

Chapter Seven

SACRIFICIAL LAMB OF GOD?

One of the basic doctrines of modern Christianity is that Jesus was crucified, suffered greatly, and died a humiliating death in order to redeem mankind from its sins. The corollary to this doctrine is that one must accept Jesus as a personal savior to enter the kingdom of God.

For many Christians these concepts have had the unfortunate effect of making Jesus the one to pray to, rather than to God. If you believe that someone will save you it is natural that you will implore him.

For other sincere believers this whole issue has led to doubt. In some cases, this doubt has given rise to theories which question the validity of the crucifixion. Such theories range from the unusual to the bizarre. Usually the theory is that someone else was crucified in Jesus' place or that he survived the event and went on to live and preach in one or more geographical locations.

REASONS FOR DOUBT

Perhaps one of the reasons that these doubts and theories exist is that, from a purely logical point of view, the Christian concept of the crucifixion is in conflict with God's qualities of omnipotence and mercy. The combined doctrines of Jesus' sonship to God and of his crucifixion create a picture of a helpless deity who cannot defend his offspring, or worse yet, a heartless one who deliberately created the circumstances under which his child was required to suffer greatly.

There is another crucial issue here—the issue of individual responsibility. The idea of a single individual atoning for the sins of humanity is in conflict with the concepts of free will and personal responsibility. One of the basic principles of western democracy is that no man can be held accountable for the mistakes of another. Each person is individually responsible for his own actions, with the freedom to make his own decisions and to reap the gain or loss resulting from those decisions.

This concept certainly is not foreign to the scriptures. The theme that “you reap what you sow” threads throughout the Bible:

When God, in the beginning, created man, he made him subject to his own free choice. If you choose you can keep the commandments; it is loyalty to do his will. There are set before you fire and water; to whichever you choose, stretch forth your hand.

[Sirach 15:14-16]

The Old Testament book of Sirach has always been accepted by the Catholic Church as canonical and divinely inspired, but it will not be familiar to Protestant readers, who will not find it in their Bibles. The above quote demonstrates the Biblical principle of freedom of choice. The next quote demonstrates that we are punished or rewarded according to those free choices which we make.

Great as his mercy is his punishment; he judges men, each according to his deeds. A criminal does not escape with his plunder; a just man's hope God does not leave unfulfilled. Whoever does good has his reward, which each receives according to his deeds.

[Sirach 16:12-14]

It is in the New Testament that we actually find the phrase "A man will reap only what he sows":

Each man should look to his conduct; if he has reason to boast of anything, it will be because the achievement is his and not another's. Everyone should bear his own responsibility.... A man will reap only what he sows.

[Galatians 6:4-7]

The Quran also strongly supports this doctrine of individual responsibility:

Say, "You are not responsible for our crimes, nor are we responsible for what you do."

[Quran 34:25]

It clearly states that no one can take on the sins of another. Each of us is individually accountable to God:

No soul bears the sins of another soul. Every human being is responsible for his own works.

[Quran 53:38-39]

GOD AS SAVIOR

The issue of Jesus Christ as savior comes into the picture here. If each man reaps what he sows, how can Jesus be the savior? How could he have taken on the sins of mankind, or negated them? Only the One who can accept repentance and wipe out sins can do that.

Indeed, throughout the Old Testament, God alone is referred to as the savior:

David sang the words of this song to the Lord when the Lord had rescued him from the grasp of all his enemies and from the hand of Saul. This is what he sang: "O Lord, my rock, my fortress, my deliverer, My shield, the horn of my salvation, my stronghold, my refuge, my savior, from violence you keep me safe."

[2 Samuel 22:1-3]

In Isaiah God Himself speaks, saying clearly that He alone is the savior:

For I am the Lord, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your savior.... It is I, I the Lord; there is no savior but me.

[Isaiah 43:3 & 11]

He repeats this categorical statement in Hosea:

I am the Lord, your God, since the land of Egypt; You know no God besides me, and there is no savior but me.

[Hosea 13:4]

CONCEPT OF JESUS AS SAVIOR

It is only in the New Testament that Jesus is mentioned as the savior of men. Even then, the Gospels use the term only twice to refer to Jesus. This is noted by Vincent Taylor (Ibid., p. 107-108):

The name 'the Saviour' was not used by Jesus Himself, and traces of its presence in the Gospel tradition are few and of late date. The only Synoptic example is Lk. ii. 11, in the angelic message to the shepherd, where Jesus is described as 'a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord'More surprising is the presence of only a single example in the Fourth Gospel, in Jn. iv 42, where the Samaritans say of Jesus, 'This is indeed the Saviour of the world'.

Besides the two occurrences referred to by Taylor, the only other occurrence in the Gospels clearly refers to God, not Jesus:

Then Mary said: "My being proclaims the greatness of the Lord, my spirit finds joy in God my savior, For he has looked upon his servant in her lowliness...."

[Luke 1:46-48]

There is a related concept, the idea of ‘Redeemer.’ In *Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, all of the references for this word are from the Old Testament (most in Isaiah) and all refer to God alone. Here are just two as examples:

Thus says the Lord, your redeemer, who formed you from the womb: I am the Lord, who made all things, who alone stretched out the heavens; when I spread out the earth, who was with me?

[Isaiah 44:24]

You shall know that I, the Lord am your savior, your redeemer, the mighty one of Jacob.

[Isaiah 60:16]

God is the Savior and Redeemer of mankind. The concept that Jesus had to suffer a painful and humiliating death in order to save mankind is not in accordance with the scripture, nor does it make sense. Why would a merciful and omnipotent God require such a thing?

WHY IS THERE SUFFERING?

The inevitable question arises: If Jesus was God’s son in the sense that “all the righteous are sons of God,” why does God allow suffering to afflict anyone? If God cares about His creation, why doesn’t He abolish all suffering and render the world perfectly happy and secure?

Many of the remaining chapters of this book deal with these critical questions. But right now we just need to know that there is very strong evidence that Jesus, in fact, did not suffer at all. This startling statement is explained in detail along with scriptural evidence in Chapter Thirteen. In summary, Jesus’ body was tortured and crucified *after* the real person of Jesus, i.e., his soul, had departed. Jesus had completed his mission, and his soul had departed at a precisely predetermined moment *prior to any torture or crucifixion*. Jesus’ tormentors were unknowingly torturing and crucifying an empty shell devoid of any feeling. Jesus did not suffer at all.

GOD’S CHILDREN DO NOT SUFFER

God’s children do not suffer. This appears to be an unrealistic concept, but it is prevalent throughout the scripture. In the Old Testament, we read the following:

You who dwell in the shelter of the Most High, who abide in the shadow of the Almighty, Say to the Lord, “My refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust.” For he will rescue you from the snare of the fowler, from the destroying pestilence. With his pinions he will cover you, and under his wings you shall take refuge; his faithfulness is a buckler and a shield. You shall not

fear the terror of the night nor the arrow that flies by day; Not the pestilence that roams in darkness nor the devastating plague at noon. Though a thousand fall at your side, ten thousand at your right side, near you it shall not come. Rather with your eyes shall you behold and see the requital of the wicked, Because you have the Lord for your refuge; you have made the Most High your stronghold. No evil shall befall you, nor shall affliction come near your tent, For to his angels he has given command about you, that they guard you in all your ways. Upon their hands they shall bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone. You shall tread upon the asp and the viper; you shall trample down the lion and the dragon.

[Psalm 91:1-13]

This Psalm proclaims a consistent biblical premise: that God's children are fully protected from suffering. This is in direct contradiction with any doctrine requiring the kind of suffering that Jesus—one of God's favorite children—supposedly endured. The Psalmist informs us that God "*has given command to his angels that they guard you in all your ways. Upon their hands they shall bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone.*"

Yes, there are exceptions to this biblical rule, but such exceptions can be explained. The righteous must first pass what can be termed "admission tests," before being admitted into God's kingdom. Once the candidate is proven to be unshakably devoted to God, he or she is admitted into God's grace and perfect happiness.

The example of Job is a perfect illustration. We are told that Satan challenged Job's piety, and was allowed to afflict Job, within limits imposed by God, in order to prove Job's sincerity and steadfastness in his devotion to God:

But Satan answered the Lord and said, "Is it for nothing that Job is God-fearing? Have you not surrounded him and his family and all that he has with your protection? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his livestock are spread over the land. But now put forth your hand and touch anything that he has, and surely he will blaspheme you to your face." And the Lord said to Satan, "Behold, all that he has is in your power; only do not lay a hand upon his person." So Satan went forth from the presence of the Lord.

[Job 1:9-12]

Satan proceeded to test Job with affliction after affliction, but Job was not shaken from his devotion:

Job ...cast himself prostrate upon the ground, and said, "Naked I came forth from my mother's womb, and naked shall I go back again. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; blessed be

the name of the Lord!” In all this Job did not sin, nor did he say anything disrespectful of God.

[Job 1:20-22]

When Job had proven himself and passed all of Satan’s tests, God removed the afflictions:

Also, the Lord restored the prosperity of Job, after he had prayed for his friends; the Lord even gave to Job twice as much as he had before.

[Job 42:10]

Once the tests were over, Job was accepted as a “child of God” and was generously rewarded for his steadfastness in the face of the suffering inflicted upon him by Satan.

The New Testament confirms the idea of perfect happiness for God’s children. A good example is found in Luke 12:28-31 where God’s children are exhorted to “*stop worrying*” about the provisions of this world. They are told that God is fully aware of their needs, and will automatically fill such needs once they belong with Him:

If God clothes in such splendor the grass of the field, which grows today and is thrown on the fire tomorrow, how much more will he provide for you, O weak in faith! It is not for you to be in search of what you are to eat or drink. Stop worrying. The unbelievers of this world are always running after these things. Your father knows that you need such things. Seek out instead his kingship over you, and the rest will follow in turn.

[Luke 12:28-31]

CONCLUSION

The scripture clearly tells us that we each “reap what we sow.” Jesus will not save us. God, not Jesus, is the savior of each and every one of us. He is the one we must pray to. He is the one we must be devoted to.

Furthermore, God guarantees protection for those who become His children by their devotion. Once admitted into God’s protection, there is no real suffering for God’s children.

As the story of Job shows us, Satan is the inflictor of suffering. This suffering is inflicted, within strictly imposed limits, upon those undergoing the “admission tests” prior to entering God’s protection, or upon those who freely choose to remove themselves from God’s domain. In accordance with these biblical guidelines, Jesus never suffered during the last days of his life.

These guidelines apply to all of God’s children:

All who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.

[Romans 8:14]