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Christ's Incredible Cross

By David Servant

NINE

The Profuse Blessings of the Cross

The New Testament authors, in explaining the gospel, used various terms to describe the benefits that are ours because of Christ's sacrificial death. Each one underscores some blessing that the atonement brings, and together they give us a complete picture of what Christ accomplished for us. The biblical terms we will briefly survey are *propitiation*, *justification*, *reconciliation*, *redemption*, and finally, *salvation*.

Propitiation: Turning Away God's Wrath

Those who have difficulty believing that God is wrathful have great difficulty with *propitiation* because propitiate means "to turn away wrath." Although the word is found only four times in the New Testament, it succinctly embodies a truth often repeated in Scripture. This truth brings us directly to the heart of the gospel: Jesus' death turned away God's wrath against us.

If hell is a real place where people dwell eternally after death, and if Jesus' death saves believers from that place, then propitiation is the best word to describe the preeminent accomplishment of the cross. Jesus "delivers us from the wrath to come" (1 Thes. 1:10).

In the previous chapter, we learned that God is indeed a God who cannot wink at disobedience, but who is, as the Bible states, "a God who has indignation every day" (Ps 7:11). If He is a "righteous judge" as the Bible says He is, then His anger should not surprise us. If God remained passive while witnessing the selfish acts of humanity, then He would be unjust. Furthermore, He would be a hypocrite for He has commanded us to act always with fairness.

Those proponents of the all-loving, never-angered God should read the apostle John's first letter. There he writes that God's love was demonstrated by Jesus' act of propitiating God's wrath:

In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the *propitiation* for our sins (1 John 4:10, emphasis added).

God has proven His love by sending His own Son to appease His wrath against us. If we are going to discard the concept of propitiation, we must also discard God's love. In fact, we must reject the very gospel itself.

Earlier in his first epistle, John wrote,

And He Himself is the *propitiation* for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world (1 John 2:2, emphasis added).

John says plainly that Jesus' saving act was not only the propitiation for the sins of believers but also for unbelievers. Of course, each unbeliever must repent and believe the gospel before Christ's saving work becomes effectual in his life.

Through the offering of Christ, God has been propitiated. His anger against us has been turned away. But as we consider the meaning of propitiation, it is important that we not equate the crude pagan notions of propitiation with that of biblical Christianity. The two are worlds apart.

First, in pagan religions, the worshiper falls prey to the wrath of his god for arbitrary, often unpredictable and whimsical reasons. God's anger, however, is always predictable because it is only aroused by sin. His anger is always perfectly righteous.

Second, the pagan propitiates his angry god by means of some sacrifice he himself offers. The Bible teaches us that we could never hope to pacify God's wrath by any effort or sacrifice of our own. God has appeased Himself by the offering of a sacrifice of infinite value, His very own Son who merited salvation for us.

This puts Christian propitiation on an infinitely higher plane than pagan religion's meager offerings. It was not some incense, some coins, or some animal that was placed on an altar. It was God Himself who was the sacrifice.

Leon Morris has summed up these two points nicely:

The Bible writers have nothing to do with pagan conceptions of a capricious and vindictive deity, inflicting arbitrary punishments on offending worshippers, who then must bribe him back to a good mood by the appropriate offerings.¹

We must also not think that Jesus was the "nice guy" who laid down His life to appease "the mean guy." It was "God in Christ" who gave Himself for our sins. As Jesus Himself declared, He was and is one with the Father (see John 10:30, 38; 17:11, 21-22).

God loved us and propitiated His own wrath by giving Himself. Jesus' sacrifice is not what made God love us; He already loved us, which is why He gave His Son.

Justification: Declared Innocent

Justification is a legal term signifying a verdict of acquittal. One who is justified is declared innocent or righteous. In fact, the New Testament words translated *justified*, *justification*, *righteous*, and *righteousness* are all derived from the same root word in the original Greek language. If you are justified, or possess justification, then you are righteous and possess righteousness. So as we study justification, we should also include those scriptures which refer to the *righteousness* we possess through Christ.

Being justified implies more than just being forgiven. When a person is justified in court, it means he is declared innocent of all charges against him.

In Christ, we are found "not guilty"! Thus God will treat us as if we've never sinned. God no longer views us as guilt-stained sinners; nor does He view us as pardoned criminals; He views us as never having been guilty!

¹Leon Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, p. 148.

Even more incredible, righteousness is not something that is earned; the New Testament calls it a gift from God. I realize this may sound too good to be true, but it *is* true. Just as our sin was imputed to Christ, so His righteousness has been imputed to us:

He [God] made Him [Jesus] who knew no sin *to be* sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him (2 Cor. 5:21; italics NASB).

Christ was and is perfect in righteousness. He never sinned, and now His righteousness is ours! God now treats us as if we had never sinned!

If you are a Christian, you'll never have a more righteous standing, legally speaking, with God than you do now. The above scripture said we have become God's own righteousness. You can't become more righteous than that.

The benefits of being justified are manifold. Being justified means we not only have the peace *of* God—we have peace *with* God and have no reason to fear His wrath:

Therefore having been *justified* by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ....Much more then, having now been *justified* by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him (Rom. 5:1, 9, emphasis added).

Continuing in faith, and thus continuing in justification, assures us that we will one day be glorified with Christ and that we need not fear being condemned:

And whom He called, these He also *justified*; and whom He *justified*, these He also glorified. What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things? Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who *justifies*; who is the one who condemns? (Rom. 8:30b-34a, emphasis added).

Reconciliation: Enemies Become Friends

Before our new birth, we were at enmity with God and He was at enmity with us. Some wonder how God could love us and yet at the same time be our enemy. But the answer is simply that God loves His enemies. Christians should understand this because we are commanded to love our enemies by following God's example. This doesn't mean that God expects us to say of our enemies, "They are really wonderful people." It means that we are to show them mercy, do good to them even when they don't deserve it, and desire the best for them. They may hate us, and we may hate what they do, but we should love them.

Obviously, this kind of love is of a different realm than the selfish, feeling-oriented emotion that the world calls love. God's love transcends feelings and is a willful decision to treat undeserving people with kindness.

The good news of the gospel is that Jesus' saving act on the cross has provided the means of our reconciliation with God. We are no longer enemies—but friends—because Jesus bore the penalty for sins and satisfied the claims of divine justice.

The references to our reconciliation in the epistles are not nearly as numerous as those to our justification (or being made righteous). There are five passages, and I can't resist showing four of them to you. I begin with a few verses from Romans:

For if while we were enemies, we were *reconciled* to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been *reconciled*, we shall be saved by His life. And not only this, but we also exult in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the *reconciliation* (Rom. 5:10-11, emphasis added).

We note that although God has reconciled the world to Himself, it remains for each individual to receive his reconciliation. Notice, too, that it was Christ's death that effected our reconciliation, not any supposed sufferings in hell.

Now all these things are from God, who *reconciled* us to Himself through Christ, and gave us the ministry of *reconciliation*, namely, that God was in Christ *reconciling* the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of *reconciliation*. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were entreating through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be *reconciled* to God. He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him (2 Cor. 5:18-21, emphasis added).

All of us, like Paul, have been given a ministry of reconciliation. We can tell the world that God was in Christ and that He has reconciled the world to Himself through Jesus, who bore their sins on the cross. Now, through us, He is entreating them to be reconciled to God and receive forgiveness of their sins.

But now in Christ Jesus you [Gentiles] who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who made both *groups into one* [Jews and Gentiles], and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, *which is the Law of commandments contained* in ordinances, that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace, and might *reconcile* them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity....for through Him we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father (Eph. 2:13-16, 18; italics are mine on the word "reconcile").

Here it is affirmed that the Mosaic Law, given solely to the Jews and a barrier between them and Gentiles, has been broken down. Now believing Jews and Gentiles are under the Law of Christ, and there is nothing to separate them. Both are reconciled to God through Jesus.

For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, and through Him to *reconcile* all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross....And although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds, yet He has now *reconciled* you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach—if indeed you continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel (Col. 1:19-23a, emphasis added).

Again it's clear that we were reconciled in Christ's *fleshly body through death* and not by any supposed sufferings He experienced in hell.

Consequently, we are now holy and blameless and beyond reproach if we continue to believe the gospel. Not only can we declare that we are righteous, but we can also proclaim that we are holy and blameless—in Christ!

Redemption: Purchased from Slavery

To many of us, *redemption* has become a generic phrase for salvation. The biblical term, however, carries certain implications that unveil specific blessings we possess because of the cross.

The biblical meaning of the word *redeem* is “to deliver from slavery or from the captivity of an enemy by payment of a ransom.”

The Bible states that because of our disobedience, we became slaves of sin, death, and Satan.² Jesus liberated us from that terrible triplet through His death. The New Testament states that “we have redemption *through His blood,*” and that we “were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold...but *with precious blood...the blood of Christ*” (Eph. 1:7; 1 Pet. 1:18-19, emphasis added).

Other New Testament expressions, such as *ransom* and *deliverance*, are closely correlated with redemption. We’ll look at them together because all of them denote a freedom from former bondage. (*Redeem* and *ransom* always imply a price paid for release, whereas *deliverance* does not.)

How exactly does Jesus’ death free us?

Before we can answer that question, we must first learn something about Satan. It was Satan who enticed man to sin, who then gained “the power of death” as the book of Hebrews teaches us (see Heb. 2:14), and who now holds unregenerate humanity captive to do his will. Sin and death are both related to Satan somewhat because death entered the world because of sin (see Rom. 5:12), and Satan is the one who tempted Adam and Eve to sin in the first place.

The apostle John wrote, “the whole world lies in the power of the evil one” (1 John 5:19), an obvious reference to Satan’s dominion over unsaved people. Jesus referred to Satan as “the ruler of this world” at least three times (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11), and Paul once called him “the god of this world” (2 Cor. 4:4). A more accurate title would be “god of this *world’s system.*”

Some have mistakenly thought that Satan has sovereign control over every earthly event, including governments, weather, volcanoes, and so on. The Bible, however, repeatedly affirms God is sovereign over the universe and our planet. Jesus referred to His Father as “Lord of heaven and earth” (Matt. 11:25). Satan is only ruling the kingdom of darkness, of which all unsaved people are citizens. He is the “god of this world” because the people of this world are serving him whether they realize it or not.

How did Satan obtain his position? We are not told in the Bible as much as we might like to know concerning Satan’s past, but at least we know that Satan rebelled in heaven and was cast down to earth long ago (see Ezek. 28:12-19; Luke 10:17-18). In the first pages of the Bible we find him tempting Eve in the Garden of Eden, and when Eve, and then Adam, yielded to Satan’s temptation, God’s judgment fell upon them.

Since they were free moral agents, God permitted Satan to tempt the first humans for the purpose of testing them. Had they not been offered a choice of obedience or disobedience, then they would have functioned as robots by virtue of their environment.

God’s Purpose for Satan

Certainly, the all-powerful God could have banished Satan, at his fall, to some other place in the universe, but He didn’t. Satan was banished to earth for a purpose. His temptations would not only serve to test humans, but if they yielded to his temptations, Satan would be given some degree of authority to administer the punishment for their transgressions, namely by inflicting them with death.

God had told Adam that in the day he ate the forbidden fruit, he would die. Specifically, God was speaking of spiritual death because Adam and Eve did not die physically the day they ate the fruit—they died spiritually. At that time, Satan gained what the New Testament calls “the power of death” (Heb. 2:14). He was given

²See John 8:31-36; Rom. 6:6; Heb. 2:14-15; Eph. 2:1-3; 2 Tim. 2:24-26.

permission, as an agent of God's wrath, to inflict sinners with spiritual and physical death.

Spiritual death is a term used to describe the spiritual disease that invades the spirits of humans who are in rebellion against God. It could be called the nature of sin, selfishness, or Satan, which infects the spirit of sinful individuals.

We are told in the book of Hebrews that Jesus, "through death...render[ed] powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil; and might deliver those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives" (Heb. 2:14b-15).

How did Jesus' death effect our release from Satan's captivity, sin, and death?

Stated simply, Jesus' death satisfied the claims of justice, making us no longer deserving of God's wrath. Thus sin, death, and Satan have no rightful hold over us. Satan can only afflict and hold in bondage those who are rightfully under God's condemnation. God has now "delivered us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son" (Col. 1:13).

Now allow me to address the possible objections to what I've just stated. Some have surmised that somehow Satan got his authority illegally—that he is operating independently of God's purposes. That, however, is an impossibility.

God is the Creator and Lord over the universe, as Jesus Himself said,³ and nothing can occur beyond His control. It was *God* who cast Satan from heaven after he rebelled, and obviously, He permitted him access to the earth. Otherwise Satan wouldn't have been there to tempt the first humans.

If God cast Satan out of heaven, He could have easily kept him off the earth as well. Satan is operating within God's parameters. Satan would not have been able to afflict people with spiritual death unless God permitted it, which He obviously did.

Because Satan is bringing God's punishment upon evildoers, am I saying that God and Satan are co-workers?

No, God and Satan are not working together. God, who is all knowing and all wise, has obviously used Satan for His own purposes. There are very clear, specific examples in the Bible of God using Satan to deliver His judgments upon evildoers (see Judg. 9:22-24; 1 Sam. 16:14-23; Matt. 18:21-35; 1 Cor. 5:1-5).

However, God and Satan have different agendas. Satan is full of hatred. He wants people to sin. He wants them to suffer. He wants them to spend eternity in hell. God loves everyone. He doesn't want anyone to sin. He doesn't want anyone to suffer. He doesn't want anyone to spend eternity in hell.

God, however, must punish unrighteousness. The Bible makes that perfectly clear. The cross makes that perfectly clear. That's why God gave Satan the right to afflict sinners with "spiritual death," making it possible for Satan to hold them in captivity. This fact of life is a foreshadowing to humanity of the ultimate wrath of God they will experience in hell. During this time of "earthly wrath," God is mercifully giving them time to repent and believe in Jesus and thus escape His full eternal wrath.

Some have swallowed a very simplistic theology that says that every bad thing that happens is from the devil, even things that the Bible often refers to as judgment from God. They unfortunately believe that God exercises no sovereign control over our earth, thus eliminating His holiness, wrath, and judgment with one fell swoop.

This whole theory comes very close to dualism, that is, the idea that there are two equal and opposing powers in the universe fighting each other. Satan is supposedly operating outside the realm of God's authority. That, however, is absurd! God could

³ See Matt. 12:25.

instantly banish Satan to hell at this moment if He desired. Satan can do nothing other than what God permits. He is like a dog on a leash. That is what the Bible teaches.⁴

Breaking the Curse of Death

Obviously, the curse of Satan's dominion and death came because of God's judgment. God had forewarned Adam that he would die if he ate the forbidden fruit. Death came because of judgment, and the Bible says it was Satan who had the power of death. Only God could have given him that authority. T. J. Crawford correctly wrote:

Our captivity to Satan is *judicial*, and is only a secondary consequence of our subjection to the wrath of God. Our enslaving foe is but, as it were, the subordinate instrument or executioner of God's righteous judgment. The grand requisite to our deliverance from his thralldom is, that the sovereign Judge should cancel or revoke our sentence.⁵

Through the curse of spiritual death and Satan's rule, God hopes that miserable sinners will come to their senses and believe the gospel. Contrariwise, Satan hopes they will continue rebelling against God, foolishly refusing Christ's pardon, so they will suffer everything they deserve in hell. The "power of death," however, has been broken over those who believe in the Lord Jesus. We are not under Satan's dominion, and spiritual death has been removed from our spirits and replaced with God's divine life and nature. As Jesus promised, our spirits have been born again, and we have "passed out of death into life" (John 5:24).

Moreover, we have no need to fear physical death because it promises better things for Christians. In addition, we can hope that we will be in that blessed group who will never face physical death—those who will be alive at Jesus' return. Then, as the apostle Paul wrote, our bodies will experience redemption (see Rom. 8:23).

Can you see that the curse of spiritual death, the grip of sin, and the dominion of Satan were all a result of God's judgment upon sinners? Therefore, when atonement was made for sin through Jesus' death, those in Christ are no longer deserving of God's judgment.

Now notice how Paul, in his Colossian letter, couples the forgiveness of our sins through the cross with our deliverance from the devil through the cross:

And when you were [spiritually] dead in your transgressions...He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, having cancelled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us and which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him [some translations, rather than saying "through Him," make a direct reference to the cross, i.e. "on the cross"]" (Col. 2:13-15).

Paul is clearly writing metaphorically in this passage. Because of breaking God's law, we were like debtors, destined to spend an eternity in "debtor's prison," hell itself. In Christ, however, our "certificate of debt" was nailed to the cross because Jesus bore our penalty, and across that certificate was stamped "paid in full."

⁴For example, see Deut. 13:1-3; Job 1:9-12; Mal. 3:10-11; Luke 22:31-32; 1 Cor. 10:13; 2 Thes. 2:8-12; Rev. 20:1-3, 7-10.

⁵Thomas J. Crawford, *The Doctrine of the Holy Scripture Respecting the Atonement*, p. 63.

On that same cross, Satan, who ruled us by the lesser evil spirits referred to as “rulers and authorities,” had his power broken by Christ. Paul metaphorically speaks of Christ’s victory over Satan using the imagery of a practice in ancient warfare, when the returning, victorious army would parade their defeated captors in chains through the streets, publicly humiliating them.

Just as the cross was a revelation of God’s righteousness, so, too, it demonstrated the end of Satan’s rule over all those in Christ.

John Stott wrote concerning this passage:

The bond [certificate of debt] he nailed to the cross; the powers he defeated by the cross....both happened together. Is not his payment of our debts the way in which Christ has overthrown the powers? By liberating us from these, he has liberated us from them.⁶

By God’s righteous permission, Satan only has a right to dominate transgressors, and those who are in Christ are no longer transgressors but righteous new creations! That is how Jesus’ death frees us from sin, Satan, and spiritual death. “If therefore the Son shall make you free, you shall be free indeed” (John 8:36).

Redeemed to be God’s Children

We must not forget, however, that because we have been “purchased with His own blood,” we are now considered “Christ’s slaves”(Acts. 20:28b; 1 Cor. 7:22).

Two important scriptures that speak of redemption are found in Paul’s letter to the Galatians:

Christ *redeemed* us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree”—in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith (Gal. 3:13-14, emphasis added).

All of us were under God’s curse because all of us have broken the laws He has written in our consciences. Jesus has redeemed us from that curse by becoming cursed in our place on the cross. Because of it, Gentiles can receive the promise that God made to Abraham, namely, God’s promise that *all* the families of the earth (not just the Jews) would be blessed through Abraham’s seed, which Paul, a few verses later, explains was Christ.

In the fourth chapter of the same letter, Paul wrote:

But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, in order that He might *redeem* those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons....Therefore you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God (Gal. 4:4-5, 7, emphasis added).

Redemption opens the door for adoption into God’s family. Now we relate to God as His very own, full-grown sons. I can’t think of a more blessed truth than that. We are God’s own children, born of His Spirit. We are heirs of God!

⁶John Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, pp. 234-244.

Salvation: Deliverance from Sin and Sickness

The word *salvation* is an all-inclusive word that combines the ideas of propitiation, justification, reconciliation, redemption, as well as other New Testament expressions.

As it is used in the New Testament, the word *salvation* simply means deliverance, implying that we have been taken from an undesirable situation to a desirable one, which is certainly the case. We have been delivered from God's wrath (propitiation), from His condemnation (justification), from our mutual enmity (reconciliation), and from sin and the curse of the Law (redemption). When we survey the combined images these words depict, we can understand why the apostle described our deliverance as "so great a salvation" (Heb. 2:3).

Virtually all evangelicals agree as to the constituent benefits of salvation; however, there has always been some tension concerning exactly *when* one certain benefit is to be experienced. That benefit is physical healing.

All agree that when we experience what Paul calls "the redemption of our body," sickness will no longer be a part of human experience. Disease will have no dominion over our imperishable, glorified bodies. The question before us is: Have we any right to pray with faith, knowing that God desires our health in this present life?

From examining the New Testament, there is sufficient evidence to answer that question in the affirmative. The biblical usage of the word *salvation* is only one of many proofs that deliverance from sickness is not something we must wait until the next life to experience.

The Greek word used for *salvation* in the New Testament is *soteria*, derived from the word *sozo*, which is most often translated "saved." *Sozo* is also frequently translated "made well" when used in the context of cases of physical healing. It is clear from Jesus' own usage of the word that it not only implied forgiveness of sins but also healing of sickness.

In the *New American Standard* version of the New Testament, the word *sozo* is translated "made well" nine times. Three times it is translated "get well," and once it is translated "cured."⁷ In every instance a physical healing was performed by Jesus. For example, when the woman with the issue of blood was healed, Matthew describes the incident by thrice using *sozo* within two verses:

For she was saying to herself, "If I only touch His garment, I shall get well [sozo]." But Jesus turning and seeing her said, "Daughter, take courage; your faith has made you well [sozo]." And at once the woman was made well [sozo] (Matt. 9:21-22).

I encourage you to look up in a concordance the other references where *sozo* is used to speak of physical healing. The important point is that this same word is translated "saved" fifty times in the New Testament. It is obvious that the people of Jesus' day used *sozo* to mean deliverance from sin and deliverance from sickness and disease. Often we find forgiveness of sins and deliverance from sickness coupled in the Bible.⁸

I realize that this in itself doesn't necessarily prove that God wants to heal everyone's sickness. However, if we can prove that sickness is a product of God's wrath or of Satan's evil doing (or both), then it is reasonable to believe that deliverance from

⁷ "made well": Matt. 9:22,22; Mark 5:34; 10:52; Luke 8:36,48,50; 17:19; 18:42; "get well": Matt. 9:21; Mark 5:23,28; "cured": Mark 6:56

⁸ i.e. Ps. 103:2-3; Matt. 9:2-8; Mark 16:16-18; Jas. 5:15

sickness must be included in our salvation. We already know that on the cross Jesus delivered us from God's wrath and from Satan's dominion.

Who or What Causes Sickness?

In briefly searching the Scriptures, I've found at least twenty-seven clear references that prove sickness is often a manifestation of God's wrath against sin.⁹ For example, a brief glance at the 28th chapter of Deuteronomy leaves no doubt that God uses sickness as a punishment for disobedience.

Furthermore, there are four clear references indicating that Satan afflicts people with sickness and disease (often as the agent of God's wrath or discipline).¹⁰

Therefore, if Jesus has saved us from God's wrath and from Satan's dominion, then why would we ever think that God wants us to remain sick? I realize some have reasoned that God wants us to remain sick to teach us some lesson or develop character in us, but you won't find such logic in the Bible. Jesus never told anyone who came to Him for healing, "I want you to remain sick so you'll learn a lesson and develop character." No, Jesus healed *all* who came to Him seeking physical healing.

Yes, God may permit sickness to attack a Christian in order to bring him to repentance (see 1 Cor. 11:30-32), but it is not God's will for him to remain sick. If he repents, he can be healed.

In addition, the Bible certainly teaches that we can grow during trials and adversity, but sickness is in a different category. The apostle James wrote:

Is anyone among you *suffering*? Let him pray....Is anyone among you *sick*? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; and the prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he has committed any sins, they will be forgiven him (Jas. 5:13-15, emphasis added).

Notice that James had different instructions for one who is sick compared to one who is suffering in other ways.

Also notice that James did not qualify his healing promise as being only for certain individuals. It is for *anyone* who is sick. The Lord *will* raise him up in response to the prayer of faith. If sin is the reason he is sick, forgiveness is promised as well.

According to James, it is only the prayer of faith that brings healing. Prayers of hope don't bring spiritual salvation and neither do they bring physical salvation. Therefore, the one praying must be convinced it is God's will for him to be healed, just as he had to be convinced that it was God's will for him to have his sins forgiven in order to be saved.

Healing in the Atonement?

Has physical healing been provided for us in Christ's atonement? Absolutely yes. It amazes me that many say healing has not been provided for us by Christ's death, yet at the same time they affirm that one day we will all live without sickness or disease in heaven. How has that future deliverance from sickness been provided? Those same people who deny that healing is provided in the atonement will have to say that our future

⁹ See Gen. 20:17-18; Ex. 7:26; 23:25; Num. 12:1-15; 16:46-50; Deut. 7:15; 28:1-63; 1 Sam. 5:9; 2 Sam. 12:15; 1 Kin. 8:37; 2 Chron. 21:12-18; 30:18-20; Ps. 38:3; 106:15; 107:17-22; Is. 10:16; 33:24; Jer. 16:4; Mic. 6:13; Matt. 9:2; 13:15; John 5:14; 12:40; Acts 28:27; 1 Cor. 11:30; Jas. 5:15; Rev. 2:22.

¹⁰ Job 2:6-7; Luke 13:10-16; Acts 10:38; 1 Cor. 5:5

health has been provided by the atonement. We're not going to be sick in heaven because Jesus died for our sins. Jesus, on the cross, merited the redemption of our bodies. Thus, those who say that healing is not provided for us in the atonement are contradicting themselves.

The question then is: Should we expect to experience now, or only later, the healing Jesus has provided for us? Of course, some want to push it off to the future. It is certainly true that there are benefits of salvation that we won't experience until the future, such as life in heaven, seeing Jesus face to face, and so on. However, there are benefits we can experience right now, such as forgiveness, adoption, rebirth, and the baptism in the Holy Spirit. Into which category does healing fall, present or future?

The answer is that healing is something provided for us now. Under the Old Covenant, physical healing was often provided for the people by means of an atoning sacrifice, and it was provided, not for some future day, but for the present (see Lev. 14:1-32; Num. 16:46-50; 21:5-9 with John 3:14-15).

The Old Testament sacrifices only prefigured Christ's atonement, which provides healing, not just for the future, but also in the present.

Jesus never said to anyone who came to Him requesting healing, "No, you can't be healed now, but you'll be healthy in heaven."

During His earthly ministry, Jesus forgave sins *and* healed the sick. He also sent His disciples out to heal the sick (see Matt. 10:8; Luke 10:9) and said one of the signs that should follow believers is that they will lay hands upon the sick and they will recover (see Mark 16:17-18).

In the early church, many people were healed as recorded in the book of Acts. In addition, the healing promise found in the book of James reflects the apostles' teachings on this matter.

Obviously, healing is a present benefit.

Some may object, saying, "Just because God healed others doesn't guarantee He'll heal me."

They don't realize that they've just assaulted the love and justice of God. God loves all equally. He is, as the Bible says, "no respecter of persons." If God will forgive the sins of *one* who repents and believes, He'll forgive the sins of *all* who repent and believe. If God healed *one* in response to his faith, God will heal *all* who pray to Him believing.

The Healing Gospel

The "healing gospel" is not some new idea that originated with the Pentecostals early in this century. In fact, it predates even the New Testament by centuries. Isaiah wrote of the healing benefit of Christ's atonement at least 700 years before any of the New Testament was written. His great 53rd chapter plainly tells us that healing would belong to us because of Jesus' sacrifice:

Surely our griefs He Himself bore [the margin indicates that *griefs* could also be translated "sickness," and anyone who studies the Hebrew will agree that "sickness" is a much more accurate translation¹¹], and our sorrows He carried [the margin indicates that sorrows could be (and should be) translated "pains"¹²]. Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, smitten of God and afflicted. But He

¹¹ The word translated "griefs" is the Hebrew word *kholee*, which is translated "sicknesses" in Deut. 7:15; 28:61; 1 Kin. 17:17; 2 Kin. 1:2; 8:8; 2 Chron. 16:12; 21:15.

¹² The word translated "sorrows" is the Hebrew word *makob*. It is translated "pain" in Job 14:22; 33:19 and Jer 51:8.

was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, and by His scourging we are healed (Is. 53:4-5).

There is absolutely no doubt that this passage refers to physical healing. Matthew confirmed this when he stated that the healing of many people at Peter's house was a fulfillment of what Isaiah wrote:

And He touched her [Peter's mother-in-law's] hand, and the fever left her; and she arose, and waited on Him. And when evening had come, they brought to Him many who were demon-possessed; and He cast out the spirits with a word, and healed all who were ill in order that what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled, saying, "He Himself took our infirmities, and carried away our diseases" (Matt. 8:15-17).

Some have argued that the healings Jesus performed during His earthly ministry completely fulfilled Isaiah's prophecy. Yet why don't they also say Jesus completely fulfilled the portions of Isaiah's 53rd chapter promising forgiveness of sins when He forgave people during His earthly ministry?

Obviously, if we maintain that we can be forgiven because Jesus bore our sins according to Isaiah 53, then we can also maintain that we can be healed because Jesus bore our sickness according to the same chapter.

Healing cannot be classified as only a future heavenly benefit of salvation because it has been experienced by so many here on earth. We don't find Jesus passing out crowns, giving people glorified bodies, or letting them walk on golden streets during His earthly ministry, but we constantly find Him healing sick bodies. In fact, one-tenth of all that has been written about Jesus in the four Gospels concerns His healing ministry. Healing is a benefit for the present age.

That is why the crippled man in Acts 14 was healed while listening to Paul preach the gospel. It is obvious that the *salvation* (sozo) of which Paul preached included deliverance from sickness as well as from sin:

And there they [Paul and Barnabas] continued to preach *the gospel*. And at Lystra there was sitting a certain man, without strength in his feet, lame from his mother's womb, who had never walked. This man was listening to Paul as he spoke, who, when he had fixed his gaze upon him, and had seen that he had faith to be made well, said with a loud voice, "Stand upright on your feet." And he leaped up and began to walk (Acts 14:7-10, emphasis added).

How did this man acquire faith to be healed? The Bible says faith comes from hearing the word of Christ (see Rom. 10:17). His faith came from hearing Paul preach the gospel, and so Paul's message *must* have included physical healing.

What would happen if that same gospel were preached today? We don't have to speculate because some *are* preaching that gospel today, including myself. When it is preached, people are delivered from sin *and* sickness. I know from personal experience, however, that people in non-western nations are more likely to have faith for healing because they have not been brainwashed (or better, "brain-dirtied") against divine healing by the usual theological arguments. Anyone, however, east or west, can receive what Jesus purchased for him. It is only a matter of faith.

Some object to the healing portion of salvation by claiming that if it were true, then everyone who is saved would also automatically be healed. That, however, is not true. The constituent benefits of salvation must be individually appropriated. A person can be saved but remain sick just as he can be saved and remain guilt-filled or fearful. The Bible tells us that although Israel possessed most of the promised land, they still left

unconquered areas that belonged to them by God's promise (see Judg. 1:27 - 2:2). So too, healing is for every Christian to individually possess.

How to Get Well

If you are sick, how can you get well?

First, make certain that God has not permitted your sickness because of your disobedience (see 1 Cor. 11:28-32). Don't try to drag something up to condemn yourself, but if you know you've been disobedient, then confess your sins. God promises to forgive you, so there will be no hindrance to your healing (see Jas. 5:14-15; 1 John 1:9). Look particularly in your heart for unforgiveness because unforgiveness is listed in Scripture as something that can open the door to God's discipline (see Matt. 18: 34-35).

Second, make certain you are not violating any of the natural laws of health. If you are not taking proper care of God's temple (your body), you can't expect Him to heal it. Your body must have enough sleep, and it must have the sufficient vitamins and minerals to work properly. Many Christians aren't sick so much as they are malnourished or even poisoned. Humanism dominates American cuisine, and we suffer for it, thinking we can improve upon God-given foods. You wouldn't pour paint into your car's gas tank, and neither should you put something into your body that isn't designed by the one who created your body.

Third, make sure you *truly* believe that it is God's will for you to be healed. If you're not convinced, your doubts will stop your healing. Spend time reading and meditating upon the healing promises in the Bible. It might take some time for your faith to grow.

Perhaps you have been "brain-dirtied" by unbelieving theological reasoning. I recommend that you read *Christ the Healer*, by F.F. Bosworth. It is an excellent faith builder for anyone seeking healing, and the author answers the common faith-destroying arguments against divine healing. I have also written a book titled *The Case for Divine Healing* that is yet unpublished. It may well be published by the time you read this, or at least published on our web site (shepherdserve.org).¹³

Fourth, pray in faith, believing that God has heard and answered your prayer according to His promises and Mark 11:24. If you believe, then begin thanking God for healing you. He will see to it that His promise comes to pass in your body!

"Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless His holy name. Bless the Lord O my soul, and forget *none* of His benefits; who pardons all your iniquities; *who heals all your diseases*" (Ps. 103:1-3, emphasis added).

So Great a Salvation

The study of the achievement of the cross is so broad that this chapter could easily grow into volumes. In fact, a pastor could spend his entire ministry expounding upon this one subject. Thank God for our full salvation provided for us by our wonderful Savior when He suffered for us on the cross, bearing our penalty!

¹³ I do not believe that it is wrong to seek the help of doctors or medication when one is sick. Divine healing is a superior means of healing, however, since there is nothing God can't heal, and He charges nothing for His service!