

THE GRAND DIMENSIONS OF THE CROSS

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When Jesus died on the cross, did He make a mere *provision* whereby something *could* be done for us if we first do our part? Or did He actually *do* something for “all men”? We must now look again at that “wondrous cross” and see something that the enemy of our souls wants us to overlook.

Yes, He most certainly did do something for every human soul, more than a mere provision. The Bible often assures us that He “is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the *whole world*.”¹ As “all have sinned,” so all are “being justified freely by His grace.”² “God was in Christ reconciling *the world* unto Himself, not Imputing their trespasses to them.”³ Jesus came that He “might taste death for *every man*.”⁴ Through His “righteous act the free gift came to *all men*, resulting in justification of life.”⁵

The common idea is that the sacrifice of Christ is only *provisional*, that is, it does nothing for anyone unless he first does something and “accepts Christ.” According to this popular idea, Jesus stands back with His divine arms folded, waiting for the sinner to decide to “accept.” In other words, salvation is a heavenly process that remains void until *we* take

¹ 1 John 2:2.

² Romans 3:23, 24.

³ 2 Corinthians 5:19.

⁴ Hebrews 2:9.

⁵ Romans 5:18.

the initiative. Like a washing machine in a Laundromat. It has been provided, but it is only provisional. It does nothing for us until we first put in the coins. This sounds reasonable for it superficially explains why many are lost.

In contrast, the gospel which Paul proclaimed shines forth in our texts quoted above: (a) Christ did not limit His sacrifice, for in tasting “death for *every man*” He die “every man’s” second death.⁶ (b) As “all have sinned,” so “all” are “being justified freely by His grace.” This is *legal* justification, as we shall soon see. (c) By virtue of Christ’s sacrifice, God is not “imputing their trespasses” unto *the world*. He imputed them to Christ instead. This is why no lost person can suffer the second death until after the final judgment, which can come only after the second resurrection. And this is why we all can live even now. Our very life is purchased by Him. (d) “The *whole world*” has been redeemed, if only they knew it and believed it and stopped resisting the grace of God.

Every person owes his or her physical life, even this earthly life and all he has or is to the One who “died for *all*.” Whether one is a saint or a sinner, if he eats his daily food, he is nourished by the body and the blood of Christ. That means that the cross of Calvary is stamped on every loaf of bread.⁷ It is reflected in every water-spring.

When the sinner sees this truth and his heart appreciates its reality, he experiences *justification by faith*. This is therefore far more than a legal

⁶ See Revelation 2:10; 20:6-14.

⁷ *The Desire of Ages*, p. 660.

declaration of acquittal, for that was made at the cross for “all men.” *Justification by faith includes a change of heart.* It is the same as forgiveness. And New Testament forgiveness is more than a mere pardon. The Greek word for forgiveness means a taking away of the sin from the heart, reclaiming from it.⁸

How Justification by Faith Works

This is how the believer who exercises true faith becomes inwardly and outwardly obedient to all the commandments of God. Christ alone has saved him and justified him, but his faith responds and “works by love.” It is a new principle that permeates every nook and cranny of the human heart, “bringing every thought into captivity to Christ . . . [so that] obedience is fulfilled.”⁹

Such faith, if it is not hindered and adulterated with error, will begin the moment the sinner chooses to respond and will then grow to be so mature and powerful that it will prepare a people for the return of Christ. This is that “everlasting gospel” that we find in Revelation 14:6-14 which is proclaimed to all the world just before the return of Jesus.

Does this mean that all will be saved? No, not all will be saved. But the reason is deeper than that the lost were not clever or prompt enough to seize the initiative. They will have *actually resisted and*

⁸ Cf. Matthew 1:23 and 26:28. Jesus says that His blood is shed “for the remission of sins.” Remission is more than mere pardon; it is taking the sin away. The Greek word for “forgiveness” used in the New Testament means “taking away.”

⁹ 2 Corinthians 10:5, 6.

rejected the salvation already “freely” given them in Christ. God has taken the initiative to save “all men,” but humans have the power, the freedom of will, to thwart and veto what Christ has already accomplished for them and to throw away what was actually placed in their hands.

Nevertheless, there will be some, a “remnant,” who do respond wholeheartedly. Christ “shall see the travail of His soul, and be satisfied. By His knowledge My righteous Servant shall justify many.”¹⁰

We can cherish our alienation from Him and our hatred of His righteousness until we close the gate of heaven against ourselves. That is sad. But it is not necessary. According to the gospel concept, those who are saved at last are saved due to God’s initiative; those who are lost are lost because of their own initiative.

Even the gift of faith is dealt to every man, even as Christ gave Himself to every man.¹¹ What then can prevent every man from being saved? The answer is, Nothing, except the fact that all men will not keep the faith that God gave them. If all would keep it, all would be saved.

It follows that there is not the slightest reason why all who have ever lived should not be saved unto eternal life, except that they would not have it. Christ died for all. So many spurn the gift given so freely.

According to Jesus, the only sin for which anyone can be lost is that of not appreciating and receiving

¹⁰ Revelation 12:17; Isaiah 53:11.

¹¹ Romans 12:3.

His grace. This is what unbelief is—receiving it in vain. “He who does not believe is condemned And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved [chose] darkness rather than light.”¹²

How can it be that “the cross is stamped on every loaf of bread,” and even unbelieving sinners enjoy life because of Christ’s sacrifice? As the Lamb “slain from the foundation of the world,” He has truly “brought life . . . to light through the gospel.”¹³ The human race was so degraded in the time of the Roman Empire that mankind would have eventually destroyed themselves if Christ had not come when He did “in the fullness of the time.”¹⁴

Even the wicked today draw their next breath because of Christ’s cross, though they do not know the fact. No one can know a moment’s joyous laughter except that a price was paid for it by the One on whom was laid “the chastisement for our peace,” and by whose “stripes we are healed.”¹⁵ This is another way of saying that for “all men” He has brought “life,” enduring the imputation of their trespasses unto Himself, and for those who believe and appreciate His cross, He has also brought “immortality.”¹⁶

Paul rejoices in the grand work that Christ accomplished on His cross: “As through one man’s offense judgment came to all men, resulting in

¹² John 3:17-19.

¹³ Revelation 13:8; 2 Timothy 1:10.

¹⁴ Galatians 4:4.

¹⁵ Isaiah 53:5.

¹⁶ 2 Timothy 1:10.

condemnation, even so through one Man's righteous act, the free gift came to all men, resulting In justification of life."¹⁷ This is such an astounding statement that people have wrestled with it for centuries. There are four ways that it has been interpreted:

First, the Calvinist view implies that Paul did not say it quite right—"the free gift . . . resulting in justification of life" came only on the elect, not on "all men." Or, the non-elect are so unimportant that they aren't included in "all men." But the text itself denies this view.

Second, the Universalist view understands from this that "all men" must be saved at last. But the Bible often says clearly that in the end some will choose to be lost.

Third, the popular Arminian view also implies that Paul did not say it quite right "the free gift . . . resulting in justification of life" did not actually come upon "all men." Christ only made a *provision* so that it might possibly come *if* but *not until* they do something right first. Unless they activate the heavenly process, nothing happens. The washing machine in the Laundromat is only a provision, for it needs coins. This view is widely believed, for it superficially explains why so many will be lost—they didn't take the initiative to put the coins into the machine. But this view conflicts with what Paul said.

Fourth, Paul's own view is far better Good News. He said it exactly right: Christ as "the last Adam" has reversed all the evil that the first Adam did. As

¹⁷ Romans 5:18.

surely as “all men” were condemned by Adam’s sin, so surely “all men” have been legally justified by Christ’s sacrifice. He has already tasted death for “every man.” He is the propitiation for the sins “of the whole world.” No one could draw his next breath unless his sins had already been imputed unto Christ, for no one, saint or sinner, could bear his own full guilt even for a moment and still live. But human unbelief can negate the Justification which has already been given us.

Thus Christ did more than make a mere *provision* for a *possible* salvation that becomes real only *if* we succeed in doing everything just right. As the condemnation came upon all, so the justification comes upon all. The New English Bible makes it clear:

“The judicial action, following upon the one offence, issued in a verdict of condemnation, but the act of grace, following upon so many misdeeds, issued in a verdict of acquittal It follows, then, that as the issue of one misdeed was condemnation for all men, so the issue of one just act is acquittal and life for all men.”¹⁸

The fact that justification 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.

In the light of the cross, therefore, even “neglect” of “so great salvation” is rejection of it. This is unbelief. Thus the lost person condemns himself

¹⁸ Romans 5:16, 18, NEB.

before the universe and unfits himself for eternal life. He shuts himself out of heaven.

The true Good News is far better than we have been led to think. Our salvation does not depend on our cleverness in taking the initiative; it depends on our *believing* that God has taken the initiative in saving us. He elects all to be saved.

Coming into sharp focus, justification *by faith* is seen as much more than a legal declaration of acquittal. No one can be reconciled to God and not at the same time be reconciled to His holy law. Justification by faith makes the believing sinner become obedient to all the commandments of God.¹⁹ This is the secret of overcoming those many addictions that plague the sinful human race. It becomes impossible for anyone who truly believes the gospel to go on living in sin, which is transgression of the law of God.²⁰ Many sincere Sunday-keepers will gladly begin to keep the seventh-day Sabbath when they see it in this relationship with justification by faith and the cleansing of the sanctuary. In God's providence we can see the relationship between this truth and the cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary which began in 1844. The Sabbath truth fails to bring conviction to

¹⁹ Waggoner, *Christ and His Righteousness*, pp. 51-67; Jones, *Review and Herald*, Nov 10, 1896, Jan. 17, 1899; *Testimonies to Ministers*, pp. 91-93.

²⁰ Waggoner, *Signs of the Times*, May 1, 1893.

hearts unless it is joined to this cleansing of the sanctuary.²¹

“Does Ellen White agree?” She loved this Good News. Her favorite illustration was Abraham Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation which declared all the slaves in the Confederate territories legally free; but no one knew *experiential freedom* until he heard the news, believed it, and acted on it. Ellen White saw that it spelled the end of our worldwide lukewarmness. This kept her awake at night for joy.²²

COMMUNION MEDITATION

Christ’s sacrifice has reversed for all men the “condemnation” which came upon us all “in Adam.” He literally saved the world from the premature suicide that sin would have brought upon us. So every loaf of bread is stamped with His cross. “Never one, saint or sinner, eats his daily food, but he is nourished by the body and blood of Christ.”²³ When this grand truth of the cross comes into focus, we see it in the Bible:

“The bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life *to the world*. . . . The bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give *for the life of the world*.”²⁴

²¹ See Ellen White series of articles in *Review and Herald*, January-April, 1890; *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 1, p. 337.

²² *Ministry of Healing*, p. 89, 90; *1888 Materials*, pp. 217, 349.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 660.

²⁴ John 6:33, 51.

“God’s act of grace is out of all proportion to Adam’s wrongdoing. . . . 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 upon the one offence, issued in a verdict of condemnation, but the act of grace, following upon so many misdeeds, issued in a verdict of acquittal. . . . It follows, then, that as the issue of one misdeed [Adam's] was condemnation for all men, so the issue of one just act [Calvary] is acquittal and life for all men.”²⁵

Here is power to motivate! The practical result of believing this Good News? We experience justification by faith, which is a change of heart. We were on the outs with God, at enmity with Him; now we see Him as a Friend. In other words, we have “received the atonement,” which means we are reconciled to Him.²⁶ We’ve been redeemed from eternal death! It’s like someone on death row who gets a last-minute reprieve. So, says Paul, “present yourselves to God *as being alive from the dead.*” The burden is lifted from the weary heart when such “peace with God” flows in. From now on, no sacrifice is too difficult to make for the One who you know has already saved you from hell itself.²⁷

Such love constrains one to live for Him, so that it becomes actually easy to be saved and hard to be

²⁵ Romans 5:15-18, NEB.

²⁶ Vss. 7-11.

²⁷ Romans 6:13; 5:1.

lost. This Good News idea is an essential part of the message of Christ's righteousness.²⁸

MORE GOOD NEWS

All around the world people study about the cross of Christ. What happened on that cross? Why did Jesus die? What did He accomplish? What does His cross mean to you? Suppose you do not believe in Jesus at all (millions, yes billions, don't), does the cross mean anything to you as an unbeliever? What does the cross mean to the believer?

The answer is: it means everything to us, whether we are unbelievers or believers. In John 6:33 Jesus says, "The bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." And in verse 50 He says, "This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that one may eat of it and not die."

The only life that unbelievers have is the life which Christ gave them by virtue of His cross. They live because He died for them. They may not know it, they may not acknowledge it, but every breath they have ever drawn is purchased for them by that sacrifice. Furthermore, if an unbeliever repents of his unbelief, then he "will live forever" (vs. 51).

In verse 53 Jesus explains further: "Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you." This is true even of our physical life. Our daily food is purchased by the cross of Christ; every day, every loaf of bread is stamped with the cross.

²⁸ Matthew 11:28-30; Acts 26:14; *Lessons on Faith*, pp. 11, 82-85; 132, 133, etc.

The apostle Paul saw this magnificent truth when he said in Galatians 6:14: “God forbid that I should glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.” When you see it, you will glory in the cross like Paul did. Do you want to?