

Metaphors of Salvation



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Rom. 2:1–29, 3:19–26, 2 Cor. 5:18–21, 1 John 4:7–11.*

Memory Text: “God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished” (*Romans 3:25, NIV*).

Key Thought: To summarize some of the ways that the New Testament interprets the death of Christ.

No one image, or one idea, is grand enough to capture the full meaning of Christ's death. Some people have argued that Christ's death was a ransom paid to liberate us from evil powers; others claim that it was a sublime revelation of God's love, one that transforms us. Some say that it was an expiatory sacrifice and removes sin as a barrier between us and God; some insist that it was a reconciling act, others that it was a declaration of acquittal. The truth is that the death of Christ is all of these, and much more. It's not possible to bring the full meaning of Christ's death under one all-encompassing concept, although some images are central, such as sacrificial substitution. This week we'll look at some of the key images used to express the wonderful gift we've been given through Jesus' death on the cross.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, November 29.*

Redemption

Read Mark 10:45; Galatians 3:13; Ephesians 1:7; and 1 Peter 1:18, 19. From these texts, how do you understand the concept of “redemption”?

Redemption is deliverance from debt or slavery through the payment of a ransom, and it’s an image used in the New Testament to interpret Christ’s death. In this thinking, the whole world became a prisoner of sin, and the law was the gatekeeper (*Gal. 3:22, 23*). As slaves of sin, humans were heading to eternal death (*Rom. 6:6, 23*). The debt could be paid only by relinquishing their own life. Then Christ came and paid the price for our redemption, making life available for all who believe in Him. Such persons “used to be slaves to sin” but have now “been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness” (*Rom. 6:17, 18, NIV*).

Christ also redeemed us from the “curse of the law” (*Gal. 3:13, NIV*). The curse of the law was the claim it made against the life of those who violated it (*vs. 10*). The law itself could not save us from its sentence of death, because it could not give us back life (*vs. 21*); it simply provided the legal basis for the death of the culprit. God’s solution was revealed when He “sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons” (*Gal. 4:4, 5, NIV*).

Christ also “gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good” (*Titus 2:14, NIV*). Redemption, therefore, includes the process of sanctification, the purification of our lives. This presupposes that on the cross Christ paid our debt and granted us forgiveness of sin (*Eph. 1:7*) and gave us the gift of justification (*Rom. 3:24*). In other words, free from the condemnation of our sin through the gift Christ bought for us (the forgiveness of our sins), we were justified by faith in Christ.

God could not ignore sin by pretending that it never existed. He satisfied His own moral demands by paying the ransom Himself. He bought back the right of existence for the human race and the whole planet. Whether humans acknowledge it or not, we all belong to God.

Read 1 Corinthians 6:20. What impact should our redemption through the blood of Christ have on our daily life? What is the value of a gift if the one who is offered it never accepts it?

The Lesson in Brief

▶ **Key Text:** *Romans 3:25*

▶ **The Student Will:**

Know: Christ chose to die in our place.

Feel: He wasn't coerced—He gave up His life of His own free will.

Do: Joyfully embrace the reconciliation of a fractured relationship between you and God.

▶ **Learning Outline:**

I. Redemption, Reconciliation, Justification: Priceless (*Gal. 4:4, 5; Titus 2:14*)

A If Christ had come in the First Advent as anything other than a baby in a manger, how would this have affected the people's reaction to Him? Could He have reached the outcast and downtrodden?

B After a relationship has been fractured, what is the best part of reconciliation? Explain your answer.

C Christ made the choice to die in our place. Express your feelings about His choice, especially if you consider what our fate would be had He not made that choice.

D What is the definition of "justification"? Why, in spite of our assurance of justification if we claim Jesus by faith, do we so often struggle with assurance?

II. Love Was the Motivating Force (*1 John 4:8*)

A What image of salvation means the most to you? Why? If you had three minutes to bring someone to Christ, how would you use this image?

B Are there some parts of the act of salvation that you struggle with accepting more than others? What creates this dilemma?

▶ **Summary:** Christ's choice to die for us unites us with Him in ways no other heavenly beings can understand or experience.

Reconciliation

Read carefully 2 Corinthians 5:18–21. What does it say about reconciliation?

Reconciliation is the restoration of peaceful relationships between individuals or groups once at enmity. Usually a mediator or negotiator is needed. This practice was used by Paul to explain the Cross.

First, God took the initiative in reconciling sinners to Himself; in other words, despite our sin, God still loved us.

Second, God used a Mediator through whom reconciliation was possible. He “reconciled us to himself through Christ” (2 Cor. 5:18, NIV); He “was reconciling the world to himself in Christ” (vs. 19, NIV). This implies an unbridgeable distance between God and humans, one that required a Mediator.

Third, the object of reconciliation is defined as “us” and the “world.” God “reconciled us to himself through Christ” (vs. 18, NIV). The verb is in the past, indicating that the action it expresses is complete. This means that believers enjoy the benefits and fullness of reconciliation right now. Concerning the world, we read that “God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ” (vs. 19, NIV). The context indicates that the reconciliation of the world is still in progress; it is not, as it is with believers, a completed event.

Fourth, reconciliation as a process is formed by two divine actions. One is the divine act of reconciliation on the cross, defined as “not counting men’s sins against them” (vs. 19, NIV). Sin was the barrier that made it impossible for God to reconcile humans to Himself. Hence, we were by nature objects of His wrath. But He decided to allow His love to flow freely toward us by removing the barrier of sin. From the divine perspective, reconciliation is the removal of that barrier. The other aspect of reconciliation is the ministry of reconciliation (vs. 18, NIV), the proclamation of the message of reconciliation (vs. 19, NIV) entrusted to us. “We are ambassadors for Christ” (vs. 20), and as such it is God Himself who is “making his appeal through us. . . . Be reconciled to God” (vs. 20, NIV). It is through this ministry that reconciliation reaches its ideal goal, which is the end of human animosity against God.

Is there anyone you need to be reconciled with? If so, how can understanding the reconciliation wrought by Jesus in your behalf help you to be reconciled to others?

Learning Cycle

► **STEP 1**—Motivate

How would you explain snow to someone who has never seen it? It could be described scientifically or by how it feels or looks covering everything. If you grew up in a climate where there was frequent snowfall, you might tell a story of your experience with snow. Your memories might be nostalgic; they may involve remembering difficulties associated with a significant snow event.

In what ways might your attempts to describe *atonement* to a twelve-year-old be similar to explaining snow to someone from a tropical climate? In Scripture, what description of atonement most impacts your understanding and compels you to respond?

Invite three members of your class to describe their experience with snow. Then as a group discuss how snow and sin are related in Scripture. (See *Ps. 51:7, Isa. 1:18.*)

► **STEP 2**—Explore


Bible Commentary

I. Communicating Salvation in the Language of the Lost

“Communication is a two-way street,” states one individual. Another says, “Communication is an exchange of ideas.” Someone else might add their opinion to the discussion by saying, “Communication is building a relationship between two people.” Use a dictionary to look up the word *communication*. How does that definition compare with the above statements?

What was Jesus trying to communicate when He came to live out salvation in the midst of humanity? How does your answer to this question relate to dialogue about communication above?

Consider This: In order for instruction to take place or ideas to be

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Justification

Justification is, fundamentally, a legal term that refers to the acquittal of someone accused of a crime but who is found innocent in a court. This concept also was used in the New Testament to explore the significance of the Cross.

Why does Paul contrast justification by faith with obedience to the law, and how does this help us understand justification? (*Rom. 3:19–24*).

A few points can be noted from these verses: First, the legal image implies that humans have been charged with a crime. In this particular case, humans have been found guilty as charged; that is to say, they are all under the condemnation of the law (*Romans 2*).

Second, God has provided for humans a way out of their predicament. “Now,” with the coming of Christ, “a righteousness from God, apart from law,” that is to say, not determined by our obedience to the law, “has been made known,” or revealed (*Rom. 3:21, NIV*). Paul explains that “this righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe” (*vs. 22, NIV*). Righteousness designates here not simply the divine declaration of acquittal but particularly our participation by faith in God’s saving deed in Christ.

Third, this justification is intended for both Jews and Gentiles (*vss. 22, 29*). God does not make distinctions between peoples: All are sinners, and all are being justified “freely by his grace” (*vs. 24, NIV*). Hence, the solution to the human predicament is the justification that comes by faith to all who believe. This gift of salvation is accompanied by the reception of the Spirit, who enables us to walk in newness of life (*Rom. 6:4; Gal. 3:2, 3*).

Fourth, God’s decision is justifiable through Christ’s redemptive work. We have here the combination of two images, redemption and justification, that describe and provide a legal basis for God’s decision to justify those who accept the righteousness of Christ (*Rom. 4:3–6*). God can do the unimaginable because Christ took our sin and died in our place (*2 Cor. 5:21*).

Read again Romans 3:19–24. Apply the message there to yourself, personally. What can you take away, right now, for yourself that can help you realize how you can be right with God?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

exchanged, there has to be someone with credible information to share and another person who is willing to listen. When Christ came to this earth to share the salvation story, some received Him gladly, others heard and rejected Him, and still others waited to hear of His salvation later. As a group, read John 1:12. Those who received Him were given a priceless gift. Discuss the other two groups. As Christ's current-day disciples, how do we reach these two groups with the message?

II. The Languages of Salvation


Paul commends salvation to Timothy using these words: "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst" (*1 Tim. 1:15, NIV*). Read 1 Timothy 1:1–17 together. Discuss how this relates to the saying "I would rather be a sermon than preach one any day" or "Don't preach, reach."

Compare and Contrast: On the North American continent, settlers from Europe encountered the American Indians. There were differences in culture and experience and language. These differences caused many challenges and injustices. Some of those barriers were overcome when the immigrants learned to understand the American Indians.

Someone once compared God's attempt to communicate salvation to humanity to us trying to speak "ant language." What would it take for us to "talk" to the ants and ask them not to spoil our picnics by climbing on the food? Consider Romans 3:19–26. In what ways can we "demonstrate" salvation to our families, neighbors, and work associates?

III. Stories of Salvation: Bridging the Postmodern Gap

Scripture is made up of 66 books. The narratives of God's Word represent His impact on individual lives. We live in a world with its own mind-set and worldview. "Perhaps our most frequent mistake in evangelism is to begin where we are, with our interests, rather than where they are."—George G. Hunter III, *How to Reach Secular People* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992), p. 102. This is a very important point. So often, in seeking to reach others, especially secular people, we have to be very careful not to assume that they are starting where we are. We are not going to get very

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Expiatory Sacrifice

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

The specific use of the word *sacrifice* (*NIV*; “propitiation,” *KJV*) to designate the death of Christ is not symbolic or metaphorical but expresses the reality of what happened; Christ *sacrificed* Himself for us. The Old Testament sacrifices were mere reflections of this true and genuine sacrifice, which sits at the core of what God has done for us.

First, this sacrifice was provided by God Himself to restore our relationship with Him (*Rom. 3:25*). What we could not do, God did for us in the person of His Son. Second, this was an act of substitution. Christ is described as sinless, without any defect; yet, He was offered as a sin offering (*Rom. 8:3, 2 Cor. 5:21*). He bore our sin on the tree, and died for us and in our place (*1 Pet. 2:21–24*). By taking our sin upon Himself, He cleansed us from it and brought us back to unity with God.

Third, Christ's sacrifice is propitiatory in the sense that it liberated us from the wrath of God. In Romans Paul introduces the sacrifice of Christ after establishing that the world was under sin and legally under the condemnation of God (*Romans 1–3*). The wrath of God was already making itself present against the injustices and perversions of humans (*Rom. 1:18*). Through the sacrifice of Christ we are liberated from that wrath, and God's love reaches us in salvation. Propitiation does not mean that Christ persuaded the Father to love us; it means that Christ's sacrifice made it possible for God's love to reach us. Christ experienced God's wrath against sin so that we don't have to experience it ourselves. Consequently, the Cross is not only the place where God's love is revealed but also the place where His wrath against sin was manifested.

Fourth, the sacrifice of Christ expresses, actualizes, and provides the legal foundation for God's will to save us. Our redemption and reconciliation would not have been possible without the sacrificial blood of Christ (*Acts 20:28, Col. 1:20, Rev. 5:9*). It is because of His death on the cross as the only and unique sacrificial victim that God is able to justify those who believe in Christ (*Rom. 5:9*). By condemning sin in Christ, God demonstrated that He is righteous when justifying those who believe in Christ (*Rom. 3:26*).

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

far with someone if we say to them, “Well, the Word of God says such and such” if these people aren’t even sure that God exists.

The stories and metaphors of Scripture present examples of how our own personal experience with Christ can impact hearts. Our unique journey can be shared as God leads us to someone we are specifically gifted to reach.

Compare and Contrast: When Paul tried to win the Jews for Christ, he began his dialogue with a discussion of the law, the thing that formed their perception of why they existed (*see Rom. 2:1–19*). When John spoke on behalf of Jesus, he used the concepts of light and love (*see 1 John 1:5–7 and 1 John 4:7–11*).

Discuss the difference in each approach. What can we learn from their example?


► STEP 3—Practice

Thought Questions:

Scripture uses many metaphors to communicate what God seeks to offer His fallen children. In your class, make a list of some of those metaphors. Break into groups and choose one metaphor to explore more deeply. What does the concept of “the story of redemption” tell us about God? What do we learn about His character? His love? His patience? His wrath?

Life Applications:

1 Children are the fount of much simple, straightforward wisdom. When asked what she learned about Jesus in Sabbath School, one kindergartner said, “Jesus is like a hug.” This child came from a broken family. She had found out that Jesus could help her during the unsettled times at her house. What other kinds of images could you imagine people using to express what Jesus means to them?

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Display of God's Love

The engine that configured the plan of salvation and put it into effect was divine love, the very essence of God (*1 John 4:8*). Every aspect of God's redemptive work is embedded in the divine matrix of love. God sent the Son to die for us because He loved the world (*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 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 to the commandments of God is our expression of love to Christ for what He has done for us (*1 John 5:3*). The whole life and death of Christ was a magnificent display of God's character, the most sublime revelation of love.

What should be our reaction to the display of God's love in the death of Christ? *1 John 4:7–11*.

The significance of God's love, as revealed in the sacrifice of Christ, is better comprehended when placed in the context of the cosmic conflict. Satan's charges against God cast doubts in the minds of heavenly beings concerning the nature of God. Was God indeed a loving, self-sacrificing God, as He claimed to be, or did He have a selfish nature hidden under the appearance of self-denial? The cross of Christ dispelled, forever, all doubts concerning the character of God. That the Creator willingly chose to become human and suffer and die on a cross in order to save a race that did not deserve it revealed that God's love was beyond the full comprehension of the heavenly intelligences. The unselfish nature of the unfathomable sacrifice is precisely displayed in the fact that what God did through Christ was done for the benefit of others, not for His own personal benefit or gain.

The manifestation of God's love on the cross of Christ served also to dispel humans' misconceptions concerning the nature of God. "By presenting Jesus as the representative of the Father, we shall be able to dispel the shadow that Satan has cast upon our pathway, in order that we shall not see the mercy and inexpressible love of God as manifested in Jesus Christ. Look at the cross of Calvary. It is a standing pledge of the boundless love, the measureless mercy of the heavenly Father."—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 156.

Read again 1 John 4:7–11 and contrast what it says to your own life and relationships with others. In what ways can you better manifest the love talked about here? What things are standing in your way, and how can they be removed?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

2 Invite the members of your class to share what makes Jesus real and personal to them. Have them share stories from their lives. Encourage them to share their testimonies with friends at work.

Witnessing

Read 2 Corinthians 5:18–21 together. How does it look to live out this description of a disciple of Jesus Christ? “We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us” (2 Cor. 5:20, NIV). Search out the Scripture’s description of an ambassador. Build an action plan for your class that embodies tangible activities that you will do as ambassadors sharing God’s salvation with someone.

► STEP 4—Apply

Consider This: John compels Jesus’ disciples, “Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God” (1 John 4:7, NIV). What would it look like if we fully followed his admonition? Consider John 17:20, 21. As a group, choose one practical, doable outreach activity that would demonstrate love to someone in the community. Set a date.

After the event, evaluate how it was received. How did you communicate what you were trying to do? In what ways was the impact of your act of kindness bigger than what you had anticipated?

Prayerfully plan your next service outreach, employing what you learned from the first. Make a calendar for your Sabbath School class that schedules monthly acts of service. At the end of the year, discuss what impact your intentional outreach ministry has made on your class and on your community. Plan to multiply your impact by sharing your class’s testimony with your church.

Further Study: Reconciliation: “Reconciliation means that every barrier between the soul and God is removed, and that the sinner realizes what the pardoning love of God means. By reason of the sacrifice made by Christ for fallen men, God can justly pardon the transgressor who accepts the merits of Christ. Christ was the channel through which the mercy, love, and righteousness might flow from the heart of God to the heart of the sinner.”—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 396.

Wrath of God: “Christ was to take the wrath of God which in justice should fall upon man. He became a refuge for man, and although man was indeed a criminal, deserving the wrath of God, yet he could by faith in Christ run into the refuge provided and be safe. In the midst of death there was life if man chose to accept it.”—Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, February 24, 1874.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ Of the various images talked about this week, which ones can you relate to the best? Why? In class, talk about the different images and share with one another the reasons for your choice.
- ❷ Dwell on this idea of reconciliation. What can we learn from human accounts of reconciliation that can help us better understand it as a metaphor for salvation?
- ❸ In what ways is the Cross the greatest manifestation and expression of God’s love? What comfort can we draw from the Cross about the nature of God that can help sustain us during hard times?
- ❹ God’s wrath against sin just couldn’t 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?

Summary: The Bible employs different images to help us grasp Christ’s death. Redemption indicates that His death liberates us from the power of sin. His death restores a peaceful relationship with God; it reconciles us by overcoming our rebellion. Through the death of Christ we are declared innocent before the heavenly court because He died in our place as our Substitute. His death on the cross is the place where God shouts and tells us, “Look, this is how much I love you!”