

As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby. - 1 Peter 2:2

THE SINCERE MILK OF GOD'S WORD

The word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword... - Hebrews 4:12

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The Cross of Christ and Our Response

Mankind's greatest problem is sin. All who reach the age and ability to distinguish right from wrong have sinned (**Rom. 3:23**). The wages of sin is eternal death (**Rom. 6:23**).

No matter how many good deeds we do, good deeds alone cannot atone for sin. Alone, we are hopeless.

Yet, God planned a means by which hopeless sinners doomed for eternal death can become joyful saints granted eternal life.

This plan of redemption centers on His Son Jesus. Though Jesus is deity, He took upon Himself "*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. 2:7-8**).

As a man, Jesus "*was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin*" (**Heb. 4:15**). Because of His perfection, Jesus was qualified to be offered as a spotless Lamb for us, in order to make atonement for sin (**1 Pet. 1:19**). At the cross, Jesus followed through with this part of God's plan of salvation.

The cross of Christ demonstrates the height of man's wickedness. **Acts 13:28** says, "*Though they found no cause of death in [Jesus], yet desired they Pilate that He should be slain.*" The motive behind the unjust treatment of Jesus was hatred (**John 7:7**).

The events leading up to Jesus' death demonstrate man's cruelty. He was mocked (**Matt. 27:29**), spit on and smitten (**verse 30**), reviled (**verse 39**), and falsely accused (cf. **John 18:30**).

Yet, what was the ugliest act of man's hatred was the perfect demonstration of God's love.

Romans 5:6-8 says "*For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.*"

Jesus *willingly* went to the cross. He could have called twelve legions of angels to prevent His death (**Matt. 26:53**). Instead, Christ *chose* to give His life for mankind (cf. **Heb. 12:2**). There is no greater example of love than this. There is no more wonderful act that has ever been done for man's good.

Through Jesus' death on the cross, it is possible to be redeemed (**Eph. 1:7**). Christ's blood paid the ransom price in order that we might be released from the bondage of sin.

Through Jesus' death on the cross, propitiation for sins is possible (**1 John 2:2**). A perfectly just God does not let sin go unpunished. Christ's death offers the appeasement of God's wrath against sin.

Through Jesus' death on the cross, it is possible for man to be justified (**Rom. 5:9**). The guilty can be pronounced "not guilty" because the "*just*" (Christ) died for the "*unjust*" (us) - **1 Pet. 3:18**.

Through Jesus' death on the cross, it is possible for man to be reconciled to God (**Col. 1:20-21**). Though sin has separated us from God, the blood of Christ allows us to be brought back into harmony with Him.

When we understand the significance of the blood of Jesus, it leaves no room for arrogance. There is nothing for us to boast

about except the death of Christ (**Gal. 6:14**). Without Him, we would be doomed. As **Ephesians 2:8-9** points out, salvation is not something we deserve. Rather, it is made possible through God's grace, which is extended to us through Christ.

This does not mean the blood of Christ nullifies *man's* responsibilities in receiving salvation. God's grace is a gift, but He can extend this gift to whomever He desires.

God has determined that for the blood of Christ to redeem us, we must obey Him.

The blood of Christ was shed "*for the remission of sins*" (**Matt. 26:28**). Obedience to Christ's will is also "*for the remission of sins*" (**Acts 2:38**). By this, we can conclude that our access to the blood of Christ is through *obedience* (cf. **Phil. 2:12**).

After Christ's death, He was raised and commissioned His apostles to tell the world about Him (**Mark 16:15-16**). Their message was to center on Christ's death, burial, and resurrection, and how mankind must respond.

The apostles obeyed and taught Christ's doctrine. Christ sent them the "*Spirit of truth*" to ensure this was so (**John 16:13**). God confirmed the apostle's "*word with signs following*" (**Mark 16:20**).

What the apostles taught by inspiration is first seen in **Acts 2**. In "Peter's Pentecostal Sermon," he spoke of Christ's fulfillment of prophecy, man's rejection of Him, and His death, burial, and resurrection. Peter emphasized that God "vetoed" man's judgment against Christ by raising Him and exalting Him to be at the right hand of God, as Lord and Christ (**verses 14-36**).

Upon hearing and believing the message of Jesus, those convicted "*said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?*" (**verse 37**). The apostle's response was "*Repent, and be baptized every*

one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost" (**verse 38**).

Throughout the book of **Acts**, the Holy Spirit's message of salvation was constant.

In **Acts 8**, a eunuch from Ethiopia was reading **Isaiah 53** when the Spirit led Philip to him (**Acts 8:26-34**). The eunuch asked about the prophecy he was reading, and "*Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus*" (**verse 35**).

Upon hearing the message of "*Jesus*," the eunuch was convinced that he needed to be baptized (**verse 36**). Phillip told the eunuch that if he believed with all of his heart, he may. The eunuch answered by confessing his faith (**verse 37**) and being immersed in water. That he was immersed was demonstrated when he and Philip "*went down both into the water*" (**verse 38**), and "*come up out of the water*" (**verse 39**).

The message of salvation has not changed.

The benefits Christ made possible through His death are reaped by those who respond to the message of Christ with belief and confession of who He is, repentance (turning from sin to obedience), and baptism in the name of Christ "*for the remission of sins*." This is God's pattern for getting "*into Jesus Christ*" (**Rom. 6:3**; cf. **Gal. 3:27**).

After one becomes a Christian, the sacrifice of Christ motivates us to love God as He did (**1 John 4:19**; **5:3**), love others as He loved us (**John 13:34**), and "*walk in the light, as He is in the light*." In other words, *obey Him*. If we do so, the blood Christ shed on the cross "*cleanseth us from all sin*" (**1 John 1:7**).

May we appreciate what Christ did on the cross. May we recognize both what *He* did, and what we must do to be saved.

-Michael Hickox