



Bible Student's Notebook™

The Herald of His Grace

Presenting every man perfect in Christ Jesus. Colossians 1:28

Volume XIII
Issue 312

“My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?”

by — C. Baxter Kruger

Psalm 22:1 begins with the most haunting cry in the Bible:

My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?

Both Matthew and Mark tell us that Jesus took up this cry when He was dying on the cross. It is very natural for us, steeped as we are in the Western framework with its fundamental legal orientation, to see this cry of Jesus as the supreme expression of His suffering. With the dark side of the Father in the background, the Son takes upon Himself our sin and the Father unleashes the fury of His eternal wrath on His Own Son. In that horrible, unspeakable moment, Jesus cries out, “My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?”

Why is it that we are so prone to zero in on this statement of Jesus from the cross? There are other statements from Jesus in that hour; why does this one get so much press? Why not focus on “It is finished” or “Father into Thy hands I commend My spirit”? Is it an exaggeration to say that more ink has been spilled on “My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?” than on all of the other statements of Jesus from the cross put together?

Why did Jesus quote the opening verse of Psalm 22? In His day, to hear the first verse of a Psalm was like hearing the beginning of the tune of a favorite song. The tune jump-starts the tape in our heads and sends us singing the rest of the song. I suspect that when Jesus quoted the first of Psalm 22, He was jump-starting the memory of the whole Psalm in the minds of the people around Him, for they all knew it by heart. In doing



so, He was interpreting the event of His suffering and death for them. He was telling them what was happening.

On the cross, Jesus surely identified with the suffering of the Psalmist, but He also identified with the *whole* Psalm. What is happening on the cross? What is the meaning of this event? Jesus is answering all of these questions.

He is saying, “Here it is, right here in Psalm 22. It looks as though all is lost. It looks as though the ‘dogs’ are winning and as if God has abandoned Me, utterly forsaken Me to the abyss. This is not the case.”

He has not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; neither has He hid His face from Him; but when He cried unto Him, He heard (Psalm 22:24).

Indeed, the very opposite is the truth, and all of the world will come to know it as the Lord’s salvation.

In the greatest of ironies, the cry of Jesus, “My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?” actually sets in motion a line of thought that completely reinterprets what is happening on the cross. Far from being a perverse moment when the angry God pours out His wrath on the Son and utterly rejects Him, the cross is the mo-

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Paul Our Guide – Christ Our Goal

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This free weekly electronic publication (52 times a year) is dedicated to:

- the proclamation of the riches of God's abundant, exceeding grace (Romans 5:20; 11:6; Ephesians 1:7);
- the affirmation of God's purpose to save all mankind through the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (I Timothy 2:3, 4; 4:10; Titus 2:11);
- the "preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began" (Romans 16:25);
- true freedom and liberty apart from law (Galatians 5:1);
- the organic nature of the church, the Body of Christ (I Corinthians 12);
- the distinct message and ministry of Paul, the apostle to the nations (Romans 11:13);
- the importance of receiving all whom Christ has received (Romans 14-15);
- the recovery of rich Biblical truth that has too long remained hidden under the veils of traditionalism, prejudice, misunderstanding, and fear (Mark 7:7, 13);
- the completeness of the believer in Christ (Colossians 2:10), with:
 - total freedom from sins (Colossians 1:14);
 - identity in His death, burial, and resurrection (Romans 6);
 - adult sonship position (Galatians 4).

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The Ministry of Hindrances

by — J.R. Miller (1840-1912)

We know that all things work together for good ... (Romans 8:28).

... The things which happened unto me have fallen out rather to the furtherance of the gospel (Philippians 1:12).

Some people are vexed and disheartened – by *obstacles* and *difficulties*. They see them as *hindrances in the way of their progress*. To them, the ideal life would be one *without* opposition or antagonism, with only favoring circumstances, with nothing to impede its movement, with no burdensome tasks, no struggles, no hardships, no disappointments.

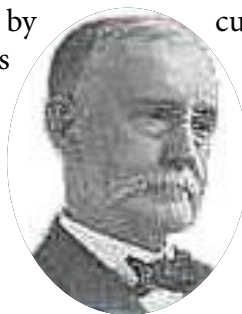
Even if such a life were possible – he would be most unfortunate who would experience it. None of us know or dream how much we owe to the *resistances* we meet.

If *learning* was easy – our mental powers would never be developed. If *work* was not necessary – our bodies would never grow into vigor and strength. If we were put into this world to do nothing, with no responsibility, with no burdens to carry – we would never be anything but *children* in character and experience.

It is important that we understand well this law of life. Some people doubt God's love when they find themselves face to face with hard conditions, when they are called to meet *losses* or *sore trials*. They are discouraged at finding it so hard to be faithful to God, and loyal to duty.

Really, however, hard things are *tokens of God's favor*. If our best friend is he who tries to make something of us, not he who would make things easy for us – surely God's friendship is shown in the difficult experiences in which the man or woman in us shall be developed and trained.

It is worth our while, therefore, to consider the meaning of *obstacles* and *hindrances* as they come into our experience. They are not ultimately the work of an enemy. We are not to regard them as meeting us to



cut off our progress, to block our advance. The opposing things which we encounter hold in themselves secrets of blessing, of good, of strength, of experience, which we are to take from them in our own *victory* over them.

We would miss many of life's best things, therefore, if we regarded the *obstacles* in our path as *limits* set to our progress. Instead of being *limits*, they hide within themselves good gifts of God for us.

The old story of Jacob's *wrestling* illustrates this. It was not an *enemy* who met the patriarch that night, although he seemed to oppose him and soon grappled with him as in a struggle of life and death. The *wrestler* was *God's messenger*, and he had a blessing for Jacob – but it could be gotten only in a victorious struggle.

All night the contest went on. At last Jacob prevailed – not by physical strength, but really through *being defeated*. He went lame and limping from the place of wrestling, but there was a new *light* in his eyes and a new *power* in his heart; he had gotten a *blessing* – in his *struggle*.

This story is a parable of all life's *hindrances*. They seem to be *enemies*, intent on doing us harm; but really they are our *friends*, bearing divine gifts and blessings for us which, however, we can get only in *victorious wrestlings*.

Overtimes, too, we are *lamed* in the fierce contest – but the *shrinking of our natural strength* is the mark of new power in us. *Limping Jacob was Israel now, a prince with God.*

Not always is our wrestling *seemingly* victorious. ►

There are, in every earnest life, *obstacles* which *seem* to prove impassable barriers in our course. Strive as we may, we cannot surmount them. The door is shut in our face, and we cannot open it. Human strength avails not. We are defeated, and can do nothing but submit.

Now, the question is, *Are these unavailing efforts real failures?* Have we sinned in not succeeding? Ought we not to have been “victorious”? Is there *shame* in our being driven back or held at bay? The answer is found in *accepting our “failure” as God’s will for us*. Then we shall find that the blessing which we thought to get in “overcoming” our trial *becomes ours in “defeat.”* That is, God’s withholding from us what we sought was a better good than the granting of the desired thing would have been.

Perhaps it was some earthly favor or treasure we craved. If we had succeeded in getting it – it might not have proved a *real* blessing after all. Perhaps we were meant, in the spirit of submission, when the “victory” was not grasped, to get the blessing *in the striving*.

We believe in *God’s providence* – that there is a *Hand* moving amid *all* of life’s affairs, so directing and adjusting them, that good is eventually wrought out. We find comfort in the thought that, when we “fail,” *it is our Father Who does not allow us to succeed*; that it is He Who sets up and bars the gate in the path we sought so eagerly to enter. We may certainly believe this of hindrances which are invincible – inevitableness is clearly God’s will for us. We may believe, also, that the true blessing is, then, in the *not* having, rather than, as we supposed, in the *having*.

The *place* we tried so hard to win, and which we imagined would have been ideal in its honor and opportunity, would have proved a *nest of thorns*, with complications and perplexities which would have made our life miserable! The *money* we hoped to have made would have brought more luxury and ease to us, but we would have lost something of our spiritual earnestness if we had gotten it. With too many people the *growth of worldly possessions* is attained by a corresponding *loss of heavenly longings*.

Life is overtimes long enough to allow godly men in later years to thank God for experiences which, in earlier years, they wept over as grievous disappointments and

irreparable “losses.” The *ploughshare* seems to work hopeless destruction as it cuts its way across the field; but it is not long before it is seen that what *seemed* ruin is indeed a process in the renewal of life and beauty. By and by a golden harvest waves on the field.

We have found the great secret of peace when we have learned to see the *hand of God* in *everything* – in the withholding of what we sought, in the taking away of our cherished pleasures, as well as in the giving of favors.

Job said it was the Lord that took away his property, his children, his health, and in this belief he rested and sang. We may be sure that ***nothing can be lost in God’s hands***. When He takes our pleasures and treasures from us, they are safe in His keeping! After a while He will give them back to us in a way in which we can keep them forever!

Of another thing we may be sure also: when we see God’s hand in the *taking* from us of the things we love, that there is compensation, some better thing in place of that which is removed. We may be *apparently* “poorer” for what has been taken away, but what God does for His children He does in love.

We need not trouble ourselves to seek His *reasons*. It is better for us to trust so confidently in our Father’s love that not a shadow of doubt or fear shall ever pass over us, whatever the disappointment or the failure of hope may be. When God shuts a door it is better that it be shut; we could find no true good in attempting to *force* it open. When God takes anything from us it is better so; let us never doubt it. Some day it will all be very plain to us – partly in this world, no doubt, and all of it from the *vantage of heaven*.

We need never fear that God in His love *truly* mars any of our blessings. Sometimes we are tempted to think that He does. He gives us something very sweet, and just when we have begun to admire its value, and when it has become *seemingly* necessary for our happiness – almost to our very life – He takes it away! In our deep sense of loss we say that we cannot see how there can be goodness, or love, in such taking away of a “necessary” gift. We cannot *see*, but we may safely *trust* God, Who both *gave*, and then *took away*. Eventually we will we get the “blessing” again, and it will be all the better for having been withdrawn for a time. ■

What Is Conciliation?

by — André Piet
Rijnsburg, Netherlands

Only in Paul's letters do we find the word "conciliation." Very often the word is confused with "propitiation" (Hebrew *kaphar*), which is a quite tentative translation. The real meaning of the Hebrew word *kaphar* is "covering" or "making shelter."

Sins are covered, enemies conciliated. That's a big difference!

References are mostly from the *Concordant Version*, which makes a clear distinction between the original words. In other occurrences the references are from the *King James Version*.

I Corinthians 7 is the only chapter (out of 6) where conciliation is spoken of within "everyday life" human relations. It's about a woman leaving her husband, and that she should remain unmarried and try to *conciliate* with her husband (:11).

We are used to thinking that the eating of the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden was disobedience, which is correct; but *why* was man disobedient? What was the *cause* of that disobedience? It was this: **Believing the serpent, who characterized God as hostile.**

God doth know that in the day you eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened (Genesis 3:5).

Since that lie, mankind has *distrusted* God. All religions are based on the *fear of a hostile God*. The idea in every religion is that God must be conciliated (satisfied). However, that *thought* is in fact the very essence of the *alienation*!

Most atheists are afraid that God is hostile. The existence of evil in the world (the suffering, pain, death and so on) motivates them in that thought. By reasoning God out of the picture, they suppress that fear.

Nowhere does Scripture say that God was or had to be conciliated. On the contrary, men and the world are being conciliated to God, not the other way round. God has never been hostile to mankind at any time.



We were conciliated to God (Romans 5:10).

God, Who conciliates us to Himself (II Corinthians 5:18).

Conciliating the world to Himself (II Corinthians 5:19).

Starting at the Garden of Eden, God is *blamed* for being hostile. When God would find it sufficient to make an end to sinners, the echo of that *accusation* would still remain. If an accusation is the *reason* of hostility and alienation, then there is only one way to end hostilities: *refute the accusation!* Only by the convincing evidence of His love will God win the hearts of alienated men (*i.e.*, conciliate the world to Himself).

In Romans 12:20 we read:

If your enemy should be hungering, give him the morsel; if he should be thirsting, give him to drink, for in doing this you will be heaping embers of fire on his head.

This verse shows beautifully how conciliation works. It is impossible to maintain hostilities if your "adversary" gives you food when you are hungry. When your enemy is vulnerable and helpless, the ideal occasion arises to dismantle hostility. That is exactly what God is doing. He gives life (bread, drink) to a hostile and starving world.

The Greek word for "conciliating," *katallassō*, is composed from two words meaning "down" and "change." The idea is that he who conciliates humbles himself before the other. Paul writes that someone might have the courage to die for a righteous person. That already is a very good deed, but God goes much further. He lets His Son die for sinners and the ungodly. That is the proof of His love.

For hardly for the sake of a just man will anyone be dying; for, for the sake of a good man, perhaps someone may even be daring to die, yet ►

God is commending this love of His to us, seeing that, while we are still sinners, Christ died for our sakes (Romans 5:7-8).

In orthodox theology it is said that God must be conciliated. Calvin wrote:

God has been an enemy to men ... God the Father is, through Christ's sacrifice, satisfied and conciliated; His wrath has, by this Mediator, been appeased.

In this presentation God is the *enemy* and Christ is the One that functioned as "the lightning conductor" warding off God's wrath.

Paul writes in II Corinthians 5:14-15,

For the love of Christ is constraining us, judging this, that, if One died for the sake of all, consequently all died.

Why did He die? From human perspective, Christ died as a victim of hostility, but from God's perspective, *Christ died to be risen ("the One dying and being roused for their sakes.")*

Through Adam, *death* became part of all of humanity. Through Christ, the last Adam, that same humanity receives *life*.

For even as, in Adam, all are dying, thus also, in Christ, shall all be vivified (I Corinthians 15:22).

How does God conciliate the world to Himself? Paul gives the answer in II Corinthians 5:19.

God was in Christ, conciliating the world to Himself, not reckoning their offenses to them.

The world convicted Jesus illegitimately; they beat Him, scourged Him, mocked Him, nailed Him to the wood, etc., but He said,

Father, forgive them, for they are not aware what they are doing (Luke 23:34).

Indeed they did not know what they were doing, but God knew what He was doing. He gave His Son over as the ultimate proof of His love. He was not reckoning their offenses to them, because this is His way to

give humanity life! So God heaps coals of fire on the head of a hostile world.

Undoubtedly, the clearest illustration of conciliation we find is in the history of Joseph, who, of course, is a type of Christ. Loved by his father, rejected by his brothers, ending up in a well (symbolically a grave), thought dead by Jacob, he stayed hidden outside of the country and reached a position at the top of society. Then, driven by starvation, the brothers of Joseph came to Egypt and Joseph gave them bread. After a lot of going back and forth, Joseph revealed himself to them and said to his totally stunned brothers,

Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you to preserve life ... And God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God (Genesis 45:7-8).

Joseph did not attribute the offenses to his brothers, because it was through their offense that God saved them. God had complete control of each detail of the entire story.

Christ had to be crucified. It was "*by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God*" (Luke 24:26; Acts 2:23). God needed the darkest background (the cross) to prove His indisputable love once and for all.

The worst twisting of the doctrine of conciliation is from orthodox Christianity. To them, God is an *enemy* who demands satisfaction. The suffering on Golgotha is the payback in which God found appeasement and was conciliated. However, God is NOT an enemy; He never was. **At the cross there was not payment to God but by God.**

At Golgotha God was not conciliated but God was conciliating the world to Himself (II Corinthians 5:19). The cross is God's instrument to conciliate the world to Him. The conciliation is completed when there is no enemy left and every tongue cheers, to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:11).

In the prison letters Paul uses a word for conciliating that is found nowhere else in Greek literature: *apokatallassō*, literally: from-conciliating (*Concordant Version*, "reconciliation").

In Ephesians 2 Paul writes that God takes away hostility between Jews and heathens (illustrated by the middle wall of partition on the temple square).

Making peace; and ... reconciling both in one Body to God through the cross, killing the enmity in it (Ephesians 2:14-15).

This is not only conciliation with God but also conciliation with each other. This is *apo-katallasso*.

In Colossians 1:20 we read in most translations,

Having made peace through the blood of His cross, by Him to reconcile all things unto Himself.

However, “*having made peace*” is in the aorist-form, meaning a timeless verb form. Aorist means: without horizon. God did not make peace at the cross, as if finished. Rather, He makes peace through the blood

of the cross. That is, through the cross God conciliates all to Himself. It demonstrates a love to which all hostility will end!

With this sure prospect of the conciliation of all, believers are already conciliated (vertically and horizontally). They have already “*acknowledged the grace of God in truth*” (Colossians 1:21, 1:6).

Apo-katallassō in Colossians 1:20 points both at vertical conciliation (the “*all things unto Himself*”) and to horizontal conciliation (all enemies to each other). Note also the comprehensive effect of the cross, not only conciliating all enemies on earth but also those in the heavens, including all hostile principalities, powers, rulers of the darkness of this world, spiritual wickedness in high places.

God doesn’t conciliate a *bit*, nor a *lot*, but “the *all*”!

Translated from Dutch.
Edited and Abridged.

FORSAKEN (continued from front page)

ment of moments when He does not hide His face, or turn His back on Him in disgust. Here, according to the Psalm and its interpretation of the event, there is no forsaking at all. In fact, the Psalm tells us that the coming generations will see this event not as divine rejection, but precisely as divine presence, rescue and salvation.

Is it accidental that Psalm 22 is followed by the great Shepherd Psalm? What if we were to read on from Psalm 22 into Psalm 23? What would we find?

*The LORD is My shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh Me to lie down in green pastures: He leadeth Me beside the still waters. He restoreth My soul: He leadeth Me in the paths of righteousness for His name’s sake. **Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for Thou art with Me;** Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort Me. Thou preparest a table before Me in the presence of Mine enemies: Thou anointest My head with oil; My cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow Me all the days of My life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever (Psalm 23:1-6).*

Far from being a moment when the wrath of God is vented on the Son, the cross is the moment when the

relationship of the Father and Son is most triumphant in the greatest darkness. On the cross, Jesus penetrated to the core of Adamic estrangement, where everything shouts that God has rejected us and abandoned us to the abyss. It was precisely there, precisely in the experience of that estrangement and horror that the fellowship of the Father and Son stood fast.

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for You are with Me.

Suppose we read on from Psalm 23 into Psalm 24 and to that magnificent shout:

Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in (Psalm 24:7).

If we take these three Psalms together, we are face to face not only with the suffering of Jesus on the cross, but also with His resurrection and ascension. There is no forsaking by the Father. Even when Jesus walked through the valley of the shadow of death, the Father did *not* forsake Him: He *saved* Him!

Adapted from C. Baxter Kruger’s *Jesus and the Undoing of Adam* (2001)

The Surreal Composure of Christ

by — Martin Zender

As He walked through His final hours on this earth in His humiliated frame, Jesus Christ was in His Own world. Every answer from His lips was calm, clean and composed. He looked straight ahead. He did whatever people told Him to do. He did not yell back at any of the people yelling at Him. All around Him was hate. His aura, however, was a sheen of acceptance. It was as if He had seen it all before – and it was fine. Not easy, but fine. All of it was supposed to happen. There was one reason for such calm.

Of all unlikely people with whom to share the reason, He told it to the Roman procurator, Pontius Pilate. When Pilate spoke to Him and He did not answer, the procurator said,

To me you are not speaking! Are you not aware that I have authority to release you and have authority to crucify you?

Our Lord replied,

No authority have you against Me in anything, except it were given to you from above (John 19:11).



What was true of Christ then is true of us now: Nothing under heaven has any power over us unless God gives it. Thus: **EVERYTHING THAT IS HAPPENING TO YOU IS GIVEN FROM ABOVE.**

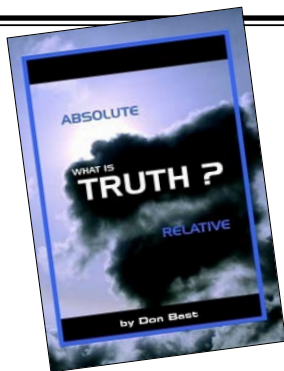
The world seems so powerful and overwhelming. Your trials seem unconquerable, and yet, they have already been conquered. For it is not the power of this world that we are under. ... We are not under the power of anyone who would seek to lord it over us. Even if we were literal slaves of a tyrannical government, we would still be free, because,

No authority have you against Me in anything, except it were given to you from above (John 19:11).

During His final hours on earth, this was the key to the surreal composure of Christ.

Let it be the key for you today.

Clanging Gong News
Volume 3, Issue 7



What Is Truth?

Absolute and Relative

by — Don Bast

High above the storm clouds the sun is always shining. When we get a glimpse of God's perspective we are able to experience the Son of His love shining through the darkest storms of life.

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