



# Big Questions

**YOU HAVE ALWAYS WANTED TO ASK.**

Why does God allow suffering? How could a loving God send people to hell? Do all religions ultimately lead to God? How do I know God really loves me? Does Science disprove God? How reliable is the Bible?

**Why did God devise the method of the cross for salvation? Was there no other way?**

Crucifixion is not specifically mentioned in the OT. Having said that, some details are spoken of prophetically which can only refer to crucifixion, such as Psalm 22:16: "They have pierced my hands and my feet." Paul refers to the crucified Jesus (Gal 3:13) when he quotes the OT verse where it says "Anyone who is hung on a tree is under God's curse" (Deut 21:23). The Romans, who adopted this method of execution from the Persians, regarded it as the "most cruel, terrible" (Cicero) and "most dishonourable" method of all (Tacitus). The cross was part of God's plan: Jesus "endured the cross, scorning its shame" (Hebr 12:2). He "became obedient to death – even death on a cross!" (Phil 2:8). Through a tree (Gen 2:17: tree of knowledge) sin entered the world; it had to be eradicated on a tree. The cross of Calvary is the tree of the curse (Gal 3:13): Jesus dies, dishonoured and excluded from any human companionship: He is cursed.

## **Redeeming Message**

The law of Moses puts a curse on the sinner. This curse has rested on all men since the Fall. Jesus accepted the Lord's curse on sin in our stead. The message of the cross is now the redeeming message for all of mankind who are cursed as a matter of course because of their sin.

## **The Unique Sacrifice**

Pope John Paul II once referred to Auschwitz as the Calvary of the 20th century. There is a theological school of thought today which sees Jesus in solidarity with the suffering of others, with the tortured and murdered who suffered as He did and died a gruesome death. But the death on the cross of Christ may never be compared with the death of other people, His cross may never be compared with the many other crosses which stood around Jerusalem or Rome. It has a different quality to the other crosses because it is the cross of the Christ, the Son of God. He suffered not only the injustice of the powerful of this world but was the only one who suffered the wrath of God over sin. He was the only

sacrificial lamb who carried the judgment of God in the place of many. “The message of the cross” (1 Cor 1:18) has since been at the centre of all Christian preaching. Paul has therefore only one thing he wants to convey: “For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified” (1 Cor 2:2). Amelia M. Hull shows us the meaning of the cross in a well-known revival song: “There is life for a look at the Crucified One, There is life at this moment for thee, Men look, sinner, look unto Him and be saved, Unto Him, who was nailed to the tree.”

## How could Jesus die 2000 years ago for sins which we are committing now?

God’s salvation plan for fallen mankind existed even before the creation of the world (Eph 1:4). This was because God not only reckoned with the Fall as a result of the free will He gave but had already foreseen what would happen. God could have sent salvation through the Lord Jesus Christ immediately after the Fall or at the end of time; what is important is that it happened at all (Hebr 9:28). In the first instance the price for sin would have been paid in advance, in the second instance, it would have happened in retrospect. We are acquainted with both from the business world: payments in advance and in retrospect. God chose the optimum time in His wisdom. As we read in Galatians 4:4: “But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son.” People who lived prior to Jesus and who listened to the teachings of God concerning salvation available at that time have been saved through the sacrifice on Calvary just as those who were born afterwards and accepted the gospel (Hebr 9:15). The time aspect of salvation is expressed in Romans 5:8: **“But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”**

## Pre-Mosaic Law

The laws did not exist during Abraham’s or Job’s time. These men acted according to their consciences and trusted God. This He credited to them as righteousness (Rom 4:3). During David’s time, the laws of Sinai had been in existence for a long time. They were the standard against which God measured man. Sins were covered by animal sacrifices. The sacrificial animals could, however, not erase sin (Hebr 10:4). Animal sacrifices were simply a pointer towards the coming sacrifice of Jesus. This is why He is called the “Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). Only through Him can guilt be erased and the contrite offender be redeemed. We now live in the time when the sacrifice is complete and the symbolic image of animal sacrifice is a thing of the past. We receive forgiveness on the basis of the perfect and complete sacrifice of Jesus.



# THE LAW GIVEN TO MOSES

## **Wouldn't it have been sufficient for Jesus to only suffer for the sins for which man has asked forgiveness, instead of suffering for the sin of the whole world?**

According to the Word of God, the wages of sin is death (Rom 6:23). Let's suppose that only one man during the entire human history had turned to Jesus because of the gospel, then for him the price of his sin would have been death. The love of Jesus was so immense that He would have died to save just one repentant sinner. The redeeming act of the Son of God, however, is of such magnitude that it is sufficient for all of mankind. This is why John the Baptist could say: "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). Now everyone who wants to can accept that forgiveness.

### **The following story illustrates this point:**

A wealthy Irish landowner once gave a most ingenious sermon to the people tilling his lands. At all important points of his widespread landholdings he posted the following announcement:

"Next Monday I will be in the office of my country residence from ten o'clock until midday. During that time, I will be prepared to pay all my labourers' debts. All unpaid bills should be brought along."

This unusual offer was the main topic of conversation for several days. Some thought it a malicious lie, others suspected a catch since nobody had ever made such an offer before. Monday arrived and a number of people came to the stipulated place. At ten o'clock exactly, the landowner arrived and disappeared silently behind his office door. Nobody dared to enter. The people started arguing about the validity of the signature and the boss's motive. Finally, at half past eleven an old couple arrived at the office. The old man, with a bunch of bills in his hand, asked whether this was where the debts were being paid. He was scorned: "Well, he hasn't paid anything up to now!" Someone else said: "Nobody has tried yet, but if he really will pay, then come out quickly and tell us." In spite of the discouragement of their fellow-workers the old couple went in. They were greeted cordially, the sums were added up and they received a cheque signed by the landowner covering the entire amount. They were still thanking him profusely and heading for the door when the landowner said: "Please stay here until twelve o'clock when I will close the office." The two old people mentioned the crowd waiting outside to hear from them whether the offer was meant in earnest. The landowner remained adamant. "You took me at my word and those waiting outside need to do the same if they want to have their debts paid." The offer of the landowner was meant for all his people, and his wealth was sufficient to cover all their debts. However, only the couple that trusted his word had their debts paid. (Source: *Friedhelm König, 'Du bist gemeint', [I am calling you], p 127 ff abridged*).

## **Forgiveness is for All but not All are Forgiven**

## Redemption for Mankind

In the same way the death of Christ is sufficient for the redemption of the whole of humanity. “Consequently, just as the result of one trespass [Adam’s] was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one [Jesus’] act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men” (Rom 5:18). The offer of redemption is open to all and should be made known to all. But only those who dare to trust the word of the Lord and commit themselves to Him personally and completely will be justified and saved.

## Based on the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ, God offers all men redemption from sin. Why doesn’t God just grant a general amnesty?

Because of Jesus’ death on the cross God’s offer of salvation is extended to all men. “In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent” (Acts 17:30), this was the message of Paul on the Areopagus. Now nobody need perish because of their sin. Every sinner can be pardoned. If even Paul, who wanted to exterminate the Messianic Church, could be forgiven, how much more does this apply to everybody else. Of the two criminals crucified with the Lord Jesus only one was saved, the one who came to Jesus acknowledging his sinfulness. The other persisted in his rejection and scorn of Jesus and so his sins were not taken away. This shows us that God does not grant a general amnesty but that He acts according to our individual decision:

“I have set before you [eternal] life and [eternal] death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live” (Deut 30:19).

“This is what the Lord says: ‘See, I am setting before you the way of [eternal] life and the way of [eternal] death’” (Jer 21:8).

Everyone truly seeking forgiveness will receive it irrespective of the seriousness of his guilt: “Though your sins are like scarlet, ...” (Is 1:18). To drive the point home, we could say: a man is not condemned because of his sin, but because of his will, i.e. his unwillingness to repent. There will only be volunteers in heaven, no conscripts.



If one rejects the gift of eternal life, the consequence is eternal death.

### What is eternal death?

The soul is immortal and requires a physical body to live in a material world. When the body dies the soul needs a spirit to express itself in a metaphysical world. To have a dead body and a dead spirit leaves the soul wandering and lost.