

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. She has a personal message for those angry lost souls. She understands them, and by sharing her own story she helps them begin to heal.

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

UNASHAMED OF THE GOSPEL

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

- A. “. . . for it is the _____ of God to _____ for everyone who _____” Romans 1:16.
- B. “. . . for in it the _____ of God is _____ from faith to faith” Romans 1:17.
- A. The gospel reveals “that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them” 2 Corinthians 5:19. In other words, because of what Jesus did, God is not counting any of our sins against us no matter who we are or what we have done. It seems too good to be true, but it is true. Instead of being ashamed, Paul is excited and anxious to share the gospel with everyone and urge them to “be reconciled to God” 2 Corinthians 5:20. Those who come will experience peace with God and be transformed through the truth the Holy Spirit brings (Romans 5:1; 12:1,2; John 8:32; 16:13).
- B. The gospel reveals that the human race was made righteous and qualified for heaven through Jesus’ perfect life and death.
- “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.
- “[God] made [Jesus] who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” 2 Corinthians 5:21.
- “For [Israel] being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God. For Christ *is* the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes” Romans 10:3,4.

Paul realized that if people believed their own righteousness was good enough, they would not feel a need for a Savior. So after introducing the gospel in 1:16,17, he describes our sinful condition in Romans 1:18-3:20.

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

In Mark 12:29-31, Jesus described 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 as I love myself? Yes No

A clear understanding of God's law helps us know that we have sinned and we are guilty before God. It also helps us realize the futility of trying to justify ourselves before God.

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

Under the law we are all guilty before God! But now the righteousness of God is revealed to the human race through "the gospel of Christ" Rom. 1:16,17. It is apart from the law, for we are not earning the righteousness ourselves. It is consistent with the law and the prophets, for this is what was promised all along (Isaiah 53; Dan. 9:24; John 1:29). Jesus was even called, "The Lord Our Righteousness." Jeremiah 23:6.

4. Read Romans 3:21,22 and compare with the King James Version.

Whose faith reveals the righteousness of God to the human race?

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.

The phrase, “to all and upon all them that believe” would then refer to two groups. The rest of chapter 3 expands on each of these phrases:

“To all” - 3:23-26 expands on this. Jesus earned the right to give the righteousness of God to everyone (1 Cor. 1:30; 2 Cor. 5:21; Phil. 3:7-9).

“Upon all who believe”– 3:27-28 expands on this. 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).

“For there is no difference” – 3:29-31 expands on this. Jews and Gentiles are treated equally by God, for Jesus is the “Savior of the world” 1 John 4:14.

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 (Rom 3:22,26; Gal 2:16,20; 3:22; Eph 3:12; Phil 3:9) involve a *subjective* genitive & 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’s Notes and Study Notes for Romans 3:22.

UNCONDITIONAL LOVE - JUSTIFIED BY GRACE

5. Read Romans 3:23,24

- A. How many have sinned? _____ (v. 23)
B. Who falls short of God's glory? _____ (v. 23)
C. Who are "being justified freely by His grace?" _____ (v. 24)

All have sinned – The word translated "have sinned" is in the aorist tense. It refers to a one time happening in the past. When Adam sinned, we all sinned in him. Therefore we all were condemned (Romans 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 (Romans 7:18-23; John 15:4,5).

[All] being justified freely by His grace – Grammatically, "all" is the "subject" of these three statements. The way people are "justified freely by His grace" is "through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus."

Since Jesus gave His life as a ransom for all, it is clear that He redeemed the human race "from the curse of the law" and therefore also justified everyone "freely by His grace." (1Timothy 2:6; Galatians 3:13).

God's choice to redeem the human race and justify everyone by His grace is what enables each person to have the freedom to choose. If Jesus hadn't promised to be our Savior, then Adam and Eve would have died the very day they sinned and the human race would have perished.

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.
E. "The Father has sent the Son as Savior of the world" 1 John 4:14.

Redemption is a legal transaction. Jesus purchased all of us with His blood (1 Corinthians 6:19,20; 1 Peter 1:18). Those who deny this truth and reject Jesus will “bring on themselves swift destruction” 2 Peter 2:1.

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

Since all have sinned, all deserve death. For the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23). However, instead of perishing, God was keeping the human race alive. Justice was temporarily put on hold until the cross, for God had “passed over the sins that were previously committed.”

As a result, God could have been accused of being unrighteous and unjust. However, when Jesus died as the last Adam, God was legally able to say that in Christ, everyone did die the death that the law demanded (2 Cor. 5:14). In this way the death of Jesus revealed that God is righteous and just when He “justifies the ungodly” Romans 4:5.

7. Read Romans 3:27-31

A. What does the law of faith exclude? (27, 28)

B. Does faith in Jesus set aside God’s law or uphold it? (31, 26)

A. Believing that all are “justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” is a humbling message. It excludes all boasting. It communicates that we are helpless to save ourselves. Those who believe this truth are “justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law.” Our faith does not make us justified, for God took the initiative to do this for the human race when Jesus redeemed us.

B. The law says the wages of sin is death. The gospel says that in Christ we did die. It also says that in Christ we are righteous (1 Cor. 1:30; Galatians 2:19,20; 2 Cor. 5:14, 21). So God’s law is upheld.

UNCONDITIONAL LOVE – SAVED BY GRACE

8. Who was Paul talking to when he said in verse 5, “By grace you have been saved?” Ephesians 2:1-5

Verse 3 makes it clear Paul is referring to everyone. “We all . . . were by nature children of wrath.” Through God’s unconditional love we all were made alive together with Christ. Then Paul stops to emphasize what this means, proclaiming, “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!”

Through Jesus’ death, everyone was saved from the condemnation and curse of the law (Romans 5:18; Galatians 3:13). As a result, God is not counting anyone’s sins against them. Having reconciled the world to Himself through Jesus, He is pleading with everyone to be reconciled to Him (2 Corinthians 5:19,20).

9. What did God do for us “even when we were dead in trespasses”?

A. “...made us _____ together with _____.” Ephesians 2:5

B. “..._____ us up together, and made us _____ together in the heavenly places _____.” Ephesians 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” Hebrews 2:11,14,15.

How the Creator could be united with the human race and be born of Mary is a mystery. It is a miracle. When Jesus was placed in the womb of Mary (Luke 1:35) and was born as a baby, He became one with the human race. This oneness qualified Him to be our representative.

From then on, 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 (Romans 5:18; 2 Cor. 5:14,21). 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).

10. Read Ephesians 2:7-10

A. What will God’s kindness in Christ 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 about themselves. Their stories will reveal 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 into being friends.
- Life in them enabled them to love others as He had loved them.

B. Paul wrote, “By grace you have been saved through faith.” We are not saved by faith. We are saved by grace. Faith is embracing the truth. Unbelief is rejecting it. Those who believe will experience inner peace and assurance of eternal life (Romans 5:1; 1 John 5:13).

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. He is the One doing the work.

A BALANCED VIEW OF GOD

11. How does Paul describe the God he trusts in? 1 Timothy 4:10

Is Paul contradicting himself? Is God the Savior of all men or only of believers? How can it be both? Jesus did save everyone from the curse of the law, restoring our freedom of choice. Those who believe the truth are the ones who *experience* peace with God and salvation from sin.

12. Read Titus 2:11-14

A. What does the grace of God bring? To whom has it appeared? (11)

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

C. How does the grace of God change our focus in life? (13)

The grace of God brings salvation. The great news is that it has appeared to all men. No one has been neglected or ignored. Jesus truly is the Savior of the world and the Lamb who takes away the sin of the world. He is the Light who gives light to everyone. If anyone is lost in the end,

it is not because Jesus didn't save them from condemnation, it is because they loved darkness rather than light (John 1:9,29; 3:19; Romans 5:18).

The word translated "teaching" is more than information. It means "to bring up a child, to educate, [It refers to] the moral and spiritual nurture and training of the child" Strong's Concordance.

God's amazing grace provides security, belonging, and meaning in life. His nurturing love draws us to Himself and leads us to repentance (Romans 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).

13. Read Titus 3:1-7

A. Who does Paul say we are to show humility to? Why? (2-5)

B. Through what means does Paul say God saved us? (5)

C. How are we justified? (7)

Paul is consistent throughout his letters. We all were hopelessly lost in sin. God took the initiative to justify us by His grace. After describing this grace in verses 4 and 5, Paul says, "He saved us through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit." Jesus is a complete Savior. He doesn't simply save us from condemnation. Those who give Him permission will experience salvation from every aspect of the sin problem. Our next lesson will focus on how He does this.

14. What impact does God's unconditional love have on you?
