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DEATH *of* GOD

*Reflections on the Meaning of Christ's Suffering,
Death and Resurrection*

MORAN MOR ATHANASIOUS YOHAN I
METROPOLITAN

FAITH AND TRADITION SERIES

The Death of God

(English)

Faith and Tradition Series

by

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INTRODUCTION

Millions around the world saw the movie *The Passion of the Christ*, created by famous movie maker Mel Gibson. The film so graphically portrays the physical suffering of Christ that we can easily overlook the thirty-three years of His life and suffering on earth where He endured as a man, was tempted in all things, but still lived a sinless life.

The orthodox fathers of faith taught us that, out of His incredible love for us, God made us in His image and that the work of salvation was to restore us to communion with Him, “to be partakers of his divine nature.”¹

Salvation or redemption should be understood without time and space in God’s program. To be saved is to be in Christ and He in us. His suffering, was to bring healing to our brokenness. He became the healer of our sin-sick life. Jesus trampled death by His death on the Cross, and by His resurrection,

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took away the fear of death for those who believe in Him.

To understand the reason for our Lord Jesus' incarnation, life, death and resurrection, as it was originally understood and taught by the apostles and church fathers, will save us from the massive deception and false teaching that has caused much damage, especially to the modern church.

In this booklet, I try to explain in simple language, the meaning of this glorious salvation. I hope that it will cause the reader to love Christ more deeply for what He has done to restore to us what the first Adam lost, which was communion with God.

May the blessings of the Holy Trinity, the source of our life and salvation be with you, Amen.

¹ 2 Peter 1:4

CHAPTER ONE

THINKING OF GOD

“What comes to our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us.”—A.W. Tozer

The Sound of Music, released in 1965, a movie based on the memoirs *The Story of the Trapp Family Singers* by Maria von Trapp, is an all-time classic movie. The setting is Adolf Hitler’s ruthless reign in Germany, spilling over into Austria. In the movie, there is a scene where the famous actress Julie Andrews is trying to teach the von Trapp children lessons on singing. She says:

Lets start at the very beginning
A very good place to start
When you read, is to begin with the ABC
When you sing, you begin with Do, Re, Mi,
Do, Re, Mi
The first three notes just happen to be.

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In our present context of talking about the death of God, it is important to know who this God we are talking about is. So, let us start at the beginning of the beginning.

Would it surprise you if I told you that there were times in my past when I wondered about where God comes from or who made God? Are you surprised? My guess is you will say, “that’s strange; I have asked those same questions myself.” The truth is, we humans are desperately curious and want to know. Honest doubts and questions please God and in talking about God, it is an honest enquiry — “where did God come from, or how does this invisible being impact or exert influence over this visible creation and humanity?”

To answer these questions, I would like to quote Dr Ken Hovind, a brilliant thinker and teacher on this subject. His response was as follows:

Your question demonstrates that you’re thinking of the wrong God. The God of the Bible is not affected by time, space or matter. If He’s affected by time, space or matter, then He’s not God.

Time, space and matter are what’s called a continuum; all of them have to come into existence at the same instant. Because, if there

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was matter but no space, where would you put it? If there were matter and space but no time, when would you put it? You cannot have time, space or matter independently—they have to come into existence simultaneously.

The Bible answers that in ten words, “In the beginning,” there’s time, “God created the heavens,” there’s space, “and the earth,” there’s matter.

So you have time, space and matter created—a trinity of trinities so to speak.

- Time is past, present and future;
- Space has length, width and height; and
- Matter has solid, liquid and gas.

The God who created them, has to be outside of them. If He’s limited by time, He’s not God. The guy who created this computer [points to a computer] is not in the computer—he’s not running around in there changing the numbers on the screen. The God who created this universe is outside of the universe: He’s above it, beyond it, in it, and through it—He’s not affected by it.

So [in response to] the concept that a spiritual force cannot have any effect on a material body, you’d have to explain to me things like [the effects of] emotions like love, hatred, envy,

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and jealousy; and rationality. If your brain is just a random collection of chemicals that formed by chance over billions of years, how on earth can you trust your own reasoning processes and the thoughts that you think?

So your question “Where did God come from?”, is assuming a limited God, and that’s your problem. The God that I worship is not limited by time, space or matter. If I could fit the infinite God in my three pound brain, He would not be worth worshipping, that’s for certain.¹

To try and explain the vastness of God and His greatness with our limited, finite minds is futile. We will come to a place where we have to admit that there’s just nothing more we can do or say to understand God. That’s why the scripture says “for he who comes to God must believe that He is!”²

Even as we start, it might be good to maybe revisit and revise our mental picture of who God is. He is, in essence, love.

God *is* Love

God loves all of His creation and He sustains them all. He sends rain to both the good and the evil. And since God is infinite, His love is also infinite. The Scripture declares, “God is love”³ and this

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is the most significant reality and the foundation upon which the entire creation and our lives rest.

Love is not love if it is not directed outward. God is love for He exists in the Holy Trinity—the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, each loving the other with infinite love. The doctrine of the infinite, uncreated love of God is understood in this Trinitarian Orthodox faith, when we understand that the Trinity is a composite unity, a trinity of Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. Each one is fully divine and for eternity, loves the other two. The Holy Trinity, as one God, is an eternal union of love, always was and will be, from eternity past to eternity future.

God's love is not a created attribute. It is uncreated, the very essence of His being, more than any other quality or attribute we ascribe to God—more than God's immensity, justice, omnipresence, perfection, mercy, omniscience, etc. It was out of love God created the universe and mankind. He wanted to express His love and thus made man with free will, to freely love and be His, without force or coercion.

A reporter once asked Karl Barth, the famous theologian, if he could summarise what he said in his lengthy theological treatise. Barth thought for

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a moment and then said, “Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so.”

When Jesus was asked by his critics, what the greatest commandment of God was or in other words, what the most important thing about God was, Jesus responded by saying,

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: You shall love your neighbour as yourself.⁴

The key word in Christ’s response was, “love.” So, if one wants to condense the whole Bible into one word, that word would be love.

Think about the redemption of mankind; what is the foundation of it? St John the apostle says,

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.⁵

Maybe you are asking yourself, why it is so important to understand this? In our fallen and

sin-sick nature, we realise that, like St Augustine says, “our hearts are restless until we find rest in our creator God.” But it is the understanding of the love of God not as an attribute of God, but rather as the very essence of God, that gives us the impetus to return to this God of love and no more want to run away from Him.

Is this not what Jesus tried to explain to the religious crowd when He shared the parable of the prodigal son? He was trying to correct their faulty thinking of God as a mean, angry, revengeful God.⁶

The father in this parable is the picture, an image of the God who loves us. The prodigal son goes off from the father who loves him and wastes his life. Now broken, destitute, lonely and dejected, he decides to come home to his father. Yet when he did, the father does not ask for any account, restitution or confession. We only see the father embracing and shouting for joy at the return of his son who was “once lost.” This is the picture or image of God that Jesus tried to portray.

To not understand His nature or misunderstand who God is—that God is love and that He loves us unconditionally, just as the sun shines brightly for it is the nature of the sun—will rob us from

fully understanding and experiencing the meaning and joy of redemption, that is ours by His love and grace.

The God Who Died

There is an old Christian song in my native language that says, “Oh sinner, behold the saviour, it is for you He is hanging, dying there on the cross.”

Pause for a moment and ask yourself this question—who was it that was dying on the cross? You say, it was Jesus Christ. True. But also see what the Scripture says.

St Paul writes, “God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them.”⁷

We see God Himself involved in the sacrificial death of Jesus, for mankind to be restored back in communion with God. So you see, it was God who was dying, hanging on the cross and He did it, because of His love for us. It cost God His very life, with all the suffering and pain, to love humanity with His uncreated agape love, that only originates in Him.

When we say “God so loved the world that He sent

his son,” to accomplish the work of redemption of man, what does this really mean? Love to us sometimes means some rush of emotions or feelings. But for God, was it just like that or something more?

C.S. Lewis in his book *Mere Christianity* writes:

The great thing to remember is that though our feelings come and go, [God’s] love for us does not. It is not wearied by our sins, or our indifference; and, therefore, it is quite relentless in its determination that we shall be cured of those sins, at whatever cost to us, at whatever cost to Him.⁸

In *The Four Loves*, he further writes:

God, who needs nothing, loves into existence wholly superfluous creatures in order that He may love and perfect them. He creates the universe, already foreseeing—or should we say “seeing”? there are no tenses in God—the buzzing cloud of flies about the cross, the flayed back pressed against the uneven stake, the nails driven through the medial nerves, the repeated incipient suffocation as the body droops, the repeated torture of back and arms as it is time after time, for breath’s sake, hitched up. If I may dare the biological image,

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God is a “host” who deliberately creates His own parasites; causes us to be that we may exploit and “take advantage of” Him. Herein is love. This is the diagram of Love Himself, the inventor of all loves.⁹

Our salvation and reconciliation has nothing to do with us. Even the faith for us humans to believe in God’s mercy and love is given to us as a gift! For man is dead and sin has alienated us from God. He is the Good Shepherd who comes after us, the lost sheep, not to punish us but to bring us home with Him. This love is beyond our ability to grasp or understand.¹⁰ The very reason, foundation and motivation for God the Father to allow His only begotten Son to leave the glory of heaven, empty Himself of His God privileges and die on the Cross of Calvary, was love and love alone. This was not to take revenge or make someone pay for our sins and to bring some satisfaction to Him by Jesus’ death on the Cross.

Often, we don’t think about nor can we possibly comprehend the implications of God’s self-sacrificing love for humanity. C.S. Lewis explains it in his book *Problem of Pain* in this way:

When Christianity says that God loves man,
it means that God loves man: not that He

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has some ‘disinterested’ . . . concern for our welfare, but that, in awful and surprising truth, we are the objects of His love. You asked for a loving God: you have one. The great spirit you so lightly invoked, the ‘lord of terrible aspect’, is present: not a senile benevolence that drowsily wishes you to be happy in your own way, not the cold philanthropy of a conscientious magistrate, nor the care of a host who feels responsible for the comfort of his guests, but the consuming fire Himself, the Love that made the worlds, persistent as the artist’s love for his work and despotic as a man’s love for a dog, provident and venerable as a father’s love for a child, jealous, inexorable, exacting as love between the sexes. How this should be, I do not know: it passes reason to explain why any creatures, not to say creatures such as we, should have a value so prodigious in their Creator’s eyes. It is certainly a burden of glory not only beyond our deserts but also, except in rare moments of grace, beyond our desiring . . .

Man does not exist for his own sake. “Thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.”¹¹ We were made not primarily that we may love God (though

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we were made for that too) but that God may love us, that we may become objects in which the Divine love may rest “well pleased.” To ask that God’s love should be content with us as we are is to ask that God should cease to be God: because He is what He is, His love must, in the nature of things, be impeded and repelled by certain stains in our present character, and because He already loves us He must labour to make us lovable . . . What we would here and now call our ‘happiness’ is not the end God chiefly has in view: but when we are such as He can love without impediment, we shall in fact be happy.¹²

¹ https://youtu.be/8_OC2t7mIWE; ² Hebrews 11:6; ³ 1 John 4:8; ⁴ St Matthew 22:37–39; ⁵ St John 3:16–17; ⁶ St Luke 15:11–32; ⁷ 2 Corinthians 5:19; ⁸ C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, Macmillan, 1952, p. 73; ⁹ C.S. Lewis, *The Four Loves*, New York Harper, 1960, p. 196; ¹⁰ Romans 8, Ephesians 2:1–10; ¹¹ Revelation 4:11; ¹² C.S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, Touchstone: New York, 1996, p. 41–43

CHAPTER TWO

PARADISE LOST

“The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord”—Romans 6:23

Man was created in the image of God.¹ He was a spiritual being. This means man was created with more than physical senses of sight, smell, touch, hear and taste. Created in the image of God also meant Adam and Eve were given free will to choose.² God’s intention was for man to love and obey God with his power to choose. And by living in submission and obedience, he will continue to manifest God’s glory, and like a child that is innocent, they will grow continually in the knowledge of God. They were without sin, guilt or shame.³

In the life of Adam and Eve, before they sinned

by disobedience, they had no reason to think about sin, sorrow, pain or death. God alone is immortal⁴ and yet, God made man with an essential part of His being, made in God's image with immortality.⁵ Then the sad event takes place. Tempted by the devil, they disobey God.⁶ The unbroken fellowship and communion with the living God was now broken. Both physical death and spiritual death entered into the human race.⁷

Result

The image of God is defaced or marred. It is important to note that even though man walks away from his communion with God, the image of God has not been totally obliterated, but seriously damaged. Man still has a conscience. There is still a "God-shaped vacuum"⁸ in every man. Man is still illuminated to some extent by God.⁹ But there is nothing in man himself to mend the broken fellowship with God.

- ◆ All the religions in the history of mankind were born as a result of man's search to find a way back to God to fill the spiritual vacuum that resulted from his spirit missing the life of God. Man, now subjected to sin, cannot save

himself—but is now controlled by the powers of darkness, the devil.¹⁰

- ◆ Death entered the human race. By ‘death’, the Scripture does not mean the end of the immortality of man, but that physical life will come to an end by separation of the soul from the body (body dies). But the soul will live eternally, either in heaven in fellowship with God in the new glorified body, or in hell with a resurrected body to suffer eternal separation from God.

- ◆ The fall of man through disobedience, and the spiritual and physical death should not be understood by judicial nature—that God had no choice but to declare man should die or that a just God could not do otherwise. If we look at the Scriptures closely and listen to the early orthodox church fathers’ teachings, we see a different picture. God did not say to Adam and Eve, “I will kill you,” but that “you will die.” God essentially was saying, “If you choose to disobey, the natural result will be the choice you make—you will die.” God is the source of all life. And if by his own will, man chooses

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to walk away from the source of life, in effect, man is walking away from life and towards death.

For Adam and Eve, until they sinned, they were in full communion with God. Now by their disobedience, that link was broken. They are now on their own, having become independent from God. Sin is much more than some external breakdown of moral codes of behaviour. Sin causes our separation from love and communion with God. This is not to be seen as man offending God, but rather as man having walked away by his own choice from life itself. It grieved God when man fell, not because of what it did to God, but what it did to man.

It is important we understand man's brokenness, crises, sins, pain, sorrow and death not as God's retributive judgement for disobeying His command, but rather the curse of death as a self-imposed state—a result of man's turning away from God, the source of all that is good and pure.

If we believe that our brokenness and spiritual and physical death is caused by an angry God, then we are tempted to be like the dark hideous religions

that seek to appease an angry carnal God. It is sad but true that there are people who see the God of the Old Testament as a carnal, angry and vengeful deity and Christ the God in the New Testament as a loving and kind one.

The truth is, there is only one God, the Holy Trinity—the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit—who is full of love and compassion toward all His creation. The orthodox fathers taught that redemption and salvation did not mean we must be saved from the angry God’s wrath, but that we are being set free, saved from the power, dominion and the poison of our enemies—sin, death and the devil.

St Irenaeus of the second century said, “Man’s original state was one of spiritual childhood, innocence and simplicity joined to moral purity. Man was to gain the divine likeness through slow process.” He sees man’s fall not as the end of everything, but since the image of God is still left in him, he can still choose to return to God by faith in the provision God provides—thanks to the life, death and resurrection of Christ, the solution to the fall of man.

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It is like a man who is sick in his body. He is not dead yet. He can be healed by submitting himself to the solution that is offered to him by the physician. According to Calvinism, the fall of man means he is dead. There is nothing he can do. Only God decides who will be made alive. In the double predestination teaching of Calvin, God decides that some should go to hell and some others to heaven. Man has no choice at all in his destiny. This is not what the fathers of faith taught, nor the teaching of the Scripture.

If we see sin and damnation as a legal matter, then we look at this from the judicial point of view. But if we see our sin and lostness as a broken, spiritual condition, then we go to the God who can forgive and heal us, inside and out by our faith in His love and mercy He offered in Christ.

Isn't this what we see in the story of the prodigal son? The son could still come back to the father; for the father is waiting for his return, full of love. The son is not dead, he is still alive—he can come home. The son is still the son of his father. The fellowship can still be restored.

¹ Genesis 1:26–27; ² Genesis 2:16–17; ³ Genesis 2:25; ⁴ 1 Timothy 6:16; ⁵ Genesis 2:17; ⁶ Genesis 3:1–7; ⁷ Romans 5:12–13, Ephesians 2:1–3; ⁸ *Blaise Pascal's Pensees*, New York; Penguin Books, 1966, p. 75; ⁹ St John 1:9; ¹⁰ Ephesians 2:1

CHAPTER THREE

MISSING THE MARK

The meaning of 'sin' is missing the mark. The question is, what is the mark that man missed?¹

The First Adam

Man is made of body, soul and spirit.²

Before the fall of man, his life was totally controlled by the Holy Spirit or the life of God in him. There was no sin in him. He was in the state of innocence. His soul (mind, emotion and will) and his physical body were in subjection to the spirit within him, deep within his life. We sometimes refer to this as the heart or the innermost being. His life was filled with light. There was no darkness in him.³ The Scripture says, "The spirit of a man is the lamp of the Lord."⁴ The candle was light and brightly shining with the life and glory of God, and there was no

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debate about right or wrong. He only did what God willed in everything. The light (God is light) or spirit alive in him was the leader and guide for his life. He was in full communion with God, without ever a break.

This is exactly how Jesus lived on earth as the second Adam. Christ's words confirm it, "I can of myself do nothing . . . I do not seek my own will, but the will of the Father who sent me."⁵ Twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, Jesus listened and acted on the Father's voice, by his spirit being one hundred percent in tune with the Father and the Holy Spirit.

But when man (Adam) sinned, the light was put out. Now his spirit within had no life of God to be the light. The Holy Spirit was no more resident to be the God of his life. His soul and body became the dominating force in his fallen state. This is what Satan told them, "In the day you eat of [the fruit] your eyes shall be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."⁶ That is how man, by his own reasoning, became the *god* of his life. Instead of saying "The Lord is my Shepherd," he will say, "I am the shepherd of my life," energised by the demons and Satan.⁷ So, through sin, his spirit was

darkened. When Jesus came to earth, it is said, “The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and upon those who sat in the region and shadow of death light has dawned.”⁸

This is important. Although the fallen man lost his direct indwelling relationship with God, since he was made in the “image” of God—the marred image remained in man, seen in: his free will, his conscience, his will to choose and the spiritual vacuum or hunger he feels from deep within.

So, when the Scripture says, man has sinned or that he has missed the *mark*, the mark or purpose he missed was to ‘reflect God’s image’.⁹ He missed the purpose of his life, which was to be in perfect communion with God and live forever, ever increasing and becoming more and more like God, but without fusion. Man will never become the uncreated eternal God, but he will share more and more in the “nature” of God.¹⁰

So, here is what we can conclude:

- ◆ The Holy Trinity was involved in the creation of man and Christ created man.¹¹
- ◆ The ‘light’ that lit the candle or spirit of man was the life of Christ living in him by the Holy

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Spirit. In other words, Adam's human spirit was indwelt by the Holy Spirit.

- ◆ Adam's human behaviour and actions in the visible body corresponded one hundred percent to his internal behaviour in the soul, which in turn reflected exactly the activity of the Holy Spirit within his human spirit. His human spirit/candle was fully lit, living out God's perfect purpose for creating him.

At the same time, this 'perfect life' of Adam inside and out, was not merely being mechanical like a robot. Having been made in the image of God, he possessed the capacity to exercise his own free will—to choose.

God's purpose for Adam was to reflect His image—to partake in the divine nature. Adam was created as a visible being with physical form with the capacity to behave God-like, not as an imitation, but as the direct result of God's activity in him, within and without.

By disobeying God, the Holy Spirit, withdrew from man's human spirit. The light went out, and the life of God that was his light was gone and now he plunged into spiritual darkness, uninhabited by

God. Now he is controlled by his own self, thus becoming ego or self centered, instead of God-centered—his entire life infiltrated by the powers of darkness without God's presence in his life.¹²

Fallen man's body now became an instrument of unrighteousness.

It is important to keep in mind, although he missed the life of God, his soul and deep within his spirit, the marred image of God was intact. This is the difference between man and animals.

So, when we say Adam and the human race fell in sin, it means that man missed God from his life.

Now the question is, how is he going to return to the original purpose for which God made him? How will he attain the mark which he has missed?

The Second Adam

In the second Adam, the Lord Jesus Christ, God became a man and we are given the revelation how this could be done. While the created Adam was given the life of God, Jesus, the second person in the Holy Trinity, was God with uncreated life, now living on earth as a man without sin and blemish, the perfect life that God had meant for the first Adam to live.

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Jesus was not created like Adam was. Jesus was in the uncreated creator God and “In Him was life, and the life was the light of men.”¹³ The Scripture says, “All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.”¹⁴

Jesus said, that those that saw Him (in flesh), saw God.¹⁵ While God is spirit and cannot be seen, by clothing Himself in human flesh and a human soul, His spirit was the almighty uncreated God, living through the soul and body he inhabited. He did (in his soul and body) nothing of his own, only what the Father told him, that is the Spirit of God pulsating, shining through, living through his external behaviour.

When Jesus said, He and His Father are one¹⁶, we must conclude that the ‘Spirit of Christ’ was the constitution of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit who live and work without restrictions of time and space—of a different dimension. It is a mystery.¹⁷

So, we can conclude; what Adam lost through sin was the marvelous, unspeakable, mystery of the almighty God’s life in his spirit—manifesting His glory. And now Jesus, the second Adam, appears to restore the broken man and reconcile him to God;

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that is once again, to be back in communion with God, or in other words, to become a partaker of his divine nature.¹⁸

This is salvation or redemption, the answer God provided. And it is up to us, mankind, to respond with our free will, which is God's gift of mercy that He left in us.

¹ Romans 3:23; ² 1 Thessalonians 5:23; ³ 1 John 1:5; ⁴ Proverbs 20:27; ⁵ St John 5:30;

⁶ Genesis 3:5; ⁷ Ephesians 2:1–2; ⁸ St Matthew 4:16; ⁹ Genesis 1:26; ¹⁰ 2 Peter 1:3;

¹¹ Genesis 1:26; ¹² St John 8:3–4, Romans 7:18, 2 Corinthians 5:15, Ephesians 2:1–2, 4:22;

¹³ St John 1:4; ¹⁴ St John 1:3; ¹⁵ St John 14:9 ¹⁶ St John 10:30; ¹⁷ 1 Timothy 3:16;

¹⁸ 2 Peter 1:4

CHAPTER FOUR

THE SCARLET THREAD

Why did God have to become man and die to save us?

Looking at Christ the man, John the Baptist made the proclamation, “Behold the lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world.”¹ This points us back to the Old Testament sacrificial system which involved the substitutionary killing or blood sacrifice of animals for the sins of the people.

The children of Israel were held captive by the Pharaoh of ancient Egypt. (Egypt is the picture of the world.) The way of redemption for them was to sacrifice an innocent lamb and put its blood on the doorpost of the house. The angel would then ‘pass over’ these houses and spare them from death. Please take time to read the full story of this

historical event as recorded in the book of Exodus Chapter 12. The Passover celebration that is still practiced by the people of Israel reminds them of this event in history—their deliverance from death by the shedding of the blood of the sacrificial lamb.

A theme running through the entire biblical narrative is God's plan for the redemption of man through the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ. Bible scholars often refer to this as the "the scarlet thread" running through the Bible. The blood of Christ runs throughout the entire Bible, symbolically: starting with the animals killed in the garden of Eden to provide garments to cover the nakedness of Adam and Eve after they sinned, the ram that God Himself provided to take the place of Isaac, Abraham's son on the altar of Moriah, the Passover lamb, the institution of the sacrificial system, the scarlet rope of Rahab the prostitute, and the continuous sacrifices performed at the tabernacle and temple. This *scarlet thread* is also what's referred to in John the Baptist's declaration at the beginning of the chapter and ends with the words of Jesus on the Cross—"It is finished."

The Scripture says that life is in the blood and

that “without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.”² That meant that in order to rescue humanity from sin and death, someone has to die and shed blood or offer a blood sacrifice. And only God could do it. In order for this to happen, God, who is a spirit and therefore invisible, had to become a man (taking on a physical body), live a sinless life and die, shedding his pure blood so that He could become the sacrificial lamb that takes away the sins of the world.

This is why Jesus, the second person in the Holy Trinity, chose to incarnate and become the sacrificial lamb for our salvation. Although Jesus was sinless, He voluntarily took upon Himself the sins of the world and chose by His own free will to give Himself up to the suffering and death on the Cross of Calvary, for the sake of our redemption.

Seven hundred years prior to the incarnation of Jesus, having been decided by the council of the Holy Trinity, it was prophesied about Christ’s birth, life and death by the prophet Isaiah.³

Who has believed our report? And to whom
has the arm of the LORD been revealed?

For He shall grow up before Him as a tender
plant, And as a root out of dry ground. He

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has no form or comeliness; And when we see Him, There is no beauty that we should desire Him.

He is despised and rejected by men, A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. Surely He has borne our griefs And carried our sorrows; Yet we esteemed Him stricken, Smitten by God, and afflicted.

But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed.

All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way; And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, And as a sheep before its shearers is silent, So He opened not His mouth.

He was taken from prison and from judgment, And who will declare His generation? For He was cut off from the land of the living; For the transgressions of My people He was stricken.

The Scarlet Thread

And they made His grave with the wicked—
But with the rich at His death, Because He
had done no violence, Nor was any deceit in
His mouth.

Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise Him; He
has put Him to grief. When You make His
soul an offering for sin, He shall see His seed,
He shall prolong His days, And the pleasure
of the LORD shall prosper in His hand.

He shall see the labor of His soul, and be
satisfied. By His knowledge My righteous
Servant shall justify many, For He shall bear
their iniquities.

Therefore I will divide Him a portion with
the great, And He shall divide the spoil with
the strong, Because He poured out His soul
unto death, And He was numbered with the
transgressors, And He bore the sin of many,
And made intercession for the transgressors.

Then there are dozens of references that explain about the life of Jesus throughout the Bible through shadows, prophecies and revelations about how this God of love will restore man to Himself by becoming the answer to man's sin, suffering and death. Please take time to read these biblical references to fully understand the meaning of this subject.⁴

His Birth

“Begotten and not made; being of one substance with the Father” —Nicene Creed

One important question that lingers in our mind is, since Jesus was born of mother Mary, who like us was part of the sinful human race, how could He have remained without sin?

For it says in the Holy Scripture that through Adam and Eve’s disobedience, the entire human race inherited the sin nature. But looking at the following scriptures, it is clear that Jesus was God in flesh.

For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.⁵

He who has seen Me has seen the Father.⁶

I and My Father are one.⁷

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.⁸

How can we reconcile these two seemingly contradictory things? Being born of a human being with sinful nature and yet being God Almighty in flesh?

No one has seen God at any time. *The only begotten Son*, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him (emphasis mine).⁹

For God so loved the world that He gave *His only begotten Son*, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life (emphasis mine).¹⁰

Notice that in both these verses, Jesus is referred to as the only begotten Son of God, and not as the only begotten son of man. The reason is, Jesus was not born from the seed of Joseph the man. Jesus was born from the very seed of God; God's very own uncreated life. The phrase the only begotten means—to be produced from or to convey the very nature of. So when we read He (Jesus) is the only begotten Son of God, it means that He has the very nature and substance of God. Notice again, the Scripture never says, Jesus was the only begotten of man, because he was not born of man from the fallen Adam race. Jesus was called the 'son of man' because He was born with the nature of Mary's humanity, but then Jesus was called the 'only begotten son of God' because His very nature was of God the Father. The Son of God is God. All people are called the sons of God and even angels were called sons of God. But Jesus is the only begotten son of God, produced with the very nature of God.¹¹

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At the same time, there are many places where Jesus is referred to as “son of man.” Yet, He was not the son of *a* man because He was born of Mary and not the man Joseph. He got His human body from Mary, His mother. Mary was of humankind, hence the name son of man. When a cow gives birth to a calf, the calf has the nature of the cow. It is not a horse. If a horse gives birth to a male horse, the baby horse is not a donkey or a cow. It is a horse. Why? It has the very nature and essence of the father. It is the seed that gives the horse its identity.

The same way, when we read Jesus is the only begotten son of God, it means He is born of the same exact substance and nature of God. So, He is God now with a human body, which he took from humankind, his mother, the blessed Virgin Mary.

Also, it is most important to know, the blood of the baby in the mother’s womb does not come from, nor even mix with, the mother’s blood. Instead, the embryo itself generates any blood it has. I once asked a renowned professor of Obstetrics and Gynaecology from our Medical College Hospital, whether the mother’s blood usually mixes with the blood of the child in her womb. She said,

“No, usually a mother and a baby’s blood do not mix while the baby is in the womb. A membrane separates the baby’s blood and the mother’s blood. All the baby’s blood is contained within the baby and placenta. The mother’s blood runs alongside the placenta, and the nutrients needed by the baby are absorbed from the mothers blood and transferred to the baby.” Both the bloods do not mix. The doctor said that if the mother’s and foetus’ blood mixed, it could be deadly for both of them.

If mother Mary’s blood would be mixed with the blood of baby Jesus in mother Mary’s womb, then Jesus’ blood could not be sinless, it would be contaminated with the fallen daughter of Adam and Eve. Thus, Jesus would be a sinner, same as all humanity, and come under the reign death.

To sum up, since Jesus was not born of the seed of Joseph (the man), He did not inherit the hereditary sin nature which only could be transmitted through the seed of a man. Jesus was conceived of the Holy Spirit (God) and there was no corruption from man. Yet, He was the son of man, as He took His human form from His mother, the Virgin Mary.

His Perfect Life—The True Meaning of Christ's Suffering

It is commonly believed that all suffering and death is the result of sin. If that is the case, what is the meaning of saying that Christ suffered for us?¹² Wouldn't that mean Christ committed sin? That verse is not talking about the cross or talking about getting crucified. It's talking about the suffering He went through from the day He was born—from having no place to be born, except a cow shed; being a helpless baby and when His mother Mary and father Joseph had to flee to Egypt to keep Him alive and lifelong being misunderstood.¹³ He suffered throughout His life before the public ministry and the more visible part of His suffering is during the time of His temptation.¹⁴

So, the meaning of Christ's suffering throughout His life meant, He said no to Himself and lived with the continuous anguish of His soul for doing only the Father's will.¹⁵ So, when He suffered in the flesh, it's not talking about crucifixion; rather, that expression in the Scripture is always about dying to self—choosing to say no to himself. When people mocked at Him, He did not retaliate, but suffered quietly.¹⁶ The ultimate suffering was when

He choose to lay down His life on the Cross. So, Christ's suffering was not the result of sin that He committed, but rather because He lived as a man, as God had intended Adam to live.

This tell us that even in our fallen nature, as we experience redemption through the power of the living Christ and the Holy Spirit, we can continue to become more like Christ—which means that suffering is a part of becoming godly. All those who want to become godly must suffer.¹⁷

If Jesus remained in His pre-incarnate form, He would be a spirit and would not be able to become the sacrifice to save mankind. The only way this loving God could save sinners was to take upon himself the form of man, being born as a man, while at the same time being without sin in nature.

The beautiful poem in the book of Philippians explains the journey Jesus made from the throne of heaven to the manger and to the Cross to redeem us and give us the privilege to share in His divine nature.

Who, being in the form of God,
did not consider it robbery to be equal with
God,

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but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

—Philippians 2:6–11

¹ St John 1:29; ² Hebrews 9:22 (ESV); ³ Isaiah 53; ⁴ Psalm 22; St Matthew 3:1–7, 16:16–23, 17:1–23; St John 1:29; St Mark 8:29–31, 9:1–9; Romans 6:23; Galatians 3:13; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Acts 20–21; 1 Corinthians 6:20; Philippians 2:5–11; ⁵ Colossians 2:9; ⁶ St John 14:9; ⁷ St John 10:30; ⁸ St John 1:1; ⁹ St John 1:18; ¹⁰ St John 3:16; ¹¹ St John 1:18; ¹² 1 Peter 2:21; ¹³ St John 8:41; ¹⁴ St Luke 4; ¹⁵ St John 12:27; ¹⁶ 1 Peter 2:23; ¹⁷ 2 Timothy 3:12

CHAPTER FIVE

THE DEATH OF GOD

As we have already seen, for man to be restored to God and to be healed from his sin and brokenness and death, God had to become a man—and that is the reason why Jesus is called the second Adam. And He was born without the nature of sin—conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of a virgin, His body, soul and spirit were not contaminated by sin. And without God becoming a man with flesh and blood, He could not become the sacrifice to restore man. So, there was no way God can accomplish restoration of man to Himself without Him becoming a man. By becoming so, He now has the right to restore man to himself.

The final temptation Christ faced was on the Cross: the temptation to despair, to lose hope and abandon God. “My God, my God, why have You

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forsaken me?”¹ For a second, the entire world goes dark before Him—alone, bearing the sin of the world. But He did not give up. At the culmination of His suffering, He cried out, “Father, into Your hands I commit my spirit.”²

Jesus said no one can take my life, I voluntarily lay down my life³—his body was broken and blood was shed. So, Christ’s sacrifice became the antidote or the means of restoring man to God, and man can appropriate that by faith.

And in this cosmic event of redemption, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, the Holy Trinity, overcame Satan and all his power by the love of God on the cross. Jesus overcame Satan by His death on the cross.

He fulfilled all the law’s requirements. By His death, the old covenant was made of no effect. The new covenant is written in the blood of Christ, sacrificed in love to His Father. By doing this, He atoned for the sin of all humanity. Thus, the Cross became the altar of the new covenant, the mercy seat, the very place the glory of God dwells, shining out from the face of Jesus who gave His life for us.⁴

His humility and obedience even unto death on the

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Cross is in stark contrast to how sin entered into the world through pride and self-elevation, and salvation and healing comes through the humility and obedience of the Son of God, the second Adam. His obedience overcame rebellion and in His humanity, His oneness with the Father and Holy Trinity stayed intact and remained unbroken.⁵ This self-emptying of all the prerogatives of His divinity, all qualities of divine nature, was necessary to become everything we are—except for sin—so that He can make us everything He is, without fusion.

But that was not the end. Praise God, Jesus overcame death and was raised from the dead! He gave His mortal body over to death and by descending to the depths of hell, He declared the absolute victory over death and hell through His death and resurrection. He came into the world to raise man from corruption and death.

By destroying death, Christ destroyed the power of sin. Finally, the spell (curse) of Satan was broken. By Christ's death on the Cross, he defeated Satan and killed death by His resurrection.

Sin and Death

How does the death of Christ in reality save man from his sin and death?

Modern day theologians have developed interpretations of atonement quite different from the orthodox fathers of faith, who were taught by the apostles themselves on the Holy Scriptures.

Ransom Theory: One of the theories was that Jesus' death was to pay the ransom to the devil since Adam chose to leave God and come under the leadership of the devil. So, Jesus' death was to buy back man from the devil's ownership.

To this false teaching, St Gregory the theologian in the fourth century said,

Now we are to examine another fact and dogma, neglected by most people, but in my judgment well worth inquiring into. To whom was that Blood offered that was shed for us, and why was it shed?

I mean the precious and renowned Blood of our God and High Priest and Sacrifice. We were detained in bondage by the Evil One, sold under sin, and receiving pleasure in exchange for wickedness. Now, since a

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ransom belongs only to him who holds in bondage, I ask to whom was this offered, and for what cause?

If to the Evil One, fie upon the outrage! If the robber receives ransom, not only from God, but a ransom which consists of God Himself, and has such an illustrious payment for his tyranny, a payment for whose sake it would have been right for him to have left us alone altogether.

But if to the Father I ask first, how? For it was not by Him that we were being oppressed; and next, on what principle did the blood of His only begotten son delight the Father, who would not receive even Isaac, when he was being offered by his father, but changed the sacrifice, putting a ram in the place of the human victim?

Is it not evident that the Father accepts Him, but neither asked for Him nor demanded Him; but on account of the incarnation, and because humanity must be sanctified by the humanity of God, that He might deliver us Himself, and overcome the [devil], and draw us to Himself by the mediation of His Son, who also arranged this to the honour of the Father, whom it is manifest that He obeys in all things?⁶

Satisfaction Theory: A new theory was spun by the Archbishop of Canterbury, Anselm, in the eleventh century where he developed his own view called satisfaction theory. It was based on the facts that God is holy and righteous and man cannot save himself and only Jesus could satisfy the demand of justice for man's sin, the payment is made to God—this also known as substitutionary atonement.

The problem with this view is, if God is God, why couldn't he just forgive man of his sin? If he can't, then is there another God over Him that he is answerable to? If God is sovereign, then he is under no obligation. He is what He is and can do what He wills without constraints.

For example—in the parable told by Jesus of the rich man to whom his servant owed a huge amount of money, the boss had pity on the debtor and freely forgave all his debts. Jesus said this to explain about how God treats us when we simply repent and accept God's offer of forgiveness fully by grace and mercy. We see the same in the story of the prodigal son.⁷

The Prosperity Gospel: Then there arose a modern version of the debt/satisfaction theory. This view is that since Christ paid the price/payment for our sin and sickness and suffered for us, that means we as humans don't have to suffer in this life and the next. He became poor so we can be rich. He took all our sickness so we don't have to be sick. The prosperity gospel and the gospel of success came out of this false view of Christ's death on the Cross. This spread very fast in the twentieth century by modern TV evangelists and erodes the faith of millions of sincere Christians, especially from poorer nations, who fell prey to it.

The Social Justice Movement: This was also the result of another false view of Christ's death. The people saw Christ's life was an example of caring for the poor and needy and standing against the Pharisees (hypocrites) and fought for justice for the downtrodden. He was always on the side of the poor and hurting. This theory was funded and spread by the liberal church movement that did not believe the Bible as God's Word nor acknowledge Jesus Christ's death as the answer to the sins of mankind.

The orthodox church fathers viewed the word

‘ransom’ in a metaphysical (spiritual) way of saying that Christ has done all things necessary to forgive, save and redeem mankind who have been enslaved to the devil, sin and death and under the wrath of God. Christ’s sinless life and sacrifice of His holy blood thus became the ‘healing’ factor when man believes it by faith, rather than it having a judicial or legal meaning. He (Jesus) paid the price for the fallen race of man to be reconciled to God, to receive forgiveness for sins and to receive eternal life—the life of God—by Christ dying and rising again.⁸

The Lord Jesus Christ embraced all our suffering, pain and brokenness and death out of His love for us, not because of anything we have done right, for “when we were still sinners [the enemies of God], Christ died for us.”⁹ Agape love—love alone is the reason. Through His death, He overcame the power of sin and by His absolute obedience He overcame sin itself. The idea of punishment did not even enter into the mind of the ancient orthodox fathers of our faith. These theories were the product of Anselm of Canterbury and Calvin—not from the fathers of faith, and they should be rejected.

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In all this, we can see how much the devil hates for people to truly understand the significance of Christ's sacrifice on the Cross of Calvary, which is the only answer for the fall of man and the consequences of that.

Seeing the overall truth of the subject is important to understand the depth of the Word, instead of picking and choosing versions from here and there to prove people's thinking. When we read the whole Scripture, we see the larger picture of Christ, the Son of God, taking upon Himself our humanity so He can assume our fallenness, that He might heal our brokenness. He suffered throughout His life on earth to show us how to endure suffering and give meaning to our suffering and death. He accepted suffering and death on the Cross so that He might be able to bear our cross—which He asks us to bear daily as we follow Him in this life. He fulfilled the law to the point of death, showing what obedience is. Jesus showed us that God is our loving Father, not our enemy, who suffers all things for the sake of our redemption so that we might be reconciled to Him.

Why on earth do people see the Father as a villain when it is the Father that loved and cared enough to send His only Son into the world.¹⁰

The Healing Factor in His Blood

Jesus said it is the sick that are in need of a doctor. This helps us to think of Jesus as the healer of a broken world that God loved so much. The ‘medicine’ to heal us of sin, fear and death—to save us—was His own sinless blood. When man lost his fellowship with God, he lost the life of God in his spirit and there was no way he could now save himself unless the sin is removed and cleansed. He must be born again. The Scripture says, “Life is in the blood.”¹¹ Adam and Eve’s blood was pure and sinless, not contaminated with sin and death. So when the second Adam, the Lord Jesus, came to this earth as a man, not born of Adam’s race, but by the Holy Spirit of Virgin Mary, His blood was pure and sinless. He was the sinless Son of God in flesh.

Jesus, the second person in the Holy Trinity, came down to earth¹² to sacrifice His life on the Cross and shed His holy blood. He became one of us to go through all the temptations, pain, suffering, brokenness and death in His sinless body so that His holy blood will be the saving ‘serum’ or the healing factor for the sin of the world.¹³

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Here is a true story that helps us to understand the meaning of Christ's death and shedding His holy blood for us sinners.

Dr Paul Brand was a famous medical doctor who worked at Vellore Medical College Hospital in southern India. Some years ago, an epidemic of measles struck Vellore community. His infant daughter, Estelle, was dangerously vulnerable because of her age and they found they urgently needed convalescent serum (antibodies) or she would die. (This was before the age of vaccinations.) The word went around the remote rural community to find the "blood of an overcomer." An overcomer was someone who had caught the disease but was able to fight the disease and recover. As a result of the fight, their bodies would develop antibodies which were effective against the disease. The antibodies they had developed in themselves could be the means of salvation for the little helpless one. The blood from such a person will give the 'serum' as the answer to the contaminated blood of the little girl. There was no use of the blood of someone who had chicken pox or malaria or some other disease. This blood had to be specifically from someone who had contracted and overcome measles.

Finally, they located one person who had measles and defeated the sickness. They drew some of his blood, let the cells settle out and injected the convalescent serum into the veins of the little girl and she was healed and saved from death. She overcame measles not by her own strength or resistance, but by the blood of one who had defeated the sickness in their own body.

Just like this, the sinless pure blood of Jesus has the power to overcome sin and death. And we become overcomers, not by our own strength, but by the power of the blood of Jesus—our faith in what Jesus did for us on the Cross of Calvary.

The Cleansing by Jesus' Blood

From age immemorial, man has always sought to appease God by various means. Anyone who has studied even basic anthropology knows this. In the First Testament, the highest form of a sacrifice of appeasement were blood sacrifices. All of these substitutionary sacrifices are only able to *cover* the sin of man; they were never able to cleanse him of his sins. But God Himself has taken the initiative to once and for all, have Himself become that sacrifice and cleanse man of all his sins.

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1 John 1:7 says, “The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.”

I have heard a story to illustrate this powerful truth. Suppose you have a very expensive table in your house—it’s your prized possession. Made of costly wood and exquisitely carved, it is beautiful in all ways. Whenever someone comes to your house, you proudly display the table. But one day, while some house renovation was happening, someone spilled paint on it, and worse, tried to clean it up, only to leave a large ugly stain right in the middle of the table. Now what do you do? You think and finally hit upon this brilliant idea—buy a nice tablecloth and cover the stain. And that’s what you do! Now people see the table but they don’t see the ugly stain—you’ve covered it. Similarly, all of what man does, including the highest form of substitutionary sacrifice, only *covers* your sins. It never takes it away and does not have the power to cleanse the stain. But the pure, innocent, holy, sinless blood of God’s Son, Jesus Christ, has the power to ‘cleanse’ us of our sinful stains. It’s like, lifting that tablecloth and cleaning the ugly stain and making the table look as good as new.

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Hebrews 9:11–15 says:

But Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation. Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? And for this reason He is the Mediator of the new covenant, by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.

Let me repeat, the blood of Jesus not only forgives us from all sins but restores us to God to once again be partakers of His divine nature. The light in the spirit of man was rekindled again by the Holy Spirit. The life of Christ, which is the light of man, now shines forth with the gift to live on earth as Jesus Himself lived and to be the light for others

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to find their way to the only source of life and salvation—Jesus.¹⁴

He made death to die by His death and resurrection and by man's believing, so that once again his dead spirit could be made alive and reconciled to God. The most precious and important aspect of salvation is we need not fear death because Jesus has defeated death. His resurrection is the proof that we are what God intended us to be when He made Adam. We will not die but live forever with God.¹⁵

¹ St Matthew 27:46; ² St Luke 23:46; ³ St John 10:18; ⁴ St John 13:2; ⁵ Romans 5:19;

⁶ Gregory Nazianzen *The Sacred Writings of Gregory Nazianzen*, Jazzybee Verlag 2012;

⁷ St Luke 15; ⁸ Romans 5–8, Galatians 2–4; ⁹ Romans 5–8; ¹⁰ St John 3:16–17;

¹¹ Leviticus 17:11; ¹² Philippians 2; ¹³ St John 1:29, Hebrews 2:10, 18, 4:15, 12:2;

¹⁴ St John 1:8–9; ¹⁵ Colossians 2:9, St John 5:24, 11:25, Romans 8:34–39, 1 Corinthians 15:42–50

CHAPTER SIX

COMING HOME

The Jewish people in Jesus' day had a serious misunderstanding about the nature of God the Father. They could not understand the love of God and His mercy. So, Jesus told them the story of a father and his two sons. The younger son is known as the prodigal son, who walked away from the love of his home and wasted his life away. Finally, realising how broken and lost he was, he thinks about his father's love and decides to come home.

And he returned. The father ran to meet his son and was overjoyed, welcoming him back home. Jesus told this parable to explain the nature of the God who loves us so much He eagerly waits for us to come back to Him.¹

So the question for us is, as part of the fallen human race, what must we do to find our way back

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to paradise and once again be in communion with God, reconciled to our creator?

What was the teaching of the orthodox church fathers about salvation? Without a doubt, it was not based on law or the courtroom, but completely based on God's unconditional love and grace.

We begin to understand that the Holy Trinity worked together to bring healing to a sin-sick humanity. We see that God is not after taking vengeance and demanding penance, etc., but all that Jesus did—His suffering, His death and His resurrection was to bring healing to our broken lives. He took upon Himself our humanity, born of the blessed Virgin Mary, the mother of God, lived a life without sin by the Holy Spirit, suffered and died and paying the price with His own blood to save us. He then resurrected from the dead—the only way God could defeat Satan and death was by His own death and resurrection in His body.

The blood He shed became the healing medicine for our sin, sickness and death. He couldn't have done it if He hadn't become one like us, human, and live a sinless life as the second Adam in order to be the eternal sacrifice on our behalf. Here, there is no question to a legal courtroom sentence, but a

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Father who, with open arms, waits for his repentant children to come home.

When Jesus died on the Cross, He became the sin-bearer of the whole world. He took upon Himself the sins from Adam till the last man alive on earth and all man must do is to accept this offer of forgiveness and redemption by faith. And even the faith to believe is given freely by grace!²

“[Forgiveness and atonement] are principally therapeutic, organic, synergistic, transformational, and ultimately ontological in nature. In fact, the Greek word translated as ‘salvation’ is *soterias*, whose root meaning is ‘health’.”³

To be saved must be understood not just as being saved from the devil, sin and hell, but being saved for something positive, wholesome—that is to be in communion and union with the living God.

The way He saves us is by forgiving all our sins and by His bearing it upon His own body and suffering and dying in our place, so we can be healed.

The ‘spirit man’ which was darkened by the departure of God (our candle was put out), now through the Holy Spirit, the life of God which is the light of man⁴ once again is lit and the spirit of

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God now resides and continues to reveal the nature of Christ through the Word and transforms us as we daily agree and obey His word.⁵

The new creation in Christ must now grow in the knowledge of God by active participation, which we call the ‘sacramental life’.

Once again, the regenerate man learns what it means to yield his or her life to Christ in humility, brokenness and obedience. Thus, he is no more controlled by the soul and body, but by Christ who now lives in him through the Holy Spirit in the human spirit. In other words he is controlled and led by the Spirit.⁶

God, who made man in His image, even after man sinned and walked away from this loving God, still is the lover of mankind and longs for all to come to repentance (to turn around and come home).⁷ But man cannot do that for himself. The life of God in *his spirit* is gone and God must become a man without sin and rekindle the *spirit of man* (with this uncreated eternal life) by the Holy Spirit so that he can once again be a “partaker of the divine nature.”

That which the first Adam lost is regained in this act of being born again, through redemption and salvation. This is what the orthodox fathers of the

Holy Church called “incarnational theology,” which is the heart and mystery of the Gospel. That is, the creator of man, God himself, the second person of the Holy Trinity incarnated and became one of us, not to be a judge to condemn, nor to make payment for man’s sin to the devil who deceived man, or to satisfy a vengeful God by becoming a substitutionary offering to appease this just and Holy God, but by becoming one of us⁸ to deliver us from our sin, brokenness, spiritual sickness, fallenness, mortality and corruption. He did this by taking the human nature through incarnation and participating with us in all human limitations, forgiving us our burden of sins which is part of the larger purpose of God—to bring us into the image of Himself⁹ through continual transformation.¹⁰ This is the actual organic participation of God in our salvation, in order to achieve the final goal for us, which is to achieve the glory that we see as shadow in the resurrected life of Christ Himself. He (Jesus) was the first born, trampling death by His death and going before us, opening the way for us to eternal life.

This was the original teaching of the Scripture before it was adulterated by some modern theologians. The fathers of faith saw our salvation

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as an organic experience which is explained in the Scripture using many expressions such as:

Being crucified with Christ—Galatians 2:20

Dying with Christ—Romans 6:8

Being buried, resurrected with Christ—
Romans 6:4 and Colossians 2:12

Living with Christ—Romans 6:8

Abiding in Christ—St John 15:4

Putting on Christ—Romans 13:14 and
Galatians 3:27

He in us and we in Him—St John 14:20; 15:4

Married to Christ— Ephesians 5:32

Members of His body—Ephesians 5:30 and
1 Corinthians 12:12

Unless you eat my flesh and drink my blood
you have no part in me—St John 6:53

Christ who loved me and gave himself for
me—Galatians 2:20

I know my sheep and my sheep hear my
voice—St John 10:27–28

Christ our life—Colossians 3:4 and Philipians
1:21

To live is Christ, to die is gain—Philippians
1:21

No more I that live but Christ in me—
Galatians 2:20

Coming Home

In baptism we become one with him—

Romans 6:5

The key to understanding this again is to see our salvation with the starting point of seeing the glory of Christ, which we missed, and make a choice with our free will to repent and turn away from sin and Satan and receive by faith this invitation Christ offers.¹¹ When He carried our burden of sin, it did cost Him His life, but this was out of His love for us,¹² not anger or vengeance or some payment from God to the devil.

Once we understand this beautiful, loving God and His plan, we are freed to be His, completely in full surrender, no longer living by our own will or choice, but growing by obedience and becoming more and more like Christ.

Those who misunderstand this mystery fall into Satan's deception of salvation by legal payment and self-righteousness to please God, which is often explained in terms of shallow and meaningless expressions such as: character development, transformation through self-will, obeying commandments to be moral, etc., all of which revolve around man, not God.

God's invitation is "Follow me and I will make you become fishers of men."¹³

The Death of God

“If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.”¹⁴

“Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”¹⁵

The story in *Pilgrim's Progress* helps us to understand this better. The man carrying the heavy burden of sin, finally runs to the cross and all of a sudden, his burden falls off. He is now free to be without all the baggage of sin and brokenness that was part of his life's journey.

Yes, the *spirit of man* is now lit by the life of Christ. “In Him was life and that life was the light of men.”¹⁶

At the same time, we still have the fallen nature to overcome: selfish, self-centered thinking, and the cravings of the fallen flesh. The understanding of the sacramental life helps us to cooperate with the new life in us—the living Christ dwelling in us by the Holy Spirit to change us (God's doing mystically) from within.¹⁷

Salvation then has a starting point, and by turning to Christ, and turning away from sin and the devil, self and the world, we are saved (in the present tense) from the power of sin and Satan and we will

be saved (in the future tense) finally from the very presence of sin and temptation itself. Therefore, death is not something to be afraid of anymore; it is no longer a doorway to eternity in hell. Rather, it is to be with Christ, His Father, the Holy Spirit and all the angels and saints in heaven.¹⁸

In C.S. Lewis's book *Last Battle*, when the children leave the Shadowlands permanently and reach Narnia, Aslan the lion reveals the *true* reality in this following way:

Then Aslan turned to them and said: "You do not yet look so happy as I mean you to be."

Lucy said, "We're so afraid of being sent away, Aslan. And you have sent us back into our own world so often."

"No fear of that," said Aslan. "Have you not guessed?"

Their hearts leaped and a wild hope rose within them.

"There was a real railway accident," said Aslan softly. "Your father and mother and all of you are—as you used to call it in the Shadowlands—dead. The term is over: the holidays have begun. The dream is ended: this is the morning."

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And as He spoke, He no longer looked to them like a lion; but the things that began to happen after that were so great and beautiful that I cannot write them. And for us this the end of all the stories, and we can most truly say that they all lived happily ever after. But for them it was only the beginning of the real story. All their life in this world and all their adventures in Narnia had only been the cover and the title page: now at last they were beginning Chapter One of the Great Story which no one on earth has read: which goes on for ever: in which every chapter is better than the one before.

¹ St Luke 15; ² Ephesians 2:8; ³ Quote from *The Original Christian Gospel* by Rev. A. James Bernstein, 2010, p. 8; ⁴ St John 1:4; ⁵ 2 Corinthians 3:18, Romans 18:29; ⁶ Romans 8:14; ⁷ 1 Timothy 2:4; ⁸ St John 1:14; ⁹ Romans 8:29; ¹⁰ 2 Corinthians 3:15; ¹¹ St Matthew 11:28; ¹² St John 3:16; ¹³ St Mark 1:17; ¹⁴ St John 7:37–38; ¹⁵ St Matthew 11:28; ¹⁶ St John 1:4; ¹⁷ 2 Corinthians 3:18, Philippians 1:6; ¹⁸ Hebrews 12:1–3

CHAPTER SEVEN

WHAT MUST I DO?

Now you may be asking the question, what must I do to be saved and restored in order to be in communion with this loving God for now and for eternity? It is as simple as you can imagine to enter into this most beautiful and glorious life.

The Holy Church in Acts 2 began in the first century right after the resurrection of Christ from the dead. There, in the beginning of Acts 2, St Peter who was the first apostle of the church, appointed by Christ himself, explained how we may enter into this new life; salvation.

Then Peter said to them, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”¹

Let me explain this as it was taught by the apostles

and the orthodox church fathers, which is quite different from some of the modern day teachings.

The one purpose of Satan and the millions of demons that work for him² is to keep mankind in spiritual darkness. Satan blinds mankind so that he will not realise the awful eternal hell, where people who choose not to follow the loving God who gave His own life to bring us back to Himself, are destined for.³

Just as Adam and Even had the freedom to choose to obey and live in communion with God and partake in the divine nature of God, although marred by sin, we still have the image of God in us, which is seen in our conscience and our freedom to choose.

- ◆ You need to stop and consider the consequence of not choosing the loving offer of God. Satan will oppose you in every way and by every means to keep you from being concerned about your eternity.
- ◆ Therefore, you must choose to humble yourself, maybe by kneeling or falling on your face, before this God who is there with you although you cannot physically see Him.⁴ Ask God for His mercy to draw you and enlighten

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your mind to understand and see the meaning of Christ in your heart.⁵ There is a prayer I pray many times a day which is known as the prayer of Jesus. It goes like this, “Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner.”⁶ Pray earnestly for God’s mercy so your heart will long for God and sense the desperate need for forgiveness of sin and to be saved. The Bible says God will not reject anyone who calls on Him.⁷

- ◆ The next step is to repent; you ask God to forgive you of all your sins and that you are coming to Him as a sinner who needs God’s mercy. Also, you now decide to turn away from all known sins and the devil that had his influence in your life.
- ◆ The prayer asking God to forgive you and turning your life to the Lordship of Christ is the next step. You may not feel anything, but it is by faith you do it. Believe that the God who promised you is more eager than you know to welcome you to His family.⁸
- ◆ Next is becoming part of Christ’s body, the Holy Church, through the means of baptism.

This is the outward sign, as circumcision was for the people of God in the First Testament. Through baptism, you become part of the people of God.

- ◆ The sacramental life. This is understood mostly by being part of the Holy Church. We grow into Christ's likeness along with others in the family of God.⁹ Therefore, you must choose to be an active member of the Holy Church where the Word of God is taught and where the Holy Sacrament is the heart of worship. Jesus is no longer in the flesh with us as He was when He was on earth, but in the sacrament of the Holy Communion, by partaking in the Body and Blood of Christ, we have the privilege to experience the living Christ—He becomes more and more real to us as we partake in His Body and Blood.

Such a Great Salvation

Imagine there is a village far off in a remote region of a country where people have to walk days on foot to buy their basic necessities for survival. Some 700 people live in that village; children, parents, old and young, with their primitive lifestyles.

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Suddenly, a deadly epidemic breaks out in the community and people begin to die one by one. Hearing about it, a healthy and able-bodied man travels from the city to this village. He sees the sickness and the imminent death of all who live there.

The question is, why did he go there? The answer is that the blood which flows through his body has the perfect antibody, the serum that could instantly heal the sick and dying. The answer for these people is his blood. He came there to give his life to save these people. Now he is faced with a dilemma; should he do it, or go back? No one forced him to come to this sick and broken people. He came by his own choice.

Think about it. Jesus Christ, the sinless son of God, could have gone back to heaven and be on His throne at any point during His entire lifetime on earth. Even in the last minute, on the Cross, He could have come down and vanished back to His own world and position at the right hand of God the Father.

But He refused such temptation (see His prayer in the garden) and the challenge He heard from the crowd who were beside the Cross.¹⁰

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He said, “No one takes [my life] from me, but I lay it down of myself.”¹¹

Why did Jesus die on the Cross? He did it to save sinners like you and me. The Holy Eucharist in worship reminds us of this eternal sacrifice.

Imagine if one person in that village who is infected and dying refuses to accept this good man’s offer of his own pure blood which is the only answer. What can anyone do?¹²

The Father is waiting for you; just come home. Enter in through the door, the door which has been kept open for you. Believe that Jesus’ death and resurrection is for you! The closed door which kept you out will be flung open! The invisible barrier that prevented your entry into this joyous life of God will disappear once you believe. You will be restored, as you were meant to be.

¹ Acts 2:38; ² Ephesians 2:1–3; ³ 2 Corinthians 3:14–18, 2 Timothy 3:1–5, Ephesians 2:1–9; ⁴ Psalm 139; ⁵ Ephesians 1:17–21; ⁶ St Luke 18:38; ⁷ St Luke 18:13–14;

⁸ St Luke 15; ⁹ Ephesians 4; ¹⁰ St Mark 15:30; ¹¹ St John 10:18; ¹² Hebrews 2:3

