

Symbols¹ of How God Saves Us



SABBATH—NOVEMBER 22

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Romans 2:1–29; Romans 3:19–26; 2 Corinthians 5:18–21; 1 John 4:7–11.

MEMORY VERSE: “God gave him [Jesus] as a sacrifice² to pay for sins. So he forgives the sins of those who have faith in his blood. God did all of that to prove that he is fair. Because of his mercy he did not punish people for the sins they had committed [done] before Jesus died for them” (Romans 3:25, NIV).

KEY (IMPORTANT) THOUGHT: To list several ways the New Testament interprets (explains) the death of Christ.

NO ONE PICTURE OR IDEA IS GREAT ENOUGH to capture the full meaning of Christ's death. Some people have argued that Christ's death was a ransom³ paid to free us from evil powers. Others claim that it was a beautiful example of God's love, one that changes us for the better. Some say that it was a sacrifice that pays for and removes sin as a barrier between us and God. Some insist it was an act that was done to bring us back to God. Others say that it was an announcement of “Not guilty!” The truth is that the death of Christ is all of these, and much more. It is not possible to put the full meaning of Christ's death into one main concept (idea). This week we will look at some of the important ideas that show the wonderful gift we have been given through Jesus' death on the cross.

1. symbols—objects, ideas, marks, signs, or persons that stand for, or mean the same as, other persons or things.

2. sacrifice—the act of giving up something of value, such as a life, to save or help save someone or something.

3. ransom—money paid for the return of a kidnapped (stolen) person. Christ's death on the cross paid a ransom for all sinners; the price paid for a person's freedom.

SUNDAY—NOVEMBER 23**REDEMPTION⁴ (Mark 10:45)**

How do Mark 10:45; Galatians 3:13; Ephesians 1:7; and 1 Peter 1:18, 19 help you understand the idea of “redemption”?

Redemption is freedom from debt or slavery through the payment of a ransom. It is an example used in the New Testament to interpret (explain) Christ's death. In this thinking, the whole world became a prisoner of sin. The law was the gatekeeper (Galatians 3:22, 23). As slaves of sin, humans (men, women, and children) were heading to eternal (forever) death (Romans 6:6, 23). The debt could be paid only by surrendering (giving up) their own lives. Then Christ came and paid the price for our redemption. He made life available for all who believe in Him. Such persons “used to be slaves of sin. . . . You have been set free from sin. You have become slaves to right living” (Romans 6:17, 18, NIV).

Christ also redeemed (freed) us from the “curse of the law” (Galatians 3:13, NIV). The curse of the law was the claim it made against the life of those who broke it (verse 10). The law itself could not save us from its sentence of death. This is because it could not give us back life (verse 21). It simply gave the legal reason for the

death of the criminal. God's answer was shown when He “sent his Son. A woman gave birth to him. He was born under the authority [power] of the law. He came to set free those who were under the law. He wanted us to be adopted as children with all the rights children have” (Galatians 4:4, 5, NIV).



The law cannot save us from death. It can only give the legal reason for why we deserve death.

Christ also “gave himself for us. By doing that, he set us free from all evil. He wanted to make us pure. He wanted us to be his very own people. He wanted us to long [want] to do what is good” (Titus 2:14, NIV). Redemption includes the process of sanctification,⁵ which helps make our lives pure. This shows that on the cross Christ paid our debt and gave us forgiveness of sin (Ephesians 1:7). He gave us the gift of justification⁶

4. redemption—the process (method or way) through which Jesus saves us. He buys us back from sin and sets us free through His death on the cross.

5. sanctification—becoming like Jesus with the help of the Holy Spirit; Jesus living in us so that we develop His character [holiness]; Jesus' work of making us holy.

6. justification—the process (method or way) of being forgiven by Jesus and being made right with God.

(Romans 3:24). In other words, we are free from the penalty of our sin through the gift Christ bought for us (the forgiveness of our sins). We were justified⁷ by faith in Christ.

God could not overlook sin by pretending that it never came up. God satisfied the rules of His own moral law by paying the ransom Himself. He bought back the right of life for humans and the whole planet. Whether humans admit it or not, we all belong to God.

According to 1 Corinthians 6:20, what influence⁸ should our redemption through the blood of Christ have on our daily lives? What is the value of a gift if the one who receives it never accepts it?

MONDAY—NOVEMBER 24

RECONCILIATION⁹ (2 Corinthians 5:18–21)

What does 2 Corinthians 5:18–21 say about reconciliation?

Reconciliation is the restoration¹⁰ of peaceful relationships between persons or groups who are past enemies. Usually a mediator¹¹ is needed. This practice was used by Paul to

explain the Cross.

First, God took the first step in bringing sinners back to Himself. This means that God still loved us, even though we sinned against Him.

Second, God used a Mediator (Jesus), who made reconciliation possible. He “brought us back to himself through Christ’s death on the cross” (2 Corinthians 5:18, NIV). He “was bringing the world back to himself through Christ” (verse 19, NIV). This suggests a very wide distance between God and humans. This gap was so wide it required a Mediator.

Third, the receivers of reconciliation are explained as “us” and the “world.” God “reconciled¹² us to himself through Christ” (verse 18, NIV). The verb¹³ *reconciled* is in the past, showing that the action it explains is finished. This means that believers enjoy the full benefits (rewards) of reconciliation right now. About the world, we read that “He [God] was reconciling the world to himself in Christ” (verse 19, NIV). The meaning shows that the reconciliation of the world is still going on. It is not, as it is with believers, a finished event.

Fourth, reconciliation as a process is formed by two of God’s actions. One is God’s act of reconciliation on the cross. “God did not hold people’s

7. justified—forgiven; made holy; made righteous (godly); cleansed (made clean) from sin.

8. influence—the power to affect or change persons or things.

9. reconciliation—the act of making peace with God again; restoring or bringing a person back to God’s favor and to a full relationship with God.

10. restoration—the act of returning to God. Sin takes us away from God, but God brings us back to Him. He puts His love and law in us and changes our hearts so that we love to obey Him.

11. mediator—a lawyer or go-between who helps bring quarreling people together. Jesus is the Mediator between God and us. Jesus helps to bring us back to God. He is a lawyer in the heavenly court. He works to make peace between God and us.

12. reconciled—to have a right relationship with God again; brought back together.

13. verb—a word that shows action.

sins against them” (verse 19, NlrV). Sin made it impossible for God to reconcile humans to Himself. So, we were receivers of His wrath (anger). But He decided to let His love flow freely toward us by removing the barrier (block) of sin. From God’s point of view, reconciliation removes that block. The second part of reconciliation is the ministry (work) of reconciliation (verse 18, NIV). This includes preaching the message of reconciliation (verse 19, NIV). God entrusts us to do this work. “We are ambassadors¹⁴ for Christ” (verse 20). It is “as if God were making his appeal through us. . . . Come back to God!” (verse 20, NlrV). It is through this ministry that reconciliation reaches its goal. The goal is the end of human¹⁵ bitterness and rebellion¹⁶ against God.

Is there anyone you need to be reconciled with? If so, how can understanding the reconciliation for you brought on by Jesus help you to be reconciled to others?

TUESDAY—NOVEMBER 25

JUSTIFICATION (Romans 3:19–24)

Justification is a legal (having to do with the law) word that means someone who is charged with a crime but is found innocent in a court. This idea also was used in the New Testament to

explore the true meaning of the Cross.

According to Paul in Romans 3:19–24, what is the difference between justification by faith and obedience to the law? How does this help us understand justification?

A few points can be made from these verses: First, the legal idea suggests that humans have been charged with a crime. In this case, humans have been found guilty as charged. Then they are all under the penalty of the law (Romans 2).

Second, God has given humans a way out of their problem. With the coming of Christ, “God has shown us how to become right with him. . . . It has nothing to do with obeying the law” (Romans 3:21, NlrV). Paul explains that “we are made right with God by putting our faith in Jesus Christ. This happens to all who believe” (verse 22, NlrV). Righteousness¹⁷ is not a matter of God’s announcement that you are forgiven. It is more a matter of how you show your faith in God’s saving action in Christ.

Third, this justification is for both Jews and Gentiles (non-Jews) (verses 22, 29). God does not make differences between peoples: All are sinners, and all are being justified (made right with God) “freely by his grace”¹⁸ (verse 24, NIV). So, the answer to the human problem is the justification

14. ambassadors—people who represent a nation or government. We are ambassadors for Christ. We represent His love.

15. human—having to do with men, women, and children; having to do with all people.

16. rebellion—a fight or struggle against any kind of power.

17. righteousness—God’s character (holiness) that is given to us by faith.

18. grace—God’s gift of forgiveness and mercy that He freely gives us to take away our sins.

that comes by faith to all who believe. This gift of salvation¹⁹ comes with acceptance of the Holy Spirit, who helps us to lead a new life in Christ (Galatians 3:2, 3; Romans 6:4).

Fourth, God's decision (choice) to make us right with Him is closely connected to Christ's saving work. We have here the joining of two ideas—redemption and justification. They describe and give a legal reason for God's decision to make righteous (holy; free from guilt) those who accept the righteousness of Christ (Romans 4:3–6). God can do the impossible for us because Christ took our sin and died in our place (2 Corinthians 5:21).



Justification means that those who are guilty are found innocent in a court of law.

19. salvation—God's plan for saving sinners from eternal (without end) death.

20. propitiation—payment for our sins; sin payment.

21. sacrificed—when something or someone is given up to save another person or thing or to get something else that is wanted.

22. substitution—taking the place of others. Christ took our place by dying on the cross for our sins.

23. unity—when two or more people or things are joined together as one; when two or more people are in agreement in ideas, feelings, and so on.

What can you learn from Romans 3:19–24 that can help you better understand how you can be right with God?

WEDNESDAY—NOVEMBER 26

CHRIST'S SACRIFICE (Romans 3:25, 26)

How does Paul explain in Romans 3:25, 26 what Christ's sacrifice did for us?

The use of the word *sacrifice* (NIV; "propitiation,"²⁰ KJV) shows how the death of Christ is not just a symbol. It shows that what happened is real. Christ sacrificed²¹ Himself for us. The Old Testament sacrifices were just examples of this true sacrifice. This sacrifice is the very basis of what God has done for us.

First, this sacrifice was given by God Himself to restore our relationship with Him (Romans 3:25). What we could not do, God did for us in the person of His Son. Second, this was an act of substitution.²² Christ is described as sinless, without any flaw (weakness). But He was offered as a sin offering (Romans 8:3; 2 Corinthians 5:21). He accepted our sin on the tree (cross), and died for us and in our place (1 Peter 2:21–24). By taking our sin upon Himself, He cleansed (made clean) us from it. And He brought us back to unity²³ with God.

Third, Christ's sacrifice pays for our sins. How? It frees us from the upcoming punishment²⁴ of a God who is made angry over sin. Paul speaks in Romans of the sacrifice of Christ. But first, Paul says that the world was under sin. This meant that legally (according to the law of God) God could punish it (Romans 1–3). God's anger already had punished the injustices (crimes; unfair things that happen) and terrible sins of humans (Romans 1:18). But through the sacrifice of Christ we are freed from that anger. And God's love reaches us in salvation. Sacrifice, as sin payment, does not mean that Christ forced the



Christ experienced God's anger against sin so we do not have to experience it ourselves.

Father to love us. Instead, it means that Christ's sacrifice made it possible for God's love to reach us. Christ experienced God's anger against sin so we do not have to experience it ourselves. So, as a result, the Cross is both the place where God's love is shown and the place where His anger against sin was shown.

Fourth, the sacrifice of Christ shows and gives the basis for God's will (plan) to save us. Our redemption and reconciliation would not have been possible without the sacrificial²⁵ blood of Christ (Acts 20:28; Colossians 1:20; Revelation 5:9). Because of Christ's death on the cross as our Sacrifice, God is able to make righteous (holy; free from guilt) those who believe in Christ (Romans 5:9). By letting Christ die for our sins, God showed that He is holy when making holy those who believe in Christ (Romans 3:26).

THURSDAY—NOVEMBER 27

EXAMPLE OF GOD'S LOVE (1 John 4:7–11)

God's love put the plan of salvation²⁶ into action. And God's love makes it work. Love is the basis of everything that is God (1 John 4:8). Every part of God's work in saving us is based on love. God sent the Son to die for us because He loved the world

24. punishment—a penalty for, or the result of, doing something wrong; when someone must suffer loss or pain for doing something bad, wrong, or against the law.

25. sacrificial—having to do with an animal, gift, or offering that is given up to get something that is wanted.

26. plan of salvation—what God has done and is doing to save us from sin.

(John 3:16). The Son came to this world to give His life for us because He loves both the Father (John 14:31) and us (John 13:1). Those who are united (joined together as one) by faith to Christ love God (James 2:5), Jesus (John 14:21), and one another (1 John 3:11). In fact, the life of obedience through faith in Jesus to the commandments of God is our way of showing love to Christ for what He has done for us (1 John 5:3). The whole life and death of Christ was a wonderful reflection of God's character.²⁷ It is the most glorious (highest) example of love.



Jesus chose to give His life for us because He loves us and the Father.

According to 1 John 4:7–11, what should be our feeling toward God's love shown through the death of Christ?

The true meaning of God's love is shown in the sacrifice of Christ. But it is better understood when we study the great war between Christ and Satan. Satan's charges against God put doubts in the minds of people and angels in heaven about the nature of God.²⁸ Was God indeed a loving, self-sacrificing God? Or was His true self-ish nature hidden? The Cross of Christ removed, forever, all doubts about the character of God. Think about the Creator who willingly chose to become human and suffer and die on a cross to save humans who did not deserve saving! This showed that God's love was so great that all people and angels in heaven could not fully understand it. God's great sacrifice through the death of His Son on the cross clearly showed that He did this for the good of others, not for self-ish reasons.

The example of God's love on the cross of Christ served also to remove humans' wrong ideas about the nature of God. "By presenting Jesus as the representative²⁹ of the Father, we shall be able to remove the shadow that Satan has thrown upon our pathway. Satan does not want us to see the mercy and love of God as

27. God's character—who God is; having and understanding the character of God is the same as being kind, loving, honest, and so on. God's law (Ten Commandments) shows us His character.

28. nature of God—any of the qualities or aspects of God that make Him who He is, such as love, mercy, goodness, forgiveness, holiness, power, and so on.

29. representative—someone who acts for another.

shown in Jesus Christ. Look at the cross of Calvary! It is a standing example of the unlimited love and mercy of the heavenly Father.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, page 156.

In what ways can you better show the love talked about in 1 John 4:7–11? What things are blocking your way? How can they be removed?

FRIDAY—NOVEMBER 28

ADDITIONAL STUDY: Reconciliation: “Reconciliation means that every block between the soul and God is removed. It shows that the sinner understands what the pardoning³⁰ love of God means. Through Christ’s sacrifice for fallen humans, God can rightly pardon the sinner who accepts Christ. Christ was the channel through which the mercy, love, and righteousness [holiness] might flow from the heart of God to the heart of the sinner.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, page 396.

Wrath (anger) of God: “Christ was to accept the wrath of God that should fall upon humans. Christ became a place of safety for us. Humans were criminals and deserved the wrath of God. But we

could by faith in Christ run into the refuge (safe place) given by God and be safe. In the middle of death there was life if we chose to accept it.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, February 24, 1874.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ❶ Of the different examples given in this week’s lesson, which one do you like best? Why? In class, talk about the different examples and share with one another the reasons for your choice.
- ❷ Think about this idea of reconciliation. What can we learn from human stories of reconciliation that can help us better understand it as a symbol (word-picture) for salvation?
- ❸ In what ways is the Cross the greatest example of God’s love? What comfort does the Cross give us about the nature of God that can help us through hard times?
- ❹ God’s wrath against sin could not just be turned off. What should that tell us about sin’s nature? In other words, why didn’t God just forget about sin instead of having to pour out His wrath against it?

30. pardoning—freeing a person from having to suffer for doing wrong.