

## GALATIANS 2:20

### THE REASON JESUS CAME

“I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”<sup>1</sup>

**W**e don't usually think of Paul's Letter to the Churches of Galatia as a resource for Christmas sermons. However, the Incarnation of the Son of God is a central theme of the book. Christmas can be wrapped up in a simple statement—God became man to present Himself as a sacrifice for sinful man. Paul repeatedly makes this point in order to stress the liberty we now enjoy in Christ Jesus.

Pleading with the wayward Galatian churches, the Apostle makes one statement concerning the love of God that can only be classified as great, both in intent and in impact. Paul's purpose in life is stated in our text, and that noble purpose would well serve each Christian as we seek to commemorate the birth of the Saviour. Examine the Apostle's statement with me that together we may discover the reason Jesus came.

**GOD'S LOVE PERSONALISED** — “I have been crucified with Christ.” The Apostle personalised God's love. Without making the central truths of the Gospel personal, one cannot be saved. Not only can an individual not be saved without making the Gospel personal, but one cannot begin to comprehend the love of God without recognising that the provision of forgiveness was because of the love of God in Christ the Lord.

One of my favourite passages in the entire Bible is **ROMANS 10:9, 10, 13**. Almost always I quote these verses at the conclusion of the messages I deliver. I do this because I am convinced that with these verses Paul makes the issue of salvation so very clear. Note how these verses stress the need to make the message of life personal. “If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.” Then, the Apostle cites the Prophet Joel who testifies that, “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

“If you,” an individual, one somebody—you—confess with your mouth and believe in your heart, you will be saved. It is a tragic error of too many of our Paedobaptist friends to give the false hope that an adult can believe in the place of an infant. Even those churches that aver that such is not their intent must admit that the common perception is that salvation is conferred on the infant who is christened.

It is a glorious truth that Jesus loves children, instructing His disciples not to hinder them as they are coming to Him. However, accepting children is quite different from declaring them saved because of a rite. Salvation is not bestowed because someone other than yourself has intervened or believed. Salvation is offered to anyone willing to receive the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus as an individual. “With the heart one believes ... and with the mouth one confesses.” Salvation implies forgiveness of sin for individuals.

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It has been well said that God has no stepchildren. Just because you were raised in a Christian home, or just because your father went to church, does not make you a Christian. Just because you were born in Canada does not mean you are a Christian. Going to church no more makes you a Christian than living in a garage makes you a Mercedes Benz. Salvation is offered to those who are lost, and if one will be saved, he must individually come as one who is lost, receiving the reign of Christ over his life and accepting His sacrifice because of their own sin. If we will be saved, we must each receive the offer of life individually.

We Baptists insist upon a testimony of faith preceding baptism as this is taught both by precept and by example in the Word of God. Those baptised on the Day of Pentecost first received Peter's word that they must repent and believe the Lord Jesus [ACTS 2:41]. Those who were baptised in Samaria were baptised when they believed [ACTS 8:12]. The jailer in Philippi who was baptised submitted to the ordinance because he believed the message of life in Christ the Lord [ACTS 16:31].

Beyond this, however, the very act of baptism itself demands that the candidate receiving the ordinance will have already accepted the truth pictured through the rite. Listen to the Apostle as he explains the significance of baptism in his letter to the Romans [ROMANS 6:3-11]. "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

"For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. For one who has died has been set free from sin. Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. We know that Christ being raised from the dead will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus."

In baptism, the child of God confesses that Christ died because of her sin, and that Jesus was raised for her justification. As she is baptised, the candidate looks back to the death and burial of Christ the Lord, confessing her personal belief in these truths. Moreover, she confesses that she has personally accepted that He died in her place and that he was raised specifically for her to be declared righteous. In other words, she confesses her personal responsibility for the death of Christ the Lord and confesses that she personally benefits from His resurrection because it has been made effectual for her.

The Christian Faith is personal, if nothing else. The implicit demand of the Faith we preach is that each individual must choose whether to believe what is declared. If the individual opts to attempt to work to make herself acceptable, she will have effectively rejected the opportunity to believe and to be saved.

Though it is true that "God is love" [1 JOHN 4:16], that love is ineffectual until one has received it personally. Until I accept the offer of love extended by Holy God, His love is merely theoretical. The call of the Word of God is to make this testimony practical, receiving the love of God personally. This means that I will accept that Christ died because of my sin—that He died because of me. Knowing that I caused His death, I will also accept that He rose from the dead to declare me righteous before the Father.

John's testimony concerning Jesus makes this Good News incredibly personal. "God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God" [JOHN 3:16-18].

To believe is to receive; to fail to believe is to reject. There is no family salvation, no national salvation, no cultural salvation. God calls us to faith as individuals, and we are born again into the Family of God through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Oh, that each individual could say with conviction, "I have been crucified with Christ." Oh, that each individual could with confidence affirm that they stand firm in confessing that salvation is the gift of God, given because an individual lays down all claim to righteousness except for that which is found in Christ the Lord.

It is vital to point out that we must affirm this truth precisely because fuzzy-minded evangelicals permit their emotions to overwhelm the truth they profess to have embraced. Such emotionally motivated individuals just cannot believe that God will not accept their child. After all, the child grew up in a Christian home and is a good kid. They grab one isolated verse and say they trained the child properly, so they "know" that their wayward daughter or son will return to the Faith in days to come. Or they cannot believe that God will not accept a neighbour, because he is a "good person."

Dear people, salvation is never extended because one is raised in a Christian environment. Neither is salvation given because someone is a good person. Each individual must personally come to the point that he confesses that Jesus is Lord, believing that his own sin necessitated the death of the Son of God. Each individual who will be saved must personally receive Jesus as Saviour and Master of life. As John says, "[Jesus] came to his own, and his own people did not receive Him. But to all who did receive Him, who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God" [JOHN 1:11-13].

**GOD'S LOVE DEMONSTRATED** — "The Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me..." Paul declares that the Son of God loved him; and each member of God's redeemed family can make that same affirmation. It is a tragic truth that whenever we speak of love, our fallen race has so distorted the concept that it is necessary to define what is meant by the term.

The Children's hymn, "Jesus Loves Me," presents a great theological truth that is too often taken for granted.

Jesus loves me, this I know,  
For the Bible tells me so.

Though we teach the song to our children, as we grow older we tend to fail to retain the truth of that declaration. Jesus attested that whoever has seen Him has seen the Father [JOHN 14:9]. Therefore, when we say that "God is love" [1 JOHN 4:16], we also testify that the Son of God is likewise defined by the essential characteristic of love. Love, in biblical terms, is associated with God, but it is utterly unlike our concept of love.

Love, in modern parlance, is usually tossed about in reference to an emotion. Love, as we most frequently define the term, is focused on gratifying our personal needs and desires, whether emotional or physical. We say we “love” a particular food, or we claim to “love” a particular football team. Obviously, we do not mean that we have a physical relationship with that food or with that football team, but we mean that eating that particular food or watching that particular team play brings gratification.

When I say I “love” wild game, we understand that I am speaking of gratifying my palate. When some of you say you “love” watching the Saskatchewan Rough Riders (though many of the players are from the United States), no one would read anything into your expression other than the enhancement of your enjoyment of the game of football by cheering for a particular team. Of course, loving a food or an object is understood as referring to a preference.

Even in our fallen condition, however, we recognise that the highest ideal of love is altogether different from personal gratification. We know that love for parents is special. The love of a child for his or her mother may not be easily defined, but it is quite evident as the child responds to the parent’s admonition. Though there is an emotional component, this love is far greater than mere emotion. The love of a father for his children is evident in the attitude of self-sacrifice that stirs to life with the birth of each child. With time, the love of a husband for his wife, or the love of a wife for her husband, becomes less dependent upon what is received than for who the individual is.

The love I have just described approximates what is described in the Greek language by the word *philēō*. The term could refer to fondness or affection, but it is most often used to speak of love such as a husband would have for his wife, or of the love a father would have for his child. This is in contradistinction to *agapáō*, the word Paul employs in our text. This latter term is most frequently used to describe the love of God and our Lord Jesus. It is a noble concept that bespeaks sacrificial love—love that is extended without demand. It is a selfless concept that seeks to bless the one loved through giving of oneself without asking anything in return.

The love revealed in Christ our Lord extends outward—always focused outward toward the one loved; it is never defined in terms of what is received. What is vital to grasp is that divine love is defined by action rather than as a feeling. When we speak of love, we almost always speak passively. However, love as revealed in Christ the Lord is active. This point is sufficiently important that we dare not pass by too quickly. Love is active. If I love you, it will be seen in my action and not in my speech.

Paul repeatedly urged believers to live in such a manner that the love they had received in Christ the Lord will be seen in them. His admonitions anticipate John’s words written decades later. John testified, “In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins” [1 JOHN 4:10]. Later, when John began to write the Apocalypse, he dedicated the missive to “Him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by His blood” [REVELATION 1:5b].

Jesus fulfilled the love of God through giving His life as a sacrifice for sin. He saw love demonstrated in the Father, and He revealed that same love to His own. The Master testified as He was preparing His disciples for His exodus, “As the Father has loved Me, so have I loved you” [JOHN 15:9]. Since “God is love” [1 JOHN 4:16], and since Jesus is God [see, e.g. JOHN 1:1, 18], we should not be surprised that He would willingly and in love provide His own life as a sacrifice for us.

Jesus fully understood the purpose of His incarnation. While preparing His disciples for His departure, the Master said, “The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” [MATTHEW 20:28]. Jesus was born to give His life. He was not destined merely to die, as the whole of our fallen race is destined to die, but He came so that He could voluntarily and in love offer His life as a sacrifice, a ransom for fallen man.

While we who preach the Gospel often speak of the love of God in Christ the Lord, we do a disservice in failing to stress the singular demonstration of love provided in the sacrifice of Jesus the Lord. He Himself stressed that He was the One offering up His life. Confronting an agitated mob of religious zealots on one occasion, Jesus testified, “The Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again” [JOHN 10:17, 18].

Did you catch what Jesus said? No one would take His life; He lay it down of His own accord. Writing to the Philippian Christians, Paul pens one of the greatest statements ever drafted concerning the Saviour’s sacrifice. Listen to the words of Paul. “Christ Jesus . . . though He was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made Himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, He humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” [PHILIPPIANS 2:5b-8].

We will do well to recall some of the other statements concerning Christ’s sacrifice for sinful man. In this same letter to the churches in Galatia, the Apostle writes, “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree’” [GALATIANS 3:13].

Paul points specifically to our Lord’s sacrifice for sinners as demonstration of divine love. Jesus our Master revealed divine love through His sacrifice for sinners. Throughout the Word of God are statements concerning the Love of Christ revealed through His sacrifice for His people. As an example, consider this statement found in Paul’s encyclical we have received as the Letter to the Ephesians. “Walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God” [EPHESIANS 5:2].

Writing the Roman Christians, Paul testified that “Jesus our Lord . . . was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification” [ROMANS 4:24, 25].

Perhaps one of the statements that I hold most dear is that which is found in Paul’s second letter to the Christians in Corinth. The Apostle averred, “For our sake [God] made Him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God” [2 CORINTHIANS 5:21]. Jesus was sacrificed because of our sin.

Perhaps you recall the testimony of Paul that “While we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly” [ROMANS 5:6]. He continued by attesting that “God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” [ROMANS 5:8].

Throughout the Epistles—indeed, throughout the Word of God—the theme of Messiah’s sacrifice is not only prominent, but it is central. When our first parents fell, plunging creation into ruin and bringing death upon each person, God promised One whom He identified as the “offspring” [literally, “seed”] of the woman who would bruise the serpent’s head, though his own heel would be bruised [see GENESIS 3:14, 15]. This protoevangelium is the first promise of Messiah’s sacrifice when He comes.

Throughout the pages of the Old Covenant are references to the suffering of Messiah which caused the saints living under the Old Covenant to ponder what was meant. The twenty-second Psalm reads less like prophecy than it does Gospel. It provides an accurate description of the crucified Messiah. One cannot read of Isaiah's suffering Messiah without marvelling. Listen again to the familiar words recorded in the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah's prophecy.

“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 crushed for our iniquities;  
upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace,  
and with 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;  
like a lamb that is led to the slaughter,  
and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent,  
so he opened not his mouth.  
By oppression and judgment he was taken away;  
and as for his generation, who considered  
that he was cut off out of the land of the living,  
stricken for the transgression of my people?  
And they made his grave with the wicked  
and with a rich man in his death,  
although he had done no violence,  
and there was no deceit in his mouth.  
“Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him;  
he has put him to grief;  
when his soul makes an offering for sin,  
he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days;  
the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand.”

[ISAIAH 53:4-10]

In retrospect, these statements clearly point to the sacrifice of the Anointed One. However, at the time they were written, they were exceptionally difficult to comprehend. During His days in the flesh, the Jewish scholars did not comprehend that Jesus spoke of His death. Not even His own disciples understood that He would give His life as a sacrifice for sinful man. They were bound by their own culture that denied that God would send the Messiah to suffer and die despite the testimony of Scripture.

**GOD'S LOVE TRANSFORMING** — Though I should enjoy taking more time to speak of the demonstration of God's love witnessed in the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus, I am compelled by Scripture to remind you that God's love, when we have experienced it, transforms us. This is Paul's testimony when he says, "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me." The individual who knows the love of God in Christ the Lord will, of necessity, be changed as he now lives for Christ's glory.

Paul pointedly wrote that there is a distinction between those in the Spirit and those in the flesh. "The works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires" [GALATIANS 5:19-24].

Writing to the Corinthian Christians, Paul stated in clearest terms that transformation was witnessed in the redeemed. "Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God" [1 CORINTHIANS 6:9-11].

The Apostle John is likewise very clear on this issue of revealing the presence of the Spirit. "This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin" [1 JOHN 1:5-7].

God's redeemed people are not perfect; they are, however, being perfected. Though they do not live sinless lives, they do not enjoy sin and they long to be righteous. A colleague who taught with me at Criswell College used to say that a sheep may fall into the mud, but the sheep will not lie down in the mud. There is truth in that statement. The child of God may sin, but the child of God will not enjoy sin. Her conscience will buffet her and she cannot enjoy the wickedness that has seized her. The reason for this is the indwelling Spirit of God and the changed life that results from salvation.

John makes this evident when he writes, "Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. You know that he appeared to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him. Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous. Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God. By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother" [1 JOHN 3:4-10].

Why do we celebrate the Incarnation of the Son of God? Christmas is a family time, but that is not the reason Christians celebrate the birth of the Son of God. We celebrate because by coming He has set us free from our sin, filling us with hope and beginning the transformation that will eventuate in our being conformed to His image. This is the message we have received from the Word of God. Paul teaches us of this when he writes, “We know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified” [ROMANS 8:28-30].

Focus your mind on this one great thought. Those who are born from above reflect the glory of their Father. They do not continue sinning because they enjoy it. The sins that plague the redeemed are the result of our fallen condition and not because we imagine that we can sin with impunity. We have been transformed and we are being transformed. At the return of our Master, the transformation that was initiated with salvation will be complete.

John writes of this day when by the Spirit he reveals what will take place. The passage is found in **1 JOHN 2:28-3:3**. “Now, little children, abide in him, so that when he appears we may have confidence and not shrink from him in shame at his coming. If you know that he is righteous, you may be sure that everyone who practices righteousness has been born of him.

“See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.”

My prayer is that each one listening to this message will be part of that great host that greets the Master at His return. I pray that even now each of you who share this service are living in the knowledge of His great power at work in your life, changing you into His image. If that is not the case, is it because you have never been born from above and into His Family? Today could be the day in which you are saved and in which He begins changing your life to reflect His grace and glory. You need but believe the message of grace that Christ died for your sin and that He has been raised for your justification.

Writing the Roman Christians, Paul spoke of what you must do if you will be saved. “If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.” He continued by stating, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved” [ROMANS 10:9, 10, 13].

This is my prayer for all who now stand outside the grace of our Lord. Believe this message and be saved. Become a Christian and celebrate the birth of Jesus the Son of God who was delivered for our sin and raised for our justification. Believe and be saved, even today. Amen.