

## 7. Christ, Our Sacrifice (4Q 2013—The Sanctuary)

**Biblical material:** Isa. 53:2–12, Heb. 2:9, Heb. 9:26–28, Heb. 9:12, Exod. 12:5, Heb.4:15; 1 Peter 2:24.

### Quotes

- I almost shudder at the thought of alluding to the most fatal example of the abuses of grief which the history of mankind has preserved—the Cross. Consider what calamities that engine of grief has produced! *John Adams*
- The Christians say that among the ancient Jews if you committed a crime you had to kill a sheep. Now they say “Charge it. Put it on the slate. The Savior will pay it.” In this way, rascality is sold on credit, and the credit system in morals, as in business, breeds extravagance. *Robert Ingersoll*
- I don’t want anybody to die for me. *Ted Turner*
- Our tendency in the midst of suffering is to turn on God. To get angry and bitter and shake our fist at the sky and say, “God, you don’t know what it’s like! You don’t understand! You have no idea what I’m going through. You don’t have a clue how much this hurts.” The cross is God’s way of taking away all of our accusations, excuses, and arguments. The cross is God taking on flesh and blood and saying, “Me too.” *Rob Bell*
- We sinned for no reason but an incomprehensible lack of love, and He saved us for no reason but an incomprehensible excess of love. *Peter Kreeft*
- Before we can begin to see the cross as something done for us, we have to see it as something done by us. *John R. W. Stott*
- God has chosen to save the world through the cross, through the shameful and powerless death of the crucified Messiah. If that shocking event is the revelation of the deepest truth about the character of God, then our whole way of seeing the world is turned upside down... all values are transformed... God refuses to play games of power and prestige on human terms. *Richard Hays*

### Questions

What is the meaning of Jesus’ sacrifice? What issues and questions does Jesus dying on the Cross answer? What is the link between sacrifice and salvation? Is there any inference that Jesus is executed by God? Why does Jesus die? What was it “for”? How would you explain the difference between the Cross and a pagan sacrifice?

### Bible summary

Isaiah 53 is the climax of the message of the “gospel prophet,” pointing to the suffering servant who dies for us. Heb. 2:9 tells us that Jesus was glorified and honored because of his death, which he tasted for everyone. Heb. 9:26-28 FBV explains that “at the end of the present age he came to remove sin by sacrificing himself. Just as human beings only die once, and then are judged, so too for Christ—having been sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people, he will come again, not to deal with sin, but to save those who wait for him.” Jesus entered into the sanctuary through his own blood Heb. 9:12. Exod. 12:5 explains what animals are acceptable as sacrifices. Jesus is our high priest who was tempted as we are, but is without sin Heb.4:15. “He took our sins on

himself in his body on the cross, so that we could die to sin and live rightly. ‘By his wounds you are healed.’” 1 Peter 2:24 FBV.

### **Comment**

Many “atonement theories” have been proposed. Each may have some element of truth, but inevitably every one of them has problems, especially when pushed to extremes. For example, the “ransom theory” has Biblical support, but breaks down when you ask to whom the ransom was paid, what was the currency, who agreed to the contract and so on.

Similarly with ideas of “substitutionary atonement.” We can all affirm that “Jesus died for me.” But how this exactly is accomplished can lead to some major misunderstandings. For example, is it not a denial of justice, divine or otherwise, to assert the legal interpretation that Jesus substitutes for the death penalty imposed on others? What is *just* in killing one for the crimes of another? Instead of upholding law and justice, as many maintain, such an idea does the exact opposite. No human court would accept such a transfer, and God’s justice is surely higher than ours. The idea that God executes his Son to satisfy himself or some concept of justice is appalling. What “law” would say that the execution of the innocent takes care of the crimes of the guilty?

Many have been shocked at such perverted ideas of justice. Take as just three examples:

The basis of your religion is injustice. The Son of God the pure, the immaculate, the innocent, is sacrificed for the guilty. This proves his heroism, but no more does away with man’s sin than a school boy’s volunteering to be flogged for another would exculpate a dunce from negligence. *Lord Byron.*

The cross is nothing less than monumental injustice: Jesus is punished undeservingly by a God who is simply unfair. *Victor Shepherd.*

For what justice is there in *his* [Jesus] suffering death for the sinner, who was the most just of all men? What man, if he condemned the innocent to free the guilty, would not himself be judged worthy of condemnation? And so the matter seems to return to the same incongruity which is mentioned above. For if he [God] could not save sinners in any other way than by condemning the just, where is his omnipotence? If, however, he could, but did not wish to, how shall we sustain his wisdom and justice? *Boso to Anselm, Cur Deus Homo.*

Note that nowhere does Scripture say that Jesus was punished by God as our substitute. Jesus certainly experienced the consequences of “being made sin,” but that is a very different concept to judicial and substitutionary execution. Hebrews 9:28 is typical of the Biblical statements that state that Christ bore our sins, demonstrating the consequences of sin—death and separation from God. But this is an intrinsic consequence of the self-destructive nature of sin, not the imposed penalty of an offended deity. While we may all see different aspects of the atonement, it is essential to reject those ideas that reinforce the devil’s charges against God—that he is severe, unforgiving, arbitrary, cruel and so on.

We must also address the issue of the blood. Explaining the role of blood in the sanctuary ceremonies, Hebrews states that this was ineffective in removing sin (10:4). Applying the image and symbol, Hebrews affirms that Jesus took his own blood and achieved salvation for us (9:12-14). Here the term blood is used interchangeably with the death of Jesus (see for example 10:19), and the blood symbolism is really shorthand for Christ's life and death, the whole mission of Christ.

Some wonder about blood and how it "works." The truth is that hemoglobin cannot save! When it comes to the historical account of Jesus' crucifixion there is little mention of blood. Salvation is not in the physical blood, but in Jesus' giving of himself to and for us. The usual recourse is to quote Hebrews 9:22, which actually says "According to ceremonial law, almost everything is made clean with blood, and without shedding blood nothing is made ritually free from the stain of sin." Heb. 9:22 FBV. This is in the context of Moses sprinkling blood in the sanctuary and is part of the ceremonial system. It only applies to the sacrifice of Jesus by extension, and only symbolically.

As God said of the blood painted on the Passover doorposts: "The blood shall be to you for a token" (Ex. 12:13). A token, a sign, a symbol between God and his people. The "blood of the covenant" (Ex. 24:8) that confirmed their special relationship with God. The physical blood had no significance of itself. Blood was seen as the source of life (Lev. 17:14; Deut. 12:23 etc.); and became a very meaningful metaphor in mankind's relationship to God, but there was nothing in the actual blood that did anything.

All the blood in the world would make no difference to the minds of those who looked no farther than the ritual. *Sacrifices cannot save. Blood cannot save. Only God can save.* Even the literal blood of Jesus cannot save except as it symbolizes the whole of Jesus' gift of himself to us. Christ's blood was no more magical than the blood of bulls and goats. It's what this blood *means* that counts. The phrase "Jesus' blood" expresses this: A picture of the great goodness of our glorious, saving God. A symbol of the way he reconciles us and wins us back to him as friends. So no more "magic blood," literal or spiritual. God saves us, not the hemoglobin! Symbols are useful, but in the end we must know the Person who says: "I am the way, the truth, and the life."

### **Ellen White Comments**

The sacrifice of Christ as an atonement for sin is the great truth around which all other truths cluster. In order to be rightly understood and appreciated, every truth in the word of God, from Genesis to Revelation, must be studied in the light that streams from the cross of Calvary. GW 315}

Centuries, ages, can never lessen the efficacy of His atoning sacrifice. Neither life nor death, height nor depth, can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus; not because we hold Him so firmly, but because He holds us so fast. If our salvation depended on our own efforts, we could not be saved; but it depends on the One who is behind all the promises. {AA 552}

No one who believes in Jesus Christ is under bondage to the law of God; for His law is a law of life, not of death, to those who obey its precepts. All who comprehend the spirituality of the law, all who realize its power as a detector of sin, are in just as helpless a condition as is Satan himself, unless they accept the atonement provided for them in the remedial sacrifice of Jesus Christ, who is our atonement--at-one-ment with God. {6BC 1077}

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