

THE CROSS OF CHRIST

**DOES IT
MAKE SENSE?**

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INTRODUCTION

For centuries the cross has been the symbol of Christianity. It is seen on church buildings and church furnishings and is often worn by church ministers and displayed by members of the congregation in various ways. The apostle Paul said the cross of Christ was foolishness to the Greeks and a stumblingblock to the Jews, but to those who believed among the Jews and Greeks, it was the power of God and the wisdom of God (1 Cor. 1:18-24). Paul would not boast about any human achievement other than the cross of Christ (Gal. 6:14).

The Greek word “stauros” which is translated “cross” in the New Testament, does not actually signify the form of a cross. Vine, in his Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words, says the word “denotes, primarily, an upright pole or stake.” The “cross” on which Jesus died was probably a simple upright wooden stake, with his hands nailed to it above his head. The apostles sometimes referred to it as a tree (Act. 5:30. 10:39. 13:29. Gal. 3:13. 1 Pet. 2:24).

The actual shape of the cross is of no great importance. Of more importance is the answer to the questions: “Why do Christians make so much of the cross? What is so special about this crude instrument of torture and death? Why did Jesus have to die on a cross?” What would our answer be? Would we hide behind generalities and theological phraseology and clichés which mean little to the non-Christian? Or would we be able to give a satisfying answer that made some sense?

This booklet is an attempt to do that and in order to do so, we need to start at the beginning, at the creation of man and work our way through to the end.



CHAPTER ONE

In Genesis chapter one we read that step by step God fashioned the earth to be a fit habitation for man and all other creatures. Man was the last of all creatures to be created and was therefore the climax and culmination - the crown and goal of God's creation.

Although created on the same day as the animals, man was created after a much higher model, being modelled after a divine type. He was made in the image and after the likeness of God (Gen. 1:26), but he was clearly greatly inferior in status - "a little lower than the angels" (Ps. 8:5. Heb. 2:7).

Animals were not created in God's image. Only man was shaped according to the divine likeness. Man is an inferior replica of God in both a physical and mental sense, i.e. in physical form and mental constitution and capacity. God did not form any of the other creatures to be a clay replica of Himself. This unique form and shape was given to man alone.

It is also evident from what Scripture says about the angels that they share the same form and shape. At the moment their nature is superior to ours. Our nature is referred to in Gen. 2:7 as a "living soul" which is defined in 1 Cor. 15:44 as a "natural body," i.e. "from the earth" (v47); "flesh and blood" (v50). The life of the natural body (flesh) is in the blood (Lev. 17:11). Angels, however, are "spirits" (Ps. 104:4. Heb. 1:7), and as such they do not have a natural body but a spiritual body. They are not sustained by blood but by the Spirit of God and are therefore immortal. Being a "quickening spirit" Jesus also has a "spiritual body" (1 Cor. 15:44-45) which consists of flesh and bone (Lk. 24:39) and is immortal, and when he returns and makes us immortal, we shall be equal with the angels (Lk. 20:36). (Jesus of course is above the angels!)

It is evident from the statement in Gen. 3:5 about the prospect of Adam and Eve becoming "as gods," that it was God's ultimate intention for them to become equal with the angels. (Angels are sometimes referred to in Scripture as "gods").

The likeness between man and God does not only relate to outward form and shape. It also relates to mental constitution and capacity which determines character.

One thing that sharply distinguishes man from the rest of nature is his potential and capacity for thought, feeling and planned intelligent action. Here and there in other animals, limited aspects of this capacity can be seen, but the full-blown development that is called a mind is unmatched elsewhere in nature.

Man clearly has a mental capacity which distinguishes him above all other creatures. God has endowed him with the ability to think and reason in his mind, enabling him to comprehend and receive spiritual ideas which empower him to think God's thoughts and conform to God's moral character. Unlike the animals, man can read, reason, understand, develop wisdom and faith and communicate with God. Man can bear responsibility, appreciate and admire beauty and goodness, love music and offer intelligent praise and thanksgiving to his Creator. Man has these and other higher powers not possessed by any other creature.

Many animals are larger and stronger than man and have physical brains as large, or even larger than man's brain, and with similar cerebral cortex complexity; but none have the powers of intellect, logic and creativity. Animals, for the most part, follow instinctive habit patterns in their feeding, nesting, migration and reproduction. God has "programmed" their brains, so to speak, with particular instinctive aptitudes. Thus beavers build dams, birds build nests etc. These aptitudes are inherited - they are not the results of logical cognitive processes.

For example, thousands of birds flock south each year in some countries as winter approaches in the northern hemisphere. They don't stop to "reason" why; they don't stop to ask themselves whether they should; they don't plan ahead an itinerary for the trip. At a given signal, like the pre-set alarm of a clock, they leave their summer feeding grounds in the north and travel thousands of kilometres south. Scientists don't fully understand why; they merely observe the operation of this animal instinct.

But man is vastly different. He is able to perceive and understand knowledge, draw conclusions, make decisions and will to act according to a thought-out plan. Each man may build a different house, eat different foods, live an entirely different way of life from every other man. If man wants to change his way of life he can - he is not bound by instinct. He is not governed by a set of pre-determined habit patterns as animals are. Man can choose for he has free moral agency; he has free will.

VERY GOOD - NO GOOD

Gen. 1:31 tells us that "God saw everything He had made, and behold, it was very good." This "very good" condition prior to the fall of man is contrasted in Rom. 7:18 with the condition after the fall: "I know that in me, that is in my flesh, dwells no good thing." Paul is referring as he says in v17, to "sin that dwells within me." It is evident

from the context that Paul is referring to sinful urges and impulses and inclinations lurking deep within his flesh nature which have a constant bias towards evil and which are opposed to law and order and righteousness. Like a gravitational pull, these sinful negative propensities constantly exert themselves to pull down to lower levels of attitude and conduct that are contrary to the Word and will of God. He says: “When I want to do good, evil desire is present with me,” with the result that he ends up doing things he doesn’t want to do.

We all know what he is talking about and can identify with what he says. One would have to be dishonest or deceived to not acknowledge this. The whole human race is, and always has been since the fall, in the same boat, driven by sinful ungodly lusts and desires which are the cause of all the problems in the world, particularly death (Jam. 4:1-5).

Now, there were three major factors which led to sin and the fall of our first parents:

1. The tree of knowledge of good and evil.
2. The command to not eat from it.
3. The serpent who deceived Eve into eating, by telling a lie.

Take away any one of these factors and sin could not and would not have been committed. All three played a part in the process.

If we were to ask the question: “Who made the tree, the command and the serpent?” The answer of Scripture is: “God.” He was responsible for all three (Gen. 2:8-9; 16-17. 3:1). It is an unavoidable fact that He made the tree, the command and the serpent, and they were all involved in the circumstances which led to the fall.

God in His foreknowledge would have foreseen this, yet He still brought those factors into existence. This being the case, there must have been good reasons for doing so. As we shall see, the reasons have a direct bearing upon the cross of Christ and God’s eternal purpose of redemption. Failure to understand the significance of the episode in the garden of Eden can unfortunately lead to many misconceptions, so it is important to get a proper perspective of the events from the outset.

GOD MADE MAN UPRIGHT

As we have seen, God originally made man “very good,” but due to sin, he became “no good.” Ecc. 7:29 relates to this by saying that God made man upright, but he ended up inventing many evils. As a result of being created in the image of God and being an inferior replica of God, man had the potential to make great inventions - for good or evil - all

depending on how he chose to exercise his creative potential.

Prior to sin entering the world, there were, of course, no sinful desires in man's nature. God did not create him with sinful propensities and therefore he had no desire to invent evil of any kind. As we shall see, it was only when he was put to the test and given the opportunity to choose between doing good or evil, he succumbed to the temptation to do evil.

Now, it needs to be pointed out that the reference to Adam and Eve originally being created "very good," does not mean that they were created with a ready-made, fully developed and mature godly character. This is not how God goes about developing such character. This is not what "very good" means in Gen. 1:31, as is evident from the fact that the statement is applied to "everything God had made." This includes not just man, but animals, birds, fish etc which are incapable of the moral and spiritual qualities and attributes that are usually associated with a godly character from the divine point of view.

Everything was very good in a natural physical sense, being well formed, well ordered and constituted. As far as man was concerned, he was a good physical being with a good body and brain. The mind functioned well in its thinking and reasoning processes, and all the bodily parts worked perfectly.

But man was made with these things. He didn't have to develop them himself. No personal effort was required. He didn't have to exercise any moral or spiritual powers to acquire them. He did not have to observe any rules or obey any commandments.

NOT CREATED WITH CHARACTER

Character, however, is an entirely different matter. It cannot be immediately or mechanically produced. It cannot be instantly or automatically printed on a person's mind like words or pictures are printed on a piece of paper as it passes through a photo-copy machine.

Character is something that grows and develops through personal experiences, which require exercising and applying moral and spiritual principles; and making decisions and choices.

In this respect, God's work on man was not finished or complete. The divine edict: "Let us make man in our image" had more in view than just a good physical body with a good brain mechanism. The sequel reveals that the Creator particularly had in mind a man who was good spiritually, who took His word seriously and who made decisions and choices that pleased Him, being obedient to His requirements, no matter what tests and

challenges were thrown at him.

MORE WORK TO BE DONE

So then, at the end of the six days of creation, God's physical external work of creation was completed and very good, but in another sense - an internal spiritual sense, it was a work about to begin. There lay ahead a deeper and more wonderful development on a moral and spiritual plane, before God's glory could be fully manifested in man - before man could become in the image of God in the fullest sense.

As we know, physical development and strength requires physical exercise, otherwise the muscles get weak and the flesh goes flabby. And so Adam was required to do physical exercise. He had to cultivate and till the ground (Gen. 2:5, 15). Spiritual development and strength also requires exercise. Heb. 5:14 informs us that spiritually minded people are those who have "exercised their senses to discern both good and evil." It is not difficult to infer from this that both good and evil have to co-exist and be confronted and encountered, before spiritual discernment and the development of godly character can be achieved. Other Scriptures, as we shall see, certainly teach this.

INNOCENT OF GOOD AND EVIL

Now, when Adam and Eve were first created, they were ignorant of both good and evil, and therefore had no opportunity to exercise their senses to discern between the two and develop character. This is obvious from the reference to the tree of knowledge of good and evil. If Adam and Eve already had knowledge of, and knew good and evil, and had exercised their senses to discern between them; why is the tree referred to as the source of such knowledge and why are they told not to partake of it?

It is not difficult to conclude that the reason for the tree being put there was to lay a basis upon which a particular series of circumstances could be set in motion, to give Adam and Eve the opportunity to "exercise their senses to discern both good and evil," and so set in motion the processes required for the development of godly character.

FAITH AND OBEDIENCE

Godly character is obviously character that pleases God, and this can be summed up in two words: “faith” and “obedience.” Faith, according to the Bible’s definition in Heb. 11:1 is “confidence in things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.” Faith is basically to believe in God and His promises. We are told in Rom. 10:17 that “faith comes from hearing the word of God,” but other Scriptures make it clear that if faith stops at just hearing and doesn’t result in doing, i.e. obedience, it is valueless. True faith is not passive but active. This is the kind of faith Heb. 11:6 refers to when it says: “Without faith it is impossible to please God.” Obedient faith is the key to godly character!

It should be evident from this then, as mentioned before, that nobody, including Adam, starts life with a perfect ready-made, fully developed, obedient faith. Had this been the case with Adam, he would not have disobeyed God and sinned!

It should also be evident that faith does not grow naturally and automatically like hair or nails, without any spiritual influence or input. No! It requires contact with the word of God and a positive obedient response and application. No one, including Adam and Eve, starts life with this obedient faith, but all who are normal are born with the potential for it to be developed.

Being created in the likeness of God, man has a mind endowed with tremendous capabilities. He is capable of tremendous good or evil. He is capable of being very believing or unbelieving, loving or unloving, obedient or disobedient, positive or negative, constructive or destructive, divine or diabolical. It is all a question of how he allows his creative potential to be exploited, influenced and directed.

NO BASIS FOR FAITH AND OBEDIENCE

Now, some may feel it is incorrect to say that Adam was not created with a perfect ready-made fully developed obedient faith. This point should therefore be clarified. As pointed out before, faith is defined in Heb. 11:1 as “confidence of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” Now, when first created, Adam was not required to be convinced of things not seen, not even as far as the presence of God was concerned because divine visitations were made, during which Adam could see and talk to the Lord (Gen. 3:8).

Neither was Adam required to confidently anticipate or hope for

anything. He had everything a man could hope for! He lived in perfect conditions - a paradise in which there were no weeds, wild animals, sickness, disease, war, famine, pestilence and no prospect or fear of death. There were not even any neighbours to argue and contend with or neighbours' wives or husbands to covet.

Adam had perfect uninterrupted fellowship and peace with God. Man, God and all creation were united. Total harmony reigned. As things stood, the conditions requiring faith and hope were non-existent. There was no basis upon which they could develop and be manifested.

The same applies to obedience. When first created, Adam was not obedient in the real sense of the word. He lacked opportunity to exercise obedience because there were not, at that stage, any commandments to obey. At this point, the need for the Lord making a commandment should start to be appreciated. Otherwise it is hard to see the sense in putting a tree in the garden and then commanding them to keep away from it.

A STATE OF FLUX

It would be wrong, of course, to say that Adam was unbelieving and disobedient. This was equally impossible because he had nothing to disbelieve or disobey. Without a law or commandments, both obedience and disobedience are impossible. So Adam was neither believing nor unbelieving, obedient nor disobedient in the strict sense of the words. He was in what has been styled "a provisional state" - a state of flux - a neutral gear, able to go into either forward or reverse.

Adam was innocent of both good and evil, yet capable of both. It all hinged on how he would react and respond when placed under the appropriate conditions and confronted with the opportunity to make his own decision and choice.

Adam was unquestionably in a unique situation and it required a unique set of circumstances to make faith and obedience possible, and this is what the early chapters in Genesis are all about, concerning the tree, the command and the serpent. God was setting in motion a certain train of events to lay a basis on which godly character could be developed.

The command involved a simple law - a prohibition notice on one particular tree, as we read in Gen. 2:16-17: "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat, but of the tree of knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day you eat, dying you shall die."

GOOD AND EVIL

The penalty for disobedience was eviction from paradise, mortality and death. This is the “evil” that would result from partaking of the forbidden fruit. With mortality, of course, would come all sorts of other evils as well, such as sickness, disease, sorrow and countless other pressures and problems. And, as a result of experiencing such evils, they would then “know,” as never before (i.e. know experimentally), the “good” they had been experiencing beforehand.

Good and evil are relative conditions and the one cannot be properly known without the other. The same applies to hot and cold, fast and slow, light and dark etc. A person would not really know or understand and appreciate the one without experiencing the other. And so it is with good and evil. One who only saw and experienced good and never evil, would not know how good the good was, and would know nothing about evil. It is the experiencing of evil that throws good into sharp relief, and reveals its goodness. The prodigal son, and many other sons and daughters since, discovered this when they ran away from a good home which they took for granted, and ended up in a bad one.

In the light of all this, it should be appreciated why the forbidden tree is called “the tree of knowledge of good and evil.” To partake of this tree constituted transgression of law, which is sin, which results in a bad and guilty conscience, a sense of condemnation and alienation from God, and fear of death.

The fruit of the tree, whatever it was, was not necessary to produce such evils, for they were all the effect of the act of disobedience. For this reason the whole emphasis in the Bible is on sin and death entering the world through the act of disobedience. For this reason also we are not told what kind of fruit it was and we need not be concerned about knowing.

TEMPTING AND TESTING

It cannot be denied that God deliberately placed something forbidden before Adam and Eve - something “good for food and pleasant to the eyes - a tree to be desired to make one wise” (Gen. 3:6). Yet He refused to let them have access and partake, and warned that death would result if they did.

Now, this clearly was not a case of God tempting them because it is emphatically affirmed in the Bible that He will never do this (Jam. 1:13). However, He does test and there is a difference, although the Authorised

Version has failed to make the distinction in some places, as for example in Gen. 22:1, where it uses the word “tempt” instead of “test.”

According to Jam. 1:14-15 temptation involves a person being lured and enticed by their own lust or desire. So when the Bible says God does not tempt, it means He does not physically manipulate our mind or emotions or perform some sort of surgical operation, or exercise an hypnotic influence on our brain to inflame and excite our desires and make us sin.

He does, however, test, by arranging or allowing an opportunity to sin to be placed before us. For example He sometimes creates situations which arouse sinful desires, but whether or not we sin, depends on whether we yield to the desires or resist them.

One thing is certain: God will never make us yield. We can never blame Him for that. His desire is that we resist and conquer the desires that lead to sin and build up a strong godly character as a result.

There are many examples in the Bible of God testing His people. For example, He led Israel into the wilderness for 40 years where He caused them to suffer many things, to humble them and test them to know what was in their heart, whether they would obey His commandments or not (Deu. 8). He allowed or maybe providentially arranged for David to see Bathsheba in her birthday suit, but He did not inflame David’s passions and make him sin. David was lured and enticed into adultery by his own desires and sinned due to yielding to them instead of resisting them.

Such tests are not laying a trap to make people stumble and fall. No! It is a case of “all things working together for good.” This is a major theme in the Bible and it starts in the garden of Eden.

Now, in the simple law given to Adam and Eve, they were given something to believe and obey, which they didn’t have up till that point of time. They now had opportunity to be convinced of something they could not see, and which their natural senses had never experienced, namely, death. Because sin had not been committed at that stage, the death sentence had not been passed. Death was an unknown quantity. Adam was therefore required to believe the word of God and be convinced of the certainty and reality of what God had stated. Such belief constituted faith, and this had to be put into practice by obeying the commandment.

Of course, as already mentioned, not only did the law provide a basis and opportunity for faith and obedience, but also unbelief and disobedience.

FREEWILL

It should be evident from all this, that man was created with freewill. If not, there was no point in giving him the commandment. Freewill - the power of choice, is one of the unique abilities with which man has been created. It permits him to decide his own destiny. It enables him to voluntarily follow or defy God.

God, of course, could have made man to be a scrupulously obedient robot if He had desired a mechanical type obedience. He could have placed a fixed printed circuit in man's head, as men do to robots and machines, causing him to only do what the Creator wanted. But God clearly did not want man to be a human machine that blindly obeys without thought, reason or choice. For this reason, God risked the entrance of sin into the world, so that man might be bound to Him by love and not force. God clearly desires moral obedience, not mechanical.

If man's mind had been "programmed" to automatically obey, there could not have been a voluntary love relationship springing from his own personal spontaneous will and desire. There would be no character or depth in it. It would be a very artificial and superficial arrangement, like teaching a parrot to say "I love you," or hypnotising a member of the opposite sex to love and be loyal to you. There could be no satisfaction with that kind of love and loyalty, knowing that it did not spring from the person's own will and desire and choice. There would be no heart and soul in such a relationship. And so, because God is love - a moral God with heart and soul, He would not settle for anything less than a voluntary relationship - a relationship in which His children personally chose to love, serve and obey Him.

It was inevitable therefore, that not only would He create man with freewill, but that He would also create a situation which would provide him with the opportunity to exercise it. This, of course, required two different directions from which to choose - the way of obeying God's word and the way of disobeying.

In view of this, it should be evident how wise and necessary it was for Adam to have access not only to a tree of life in the garden, but also a tree of death, and for God to issue the command in relation to the tree of death.

THE THIRD FACTOR

We now turn our attention to the third major factor which led to the fall of Adam and Eve - the serpent. Can the wisdom of God be

seen in making this creature and allowing him to come on the scene? God in His foreknowledge would have known that the serpent would use his subtlety to question and challenge the commandment, yet He allowed it. Did He allow it as a test of faith and obedience, as a result of which the utmost good could come if the right response was given? Or was the serpent an unwanted, underhanded and unnecessary intrusion and interference by an enemy of God whose presence in the garden could do no possible good at all and who sabotaged God's work? Let's think about this and do some digging beneath the surface.

A TESTED FAITH

As we have seen, the tree of knowledge of good and evil and the commandment to not eat from it, were necessary as part of a process designed to bring about obedient faith. However, a passive quiescent faith is one thing, but a tried and tested and active faith is quite another. And it is emphasized throughout the Bible that an untried and untested faith is of no value to God. It is only the faith that stands the test of trials that is "much more precious than gold" (1 Pet. 1:7).

You see, it is relatively easy to believe and have faith when nothing questions, challenges or opposes it. It is easy to have faith when it is never subjected to pressure, criticism, contradiction and opposition. It is easy to have faith when a wall of protection surrounds us, preventing us from being exposed to adverse and antagonistic influences.

Faith can look good like hot-house plants which are protected from the elements, but which can't survive being exposed to the real world - to fluctuating temperatures, wind, hail, frost and snow.

The wise man Solomon wrote: "If you faint in the day of adversity, your strength is small" (Prov. 24:10). And so God in His wisdom allows His people to be subjected to adversity and conflicts of faith to test and develop them. See 1 Pet. 4:12. Jam. 1:12. Job. 23:10.

GOD ALLOWS EVIL FOR GOOD

When everything is good and going well as in the Garden of Eden, there can be no trial. Whether we like it or not, there has to be evil - adverse circumstances - negative pressures, before trials can take place. So it should not surprise us that the testing processes of God require challenges, and He therefore allows it. But He does not require fallen angels to produce it! Let's look at some examples.

In Gen. 22 we read that God put Abraham to the test by asking him to do something which in reality was contrary to the divine will, and which God never really intended to be carried out, namely, the killing of his own son Isaac.

In Judg. 2:21 to 3:3, we read that in order to test Israel, to see whether or not they would be obedient, the Lord left the Canaanites in the land and did not drive them out. In a sense it was like leaving serpents in the garden to test and develop faith and obedience.

In Deu. 13:1-4 we are told that the Lord, in order to test the love and loyalty of His people, would allow false prophets to come in among them telling lies trying to deceive them into turning their back on God and His word.

In some cases, when God's people are bent on pursuing a wrong course and abandoning truth and righteousness, God will actually confirm and strengthen their deception and hurry them to their destruction. An example of this can be found in 1 Kng. 22. This chapter relates to wicked king Ahab who pushed the patience of God too far, resulting in Him sending an angel to be a "lying spirit" in the mouth of the king's prophets. Through these prophets, the angel deceived Ahab into leading his army out to do battle with the Syrians, resulting in his defeat and death.

In Num. 22 we read that due to the prophet Balaam's persistence, God put him to the test by telling him to do something that he had previously been told not to do and was angry with him when he did it. Balaam was expected to know that God does not change His mind in such matters and it proved to be fatal for the prophet.

We learn from 2 Sam. 24:1 and 1 Chr. 21:1 that God put David to the test by allowing him to be provoked into taking a course of action that was contrary to the Divine will. This action involved assessing his military strength by numbering Israel.

In 2 Thes. 2:10-12 the apostle Paul goes so far to say that God will send a strong delusion to those who refuse to welcome and love the truth, causing them to believe a lie, resulting in them being condemned.

GOD CREATES GOOD AND EVIL

It should be clear from these examples that God not only allows evil, but sometimes even creates it. Scripture in fact plainly states this in Isa. 45:7: "I form the light and create darkness: I make peace and create evil. I the Lord do all these things." The word "evil" here means adversity - adverse circumstances, including affliction and death.

Sometimes God does this simply to provide a basis upon which the faith and obedience of His people can be tested and developed, in much the same way as a manufacturer deliberately creates harsh and adverse conditions and climate to test the strength and endurance of his product before getting a seal of approval. He doesn't do it because he hates his product but because he wants it to be strong and successful.

Other times God creates evil to punish sin. So we need to clearly understand that reference to God creating evil does not mean He creates sin. No! He creates evil to punish sin, and some of the evils He creates to do this are floods, earthquakes, famines and pestilences. There are many examples in the Bible of God doing this.

EVIL ANGELS

More often than not, God uses His holy angels to inflict these evils. For this reason they are referred to in Ps. 78:49 as "evil angels" (Authorised Version). Modern translations render it "destroying angels," or "messengers of calamity" - "messengers of adversity." Because angels are "spirits," the Berkley translation renders "evil angels" as "evil spirits."

Now, when an holy angel is used by God to adversely affect someone, whether it be to test their faith or to punish sin, it is not uncommon for that angel to be referred to as "satan," which means "adversary." An example of this can be found in Num. 22:22 where an angel is called "adversary," which is "satan" in Hebrew, because he stood in the middle of a narrow path forcing Balaam's ass to move over and crush his foot against the wall.

JOB'S SATAN

A particularly good example of God using an angel to create adverse circumstances as a test, is recorded in the book of Job. This angel is referred to as "satan" because of the adversity he inflicted upon Job. But this was no fallen angel. He had not been cast out or banished from heaven. Quite the opposite! He had free access to heaven and engaged in conversation with God, and all the adversity he inflicted on Job was done with the Lord's permission. Throughout the book of Job, the "evil" he experienced is attributed to God many times, but never to a fallen-angel devil!

Job, like Adam, had an hedge around him and his life was pleasant

and sweet. He was protected and prospered by God. Under the circumstances it was relatively easy to have faith and be obedient. So God, in His wisdom, allowed the angel to make a breach in the hedge around Job's "garden", and let waves of adversity enter.

This "evil" had a twofold purpose. It acted as a test and trial of Job's faith and obedience, resulting in him being purged of some deep-rooted and hidden weaknesses, and becoming a stronger and more mature character. And it acted as a punishment upon Job's sinful sons and daughters to whom life had become just one continual round of partying and pleasure seeking. They were lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God.

BACK TO ADAM AND EVE

With these thoughts in mind we come back to Adam and Eve. As things stood, when God first presented them with the commandment to not eat from the tree, there was nothing difficult about this. It wasn't hard to believe and obey. Being innocent and ignorant of good and evil, they simply believed God without doubting, questioning or challenging the commandment. By itself, the commandment did not present a trial to their faith.

Adam and Eve's response was totally passive. There was no resistance, no objection or opposition, just total unquestioning submission. The reason for this is because sin had not entered the world at that stage. As pointed out earlier, there was no "sin in the flesh." Their nature was "very good" in contrast to becoming "no good" when sin was finally committed.

When the commandment was presented to Adam, it would not have awakened any desire within him to disobey. At that stage, there was no natural bias or tendency in the flesh nature to rebel against law, as there was afterwards as a result of sin. Human nature since the fall is affected by law quite differently. Rom. 7:9 explains it in these words: "When law comes, sin springs to life."

ANTI-AUTHORITY SPIRIT

Because of sin, a rebellious, anti-law, anti-authority spirit took possession of fallen man, resulting in law having a negative effect. Sin hates commandments and being obedient. Law and authority provokes and aggravates sin, causing it to manifest itself in rebellion and

disobedience. Where there is no law, there is no restraint or restriction on sin. The flesh is left free to do as it pleases and fulfil its ungodly lusts without any sense of shame or guilt. But, when law is imposed, sin resists the restraints and restrictions, and resents not being able to be free to please itself.

Since the fall, sin in the flesh became the prime source of testing of the faith and obedience of God's people. It is the daily battle with this enemy of God that develops godly character.

However, it is important to remember that when God's law was given to Adam and Eve, it did not cause any rebellious thoughts to intrude and resist, because there were no negative or sinful propensities in their nature. The flesh, at that stage, could not produce the desire to disobey and sin.

So, no trial of their faith and obedience was involved up to this point. Something else - another element or factor was required to make the character-developing process complete. Obviously, some adverse circumstance was needed - some dissenting voice which challenged God's commandment and questioned their faith and obedience. Adam and Eve needed to be subjected to a pressure situation in which their freewill could be exercised by making a choice between believing or not believing - obeying or not obeying God.

SIGNIFICANT TIMING

Is it not significant, therefore, that it is precisely at this very point in the Genesis narrative that we are introduced to the serpent, and that he fulfilled the very function that was required to complete the basis on which faith and obedience could be tested? It is very significant indeed, and with these thoughts in mind, we are in a better position to appreciate the role that the serpent played, and how it all relates to the cross of Christ.



CHAPTER TWO

If we set out to read the Bible from the beginning at the book of Genesis for the first time, with the intention of ascertaining what God expected of man after creating him, we would only need to get to the second chapter of Genesis to find out. Reference here to God giving Adam a commandment to not eat forbidden fruit, reveals that his expectation was: OBEDIENCE. Obedience to God's commandments is evidence of reverential fear and respect, and "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." Scripture therefore instructs us to: "Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man" (Ecc. 12:13). Elsewhere we read that God's commandments are a test of love: those who love God will obey them (1 Jn. 5:3. Jn. 14:15). The Lord said: "You are my friends if you do whatever I command you" (Jn. 15:14). All who know and love the Lord will therefore keep His commandments (1 Jn. 2:3-5).

Now God did not command Adam to climb the highest mountain or dive into the depths of the sea or run a marathon, or perform some other physical feat. Moral strength, not muscular, was what was required by the commandment that God gave Adam. This is what is near and dear to God's heart and gives Him great delight. Obedience to this kind of commandment shows love and respect for God and is the key to lasting friendship and fellowship with God. Disobedience, which is sin, shows lack of love, faith and respect, resulting in death (Isa. 66:2. Jer. 9:23-24).

The importance of obedience and how much it means to God is indicated by the many references to it in the Word of God. Here are just a few examples:

Ex. 19:5: "Now therefore, if you will obey my voice and keep my covenant, then you will be a special treasure to me above all people, for all the earth is mine."

Deu. 11:26-28: "Behold, I set before you this day a blessing and a curse; a blessing, if you obey the commandments of the Lord your God, which I command you this day; and a curse, if you will not obey the commandments of the Lord your God ..."

1 Sam. 15:22: "Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry."

Gen. 3:1-6 reveals how disobedience and sin originated. The serpent questioned whether God had spoken, saying: "Hath God said," and then

questioned whether God knew what He was talking about. God had said that disobedience would result in death, but the serpent contradicted this saying: “You shall not surely die.” The serpent then attributed selfish motives to God for not wanting Adam and Eve to partake of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. He claimed that God was depriving them because He didn’t want them to be as the gods, knowing good and evil.

The serpent suggested that a course of action be taken contrary to what God commanded. It involved crossing the law-line established by God which is disobedience, which is sin. This aroused Eve’s desires and induced them in a direction opposite to God’s will. She yielded to these newly excited lusts and allowed them to take control of her mind and emotions and lure her into committing sin, and Adam later followed suit.

A DIVINE ARRANGEMENT

As we have seen, the circumstances at the time required Adam and Eve’s faith and obedience to be put to the test and this required a challenge from an external source. So God arranged for the adverse influence to come from one of the other living creatures which He had created on earth. And the serpent, due to being created more subtle than all the creatures God had made, became the creature that fulfilled that function. The Sovereign Lord was in control. Divine wisdom, not diabolical devilry, was behind the whole arrangement, with the utmost good in mind for man. This was not a sneaky, unnecessary and unwanted attempt behind God’s back, to undermine and sabotage His purpose by an arch enemy. No! It was something the providence of God permitted in order to develop faith and obedience in the progenitors of the human race.

Left to themselves, obedience would have been a matter of course. But it is not obedience of this mild passive type that is well pleasing to God. Obedience under trial is what pleases Him. Obedience without challenges pressures and problems is a flimsy superficial type of obedience - a mere circumstantial type due to favourable circumstances and conditions.

God’s purpose was to produce willing obedience in a free-willed race. Willing obedience requires the opportunity to obey or disobey, and this required God to arrange circumstances that would make that choice possible. This was achieved by the serpent.

As far as Gen. 3 is concerned, God tested Adam and Eve, the serpent beguiled (deceived) them by making sin sound logical and plausible, and Adam and Eve were tempted by yielding to the sinful desires aroused

within them by the serpent, resulting in being drawn away into sin. Jam. 1:13-15 quite clearly states that God does not tempt, and that man is tempted when he is drawn away by his own lust.

THE SERPENT AND SIN

When you think about it, the serpent's statement to Eve represented sin, for sin is transgression of law and this is what the serpent advocated. God's law commanded Adam and Eve to not eat the fruit of the tree, warning them that death would be the punishment if they disobeyed. The serpent contradicted this with a lie, convincing Eve she would not die, deceiving her into disobeying and Adam followed suit.

Now, we have seen that prior to the fall, there was no sinful tendency or bias in man's nature that inclined him towards disobedience. When God's law was given, no negative force within him aroused a desire to disobey. His flesh nature was "very good."

However, when the serpent suggested going against God; for the first time in human history, a war or conflict was experienced in the mind - a war between two opposing principles - God's truth and the serpent's lie. It was a war between righteousness and sin.

The serpent's dissenting voice awakened human thoughts and desires to new and different possibilities - an alternative course of action contrary to the way of God. Had Adam and Eve rejected the serpent's sinful suggestion, and held fast to God's truth, their faith would have passed the test of trial, and true obedience would have been achieved. As a result, they would have retained a good conscience, peace and fellowship with God, and continued living in Paradise.

They were quite capable of overcoming the temptation by allowing the word of God to dominate their thoughts and actions, and that is what the Lord desired. He makes it quite clear in His word that He will not test His people beyond what they are capable of handling. Adam and Eve didn't have to succumb in order to develop character. The modern philosophy that one has to indulge in sin to build character is wrong. Jesus was the greatest of all characters and he never sinned once, and he was tempted in all points like us. Adam and Eve, however, yielded to their newly inflamed lusts and became servant to them, allowing their thoughts and actions to be governed by the creature instead of the Creator.

God, in His foreknowledge, knew beforehand that this would happen, and had already made provision for it in His eternal purpose. But His foreknowledge did not force them to be disobedient. Adam and Eve had

freewill and were free agents to make their own choice. They could choose obedience unto life, or disobedience (sin) unto death.

BY ONE MAN SIN ENTERED THE WORLD

The result of choosing sin is stated in Rom. 5:12, 19: “By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin ...” “By one man’s disobedience, many were made sinners.” This simply means man’s nature became sinful and rebellious containing a strong bias or proneness towards sin.

Because Adam and Eve made a decision to sin by yielding to the lusts aroused by the serpent, a propensity towards that choice became implanted in their spirit - in the deep sub-conscious region of the brain. And this resulted in the tendency to sin becoming a fixed and established principle in their spirit. In the words of Jam. 4:5: “The spirit that dwells in us lusts enviously” (A.V.). As a person who decides to take up smoking or drugs becomes addicted and wants to keep on with the habit, so the choice to sin resulted in an addiction to sin.

Of course, the bias towards sin did not stop at Adam and Eve. It was transmitted from them to all their descendants, which is the whole human race. This is a fact of life and is declared in Rom. 5:19: “By one man’s disobedience, many were made sinners.” Verse 12 explains how: “By one man sin entered the world, and death by sin, and so death passed upon all men, in whom all had sinned.”

The point being made here is that the whole human race was in Adam (seminally) when he sinned, and therefore affected by it. As a child conceived by a woman who is a drug addict or alcoholic, can be born with a propensity towards drugs or alcohol, so all who have been born since the original sin was committed, come into the world with a propensity to sin and rebel against law and authority. Due to the law of heredity, when Adam’s nature became sinful and mortal as a result of sin, it followed as a natural course that the “seed” produced by that nature would be of the same kind - sinful and mortal. Adam was clearly the seed-bearer of the whole world. All of humanity was bound up in him.

So then, the effects of one man’s sin were imputed to all his posterity by reason of the organic unity or genetic connection that existed between them. From the time of Adam’s sin, therefore, a bias towards sin and death has been the inheritance of every natural born soul. But the seeming injustice of this is more than countered, as we shall see, by the immeasurable grace made available by God to all men through the

obedience of one man, Jesus Christ, who was obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

THAT WHICH IS BORN OF THE FLESH IS FLESH

As things stand, it is impossible for anyone born of a woman, to avoid partaking of the same sin-prone nature. Referring to this, Job 25:4 says: “How can anyone be clean (untainted and unscarred by sin) who is born of a woman.” “That which is born of the flesh is flesh” (Jn. 3:6).

It is obviously not our fault or a sin that we are born with a sin-prone nature. It is rather our misfortune. We had no control over it. However, due to having freewill - the power of choice, we are blameworthy and held responsible if we choose to yield to the inner inducements and enticements of sin, and disobey. To do so is to imitate, in principle, our first parents who yielded to the sinful desires induced by the serpent.

The individual historical serpent in Eden has, of course, long since passed away during the course of time. Being a snake it was not immortal. The serpent’s mortality is indicated in God’s own words in Gen. 3:14: “Cursed art thou upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life.”

However, the effects of sin aroused by the serpent in our first parents, continue to live on in the sinful nature of their descendants. The “law” or principle of sin inculcated by the serpent has been an ongoing principle. And it functions in the same manner as the original serpent, by exciting our baser lusts, arousing and inflaming sinful desires, inducing us to sin. As Gen. 4:7 puts it: “sin is crouching at the door (of the heart); his desire is toward you, but you must master him.”

In this sense, the serpent is still very much alive in the world today, and will continue to exert influence as long as sinful desires in the flesh assert themselves against God.

THE PROPOSITION

The proposition is, therefore, that the serpent represented sin in an external form, which ultimately became an indwelling principle in the nature of fallen man, resulting in the germination of generations of human serpents, referred to as “the serpent’s seed” in Gen. 3:15.

Prior to committing sin, the suggestion to sin came from outside Adam and Eve from an external source. But after they sinned, and their nature became sinful, they became subject to temptation from evil

thoughts which could arise within their own hearts. This is the situation that all their descendants are born into, and all who are honest will acknowledge that sinful thoughts do arise in their own heart in opposition to the will of God, without provocation or stimulus from external influences being necessary.

These sinful impulses are like the writhings and twistings of a serpent, and are therefore fittingly styled in Rom. 7:5: “The motions of sin working in our members” (body). Like a snake, they are always present, coiled up, ready to strike at any time with poisonous thoughts, seeking to captivate and control our mind and induce us into sin. Of all the creatures in God’s creation, a more fitting representation of sin could not be found.

Now, once the serpent in Eden had induced man to sin, it was not necessary for the serpent to remain to keep the process going. It would rather gather force under its own momentum. As the flesh population multiplied, so did sin which resided within it. With the growth of the human race, temptations from within man’s sinful nature were supplemented by temptations from outside in other men’s nature, due to the daily contact of mankind, pressures of life, and the struggle for existence in a world living under a curse and harsh conditions.

All the necessary tests for faith and obedience were provided within the human race itself, without needing other influences to be added. One thing is certain: the sin in fallen man is more than enough to cope with, without throwing fallen angels against him as well!

Jam. 1:13-15 plainly teaches that “every man is tempted when drawn away by his own lusts.” And Jam. 4:1-3 says “What causes wars and fightings? Do they not spring from your own lusts ...”

The first murder in history of Abel by Cain, is completely explained by obvious natural circumstances, namely: pride, envy, and hatred, which are attributes of the flesh. Other powers are not mentioned anywhere in the narrative and to introduce them is quite superfluous - a distraction.

A POSITIVE SIDE

Sin is clearly a negative destructive force, but there are positive sides to it: 1. Its entrance into the world made the Lord Jesus Christ’s place in history necessary. 2. It provided a basis for God’s love and grace to be manifested and magnified. 3. It accentuated and highlighted the righteousness, sinlessness and holiness of God. (Sin and righteousness, like good and evil, are relative conditions, the one being understood better as a result of witnessing and experiencing the other). 4. It provided the

basis for Christ's glory which had to do with conquering all temptation and sin. Plp. 2 states that it was his obedience that led to his exaltation. 5. It provides a basis upon which faith and obedience can be tested and godly character developed.

Without the propensity of sin - without a negative force to cope with and resist, we would have no fight or battle or spiritual warfare to prove our love and commitment to God and obedience to His word. We would be as Adam and Eve were before the serpent came on the scene.

So we shouldn't despise the negative propensity or get dejected over temptation, for they have a good and positive purpose. We should look at it as a high-jumper looks at the high jump, or as a hurdler looks at hurdles, or as one looks at obstacles in an obstacle race.

The athletes don't complain about the height of the high jump or the force of gravity that tries to keep them earthbound; they don't complain about the hurdles and obstacles being in the way or the number of them. No! They see them as a means of rising above and overcoming, extending themselves to gain victory and win a crown of glory.

In like manner the people of God should not be condemned or discouraged or complain about the obstacles and hurdles and handicaps and "gravitational pull" of sin. They are there to step over, not fall over; to be stepping stones not stumblingblocks, for the glory of God.

THE SERPENT AND SIN

The proposition that the serpent represented sin has quite a bearing on the cross of Christ. By comparing certain Scriptures it is evident that the things said about the serpent are also said about sin, confirming that the serpent became a symbol of the sin he provoked.

The serpent caused Adam and Eve to miss the mark and fall short of God's high calling, and ever since the fall, sin has had the same effect. In fact, the Greek word for sin means "to miss the mark."

Because sin was originally aroused by a personal agent, the serpent, it is often personified in Scripture and referred to in terms which connect it with the serpent. The word "sin" is not only used as a verb to describe an act of sin, but also substantive and relates to the source of sinful acts which is the lust of the flesh. Because these lusts cause sin, they are sometimes referred to as sin, particularly in Paul's writings. Barclay in his book on New Testament words says: "In fact, in Paul, sin becomes personalized until sin could be spelled with a capital letter, and could be thought of as a malignant, personal power which has man in its grasp."

Because sin originally stemmed from a personal agent, it is appropriate that it should be personified in this way. This suggests that we regard every temptation as a re-enactment of the temptation of our first parents. It would greatly help us in our warfare against sin if we could.

AN IMPRESSIVE THEME

The relationship between the serpent and sin is quite an impressive theme in the New Testament and a few examples will now be given where various figures of speech and principles, which originally related to the serpent, have been transferred to, and applied to sin.

Rom. 7:7-11 refers to sin as a personal enemy which seeks opportunity through God's law to produce in man all manner of lust. Verse 9 speaks about sin springing to life as soon as God's commandment is given. Verse 11 goes on to speak about sin, finding opportunity in the commandment, "deceived me, and by it killed me."

Sin is personified in quite a dramatic way here. It is referred to as a personal wicked being, seeking to use God's law as a means of arousing ungodly lust in man, which, precisely, is what the serpent did in Eden.

The reference in v 9 to sin springing to life as soon as God's commandment came, also calls to mind the fact that the serpent appeared on the scene when God's commandment came to Adam. And the serpent's action of finding opportunity in God's commandment to deceive and kill, was no doubt in Paul's mind in v 11 where he refers to the working of sin in the same terms.

In every respect, Paul describes the working of sin in terms which link up with the original serpent. Originally, the deceit which led to sin and death, came from the serpent. But since the fall, Scripture says deceit is an attribute of sin and comes from man's sinful heart. For example, Heb. 3:13 refers to "the deceitfulness of sin," and other verses such as Mk. 7:21-22, Jer. 17:9 etc declare that the human heart is the most deceitful thing there is and desperately wicked and all evil thoughts and lusts proceed from it.

ENMITY

Another indication of a link between the serpent and sin, can be seen by comparing Gen. 3:15 with certain New Testament statements. In Gen. 3:15 the Lord said He would put "enmity" between the woman's seed and the serpent's seed, and it is interesting to note how this word

“enmity” is used in the New Testament. For example, Rom. 8:7 speaks about the carnal mind (sinful mind), being at enmity with God. And Jam. 4:4 makes the point that friendship with the world is enmity with God. (According to 1 Jn. 2:16, the “world” represents “the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life”).

So then, originally the serpent was the source of enmity, but afterwards the enmity is linked with the “carnal mind,” “the flesh,” “lust,” “world,” all of which belong to sin’s influence and dominion.

A closer look at Gen. 3:15 results in further proof that the serpent represented sin. This verse relates to the punishment of the serpent, and, significantly enough, it is at this point that the Genesis narrative merges into the symbolical promise of Christ’s ultimate victory over sin. This means that the serpent’s punishment was an object lesson - a symbolic prophecy of the ultimate debasement of sin.

THE WOMAN’S SEED

The words in Gen. 3:15 are addressed by God to the serpent and read like this: “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.”

This is generally accepted as the first promise in the Bible of Christ’s ultimate victory over everything the serpent stood for. The fact that the woman’s “seed” is referred to by the personal singular pronouns “he” and “his” clearly indicate that the reference is to a specific man. The same “seed” was promised to Abraham in Gen. 22:17-18 and we are told in Gal. 3:16 that it refers to Christ. Then Gal. 3:29 goes on to say that it ultimately includes “all who are Christ’s,” i.e. his “body,” the church, which shares his victory over the serpent.

Jesus was certainly a “woman’s seed.” He was “conceived” by Mary (Lk. 1:31), which is a biological term signifying the fertilization of the female “seed” (ovum). As Paul puts it in Gal. 4:4, Jesus was “made of a woman.” It is significant that Gen. 3:15 says he would be a “woman’s seed,” not a “man’s seed,” because it was not a man’s seed that caused Mary to conceive. She conceived by the Holy Spirit, which means the power of God performed the function normally performed by the male sperm. Jesus was clearly not a pre-existent embryo planted in Mary!

In a normal conception, when fertilization of the female egg takes place, 23 single chromosomes are contributed by the father’s seed, and 23 by the mother’s, so that the child has 23 pairs, and is therefore

impregnated with sets of genes from both parents, and inherits characteristics from both sides. Jesus therefore inherited characteristics from both sides. On his mother's side he inherited the characteristics of the flesh, and on his Father's side he inherited characteristics of the Spirit. Because his mother Mary was a descendant of Adam, Jesus is often referred to as "son of man" (Adam). But, because God was his Father, he is also called "son of God."

THE SAME FLESH

Jesus himself taught that "a person born of the flesh is flesh," and this was no less true in his own case. It is clearly stated in Heb.2:14 that he had "the same" flesh and blood as all other members of the human race. This means he shared the same fallen flesh nature of man which contains the propensity towards sin. For this reason, he was "tempted in all points like us, but without sin" (Heb. 4:15). On the basis of the definition of temptation in Jam. 1:14, this means Jesus experienced the lurings and enticings of the sinful desires of the flesh, but refused to yield or succumb.

On the other hand, inheriting characteristics of the Spirit as a result of being begotten by God, gave Jesus a quick understanding of spiritual values and the moral fortitude to apply and implement them, enabling him to conquer and crucify every temptation, and live a sinless life (Isa. 11:1-5). In every respect, he was clearly a special provision of God in order to overcome anti-forces that all other men were too weak to conquer. Those who deny that Jesus came in the flesh are antichrist (2 Jn.v7), because they rob him of the moral glory involved in overcoming sin in the flesh.

With these thoughts in mind, we return to Gen. 3:15. What this verse is declaring is that in order to deal with whatever the serpent stood for, the conqueror would have to be a "woman's seed," i.e. a partaker of the same sin-prone fallen nature of man. This person, not being a man's seed, would obviously have to be Divinely begotten, as a result of which he would have the strength on his Father's side, to resist and defeat the sinful impulses in the flesh inherited from his mother's side. "God was in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself" (2 Cor. 5:19).

To put it in a nutshell, God planned to send a seed of a woman forth who would meet sin on its own ground, which is the flesh, and defeat it by crucifying and putting to death all of its sin-prone desires and passions. This is the significance of the woman's seed bruising the serpent's head.

BRUISING THE HEAD AND HEEL

The “head” is the most vital and vulnerable part of the body, and the “heel” is much less vital. To be struck on the head signifies death, which is what Jesus inflicted on sin during his life in the flesh, and once and for all on the cross in his body of flesh.

To be struck on the heel signifies a temporary interruption of one’s walk in life - temporary suffering, which was the case with Christ. The death inflicted on him in his combat with sin, only temporarily halted his walk in life. On the third day he rose again, stood on his feet, having triumphed over sin and death.

Identifying Jesus as the “woman’s seed” is really the key to ascertaining the significance of the serpent whose head had to be bruised. If we took Gen. 3:15 literally, we would have to expect the mission of Jesus to involve striking a snake on the head. But there is no record of him doing this. He was not concerned about snakes (or fallen angels)! He was concerned with doing battle against sin. As Lk. 4:18 puts it: Jesus came to “set at liberty those who were bruised,” referred to in Matt. 12:20 as a “bruised reed.” That is, Jesus came to deliver and restore those who had been wounded and broken by sin. Significantly enough, Jesus related his sacrifice for sin on the cross, to the nailing up of a replica of a serpent on a stake in Moses’ day (Jn. 3:14-15).

Now, if the serpent represented sin, we would expect to find that firstly, it was sin that temporarily interrupted Jesus’ walk in life and caused temporary suffering, and secondly, that Jesus inflicted a death blow upon sin. That the mission of Jesus was bound up in dealing with sin, is so well known and fundamental, there should be no need to spend time quoting Scriptures to prove it.

And it is equally as well known that Jesus’ walk in life was only temporarily interrupted when he was nailed on the cross. He was, as Isa. 53:5 puts it: “wounded for our transgressions, and bruised for our iniquities.” But he rose again, stood on his nail-pierced feet and is alive forevermore.

NOT THE ABSTRACT SENSE

It was obviously not sin in the abstract sense that nailed Jesus to the cross. Sin needs hands to perform such a deed. It was sin manifested through sinful men that bruised Jesus. As Act. 2:23 declares: “You (Jews) have taken him (Jesus), and by wicked hands (sinful Romans), have

crucified and slain.” The crucifixion was performed by the Romans, but the Jewish leaders were the motivators and instigators.

The fact that Gen. 3:15 predicted the serpent would wound Jesus, and the Romans and Jews, motivated by sin, fulfilled it, compels a simple equation. The connection between the serpent and those who wounded Jesus is obvious.

In the light of this, is it not significant that Matt. 26:4 makes the point that the Jewish leaders “consulted that they might take Jesus by “subtlety” and kill him.” This reference to “subtlety” takes us back to the serpent who was “more subtle” than any other creature, and through whose subtlety death came upon Adam and Eve.

It is particularly significant in view of the fact that Jesus said to those same Jewish leaders; “You serpents, you generation of vipers” (Matt. 23:33). John the Baptist used the same language (Matt. 3:7), and so did Paul: “With their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips.”

NO EXTERNAL STIMULATION NEEDED

It is important to note that neither Jesus, John nor Paul used the word “serpent” in relation to fallen angels. In each case they are addressing men - Jewish authorities - “principalities and powers.” And these authorities are not called “serpents” because they were influenced by a fallen-angel devil. No! They were called serpents because of the sinfulness of their own heart. The sinful impulses in the flesh are active by themselves without needing any external stimulation or provocation, as all who are honest will admit.

This is how Jesus puts it: “O generation of snakes, how can you being evil, speak good things? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks” (Matt. 12:34). Jesus plainly called them snakes due to the sinfulness of their own heart. Again in Matt. 23:25, 28 Jesus said to them: “within (i.e. inside your heart) you are full of extortion and excess ... within you are full of hypocrisy and iniquity.”

“There is nothing outside a man that can enter him and defile him ... that which comes out of man defiles the man. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lust, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness; all these things come from within, and defile the man” (Mk. 7:18-23).

Even Pilate knew that it was their own fleshly carnality that inspired

them, for we read in Matt. 27:18 that he knew it was through envy that they delivered Jesus up to him to be sentenced to death. Envy, according to Gal. 5:19-21 is a “work of the flesh,” not a fallen-angel devil.

The application of the term “serpent” to the wicked among fallen man, is not confined to the New Testament. Many verses could be quoted in the Old Testament which refer to those governed and controlled by the sinful desires of the flesh as serpents. They were fittingly so-called because they were full of spiritual wickedness and darkness, lies and deceit, and caused much suffering and death for God’s people.

In view of these examples, it can be seen that the figure of the serpent is not only used in Scripture to signify the sinful desires of the flesh, but also the people themselves whose lives are controlled and ruled by those desires and who become the physical embodiment of them. It is such people who are referred to as the “seed” of the serpent in Gen. 3:15.

It is evident from Gen. 3:15 that the world was going to be divided into two antagonistic communities - two camps between which “enmity” would exist. These two communities are referred to as the “woman’s seed” and “serpent’s seed.” The woman’s seed refers to Christ and his body, the church, i.e. those who have renounced sin and are committed to crucifying the sinful desires of the flesh, refusing to be servant to them. And the “serpent’s seed” are those who yield to sin and are governed and controlled by the ungodly lusts and desires of the flesh, originally aroused by the serpent.



CHAPTER THREE

According to the early record in Genesis, death came about as a result of one sin. A single solitary sin brought death to not only Adam and Eve but also the whole of humanity. One small slip by a man resulted in one giant fall for mankind.

We understand from this that in order for Adam to have gained eternal life, not one sin could be committed; not a single slip would be permitted. To a holy one hundred percent righteous immortal God who dwells in sinless perfection, just one sin had such a profound marring effect, it resulted in rejection and prevented immortality from being conferred.

This principle of perfection can be observed to a degree even among humans, especially those who are regarded as perfectionists. Just one scratch or dent on a table or motor vehicle in a showroom would prevent them from purchasing and accepting it. The same would apply to a flaw in a vase or painting etc. A single scratch or flaw on a new product causes considerable depreciation of value. It would not be accepted in a royal palace. And, if anyone thinks that it is unreasonable that one small slip on Adam and Eve's part should result in death, consider the following examples in human experience of small actions that have disastrous results, sometimes resulting in death.

A mountain climber may successfully climb a mountain over a period of many hours and have one slip just short of the summit and plummet to his death. The law of gravity is unyielding even when one small slip is made.

The space shuttle that exploded some years ago was in perfect order except for one small "O" ring that caused the destruction of the whole space craft.

One slight movement of the steering wheel in the wrong direction can result in a motor vehicle having a head-on crash.

One push of a button can release a bomb that can kill thousands of people.

One small squeeze of the trigger of a gun can cause death.

One small drop of black dye can discolour and contaminate a whole glass of clear fresh water.

One flirtatious moment can destroy a marriage.

One indiscretion can result in being demoted or dismissed (Ecc. 10:1).

One tree can make a million matches, but one match can burn down a

million trees. “Behold, how great a forest is set ablaze by a little fire” (Jam. 3:6).

Much could be written in relation to humans being tripped up over the small details, and suffering death through small actions or through making silly little mistakes.

God’s attribute of immortality goes hand in hand with His attributes of righteousness and holiness and sinless perfection. In order for man to attain to immortality, sinless perfection was therefore required. Adam and Eve’s sin had a marring effect, preventing them from being allowed to live forever. For this reason the way was barred to the tree of life and they ultimately died.

From Adam through to Christ, no one was able to conquer and subdue the sinful desires of the flesh and render one hundred percent obedience to God’s laws and commandments. All sinned, missed the mark and fell short of the required perfection and therefore died. Sin “reigned unto death” (Rom. 5:21). Sin was truly a powerful ruler, the “god” or “prince” of the world, completely dominating and enslaving all men, bringing them into bondage.

THREE ALTERNATIVES

God had three alternatives to remedy the situation in order that man might attain to immortality.

1. He could have ignored sin and the marring effects of it and let man have eternal life in spite of his fallen condition. But this would in effect be saying that sin does not really matter and it would have made a liar out of God because He had warned that sin would result in death. One hundred percent righteousness was required to attain to immortality and to grant eternal life in spite of falling short of that righteousness would violate or compromise His righteousness i.e.His righteous standards. This would result in the earth being populated with a race of immortal sinners. Imagine the chaos and anarchy that would be caused by men like Adolph Hitler living forever!

2. God could have immediately destroyed Adam and Eve and made a fresh start by creating another couple. But to do this would have meant defeat, which is impossible for God. He is able to bring good out of evil, and this is what He intended to do, because He delights in allowing His mercy to rejoice against judgement.

3. God planned to send forth one born of a woman to meet sin on its own ground which is the flesh - one who would be a “woman’s seed” and

therefore a partaker of the same flesh nature of the condemned human race which contains the same sinful propensities which had ruled over and enslaved all mankind. However, the will and desire of this special “seed” to be obedient to God would be so strong that he would refuse to yield to the propensities of sin. He would overcome every test and challenge and crucify every inclination to sin, resulting in upholding the righteousness of God and therefore qualify to attain to immortality.

God’s plan then, was to produce from the human race a conqueror of sin - one who would breach the wall of the enemy and lead the captives through into victory. This is symbolically expressed in Gen. 3 in terms of the woman’s seed inflicting a fatal wound on the serpent.

God’s grace was such that He was prepared to accept one man’s victory as a basis for the salvation of many. It was impossible for a righteous sinless God to grant the release of eternal life until his righteous demands were satisfied. This required sin’s deadlock and strangle-hold to be broken and His righteousness vindicated. And, in his mercy, God only required one man to do this. That man of course, was Jesus, His only begotten son - the only man in the history of the human race who lived a sinless life. All others were too weak and powerless.

TWO ADAMS

So then, in Adam’s case, one slip on his part resulted in one large fall for mankind. But in Jesus’ case, his single success resulted in one large leap for mankind! As we have seen, due to the human race being “in” Adam (i.e. in a seminal sense) when he sinned, the effects of his sin were imputed to the whole race. Through natural birth, all inherit a sinful nature, mortality and death. But all who are prepared to be “in” Christ (i.e. in a spiritual sense) are able to have the effects of his righteous sinless life imputed to them. By being born again by a spiritual birth, which involves repentance of sin and conversion to Christ, followed by baptism, and faithful commitment, all who truly believe in him and belong to him have his righteousness imputed to them and are thereby regarded as righteous by God, and they will be given eternal life. Those who fail to take advantage of the offer only have themselves to blame. God would be prepared to save everyone, but unfortunately not everyone is prepared to meet the condition of being in Christ.

Where Adam failed, Jesus succeeded, and so the seeming injustice of the whole human race being condemned to death through the sin of Adam, is more than countered by the immeasurable grace of God which is

prepared to reverse the curse and bless with eternal life through the righteousness of Christ. For this reason, Scripture refers to Adam as “the first man Adam” and Jesus as “the last Adam” (1 Cor. 15:45). The contrast between the effects on the human race of the actions of these two “Adams” is expounded by the apostle Paul in Rom. 5.

MANY AFFECTED BY THE ACTIONS OF ONE

The principle of many being saved and blessed by the life and actions of one man is exemplified in 1 Sam. 17:8-9. Goliath the giant challenged the army of Israel saying: “Choose a man for yourselves, and let him come down to me. If he is able to fight with me and kill me, then we (the enemy) will be your servants; but if I prevail against him and kill him, then you shall be our servants and serve us.”

This episode was a type and foreshadow of Christ’s victory over sin and the effects of it. Goliath the giant represented sin which, up until the time of Christ, had been too big and strong for man to conquer. When Goliath made his challenge, no one was strong or courageous enough to confront him. They were all dismayed and greatly afraid. But eventually David came on the scene, whose name means “beloved,” which is a title of Christ (Eph. 1:6). He succeeded where all others failed. In the name of his God he went forth and encountered the giant and defeated him, resulting in all of his brethren being set free from the fear and bondage of the enemy. It mattered not that his brethren were too weak to get the victory themselves, but they were able, as a result of being David’s brethren, to reap the reward of his success!

Another example of this principle can be seen in the story of a king’s son who made friends with some people from the poor and common class of society. Under normal circumstances these people would not have been given access to the palace. But the king’s son took them to the palace. He entered the gate and they were following behind him. As they approached, the guard at the gate stopped them and was going to refuse to let them enter. But the king’s son turned around and said: “They are with me.” And so, because they were with him, they were given access to the royal palace!

As the saying goes: “It’s not what you know, but who you know that opens doors.” For all who know and love the Lord and are His friends, the door is open and eternal life is assured. In Jesus’ own words: “This is life eternal, to know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent” (Jn. 17:3).

Coming back to the example of David's victory over Goliath: It is evident that David himself personally benefited from the victory as well as his brethren. Had David not been prepared to fight and defeat the giant, both he and his brethren would have remained under bondage to the enemy.

Jesus also personally benefited by his victory over sin in the flesh on the cross. The fact that Jesus was "obedient" unto the death of the cross (Plp. 2:8) indicates that he was under a command from God to go to the cross (Jn. 10:18. Heb. 5:8). Had Jesus refused to be obedient to the will of God in this matter, the result would have been disobedience, which is sin, the wages of which is death. Being a partaker of the same flesh and blood as all men, Jesus was mortal. Had he sinned by not offering himself as a sacrifice for sin, he would have eventually died of old age, and failed to qualify for resurrection. He would have remained in the grave where his flesh would have suffered corruption. This is implied in Act. 2:22-32 where it is taught that as a result of being obedient unto death on the cross, God would not leave his son in the grave, but raised him from the dead before he could suffer corruption.

Several other Scriptures teach that Christ personally benefited from his own sacrifice. Heb. 13:20 says that it was through his own blood that Jesus was raised from the dead by God, and Heb. 9:12 says it was by his own blood that he entered heaven and obtained eternal redemption (for himself as well as us). In Plp. 2:8 we are told that as a result of being obedient unto death on the cross, God has highly exalted him, and Rev. 5:12 teaches that because he was willing to be slain, he is worthy to receive honour and glory.

SOME KEY VERSES

Paul says this in Gal. 5:19-21: "Now the works of the flesh (i.e. the effects of sin in the flesh) are clear, which are these: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lust, idolatry, witchcraft (i.e. spiritualism), hatred, quarrels, jealousy, bad temper, strife, divisions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, orgies, and other things like these."

The flesh by itself produces all these sins; they all originate and arise out of man's own sinful nature.

When the sinfulness of our own nature is recognized and acknowledged, we can identify with Paul's cry in Rom. 7:24: "Who shall deliver me from this body of death?" Fortunately, God has provided a way and Paul is quick to declare it: "I thank God through Jesus Christ our

Lord.” Paul then proceeds to explain how, and introduces us to some key points.

Paul says in Rom. 8:1-3 “There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, because the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God has done by sending His son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and as a sacrifice for sin, condemned sin in the flesh.”

Verse 3 is the key verse as far as the present investigation is concerned. Let’s look at it phrase by phrase, starting with: “For what the law could not do.” What could the law not do? It could not conquer or condemn sin. It aggravated and aroused sin, resulting in condemning sinners and failing to confer life.

The law was, as the next phrase says, “weak through the flesh.” i.e. the law was powerless to confer life due to the weakness of the flesh. To gain eternal life under the law required one hundred percent obedience. No slip-ups were tolerated. The law was rigid and inflexible, as is the law of gravity in relation to a mountain climber. No matter how long and how well he has been climbing, or how near the top he gets, just one slip can result in death.

THE LAW WAS GOOD

Due to man’s inability to control his sinful nature and be totally obedient to God’s law, the law could only give death and not life. Not that it was the fault of the law! Paul makes it clear in Rom. 7:12 that the law was “holy, just and good.”

One of the good things about the law was that it revealed to man how weak he was and that he was a sinner under sentence of death and in need of salvation. The impossibility of being saved by his own work and effort keeping the law, made him come to the point of realizing there has to be some other way - a better way. And so there was! As Jesus said: “I am the Way.” And the way to salvation through him is through grace not law. The law was, as we read in Gal. 3:24, a “schoolmaster” designed to lead people to Christ.

SIN REIGNED UNTO DEATH

So then, human lust was a major problem under the law. Sooner or later sinful desires of the flesh caused people to break the law, which is sin and results in death. And so, as Paul puts it: “Sin reigned unto

death” (Rom. 5:21).

From Adam through to Christ, no one was able to subdue their sinful flesh and live a totally sinless life, rendering one hundred percent obedience to the law. All sinned, missed the mark and fell short, and therefore died and corrupted away.

What was needed to break the deadlock or stronghold of sin was someone who never yielded or succumbed to the promptings and propensities of the flesh - someone who conquered every temptation and crucified the flesh, putting to death every urge and impulse that was contrary to God’s way - someone who yielded one hundred percent to the Spirit, rendering total obedience to God’s law.

THE SAME HANDICAP

Obviously, to gain this victory over sinful flesh, such a person would have to partake of it. In much the same way that athletes who want to conquer the four minute mile don’t hop on a horse or into a racing car and ride around the track, or do the high jump on the moon where there is less gravitational pull. That would be cheating and nobody would recognize it as a great achievement or victory.

For an athlete’s performance to be recognized and acclaimed, it has to be performed in the flesh, in the same way and on the same track and under the same conditions as other contestants. Imagine, for example, what the response would be at the Olympics for physically handicapped and disabled people, if someone who was not handicapped entered the events and won them all. No one would be impressed. It would be an empty and hollow victory. However if a physically handicapped athlete has been blessed and advantaged with a large heart and strong spirit due to genetic factors inherited from his father, and achieves victory, no one complains or objects to that, but gives due praise.

In like manner, conquering the fallen sinful flesh nature of man required partaking of the same nature which all have battled with, i.e. having the same handicap of sin in the flesh - the same anti-force that has caused the “up-hill” struggle.

There would certainly be no point coming in the nature of God, who does not possess the propensity to sin and therefore cannot be tempted, sin or die. Neither would there be any point coming in the nature of angels for the same reason, because they, being divine immortal beings, likewise cannot be tempted or sin, and therefore cannot die (Lk. 20:35-36).

It is an unavoidable conclusion that the conquering of sin in the flesh

required someone coming in the same flesh and gaining victory over all of its desires, making it bow and surrender to the word and will of God. And this precisely, is what the mission of Jesus was all about. In fact, this is the very point that Paul makes in his last phrase in Rom. 8:3.

Having said that “What the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God has done through Christ,” Paul then explains how: “By sending His own son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and, as a sacrifice for sin, condemned sin in the flesh.”

THE SAME FLESH

Whether we like it or not and whether it fits in with our theology or not, Paul clearly teaches here that Jesus partook of the same “sinful flesh” nature of fallen man - the very same nature described previously by Paul in Rom. 7 where he talked about “sin in the flesh,” and said, “I know that in me, that is in my flesh, dwells no good thing.”

This is why Jesus said on one occasion “call me not good,” in response to a man who addressed him as “good master” (Mk. 10:18). Jesus did not mean that he was not a good character, for he was all of that and more, due to his divine begetal and the rich influence of the Spirit and word of God in his life. But the man to whom Jesus addressed the words “call me not good,” thought the good that was manifested by Jesus had its source in his physical flesh personage which was the product of his mother’s seed. The man only saw Jesus as a seed of a woman - a “son of man,” and not as the Divinely begotten son of God, and was attributing the good displayed by Jesus to the flesh instead of the Spirit. But, as Paul taught, there is no good thing in the flesh, and Jesus confirmed that the same applied to his flesh by saying “call me not good.” Jesus did not want the flesh to get the glory that belonged to the Spirit! As the Spirit of Christ declares in Ps. 16:2: “preserve me O God, for in Thee do I put my trust. I say to the Lord, Thou art my God; I have no good apart from Thee” (Revised Standard Version).

THE FLESH PROFITS NOTHING

On another occasion, recorded in Jn. 6:63 Jesus, referring to his own flesh said, “the flesh profits nothing; it is the Spirit that gives life; the words that I speak are Spirit and life.”

The reason for saying this was because the Jews had misunderstood his teaching to mean that they had to literally eat his physical flesh in order to

gain eternal life. Jesus therefore made it clear to them that there was nothing profitable about his flesh; the profit lay in the words that he spoke which were inspired, not by the flesh, but by the Spirit.

During his ministry Jesus freely and unashamedly confessed “Of (out of) my own self I can do nothing” (Jn. 5:19, 30). The good that he achieved and manifested did not come from his flesh, but the Spirit. Left to itself, without the Spirit, nothing good can be produced by the flesh, only the promptings of sin.

THE SAME POTENTIAL TO SIN

Because Jesus shared the same fallen flesh nature which contains the propensity to sin, he had the same potential to sin as all other men, but did not of course! This is taught in a Messianic prophecy in 2 Sam. 7:14 in which God says: “I will be his Father, and he shall be my son. If he commit iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men, and the stripes of the sons of men, but my mercy shall never depart from him.” We know that this prophecy refers to Jesus because it is quoted in Heb. 1:5 and applied to him.

If, as we read in Heb. 4:15, Jesus was “tempted in all points like us,” and if, as we read in Jam. 1:14, temptation involves being “drawn away by our own lust,” we cannot avoid the conclusion that Jesus must have been able to experience the lurings and enticings of the impulses of the flesh which lead to sin, and therefore could have sinned had he chosen to do so.

NOT MY OWN WILL

For this reason Jesus said: “I came, not to do my own will, but the will of Him who sent me” (Jn. 6:38). “I seek not my own will, but the will of the Father who has sent me” (Jn. 5:30). These statements teach that Jesus had a will separate and independent of his Father’s will, and which was contrary to his Father’s will. How else can it be explained that Jesus refused to do his own will, but chose to do his Father’s instead? Jesus’ “own will” refers to the will of the flesh and the Father’s will is that of the Spirit, and the two are at variance and at enmity with each other. The Father’s will was for Jesus to pass the ultimate test of obedience by remaining obedient under the excruciating pain of crucifixion, but it is not the will of the flesh to die such a horrible painful death, and Jesus experienced the battle between the flesh and the Spirit in the garden of

Gethsemane prior to his crucifixion. He fell to his knees three times, sweating as it were great drops of blood as he pleaded in prayer to his Father: “If it be possible let this cup pass from me, nevertheless, not as I will, but what You will.”

It must be emphasized that although the physical flesh nature of Jesus was, as he said, “not good,” and “profited nothing,” he had a perfect moral and spiritual character, and was without blemish in this respect. He never sinned, but completely and perfectly overcame all the impulses and propensities of the flesh.

As death is the punishment for sin, it was impossible that the grave could hold a sinless man, so Jesus was raised from the dead before his flesh could see corruption. But his physical mortal body that was raised was “changed” into a “perfect” immortal body, which cannot be tempted due to not having a propensity toward sin.

MADE PERFECT THROUGH SUFFERING

This perfection of the physical body is referred to in Heb. 2:10 which says Jesus “was made perfect through suffering.” (The same point is made in Heb. 5:8-9. 7:28. Lk. 13:32). These references to physical perfection being attained as a result of resurrection clearly imply and confirm that the physical flesh nature of Jesus was not perfect beforehand, during his ministry on earth.

And so, as Paul says in 2 Cor. 5:16: “Though we have known Christ after the flesh, from now on we no longer regard him.”

CAME IN THE LIKENESS OF SINFUL FLESH

Coming back to Rom. 8:3, Paul states the reason for Jesus coming in sinful flesh in these words: “so that as a sacrifice for sin, he could condemn sin in the flesh.” Now, how could Christ possibly condemn the propensities of sin in the flesh through his sacrifice, unless they were in his body of flesh which was put to death on the cross?! A careful analysis of Rom. 8:3 makes it fairly obvious that Jesus had to come in the very same nature that had been conquering mankind and causing death. But, instead of being conquered and put to death by that sinful nature, Jesus, by the Spirit, conquered it and put it to death. The cross was a public execution and ceremonial condemnation of sin in the flesh (“sinful flesh”) by a perfect representative of the fallen human race.

CARRIED SINS IN HIS OWN BODY

Because Jesus had the same “sinful flesh” as all other sinners, he had the potential to commit every kind of sin that has been, or can be committed in the world. The sins of the world are summarised in 1 Jn. 2:16 as “the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.” And the fact that Jesus said “I have overcome the world” (Jn. 16:33), indicates he was tempted in all areas of the sins of the world. (See the account of Christ’s temptation in Matt. 4:1-11). The propensity for all the world’s sins were in his flesh and he overcame and destroyed them in his sacrificial death. And, due to the grace of God, Jesus’ victory is imputed to all true believers by reason of the spiritual unity they have with him through faith. Scripture therefore declares that he carried the sins of the world in his own body on the tree. (1 Pet. 2:24. 1 Jn. 2:2).

Under the old covenant, sins already committed were symbolically placed on an animal by the laying on of hands. This transfer of sin was obviously artificial and superficial. It only dealt with the effects of sin, not the cause. But under the new covenant, the actual power of sin in the flesh that causes all sins in the world to be committed, was destroyed in Christ’s body of flesh - literally and physically. For this reason, Scripture never refers to Christ dealing with sin on his flesh, as in the case of animal sacrifices, but in his flesh. (Rom. 8:3. Eph. 2:15. Col. 1:22. 1 Pet. 2:24.) There was nothing merely symbolical, artificial or superficial about Christ’s sacrifice. He dealt with the root cause of all sin and triumphed over it, crucifying it in his own body of flesh.

HEBREWS 2:14

Having gone through Rom. 7 through to 8:3, we now turn to Heb. 2:14. This is how it reads: “Seeing, then, the children (God’s children) are partakers of flesh and blood, he (Jesus) also himself likewise partook of the same, so that through his death, he might destroy him who has the power of death, that is, the devil.”

Heb. 2:14 runs parallel with Rom. 8:3 and a comparison between the two is enlightening.

<u>Romans 8:3</u>	<u>Hebrews 2:14</u>
1. Made in the likeness of sinful flesh	Took part of the same flesh
2. As a sacrifice for sin	Through his death
3. Condemned	Destroyed

4. Sin in the flesh. The devil.

The last item in this list of parallels is the most interesting because it teaches that sin in the flesh is the devil, i.e. the lusts and desires of the flesh which lure and entice us into sin, constitute the devil, which means “sin in the flesh” and “devil” are synonymous or interchangeable terms.

(A book written by the same author, entitled:
“That Old Serpent Called the Devil and Satan”
deals exhaustively with this subject).

ANIMAL SACRIFICES INEFFECTIVE

Failure to accept that Jesus came in sinful flesh, and defeated the power of sin by conquering it in his own flesh, results in a rather superficial and unsatisfactory concept of the cross.

A very common view is that, in some mystical way that cannot be explained, the sins of the world were transferred to Jesus as he died on the cross. But there are several problems with this, mainly, that it would mean the principle involved in his sacrifice for sin was no different from the animal sacrifices under the law, which were unable to take away sin.

Under the law, when a man sinned, he artificially or symbolically transferred the sin to a beast by the laying on of hands, then it was killed. However, in reality, something abstract like an act of sin, cannot be transferred from one body to another, be it animal or man. Even if it could, of what value would it be, because sins continue to be committed afterwards, necessitating the same procedure.

For this reason, as is taught in the New Testament, “It was impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sin.” Putting down an animal after sins were committed, was like cutting down thistles at ground level. Because the roots are left in the ground, it is only a question of time and they will sprout and grow again.

If all that was required to put away sin was for sins to be symbolically transferred to a sacrifice, why weren't animal sacrifices sufficient or effective? And if sins are laid on Christ according to the same principle, how is it that his sacrifice does put away sin but the others didn't? Why did the artificial transfer system not work with animals but worked with Christ?

THE ANTITYPE TRANSCENDS THE TYPE

From Heb. 10 we learn that the animal sacrifices under the law were only a shadow of a better and more effective principle to come in Christ's sacrifice. In verses 5-10 we are told that at the heart and root of this principle is Christ's success in doing the will of God. This, of course, involved renouncing and crucifying the sinful will and desires of the flesh, and fully obeying the will of God. And this could only be done by partaking of sinful flesh.

Herein lay the major difference between animal sacrifices and Christ's. Not being human or moral creatures, animals cannot know the will of God, let alone obey it. Neither can they know what sin is, and, not having sin in the flesh to contend with, they cannot consciously conquer its propensities out of love and respect for God with a desire to please and glorify Him.

This means that during the centuries that animal sacrifices were offered, the power of sin itself was never actually conquered, in spite of the countless times sins were artificially transferred by the laying on of hands. And the same would apply to Christ's sacrificial death, if the propensity to sin was not in his body of flesh. Under such circumstances, the death of his body would not be the death of sin's power in the flesh. And this would mean that in spite of the many hands that have reached out to identify with him and his sacrifice, the power of sin in the flesh in reality has not been conquered, condemned and destroyed. As has been said, denial that Jesus came in sinful flesh, reduces his sacrifice to the same level as the animal sacrifices, and for this reason is branded as "anti-Christ" by the apostle John, because it robs Jesus of his moral glory and takes the chief virtue out of his example as an overcomer of sin.

NO SHADOW CAN EQUAL SUBSTANCE

If animal sacrifices were only a "shadow" of Christ's, it is natural to expect that a much higher or deeper sacrificial principle would be involved in his. If the artificial transfer principle involved in animal sacrifices was the same principle involved in Christ's sacrifice, then shadow and substance would be the same and that would be absurd. No shadow can ever equal the substance.

Animal sacrifices only dealt with sins already committed, and were a bit like shutting the gate after the horse has bolted. Animal sacrifices only dealt with the effects or symptoms or outcroppings of sin, not the root

cause. But Christ, in his sacrifice, got down to the root of the matter and dealt with the cause, namely, the devil - sin in the flesh.

In every respect the sacrifice of Christ transcends the animal sacrifices. As the one sin of Adam impacted on all who were “in him” (seminally), imputing sin and death to them, so the one sacrifice of Christ impacts on all who are prepared to be “in him” (spiritually), imputing righteousness and life to them. Through the one sacrifice of Christ - the one and only victory over sin in the flesh in history, the sins of those who are prepared to be in him by repentance, faith, baptism and commitment are cancelled. Such is the love and grace of God in Christ whose desire is for us to be saved and not perish (Jn. 3:16).



CHAPTER FOUR

It was pointed out earlier that obedience i.e. obedience that remains obedient under testing and trying conditions, is the key to lasting friendship and fellowship with God. Perfect obedience involves suffering, either mentally or emotionally or physically or all three. This was certainly the case with Jesus who was “made perfect through suffering” and was “obedient unto death.”

The question is: How much will a man’s love for God, and desire to be obedient to God be prepared to suffer; to what extent will a man put himself out and make sacrifices and deny himself in obedience to God? Would he be prepared to make the ultimate sacrifice - the relinquishing of life itself which is man’s most precious possession? Or would he love his life more than he loves God and therefore refuse to lose his life if God requested it? Abraham was put to this test. God asked him to take his only son Isaac whom he loved so dearly, and offer him up as a sacrifice (Gen. 22). Abraham obeyed without question or hesitation and as he was about to plunge the knife into his son, a voice from heaven stopped him saying: “Lay not your hand upon the lad, neither do any harm to him, for now I know that you fear (respect and reverence) God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son from me” (v12).

Abraham’s willingness to obey God by giving Him his son whom he loved so much, proved his profound love and respect for God. The test for Abraham was: who did he love the most: his beloved son or God? Abraham’s reaction to the test proved that God was first and foremost to him, and this is the position in which God expects to be placed by all of His servants. No wonder Abraham is referred to as a “friend of God” and is assured of a place in His eternal kingdom!

Job was also subjected to some severe tests and trials. Due to God putting a hedge of protection around him and blessing him, he became very wealthy. Under such circumstances it could be imagined that it was only because God had made life so sweet for him that he feared God, and that if he suffered loss, he would turn against God and curse Him. So he was put to the test. His sons and daughters were all killed along with most of his servants, and all his asses, sheep and camels were stolen. But Job did not turn against God. His reaction was: “The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.” In spite of the mental and emotional anguish this trial would have caused him, he passed the test. He was obedient under trial.

However, it might be thought that at least his own skin and bone had

been saved. The calamities had only affected the lives of others and his own physical person had been untouched. Was he the kind of person who was willing to be obedient to God no matter who else suffered, so long as his own personal health and well-being was unaffected and his own life was not threatened? So God was challenged to put forth His hand and touch his bone and his flesh, and see if he would retain his integrity or curse him to His face (Job 2:5).

In spite of being a righteous man (Job 1:1) Job was nevertheless inflicted with very painful boils from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head. This pain and suffering was clearly not a punishment, but a test and trial. He sat down in the ashpit and each day he used a piece of broken pottery to scrape away the pus. His wife found it so revolting that she told him he should abandon his integrity and curse God and die, but he refused to do it and rebuked her saying: “You speak as a foolish woman speaks. If we receive good from God’s hand, shall we not also receive evil?” Although experiencing much suffering, Job did not allow his lips to utter anything sinful. He knew that God was testing him and at one stage said: “When God has finished testing me, I shall come forth as gold” (23:10). Up to this point he handled his “cross” well.

However, the pain persisted and his best friends came to comfort him, but ended up brow-beating him. They harassed him with the argument that he must be an evil man because only an evil man would be inflicted by God and be made to suffer such pain. They did not know that pain and suffering is not always necessarily a punishment. In the end the continual pain and harassment wore Job down and he ended up saying some rash words, criticizing God and justifying himself instead of God. He was sternly rebuked by God for this and repented and was restored.

There is a recurring theme running through the Scriptures, teaching that God puts the faith and obedience of all His sons and daughters to the test. Such tests which can involve pain and suffering are designed to strengthen, deepen and mature faith and obedience, and are referred to in 2 Cor. 4:17 as “light affliction, which is but for a moment, preparing us for a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.” Our afflictions are “light” compared to Christ’s and our “glory” will therefore be correspondingly inferior.

In view of the fact that the glory Christ is destined to receive is exceedingly higher than that which any other man, (not to mention angels) will receive, it is not surprising that he had to endure greater suffering. Being the divinely begotten son of God did not exempt him from this: “Though he were a son, yet he learned obedience by the things he

suffered” (Heb. 5:8).

As we have seen, Abraham was spared from having to inflict death on his son, and although Job suffered physical affliction, he was also spared from death. But Jesus had to suffer the ultimate test. He was, as we read in Plp. 2:8: “obedient” - “obedient unto death.” But this is not referring to a man being obedient until he died peacefully of old age in his sleep. No! It goes on to say: “even the death of the cross,” stressing that the death was no easy or ordinary death. Death by crucifixion involved terrible prolonged excruciating pain, agony and humiliation. The word “even” stresses that Jesus remained obedient even when suffering the most painful death possible. The word “obedient” is also highly significant, for it teaches that the cross was a test of obedience - the pinnacle and climax of all tests of obedience.

One of the reasons why it was so important for Jesus to be obedient unto death on the cross was because in order to avoid it, he would have to deny that he was the Messiah, the son of God and king of Israel. To deny this would be a lie which is sin. You see, it was because the Jews regarded it as blasphemy for anyone to claim to be son of God and Roman law regarded it as treason for anyone besides Caesar to claim to be lord or king, that resulted in Jesus being executed. He refused to deny these truths even though it meant facing execution. And it so happened that crucifixion was the method of execution employed by the Romans at that time in history. God in His foreknowledge knew this and predicted it.

Therefore, in order to be faithful and obedient to God’s calling and uphold the truth that he was son of God and king, Jesus had to submit to being crucified. From this perspective, the cross represents upholding the truth of God and being faithful and true to His Word. Not surprisingly, “faithful and true” is a title given to Jesus in the book of Revelation (3:14. 19:11). Many Christians who understood this, were willing to become martyrs, rather than deny that Jesus was lord and king.

SACRIFICE BY THE SHEDDING OF BLOOD

It was not appropriate that Jesus should live out his natural life and die naturally of old age. Such a death would not be a sacrificial death in which the power of sin was conquered and put to death. It would rather be a victory for sin which caused mortality and death in the first place. In his battle against sin, the Father wanted the son to make the ultimate sacrifice and lay down his life by the shedding of his blood in the prime of his life.

From the very beginning when sin first entered the world, God made

it known that remission of sin would involve the shedding of blood. This is seen in the “covering” provided by God for Adam and Eve after they sinned, which involved the skins of animals. In order for this covering to be provided, the animals had to be killed and their blood shed.

From that time forward up to the time of Christ, God required His people to shed the blood of animals and offer them up as a sacrifice for sin. And the New Testament makes it clear that those sacrifices foreshadowed the sacrifice of Christ. In this sense, Jesus was “the lamb of God slain from the foundation of the world” (Rev. 13:8). But, as pointed out earlier, the sacrifices and the principles governing animal sacrifices were only a “shadow” of Christ’s sacrifice, not the very image (Heb. 10:1).

THE BLOOD

It should be pointed out that although there is great emphasis in the New Testament upon the blood of Christ being precious, and of us being saved, sanctified, cleansed, forgiven etc through the shedding of it, there is a possibility of looking too closely at it, and restricting our thoughts too much to the literal physical blood itself.

According to Heb. 2:14 Christ’s blood was the same as ours and it drained away when he died. His new resurrection body was “flesh and bone” not flesh and blood (Lk. 24:39). Nobody could find his shed blood if they tried, and if they could, it would not be of any spiritual value. It is one of the Roman Catholic superstitions that the real blood of Christ could be and was retrieved and bottled. We read in history of one of the kings of England receiving a small bottle of it from the Pope, which set him up wonderfully and led him to great religious extravagances.

Being the same blood as ours, there was nothing magical about the blood of Christ in itself. There was no inherent efficacy in it. It is not the literal blood that is precious or efficacious, but what it signifies and its relation to that of which the blood-shedding is expressive. Because the life is in the blood, the blood represents life, and it was the life of Jesus that was precious, given as a ransom for many (Matt. 20:28. 1 Tim. 2:6). The shedding of his blood represents the voluntary giving up of his life in a sacrificial death in order to secure salvation. Therefore, instead of saying Jesus shed his blood, many verses in the New Testament say he gave his life. They are synonymous expressions. Other verses say he offered his “body,” or that by means of his “death” he brought about redemption. Expressions involving the words “blood,” “life,” “death” and “body” in

relation to Christ's sacrifice, are often used synonymously.

Jesus was aware that animal sacrifices foreshadowed his own sacrifice and that he was going to die a painful death on the cross. Naturally, he was not eagerly anticipating such a death. In fact, he was troubled in his mind and heart over the prospect of it. As we have seen, he experienced a battle between the flesh and the spirit. For example, we read in Jn. 12:27 that Jesus gave expression to this problem, saying, "Now is my soul troubled, and what shall I say?" The flesh, which prefers to avoid and escape the cross gave the reply in these words: "Say, Father, save me from this hour." But the Spirit, or spiritual understanding responded by saying: "But for this purpose came I to this hour." And so, after this discussion (battle) between the flesh and Spirit (feelings and faith), Jesus, the son of God triumphantly declares: "Father, glorify Thy Name." i.e. "Not my will, but Thine be done." He crucified the flesh and made his decision to serve God and not the devil.

We see the same duality of flesh and Spirit contending with each other in Jesus' mind in the garden of Gethsemane where he prayed: "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me." It was a request to avoid the cross. But the Spirit was totally in charge of the flesh, as can be seen in the immediate rejoinder of Christ: "Nevertheless, not what I desire, but what You desire."

THE HUMAN EGO

This statement really expresses in a nutshell what the cross of Christ was all about. It was all about dealing with "I" - the human ego. ("Ego" is the Greek word which is translated "I"). Sin in the flesh is an ego-orientated, selfish, self-seeking problem. The original sin was, in fact, triggered off by the serpent's appeal to ego - to look after self - to not deny self anything - to be as the gods.

And so pride was birthed in the human spirit, and, as the saying goes, "Pride is the mother of all sins." How true! Pride wants to be the best and have the best, and have everyone look up to you and treat you like a god, and this results in becoming resentful, envious and jealous of those who seem to be better and possess better things and who are looked up to by others. This leads to bitterness and hatred, and hatred can end up in murder. Every evil negative attribute of the flesh has its root in pride.

Now, because Jesus came to deal with sin in the flesh, he had to meet and confront Mr. Ego, i.e. the urge to put self and self-interest and personal welfare before anyone and anything, including service to God.

And the ultimate test is when that service demands death in the prime of life in a very painful and ignominious way. Mr. Ego does not want to die! - Not that kind of death! That is the ultimate test of the “I” factor.

Survival is the strongest instinct and passion of the flesh, and the slow cruel death of crucifixion allowed full play for this instinct to rebel and seek escape from the cross. Death by stoning or the sword would be swift by comparison, but would not have allowed the same opportunity and scope for humility, submission and obedience to be exercised and displayed. Torture tests the spirit of a man; it tests the depth of his love and faith for his cause, and the courage of his convictions and commitments. Jesus therefore equated the cross with the denial of self (Matt. 16:24).

NOT MY WILL BUT THINE BE DONE

In suffering death for all men in order to deal the death blow to ego, it was necessary for the death to be a difficult one - one that would give the fullest possible play and scope for the human ego to assert itself and attempt to circumvent the death. Humble submission to that kind of death would mean victory over the fullest force that ego can muster.

This is what the cross was all about, perfectly expressed in those words of Jesus: “Not what I desire, but what You desire.” If you take the vertical letter “I” and cross it out by putting an horizontal line through it, you have a cross. And that is what Jesus achieved during his life and finally, once and for all at his crucifixion on the stake. He denied his own will and desires which came from the flesh, and put God’s will first no matter what it cost. He “endured the cross and despised the shame” (Heb. 12:2). Pride in most men would feel ashamed and humiliated at having to die the ignominious death of a criminal on a cross. But Jesus endured the disgrace and humbly resigned himself to it with grace and dignity, knowing it was his Father’s will to lay down his life on the cross. He humbled himself, making himself of no reputation, and was obedient all the way to his death upon the cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and given him a name above every other name (Plp. 2:1-11).

Other men have been crucified and died horrendous deaths, but with this difference: only Jesus could have called twelve legions of angels to his rescue. Other men have not had that choice and had to die whether they liked it or not. Jesus had the choice but did not take it because it was more important to him to die in obedience to God than live in disobedience for himself. The motto of his life from beginning to end was:

“I come to do thy will O God” (Heb. 10:7). He loved righteousness and hated iniquity (Heb. 1:9).

The power of Rome, represented by Pilate, and the power of the Jews, represented by the high priest and the high court of the Sanhedrin, nailed him to the cross, manifesting how much sin hates righteousness. They thought they had stripped Jesus of his power and influence and triumphed over him. This indeed, would have been the position had Jesus never been raised from the dead.

But Jesus did rise from the dead and turned, what appeared to be defeat, into victory. The resurrection of Jesus disarmed and defeated the authorities and made a fool of them for trying to exterminate him. Instead of being exterminated, he rose from the dead stronger than ever, and was elevated to a position of power far above all principalities and powers in the world. He became “king of kings and lord of lords.” It was a devastating blow to the plans and aspirations of the principalities and powers.

PRINCIPALITIES AND POWERS STRIPPED

Col. 2:15 relates to this: “And having stripped principalities and powers, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it” (i.e. the cross).

But the resurrection of Jesus was much more than just a victory over the Roman and Jewish powers. It was a victory over the underlying and motivating power behind those powers, which is sin in the flesh. Sin, as ruler, prince and god of the world, was flexing its muscles in the Romans and Jews, being manifested in their pride, arrogance, envy, hatred and cruelty. Sin gave full vent to itself in the attitude that was shown to Jesus and the treatment meted out to him. Sin, through sinful hands, did its worst to Jesus, inflicting him with a terribly painful death, energizing and inspiring wicked men to bruise his head. Instead of accomplishing this, it only bruised his heel and ended up receiving a death-blow to its own head!

The hours during which Jesus was nailed to the cross would have put him under enormous strain and provocation. The propensity of sin in the flesh of many men would have manifested itself in outbursts of anger, cursing God and man. But the propensity to sin in Christ’s flesh had been well and truly disciplined and brought into subjection and was about to be put to death in the death of his body of flesh on the cross. In spite of the pain and provocation, Jesus retained his composure and integrity and did

not react rashly. He didn't curse or revile God or man, but trusted in God and committed his life to Him and asked Him to forgive those who hated him and crucified him. To his dying breath, he never sinned. He was "obedient unto death" (Plp. 2:8). Painful as his death was, he died with dignity, causing even a Roman soldier to say: "Truly this man was the son of God" (Mk. 15:39).

It is clear from all this that in order for Jesus to achieve the maximum victory over sin, not only did his death have to involve maximum pain, but the maximum power that sin could muster in its battle against him had to be mobilized to inflict it. This would not have been achieved if Jesus had been killed by order of some small-time local council in one of the remote towns in Judea, or by a skirmish involving a band of ruffians out in the wilderness. The death of Jesus could not be a low profile event involving low profile people. It had to involve high profile people and power so that his victory would be over the best and strongest sin could offer and muster. And this was certainly achieved due to the involvement of the principalities and powers. And because Jesus exercised perfect rule over his own spirit, he qualified to rule over all principalities and powers. He has been given all power in heaven and in earth (Matt. 28:18).



CHAPTER FIVE

Christ's mission to conquer sin and death by the cross and rule the nations was "foreordained before the foundation of the world" (1 Pet. 1:20). It was the "determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God" for him to be "taken and crucified by wicked men" (Act. 2:23). In the prayer of the church, recorded in Acts 4:25-28, it is made clear that what Herod, Pontius Pilate, the Gentiles and the people of Israel did to Jesus, had been planned and predetermined by God long before. It was His will for Jesus to be arrested, scourged and nailed to the cross.

The apostle Paul refers to God's purpose as "the eternal purpose which He purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Eph. 3:11). Long before God created planet earth and placed Adam and Eve upon it, His ultimate plan was to have an only begotten son who would be heir of all things and who would rule over all to His glory. In fact, the Father's purpose in His son was the reason and motive for creation in the first place! He obviously knew that sin would enter the world and that it would require his own divinely begotten son to deal with it!

However, the position of power and rule was not going to be given by the Father to His son as a mere easy hand-out for which the son did not have to prove to be obedient nor make any sacrifices. An earthly father might appoint his son as manager of his business and set him up over the staff without requiring him to start from scratch and serve an apprenticeship and prove himself, but not Father-God. "Though he (Jesus) were a son, yet learned he obedience by the things that he suffered. But once perfected, he became the source of eternal salvation to all those who obey him" (Heb. 5:8-9). Even though he was the "manager's son," Jesus "made himself of no reputation, and assumed the demeanour of a servant ... he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted him and given him a name which is above every name that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow ..." (Plp. 2:5-11).

Being a person of principle, integrity and character, God could not and would not honour, glorify and exalt His son and place him over men and angels, unless they could say in all honesty and truth and with conviction: "Worthy is the Lamb to receive honour and glory ..." It is all because of the cross that they can say this! (Rev. 5:11-12).

IT PLEASED THE LORD TO BRUISE HIM

The sufferings of Christ were prophesied in remarkable detail in Ps. 22 and Isa. 53 and Jesus would have been very familiar with these passages of Scripture. He knew well in advance of time the ordeal he would have to confront at the end of his ministry and probation period.

A particularly striking statement is made in the Authorized Version's rendition of Isa. 53:10. It says that "it pleased the Lord to bruise him; He has put him to grief." And v11 says: "He shall see of the travail of his soul and shall be satisfied." According to this translation, Father -God derived pleasure from subjecting His son to pain and grief, and received satisfaction from seeing his torment of mind.

On the face of it, this might give the impression that God is a sadist, but that would clearly be a wrong conclusion. The significance of the statements can be understood by a statement sometimes made in relation to athletes: "No pain, no gain."

Running in a marathon for example, is a very gruelling, strenuous and exhausting ordeal. It sorts the men out from the boys! Some drop out as the going gets tough, but the tough keep going. Pain is written all over their face; sweat pours out of their skin and they sometimes stagger towards the end delirious with fatigue and collapse at the finishing line, and have to be carried away on a stretcher. Such is the effort or price that some pay to gain the victory and receive the crown. And on the medal table, the victory is accredited not just to the athlete, but his whole country! Many can bask in, and benefit from the victory and glory of one!

Not only does the athlete want to win the race for himself, and his country, but even more so if the coach is his father and the son knows that he wants him to win! Such a coach is happy to subject his son, if he is willing, to the pain and agony of the race in order to gain victory. How disappointed and possibly even angry the father would be if, at the first sign of sweat and pain, his son dropped out of the race and tossed in the towel. Such a poor effort and lack of courage, tenacity, perseverance and endurance would not be very impressive. But how pleased and satisfied he would be if he could see pain written over his son's face and sweat pouring out of him as a result of persevering, knowing that it was because he was determined to finish the race and win. But who would be so unreasonable to say that this would make the Father a sadist.

How pleasing it is to a father who is a boxing coach, to put someone in the ring to fight with and bruise his son who he loves and who has great potential to be a world champion, and to see that his son takes it on the

chin and does not toss in the towel. This is the sense in which Father-God derived pleasure from subjecting His son to pain and bruises, and received satisfaction from seeing his travail.

NOT A PUNISHMENT

Someone who lacked knowledge and understanding of boxing might misinterpret the actions in the ring to mean that it was due to anger on the Father's part that the son was getting battered and bruised and that it was being inflicted as a punishment. The Jews interpreted the cross of Christ in the same way. They regarded the buffeting, scourging, chastisement and the cross itself to which Jesus was nailed, as a punishment. They believed that Jesus was a false Messiah and a false prophet and that God used the Romans to chastise and punish him for this. Isa. 53:4 refers to this: "We regarded him stricken, smitten by God and afflicted." The Good News Bible puts it simply like this: "We thought that his suffering was punishment sent by God."

The next verse (v5) goes on to say: "But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed."

On the basis of this statement many have concluded that the suffering of Jesus on the cross was a punishment for the sins of others, i.e. he was punished instead of us as a substitute, for the sins that we committed.

In response to this, it should firstly be pointed out that v5 says nothing about the sufferings of Jesus for our sins being a punishment. The word "punishment" does not occur here or anywhere else in Scripture in relation to the divine reason for the cross. The only place where this idea is conveyed is in Isa. 53:4 where it relates to the misconception of the Jews.

Taking v5 as it stands, it simply states that Jesus was wounded, bruised and chastised for our sins. In view of what has been said up to this point, this should not be hard to understand. The testing process of God required Jesus to remain obedient when wounded, even unto death on the cross, in order to prove his absolute love for his Father and his power over sin, and gain victory over it for all who believe. This is the sense in which he was "wounded for our transgressions ..."

The Jews wanted Jesus to be crucified as a punishment, but although God allowed him to be crucified it was not as a punishment. His motive was different. To Him the cross was a climactic test of obedience to which he allowed His son to be subjected in order to prove his absolute power

over sin. “Though he were a son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered” (Heb. 5:8).

It was prophesied in 2 Sam. 7:14 that if Jesus committed iniquity, God would chasten him with the rod and stripes of men. Seeing that Jesus never sinned, the chastening inflicted by the Romans could not have been a punishment for acts of sin. And neither could it have been a punishment for possessing the propensity to sin in his flesh. Jesus, like all other men, was born with this propensity. It was not his fault and punishment for it would have been unjust. He would only have been punished if he succumbed to the propensity and committed iniquity.

In view of what God says elsewhere in Scripture against punishing a man for another man’s sin, it is not likely that He would punish His own son for the sins of others. How could a just God find satisfaction in doing that? He obviously could not for He says: “The fathers shall not be put to death for the children, neither shall the children be put to death for the fathers: every man shall be put to death for his own sin” (Deu. 24:16. 2 Kng. 14:6). “The soul that sins shall die. The son shall not suffer (punishment) for the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father suffer (punishment) for the iniquity of the son ...” (Ezk 18:20).

Jesus of course, suffered for us, in order to conquer sin, but what he suffered was not a punishment. He suffered the gruelling test of a painful trial in order to manifest the maximum measure of love, faith and obedience required to attain to immortality.

Even in human courts, it would be regarded as a violation of justice to punish an innocent man for sins committed by another. Most parents would be outraged if their son was punished for another man’s crime.

BETTER IS HE WHO RULES HIS OWN SPIRIT

Coming back to the analogy of a runner: God, of course, “delights not in the strength of a horse and takes no pleasure in the legs of a man. The Lord takes pleasure in those who fear (reverence) Him and who hope in His mercy” (Ps. 147:10-11). As has been stated before: moral strength, not muscular, is what pleases God. For this reason, when God first made man and put his obedience to the test, He did not ask him to climb the highest mountain, descend into the depths of the sea, run a marathon or lift heavy weights. He simply asked him to obey by not contravening a commandment. And He expected this obedience to endure under trial.

In this respect, God’s ways are so much higher than the ways of man. The world looks up to, and admires conquerors of mountains, deserts, the

sea and space, not to mention those who break records in track and field and other sports events. It matters not if they are proud, arrogant and immoral, and have no respect for man or God. Their physical and muscular expertise gains them glory and admiration all around the world.

This is illustrated in the Guinness Book of Records, in which all manner of human accomplishments are recorded. There are many references to physical and mental achievements, but not moral. There are no references to anyone living for a week, month, year or life time, being law-abiding or obedient to God's commandments and never sinning. Such moral achievements are boring to a carnal, materialistic and ego-centric world. There is no fun for the flesh in obeying God's commandments; the pleasures of sin are far more exciting and entertaining. Not to God they aren't, and that is why His book of records majors on moral and spiritual achievements. In His view, it is the moral that maketh the man. It is spiritual fitness and stamina that will win His commendation and crown of glory.

Throughout history man has been more obsessed with overcoming and conquering by brute strength other men and their cities, than overcoming and conquering his own proud and selfish spirit which "lusts enviously." But in God's view, according to Pr. 16:32, the man who rules his own spirit is better than the man who conquers a city. The greatest conquest of all is self-conquest, and it involves self-control, not the controlling of others. Mastering and controlling our own proud and selfish human spirit, requires honesty, courage and humility, and is much more important to God than seeking to master others. If men were more preoccupied with overcoming and controlling their own ego and sinful passions, instead of being preoccupied with overcoming other men, peace would have prevailed upon the earth among the nations. Only those who overcome and rule their own spirit, are qualified to rule others. Jesus said: "He who overcomes and keeps my works to the end, to him will I give power over the nations, and he shall rule them with a rod of iron ..." (Rev. 2:26-27). Authority will be given to them to rule over the cities in the age to come (Lk. 19:11-19).

Jesus is the supreme example of this. Because he ruled his spirit, remaining obedient to God even under intense pressure and pain, he is qualified to rule the world as king of kings and Lord of Lords. Adam and Job and others faltered under trial, but Jesus, although under such provocation of pain, gained the victory, thereby proving his unconditional love and respect for his Father.

Jesus is the only man in history who has successfully resisted every

temptation to sin. Not one little drop of black dye contaminated his character. No matter how severely he was tested, he never wavered or buckled or succumbed, not even when he was subjected to the enormous pressure of the pain and ignominy of the cross. Even though every fibre in his flesh would be crying for rescue and relief, his mental resolve remained the same: “Not what I will, but thy (God’s) will be done.” His face was set as flint to remain in complete control of his emotions and passions. The power of sin, knowing that Jesus had the power to come down from the cross, as he was taunted to do by his enemy, would be crying out for him to do so but the appeals fell on deaf ears and got no response. By the Spirit of God Jesus ruled his own spirit. Jesus, the son of God, was in control of Jesus the son of man. the Spirit conquered and crucified the flesh.

Because Jesus is the only man in history to fully conquer sin, he alone qualifies to save and redeem others from sin. There is no other name given under heaven by which we can be saved (Act. 4:12). There is only one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus (1 Tim. 2:5). All other leaders of the various religions of the world have died and are still dead. They couldn’t save themselves let alone others. But Jesus was raised from the dead and lives forever, and he has been given the power to save all who come to him. He alone is the door to eternity, and all who try to enter some other way are a thief and a robber (Jn. 10:1-8).

SAVED BY GRACE

By his own sweat and blood, Jesus earned and deserved salvation. For this reason heaven’s host sing to him, saying: “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory and blessing” (Rev. 5:12). No one else is able to do what Jesus did. To do so would require living a sinless life, but no one is strong enough to do this. Fortunately we don’t have to earn it: “For by grace you are saved through faith; it is not your own doing but a gift from God. It is not by human effort and works lest any man should boast. For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them” (Eph. 2:8-10).

This is the good news of the gospel which is the power of God unto salvation. Because Jesus met and fulfilled the just and righteous demands of God that were required to defeat sin and qualify for immortality, God is prepared to allow all who believe it and acknowledge the justness of it, to share immortality with Christ. It is important to acknowledge the justness

of the cross, i.e. that it was a just requirement of God in order to “declare His righteousness” (Rom. 3:25). Instead of the cross being foolishness or a stumbling block, it must be regarded as a just requirement on the part of God to expect Jesus to remain obedient to Him under the extreme pain and provocation caused by crucifixion in order to gain total victory over sin and attain to immortality.

So then, salvation is given as a gift to us by God’s grace. “Grace” means unmerited favour i.e. favour that cannot be earned or deserved. The best effort that we can put forward cannot earn or deserve salvation because we all still fall short of perfection. So it is impossible for us to be saved by works. We can only be saved by the work of Jesus! So there is no ground for boasting on our part, except about the work of Christ.

However, although we cannot be saved by our own works, we are nevertheless required to do good works: “For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works.” If we are truly “in Christ” i.e. if our lives are centred in him and his Spirit is in us, we will, like him, want to do good works, manifesting the fruit of the Spirit: “love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance” (Gal. 5:22-23). But the motive behind doing good works should not be to try and earn and deserve our salvation, for that is impossible. We do good works out of love and gratitude to God for the free gift of salvation his grace has given us on the basis of His son’s victory over sin and death.

God’s magnificent grace must never become a license to freely do our own thing, but rather a powerful compulsion to turn our whole lives over to God in obedient service. We cannot be willing to accept His love without giving love in return. We cannot take what God has given us and carry on with no sense of grateful appreciation that exceeds a momentary emotion of “accepting Christ.”

God’s love, by its very nature, demands love in return. His gift to us is so precious that it would be a most unperceiving and ungrateful act indeed just to accept it and then simply set it on the shelf to use at our own convenience. Surely one would have no real concept of what a “pearl of great price” God’s love is, if He could receive it and then simply put it aside as some kind of insurance policy to pull out at the resurrection.

So then, let us be grateful to God for His incredibly generous gift and do our best to follow the example of Jesus, knowing that when we slip due to sin which so easily besets us, “if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 Jn.1:9). “If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, and he is the propitiation (covering) for our sins ...” (1 Jn.

2:1-2). “There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 8:1).

