

THE CROSS OF JESUS CHRIST

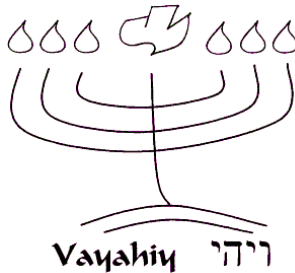
Getting a Grip on the Gospel Truth of the Ages

written by
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Last Sunday, April 8, 2007, we celebrated the resurrection of our Lord, Jesus Christ. In my message I began with the resurrection but I ended at the Cross. In fact, my message for Sunday morning was mostly about the Cross of Christ, and I didn't even finish going over all my notes. Suddenly, I looked at the clock and realized I had been speaking for nearly an hour.

For the past year I have been suffering from an illness that the doctor's can't diagnose, even with all the testing they ran in Anchorage. One of the symptoms is a short-term memory loss... or was that long-term memory? I can't remember. All kidding aside, it is something that is quite uncharacteristic of me from the way I was in the past, but now, it is what it is, and I praise God. Hey, and don't feel sad or sorry for me. I don't. Rather than trusting in that uncanny photographic memory I had as a young Navy deep sea diver, I must ever trust in Him and lean upon His everlasting arms. God is good.

Because I seem to forget things so much anymore, lately I have had an urgency to write things that are very important to me. Today, I just want to convey the awesome message of the Cross of Jesus Christ.

There have been times of prayer when I have been left utterly speechless because I've been overwhelmed by the thought of the Cross of Jesus Christ. Amazing grace is not merely a nice hymn for me. God's grace is truly amazing.

ALL HAVE SINNED

"For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23).

"For all have sinned..." Most of us really have no idea what that means. We write it off as simple mistakes. Or, we might think of it as having done some bad things. No, no, no...

It means that, apart from Christ, we can do nothing good, nothing holy, nothing decent, nothing honorable, and nothing righteous, whatsoever. Apart from Christ, everything we do, have done in the past, and ever will do, is vile and wicked before a holy God. Apart from Christ, everything we are, were, and ever will be, is vile and wicked before a holy God.

We have broken EVERY commandment of God. The Bible tells us,

“For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all” (James 2:10).

Let me show you an example, just from The Ten Commandments.

Let’s say that you’ve broken the 7th commandment, *“Thou shalt not commit adultery” (Exodus 20:14)*. Remember, Jesus said that even if you lusted after another in your heart, it is as if you committed the act (**Matthew 5:27-28**).

If you’ve broken that commandment, then you’ve also broken the 10th commandment by, coveting, desiring something that is not yours to have.

Then you’ve also lied, breaking the 9th commandment because you have witnessed falsely in failing to keep yourself for the one mate that God has for you.

With that adultery you’ve also broken the 8th commandment by stealing, taking something that is not yours.

Through that same adultery you have also broken the 5th commandment by bringing shame to your father and mother, whom you were commanded to honor.

In that sin, there is no way that you can take one day out of the week to make it holy before God because it profanes the Sabbath’s holiness, thus breaking the 4th commandment.

In breaking any one commandment of God, you have blasphemed the name of God, the 3rd commandment, because He has given the commandments by His name, YHVH.

Giving this desire a place of such importance breaks God’s 2nd commandment against idolatry because this person with whom you have committed adultery has been raised as an idolatrous image equal to or superior to God.

The 1st commandment, to have no other gods beside YHVH God, is also broken because this person that you have had an adulterous affair with, however fleeting or temporary the deed or thought, has been given a greater place than God in your heart and mind.

Finally, the 6th commandment, the commandment not to murder, has been broken if you remain unrepentant before God because you are guilty of murdering Jesus Christ, who died for sin.

Now, under the new covenant given us in Jesus' blood, we are not under the law, or even under The Ten Commandments. Nevertheless, these commandments, as a schoolmaster, present an interesting illustration of how a single sin makes us guilty of all.

Additionally, as far as the gospel is concerned, I don't have to convince you that you are a sinner. You *are*. I *am*. The Bible declares it. When the Cross is preached, the Holy Spirit convicts you and I of the villainy and wretchedness of our sin.

ALL HAVE FALLEN SHORT OF GOD'S GLORY

"...and come short of the glory of God..." We have also lost the meaning of this portion of that verse. In other versions it is translated, *"and fall short of the glory of God."*

Falling short or coming short of the glory of God does not mean, "God has a wonderful purpose for your life and if you just say, 'Jesus I believe you and receive you,' you'll be on your way to having a purpose driven life."

It does not mean, "You have all these wonderful things going for you and that's great, but you just need Jesus to make your life complete."

To fall short, the Greek *υστερουνται* (*husterountai*), means that you and I are devoid, utterly lacking, completely destitute, and absolutely inferior of any heavenly value whatsoever. Apart from Christ, we are so wretched and destitute that we are not only unworthy of being redeemed, but we are not worth a micro-micro second of God's time to consider redeeming us. In fact, the Holy Spirit tells us specifically through the apostle Paul as he quotes **Psalms 14** (and **53**):

"As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: there is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one. Their throat is an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips: whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness: their feet are swift to shed blood: destruction and misery are in their ways: and the way of peace have they not known: there

is no fear of God before their eyes” (Romans 3:10-18).

YET! God redeems us anyway in pouring out His holy wrath upon His one and only Son to be our propitiation (our mercy seat), where the anger of God against sin and the justice of God to punish sin is reconciled with the mercy of God to cast away the debt of sin and the love of God to forgive sin.

That's why I'm so amazed with the Cross of Jesus Christ! That's why I'm so amazed with the grace of God!

THE GOOD NEWS!

We may want to take off our shoes here because where we are treading now is holy ground, so to speak...

“Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (Romans 3:24).

When we ponder the Cross of Jesus Christ, let us not corrupt the holy work of God in it by trying to close our eyes and imagine the nails, the thorns, the beatings, and so forth.

Every movie that has attempted to capture what was going on in the Cross will ALWAYS fail because the truth of the Cross can only be revealed by the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit. The truth of the Cross of Jesus Christ is eternally holy and infinitely glorious, and the discovery of God's amazing grace by the Cross will never be fully comprehended by the creation of God. A great deal of what heaven is about is the eternal discovery of God's holy work upon the Cross in the great demonstration of His wrath and justice consistent with His love and mercy.

Justified, δικαιουμενοι (*dikaioumenoi*), means, “to be declared legally righteous.”

Freely, δωρεαν (*doorean*), isn't translated as an English word in the New American Standard Bible (NASB), but it means, “undeservedly.”

Grace, χαριτι (*chariti*), means, “favor” or “free gift.”

Redemption, απολυτρωσεως (*apolutrooseoos*), is a compound of two Greek words, *apo*, meaning, “cast away” or “cast off”; and *lutron*, meaning “redemption” or “ransom price.” This Greek word would seem to present the majesty of Jesus' statement from the Cross, “*It is finished*” (**John 19:30**). “*It is finished*” is translated from the Greek word, τετελεσται

(*tetelastai*), which means, “paid in full.”

Because of the villainy and wretchedness of our sin and rebellion against a holy God, we owe a debt that we cannot possibly pay. Therefore, the God-Man, Jesus Christ, pays the penalty Himself, with Himself.

If I may so bold as to paraphrase **Romans 3:24**, I might render it in this way: “Being declared legally righteous, and although we are undeserving of it, God cast the ransom price off of us as His free gift because the redemption price was channeled through and paid by Christ Jesus.”

THE PROPITIATION

The lofty majesty and incredible splendor of this work of God continues...

“Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in His blood, to declare His righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God” (Romans 3:25).

Propitiation, ἡλασθηριον (*hilasteerion*), perhaps the most important word in the Bible, is the word that is also translated “mercyseat” in **Hebrews 9:5**,

“And over it the cherubims of glory shadowing the mercyseat; of which we cannot now speak particularly.”

הכפרה (*HaKaphoret*) is what has been translated “mercy seat” in the Old Testament and literally means, “the lid” or “the covering.”

Exodus gives instruction as to how the mercy seat was made, etc. The mercy seat was a separate item that sat upon the ark of the testimony, or (אֲרוֹן הָעֵדוּת, *Aron HaEdut*).

Numbers 7:89 tells us that it was from the mercy seat, between the two cherubim that the voice of God spoke to Moses.

We get our most significant insights to the mercy seat in **Leviticus 16** and **Hebrews 9**. These chapters provide for us the insights into another Feast of the LORD, *Yom Kippur*, the Day of Atonement (יּוֹם הַכִּפּוּרִים).

In this fall feast, this one day that is appointed to atone for all the sins of Israel, the high priest performs all the sacrifices and enters into the Holy of Holies by himself. He sprinkles the blood on the mercy seat by the commandment of God to bring mercy upon the people for their sins. In the

Holy of Holies, the high priest is the mediator for the people. This is a prophetic foreshadow of Jesus, our Mediator and Intercessor:

“For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus” (1 Timothy 2:5).

It is here, in the courtyard of the Tabernacle, which is also called the outer court, where we gain insights into understanding the propitiation of sins made at the Cross.

The high priest, in offering the sacrifices in the outer court of the Tabernacle, is a “type” of God the Father, while the sacrifice, is a “type” of Jesus, the Son. The blood from the sacrifice was taken by the High Priest and sprinkled upon the mercy seat.

The sins of believers, those saved by grace through faith, were not atoned for because the Jews and Romans brutalized and tortured the Lamb of God. The total disfigurement of the Son of God before He went to the Cross was the evidence that sinful man utterly hates God.

The sacrifice for our sins that provides us forgiveness was made by God at Calvary when, in His holy justice, He poured out His righteous anger upon His only Son because Jesus became the curse for us, as it is written,

“Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree” (Galatians 3:13).

All the anger of God against sin was poured out upon His only begotten Son and that is LOVE.

REMISSION OF SINS THAT ARE PAST

“Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in His blood, to declare His righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God” (Romans 3:25).

Three very important things are revealed to us here.

Remission, παρεσις (*pareisin*), means, “letting pass” or “disregarding.”

Sins, αρματηματων (*harmateematoon*), means, “sins” or “damnation” just as it is used here:

*“Verily I say unto you, All **sins** shall be forgiven unto the sons of men, and blasphemies wherewith soever they shall blaspheme: but he that shall blaspheme against the Holy Ghost hath never forgiveness, but is in danger of eternal **damnation**” (Mark 3:28-29).*

“**That are past...**”, τῶν προγεγονοτῶν (*toon progegonotoon*), meaning, “past” or “already” or “previously transpired.”

Therefore, **Romans 3:25** says that the soul that is saved through faith in the righteous blood of Jesus Christ applied to the mercy seat in heaven, has had his or her condemnation disregarded by God. Why?

As vile and wretched sinners that are not worth redeeming, we are condemned the moment we are born. Apart from Christ, we are condemned already because we are descendents of Adam:

“He that believeth on Him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God” (John 3:18).

Second, **Romans 3:25** also says that the soul which is saved through faith in the righteous blood of Jesus Christ applied to the mercy seat in heaven, has had his or her past sins disregarded by God. Why is that important to know?

The Cross of Christ NEVER gives us license or permission to continue to sin.

I suggest that if someone continues in a lifestyle of habitual sin and is never sorrowful for it, casually brushing it off as if to say, “Well, I’m already forgiven,” that person may have never been saved at all.

But when we do sin, because of faith in the righteous blood of Jesus Christ, we have forgiveness of those sins we commit, as it is written,

“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us” (1 John 1:9-10).

Third, and MOST IMPORTANT, is that God’s forbearance for sins committed by mankind, from Adam until the crucifixion of Christ, is

justified, vindicated at the Cross of Calvary.

“Who in times past suffered all nations to walk in their own ways”
(Acts 14:16).

“And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent: because He hath appointed a day, in the which He will judge the world in righteousness by that Man whom He hath ordained; whereof He hath given assurance unto all men, in that He hath raised Him from the dead” **(Acts 17:30-31).**

This is explained in the next verse.

THE JUST JUSTIFIER

“To declare, I say, at this time His righteousness: that He might be just, and the justifier of Him which believeth in Jesus” **(Romans 3:26).**

The entire heavenly host sees the holiness God every single moment. All the angels know God’s holy justice and holy righteousness. They declare God’s three-fold holiness around His throne:

“Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts: the whole earth is full of His glory” **(Isaiah 6:3).**

This is why, when angels see the grace of God bestowed upon mankind, they examine it with utter awe and amazement, as it is written,

“Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into”
(1 Peter 1:12).

In the Cross, God is just and righteous in pouring out His holy wrath upon a Man for sin. Also in the Cross, God is the Justifier of sinners who have been saved by faith in the only work God finds acceptable, the sacrifice of His one and only Son, Jesus Christ, who gave His life on Calvary’s Tree.

The entire Bible is God’s amazing explanation for His longsuffering forbearance, His tolerance, upon sinful flesh AND the amazing provision He has made for sin in His one and only Son!

God could have wiped out all sin, beginning with Satan, without any explanation whatsoever, and all of creation would have said, “Amen, amen.”

Yet, God who had disregarded the sins that had gone on from Adam until the Cross, was just in His holy and righteous work upon the Cross, and therefore, the Justifier of all those to whom He would show mercy, because of the Cross.

But having done this incredible thing, because God is good, and He is absolutely good in His holiness, He sets out to explain what He has done so that all of His creation will see His glory.

That’s what the whole Bible is about folks: God explaining what He has done upon the Tree at Calvary in His only Son.

WHERE IS BOASTING?

“Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay: but by the law of faith” (Romans 3:27).

There is not a man, woman, or child, that is, ever was, or ever will be able to boast in anything apart from the Cross of Jesus Christ.

Any nice thing, good work, or righteous act that is not performed as a result of faith in Jesus Christ is sin, as it is written,

“...for whatsoever is not of faith is sin” (Romans 14:23).

“Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God” (2 Corinthians 3:5).

Where is boasting then? It is, I say, in the amazing grace found in the Cross of Jesus Christ!

“But God forbid that I should glory, save in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world” (Galatians 6:14).

WHAT MUST WE DO?

“Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren,

what shall we do?” (Acts 2:37).

Salvation is by the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit, performed by Him with a greater miracle than the creation of the universe, in that God is creating a new life in you from a corrupt and wicked life, whereas, when He created the heavens and the earth, He created it from nothing.

Therefore, the Holy Spirit awakens to the dead soul the ability to respond to the words that you’ve just read, as it is written,

*“So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God”
(Romans 10:17).*

According to Charles Spurgeon, faith is made up of three things: knowledge, belief, and trust.¹

Now you have knowledge of certain truths that have come from the Bible, the Word of God. Yet, knowledge alone is not Biblical faith. These gospel truths have been presented to millions yet the response of many has been to reject these things as stuff and nonsense. They are armed with as much knowledge as you and I have concerning the truth of Jesus Christ, but will disregard this information as untrue. The Bible says this about them:

“Because that, when they knew God, they glorified Him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools” (Romans 1:21-22).

Knowledge of this truth and belief in it does not constitute Biblical faith either. It is more than a mere mental ascent to this knowledge. The Bible says,

“Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble” (James 2:19).

Satan and his angels are not only aware of the knowledge of God, they believe that He exists as the Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, yet that knowledge and belief is not the Biblical faith that saves a soul by God’s grace. Biblical faith requires the third element: trust.

Trust is responding appropriately to the belief in that knowledge. This trust is accomplished supernaturally by the Holy Spirit to regenerate the soul and

¹ C. H. Spurgeon, *All of Grace*, “What is Faith?”

make him or her alive when once they were dead in sin.

“Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;)” (Ephesians 2:5).

In faith, therefore, the result of that life that has been saved by the free gift of a sovereign God through the Cross of Jesus Christ (grace), is a life that lives righteously because of the reality of what God has done in that soul:

“Who His own self bare our sins in His own body on the Tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed” (1 Peter 2:24).

Therefore, the result of the saved life will be evidenced by, but not limited to these things: a growing resemblance to the life of Christ in sanctification (**1 John 1:7**), repentance of sins as the illumination of His light reveals them (**1 John 1:8-10**), a love for God’s Word (**1 John 2:3-5**), abiding in the Holy Spirit-led life (**1 John 2:6**), exhibiting a sacrificial love for fellow-believers (**1 John 2:9-11**), a hatred for the things of this world and hatred for the lusts of the flesh because those things are at enmity with the Father (**1 John 2:13-17**), and a love for and discernment of the truth (**1 John 2:20-21**).

Therefore, *“Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?-- unless indeed you are disqualified” (2 Corinthians 13:5, NKJV).*

