

ENDTIME ISSUES NEWSLETTER No. 126

“The Achievements of the Cross -Part 2”

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January 24, 2005 will go down into the annals of my family history as the day when I stood together with 454 persons from over 50 nationalities to take the oath of allegiance to the Constitution of the United States, and thus become an American Citizen.

You may be wondering why I waited 30 years to apply for citizenship of the United States? A reason has been my desire to overcome my Italian accent before becoming an American. It is nice to sound American when claiming to be one. But after 30 years of trying to sound American, I concluded that there is no point in waiting any longer—my Italian accent is here to stay.

Could this serve as an object lesson of salvation? Some people wait to accept Christ until they have overcome major sins in their lives and become more Christ-like. They feel that it is nice to live like Christ when claiming to have accepted Him as their Savior. But, the stark reality is that the longer a person waits to accept Christ as one’s personal Savior, the more difficult it becomes to break the grip of sin in one’s life.

The Good News of the Gospel is that by accepting Christ we receive, not only forgiveness for our past sins (citizenship in God’s Kingdom), but also power to become like Him. As we are going to see in this newsletter, Christ, not only declares the penitent sinner just (*justification*), but also enables the sinner to become just (*sanctification*).

Reflections on the Naturalization Ceremony

During the Naturalization ceremony, the Michigan State Senator and a Congressman delivered eloquent speeches, reminding us that America is the land of the free—the land where dreams come true. They shared how their parents left the poverty and tyranny of the Old World in their search for the prosperity and freedom of the New World. They stood as living witnesses of their family dreams which had come true.

While listening to the speeches, I asked myself: “How marvellous it would be if every American citizen could achieve their dreams of freedom from poverty! How reassuring it would be if every sick person in America could have free access medical services and medicine! Unfortunately, for millions of Americans their dreams of prosperity and success have become a nightmare.

“According to the most recent Census Bureau statistics, nearly 36 million Americans lived in poverty in 2003, an increase of 1.3 million from 2002. And since 2000, 4.4 million more people in this country are living in poverty. The Census Bureau defines poverty as an individual earning \$9,393 or less and \$14,680 or less for a family of three” (http://money.cnn.com/2004/12/22/news/economy/poverty_overview/index.htm).

The same CNN/Money report notes that in recent years the richer are getting richer in America, while the poor are getting poorer. According to the most recent Census Bureau Report “the number of people who lacked health insurance coverage throughout the year rose to 45 million in 2003. . . . This represents the third consecutive year in which the number of uninsured Americans has climbed, with a total increase of 5.2 million since 2000, when 39.8 million were without insurance.”

These cold statistics hardly helps us to comprehend the hunger and sufferings millions of people are experiencing even in the most prosperous country in the world today. Were we to look beyond the USA’s borders, the picture is even more frightening. “In the developing world, more than 1.2 billion people currently live below the international poverty line, earning less than \$1 per day (Human Development Report 2003, Millennium Development Goals: A Compact Among Nations to End Human Poverty, United Nations Development Program). Among this group of people, there are 915 million people who are either starving or malnourished. The lack of food stunt their growth, saps their energy, hinders fetal developments and contributes to mental retardation.

Never before in human history has mankind had almost one billion persons suffering from starvation or malnutrition. The occurrence of famines is presented by Christ in His Olivet Discourse together with wars and earthquakes as one of the precursory signs of His Advent: “There will be famines” (Matt 24:7; Mark 13:8).

The Meaning of Famines

The meaning of famines in the Bible is similar to the meaning of earthquakes, discussed in the previous newsletter. They are regarded in the Bible, not as a mere accident but as part of God's ordering of the lives of His people. It was by means of famine that Abraham and Jacob went to Egypt (Gen 12:10), that Naomi met with Ruth (Ruth 1:1), that God raised Joseph to a position of authority in Egypt (Gen 41). The usually stated purpose of actual or threatened famine is the judgment of God designed to warn (1 Kings 17:1), to correct (2 Sam 21:1) or to punish His people or heathen nations (Jer 29:17-18; Ezek 5:11-12). Similarly the famines predicted by Christ represent divine judgment upon human rebellion prior to Christ's Coming.

The scene of widespread famine before Christ's Coming is portrayed in Revelation symbolically through a pair of scales in the hands of a rider. A voice is heard saying: "A quart of wheat for a day's wages, and three quarts of barley for a day's wages, and do not damage the oil and the wine!" (Rev 6:5-6, NIV).

The scales suggest that careful rationing will be needed in using the little food that can be purchased with the income of a day's work. The worldwide extent of the crisis is intimated also by the mention that "a fourth of the earth" will be destroyed "with sword and with famine and with pestilence and by wild beasts of the earth" (Rev 6:8). It is noteworthy that the same signs (war, famine, and pestilence) are found in the Olivet Discourse (Luke 21:10-11).

These signs are finding an unprecedented fulfillment today. Despite efforts by governments and the international community to solve world food problems, more people are hungry today than ever before. A major contributory factor to the unprecedented hunger crisis present in the world today is the population explosion which has been occurring during this past century in countries unable to produce enough food to feed their population.

It took until 1830 for the world to have one billion persons. But then it took only a hundred years (1930) to add another billion. The third

billion was added in merely thirty years (1960), the fourth billion in half the previous time, namely, fifteen years (1975). The fifth, sixth, and seventh billion were added to the world population in eleven and nine years respectively. Today the world's population has climbed to about seven billion.

The problem is compounded by the fact that eighty percent of the world population is living today in developing countries where a hunger crisis already exists. In Calcutta there is a hospital that cares for starving children. A head nurse has been quoted as saying: "They die so gracefully." But they die nevertheless. The starvation of a few individuals is a sad statistic, but the starvation of hundreds of millions is an unprecedented world tragedy. For the coming generation, the symbol of death may well be not war but starvation, which Richard Selzer calls "strangulation in the open air."

Will God allow the proliferation of famines, wars, disasters, and the depletion/pollution of the earth's resources to destroy the present order? In His prophetic discourse, Christ spoke of wars, earthquakes, famines, pestilences, not as being the cause of the End but rather as being the precursory signs of the End.

The End of the present order will be brought about not by irresponsible human destruction of God's good creation, but by the Coming of Christ who will bring an end to human perversity and suffering and will restore peace, justice, and prosperity on this earth. The fact that we are experiencing today an unprecedented intensification of the various predicted disasters, such as earthquakes, tsunamis, and famines which threaten the very survival of mankind, is a clear sign to the believer that the Return of Christ is both certain and imminent.

Responses to the Last Newsletter

The flow of responses to my last newsletter "God and Tsunami: What is the Lord Telling us?" is continuing unabated. The fact that many of you subscribers have felt the urge to respond to my Bible study by expressing your agreements or disagreements, is a healthy sign. My goal is to stimulate your thinking on the issues we are facing today. Thirty six

years of teaching have taught me that causing students to think is the most important contribution to their education.

To avoid repetition and to save time, I will only limit my few comments to the popular perception that disasters are acts of Satan, because God is too-loving to cause disasters that destroy human lives and property. Some people find it difficult, if not impossible, to imagine that God would use disasters like the Southeast Asia Tsunami to accomplish His purpose.

Part of the problem is the gradual change that has taken place in the understanding of God during the course of Christian history. This change can be characterized by a movement from a *punitive* view of God prevailing during the Middle Ages, into a *permissive* view of God popular today. The punitive view of God is reflected in the Passion Plays that started in the thirteenth century as an attempt to ward off God's wrath manifested in the catastrophes and disasters of the time, such as the Black Death (1347-49) that decimated over twenty million people.

To placate a punitive God, people not only staged the brutal suffering of Christ's Passion, but they also whipped themselves in their belief that by sharing in Christ's suffering they could appease God's wrath and avert His divine judgments.

Gibson's movie on *The Passion of the Christ* reposes the medieval concept of a punitive God by submitting Christ to brutal torture from Gethsemane to Golgotha, in order to appease the demands of divine justice. You will find an informative discussion of this question in chapter 1 of *The Passion of Christ in Scripture and History*.

God is too Good to Hurt Anyone

The Protestant Reformation played a major role in replacing the medieval vision of God as an exacting, unapproachable, punitive Judge, with that of a loving God, eager to forgive and save all who accept the atoning sacrifice of His Son. The result is that today many Christians envision God as too good to hurt anybody, and as too lenient to punish people for their perverted life-style.

Somebody wrote to me that His God is different from mine, because His God is not responsible for natural disasters that snatch away innocent lives. The fact is that from a biblical perspective, God is not only the Creator and Redeemer of this world, but also the Controller of the forces of nature. He allows disasters to occur to accomplish His purpose. We shall come back to this point in a moment.

It appears to me that it is imperative to recapture the balanced biblical picture of God as being both *just* and *merciful* at the same time. In His mercy, God has been willing to offer Himself through His Son for the salvation of mankind, but in His justice He does not overlook human rebellion (Ex 34:7). He uses disasters and calamities to call mankind to repentance. “When thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world learn righteousness” (Is 26:9).

God Uses Disasters to Accomplish His Purpose

Both the OT and the NT portray God as using natural disasters to accomplish His purpose. In Amos, for example, God repeatedly warns Israel of the calamities He sent them to lead them to repentance. “ ‘I withheld rain from you when there were yet three months to the harvest; . . . yet you did not return to me,’ says the Lord. ‘I smote you with blight and mildew; I laid waste your gardens and your vineyards; your fig tree and your olive trees the locust devoured; yet you did not return to me,’ says the Lord. ‘I sent you a pestilence after the manner of Egypt; I slew your young men with the sword; . . . yet you did not return to me,’ says the Lord” (Amos 4:7-11). The reason given for these calamities is to call upon the people to “prepare to meet your God, O Israel!” (Amos 4:12).

In the NT we find a similar picture of God using calamities and disasters to accomplish His purpose. A revealing example is found in Revelation where from His heavenly throne God send calamities upon the earth to accomplish His purpose. In Revelation each of the seven seals are opened by Christ, the Lamb (Rev 6:1, 3, 5, 7, 9, 12; 8:1). Each time the Lamb opens a seal, a messenger of destruction is sent to this earth. For example, “When he [the Lamb] opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature say, ‘Come!’ And I saw, and behold a pale horse, and its rider’s name was Death, and Hades followed him; and they were given power over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword and with famine and with pestilence” (Rev 6:-7-8).

The seven angels who blow the seven trumpets that bring all sorts of disasters upon the earth, are described as angels “who stand before God” (Rev 8:2). In other words, they are God’s angels who act according to God’s directives, not Satan’s angels sent to cause destruction upon the earth. The same is true of the seven angels who are commissioned by God to pour out the last seven plagues upon the earth. They are told: “Go and pour out upon the earth the seven bowls of the wrath of God” (Rev 16:1). It is God, not Satan, who sends out the endtime calamities (plagues) upon the earth to lead unbelievers to repent, but we read that “they cursed the name of God who had power over these plagues, and did not repent and give him glory” (Rev 16:9).

There is no question that Satan is the originator of all forms of evil present in the world today. In a sense Satan bears responsibility not only for human rebellion against God, but also for natural disasters because the latter are the result of the curse that Satan brought upon the earth by instigating rebellion against God. This resulted in God cursing not only our disobedient parents, but also the earth: “Cursed is the ground because of you” (Gen 3:17).

The curse that Satan brought upon this earth has resulted both in a moral and physical deterioration of the earth. Simply stated, because of the Fall, the earth “is growing old like a garment” (Is 51:6). As a result of the Fall, the whole creation is gradually winding down, as indicated by major changes in weather patterns and in the shape of the earth.

NASA scientists tells us that the massive force unleashed by twinned earthquake and tsunami that struck Southeast Asia, has not only killed over 200,000 persons, but it has also moved the North Pole of about an inch in an eastward shift that is part of a long-term seismic shift. Such movements and shifts in the formation of the earth will cause an intensification of disasters in the years to come.

Surprisingly today biblical prophets and secular scientists agree that we will see in the future an increase in natural disasters, with more devastating earthquakes, floods, and storms. In a sense scientists have become secular prophets or eschatologists. What we have witnessed in our TV screens of the Tsunami devastation, is “but the beginning of the End.”

The present intensification of natural and man-made disasters must be seen as clear signs of God's final warning to mankind of the impending divine judgment. These disasters tell us that, as in the experience of ancient nations, God will not allow human rebellion and wickedness to continue much longer (Gen 15:16). Soon Christ will come to bring an End to the colossal crises that are engulfing our fragile planet (Rom 8:19-22). Since these things are about to happen, "What sort of persons ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God"? (2 Pet 3:11:123).

PASTORS ACCEPT THE SABBATH

One of the rewards of my ministry, is the interaction with pastors who are accepting the Sabbath through the printed page. Hardly a week goes by without receiving phone calls or emails from ministers who have accepted the Sabbath.

Last week, for example, I received a phone call from a Baptist minister, Ronald E. Davis, from Whitley City, Kentucky. He shared with me his unusual experience. In surfing the web, he found an article of mine on "Life in the World to Come." Google, the most powerful search engine in the web, has over 3000 links to my research, listing not only all my books, but also all my articles. In reading the article Pastor Davis found the address of my website, which he has visited time and again. I have posted over 3000 pages of research in my website: www.biblicalperspectives.com. He read several chapters from my four books on the Sabbath. Eventually, Pastor Davis downloaded and printed these chapters and shared them with his congregation.

After studying the Sabbath for several months with his congregation, the majority of his church members voted to move their services from Sunday to Saturday. Pastor Davis called me for two reasons. First, he was eager to order all my 17 books and recordings, which I sent him immediately. Secondly, he wanted to invite me to help his congregation to understand and experience the Sabbath more fully. I promised to visit his church later this year because until August every weekend is already booked.

During the next few months I will be sharing my ministry with pastors and members of different denominations in several countries. On

March 25, 26, 27, I will speak in Bermuda to a local Methodist congregation and Adventist believers. Then, on April 15 to 18, Methodist Pastor Noel Goh from Singapore, who recently visited Andrews University for three weeks, is arranging for a meeting in Singapore with his ministers friends.

Few days later on April 22, a meeting has been planned for the local clergy by Dr. Dicky Ng of our Penang Adventist Hospital in Malaysia. The meeting will be held at the Crown Jewel Hotel in Tanjung Bungah, Penang, Malaysia. Thank you for remembering me in your prayers. May God grant me the wisdom and grace to communicate vital endtime truths with clarity and conviction to church leaders of different faiths.

UPCOMING WEEKEND SEMINARS

As a service to our subscribers, I am listing the date and the location of the upcoming seminars for the months of February and March 2005. Every Sabbath it is a great pleasure for me to meet subscribers who travel considerable distances to attend the seminars.

FEBRUARY 4-5: LOS ANGELES: ROLLING HILLS SDA CHURCH

Location: 28340 Highridge Road, Rolling Hills Estates, California 90274-3405.

For information call Pastor Jeff Rosenthal at (714) 522-5280 or (714) 928-6596.

FEBRUARY 11-12: VICTORIA SDA CHURCH, BRONX, NY

Location: 1271 Burke Avenue, Bronx, New York 10469

For information call Pastor Bancroft Daughma at (914) 381-1292

FEBRUARY 18-19: NEW YORK - JACKSON HEIGHTS SDA CHURCH

Location: 72 - 25 Woodside Avenue, Woodside, New York 11377

For information call Pastor John Pirotsky at (718) 343-2171

FEBRUARY 25-26: LAS VEGAS PARADISE SDA CHURCH

Location: 4575 South Sandhill Road, Las Vegas, Nevada 89121

For information call Pastor George McLain at (702) 456-3538

MARCH 4-5: CERES SDA CHURCH (MODESTO, CA)

Location: 1633 N. Central Avenue, Ceres, California 95307.

For information call Pastor Keith Mulligan at (209) 538 1024 or (209) 537-0601.

MARCH 11-12: LONDON GHANA SDA CHURCH, ENGLAND

Location: John Loughborough School, Holcombe Road, Tottenham, London EN N179AD.

For information call Pastor Emmanuel Osei at 020 8699 7881

MARCH 18-19: GREENWICH SDA CHURCH, ENGLAND

Location: Devenshire Drive, Greenwich, London SE10 6JZ.

For information call Pastor Terry Messenger at 020 8262 6535

MARCH 25-26-27: BERMUDA- ROCKAWAY SDA CHURCH

Location: Mt. Zion A. M. E. Church, Whale Bay Road, Southampton, Bermuda.

For information call Pastor Mike Faison at (441) 234-0888.

SPECIAL OFFER ON THE PASSION OF CHRIST IN SCRIPTURE AND HISTORY

The timely book *THE PASSION OF CHRIST IN SCRIPTURE AND HISTORY* (208 pages), came off the press just in time for the December 9, 2004, 3ABN interview. The demand for this timely book has surpassed my fondest expectations. The first printing was sold out in few weeks.

You will be proud to have copies of this timely book for your personal study of the Sabbath School and to give with confidence to your friends. The book is factual, not confrontational. It is designed to help many people to recognize the fundamental Catholic heresies embedded in Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ*. More important still, the book presents in a clear and compelling way the unique Adventist understanding of the redemptive accomplishments of the Cross, within the context of Protestant and Catholic teachings.

To make it possible for many to benefit from this timely study, we offer the book by the case of 30 copies at the special offer of only \$5.00 per

copy, postage paid, instead of the regular price of \$20.00. You can order a single copy or a case of 30 copies online at <http://www.biblicalperspectives.com/passionoffer.htm>, or by emailing us your order at <sbacchiocchi@biblicalperspectives.com>, or by calling us at (269) 471-2915, (269) 978-6878.

NEW OFFER ON HITACHI LCD PROJECTORS

Because of the large volume of HITACHI projectors purchased by Adventist churches and schools during 2004, HITACHI has reduced the price for the fourth time on most of their HITACHI projectors. For example, the new price for the award winning 2000 lumens HITACHI CP-X328 is now only \$1,695.00, including 3 years of 24/7 warranty, instead of the factory suggested retail price of \$7,495.00. The new price on the 2700 lumens HITACHI CP-S420 is only \$1995.00, instead of the factory suggested retail price of \$8,495.00.

If your church needs a powerful projector to throw the image from the balcony (80' to 100' feet away from the screen), HITACHI has just come out with an outstanding 4500 lumens projector CP-X1250 High Definition, that will project a very bright picture from far away even with the flood lights on. The projector has many new features like shift lens and four interchangeable lenses. The special price to our churches and schools is only \$4,400.00, instead of the factory listed price of \$14,995.00.

For specific information on all the HITACHI projectors, visit our NEW website BP Projectors at: <http://www.biblicalperspectives.com/projector.html>. If you have a problem accessing the NEW website, just email us your enquiry or call us at (269) 978-6878 or (269) 471-2915. We will be glad to give you all the information about the special HITACHI offer.

DOES YOUR CHURCH NEED A SCREEN?

If your church is looking to buy a screen, the DA-LITE SCREEN COMPANY, one of the largest in the world, has agreed to offer to our churches and schools, their line of screens at a substantially discounted price. The details will soon be posted at my website. To view the various

models, visit the DA-LITE SCREEN COMPANY website at www.da.lite.com. For special prices call us at (269) 471-2915 or email your request to: sbacchiocchi@biblicalperspectives.com.

A BREATHTAKING MULTIMEDIA PRESENTATION OF THE GREAT CONTROVERSY

Have you ever wished that you could see the unfolding of the Great Controversy during the history of Christianity? This has been the dream of Gerard Damsteegt, Ph. D., Professor of Church History at our Andrews University Theological Seminary. With the help of competent people who worked with him during the past 8 years and the generous contribution of supporters who believed in this project, Damsteegt has produced an incredible interactive multimedia CD-ROM that will thrill your soul and enrich your mind.

Read the rest of the story at my website: <http://www.biblicalperspectives.com/Promotions/TheGreatControversyExp.htm>. If you have a problem ordering this marvellous CD-ROM through my website, just email us your order or call us at (269) 978-6878 or (269) 471-2915. We will be glad to take your order and AIRMAIL you immediately this fantastic multimedia interactive CD-ROM.

THE BEST SDA COMMENTARY ON REVELATION

Much of the prophetic message and mission of the Seventh-Adventist Church derives from the Book of Revelation. Yet until now our church did not have an authoritative commentary. Finally, Andrews University Press has published a thorough Commentary on the Book of Revelation, authored by an outstanding Adventist scholar. This new commentary provides a wealth of information needed to unlock the meaning of the prophetic message of Revelation for our times.

Read the full story at my website: <http://www.biblicalperspectives.com/Promotions/RevelationofJesusChrist.htm>. If you have a problem ordering the book through my website, just email us your order or call us at (269) 978-6878 or (269) 471-2915. We will be glad to take your order and mail you the book immediately.

SPECIAL ONETIME OFFER ON THE PACKAGE OF SPECIAL ONETIME OFFER ON ALL MY RECORDINGS

For the first time we are offering the complete package of all recordings for only \$100.00, postage paid, instead of the regular price of \$490.00. The package includes the latest 3ABN two hours interview on a DVD disk, ONE CD-ROM with all my research (over 7000 pages), ONE CD-ROM with all my PowerPoint lectures, TWO MP3 AUDIO disks with 22 popular lectures, and the FIVE DVD DISKS or FIVE VIDEO TAPES with 10 live PowerPoint lectures of my SABBATH/ADVENT seminars, taped few months ago by a TV crew at Andrews University.

The special offer is ONLY \$100.00, postage paid, instead of regular price of \$490.00. Read the details at my website: <http://www.biblicalperspectives.com/Promotions/SPECIALPACKAGEOFFER.htm>. If you have a problem ordering the package through my website, just email us your order or call us at (269) 978-6878 or (269) 471-2915. We will be glad to take your order by phone and mail you the package immediately.

BED AND BREAKFAST IN LONDON, ENGLAND

If you are planning to travel to London, England in the near future you will be pleased to learn about a most gracious Adventist couple who offer the best bed and breakfast service you can find in London for only £20.00 a day. I stayed with this couple numerous times and they have always treated me so well that I promised to announce their services in this newsletter. They have three nice guest rooms, a lovely garden, and a modern bathroom. The home is close to Heathrow airport and at a walking distance from the Subway. You will be treated royally at a bargain price. You can see the pictures and read the details at my website <http://www.biblicalperspectives.com/Promotions/BED&BREAKFAST.htm>

“The Achievements of the Cross -Part 2”**Samuele Bacchiocchi, Ph. D.,****Retired Professor of Theology and Church History,****Andrews University**

This newsletter continues the study we began in the newsletter no. 123 on the reasons for Christ’s death. The study is excerpted from chapter 4 of *THE PASSION OF CHRIST IN SCRIPTURE AND HISTORY*, which is entitled “The Cross of Christ.” I decided to post the second part of this study, because it directly relates to the Sabbath School lessons we will be studying during the coming weeks.

For example, the Sabbath School lesson for March 5-11 is entitled THE CROSS AND JUSTIFICATION. This newsletter will help you understand what the Sabbath School leaves out, namely, the difference between the Catholic and Protestant understanding of justification by faith. You will see the problems found in both views as compared with the more biblical Adventist view. Obviously the Sabbath School is not designed to offer an indepth study of this subject.

If your Sabbath School class has not yet received *THE PASSION OF CHRIST IN SCRIPTURE AND HISTORY*, just call us at (269) 471-2915. We will mail you immediately a case of 30 copies for only \$5.00 per copy, postage paid, instead of the regular price of \$20.00. This book will help you understand, not only the Catholic heresies embedded in Gibson’s movie, but also the unique Adventist understanding of the Cross.

In the newsletter no. 123, we looked at two of the first word pictures used in Scripture to illustrate the achievements of the Cross. The first is *propitiation*, which derives from the sacrifices offered in the Temple court. The second is *redemption*, which is taken from the release of slaves in the marketplace.

In this newsletter we continue our study by examining the remaining three word pictures. The third is *justification*, which comes from the acquittal of an accused person in a law court. The fourth is *reconciliation*, which is inspired by family relationships. The fifth is *intercession*, which comes from Christ’s heavenly ministry.

Christ's Death as Justification

The third word picture used to describe the achievements of the Cross is “justification.” This picture takes us from the marketplace to a law court, because the word was used to describe the verdict of a judge who pronounced an accused person “not guilty.”

The term “justification” is a translation of the Greek *dikaioma*, which means “righteous requirement,” “judicial sentence,” and “act of righteousness.” It also translates *dikaiosis* which signifies “justification,” “vindication,” “acquittal.” The related verb *dikaio* means “to be pronounced and treated as righteous,” “to be acquitted,” “to be set free, made pure.”²⁷ The basic meaning of *justification* is the act of God that declares penitent sinners righteous or regards them as righteous. Justification is the opposite of condemnation (Rom 5:16).

There is a logical progression in the order we are reviewing the great achievements of the Cross. *Propitiation* comes first, because God's displeasure and condemnation of sin (wrath) must be appeased by the sacrificial death of Jesus before salvation can be extended to human beings. Once the demands of divine justice have been met, *redemption*, that is, the rescue of penitent sinners, takes place at the high price of Christ's blood. The next picture, *justification*, expands on the divine deliverance by depicting God as Judge who imputes the righteousness of Christ to a believer and declares that person to be forgiven of all sins, thus pronouncing the person righteous in His sight (Acts 13:38-39; Rom 4:5, 24).

Justification is best understood in the context of a judicial court of law (Rom 8:33-34). Being sinners, we deserve the death punishment (Rom 6:23). Justification is the act of God as the universal judge who acquits penitent sinners of their guilt and declares them righteous (Rom 5:8). Justification is the opposite of condemnation. By means of Christ's righteousness, God justifies penitent sinners by forgiving their sins and reconciling them to Himself. In an attempt to better understand Paul's teachings on the divine justification of sinners, we will consider four of his key phrases which relate to the *source, ground, means, and effects* of justification.

The Source of Our Justification. The *source* of justification is indicated by the phrase *justified freely by his grace*: “We are *justified freely by his grace* through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus” (Rom 3:24; NIV; emphasis supplied). Justification is an undeserved favor because “None is righteous, no, not one” (Rom 3:10). Self-justification is utterly impossible because we cannot declare ourselves righteous before God (Rom 3:20; Ps 143:2). It is only “God who justifies” (Rom 8:33), and He does so not because of good works done by penitent sinners, but because of His grace.

The Ground of Our Justification. The *ground* or the righteous basis of our justification is expressed by the phrase *justified by his blood*: “Since we have been *justified by his blood*, how much more shall we be saved from God’s wrath through him” (Rom 5:9; emphasis supplied). Justification is not an arbitrary act of God declaring bad people good, or saying that they are not sinners after all. Rather, as John Stott aptly observes, “God is pronouncing them legally righteous, free from any liability to the broken law, because he himself has borne the penalty of their law-breaking.”

The basis of justification is not our obedience, but Christ’s, for “through one Man’s righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life . . . By one Man’s obedience many will be made righteous” (Rom 5:18-19; KJV). Through Christ’s obedience, believers are “justified freely by His grace” (Rom 3:24; KJV).

The Means of Our Justification. The *means* of our justification is indicated by Paul’s favorite expression *justified by faith*. “We maintain that a man is *justified by faith* apart from observing the law” (Rom 3:28; emphasis supplied; cf. Rom 5:1; Gal 2:9). Paul speaks of faith as the sole means of justification because, as mentioned in the previous verse, he wants to exclude human boasting. “Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded. On what principle? On that of observing the law? No, but on that of faith” (Rom 3:27).

Paul’s statement on justification by *faith* has been the object of endless controversies between Catholic and Protestant theologians since the sixteenth-century Reformation. What is at stake is the definition of the

nature of faith and of the dynamics of the process of justification. Before discussing how Catholic and Protestant theologians have defined their positions, let us mention the *effects* of justification.

The Effects of Our Justification. The *effects* of our justification are described as a restored relationship with Christ. This is suggested by Paul's expressions that we are *justified in Christ* (Gal 2:16-17; Rom 8:1; 2 Cor 5:21). "We have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be *justified by faith in Christ*. . . . But if, in our endeavor to be *justified in Christ*, we ourselves were found to be sinners, is Christ then an agent of sin? Certainly not!" (Rom 2:16-17; emphasis supplied).

Being justified *in Christ* points to a personal relationship with the Savior that believers can enjoy now. This fact shows that justification is not purely an external judicial declaration of acquittal, but an internal union with Christ that brings assurance of the believer's acceptance. No matter how sinful one's past life may have been, God pardons all our sins and we are no longer under the condemnation of the law. "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom 8:1).

The realization that our Savior's sacrifice forgives our sinful past brings healing to our body and mind. It enables us to forget the dark chapters of our past life, because His forgiving grace has taken care of them (Phil 3:13-14). It motivates us to "walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit" (Rom 8:4).

The reassuring message of justification by faith appears to be a simple and clear biblical teaching, yet it has been intensely debated since the Reformation. It is a teaching that has deeply divided the Catholic from Protestant churches. The limited nature of this study allows for only a summary statement of the respective Catholic and Protestant understandings of justification by faith.

The distinction between the Catholic and Protestant views of justification by faith revolves around four major questions, aptly summarized by Avery Dulles: "1) Is justification the action of God alone, or do we who receive it cooperate by our response to God's offer of grace?"

2) Does God, when He justifies us, simply impute to us the merits of Christ, or does He transform us and make us intrinsically righteous? 3) Do we receive justification by faith alone, or only by a faith enlivened by love and fruitful in good works? 4) Is the reward of heavenly life a free gift of God to believers, or do they merit it by their faithfulness and good works?"²⁹

The Reformers' Understanding of Justification by Faith. The sixteenth-century Reformers were convinced of the central importance of justification by faith. Martin Luther called it "the principal article of all Christian doctrine, which maketh true Christians indeed."³⁰ Luther developed his answer to the above questions on the basis of his study of Paul and of his personal monastic experience. As an Augustinian monk, he sought in vain to find reassurance of salvation by submitting himself to a rigorous regiment of fasting and prayer. But in spite of his rigorous spiritual exercises, he still felt as a condemned sinner in God's sight.

Luther's quest for a gracious God, not a stern judge, led him to discover in Paul's writings that justification is by faith, without the works of the law. To ensure that his German people would understand the exclusive role of faith, Luther added the word "alone" to Romans 3:28: "We hold that a man is justified by faith *alone*, apart from works of the law." This interpretation made him feel like a newly born person entering Paradise. Out of pastoral concern for the conscience of terrified people buying indulgences to avoid the temporal punishment of their sins, Luther developed the slogan "By grace alone, by faith alone."

Luther concluded that justification is a divine act, by which God imputes Christ's righteousness to a believer, regardless of that person's cooperation. God declares a person to be forgiven of all sins, thus pronouncing that person righteous in His sight (Acts 13:38-39; Rom 4:5, 24). According to Luther, we are justified by God's grace that freely imputes to us the merits of Christ apart from our inner renewal. We receive justification by *faith alone*, that is, by a *passive faith* that accepts God's provision of salvation, not by an *active faith* manifested in obedience to God's commandments. The problem with Luther's interpretation, as we shall see shortly, is that faith is never *alone*—it is never *passive*, because it involves the mind and the will.

In summation, Luther understood justification by faith as a declarative and judicial act of God based on Christ's righteousness. It changes the legal standing of a believer from condemnation to justification (acquittal), but is not dependent upon a change in the person's behavior. This means that a person can be simultaneously saint and sinner—*simul justus et peccatoris*. The problems with the Lutheran (Protestant) understanding of justification by faith will be discussed after the Catholic understanding of justification by faith is described.

The Catholic Understanding of Justification by Faith. The Catholic view of justification by faith was formulated by the Council of Trent in 1546 A.D., largely as a response to the teachings of Luther and Calvin. Since Trent, the official Catholic views have not substantially changed. The recent study (1986 to 1993) on *Church and Justification* produced by the Lutheran-Roman Catholic International Commission, as well as the joint Catholic-Lutheran declaration, shows that fundamental differences still do exist.

Simply stated, for the Roman Catholic church, justification by grace is not a declarative judicial act of God that imputes Christ's righteousness to the believer, but an infusion of grace that enables believers to produce good works. The latter is a process that begins at baptism and continues through the whole life as believers partake of the sacraments and produce good works.

Avery Dulles succinctly summarizes the teachings of Trent, saying: "The Council taught that although justification is an unmerited gift, it needs to be freely accepted, so that human cooperation is involved. Secondly, it taught that justification consists in an inner renewal brought about by divine grace; thirdly, that justification does not take place by faith without hope, charity, and good works; and finally, that the justified, by performing good works, merit the reward of eternal life."

The new *Catechism of the Catholic Church* reiterates the teachings of the Council of Trent by affirming that justification is an infusion of grace bestowed at baptism that enables believers to conform to God's righteousness. "Justification is conferred in Baptism, the sacrament of faith. It conforms us to the righteousness of God, who makes us inwardly just by the power of his mercy."

By linking justification to a person's moral condition, the Catholic church teaches that the righteousness received in justification can be increased or decreased. If lost, justification can be recovered by good works such as a Penance. The new *Catechism of the Catholic Church* explicitly states that those who "since Baptism, have fallen into grave sin, and have thus lost their baptismal grace . . . to them the sacrament of Penance offers a new possibility to convert and to recover the grace of justification."³³ Such a view goes against the popular Protestant belief of once saved, always saved. Once believers are imputed with Christ's righteousness and are declared righteous, allegedly they cannot lose the legal standing as forgiven children of God. Unfortunately, both positions misinterpret the biblical view of justification.

Evaluation of the Protestant and Catholic Understandings of Justification by Faith. A comparison between the Catholic and Protestant formulations of the doctrine of justification by faith reveals the extreme definitions formulated in the crossfire of controversy by the respective churches. Protestants tend to reduce God's justification to an external *legal declaration* of acquittal which is not conditioned by interior renewal. By contrast, Catholics make justification by faith a process of *moral transformation* that continues throughout one's life, and also in Purgatory if necessary.

For Protestants, Christ's righteousness is *imputed* to believers, while for Catholics it is *infused* by means of baptism and the other sacraments. For Protestants, justification is received by *faith alone*, while for Catholics it is achieved by *faith together with works* of obedience. For Protestants, believers put on *righteousness like a cloak*, leaving their character and conduct unchanged, while for Catholics, believers are *infused with righteousness* which enables them to become righteous by means of sacraments and good works.

These extreme contrasts between the Protestant and Catholic positions serve to highlight how both positions misrepresent the biblical truth expressed through the word picture of justification by faith. For example, the Reformers' teaching that every justified Christian is *simul justus et peccator*, that is, a saint and a sinner at the same time, makes justification a phoney external transaction which leaves people internally unchanged. Such an understanding of "justification by faith alone" can

become a thinly disguised license to go on sinning.

In their zeal to emphasize the free gift of salvation in opposition to the Catholic emphasis on good works, Protestants have often given the impression that obedience to God's law is not important, because after all justification is a judicial declaration of acquittal, not a moral transformation. Actually, the separation between these divine saving activities can occur only in the minds of speculative theologians, not in the practical experience of believers. Believers who are justified are also sanctified at the same time. Note how Paul lumps together regeneration, sanctification, and justification: "You were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God" (1 Cor 6:11).

The fact that Paul mentions the cleansing, the sanctification, and the justification as saving activities simultaneously experienced by believers indicates that believers are sanctified at the moment of justification. The reason why "there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom 8:1) is not merely because penitent sinners have been declared "not guilty" before God's court, but because "God sent His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin . . . in order that the just requirements of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit" (Rom 8:3-4).

Both the *legal declaration of justification* and the *moral transformation of sanctification* are gifts of divine grace received at the same time. "The righteousness by which we are justified is imputed; the righteousness by which we are sanctified is imparted. The first is our title to heaven, the second is our fitness for heaven." The imputed and imparted righteousness of Christ are both offered at the same time to those who accept God's provision of salvation.

Catholics are right in affirming that justification by faith is not merely a legal declaration but also a moral transformation. But they are wrong in claiming that such a transformation is triggered by an infusion of grace that begins at baptism and continues through life by means of the sacraments and good works. To Catholics, justification is ultimately not a divine gift of grace, but a human accomplishment by believers who join

their works with faith. This understanding of salvation is reflected in Passion Plays like Gibson's movie. We have seen in chapters 1 and 2 how the Passion Plays have inspired Christians to imitate Christ's suffering as a way to earn their own salvation. Salvation is thought to be achieved through penitential suffering, rather than being received as a divine gift of grace.

Luther's Understanding of Faith. "Faith" lies at the heart of Paul's doctrine of salvation, being often presented as an indispensable requirement for salvation. The definition of "faith" lies also at the root of the difference between Catholic and Protestant understandings of salvation. Trying to capture the exact Catholic and Protestant understandings of faith is a most difficult task, because their respective literature hardly offers clear, unambiguous definitions of faith.

Justification by *faith alone* was Martin Luther's great spiritual and theological breakthrough. To find peace with God, he tried everything from sleeping on hard floors, confessions, prayers, and fasting to climbing the "Holy Staircase" in Rome while kneeling in prayer. All these good works proved fruitless. Finally, Luther found peace when he discovered in the study of Paul's writings that justification is by *faith*, not by the works of penance he had been performing. The phrase "justification by *faith alone*" became for Luther the key to unlock the Bible.

What was Luther's understanding of the justifying faith? The answer seems to be complete trust in Christ's forgiving grace. He wrote: "Justifying faith is a sure trust, by which one believes that his sins are remitted for Christ's sake; and they that are justified are to believe certainly that their sins are remitted."³⁵ He further explains: "No previous disposition is necessary to justification; neither does faith justify because it disposes us, but because it is a means or instrument by which the promise and grace of God are laid hold on and received."

In his "Introduction to St. Paul's Letter to the Romans," Luther wrote: "Faith is a living, bold trust in God's grace, so certain of God's favor that it would risk death a thousand times trusting in it. Such confidence and knowledge of God's grace makes you happy, joyful and bold in your relationship to God and all creatures."

Faith and Works. These statements suggest that for Luther “faith” was absolute trust in Christ’s forgiving grace. It involves the mind rather than the will, that is, mental acceptance of Christ’s atoning sacrifice rather than willingness to obey God’s commandments. He reached this conclusion because all his works of penance never gave him the assurance of salvation. What Luther failed to realize is that the doctrine of justification by faith does not mean that we are saved by faith without works, but that we are saved by God’s grace without human merits.

“Works” for Paul are the works of the law—acts of obedience motivated by the desire to gain righteousness. Such works obviously negate faith, that is, the acceptance of salvation as a divine gift of grace. For James, however, “works” are not a means of salvation, but an outward manifestation of genuine faith. A professing faith is a practicing faith (James 2:14-26). With these connotations, the terms “faith” and “works” are fully compatible.

The two apostles address two different concerns. Paul addresses the question of the *basis* of salvation: Is it a human achievement or a divine gift? James discusses the *effect* of salvation: Is it a profession or a practice? Both apostles are concerned about the misuse of the law. Paul addresses the problem of *legalism*, using the law as a means of salvation—while James discusses the problem of *antinomianism*—disregarding the law as irrelevant to salvation. Understood in their proper contexts, there is no conflict between Paul and James on the question of faith and works.

For Paul, faith is not purely an intellectual acceptance of the provision of salvation, but a complete commitment to God manifested through obedience. Three times Paul states: “neither circumcision counts for anything nor uncircumcision”; each time he concludes this statement with a different phrase: “but keeping the commandments of God . . . but faith working through love . . . but a new creation” (1 Cor 7:19; Gal 5:6; 6:15). The parallelism suggests that a believer who has been saved by faith is not released from the observance of God’s commandments, but is empowered to observe them.

The Catholic View of “Faith.” The Catholic understanding of saving “faith” differs substantially from the Protestant one. In Catholic

thought, faith occupies a subordinate place. The Council of Trent admits that faith does play a role during the life process of justification, but final justification only occurs when a person receives the infused grace through water baptism. While in Protestant teachings faith is the instrumental cause of justification is faith, in Catholic teachings baptism operates as the instrument of justification.

The new *Catechism of the Catholic Church* explains that “*faith is a gift of God, a supernatural virtue infused by him.*” Since baptism is viewed by the Catholic church as a sacrament administered by the church, it is through the church that the believer receives the faith. As stated in the new *Catechism*, “It is through the Church that we receive faith and new life in Christ by Baptism.” This means that, for the Catholic church, faith is a *dispensation of the church* rather than a *disposition of the believer*.

The fact that baptism is administered at birth, when a newborn baby is unable to mentally accept Christ’s forgiving grace, shows that for Catholics the saving faith is an external infusion of grace rather than an internal, intelligent decision. The initial infusion of grace at baptism is instantaneous, but from that point on grace is a lifelong process that works with the believer to earn salvation.

Faith as Infusion of Grace. The Roman Catholic church sees grace everywhere. For example, believers by God’s grace must suffer to pay the penalty of their sins throughout the present life, and if necessary in Purgatory. The sufferings of Christ portrayed in Passion Plays like Gibson’s movie serve as a model for believers to imitate Christ’s sufferings to atone for their sins.

The Council of Trent is most explicit on this matter: “If anyone says that after the reception of the grace of justification the guilt is so remitted and the debt of eternal punishment so blotted out to every repentant sinner, that no debt of temporal punishment remains to be discharged either in this world or in purgatory before the gates of heaven can be opened, let him be anathema.”

God’s grace can shorten the stay in Purgatory! God’s grace can generate more grace through the eating of Christ’s actual body and drinking of His actual blood at the Catholic Eucharist! God’s grace enables

believers to secure more grace through indulgences or by paying for perpetual Masses on behalf of departed relatives and by praying directly to Mary to ask special favors of the Son!

It is evident that, for the Roman Catholic Church, salvation or eternal life can be attained through a combination of grace, faith, and good works. It is a works-oriented method of salvation that challenges believers throughout their lives to do “good works” and to receive the sanctifying grace of the Sacraments in order to reach the level of righteousness needed for entry into heaven.

The Catholic combination of grace and good works as the method of salvation negates the biblical teaching that salvation is entirely the free gift of God. By grace God makes available to us through Christ His provision for our salvation, which we accept by faith, that is, by trusting in Him, not through our own good works. To use Paul’s words, “For by grace you have been saved through faith: and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God, not because of works, lest any man should boast” (Eph 2:8; cf. Rom 5:1).

Christ’s Death as Reconciliation

The fourth word picture of salvation that illustrates the achievements of the Cross is “reconciliation.” This is probably the most popular of the four word pictures, because it portrays the restoration of relationships with family members and friends. Through the previous word pictures we made our way through the Temple court to understand *propitiation*, the slave market to clarify the origin of *redemption*, and to the law court to grasp the meaning of *justification*. Now we are going home to renew our relationship with family and friends.

Reconciliation expresses that the ultimate purpose of the Cross is to reconcile us to God and fellow beings. The verb *katallasso* (“to reconcile”) occurs six times in the New Testament (Rom 5:10; 1 Cor 7:11; 2 Cor 5:18-20), and the noun *katallage* (“reconciliation”) appears four times (Rom 5:11; 11:15; 2 Cor 5:18f). The central idea in all these occurrences is the termination of the estrangement between God and human beings by the death of Christ: “When we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son” (Rom 5:10).

The message of reconciliation is most relevant today when many people feel alienated and estranged from their homes, churches, workplaces, and society. To them, the message of reconciliation is Good News. To appreciate the full import of this divine act of reconciliation, it is important to consider both the divine and human dimensions of this reconciliation.

Divine Dimension. The act of reconciliation is in the first place a divine and not a human initiative. It is accomplished by God through Jesus Christ's atoning death which removes divine judgment against the sinner: "All things are of God, who has reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ . . . God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself not imputing their trespasses unto them" (2 Cor 5:18-19). In Colossians, Paul reminds the believers that it pleased the Father "through him [Christ] to reconcile to himself all things . . . making peace by the blood of His cross. And you . . . He has reconciled in his body of flesh by his death" (Col 1:19-22). Note that *reconciliation is the work of God*, initiated by Him and accomplished through the Cross.

Reconciliation is accomplished not by a change in human attitude toward God but by the objective historical reality of Christ's death. *Christ is the agent of reconciliation*. This is crystal clear in 2 Corinthians 5:18-19, where Paul says: "God . . . through Christ reconciled us to himself . . . in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself." Both statements tell us that God took the initiative to reconcile and He accomplished it through Christ. The beneficiaries of reconciliation are both "us" and "the world," which suggests the universal scope of reconciliation.

The *cosmic* scope of reconciliation is expressed more fully in Colossians 1:19-20, where the supremacy of Christ is linked to His work of reconciliation: "For in him the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of the cross." The ultimate reconciliation will take place at the end when all the natural order will be liberated "from its bondage to decay" (Rom 8:21).

God reconciled us to Himself by the death of His Son "while we were enemies" (Rom 5:10). Thus believers do *not initiate* but *accept* the reconciliation already effected on the Cross. Through the Cross, God

reconciled the world unto Himself by “not counting their trespasses against them” (2 Cor 5:19), because He has dealt with them in Jesus Christ. Reconciliation is then a work outside us, initiated by God who through Christ removes the barrier of sin that separates us from Him.

Human Dimension. Our response to God’s initiative involves first of all the acceptance of the reconciliation provided by God: “We rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now *received* our reconciliation” (Rom 5:11). The acceptance of God’s act of reconciliation brings *joy* (“we rejoice”), assuring believers that they have been restored to the Father’s house. We experience “*peace*,” Paul says, because we “are no longer strangers and sojourners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God” (Eph 2:12-19).

Accepting God’s provision for our reconciliation means also accepting the mandate to become *the ambassadors of the reconciliation*. Paul explains that not only has God in Christ reconciled us to Himself, but He has also “entrusted to us the message of reconciliation. So we are ambassadors for Christ, God making His appeal through us. We beseech you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God” (2 Cor 5:19-20).

God finished the work of reconciliation at the Cross, yet it is still necessary to appeal to people to be reconciled to God. It is significant to note that God has entrusted to us a *message* and a *mission*. The *message* is the Good News that God in Christ has reconciled the world to Himself. The *mission* is to appeal to people to come to Christ. John Stott perceptively points out that “it is not enough to expand a thorough orthodox doctrine of reconciliation, if we never beg people to come to Christ. Nor is it right for a sermon to consist of an interminable appeal, which has not been preceded by an exposition of the gospel. The rule should be ‘no appeal without a proclamation, and no proclamation without appeal.’”

It is a remarkable truth that the same God who achieved the reconciliation through Christ now is working through us to announce the message of reconciliation to others. By sharing the good news of reconciliation, we experience its blessings and express our gratitude to God for His gracious provision.

Christ's Death as Intercession

The fifth word picture of salvation that illustrates the achievements of the Cross is “intercession.” This word picture describes Christ’s heavenly ministry at the right hand of God to make available to us the benefits of His redemptive mission. In the previous four word pictures, we have examined the achievements of the Cross through Christ’s sacrificial death on earth. Now our eyes are directed heavenward to catch a glimpse of the benefits of the Cross extended to us on earth through Christ’s heavenly ministry.

The Inauguration of Christ’s Heavenly Ministry. Christ’s intercessory ministry in the heavenly sanctuary began at the time of His ascension to heaven and exaltation to the right hand of God. Jesus had prophesied at His trial that “from now on the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the power of God” (Luke 22:69). Peter at Pentecost announced the fulfillment of the exaltation of Jesus: “This Jesus God raised up . . . being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this which you see and hear” (Acts 2:33).

It is noteworthy that the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost—the most significant event of the Apostolic Church—is connected with the exaltation of Christ and His installation at the right hand of God. The installation of Christ to His heavenly ministry is reflected in those passages which speak of Christ “sitting” at the right hand of God (Acts 2:34; Eph 1:20; Col 3:1; Heb 1:3, 13). The sitting signifies not a position of repose, but the official enthronement to His intercessory ministry. This is indicated by the fact that Stephen saw “the heaven opened and the Son of Man *standing* at the right hand of God” (Acts 7:56; emphasis supplied).

The “standing” position points to Christ’s role as our heavenly advocate and intercessor before the Father. The meaning of “sitting” is further clarified in Hebrews 8:1-2 where Christ is presented as the “high priest . . . seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, a minister of the sanctuary and the true tent.” These word pictures of Christ standing or sitting at God’s right hand signify Christ’s official enthronement in His heavenly intercessory ministry. The nature of Christ’s ministry is

described in prophetic, kingly, and priestly terms. For the purpose of our study, we will focus only on the priestly ministry of Christ.

Christ's sacrificial death on the Cross did not terminate His priestly ministry, because "he holds his priesthood permanently" (Heb 7:23). Just like in the Old Testament sacrificial system, the priests not only offered sacrifices for the people, but also interceded for them, likewise, Christ continues His ministry of intercession after having offered Himself for our sins. "He is able for all time to save those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them" (Heb 7:25).

Christ's heavenly priestly intercession is based on His sacrifice on the Cross. This connection is brought out in 1 John 2:1-2, for example: "If anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, not for ours only but also for the whole world." Christ's death *accomplished* our salvation and His heavenly intercessory ministry *applies* the benefits of the Cross to our lives today.

New Dimension of Christ's Ministry. When Christ ascended into heaven, He entered the heavenly sanctuary to present His completed sacrifice to His Father. Louis Berkhof writes: "Just as the high priest on the great Day of Atonement entered the Holy of Holies with the completed sacrifice, to present it to God, so Christ entered the heavenly Holy Place with His completed, perfect, and all sufficient sacrifice and offered it to the Father."⁴² "Now Christ appears 'in the presence of God for us' (Heb 9:24), and thus continually embodies before God the sacrifice He made for our sins . . . the perpetual presence of the completed sacrifice of Christ before God contains in itself an element of intercession as a constant reminder of the perfect atonement of Jesus Christ."

The heavenly intercessory ministry of Christ at the right hand of God points to the new dimension of Jesus' Lordship. Wayne Grudem comments that "After his resurrection, Jesus was given by God the Father far greater authority over the church and over the universe. God raised him up and 'made him sit at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come; and he has put

all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church' (Eph. 1:20-22; cf. Matt. 28:18; 1 Cor. 15:25). That authority over the church and over the universe will be more fully recognized by people when Jesus returns to earth in power and great glory to reign (Matt 26:64; 2 Thess 1:7-10; Rev 19:11-16). On that day he will be acknowledged as 'King of kings and Lord of lords' (Rev 19:16) and every knee shall bow to him (Phil 2:10)."⁴⁴

Earthly Sufferings and Heavenly Intercession. The sufferings that Christ experienced during His life and sacrificial death qualified Him for His sacerdotal heavenly ministry. The Cross must be seen as the culmination of Christ's life of suffering. There is a tendency to focus on the suffering of the last week of Christ's life, or even the last twelve hours, like in the case of Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ*. Such a tendency ignores that Christ suffered pain, fatigue, hunger, and thirst throughout His life (Matt 4:2). He suffered temptation at the hands of Satan (Heb 4:15). He suffered rejection from His people (Matt 11:20-24). He suffered denial (Luke 22:60) and betrayal (Matt 26:47-56) from His friends.

What was the purpose and value of the sufferings Christ experienced in His life and death? While the sufferings of Christ's death represent, as noted earlier, the satisfaction of divine justice, His life of suffering has a broader purpose, which includes two significant aspects.

Suffering to Become a Perfect Sacrifice for Sin. Twice in Hebrews the sufferings of Christ are mentioned as a means of perfecting Him. Hebrews 2:10 says that the Author of our salvation was made "*perfect through suffering*" (emphasis supplied). Later we read that Christ "learned obedience through what He suffered; and being made *perfect* He became the source of eternal salvation" (Heb 5:8-9; emphasis supplied).

Sufferings perfected Christ by enabling Him not to overcome moral imperfection but to become a perfect Savior for sin. In what sense? Through the pain and stress of temptation and suffering Christ "learned obedience." He learned what it means to obey as a human being under the stress and strain of human limitations and temptations. His perfect life of obedience, in spite of sufferings, qualified Christ to be a perfect Savior for sin and an understanding intercessor.

The sufferings that Christ experienced throughout His life, climaxing at the Cross, enabled Him to offer up Himself as the blameless Lamb who takes away our sins through His once-for-all sacrifice (Heb 9:28; 10:12). Christ's obedience, manifested in His willingness to suffer even unto death rather than disobey, qualified Him to expiate our sins through the sacrifice of His life. As sin and death came into the world through the disobedience of one man, so, Paul explains, "by one man's obedience many will be made righteous" (Rom 5:19). It is Christ's obedience, even unto death, that gives atoning value to His death.

Suffering to Become a Perfect High Priest. The suffering that Christ experienced in His life and death qualified Him for His role as Mediator and High Priest. The priests functioned as mediators between sinners and God by providing the means of reconciliation through sacrifices (Heb 8:3; 10:11). The Book of Hebrews explains that Christ can rightfully function as our heavenly High Priest for two reasons. First, because He was fully man (Heb 2:14,17), who "in every respect has been tempted as we are" (Heb 4:15). The experience of suffering and of being tempted enabled Christ to be a sympathetic High Priest: "We have not a High Priest who is unable to sympathize with us, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are yet without sinning" (Heb 4:15). The human suffering undeniably gave Christ an experiential understanding of human woes and temptations.

A second reason why Christ can rightfully function as our High Priest is because He secured our "eternal redemption" through His suffering and sacrifice (Heb 9:12). Christ has no need "to suffer repeatedly" (Heb 9:26), because His onetime sacrifice qualifies Him "to appear in the presence of God on our behalf" (Heb 9:24). There is an unmistakable connection between the atoning function of Jesus' suffering and death and His right to function as our heavenly High Priest. Having suffered to atone for our sins, Christ "is able for all time to save those who draw to God through Him since He always lives to make intercession for them" (Heb 7:25).

What is the nature of Christ's intercessory work in the heavenly sanctuary? Obviously, it is not intended to induce God to love us since the Father shared in the sacrifice of His Son (John 3:16; 2 Cor 5:19).

Its function is to represent us before God's throne in order to make available to us the gracious provisions of divine redemption. To appreciate the scope of Christ's intercessory work, we shall briefly consider some of its benefits.

Extension of Human Probation. Christ's intercession extends to the whole human family by offering physical life and temporal benefits to all. As Paul explained on Mars Hill, "He Himself gives to all men life and breath and everything" (Acts 17:25). It is by virtue of Christ's atoning work that the punishment for human disobedience has been stayed. Ellen White comments: "Whether men receive or reject Him, He works earnestly for them. He grants them life and light, striving by His Spirit to win them from Satan's service."

Sustenance of the Church. Christ's intercession sustains the church in her mission to illuminate the world with the good news of salvation. John the Revelator saw "in the midst of the lampstand one like a Son of Man" (Rev 1:13). Since the "seven lampstands are the seven churches" (Rev 1:20), which symbolically represent the church at large, the standing of Christ in the midst of His church points to His sustenance of those who have accepted Him and who keep their light shining before the world.

As the earthly priests daily trimmed and filled the lamps to keep them burning, so Christ in the heavenly counterpart of the holy place symbolically ministers daily at the candelabra by sustaining and strengthening the church. This ministry is accomplished through the work of the Holy Spirit who is also identified in Revelation 4:5 with the seven lamps: "Before the throne burn seven torches of fire, which are the seven spirits of God." It is noteworthy that these "seven spirits" are explicitly identified with the "seven eyes" of the Lamb-Priest: "I saw a lamb standing . . . with seven eyes, which are the seven spirit of God sent out into all the earth" (Rev 5:6). Through the Holy Spirit, Christ fully sees ("seven eyes") and supplies the needs of His people.

Mediation of Believers' Forgiveness. Christ's intercession mediates repentance and forgiveness of sin to penitent believers. Peter proclaimed before the council: "God exalted Him [Jesus] at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins"

(Acts 5:31). Similarly, John explains: “My little children, I am writing this to you so that you may not sin; but if any one does sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; He is the expiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world” (1 John 2:1-2).

Forgiveness involves not merely the cancellation of punishment, but also the cleansing of believers (1 John 1:9) and their restoration to full fellowship with God. All of these are provided through Christ’s continuous ministry in the heavenly sanctuary.

Mediation of Believers’ Prayers. Christ’s intercessory ministry makes it possible for our prayers to ascend to the Father. In our human sinfulness, we cannot approach our holy God in prayer without claiming the merits of Christ. Looking forward to His heavenly ministry, Jesus promised: “Truly, truly, I say to you, if you ask anything of the Father, He will give it to you in my name” (John 16:23-24).

This dimension of the heavenly ministry of Christ is portrayed in Revelation 8 by the incense from the golden altar given to an angel, presumably by the Lamb: “Another angel came and stood at the altar with a golden censer; and he was given much incense to mingle with the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar before the throne” (Rev 8:3).

It is noteworthy that the “prayers of the saints” ascend to the throne of God “*with*” the smoke of the incense” (Rev 8:4). It is Christ’s merits and intercession, represented by the incense, that make our worship and prayers acceptable to God. Ellen White perceptively explains the unique intercessory role of Christ represented by the incense: “The religious services, the prayers, the praise, the penitent confession of sin ascend from true believers as incense to the heavenly sanctuary; but passing through the corrupt channels of humanity, they are so defiled that unless purified by blood, they can never be of value before God. They ascend not in spotless purity, and unless the Intercessor who is at God’s right hand presents and purifies all by His righteousness, it is not acceptable to God. All incense from earthly tabernacles must be moist with the cleansing drops of the blood of Christ. He holds before the Father the censer of His own merits, in which there is no taint of earthly corruption. He gathers into this censer the prayers, the praise, and the confessions of His people, and with these

He puts His own spotless righteousness. Then, perfumed with the merits of Christ's propitiation, the incense comes up before God wholly and entirely acceptable. Then gracious answers are returned."

Ministration of Angels to Human Beings. The intercessory work of Christ makes possible the ministry of angels to human beings. The veil and the curtain covering the tabernacle were inwrought with cherubims (Ex 26:31), representing the angels surrounding the throne of God (Dan 7:10; Rev 5:11) and the ministry angels render to God's people. Hebrews concludes the first chapter, not only asserting the superiority of Christ over the angels, but also asking the question: "Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to serve, for the sake of those who are to obtain salvation?" (Heb 1:14).

In Revelation 5:6, Christ is represented as a "Lamb standing . . . with seven eyes, which are the *seven spirits* of God *sent out into all the earth*." Similarly, in Revelation 1:16, 20, Christ is represented as holding "seven stars" which are interpreted as typifying "the angels of the seven churches." This imagery effectively illustrates the close connection between Christ and the angels who serve as His messengers to human beings. "Through Christ," Ellen White writes, "communication is opened between God and man. Angels may pass from heaven to earth with messages of love to fallen man, and to minister unto those who shall be heirs of salvation. It is through Christ alone that the heavenly messengers minister to men."

This brief survey of Christ's intercessory ministry in heaven has shown its vital importance for our present life and eternal salvation. As our heavenly *High Priest*, Christ sustains us, offering us repentance, forgiveness, and cleansing. He makes our prayers acceptable to God, and provides us with the invisible, yet real, assistance of His angels. Such a knowledge of Christ's heavenly ministry can make the difference between living without assurance of divine assistance in this present life, and consequently without hope for the future, and living with the assurance of divine help and grace for our daily life and with hope for a glorious future.

CONCLUSION

Our study of the Cross of Christ has highlighted the richness of meaning and function of Christ's sacrificial death. The various word

pictures employed to explain the significance and value of Christ's death represent partial attempts to capture its many dimensions. The total scope of meaning of Christ's death cannot be reduced to few conceptual statements, but will always remain "the mystery of the gospel" (Eph 6:19). The contemplation of this mystery will engage our minds through countless ages, constantly heightening our appreciation for the love of God.

We have found that the Cross has both a *subjective* and an *objective* dimension. *Subjectively*, through the Cross God revealed the depth of His love in being willing to offer His Son for undeserving sinners. *Objectively*, the Cross reveals how God dealt with the objective reality of sin, not by minimizing its gravity, but by revealing its costliness, assuming its penalty, and thus satisfying divine justice.

We have found that the substitutionary significance of Christ's death is central to the New Testament understanding of the Cross. Christ is the Lamb who takes away the sins of the world by expiating through His substitutionary sacrifice our grievous disobedience. Thus, at the Cross, divine love was manifested not by the relaxation of justice, but by the satisfaction of its demands through the voluntary substitutionary sacrifice of Christ, who paid the price of human disobedience.

Five major word pictures are used to explain how God deals with the objective reality of sin—propitiation, redemption, justification, reconciliation, and intercession. These word pictures help us appreciate what God did for us and is doing in us.

Christ died to redeem us not only from the *penalty* of sin (Gal 3:13) but also from the *power* of sin (Titus 2:14). Redemption is not only a *rescue* but also a *cure*—not only a *liberation* but also a *transformation*. It is important to maintain both of these dimensions of the Cross in their proper balance. The Cross is not merely an important doctrine but the very essence of the Gospel. Paul, recognizing the fundamental value of the Cross, explained: "I have decided to know nothing among you, except Jesus Christ and him crucified" (1 Cor 2:12).