

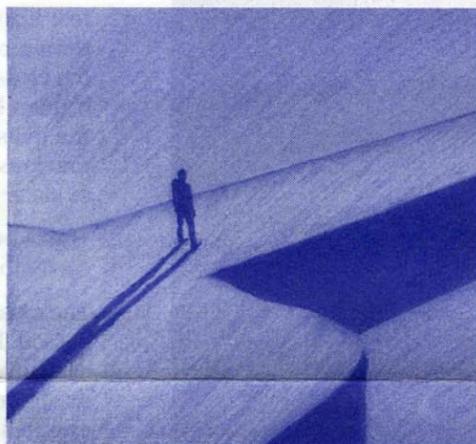
#136

First we must understand the nature of our relationship with the Lord. The security of our relationship with Him is based on something much stronger than our performance. It is based on the blood of Christ! Sanctification takes place in the setting of that security as God begins to work on our character. We are led to repentance for sins and sinful attitudes, and to changes in character and lifestyle that bring us more and more into harmony with the nature of God. As this is happening, we discover increasing joy and fulfillment as we learn to live for His glory and pleasure, not our own.

God's design for human relationships has exactly the same characteristics. When we are secure in our acceptance of one another, we have the courage to face up to correction of wrong attitudes and behavior, and our characters and lifestyles begin to harmonize more and more. We discover increasing joy and fulfillment in not only living with one another but in putting one another first.

### The answer to every need

Because the world and men and women are God's creation, and sin has ruined them both, the cross that deals with the sin question is buried in the very center of our world and the very center of our human lives. It redeems all things, it reconciles all things, it restores all things.



The answer to every human need is ultimately found in God's two great works, the work of the cross and the work of the Spirit. They go together. Without the work of the cross there is no way for sinful man to stand before a Holy God. Without the work of the Holy Spirit there is no way for the great objective work of the cross to become a subjective experience for us.

Let us glory in them both.

For local help or information, please contact:

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#### Are You Searching?

If you want to know more about what it means to be a Christian, we have some information we'd like to send you. There is no charge or obligation. Just write to Last Days Ministries and ask for the free packet, "Walking With Jesus."

A teacher as well as a businessman, **Tom Marshall** founded Kapiti Christian Centre and Servant Industries Trust in New Zealand, and is currently consulting editor of the magazine *Today's Christian*. Tom has written books on healing, relationships, Christian living, and leadership, and is in high demand internationally as a Bible teacher. Tom and his wife Gabrielle live in Sydney, Australia.



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As Christians, we know that God has reconciled us to Himself through the cross and the shed blood of Jesus Christ. The Apostle Paul says, "Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. But now He has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in His sight, without blemish and free from accusation." (Colossians 1:21,22 NIV)

Once we were enemies – but now God sees us as *holy in His sight... free from accusation!* This was the awesome act of reconciliation accomplished by Jesus, the Rock of our salvation: that we who were altogether in sin and darkness should be called into God's kingdom of light! (1 Peter 2:9)

All of our hope and joy and peace rests on this solid foundation. Is there any greater force of hope in all the universe?

For the Christian, there is more to the cross than personal salvation. Christians have an awesome responsibility in a deeply divided world because God has given us the ministry of reconciliation. Jesus, on whose shoulders rests the spiritual government of all things (Isaiah 9:6,7), calls us to shoulder His yoke and enter into this work of reconciling.

### What we see; what we hear

Is there any doubt that the world needs the ministry of reconciliation? Everywhere we look, we are hit in the face with fighting. Marriages end in bitter quarrels in which children are emotionally beaten. Industry grinds to a halt in labor feuds. Cities and nations bleed with racial strife. Nations crush life and breath out of other nations.

Worldly men and women employ the only means they know in their attempts to bring peace. Our particular modern tragedy is the idea that pressure will move the "log jam." If that won't work, pressure is taken to its natural extreme – violence. We end up shooting one another in the cause of reconciliation. Why is there this sad contradiction between what we desire and what we end up doing?

The Bible reveals that alienation in all its forms resulted from the fall of mankind. It is now part of our fallen nature. Alienation is the total inability to understand one another's hearts and minds – and so we are left with nothing but doubt, suspicion, treachery, betrayal of trust, and violation of personal pledges and legal treaties.

What we see before our eyes, if we are aware of conditions at all, is that bitter gulfs of hatred have split open our world. What do we hear? If we listen, we hear the world's cries to be healed. It is ripe and ready for our ministry of reconciliation. Are we listening?

Some Christians do hear the call to be ministers of reconciliation – but do we know the resources God has given us to accomplish this work in the world? Do we know His methods? If not, we will fail as miserably as anyone else. We need not fail, though. As Christians we can know how to cooperate with God's methods and His plan.

### The meaning of reconciliation

To take our place in God's plan for reconciliation, we must first know how that plan works and how to implement it in our daily lives. Reconciliation is the process whereby parties who have been at odds with one another are restored to a relationship of harmony or peace by changing their attitudes toward each other, or by settling their dispute or disagreement. If we are reconciled in the deep, true, biblical sense, then innermost attitudes will be changed.

The New Testament shows us that reconciliation is costly. God gave His Son, Jesus, to overcome the alienation that once stood between us by His death and resurrection. There was a serious rift that had to be bridged in order for us to be righteous, or rightly related to Him.

Unless we see this with the eyes of our soul's understanding, we will think peace with others can be bought by forgiveness alone. But forgiveness, as mighty a force as it is, is not enough. If we would be ministers of reconciliation, we must see to the bottom of a matter with the eyes of our hearts.

### The heart of the matter

God's attitude toward mankind has always been one of unconditional goodness and infinite love. The problem is all on our side: *We are rebels. We are disobedient, and we sin.* Between us there is a double gulf that we have neither the ability nor the desire to bridge – the gulf between the finite and the Infinite, and the greater moral gulf between the sinful and the Holy. God's attitude toward sin is anger, and it must always be anger. Many people, including Christians, stumble over this idea. But we must see the matter in the right light.

Let's say a man is walking along the street, and he sees another man beating a woman. Can he simply overlook such a terrible offense and still call himself a man? A true man would see it as an offense not only against the woman; he would instinctively feel it as an offense against his own manhood. He would be *compelled* to act against the crime, unable to ignore it and live with himself.

In a similar way, sin is more than going against God's laws. It's an offense against His very nature. He is holy, and all the beauty and goodness of life come through living in cooperation with laws that govern His creation. Sin is a hideous, willful violation of this order. More than that, it is a knife slash at the very face of God.

Have you thought of sin only as a violation of "arbitrary rules" that God set up without consulting you? Not in the least.

*Sin is a crime against God.*

### What Christ accomplished

Do you see what we are up against? The very order of creation is at stake. If there is no justice, no way to punish the crime, all order collapses.

Judgment was absolutely necessary in order to end the effects of sin. Forgiveness alone wasn't enough – a price had to be paid. Yet justice can only be *redemptive* if its recipient sees its necessity. Even a child needs to understand the reason for his parent's discipline, and in some sense agree with its rightness, for discipline to act as a corrective. Otherwise it will either crush or provoke rebellion. None of us, however, can understand and agree with God's holy wrath and judgment on sin because we are too infected with the disease to comprehend its deadly nature.

There stands God, Who is love itself, bound equally by His holy order and by His love. Who could atone for our crimes against Him? How could God execute perfect justice, and yet offer love and pardon to all? Who could free the beloved but fallen creature who was in no way capable to free himself?

The Apostle Paul, staring with awe into the depths of this holy mystery, shouts both the question and the answer: "*Who will rescue me from this body of death? Praise be to God – [it is done] through Jesus Christ our Lord!*" (Romans 7:24,25 NIV) Only Jesus, because He was sinless, because He fully understood the nature of sin, and because He agreed with the punishment, could become the Redeemer. When He gave Himself over to be crucified – a perfect sacrifice – He received the full blow of divine judgment in our place and made it possible for God to offer pardon with perfect justice.

In the incarnation God became man, and in the sinless Son of Man, God got a foothold on both sides of the divide and a place within humanity to change its heart. In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus took our rebellious, self-centered human will and in Himself, for us, broke that will and made it do the Father's will. "...*Not what I will, but what you will*" (Mark 14:36 NIV) He prayed not once or twice but three times, in such moral agony that it says, "*His sweat became like drops of blood, falling down upon the ground.*" (Luke 22:44 NASB) It was not His own will Christ grappled with in the Garden, it was ours, breaking it free from radical rebellion and making obedience possible. He died, a Man for all men, and a Man as all men.

### His blood, our peace

Now God can forgive our sin if we repent of it and look to Christ as our Substitute. His just anger is ended and He can have communion with a people He is making holy.

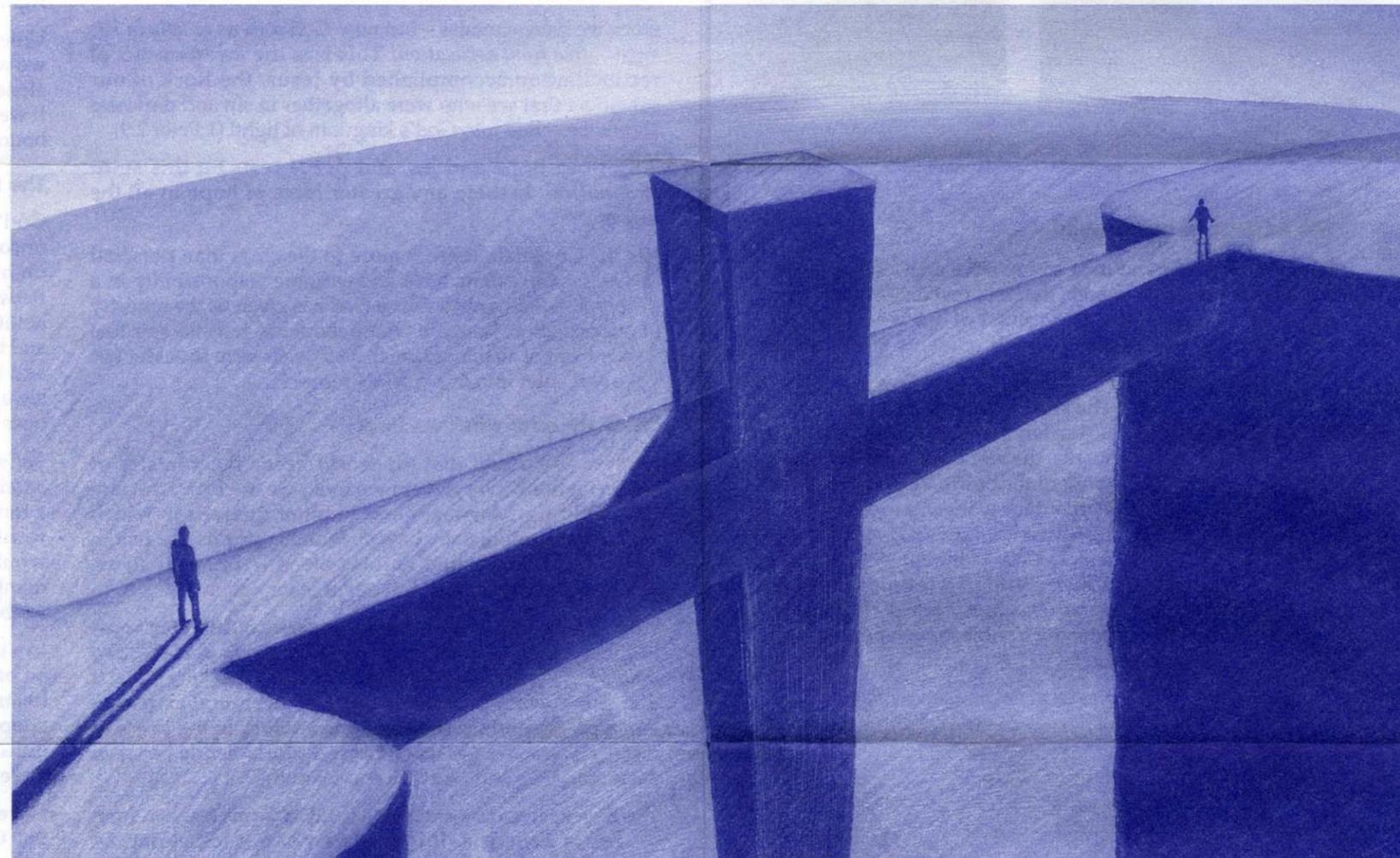
This is the part of the process where we enter in. Now the Holy Spirit wants to begin His work within us. He begins to impart the holiness of Christ – an active holiness, by which we are changed. To do this, the Holy Spirit gives us access to God the Father. He teaches us the relationship of a true son to his Father. He instructs us how to live in a way that pleases the Father, so our relationship with Him can be deepened. All of this is life-changing truth in itself and we need to ponder its deeply personal meaning.

There is, however, another question we must ask: What is reconciled by Christ's death on the cross? We know that our personal salvation was secured – but was there more? What does the work of the cross have to do with marriage breakdowns? With churches that are pulling apart at the seams? With workers caught up in hostile labor disputes? With nations where races seethe against one another?

Paul points us beyond personal – or I should say merely personalized – salvation: "*For by [Christ] all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible...all things were created by Him and for Him.*" (Colossians 1:16 NIV) Paul declares that, through Jesus, God has set in motion a plan to "*reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.*" (Colossians 1:20 NIV)

Do you see this? The "all things" of creation becomes the "all things" of redemption! This has far-reaching implications – a real, practical meaning that reaches across the whole fabric of life on this planet.

We have seen the world smashed by anger and hostility. We have heard the world crying in its pain. What do we, as Christians, have to offer in the way of help and hope? Only that we are personally saved by the blood of Jesus – as if we are now one less mess for God to have to worry about? No. *The cross is the divine intervention in all disputes! It is redemption, reaching as far as sin has gone, to restore all that sin has damaged.* We now hold within us the very thing the world needs: the ministry of reconciliation.



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### Restoring broken relationships

This was a revolutionary discovery to me some years ago: *In human relationships that have suffered breakdown, salvation is the model for making a new beginning.*

Our approach to "healing" relationships has been *problem solving*: Find the problem, discover a solution and apply it. But there is one minor defect: This doesn't work. Sit in any

divorce lawyer's office or city council chambers where racial leaders meet to argue over offenses. In any badly stressed relationship it is impossible to untangle words and establish objective truth. Few relationships can stand the strain of such a process. In our human attempts at peace, we lose each other.

"Problem solving" is just what God does *not* do. He has never said to you or me, "Sort out these enormous problems in your life, then come and see me about our need for reconciliation." He *first* provides reconciliation through the cross by the working of His powerful grace. He reconciles us to Himself *as persons*. In Himself, He heals the relationship.

Grace, in human relationships, simply means *doing good to one another – with no conditions attached*. We must put aside our offenses and our agendas. We must go looking for the one we have lost. Then we will find each other at the place where we were found – at the cross.

### But suppose...

But even if we find one another, what if we find that love has died, or trust has been shattered beyond recovery, or respect has been lost and we no longer understand each other? How can we revive a dead relationship? The cross is not only God's methodology, it is God's resource. Life begins anew at the cross. We need to understand how.

The cross was the outpouring of divine love, but it was poured out through a human heart, the heart of Jesus. When that happened, divine love was injected into the bloodstream of humanity – the kind of love that can regenerate human love after it has died. I have seen it happen at the cross many, many times.

The death of Jesus was also the ultimate act of human trust: "*Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.*" At the cross we encounter a faith that can revive the strength to trust again after trust has been broken beyond repair – a faith that can transform the most untrustworthy person into someone worthy of trust.

"But I've lost all *respect*."

Honor and respect, in the ultimate sense, cannot rest upon outward words or actions. They come from recognizing someone's value before God, and the cross is God's ultimate sign of value for every human being. At the cross we see the other with the eyes of Jesus. This man or woman becomes precious to us, for we see him or her as the brother or sister for whom Jesus died!

"But you still don't see. We no longer *understand* each other..."

The cross is the ultimate self-disclosure of the heart of God. It is God reaching out to find us, so that we can fully understand His heart's attitude toward us. Therefore, at the cross we receive grace that enables us to let down the walls and disclose ourselves to one another – to seek each other until we find.

The cross has never been a "static" event fixed in time. Its work in all of life is continuously powerful to resurrect, to restore, to bind us together as never before.

### Do we ignore the problems?

God, I have discovered, *is* very interested in solving problems in my life. He does not *start* with the problems, but He does not leave us *in* our problems either. He begins the work of sanctification.

*Sanctification* is the means by which God is conforming us to the image of His Son. It's part of being in a relationship with Him – a process by which He changes and teaches us to move in harmony with Him. Sanctification, then, can be the model for harmony in our relationships with one another.

How?