

"God So Loved The World" Bible Study

"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." John 3:16 (NIV)

Study #4: The Supreme Sacrifice of Christ

At the very heart of the gospel message is Christ and Him crucified. It is Satan's determined purpose to engulf this truth in darkness. In this he has had some measure of success. By convincing the Christian church to believe the lie that men possess an immortal soul, he has robbed the cross of its glory.

If man possesses an immortal soul then death is not good-bye to life but simply the separation of the soul from the body. In that case, that which constitutes Christ's supreme sacrifice has to be limited to the shame and torture of the cross, which was no different than that of the two thieves who were crucified with Him and countless others who were executed by crucifixion.

Another factor that has robbed the cross of its glory is looking at the crucifixion of Christ from the Roman perspective. While it is true Christ was crucified on a Roman cross, it must be remembered that it was not the Romans who demanded His crucifixion but the Jews. It is only as we perceive the cross of Christ from the Jewish perspective, as did the New Testament writers, that we can begin to grasp the meaning of His supreme sacrifice that demonstrated God's infinite and unconditional love for us.

Crucifixion was not a Jewish method of execution. On the contrary, the Jews detested the cross because it had a very special meaning for them. As we discover the significance of the cross to the Jews, we will understand why the Jews demanded that Christ be crucified and why this constitutes the supreme sacrifice.

The cross was invented by the Phoenicians approximately 600 years before Christ. It was then adopted by the Egyptians and later the Romans, who refined it and used it to execute run-away slaves and their worst criminals.

Crucifixion was the most painful and shameful instrument of execution ever practiced by man. Besides bringing disgrace and shame, it involved tremendous physical and mental pain and anguish. It could take anywhere from three to seven days for the crucified one to die.

However, as we look at the cross of Christ with Jewish spectacles, we will be amazed to discover the self-emptying love of Jesus and what He was willing to give up in order to save humanity. May this truth of Christ and Him crucified impact you as it did the disciples of Jesus and the early church.

1. What condition were we in when Jesus died for us?

Romans 5:8 _____

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

2. What did the death of Christ do to man's relationship with God?

Romans 5:10 _____

Note: The good news is that God no longer looks upon the human race as sinners. He has reconciled or redeemed the world to Himself through the death of His Son. Because of this God is able to accept you in His Son as if you had never sinned.

3. What does the law say is necessary for the remission or forgiveness of sins?

Hebrews 9:22-26 _____

Note: The word purged or purified here means cleansed. The law demands death in order for sins to be forgiven. The sacrifice of animals, as was practiced in the Old Testament, could not accomplish this. They were only types to point to Christ's sacrifice. When Christ died on the cross, He paid the full price for the sins of the whole world once and for all.

4. Through what are we justified freely by God's grace?

Romans 3:24 _____

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

5. What did the death of Christ demonstrate?

Romans 3:25 (NIV) _____

Note: God cannot lawfully forgive sins without the shedding of blood (death). Therefore, before the cross event, God forgave the sins of the Old Testament believers out of His kindness or patience. But since Christ met the justice of the law for the sins of the entire human race on the cross, God is just in forgiving all who come to Him through the shed blood of His Son. This is what Christ meant when He instituted the Lord's Supper, "This is my blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the forgiveness of sins" (see Matthew 26:28).

6. Since the cross, what can God lawfully do to those who have faith in Christ?

Romans 3:26 _____

Note: This is how the Amplified Bible translates verse 26: “It was to demonstrate and prove at the present time in the now season that He Himself is righteous and that He justifies and accepts as righteous him who has true faith in Jesus.” Through the cross, God can legally or lawfully justify sinners and that is good news. That is why Paul calls the cross of Christ “the power of God unto salvation” (see 1 Corinthians 1:18).

7. In contrast to the wages of sin, what is the gift of God?

Romans 6:23 _____

8. Christ died on the cross and is risen. Where is He now and what is He doing?

Romans 8:32-34 _____

Note: At the cross, the love and the justice of God met. God did not spare His own Son the wages of sin because He so loved the world. The devil will accuse you of being a sinner and not deserving heaven. But there is One who will never accuse you and that is God. God has set you free, acquitted or justified you from all sins; therefore, He will never accuse you. Also, Christ, who died for our sins, is interceding on our behalf, since the devil accuses us day and night (see Rev. 12:10).

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

Hebrews 2:9 _____

Note: When Christians die they only go to sleep. The death that Christ tasted for everyone was not the sleep death but the wages of sin, good-bye to life. One of our future studies will be on the state of the dead, but now we want to find the meaning of the death that Jesus tasted for everyone.

10. What did the chief priests and officers cry out when Pilate presented Christ to them?

John 19:5-7 _____

Note: Pilate, who represented Roman law, found no fault in Jesus. The Jews had to give a reason why they were demanding Jesus’ crucifixion. They said that they had a law that condemned Christ to death. This law referred to the law of blasphemy.

11. According to the law of blasphemy to which the Jews referred, what method of death was stipulated?

Leviticus 24:16 _____

Note: In John 10:30, 31 we see the Jews taking up stones “again” to stone Jesus when He said, “The Father and I are one.” This proved they were aware that stoning was the method of death for blasphemy.

12. Why then did the Jews demand that Christ be crucified, which to the Jews was synonymous to hanging on a tree? (see Acts 5:30; 10:39; 13:29)

Deuteronomy 21:22, 23 _____

Note: When the Jews cried out “crucify him,” they were not only demanding that Christ be put to death, but they were demanding that God curse Him. When God’s curse falls on anyone, that is saying good-bye to life forever. Christ experienced this God-abandonment death on the cross and that is why He cried out, “My Father, my Father, why hast thou forsaken me?”

13. What is the curse of the law to all who have failed to obey it?

Galatians 3:10 _____

Note: Have you kept the law perfectly? If not, you deserve to be cursed. But what we deserve God heaped on His Son at the cross.

14. How did Christ redeem us from the curse of the law?

Galatians 3:13 _____

Note: The reason why the law does not curse the believer is because God made Christ to be the curse for us. Jesus tasted the wages of sin, the curse of the law, for all humanity on the cross. That is the supreme Sacrifice.

15. Why was God the Father satisfied when He saw the results of Jesus’ suffering and death?

Isaiah 53:6, 10, 11 _____

Note: We can only faintly understand the agony that our Heavenly Father must have suffered as He Himself allowed the curse of our sins to fall on Jesus, His beloved Son. Through the supreme sacrifice on the cross, both the Father and the Son were telling the human race that their love for us is more than their love for themselves! This is God’s selfless love which Christ demonstrated on the cross.

16. How should the supreme Sacrifice affect us?

2 Corinthians 5:14, 15 _____

Note: Not the fear of punishment nor the desire for reward must be the motivation of Christian living. The love of God, demonstrated on the cross, is the driving force in true Christian living. No wonder the songwriter wrote: “Love so amazing, so divine, demands my life, my soul, my all.” This is exactly what the cross of Christ did to His disciples, and this is what it must do to us.

17. What has Christ done to show us the love of God?

1 John 3:16 _____

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

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

"Upon Christ as our substitute and surety was laid the iniquity of us all. He was counted a transgressor, that He might redeem us from the condemnation of the law. The guilt of every descendent of Adam was pressing upon His heart. The wrath of God against sin, the terrible manifestation of His displeasure because of iniquity, filled the soul of His Son with consternation. All His life Christ had been publishing to a fallen world the good news of the Father's mercy and pardoning love. Salvation for the chief of sinners was His theme. But now with the terrible weight of guilt He bears, He cannot see the Father's reconciling face. The withdrawal of the divine countenance from the Savior in this hour of supreme anguish pierced His heart with a sorrow that can never be fully understood by man. So great was this agony that His physical pain was hardly felt.

"Satan with his fierce temptations wrung the heart of Jesus. The Savior could not see through the portals of the tomb. Hope did not present to Him His coming forth from the grave a conqueror, or tell Him of the Father's acceptance of the sacrifice. He feared that sin was so offensive to God that Their separation was eternal. Christ felt the anguish which the sinner will feel when mercy shall no longer plead for the guilty race. It was the sense of sin, bringing the Father's wrath upon Him as man's substitute, that made the cup He drank so bitter, and broke the heart of the Son of God."

Ellen G. White, Desire of Ages, p. 753

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