

# 612 Why Did Christ Die?

## Phil Sanders

### God's Answers to Life's Questions

The best known passage of the Bible is John 3:16: "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life." God gave His Son, Christ Jesus, to the world, because He loved the world. God not only gave His Son, He gave Him to die. The death of Jesus on the cross was very cruel and agonizing. To give the Lord Jesus in that way demonstrated an amazing and deep love. We cannot imagine the Father asking Jesus to die on a cross if there were any other way. Why did Christ die? We'll look into the Bible to find out! Because the Bible is the only real source of truth.

To contemplate the death of Christ will have a definite effect on the heart. No one can think long and hard about the suffering of Jesus and not be moved by it. There may be many things about the death of Christ we may not understand in this life, still the Bible does reveal some things to us of great value. The New Testament mentions the death of Christ 175 times. It is helpful to learn what we can about the death of Christ and its connection with our salvation and our eternity. It is touching to know that Jesus was willing to give his head to a crown of thorns, his back to a cruel scourging, his hands and feet to nails, and his side to a spear. Asking why Jesus would do this is very, very important.

It is hardly sufficient to say that **Christ died for our sins**, but the Bible teaches that clearly. The value of his death was not that he died a martyr or that he set a wonderful example for us, but its value is in the fact that He died for our sins. He took our place and suffered a death that we should have suffered. The Bible teaches that Jesus himself was sinless. Hebrews 4:15 says that Jesus "has been tempted in all things as *we are*, yet without sin." He was the righteous or just one suffering for the unrighteous (1 Pet. 3:18). Paul said, "He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Cor. 5:21). He lovingly took our place to save us.

1 Corinthians 15:3 says, "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures." Romans 5:8 says, "While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." Peter said, "He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed" (1 Pet. 2:24). This death was for all. The Hebrew writer said in Hebrews 2:9, "by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone." Some teach that Jesus only died for some, but John said in 1 John 2:2, "He Himself is the propitiation (atoning sacrifice) for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for *those of the whole world*." That's why everyone can be saved, can find the forgiveness of sins, if they will.

It is very strange to me, in light of all these verses, why some people think that a person can go to heaven independent of the death of Christ. They may depend on their good morals as a ground for their salvation. When they do that, they are actually saying that it was not necessary for Jesus to die as far as they are concerned. No one can be saved by their own goodness. We are all saved by grace, and without grace we would all be helpless and hopeless. There is no salvation except by the way of the cross. Jesus said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me" (John 14:6). Without His cleansing blood there is no salvation and no cleansing.

**Second, Jesus died so God could save and be just.** God made man a free moral agent, free to choose right from wrong. When man sinned, he became guilty before God and stood condemned. The only penalty for sin is "death." God loved man, but His holy character meant that he could not allow man to get away with his sin. Sin stood as a barrier between God and man (Isa. 59:1-2). God wanted a

reconciliation with man and found a way to reconcile the world through Christ Jesus our Lord. Someone might suggest that God reach down and pardon man as a father overlooks the errors of his son. But God is not a man, and this could not be. God could not govern all men and simply pardon.

Indiscriminate pardoning might lead mankind to have disrespect for the law and the Lawgiver. The justice of law must be upheld. So God faced the problem of being just, on one hand, and being merciful, on the other. God wanted to find a way to satisfy His justice without destroying man altogether. What could satisfy that justice? A lamb could not. Animal blood was not a sufficient offering. "For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins" (Heb. 10:4). So Jesus volunteered to be clothed with human flesh and die in man's place. Heb. 10:5 says, "Sacrifice and offering You have not desired, But a body You have prepared for Me" Jesus came to earth and died for our sins, so that God could save man (in His mercy) and yet be just (by punishing Jesus) at the same time. Paul says of Jesus, "whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. *This was* to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; for the demonstration, *I say*, of His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus" (Rom. 3:25-26). By punishing Jesus, God could be just and the justifier for those who would believe in Him. What a shame it would be for anyone to neglect so great a salvation offered at such a great price.

There is a story handed down from antiquity that helps us to understand what God did with Jesus. A certain king enacted a powerful law. The punishment for breaking that law was that the offender would lose both of his eyes. You can imagine the emotions that came into the heart of this king when he learned that his own son was brought before him guilty of breaking his law. The king wanted to grant mercy to his own son, but justice demanded that the king respect his own law. How could he blind his own son? At last the king found a way to be just and merciful at the same time. He decided to put out one of the eyes of his son and one of his own. No one could ever accuse this king of injustice.

He knew that by taking the punishment on himself, He could still have respect for his law and save his son's eyesight. God took on our punishment in the death of His Son. Can anyone ever think of accusing God of not being just and fair? Can anyone look at God and think because He is patient with us that He doesn't mean what He says in His laws? Can anyone look at the cross and think that God is not loving or good to us? "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." Jesus is loving to those who will believe in Him and serve Him. But let's also think about another matter. Is God fair to those who reject Him?

When one considers what great lengths God has gone to save mankind, how that Jesus took the sins of the whole world upon Himself, how could anyone blame God for punishing those who reject Him? If God had not hated sin, detested it completely, He certainly would not have gone to such great lengths to punish it. As much as God loves you, He hates sin—all sin, yours and mine. And were it not for Jesus who paid the price for our sins we would all surely be lost. What would you do with those who, after you had given your best to save them, rejected you and refused to obey you and would not listen to you? God gave Jesus to save mankind, but those who reject Him must face their sins alone.

**Third, Jesus showed the importance of obedience by His death.** Hebrews 5:8-9 says, "Although He was a Son, He learned

obedience from the things which He suffered. And having been made perfect, He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation.” Though Jesus paid the price for our sins, the Bible also plainly teaches that there are conditions to our salvation. Christ is the author or source of eternal salvation to “all those who obey Him.” Those who will not obey cannot enjoy the blessing of eternal life. Now this passage does not tell us how to obey the Lord; it does tell us that obedience is absolutely necessary. We must go to the apostles to learn more.

Jesus said in the Great Commission in Matthew 28:18-20, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Jesus said in Mark 16:15-16, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned.” Jesus wanted His “Good News” preached and believed to the point that people would be baptized, so that they could be saved.

We learn more from the book of Acts about what people were taught and what they did. When the guilt ridden Jews on the day of Pentecost were cut to the heart by their sin, they cried out, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” Peter replied to them, “Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38). If I wanted to be saved, I wouldn’t be arguing with that. If I loved Jesus and believed that He died and rose again, I would gladly repent of every sin and be baptized in His name so that my sins could be forgiven. I wouldn’t wait another day. If Jesus saves the obedient, I need to obey.

Not only are we saved from all our past sins by the power of the death of Christ when we repent and obey the gospel in baptism, we enter into a relationship with the Lord as His child and become members of His church. As faithful and obedient Christians, the blood of Jesus keeps on cleansing us from all sin. John said in 1 John 1:7, “but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.” This cleansing is continuous, ongoing. He further says, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” God is so good to us.

This is not a license for us to keep on sinning; but it is encouraging to know that when whether through ignorance or weakness we sin, we can come penitently and prayerfully before God and find grace and forgiveness. God’s grace and forgiveness are ours when we walk in the light and when we are willing to confess our sins before Him. It is the blood of Jesus that takes away our sins, that looses us from our sins (Rev. 1:5). Baptism is not the blood, but it does put us in contact with the blood. Paul said, “Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death?” (Rom. 6:3) Baptism puts us where Jesus shed His blood—His death on the cross.

The blood of Jesus is not some small thing to be set aside by any person. We must think about the conditions of God and how we live. Peter said, “And if you address as Father the One who impartially judges according to each one’s work, conduct yourselves in fear during the time of your stay *on earth*; knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, *the blood of Christ*” (1 Peter. 1:17-19). The worst thing we can do is to ignore or forget what God through Jesus has done for us in the shed blood of the Lord.

How sad that many people do take the Lord and the blood He shed for granted. They begin a life with Christ but after a time fall away from Him to live the way they please. They forget what a price was paid for them. The Lord’s church will remember the Lord’s supper each Lord’s day (Sunday) so that they will remember the blood that was shed for the remission of their sins. That blood was part of a covenant God made with us to save us. But if we neglect that blood by unholy lives that forsake the Lord and His way, we can hardly count on that blood to keep on blessing us. How can we stay close to God when we fail to remember Him from week to week? From Supper to Supper?

My friend, if you have wondered away from God, it is time to come home to Him. It is time to give up living your life alone. If you forsake the Lord, you will have to face your sins alone without His grace and blood to forgive you. If you are not yet a Christian, believe in the Lord, repent of your sins, confess His name, and be baptized in water in the name of Jesus so that the blood of Jesus will forgive your sins. Won’t you do that today?

The most important lesson you can learn today is this: **Jesus Christ loves you enough to die for your sins.** He died for you, to save you from the sins you’ve been committing. Paul said in Romans 5:6-8, “For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” Such love is beyond words. Jesus did not die for us because we deserve it or because we are so good. He died for us because He is so good and wants us to live with Him eternally. Such love is amazing.

Paul also said in 2 Cor. 5:14-15, “For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died; and He died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf.” My friend, has the love of Christ made a difference in your life? Jesus died for all, but not all live for Him. What will matter in your eternity is whether that death He died for you has caused you to live for Him. Have you obeyed Him? Don’t think that you can find some other way. Obey Him. Follow Him, serve Him, love Him, and do His will. Don’t let anything or anyone keep you from coming into contact with His blood by your obedience.

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