the modern world is steeped in lifeless ignorance of it. Yet one sees crosses almost everywhere—on churches, around people's necks, in stained glass windows. Why such ignorance of its meaning?

How SATAN SHOT HIMSELF IN THE FOOT.

This darkness has been brought about by the cunning plans of the enemy of all good. Satan knew that the cross assured his utter defeat and exposed his complete depravity. It rang his death knell. All the universe of God watched Jesus die, like spectators in the grandstands watching a fight in the arena. Satan's hatred of Christ displayed in the crucifixion uprooted him forever from any tiny root of sympathy or affection in that vast audience. In this sense "the ruler of this world" was "cast out" when Jesus died on His cross. See John 12:31-33.

Paul became a believer because he saw Jesus, who had died on the cross. Before that, Paul was full of hate toward others. But in a short time, he understood that Jesus dying on the cross showed He was the Savior God had promised. From that moment on, the cross became the most important thing in Paul's life. It was the center of his message and never lost its meaning for him.

Today, many people do not understand the cross. Long ago, people paid close attention to it. Some thought it was foolish, others thought it was wrong, and many were offended by it. But today, many people think the cross is just boring or confusing. The cross cannot upset people if they do not understand it.

That is why many people today do not really care. Instead of arguing about the cross like people did in Paul's time, many people today simply do not know what it means. Still, we see crosses everywhere—on churches, on necklaces, and in colorful church windows. So why do so many people not understand what the cross really means?

How SATAN HURT HIS OWN PLAN

This darkness happened because of the tricky plans of the enemy of everything good. Satan knew that the cross meant he would be fully defeated. It showed how evil he really was. When Jesus died, it was like the whole universe was watching, the way people watch a big fight in a stadium.

At the cross, Satan showed his deep hatred for Jesus. Because of this, no one watching felt sorry for Satan anymore. When Jesus died on the cross, Satan lost his place as the "ruler of this world" (see John 12:31-33).

His mask torn off once and for all, Satan retained no sympathy from heavenly angels. No one who knew God's true character ever again would waste a thought of pity on Satan. So far as the great hosts of unfallen angels were concerned, Satan knew he had lost his case. All he could do now would be to hope to get this newly created planet on his side, and with that advantage wage "war" against Christ.

THERE REALLY IS A BEHIND-THE-SCENES CONSPIRACY!

Thus he formed his malignant design to blot the knowledge of the cross from the understanding of mankind. In setting up the "abomination of desolation" (Daniel 12:11), he forged a counterfeit of true Christianity. Its basic principle was to make a detour around the cross so that mankind should not get so much as a glimpse of its meaning. To fasten us in his deception, Satan was to exalt **the sign of the cross** to be worshipped, to the exclusion of **the truth of the cross**.

Thus from the days of Constantine the sign of the cross became the emblem of professed Christianity, while a subtle counterfeit of the gospel wrought a "transgression of desolation" in the human heart. See Daniel 8:11-13. Christendom's history for over 1,600 years offers a pathetic comment on Satan's "great wrath" against the gospel, "because he knows that he has a short time." Revelation 12:12. He has offered men a shadow in place of the substance. Those crosses worn about the neck or erected on church steeples or glazed in church windows are a familiar talisman, a charm or amulet, an adornment. Crosses of wood or metal are even worshipped, while the genuine, the **principle** of the cross, is unknown.

So confident is Satan of his plans that he freely permits talking about the cross, praying about it, singing about it, wearing it, using it as an architectural emblem, even worshipping it, just so long as he can thwart any attempt toward **understanding what happened there**. What more clever trick can a defeated enemy perfect than to take the sign of his defeat and transform it into an emblem of his victory?

Once Satan's true self was clearly seen, even the angels in heaven had no sympathy for him. Anyone who truly knew God would never feel sorry for Satan again. Satan knew he had lost in the eyes of the angels who had stayed faithful to God. So the only thing left for him to do was try to get the people of this new planet on his side and fight against Jesus.

A HIDDEN PLAN

So Satan made a mean plan to erase the meaning of the cross from people's minds. He made a fake kind of Christianity. In this fake way, people go around the cross instead of learning what it really means. Satan wanted people to worship the *shape* of the cross, but not understand the *truth* of the cross.

Starting long ago, the cross became a sign of Christianity. But the real message of the good news was slowly lost in many hearts. For over 1,600 years, history has shown how hard Satan has worked against the true message of Jesus. He knows his time is short. He gave people a shadow instead of the real thing. Many people wear crosses, put them on churches, or show them in windows. The cross becomes a decoration or a lucky charm. Some people even worship crosses made of wood or metal, but they do not understand what the cross really means.

Satan is so sure of his plan that he lets people talk about the cross, pray about it, sing about it, wear it, and put it on buildings. He even lets people worship it—as long as they do not understand what really happened when Jesus died. What could be more clever than turning the sign of his own defeat into something that looks like a victory?

The sun has truly been blotted from the sky of such "Christianity." Although the truth of the cross may not be consciously disbelieved or rejected, yet the failure to grasp its meaning results in a tragic loss, just as much as the rejection of the cross meant to the Jewish leaders of Christ's day. The mind accepts the symbol while the heart fails to realize the experience.

THE GREATEST CONSPIRACY DEFEAT OF ALL HISTORY.

But we need not be misled by the meaning less symbol of an empty word. The forging of the counterfeit was meant only to forestall a search for the genuine. But the very existence of the counterfeit suggests that somewhere we shall find the genuine! The clouds and mist that Satan has sought to throw about the cross will be lifted for us, and we will come to see in breathtaking reality the same glorious revelation that Paul saw. What Satan hoped would be his **coup d'etat** turned out for him to be a self-inflicted total defeat.

Our personal victory over Satan is assured in these words: "They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb." Revelation 12:11. When and where was that blood shed? At the cross. John the Baptist's words still make sense: "**Behold!** The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." John 1:29. "**Look** to me, and be saved," is what God asks us to do. Isaiah 45:22.

LOOKING IS PEOPLE'S FAVORITE PASTIME.

News magazines capitalize on this desire to "look" at something new. Millions spend their idle hours just watching the parade of humanity passing by their doors or their TV screens, or poring through picture magazines. If there is an accident on the freeway or anything unusual, we have an urge to "behold." All have this built-in yearning to feast our eyes on some sight yet unseen. There is an unsatisfied longing to see something ultimate.

In this kind of Christianity, it is like the sun has been taken out of the sky. People may not say they reject the cross, but they do not understand it. This causes a great loss. It is the same kind of loss that happened when leaders long ago rejected Jesus. The mind accepts the symbol, but the heart never truly understands what the cross means.

THE GREATEST LOSS BECAME THE GREATEST WIN

But we do not have to be fooled by an empty word or a symbol with no meaning. Satan made a fake to keep people from looking for the real truth. But the fact that there is a fake means there must be something real! The fog that Satan has tried to put around the cross will be taken away. Then we can see the wonderful truth that Paul saw. What Satan thought would be his big win turned into his complete loss.

The Bible tells us that we can win over Satan: "They won because of the blood of the Lamb" (Revelation 12:11). Where was that blood given? At the cross. John the Baptist said, "Look! This is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). God also says, "Look to Me and be saved" (Isaiah 45:22).

LEARNING TO LOOK

News magazines know that people like to look at new things. Millions of people spend free time just watching others—on the street, on TV, or in picture magazines. When there is an accident on the road or something strange happens, we feel a strong need to stop and look.

Everyone has a built-in desire to see something new and exciting. We want to see something we have never seen before. Deep inside, there is a feeling that we are still looking for something very important to see.

Upon that cross of Jesus my eye at times can see
The very dying form of One who suffered there for me.
And from my smitten heart, with tears two wonders I confess:
The wonders of redeeming love, and my unworthiness.

I take O cross your shadow for my abiding place!
I ask no other sunshine, than the sunshine of His face.
Content to let the world go by, to know no gain nor loss
My sinful self my only shame, my glory all the cross.

Elizabeth Clephane

What we long to see is that cross of Jesus.
No other sight can satisfy.

And once we have seen it, like Paul, we will "glory" in nothing else. It will become our passion. If we "behold the Lamb of God," we will see a sight that has power to dissolve all idolatry into the nothingness that it is. Money, possessions, careers, fame, sensual pleasure, all lose their charm for the person who has seen what Calvary means. Life begins.

Let us look.

When I look at Jesus on the cross,
I see how much He suffered for me.
My heart feels sad, and I cry as I learn two things:
His great love for me, and how much I still need Him.

I choose the cross to be my safe place.
I do not need anything else but Jesus with me.
I do not care about winning or losing in the world.
My wrong choices are my shame, but the cross is my greatest honor.

Elizabeth Clephane

What we really want to see is the cross of Jesus. Nothing else can fully make us happy.

When we truly see it, like Paul did, we will not be proud of anything else. The cross will become the most important thing to us. When we "look at the Lamb of God," we see something so powerful that it makes false gods seem empty and useless. Money, things we own, jobs, being famous, and selfish pleasures stop feeling so important when someone understands what Jesus did on the cross. That is when real life

Let us look.

Chapter 2

THE CROSS AS NATURE'S SECRET

Nature hasn't wanted to hide its secret. But for thousands of years sinful man trod the soil of this planet without seeing the most simple and elemental secret written there—the way of the cross.

The farmer cast seed into the ground to produce his daily food without realizing the lesson each seed would teach him: that fruitful life comes only through surrender of life to death, so a new creature can come forth.

When at last a sinless Youth trod our soil, day after day He knelt upon it to pray to His Father for strength and wisdom to bring to man the answers to our questions: How can the problem of death be solved? How can the human race be redeemed from extinction? How can bad people become good?

HIS AMAZING DISCOVERY.

As Creator, Jesus had written the book of nature with His own hands. Now, as a Man, he sought to understand it, to draw from its mysteries a lesson that would point others to the only way of life—the way of the cross.

Later, when visitors from Greece asked to see Jesus, He answered them: "The hour has come that the Son of man should be glorified. ... Unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain. He who loves his life will lose it; and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life." "'I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself.' This He said, signifying by what death He would die." John 12:23-25, 32, 33.

The seed that seeks "security" laid up in a vessel on a shelf comes to nothing because in cherishing its precious "self" it "remains alone." Though without fault, only that seed conquers death that finds a lonely grave within the darkened earth. Only by dying can it bring forth "much fruit" (KJV).

Nature has never tried to hide its secret. But for thousands of years, sinful people lived on this earth without seeing the simple lesson written all around them—the meaning of the cross.

Farmers planted seeds in the ground to grow food every day. But they did not notice the lesson each seed teaches: a plant can only grow when the seed first gives up its life in the ground, so something new can grow.

Later, a perfect and sinless Young Man, Jesus, walked on this earth. Day after day, He knelt on the ground and prayed to His Father. He asked for strength and wisdom to help answer the big questions people had: How can death be overcome? How can people be saved from being lost forever? How can people who do wrong learn to do what is right?

HIS AMAZING DISCOVERY

Jesus made the world. He made nature with His own hands. Later, when He lived on earth as a Man, He studied nature to learn from it. He used its lessons to help people understand the only true way to live—the way of the cross.

One day, some visitors from Greece wanted to see Jesus. Jesus said, "The time has come for me to be honored. A grain of wheat must fall into the ground and die. If it does not die, it stays alone. But if it dies, it grows and makes many new grains. Anyone who loves only their life on earth will lose it. But anyone who gives up their life for God will live forever. When I am lifted up from the earth, I will bring all people to Me." Jesus said this to show how He would die.

A seed that stays safe on a shelf never grows. Because it protects itself, it stays alone. Even though the seed is good, it can only defeat death by being buried in the dark ground. Only by dying can it grow and make many new plants.

A TINY SEED TEACHES A POWERFUL LESSON!

To the sinless Youth seeking to discern the mystery, each flowering petal, each towering forest tree, bespoke a Gethsemane-like sacrifice for some little seed that died alone in the earth. What glory out of all proportion to its sacrifice does the tiny grape seed attain in the heavy vines laden with purple clusters of fruit! So, the Son of God knew, would His sacrifice become the means of "bringing many sons to glory." Hebrew 2:10.

Through his young soul surged a mighty commitment: He would count Himself a "seed" and cast His security and all that was precious to Him forever into the "soil" to die. Thus He drew from nature the elemental principle, previously undiscerned, that led to His wondrous cross, the secret weapon that vanquishes death.

It doesn't matter whether Jesus as a boy fully understood that His sacrificial death would assume the form of a Roman crucifixion. What is important is that this ancient criminal death, the most shameful and spectacular, was the best way for the whole world to "see" the demonstration of his sacrificial love. For him, to "fall into the ground and die" as a "seed" was more painful and bitter than enduring a mere physical death. The apostle Paul suggests a great contrast between "the death on the cross" and ordinary death. See Philippians 2:8. The full measure of ultimate death, the real thing that is infinitely more than the "sleep" we think of as death, is despair and shame to the uttermost. Jesus' cross embraced that full measure.

But today the cross means little to us, because history has secured an almost complete reversal of values. Once suggesting the most ignominious and degrading torture a human being could endure, a death almost too terrible for even a demon to merit the cross is now the world's most honored emblem.

A TINY SEED TEACHES US A VERY POWERFUL LESSON.

When Jesus was a young boy, He noticed how nature worked. Every flower, every tall tree, showed Him that small things sometimes have to die to make something wonderful grow. A tiny grape seed, for example, must be buried in the soil before it can grow into a vine full of grapes. Jesus understood that His own life, like that little seed, would be given so that many people could be saved and share in God's glory.

Even as a boy, Jesus decided He would be like a seed. He would give up what was safe and precious to Him and "fall into the ground" to die. From watching nature, He learned this important lesson: only by giving up life can it truly bear fruit. This idea would guide Him to the cross, the place where He would defeat death.

It didn't matter if young Jesus fully understood that His death would be a Roman crucifixion. What mattered was that dying like a seed, giving up everything, was the most powerful way to show His love for the world. Dying on the cross was much worse than ordinary death—it meant facing the deepest shame and suffering, as the apostle Paul explains.

Today, many people do not fully understand the cross. What used to be the most shameful and painful death is now seen as a symbol of honor.

The reason for such a transformation in value lies deeper than a mere fortune of history. No hero worship centered in a martyr's death could secure the awesome appreciation multitudes of intelligent people feel for Christ's cross. To discover the reason for this appreciation is the purpose of this book.

THE CROSS TOUCHES THE TENDER NERVE OF OUR DEEPEST, INMOST NEED.

Whether or not we profess to be religious, we need only a glimpse of its significance in order to be aware that there is something within the depths of our being which responds. The truth of the cross awakens strange overtones of appreciation, chords within human nature that nothing else can touch. History points to its own climax and objective when this truth shall at last penetrate the awakened conscience of every human being on earth.

Everyone knows that a tender tie binds his soul to Calvary because the One who died there is so close to him as to be almost himself. There can be no sympathy with anyone else on earth so close as His sympathy with us and our sympathy with Him while He hangs on His cross. Since Christ died for all, "they all share in his death." 2 Corinthians 5:14, TEV. The truth-seeker knows this, and the truth-evader cannot avoid a confrontation with the truth he or she seeks to reject.

Believer or unbeliever, everyone will likewise ultimately know the **power** revealed at the cross. "I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw **all peoples** to myself," says the Crucified One. We may choose to resist this "drawing" felt within our souls, but before any of us can possibly suffer the pain of being lost, we will be obliged persistently to resist. Rejecting love, "all those who hate me love death," Christ says. Proverbs 8:36.

BUT IF WE CHOOSE NOT TO RESIST, WE ARE "DRAWN" TO CHRIST THROUGH HIS CROSS.

This change is not just because of history. People are drawn to the cross because it shows something far greater: Jesus' love and the power of giving up life to save others. Understanding this is the main purpose of this book.

THE CROSS TOUCHES SOMETHING VERY DEEP INSIDE US.

Whether or not we say we are religious, everyone can feel that the cross is important. Deep inside, something in us responds to it. The cross touches parts of human nature that nothing else can. History shows that one day, everyone in the world will understand its meaning.

Everyone feels a special connection to Jesus on the cross. He is so close to us that it's almost like He is part of us. No one else can feel so close or care so much for us as He does while He suffers there. Because Jesus died for everyone, "they all share in His death." People who are looking for truth know this, and even people who try to ignore it cannot avoid facing it.

Whether we believe in Him or not, everyone will eventually feel the power of the cross. Jesus said, "If I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all people to me." We can try to resist His love, but before anyone is truly lost, they will have to struggle against it. Rejecting Jesus is like choosing death, because His love is life itself.

IF WE CHOOSE NOT TO FIGHT AGAINST IT, THE CROSS GENTLY PULLS US TOWARD JESUS.

A million devils, opposing through all the circumstances of life, are as powerless to counteract this drawing as is a thread to restrain a surging battleship. Jesus' words to the inquiring Greeks can be understood only as a claim to universal power over the hearts of all people through the uplifting of his cross. No, it is not a claim that all will be saved, but that all will feel in some measure the drawing power of the cross, some to yield, and others perversely to resist.

THERE IS AN ALMOST IRRESISTIBLE CHARM IN CHRIST'S CROSS.

What is it? Something invests Christ's cross with an appeal to the one who pauses to contemplate its meaning. If its Victim were merely a fanatical zealot or deranged mystic with a pitiable delusion that He was divine, or if He were merely a good man tragically murdered, His death would make no more lasting impression on recurring generations than a martyr dying or the assassination of a statesman. Mankind would soon forget. ***The Victim's claim to be God is what accounts for the timeless appeal of His death.***

But how can we know that He is divine? Is our faith rooted merely in tradition or superstition? Is our desire for eternal reward so strong that we are willing to assume the incredible in order to escape from the hard world in which we live?

Even a million devils, trying to fight against it, cannot stop the pull of the cross—like a tiny thread trying to hold back a huge battleship. When Jesus spoke to the Greeks, He was showing that His cross has power over everyone's heart.

This doesn't mean that everyone will be saved, but everyone will feel the pull of the cross in some way. Some people will follow it, and others will stubbornly resist it.

THERE IS SOMETHING ABOUT JESUS' CROSS THAT STRONGLY PULLS ON OUR HEARTS.

What makes the cross so powerful? Something about it touches anyone who stops to think about it. If Jesus were only a crazy person, or just a very good man who was killed, people would quickly forget Him—like a hero or leader who dies. But Jesus said He was God, and that is why His death is remembered forever.

But how can we know He really is God? Is it just because people told us to believe it, or because we want something good after we die?

A glimpse of the cross is better than all the labored arguments employed to prove that Jesus is divine. Once discern the nature of the love (**agape**) revealed there, and the Victim stands out clearly as none other than the Son of God. Only "God is love [**agape**]." 1 John 4:8. Human love alone could never stage or invent the demonstration we see there. The quality of love revealed is self-emptying, infinitely beyond our calculating, self-centered human love which easily fails test. Every one's heart convicts him that such **agape** must come from God alone, and that the hostility which murdered the Victim there was in essence our own "enmity against God." Romans 8:7. Jesus' **agape** carries its own built-in witness to prove its credentials are divine. That love was unearthly. No philosopher, poet, playwright, in thousands of years had dreamed of such a love.

This love sends the appeal of the cross home to human hearts in the awareness that the One who died thereon is every person's truest and closest relative, the unfailing Friend or Elder Brother who has always loved us when we were most inclined to hate ourselves, the Companion who has remained with us in our shadows and believed in us when we doubted and disowned ourselves.

Every person has at times been faintly conscious of this brightest of all hopes—that Someone trusted him and believed in him while knowing the fullness of all his guilty secrets. Sweeter than the words "I love you" is the assurance, "I believe in you; I trust you all the way; I risk everything on your future."

NO MERELY HUMAN VOICE COULD SPEAK SUCH ASSURANCE TO US!

Since we know our sins are infinite, only an infinite forgiveness and trust could so encourage us. That everyone has heard this Voice of hope and encouragement is evidence to us all that the Son of God has come in our "flesh." We may resist and drown the Voice, but if we listen to it, we will be impelled to follow Him.

The Voice that speaks to our hearts and the truth written in nature—both disclose the heavenly origin of the principle of the cross.

Seeing the cross itself shows us more than all the arguments in the world. The love Jesus showed there is amazing. It is a selfless love, giving everything for others. Human love cannot reach this level. Our hearts know that such perfect love must come from God. The hate and cruelty that killed Jesus also show how far humans can turn against God.

Jesus' love proves He is divine. No writer, poet, or thinker could ever invent a love like that.

This love makes the cross touch our hearts because the One who died is our truest friend, our closest family, the Elder Brother who has always loved us—even when we hated ourselves. He is the companion who stayed with us in our darkest times and believed in us when we doubted ourselves.

Every person has felt, at least a little, the hope of someone trusting them completely. It is even sweeter than hearing, "I love you." The greatest hope is hearing, "I believe in you. I trust you all the way. I am counting on your future."

NO ORDINARY HUMAN VOICE COULD GIVE US THIS KIND OF HOPE.

Because our mistakes and sins are so many, only a never-ending forgiveness and trust could really help us. Everyone has heard this voice of hope in some way. It shows us that Jesus, the Son of God, came to live as a human. We can try to ignore it, but if we listen, it will lead us to follow Him.

The voice in our hearts and the lessons we see in nature both show that the cross comes from heaven.

This little book makes no pretense of reaching beyond a **search** for the cross. When we conclude our visit together, the search will have only begun for us both. The vast reservoir of truth yet unrealized is a pledge that there must be an endless life to come that will be devoted to a quest for the meaning of that infinite sacrifice. Our search will grow into the science and song of the redeemed throughout eternity.

This little book does not try to explain everything about Jesus or life. By the end, our journey will really only be starting. There is still so much to learn about the cross. This shows us that life will continue forever, giving us endless time to explore the meaning of Jesus' great sacrifice. Our search for understanding will grow and continue, becoming part of the joy and knowledge of those who are saved for all eternity.

Chapter 3

JESUS' FIRST LESSON ON THE MEANING OF THE CROSS

Why did he postpone the lesson so long? It is surprising to discover that Jesus waited until nearly the close of His three years of ministry before He clearly told the disciples about His crucifixion to come.

When we remember that the teaching of the cross is the one central theme of the gospel, the sun in the firmament of heavenly truth, we wonder why the Savior so long delayed instruction on that all- important subject.

Only an occasional mystic reference had He made to His death. There were only His remarks about "this temple" being destroyed and raised again in three days (John 2:19), of His being lifted up as the bronze serpent (John 3:14), of giving His "flesh" for the life of the world (John 6:51), of the sign of the prophet Jonah (Matthew 12:39), or of a sad separation of the Bridegroom from "the children of the bride chamber" (Matthew 9:15, KJV).

But the disciples did not catch the meaning of these pregnant utterances. What they needed was a clear, full story of the soul-shaking event to come. This Jesus did not divulge until His visit to the coasts of Caesarea Philippi only a few months before the great trial of faith itself took place.

It is also surprising that not until the same time did Jesus venture to ask the disciples who they thought He really was. Time must be allowed them to nurture the first superficial enthusiasm roused by His early ministry into the more sober conviction of a faith that could endure trial.

**AND INDEED THEIR FAITH
IN JESUS' DEITY WAS SORELY TRIED.**

Why did Jesus wait so long to teach this lesson? It may surprise us that Jesus waited until near the end of His three years of teaching before clearly telling His disciples that He would be crucified.

The cross is the most important message of the gospel. It is at the center of God's truth. So we may wonder why Jesus waited so long to teach them about it.

Before this, Jesus only spoke about His death in unclear ways. He talked about the temple being destroyed and raised again in three days. He spoke about being lifted up like the bronze snake, giving His life for the world, the sign of Jonah, and the bridegroom being taken away. But the disciples did not understand what He meant.

What the disciples needed was a clear and full explanation of what was going to happen. Jesus did not explain it plainly until His visit to Caesarea Philippi, only a few months before it actually happened.

It may also surprise us that Jesus waited until this same time to ask the disciples who they thought He really was. They needed time to grow from their early excitement into a strong faith that could last through hard times.

**THEIR FAITH THAT JESUS WAS TRULY GOD
WAS TESTED**

Reticent to take to Himself the title "Son of God," He found a strange pleasure in persistently calling Himself the "Son of man." He had progressively disappointed the fond hopes of the Jews regarding their expected Messiah.

Steadfastly declining the applause of people who would like to see in Him the fulfillment of their popular hopes, He seemed all too content to remain in poverty and obscurity. He took no interest in courting the approval of the religious "establishment," but instead pursued a course that appeared needlessly to attract their enmity.

After the difficult discourse on the Bread of Life (John 6), multitudes of former disciples went back to walk no more with Him. He even dared abruptly to dismiss a crowd who purposed to make Him king. Now He was becoming "despised and rejected of men." The disciples could find every excuse, it seemed, to renounce even a purely human, worldly faith in Jesus as the Christ.

HOW THE DISCIPLES FINALLY RECOGNIZED CHRIST.

At the same time they had seen plenty of evidence to confirm the insistent convictions of the Holy Spirit that this Man was indeed the Messiah, the Son of God. And this evidence was not merely the physical miracles He performed. These could be explained away by friend or foe, or at least disregarded. Physical miracles seldom strengthen true faith. What did confirm the faith of the disciples was the unworldly, supernatural, truly miraculous love seen in every word and act of Jesus. There was profound spiritual wisdom and heavenly common sense in all He said. These were the "very works" for whose sake Jesus appealed to Philip to believe Him (John 14:11,12, KJV) Refusal to recognize **these** "works" was the hopeless and incurable sin of unbelief on the part of the Jewish leaders, not against the Son of man, but against the Holy Spirit.

But the disciples believed! Now at Caesarea Philippi, within a few months of the crucifixion, they were at last ready to confess their faith.

Jesus did not often call Himself the "Son of God." Instead, He liked to call Himself the "Son of Man." He did not act the way many Jews expected the Messiah to act. He did not accept praise from people who wanted Him to be a popular hero. Instead, He was happy to live a simple life without riches or fame. He did not try to please the religious leaders. In fact, He often did things that made them angry.

After Jesus taught about the Bread of Life, many people who had followed Him stopped following Him. He even sent away a crowd that wanted to make Him king. Soon, many people disliked Him and rejected Him. Because of this, the disciples could have found many reasons to stop believing in Him as the Savior, at least in a human and worldly way.

HOW THE DISCIPLES FINALLY KNEW WHO JESUS WAS

At the same time, the disciples had seen many things that made them sure, with the help of the Holy Spirit, that Jesus really was the Messiah, the Son of God. It was not just His miracles that convinced them—because people could make excuses for those. Miracles alone do not make faith strong.

What really made the disciples believe was the amazing love they saw in everything Jesus said and did. His words showed great wisdom and a deep understanding that came from God. These were the "works" Jesus asked Philip to believe in. The Jewish leaders refused to see these works, and that refusal was called the sin of unbelief—not against Jesus, but against the Holy Spirit.

But the disciples did believe! By the time they reached Caesarea Philippi, only a few months before the crucifixion, they were ready to say what they truly believed.

"When Jesus came into the region of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, saying, 'Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?'" Matthew 16:13. Their replies would have been flattering to anyone—except the Son of God. Popular fancy acclaimed Him as Elijah, Jeremiah, or another of the prophets. Unsatisfied, Jesus proceeded to ask His disciples to crystallize their somewhat vague conceptions into a confession of deep conviction. He put them on the spot: "But who do you say that I am?" Verse 15.

Peter was the first to find words to express the bold faith that had gripped their souls. Not only this Man a greater than all the prophets; not only was He the long-expected human Messiah. "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God," he boldly confessed. Verse 16.

Jesus commended Peter's faith, but quickly cautioned him against the sin of supposing he deserved credit for it: "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven." Verse 17. Peter must not be self-sufficient as though he were more clever than others.

As brilliant as fleshly brain cells may be, unless aided by the Holy Spirit the human mind is utterly incapable of recognizing God when He appears incognito. "No one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit." 1 Corinthians 12:3. The Son of God walked the dusty thoroughfares of life two thousand years ago quite unperceived and unrecognized by humanity, even as in all the years since then heavenly truth has been equally unperceived by "flesh and blood."

Now JESUS GOES TO WORK TO TELL THE FULL TRUTH.

With the disciples' confession of faith, Jesus was now ready to lay the foundation and cornerstone of His church. "On this rock [that is, this confession of My identity] I will build my church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it." Matthew 16:18. We now see Him laboring swiftly, skillfully, a wise Master Builder and divine Craftsman, erecting an edifice of faith against which "the gates of hell" shall not prevail.

Jesus asked them, "Who do people say that I, the Son of Man, am?" (Matthew 16:13). The answers they gave were flattering to many, but not exactly true. People said He was Elijah, Jeremiah, or another prophet. Then Jesus asked them to say clearly what they truly believed: "But who do you say that I am?" (Matthew 16:15).

Peter was the first to speak the bold faith in their hearts. He said that Jesus was more than all the prophets and the long-awaited Messiah. He boldly said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:16).

Jesus praised Peter's faith but quickly warned him not to take the credit for it: "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by any human, but by My Father in heaven" (Matthew 16:17). Peter could not think he was smarter than everyone else.

Even the brightest human mind cannot recognize God on its own. Only the Holy Spirit can show us who Jesus really is. "No one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit" (1 Corinthians 12:3). When Jesus walked on earth two thousand years ago, most people did not recognize Him. Even today, people cannot understand God's truth without His help.

Now JESUS BEGINS TO TELL THE WHOLE TRUTH

After the disciples said they believed in Him, Jesus was ready to begin building His church. He said, "I will build my church on this truth, and even the power of death will not defeat it." Jesus worked like a wise builder, carefully and quickly building a strong faith that evil could not destroy.

Now that the disciples were thoroughly convinced of His divinity, He was prepared to enlighten them about His death. Drawing aside all the mystic veils that had beclouded the previous brief references to the cross, He plainly, even bluntly, told them that He must be rejected and slain: "From that time Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day." Verse 21.

BAD NEWS!

The disciples listened with more astonishment than terror. The idea of God having a Son was revolutionary enough to their Jewish minds; now the thought of that Son of God **dying** seemed incredulous. This cannot be! A crucified Messiah in place of a glorified, crowned, world-ruling one? This was an insult to their intelligence, a scandal and a reproach. The more convinced the disciples were that Jesus was the Son of God, the more confused and confounded they were to be told that He must be put to death. And by the best people in the world, their own nation!

Now the same "blessed" Simon Bar-Jonah who had been first to confess the Son of God was first to deny His cross. Solicitous, apparently, even for Jesus' mental health at hearing the astounding announcement so repugnant to his colleagues, the well-meaning Peter rudely grasped the person of his Lord as if to give Him a kind of shock treatment to jar Him from such morbid imaginings. No ill treatment could be accorded **Him** by members of the human race, especially by the Chosen People! "Then Peter took Him aside, and began to rebuke Him, saying, 'Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to you.'" Verse 22. Crosses are for felons, not for anyone good, and especially not for one who is the Son of God!

Thus was the cross both a "stumbling block" and "foolishness" to the first disciples, and an "offense" as well. Thus is it even today to our human nature.

**WE NEED NOT BE SURPRISED
AT THE CONFUSION OF THE DISCIPLES.**

Now that the disciples truly believed that Jesus was God's Son, He was ready to teach them about His death. He no longer spoke in unclear ways. Instead, He told them plainly that He would be rejected and killed. Jesus said that He would go to Jerusalem, suffer at the hands of the leaders, be killed, and then rise again on the third day.

BAD NEWS!

The disciples listened with great surprise, not fear. The idea that God had a Son was already very hard for them to understand. Now hearing that God's Son would die seemed impossible. They thought, "This can't be true!" A Messiah who would be killed instead of honored, crowned, and ruling the world did not make sense to them. It felt wrong and upsetting. The more sure they were that Jesus was the Son of God, the more confused they became when He said He must die. And to be killed by their own people!

Simon Peter, who had been the first to say that Jesus was the Son of God, was also the first to say no to the cross. He meant well and thought he was helping Jesus. Peter took Jesus aside and spoke strongly to Him, trying to stop Him from thinking this way. He believed that nothing bad like this should ever happen to Jesus, especially at the hands of their own people. Peter said, "This must never happen to You, Lord!" Crosses were for criminals, not for good people—and certainly not for the Son of God.

So the cross was confusing and upsetting to the first disciples. It seemed foolish and wrong to them. In the same way, our human nature still struggles with the cross today.

**WE SHOULD NOT BE SURPRISED
THAT THE DISCIPLES WERE CONFUSED**

If "flesh and blood" could not comprehend the idea that Jesus was the Son of God, much less could Peter unaided comprehend the doctrine of the cross. The very idea was something so utterly beyond human invention as to be unfathomable to their minds without the revelation of the Holy Spirit.

It was good that Jesus had first drawn from the disciples their confession that He was the Son of God before springing this shocking news on them. Otherwise they would have bolted in unbelief and abandoned Him as did so many others of His interested followers had just done. Man-made religions could invent "messiahs" but none could conceive of a suffering, dying Messiah giving Himself in unutterable love for the world.

ARE WE BETTER OR WISER THAN PETER?

Our unaided human thinking today is just as blind to the truth of the cross as was that of the first disciples. We are in even greater peril; we have what they did not have—a mental knowledge of the facts of the crucifixion and a nearly universal recognition that it really happened, but this "head knowledge" can confuse the avenues of approach to a heart understanding of the cross.

If we have the least idea that our fortunate birth in the Christian era now gives us any advantage over Peter, we may feel that we naturally are wiser than he was, living as we do in a more enlightened age. We have graduated out of spiritual ignorance like his! And then, we miss the whole point of the gospel.

We cannot even begin to comprehend what took place at Caesarea Philippi unless we realize that our human nature is the same as was Peter's. Failure to recognize this may expose us to the tragedy of repeating on a fatal plane Peter's spurning of the cross. He spurned it ignorantly; we may be in danger of rejecting it knowingly. Incidentally, **that** will be the final sin of lost people.

THE REASON WHY PETER REACTED AS HE DID IS OBVIOUS.

If people could not understand on their own that Jesus was the Son of God, then Peter could not understand the idea of the cross by himself either. This idea was far beyond anything people could think up. They could only understand it if God's Spirit showed it to them.

It was good that Jesus first helped the disciples say that He was the Son of God before telling them this surprising news. If He had not done that, they might have stopped believing and left Him, like many others already had. People can make up religions and false saviors, but no one could imagine a Savior who would suffer, die, and give Himself in great love for the world.

ARE WE BETTER OR WISER THAN PETER?

On our own, people today still have a hard time understanding the truth about the cross, just like Jesus' first followers did. In some ways, we are in even more danger. We know the story of the crucifixion, and almost everyone agrees that it really happened. But knowing these facts in our heads can sometimes keep us from truly understanding the cross in our hearts.

If we think that being born in Christian times makes us better or wiser than Peter, we are mistaken. We might think we understand more because we live in a time with more knowledge. But thinking this way causes us to miss the true message of the gospel.

We cannot understand what happened at Caesarea Philippi unless we realize that we are just like Peter. If we forget this, we may make the same serious mistake he made by turning away from the cross. Peter did this without understanding. We could be in danger of turning away even though we do understand. This is the final sin of those who are lost.

THE REASON WHY PETER REACTED AS HE DID IS CLEAR

The idea of the cross was something so original, unworldly, that it could arise only in the mind of God. The cross is both the "wisdom" and the "power" of God. 1 Corinthians 1:13, 24. It is a divine strategy of spiritual warfare of sublime skill. But Peters response to the Savior's stunning announcement was the same as that which people of every place and age would experience. He was expressing the thoughts of our own hearts, even today, in treating as repugnant foolishness the very idea of being crucified.

Jesus revealed this insight in His rebuke to Peter for his disrespectful and irreverent interruption: "You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men." Matthew 16:23. Peter was simply a man, as anyone of us is, who could comprehend only the things that are of men! Peter was no more "wicked" than any of us—he was just being himself. And being himself; he couldn't fathom "the things of God" enough to discern the meaning of the cross. Those "things of men" which blinded his understanding blind ours as well.

But we have not yet considered the real source of Peter's opposition to our Lord's cross. Jesus was not rude or angry with the poor man, and His words were no passionate outburst of temper. The unmitigated severity of His stinging rebuke to His beloved disciple reveals a significant origin of Peter's worldly sentiments. Jesus merely putting His finger of recognition on the plague spot of **mankind's** opposition to the cross: "He turned, and said to Peter, 'Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me.'" Verse 23.

POOR PETER!

He had unwittingly let himself be a tool in the hands of Satan by seeking to turn Jesus away from His sacrificial purpose. That temptation was real to Jesus! Christ saw that Peter's ideas had their source in the enemy's original rebellion in heaven. Evading His cross was an alluring temptation to Jesus that He had to resist with all the power of His will. Serving as Satan's amanuensis, Peter had touched a raw nerve in Jesus' soul.

The idea of the cross was very new and not like anything people usually thought about. Only God could come up with it. The Bible says the cross shows God's wisdom and power (1 Corinthians 1:24). It was God's wise plan to fight evil. But Peter's reaction to what Jesus said was the same reaction many people have had in every time and place. Peter was saying what many of us still feel today—that the idea of being put on a cross sounds scary and foolish.

Jesus showed this when He corrected Peter for speaking in a rude and careless way. Jesus said, "You are in My way, because you are not thinking about what God wants, but about what people want" (Matthew 16:23). Peter was just a regular man, like any of us. He could only understand human ideas. He was not worse than anyone else—he was simply being human. Because of this, he could not understand God's plan or the meaning of the cross. The same human thinking that confused Peter can confuse us too.

But we have not yet talked about the real reason Peter did not want Jesus to die on the cross. Jesus was not being mean or angry with Peter. He did not lose His temper. Jesus spoke very strongly because He loved Peter.

His sharp words showed where Peter's wrong thinking came from. Peter was thinking in a worldly way, not God's way. Jesus pointed out the real problem that makes people reject the cross. He turned and said to Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are in My way." (Verse 23)

POOR PETER!

Without meaning to, Peter let Satan use him when he tried to stop Jesus from going through with His sacrifice. This temptation was very real for Jesus. Jesus knew that Peter's ideas came from the enemy's first rebellion in heaven. Avoiding the cross sounded tempting to Jesus, and He had to fight it with all His strength. By speaking for Satan, Peter had hurt Jesus deeply.

We are not to understand that Peter was Satan himself; but Peter's attitude toward the cross was more than a reflection of fallible, uninformed human nature. It perfectly reflected the attitude of Satan himself.

We can imagine that the disciples by now were a subdued and quiet group as the full force of Jesus' pointed rebuke began to sink into their minds.

We should not think that Peter was Satan. But the way Peter spoke about the cross showed more than just a human mistake or lack of understanding. His words showed the same kind of thinking that Satan had.

We can imagine that the disciples became very quiet and serious as they started to understand how strong and serious Jesus' correction was.

Chapter 4

HOW LUCIFER CHOSE TO HATE THE CROSS

If "flesh and blood" could not comprehend the idea of the cross, could Satan understand it? There is nothing dense or unintelligent about him—he understands well what he is doing.

Therefore, in order to be the enemy of the cross, he must have understood it clearly. Were there a residual knowledge of salvation unknown to him, to that extent his opposition to truth would be blind and innocent. He could not then be "the devil and Satan." But knowing fully, Satan rebels.

Why must always remain the inscrutable "mystery of iniquity." The **how** of his rebellion included the most determined and intelligent scorning of the cross.

Peter in his human innocence was treading too near to the former Lucifer's ground when he tried to turn Jesus away from the cross.

When Satan tempted Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, his bait was the assurance that in transgression they would reach a higher life than they had been created to enjoy. "You will be as God," he promised. Genesis 3:5, Hebrew. This desire to be as God the same that led to Satan's original sin in heaven:

"How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How you are cut down to the ground, you who weakened the nations! For you have said in your heart: **I** will ascend into heaven, **I** will exalt my throne above the stars of God; **I** will **I** will ascend above the heights of the clouds, **I** will be like the Most High." Isaiah 14:12-14.

No one can be **as** God without in fact seeking to **displace** God, because there can be only one "Most High."

LUCIFER'S LUST LED TO SELF-LOVE.

If people like us cannot understand the meaning of the cross, could Satan understand it? He is not stupid—he knows exactly what he is doing.

To be the enemy of the cross, he must have understood it clearly. If he didn't know the truth about salvation, then his opposition would be blind and innocent. But he does know, and that is why he fully rebels. This is what makes him the devil and Satan.

Why Satan rebelled will always remain the mysterious "mystery of sin." The way he rebelled included the strongest and smartest rejection of the cross.

Peter, even though he was innocent, was getting dangerously close to the same kind of thinking as Lucifer when he tried to turn Jesus away from the cross.

When Satan tempted Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, he promised them that if they sinned, they would become greater than they were created to be. "You will be like God," he said (Genesis 3:5). This same desire—to be like God—was what caused Satan's first sin in heaven.

No one can truly be like God without trying to take God's place, because there is only one "Most High."

LUCIFER LOVED HIMSELF Too MUCH

This has now become the natural "mind" of us all, apart from redemption. But the love of self leads to an "enmity against God." Romans 8:7. Enmity in turn leads to murder. Jesus said of the devil, "He was a murderer from the beginning." John 8:44. This is true because "whoever hates his brother is a murderer." 1 John 3:15. Satan hated God, and was jealous of Him. So in the very beginning of Lucifer's heavenly rebellion, the stark outline of a cross began to take shape in the shadows of eternity's history.

Doubtless Lucifer began to see where his rebellion would lead. He saw that the crime he nurtured in his soul a dark and ugly one—that of murdering the eternal Son of God. So terrible is one's devotion to the love of self! Five times in Isaiah's passage we read of Lucifer's passion for his "I." Sin has its root in self-centeredness *indulged*.

Satan's root problem hated of the idea of **agape**, a love which is God's character, totally different than anything we humans naturally think of as "love." Our kind of "love" loves nice people; **agape** loves bad, mean people. Our love is dependent on the beauty of its object; **agape** loves ugly people, even our enemies. Our love depends on the quality of its object; **agape** creates value in its object. Our love always wants to climb up higher just as Lucifer wanted to set his throne "above the stars of God"; **agape** is a love that dares to step down lower, as the Son of God did in those seven steps of amazing condescension listed in Philippians 2:5-8. Our human love always want to get; **agape** is always ready to give. Our human love seeks a reward; **agape** dares to relinquish it.

Last of all, what Satan hated the most was the ultimate revelation of **agape** displayed in Christ: **agape** dares to surrender eternal life, to die the second death. That is the supreme aspect of **agape** that Lucifer does not want the world or the universe to see. It's the opposite of everything he stands for.

This is now how all of us naturally think, unless we are saved. But loving ourselves too much leads to being against God (Romans 8:7). Being against God can lead to hurting or even killing others. Jesus said about the devil, "He was a murderer from the beginning" (John 8:44). That is true because "whoever hates their brother is a murderer" (1 John 3:15). Satan hated God and was jealous of Him. Right at the start of Lucifer's rebellion in heaven, the idea of a cross—the way of giving up self—began to appear, even in the shadows of eternity.

Lucifer probably began to see where his rebellion would take him. He realized that the terrible sin in his heart would lead to killing the eternal Son of God. This shows how dangerous selfish love can be! Isaiah mentions Lucifer's obsession with his "I" five times. Sin always starts with being self-centered.

Satan's main problem is that he hates agape—God's kind of love—which is very different from human love. Our kind of love likes only nice people; agape loves even mean or bad people, even enemies. Our love depends on how good someone is; agape makes someone valuable. Human love wants to go up higher, like Lucifer wanted to put his throne above God's stars. Agape, on the other hand, is willing to step down, just like Jesus did in Philippians 2:5-8. Human love wants to get; agape is ready to give. Human love looks for a reward; agape dares to give up its reward.

Most of all, what Satan hated was seeing God's amazing love (agape) fully shown in Jesus: a love that is willing to give up even eternal life, to die the second death. This is the greatest kind of love, and it is the exact opposite of everything Satan stands for. He does not want anyone—people or angels—to see it.

Lucifer must have pondered long and earnestly the path he was choosing. Should he repent while there was still opportunity? If so, there could be only one way in which he might overcome the sin of his angelic soul—this wonderful "I" that sought to be "like the Most High" and to topple Him from His holy throne, would have to die. Self in Lucifer would have to be crucified.

HOW A BRIGHT ANGEL BECAME THE DEVIL, OR SATAN.

A spiritual cross on which Lucifer must die tosself was the only way out of his dilemma in his incipient war with God. All his pride, his ego, his precious, darling 'I' that he had cherished, must perish willingly of his own free choice so that only truth, and right, and holiness might live. Lucifer came so near to yielding that he was able to grasp the significance of the one way of deliverance for him.

Then emphatically, indignantly, irrevocably, he rejected the idea. No cross for him! Once for all, intelligently and responsibly, Lucifer repudiated the idea of self-denial and self-sacrifice. He would institute a new way of life for the vast universe of God—the love of the "I" the way of self-seeking, self-assertion, self-love. Thus Lucifer rejected the cross.

It was then that he became the devil and Satan, "that serpent of old, ... who deceives the whole world." Revelation 12:9. A bright angel who hates the cross becomes God's (and our) enemy.

This one bitter, unrelenting opponent to the divine principle of the cross well knows that the only avenue of return to righteousness for any sinful being in the universe is by way of the cross. Hence his studied, determined plan to blot the knowledge of that way from the consciousness of humanity. Anything satanic is anti-cross; the profound truth follows that anything anti-cross is satanic.

WHY WAS JESUS SO OUTSPOKEN TO PETER?

Lucifer must have thought very carefully about the choice he was making. Could he turn back while he still had the chance? If he did, there was only one way to fix the sin in his angelic heart—this proud "I" that wanted to be "like the Most High" and take God's throne would have to die. Lucifer's self would have to be crucified.

HOW A BRIGHT ANGEL BECAME THE DEVIL, OR SATAN

Lucifer's only way out of his problem with God would have been a spiritual cross—giving up his pride, his ego, his selfish "I" willingly, so that truth, right, and holiness could live. He almost understood that this was the only way he could be saved.

But then, angrily and firmly, he said no. He refused to give up himself. He chose not to deny himself or make sacrifices. Instead, he decided to follow his own way, putting self first—self-seeking, self-love, and self-importance.

That's when he became the devil, Satan, "the serpent of old... who deceives the whole world" (Revelation 12:9). A bright angel who hates the cross becomes God's—and our—enemy.

Satan knows that the only way any sinful being in the universe can be saved is by the cross. So he works hard to hide that truth from humans. Anything that is against the cross is from Satan; and anything that comes from Satan is against the cross.

WHY WAS JESUS SO FIRM WITH PETER?

The Savior's stinging rebuke to him becomes more intelligible in this light. It was not an outburst of irritated temper on Jesus' part. Not only was Peter reflecting the "things of men," he was also reflecting the things of Satan! He was unwittingly voicing the sentiments of the enemy when he urged Jesus to put self-interest first and renounce the idea of going to Jerusalem to be crucified. Self-interest, self-concern, spiritual self-preservation, are uppermost thoughts to the soul of this fallen mighty angel. They now were to Peter, too. Are they not to us as well?

The "things of men" are shown to have an unfortunate spiritual origin, and Peter has revealed the problem to us. Peter found himself unconsciously in cooperation with Satan in his anti-cross campaign. Rightly understood, the temptation to turn Jesus aside from the cross was Satan's supreme weapon used over and over again throughout His earthly life.

Satan was not ignorant of the principle of the cross, but what he could not comprehend was the divine love revealed in the incarnate Christ that would lead Him to go all the way to the supreme sacrifice, and to do it voluntarily. The last malicious taunt flung at Christ was inspired by Satan—"Save Yourself, and come down from the cross!" Mark 15:30. And now at Caesarea Philippi self-interest is the ruling principle in the heart of dear Peter. He, too, is saying in effect, "Save Yourself, Lord." Jesus addressed him by his proper name when He said, "Get behind Me, Satan." Peter was anti-cross.

ARE WE LIKE PETER?

We would do well to refrain from a heart attitude of superiority over this man. He was a Christian, and he loved his Master ardently. Not only was he a "church member," he was an ordained minister as well. He could point with pride to the experience of actually casting out devils in the name of Christ! He had just been signally blessed by the commendation of Christ. And yet he was unconsciously in league with Satan in trying to oppose what Christ had to do!

Jesus' sharp rebuke to Peter makes more sense when we see it this way. He was not angry or losing His temper. Peter was thinking like a human, but he was also unknowingly thinking like Satan! He was speaking the enemy's words when he told Jesus to avoid going to Jerusalem to be crucified and to put His own safety first. Self-interest and self-protection are the main thoughts of Satan, and at that moment, they had taken hold of Peter too. Aren't these thoughts sometimes in our hearts as well?

The "things of men" actually have a hidden spiritual problem, and Peter shows it to us. Without realizing it, he was helping Satan by trying to stop Jesus from going to the cross. This temptation to turn Jesus away from the cross was Satan's greatest weapon, used again and again during Jesus' life on earth.

Satan understood the rule of the cross, but he could not understand the amazing love of God shown in Jesus, who willingly chose the greatest sacrifice. Even the last cruel words spoken to Jesus on the cross, "Save Yourself, and come down from the cross!" (Mark 15:30), were inspired by Satan.

Now, at Caesarea Philippi, Peter's heart is ruled by self-interest. He is, in effect, saying, "Save Yourself, Lord." Jesus calls him by name and says, "Get behind Me, Satan." At that moment, Peter is opposing the cross.

ARE WE LIKE PETER?

We should not feel proud or think we are better than this man. He was a Christian, and he loved Jesus very much. He was not only a church member, but also a minister. He could proudly tell how he had cast out demons in Jesus' name! Jesus had even praised him. Yet, without knowing it, he was helping Satan by trying to stop what Jesus needed to do!

We too are Christians who love our Lord ardently. We may work for Him, and we may point with pride and joy to an impressive lifework, rejoicing that apparently the devils are subject to us in Christ's name and that Satan falls like lightning from heaven at our mere word. Is it possible that we should unwittingly be in the same spiritual state of misunderstanding that Peter was in that day when our Lord said, "Get behind Me, Satan"?

If it was possible for dear, winsome, lovable Peter to be blindly in accord with the sentiments of the enemy, it may be no less so for us. Whether or not that highly undesirable epithet applies to us depends upon our heart attitude toward the cross.

"Let him that thinks he stands take heed lest he fall." With the disciples, we need to gather closely about Jesus to hear His next lesson on the meaning of the cross.

We are Christians who love Jesus very much. We may work for Him and feel proud of what we have done, happy that it seems we have power over evil spirits in Jesus' name, and that Satan seems to fall at our command. But is it possible that we could be wrong, just like Peter was when Jesus said, "Get behind Me, Satan"?

If it was possible for Peter, who was dear, lovable, and full of faith, to be following the enemy without knowing it, it could happen to us too. Whether this is true for us depends on our heart and how we feel about the cross.

The Bible warns: "Let the one who thinks they stand take care not to fall." Like the disciples, we need to stay close to Jesus to learn His next lesson about what the cross really means.

Chapter 5

JESUS' SECOND LESSON ON THE MEANING OF THE CROSS

Peter would be shocked when he had time to consider what he had done. He had actually dared to rebuke his Master, and had even laid hands on Him as on a fellow fisherman that he thought was out of his mind.

An awed and deeply impressed group listened as Jesus for the first time clearly unfolded the law of the kingdom of heaven. Here is the real point of what it means to follow Him:

"Then Jesus said to His disciples, 'If anyone desires to come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.' Matthew 16:24, 25.

It was as if He said, in effect: You are astonished that I, the Son of God, must go to My cross and die. Not only so, but you yourselves, if you will follow Me, must each one surrender to die upon his cross with Me. We are in this together, and the law of the cross is binding upon us all!

THAT "WHOEVER" IS ALL-INCLUSIVE.

Neither God is excepted, nor man. In the distant ages of eternity before sin began, Father and Son clasped hands in a solemn agreement that if man should sin, the Father was to give His Son, and the Son to give Himself, that the universe might be saved from the ruin of self-seeking.

Further, in the end God would share His throne with all who would choose to share Christ's cross. For Him there must be a risking of everything in a dramatic expression of love, revealing depths and heights as yet undreamed of by sinless beings. God has **His** cross!

Peter would be shocked later when he had time to think about what he had done. He had dared to talk back to his Teacher. He had even grabbed Him, like he would grab another fisherman he thought was not thinking clearly.

A quiet and amazed group listened as Jesus clearly explained the rules of God's kingdom for the first time. He showed them what it really means to follow Him:

It was as if He was saying: You are surprised that I, the Son of God, must go to the cross and die. But it does not stop there. If you want to follow Me, each of you must also be ready to give up your life and carry your own cross with Me. We are in this together, and this rule of the cross is for all of us.

THAT "WHOEVER" MEANS EVERYONE

God is not left out, and people are not left out either. Long, long ago, before sin began, the Father and the Son made a serious promise. If people ever sinned, the Father would give His Son, and the Son would give Himself, so the whole universe could be saved from the harm of selfishness.

Later, God would share His throne with everyone who chooses to share Jesus' cross. God was willing to risk everything to show His great love, a love deeper and higher than anyone had ever known before. God also has His cross.

Whoever you are, if you follow Jesus, you have **your** cross. You need not be a priest, a monk, a clergyman, a missionary, or even a church officer or religious leader, in order to be included in the "whoever" who otherwise must lose his "life." The seed that would save its life will lose it; the seed that will die in the ground alone will bear much "fruit." Here, says Jesus, is the genius of principle on which my kingdom is founded.

It is no surprise that when sin challenged the government of God, it zeroed in to attack this principle of self-surrender at the cross. In the war that followed, divine love could find no other way to conquer than the way of the cross. Love chose it instinctively because it is its perfect expression. No other course could the Son of God have taken than to surrender to the cross.

Whenever genuine love (**agape**) meets the problem of sin, a cross is erected on which self is crucified. No other decision could the Father have made than to give His only-begotten Son, because He "so loved the world." In those dimly understood ages of eternity, the solemn agreement was entered into by the eternally pre-existent Christ that He should become the Lamb of God. Because His heart was the infinite reservoir of love itself, He chose that way. Thus He was "slain from the foundation of the world." Revelation 13:8.

In whatever heart it enters today, divine love chooses alike when it meets the problem of sin. The principle of victory is the same whether it is the Creator wrestling with the problem, or you and I.

HOW THE BOY JESUS DISCOVERED THE CROSS.

No matter who you are, if you follow Jesus, you have a cross to carry. You do not have to be a priest, monk, pastor, missionary, or church leader to be included in the "whoever." Anyone who tries to save their own life will lose it, but like a seed that falls into the ground and dies, it will grow and produce lots of fruit. Jesus says this is the main rule on which His kingdom is built.

It is not surprising that when sin fought against God's rule, it attacked this rule of giving up self at the cross. In the battle that followed, God's love had only one way to win—the way of the cross. Love chose this way because it shows love best. There was no other path the Son of God could take except to give Himself on the cross.

Whenever real love meets the problem of sin, a cross appears, where selfishness is put to death. The Father had no other choice but to give His only Son, because He loved the world so much. Long ago, before people could understand it, Jesus agreed to become the Lamb of God. Because His heart was full of perfect love, He chose this way. That is why the Bible says He was "slain from the beginning of the world" (Revelation 13:8).

The same thing happens today wherever God's love enters a heart. When love meets sin, it makes the same choice. The way to win is the same, whether it is God solving the problem, or you and me.

HOW JESUS LEARNED ABOUT THE CROSS AS A BOY

The truth of the cross is beautifully illustrated in the experience of Jesus when He came to earth. Although He was fully man, "in all points tempted like as we are," yet His heart was without sin, and therefore pure. It thus remained —wonder of wonders!—the reservoir of love (**agape**). In that respect He differed from all other human beings who have been born into the world. He alone knew no sin, no **surrender** to egoism in any form although the temptation to self-indulgence was as real for Him as for us.

Yet we cannot suppose that any conscious memory of His pre-existence remained with Him in His earthly childhood. As a babe in His mother's arms in the stable at Bethlehem, He had no conscious intelligence beyond that of other human babies at birth. He could not acknowledge the adoration of the shepherds or the wise men from the East. As a child in Nazareth, did He entertain Joseph and Mary with tales of the glories of heaven which He knew in His pre-existence there? Like a fortunate child who has been to the "big city," did He tell his playmates in the rustic mountain village of His exploits as the Commander of the heavenly angels?

No; as a child, Jesus learned wisdom as we must learn. "The Child grew" and "increased in wisdom and stature." (Luke 2:40, 52). The wonder of Christ is the wonder of His birth, God in human flesh, subject to the laws of mental and physical growth as we are all subject to them, yet "without sin." Certainly He was not born with any miraculous memory of His divine pre-existence. All these divine advantages He laid aside.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE AGE OF TWELVE.

By the time a child reaches that age, very deep thoughts can course through his/her mind. Patterns of choice are being formed that determine the whole of afterlife.

The meaning of the cross can be seen clearly in the life of Jesus when He came to earth. Jesus was fully human, and He was tempted just like we are. But His heart had no sin in it, so it stayed pure. Because of this, His heart was full of perfect love. This made Him different from all other people who have ever been born. He never sinned and never gave in to selfishness, even though the temptation to think of Himself was just as strong for Him as it is for us.

But we should not think that Jesus remembered His life in heaven while He was growing up on earth. As a baby in His mother's arms in Bethlehem, He knew no more than other babies do. He could not understand the praise from the shepherds or the wise men. As a child in Nazareth, He did not tell Mary and Joseph stories about heaven or tell other children about leading angels.

No, Jesus learned just like we do. The Bible says He grew and became wiser as He got older. The amazing thing about Jesus is that He was God living as a human. He had to grow in mind and body just like we do, but He never sinned. He was not born remembering His life in heaven. He chose to give up all those special advantages.

WHY THE AGE OF TWELVE IS IMPORTANT

By the time a child reaches this age, he or she can think very deeply. The choices made then begin to shape the rest of life.

Jesus was twelve when He first visited the national festival of His people known as the Passover. For the first time He looked upon the famed temple and watched the white-robed priests lay a bleeding sacrificial victim upon the altar. Alert and reverently inquisitive, His young mind sought the meaning of the strange symbolism of this offering of an innocent lamb. No one could tell Him what it meant, not even the priests themselves. The latter mouthed phrases and performed rituals the meaning of which they could not grasp. For four thousand years God's servants had offered the blood of beasts as an atonement for sin. To the Youth's inquiring "Why?" no one could give an answer, nor could anyone explain the mystery of blood sacrifice. Is it possible, wondered Jesus, for the "blood of bulls and goats" to take away sin?

A PRAYER OFFERED IN HEAVEN IS OFFERED AGAIN ON EARTH.

Even as a child, Jesus must walk alone. He turned away from the idle chatter and frivolous play of His companions. Not even His earthly parents could help Him. Silent and alone, He pondered the sight of shed blood that had impressed Him so deeply. Paul tells us what happened in His mind as He came to realize that the blood of goats, calves, or lambs, could never atone for human sin. Not only in heaven before He came, but also as a youth on His knees, He gained an insight and formed the same heart commitment He had made in heaven:

"For this reason, when Christ was about to come into the world, He said to God: You do not want sacrifices and offerings, but you have prepared a body for Me. You are not pleased with animals burned whole on the altar or with sacrifices to take away sins. Then I said: "Here I am, to **do Your** will, O God." Hebrews 10:5-7, TEV.

Jesus was twelve years old when He went to the Passover, the special national festival of His people. For the first time, He saw the famous temple and watched priests dressed in white place a bleeding animal on the altar. Jesus watched carefully and with respect. He wondered what it all meant. Why was an innocent lamb being offered?

No one could explain it to Him—not even the priests. They said the words and followed the rituals, but they did not really understand their meaning. For many years, God's servants had offered animals to pay for sin. When Jesus asked, "Why?" no one could answer Him. No one could explain why blood had to be given. Jesus wondered if the blood of bulls and goats could really take away sin.

A PRAYER SAID IN HEAVEN IS SAID AGAIN ON EARTH

Even as a child, Jesus had to walk His own path. He didn't join in with the silly talking or playful games of the other children. Not even His mother and father could fully help Him. Quiet and alone, He thought deeply about the animals' blood He had seen, which had made a big impression on Him.

Paul tells us that Jesus realized the blood of goats, calves, or lambs could never really take away people's sin. Not just in heaven before He came, but also as a young boy praying on His knees, He understood this and made the same promise in His heart that He had made in heaven:

It was as if He prayed: Father, You have no need of all these rivers of beasts' blood! You have no delight in them because they cannot avail to wash away sin from even one human heart. But you have made Me what I am—I have a body that I can give! I have blood that I can shed. Here I am, Father—let **Me** be the Lamb of God! I will die for the sins of the world. **My** blood will be the atonement! I will be that "suffering servant" of Isaiah on whom the Lord has laid the iniquity of all. Let **Me** be wounded for man's transgressions, bruised for his iniquities, that with **My** stripes he may be healed. Lo, I come—to do your will, O God!

Paul adds that Jesus took away the Old Testament typical offerings, and established instead the antitypical offering of Him:

"So God does away with all the old sacrifices and puts the sacrifice of Christ in their place. Because Jesus Christ did what God wanted Him to do, we are all purified from sin by the offering that He made of His own body once and for all." Hebrews 10:9, 10, TEV.

A BOY'S LOVE (AGAPE) BECOMES PROFOUND.

No memory of His pre-existence could interpret for Jesus the solemn meaning of that mysterious Passover service. He could not recall the fateful agreement with the eternal Father before the world was, when "the counsel of peace" was "between them both" (Zechariah 6:13), and the Son gave Himself to be the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world. His own pure mind, undefiled with sin, gradually discerned the import of what He saw.

It dawned upon Him that these lambs and sacrifices "cannot make him who performed the service perfect in regard to the conscience" (Hebrews 9:9), and that "the law, having a shadow of the good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with these same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect." Hebrews 10:1.

It was as if Jesus prayed: Father, You don't need all these animals' blood! You don't want them because they can't take away even one person's sin. But You have made me just as I am—I have a body I can give! I have blood I can shed. Here I am, Father—let me be the Lamb of God! I will die for the sins of the world. My blood will pay for sin! I will be the "suffering servant" Isaiah spoke about, the one who takes the sins of everyone. Let me be hurt for people's wrongs, so that by my suffering they can be healed. Here I am, ready to do Your will, God!

Paul also says that Jesus ended the Old Testament animal sacrifices and offered Himself instead, the true and perfect sacrifice.

A BOY'S LOVE GROWS VERY DEEP

Jesus did not remember His life in heaven, so He had to understand the meaning of the Passover service on His own. He could not recall the promise He had made with God the Father before the world began, when He agreed to be the Lamb of God to take away the sins of the world.

With His pure and sinless mind, He slowly began to understand what He saw. He realized that the lambs and other sacrifices "cannot make the person who offers them truly clean in their conscience" (Hebrews 9:9). He understood that the law and its sacrifices were only a shadow of the good things to come and could never make people perfect, no matter how often they were offered (Hebrews 10:1).

This is all a **type**, He reasoned. Someone innocent, sinless, holy, and undefiled, must die as a Lamb of God if lost human hearts will ever be reached! The whole vain round of types and shadows must be dramatically brought to an end in the offering up of some divine sacrifice.

This was a conclusion that the wise men and priests of Israel in the course of millenniums had not discerned. But now, seeing for the first time what others had witnessed countless times "not discerning the Lord's body," this Boy of twelve understands. Through His youthful soul there surges the unresisted power of a mighty resolve. These poor souls, looking vainly to human efforts for salvation, must not be left mercilessly to what will prove at last only hopeless despair. **He will sacrifice Himself.** The Boy of twelve "saw it, and it displeased Him that there was no justice. He saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor; therefore His own arm brought salvation for Him; and His own righteousness, it sustained Him." Isaiah 59:15, 16. "Christ ... through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God." Hebrews 9:14.

Behold the amazing work of love! He tabernacles in human flesh, a Boy of tender years, with the mysterious past all unknown to Him except by faith in the Written Word. He makes the same decision which as Commander of the heavenly hosts He made in the councils of heaven. **He chooses to go to the cross.**

THE ONLY WAY OUR "LIFE" CAN BE SAVED.

When the love of God (**agape**) is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit given to us, we choose the way of the cross as readily as the Son of God chose it in the heavenly council ages and again as a Boy of twelve in the Jerusalem temple. In each instance, whether in the heart of the Son of God or in the heart of a believing sinner, the results lead to resurrection—which is as much a part of the principle as is the cross. There is Good News: "He who hates his life in this world will keep it for life eternal." John 12:25.

There are two crosses: the cross of Christ, and the cross for you and me on which we die with Christ as did the penitent thief.

Jesus thought to Himself: This is all just a picture. Someone innocent, sinless, and holy must die as the Lamb of God if people's lost hearts are ever going to be saved! All the sacrifices and rituals must come to an end through a real, divine sacrifice.

The wise men and priests of Israel had never understood this, even after thousands of years of doing these ceremonies. But now, for the first time, the twelve-year-old Jesus understood what everyone else had missed. His heart was filled with a strong and unstoppable decision. He saw that people, trying to save themselves, would be left in hopeless despair if no one helped them. So He decided to give Himself. The boy Jesus "saw that there was no one to help, so His own arm brought salvation; His own righteousness kept Him strong" (Isaiah 59:15-16). "Christ ... through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without sin to God" (Hebrews 9:14).

Look at the amazing love of Jesus! He lives as a human boy, young and tender, knowing nothing of His past except what He learns from God's Word. Yet He makes the same choice He had made as the Commander of heaven's angels. He chooses to go to the cross.

THE ONLY WAY WE CAN REALLY SAVE OUR LIFE

When God's love (agape) fills our hearts through the Holy Spirit, we can choose the way of the cross just like Jesus did—first in heaven and again as a twelve-year-old boy in the temple. Every time someone's heart chooses this way, whether it's the Son of God or a believer, it leads to new life, just like Jesus rose from the dead. There is good news: "If you hate your life in this world, you will keep it for eternal life" (John 12:25).

There are two crosses: the cross of Christ, and our own cross, where we "die with Christ," like the repentant thief did.

There was a third cross at Calvary, but there was no redemption for the impenitent thief who died on it. He was caught in a suffering and death to which he never surrendered. Rebellious, he cursed his fate and God unto the bitter end, ***and perished.***

Shall we rebel against the principle of the cross and follow him to eternal darkness?

Bearing our cross is made easy through seeing that other cross on which our divine Example died. "My yoke is easy," the crucified One tells us. Through understanding His cross, we can discern our own and find strength to bear it gladly.

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 realms of nature mine,
That were a tribute far too small;
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my life, my soul, my all.

Isaac Watts

There was a third cross at Calvary, too, but the thief who refused to turn to God did not receive salvation. He suffered and died without surrendering, cursing God until the end, and he was lost.

Should we rebel against the way of the cross and follow him into eternal darkness?

Carrying our cross is easier when we see Jesus' cross first. He says, "My yoke is easy." By looking at His cross, we can understand our own and find the strength to carry it gladly.

When I look at the special cross
Where Jesus gave His life,
I see that everything I own
Is small compared to His love.
If I owned the whole world,
It still would not be enough.
His love is so great and wonderful
That I want to give Him my whole life and heart.

Isaac Watts

Chapter 6

WHO IS THE "OLD MAN" CRUCIFIED WITH CHRIST?

A dear Christian woman was stricken with blindness. While she lay on her bed trying to sense the meaning of her tragic plight, her well-intentioned pastor called to comfort her.

"Dear one, God has laid His cross upon you!" he said.

How would you feel if someone told you that a misfortune that came to you uninvited was your cross? Would you be tempted to feel resentful toward God for thus interfering with your plans for your life?

No one in his right mind would voluntarily choose the sorrows and heartaches common to humanity which we have so often thought to be our cross. The cross which the Savior bids us bear must be taken up as a freewill choice, just as much so as He took up His cross willingly. No one would choose to become blind, lame, a paraplegic, or even poverty-stricken. While it is good for us to bear these burdens cheerfully, such patient endurance is in no short of fulfilling the principle of the cross as **Jesus taught it.**

More than any other of the apostles of Christ, Paul recognized the tremendous impact the cross has on human nature. Not only had he been well educated in Jewish thought; he had mastered also the ideas of Greek philosophy. The startling idea of the cross struck Jews and Greeks differently. To the Jews it was a "stumbling block"; to the Greeks it was "foolishness." 1 Corinthians 1:23.

CHRIST'S CROSS IS NO MORE WELCOME TODAY THAN ANCIENTLY.

It is not surprising that the Greeks saw the cross as "foolishness," unenlightened as they were with that wisdom that the Jews ought to have given them. The Greeks had a word for "self"—*ego*. But what to *do* with *egoism*, they hadn't the slightest idea. When Paul came along and said that self must be "crucified," they thought his idea was "nonsense" (TEV).

A kind Christian woman became blind. While she lay in bed, trying to understand why this happened, her pastor came to comfort her.

"Dear one," he said, "God has given you a cross to bear."

How would you feel if someone told you that a sad event in your life—something you didn't ask for—was your cross? You might feel upset or even angry at God.

No one would ever choose the pain and troubles that people often call their cross. Jesus' cross is different—it must be taken willingly, just as Jesus took His cross willingly. No one would choose to become blind, unable to walk, paralyzed, or very poor. It's good to bear these hardships patiently, but that alone is not the same as carrying the cross Jesus taught about.

Paul, more than any other apostle, understood the power of the cross on human hearts. He was very educated in Jewish teachings and also knew Greek philosophy. The idea of the cross surprised people. To the Jews, it seemed like a "stumbling block"; to the Greeks, it seemed like "foolishness."

PEOPLE STILL DON'T LIKE JESUS' CROSS TODAY

It is not surprising that the Greeks thought the cross was "foolish." They did not understand the kind of wisdom the Jews should have shared with them. The Greeks had a word for "self"—*ego*—but they had no idea what to do with selfishness. When Paul said that people must "crucify" their selfishness, they thought he was talking nonsense.

On the other hand, the idea of a cross was repugnant to the Jews because they were blindly (though inexcusably) ignorant of a psychology of human nature. Had they seen the meaning of their own sanctuary service, they would have recognized in the atonement of Christ the perfect answer to the need of all human nature the world around. But they were pathetically ignorant of the meaning of their own revelation.

Being familiar with Greek philosophy, Paul sensed how "the sons of this world are more shrewd in their generation than the sons of light" (Luke 16:8) in that they at least were aware that human nature needed something which none of the religions of their ancient world supplied. "The Greeks seek after wisdom," Paul said (1 Corinthians 1:22); but he recognized that in the principle of the cross lay the wisdom they were vainly seeking, and which the unconscious repression of human nature had obscured.

PAUL'S UNDERSTANDING OF THE CROSS EXPLAINS LIFE'S GREATEST PROBLEM.

Nothing in the New Testament claims to be a full, systematic outline of the teaching on the cross as Paul presented it to his audiences in Asia Minor. All we have is a collection of occasional letters, none of which Paul intended as a transcript of his ideas which turned the ancient world "upside down." Acts 17:6. Therefore find in these letters evidence of Paul's dynamic concepts that split history in two.

Much comes to light that shows Paul's vivid idea of the cross as the only way to change selfish human behavior. The clearest explanation is found in his letters to the Roman and Galatian churches:

The Jews, on the other hand, did not like the idea of a cross either. They did not understand human nature very well. If they had, they would have seen that Jesus' death was the perfect answer to what every person truly needs. But they did not understand their own teachings well enough to see it.

Paul, who knew Greek philosophy, noticed that people of the world often understand human nature better than religious people do. Even though the Greeks were looking for wisdom in the wrong places, Paul saw that the cross contained the wisdom they were really searching for. Human nature had hidden it from them, but the cross revealed it clearly.

How PAUL'S IDEA OF THE CROSS HELPS US UNDERSTAND LIFE'S BIGGEST PROBLEM

The New Testament does not give a complete, step-by-step explanation of everything Paul taught about the cross. What we have are letters he wrote from time to time. Paul did not mean these letters to explain all his ideas that shook the ancient world.

Even so, we can see in these letters some of Paul's powerful ideas that changed history. They show how much he believed the cross was the only way to help people stop being selfish. The clearest explanations are in his letters to the churches in Rome and Galatia.

"Surely you know that when we were baptized into union with Christ Jesus, we were baptized into union with His death. By our baptism, then, we were buried with Him and shared His death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from death by the glorious power of the Father, so also we might live a new life.... Our old being has been put to death with Christ on His cross, in order that the power of the sinful self might be destroyed, so that we should no longer be the slaves of sin. For when a person dies, he is set free from the power of sin."

Romans 6:3-7, TEV.

"I have been put to death with Christ on His cross, so that it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me." Galatians 2:19, 20, TEV.

The King James Version describes "our old being" as "our old man." He is a strange figure. Who is he?

Is he Satan? Hardly, because Satan will never consent to be crucified with Christ, nor can God force him to be.

Is the "old man" our "sinful nature"? Paul had another term that he used when he spoke of our "sinful nature." He called it "sinful flesh" (Romans 8:3). (Obviously, there is nothing sinful about one's flesh in the sense of physical body! "Sinful flesh" is "carnal mind" or "sinful nature." Verse 7. Compare NKJV with TEV.)

Paul's original idea of our "old man" is more than what our "sinful nature" means. What he is talking about is not merely what **appears** to be bad. It may be what we would like to think is a good nature, unenlightened as we are concerning our true spiritual condition. Unless we are very careful we may say, "This must be crucified, but that need not be crucified," when in reality both aspects of our nature alike stem from a love of self. After we are proudly certain that the "sinful nature" has been thoroughly crucified today, tomorrow the "old man" may still be peeking at us from behind the curtains of our self-centered facade.

**GETTING DOWN TO THE ROOT OF
OUR HUMAN PROBLEM.**

The King James Version calls "our old being" the "old man." But who is this "old man"?

Is he Satan? No—Satan would never let himself be crucified with Jesus, and God cannot force him.

Is the "old man" our sinful nature? Paul had another name for our sinful nature—he called it "sinful flesh" (Romans 8:3). This does not mean our physical body is bad! "Sinful flesh" really means our sinful thoughts or self-centered nature (Romans 8:7).

Paul's idea of the "old man" is bigger than just our sinful nature. It's not only the bad things we do. It can also include the parts of ourselves we think are good, but are really still selfish. We have to be careful—just because we think we have "crucified" our sinful nature today doesn't mean the "old man" isn't still hiding in our hearts, waiting to show itself tomorrow.

**FINDING THE REAL CAUSE OF OUR HUMAN
PROBLEMS**

For example, our "sinful nature" is thought to be revealed in sinful acts, so that the crucifixion of the "old man" is supposed to consist only of mortifying those **acts** of sin. But Jesus taught that it is the lustful thought, not merely the act, which is the sin of adultery; and cherished hatred even before the act of killing is murder. The sinful nature stems from the existence of the self, or ego. It shows itself in a love for sin. David recognized this truth when he said, "I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me." Psalm 51:5.

Sin is therefore not only what we **do**, but what we **are**. Sin is rightly understood to be "transgression of the law" (1 John 3:4, KJV; the word is **anomia**, which means hatred of the law, thus a hatred of God). But it must be remembered that transgression is much deeper than outward acts. The first sin was the cherishing of the "I" in the heart of Lucifer. The last sin of mankind that must be overcome is the same.

In our search to understand who the "old man" is, we are perplexed by another term: what is the "body of sin" which is destroyed when the "old man" is crucified? Is the "body of sin" the same as the "sinful body"?

We know that the physical cravings of our body are sometimes connected with acts of sin. Does that mean that the bodily cravings or instincts are themselves sin? In order to destroy the "body of sin," must we continually repress our physical cravings?

The "body of sin" is not the physical body, but it is the root or source of sin, just as the "body" of this book is the text in the chapters aside from the covers. The "old man" is so important that once he is crucified, the "body of sin," or source and taproot of it, is "destroyed."

**WHO IS THE "OLD MAN"
WHO IS CRUCIFIED WITH CHRIST.**

Many people think our "sinful nature" only shows up in the bad things we do. They think getting rid of the "old man" means just stopping those actions. But Jesus taught that sin starts in our thoughts, not just in what we do. For example, wanting something we should not want is already sinful, even before we act. Feeling hate in our heart, even before hurting someone, is already like murder.

Our sinful nature comes from the self, from our "ego." It shows up as a love for selfish things. David understood this when he said, "I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me" (Psalm 51:5).

This means sin is not only what we do, but also who we are inside. Sin really means going against God's law. But sin is deeper than just doing wrong things. The first sin began with pride in Lucifer's heart. The last sin that people must overcome is the same kind—selfishness that goes against God.

When we try to understand the "old man," another question comes up: what is the "body of sin" that is destroyed when the "old man" is crucified? Is it the same as our physical body?

We know that sometimes our body wants things that lead us to sin. But that does not mean the body itself is sinful. Do we have to fight against our body all the time to destroy the "body of sin"?

The "body of sin" is not the physical body. It is like the root or source of sin, just as the "body" of a book is the words inside, not the cover. The "old man" is so important that when he is crucified, the "body of sin," or the root of sin, is destroyed.

**WHO IS THE "OLD SELF" THAT DIES WITH
JESUS?**

Paul himself answers our question as simply as we can answer what x is in the equation $x + 2 = 4$. We simply answer: $4 - 2 = 2$; therefore, $x = 2$. In Romans he says the "old man" is crucified with Christ; in Galatians he says that what is crucified with Christ is *I*. Therefore, the "old man" is simply "I," or **self**. In Today's English Version it is translated "the sinful self."

To Paul the truth as simple and obvious as sunlight: the love of self is the source of all sin; and self cannot be dealt with merely by punishment, beatings, or even denial. It cannot even be ignored. ***It must be crucified.***

Forthwith, says Paul, the sin problem is solved, because in dealing with the source, or "body of sin," we have dealt with its taproot. Pull out the root of a tree, and the tree is dead. "He who has died has been freed from sin." Romans 6:7. Understood and accepted, the principle of the cross would go far to solve the psychiatric problems in our modern world as well as in the Greek world of Paul.

BUT HOW IS SELF TO BE CRUCIFIED?

Such an idea would have been worse than foolishness and utter vanity, were we not given an object lesson showing **how** it can be. The cross of Christ is our demonstration. Self can never be crucified by ourselves alone; it must be crucified **with** Christ.

In fact, for self to be crucified **with** Christ is as natural for the heart that believes as it is to say "thank you" to someone who does a gracious deed for us. The way of the cross is not difficult so long as we behold the Lamb of God on His cross. **Seeing** Christ crucified, comprehending what it means, leads to self being crucified with Him. "I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to myself." John 12:32.

Paul answers this question as simply as solving a math problem. For example, if $x + 2 = 4$, we solve it like this: $4 - 2 = 2$, so $x = 2$.

In the Bible, Paul says in Romans that the "old man" is crucified with Christ. In Galatians, he says that what is crucified with Christ is "I." So the "old man" is really just "I" or self. In Today's English Version, it is called "the sinful self."

To Paul, this was as clear as sunlight: selfish love is the source of all sin. Selfishness cannot be fixed by punishment, beating, ignoring it, or just saying "no." It must be crucified.

When the "self" is crucified, the problem of sin is solved. It is like pulling out the root of a tree —once the root is gone, the tree dies. Paul says, "He who has died has been freed from sin" (Romans 6:7). Understanding this principle of the cross could help solve the same kinds of problems in people's hearts today as it did in Paul's time.

HOW CAN WE PUT SELF TO DEATH?

This idea might seem foolish or impossible—except that we have an example to show us it can work: the cross of Christ. We cannot get rid of selfishness by ourselves; it must be crucified with Christ.

In fact, crucifying self with Christ can be as natural for a believing heart as saying "thank you" to someone who does something kind for us. Following the way of the cross is not hard when we look at Jesus on His cross. Seeing Him there and understanding what it means helps our selfishness die with Him. Jesus said, "I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to myself" (John 12:32).

Satan's favorite scheme therefore is to envelop the cross of Christ in a hazy mist of confusion so that we cannot understand what happened there. He will then be free to taunt us with the supposed impossibility of our bearing our cross: "What foolishness the idea of the cross is in our modern, competitive world! How dare you crucify self? There's nothing you can do but surrender to the popular and universal idea of self-love! Pamper yourself. Get ahead! Walk over others!" So the enemy would bombard us everyday.

If the cross of Christ is hidden, Satan is right; without the clear vision of Christ crucified, there is nothing any of us can do but do but live unto self.

But let Christ's cross emerge out of the mists, and it becomes the "power of God" (1 Corinthians 1: 18) to all who appreciate its worth.

THE CLARITY OF THE TRUTH.

No involved, difficult, or obscure process of doing battle with sin is the method of God. His plan is simplicity itself. In fact, sin itself is as simple a thing as God's remedy for overcoming it—indulged love of self. Kneeling before the throne of God as the "anointed cherub who covers" (Ezekiel 28:14), Lucifer did not appreciate or love the principles of God's self-denying character. His heart was lined up with his own beauty, and his wisdom was corrupted by reason of his brightness. Verse 17. This lack of appreciation for the character of God is what the Bible calls "unbelief." It is the precondition of sin. From that root in the heart of Lucifer came all the pride and passion of sin as we know it.

The "old man" simply being the cherished "I" or self, it dies with Christ when the love revealed at the cross is seen for what it is. Christ has come in our flesh, your flesh, my flesh; He meets our problem of life precisely as we find it. Directly from our given situation wherein we find ourselves, His honesty, His purity, His selflessness, His love, His self-surrender, led Him to His cross. He takes the raw materials of our present life and adds the ingredient of love (*agape*). The result: His cross.

Satan's favorite trick is to make the cross confusing, hiding it so we cannot understand it. Then he can make us believe we cannot follow it: "The cross is foolish! You can't give up yourself in today's world! Love yourself, get ahead, step on others!" He tries to fill our minds with these lies every day.

If we cannot see the cross clearly, Satan is right—without it, we can do nothing but live for ourselves.

But when we see Jesus on the cross clearly, it becomes the "power of God" (1 Corinthians 1:18) for everyone who understands how important it is.

SEEING THE TRUTH CLEARLY

God's way of dealing with sin is not hard, confusing, or complicated. His plan is very simple. In fact, sin itself is simple—it is just loving yourself too much.

Long ago, Lucifer (Satan) knelt before God as the "anointed cherub who covers" (Ezekiel 28:14), but he did not understand or love God's selfless character. He cared only about his own beauty and cleverness. This not believing in God is called "unbelief" in the Bible. That selfish pride in his heart was the root of all sin, and from it came all the pride and selfishness we see in the world.

The "old man" is simply the selfish "I" or self. It dies with Christ when we understand the love shown on the cross. Jesus came as a human—your human, my human—and He faced life just like we do. From the life He was given, His honesty, purity, selflessness, love, and complete surrender led Him to the cross. He took our ordinary lives and added His love (*agape*). The result was His cross.

Christ crucified is simply **you** crucified if you have that kind of love. If you had love, you could no more evade the cross than could He have evaded it. When you see that He has come in your flesh, that is, has taken your place in your particular situation at this moment, you can see how love is set straight on the collision course of the cross.

As readily as you say "thank you" for a kindness done you, your heart responds with a deep sense of contrition. All your petty self-love stands revealed in its ugliness. As in ultraviolet light, all the motives of your heart suddenly appear different from what you ever saw them before. No preaching has done the trick—you have **seen** something yourself. What you have seen in that light is the real you, the you that is without love. A light shines from the cross that illuminates your soul in the floodlights of heaven, and you see yourself as the beings of the unfallen universe look upon you.

And now it seems that every character-sinew and cell of your being stands out saturated with that sin of self-love. You feel as if you want to hide your face. But as this strange light of love bathe your soul, every little root of pride and self-esteem shrivels up. The sense of guilt that rises in the heart would kill you outright were it not that Christ already bears that guilt on His cross. You are never crucified alone, but you are crucified with Him. You live, but nevertheless the "old man" dies. Your love of self; your pride, your smug satisfaction with yourself, are shattered—well, there is no better word for it than "crucified."

AND THE TASK OF CONQUERING SIN IS DONE.

No offerings of penance, no expensive pilgrimages to Rome or line or there, no beating yourself or starving yourself; no wearing hair cloth, no grim gritting your teeth to shake off evil habit after evil habit while you tick off a check-list of assumed "progress." "He that has died has been freed from sin." The atonement of Christ does it; and nothing else in the wide universe can do it.

When we have the kind of love Jesus showed, being crucified with Him means we die to selfishness too. If you had that love, you could not avoid the cross any more than Jesus could. When you understand that He has come in your life, in your exact situation right now, you can see how love leads straight to the cross.

It is like when someone does something kind for you and you say, "thank you." Your heart naturally responds. When you see the love of Jesus, all your selfishness is shown clearly. It's like a special light shines on your heart and shows the real you—the part that is full of self-love and not love for others. You see yourself as God and the angels see you.

At first, it may feel overwhelming, like you want to hide. But as the light of Jesus' love fills your heart, every little root of pride and self-centeredness fades away. The guilt you feel would crush you if Jesus were not already carrying it on His cross. You are never alone—your "old man" dies with Him. Your selfishness, pride, and self-satisfaction are gone—they are crucified.

FINISHING THE JOB OF OVERCOMING SIN

You don't need to do hard or painful things to get rid of sin—no special trips, no punishing yourself, no starving yourself, no wearing rough clothes, no forcing yourself to stop one bad habit after another. All those things don't really work. The Bible says, "He that has died has been freed from sin." Jesus' sacrifice does it, and nothing else in the world can.

The best that any other so-called cure for the problem of egoism can accomplish is to suppress the symptoms in one place while they break out afresh in another place, to our embarrassment. So long as the root (the "body of sin") is there intact, we can lop off all the branches we like, but the love of self will go on bearing its fruit of passion, anxiety, worry, envy, lust, and even subtler pride.

But now Christ has drawn you by uplifted before you. You sense the power in that drawing. Consider it well, for it is the power of love. It is stronger than the mightiest brute forces of nature. It is the principle of God's free universe. Look for yourself, realize for yourself. You don't need to take anyone else's word for anything!

Was it for crimes that I have done
He groaned upon the tree?
Amazing pity! Grace unknown!
And love beyond degree!

Well might the sun in darkness hide,
And shut his glories in,
When Christ, the mighty Maker, died
For man, the creature's, sin.

Thus might I hide my blushing face,
While His dear cross appears,
Dissolve my heart in thankfulness,
And melt mine eyes to tears.

But drops of grief can ne'er repay
The debt of love I owe;
Here, Lord, I give myself away;
'Tis all that I can do.

Other ways people try to fix selfishness only stop it for a little while. The problem keeps coming back somewhere else. As long as the root of selfishness (the "body of sin") is still there, you can cut off some branches, but selfishness will still grow, bringing worry, envy, pride, and other sins.

But now Jesus has lifted you up with Him. You can feel the power of His love. Think about it carefully—it is stronger than anything in nature. It is the way God designed the world to work. See it for yourself. Understand it for yourself. You don't have to just believe what someone else says!

Was it because of what I did
That Jesus hung on the tree?
It is amazing love and kindness,
So much grace given to me.

The sun could hide and turn dark
On that sad and painful day,
When Jesus, who made everything,
Died to take our sins away.

I feel ashamed and bow my head
When I see the cross so clear.
My heart feels full of thanks and love,
And my eyes fill up with tears.

My tears can never pay Him back
For all He's done for me.
So, Lord, I give my whole self to You—
That's the best gift I can give.

Isaac Watts

Isaac Watts

Chapter 7

THE SUBTLE REBIRTH OF THE “OLD MAN”

Unless Christ died for nothing, His followers will shine in this dark world like stars on a black, stormy night. They will be free from the curse of selfishness.

But as we look both about us and in us, we see that often when sin is overcome on lower levels, it subtly reappears on higher levels. Selfishness crops out anew, disguised and refined but nonetheless evil. The pathetic pretensions of "saints" who have forgotten that they are sinners have been the scandal and reproach of much that the world sees as "Christianity." Is it hard to imagine the shame that Christ must often feel?

In Jesus' clear teaching about the cross we find the solution to this problem: "Then He said to them all, 'If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross **daily**, and follow Me.'" Luke 9:23. The reason for Jesus' command to take up our cross **daily** is the fact that the "old man" who was crucified yesterday reappears in a new form today. His true identity is never fully apprehended by the sincere believer.

What we sense as "self" today may be correct, and our experience of renouncing and crucifying self today may be genuine. But each succeeding victory is that of a battle and not the war itself. The "old man" reappears in a higher, more cleverly disguised form daily. Hence the need, as Jesus says, for bearing the cross daily.

CAN WE EVER GET BEYOND BEARING THE CROSS?

If we say Yes, we make ourselves better than Jesus was, because He **had** to fight the battle daily throughout His life. "I do not seek my own will," He said of His daily conflict, "but the will of the Father who sent Me." John 5:30. Jesus would not ask us to follow Him in taking up our cross daily unless He also took up His cross daily. "A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master." Matthew 10:24.

If Jesus did not die for nothing, then the people who follow Him will shine in this dark world like stars in a stormy night. They will be set free from being selfish.

But when we look around us—and inside our own hearts—we see something surprising. When we stop doing wrong things in obvious ways, those wrong attitudes can come back in quieter, sneakier ways. Selfishness returns, dressed up to look better, but it is still wrong. Sometimes people who call themselves "good Christians" forget that they still make mistakes. This has made others confused or disappointed about Christianity. It must make Jesus very sad to see this.

Jesus gives us the answer in what He teaches about the cross. He said, "If anyone wants to follow Me, he must say no to himself, carry his cross every day, and follow Me." (Luke 9:23) Jesus tells us to carry our cross every day because our "old self" does not stay gone forever. Even when we think it is gone, it can come back in a new way.

Today, we may truly see our selfishness and honestly try to give it up. That is real and good. But each time we win, it is only one small battle—not the whole war. The old self comes back again and again, looking smarter and harder to see. That is why Jesus says we must carry our cross every day.

CAN WE EVER STOP CARRYING THE CROSS?

If we say we do not need to carry the cross anymore, we would be saying we are better than Jesus. But even Jesus had to choose God's will every day. He said, "I do not do what I want. I do what God the Father wants." Jesus would not ask us to carry our cross every day unless He also did the same. A student is not greater than the teacher, and a servant is not greater than the master.

Not only will the cross be carried here in this life daily, but even in heaven's eternity the principle of self-renunciation symbolized by the cross will motivate the behavior of the redeemed, while the cross of Christ will remain their study. The book of Revelation presents to us that after sin is no more, Christ will still bear his title as the Crucified One—the "Lamb." The temple in the New Jerusalem is the Lamb; and proceeding from the throne of the Lamb is the river of water of life. The throne of God is the throne of the Lamb. Revelation 21:22; 22:1, 3. The love so amply demonstrated on the cross will ever be recognized as the basis of God's government, and will flow out to the entire universe in unending streams of light and life and gladness.

Only as the selfless love of Christ on the cross reigns in every heart will it be certain that sin can never appear again. Should the love of self ever arise in any heart in the universe, the very essence of sin would be back again, and the whole sad war in the universe would have to be repeated. Thank God, that will not happen! "Affliction will not rise up a second time." Nahum 1:9. And in bearing our cross daily now, we are beginning to live out that principle of eternal life. In fact, eternal life begins now.

THERE ARE NEW FORMS THE "OLD MAN" ASSUMES.

Since Jesus' command to take up our cross daily is necessary only because the "old man" is resurrected daily, it is now our duty to discover what new forms the "old man" assumes from day to day.

- The "old man" may be a polished, refined highly cultured self, well educated and honorable.

- He may have excellent tastes in art, literature, and music, and move in the best social circles. But there is no real difference between what we think of as a reprehensible "old man" and this highly cultured, proud self, except that the latter may be more difficult to apprehend and bring to the cross.

- The "old man" may be fond of doing good works in his family or community.

We carry the cross every day in this life. And even in heaven, the meaning of the cross—loving others instead of ourselves—will still guide how God's people live. The Bible shows us that even after sin is gone forever, Jesus is still called the Lamb, the One who was sacrificed. In the new city God makes, everything centers on Jesus and His love. God's love, shown on the cross, will always be the reason His kingdom is full of life, joy, and light.

Only when Jesus' unselfish love fills every heart will sin never come back again. If selfishness ever returned, sin would return too, and the great fight would start all over again. But God promises that this will never happen. Trouble will not come back a second time. When we choose to carry our cross each day now, we are learning how to live God's way forever. Eternal life does not start later—it starts now.

THE OLD SELF CAN COME BACK IN NEW WAYS

Jesus tells us to carry our cross every day because our "old self" can come back every day too. It is our job to learn how the old self shows up in new ways.

- Sometimes the old self looks very polite and educated. It may seem kind, smart, and well behaved.

- The old self may enjoy good books, art, and music and be popular with others. But this proud self is not really better than a mean or rude self—it is just harder to notice and harder to give up to God.

- The old self may like doing good things for family or the community.

- He may enjoy civic leadership, joining idealist clubs, laboring nil the time to do a good work while he fails to see the best work. Politicians do a great amount of good; and there are among them many good men and women. But how easily the plaudits of men become a cherished laurel wreath, and pride becomes the reward of service. The "old man" bears away the victory.

- The most difficult form the "old man" assumes is that of the religious self, finding an outlet for his sinful pride in pious praying, exhorting, and even preaching. Spiritual pride is enhanced by the very sacrifices self makes.

- In fact, no one needs more carefully to guard against the subtle rebirth of the "old man" than the gospel minister. The performance of his duties, even so-called evangelism, can become most deadly stumbling blocks to real fellowship with Christ if the principle of the cross is not accepted daily.

- Such labor wrought in self becomes fatal because it is a sinful, self-seeking expression of the "old man's" existence.

This is the reason why the Lord Jesus will be obliged to disclose startling tragedies in the last day: "Many will say to me in that day, 'Lord, lord, have we not prophesied in your name, cast out demons in your name, and done many wonders in your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you who practice lawlessness!'" Matthew 7:22, 23. They had worked evil because it was self that worked.

ALL THAT SELF DOES IS DEADLY SIN.

Since the preaching of the cross is the "power of God" (1 Corinthians 1:18), any preaching which denies the principle of the cross can be nothing else than Satan trying to edge his way in, with the "old man" acting as his agent.

When self does the work, the "old man" is sure that he has been doing it in Christ's name, as Jesus said that "many" would protest to Him in the last day that all the good they had done was done in His name.

- The old self may enjoy being a leader, joining clubs, or working hard to help others. Many leaders do good things, and many are good people. But it is easy to start loving praise from others. Then pride sneaks in, and the old self wins again.

- The hardest kind of old self to see is the religious self. This happens when a person feels proud about praying, teaching, or helping others know God. Even good actions can make pride grow if we are not careful.

- Because of this, people who teach or preach about God must be extra careful. Even doing church work can pull someone away from Jesus if they forget to choose humility every day.

- When good work is done to make ourselves feel important, it becomes wrong because it comes from the old self.

That is why Jesus warned that some people will say they did many great things for Him, but He will say He never really knew them. Their actions were wrong because they were done for themselves instead of for God.

WHEN SELF IS IN CHARGE, IT LEADS TO SIN

The Bible says the message of the cross shows God's power. So if someone teaches without the meaning of the cross—giving up selfishness—it is not from God. That kind of teaching lets the old self take control.

When people work for God but do it for themselves, they may truly believe they are doing it in Jesus' name. Jesus warned that many people would say, "We did good things for You," but He would say He did not really know them.

Those "many" to whom the Lord must at last deny personal knowledge are a pitiable group. They have felt so sure all along that they were enlisted in Christ's service. They have been ready to praise the Lord for the wonderful works accomplished, not realizing that their confidence was dependent on the results they thought they saw. They saw their work, not Christ. The "old man" lives by sight and not by faith.

They have ever been ready to praise the Lord for the wonderful work they have accomplished, but they have not discerned their pride in their hidden thought that the Lord was fortunate enough to have them on hand to enable Him do it. Sometimes the deception is so cruel that even the "very elect" are sorely tempted.

Jesus foresaw this subtle temptation when He tenderly pleaded with the disciples not to yield to the insidious pride of spiritual labor. It was when "the seventy returned with joy, saying: Lord, even the demons obeyed us when we gave them a command in your name" (Luke 10:17, TEV), that Jesus' mind flashed back to the original sin in Lucifer's heart in heaven when he was a minister, even the "anointed cherub who covers."

He quickly saw how easily the excitement of the disciples' rich success could become as Lucifer's pride. "Jesus answered them: 'I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. Listen! ... Don't be glad because the evil spirits obey you; rather be glad because your names are written in heaven.'" Luke 10:18-20, TEV. If Jesus' words were more heeded by pastors, evangelists, bishops, and other church administrators, how many sincere ministers might be able to overcome the deceptive pressures of ministerial pride!

PAUL HAD A DEEP INSIGHT INTO THIS POSSIBILITY OF TRAGEDY.

These people are sad to think about. They truly believed they were serving Jesus. They were quick to thank God for the good things they thought they had done. But they were trusting what they could see instead of trusting Jesus. They focused on their own work, not on Christ. The old self trusts what it sees, not faith.

They praised God for their success, but they did not notice a proud thought hiding inside: that God was lucky to have them helping Him. This trick can be so sneaky that even very faithful people can be fooled.

Jesus knew this danger. That is why He gently warned His followers. One time, seventy of His helpers came back very excited. They said, "Lord, even evil spirits obey us when we use Your name!" Jesus remembered how pride once grew in Satan's heart long ago.

So Jesus told them not to be proud of their power. He said they should be happy instead that their names were written in heaven. If church leaders today listened more carefully to Jesus' words, many good helpers could be saved from the trap of pride.

PAUL WARNED ABOUT A SERIOUS DANGER

He tells us of his conviction that should the gospel worker be willing to confess his "work" a failure **before** the last day, "he himself will be saved yet so as through fire." 1 Corinthians 3:15. Only through such an experience of humbling of heart before God can one be enabled to build upon the foundation a lifework of "gold, silver, precious stones" that shall endure the "fire" of ultimate judgment. Verses 12, 13.

All work founded on anything other than Jesus Christ will prove at last to be only "wood, hay, straw." Verses 12, 15. George MacDonald has said, "Nothing saves a man more than the burning of his work, except the doing of work that can stand in the fire." — ***Unspoken Sermons***, page 147.

- It is easy for the "old man" to covet the honors that follow religious service, especially within a community of people processing to be "spiritual Israel." With them, the seeking of worldly fame and honor has been supposedly "crucified" and there are no opportunities for gratifying the human craving for worldly pre-eminence. If the "old man" is not crucified daily, his craving for eminence is sublimated in a desire to be an honored leader in the gaze of the limited religious community. As the church increases in prestige and glitz, her "prophets" are thus more and more liable to the deceptive snare of a modern species of Baal worship—self-worship disguised as worship of Christ.

THE "OLD MAN" IS EVEN MORE CRUEL IN HIS DECEPTIONS.

- Another manifestation the "old man" may assume is that of trust in the rapturous ecstasy of a glorious experience, the miraculous moving of a supernatural power in us and through us.

- The temptation is strong to regard miracles as proof of the blessing of God. How could the "old man" be involved in a miracle demonstration? Would not denial of miracle power be a denial of God? Not necessarily.

Paul understood that something very sad could happen. He said that even if a person who works for God finds out in the end that his work did not last, that person could still be saved—but only after losing the work he was proud of.

Paul taught that we must first be humble before God. Only then can we build a life that lasts. A life built on Jesus is like using gold, silver, and precious stones. It will stay strong when tested. But work not built on Jesus is like wood, grass, or straw—it burns up easily.

A writer once said that nothing helps a person more than seeing his bad work burn away, except doing work that lasts through the fire.

- The old self easily wants praise and honor, even when doing church work. In a church setting, people may say they do not care about fame, but the desire to be important can still hide in the heart.

- If the old self is not given up every day, it may change into wanting to be a respected leader in the church. As churches become bigger and more impressive, this danger can grow.

- This kind of pride is very tricky. It looks like serving Jesus, but it is really serving self.

THE OLD SELF CAN TRICK US IN VERY SNEAKY WAYS

- Another way the old self can fool us is by trusting exciting feelings or amazing experiences. These can feel powerful, joyful, or even miraculous, and we may think God is working through us in a special way.

- It is easy to think that miracles mean God is pleased with us. We might ask, "How could something bad be part of a miracle?" But not every miracle is proof that God is at work in the right way.

It is not beyond the power of the fallen Lucifer to work miracles. "No wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light." 2 Corinthians 11:14. Are we so sure that we can unerringly distinguish from the genuine work of the Holy Spirit the work of such an "angel of light"? "Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall." 1 Corinthians 10:12.

Our Saviour has kindly warned us: "False christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect." Matthew 24:24.

- Answers to prayer can seem such bona fide evidence of God's special favor and activity on our behalf that we may not realize how much the "old man" is enjoying the experience of pride that seems to lift us above our fellowmen. Dropping names is a common example of one's pride in knowing the high and mighty in this world; the poor fellow who doesn't know these great people is left to wallow in his envy.

- Pride in one's answers to prayer can likewise arise from one's assumption that he is, like the Pharisees of old, a favorite of Heaven, someone better than the common run of humanity who seem to be denied these miraculous demonstrations in their honor. The part that self played in the glorious experience is not easily discerned.

THE CROSS BECOMES THE BASIS FOR FINAL JUDGMENT.

Look again at that pathetic group who in the judgment remonstrate with Christ, "Have we not prophesied in your name, cast out demons in your name, and done many wonders in your name?" Doubtless they have always **assumed** that their works were done in answer to their prayers in Christ's name. They prayed; and they received undeniable results that were astounding to everybody. But it is clear that the answers to their prayers were not from Christ at all, because He is obliged to tell them sadly, "I never knew you." Matthew 7:22, 23.

- The Bible teaches that even Satan can do things that look good and bright. He can pretend to be an angel of light. This means we must be careful. We should not be too sure of ourselves. Anyone who thinks they cannot be fooled should be extra careful.

- Jesus warned us that false teachers will do amazing signs and wonders. These things can trick people—even very faithful people.

- When our prayers are answered, we may start to feel special or better than others. Pride can grow quietly in our hearts. It can be like bragging about knowing important people, while others feel left out or less important.

- Pride can also come when we think God answers our prayers because we are better than others. This is like the Pharisees long ago, who thought they were God's favorites. It can be hard to notice how much the old self is enjoying the attention and praise.

THE CROSS HELPS SHOW WHAT IS TRULY RIGHT

Think again about the sad group of people who talk to Jesus at the judgment. They say, "Didn't we teach in Your name? Didn't we do miracles in Your name?" They truly believed God answered their prayers. They prayed and saw amazing results that surprised everyone. But Jesus sadly tells them, "I never knew you."

Somebody knew them, because there were undeniable miracles in answer to their prayers. If Jesus says that it was not **He** who knew them, who could it have been?

We have seen that Satan has the power to appear as an "angel of light," a "false christ" who "performs great signs." Indeed, he seems to have a connection with heaven, "so that he even makes fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men." But his real character lies concealed in these miracles. John adds that he "deceives those who dwell on the earth by those signs which he was granted to do in the sight of the beast" Revelation 13:13, 14. **Miracles are thus no test of genuine Christian experience.**

- Nothing may be more difficult to recognize as honor for the "old man" than the rapturous ecstasy of a glorious experience, the psychic moving of some supernatural power in us and through us. But signs and wonders are becoming the peculiar stock in trade of the false christ, or Baal in his modern form.

If it is possible for the "old man" of self to reappear in gospel preaching and ministry, it is also possible for Baal to bless and prosper his prophets in their work. The "christ" of our feelings, or our emotions, is not infallible, but the Christ of the Bible, of the cross, of truth, is infallible. The two must not be confused!

The last temptation is the greatest treason:
To do the right deed for the wrong reason

T. S. Eliot, Murder in the Cathedral

Either Christ or Satan will be the eventual object of every soul's heart service, with no middle ground possible in the final crisis yet to come. Since Satan well knows that but few will ever knowingly and openly choose his service, he is obliged to make it **appear** that the worship of self is the worship of Christ, because it is in man's devotion to self that Satan claims as allegiance to his principles. This is the genius of the "antichrist."

Someone must have answered their prayers, because real miracles happened. But if Jesus says it was not Him, then who was it?

The Bible tells us that Satan can pretend to be good. He can look like an angel of light and even act like a false Christ. He can do signs that look powerful and amazing, even calling fire down from the sky. But these miracles hide who he really is. The Bible says he uses these signs to trick people. This shows us that miracles alone do not prove that someone truly belongs to Jesus.

- One of the hardest tricks to notice is when the old self feels proud because of exciting or powerful experiences. Big signs and wonders can feel special, but they are often used by false teachers today.

If selfish pride can sneak into preaching and church work, then it is also possible for false powers to seem to bless that work. Feelings and emotions can fool us. They are not always right.

The Jesus we trust must be the Jesus of the Bible—the Jesus of the cross and of truth—not just the Jesus of our feelings. We must be careful not to mix the two.

The hardest test is the biggest trick:
To do something good for the wrong reason.

T. S. Eliot, Murder in the Cathedral

In the end, every person will choose who they truly serve—either Jesus or Satan. There will be no middle choice. Satan knows that most people would never choose him on purpose. So he tries to trick them. He makes serving ourselves look like serving Jesus. When people put themselves first, Satan counts that as following his way. This is what makes the false Christ so tricky.

Skillfully he is preparing for the last great conflict, hoping to sweep into his ranks the multitudes of earth, including the "elect" through the avenue of a devotion to self which appears on the surface to be devotion to Christ. Many will not discern that their very motive of service has been either a desire for reward for themselves, or a craven fear of punishment. Like a fickle populace in the changing fortunes of war, they were ready to submit to whoever offers in his hand the prizes of reward or wields the sword of power, irrespective of a genuine appreciation of his character.

- The "old man" will obsequiously submit to whoever has the upper hand.

BUT CHRIST WILL ACCEPT NO SUCH SERVICE BASED ON FORCE.

There must, therefore, come a test to every soul to prove his/her deepest heart devotion. That test is one's response to the way of the cross. Day by day the test continues

When one is sick or injured, proper medical care may sometimes involve painful experiences. But no one in his right mind will refuse the pain that leads to health and renewed life.

The way of the cross is likewise a health-giving experience. The "deceitfulness of sin" may make the bearing of the cross seem unpleasant, but when one is brought up "out of a horrible pit, out of the miry clay," and one's feet are "set... upon a rock," joy follows the pain as surely as day follows night. The "rock" is Christ and the "miry clay" is the constant bewilderment and confusion of domination by the "old man" of self and sensuality. Psalm 40:1, 2.

Are you weary of your fear, your killing anxiety, your envy of others, your sense of insecurity, and your haunting awareness of vanity?

Let your feet be set on that solid rock where the cross is planted. What joy will be yours to say, "He ... has put a new song in my mouth—praise to our God!" Verse 3.

Satan is carefully getting ready for the last big struggle. He hopes to pull many people to his side—even good people—by using self-love that looks like love for Jesus. Many people will not notice that they are serving for the wrong reasons. Some serve because they want rewards. Others serve because they are afraid of punishment. They follow whoever promises prizes or shows power, without really caring about who that person truly is.

- The old self is quick to follow whoever seems strongest or most important at the moment.

CHRIST WILL NOT ACCEPT FORCED SERVICE

Everyone will have a test to show what is really in their heart. That test is how we choose to follow the way of the cross. This test happens every day.

Being sick or hurt can be painful, but doctors sometimes have to do things that hurt so we can get better. No one refuses help that brings health and new life.

Following Jesus and taking up the cross is like that. It can feel hard or unpleasant because sin tricks us and makes it seem bad. But when we come out of the confusion and sadness caused by selfishness, we are set on a solid rock—Jesus—and joy comes after the pain, just like day comes after night.

Are you tired of fear, worry, jealousy, or feeling insecure?

Set your feet on the solid rock where Jesus and the cross stand. Then you can be filled with joy and say, "He has put a new song in my heart—praise to God!"

The Lord is my light, then why should I fear?
By day and by night His presence is near.
He is my salvation from sorrow and sin.
This blessed persuasion the Spirit brings in.

James Nicholson

The Lord is my light, so why be afraid?
By day and by night, He is close to my side.
He saves me from sadness and from sin,
And the Holy Spirit brings this truth in.

James Nicholson

Chapter 8

JESUS' THIRD LESSON ON THE MEANING OF THE CROSS

Jesus felt the tremendous temptation of his great popularity. Should He ride the crest of the wave that mounting upward, bearing Him prominently to the pinnacle of national prestige and influence?

Or should He arrest the movement of popularity by solemnly announcing the real truth of His Messianic message—His coming sacrifice on the cross?

This was no mystic reserved for the inner circle of a few close disciples. At the height of His ministry when "great multitudes went with Him," He boldly proclaimed to them all the same testing truth. Luke reveals how He chose to present it with ultra simple realism to the startled ears of the "great multitude":

"And He turned, and said to them: If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. And whoever does not bear his cross and come after me cannot be my disciple." (Luke 14:25-27)

It was as if he said, I am glad to see you following Me; but are you really sure this is your heart's choice? I must be plainly honest with you. I am indeed the Messiah, but not the one of popular hopes and expectations. I am indeed going to the kingdom of heaven, but mark you, My route lies via the cross. If you follow Me, you must of necessity accept My route. Many will at some future time mistake the god of this world for the Christ; I must ensure now that you do not mistake the Christ for the god of this world.

IT REQUIRES RARE PREACHING, SELDOM HEARD TODAY, TO LEAVE THE HEARERS THUS FREE TO DECIDE.

Jesus felt a strong pull because many people liked Him and followed Him. He had a choice. Should He enjoy being famous and powerful?

Or should He stop the excitement and tell the hard truth about why He came—to suffer and die on the cross?

Jesus was not teaching secrets to only a few people. When huge crowds followed Him, He told everyone the same hard truth. The Bible says He turned to the crowd and spoke very plainly:

It was like Jesus was saying, "I am happy you are following me, but are you sure you really want to? I need to be honest with you. I am the Messiah, but not the kind people expect. I am going to God's kingdom, but the way there is through the cross. If you follow me, you must follow that same path."

Jesus wanted to make sure people did not follow Him just because He was popular. He wanted them to know the truth and choose Him for the right reasons.

IT TAKES BRAVE AND HONEST PREACHING, WHICH WE DO NOT HEAR VERY OFTEN TODAY, TO LET PEOPLE FREELY CHOOSE FOR THEMSELVES.

But Jesus had no fear of the multitudes. He had faithfully preached the truth—so faithfully, in fact, that His path leading Him directly to His own death. Why then need He fear to present the cross to the multitudes and to call for their decision? Only the man who himself bears the cross dare summon others to do so. What need had Christ to resort to any psychological subterfuge? The way of the cross had delivered Him from any such helpless vanity.

Since it is clear that a decision to accept the gospel is a decision to accept the cross, and since that decision can be made only by the inner heart of hearts, it follows that there must be no confusing pressure in true soul-winning work. Simple truth needs no alluring embellishments to make it attractive to the honest heart.

In fact, such embellishments serve only to repulse the sincere seeker for truth who fails to discern the voice of the True Shepherd in the confusing appeals to "self" voiced by the would-be soul winner. Psychological tricks and egocentric inducements to "decision" can be the tool only of one who knows not the strength of the cross.

The reason the cross is the "power of God unto salvation" is that love alone has true drawing power. "I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore with loving-kindness I have drawn you." Jeremiah 31:3. George Matheson, author of the beautiful hymn "O Love That Wilt Not Let Me Go," has made the following apt comment:

Jesus was not afraid of large crowds. He always told the truth, even when that truth led Him to die. Since He was willing to carry the cross Himself, He was not afraid to talk about it and ask people to choose. Only someone who carries the cross can ask others to do the same. Jesus did not need tricks or special ways to persuade people. The way of the cross kept Him humble and honest.

Choosing to follow the good news means choosing the cross. That choice must come from deep inside a person's heart. Because of this, people should never be pushed or pressured into believing. The simple truth does not need fancy words or tricks. Honest hearts will recognize it.

In fact, fancy words and extra tricks can push away people who truly want the truth. They may not hear the voice of the true Shepherd because the message becomes confusing and too focused on pleasing people. Using mind tricks or selfish rewards to make someone decide shows that a person does not really understand the power of the cross.

The cross is called the "power of God to save" because love is what truly pulls people in. Love is stronger than anything else. God says, "I have loved you forever, so I have drawn you to myself with kindness." (Jeremiah 31:3)

George Matheson, who wrote the hymn "O Love That Will Not Let Me Go," shared a wise thought about this:

"I understand the word 'drawn' to be used here as of the opposite of 'driven'. I take the meaning to be: 'It is because I love you that I do not force you; I desire to win by love.' Love is incompatible with the exercise of omnipotence inexorable law can rule the stars; but the stars are not an object of love. Man is an object of love, and therefore he can only be ruled by love, as the prophet puts it, 'drawn'. Nothing is a conquest for love but the power of love, of drawing Omnipotence can subdue by driving, but that is not a conquest for love; it is rather a sign that love is baffled.

"Therefore it is that our Father does not compel us to come in. He would have us drawn by the beauty of holiness; therefore he veils all that would force the will. He hides the glories of heaven. He conceals the gates of pearl and the streets of gold. He reveals not the river of His pleasures. He curtains from the ear the music of the upper choir. He obscures in the sky the sign of the Son of man. He forbids the striking of the hours on the clock of eternity. He treads on a path of velvet lest the sound of His coming footsteps should conquer by fear the heart that ought to be won by love."— *Thoughts for Life's Journey*, pages 70, 71.

CHRIST WOULD RATHER DRAW BY THE CROSS THAN DRIVE BY THE CROWN.

The converts who come by way of the cross are those whom the Father draws. In His mysterious process of drawing, He doesn't want mere lip servers, but disciples who will follow the Lamb wherever He goes. The power of the drawing is in the truth, for Christ is the Truth. If truth is made unmistakable, the power will prove to be invincible. Another way of saying the same thing is that the truth-seeker and truth made for each other and when they meet, like Crazy Glue they unite.

"I understand the word drawn to mean the opposite of pushed. God is saying, 'Because I love you, I will not force you. I want to win you with love.' Laws can control the stars, but God does not love the stars the way He loves people. People are meant to be led by love, not by force. That is why the Bible says we are drawn to God. Love can only win by love, not by pushing or forcing.

Because of this, God does not make us come to Him. He wants us to be drawn by what is good and right. So He hides anything that would force us to choose out of fear. He hides how amazing heaven is. He does not show us the pearl gates or golden streets. He does not let us hear the music of heaven. He even hides clear signs in the sky and does not tell us the exact time of eternity. God comes quietly and gently, so our hearts are won by love, not by fear."

JESUS WOULD RATHER GENTLY PULL PEOPLE TO HIM BY THE CROSS THAN PUSH THEM WITH POWER AND GLORY.

The people who come to Jesus through the cross are the ones God the Father is drawing. God does not want people who only say the right words. He wants true followers who will follow Jesus wherever He leads. The power that draws people comes from the truth, because Jesus is the Truth. When the truth is made clear, nothing can stop it.

Another way to say this is that people who truly want the truth and the truth itself belong together. When they meet, they stick together very strongly—like super glue.

On the other hand, the use of psychological and emotional techniques designed to force "decision" may attract an entirely wrong class of adherents who are neither disciples nor followers of the Lamb. If "decision" is secured on the basis of naked self-interest, it cannot be of faith. And "whatever is not of faith is sin." Romans 14:23. In the resultant confusion, the True Shepherd's "sheep" may be turned away completely because "they will by no means follow a stranger, but will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers." John 10:5. This may be one reason why sometimes so few people respond to gospel invitations.

Putting a stumbling block before Christ's "little ones" is surely sin. But Jesus said that His own sheep hear His voice. "The sheep follow Him, for they know His voice." "My own know Me, as the Father knows Me and I know the Father." John 10:3, 4, 14, 15, RSV. Those "other sheep" of Christ's fold therefore need not be **persuaded** to accept gospel truth; once the truth (made known by the voice of Christ) is clearly presented to them, no power in earth or hell can possibly **dissuade** them from following that Voice!

The winsomeness is in the truth itself because love and truth are inseparable. He who thinks he is speaking right doctrine but does not speak in love cannot be speaking truth.

CAN THE LOVE OF SELF ALSO INCLUDE LOVE OF FAMILY?

If Jesus' words to the multitudes sound a bit hard, we must know that He was not teaching an attitude of harsh, unfeeling hatred toward one's loved ones in the family circle. The biblical meaning of the word "hate" is to love less in comparison.

An illustration of what He meant can be found in His attitude toward His own mother and relatives. He tenderly loved His mother, and even in His desperate hour on the cross was thoughtful of her needs. His was a perfect example of filial devotion. However, He would permit no family tie, however intimate, to lessen His devotion to all suffering, needy members of the human family.

On the other hand, using strong emotional tricks to force people to "decide" can bring the wrong kind of followers. These people may not truly follow Jesus or live like His disciples. If someone chooses only because it benefits them, that choice is not based on faith. The Bible says that anything not done in faith is wrong. When things become confusing, people who truly belong to Jesus may turn away, because they do not follow voices they do not recognize. This may be one reason why sometimes only a few people respond to invitations to follow Jesus.

Causing problems that make it harder for young or new believers to follow Jesus is wrong. But Jesus said that His sheep hear His voice. They follow Him because they know His voice. Jesus knows His people, and they know Him, just as He knows the Father. Because of this, those who truly belong to Jesus do not need to be pressured. When the truth is clearly shared in Jesus' voice, nothing on earth or anywhere else can stop them from following Him.

The beauty of the message is in the truth itself, because love and truth always belong together. If someone thinks they are teaching the right beliefs but does not speak with love, then they are not truly speaking the truth.

CAN LOVING YOURSELF ALSO INCLUDE LOVING YOUR FAMILY?

When Jesus spoke to large crowds, His words may sound hard at first. But He was not teaching people to be mean or unkind to their family. He did not want anyone to hate their loved ones. In the Bible, the word "hate" means to love something less when compared to something else.

We can see what Jesus meant by how He treated His own mother and family. Jesus loved His mother very much. Even while He was dying on the cross, He made sure she was cared for. He was a perfect example of loving and honoring a parent. But Jesus did not let family ties, no matter how close, stop Him from caring for all people who were hurting or in need.

On one occasion while He was helping the multitudes, His relatives arrived: "Then His mother and brothers came to Him, and could not approach Him because of the crowd. And it was told Him by some, who said, 'Your mother and Your brothers are standing outside, desiring to see You.' But He answered and said to them: My mother and My brothers are these who hear the word of God and do it." Luke 8:19-21.

Here was no spurning of the tender affections of kin, but rather a recognition that these affections must not become perverted through a failure to love **all** needy members of the human family. It is a deep lesson that many of us need to grasp, who instinctively feel that our charity can be confined within the narrow walls enclosing precious kinfolk or close friends.

Love of family and pride of blood can be a very difficult form the "old man" assumes. When God calls us to do something or to go somewhere for Him, and we say No because of the ties of kinship that bind us, here is the "old man" alive and well. Love for those who **potentially** will "hear the word of God, and do it" will prevail even as Jesus heeded the call to come to save us. But when a call comes to leave father, mother, brother, sister, and other cherished ties of the homeland, to go to a distant land in service for Christ, "sell" often protests. Seldom is it seen that rejection of duty is a rejection of the cross.

JESUS' ENTIRE LIFE WAS DEVOTED TO SERVICE, EVEN FROM CHILDHOOD.

It was His to "taste" all the suffering and privation that we humans can know. Although many rejected Him, there were those who listened to the voice of the Holy Spirit and were drawn to Him. And there were worshipers of "self" who belonged to Satan's kingdom who did not respond to the drawing. Eventually all would show on which side they stood.

And thus throughout time everyone passes judgment on himself.

One time, while Jesus was helping many people, His family came to see Him. Because the crowd was so big, they could not get close. Someone told Jesus, "Your mother and brothers are outside and want to see you." Jesus answered, "My mother and my brothers are those who hear God's word and obey it." (Luke 8:19-21)

Jesus was not being unkind to His family. Instead, He was teaching that love for family should not keep us from loving and helping everyone. This is an important lesson for us, because we often think our care should be only for close family and friends.

Loving family too much can sometimes become a problem. When God asks us to do something or go somewhere, and we say no because we do not want to leave family, our selfish nature is still in control. Loving people who will listen to God and obey Him is more important, just as Jesus obeyed God's call to save us. But when God asks someone to leave parents, brothers, sisters, or home to serve Him far away, the selfish side often complains. Many people do not realize that saying no to what God asks is also saying no to the cross.

JESUS SPENT HIS WHOLE LIFE HELPING OTHERS, EVEN WHEN HE WAS A CHILD

Jesus went through all kinds of pain and hard times that people can face. Many people chose not to accept Him, but some listened to God's Spirit and were drawn to Him. Others loved themselves more and chose a different path, so they did not follow Him. In the end, everyone showed which side they chose.

In this way, people judge themselves by the choices they make.

There will be a day of final judgment when every lost person will understand why he is "outside." In the final encounter, as on a screen, the cross will be presented, and its real bearing will be seen by every mind that has been blinded by sin. When the lost see Calvary with its mysterious Victim, sinners will condemn themselves. People will see what their final choice was been.

If we refuse a call to difficult service for our Master because of love of family or for other selfish reasons, there can be no lighter sentence awaiting us eventually than if we reject Bible truth for similar excuses. In either case it is the cross which is being rejected rather than either doctrine or service.

THERE IS A "PRICE" TO PAY IN BUILDING CHARACTER.

In explaining the cross to the multitudes Jesus used three simple illustrations.

(1) The first shows the need for counting the cost before one professes the building of Christian character. The price to be paid is the bearing of the cross:

"If one of you is planning to build a tower, he sits down first and figures out what it will cost, to see if he has enough money to finish the job. If he doesn't, he will not be able to finish the tower after laying the foundation; and all who see what happened will make fun of him: 'This man began to build but can't finish the job! they will say.'" Luke 14:28-30, TEV.

There was something decidedly attractive in the teaching of Christ. Its appeal was phenomenal. But Jesus saw that this very appeal, in the warmth of its rushing tide, might sweep the emotions into impulsive beginnings of character-building which would bring shame if left unfinished. The irresistible rush of enthusiastic devotion will be needed later when the cost has been counted and accepted. ***For the cost is the cross.***

One day there will be a final judgment. Everyone who is lost will understand why they are outside of God's kingdom. It will be as if the cross is shown clearly for everyone to see. People will understand what Jesus did and what their own choice was. When they see this, they will realize for themselves why they are lost.

If we say no to doing something hard for Jesus because we love comfort, family, or ourselves more, it is no different than saying no to Bible truth for the same reasons. In both cases, it is really the cross that is being refused, not just a teaching or a job to do.

LEARNING TO BE A GOOD AND STRONG PERSON SOMETIMES COMES WITH A COST.

When Jesus explained the cross to the crowds, He used three simple examples.

1. The first example shows that people need to think carefully about what it will cost to follow Jesus and become a good Christian. The "price" to pay is carrying your own cross.

"If one of you is planning to build a tower, he sits down first and figures out what it will cost, to see if he has enough money to finish the job. If he doesn't, he will not be able to finish the tower after laying the foundation; and all who see what happened will make fun of him: 'This man began to build but can't finish the job! they will say.'" Luke 14:28-30, TEV.

Jesus' teaching was very exciting and attracted many people. But He knew that sometimes people get so excited that they start following Him without really thinking about the cost. If they give up later, it would be embarrassing. The strong excitement and devotion will be helpful later, but first, a person must understand and accept the cost: the cross.

Accept the "price" first; **then** let the tide of emotional appeal reinforce the consecration. Understand at the outset, Jesus said in effect, that the cross on which self is crucified is the price for the building of any useful and enduring Christian character. Failure to count the cost of surrender to the cross brings a disgraceful failure to reach the proper heights of Christian character. An unfinished "tower" can result only in the grief of heaven, the scornful derision of the world, and a painful shame of disillusionment for the builder.

How often has the world laughed at the inconsistencies of professed followers of the Lamb, Perhaps the early enthusiasm gave promise of a wonderful edifice to be erected. After the early difficulties with gross evils such as drunkenness, tobacco, sensuality, and the like, it is assumed that the work will be carried on to completion.

But there comes a time when subtle evils impede further progress. Gradually the "workmen" on the "tower" are withdrawn, and the heart is left an unfinished temple marred with deficiencies, unsightly in its deformity. Pride, evil temper, catty impatience, pious selfishness, uncharitable judgment, peevishness, envy—these constitute the ruins of an unfinished character. "All who see what happened will make fun of him. 'This man began to build but can't finish the job!'" Christ is dishonored in his professed follower.

The "builder" himself can miss out on both worlds through a failure to reckon the true cost of Christian experience. A painful sense of futility comes to anyone who has used all his resources in a half-finished building program. Few have the courage to tear down the unfinished "tower" that the embarrassment of failure might be hidden through ceasing to profess Christ. Most are content, like survivors in bombed houses, to dwell in the dismal rubble, hoping that sometime resources for the completion of the "tower" will be miraculously forthcoming. Such hopes are doomed to ultimate disappointment unless we here and now assess the cost and surrender to its payment.

Jesus was saying that giving up selfish desires and carrying the cross is the "price" to build strong and lasting Christian character. If someone starts following Jesus without counting the cost, they might fail and feel ashamed, and the world might laugh at them.

Many times, people start following Jesus with great enthusiasm, but when they face problems like bad habits or hard choices, they stop. The early excitement promised something wonderful, but without counting the cost and accepting the cross, the "tower" of good character is left unfinished.

Sometimes, small wrong habits and selfish ways can stop a person from growing as a follower of Jesus. Little by little, the effort to build good character is lost, and the heart is left like an unfinished building, full of mistakes. Pride, anger, impatience, selfishness, judging others, grumpiness, and envy—these are the ruins of a character that is left unfinished. People will notice and say, "This person started following Jesus but couldn't finish!" Jesus is not honored when His followers quit.

The person who quits may also miss out on both God's blessings and their own potential. It feels empty and sad to put effort into something that is left half-finished. Many people do not have the courage to start over and finish building their character, so they live with the "rubble" of what is left, hoping it will somehow get fixed later. But this hope will not work unless they count the cost now and commit to follow Jesus fully.

When the "tower" of Christlike character is properly finished, the world will see it and marvel. There can be no power more effective for the finishing of the gospel commission in the earth than the finishing of that work in our own hearts.

MEASURING THE STRENGTH OF THE ENEMY, AS IN WAR.

(2) The second illustration Jesus gave was that of the unequal battle:

"If a king goes out with ten thousand men to fight another king who comes against him with twenty thousand men, he will sit down first and decide if he is strong enough to face that other king. If he isn't, he will have to send messengers to meet the other king to ask for terms of peace while he is still a long way off. In the same way, concluded Jesus, none of you can be my disciple unless he gives up everything he has." Luke 14:31-33, TEV.

Solemn words!

Human nature sees the futility of a king seeking battle with an army twice as strong as his own. Any king with sense would send messengers to seek out the best terms possible, salvage as much of the original kingdom as he could, and then abandon the rest. The invader dictates the terms he will impose and sets the new boundaries. On one side he sets up his new kingdom; on the other, the overmastered king will dwell with his trembling subjects, trying vainly to keep up a pretense of the old glory and power, while his independence is gone.

Jesus was here illustrating the solemn truths of the cross.

In effect, He was saying: Do not underestimate the strength of the enemy with whom you strive, namely, the "old man," or "self." If your will to crucify self is only half as strong as the will of the "old man" to live, you must be reduced to the pitiable recourse of seeking a truce. Better have the courage to forsake all. Only thus can you defeat the enemy. Be my disciple in truth, and rejoice in your freedom and victory.

BUT HOW MANY MAKE A TRUCE WITH THE ENEMY!

When someone finishes building Christ-like character in their heart, everyone will see it and be amazed. Nothing is more powerful for helping others or sharing God's message than a heart that has been fully dedicated to Jesus.

CHECKING HOW STRONG THE ENEMY IS, LIKE WHEN PREPARING FOR A BATTLE

2. The second example Jesus gave was about a battle that is not fair:

Very serious words!

People know it is useless for a king to fight an enemy who has twice as many soldiers. Any wise king would try to save as much as he could and give up the rest. The stronger enemy would make the rules and take over. The weaker king would live with his scared people, trying to act like he was still in charge, even though he was not.

Jesus was using this story to teach an important lesson about the cross.

He was saying: Don't underestimate the power of the enemy inside you—your "old self" or selfish nature. If your desire to give up selfish ways is weaker than your old self's desire to keep living for itself, you will fail and have to make a weak compromise. It is better to have the courage to give up everything. Only then can you truly defeat the enemy. Follow Jesus fully, and you will be free and victorious.

BUT HOW MANY PEOPLE TRY TO MAKE PEACE WITH THE ENEMY INSIDE THEM!

The heart is divided with a boundary. Feebly, a show of loyalty is kept up by attendance at divine worship, tithe paying, and participation in some Christian endeavor of good works. The boundary divides the kingdom of the "old man" from that of his puppet. The "old man" dwells on one side, the half-hearted Christian on the other. There are occasional border incidents, for it is a kind of armed frontier. The soul cannot rest. But if one is unwilling to risk an all-out engagement, he must dwell side by side with the enemy.

Jesus' apt illustration shows the Laodicean condition of lukewarmness. It is a state neither radiantly alive, nor dead, but in between—pitifully weak; neither hot nor cold, lukewarm.

WE CANNOT FOREVER REMAIN IN SUCH TEPID DEVOTION.

Eventually reality must be faced. We come to the point of decision, the dividing of the ways. We must choose one of two roads—one leading back to Egypt and apostasy, the other leading by way of the cross to the sunlit plains of the heavenly Canaan and eternal victory. Which will we choose?

Patience and so-called balance can be overdone in our time of crisis. The former can degenerate into cowardice, and the latter, when thermostatic, can be most disappointing to our Saviour. He knew no lukewarm "balance" in his love which drove him to his cross. "My devotion to Your house, O God, burns in Me like a fire," he says. John 2:17, TEV. Peter Marshall prayed, "While time is running out, save us from patience which is akin to cowardice. Give us the courage to be either hot or cold, to stand for something, lest we fall for anything."

THERE IS A HIDDEN ELEMENT OF VALUE.

(3) The third illustration Jesus gave about the cross is striking in its simplicity:

The heart can be divided, like a land with a border. On one side is the "old self," and on the other side is the half-hearted follower of Jesus. People may try to look faithful by going to church, giving money, or doing some good things, but their heart is not fully committed.

The old self and the half-hearted Christian live side by side, but there are always small conflicts, like a tense border. The soul cannot be at peace. If a person is not willing to give everything to Jesus, they must live with the enemy inside them.

Jesus' story shows what it means to be lukewarm, like the people in Laodicea. Being lukewarm is a weak state—not fully alive in faith, but not completely dead either. It is a sad middle place, neither hot nor cold.

WE CANNOT STAY HALF-HEARTED IN OUR LOVE FOR GOD FOREVER.

One day, everyone has to face the truth. We reach a point where we must choose a path. There are two roads: one leads back to sin and turning away from God, and the other leads through the cross to the bright, happy land of heaven and eternal victory. Which road will we take?

Being too patient or trying to stay "balanced" can be a problem in times of hard decisions. Too much patience can turn into fear, and trying to be "balanced" can make God disappointed. Jesus' love was never lukewarm—He gave everything, even going to the cross. He said, "My love for your house, O God, burns like a fire in me" (John 2:17).

Peter Marshall prayed, "While there is still time, save us from patience that is really fear. Give us the courage to be either fully on fire for God or completely honest about our hearts, so we will stand for something good and not fall for anything wrong."

THERE IS A HIDDEN PART THAT IS REALLY VALUABLE.

3. The third example Jesus gave about the cross is very simple:

"Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, there is no way to make it salty again. It is no good for the soil or for the manure pile; it is thrown away." (Luke 14:34, 35)

Christianity is good. But if that Christianity has lost the principle of the cross, what is it good for? It is lit only for what is happening to it in many parts of the world. It is not execrated, cast on the "manure pile" through persecution and violent opposition; nor yet is it valued as the world's only vital preservative as it should be. It is merely ignored, trodden underfoot, "thrown away."

Those good people who comprise the church of Jesus are indeed the salt of the earth. But the saltiness which alone can cause them to preserve the world from spoiling prematurely must be seen for what it is. Moral rot will corrupt the whole world unless that saltiness is in God's people. What is needed is the preaching, and the living of the principle, of the cross!

Solemnly Jesus warned the chosen people of his day of the danger of their not discerning a hidden lack in their work for their world. To the outward eye and touch, whole mountains of salt may appear beautiful, glistening white, and genuine. Enraptured souls may exclaim regarding the marvellous potential of such an abundance of "salt" for salting the needy earth. But an increase in volume and weight of such salt is no increase to its saltiness. Numerical and statistical increases to the church do not necessarily make her any more the "salt of the earth." Tons upon tons of salt that has lost its savor is worth less than a cup of truly salty salt.

There were neither refrigerators nor ice storage facilities in the world of Jesus two millennia ago. Salt was used as the preservative for meat and fish. A shipment packed in saltless salt spoiled.

The spoilage process in the moral and spiritual health of our world today is plain for anyone to see and feel for himself. Brutal ethnic cleansings and genocides are terrifying. Crime, the inroads of loveless infidelity, the corruption of human morality, the steady degeneration of physical and mental vitality—all alarming evidence that our sinful world is spoiling like rotten fish on the way to market.

Being a Christian is good. But if a Christian has lost the power of the cross, it is not helping anyone. In some parts of the world, Christianity is not treated as something important. It is not rejected or opposed for its true strength, and it is not valued as the world's best guide. Instead, it is often ignored, treated as unimportant, or "thrown away."

The good people who follow Jesus are like the salt of the earth. But salt only works if it still has its "saltiness." The world will be spoiled by sin and wrong choices unless God's people keep their saltiness—by living and teaching the way of the cross.

Jesus seriously warned the people of His time to be careful. They might look like they were helping the world, but there could be something missing in their hearts. On the outside, mountains of salt might look beautiful, shiny, and real. People might be excited about how much salt there was and think it could help the world. But adding more salt does not make it saltier. Just having more people in the church does not make it stronger or better. Tons of salt that has lost its taste are worth less than a small cup of really salty salt.

In Jesus' time, there were no refrigerators. Salt was used to keep meat and fish from spoiling. If the salt had lost its taste, the food went bad.

Today, we can see how the world is spoiling. There is terrible violence, cruelty, crime, broken families, selfishness, and bad choices. People's hearts and minds can decay like food left without salt.

It was never God's plan that the world spoil for want of salty salt to preserve it. He never intended that the work of his followers should be made so difficult in these last days. The final conflict between Christ and Satan could take place without the need for moral and spiritual values to degenerate to the place that multitudes become unable to comprehend the gospel sufficiently to accept or reject it intelligently.

In his love and mercy, God intends that his last message to the world shall be considered thoughtfully and freely by a world population capable of **intelligent** acceptance or rejection. In His providence His people are scattered all over the world among many nations, tongues, and peoples. Their living the principles of the cross, with their proclamation of its message, is to be a preservative salt to a society that will otherwise spoil to a desperate degradation without it.

But let us take heart. The world will surely listen to the message of the cross when presented in its "high-fidelity" truth. Even the obvious fact that much preaching is ignored can be a cause for encouragement, for it is not genuine Christianity that the world so ignores, but merely the cross less imitation of it. No **salty** salt is ever "trodden underfoot." It will be accepted vigorously, or rejected vigorously.

So it was in the days of Christ and his apostles; and so will it be until history ends.

Jesus concluded His sermon to the multitudes:

"Listen, then, if you have ears!"

God never meant for the world to spoil because His followers had lost their "saltiness." He never wanted His people to make the work of helping others so hard that people could not understand or accept His message. Even in the final battle between Jesus and evil, the world could still be saved if His followers stayed true and salty for Him.

Because of His love and mercy, God wants His last message to the world to be thought about carefully and freely by people who can choose to accept or reject it. God has scattered His people all over the world among many nations, languages, and cultures. By living the way of the cross and sharing its message, His people are like salt that keeps the world from spoiling. Without them, society would fall into great trouble and decay.

But we can be encouraged. The world will listen to the message of the cross when it is shared clearly and truly. Even when people ignore preaching, that can be a good sign. The world is not ignoring real, salty Christianity—it is ignoring fake, weak Christianity. True salty Christians are never "trampled down." People will either strongly accept it or strongly reject it.

This was true in Jesus' time and the time of His apostles, and it will be true until the end of history.

Jesus ended His sermon to the crowds by saying:

"Listen carefully, if you have ears!"

Chapter 9

HOW I DISCOVERED THE CROSS

When I was a youth I heard the story of the cross of Jesus, with all the harrowing details. I had also heard stories of martyrs who had died in the Dark Ages for their faith. My young mind found it hard to distinguish between the suffering Jesus endured on his cross and that endured by the faithful martyrs.

In fact, it seemed that some of the tortures the martyrs endured might have been even more painful than Jesus' flogging and crucifixion, and longer in duration as well.

As I became older, I began to appreciate a little more the more-than-physical pain of His sufferings. I could sense the shame and loneliness He had to endure. His disciples and friends all forsook Him and fled. Whereas most of the martyrs had at least someone to cheer them in their last hours. But still I found it difficult to see how Christ's sufferings were more severe than those of some people I could imagine suffered both excruciating physical torture and the loneliness of rejection.

It also seemed to me that anyone could better endure unpleasantness and pain if he could look forward to a bright future of reward. I had learned that when a person died, if he were good he went to heaven for such a reward; and if he were bad, to an opposite place of torture and punishment. Jesus was undeniably good. Therefore, I reasoned to myself, as soon as He died He must have gone straight to heaven for an enjoyable weekend in reunion with His Father and the angels. The assurance that He was going there seemed expressed in the promise to the dying thief, "Today you will be with Me in Paradise." Luke 23:43.

When I was young, I heard the story of Jesus' cross and all the suffering he went through. I also heard about people long ago who were killed because of their faith. As a kid, I had a hard time understanding the difference between the pain Jesus went through and the pain of those people.

Sometimes it seemed like the martyrs' suffering might have been even worse than Jesus' flogging and crucifixion, and it lasted longer too.

As I got older, I started to understand more about Jesus' suffering—not just the physical pain, but also the shame and loneliness. His friends and followers all ran away and left him alone. Most martyrs at least had someone there with them in their last moments. But I still had trouble seeing how Jesus' suffering was worse than that of some people who went through terrible pain and were also rejected by others.

I also thought that it's easier to bear pain if you know a reward is coming. I had learned that when someone dies, if they were good, they go to heaven; if they were bad, they go somewhere terrible. Jesus was perfectly good, so I thought he must have gone straight to heaven right after he died. The promise he gave to the thief on the cross—"Today you will be with me in Paradise" (Luke 23:43)—made me think he must have been looking forward to that.

Jesus died about three o'clock Friday afternoon and was resurrected early Sunday morning. I assumed therefore He must have spent the intervening time in heaven or at least Paradise, whatever that was. Such anticipation could well have buoyed up His spirits during His severe trials. It is almost incredible what people can endure when they are certain of an almost immediate reward. Where was the unique "glory" in Christ's cross?

Further, the length of time during which He suffered His physical pain did not seem to be long. All the floggings and the final agony hardly lasted more than twelve or fifteen hours. Long enough, indeed; I shouldn't want to endure such pain for a fraction of that time. But many people have been forced to endure torture for longer periods, and without the hope of an imminent happy weekend such as I supposed Christ looked forward to.

TRY AS I COULD, I FOUND IT DIFFICULT TO SEE ANYTHING VERY WONDERFUL IN JESUS' CROSS.

Perhaps, I thought, what makes it so special is the fact that the Sufferer was the Son of God enduring all these agonies we poor humans must sometimes know. I could sense a certain feeling of awe, much as I would feel if a king were to condescend to sleep under our family roof, toil in our garden with us, and eat at our humble table. I could look and wonder, but I could hardly understand.

It troubled me that I could not induce within myself those feelings of deep heart appreciation for the cross that others have seemed to feel. According to what I had heard, I should "glory" in the cross of Christ, feel some unusual emotion or profound moving of heart. I saw some people actually moved to tears about it. I felt worried because I couldn't.

It seemed I couldn't touch with my fingertips what Paul sensed when he said, "God forbid that I should glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ." Galatians 6:14.

I TRIED VERY HARD TO BE IMPRESSED AS I THOUGHT I SHOULD BE IMPRESSED.

Jesus died on Friday afternoon and came back to life early Sunday. I assumed he spent the time in heaven or Paradise. If he knew something good was waiting, that could have helped him get through the suffering. I wondered, then, what was so special about the cross.

Also, his physical pain didn't last very long. From the flogging to his death was only about twelve to fifteen hours. That's long enough—I wouldn't want to go through it for even part of that time. But many people have suffered longer and without knowing any reward was coming soon.

NO MATTER HOW HARD I TRIED, I FOUND IT HARD TO SEE ANYTHING AMAZING ABOUT JESUS' CROSS.

Maybe what makes it so special is that the person who suffered was God's Son, going through all the pain that people sometimes have to face. I felt a kind of wonder, like I would if a king came to stay in our house, worked in our garden with us, and ate at our small table. I could look at it and be amazed, but I didn't really understand it.

It made me sad that I couldn't feel the deep, thankful feelings about the cross that other people seemed to have. I had heard that I should "glory" in the cross of Jesus, feel strong emotions, or have my heart moved in a big way. I even saw people cry because of it. But I didn't feel that, and it made me worry.

It felt like I couldn't understand what Paul meant when he said, "God forbid that I should glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Galatians 6:14).

I TRIED REALLY HARD TO FEEL AMAZED LIKE I THOUGHT I SHOULD.

But I couldn't help reasoning that if the Sufferer were the Son of God, knowledge of that fact should certainly have made it easier for him to endure trials that to us in our finiteness and partial ignorance seem so distressing and painful. He knew all things, He knew that He had "come from God and went to God." Surely he could stand for a short time the physical discomforts and pain we know for long periods of time! What is so wonderful?

I remembered reading an experience of a man who was once one of the world's richest men— Henry Ford, the builder of both the once-famous "Model T" and the luxurious Lincoln automobiles. Traveling incognito with a party of friends on some back roads. Mr. Ford had whimsically chosen to drive one of his little Model T's. It broke down—an event many of his less wealthy customers also experienced—and he was obliged to seek repairs at a village garage. Although he was inconvenienced a short time, the story indicated that he thoroughly enjoyed the experience. I felt sure that one reason was his inner knowledge that he didn't have to depend on that balky Model T to get him home. Any moment he wished he could have telegraphed for a fleet of his Lincoln limousines to come and rescue him. With confidence others could not know. Mr. Ford might have enjoyed what the ordinary motorist of that day would have endured only with much anxiety.

Wasn't Christ in much the same situation? I reasoned. At any moment in His trials He told Peter He could pray to His Father and He would send Him more than twelve legions of angels. Matthew 26:53. A soldier in bulletproof armor should be expected to show more courage than one without it.

AND "SAVED BY FAITH" PERPLEXED ME.

But I couldn't help thinking that if the one who suffered was really the Son of God, knowing that should have made it easier for him to go through things that seem so painful and scary to us. He knew everything. He knew he had come from God and would return to God. Surely he could handle physical pain for a short time, the kind of pain we would find very hard to bear for a long time. So what was so amazing?

I remembered a story about Henry Ford, the man who made the famous Model T cars and the fancy Lincoln cars. One day, while traveling with friends on small country roads, he decided to drive one of his little Model T cars. It broke down—something that happened to many of his customers too—and he had to stop at a small garage to get it fixed. Even though it was a little trouble, the story said he really enjoyed the experience. I thought part of the reason was that he knew he didn't have to worry about it. At any time, he could have called for one of his fancy Lincoln cars to come and take him home safely.

I thought, wasn't Christ kind of like that? He told Peter that if he wanted, God could send more than twelve legions of angels to help him (Matthew 26:53). If someone has a strong suit of armor, they can be braver than someone who doesn't.

AND "SAVED BY FAITH" CONFUSED ME

I had heard it said that we are saved by faith. But I apparently I wouldn't get it. Was there something wrong with me, or had God given me the brush-off, leaving me to be lost for want of a proper appreciation of what his Son had done for me? Or should I force myself to say I felt something that I didn't feel? Would that do the trick? It was terribly difficult for me to confess a feeling I didn't have. I desperately wanted to be saved, but I also wanted to be honest.

Certain writers and speakers say that we human beings cannot comprehend the real meaning of the cross or appreciate what it meant to Jesus. They say we shall have to wait until eternity to learn. But these remarks, instead of bringing me comfort made me feel more disturbed. I had understood from the New Testament that the apostles, including Paul, had been profoundly moved in their human lifetime by something about the cross. Something phenomenal got hold of them. They were willing to suffer "the loss of all things," and instead of crying about it, were actually "content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and difficulties for Christ's sake." 2 Corinthians 12:10, TEV.

I knew no such willingness to suffer for Christ's sake, certainly not to the extent of taking **pleasure** in suffering for Him! The apostles had something I didn't have; and apparently I couldn't get it until I got to heaven. But the distressing point was that I probably wouldn't be able to get to heaven unless first of all I had the requisite experience! I was trapped in a hopeless circle.

Someone may want to interrupt me here and say: Too bad I couldn't have been there to help you out. You didn't need to feel any particular sense of appreciation for the cross of Christ. Just accept Him as your Saviour as you would sign up for an insurance policy. You don't sense any gratitude or emotion when you sign on the dotted line. And yet you are covered' the moment you sign up. That's all there is to being saved.

I had thought of that. I knew that many people look at it that way. But their complacency seemed to me a far cry from the apostles' burning devotion to Christ. Paul actually "gloried" in bearing a cross of sacrifice like Jesus bore:

I had heard people say that we are saved by faith. But I didn't understand it. I wondered if something was wrong with me. Maybe God had given up on me because I didn't feel thankful enough for what his Son had done. I also wondered if I should just pretend to feel something I didn't really feel. Would that work? But it was very hard for me to say I felt something when I didn't. I really wanted to be saved, but I also wanted to be honest.

Some writers and speakers say that people cannot really understand the cross or how Jesus felt until we get to heaven. They say we will understand it someday, but not now. Instead of making me feel better, this made me feel more upset. From the Bible, I thought the apostles, including Paul, were deeply moved by the cross while they were still alive on earth. Something very powerful changed them. They were willing to give up everything and even suffer for Christ. They didn't complain about it. They were strong and faithful even when life was very hard (2 Corinthians 12:10).

I didn't feel anything like that. I didn't want to suffer for Christ, and I certainly didn't feel happy about it. The apostles had something I didn't have. And it seemed like I couldn't get it until I went to heaven. But the problem was that I thought I couldn't get to heaven unless I already had that feeling. It felt like I was stuck and couldn't find a way out.

Someone might want to interrupt and say: "That's okay! You didn't need to feel anything special about Jesus' cross. Just accept Him as your Savior, like signing up for an insurance policy. You don't feel any excitement or gratitude when you sign, but you're still covered. That's all it takes to be saved."

I had thought about that. I knew many people see it that way. But to me, that calm attitude was very different from the apostles' strong love for Jesus. Paul actually proudly accepted the hard sacrifices he had to make, just like Jesus did:

"Three times I was whipped by the Romans; and once I was stoned [with rocks, not drugs!]. I have been in three shipwrecks, and once I spent twenty-four hours in the water. In my many travels I have been in danger from floods and from robbers, in danger from fellow Jews and from Gentiles; there have been dangers in the cities, dangers in the wilds, dangers on the high seas, and dangers from false friends. There has been work and toil; often I have gone without sleep; I have been hungry and thirsty; I have often been without enough food, shelter, or clothing. If I must boast, I will boast about things that show how weak I am." 2 Corinthians 11:25-30, TEV.

The "insurance policy" kind of faith had barely enough power to drag its adherents out to sit on cushioned pews in church once a week. Jesus said: "None of you can be my disciple unless he gives up everything he has." "Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple." Luke 14:33, 27, TEV. That deeply impressed me. Either one finds the power to serve Christ as those apostles did, or he isn't a real Christian.

Those misgivings I had were right, and the fact that I had them was probably evidence the Holy Spirit had not forsaken me. Being a sinner, I was no better than anybody else; but neither was I worse than others. I had the **potential** for a true heart appreciation of Christ's cross. ***What I lucked was an understanding of what was involved in the cross, what it meant to him.***

My parents and pastors had ignorantly taught me an error that obscured the love of Christ and hid from me the full extent of its beauty and power. This error obscured the cross as heavy smog obscures one's view of snow-capped mountains. The apostles in the New Testament had been seeing something I had never seen, and what they saw moved them to their astounding heart devotion to Christ. I was spiritually paralyzed because I couldn't see what they saw.

WHAT HIDES THE CROSS FROM VIEW.

The "insurance policy" kind of faith was very weak. It barely gave people the energy to go sit in a comfortable church once a week. But Jesus said:

"None of you can be my disciple unless you give up everything you have." "Whoever does not carry their own cross and follow me cannot be my disciple." (Luke 14:33, 27)

That made a strong impression on me. Either a person finds the power to serve Jesus like the apostles did, or they are not a real Christian.

The doubts I had were probably a good sign —the Holy Spirit hadn't left me. I was a sinner, no better than anyone else, but not worse either. I could still learn to truly appreciate Jesus' cross. What I didn't understand yet was what the cross really involved and what it meant to Him.

My parents and pastors had unknowingly taught me wrong ideas that hid the love of Christ from me. These wrong ideas were like heavy fog hiding the view of tall, snowy mountains. The apostles in the New Testament saw something amazing that I had never seen, and it made them love Jesus with all their hearts. I felt stuck spiritually because I couldn't see what they saw.

WHAT KEEPS US FROM SEEING THE CROSS CLEARLY

This error was the common idea of the natural immortality of the soul, the teaching that one cannot really die, that what we call death is merely an immediate release to another level of life. As a host of physical ills can result from a simple vitamin deficiency, so this basic error borrowed from ancient paganism but handed down through Christendom triggered a chain reaction of confusion in my understanding.

In the Garden of Eden the Creator had plainly told Adam and Eve that if they should sin, "in the day" of their transgression "you shall surely die." Genesis 2:17. He said exactly what He meant. It was the devil who flatly contradicted Him, telling them: "You will not surely die." Genesis 3:5.

In effect, the tempter was voicing the tenets of paganism and of much so-called Christianity when he said that there is no such thing as death itself. No man can utterly perish. The soul possesses a natural immortality.

This idea became not only the cornerstone of pagan religion, but from thence it infiltrated the doctrine of many Christian churches. The error may seem innocent enough at first thought; but consider what it does to our understanding of the cross of Christ:

- It effectively contradicts the Scriptural statements: "Christ died for the ungodly," and "Christ died for us." Romans 5:6, 8.
- In other words, the way Satan wants us to understand it, Christ didn't really die for us at all. He merely endured physical pain in which he was sustained throughout by the assurance that he had nothing to risk, nothing to lose, since he could not really die. If he had nothing to lose, he therefore had nothing to give of any value beyond the endurance of physical pain.

- As soon as he cried out: "It is finished," He went to heaven. (Some say He went to "hell" in order to preach to the "spirits in prison;" but I reasoned that if He did, He went as a visiting missionary and not as one suffering the expected torments of the lost. Either way one looks at it, He didn't really die at all. He merely entered into a larger existence.)

This mistake was the common idea that the soul cannot really die. People believed that death is not really the end, but just a step into another kind of life. Just like a small lack of vitamins can cause many health problems, this wrong idea—borrowed from old pagan religions and passed down in some Christian teachings—caused a lot of confusion in my understanding.

In the Garden of Eden, God clearly told Adam and Eve that if they sinned, "on the day" they sinned, "you will surely die" (Genesis 2:17). God meant exactly what He said. But the devil lied to them, saying, "You will not surely die" (Genesis 3:5).

The devil was repeating the same false ideas found in pagan religions and in some teachings of Christianity: that people never really die and that the soul lives forever on its own.

This idea became the main belief in many pagan religions, and later it spread into some Christian churches. At first, it may seem harmless. But think about what it does to our understanding of Jesus' cross: it makes it much harder to see why His death was so important.

- This idea goes against what the Bible says: "Christ died for the ungodly" and "Christ died for us" (Romans 5:6, 8).
- In other words, if we believe Satan's version, Jesus didn't really die for us. He only went through physical pain, knowing He couldn't really die. If He had nothing to lose, then He had nothing truly valuable to give except for the pain He endured.
- Some say that after Jesus cried out, "It is finished," He went to heaven. Others say He went to "hell" to preach to spirits in prison. Either way, He didn't really die in the way death usually is. He only moved into a different kind of life.

Where is the sacrifice? Gone! And that helpless vanity is precisely what Satan wanted me to feel regarding the cross of Christ.

In comparison with the sufferings of martyrs or soldiers who die for their country, or heroes who die for their friends, there was nothing very special about what Jesus did. In fact, His sacrifice lacked one quality of nobility inherent in the self-sacrifice of soldiers and heroes: through it all He held fast to His own security, whereas they sacrifice **their** security, Jesus didn't really give up anything, least of all Himself. And when John 3:16 says that "God so loved the world that He **gave** His only begotten Son," it really means that the Father only **lent** Him.

This error of the natural immortality of the soul is intended by its author to cast a suspicion of make-believe into the story of Calvary—just enough to paralyze the devotion of those who profess to follow Christ. If their appreciation of Jesus' cross is beclouded, their love will be stifled, and their devotion hobbled.

THE REAL MEASURE OF JESUS' SACRIFICE.

The sufferings of Jesus were incomparably greater than the endurance of physical pain, or the torture of any of the martyrs. There was no sham or make-believe about the burden He bore. Scripture says: "The Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all." Isaiah 53:6.

What is "iniquity"? "Your iniquities have separated you from your God, and your sins have hidden His face from you." Isaiah 59:2. Iniquity leaves the soul desperately bereft and alone, destroys all sense of security. The Lord did indeed lay upon Christ "the iniquity of us all." This means that He laid upon Him the same feelings of guilt, loneliness, insecurity, and despair that we know so well. It was this burden laid upon Him that separated Christ from His Father.

So where is the sacrifice? It's gone! And that false idea is exactly what Satan wanted me to feel about Jesus' cross—like it didn't really matter.

Compared to the suffering of martyrs, soldiers who die for their country, or heroes who die for their friends, Jesus' death might not seem very special. Some people think His sacrifice didn't have the same kind of bravery, because He kept His own safety while others gave up theirs. They say He didn't really give up anything, not even Himself. And when John 3:16 says, "God so loved the world that He gave His only Son," some say it really means God just "lent" Him.

This wrong idea that the soul cannot really die is meant to make people doubt Jesus' death on the cross. It can make people feel like the story of Calvary isn't real, stopping them from truly loving Jesus and keeping their devotion weak.

THE TRUE MEANING OF JESUS' SACRIFICE

Jesus' suffering was much greater than just pain in his body, or even what any of the martyrs went through. His burden was real—he truly carried it. The Bible says, "The Lord has put the sins of everyone on him." (Isaiah 53:6)

What is "iniquity"? The Bible says, "Your sins have separated you from God, and your wrongdoings have hidden his face from you." (Isaiah 59:2) Iniquity means doing wrong in a way that makes your heart feel alone, guilty, and scared.

Jesus really took on this iniquity for all of us. He felt the guilt, loneliness, fear, and despair that we sometimes feel. That is what separated him from God for a little while.

Before I learned the truth, it had seemed that Christ could not possibly have really felt forsaken. The Bible says He cried out: "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" Was this a dramatic actor following a teleprompter, wailing his lines on the stage, or was this an honest cry from a heart wrung with bitter anguish?

Christ did not bear this burden as a man might carry a heavy load on his shoulders. He bore the burden deep within His own soul. Peter says, "Himself bore our sins **in His own body** on the tree." 1 Peter 2:24. It was therefore within His own nervous system, in His mind and soul, in His most inner consciousness that Jesus bore the killing load. Paul is even more explicit: "He [the Father] made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us." 2 Corinthians 5:21.

CHRIST WAS NOT A SINNER, FOR HE WAS SINLESS.

But he was made "a curse for us (for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree')." Galatians 3:13. The "sin" and the "curse" are here identical. Paul's statements indicate that Christ's identity with sin as He bore His cross was something terrifyingly real. "The wages of sin is death." Romans 6:23. If Christ was "made to be sin," "made a curse for us," it is clear that he was likewise made to suffer the wages of sin.

Christ is very close to us, "for both He [the sinless Christ] who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified [sinners] are all of one, for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren." Hebrews 2:11. But how did He bear our death?

WHAT IS DEATH, THOSE "WAGES OF SIN" WHICH CHRIST SUFFERED?

Before I understood this, I thought Jesus couldn't have really felt so alone. The Bible says he cried out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" This wasn't acting or pretending—he was really hurting, deep in his heart.

Jesus didn't just carry this pain on the outside, like a heavy load. He carried it deep inside his mind and heart. Peter says, "He himself carried our sins in his own body on the cross." (1 Peter 2:24) Paul adds, "God made the one who never sinned to take on our sin for us." (2 Corinthians 5:21)

JESUS WAS NOT A SINNER; HE NEVER DID ANYTHING WRONG.

But Jesus became "a curse for us, because the Bible says, 'Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.'" (Galatians 3:13) The "sin" and the "curse" are connected here. Paul shows that when Jesus carried the cross, he really took on our sins—it was a very real and frightening thing. The Bible says, "The wages of sin is death." (Romans 6:23) Since Jesus was "made to be sin" and "made a curse for us," he also had to suffer the consequences of sin.

Jesus is very close to us, because "the one who makes people holy and those who are being made holy are all of one family. That is why he is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters." (Hebrews 2:11) But how did Jesus take on our death?

WHAT IS DEATH—THE "WAGES OF SIN"—THAT JESUS HAD TO SUFFER?

There are two kinds of death in Scripture: (a) one called sleep (see John 11:11, 13), which is the "death" we commonly speak of; and (b) the other is the real thing, the second death. (see Revelation 2:11; 20:6; 21:8). The latter is eternal separation from God—good-bye to light, joy, and life, forever.

It was this "second death" that Jesus experienced. "He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone." Hebrews 2:9. Since He tasted it for everyone, this sleep that we call death cannot be what He "tasted," because everyone tastes that kind of death for himself. Whatever it was that Jesus tasted, it was that we might not have to taste it ourselves.

Christ in fact died the death that the Creator promised Adam and Eve that they should die if they sinned, the death that sin will bring to the lost at last. Jesus felt it as much as any human being can feel it, because "in all things He had to be made like His brethren.... He Himself has suffered, being tempted." Verses 17, 18. Therefore the death that Jesus died on the cross was the full bitter cup of despair and ruin that will be the eventual "wages of sin."

This had to involve the hiding of his Father's face. There is no hope, no light, in the second death, neither is there expectation of a resurrection to brighten its despair. No candle light even at the end of the tunnel. If Jesus "died for our sins" or "died for us" (1 Corinthians 15:3; Romans 5:8), then He experienced in His final suffering a darkness that veiled from His sight the expectation of a resurrection. If He had been buoyed up by the hope of resurrection, to that extent He would have come short of "tasting death for everyone" or truly **giving** himself "for our sins." At best He could only have **lent** Himself, which would not be **giving** Himself.

The Bible talks about two kinds of death:

1. **Sleep** – This is the kind of death we usually think about, like when someone dies and their body stops working. (See John 11:11, 13)

2. **The second death** – This is the real, eternal death. It means being separated from God forever, losing all light, joy, and life. (See Revelation 2:11; 20:6; 21:8)

Jesus experienced this "second death." The Bible says, "He, by God's grace, tasted death for everyone." (Hebrews 2:9) It couldn't have been the regular kind of death, because everyone experiences that on their own. Jesus took the second, eternal death so that we wouldn't have to.

Jesus died the death that God told Adam and Eve would come if they sinned—the death that sin causes for everyone who is lost. He felt it as deeply as any human could, because "in everything he had to be made like his brothers and sisters... He himself suffered and was tempted." (Hebrews 2:17-18) So the death Jesus died on the cross was the full, bitter suffering and despair that sin brings.

Jesus had to go through a time when he felt God's face was hidden from him. The second death has no hope, no light, and no promise of coming back to life. There isn't even a little bit of light at the end of the tunnel.

If Jesus "died for our sins" (1 Corinthians 15:3; Romans 5:8), then during his final suffering he had to face this complete darkness, without thinking about being raised from the dead. If he had hoped for resurrection while suffering, he wouldn't have fully "tasted death for everyone" or given himself completely for our sins.

No wonder Christ's human nature recoiled against that terrifying experience! He flung himself on the ground in Gethsemane: "My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death," He groaned. "He went a little farther and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, 'O my Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless not as I will, but as You will.' Matthew 26:38, 39.

The cup which He drank was something no other human being before or since has ever fully tasted. In fact, since time began, He is the one and only person ever to have *truly* died. The full terror of hopelessness in the second death is what he "tasted" in the full consciousness of its for- eternity killing reality. Neither the nails driven through His hands and feet nor the floggings killed Him. He scarcely felt the physical pain on the cross, so terrible was the intense soul suffering that evoked a perspiration of blood in Gethsemane and at last literally broke His heart. "Reproach has broken My heart, and I am full of heaviness." Psalm 69:20.

Throughout His life and even through some hours of His final passion, Jesus knew a bright confidence in His resurrection. He lived as in the very sight of His Father's smiling face. In that divine sunshine no shadows could terrify Him. Even when the repentant thief pleaded, "Remember me," Jesus still retained His joyful confidence, for He promised, Assuredly I say to you today, you will be with Me in Paradise. Luke 23:43. (There is no comma in the original.)

But not yet had Christ drained the cup to its bitter dregs. There was to come a change.

THE THREAT OF ETERNAL FAILURE IN HIS MISSION.

To press that bitter cup deeply to the Savior's lips, the wicked tempter used as his agency the people Christ had come to save.

It's no wonder that Jesus' human nature struggled with this frightening experience! In Gethsemane, he threw himself on the ground and said, "My soul is very sad, even to the point of death." He went a little farther, fell on his face, and prayed, "Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me. But not my will, only your will." (Matthew 26:38-39)

The suffering he drank from that cup was something no other human has ever fully faced. Since the beginning of time, Jesus is the only person who truly died this way. He felt the full terror of hopelessness in the second death. It wasn't the nails or the beatings that killed him; the pain of his soul was so intense that it caused him to sweat blood in Gethsemane and finally broke his heart. As the Bible says, "Reproach has broken my heart, and I am full of sadness." (Psalm 69:20)

All through his life, and even during some of the hardest hours on the cross, Jesus had a strong confidence that he would rise again. He lived as if he could see his Father's happy face. In that light, nothing could scare him. Even when the thief on the cross asked, "Remember me," Jesus stayed full of hope and said, "I promise you will be with me in Paradise today." (Luke 23:43). (There is no comma in the original)

But Jesus had not yet finished suffering. There was still more pain to come.

THE DANGER OF FAILING HIS MISSION

The evil tempter tried to make Jesus suffer even more. He used the very people Jesus came to save to hurt him.

While on the cross, Jesus could not help hearing the people say to each other, "**If** He is the King of Israel, let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe Him. He trusted in God; let Him deliver Him now if He will have Him: for He said, 'I am the Son of God.'" Some challenged Him directly. "**If** You are the Son of God, come down from the cross." Matthew 27:42, 43, 40.

We have no right to think that Jesus was unaffected by these taunts. That tempting **if** was terrible to bear in His hour of extreme humiliation. "Let God deliver Him now, **if** He will have Him!" His hands nailed to the bars, Jesus had no way to shut His ears to their taunts and insinuations. All He could do was pray. But it seemed that no one in heaven would listen to Him. "You do not hear," He complained. Psalm 22:2.

For hours he wrestled with the awful burden. Some time after those malicious **ifs** "from the sixth hour until the ninth hour there was darkness over all the land" (three o'clock in the afternoon), when Jesus "cried out with a loud voice" those words of forsaken loneliness that indicated He now felt the terror of entire separation from His Father. Matthew 27:45, 46. Like a barbed arrow tipped with poison, that last temptation of despair caused Him His most bitter anguish.

Darkness mercifully veiled his agony when He was unable to use His crucified hands to hide His tear-stained face from the gaze of the mocking crowds. Only His broken, sobbing voice could be heard in the pitch blackness that enveloped Calvary. How cruel humans can be! And how merciful was the Father to wrap His tortured Son in folds of darkness while He suffered so! No angel even was allowed to see the sight of His anguished human face as He uttered those despairing words, nor was Christ permitted to feel the kiss of love and loyalty the Father longed to press upon Him in the gloom. The Father was there with Him, suffering with Him, for "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself." 2 Corinthians 5:19. But Christ must be left to feel forsaken, to "tread the winepress alone," fearfully so.

SOMETHING IN HIM HELD ON; SOMETHING HE WILL SHARE WITH US.

While Jesus was on the cross, the people he came to save said mean things about him. They said, "If you are the King of Israel, come down from the cross, and we will believe you. If God really loves you, let him save you now, because you said you are God's Son." Some even said to him directly, "If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross!"

Jesus could not ignore these words. They were very hard to hear while he was already suffering so much. His hands were nailed to the cross, so he could not stop listening. All he could do was pray, but it felt like no one was listening. "You do not hear," he said, feeling very alone.

For hours, Jesus struggled with the terrible burden he was carrying. Around three o'clock in the afternoon, "darkness covered the whole land," and Jesus cried out loudly, feeling completely alone and separated from God. This feeling of being abandoned caused him the deepest sadness.

The darkness hid his suffering from the people watching. He could not use his hands to cover his tear-stained face, so only his voice could show his pain. People can be very cruel, but God kindly covered Jesus in darkness while he suffered so much.

Not even angels were allowed to see how much Jesus hurt, and Jesus could not feel God's comforting love in that moment. Still, God was with him, suffering with him in a way we can't fully understand, because "God was in Christ, bringing the world back to himself." But Jesus had to face this pain feeling completely alone, carrying it all by himself.

SOMETHING INSIDE JESUS KEPT HIM GOING, AND HE WANTS TO SHARE THAT WITH US.

But although hope died, love endured. There is a strange psalm that describes the horrible experience that Christ went through. It opens a window for us that we might peer into Christ's heart as He hangs on the cross in the long hours of darkness.

He hears the taunts of the people and ponders the mysterious silence of His Father. Psalm 22 tells how He recalls that His ancestors got answers when they prayed. Why couldn't He? "**They** trusted, and You delivered **them**. **They** cried to You, and were delivered: **they** trusted in You, and were not ashamed. But **I** am a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised of the people." "**I** cry in the daytime, but You do not hear." Verses 4-6, 2.

That's a terrible way for anyone to feel! When you feel that **no one** cares, not even God, despair is distilled into its final death-dealing poison. The truth is that no other human soul has ever had to drink that same cup of pure despair mingled with the guilt of the whole world's sin laid upon His consciousness. Christ is "the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world" (John 1:9) and sustains everyone in his/her darkest hours with a clear-shining ray of hope. The Holy Spirit presses upon our souls the assurance, "**Somebody cares!**" Even if you've spent your life in wrong- doing. You can see some hope in those last moments.

But Jesus must see no such hope, feel no such assurance. "I have trodden the winepress alone," He says. Isaiah 63:3. He drinks the cup to its bitterest dregs.

Nevertheless, He must find some way to bridge the dark gulf between His forsaken soul and the Father. He must overcome this conviction of separation. He must achieve an atonement, a reconciliation with Him. If the Father forsakes Him, He will not forsake His Father! If He can see no bridge over the dark chasm of ultimate human and divine despair, as the Son of God, the Crown Prince of glory, He will build one!

Even when all hope seemed gone, his love stayed strong. There is a special psalm that talks about the terrible things Jesus went through. It helps us look into Jesus' heart as he hangs on the cross during those long, dark hours.

Jesus hears people making fun of him and wonders why God seems so quiet. Psalm 22 tells how he remembers that his ancestors got answers when they prayed. He wonders, "Why can't I?" He remembers: "They trusted you, and you helped them. But I feel so small and alone. People make fun of me, and everyone looks down on me. I cry, but it feels like you don't hear me."

That is a really awful feeling! Feeling like no one cares, not even God, is one of the saddest feelings anyone can have. Nobody else has ever felt the same way Jesus does—carrying the sadness of the whole world's mistakes on his shoulders. Jesus is the true Light of the world, and normally he helps people see hope even in their darkest times. The Holy Spirit reminds us, "Someone cares about you!" even when we've done wrong.

But Jesus cannot feel that hope. He is completely alone. "I have walked this path alone," he says. He drinks the bitter cup of suffering all the way to the bottom.

Still, Jesus has to find a way to reach God even in the darkness. He has to overcome the feeling of being abandoned. He has to make things right between humans and God. If it seems like God has left him, Jesus will not leave God! Even when it looks impossible, as the Son of God, he will build a way to fix the broken connection between people and God.

The inspired psalm tells what happened. Christ's mind goes back to His human infancy in Bethlehem. Though **now** "You do not hear," yet "You are He who took Me out of the womb: You made Me trust when I was on My mother's breasts. I was cast upon You from birth, from My mother's womb." Tortured in spirit, He relies on the events in His life that prove the Father's care for Him. If God heard the prayers of "our fathers" and if He protected Me, the infant Jesus in those born-in-a- stable days in Bethlehem, surely he will not turn away now!

Christ understands His mercy and great love; surely He will not fail Me now! "By faith" the anguished Son of God will bridge the chasm—as a human being **He will believe His Fathers love in the darkness and in the torment of hell.**

As the final moment of endurance comes, He feels like one being tossed on the horns of savage beasts: "Save me from the lion's mouth and from the horns of the wild oxen [wild African buffalo]!" Psalm 22:21. In that last desperate moment His faith breaks through the impenetrable darkness, and He triumphs. Like Jacob wrestling with the Angel in the darkness, Christ grasps the Father who is not permitted to embrace Him, and He clings to Him by faith: "**You have heard Me!**" The Father may forsake Him, but He will not forsake the Father! The new Jacob cries out, "I will not let You go unless you bless Me!" Christ's faith endures, even through the horrors of the "second death."

"HEREIN IS LOVE."

When once the error had been cleared away, I began to see the cross as it is. I began "to understand how broad and long, how high and deep, is Christ's love.... although it can never be fully known." Ephesians 3:18, 19, TEV. The picture that had been so foggy, now was in sharper focus. At last I was in the kindergarten.

This psalm tells what happened to Jesus. It shows that Jesus remembers when he was a baby in Bethlehem. Even though it feels like God isn't listening now, Jesus remembers: God cared for him when he was born and trusted God as a baby. He knew God watched over him from the very beginning.

Even when Jesus feels very sad and in pain, he remembers all the ways God helped him in his life. If God helped the people before him, and if God took care of him as a baby, he will not stop caring for him now.

Jesus knows how kind and loving God is. He believes God will help him. By faith, Jesus trusts God even in the darkest and hardest times.

At the hardest moment, Jesus feels like he's in danger from wild animals: "Save me from the lion's mouth and the horns of the wild oxen!" But even then, his faith is strong. Like Jacob wrestling with the Angel in the Bible, Jesus holds onto God with faith. He believes God hears him.

Even if it feels like God has left him, Jesus will not give up on God. He says, "I will not let you go unless you bless me!" Jesus' faith never fails, even through the hardest trials and the "second death."

"HERE IS LOVE"

Once I started to see past my mistakes, I began to understand the cross better. I started to see how big and amazing Christ's love is—how wide, long, high, and deep it goes—even though we can never fully understand it (Ephesians 3:18–19). What used to be fuzzy in my mind now became clearer. It felt like I was just starting to learn the basics, like being in kindergarten.

Here at last I began to see the love that moved the apostles so wonderfully. No longer did their self-sacrificing devotion appear so phenomenal or impossible. The love they knew appears more and more to be the normal. Proper response of any honest human heart to the sacrifice Christ made. Yes, "in the cross of Christ I glory."

But still a gulf in understanding remains that tends to separate us from that full fellowship with Christ that the apostles knew. Let us now search for the truth that by faith spans that chasm.

Now I could see the love that inspired the apostles. Their selfless devotion didn't seem so impossible anymore. The love they felt started to seem like the natural way any honest heart should respond to what Jesus did. Yes, I could say, "I glory in the cross of Christ."

But I still didn't fully understand everything, and that made it hard to have the same closeness with Jesus that the apostles had. Now we need to look for the truth that faith can show us, so it can help us cross that gap.

Chapter 10

HOW THE CROSS CAST OUT OUR HUMAN FEAR

Creatures that God has made don't find it hard to be themselves. We marvel at the strength of the lion, the grace of the gazelle, the flight of the eagle, but do not praise them for their respective facts because they are just doing what they were made to do.

The eagle knows within himself no conflict between the desire to be an earthbound creature and the urge to be an eagle. He is satisfied to be what he was made to be. We humans likewise find it comparatively easy to do what we were gifted to do, and impossible to do what we feel we were not gifted to do.

One often wonders if it wasn't easy for Jesus to bear His cross. Wasn't he the Son of God? As such wasn't it natural and easy for Him to do His Father's will?

If so, His sacrifice has little meaning for us, because we most definitely do not find it easy to do what is right, and certainly not to bear a cross. As well might an eagle tell an earth-bound animal: "Follow me," as for Christ to tell me to take up My cross and follow Him!

Any poor animal would be frustrated trying to soar over the clouds, whereas the eagle would find it the easiest thing he has ever done. Yes, Christ is the Son of God who "delights" to do His Father's will. We are often tempted to think it seems a piece of effrontery for Him to tell us, "Take My yoke upon you.... For My yoke is easy and My burden is light." Matthew 11:29, 30. We are as much different from Him, we suppose, as a horse is different from an eagle. What is easy to the eagle is impossible to a different creature.

This problem troubled me for years until I discovered a truth in the Gospels that seemed like the opening or another window into the depths of the heart of Christ.

DID CHRIST HAVE AN INWARD STRUGGLE?

Animals that God made don't have trouble being themselves. We are amazed by the strength of a lion, the speed of a gazelle, or the flight of an eagle, but we don't really praise them for it, because they are just doing what they were made to do.

The eagle never worries about wanting to be something it's not. It is happy being an eagle. People are a little like that, too. It's easy for us to do things we are good at, and hard to do things we aren't good at.

Some people wonder if it was easy for Jesus to carry his cross. Wasn't he God's Son? Wouldn't it have been natural for him to do his Father's will?

If it had been easy for him, then his sacrifice wouldn't mean as much to us. We don't find it easy to do what is right, and we definitely don't find it easy to carry a cross like Jesus told us to. It would be like an eagle telling a land animal, "Follow me!"

—the land animal would struggle, but flying is easy for the eagle.

Yes, Jesus is God's Son, and he loved doing what God wanted. But for us, it is often very hard, and it seems almost unfair when he says to us:

Jesus said, "Take my yoke and follow me. My yoke is easy, and my load is light." (Matthew 11:29, 30)

Sometimes we think we are very different from Jesus. We may feel as different from Him as a horse is from an eagle. What is easy for an eagle feels impossible for another animal.

This idea confused me for many years. Then I found an important truth in the Gospels. It felt like opening a new window and seeing deeper into Jesus' heart.

DID JESUS HAVE STRUGGLES INSIDE HIS HEART?

If He found it easy to bear His cross and follow His Father's will, He must have had only one will, that is, the will of His Father, as an eagle has only one will, that is, the will to be what he was created to be. The eagle knows no conflict wishing to be something else than a flying bird.

A certain prophecy had led me to think Jesus had only one will. Speaking prophetically of Christ, the psalm records His own words: "Then I said, 'Behold, I come; in the scroll of the book it is written of Me. I **delight** to do Your will, O My God, and Your law is within My heart.'" Psalm 40:7, 8. So important is this matter of Jesus' "will" that the writer of the book of Hebrews adds that it is "by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all." Hebrews 10:10. The "will of Jesus" is page one news in Bible teaching.

Now it began to look to me as though Jesus was kind of automaton, a human machine that "delighted" in doing what everybody else in the world, or at least I and most people I knew, found it impossible to do. There was my "Eagle," flying in the clouds and enjoying it, while I stumbled around below saying to myself, "He says: Follow Me; but I can't!"

BUT I HAD NOT READ FAR ENOUGH.

When Jesus came, Scripture says that the Father sent Him "in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: "He condemned sin in the flesh." Romans 8:3. Evidently the "Eagle" became what I am, an earthbound creature, gave up his wings! If Christ came "in the likeness of sinful flesh," that is, **my** flesh, He must have had as much of a conflict in that flesh as I do in mine; and it would have been no more easy for Him to do His Father's will than it is for me. It was in **my** human flesh that He "condemned sin," not in sinless flesh. It would be pretty silly for an eagle to condemn a cow for not being able to fly. The animal could well retort: "What do **you** know about my real condition?"

If Jesus found it easy to carry His cross and do what His Father wanted, then it might seem like He had only one will—the same will as His Father. It would be like an eagle. An eagle only wants to be what it was made to be. It does not wish to be something else. An eagle does not feel confused about flying.

A prophecy in the Bible once made me think Jesus had only one will. In a psalm that speaks about Jesus, He says, "Here I am. I have come to do what is written about me. I am happy to do what You want, my God, and Your law is in my heart."

This idea is very important in the Bible. The book of Hebrews says that because of Jesus' will, we are made holy through His sacrifice. So the "will of Jesus" is very important in Bible teaching.

After thinking about this, it almost seemed to me like Jesus was a kind of machine—someone who easily enjoyed doing what most people, including me, found very hard to do. It felt like Jesus was the "eagle," flying high and loving it, while I stayed on the ground saying, "He says, 'Follow Me,' but I can't."

BUT I HAD NOT READ FAR ENOUGH.

The Bible says that when Jesus came, God the Father sent Him to be like us. He came in a human body, the same kind of body we have. In that body, He showed that sin was wrong.

This means the "eagle" became like me—someone who lives on the ground. It is like the eagle gave up his wings. If Jesus had a body like mine, then He must have had struggles like mine too. Doing God's will would not have been easy for Him either.

Jesus did not fight sin in a perfect body. He fought sin in a human body. It would be silly for an eagle to blame a cow for not flying. The cow could say, "You don't know what it's like to be me."

I found that Jesus acknowledged openly that He had as much of a conflict in His soul as I have in mine. True, He was infinitely different than I am because He never gave in to a selfish will whereas I have. But as Son of man, He faced the problem of two wills; and it was not without a terrible struggle that He surrendered His own will to follow His Father's will.

Although the psalm said of him, "I delight to do My Father's will," note what it cost him: "My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even to death.... O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will." Matthew 26:38, 39. Here a frightful conflict.

Jesus had a will of His own that was naturally opposed to bearing the cross, just as I have a will of my own that is likewise opposed. He said openly: "**Not** as I will." What He did is as clear as sunlight. He denied His own will. Further, it is plain that it was impossible for Him to follow His Father's will unless He first denied His own will, because the two wills were in direct conflict. **They formed a cross.**

I learned that Jesus said clearly that He had struggles inside His heart, just like I do. He was very different from me because He never chose selfishness, but He still felt the struggle. As a human being, Jesus had two choices, or two wills. It was very hard for Him to give up His own will and follow His Father's will.

The Bible says Jesus loved to do His Father's will, but it cost Him a lot. Jesus said, "My heart is very sad, almost to death." He also prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, take this suffering away from me. But not what I want—what You want."

This shows how great the struggle was.

Jesus had His own will, and it did not want to suffer on the cross. In the same way, I have my own will that does not want hard things either. Jesus said clearly, "Not what I want."

What Jesus did is easy to understand. He said no to what He wanted. He chose to give up His own will. He could not follow His Father's will unless He first let go of His own will, because the two wants were opposite. Together, they made a cross.

Awesome thought!

TALK ABOUT CONFLICT!

I began to feel ashamed of myself for ever imagining that Jesus had none.

But then, I thought, conflict means different things to different people. Some love it because they find it easy. This denying His own will that Jesus did—perhaps it was easy for Him. I found it hard to deny my own will, but perhaps I was mistakenly projecting onto Jesus my own experience.

Then I remembered what Luke says about Jesus' struggle: "And being in **agony**, He prayed more earnestly. Then His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground." Luke 22:44. I then felt even more ashamed of myself for imagining that the conflict was easy for Him!

That is an amazing thought.

THAT WAS A BIG STRUGGLE!

I began to feel sorry for ever thinking that Jesus had no struggle.

Then I thought more about it. Struggles can feel different to different people. Some people like hard things because they seem easy to them. Maybe giving up His own will was easy for Jesus. It was hard for me, but maybe I was wrong to think Jesus felt the same way I did.

But then I remembered what Luke wrote about Jesus. He said that Jesus was in deep pain and prayed even harder. He was so upset that His sweat fell to the ground like heavy drops.

When I remembered this, I felt even more sorry for thinking that the struggle was easy for Him.

NOT ONLY IN GETHSEMANE DO WE FIND RECORD OF HIS STRUGGLE

It had continued all through His life. "I can of Myself do nothing: ... I do not seek My own will **but** the will of the Father who sent Me." John 5:30. "I have come down from heaven, **not** to do My own will, **but** the will of Him who sent Me." John 6:38. In other words, He came down from heaven to fight our battle in our place, with our flesh and nature, to endure the conflict we must endure, and to surrender His will where we have sinfully, selfishly, followed our will.

His "follow Me" therefore makes sense because He "condemned sin" (that is, self-will) in **our** flesh. Never did it get the upper hand for a moment; but the struggle was terrible, far more severe than our own. And in so doing He made a profound difference in human living on this planet.

I was completely wrong when I thought that Christ was a kind of automaton. He was a free man, left to choose for Himself which way He would choose to go. In fact, love cannot exist without freedom. A doll may have a tape recorder in it which says: "I love you," but no one cares what it says.

But still another problem arose. Wasn't Christ a kind of spiritual "genius"? His love was wonderful—no question. And His voluntary surrender of Himself throughout life and at the cross is amazing. But still the question persisted: "Isn't it about as impossible for me to follow Christ's way as it is to follow the mathematical genius of an Einstein?" I never was very good at mathematics in school. If God told me that in order for me to get to heaven, I must also invent the mathematics for an atom bomb as Einstein did, I'd throw up my hands in despair, although I might wish very much I could do it.

I can marvel at what Einstein did, and I can also marvel at what Christ did. But there my following seems to end.

BUT I DISCOVERED ONE IMPORTANT DIFFERENCE.

WE SEE HIS STRUGGLE NOT ONLY IN THE GARDEN OF GETHSEMANE.

Jesus' struggle did not happen only once. It lasted all through His life. Jesus said, "I can do nothing by myself. I do not try to do what I want, but what the Father wants." He also said, "I came from heaven not to do what I want, but to do what God wants."

This means Jesus came to fight our battle for us. He lived with the same kind of human body and nature that we have. He felt the same struggle we feel. But where we often choose our own selfish way, Jesus chose to give up His will and follow God's will.

Because of this, Jesus' words "Follow Me" make sense. He showed that selfishness could be defeated in a human life. It never won against Him, not even for a moment. The struggle was very hard—harder than ours—but He stayed faithful. Because of this, He changed what human life could be like.

I was wrong to think Jesus was like a machine. He was a free person. He had to choose which way to go. Love cannot exist without freedom. A toy doll might say, "I love you," but that does not really mean anything.

But then another question came to my mind. Was Jesus like a spiritual genius? His love was amazing, and His choice to give Himself was wonderful. But I wondered, "Is it just as impossible for me to live like Jesus as it would be for me to be as smart as a great scientist?"

I was never very good at math in school. If God told me I had to invent something very hard, like a famous scientist did, just to get to heaven, I would feel hopeless—even if I wanted to do it.

I can admire what a great scientist did, and I can admire what Jesus did too. But I wondered if that was as far as I could go.

BUT I DISCOVERED ONE IMPORTANT DIFFERENCE.

Einstein's genius for math was not like Christ's genius for love. Einstein never offered to teach me anything, never made any promise that if I could follow him: "Look to me, and you'll be inventing all kinds of nuclear marvels." (This illustration of the atom bomb is something completely backward to what I want to say. If you can imagine something the exact opposite, something fully as powerful but fraught with corresponding good for the world, you'll have what I want. Think of a dynamic love that turns our modern world upside down and reverses all the human selfishness that plagues us—that's it.)

But Christ did promise me that I could receive in my heart the same love He had! He would teach me His "genius" for it so that I could become, not a little Einstein working scientific wizardry, but something infinitely more wonderful—a "representative" of Christ serving in His loving ministry to my fellowmen.

Not that Christ ever promised me that I could really **duplicate** Him, but the world would at least imagine I did. I could be close to Him in unselfish service. That is what they thought of the disciples at Antioch when they called them (for the first time) "Christians" (which meant—like Christ, close to Him).

AND THEN I FOUND THE SCRIPTURE THAT BRIDGED THE LAST GAP.

Philippians 2:5-8 (RSV) spoke of the steps of sacrifice Christ took in leaving His exalted place in heaven, seven of them:

- (1) Counting His equality with God nothing to be "grasped."
- (2) "Emptying Himself."
- (3) Taking upon Him the "form of a servant" (slave, in the Greek).
- (4) Stepping lower than angels (who are all servants) in that He was made "in the likeness of men."

Einstein was very smart in math, but that was different from how Jesus was wonderful in love. Einstein never promised to teach me how to be as smart as him. He never said, "Follow me, and you'll make amazing inventions."

But Jesus did promise that I could have His love in my heart! He would teach me how to love like Him. Then I could do something even more amazing than any invention—I could be like Him, helping other people with His love.

Jesus didn't say I could be exactly like Him, but people could see His love in me. That is why the followers of Jesus in Antioch were called "Christians." It meant they were close to Jesus, showing His love to others.

THEN I FOUND THE BIBLE VERSE THAT HELPED ME UNDERSTAND EVERYTHING.

Philippians 2:5-8 talks about the steps Jesus took to give up His high place in heaven. There are seven steps:

1. Even though He was equal with God, He did not hold on to that.
2. He "emptied Himself."
3. He became like a servant (a slave).
4. He chose to be lower than the angels by becoming a human.

(5) Choosing to be born not as a king in a royal palace or as a child of wealth, but "being found in appearance as a man, ... humbled Himself" (NKJV), and accepted the rude, toilsome life of a peasant, working with his hands for a living.

(6) Becoming at the end "obedient unto death."

That last step made me pause. As I thought about it, I began to realize that no suicide is "obedient unto death." What he/she wants is sleep and unconsciousness, not the terror of the second death. ***But Christ was obedient unto the curse of being hanged on the tree.***

Galatians 3:13. It was "tasting" eternal condemnation, drinking, in an infinite sense, the poison of that soul-destroying "curse," salivating it, absorbing it, for "everyone." Infinite bitterness! As our God-man, He could endure human pain and agony to an infinite degree, a degree that no human has ever been able to "taste."

But then what bridged the gap for me was the command which preceded this recital of Christ's sacrifice: "**Let** this [same] mind be in you." Philippians 2:5. We can never repeat His sacrifice, but we can learn to appreciate it.

In other words, if I would just **let** the Holy Spirit write that mind of Christ in me, His will would become my will just as His Father's will became His will for Him. Thereafter, to put it in simple words, what Jesus was to His neighbors I would be to mine. And moreover, I would "delight" in it. No more moaning about what great sacrifices I was making.

But there was that last step:

(7) As we have seen, that "death of the cross" involved for Jesus the surrender of His eternal security.

It is encouraging that such self-emptying love is a possibility for sinful man through Christ. Christ can dwell in human hearts by faith, and we can learn to serve Him from love and not from selfish motives. But has anyone ever done so?

5. He was not born as a king or a rich child. He was born like a normal person, living a hard life and working with His hands.

6. In the end, He was "obedient even to death."

That last step made me stop and think. I realized that no one who takes their own life is truly "obedient unto death." They are just trying to escape pain, not face what Jesus faced.

Jesus was obedient even to being put on the cross. He accepted the punishment for all people's sins. He felt the full weight of that suffering—more than any human could ever feel—because He was both God and man.

Then I understood something that helped me. Right before talking about Jesus' sacrifice, the Bible says: "Let this same mind be in you" (Philippians 2:5). We can never do exactly what Jesus did, but we can try to have the same heart and attitude.

If I let the Holy Spirit put Jesus' mind in me, His will could become my will, just like His Father's will became His will. Then I could love and serve people around me the way Jesus did. And I would even enjoy it—no more complaining about what I had to do.

But that last step of Jesus' death was still very hard. It meant giving up His eternal safety and trusting God completely, even while dying on the cross.

It is encouraging to know that this kind of self-giving love is possible for people, even though we make mistakes, because of Jesus. Jesus can live in our hearts when we trust Him, and we can learn to serve Him out of love, not just for ourselves.

But has anyone ever really done this?

THERE WERE TWO PEOPLE WHO KNEW SOMETHING OF THAT LOVE.

• One was Moses. Israel had "committed a great sin" in that they had made and worshipped a golden calf. The Lord proposed to Moses that he step aside. "Let Me alone," He said, "that I may destroy them and blot out their name from under heaven; and I will make of you a nation mightier and greater than they." Deuteronomy 9:14. To take the place of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as the progenitor of the "chosen people"! What a great honor! This proposal would guarantee Moses' salvation and his everlasting honor.

Naturally it was a severe temptation to him. So far as Israel was concerned, he could reason that he had no obligation toward them, for they had sinned and deserved to perish. But Moses did something totally contrary to our natural human nature.

He proposed that someone else's name be blotted out from under heaven—His own, if Israel could not be forgiven: "If You will forgive their sin—but if not, I pray, blot me out of Your book which You have written." Exodus 32:32. Moses' love was stronger than his desire for personal security in heaven, or for eternal life and honor. Can you imagine?

• Another man who knew that same self-emptying love was Paul: "I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen [relatives] according to the flesh, who are Israelites." Romans 9:3, 4.

So long as our predominant motive for following Christ is our own desire for personal security, we will fail of receiving the "mind of Christ" and thus come short of bearing the cross. Christ was no "opportunist"; neither was Moses or Paul. Neither are His people who "follow the Lamb wherever He goes."

THE "OLD MAN" HAS ONE LAST STAND HE TAKES.

THERE WERE TWO PEOPLE WHO KNEW A LITTLE BIT ABOUT THAT KIND OF LOVE.

One example is Moses. The people of Israel had done something very wrong—they made and worshiped a golden calf. God told Moses to step aside and let Him punish them. God said, "Leave them! I will destroy them and erase their name. But I will make you into a people greater than they are" (Deuteronomy 9:14).

This was a huge honor! If Moses agreed, he would be safe and remembered forever as a great leader.

Naturally, this was a big temptation for him. He could have said, "Why should I help them? They sinned and deserve to die."

But Moses did something completely different from what most people would do.

Moses even offered to take the punishment himself so that the people of Israel could be forgiven. He said, "If you will not forgive their sin, then erase my name from your book instead" (Exodus 32:32). Moses loved the people more than he wanted to be safe in heaven or to have honor forever. Can you imagine doing that?

• Another person who knew that same kind of self-giving love was Paul. He said, "I wish I could be separated from Christ if it would help my own people, my relatives, the Israelites" (Romans 9:3-4).

As long as we follow Jesus mostly to protect ourselves or to feel safe, we will miss having the "mind of Christ." We won't be able to carry our cross fully. Jesus was never selfish. Moses and Paul weren't either. And neither are the people who truly follow Jesus everywhere He goes.

THE "OLD SELF" MAKES ONE LAST FIGHT TO KEEP CONTROL.

The last bastion he holds is covetousness of reward and its natural bulwark—fear of personal loss. It is of course severely anti-cross.

There was present in the first sin of man a desire for equality with God, to be as God, to possess natural immortality. Our first parents knew no fear until they cherished that desire. That same fear will underlie the last sin of man; and the cross is the only way to exchange it for love.

But what we call love is not love if fear is its foundation. Self-interest is not the basis of genuine love, which is **agape**. The search for one's own security is the reverse of genuine love. This is evident from what John says, "There is no fear in love [**agape**]; but perfect love [**agape**] casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love."

1 John 4:18.

John is discussing our basic problem of anxiety. We are all born with it. Its "torment" is expressed in many ways, including diseases of the body that have their source in this underlying bedrock of anxiety. Holistic medicine recognizes that migraine headaches, colitis, ulcers, asthma, and many other diseases can have their source here.

When Christ, "the Sun of Righteousness," arises in the heart, there is "healing in His wings" (Malachi 4:2). The healing comes with the casting out of fear and anxiety.

BUT HOW IS FEAR "CAST OUT"?

Through the crucifixion of the "old man" the self who is "crucified with Christ." Anxiety is the fear in which the self is nourished. Although fear is something open that we can see, like a railroad train bearing down upon us, anxiety is a fear that is beneath the surface, a dread we cannot tangibly recognize and identify in the open, because the real identity of the "old man" is never full and complete.

How does love cast out fear?

The last thing the "old self" tries to hold onto is wanting rewards and being afraid of losing something. This is the opposite of carrying the cross.

The very first sin of humans came from wanting to be equal with God, to live forever, and to have everything. Adam and Eve didn't feel fear until they wanted those things. That same fear is behind the last sin people make. The cross is the only way to change that fear into love.

But love is not real if it is based on fear. If we only care about our own safety, that is not true love, which is called agape. John says, "There is no fear in love. Perfect love pushes out fear, because fear brings suffering. Anyone who fears has not been made perfect in love" (1 John 4:18).

John talks about our basic problem: worry and anxiety. Everyone is born with it. This worry can cause a lot of suffering, and sometimes it even leads to sickness. Some health experts know that problems like headaches, stomach troubles, or asthma can come from deep anxiety.

But when Jesus, called "the Sun of Righteousness," comes into our hearts, there is healing. The healing comes when fear and worry are driven out (Malachi 4:2).

BUT HOW CAN FEAR BE DRIVEN OUT OR GONE?

When the "old self" is put to death with Christ, the selfish part of us that causes fear is defeated. Anxiety is like hidden fear—it's under the surface, not easy to see, like a quiet dread we can't name. The "old self" is never fully clear or complete, so this hidden fear stays inside.

How does love get rid of fear? Love is stronger than fear. When we truly see and feel Jesus' love, it pushes out the fear and worry that the old self feeds on.

SEEING THE LOVE OF CHRIST REVEALED AT THE CROSS DOES IT.

We have seen that the bridge that spans the last chasm between us and full fellowship with Christ is the surrender of the will in precisely the same way that Christ, in our flesh, surrendered His will. "By that will [God's] we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all."

Therefore we have "boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which he consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, his flesh." Hebrews 10:10, 19, 20. As He surrendered His will to the Father, He fulfilled that love. As we surrender our will to Him, that same love is forthwith fulfilled in us. The way to boldness is through His flesh.

Anxiety is basically what the Bible calls the "fear of death." What we have called "death" the Bible calls "sleep." Few fear that. Our "fear of death" is that of the second death, a fear of the nakedness, aloneness, forsakenness, the horror of great darkness, that comes when one is forever separated from the life and light of God and his great universe of joy.

This buried anxiety touches every aspect of our waking life and even intrudes upon us in our dreams. We have seen that only as we sense the dimensions of Christ's sacrifice on the cross can we possibly come to grips with that problem of naked anxiety.

YOU ARE CAPABLE OF RESPONDING TO CHRIST'S LOVE.

If someone gave you a precious gift, your most natural response would be to say a fervent thank you. And, further, according to the value of the gift, your most natural response would be a desire to demonstrate your gratitude to the friend for what he did. This capacity for glad, thankful response is built into your human nature, a part of the package that is you. It is almost instinctive. Dozens of times a day we will catch ourselves saying thank you for kindnesses done, and as often will we find ourselves watching for opportunities to respond.

WHEN WE SEE JESUS' LOVE SHOWN ON THE CROSS, IT CAN DRIVE OUT OUR FEAR.

We have seen that the last step to be close to Jesus is giving up our own will, just like Jesus gave up His will in our human nature. The Bible says, "By God's will we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once and for all."

Because of Jesus, we can boldly come close to God. The Bible says, "We have boldness to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way He made for us, through the veil, that is, His body" (Hebrews 10:10, 19-20). When Jesus gave up His will to God, He showed His love. When we give our will to Him, His love can work in us too. The way to boldness is through Jesus.

Anxiety is basically what the Bible calls the "fear of death." But the Bible also calls the normal sleep of death just "sleep," and people don't fear that. What we really fear is the "second death"—being completely alone, cut off from God and all joy forever.

This hidden fear affects everything we do, even our dreams. The only way to deal with it is to understand the full meaning of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross. That is how we can face this deep anxiety.

YOU ARE ABLE TO RESPOND TO JESUS' LOVE.

If someone gave you a really special gift, your first natural response would be to say a big, heartfelt thank you. And if the gift was very important, you would probably want to show your thanks by doing something nice for that person. Feeling glad and thankful is part of being human. It is almost like a natural habit. Many times a day we say thank you for little kindnesses and look for ways to return kindness too.

This simple, unaffected, uncomplicated response of our humanity is all that God has ever asked from anyone. Christ **gave** himself for us on the cross. If we don't see it, or can't sense how there was any real gift or sacrifice involved, there will naturally be no response of loving sacrifice on our part, only the self-centered desire for our own personal security which leaves fear still intact. Such a halfhearted, lukewarm response is inevitable from anyone's heart when Satan succeeds in obscuring the reality of what Christ gave for us.

But when we see what happened at Calvary, something does begin to move us. "Through death [the second death]" Christ destroyed "him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and" thus released "those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage." Hebrews 2:14, 15. Truly,

None of the ransomed ever knew
How deep were the waters crossed,
Nor how dark was the night that the Lord passed
through
Ere he found His sheep that was lost.

BUT WE DO KNOW A LITTLE SOMETHING ABOUT IT!

Our search is begun. As Satan seeks more and more to ensnare us in the allurements of self-seeking, sensual or material, we shall find something wonderful happening. As "sin abounds," the stronger grace of Christ will "much more abound." As we remember the cross, Satan will be defeated continually. Many people all around the world will respond exactly as Paul did:

"We are **ruled** by the love of Christ, now that we recognize that one Man died for everyone, which means that they all share in His death. He died for all, so that those who live should no longer live for themselves, but only for Him who died and was raised to life for their sake." 2 Corinthians 5:14, 15, TEV.

It simply becomes almost impossible for anyone who sees it to live any longer unto himself. Talk about power. This must be what Paul meant when he said: "The message of the cross ... is the power of God." 1 Corinthians 1:18.

This simple, honest thankfulness is all God has ever asked from anyone. Jesus gave Himself for us on the cross. If we don't understand or feel how big that gift and sacrifice was, we won't respond with love. Instead, we may only focus on keeping ourselves safe, and fear will still stay in our hearts. This weak, halfhearted response happens when Satan hides the truth of what Jesus gave us.

But when we really see what Jesus did at Calvary, it begins to change us. The Bible says, "Through death, Christ destroyed him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and set free those who were afraid of death and had been enslaved all their lives" (Hebrews 2:14-15). Truly, this is amazing.

No one who has been saved ever knew
How deep the waters were that Jesus crossed,
Or how dark the night was that He went through
Before He found the lost sheep.

BUT WE DO KNOW A LITTLE BIT ABOUT IT!

Our journey has begun. As Satan tries harder and harder to trap us with selfish desires—whether for pleasure or for things—we will see something amazing happen. When sin is strong, the grace of Jesus becomes even stronger. When we remember the cross, Satan is defeated again and again.

When we really see this, it is almost impossible to live just for ourselves. That is real power! This is what Paul meant when he said, "The message of the cross is the power of God" (1 Corinthians 1:18).

Power for what? To change that most changeless thing—a self-centered human mind. The old patterns of thought are changed, and love **rules**.

I hope no one will misunderstand me as I say this, it actually becomes easy to follow Christ! Jesus promised that it would be when He said: "My yoke is easy and My burden is light." Matthew 11:30. The cross supplies the missing element.

Now we can see what Paul meant when he said, "God forbid that I should glory, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ." And now that we, too, have had a glimpse of what he saw in his day, our hearts cry out with all our being: "Yes, Paul, we're with you! We kneel, too, at the feet of the Crucified One and confess Him Lord of our lives, King of our love, eternal Sovereign of our hearts."

Wherever I go, I'll tell the story
Of the cross;
In nothing else my soul shall glory,
Save the cross.
And this my constant theme shall be,
Through time and in eternity,
That Jesus tasted death for me
On the cross.

Anon.

Power for what? Power to change the most stubborn thing—our self-centered minds. The old ways of thinking are replaced, and love becomes the ruler of our hearts.

I hope no one misunderstands me when I say this—it really can become easy to follow Jesus! Jesus promised this when He said, "My yoke is easy and my burden is light" (Matthew 11:30). The cross gives us what we need to make it possible.

Now we can understand what Paul meant when he said, "I will only boast in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ." And now that we have seen a little of what he saw, our hearts can say with him: "Yes, Paul, we are with you! We kneel at the feet of Jesus who was crucified, and we confess Him as Lord of our lives, King of our love, and the eternal ruler of our hearts."

Everywhere I go, I will tell the story
Of the cross;
Nothing else will make my heart proud,
Only the cross.
This will be what I always share,
Now and forever everywhere,
That Jesus died for me
On the cross.

Anon.

Chapter 11

MARY MAGDALENE AND THE CROSS

What can the truth of the cross do for one whose life has been a tragic mess? Here's a basket-case woman so badly twisted out of shape that the Bible says "seven devils" had control of her. Mark 16:9.

"And being in Bethany at the house of Simon the leper, as He sat at the table, a woman came having an alabaster flask of very costly oil of spikenard. Then she broke the flask and poured it on His head.

"But there were some who were indignant among themselves [These "some" are identified not as the pagan Romans or Greeks who might have been present, nor as the unbelieving Jews, but as none other than Jesus' own disciples! And the instigator of their murmuring turns out to be none other than Judas Iscariot, the betrayer. So blinded were the Eleven! They could do nothing other than to say "amen" to his disloyal spirit. See Matthew 26:8 and John 12:4, 5], and said, 'Why was this fragrant oil wasted? For it might have been sold for more than three hundred denarii and given to the poor.' And they criticized her sharply.

"But Jesus said, 'Let her alone. Why do you trouble her? She has done a good work for Me. For you have the poor with you always, and whenever you wish you may do them good; but Me you do not have always.'

"She has done what she could. She has come beforehand to anoint My body for burial. Assuredly, I say to you, wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be told as a memorial to her.'" Mark 14:3-9.

When Mary broke the alabaster flask of precious ointment to anoint Jesus, she was giving to the world her unconscious expression of that same spirit of love and sacrifice which Jesus' life and death exemplified. Thus Mary's act has special meaning for us as an illustration of the truth of the cross.

This poignant act at Bethany is the most beautiful, heart-touching deed ever performed by a repentant sinner. [How can one who disbelieves that Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of God explain the amazing fact that Jesus is the only man in world history who has had his feet washed with tears?] It was welcome evidence to Jesus and to the watching universe that humanity is indeed capable of attaining a profound heart appreciation of the sacrifice Jesus made. Mary had no righteousness of her own; but her Savior's righteousness had been truly imparted to her.

What can the truth of the cross do for someone whose life has been a complete mess? Here is a woman whose life was so troubled that the Bible says "seven devils" controlled her (Mark 16:9).

"But Jesus said, 'Let her alone. Why do you trouble her? She has done a good work for Me. For you have the poor with you always, and whenever you wish you may do them good; but Me you do not have always.'

When Mary broke the jar of expensive perfume to anoint Jesus, she was showing, without even realizing it, the same spirit of love and sacrifice that Jesus showed in His life and death. Mary's act helps us understand the meaning of the cross and what true love and giving look like.

This act at Bethany is one of the most beautiful and heart-touching things ever done by someone who had sinned. How could anyone who doesn't believe that Jesus is the Son of God explain that He is the only person in history whose feet were washed with tears? Mary's act showed Jesus—and the watching world—that humans can truly appreciate the sacrifice He made. Mary had no goodness on her own, but Jesus' goodness was shared with her.

Imagine how her noble deed cheered the heart of the Savior in His darkest hours! No mighty angel from heaven could have brought to Him the comfort which the memory of her tearful sacrifice imparted; for in her sacrificial love to Him He discerned a pledge of His eventual joy. The travail of His soul will purchase for Him a precious reward—the making of many righteous through "faith which works through love." Galatians 5:6.

The evoking of such repentant love in human hearts changes lives. Surely this is the end to be achieved by the Savior's sacrifice!

A DEBT TO CHRIST, AND A DEBT TO THIS WOMAN!

The world may owe something to Mary which it has never recognized for thus encouraging the sorely tempted One in His time of greatest need. Surely the cold-hearted Twelve gave Him no such comfort as did Mary, whom they despised!

But Mary knew not why she had been moved to make this strange, prodigal offering. Informed only by the inscrutable yet infallible reason of love, she had spent her all to buy this extravagant ointment. What really happened was that she anointed beforehand Christ's body for the burial.

She was so completely unable to defend her action before the reproachful disciples that Jesus Himself had to come to her rescue. In undertaking her defense before the unfeeling obtuseness of the Twelve, He transformed the incident into a lesson on the meaning of the cross—something the church of today hungers to understand.

In fact, from what He said, a sympathetic appreciation of Mary's mysterious deed is necessary if we would understand the gospel itself. Jesus bespoke for her act the high regard of His followers in all ages: "Wherever this gospel is preached throughout the whole world, what this woman did will also be spoken of as a memorial to her." Infinitely better than any marble inscription for a Roman emperor!

Here is reason enough for giving Mary our attention.

WHY DID JESUS PRAISE HER SO EXTRAVAGANTLY?

Imagine how much her loving act cheered Jesus' heart in His hardest and darkest moments! No angel could have brought Him more comfort than her tears and sacrifice. In her love, Jesus saw a promise of the joy He would have later—making many people righteous through faith and love (Galatians 5:6).

When humans show this kind of love after repenting, it changes lives. This is exactly what Jesus wanted His sacrifice to accomplish!

I OWE A DEBT TO JESUS AND A DEBT TO THIS WOMAN!

The world may owe something to Mary, even though no one noticed, because she encouraged Jesus when He needed it most. Surely the twelve disciples, who were often cold and uncaring, did not give Him comfort like Mary did!

But Mary didn't really know why she felt moved to give this special gift. Guided only by love, she spent everything she had to buy the expensive perfume. What actually happened was that she was preparing Jesus' body for His burial ahead of time.

Mary couldn't explain or defend what she did because the disciples were criticizing her. Jesus had to step in and defend her. By doing this, He turned her act into a lesson about the meaning of the cross—something the church today still wants to understand.

In fact, to really understand the good news of Jesus, we need to appreciate what Mary did. Jesus said that her act would always be remembered: "Wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman did will also be spoken of as a memorial to her." That is even better than a fancy statue or inscription for a famous ruler!

This is a very good reason to pay attention to Mary and what she did.

WHY DID JESUS SAY SUCH NICE THINGS ABOUT HER?

Not for her sake, but for the sake of "this gospel," the fragrance of her deed is to be published abroad like this. Here is the key to all that is perplexing in this strange event. **Mary was preaching a sermon.**

- Her act illuminates the gospel and casts into sharp and grand relief its principles of love, sacrifice, and magnificence.

- Likewise the faultfinding of the disciples exposes our natural human reaction to the tender love revealed at the cross.

- Had we been present on the occasion, we would have found it difficult not to take our stand with Judas and the other disciples.

Mary had done something that was to all human appearance irrational and wasteful. "Three hundred denarii," the value of the ointment, represented the wages of a laboring man for a full year, "a denarius a day" being the usual pay. Matthew 20:2. Such a sum would probably have been sufficient to provide a small meal for five thousand men "besides women and children," according to Philip's cautious estimate. John 6:7; Matthew 14:21.

If we did not know the outcome of this drama of Bethany, what would we have thought of this apparently senseless extravagance? How many church managers and committee members would approve of such expenditure? Who among us would not have sympathized decidedly with the disciples in their feelings of outrage? This emotionally disturbed woman deserves rebuke!

We would find our hearts ready to second Judas's motion of censure: "Why was not this fragrant oil sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?"

BUT JESUS HIMSELF STEPS IN TO DEFEND MARY.

Mary did something that seemed strange at first, but she did it to show how important Jesus' message is. Her action teaches us about love, sacrifice, and doing something wonderful for God.

- What Mary did helps people see clearly how amazing Jesus' love is.

- The other disciples, who complained, show how people sometimes react when they see love that is very kind and powerful.

- If we were there, we might have agreed with the disciples and thought Mary was wasting her money.

Mary used a lot of expensive perfume—enough money to pay a worker for a whole year! That could have bought food for thousands of people.

If we didn't know what would happen later, we might have thought Mary was being careless. Many people in the church might have said it was wrong to spend so much money. We might have felt the same way as Judas and the other disciples, asking, "Why didn't she sell the perfume and give the money to poor people?"

But Mary wasn't wasting her money—she was showing love and honoring Jesus in the best way she could.

BUT JESUS SPEAKS UP TO PROTECT MARY.

According to our natural judgment, we would be ready to agree with Judas. Would it not be a more sober, practical act of devotion for Mary to use a few drops of the precious ointment to anoint His head, and then sell the balance for the benefit of the poor? We might feel a vague sense of thankfulness that such zealots as Mary are only a small minority in the church today.

But even more perplexing is the apparently reckless extravagance with which Jesus defended her. We are inclined to think he might have said something nice to her, tenderly commanding the warmth of her affection while gently deplored this wild extravagance of its expression. He could have kindly encouraged her and at the same time placated the indignation of the Twelve.

Not so! While the hapless penitent tries to escape unnoticed, overwhelmed with confusion and embarrassment, fearing that her sister Martha and possibly even Jesus will think her foolish and improvident, Jesus lifts His voice above the murmuring of the disciples: "Let her alone. Why do you trouble her? She has done a good work for Me." Far from approving the disciples' apparent regard for the poor, He places an entirely different interpretation on Mary's motive. It was a far truer charity. Her deed was a parable of divine love, a vehicle for proclaiming the gospel. Jesus forced to defend her, for in so doing he was defending Himself and His cross. He was, in fact, imparting to her deed a symbolic meaning of which she herself was ignorant.

- In the alabaster bottle, broken at His feet, He discerned His body, broken and bruised for us.
- In the precious ointment running to waste on the floor, He saw His blood "shed for many for the remission of sins," yet rejected and despised by most of them.
- In the motive that prompted Mary's act—her heartbroken, repentant love for Him—Jesus saw the true reflection of His love for us.
- In her sacrifice to purchase the ointment with the sum total of her hard-earned savings, He saw the utter emptying of Himself in the role of the divine Lover of our souls.

At first, we might agree with Judas. We might think it would have made more sense for Mary to use just a little of the expensive perfume on Jesus' head and then sell the rest to help poor people. We might even feel glad that most people in the church today aren't as "extreme" as Mary.

But Jesus did something surprising—He didn't just gently praise Mary or tell her to be more careful.

When Mary tried to hide, feeling embarrassed and worried that others would think she was foolish, Jesus spoke loudly for her: "Leave her alone! Why are you bothering her? She has done a good thing for me."

Jesus wasn't worried about money or what the disciples thought. He saw something much deeper in Mary's love:

- In the broken perfume bottle, He saw His body that would be broken for us.
- In the expensive perfume poured out on the floor, He saw His blood that would be shed for many people, even though most would not accept Him.
- In Mary's act of love, He saw her heart reflecting His love for us.
- In her sacrifice to buy the perfume, He saw the way He would give everything to save us.

• In her apparent extravagance He saw the magnificence of Heaven's offering poured out sufficient to save a world, yet accepted by only a handful of its inhabitants.

Thus was Jesus obliged to defend His wondrous cross before those who should have had hearts to appreciate its unutterable worth.

PATHETICALLY, WE SEE OURSELVES IN THE COLD-HEARTED SIMON AND THE TWELVE.

Judas had only sneers of contempt for the purest and holiest love eternity had known; and the slow-hearted, unappreciative disciples could only follow the promptings of his selfish criticism. Dare we think ourselves holier than they?

Hardly. We do well to remember that Mary was informed by the mysterious promptings of the Holy Spirit, an inspiration that stoops to give no reason. Only in a broken and a contrite heart can that inspiration find entrance.

The disciples were conscious of no such promptings, yet they had privately received clear teachings about Jesus' approaching death that Mary likely had not heard. They should have had preparatory understanding of the cross. But now an untaught woman with a penitent heart preached a **sermon** on the cross more eloquent even than Peter's at Pentecost, a sermon that to this day thrills the hearts of those who ponder its meaning. Thus we see that acquaintance with the historical details of the crucifixion is nothing compared with a heart appreciation of it. If flesh and blood cannot understand the doctrine of Christ's person, as the Savior said at Caesarea Philippi, neither can flesh and blood understand the doctrine of the cross.

MARY'S DEED ILLUSTRATES CHRIST'S SACRIFICE FOR US.

Consider the **motive** that prompted Mary. It was not for any hope of reward or even desire for praise that she did this unusual act. She had hoped to do it unnoticed. Only the sudden fragrance that filled the room betrayed her. Love alone was her guiding principle, love that in turn was a reflection of Jesus' love for sinners.

• In what looked like waste, He saw a gift powerful enough to save the world, even if only a few accepted it.

So Jesus had to defend Mary's love because, by doing so, He was also showing the true meaning of His own sacrifice on the cross.

SADLY, WE CAN SEE OURSELVES ACTING LIKE THE UNFRIENDLY SIMON AND THE TWELVE DISCIPLES.

Judas didn't care at all about Mary's pure and holy love—he only made fun of it. The other disciples, slow to understand and ungrateful, followed his selfish complaining. Can we really think we are better than they were? Probably not.

Mary's love and action came from the prompting of the Holy Spirit, a quiet inspiration that doesn't give reasons—it only works in a humble and sorry heart.

The disciples had learned about Jesus' coming death, but they didn't really understand it. Mary, a simple woman with a repentant heart, showed the meaning of the cross in a way even more powerful than Peter's famous sermon later. Her act still inspires people today.

This shows that knowing the history of Jesus' death is not as important as truly understanding it in your heart. If people can't fully understand who Jesus is, they also can't fully understand the meaning of His cross.

MARY'S ACT HELPS US UNDERSTAND HOW JESUS GAVE HIMSELF FOR US.

Think about why Mary did what she did. She didn't do it to get a reward or to be praised. She even hoped nobody would notice. The only thing that gave her away was the sweet smell that filled the room. She acted out of love—love that showed a little of Jesus' own love for people.

What was the motive that led Jesus to His cross? Theologians may write their ponderous tomes in efforts to account for the strange act at Calvary, only to return, weary at last, to the realization that no reason can be given: love alone was the motive.

How encouraging to Jesus to see reflected in Mary the image of His own character! In a sinner, do you ask? Yes, in "a woman... who **was** a sinner" (Luke 7:37) and a grievous one at that, He saw Himself reflected. As a positive print of a photograph from a negative, He saw in her love the print or likeness of His own pattern-love. "Reproach has broken My heart," He said (Psalm 69:20); repentance had now broken her heart through the ministry of His own broken heart.

Wonder, O heavens, and be astonished, O earth, for the plan of salvation is a success! Whether the divine risk of Calvary is as yet seen to be justified so far as the cold-hearted Twelve are concerned, it is a success for the daughter of Bethany! The sacrifice of God in Christ has elicited from her soul its complementary sacrifice: "a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart," which God, fortunately different from the disciples, will "not despise." Psalm 51:17.

AGAIN, CONSIDER THE SACRIFICE OF MARY'S DEED.

It shines brightest when compared with the sacrifice of Jesus' offering Himself for us. In commanding her, He said: "She has done what she could," the intent being that she had done all that she could. He too "has done what [He] could!" If Mary was ever rewarded in a temporal way for the almost endless days of humble toil expended for the purchase of the ointment, we do not know. But O that He who emptied Himself — "humbled Himself and became obedient to death... even the death of the cross" (Philippians 2:8)—might find ample reward for his sacrifice! Cannot we who have no alabaster flask of ointment to break upon His head at least find tears with which to wash those feet pierced for us? O Jesus, can You not find in us "seven devils" to cast out, that we might learn to love You as Mary did?

Why did Jesus go to the cross? Even smart teachers and scholars can't fully explain it. The truth is simple: He did it because of love. Love was the only reason.

How happy Jesus must have been to see Mary's love showing His own heart! You might wonder—wasn't she a sinner? Yes, she was, a very serious one, but Jesus saw His own love reflected in hers. Just like a photo made from a negative, her love showed the same pattern as His love. When Jesus said, "Reproach has broken my heart," He saw that His own love had helped break her heart too, making her sorry for her sins.

Be amazed, heaven and earth! God's plan to save people is working! Maybe the other disciples didn't understand yet, but for Mary, it was a success. Jesus' sacrifice on the cross brought out her own act of love: a heart that was sorry, humble, and fully devoted. God sees that kind of heart—and unlike the disciples, He does not look down on it.

THINK AGAIN ABOUT HOW MUCH MARY GAVE WITH HER SPECIAL ACT.

Mary's love is even brighter when we think about Jesus giving Himself for us. Jesus said about her, "**She has done what she could,**" meaning she did everything she could. And Jesus also **did everything He could** for us!

We don't know if Mary was ever rewarded for all the hard work she did to buy the expensive perfume. But Jesus, who gave up everything and died on the cross, deserves the greatest reward for His sacrifice.

Even if we don't have expensive perfume to give Him, we can show our love in other ways—like with tears, prayers, or acts of kindness for Him. Jesus, help us get rid of anything in our hearts that stops us from loving You like Mary did.

**THE MAGNIFICENCE OF MARY'S DEED SHINES
BRIGHTEST WHEN LIKENED TO THAT OF JESUS'
SACRIFICE.**

The disciples' reasoning was, Why not use a little ointment? Why this extravagance with something so precious? Look, it's running to waste on the floor! Three hundred silver coins gone down the drain! Just a few drops on His head would have been enough, Mary!

So we would have reasoned!

To this day the human heart, when uninformed by inspiration, is unable to appreciate the magnificence of Calvary's sacrifice.

- Why give the divine life "a ransom for many" when only a few will respond?

- Why pour out a Niagara of "self-sacrificing love when all but a trickle seemingly runs to waste?"

- The sacrifice made was sufficient to redeem all of earth's billions of sinners; why pay such a price when the ultimate returns will be so meager?

- Why should the divine Form be racked with grief and tears over "Jerusalem" that know not of and care not for the day of their visitation?

- Why not restrict the love and its expression to the few who will respond to its appeal rather than pour out such an infinite waste that seems so useless? [This reasoning is held by many Christians today who adhere to strict Calvinistic predeterminism. They feel that Christ died only for the elect.]

Thus did the disciples reason concerning Mary's magnificence; thus do many reason today concerning Him of whom her love was but a type.

**MARY'S GIFT LOOKS EVEN GREATER WHEN WE
COMPARE IT TO JESUS' SACRIFICE.**

The disciples were thinking: *Why use so much perfume? Why waste something so valuable? Look, it's spilling on the floor! Three hundred coins gone! Just a little on His head would be enough, Mary!*

We probably would have thought the same way!

Even today, people who don't have God's guidance often can't understand how amazing Jesus' sacrifice on the cross really was.

- Why give His life to save so many people when only a few will listen?

- Why show so much love when most of it seems to be wasted?

- Jesus' sacrifice could save everyone, but why pay such a high price if only a few will accept it?

- Why should Jesus feel sadness and cry for people who don't know Him or care about His gift?

- Why not give love only to those who will respond, instead of giving so much that seems wasted? (Even today, some people think like this—they believe Jesus only died for certain people and not for everyone.)

This is how the disciples thought about Mary's amazing gift—and this is how many people think today about Jesus, whose love her act showed a little bit of.

To answer we can only say that love is never genuine unless it is prodigal—wasteful Love never stint, never calculates. Mary's "very precious" alabaster flask of ointment was not bought at a bargain sale. She paid the full price for the finest that could be purchased with no grudging thought of saving anything. One can imagine her asking the shopkeeper for some ointment. Seeing in her only a poor peasant, he suggests a cheap preparation. "Have you nothing better?" she asks.

"Yes, I have a better quality, but it will cost you two hundred denarii."

"Do you have anything still better than this?" she persists.

"Yes, I have only the very finest and most expensive, but it will cost three hundred. You can't afford that, Mary. It's only for a king or emperor!"

"Let me have it," she replies. With her motive of love, she can do nothing less.

Could God, who is Himself love, do less than His utmost? He thought not of how to affect the salvation of the redeemed at the least possible cost to Himself. Heaven, the "ivory palaces," the devotion of a myriad of angels, the thrones of an infinite universe, life eternal, yes, the precious companionship of the Father, all Christ freely spent in the giving of Himself. An ocean of the water of life to be expended lavishly, and the only returns to be a few fragile earthen vessels filled with human tears of love! How infinitely precious must those "bottles" (Psalm 56:8) be to Him! "O Israel, hope in the Lord; for with the Lord there is mercy, and with Him is **abundant** redemption."

Psalm 130:7.

SIMON THE LEPER'S COLD REACTION TO MARY'S DEED DISTURBS US.

The host had been a silent witness to Mary's act of devotion. He seemed not to be concerned as were the Twelve with its extravagance. Darker surmising even than those were coursing through his soul, honest as he was.

The answer is that true love is never stingy or careful—it is generous and gives freely. Mary's perfume was very expensive, and she paid full price for the best she could find. She didn't try to save anything for herself.

You can imagine her in the shop, asking for some perfume. The shopkeeper sees only a poor girl and offers a cheap one. "Do you have nothing better?" she asks, wanting the very best to give to Jesus.

"Yes, I have a better one, but it will cost you 200 coins."

"Do you have anything even better than that?" she asks.

"Yes, I have the very best and most expensive, but it costs 300 coins. You can't afford it, Mary. It's only for a king!"

"Give it to me," she says. Because she loves Jesus so much, she can't do anything less.

Could God, who is love, do anything less than His very best? No—He gave everything to save us. He didn't worry about what it would cost Him.

Jesus gave up Heaven, the angels, His special place with the Father, and eternal life to help us. He gave Himself completely, like an ocean of water flowing out freely. And what did He get back? Just a few small acts of love from people.

Those little acts of love are very precious to Him. As the Bible says, "**Hope in the Lord, for He is full of mercy and gives great rescue.**"

SIMON THE LEPER DIDN'T LIKE WHAT MARY DID, AND THAT BOTHERS US.

The host, Simon, watched quietly as Mary showed her love for Jesus. He didn't seem as worried about her spending so much money like the Twelve were. But Simon was thinking his own secret thoughts.

He had not yet accepted Jesus as a Savior, though he had hoped that He might indeed prove Himself to be the Messiah. Having experienced the thrill of a miraculous healing, he had condescended now to invite the Galilean and His rude followers to this social occasion in order to express His gratitude. In so doing, he avoided giving Jesus even the honor of recognition as a social equal. He offered Him no kiss of welcome, no ointment for His head, not even water for His feet, the smallest elementary courtesy in the Middle East of that day.

Beholding the sublime spectacle of a repentant sinner wiping the tearstained feet of the world's Savior with her hair, Simon reasoned darkly within himself; "This Man, if He were a prophet, would know who and what manner of woman this is who is touching Him, for she is a sinner." Luke 7:39. How little does the self-righteous heart discern the credentials of divinity!

In the parable by which He sought to enlighten poor Simon, Jesus reveals the lesson of the glory of the cross that enlightens every honest heart that will pause long enough to survey the wondrous scene:

"There was a certain creditor who had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing with which to repay, he freely forgave them both. Tell me, therefore, which of them will love him more? Simon answered and said: I suppose the one whom he forgave more. And he said to him: You have rightly judged." Luke 7:41-43.

Simon, having been the instrument in leading Mary into sin originally, was clearly the debtor owing "five hundred denarii," not fifty. By contrasting Simons cold-hearted lovelessness with the warm devotion of Mary, Jesus tactfully revealed to his darkened mind and heart the truly astounding realization that Mary's repentant love should have been his if the one forgiven most should love most.

He hadn't really accepted Jesus as his Savior yet, even though he hoped Jesus might be the Messiah. After Jesus healed someone, Simon invited Him and His followers to dinner to say thanks. But he didn't show Jesus any real respect —he didn't greet Him with a welcome kiss, put oil on His head, or even give Him water for His feet, which was normal in those days.

When Simon saw Mary washing Jesus' feet with her hair, he thought to himself, "If Jesus were really a prophet, He would know what kind of woman this is—she's a sinner." Simon's proud heart couldn't understand what was happening.

Jesus told Simon a story to help him understand:

Simon had been the one who first led Mary into doing wrong, so he owed much more than she did. Jesus wanted Simon to see that Mary's big love came from being forgiven a lot, and he should have loved Jesus just as much if he understood how much he had been forgiven.

More than seven devils had been troubling Simon! He, the self-righteous one, was bothered with an eighth, the evil spirit of self-righteousness which hid the presence of the other seven. But the light even now shining from the cross illuminated Simons heart and disclosed to him the almost hopeless sinner that he was. Only the infinite pity of Jesus saved him from an ultimate ruin greater than Mary's had been. Simon could have also sung the hymn: "Jesus, Lover of my soul," as Mary could.

WHY DO SOME PEOPLE LOVE MUCH AND SOME LOVE LITTLE?

The parable of Jesus was not intended to show that different degrees of obligation should be felt by different sinners. Both Simon and Mary were infinitely and eternally in debt to the divine Creditor. Mary's love however was due to the simple fact that she knew she was a sinner and had been forgiven much. Simon had been forgiven little because he felt that he had sinned but little.

"Will anyone in God's eternal kingdom go about feeling superior to others?" I never did anything bad like the common run of people! I came from a good family and grew up on the right side of the tracks! My friends weren't the ordinary drop-outs living loosely, or using drugs. I was pretty good on my own, and all I needed was a slight push from Christ to get me into the kingdom!"

Wouldn't such words seem more appropriate coming from some whiner outside the gates of the city than from someone inside?

O for Mary's tender conscience! If Paul could call himself "the chief of sinners," can we do less? What light the doctrine of the cross may shed upon the unfeeling heart of Laodicea, the last of the great seven churches of all history! Lukewarm, self-righteous saints will trail behind the publicans and harlots who, like Mary, will repent. "Many that are first shall be last; and the last first."

Simon had many bad habits and wrong ways of thinking—more than seven! But he also had another problem: he thought he was better than others, which made it hard for him to see his own mistakes.

Even so, Jesus' love and kindness helped Simon. Jesus showed him that he was a sinner who needed forgiveness, just like Mary. Because of Jesus, Simon was saved from even worse trouble. If he had understood this, he could have praised Jesus with the same joy that Mary did.

WHY DO SOME PEOPLE SHOW BIG LOVE AND SOME SHOW SMALL LOVE?

Jesus' story wasn't meant to say that some people are more guilty than others. Both Simon and Mary had sinned and needed God's forgiveness. Mary loved Jesus a lot because she knew she had been forgiven a lot. Simon didn't feel the same way because he thought he hadn't done much wrong.

"Would anyone in God's kingdom feel proud and think they were better than others? "I've never done anything really bad. I came from a good family and behaved well. My friends were good too. I just needed a little help from Jesus!"

That kind of thinking doesn't really fit for someone who is already trying to follow Jesus.

Mary had a kind and humble heart. Even Paul, a great teacher, called himself "the worst sinner," and we should remember that too. God's forgiveness can teach us to be humble. Sometimes, people who think they are good will end up behind those who were once sinners, like Mary, but turned to God. Jesus said, "Many who seem first will be last, and the last will be first."

Chapter 12

THE CROSS AND PERFECT CHRIST LIKENESS

Never did Jesus offer words of praise more impressive than His approval of Mary's act. "She has done what she could," He said, implying that she could not have done more. He could hardly have said, "Well done, you good and faithful servant!" any more enthusiastically.

Such praise of Mary sets her forth as the model Christian:

- Her experience of repentant love was the perfect reflection of His sacrifice on the cross.
- What a photographic print is to a photographic negative, her repentant love was to His own love for the world. How wonderful that Jesus found someone He could display as an example of what He died to accomplish!
- It was Mary's understanding of the cross that enabled her to "come beforehand to anoint My body for burial," Jesus implied.
- Her "good work" lay in her "discerning the Lord's body," the same work that the apostle Paul says is so vital to our own participation in the Lord's Supper. 1 Corinthians 11:29.

This means that it was Mary's discernment of the cross that caused Jesus to set her forth as the model of true Christian experience. "Wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be told of as a memorial to her."

Jesus never praised anyone more than he praised Mary. He said, "She has done what she could," which means she did everything she could do. It's like he was saying, "Great job! You did amazing!"

This praise shows that Mary is a great example of a Christian:

Her loving heart, full of sorry and care, perfectly showed Jesus' love and sacrifice on the cross.

Her love was like a clear picture of Jesus' love. Just like a photo shows a picture from a negative, her love showed what Jesus' love was like. Jesus was happy to have someone he could show as an example of how people should love like he does.

Mary understood the meaning of the cross, and that is why she came to take care of Jesus' body before he died.

Her "good work" was that she understood Jesus and what he was doing. This is the same kind of understanding Paul says is important when we take part in the Lord's Supper.

This means that Mary understood the meaning of the cross, and that's why Jesus showed her as the best example of a true Christian. He said, "Wherever this good news is told, people will also tell what this woman did to honor her."

When one begins to understand the cross, he begins to understand himself. Mary could never have "done what she could" had she not understood the truth about herself. She learned not to think of herself more highly than she ought to think. Willing to discover the worst about her case in order to find the Savior, she would not fight the conviction that she was possessed of "seven devils." She learned how offensive is sin when she heard Jesus seven times rebuke the demons that had controlled her heart and mind. The most deeply fallen transgressor became the noblest example of a Christlike Christian because she had come to see herself truly as the "chief of sinners." She could appreciate what it meant to be saved from hell, because she had been to hell.

ARE WE POSSESSED OF FEWER DEVILS THAN WAS MARY?

If so, we may cast the first stone of supercilious disdain at her repentance as being other than that of a model Christian. Respectable Christians often regard a repentance such as Mary's as the norm only for prostitutes, publicans, or criminals. A much more modest and restrained repentance befits those who have not committed great sins! They think they need only a fraction of the depth and scope of Mary's repentance!

On the surface it may indeed appear that Jesus recognizes a vast difference in the magnitude of repentance different people should feel. His illustration used in speaking to Simon contrasts the debt of fifty denarii owed by one debtor with the debt of five hundred owed by the other. Apparently some people need to repent only one-tenth as much as others!

When someone begins to understand the cross, they begin to understand themselves. Mary could not have "done what she could" if she didn't understand the truth about herself. She learned not to think she was better than she really was.

Mary was willing to see her own mistakes so she could find Jesus. She didn't fight the truth that she had been controlled by "seven demons." She learned how bad sin really is when Jesus spoke to the demons that had hurt her heart and mind.

Even though she had done very wrong things, she became a great example of a Christian because she saw herself honestly as the "worst sinner." She understood how amazing it was to be saved, because she had felt what it was like to be lost.

DO WE HAVE FEWER PROBLEMS OR BAD HABITS THAN MARY DID?

If we think this way, we might look down on Mary and say her saying sorry was not the right kind for a good Christian. Some well-behaved Christians think that strong sadness over sin is only for very bad people, like criminals or people with terrible pasts. They think they only need to feel a little sorry because they believe they have not done very bad things. They believe they need much less repentance than Mary did.

At first, it might seem like Jesus agrees with this idea. When he talked to Simon, he told a story about two people who owed money. One owed a small amount, and the other owed a lot more. It can sound like some people only need to say sorry a little, while others need to say sorry much more.

But let us not miss the point of Jesus' little parable. He did not intend to teach that the two debtors should feel a different amount of gratitude. Both were unable to pay, and both were eternally and infinitely in debt. Both should therefore feel an infinite repentance. When the Bible says "all have sinned," it means that "all **alike** have sinned." Romans 3:23, NEB. The sin of sins is the taproot of sin—self-love, cold-heartedness, disbelief. Only an insight into the meaning of the cross can disclose this exceeding sinfulness. We **all** are debtors owing "five hundred." Our difficulty is simply that, like Simon, we have not **realized** it. We think we have been forgiven only fifty. This is why we love so little and are lukewarm in our devotion.

Of all the problems God has had to deal with through the ages, none is so difficult as the lukewarmness of the last-day church of Laodicea. No more effective weapon could the dragon have invented to use in his last battle to overcome the last segment of Christ's church. See Revelation 12:17. Were not the ingenuity of love truly infinite, God Himself might well despair of winning such a battle. He much prefers a hot war to a lukewarm war!

But the resources of His love are sufficient to assure the victory. His elect will be delivered from even this almost overmastering temptation.

SOMEONE MAY ASK WHAT BASIS WE HAVE FOR BEING SO HOPEFUL.

But we should not miss the main point of Jesus' story. He was not teaching that the two people should feel thankful in different amounts. Both people could not pay their debt at all. Both owed far more than they could ever repay. So both should feel very sorry for their sins in the same deep way.

When the Bible says, "All have sinned," it means everyone has sinned the same way. The biggest sin is loving ourselves too much, not caring enough about others, and not trusting God. Only when we understand the meaning of the cross can we see how serious sin really is.

All of us are like people who owe a very large debt. The problem is that, like Simon, we don't realize it. We think we only needed a little forgiveness. That is why our love for God can be small and our faith can feel weak or half-hearted.

One of the hardest problems God has ever faced is people who feel lukewarm—not fully loving Him and not fully turning away. This is talked about in the Bible in the message to the church of Laodicea. This kind of weak faith is very dangerous. God would rather people be fully for Him than only halfway.

But God's love is strong enough to win. His love will help His chosen people overcome even this big problem.

SOMEONE MIGHT WONDER WHY WE CAN FEEL SO HOPEFUL.

It is the same story of Mary and Simon that provides the assurance. Hopeless as the case of Mary seemed, possessed as she had been of seven devils, the case of Simon even more difficult. He was a greater sinner than Mary ever was. [How do we know that Simon was the one who originally ruined Mary's life? This conviction, held by devout Bible students for centuries, is sustained by the import of Jesus' parable. Simon saw himself as owing the "five hundred" denarii.] His blindness to his own need left him feeling smug, self-satisfied, and superior. How easily Christ might have done what we are so often inclined to do—abandon Simon to his own pitiful darkness.

But not so. As much as He labored to save Mary, so much more did He labor to rescue Simon from the grip of cold-hearted pride that so nearly sealed his eternal doom. Even greater than the miracle of casting seven devils out of Mary was His effective ministry for the proud socialite.

Simon now saw himself in a new light. He saw what he had done to Mary. Jesus could have crushed him with ridicule and condemnation, but His kindness in showing him the truth won his heart. We can only assume that such divine love was not expended on him in vain.

O Miracle-worker of Bethany, come to us today!

MARY'S LOVE IS THE "PERFECT" CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE.

Having seen that Mary's great repentance was truly normal, the model for all Christians, let us consider how the love which led to her repentance was itself that of the model Christian. The awakening of such love in the human heart is the great end Christ longed to achieve by His offering on Calvary. The cross satisfied all the legal demands of a broken law, but it also worked miracles on human souls.

The story of Mary and Simon gives us hope. Mary's life looked very sad because she had once been controlled by seven demons. But Simon's problem was even harder. He was a bigger sinner than Mary, even though it did not seem that way.

Some serious Bible readers have believed for a long time that Simon may have been the one who first caused Mary's life to fall apart. Jesus' story helps support this idea. Simon thought of himself as owing a very large debt, but he did not really see how much he needed forgiveness. Because of this, he felt proud, pleased with himself, and better than others. Jesus could have easily left Simon alone in his darkness, like people often do.

But Jesus did not do that. He worked hard to save Mary, and he worked even harder to save Simon. Simon was trapped by pride and a cold heart, which almost ruined him forever. Helping Simon change was an even greater miracle than freeing Mary from seven demons.

Simon finally began to see himself clearly. He saw the harm he had done to Mary. Jesus could have shamed him or judged him, but instead, Jesus showed him the truth with kindness. That kindness changed Simon's heart. We believe that Jesus' love was not wasted on him.

O Jesus, the miracle worker from Bethany, please come and work in our hearts today!

MARY'S LOVE IS THE BEST EXAMPLE OF HOW A CHRISTIAN SHOULD LOVE.

Now that we see Mary's deep saying-sorry as normal and the best example for all Christians, let's think about the love that made her repent. This kind of love is also the kind of love a model Christian has. Jesus wanted to bring this love into human hearts when he died on the cross. The cross not only followed God's rules but also changed people's hearts in amazing ways.

Seldom has this glory of the cross been clearly discerned. All too often the usual concept of Calvary's sacrifice is that of a judicial maneuver exacted by divine vengeance, a penalty vicariously paid, an offering made to placate the offended anger of God or to satisfy cold divine justice. The cross is seen as a spiritual lightning arrester through which the thunderbolts of God's hot wrath against sinners fall harmlessly to the ground.

Thus God is looked upon as an aggrieved Judge whose desire for revenge is satisfied by the cruelties inflicted on His Son at Calvary. Through His "vicarious" suffering He can bring Himself to pardon those who avail themselves of the legal provisions of a strange transaction known as the atonement. Long words are used in trying to explain the intricacies of a legalistic procedure.

It's no wonder that the doctrine of the atonement, thus presented, leaves many untouched. Gratitude, contrition, and love are unawakened. Only a sense of personal security is achieved, much as one feels when he has signed a business insurance coverage against risk.

Such a concept can never inspire the magnificent love that moved Mary. At best, only a staid and modest lukewarm devotion is possible. All that is needed to reproduce Mary's intense devotion in every believer is for the full truth of the cross to shine into the darkened chambers of our hearts:

- Mary is not a unique person; she represents the church.
- There is no difference between her human nature and ours.
- Given her understanding of the cross, we too will know the full dimensions of her gratitude and love.
- The gospel has lost none of its power. Liberated from the confusion of error, it will again accomplish in millions of human hearts the same glorious work accomplished in the heart of Mary.

Many people do not fully understand how wonderful the cross is. Often, people think of Jesus' death as just a way to punish sin, to pay a penalty, or to stop God's anger. They imagine the cross like a tool that keeps God's "anger bolts" from hurting us.

Some people think of God like a strict judge who wants revenge, and they imagine that Jesus suffered on the cross just to satisfy God's anger. They see the cross as a kind of legal deal, with long, confusing words to explain it.

It's no wonder that when people think about it this way, their hearts don't really change. They may feel safe, like having insurance, but they don't feel true thankfulness, sorrow for sin, or love.

This kind of idea cannot make people love God like Mary did. At best, it only leads to a small, half-hearted devotion.

- Mary is not just one special person; she represents the whole church.
- Her human nature is the same as ours—she is like every person.
- Because she understood the cross, we can also learn to feel the same deep thankfulness and love she had.
- The good news of Jesus is still just as powerful as ever. Once it is freed from mistakes and confusion, it can do in millions of hearts the same amazing work it did in Mary's heart.

- This promise is disclosed in the amazing prophecy in Revelation 18:1-4 of an angel coming down from heaven to lighten the earth with glory, and a heavenly voice penetrating to the inner consciousness of every human being: "Come out of [Babylon], my people."

BUT SUCH POWERFUL LOVE MUST CONTEND WITH THE OPPOSITION OF THE "SAINTS."

The drama of Bethany illustrates the conflict of all ages. In despising Mary's love, the disciples were joining with the world in despising enthusiasm in the service of Christ. Had Jesus not personally intervened, they would actually have cast Mary out of their fellowship.

To this day it is all too easy for Christ's modern disciples to fall into the same pattern of condemning model Christian experience. Let there be unusual devotion to Christ, unusual love, unusual contrition, unusual insight, and someone (as did Judas) is sure to raise the cry, "Fanaticism!" It never fails; others nod their heads in agreement, as the modern-day "eleven" mistakenly followed Judas's lead.

"Be not be overly righteous.... Do not be overly wicked" (Ecclesiastes 7:16, 17) has been so quoted out of context and so misunderstood that the world has been encouraged by the church to regard evil not as evil nor good as good, but enthusiastic devotion to either as less preferable than a middle-of-the-road compromise between the two. Alcoholics, scam artists, and prostitutes who go to extremes in evil are roundly condemned, and likewise such devoted ardor as moved the heart of Mary to expression out of the ordinary norm is feared and shunned, and even condemned.

The twelve disciples at Bethany partook of this spirit of worldliness by condemning as fanatical the love which Jesus accepted as the true model for His followers. In this end of time, would it not be the tragedy of all ages if we should fall into the same error of condemning as fanaticism the heart devotion aroused by the appreciative sense of Christ's love poured out at the cross?

- This promise is shown in the prophecy in Revelation 18:1-4. It talks about an angel coming from heaven to shine light over the earth, and a heavenly voice reaching into everyone's heart saying, "Come out of [Babylon], my people."

The story of Bethany shows a problem people have had in every age. When the disciples did not like Mary's loving actions, they were acting like the world, which often looks down on people who show strong love for Jesus. If Jesus had not stepped in, they might have pushed Mary away from their group.

Even today, people who follow Jesus can make the same mistake. When someone shows a very strong love for Jesus, deep sorrow for sin, or special understanding, others may say, just like Judas did, "That's too much!" This happens again and again. Then other people agree, just like the other disciples followed Judas instead of thinking for themselves.

The Bible verses that say, "Do not be too good or too bad," have often been misunderstood. Because of this, some people think that being in the middle is better than clearly choosing good or clearly choosing evil. Very bad behavior is strongly criticized, but strong love and devotion to God are also feared and sometimes judged as wrong.

At Bethany, the twelve disciples showed this same way of thinking. They said Mary's love was too much and called it foolish, even though Jesus accepted it and showed it was the right example for His followers. Today, near the end of time, it would be very sad if we made the same mistake —calling deep love for Jesus "fanatic" when it comes from understanding how much He loved us and died for us on the cross.

THE NOBILITY OF MARY'S SACRIFICE IS MODEL CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE.

The "good work" Mary wrought upon the Savior was more than a useful or meritorious deed. The Greek word (*kalos*) translated **good** implies something beautiful and noble, morally exquisite.

What was so noble about Mary's act? **She did it with no thought of securing reward.** She had spent her all to buy the alabaster flask of ointment without the slightest expectation of hearing herself praised or justified by the Savior. No selfish concern for reward clouded the sheer beauty of the flame of her devotion. When love prompted her to action, it transcended both faith and hope and thus proved itself the "greatest of these."

In this respect Mary is the model Christian. Devotion to Christ cannot burn bright and clear when its motivation is either fear of punishment or hope of reward. If we serve Him because of what we want or because we fear punishment, we are ultimately legalists. In fact, to be "under the law" is to be under the compulsion of self-seeking, even when the reward lies beyond this life. "If righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain." Galatians 2:21.

Put into modern words, Paul's conviction is this: if genuine faithfulness and goodness can be induced by concern for reward or fear of punishment, **then the cross of Calvary means nothing.** "I do not frustrate the grace of God," he insists; the cross is everything or it is nothing! Faith is not a fire-escape plan, nor a glorified social security program, appealing to man's innate selfishness of soul.

MARY'S SACRIFICE SHOWS US THE BEST EXAMPLE OF HOW A CHRISTIAN SHOULD LIVE.

The "good work" Mary did for Jesus was more than just something helpful. The word "good" in the Bible also means something beautiful and kind in a very special way.

What made Mary's act so special? She did not do it to get a reward. She used all her money to buy the perfume and did not expect Jesus to praise her or thank her. She was not thinking about herself at all. Her love was pure and honest. Because she acted only out of love, her gift showed the greatest kind of love—greater than hoping for something back or even trusting that she would be noticed.

In this way, Mary shows us what a true Christian looks like. Our love for Jesus cannot shine brightly if we only serve Him because we are afraid of being punished or because we want a reward. If we obey God just to get something for ourselves or to avoid trouble, we are really thinking about ourselves, not about Him.

The Bible teaches that if people could become truly good just by following rules to earn rewards or avoid punishment, then Jesus did not need to die on the cross. But Paul says that is not true. God's grace is everything. Faith is not a plan to escape trouble or a way to get prizes later. Real faith is loving Jesus simply because of who He is and what He has done for us.

The principle of the cross does not justify itself as a calculating, clever transaction by which surrender something of lesser value (such as present happiness) for a future good, a profitable bargain. Salvation is not presented in Scripture as the profit we gain from business trading on faith. Salvation is indeed most certainly profitable, infinitely so, and a tremendous bargain beyond all calculation; but faith, prophesying only "in part," has her eyes closed as she leads to the cross, and only love (**agape**) enables us to see beyond its present darkness.

All of us are tested eventually to determine whether our faith is merely a self-seeking exercise. In the hour of ultimate trial, love alone assumes the leadership, and both faith and hope are subservient. Therefore "the greatest of these is love."

Let grace do its perfect work. Let's get ready for the final test!

MARY'S LOVE WILL FINISH THE GOSPEL TASK IN ALL THE WORLD.

The most serious problem facing the church is the task of proclaiming the gospel in all the world so that everyone is fully aroused to its claims, either to believe intelligently, or to reject it knowingly. This task must be completed before the long-awaited return of Jesus can take place. "This gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come." Matthew 24:14.

Good men have wrestled with this problem for generations. Despite the best efforts of all churches, the task actually becomes greater with each passing generation. At the present rate of progress, souls are being born faster than the combined efforts of all Christian churches to reach the world with an impressive presentation of the gospel.

Understandably, sincere men have sought to discover ways and means of hastening this divinely appointed task. Committees have evolved all kinds of programs and campaigns, including the use of every possible technological invention such as TV, radio, satellite, Internet.

The cross is not just a clever way to trade something small, like happiness now, for something better later. Salvation is not like a business deal where we earn a profit by believing. It is true that salvation is very good—more than we can measure—but we cannot see all its value by thinking only with our minds. Faith can only see part of it, and only love helps us understand even when things seem dark.

Everyone is tested to see if their faith is just for themselves. At the hardest times, love takes the lead, and faith and hope follow. That is why the Bible says, "The greatest of these is love."

Let God's grace do its perfect work in us. Let's get ready for the final test!

MARY'S KIND OF LOVE WILL HELP FINISH SHARING THE GOOD NEWS WITH THE WHOLE WORLD.

The biggest problem the church faces is sharing the good news with the whole world. Everyone needs a fair chance to hear it so they can choose to believe it or choose not to. This work must be finished before Jesus can come back. Jesus said, "This good news will be shared in the whole world, and then the end will come."

Good people have worked on this problem for many years. Even though churches try very hard, the job keeps getting bigger. More people are being born every day, faster than all the churches together can reach them with the good news.

Because of this, honest and caring people have tried to find faster ways to finish this work that God has given us. Groups have made many plans and programs. They have used all kinds of tools, like TV, radio, satellites, and the Internet.

Can Mary's sacrifice point us to the ultimately efficient way? There are several lessons Mary can teach us today:

1. We marvel at the originality of her method.

It was utterly unusual. Who would have ever thought to advance the work of the gospel by bringing an "alabaster flask of ointment... very precious" and pouring its contents on Jesus' feet, and then in timid confusion endeavoring to wash His feet with tears and dry them with the best means available, her long, flowing tresses? How thoughtless, not to anticipate the need for a towel!

Her critics would judge that she bungled her performance. No cold-hearted committee ever thought up a method of doing a "good work" such as Mary wrought. We see here the resourceful ingenuity of love. Only such contrite love awakened by repentance can possibly think up the new ways and means that will finish Christ's work on earth. This gospel, of which Jesus spoke when He commended Mary, cannot be preached throughout the whole world without the inventive genius of her love. The frustrating attempts of formalism are the methods of lukewarmness; foolish extremes are the method of self-centered fanaticism; but the efficiency of love is the method of contrition. It will work; and when it begins, the task will soon be finished!

2. We are impressed that Mary's love became prophetic.

The disciples had been repeatedly instructed about the Savior's approaching death and burial, but they could not grasp the reality of it. Mary alone was able to sense the significance of what was to happen. With an intuition more deeply penetrating than that of any of the Twelve, she read the future. Taught by the infallible promptings of love, she had come to anoint His body "beforehand ... for burial." Alexander Bruce says: "Thus is love prescient. Such as Mary can divine."

In the exercise of her prophetic insight does she represent the church, or only a rare individual in the church? Is it the Lord's will that eventually such insight be imparted to all?

Can Mary's sacrifice show us the best way to do this work? Mary has several important lessons she can teach us today:

1. We are amazed by how creative and different her way of serving was.

What Mary did was very unusual. No one would have thought to help spread the good news by bringing a jar of very expensive perfume and pouring it on Jesus' feet. She then felt shy and confused and tried to wash his feet with her tears. Since she had no towel, she used her long hair to dry them. She did not plan ahead, and she did not even think about needing a towel.

Some people thought she did a poor job. They believed she messed everything up. But no cold or uncaring group could ever plan a "good work" like the one Mary did. Her love helped her think of what to do in the moment.

This shows how powerful love can be. Only a heart that is truly sorry and full of love can find new and caring ways to serve Jesus. The good news Jesus talked about cannot be shared with the whole world without this kind of loving creativity. Doing things only by strict rules does not work, and acting wildly for selfish reasons does not work either. But love that comes from a sorry and humble heart does work. When that kind of love begins, the work will be finished.

2. Mary's love was so special that it showed what was going to happen later.

The disciples had been told many times that Jesus was going to die and be buried, but they did not really understand it. Mary was the only one who seemed to understand what was about to happen. Her love helped her see the meaning of the future in a way the others could not.

Because she loved Jesus so much, she felt moved to prepare His body ahead of time for burial. Her loving heart helped her understand something very important before anyone else did.

This makes us wonder: does Mary stand only for one special person in the church, or does she show what God wants all His people to grow into — people whose love helps them understand His plans more clearly?

Tucked away in the Old Testament is an inspired prayer that is yet to be answered. Seventy chosen men from the camp of Israel were gathered about the tabernacle to share the prophetic gift bestowed on the overworked Moses, the Lord graciously "took of the Spirit that was upon him, and placed the same upon the seventy elders: and it happened, when the Spirit rested upon them, that they prophesied."

Then something happened that was not anticipated. Two men not gathered with the official group also received the same Spirit, "and they prophesied in the camp." An excited messenger ran to tell Moses and Joshua of this unofficial irregularity. Joshua was disturbed: "Moses, my Lord, forbid them!"

But Moses had a deeper understanding of the scope of the prophetic gift promised to the church: "Are you zealous for my sake? Oh, that **all** the Lord's people were prophets, and that the Lord would put his Spirit upon them!" See Numbers 11:24-29. Joel adds that in the last days the Spirit will be poured out "on **all** flesh." Then will the long-awaited gifts of the Spirit be fully restored in the church.

As surely as day follows night, the experience of Mary's love awakened the church today will reproduce her prophetic insight as the fruit of love. When perfect love casts out fear, it will also cast out disunity. Partakers of one Spirit, all will know the unfailing "unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." Ephesians 4:3, 4. All will recognize truth because it is truth, not because an authoritative spokesman has recognized it for them and excused them from the necessity of discernment. Thus Moses' prayer will be granted.

3. The power to love is paralyzed by the drug effects of lukewarmness. Love is a secret chamber of the soul which can be reached only by the gateway of contrition. And that, in turn, can be reached only by the way of the cross, whereon self is crucified with Christ.

In this light, the lukewarmness of Laodicea, is seen to be a refusal, doubtless unconscious, of the principle of the cross.

Hidden in the Old Testament is a special prayer that has not fully come true yet. Moses was very tired from leading the people of Israel, so God chose seventy men to help him. God shared His Spirit with them, and when the Spirit came upon them, they spoke messages from God.

Then something unexpected happened. Two men who were not with the group also received God's Spirit, and they began to speak messages from God right in the camp. Someone quickly ran to tell Moses and Joshua. Joshua was upset and told Moses to stop them.

But Moses understood something important. He said that he wished all of God's people could receive God's Spirit and speak for Him. Later, the prophet Joel said that in the last days, God's Spirit would be given to everyone. Then the special gifts from God would be fully brought back to the church.

Just as day always follows night, the church today will show the same kind of understanding when it has Mary's kind of love. When perfect love removes fear, it will also remove fighting and division. Sharing one Spirit, everyone will experience true unity and peace together.

People will know what is true because it really is true, not just because an important leader says so. Each person will learn to understand and choose truth for themselves. In this way, Moses' prayer will be answered.

3. When people become half-hearted and don't really care, their ability to love becomes weak and almost stops working. Love is like a secret room in our hearts, and we can only enter it through true sorrow for our sins. To feel this sorrow, we must follow the way of the cross, where we let go of selfishness with Jesus.

When people are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold in their faith—they are turning away, even without realizing it, from the lessons of the cross.

Love alone being capable of prophetic insight, and love being benumbed by lukewarmness, the gifts of the Spirit must lie latent and dormant until love is awakened. Moses' prayer indicates that it is God's plan to lead His people into "the glorious liberty of the children of God." Romans 8:21. Then will every "Mary" know "beforehand" not to anoint His body to the burying, as once she knew to do, but to prepare for Him a crown. Love will know just what to do at just the right time,

4. Judas's monetary appraisal of Mary's offering disturbs our conscience. "Why was this fragrant oil wasted? It could have been sold for more than three hundred denarii." Statistics were all that Judas could think about. All too often we are obsessed with them too.

But Mary's love cannot be measured by computers. The attempts to gauge it thus reveal an ignorance of its nature. All our attempts to measure love's devotion by statistical sheets are condemned by the simple story of Bethany. Love brings her offering with tears, not with self-congratulatory per capita sheets.

In the terrific strain of last-day events, the surest way for the church to go out of business is to try to stay in business "as usual," content to measure calculated progress by trivial percentage gains year by year. Our evangelism must be Mary's method of contrite love. God grant the gift! Finally, we discern in the heart-moving story of Mary the answer to a question in the hearts of many.

5. Just what is "righteousness by faith"? "Righteousness" is not a perplexing concept. Although we cannot see Christ in the flesh so as to know what righteousness is, His representative on earth, the Holy Spirit, imparts to the human soul a vivid concept of what it is. "When He [the Holy Spirit] comes, He will convince the world ... concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see Me no more." John 16:8-10, RSV. Christ likeness of character is the true definition of "righteousness."

But how to attain this ideal of righteousness is the problem. The "how" is declared in Scripture to be the way of faith.

Love is what helps us understand God's plans, but if love is weak, the gifts of the Spirit stay asleep until love is awake.

God wants His people to experience the full freedom of being His children. Then, just like Mary once knew what to do for Jesus ahead of time, every follower will know the right thing to do at the right time, guided by love.

4. Judas judging Mary's gift by how much money it was worth makes us feel uneasy inside. "Why did we waste this sweet-smelling oil? We could have sold it for more than three hundred coins," Judas kept thinking about numbers. Sometimes, we think too much about numbers, too.

But Mary's love can't be measured by a computer. Trying to figure it out that way shows we don't really understand it. Love can't be counted on a chart. Mary showed her love with her tears, not with papers full of numbers.

In the busy and hard times at the end, the easiest way for the church to fail is to try to keep going "as usual," only caring about small yearly numbers. Our sharing of God's love must be like Mary's way—full of true, humble love. God, please help us!

Finally, Mary's story shows the answer to a question many people have in their hearts.

5. What Does It Mean to Be Right with God by Believing? "Righteousness" isn't a hard idea. Even though we can't see Jesus with our eyes, the Holy Spirit helps us understand what righteousness is in our hearts. The Bible says, "When he [the Holy Spirit] comes, he will show the world what is right..." (John 16:8-10). Being like Jesus is what righteousness really means.

But how do we become like Jesus? The Bible says the way is by faith.

But what is faith?

Multitudinous and perplexing are the answers given to this question. Some say it is one thing; some say it is another. If only the Lord had told us clearly in easily understood terms what faith is! "Wherever this gospel is preached throughout the whole world," Mary's deed of love will illuminate the true meaning of this all-important word, **faith**.

From time to time, Jesus warmly commended the faith of various individuals whom He healed. But his commendation of Mary sets the crowning seal of perfection to His growing definition of "faith."

He had said to the cold-hearted Simon, "Her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much." Luke 7:47. Clearly, Mary **loved** much because she knew she had been **forgiven** much.

She probably felt, however, as many since have felt, that she yet wanted faith. This simple contrite love she knew—what good would it be if she knew not that greater virtue of faith which alone could get something done, like moving mountains? Yes, Mary knew she was least in the kingdom of God!

Imagine her surprise to hear Jesus assign His own definition to her experience of contrite love, as He told her: "Your faith has saved you. Go in peace." Verse 50.

- Not with the cold intellect, but with the melting heart, "one believes unto righteousness." Romans 10:10.

- Whatever faith is in its wide embrace of many virtues, including trust, confidence, strength to lay hold of God's promises, courage, reliance, or conviction of truthful doctrines, its common denominator always present is a heartfelt appreciation of the love of Christ seen at Calvary.

- Faith is the human response to divine love. That is the lesson this story has to teach us! What "avails" everything is "faith working through love." Galatians 5:6.

So, what is faith?

People give many different answers, and it can be confusing. Some say one thing, some say another. It would be nice if God had explained it in very simple words! But when people hear the good news everywhere, Mary's loving act shows what faith really means—doing something with love and trust in God.

Sometimes, Jesus praised the faith of people he healed. But when he praised Mary, it showed the highest example of what faith really is.

He said to Simon, "Her many sins are forgiven, because she loved so much" (Luke 7:47). Mary loved a lot because she knew God had forgiven her a lot.

Still, Mary probably wished she had more faith, like many people do. She knew her love, but she wanted the kind of faith that could do amazing things, like moving mountains! Yes, Mary knew she was small in God's kingdom, but she loved with all her heart.

Imagine how surprised Mary must have been when Jesus said her own loving heart showed real faith. He told her, "Your faith has saved you. Go in peace" (verse 50).

- We don't believe with our heads alone, but with our hearts. "It is by believing in our hearts that we are made right with God" (Romans 10:10).

- Faith can include many things—trust, courage, confidence, and holding on to God's promises—but the most important part is loving Jesus and seeing how much he loves us, especially at Calvary.

- Faith is how people respond to God's love. That's the big lesson this story teaches! What really matters is "faith that shows itself through love" (Galatians 5:6).

Look to Calvary. Unless you elect to trample the crucified Christ underfoot, unless you join the great rebel in crucifying Him afresh, your honest heart will respond with that same faith. The phenomenon of such a response is as sure as heaven. God has staked the honor and stability of His throne upon its certainty!

Is that response struggling for birth within you?

Yes, without a doubt, for "God has dealt to each one a measure of faith." Romans 12:3. This is the seed which He implants in every human heart, including yours. If you let it take root, if you choose not to dig it up or stamp it out or choke it to death, ***it will transform you into the person you long to be.***

Speaking of his cross, Christ says: "I ... will draw ***all*** peoples to Myself." John 12:32. He actively draws you, takes the initiative repeatedly, persists in spite of your perverseness and your hanging back.

Yield, and you know firsthand what a penitent sinner's faith can be. Its miracle is the pledge that all God's promises are true, that all your dreams are even now being fulfilled; it is "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." Hebrews 11:1.

Yield, and you know for sure that God is real. The cross has revealed Him to you.

O for a heart to praise my God!
A heart from sin set free,
A heart that always feels thy blood
So freely shed for me.

A heart in every thought renewed,
And full of love divine,
Perfect, and right, and pure, and good,
A copy, Lord, of Thine.

Charles Wesley

Look to Jesus on the cross. If you don't choose to ignore him or hurt him again, your heart will want to believe in him. That kind of faith is as certain as heaven itself. God promises it will happen!

Do you feel that faith trying to grow in your heart?

Yes, for "God has given each person a little faith" (Romans 12:3). This is like a tiny seed planted in every heart, including yours. If you let it grow and don't try to destroy it, it will change you into the person you want to be.

Talking about his cross, Jesus says, "I ... will draw all people to myself" (John 12:32). He keeps reaching out to you, even if you resist or hesitate.

If you trust him, you will see what faith can do. It shows that all of God's promises are true, and that your hopes are starting to come true, even if you can't see them yet. Faith is "the reality of what we hope for, the proof of what we don't see" (Hebrews 11:1).

Trust Jesus, and you will know for sure that God is real. The cross shows you who he really is.

Oh, I wish I had a heart to praise God!
A heart free from sin,
A heart that always remembers
The blood Jesus gave for me.

A heart that is made new in every thought,
Full of God's love,
Perfect, good, and pure,
Like Yours, Lord, I want to be.

Charles Wesley

Chapter 13

WHAT DID CHRIST ACCOMPLISH ON HIS CROSS?

ONE MORE Important QUESTION REMAINS

I could not doubt that the death of Jesus on His cross was real.

- He "poured out His soul unto death," an infinite sacrifice. Isaiah 53:12.
- He could not have "emptied Himself" more. Like when one turns a glass upside down to drain it to its last drop, He made a commitment to drain Himself of everything dear to him, even life. Philippians 2:5-8, RSV.

• He endured the "curse" of God, which is Heaven's total condemnation. Galatians 3:13.

• This is how He "tasted death [the second] for everyone." Hebrews 2:9.

• He "**gave** Himself for our sins," holding nothing back. Galatians 1:4.

• It must be said reverently, softly, in awe: He went to hell in our behalf in order to save us. Psalm 16:10; Acts 2:25-27.

• So great was His love (**agape**). 1 John 4:9-14.

But the question haunted me for years: **what did He accomplish? Was His sacrifice a real success?** Or did Satan succeed in hampering or partially destroying what He accomplished?

Through the centuries, people wiser than I have wrestled with those questions. But someone helped me find an answer in Romans 5:15-18 that seemed to say that Christ's sacrifice was wonderfully successful:

"God's act of grace is out of all proportion to Adam's wrongdoing. For if the wrongdoing of that one man brought death upon so many [Greek: the many meaning all], its effect is vastly exceeded by the grace of God and the gift that came to so many by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ. And again, the gift of God is not to be compared in its effect with that one man's sin; for the judicial action, following on the one offense, resulted in a verdict of condemnation, but the act of grace, following on so many misdeeds, resulted in a verdict of acquittal. ... It follows, then, that as the result of one misdeed condemnation for all people, so the result of one righteous act is acquittal and life for all." Romans 5:15-18, REB.

ONE LAST IMPORTANT QUESTION IS LEFT.

I couldn't doubt that Jesus' death on the cross really happened.

- Jesus gave His life completely, a huge, perfect gift (Isaiah 53:12).
- He poured out everything He had, even His life, like turning a glass upside down until the last drop is gone (Philippians 2:5-8).

• He took on God's curse for us, which is total punishment (Galatians 3:13).

• This is how He "tasted death for everyone" (Hebrews 2:9).

• He gave Himself for our sins and held back nothing (Galatians 1:4).

• We should say this quietly and with respect: He went through hell for us to save us (Psalm 16:10; Acts 2:25-27).

• His love for us was amazing and full of care (1 John 4:9-14)!

But for years, I kept asking myself: What did Jesus really accomplish? Was His sacrifice a true success, or did Satan manage to mess it up or ruin some of it?

People much wiser than me have thought about these questions for hundreds of years. But I found an answer in Romans 5:15-18 that seemed to show that Jesus' sacrifice was completely successful:

How could one get better Good News than that? But then, that problem, not everybody agrees. Some think they see fine print somewhere. I couldn't imagine how God could contradict that, but through the centuries some have tried to explain away what I thought Paul said. There are several attempts:

1. STRICT CALVINISM.

To put this idea in simple language, Christ did not intend to die for "all people." In fact, some of its prominent spokesmen have said frankly He didn't even love "all people." He loved and died only for a special group known as "the elect."

The idea is that God has predestined some people to be saved; and because this is His "sovereign will," not even they can thwart what He has purposed to do. The predestined ones go to heaven whether they want to or not.

In one sense, that may sound reasonable. Strict Calvinists feel forced to this position because of their view of the irresistible "sovereignty" of God. If He wills something, man cannot counteract His will. They understand the Lord's Prayer to say: "Thy will must and will be done in earth as it is in heaven."

THAT'S ONE SIDE OF THE CALVINISM COIN.

The other side has been the "double predestination" idea that God has predetermined that the rest of people must be lost, even if they want to be saved, and may even try hard to be. (I was reared in a church that favored this doctrine.) It's "good news" if you are one of the lucky ones; but the others? Too bad.

But when I began to read the Bible for myself, I discovered some things that seemed to be very good news:

- The very last page of the Bible contradicts this distorted view of Jesus; it brought immense joy to my heart: "The Spirit and the Bride say, Come! And let him who hears say: Come! And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely." Revelation 22:17. It would be awful if it turned out that I wasn't invited: could that "whoever" include me? Yes, I **am** invited!

How could there be better Good News than that? But some people don't agree. They think there is some hidden rule or "fine print" somewhere. I couldn't believe God would go against this, but over the years, some have tried to explain away what Paul really meant. There are several ways they've tried to do that:

1. STRICT CALVINISM

To make this idea simple: some people say that Jesus didn't die for everyone. They say He only loved and died for a special group called "the elect."

This means God already chose some people to be saved, and they will go to heaven no matter what.

Some people, called strict Calvinists, think this makes sense because they believe God's will cannot be stopped. If God decides something, no one can change it. They even read the Lord's Prayer as meaning, "Your will must happen on earth, just like it does in heaven."

THAT'S ONE SIDE OF THE CALVINISM IDEA.

Some people believe in "double predestination," which says God has already decided that some people will be saved and the rest will be lost, no matter what they do. (I grew up in a church that taught this.) That might sound like good news if you're one of the "lucky" ones—but what about everyone else?

But when I read the Bible for myself, I found some really good news:

- The very last page of the Bible shows that this idea is wrong. It made me so happy! It says: "The Spirit and the Bride say: Come! Let anyone who hears say: Come! Let anyone who is thirsty come. Whoever wants it may take the water of life for free" (Revelation 22:17). It would be awful if I wasn't invited—but the word "whoever" **includes me!** I am invited!

- Jesus promised: "The one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out." John 6:37. "Come to me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. ... My yoke is easy and My burden is light." Matthew 11:28, 30. The more I thought about this, the more I began to believe that the gospel is really very Good News: has God actually chosen **everyone** to be saved, that is, who is willing to "come"?

- There was Isaiah 45:22: "Look to Me, and be saved, all you ends of the earth!" I would have to get off of the "end of the earth" not to get **that** invitation.

- Then I discovered sixteen first person plural pronouns in Isaiah 53:1-6; each "we" and "us" and "our" must mean everybody, because it's the "we all" who have sinned: "Surely He has borne **our** griefs and carried **our** sorrows ... 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." The "us all" must include me.

- Then there was John 1:29: "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" None of us has come from the planet Mars; it must be that he takes away **my** sin.

- And John 4:42 says Christ's true title is "the Savior of the world," not just or some especially fortunate ones. I had to believe that I am part of that "world." Of course, we all have the power or choice and we can reject Him, and many do.

- And how could I question John 3:16 that says: "God so loved the world," and "whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life"? But maybe there is some fine print here: what if God has not given some people the ability to "believe"? Then Romans 12:3 cleared up that problem: "God has dealt to each one a measure of faith."

- Jesus promised: "Anyone who comes to me, I will never turn away" (John 6:37). He also said, "Come to me, all of you who are tired and carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest... My yoke is easy and my burden is light" (Matthew 11:28, 30). The more I thought about this, the more I believed the gospel really is Good News. God has made salvation possible for everyone who is willing to come to Him.

- Isaiah 45:22 says, "Look to me, and be saved, all you people everywhere!" I would have to ignore that to miss this invitation.

- Then I saw that Isaiah 53:1-6 uses sixteen "we," "us," and "our." These must mean **everyone**, because it's talking about all of us who have sinned: "Surely He has carried our sadness and pain... He was hurt for our wrongs; the punishment for our peace was on Him, and by His wounds we are healed. All of us, like sheep, have gone our own way, and the Lord has put the wrongs of us all on Him."

- John 1:29 says, "Look! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" We don't come from Mars, so that means He takes away my sin, too.

- John 4:42 says Jesus' real title is "the Savior of the world," not just some lucky people. That means I'm included too. Of course, we all have a choice to accept Him or not, and many people refuse.

- And John 3:16 says, "God loved the world so much that whoever believes in Him will not die but have life forever." Could it be that some people can't believe? Romans 12:3 answers that: "God has given each person a little faith."

- Who then is going to be lost at last? John 3:17-19 answered: "He who does not believe is condemned.... And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness father than light." And there is John 5:30: only those who "will not come" can be lost.

- What Jesus said about the Lord's Supper impressed me: "My blood ... is shed for **many** for the remission of sins." Matthew 26:28. Who are the "many"? Since everybody has sinned (Romans 3:23) it must mean that Christ shed his blood for the same "everybody." He said, "Everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life.... The bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world. Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you." John 6:40, 51, 53. What he gives is universal.

Then I read how Paul says that some people who "eat" do so with unbelief, "not discerning the Lord's body." 1 Corinthians 11:29. Apparently he believed that Christ has done something for every human being.

- Then I found 1 Timothy 4:10: Christ "is the Savior of all men, especially of those who believe." Every person can think of Him as already His Savior! It was beginning to look certain that Christ accomplished something on His cross that applies to "all men," and no one is excepted. It reminded me of a song I have heard:

And once again the scene was changed, new earth there seemed to be.
I saw the Holy City beside the tideless sea.
The light of God was on its streets, its gates
were opened wide,
*And all who would might enter, and no one
was denied.*

- So who will be lost in the end? John 3:17-19 says, "Anyone who does not believe is judged... people loved darkness instead of the light." John 5:30 adds that only those who refuse to come to Jesus will be lost.

- What Jesus said about the Lord's Supper really stood out to me: "My blood... is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (Matthew 26:28). Who are the "many"? Since everyone has sinned (Romans 3:23), it must mean that Jesus gave His blood for everyone. He also said, "Everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have life forever... The bread I give is my body, which I give for the life of the world. If you don't eat my body and drink my blood, you have no life in you" (John 6:40, 51, 53). What He gives is for everyone.

Then I read that Paul said some people "eat" without believing and "don't understand the Lord's body" (1 Corinthians 11:29). This shows that Paul believed Jesus had done something for every person.

- I also found 1 Timothy 4:10, which says that Jesus "is the Savior of all people, especially those who believe." That means every person can think of Jesus as their Savior. It was starting to become clear that Jesus did something on the cross for everyone, and no one is left out. It reminded me of a song I have heard:

And once again, the scene was different, and
a new earth appeared.
I saw the Holy City next to a calm, endless
sea.
God's light shone on its streets, and the
gates were wide open.
*Anyone who wanted to could go in, and no
one was turned away.*

• Could "the everlasting gospel" be news as good as that? Evidently, for 2 Timothy 1:10 went further by saying: "Our Savior Jesus Christ... has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel." How could that be, if the cemeteries are full? It must be the second death. Yes, when Christ died, he abolished it because he suffered it. The lake of fire was never intended for humans, but "for the devil and his angels." Matthew 25:41. The humans who wind up there do so only because they have despised the deliverance Christ has already given them, as He says: All those who hate me love death." Proverbs 8:36.

• Then I discovered Ephesians chapter 1 that gave me tremendous encouragement:

The "Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, ... chose us in Him before the foundation of the world... having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will... in [whom] we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence." Verses 3-8.

Who is the "us"? When at the Jordan River, the Father threw His arms around His Son Jesus, He embraced the human race too, and adopted us "in Him."

Coming back to that statement in Romans 5:15- 18, there is a second explanation of this Good News. It doesn't try to explain it away, but it jumps to a wrong conclusion:

2. Universalism.

This is a reaction against Calvinism, and insists that God will at last take every human being to heaven, and no one will be lost, even the most persistently wicked and rebellious.

• Could "the everlasting good news" be this amazing? It seems so, because 2 Timothy 1:10 says: "Our Savior Jesus Christ... has defeated death and shown us life and never-ending life through the good news." How can that be if cemeteries are full? It must mean the second death. Yes, when Jesus died, He defeated it by suffering it Himself. The lake of fire wasn't meant for people, but for the devil and his angels (Matthew 25:41). People only end up there if they refuse the rescue Jesus already gave them. As it says, "Those who hate me love death" (Proverbs 8:36).

• Then I read Ephesians chapter 1, and it gave me a lot of hope and encouragement:

"The Father of our Lord Jesus Christ chose us in Him before the world was made. He planned for us to be His children through Jesus, and because of Jesus' blood, our sins are forgiven. God gave us this gift of grace and wisdom freely" (Verses 3-8).

Who is the "us"? When God hugged His Son Jesus at the Jordan River, He was also including all people, and adopted us as His children in Jesus.

Looking back at Romans 5:15-18, there is another way some people have tried to explain this Good News. It doesn't ignore the gift, but it ends up at the wrong conclusion:

2. Universalism

Arminianism reacted against Calvinism and says that God will eventually take every person to heaven, and no one will be lost, even the people who are very bad and refuse to obey.

But the Bible contradicts this. God *wishes* that everyone could be saved (1 Timothy 2:3, 4), but Paul elsewhere has to tell the sad truth that many will refuse. 2 Thessalonians 1:8, 9; 2:8-10. Therefore, much as we might wish that everyone could be saved at last, the Bible won't let us believe that idea. Revelation speaks of people in "number as the sand of the sea" who will finally perish, not because God has rejected them, but because they would not receive the gift he has given them "in Christ." Revelation 20:8-15.

But there remained another explanation of those Good News texts, one that again presented problems:

3. ARMINIANISM, A HIGHLY RESPECTED PROTESTANT DOCTRINE

This belief says that the "all men" Paul speaks of in Romans 5 are only those who believe and obey. It arose as a protest against Calvinism, because the double predestination doctrine seemed to create both arrogance and despair. John Wesley tells of people who were so discouraged thinking they were predestined to be lost that they gave up hope; and others, thinking they were "the elect," wanted to sin ***ad infinitum*** and still be saved. Arminianism arose in an effort to get the truth back on track again.

God actually wants everyone to be saved. Christ has died for everybody, Arminianism said; everybody **can** be saved. And Christ died in order to make a provision so that everyone **could** be saved, but what He accomplished was only **provisional**. The fine print amounts to a big "if."

Could there be an Achilles heel lurking here in this doctrine? If Christ actually **accomplished** nothing for anyone unless he first takes the initiative to believe and obey, then so far as the lost are concerned, it's the same as if He had not died. They end up themselves paying the debt of their own sins, and they will never agree with the song that says: "Jesus Paid It All" for them.

But the Bible does not teach this. God wants everyone to be saved (1 Timothy 2:3-4), but Paul also tells the sad truth that many people will refuse His gift (2 Thessalonians 1:8-9; 2:8-10). So even though we might wish everyone could be saved, the Bible shows that this won't happen. Revelation talks about people "as many as the sand of the sea" who will be lost, not because God rejects them, but because they would not accept the gift He gave them in Jesus (Revelation 20:8-15).

Still, there was another way to understand the Good News texts, but it also had problems:

3. ARMINIANISM, AN IMPORTANT IDEA IN THE PROTESTANT CHURCH

This belief says that when Paul talks about "all people" in Romans 5, he only means the people who believe and obey. It started as a reaction to Calvinism, because some people felt hopeless thinking they were "chosen to be lost," while others thought they could sin as much as they wanted because they were "chosen to be saved." Arminianism tried to fix this and get the truth back on track.

Arminianism says God wants everyone to be saved and that Jesus died for everyone. But it also says that Jesus' gift only works if people first believe and obey. That makes it more like an "if" gift.

Could there be a problem with this idea? If Jesus didn't really do anything for anyone unless they first do the right thing, then for the people who are lost, it's as if He didn't die at all. They end up "paying" for their own sins, and they couldn't honestly sing, "Jesus Paid It All" for them.

The implication is that when the lost die their second death, they will owe no debt to God. They are even; by dying their own second death, they will have balanced their account. They will have fulfilled the Hindu ideal of ultimate karma—they pay up and never needed a Savior.

Does God want them to think that?

My conscience forced me to ask: Did not Jesus truly "pay it all" for everyone?

Some who accept this respected doctrine recognize that there would be no life on this planet unless Christ had died for us all; so yes, our physical life was secured for us by the sacrifice of Christ; but He also gave the animals the same physical life we have. So actually, Christ accomplished nothing more for the human race than He accomplished for the animals, unless we take that all-important initiative upon ourselves to believe and obey. What he did was only provisional, an IF offer.

True, eternal salvation is an offer; but is it only that?

I WAS DISTURBED.

Doesn't the cross of Christ deserve more honor and glory than that? Isn't it true that all the happiness that humans enjoy on this planet is also the purchase of His sacrifice? Didn't Jesus say, "I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly"? John 10:10.

Many who will be lost have "lived luxuriously, ... clothed in fine linen, purple, and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls." Revelation 18:7, 16. For every human being, believer and unbeliever alike, Christ "has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows" so that the "more abundant life" we already enjoy, believers and unbelievers alike, has been bought for us by His blood. For everyone, "the chastisement of our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed.... The Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all." Isaiah 53:4-6. Never has even an unbeliever enjoyed any pleasure in life except that Jesus suffered a corresponding sorrow and chastisement.

This idea means that when people who are lost die their second death, they won't owe anything to God. By dying, they would have "paid their own way" and wouldn't need a Savior.

But does God want them to think that?

I had to ask myself: didn't Jesus really "pay it all" for everyone?

Some people who believe this teaching say that without Jesus' death, life on earth wouldn't even exist. That's true—our life is a gift because of Him. But even animals get the same life we have. So if Jesus' gift only works for humans when we do something first, then what He did isn't fully for us—it's only conditional, like an "if" offer.

Yes, eternal life is offered to everyone, but is it only an offer, or did Jesus actually make it real for all of us?

I FELT UPSET.

Doesn't what Jesus did on the cross deserve more thanks and honor? Isn't it true that all the good things people enjoy in life come because of what He did? Jesus even said, "I came so people could have life, and have it fully" (John 10:10).

Some people who will be lost have lived in luxury, wearing fancy clothes and jewelry (Revelation 18:7,16). But Jesus has carried the sadness, pain, and suffering for every person, so that everyone can enjoy life. For everyone, He took the punishment that should have been ours (Isaiah 53:4-6). Even people who don't believe in Him still enjoy the good things He bought with His sacrifice.

Could it be that Christ hasn't actually **given** anything to unbelievers more than he gave the animals? Is the "gift" that Paul speaks of in Romans 5:15, 16 only offered to us? Do we get nothing unless we take the initiative? If a friend offers you a gift but doesn't give it, then he hasn't given anything to you. You have no reason to be grateful. You owe him nothing. Credit card banks deluge you with offers of loans, but they give you no gifts. **It's all merely provisional.**

I BEGAN TO THINK THIS MATTER THROUGH TO ITS LOGICAL CONCLUSION.

According to Arminianism, our receiving what Christ offers us is what makes it **become** a "gift." Otherwise He has done nothing more than make us an offer, a kind intention, and we go away with no sense of real gratitude for a **gift given**. We had a significant part in our own salvation. I began to wonder: Does this have something to do with the lukewarmness that pervades the last-days church of "Laodicea"?

Arminianism is wonderful in that it was a brave response to Calvinism, but the more I thought about it, the more it seemed to come short of the full sunlit truth that the apostles preached. God **gave** His Son, not merely offered to do so; Christ **died** for us, not just offered to. He actually shed his blood "once for all" to redeem us, not merely offered to; He doesn't have to shed it again constantly in the Roman Catholic mass where each adherent requires a new sacrifice. In the long run, those who enter heaven at last will say: Thanks, Jesus for all that You actually **did** for us; we owe everything to You.

But if Arminianism is right, then those who enter heaven can say: "Thanks Jesus for your good offer; but You didn't **accomplish** anything for us until we did the right thing first to make it effective. We did our part; that's why we're here." Thought through to its ultimate conclusion, this turns out to be salvation-by-faith-plus-by-works.

Could this confused idea of what happened on the cross of Christ be the deeply rooted reason for the lack of zeal that permeates the church worldwide? This doctrine must exert an unconscious influence.

Could it be that Jesus hasn't actually done anything for people who don't believe? Is His gift only something we get if we do something first? That's not how a real gift works. If a friend offers you a gift but doesn't actually give it, then you have nothing to be thankful for. It's like credit card companies sending offers—they don't give anything for free. Jesus, on the other hand, really gave His gift to everyone.

I STARTED THINKING ABOUT THIS ALL THE WAY TO THE END.

Arminianism teaches that we have to do something to make Jesus' gift work for us. If we don't, it's like He just offered to help, but didn't really do anything for us. We would feel like we earned it ourselves instead of being truly thankful for God's gift. I started to wonder if this is why some people in the church don't have strong, full hearts for Jesus.

Arminianism is good because it tried to answer a big question about God's plan. But the more I thought about it, the more I saw that it doesn't tell the whole story. God didn't just offer His Son—He gave Him. Jesus didn't just offer to die—He really died for us once and for all. He doesn't need to keep dying again in every church service. In the end, everyone in heaven will say: "Thank you, Jesus, for everything you did for us. We owe it all to you."

If Arminianism were completely right, people would have to say: "Thanks, Jesus, for your good offer, but we had to do something first to make it work. We did our part, that's why we're here." That really turns salvation into something we earn, instead of something God gives freely.

Could this confused idea about what Jesus did on the cross be the reason why many people in the church don't feel excited or passionate about God? This idea might affect people without them even knowing it.

And further, what about the lost at last who stand before the judgment throne? Are they lost because they weren't smart enough to accept a mere offer, or will they be lost because they wilfully rejected a gift that was **given** them?

Lastly, I discovered a fourth alternative that seemed to be pure gospel truth.

4. CHRIST DID ACCOMPLISH SOMETHING FOR EVERY PERSON!

The Bible seems to make clear that the lost will at last fully realize that Christ gave them the **gift** of justification and salvation "in Him," but they threw it away. He did as much for them as He did for the saved people. Their unbelief caused the loss of their souls, unbelief that was more than merely passive. It was an active refusal to repent and be reconciled to God. The lost not only thoughtlessly "neglected so great a salvation;" the Greek word means "they made light of it," scorned it (Hebrews 2:3; Matthew 22:5). They **wanted** to go on being rebellious.

The problem boils down to one simple question: Did Christ actually pay the debt for every human sin?

Scripture spells out an unequivocal yes.

This is not an abstract, academic much-ado-about-nothing issue. The answer gives the key to reaching the Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, Jewish mind. Yes, all those people in "Babylon" whom the Lord calls, "My people" (Revelation 18:4). **The answer also spells the difference between a church being lukewarm, or on fire for the One who died for us.**

PAUL WASN'T LUKEWARM!

And what about the people who are lost and stand before God on judgment day? Are they lost because they didn't understand a simple offer, or because they chose to say no to a real gift God already gave them?

Finally, I found a fourth way of understanding this that seemed to be the true message of the gospel.

JESUS DID SOMETHING FOR EVERY SINGLE PERSON!

The Bible shows that some people will finally understand that Jesus gave them the gift of being made right with God and saved, but they didn't accept it. He did as much for them as He did for the people who believed. Their unbelief caused them to lose their chance to be saved. This wasn't just forgetting about it—they actually chose not to say sorry and be friends with God. They didn't just ignore God's gift; they made fun of it and wanted to keep doing their own way (Hebrews 2:3; Matthew 22:5).

The main question is simple: Did Jesus pay for every person's sins?

The Bible clearly says yes.

This isn't just a school lesson or something to argue about. Knowing the answer helps us understand how to reach people from all kinds of religions, like Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, and Jews. God calls all people "My people" (Revelation 18:4). This answer also shows the difference between a church that is cold and one that is full of love for Jesus, who died for us.

PAUL WAS NEVER HALF-HEARTED!

The love (*agape*) of Christ compelled [constraineth, KJV] him. When he said that "One died for all," he reasoned that it had to mean that "all died," so that "those who live" cannot in peace of conscience go on living "for themselves." They are constrained henceforth to "live for Him who for their sake died and was raised to life." 2 Corinthians 5:14, 15. Paul saw something that set him on fire for the Lord until that last hour in the Roman Mamertine prison when he laid his head on the block before the executioner, and died for the One who had died for him. "God forbid that I should glory except in the cross," he had said. No glorying in his own response, or his own faith, or his own obedience. That's why he wrote those words that we already noted:

"The grace of God and the gift [with it] came to the many by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ [in Greek **the** many means all people].... The judicial action, following on ... so many misdeeds, resulted in a verdict of acquittal.... The result of one righteous act is acquittal and life for all."

All the other major Bible versions agree with the Revised English Bible. They render "judicial verdict of acquittal" as "justification." It's not that Christ's sacrifice **makes** everybody to be righteous, but He **treats** every person as though he were righteous, because God accepted the human race "in Christ." He is already reconciled to **you**; now, says Paul: "We implore **you** on Christ's behalf; [you] be reconciled to God." 2 Corinthians 5: 19, 20.

WHAT THIS FOURTH VIEW OF WHAT HAPPENED ON THE CROSS HAS MEANT TO ME.

Confronted with objections from some that Paul didn't mean "all people," only those "all" who first do something right to make it effective, I looked again. Paul was plain: the "all" upon whom comes this glorious "verdict of acquittal" are the same "all" who sinned "in Adam," they "all are justified by God's grace alone, through his act of liberation in the person of Christ Jesus." Romans 3:23, 24, REB. Seven truths here seemed very clear:

- "All ... **sinned**." That included me.
- The same "all are **justified**."

The love of Jesus was so strong that it moved Paul to act. When Paul said, "One died for all," he meant that everyone should understand that they cannot just live for themselves anymore. People who follow Jesus are now supposed to "live for the one who died for them and came back to life" (2 Corinthians 5:14-15).

Paul loved Jesus so much that even when he was in a Roman prison, he stayed strong in his faith until the very end, when he was killed for Jesus. He once said, "I will only be proud of the cross," which means he didn't want to brag about himself, his faith, or his good choices—only about what Jesus did.

Paul also explained that God's gift of grace came to many people through Jesus. Because of Jesus, God forgives people and treats them as if they are good and right with Him. This doesn't mean that everyone becomes perfect, but God accepts everyone because of Jesus. Now, Paul tells us: "We ask you to be friends with God" (2 Corinthians 5:19-20).

HOW JESUS' DEATH ON THE CROSS AFFECTS ME

Some people said that when Paul wrote "all people," he really only meant the people who do something good first. But when I read it carefully, Paul was very clear. The "all" who are forgiven are the same "all" who have done wrong. Everyone can be made right with God **only by His gift of grace**, because of what Jesus did for us.

From this, seven important ideas seem very clear:

- Everyone has done wrong, and that includes me.
- But everyone can be made right with God.

- And they are "**justified freely**" (they pay nothing, they merit nothing).
- It's **by grace** (that means free to all undeserving people, without exception).
- And it's not only by grace, it's by grace **alone.**"
- The "act of liberation" is for **all**, because
- It's "**in the person of Christ Jesus,**" "**the Savior of the world.**"

There were those who worried that believing this would encourage people to go on sinning. I thought about that. What they didn't understand was that genuine faith "works through **agape**." One can't believe that on the cross Christ legally justified him by grace, without something happening in his heart. It constrains him to be obedient to all the commandments of God, for "**agape** is the fulfillment of the law." Romans 13:10. When you appreciate that "in Christ" God **treats** you as though you were just, then He can transform you and **make** you just "in Christ." It's called justification **by faith.**

I AM INDEBTED TO SOMEONE ELSE FOR THIS BREAKTHROUGH IN UNDERSTANDING.

I must make plain that I wasn't smart enough to think this through. I wandered in perplexity because of this tension between Calvinism and Arminianism until a friend shared with me a comment from an author who a century ago recovered the heart-warming truth of what Paul said. This brought it into focus for me:

"By the righteousness of One the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life." [Romans 5:18]. There is no exception here. As the condemnation came upon all, so the justification comes upon all. Christ has tasted death for every man. He has given himself for all. Nay, he has given himself **to** every man. The gift has come upon **all**. The fact that it is a free gift is evidence that there is no exception. If it came upon only those who have some special qualification, then it would not be a free gift.

- They don't have to pay or earn it—God gives it freely.
- It's a gift of God's love to everyone, even people who don't deserve it.
- It's only by God's gift, not by anything we do.
- This gift is for everyone.
- It's because of Jesus, who is the Savior of the whole world.

Some people worried that if others really believed this, they might keep doing wrong things. I thought about that. What they didn't understand is that real faith changes your heart. When you believe that Jesus forgives you because of what He did on the cross, it makes you want to do what is right. Love (agape) helps you follow God's rules, because love is what God's law is really about (Romans 13:10). When you understand that God treats you as good because of Jesus, He can also help you become good in your heart. This is called being made right with God by faith.

SOMEONE HELPED ME FIGURE THIS OUT, AND I'M VERY GRATEFUL TO THEM.

I have to be honest—I wasn't smart enough to figure this out on my own. I felt confused because I didn't understand the difference between two big ideas called Calvinism and Arminianism. Then a friend shared something with me from an author long ago that helped me understand Paul's words:

"Because of what one person did (Jesus), God's free gift comes to everyone so they can have life" (Romans 5:18). There are no exceptions. Just like everyone has done wrong, everyone can be made right. Jesus died for every person. He gave Himself for all. The gift is free, which shows it really is for everyone.

"It is a fact, therefore, plainly stated in the Bible, that the gift of righteousness and life in Christ has come to every man on earth. There is not the slightest reason why every man that has ever lived should not be saved unto eternal life, except that they would not have it. So many spurn the gift offered so freely." (*Waggoner on Romans*, by Ellet J. Waggoner, p. 101, emphasis supplied).

"God has dealt to every man a measure of faith, and to all the same measure, for the measure of grace is the measure of faith, and 'unto everyone of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ.' Eph. 4:7. Christ is given without reserve to every man. Heb. 2:9. Therefore, as the same measure of faith and grace is given to all men, all have an equal opportunity to gain the inheritance." (p. 89).

"Do you ask what then can prevent every man from being saved? The answer is: Nothing, except the fact that all men will not keep the faith. If all would keep all that God gives them, all would be saved." (p. 89).

Such precious insight! But the same author said more:

"God wills that **all** men should be saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth. 1 Timothy 2:4. And He accomplishes all things according to the counsel of His will. Ephesians 1: 11. Do you mean to teach universal salvation? Someone may ask. We mean to teach just what the Word of God teaches—that 'the grace of God hath appeared, bringing salvation to all men.'" Titus 2:11, RV. God has wrought out salvation for every man **and has given it to him**, but the majority spurns it and throw it away. The judgment will reveal the fact that full salvation was given to every man and that the lost have deliberately thrown away their birthright possession." (*Waggoner, The Glad Tidings, Galatians Made Clear*, pp. 13, 14).

The Bible clearly says that the gift of being right with God and having life in Jesus is for every person on earth. The only reason someone wouldn't be saved is if they refuse the gift. Many people sadly say no to this gift that is given so freely.

"God gives a little bit of faith to every person, and everyone gets the same amount. The gift of Jesus is the same for everyone. Jesus is given to everyone without holding anything back. Because everyone has the same faith and grace, everyone has the same chance to receive God's gift and live with Him forever."

"You might ask, 'What stops everyone from being saved?' The answer is: nothing—except that not everyone keeps their faith. If everyone held on to what God gives them, everyone would be saved."

This is very special truth. The same writer also said more.

The Bible says God wants everyone to be saved and to know the truth (1 Timothy 2:4). It also says God does everything according to His plan (Ephesians 1:11). Someone might ask, "Are you saying everyone will be saved?"

The answer is no. We are only teaching what the Bible says. God's grace has come and brings salvation to everyone (Titus 2:11).

God has made salvation for every person and has given it to them. But most people do not want it. They push it away and throw it aside.

When the judgment comes, it will show that God gave full salvation to everyone. It will also show that those who are lost chose to throw away the gift God gave them.

"Someone may lightly say, 'Then we are all right; whatever we do is right, so far as the law [of God] is concerned, since we are redeemed. It is true that all are redeemed, but not all have **accepted** redemption. Many say of Christ, 'We will not have this Man to reign over us,' and thrust the blessing of God from them. But redemption is for all. **All** have been purchased with the precious blood—the life— of Christ, and **all** may be, if they will, free from sin and death." (p. 61).

Our search for the truth of the cross has brought us to a place where profound gratitude must fill our hearts. No wonder people sing those four grand Hallelujah Choruses in Revelation 19:1-6, each grander than Handel's in his ***Messiah***,

"And I heard, as it were the voice of a great multitude, as the sound of many waters and as the sound of mighty thunderings, saying: Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns!"

When we begin to realize what Christ **accomplished** on his cross, we can't wait until we join our voices to swell the anthem:

"Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom, and strength and honor and glory and blessing!" Revelation 5:12.

Start singing now; you will be happy forever.

Someone might say, "Then we are fine no matter what we do. Since we are saved, God's law does not matter." But that is not true.

It is true that Jesus paid the price for everyone. But not everyone accepts what He did. Some people say about Jesus, "We don't want Him to be our King," and they push away God's gift.

Jesus paid for everyone with His own life. Because of that, everyone *can* be free from sin and death—if they choose to accept His gift.

As we learn more about the cross, our hearts should feel very thankful. We understand why people in heaven sing loud songs of praise in Revelation 19:1-6. They sing four powerful "Hallelujah" songs. These songs are even greater than the famous music written by Handel.

The Bible says the sound is like a huge crowd. It is as loud as rushing water and strong thunder. They shout, "Hallelujah! The Lord God who has all power is King!"

When we start to understand what Jesus did for us on the cross, we feel so happy and thankful. We can't wait to join in and sing this great song too.

Start praising Him now, and you will be happy forever.