

5 - JESUS, THE SAVIOR OF THE WORLD

GOD IS CRAZY ABOUT YOU

By Cherie Peters

The coolest thing I've ever experienced from God happened when I was a new Christian. I was trying so hard, but felt so unworthy. Here I was, a recovering drug addict, trying to do and be right. One day I felt so discouraged that I just bawled. I'd never be worthy of God!

I'll never forget what happened next. God showed me a past event—myself, unconscious on the floor of a crack house, overdosed on heroin. We'd desperately waited for the shipment. When it finally arrived we measured out what we normally took, but it was way too potent.

There I lay on this filthy floor, and my panicked friends realized I wasn't breathing. I'd lost control of my bladder and bowels, so they dragged me into a cold shower and rubbed me with ice cubes. They scraped vomit out of my mouth and put their mouths over mine to breathe for me, but hey, it wasn't working. All this is what God showed me when I prayed that one day.

I have no memory of coming out of it. Just of coming to on the floor in that squalor. "God, why did You show me that?" I asked in horror.

"Cheri, I have always loved you," I felt Him kindly say. "I loved you just as much when you were lying on the floor in your own feces as I do now when you're trying to be 'good.' Please don't make this a behavior thing. I love you. You are My child."

Oh, how I needed to understand that early on in my recovery, and to have the assurance of His love. For understanding His love allowed me to change in response to Him, not because I had to. Because God loves me, I want to be more like Him. I want to be healed emotionally, physically, and spiritually. God had a work for me to do, but first I had to know that He loved me—unconditionally.

Then I read Psalm 51:10-13 and cried like a baby. All of a sudden it hit me, God saying, “Cheri, I want you to get this and then tell someone else. People are overwhelmed by not feeling worthy to sit in My presence, but I will make them worthy.”

He loves you, too, in just the same way, whether you’re struggling with an eating disorder, your finger jammed down your throat, or screaming or drinking or drugging . . .

The only way I can help hurting, recovering people is if I understand the depths of God’s love for them. God says, in essence, “Your past and your struggles don’t turn Me against you. I can help you.” God gives us forgiveness and repentance—true sorrow for sin, for what we did to ourselves and to others—then tells us, “Go find someone to tell what I did for you.”

GOD’S TOUCH

By age 13 I was homeless and on the streets. Ten years later God took me off the streets. I learned to read, went back to school, got my GED and a nursing degree, and started working with psych patients in rehab. I worked there for 15 years, frustrated because I could tell my patients, “If you take this medicine and go to therapy, you’ll get better,” but was not allowed to tell them how much God loved them and that only God could bring true healing.

I prayed for years that God would give me a ministry. Then in 1996 God made it possible for me to begin ministering to teens and anyone else at risk. (And we’re all at risk!) We call it True Step Ministries.

One of the first teens who came to us was a 17-year-old girl I’ll call Katie. Even though her mom flew her to Idaho from Oklahoma, Katie insisted that she had no problems. “My mom is crazy,” she said. I had some meetings coming up in Oregon so took her with me. A friend, Chris, came along to help drive so I could sleep. I woke up when Chris stopped to check on a racoon lying beside the road. It was injured, and immediately Chris and Katie decided to take it to a vet.

“It’s going to die,” I said.

“I’m not going to leave it,” Chris said. “It’s got to have help.”

Not long before that, Chris’s 22-year-old son had died from his drug abuse. I knew she was crying for her son, not the raccoon. I snuggled down in the back seat with the coon on my lap. Sensing it was dying, I cuddled it close, prayed over it, and sang while Chris and Katie cheerfully planned the fun they’d have when it was well.

We rolled on through the darkness. The little coon grew limp in my arms. I held it for a good five minutes before I had the heart to tell them it was dead. Chris pulled off the road to bury it, but as we were placing “Boo Boo” into the ground we saw a bear. Screaming, we leaped back into the car. Then, silly with relief, we laughed until Katie’s laughter choked into sobs. “I feel like I’m dying on the side of the road and no one is picking me up,” she cried.

KATIE’S SECRET

Katie told us that at age 15 she’d been raped by six boys at a party her parents had forbidden her to attend. For two years she’d kept the agonizing secret, but had grown so angry at her parents and God and the church that she started acting out with drugs, sex, and violence.

Every talk and every drama we heard that weekend was on forgiveness and healing. It was exactly what Katie needed, and as we watched, God miraculously healed her. No, Katie didn’t need forgiveness for the rape itself, but for all the junk she had added to her life after the rape.

Katie eventually understood that the rape was not a punishment for disobeying her parents. It was never God’s intention that abuse of any kind happen to us. Katie came to see that Satan has an agenda, and that he roams around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour (1 Peter 5:8). He almost succeeded with Katie, but God never let go, and she finally saw His love and accepted His healing power.

Since that time, in both the U.S. and abroad, Katie has ministered to those in bondage as a result of sexual abuse and addictions.

To order the book, “God is Crazy About You,” go to www.truestep.org.

UNASHAMED OF THE GOSPEL

1. Why was Paul not ashamed of the gospel? Romans 1:16,17

(16)

(17)

The gospel is fantastic news: God is not counting any of our sins against us no matter who we are or what we have done. No wonder Paul is not ashamed! He urges everyone to embrace this truth and choose to be reconciled to God (2 Corinthians 5:19,20). All who believe the gospel will experience peace with God and the transforming power of His love, grace and forgiveness (Romans 5:1; 12:1,2; John 8:32; 16:13; Matthew 11:28-30).

The gospel also reveals the righteousness of God that Jesus earned for the human race through His perfect life and death.

- “[God] made [Jesus] who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” 2 Cor. 5:21.
- “But of [God] you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God—and righteousness and sanctification and redemption—” 1 Corinthians 1:30,31.

Because of this gift of righteousness, God is able to say that everyone is qualified for heaven and has been given the gift of eternal life (Colossians 1:12-14; 1 John 5:10,11).

John 17:1-3-“Father, . . . Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You, as You have given Him authority over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as You have given Him. This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.”

Jesus was given authority over “all flesh” that He might give them eternal life. This gift gives everyone the opportunity and privilege of knowing the true God and experiencing a loving relationship with Him that would last forever. Sadly, many turn away from Him to seek the knowledge of evil instead. They won’t want to live with Him and God will not force them to.

2. Read Romans 3:23,24

A. How many have sinned? _____ (23)

B. Who falls short of God's glory? _____ (23)

C. Who are "being justified freely by His grace?" _____ (24)

All have sinned – The word translated "have sinned" is from the aorist tense. It refers to a 1 time happening in the past. When Adam sinned, we all sinned in him. Therefore we all were condemned (Rom. 5:18).

[All] fall short of God's glory – We also fall short by our own choices. Without a Savior, we are slaves to sin (John 8:34; 15:5; Rom. 7:18-23).

[All] being justified freely by His grace – Grammatically, "all" is the "subject" of each of these phrases. The way people are "justified freely by His grace" is "through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." When Jesus gave His life as a "ransom for all," He redeemed the human race "from the curse of the law" (1 Tim. 2:6; Gal. 3:13). This is how He was able to justify everyone "freely by His grace."

God's choice to redeem the human race and justify everyone by His grace restores our freedom of choice. If Jesus hadn't promised to be our Savior, Adam and Eve would have died without any hope of the resurrection and the human race would have perished.

Redemption is a legal transaction. Jesus purchased all of us with His blood (1 Cor. 6:19,20; 1 Pet. 1:18). Those who deny "the Lord who *bought* them" will "bring on themselves swift destruction" 2 Pet. 2:1.

THE SAVIOR OF THE WORLD

A. "The Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all" Isaiah 53:4-6.

B. "John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, 'Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!'" John 1:29.

C. "Jesus. . . gave Himself a ransom for all" 1 Timothy 2:5,6.

D. Jesus died for the sins of "the whole world" 1 John 2:2.

UNDERSTANDING THE CONTEXT

The grammar of Romans 3:23,24 is easy to understand. It communicates that everyone is “justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.”

However, some people have a difficult time believing this because it doesn't fit with what they have previously understood. This leads all of us to honestly ask, “Does it really mean this? Has the verse been taken out of context to say something Paul didn't mean to say?”

In order to answer these questions, we need to prayerfully study the immediate and broader context. After introducing the gospel in Romans 1:16 and 17, Paul describes the sinful condition of the human race in Romans 1:18-3:20. He knows that we will not recognize our need for a Savior if we believe our own righteousness is good enough. Paul then summarizes the sin problem in Romans 3:19 and 20.

3. What does the law teach us about ourselves? Romans 3:19,20

A clear understanding of God's law helps us know that we have sinned and are guilty before God. It also helps us understand our need for a Savior and realize the futility of trying to justify ourselves. In Mark 12:29-31 Jesus describes the law as perfect love. How would you respond if you honestly asked yourself these two questions?

Have I loved God with *all* my heart, soul, mind and strength? Yes No

Have I loved my neighbor (everyone) as I love myself? Yes No

4. What is revealed apart from the law? Romans 3:21,22

Under the law, all are guilty before God! But now the righteousness of God is revealed. Paul now returns to the theme he introduced in Romans 1:16 and 17 when he said the righteousness of God is revealed through the gospel of Christ.

This righteousness is apart from the law, for we are not earning it ourselves. At the same time, it is consistent with the law and the prophets, for this is what they promised all along (Isaiah 53; John 1:29). Jesus was even called, “The Lord Our Righteousness” Jeremiah 23:6.

5. Read Romans 3:21,22 again. Compare with the King James Version. Whose faith reveals the righteousness of God?

NKJV ____ Our faith in Jesus

KJV ____ Jesus’ faith

NKJV – “But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God *through faith in Jesus Christ*, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference; . . .” Romans 3:21, 22.

KJV - “But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; Even the righteousness of God *which is by faith of Jesus Christ*, to all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference; . . .” Romans 3:21,22.

A. NKJV - “Through faith in Jesus Christ” means the righteousness of God comes only to those who have faith. The phrase, “to all and upon all who believe” would then refer to one group. Whether Jew or Gentile, all who believe are given the righteousness of God.

B. KJV - “By faith of Jesus Christ” – In Romans 1:16,17, Paul said the righteousness of God is revealed through “the gospel of Christ.” The KJV continues this thought by saying the righteousness of God is revealed through Jesus’ faith and faithfulness, not by our faith.

The phrase “to all and upon all them that believe” would then refer to two groups:

a. **To all:** Jesus earned the right to give the righteousness of God to everyone. Romans 3:23-26 expands on this truth.

b. **Upon all who believe:** The righteousness of God comes “upon” those who believe the gospel and receive Jesus as their Savior.

They will experience “peace with God” and the blessing of having the “righteous requirements of the law fulfilled in them” (John 1:12; Rom. 5:1; 8:4). Romans 3:27-28 expands on this.

- c. **For there is no difference:** Jews and Gentiles are treated equally by God, for Jesus is the “Savior of the world” 1 John 4:14. In other words, the righteousness of God was given to everyone. All who believe the gospel will experience the peace and transformation Jesus gives. Romans 3:29-31 expands on this.

FAITH OF JESUS: “Though traditionally translated ‘faith in Jesus Christ,’ an increasing number of NT scholars are arguing that *pistis Christou* and similar phrases in Paul (Romans 3:22,26; Galatians 2:16,20; 3:22; Ephesians 3:12; Philippians 3:9) involve a *subjective* genitive and mean Christ's faith or Christ's faithfulness.”

“The faith/faithfulness of Christ . . . implies that the object of faith is a worthy object, for he himself is faithful.” Translating the phrase *pistis Christou* as the faith or faithfulness of Christ “is not a denial of faith *in* Christ as a Pauline concept, for the idea is expressed in many of the same contexts, only with the verb πιστεύω rather than the noun.” New English Translation: Translator & Study Notes for Rom. 3:22,26.

6. What did Jesus’ death reveal about God? Romans 3:25,26

In the beginning God said, “Of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die” Genesis 2:17. Adam and Eve ate from it, but continued to live. Did God lie? The human race multiplied and sin increased. It appeared that God was not being just, “For the wages of sin is death” Romans 6:23. Was He setting aside the law in order to keep us alive?

Jesus’ death answers the questions. When He died as the last Adam, God was able to say that in Christ, everyone did die the death that is the wages of sin. (2 Cor. 5:14; Gal. 2:19,20). Jesus’ death revealed that God is righteous and just when He “justifies the ungodly” Romans 4:5.

The word propitiation refers to Jesus' death on the cross. Jesus "is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world" 1 John 2:2. His death was not for the purpose of appeasing God's wrath so He could love us. Instead, Jesus died so the law could be fulfilled and God could be just when forgiving us. John wrote, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" 1 John 1:9.

7. What does the law of faith exclude? Romans 3:27-30

Many have tried hard to be good so God will accept them. Some feel they have succeeded. All boasting is excluded, however, when we learn that everyone was "justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." It is humbling to realize there is nothing we can do to make ourselves acceptable to God.

Those who believe this truth are "justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law." They experience "peace with God" Rom. 5:1. Our faith does not make us justified, for God took the initiative to justify us when Jesus redeemed the human race. We either believe the truth or reject it. Faith is embracing what is true, not making something true.

8. Does faith in Jesus set aside God's law or uphold it? Rom. 3:31

The gospel says that in Christ we did die. It also says that in Christ we are righteous (Galatians 2:19,20; 2 Corinthians 5:14,21). So faith in Jesus is the only way to truly uphold God's law and have eternal life.

UNCONDITIONAL LOVE – SAVED BY GRACE

The Bible is very consistent. God takes the initiative to:

- Redeem the human race from the curse of the law,
- Justify everyone by grace through the death of Jesus, and
- Save the world from the wages of sin.

God's grace restores our freedom of choice. We can embrace the truth and surrender our lives to God or choose to love and pursue sin. Ephesians 2:4-10 is another example of this balanced understanding.

9. Who was Paul referring to when He said, "By grace you have been saved?" Ephesians 2:4,5

Through God's unconditional love we all were made alive together with Christ, "even when we were dead in trespasses." Before anyone believed, God took the initiative to save the human race from the wages of sin. Paul then proclaims, "By grace you have been saved!"

Many well meaning Christians have asked others the question, "Have you been saved?" The truth is, Paul wrote this as a statement, not as a question: "By grace you have been saved!" In other words, through Jesus' death, everyone has been saved from the wages of sin and from the condemnation and curse of the law (Rom. 5:18; 6:23; Gal. 3:13). We are now free to choose to let Jesus be our Savior or cling onto sin.

10. What else did God do for us "when we were dead in trespasses?"

A. "...made us _____ together with _____." Eph. 2:5

B. "..._____ us up together, and made us _____ together in the heavenly places _____." Eph. 2:6

Since Jesus created Adam, He had the legal right to become another head and representative of the human race. In order for Him to do that, He had to become one with us.

"He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified *are* all of one, for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren As the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage" Heb. 2:11,14,15.

When Jesus was placed in Mary's womb (Luke 1:35) and was born as a baby, He became one with the human race. This qualified Him to be our representative. What He did, we did in Him. He created a new history for the human race, freeing us from condemnation and giving us His righteousness (Rom. 5:18; 2 Cor. 5:21).

We are even described as being in heaven "in Christ Jesus" now. Those who believe this truth and want Jesus to be their Savior are able to see themselves as citizens of heaven and ambassadors on earth (Ephesians 2:19; 2 Corinthians 5:20).

11. Read Ephesians 2:7-10

A. What will God's kindness show in the ages to come? (7)

B. What enables us to experience salvation that is by grace? (8)

C. What does God create in those who believe in Him? (v. 10)

A. In the ages to come, the redeemed will be a living testimony of God's amazing grace. There will be no room for anyone to boast. Their stories will testify that God was the source of life and of any good work that they did (Hebrews 12:2; Philippians 1:6; 2:13; Romans 5:6-10). Their stories will reveal how His:

- Forgiving grace freed them from slavery to sin.
- Healing love turned them from being enemies to being friends.
- Life in them enabled them to love others as He had loved them.

B. In verse 5 Paul wrote, "By grace you have been saved." This communicates what Jesus did for the human race. In verse 8 Paul wrote, "By grace you have been saved through faith." Faith is embracing the truth. Unbelief is rejecting it. Those who believe will experience inner peace and the assurance of eternal life.

C. We are God's workmanship. "We are God's masterpiece" (NLT). God's plan includes re-creating us, giving us a new heart and putting His Spirit within us (Ezekiel 36:26,27; John 1:12,13; 3:1-6). When we give God permission to live within us, the Holy Spirit will transform us and produce the fruit of righteousness that brings glory to God (Romans 8:2-4; Galatians 5:22,23). Jesus said, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven" Matthew 5:16. God is the One who is glorified, for He is the One doing the work through us.

A BALANCED VIEW OF SALVATION

12. Read Titus 2:11-14

A. What does the grace of God bring? (11)

B. How does the grace of God teach us to live? (12,13)

C. Why did Jesus "give Himself for us?" (14)

The NASB translates verse 11 in the same order that it is in the Greek. "For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men."

God's amazing grace provides security, belonging, and meaning in life. His nurturing love draws us to Himself and leads us to repentance (Rom. 2:4). The more we know Jesus, the more we will love Him. The more we love Him, the more we will hate sin, for it hurts everyone. Compelled by His love, we will live for Him and look forward to His return because we enjoy being with Him (2 Corinthians 5:14,15).

Jesus gave His life that He might redeem the human race from every lawless deed and purify for Himself a people who love what is right and good. Jesus came to be a complete Savior from sin. Our next lesson will focus on how Jesus saves us from all aspects of the sin problem: the wages of sin, slavery to sin, and the evil effects of sin.