

VIGIL



“Be sober, be vigilant, because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.”

~ I Peter 5:8

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The Cross**

THE DEPTH OF THE CROSS (LOVE, GRACE, FORGIVENESS)

John Daniels

When we see the depth of Christ's love, grace and forgiveness that surrounds the Cross, we can see that God's wisdom is greater than the wisdom of the world. "For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but to us which are saved it is the power of God" (1 Corinthians. 1:18). "For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling block, and unto the Greeks foolishness; but unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than man" (1 Corinthians 1:22-25).

The word "depth" means . . .the distance from the top downward or from the front to back . . .deepness . . .intensity . . . profundity . . . the deepest part (Webster's New World Dictionary). Therefore, the depth of

Christ's redeeming love reaches its highest point at the cross. His love offered salvation to all who lived faithful to God from the Patriarchal and the Mosaic age and to all who would live faithful to God under the Christian dispensation. Jesus' death is the greatest expression of God's love to man. "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). Because of His redeeming love being both Divine and unselfish it is directly connected to God's grace and man's forgiveness.

Knowing what His destiny would be here on earth, i.e., the cross, He came with grace and truth (John 1:17). The "grace" that would appear unto all men (Titus 2:11), and "truth" that would "set free" (John 8:32), and "sanctify" (John 17:17). A grace that would require of Him the suffering of crucifixion. Grace that was necessary for man to be forgiven. We now begin to see the

intensity of His submissive will to His Father "Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all that obey him" (Hebrews 5:8-9).

A part of this submissiveness would be the shedding of blood". . and without shedding of blood is not remission" (Hebrews 9:22). "In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace" (Ephesians 1:7). The first thing Jesus requested after being nailed to the cross involved forgiveness. Luke records that request in chapter 23 verse 24. The answer to this request was made possible on the day of Pentecost when the Gospel was preached for the first time.

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Editorial

DRAWING POWER OF THE CROSS

Ronnie Hayes

Christ stated, “And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me” (John 12:32). Burton Coffman in his commentary on the book of John writes:

“The primary reference of this is to Jesus’ death by being lifted up upon the cross; but the words suggest other truth also. Christ was lifted up from the grave; he was lifted up into heaven; he has been lifted up in the hearts of men by the preaching of the gospel in all ages since then” (p. 302).

What drawing powers the cross has! Can you imagine a harden centurion even taking the time to look up at a condemned criminal, yet, on this occasion he said, “Truly this was the Son of God” (Matthew 27:54). An angry mob was there. This mob consisted of those that “passed by” (Matthew 27:39), “religious leaders” (Matthew 27:41), “two thieves” (Matthew 27:38), “the soldiers” (Matthew 27:27), and even “compassionate women” (Matthew 27:56). The truth is the world has been drawn to the cross since that horrible day. Why or how does the cross have such a drawing power?

The Cross touches or draws through the heart. For one to read the account of the cross with the agony, pain, suffering, hopelessness and it not affect your heart, something would be wrong. Isaiah 53 is a perfect example of how the story of the cross touches our heart. We can see a man of sorrow, “...a man of sorrow and acquainted with grief” (53:3). There is also a man put to shame, “...he was despised

and we esteemed him not” (53:3). This one on the cross was a man of sufferings, “...the chastisement of our peace was upon him and with his stripes we are healed” (53:5). There is a man of solitude on the cross, “...He was oppressed and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth” (53:7). This point of solitude is the most difficult for me. Imagine the Son of God on the Cross as he cried out “...Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? That is to say, My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me” (Matthew 27:46), and no one answer? Why did the Son of God do this? Why suffer the shame, sorrow, and solitude? Because he loved us! He was willing to do the will of His Father (Matthew 26:39,42,44). How can this not pull at our heartstrings?

Another draw of the Cross is that it brings hope. In the darkest moment in time there was hope! Satan may have thought he won and that the Son of God was dead and forgotten, but HE AROSE! When the women arrived early at the tomb, what they found was an angel which said, “...fear not ye: for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified. He is not here: for he is risen” (Matthew 28:5,6). Hope springs out of tragedy. There is hope from the grave. In Luke’s account of this great event, he records the angel as saying, “...why seek ye the living among the dead” (Luke 24:5)? Christ is not dead! Our hope over the grave is based on what Christ did. Paul records, “...death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is they sting? O grave, where is they victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 15: 54-57). There is hope from the grieving. God has promised, “...to wipe away all tears” (Revelation 21:4) and this is done through the cross and our Lord’s resurrection. To all those

who are weeping at the edge of a grave, you can look up to the cross and see hope! To all those who may be crying at the bedside of one who is extremely ill, you can look up to the cross and see hope! This is why the cross has the ability to draw all unto it.

Third, the Cross draws because of the promise of Heaven. God’s plan of redemption runs through the cross. Christ said of His Father, “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should have everlasting life” (John 3:16). Paul records that “...God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8). Because Christ made the sacrifice on the cross, we have the promise of the reward. Don’t you love the words of Paul when he said, “I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing” (2 Timothy 4:7,8). Everyone who is drawn by the cross has the promise of that crown! One excitement to consider is the great reunion that will occur in heaven. All the saints of all ages will be there (Matthew 25:31-46). Heaven truly is brighter with all those we love which have gone on before us. What a glorious reunion it will be. For all those who have been drawn by the cross comes the promise of a rest. John wrote, “...that they may rest from their labours” (Revelation 14:13). Now is not the time to rest, but we can look to the cross and see that our rest is at hand.

The Cross has an amazing power to draw. Does the Cross draw you?

DESERTION ON THE CROSS

Ashley Kizer

“Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani” (Matthew 27:46)? The words of the Psalmist were quoted by our Lord in the Syro-Chaldaic tongue and translated, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Psalm 22:1). In this, one of the most sobering statements from the cross, we can see the depth of our Savior’s woe. However, “Some of them that stood there, when they heard *that*, said, This *man* calleth for Elias” (Matthew 27:47). It seems that no one truly understood the grief of the “man of sorrows” because “we hid as it were *our* faces from him” (Isaiah 53:3).

“He was cut off out of the land of the living...” (Isaiah 53:8). As though He were one left to die in the blistering heat of the desert, He said, “I thirst” (John 19:28). In the words of the Psalmist, “My strength is dried up like a potsherd; and my tongue cleaveth to my jaws; and thou hast brought me into the dust of death” (Psalm 22:15). Joseph was rescued from the pit, and Daniel was saved from the lions. But it was here, in the desert on the cross that the Son of God, “gave up the ghost” being truly alone for the first time in eternity (John 19:30).

Jesus is a constant friend when others seem to only be around for “fair weather”. He lovingly explained to His disciples, “Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends...” (John 15:15). We must remember that Jesus is always our Friend, but we are only His friends when we obey His commands (v. 14). The Son of God knew that Judas would betray Him and Peter would deny Him, but being forewarned did not take away the pain He experienced when it actually happened.

On the night of His crucifixion, He told His disciples, “All ye shall

be offended because of me this night...” (Matthew 26:31), for Zechariah had prophesied, “...smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered...” (Zechariah 13:7). Matthew tells us that after Jesus had given Himself up to the multitude who had come with “swords and staves...all the disciples forsook him, and fled” (26:47, 56). Peter followed from a distance, but he denied having even known the Christ (vv. 58, 69-74). Luke reveals in his account that while Peter was still speaking his third denial, “the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter” (22:61). Can you imagine the sadness that must have been in His eyes?

Jesus had fished Peter out of the lake of Gennesaret and caused him to walk on the water. But now their friendship had dissipated like a mist in the scorching hot desert of loneliness. Peter had followed his Master for a space of about three years, but it only took a few minutes to desert Him when his friendship was needed most. How long have you followed Jesus? Are you still a loyal friend? He has plainly stated, “Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven” (Matthew 10:32-33).

We desperately need Jesus to confess us before our heavenly Father because He is our only sacrifice for sin (cf. Hebrews 10:12). Isaiah prophesied that “he *was* wounded for our transgressions, *he was* bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace *was* upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.” (Isaiah 53:5). Apparently, in order to die in our stead, He had to carry our sin on the cross. “Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows...” (v. 4). Paul wrote to the Corinthians, “For he hath made him

to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him” (2 Corinthians 5:21). Using even stronger language, he told the Galatians, “Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us...” (Galatians 3:13).

What was it that transpired at “about the ninth hour” when Jesus “cried with a loud voice” (Matthew 27:46)? Was the physical pain becoming too much to bear? Had the terrible humiliation driven Him to despair? Or was He hurting from the absence of a Father’s loving care?

We may never know exactly what was going on in our Lord’s mind as He hung there on the cross. The Psalmist seems to speak for Him when he says, “Be not far from me; for trouble *is* near; for *there is* none to help” (Psalm 22:11). The “power of darkness” was in full force, and the serpent had bruised His heel (Luke 22:53; Genesis 3:15). He had endured the humiliation of His own people and the Roman scourge, but “he opened not his mouth” (Isaiah 53:7). Here, at the brink of death, it seems that He was faced with something utterly unbearable – separation from His Father Who simply cannot tolerate sin. Yet He suffered it all alone: the Son of God against the “power of darkness,” and “death is swallowed up in victory” (1 Corinthians 15:54).

But it is comforting for Christians to know that we will never be alone. “For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:38-39).

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EVENTS LEADING UP TO THE CROSS

Ben Wright

Before Jesus was ever taken captive, He spent time with the apostles. The conversation is recorded in John 13-17. No doubt this was a stressful time for Jesus. He instituted the Lord's Supper at a table that was occupied by the one who would betray Him and cause His physical death. There was also the matter of the apostles not understanding the events that were about to take place. During this conversation it was revealed that, at least on Philip's part, there was still a misunderstanding of exactly who Jesus was (John 14:8-11). The grief shown by the apostles because of His imminent departure must have weighed heavily on the mind of Jesus as well. Added to all of these things was the knowledge that those closest to Him would deny Him at His time of greatest need (Luke 22:33-34).

Jesus left that upper room with the apostles and then went to the Mount of Olives. On this mount was the Garden of Gethsemane, a place often visited by Jesus in order to pray. Three times Jesus prayed that the cup of anguish that was coming His way might be turned aside if it be the Father's will. All three times Jesus would say that the Father's will must be done and not that of the Son.

Luke reveals an amazing physiological event that took place: "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). The word "agony" means "severe mental struggles and emotions" (#74, Online Bible Greek Lexicon). "Earnestly" carries the idea of intensity. Thinking of His impending death, the weight of the sins of the world on His shoulders, the separation from the Father and all of the things that were involved in His death, our Lord burst blood vessels in His forehead. This is a medical event called hematomatidrosis. Defined by Merriam-Webster's Medical

Dictionary as "the excretion through the skin of blood or blood pigments." It is a very rare event that takes place in only the most extreme mentally agonizing situations. Jesus has now suffered from extreme mental anguish and blood loss.

Judas now comes into the Garden with his mob. They take Jesus and bring Him to the high priest's, Caiphas, house. As one studies the various trials through which Jesus went and does so in light of the laws of the land, one quickly comes to the conclusion that the trials were a mockery of justice and highly irregular, if not illegal.

Wayne Jackson, in a two-part article entitled "The Theological Implications of the Trial of Jesus," has gone into great detail about the violations of Jewish and Roman law. He listed twelve violations that took place and wrote that other authors have suggested there were as many as twenty-seven violations that occurred. We will just note a few that Br. Jackson mentioned in his article found at www.christiancourier.com. It is interesting that there were no formal charges brought against Jesus. There was no type written warrant for the arrest of Jesus as was mandatory under Jewish law. In fact, the Bible says a "great multitude" came to arrest Jesus. The word "multitude" means "a casual collection of people" (#3793, Online Bible Greek Lexicon). This was a mob action not a judicial action.

The assembly at the high priest's house was led by Annas, a deposed high priest and father-in-law to the true high priest, Caiphas. This assembly was also at night, which was against Jewish law.

While this mockery of justice was going on, our Lord was being slapped, spit upon and verbally abused. Truly the inspired words of Isaiah were fulfilled: "He 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" (53:7).

After all of this, we see one of the greatest understatements in the history of man: "Then Pilate therefore took Jesus, and scourged him" (John 19:1). We will never know the pain and agony Jesus underwent as that flagrum was lashed against His back. This cruel instrument had several braided thongs of different lengths. At the end of each thong was either a metal ball or some sharp, jagged object such as a piece of bone. There was no limit to the lashes that could be given.

History tells us that scourging was called the "little death" before the "big death" of the cross. Words cannot possibly describe the suffering Jesus underwent during this process.

After this, Jesus was taken and mocked by the soldiers. A thorny crown was placed on the head whose blood vessels had already broken. These thorns were normally an inch long with a needle-sharp point at the end. His clothes, having been placed back on him were then removed and a robe of purple was placed over his raw and bleeding shoulders and back, later to be taken off after the blood had dried to it. Jesus was then commanded to carry His cross to Golgotha. Unable to bear the burden because of the tortures of the night and morning, Jesus fell beneath the great weight. Simon of Cyrene was forced to carry the cross the rest of the way to the place of the skull. Then our Lord was nailed to that cross.

How can we not love the One who endured so much just to get to the place where the crucifixion would take place?

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DEATH: THE SUFFERING, SHAME, AND SOLITUDE

Kerry Richardson

“And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” (Philippians 2:8). In a context of encouraging readers to model the “mind of Christ” (2:5), the Holy Spirit called attention to the fact that Jesus did not simply suffer death. Rather, he suffered *the death of the cross*. Death by crucifixion was, for them, the most heinous means of inflicting death... having been “perfected” by the executioners of Christ - the Romans. To state the matter clearly, the death of Christ was a punishment reserved for hardened criminals - intended by the Roman government to both inflict the maximum amount of suffering to a victim while deterring others from violating Roman law (*DePasquale and Birch, 1963, p.434*). Thus, *the death of the cross* was not just an “ordinary” death... it was greatly feared by all those who lived under Roman rule.

As we study that *death on the cross*, it is helpful to briefly consider various activities experienced by Christ throughout the ordeal. Preliminary to virtually every Roman crucifixion was a “scourging” (*Hengel, 1977*). While the scourging process might vary to some degree in each province, it usually included (1) being tied to an upright post, (2) utilization of a short whip with metal/bone attached to cords, and (3) unlimited number of blows to a victim. Weakening victims through shock and blood loss, scourging was a considered a vital part of the crucifixion practice- hastening death on the cross (*Harrub and Thompson, 2002*). Following Christ’s scourging (Mark 15:16-20), scripture reveals Christ began a journey to Golgotha - likely bearing the crossbeam, which would weigh approximately 75-100 pounds (*John 19:17*). The fact that the gospel accounts reflect a “Simon

of Cyrene” was recruited to carry the cross, a popular assumption is that Christ physically became unable to bear the load the entire way (*not an unusual occurrence*).

Upon reaching Golgotha, Roman soldiers stripped Christ of His clothing and crucified Him between two thieves (*Mark 15:24-27*). Data from archaeologists suggest tapered iron spikes 5-7 inches in length were the likely objects used to attach Christ’s hands and feet to the cross (Clements, 1992, p.108). From possible mid-morning until the time of His death, a variety of medical conditions were likely experienced - hypovolemic shock, exhaustion asphyxia, dehydration, and cardiac complications being possible candidates (*Harrub and Thompson, 2002*). For Christ, the tragic scene would conclude in an exclamation (“*it is finished*”) and “giving up the ghost” (John 19:30).

From the time the first stripe was laid upon His precious body to His final breath around the ninth hour of the day, mere words cannot adequately express the pain our Lord experienced. Surely, David’s words of Psalm 22:14-16 echo loudly in our ears:

“I am poured out like water,
and all my bones are out of
joint; my heart is like wax; it is
melted in the midst of my
bowels. My strength is dried up
like a potsherd; and my tongue
cleaveth to my jaws; and thou
hast brought me into the dust
of the death. For dogs have
compassed me: the assembly of
the wicked have enclosed me:
they pierced my hands and my
feet.

In addition to His suffering, the cross of Christ was *one of shame* (Hebrews 12:2). During the entire process, Christ received treatment as if He were a criminal - although Pilate believed Him to be innocent (John

19:6). He was mocked by captors (Luke 23:63), Jewish rulers (Matthew 26:67-68; 27:41-43), Herod and his men (Luke 23:11), Roman soldiers (Matthew 27:29-31; Luke 23:36-37), and the thieves crucified with Him (Mark 15:32). Furthermore, He was stripped of His clothing twice in public settings (Matthew 27:28; 35). Truly David’s prophesy in Psalm 22:6-8 predicted this embarrassment.

“But I am a worm, and no man;
a reproach of men, and
despised of the people. All they
that see me laugh me to scorn:
they shoot out their lip, they
shake the head, saying, ‘He
trusted on the Lord that he
would deliver him: let him
deliver him, seeing he has
delighted in him.’”

Finally, we notice *the solitude* Christ experienced in the crucifixion experience even though His mother and other women were present at the crucifixion scene along with the disciple whom Jesus loved, all of Christ’s followers had abandoned Him after His arrest - just as He had predicted (Mark 14:27-31; 50). Isaiah would say, “He is despised and rejected of men;” Isaiah 53:3.

As we study the gospel accounts of Christ’s execution, may we always do so with the utmost of respect and appreciation - for it was indeed “the death of the cross” (Philippians 2:8).

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THE DETERMINATION OF JESUS AS SEEN ON THE CROSS

Dale Hubbert

The desire to do something worthy is admirable. Good is accomplished when desire is coupled with the determination to see the goal to its completion. Many commendable plans fail to meet the desired achievement because the level of determination is not equal to the task. Jesus is an example of the importance of determination as he endured the shame and pain of the cross so that the Father might be glorified and we might have the hope of salvation.

Jesus knew when he left heaven that six agonizing hours on a cross would offer the opportunity for the remission of the sins of the whole world (I John 2:2). He also knew that the path to the cross would not be easy. Mankind has devised no death that is more cruel, shameful, and painful than nailing a man to the cross and watching him die. How and why did Jesus keep this appointment? He was determined to do God's will (John 5:30) and become our Savior (Matt 1:21)!

The determination of Jesus is seen by his loyalty. Our Lord was unwilling to fail those whom he loved. The love of Jesus for the Father is observed by the willingness to serve at all cost. At an early age Jesus was about the Father's business (Luke 2:49). Jesus loyalty to the Father was seen in his determination to resist temptation (Matt 4:1-11) so that he might remain the spotless lamb led to the cross (Heb 9:14). We stand in awe of the loyalty Jesus showed for us even in our unworthiness (Rom 5:8). Our Master was determined to be loyal to his disciples even when they forsook him (Matt 26:56). Determination and loyalty are inseparable partners in the challenge of obedience in the face of hardship.

The determination of Jesus shines brightly as we are immersed in

the overwhelming nature of his love. Jesus knew the price sin would require to reconcile sinful man to a righteous God (Rom 5:10). Jesus eyes were focused on the task and his love produced a determination that led him to make the ultimate sacrifice (John 15:13). Jesus "came unto his own, and his own received him not" (John 1:11) plainly and powerfully professing a love at the cross that few ever achieve. Jesus was determined to take the path to Golgatha even though many would reject and refuse this supreme act of mercy and compassion.

The determination of Jesus reflects the superiority of his leadership. Real leaders are always people of strong determination that enable them to see important matters to a successful end. Jesus spent about three years training his disciples to have the courage and dedication to see the Father's will to the end – even if it cost them their lives (Matt 10:28). Jesus displayed leadership when he forgave those on the cross who were inflicting his horrific pain and agony (Luke 23:34). We view the determination and leadership of Jesus on the cross as he gives instruction for the care of his mother (John 19:27). Great leaders are always selfless as they put the welfare of others above their own. "It is finished" (John 19:30) demonstrates the unyielding determination of a leader to see the task to the end.

The determination of Jesus at the cross is noteworthy because of his understanding of what would be lost if he did not complete his mission. When Jesus explained his fate to his disciples, the response was understandable. Peter began to rebuke the Lord and did not want his friend Jesus to suffer such torture and distress. "Get thee behind me, Satan" was the command of the Lord to one

of his closest friends (Matt 16:23). Why would Jesus talk to Peter that way? The Lamb of God continued by explaining that Peter was not recognizing the will of God but was looking through human eyes. God in the flesh (John 1:14) knew what would be lost if his determination did not propel him to hang between heaven and earth - forever becoming a mediator between sinful man and righteous Jehovah. Christ was keenly aware that a desertion of the mercy laden cross would forfeit all the spiritual and animal sacrifices of those under a system that looked with eager anticipation to the "Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). Too much was at stake to fail because of a lack of determination!

The determination of Jesus is seen in the place he lay the night before he died. In the darkness of Gethsemane our Lord expressed his emotions to his friends and requested their support (Matt 26:36). The mission was clear but the grief and dread were equally present. How determined would God's beloved be to walk with courage into the face of sorrow, pain, and death? The face of Mary's son came in contact with the dark dirt of Gethsemane's garden pleading for an alternative to the cross (Matt 26:38). Three times this request was immediately followed with the willingness and determination of a loving and obedient son to carry out the Father's will. Jesus then rose up and informed his friends that it is was time to go - time to go with determination to the place where holy God meets sinful man.

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THE DARKNESS OF THE CROSS

Chuck Webster

Three hours into the crucifixion of Christ the sun could no longer offer it's blessing to the horrific and unjust execution of the only innocent man who ever lived. A sudden blackness descended upon Calvary and by its presence pointed to the cause of that day's execution the sins of humanity.

God's hatred of sin had been the impetus behind His scheme of redemption since Adam and Eve first chose that awful course thousands of years before the tragic and wonderful events of that Friday two thousand years ago. When He spoke to the serpent in the Garden He gave the first recorded prophecy of what sin would eventually cause: "And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel" (Genesis 3:15, NKJV). The bruising of the serpent's head the crucifixion of Eve's seed was made necessary because Adam, Eve, and everyone since have chosen to rebel against God's will for humanity.

The Bible often describes sin's horrible nature. One can almost see the tears that stained the scroll on which David described his struggle with the guilt of his sin with Bathsheba:

"Have mercy upon me, O God,
According to Your
lovingkindness; According to
the multitude of Your tender
mercies, Blot out my
transgressions. Wash me
thoroughly from my iniquity,
And cleanse me from my sin.
For I acknowledge my
transgressions, And my sin is
always before me. Against
You, You only, have I sinned,
And done this evil in Your
sight? That You may be found
just when You speak, And
blameless when You judge.
Behold, I was brought forth in

iniquity, And in sin my mother
conceived me. . . . Purge me
with hyssop, and I shall be
clean; Wash me, and I shall be
whiter than snow. Make me
hear joy and gladness, That the
bones You have broken may
rejoice. Hide Your face from
my sins, And blot out all my
iniquities. . . . Deliver me from
the guilt of bloodshed, O God,
The God of my salvation, And
my tongue shall sing aloud of
Your righteousness (Psalms
51:1-5, 7-9, 14).

Sin though temporarily gratifying produces guilt and destruction. Its most devastating consequence is a chasm between us and God: "But your iniquities have separated you from your God; And your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear" (Isaiah 59:2). A holy and righteous God simply cannot approve of sin; it destroys the perfect communion God planned for His relationship with His creation.

He established the Law of Moses in order to show the world how terrible sin is. It was given to create an awareness of sin (Romans 7:7) and in some sense even to increase it (Romans 5:20). Each time an Israelite brought his offering to the priest, saw (and smelled) the animal's blood, and witnessed its death, he was reminded of the awfulness of sin. Imagine the scene as Solomon offered 22,000 oxen and 120,000 sheep as peace offerings to God during a two-week period. Every cry, every ounce of blood, every dying breath from an ox or sheep represented an act of rebellion in the life of one of God's children. These were perpetual reminders that God hated sin.

The Israelites were also reminded at each ceremony that these animal sacrifices were impotent to atone for sin. God required them but was

unsatisfied by them. It was impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sin (Hebrews 10:4). At the end of the Mosaic system, untold millions of animals had been slaughtered as offerings for sin . . . but not a single sin had been expiated.

And so when God robed Himself in human flesh and took those first few halting steps as a child, each stride for the rest of His earthly life took Him closer to the final act of propitiation for sin. All of the sins of humanity stood as stark reminders of the inability of animal sacrifices and legal systems to pay the price for sin. From noon to three o'clock on that fateful Friday, however, God gave witness to sin's final defeat in His blocking the rays of the sun. The blackness of that day was testimony to the reason the Lord died the sins of humanity. This should motivate us to view sin as God does . . . to expend every effort to avoid committing acts which hurt God and violate His holiness.

One of our greatest temptations is to whitewash sin, to euphemize it as a mere act of indiscretion, a moment of weakness, or just a mistake. So adultery becomes an affair, dishonesty a little white lie, and uncontrolled anger this temper of mine. When tempted to minimize sin, we need to journey with our imagination to midday on this pivotal Friday nearly two thousand years ago. Stand near the cross and visualize the world becoming as dark as night.

The sun was eclipsed because of the sins we commit and so often trivialize. Sin matters to God . . . we dare not take it lightly.

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The Depth of the Cross (Love, Grace, Forgiveness) by John Daniel ----- continued from page 32

The word that is translated “forgive” (aphiemi) is found 146 times in the New Testament. This word is translated “leave” 52 times, “forgive” 47 times, “suffer” 14 times, and “let alone” 6 times. This word means “to send, to send away, dismiss, to emit, send forth as a voice. . . to yield, give up as a ghost or spirit, referring to Christ’ voluntarily giving up His spirit, to dismiss, put away a wife (I Corinthians 7:11-13); to forsake, leave (Matthew 4:20-22; 5:24). . . to remit, forgive debts, sins or offenses.” (Strong’s). In other words, if man is willing to make acquisition to the grace of God, offered because of His love through the cross, then forgiveness of sins will accrue resulting in man’s salvation. What is salvation? It is a change of relationship; it is redemption,

reconciliation, regeneration, justification, conversion, and sanctification. All of this made possible because of the profundity of the cross. Without a revelation of God’s eternal wisdom, and a disposition to obey it, and knowledge of its requirements, humans could never be free from the guilt of sin, and therefore could not be with God. Psalm 119 is an eloquent tribute to the power, beauty, and importance of God’s Word. The Bible includes the Gospel, which is God’s power to save (Romans 1:16). The unspeakable gift of God’s Son, His death, His resurrection, His ascension, His intercession, and His eternal reign manifest the amazing grace of a loving and forgiving Savior, in whom all spiritual blessings, in heavenly places, are located (Ephesians 1:3).

None of which, would be possible without the cross! In a paradoxical sense, the cross shows God’s hatred of sin, but also His love for the sinner. It brought death, but it also brought life. It saddens us to think of the suffering of our Savior, but it gives us joy because of the enormity of God’s love. We often wonder, “Why did God send His Son, Jesus, to die on the cross?” Theologically, it was necessary for salvation – atonement had to be made for our sins (2 Corinthians 5:2; Romans 6:23). May we ever focus our eyes on the cross of Jesus and perceive with clarity, the significance of this unparalleled event through His “love”, “grace”, and forgiveness!

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*There are several books and CD’s available by **Franklin Camp** and **Bobby Duncan**. For more information call or email Brother’s Inc. at 205-674-5659 or acofc@bellsouth.net.*

