

ENDTIME ISSUES NEWSLETTER No. 165

“The Necessity of the Cross”

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INDEX OF TOPICS OF THIS NEWSLETTER

- **How to Subscribe and Unsubscribe**
- **The Unique Adventist Understanding of the Gospel**
- **Unexpected Colon Cancer Diagnosis:
Remember Me in Your Prayers**
- **Benedict XVI and Islam**
- **Bacchiocchi Responds to False Allegations**
- **THE NECESSITY OF THE CROSS
(The Essay of this Newsletter)**
- **Announcements of Services and Products**
 - * **Upgrade of Prof. Jon Paulien’s Album with powerpoint outlines of his Revelation’s lectures**
 - * **Special offer on New DVD Album with 10 powerpoint**

lectures on the Sabbath and Second Advent

- * **A New Townhome Community near the campus of Andrews University**
- * **Incredible New Offers on Hitachi Projectors**
- * **The Smallest and most Powerful Remote Presenter**
- * **Does your church or School Need a Screen?**
- * **Bed and Breakfast in London, England**
- * **TAGNET new Web-hosting offer**

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THE UNIQUE ADVENTIST UNDERSTANDING OF THE GOSPEL

Adventists are often being accused of being legalistic, that is, of focusing on the “law” rather than on the Good News of the Gospel. Part of the problem is that our detractors ignore that our Adventist respect for God’s law is largely derived from our unique understanding of the Good News of the Gospel. For us the Cross is not only Christ’s

DYING to atone for our sins, but it is also Christ's *DOING* in the heavenly sanctuary to forgive and cleanse us of our sins. His intercessory ministry extends to us the benefits of the Cross. It is because "He always lives to make intercession for us" that "he is able to save completely those who come to God through him" (Heb 7:25).

Christ's *DYING* on the Cross to atone for our sins and His *DOING* in the heavenly sanctuary to forgive and cleanse us of our sins, reveal the importance that God attaches to His moral law. Those who believe that the *law was nailed to the Cross and Christians today live by the principles of love*, ignore that Christ is ministering in the heavenly sanctuary to forgive and cleanse penitent transgressors of His law. "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).

The biblical teaching of Christ's intercessory ministry in the heavenly sanctuary, is largely ignored by most Christians. *The impression one gets reading systematic theology books is that Protestants leave Christ on the Cross while Catholics place Christ on the altar of the Mass.* Most Catholics and Protestants wonder: "What on earth is Christ doing in heaven?" Perhaps they think that He is recovering from His exhaustive earthly mission!

For Catholics what counts, is not Christ's intercessory ministry in the heavenly sanctuary, but the priest's intercessory ministry at the altar. Contrary to Scripture that teaches us that "Christ offered for all time one sacrifice for sin" (Heb 10:12), the priest sacrifices afresh Christ on the altar every time the Mass is celebrated. The re-enactment of Christ's sacrifice is supposed to generate "merits" not only for the living, but also for the souls in Purgatory. I vividly remember nuns and monks knocking at our door in Rome, Italy, to ask if we wanted to pay for some masses on behalf of our loved ones in Purgatory. Thus, for the Catholics the benefits of Christ's sacrifice derive, not from His

intercessory ministry in the heavenly sanctuary, but through the priest's intercessory ministry at the earthly altar of the Mass.

The Passion of Christ exposes the prevailing Catholic and Protestant misconceptions of the Cross. The book is designed to lead people to appreciate the unique, biblical, Adventist view of the suffering, death, and heavenly intercession of Christ. It is an ideal book for witnessing. It will help your friends appreciate and accept the beauty of our Adventist Message.

In the last newsletter I explained the mistake I made by asking the printer to reprint twice *The Passion of Christ*, forgetting completely that he had already delivered me the reprint of book two weeks earlier. I sense that this was a providential mistake that will help many people to appreciate the unique Adventist understanding of the centrality, necessity, and achievements of the Cross.

To make it possible for many people to benefit from *The Passion of Christ*, we offer this timely book until March 31, 2007 for only \$3.00 per copy for a case 34 copies (\$100.00 for the case, postpaid), and \$5.00 per copy for a smaller case of 10 copies (\$50.00 for the case, postage paid). The regular price of the book is \$25.00 per copy. You will also receive as a special bonus TWO FREE DVD ALBUMS with the two hours 3ABN live interview, where I share the highlights of the book. The DVD ALBUM regularly sells for \$50.00, but you receive it free with your order.

After the 3ABN interview, the phone kept on ringing for three weeks. Viewers from different parts of the world were calling to order a copy of the book which sold out in three weeks. This double reprint came out at the right time, because in few weeks time most Christians will celebrate Christ's Passion and Resurrection on Easter-Sunday (April 8, 2007).

Incidentally, the term “Easter” is not found in the New Testament. Jesus was crucified and resurrected at the time of the Passover, not at Easter, which dated on the Sunday following Passover to show separation from the Jews. (Check your calendar). It was the Bishop of Rome who changed the Sabbath to Sunday and Passover to Easter-Sunday. The reasons for these changes are discussed in my dissertation *From Sabbath to Sunday*.

The book *The Passion of Christ* and the accompanying DVD album, are ideal witnessing tools. They will help both your church members and friends to appreciate more fully the meaning of the Cross. Your help in promoting and distributing this timely book is greatly appreciated.

This is the Special Offer for quantity orders of *The Passion of Christ in Scripture and History*.

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**UNEXPECTED COLON CANCER DIAGNOSIS:
REMEMBER ME IN YOUR PRAYERS**

January 31, 2007, was a wake up call for me. Our family doctor recommended that I undergo a test procedure called colonoscopy and upper GI endoscopy, to find out why I was having problems with my digestion. The colonoscopy checks the entire colon while the upper GI endoscopy checks the upper part of the GI track, especially the stomach.

The results were both positive and negative. No problems were found in my stomach, but a cancer formation was found in my colon. The surgeon wanted to remove the cancer immediately, because it is fast deteriorating. Initially I resisted the proposal because this would force me to cancel, not only of my speaking engagements in Columbia, SC on February 2-3 and Arvada, CO on February 9-10, but also of my trip to London, England, where I was scheduled to speak at three rallies from February 16 to March 3, 2007. But, after further consultation with the surgeon, my wife and I decided to cancel my speaking engagements

to London, England, in order to schedule the surgery on February 20, 2007.

The recovery process will take about a month. This means that I had to reschedule several speaking engagements and will accept fewer invitations in the near future. I need to give time to my body to heal and get strong, before going back to my regular worldwide itinerant ministry.

The diagnosis of colon cancer took our family by surprise because I have enjoyed good health during the past 69 years of my life. We celebrated my birthday with a joyful family reunion on January 29, without ever imagining that two days later I would be diagnosed with colon cancer. My only recent complaint was a slow digestion, which did not really slow me down. Last year I spoke at 48 weekend rallies.

But the cancer diagnosis and forthcoming surgery, are a wake up call for me. I sense that the Lord is telling me: "Sam, you need to slow down and change your life-style." This is what I intend to do. With the guidance of our daughter Loretta, who teaches nursing at the Florida Hospital School of Nursing, I am endeavoring to boost my immune system through a special diet, natural products, exercise, and rest. I am determined to put forth my best efforts trusting in God for the rest.

The Pastor and the Elders of the Columbia First SDA Church in South Carolina, prayed and anointed me on Saturday night after the seminar. Many others have reassured me of their prayers. Please remember me in your prayers. It is comforting for me to know that I belong to a community of faith where I can count on the prayers and encouragement of fellow believers around the world. Your prayers at this critical time are greatly appreciated.

If you have experienced colon cancer in the past and have learned

some valuable lessons, feel free to share with me any helpful guidance. I will gratefully receive any information that could help me at this time in the healing process. Thank you for considering my request.

BENEDICT XVI AND ISLAM

There seems to be a significant difference between the policy of the late Pope John Paul II and that of Pope Benedict XVI toward Islam. Simply stated, John Paul II worked hard to develop a religious partnership with Islam, while Benedict XVI seems to believe that such partnership is impossible. The reasons will be stated shortly.

At a time when the USA is spending billions of dollars to find a military solution to the sectarian terrorism that kills daily innocent people in Iraq and other Muslim countries, it would be most helpful if Benedict XVI could use the influence of his office to bring together Muslim leaders of all persuasions in order to discuss ways to denounce and renounce terroristic activities. By so doing, Benedict XVI could win the admiration of people of all faith as the “Promoter of Peace.” But so far there are no indications that this is happening.

It is well to remember that the Pope can exercise enormous influence, both in the political and religious world. This was demonstrated by John Paul II, who played a major role in the collapse of Soviet Communism, the fall of the Berlin Wall and the reunification of Eastern and Western Europe. The USA government recognized the power of persuasion of John Paul II by channeling millions of dollars through the Vatican. I remember the caption “HOLY ALLIANCE” on the cover of *Times*, with the picture of President Regan and John Paul II. The article discussed at great length the American support for the Pope’s efforts to bring down communism.

At present there are no signs of any “HOLY ALLIANCE” between

the USA and the Vatican on the war against terrorism. The reason is that Benedict XVI has shown little disposition to engage Muslim leaders in a dialogue that could lead to a peaceful end of the terroristic activities that are causing countless losses of human lives and property. To understand why Benedict XVI is not more actively involved in seeking for a religious resolution to Muslim terrorism, I shall attempt to briefly outline the difference between the vision for Islam of John Paul II and that of Benedict XVI. We shall see that the former believed that a religious partnership with Islam is possible, while the latter excludes the possibility of any such partnership.

John Paul II Believed that a Partnership with Islam is Possible

John Paul II worked hard to woo Mecca to Rome. In May 2001 the pope made history by becoming the first Catholic leader to set foot into a mosque and participate in an organized prayer service. The symbolic meeting took place when the Pope entered the *Umayyad Mosque* in the Syrian capital of Damascus. This mosque has significance for both Muslims and Christians. For Muslims it is the oldest stone mosque in the world, while for Christians it is the alleged place where John the Baptist was buried.

The Pope led in Christian prayers, while his Moslem counterpart, Sheikh Ahmed Kataro, led in Moslem prayers. By this dramatic act of worshipping together in a mosque, the Pope underlined his commitment to work toward a rapprochement with the Muslims.

Twelve days after the horrors of September 11, 2001, the Pope renewed his commitment to work toward a new partnership with Moslems in his message to the predominantly Muslim nation of Kazakhstan. The Pope declared: “‘There is one God.’ The Apostle proclaims before all else the absolute oneness of God. This is a truth which Christians inherited from the children of Israel and which they

share with Muslims: it is faith in the one God, ‘Lord of heaven and earth’ (Lk.10:21), almighty and merciful. In the name of this one God, I turn to the people of deep and ancient religious traditions, the people of Kazakhstan.”

The Pope then appealed to both Muslims and Christians to work together to build a “civilization of love.” “This ‘logic of love’ is what he [Jesus] holds out to us, asking us to live it above all through generosity to those in need. It is a logic which can bring together Christians and Muslims, and commit them to work together for the ‘civilization of love.’ It is a logic which overcomes all the cunning of this world and allows us to make true friends who will welcome us ‘into the eternal dwelling-places’ (Lk.16:9), into the ‘homeland’ of heaven.”

Muslim Included in the Plan of Salvation

In spite of the catastrophic events of September 11th, John Paul was committed to work toward a religious partnership with the Muslims. The basis of this partnership is the belief that Catholics and Muslims worship the same God of Abraham. This belief is clearly expressed in the new official *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, which speaks of the new Catholic relationship with the Muslims in these terms: “The plan of salvation also includes those who acknowledge the Creator, in the first place amongst whom are the Muslims; these profess to hold the faith of Abraham, and together with us they adore the one, merciful God, mankind’s judge on the last day” (Paragraph 841).

It is evident that the Catholic estimation of Islam has undergone a fundamental change from the religion of “infidels” to that of believers who worship the same God of Abraham. While in the past the Catholic Church denounced Islam as an evil religion to be suppressed by crusades (Holy War), John Paul II welcomed and affirmed Muslims as

having the same faith of Abraham as Catholics.

The determination of John Paul II to develop a partnership with Muslims stemmed from the simple fact that their 1.3 billion members outnumber the 1 billion Catholic members. By acknowledging the legitimacy of the Islam faith, John Paul II tried to facilitate the Muslims' acceptance of His role as the leader of a future New World Order.

Benedict XVI Does not Believe that a Partnership with Islam is Possible

Already prior to his election as Benedict XVI, Cardinal Ratzinger was uncomfortable with Pope John Paul II's attempts to improve dialogue and develop a partnership with the Islamic world. He found it unacceptable for John Paul II to step inside a mosque, during his visit to Syria in 2001. The reason is that Ratzinger believes that Islam is a religion totally different than Christianity and no true partnership can ever be established between the two religions.

Benedict XVI's thinking on Islamic religion, is found in his book *The Salt of the Earth* written in 1996, when he was still cardinal. He highlights the various differences between Islam and Christian religions. First of all, he argues that there is no orthodoxy in Islam, because there is no one authority, no common doctrinal magisterium. This makes dialogue difficult: when we engage in dialogue, it is not "with Islam", but with groups.

Another key point that he addresses is what is called the shari'a, that is the Koranic law that governs the religious, political, and social life of the Muslim. He writes: "The Koran is a total religious law, which regulates the whole of political and social life and insists that the whole order of life be Islamic. Shari'a shapes society from beginning to

end. In this sense, it can exploit such freedoms as our constitutions give, but it cannot be its final goal to say: Yes, now we too are a body with rights, now we are present [in society] just like the Catholics and the Protestants. In such a situation, [Islam] would not achieve a status consistent with its inner nature; it would be in alienation from itself.”

For Benedict XVI the alianation cannot be resolved because when a Muslim find himself in a Western society, he cannot identify himself with non-Muslim citizens, because they are not a Muslim society. For the pope it is impossible to establish a religious and political relationship with the Muslim world, because of the exclusivistic concept of the Islamic religion. It is a religion that does not allow for accommodations or integration. It only calls for the total Islamization of society.

“In a closed-door seminar, held at Castel Gandolfo, September 1-2, 2005, the pope insisted on and stressed this same idea: the profound diversity between Islam and Christianity. On this occasion, he started from a theological point of view, taking into account the Islamic conception of revelation: the Koran ‘descended’ upon Mohammad, it is not ‘inspired’ to Mohammad. For this reason, a Muslim does not think himself authorized to interpret the Koran, but is tied to this text which emerged in Arabia in the 7th century. This brings to the same conclusions as before: the absolute nature of the Koran makes dialogue all the more difficult, because there is very little room for interpretation, if at all.” (Samir Khalil Samir, S. J., “When Civilizations Meet: How Joseph Ratzinger Sees Islam”).

No Religious Dialogue is Possible with Muslim Leaders

Ratzinger’s thinking as a cardinal about the radical difference between Islam and Christianity, carried over into his vision of Islam as pontiff. He does not see any value in having a theological or religious

dialogue with Muslim leaders. Instead he thinks in terms of intercultural dialogue.

Benedict XVI's hardening of attitude toward the Muslim is reflected in significant reshuffles of Vatican leaders. "The generally eirenic Archbishop Michael Fitzgerald, formerly head of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and a well-known adversary of Ratzinger, has been sacked and demoted to run the papal mission in Egypt. Ratzinger has also moved to distance himself from Cardinal Angelo Sodano, the previous pope's Secretary of State, who is widely regarded as pro-Palestinian, and remains a close friend of the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, Michel Sabbah. Sodano's likely successor is widely expected to be Cardinal Ruini, the former president of the Italian Bishops' Conference, who has been outspoken in insisting that Muslim children in Italian schools should not have the right to study their own religion, because, Ruini believes, this would involve 'dangerous social indoctrination.'" (Abdal Hakim Murad, "Benedict XVI and Islam: The first Year").

Benedict XVI's Reaction to the Benign Tolerance of Vatican II

The hardening of Benedict XVI's attitude toward the Muslim, must be seen as part of his reaction to the policy of benign tolerance toward non-Catholics and non-Christian religions, inaugurated by Vatican II. He believes that such policy has gone too far, weakening the alleged unicity and primacy of the Catholic Church. This concern is expressed in the Vatican Declaration *Dominus Jesus*, prepared by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, when he was the powerful Prefect of the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. The document was approved by Pope John Paul II on June 9, 2000.

In *Dominus Jesus*, Benedict XVI reaffirms the traditional Roman Catholic belief that there is only one true church that possesses the

means of salvation and such church is the Roman Catholic church. Any salvation obtainable through other churches or religions, ultimately derives from “the fullness of grace and truth entrusted to the Catholic Church.” This traditional teaching was largely modified by Vatican II which affirmed that salvation can be found both within and without the Catholic church.

Benedict XVI is opposed to the pluralistic policy inaugurated by Vatican II. The reason is his concern over the rapid spread of the relativistic and pluralistic mentality among liberal Catholic theologians, who believe that “one religion is as good as another.” To remedy this problem, he reiterates in *Dominus Jesus* that “Catholic faithful are required to profess that there is an historic continuity—rooted in the apostolic succession—between the Church founded by Christ and the Catholic Church. . . . There exists a single Church of Christ, which subsists in the Catholic Church, governed by the Successor of Peter and by the Bishops in communion with him.”

Benedict XVI is a Bavarian German

To understand Benedict XVI thinking, it is important to remember that he is intensively a Bavarian German. Bavaria lies in the heart of Europe. It was the beating heart of Nazism, a most brutal political movement determined to purify the German race by liquidating alien ethnic people, like the Jews.

Benedict XVI is no Nazi, but to some extent he shares the same vision for the Catholic Church that Hitler had for the German Arian race. He is determined to preserve the identity and unity of the Catholic Church, by opposing the notion of any partnership with Muslim or any other Protestant or Orthodox churches.

The retrenchment of Benedict XVI into the traditional, exclusivistic

view of the Catholic Church as the sole way to salvation, reminds us of the warning Ellen White wrote over a century ago: “Rome never changes. Her principles have not altered in the least. She has not lessened the breach between herself and Protestants; they have done all the advancing. But what does this argue for the Protestantism of this day? It is the rejection of Bible truth which makes men approach to infidelity. It is a backsliding church that lessens the distance between itself and the Papacy” (*Signs of the Times*, Feb. 19, 1894, par. 4).

Benedict XVI is a living and compelling example of the truth that “Rome never changes.” As Adventists who believe in the prophetic role of the Papacy in the final showdown over worship, it is important to observe how the strategy of the present pope is playing in the endtime prophetic scenario.

BACCHIOCCHI RESPONDS TO FALSE ALLEGATIONS

The recent attempts to prove that Sunday was established by Christ and the apostles (see the recent declaration of Pope Benedict XVI himself in my previous newsletter No. 164), may explain why the General Secretary of the Pontifical Gregorian University is attacking my moral integrity and trying to discredit the scholarly credibility of my dissertation *From Sabbath to Sunday*.

In an official document, the General Secretary accuses me of having falsely claimed to have received the *summa cum laude* academic distinction, a gold medal donated by Pope Paul VI, and the *imprimatur* for the abridged and unabridged versions of my dissertation.

During the past three months I worked diligently to prepare an official response to these false allegations made against me. I shared my documented response in the Newsletters No. 159 and 160. If you

missed these newsletter, you can read my official response by clicking at this link <http://www.biblicalperspectives.com/Gregoriana1>

On January 3, 2007 I sent by registered airmail my official documented response to the Rector (President) and to the General Secretary of the Pontifical Gregorian University. On January 23 I called the office of the Rector to find out if the documents had been received. The response was that no documents had been delivered to the Rector's Office. Without delay, I printed another set of documents and this time I sent them UPS express. The trucking Number 4686 0863 232 indicates that they were delivered Friday morning, January 26, at 10:22 a. m.

From the delivery date of January 26, 2007, a period of 60 days is granted to examine my documented response of 46 pages. If no reply is received within 60 days, I will explore my options with legal counsel. I will keep you updated on future developments.

If you are interested to read my documented response sent to the Rector and to General Secretary of the Pontifical Gregorian University, just click this link: <http://www.biblicalperspectives.com/Gregoriana1>

“The Necessity of the Cross”

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In preparing these three newsletters dealing with the *centrality*, *necessity*, and *achievements* of the Cross, I have been frequently reminded of Ellen White's statement that “The theme of redemption will employ the minds of the redeemed through all eternity. There will be new and rich developments made manifest in the plan of salvation throughout eternal ages” (*Selected Messages* vol. 1, p. 403). This

means that our efforts to define some vital aspects of the Cross, must be seen at best feeble attempts to catch glimpses of a subject that surpasses our comprehension.

The biblical emphasis on the centrality of the Cross as the only ground on which God forgives sinners bewilders many people. Some argue that if God does not pardon sin without requiring the death of Christ, He either must not be an all-powerful God or else He must be a punitive God, concerned more about enforcing His law than expressing His love. The latter is the picture of God portrayed in Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ*, in which Christ is brutalized beyond recognition to meet the demands of justice of a punitive God.

Did God need to submit His Son to brutal torture to meet the demands of His justice? Is redemption in the Bible achieved by the intensity of Christ's suffering, as portrayed in Gibson's movie, or by the sacrificial death of Jesus on the Cross? Can God forgive sin out of His pure mercy without the necessity of the Cross? Since God expects us to forgive those who sin against us, why doesn't He practice what He preaches? These are legitimate questions that need to be addressed. We shall attempt to answer them in the light of God's holiness and the gravity of sin.

God Deals with Sin in Accordance with His Holiness and Justice

The analogy between our forgiveness and God's forgiveness ignores the fact that God is not a private, sinful being. It is true that Christ taught us to pray: "forgive our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us." But the point of Christ's teaching is that we cannot expect to be forgiven by God if we are unforgiving toward fellow beings. To argue that God should forgive us unconditionally, as we are expected to forgive wrongdoers, is to ignore the elementary fact that we are not God.

John Stott rightly explains: “We are private individuals, and other people’s misdemeanors are personal injuries. God is not a private individual, however, nor is sin just a personal injury. On the contrary, God is himself the maker of the laws we break, and sin is a rebellion against him.”

To appreciate the nature of God’s forgiveness, we need to keep in mind the contrast between God’s perfection and our human rebellion. The problem God faces in forgiving sin is reconciling His loving mercy with His perfect justice. For, although “God is love,” we need to remember that His love is “holy” and “just;” it is a love that yearns to forgive sinners, without compromising His justice and holiness.

At the Cross, God’s mercy and justice are equally revealed and reconciled. His mercy is revealed in offering His Son to pay the full penalty of our transgressions, and His justice is manifested in taking upon Himself the punishment that we deserve in order to offer us the forgiveness that we do not deserve. In the Cross of Christ “Love and faithfulness meet together; righteousness and peace kiss each other” (Ps 85:10).

At the Cross, as A. H. Strong puts it, “Mercy is shown not by trampling upon the claims of justice, but by vicariously satisfying them.” It is important to realize that God exercises all His attributes in harmony with each other. In His holiness God demands atonement for sin, while in His mercy He provides it. God’s attributes are not antagonistic to each other, but work together in full and complete harmony.

God’s Holiness Requires the Punishment of Sin

Those who object to the necessity of Christ’s death on the Cross to

atone for our sins fail to understand that God is merciful and just at the same time. This is the problem with those who say: “Why doesn’t God forgive and forget? Shouldn’t God forgive people who are sorry for their wrong doings and endeavor to become better persons? Isn’t it unreasonable to claim that only the sacrificial death of Jesus on the Cross can remove sin?”

These questions ignore that God cannot overlook sin, pretending that it does not exist, because He is righteous and just. “Righteousness and justice are the foundation of thy throne” (Ps 89:14). “His work is perfect; for all his ways are justice. A God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and right is he” (Deut 32:4).

God’s ethical absolutes are not philosophical abstractions existing in ideal realms. They are rooted in God’s very being and thus are as immutable as God Himself. “God is light and in him is no darkness at all” (1 John 1:5). God can only do what is right because His nature is altogether just. Human beings have a sense of right and wrong only because they have been created in God’s image (Gen 1:26) and, thus, have the principles of God’s law written in their hearts (Rom 2:15).

The just, holy, and righteous nature of God is incompatible with sin. God’s “eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrong” (Hab 1:13; NIV). Consequently, our sins effectively separate us from God. “Your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you so that he does not hear” (Is 59:2).

The Meaning of God’s Wrath

The reaction of God’s holiness to sin is frequently described as the “wrath of God.” “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of men who by their wickedness

suppress the truth” (Rom 1:18; cf. John 3:36; Eph 5:6; Col 3:6; Rev 14:10). The wrath of God in the Bible is not an irrational, capricious, emotional outburst of anger and “seeing red.” Rather, it is His consistent and necessary reaction to the objective reality of moral evil. In the words of Leon Morris, God’s wrath is His “personal divine revulsion to evil,” and “his personal vigorous opposition to it.”

Contrary to human wrath, which is usually arbitrary and uninhibited, divine wrath is principled and controlled. It is free from personal animosity or vindictiveness. It is always accompanied by undiminished love for the sinner. God’s wrath in the Bible is always judicial in the sense that it is the wrath of the judge who administers justice (Eph 5:6). It is His intense displeasure and condemnation of sin. It issues not from passion, but from God’s holiness and righteousness which is the basis of the administration of the universe.

John Stott rightly observes that “What is common to the biblical concepts of the holiness and the wrath of God, is the truth that they cannot coexist with sin. God’s holiness exposes sin; his wrath opposes it. So sin cannot approach God and God cannot tolerate sin.” This biblical understanding of God’s nature is unpopular today. Most people prefer an easygoing God who is tolerant of their offenses. They want God to be gentle, accommodating, without any violent reaction. They want to bring God down to their level and raise themselves up to His, so that ultimately there is no need for the sacrificial death of Jesus on the Cross on their behalf.

To counteract this misconception of God, it is imperative to recover the biblical revelation of the God who hates evil, is angered by it, and refuses to compromise with it. It is essential to understand that God’s holiness requires that sin be punished. If God failed to punish sin, then He could not claim to be perfectly just. His infinite justice demands the punishment of the sinner or of an appropriate substitute. Frequently the

Bible reminds us that God cannot excuse or overlook sin. “I will not acquit the wicked” (Ex 23:7). “I will by no means clear the guilty” (Ex 34:7; cf. Num 14:18).

The Gravity of Sin

To appreciate the necessity of the Cross, it is essential to understand not only God’s holiness, but also the gravity of sin. The biblical notion of sin has been largely rejected by our secularized society. Wrongdoers are no longer called “sinners,” but persons with behavioral disorders to be treated as sicknesses rather than sin.

In the Bible, however, sin is not a regrettable lapse from accepted social standards, but an active rebellion against God. The New Testament uses five Greek words for sin which help us to understand its various aspects. The most common is *hamartia*, which signifies “missing the mark.” *Adikia* signifies “unrighteousness” or “iniquity.” *Poneria* means a vicious or degenerate kind of evil. *Parabasis* means “transgression,” the stepping over a boundary. *Anomia* is “lawlessness,” “the violation of a known law.” Each of these terms implies the violation of an objective standard of conduct.

In Scripture, the objective standard of conduct is God’s law which expresses His own righteous character. It is the law of God’s own being, as well as the law that He has implanted in the human heart (Rom 2:15). Thus, there is a vital correspondence between the moral principles of God’s character and the moral principles that should govern our relationship with God and fellow beings.

The emphasis of Scripture is on the godless, self-centeredness of sin which results in active violation of God’s law. “Every one who commits sin is guilty of lawlessness: sin is lawlessness” (1 John 3:4). Every sin that we commit reflects a spirit of rebellion against God.

David acknowledges this fact in his confession: “Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done that which is evil in thy sight, so that thou art justified in thy sentence and blameless in thy judgment” (Ps 51:4). Emil Brunner sums it up well: “Sin is defiance, arrogance, the desire to be equal with God, . . . the assertion of human independence over against God, . . . the constitution of the autonomous reason, morality, and culture.”

Forgiveness through Christ’s Sacrifice

The fact that sin is an act of defiance against God poses a question: “Could sinners be forgiven by other means than Christ’s sacrifice on the Cross?” In theory, God could have saved humankind by other means. But in practice, any other method would not have been consonant with the exigencies arising from the perfections of His character which are reflected in His law.

God’s law necessitated the sacrificial death of Christ, because law carries with it the penal sanction of death for the transgressors. These sanctions are immutable and eternal because they reflect God’s nature and character. God’s holiness causes Him to condemn sin, and His justice requires Him to punish sin. And the penalty for sin prescribed by God’s law is death. “In the day that you eat of it you shall die” (Gen 2:17). “The soul that sins shall die” (Ezek 18:20). “For the wages of sin is death” (Rom 6:23). “Sin when it is full-grown brings forth death” (James 1:15). “Since God is true and cannot lie, these threatenings must necessarily be executed either upon the sinner himself or upon a surety.”

The Good News is that God in His mercy has offered His own Son as the “surety” for our salvation. The New Testament explains the necessity of Christ’s death in terms of the sacrificial shedding of blood for the remission of sin. For example, the Book of Hebrews affirms:

“Without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sin” (Heb 9:22). If the method of salvation depended solely upon God’s arbitrary decision, then He could have devised a bloodless redemptive plan. But God’s decisions are not arbitrary. They are consonant with His inner Being.

The writer of Hebrews explains that the shedding of blood is necessary for the remission of sin, and that only the blood of Jesus can accomplish this purpose. “For it is impossible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sins” (Heb 10:4). “And every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God. . . . For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are sanctified” (Heb 10:11-12, 14).

Only Christ’s Death Meets the Demands of Divine Justice

If God could have forgiven sin by a mere act of volition, without first demanding the satisfaction of the penalty of sin, then the whole biblical teaching of remission of sin through Christ’s sacrificial death would be totally untrue. Furthermore, the Cross of Christ would hardly be the supreme demonstration of God’s love (Rom 5:8; 1 John 4:9-10) if the redemption secured by it could have been achieved without it.

If it had been possible for the cup of Christ’s suffering and death to pass from Him, then surely the Father would have answered His Son’s prayer in Gethsemane. The fact that it was not possible shows that only the sacrificial death of Jesus could fulfill the exigencies of divine justice. The ordeal of Calvary reveals the depth of God’s love for lost sinners. When the Cross is viewed in this light, then the love of God manifested at Calvary takes on new meaning and fills us with adoring amazement.

Although God is almighty and omniscient, there are certain things that He cannot do. For example, God cannot lie (Tit 1:2; Heb 6:8); He cannot deny Himself (2 Tim 2:13); He cannot tempt people to sin (James 1:13). Neither can He violate the moral principles that govern His own nature. When God determined to save human beings from the consequences of sin, He could only design a plan consistent with His moral law that envisions death as the punishment for sin.

God's plan for the salvation of lost sinners could only be carried out through the incarnation and sacrificial death of His Son. This is indicated by the fact that Christ is presented as "The Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world" (Rev 13:8). Through this plan of salvation, as Paul puts it, God is able to demonstrate that "He himself is righteous and that he justifies him who has faith in Jesus" (Rom 3:26).

God Is Just in Justifying Penitent Sinners

In Romans 3:21-26, Paul explains that by offering His Son as an expiation for our sins, God was able "to prove at the present time that he himself is righteous" in justifying those "who have faith in Jesus." The reason is that God acts in harmony with His whole character. On one hand, He shows His complete abhorrence of sin by punishing it, while on the other hand He reveals His mercy by offering to pay its penalty.

The notion of God offering His Son to die for our sins as an innocent victim for guilty sinners is regarded by some as immoral and unjust. In a human court, an innocent person cannot assume the guilt and punishment of a wrongdoer. This reasoning, however, ignores two important considerations. First, Christ was not an unwilling victim. The glory of the Cross is to be seen in the voluntary nature of Christ's

incarnation, life of suffering, and sacrificial death. “Though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but . . . humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on the Cross” (Phil 2:7-8). Christ’s sacrifice was a voluntary act, not an imposition.

Second, God is just in acquitting penitent sinners (Rom 3:26), because, through Christ’s atoning death, He not only acquits sinners, but also empowers them to become righteous. “For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so by one man’s obedience many will be *made righteous*” (Rom 5:19; emphasis supplied). This is something a human judge cannot do. A judge’s declaration of guilt or innocence does not change the behavior of the dependent. But the Good News of the Gospel is that “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

We could say that from a biblical perspective, *justification* through Christ’s death entails not only a *declaration* of acquittal, but also a *transformation* into newness of life. “We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life” (Rom 6:4). The new life in Christ, made possible through the acceptance of His atoning death, proves that God’s plan of salvation is both just and effective. It accomplishes both the reconciliation and the transformation of the penitent sinner—or to use more technical words, the justification and sanctification of believers.

Conclusion

The necessity of the Cross stems from the holiness of God and the gravity of sin. God’s holiness requires the punishment of the sinner or of an appropriate substitute. Christ’s sinless life and sacrificial death

were the only way for sinners to be saved. Jesus said: “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me” (John 14:7). The Cross serves as a constant reminder that “There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

In the next newsletter we shall examine *The Achievements of the Cross*. We shall see that the Scripture does not offer us a clear-cut explanation, but multifaceted images, each designed to help us understand an important aspect of Christ’s redemptive accomplishments. No single image could exhaust the many aspects of the Cross.

We will study five major word pictures of salvation which are 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. 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.

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