

## Why Christ Died

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People will sometimes ask the questions with respect to salvation and redemption, *“Why did God do it this way? Why did Jesus die on the cross?”* Of course, we could just give the simple answer, and say that this is just how God wanted it done! However, this answer does not fully satisfy our interest, nor does it help us to fully appreciate what God has done for man. The fact is that the particulars and mechanics of the scheme of redemption are rooted in the very nature of God and His creation. God, by nature, “is love” (1 John 4:8,16). The kind of love that is attributed to God is a *sacrificial love* (Ephesians 5:25). Hence the notable words of Jesus in John 3:16: *“For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.”* Also, *“Greater love has no one than this, than a man lay down his life for his friends”* (John 15:13). These two verses combine to attribute this sacrificial love to both God the Father and God the Son. This love is intrinsic in God’s nature. God is so genuinely concerned for man, that He is willing to subject Himself to the cruelty and rejection of the very men that He wants to save. This was most evidenced in the treatment of Jesus Christ. Men had tested, resisted and rejected God before (Genesis 6; Acts 7:51-53), but this rejection became quite personal when God came in the flesh. But, regardless of this rejection by His own creatures, Peter said, *“God is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance”* (2 Peter 3:9). God *“desires for all men to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth”* (1 Timothy 2:4). God *“takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked”* (Ezekiel 33:11). He wants them to *“turn, and live.”*

Let us not conclude, however, that just because God is a *God of love*, that He is not also a *God of justice* and of *vengeance*, for He most certainly is. *“God considers it a just thing to repay with affliction those who afflict”* His people (2 Thessalonians 1:6). Vengeance belongs to God, and He will one day “repay” evil men for their behavior (Hebrews 10:30). *“It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God”* (Hebrews 10:31). We are to note both the *“kindness”* and the *“severity”* of God (Romans 11:22). God is love, but He is also *“a consuming fire”* (Hebrews 12:29). God’s own nature is one reason for the salvation system that He devised.

God is sacrificial love *personified*. It is reasonable that salvation would therefore involve some type of sacrifice for sin. But again, *Why did Jesus die on the cross?* The answer is found in that little word SIN. Jesus died because of the sins of mankind. Sin is contrary to the very nature and being of God. Humans cannot have fellowship with God unless their sins are washed away. John said, *“God is light, and in Him is no darkness at*

*all*" (1 Jn. 1:5). Darkness is sin, so as long as humans have sin to their account, they cannot be in fellowship with God. Hence, the need for salvation.

The Bible affirms that, "*All have sinned and come short of the glory of God*" (Rom. 3:23). With the reign of sin comes the reign of death, for "*the wages of sin is death*" (Romans 6:23; 5:14). Because of sin, "death has passed upon all men, for all have sinned" (Romans 5:12). Isaiah tells us that sin separates humans from God (Isa. 59:1, 2). This has been true from the beginning, for man was cast out of the Garden of Eden on account of sin (Genesis 3:22-24). Access to the Tree of Life was lost, and it can only be regained through the process of redemption (Rev. 22:14).

But what is "sin?" Men tend to define sin in many different ways, but the only definition that really matters is God's definition. We must consult the Scriptures in order to know God's definition of sin.

1. Sin is the transgression of God's law (1 John 3:4). The word "sin" means literally "to miss the mark." Sin is the failure to do what God tells us to do. It should be noted that God's law contains both moral and positive commands. We must not question God's requirements.
2. All unrighteousness is sin (1 John 5:17). "Righteousness" is conduct that is consistent with the standard of God's law. "Righteousness," according to Peter, is something that is "worked" (Acts 10:35).
3. Sin is refusing to do what one knows to be right (James 4:17). I often ask people if they believe that they we must do what God tells us to do. Most people say yes. At the marriage feast of Cana, Jesus' mother told the servants, "*Whatever He says to you, do it*" (John 2:5). We may apply this suggestion to all of Christ's instructions, for He is our Lord and King (Acts 2:36). Failure to comply with Christ's terms results in sin.
4. Sin is the violation of one's conscience: "*Whatever is not of faith is sin*" (Rom. 14:23). Paul's point, in the Romans 14 context, is that a person should not violate the dictates of his own conscience – that which he *strongly believes*.

### **"There Is Power In The Blood"**

The old hymn acknowledges the "wonder working power" in the soul saving blood of Christ. *Why did Jesus die on the cross? Why did his blood have to be shed?* The answer is rooted in the very nature of life itself. Before the time of Christ, blood sacrifices of animals were offered for the sins of mankind. Even before the Law of Moses, God had ordained that "life is in the blood" (Genesis 9:4). Then, with the inauguration of the Law of Moses, this truth was restated and joined to the concept of atonement: "***For the life of the flesh is in the blood: and I have given it to you upon***

*the altar to make an atonement for your souls: for it is the blood that makes atonement for the soul*" (Leviticus 17:11). The Hebrew writer tells us that under the Law of Moses *"almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins"* (Hebrews 9:22). These Bible statements combine to lead us to one inescapable truth: humans cannot be saved without a blood sacrifice. Death can only be reversed by life, and life is in the blood.

The Hebrew writer also explained that the blood that was shed in the animal sacrifices of the Old Testament was not sufficient to take away sins: *"For it is not possible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sin"* (Heb. 10:4). We are told that these sacrifices were merely a "shadow" or type of good things to come (antitype, Heb. 9:23). We are told that those annual sacrifices only gave people "remembrance" of their sins "year after year continually" (Heb. 10:2-3). Animal sacrifices themselves could not atone for sin. However, the practice of blood sacrifice did train people to connect sacrifice to salvation. Old Testament blood sacrifices pointed to the real substance of a "better covenant," that was based upon "better promises," that was inaugurated by a "better ministry" and purchased by a "better sacrifice" (see Hebrews 8:6; 9:23). Indeed, Christians are "bought with a price" (1 Cor. 6:20), and that purchase price is the blood of Christ (Acts 20:28). Peter said that saints are *"redeemed by the precious blood of Christ; as of a lamb without blemish and without spot"* (1 Peter 1:19).

### **How We Are Saved By The Blood of Christ:**

This leads us to an important question: How are we saved by the blood of Christ? Justification and redemption are certainly through the *blood of Christ* (Romans 5:9 & 3:24-26), but at what point are we justified by that blood? Are human sins forgiven *automatically and unconditionally* by the mere fact of Christ's death? Universalists say yes. But if they are correct, then how do we explain the various conditions of salvation that are required by Scripture? In John 3:16, Jesus promised salvation to *those who believe on Him*. If people were all saved automatically at the death of Christ, then why would *faith* be necessary to salvation? Jesus said, *"he that believes and is baptized will be saved; but he that disbelieves will be condemned"* (Mark 16:16). How can people be "condemned" after Jesus shedding His blood for them? Salvation must be conditional.

And what about *confession* and *repentance*? Jesus twice stated that we will perish if we don't repent (Luke 13:3, 5). In Acts 2:38, *remission of sins* is predicated upon *repentance*. Was Peter wrong to promise forgiveness of sins upon the basis of faith and repentance? No, for he was an inspired apostle. And what about the requirement of *baptism*, which Peter fastened to repentance? He said, *"Repent and be baptized, every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins..."* May we

ignore such commands? Not if we wish to be saved! Obedience to King Jesus is demanded (Hebrews 5:9; 2 Thess. 1:7-9).

God's grace contains conditions. It "teaches us" what we must do, and how we must live (Titus 2:11-14; 3:5). In order for the spiritual benefits of the blood of Christ to save us, we must meet the conditions of salvation. We are saved by God's grace, and we are saved by Christ's blood, but only when we respond to God's word in obedient faith.

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