

Why Did Christ Die?

How many times have we seen billboards that read, "Christ died to save sinners." Or bumper stickers that say, "Jesus saves"? Do most people really understand what is meant? Probably not. It is not difficult, however, to know what they mean if one is willing to examine the Scriptures. So, why did Christ die to save sinners? And how are we saved by Jesus? It's time we understood!

Jesus Christ was God manifested in the flesh. The Scripture tells us, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. . . . And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth" (John 1:1-3, 14). See also 1 Timothy 3:16, Titus 2:13-14, and Hebrews 1:8. Before His human birth, Jesus Christ was the God of the Old Testament (1 Cor. 10:1-4)-the YHWH mentioned so many times in the Scriptures. He was the One who created man (John 1:3, Col. 1:16).

But, from the very beginning men began to sin. The Bible defines sin as the transgression of the Law-the breaking of the Ten Commandments (1 John 3:4). The Apostle Paul wrote ". . . all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). ". . . The wages of sin is death. . ." (Rom. 6:23). God is a God of mercy, but He is also a God of justice. A penalty must be paid for sin. Jesus came to the earth in human form. He lived a perfect life; He did not sin (1 Pet. 2:21-22). He did not deserve to die. But He willingly took our penalty upon Himself. How could He do this? Here is how! Jesus Christ was the Creator of mankind (Col. 1:16). Therefore, His death was of a greater value than the sum total of human beings who have lived, or will ever live. It is not possible for human beings to live without sin. This is why the Scripture states: ". . . God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh" (Rom. 8:3). Christ was the perfect sacrifice sent from heaven. He gave His life as a sacrifice for the sins of all mankind.

What Man Must Do

There are two requirements that each man must do before the sacrifice of Christ can apply. Each man must believe and accept the sacrifice Christ made, and each man must repent of sin. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). "Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord" (Acts 3:19). Accepting Christ means we must believe that Christ did indeed die to save sinners. Repenting of sin means we must turn around and go the other way. We must forsake a life-style that is contrary to the Law of God. We must stop breaking the Ten Commandments. Breaking the Ten Commandments is what brought the penalty of sin upon man in the first place.

Christ-the Lamb of God

John 1:29 records what John the Baptist said when he saw Jesus approaching, ". . . Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." John knew that Jesus was the antitype of the Passover lamb. In the book of Exodus, we read that at the first Passover, the lamb was slain and the blood was sprinkled on the door posts and lintel of each home. As a result, the death angel spared the homes of the Israelites (Ex. 12:6-7, 12-13). Jesus Christ-the antitype-was chosen as the sacrificial Lamb of God before the foundation of the world (Rev. 13:8). As the atoning sacrifice, His blood was shed for the sins of

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mankind. Isaiah wrote: "He [Christ] was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth" (Isa. 53:7). The Apostle Peter tells us: We have been redeemed ". . . with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot" (1 Pet. 1:19).

The system of worship in ancient Israel depicted many types of the coming sacrifice of Christ.

Paul tells us this about this temporary system of worship:

Which was a figure for the time then present, in which were offered both gifts and sacrifices, that could not make him that did the service perfect, as pertaining to the conscience; Which stood only in meats and drinks, and divers washings, and carnal ordinances, imposed on them until the time of reformation. But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building; Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us. For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? . . . Nor yet that he should offer himself often, as the high priest entereth into the holy place every year with blood of others; For then must he often have suffered since the foundation of the world: but now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself (Heb. 9:9-14, 25-26).

Of Christ's sacrifice we read: "Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin. . . . because he hath poured out his soul unto death: and he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors" (Isa. 53:10, 12). Paul adds: "But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man" (Heb. 2:9).

Jesus knew an important part of His mission here on this earth was to die for the sins of the world. He foretold His own death and resurrection. He said, ". . . The Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be slain, and be raised the third day" (Luke 9:22). "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up" (John 3:14). "As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep" (John 10:15). The Apostle Paul affirms: "For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures" (1 Cor. 15:3). "For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh" (Rom. 8:3).

The Bible tells us that we are justified by the blood of Christ (Rom. 5:9). Justification simply means the guilty slate has been wiped clean, and we can begin anew. Acceptance of Christ and His shed blood removes our guilty past only. It does not cleanse us from future sins. If we sin after repentance and baptism, John tells us, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:8-9). "My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world" (1 John 2:1-2). The penalty man has brought upon himself is not because of Adam and Eve. What took place was that when Adam and Eve sinned, mankind was cut off from God, left without help. Human nature being what it is, it is impossible for man not to sin. Paul wrote: ". . . the carnal mind [the natural mind which we were all born] is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be" (Rom. 8:7). Each one of us has

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incurred the death penalty because we have sinned. This is why Paul said: “Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned” (Rom. 5:12). But through Christ “. . . we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins” (Col. 1:14). “For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s” (1 Cor. 6:20). To repeat, what we must do is to accept the sacrifice that was made for us, and repent. The Apostle Paul instructs: “Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us” (1 Cor. 5:7).

Christ-the Real Sacrifice

The sacrificial system of the Old Testament pointed toward the real sacrifice-Christ-the sacrifice that would be truly efficacious. Animal sacrifices were only a type and did not and could not expiate sin. They could only “purify the flesh” and serve as a reminder of sin (Heb. 9:13; 10:3). “For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins” (Heb. 10:4). The antitype-the sacrifice of Christ-was foretold from the beginning. After Adam and Eve sinned, God said: “And I will put enmity between thee [Satan] and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel” (Gen. 3:15). This promise was that at a future point of time, a truly propitious sacrifice would be made for the sins of the world. Peter wrote that Christ was “. . . foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you” (1 Pet. 1:20). Job understood the significance of this coming sacrifice. He called the Messiah “the redeemer.” Job said, “For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth” (Job 19:25). Notice what the Apostle Paul said. He wrote that Christ “. . . being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” (Phil. 2:6-8). Jesus Christ was the true sacrifice-the only sacrifice that could atone for the sins of the world. “Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us. . . . For then must he often have suffered since the foundation of the world: but now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. . . . So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation” (Heb. 9:12, 26, 28).

Christ Suffered in the Flesh

Jesus Christ was God incarnate-God in the flesh. He existed from the beginning with God as the Logos or Spokesman (John 1:1). John said He was made flesh and dwelt among us (John 1:14). Jesus Christ was both God and man! While on the earth He suffered in the same way all men suffer. He endured the same things all of us endure. But He did not sin one time (1 Pet. 2:22). As the “Son of man” Jesus knew how important it was to rely on God for the spiritual strength He needed. The Scripture tells us this about Christ: “Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared; Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered” (Heb. 5:7-8). He completed what He set out to do. He accomplished His purpose on the earth. He said to the Father, “I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do” (John 17:4). This effort did not come about without intense anguish and great stress. At the time of His crucifixion we read: “And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground” (Luke 22:44). “And he went a little further, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt” (Matt. 26:39). “And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Matt. 27:46). Jesus Christ understands what the human experience is all about. This is why He “. . . can have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are

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out of the way; for that he himself also is compassed with infirmity” (Heb. 5:2). He is now at God’s throne in heaven helping us. “Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same. . . .” (Heb. 2:14). “Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need” (Heb. 4:14-16).

God’s Love for Man

Shortly after Creation mankind turned away from God (Gen. 6:5). The Flood destroyed the world that then existed. After the Flood men did not really change. They continued in sin.

Paul describes this human behavior:

Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things. Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves: Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen (Rom. 1:21-25).

In spite of this, God’s love for man has never waned. The Apostle John wrote: “Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins” (1 John 4:10). Paul adds: “But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8). Christ was our sin offering (2 Cor. 5:21). Our acceptance of that sacrifice is the first step necessary in order to receive God’s forgiveness and reconciliation. Christ’s sacrifice for the sins of mankind was a supreme act of love. Jesus Himself said, “. . . the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many” (Matt. 20:28). Jesus further stated, “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13). “I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep. . . . As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep. . . . Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life. . . . No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. . . . This commandment have I received of my Father” (John 10:11, 15, 17-18). Of His own volition Christ willingly gave Himself. This is why Peter could say: “Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain [course of life] received by tradition from your fathers; But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot” (1 Pet. 1:18-19). Christ’s sacrifice bought back our lives-lives which most surely would have ended in eternal death had not God and Christ manifested this supreme act of love. “For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom. 6:23). God did indeed so love this world of helpless sinners that His only begotten Son became the propitiation for our sins. “. . . Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour” (Eph. 5:2).

Though tempted in all points as we are, Christ lived without sin and died for us as the substitutionary sacrifice for man. By this means it is legally possible for our sins to be forgiven, and for us to be released from the penalty of sin. Jesus’ life was of a greater value than all human lives-past, present, and future. Thus, He paid the penalty for sin in our stead. Let us thank God for the sacrifice that was made for us, and for His infinite love.