

GOD'S PLAN FOR THE AGES

A Comprehensive View of God's Great Plan from
Eternity to Eternity Illustrated with Chart

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CHAPTER SEVEN

THE MEANING OF THE CROSS

In our former studies on “*God’s Plan of the Ages*” we have repeatedly noted two striking facts of Old Testament times:

- (1) The ever-increasing evidence of the sin and guilt of fallen man; and
- (2) the ever-unfolding plan of God to send into the world a Redeemer.

We have called attention to the fact that on our chart the line of sin gets blacker and blacker as each age goes on; whereas, side by side with the development of sin in the earth, the line of sacrifice becomes plainer and plainer.

Let us look at the chart just here. On the one hand we see the blackness of sin: corruption in the days of Noah, degeneration at the Tower of Babel, and the rejection by Israel of her Messiah.

On the other hand we see, from the time of Adam to the cross, the line of sacrifice. If ours were a colored chart, this line would be red; for it indicates the shedding of innocent blood for sinful man.

Through promise and prophecy, through shadow and type, God was painting a portrait of the coming Saviour, even Jesus, the Lamb of Calvary. But with His cross the line of sacrifice ends; for since He died for sin “**once for all,**” “**there is no more offering for sin**” (Hebrews 10:18).

The Messianic Prophecy

When an artist draws a portrait, he first puts on the canvas mere daubs of paint. Then under his skillful hand there later appears — a face.

Likewise, in the Old Testament, God first showed through the animal sacrifices that “**it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul**” (Leviticus 17:11).

Even in these animal sacrifices He was pointing sinners to the Saviour who was to come. But as time went on, He placed the emphasis not upon the type, but upon the reality, not upon the animal sacrifice, but upon a Face, both human and divine. In the Messianic prophecy we see the portrait of the Face in minute detail, revealing the love that from the beginning was in the heart of the God of grace.

- It was Moses who wrote first of Him, saying that He should be **“the seed of woman”** (Genesis 3:15).
- It was Moses who wrote also that He should come from the nation of Israel and from the tribe of Judah (Genesis 12:3; 49:10).
- To David God promised through Samuel the prophet, that his family should give to the world this Saviour (II Samuel 7:12-16).
- Then seven hundred years before Jesus came into the world, Micah, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, named the very place where He was to be born (Micah 5:2).
- Seven hundred years before Bethlehem's manger, Isaiah prophesied that He was to be born of a virgin (Isaiah 7:14), that He was to be **“a son,” “a child,” “a ruler,” “The Prince of Peace”** (Isaiah 9:6, 7).
- Daniel 9:26 tells the very time of His coming into the world; and Daniel lived six hundred years before Christ was born in Bethlehem of Judea.
- Psalmist and prophet foretold in minute detail His sufferings, even the manner of His death (See Isaiah 53; Psalm 22).
- David foretold His resurrection (Psalm 16:8-11) and His ascension (Psalm 68:18).

Pages and pages in the Old Testament are given over to the painting of the portrait of the promised Redeemer and the coming King. As **“the seed of woman,”** He was to be the Redeemer of the whole human race. Then the line of prophecy was narrowed down — to the nation, the tribe, the family, the time and place of His birth — all, that we might know Him when He did come as the promised One of God! Then at Malachi the Divine Artist put down His brush. The portrait was finished. The Messiah was at hand.

He came to fulfill all the promises. And in coming, He has devised **“means, that his banished be not expelled from him”** (II Samuel 14:14). The **“means”** He devised was His cross.

The Christ of prophecy became the Christ of history, that His banished ones, banished from His presence by sin, might not be expelled from Him forever!

This is the meaning of the cross, my friends. Man sinned; God promised a Redeemer; men and women of Old Testament times were saved because they believed God's promise and put their faith in the coming Messiah.

Then He came; He died; He rose again! He ascended into heaven, where He now intercedes for His blood-bought children.

And He is coming again to reign **“from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth”** (Psalm 72:8). It is the cross that saves from sin; and **“the way of the cross leads home.”**

What Calvary Reveals

Nearly two thousand years ago wicked men crucified the Lamb of God, **“and sitting down they watched him there”** (Matthew 27:36). As we turn the eye of faith upon that scene of tremendous significance, we see something of the meaning of the cross.

1. The Fearful Reality of Sin.

As we behold the bleeding wounds of the Lamb of God, we see revealed the depravity of the human heart, its hatred of God, its preference for darkness rather than light, murder, lawlessness, the length to which sin will go — all this we see revealed at Calvary. Sin crucified the eternal, holy Son of God — your sins and mine and the sins of the world.

2. “The Wages of Sin” we see revealed at Calvary.

And **“the wages of sin is death”** (Romans 6:23). **“By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned”** (Romans 5:12).

What is death? Cessation of existence? No! The death that comes as a consequence of sin is not physical death only; it is that and more; it is eternal separation from God. Sin separated Adam from God, who is the Fount of all life. Sin separated Cain from God; and in bitter remorse the murderer cried out to a holy God: **“From thy face shall I be hid”** (Genesis 4:14).

- Sin in the home separates husband from wife;
- Sin in the business world separates employer from employee;
- Sin in the heart separates the sinner from the Saviour.
- Natural death separates soul and spirit from the body;
- Penal death separates soul and spirit from God.
- Sin spells separation!

That is why there was a supernatural darkness at the cross.

A holy God was hiding His face from the Sin-Bearer. That is why the holy Son of God cried out in that dark hour: **“My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?”**

You will note that He did not say, “My Father . . . why hast thou forsaken me?” though He was the only begotten Son of the Father. In this moment He was addressing God as the Supreme Ruler and Judge. And a holy God cannot look upon sin. Sin separates!

At Calvary all the demerit and sin and transgression and guilt of the race were rolled upon the Lord Jesus. The agony of the cross was not the physical suffering; it was the separation it brought between Him and His Father in heaven, with whom He had ever known unbroken fellowship, before whom He had always been well-pleasing.

If we could see hell opened, even that would not reveal the full manifestation of the character of sin. We must look to Calvary to see **“the wages of sin.”**

Our sins crucified a holy God! And but for His death as our Sin-Bearer, our sins would forever separate us from God. My unsaved friend, your sins will forever separate you from God unless you accept Jesus as your Substitute. He has borne the penalty of your sins. He bids you to go to His cross, and by faith behold him, **“the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world”** (John 1:29).

While I was in Australia recently, I met a childhood friend who had lapsed into Unitarianism — a creed which denies the deity of Christ and the necessity for His atoning work on Calvary. As I talked with this man, he asked me the question that many are raising today, and have raised since the days of the Apostle John: “Is God not a Father? Why doesn't He forgive me as I forgive my children?” And my friend pointed to his boy and girl playing on the carpet before him. “I forgive them freely,” he continued, “without bloodshed. Why shouldn't God do the same?”

Now the reasoning which that man followed springs from his ignorance of who God is and what sin is. God is a Father; but God is also a Sovereign and a King.

The president of our United States is a father; but he is also a chief-executive; and as such, he is responsible to see that the laws of the land are obeyed, even by his own children. God is the Father of all in the sense that He is the Creator; but let us note first that the unsaved man cannot address God as his Father. Only the redeemed child of God can call Him **“Father,”** on the basis of the shed blood of His Son, our Saviour, who identified Himself with us, as a Man, that He might call us His brethren. (See Hebrews 2:17).

Then in the second place, let us remember that our sins sent Him to the cross.

He did not overlook our sins; He paid the penalty for them. Could any earthly father do as much for his erring children? Never! Because no human father could possibly suffer as our sinless Saviour suffered in becoming our Substitute on Calvary! It is ignorance of who God is and ignorance of what sin is that blinds men's hearts to this fundamental truth.

When they crucified the Lord from heaven nearly two thousand years ago, they sat down and **“watched him there.”**

When we behold our Sin-Bearer, with the eye of faith:

- We see sin in all its character;
- We see Satan in his hostility to God;
- We see the depravity of the human heart; and
- We see what sin does, bringing physical and spiritual death upon a ruined world.

All these things are brought into the light of the noonday when we look at Calvary.

It was noonday when our Lord was crucified; and in the searching light of the cross, we see sin as it is — a fearful reality, bringing death upon a fallen race.

3. The Supreme Vindication of the Law of God.

Calvary reveals not only the fearful reality of sin and the wages of sin; it reveals also the supreme vindication of God's holy law.

We have seen that God is a Sovereign Judge, as well as a loving Father. And in this sense — I say it reverently — in this sense God never forgives sin. Strictly speaking, He punishes sin and judges it. He does not set aside His holy law.

His love and mercy are made manifest not in that He overlooks sin — but in that He died, **“the just for the unjust”** — on Calvary. God did not lay the sins of the world on another; He laid them upon Himself; for **“God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself”** (II Corinthians 5:19).

Yes, He is merciful; but His mercy is always based on justice. Human mercy is not so. When an earthly judge begins to be merciful, he ceases to be just; and when he is just, he ceases to be merciful. But God is both merciful and just. He never shows mercy at the expense of justice and His righteous law. On the contrary, He magnified and vindicated His law when He bore the curse of the law **“in his own body on the tree.”**

- The Lord our God is holy; therefore He cannot tolerate sin.
- He is just; therefore He judges sin.
- He is merciful; therefore He devised **“means, that his banished be not expelled from him.”** And the **“means”** He devised was His cross!

My dear friends out of Christ, He uttered the forsaken cry from the cross because of your sins and mine. He bore the separation that sin brings, that you need not be forever separated from Him. He uttered that forsaken cry, that you need not have to utter it. But His holy law must be vindicated. If you reject Him, you will cry that cry — when it is too late. He will say to you in that day, **“Depart from me, ye cursed.”**

As a righteous Judge, He will have to punish your sin. And there will be no second chance after death. **“It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment”** (Hebrews 9:27). But by His cross He has provided a way of escape. He has borne the penalty of your sins. Yet you must accept His pardon. He does not force it upon you. He wants your voluntary allegiance and your willing love. **“Today if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts”** (Hebrews 3:7, 8).

4. The Supreme Evidence of the Love of God.

As we look at Calvary, we see something more; we see that “God is love.”

“Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13).

The measure of the love of Christ is determined by the extent of His sufferings. And for Him the cross meant indescribable sufferings, unspeakable shame, physical death, separation from His Father in the hour of His agony. God poured all of His love and mercy into the death of His Son.

Again, the love of Christ is seen in the fact that He gave His life not for the lovely and the lovable; **“God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us”** (Romans 5:8).

- It is a vision of Calvary that makes us love Him, **“because he first loved us.”**
- It is a vision of Calvary that makes us love one another, because His love is **“shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost”** (Romans 5:5).

“God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”

Can you reject the **“unspeakable gift”** of God's love, my friend? Look at Calvary, and that love will break your heart.

What Calvary Provides

Thus far we have been viewing Calvary from the Godward side. We have been seeking the meaning of the cross in the eyes of a holy, yet merciful God. Now let us behold Christ crucified and see, from the human point of view, what Calvary provides for the redeemed children of God.

Again let us look at our chart and note the rays of light proceeding from the cross — light and life that the believer in Christ receives as his inheritance by faith in Him. These rays of light we have named in the terms of Bible phraseology: Redemption, justification, righteousness, peace, sanctification, access and glory.

Let us consider briefly these seven terms in the light of the Word of God, to see the meaning of Calvary to the human heart.

1. Redemption.

“Ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation . . . but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot” (I Peter 1:18, 19).

The word **“redemption”** means *“to buy back by the payment of a price.”* It implies that we have sold ourselves to sin. Adam sold himself to sin; and as his posterity, all mankind has received in Adam the heritage of sin and death. This bondage to sin cannot be broken except by personal faith in a personal Saviour who bought our redemption for us by His own **“precious blood.”**

Mr. Moody, during an evangelistic campaign in England, noticed that a certain young man drove in the carriage just ahead of him each morning as he went to the service.

Upon asking who the young man was, Mr. Moody was told that he was the son of a man who had once been very wealthy. But the father had gambled away his estate. Then the son went to work and bought it back.

My dear friend, something like this occurred when Adam through sin lost his first estate, for himself and all his descendants. But the second Adam, the Lord Jesus Christ, has bought it back by the payment of a price. That price was Calvary's cross. And remember! That price was costly!

2. Justification.

We have been **“justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus . . . justified by faith . . . justified by his blood”** (Romans 3:24; 5:1, 9).

This means complete justification before a holy God. It means justification not in heaven only, but now also, the very moment we put our faith in His shed blood.

Justification means far more than forgiveness. If I should steal a thousand dollars from you, by an act of grace you might forgive me, but you could not justify me. I should still be a thief. You could wipe out the penalty, but not the guilt. God can do both — because Christ died.

Suppose I were tried for murder, and the jury rendered the verdict, “Not guilty.” Then I should be justified in the eyes of the law of the land. Something like this took place when I accepted Christ as my Saviour. He forgave me — and more; He justified me in the eyes of His holy law, because He bore the penalty in my stead.

3. Righteousness.

“The righteousness of God . . . is manifested . . . even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe” (Romans 3:21, 22).

Righteousness fits a man for the presence of God. Since Adam lost his garment of light, unregenerate man has been ashamed and afraid to stand before God. But the righteousness of God, which is **“unto all”** is **“upon all them that believe.”**

As a garment it is upon the redeemed child of God. It is a covering for his sins. Our robes in heaven shall be made **“white in the blood of the Lamb”** (Revelation 7:14).

And this righteousness God imputes — bestows freely upon the sinner the moment he goes for cleansing to the “fountain filled with blood, drawn from Immanuel's veins.” We do not have to wait until we get to heaven to be made righteous before God!

4. Peace.

“Therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 5:1).

“Having made peace through the blood of his cross,” He has **“reconciled”** us **“unto himself”** (Colossians 1:20). **“For he is our peace . . . having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace”** (Ephesians 2:14, 15).

We cannot make our peace with God; we can only accept the peace which God has made for us. **“Having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”**

5. Sanctification.

“Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate” (Hebrews 13:12).

Sanctification does not mean sinless perfection in this life, but separation from sin unto God. We have been **“set apart”** for His glory, **“that we should bring forth fruit unto God”** (Romans 6:4).

Through the Word of God, as it is applied to our hearts by the Holy Spirit, we are sanctified, separated unto Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood. (See John 17:15-19; II Corinthians 6:14-18; James 1:27).

6. Access

“Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God . . . let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need” (Hebrews 4:14-16).

“Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh . . . let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith” (Hebrews 10: 19-22).

In these passages of Scripture we are reminded that the Holy of Holies in the Jewish tabernacle and in the temple was God's dwelling place. Only the high priest could enter that sacred place once a year, on the Day of Atonement, not without blood. The veil shut this room from the gaze of man. But when Christ died, **“the veil of the temple was rent in twain”** (Matthew 27:51).

And from that moment the redeemed sinner has had access into the very presence of God through prayer. He needs no human priest to intercede for him, because he has a Great High Priest, even Jesus, the Son of God, who **“ever liveth to make intercession”** for him (Hebrews 7:25).

This is a precious truth to the Christian; but there is another and a deeper meaning to the word **“access.”** It has reference to the abode of the holy dead since the risen Lord ascended on high and **“led captivity captive.”** Before Christ died, the spirits of the saints went into a place of bliss called Paradise; since He ascended into heaven, **“the dead in Christ”** go immediately into His presence.

We shall consider this point more fully in our next lesson as we study about the resurrection and ascension of Christ. But here suffice it to say that the believer in Him has access now into His presence by faith through prayer, and his spirit goes into His presence the moment he dies — all because of Calvary!

7. Glory.

Shortly before He went to the cross, the Lord Jesus prayed to His Father, saying: “**Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory**” (John 17:24).

And John, writing later in Revelation, gives us a beautiful picture of the saints in glory, “**arrayed in white robes . . . made . . . white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them**” (Revelation 7:13-15).

Redemption — Justification — Righteousness — Peace — Sanctification — Access — Glory!

What a heritage for the child of God — all wrought on Calvary! If you do not know the meaning of the cross, my friend, turn your eyes upon Calvary, and behold “**the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.**”

~ end of chapter 7 ~

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