

Chapter Seven The Chasm Bridged

God and God's first man enjoyed sweet and intimate communion until they were separated by sin. How could this great, impassable chasm which sin had made between God and man be bridged? From the very nature of the case man could do nothing, even had he wanted to, for sin had closed all possible access to God. Clearly, if anything was to be done, God would have to do it.

But what would God do? Adam's sin presented a terrific problem: one which not only affected God's personal relationship to man but His governmental relationship to the whole universe; nay, even, it affected His own personal character.

Adam's sin was spiritual anarchy; it was resistance to God's authority; disobedience to God's command; rebellion against God's law. How would God treat sin? Would He punish it and pass judgment upon it? Or would He condone it and pass over it? If God failed to deal righteously with such a flagrant case of disobedience and disloyalty, how could He maintain order through obedience to law in any other part of His universe? God's governmental administration of the universe was involved in this stupendous difficulty.

But Adam's rebellion created an even greater problem than this. By it God's holiness had been outraged; His righteousness denied; His veracity questioned; His goodness doubted; His Word disbelieved; His command disobeyed; His love spurned. Surely such treatment deserved drastic action. Why did He not then and there abandon Adam and Eve utterly and leave them and their posterity to the consequences of their sin?

He did not because He could not. "God is love," and "love never faileth." God's love is an everlasting love which nothing can quench, not even sin. Awful, terrible as sin is, it is not powerful enough to defeat God's purpose in the creation of man. Man was created not only *by* God but *for* God. Man was made for fellowship with God, much more, for ultimate sonship. Apart from a living, loving relationship with man God could never be satisfied. God, who is love, could not cast away the sinner in his sin and still be love. The claims of God's love must be met.

But "God is light" and "in him is no darkness at all." As light cannot fellowship with darkness, so holiness cannot commune with sin. An holy God

cannot have intimate relationship with a sinful man. God and sin cannot dwell together. The claims of God's holiness must be satisfied as truly as the claims of His love.

"We speak of law and love, of truth and grace, of justice and mercy, and so long as sin does not exist, where is no controversy between any of these. If there be no sin, law and love are never out of harmony with each other; truth and grace go ever hand in hand; justice and mercy sing a common anthem. If the law be broken, what is love to do? If truth be violated, how can grace operate? In the presence of crime, how can justice and mercy meet? This is the problem of problems. It is not a problem as between God and man. It is not a problem as between God and angels. It is a problem as between God and Himself" (G. Campbell Morgan, *The Bible and the Cross*, p. 125).

Let us think deeply into this greatest of problems created by Adam's sin. How would He satisfy the claims of both His love and His holiness? His holiness must condemn sin and command the sinner to depart. His love must open its arms to the sinner and bid him come. An holy God could not tolerate sin, a loving God could not turn away from the sinner. God could not desert the sinner but what should He do with the sin? God's attitude toward sin would reveal His true character quite as much as His attitude toward the sinner.

Would Adam's sin not only separate God and man but would it even bring division into God's own being? "Sin, whether as anticipated by the Creator, or as become actual in our world, created an antinomy in the very being of God, created a new ethical exigency for God and for the universe, so that for the legitimate expression of either or both of these polarities (holiness and love) in question a new reconciliation was necessary: that is, a reconciliation of opposite moral relationships within God's being itself. On the one hand, as we must believe, the self-affirmatory character of the divine purity must compel displeasure against sin: and on the other hand, the divine clemency which on God's part yearns to impart its own holy nature to His creatures would constrain Him to forgive and cleanse from that sin" (H. C. Mabie, *The Divine Reason of the Cross*, p. 54).

What, then, would God do that both would be consistent with His holiness and conciliatory to His love; which would mercifully and yet righteously bridge that awful chasm between Himself and man?

THE CHASM BRIDGED

A perfect reconciliation was brought about within God's being by a synthesis of His holiness and His love by which the claims of each were satisfied. God's holiness and righteousness compelled Him to pronounce the curse upon the serpent, the man, the woman and even upon the earth. God had said, "For in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." God's word is true and is from everlasting to everlasting; God's righteousness compelled Him to carry out His judgment upon sin.

"But God's love put an exquisite, fragrant, fadeless rose in the midst of the thorns." Right in the very heart of the pronouncement of that awful curse recorded in Genesis 3:14-19 is that gracious, wondrous promise of salvation through a Saviour.

Genesis 3:15, "And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed: it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel."

God's holiness and love are melted together in this precious promise and out of this golden crucible emerges *the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ*, and stretches itself across the impassable chasm sin has made between God and man. "The reconciliation was effected through the self-provided, suffering reconciliation of God in Christ. 'Mercy and truth are met together: righteousness and peace have kissed each other.' Thus the antinomy in the divine Being itself was dissolved."

Before Adam and Eve left the garden of Eden the promise was made of a way of salvation for the whole human race which had been plunged into moral and spiritual ruin through sin. It was not man's way but God's — salvation through a Saviour.

THE CROSS IN GOD'S ETERNAL PURPOSE

But just here we may ask — and reverently so — Did Adam's and Eve's sin take God by surprise and did He have to think out a way of escape for man after his fall? Here we come to the very acme of the infinite grace of God. May the Holy Spirit grant each reader spiritual understanding to apprehend "the breadth and length and depth and height of the love of God which passeth knowledge."

No, Adam's sin did not take God by surprise, nor was God's way of redemption an after-thought. God knew even before the foundation of the world and the creation of man the sad and tragic devastation sin would work in the human race. God had anticipated the fall and was ready for it.

The cross which was to bridge the chasm made by sin was set up in love in the dateless eternity of the past before it was set up in promise in Eden or in history on Calvary. "The divine redemptive movement, *in purpose anterior to creation*, once determined upon, never paused until it victoriously expressed itself in the language of Calvary. . . The atonement in principle and in God is dateless, but as taking effect on man it is historical, though dateless. Redemption then, in the large, is anything but an afterthought, a mere appendix to make good an unexpected disaster which had overtaken God's universe. Both sin and redemption were foreseen from the beginning" (H. C. Mabie, *The Divine Reason of the Cross*, chap. 2).

There was a Cross set up in Heaven before it was ever set up on earth. The atonement for man's sin made visible, effectual and historical on Calvary, was wrought out in purpose and in principle in the heart of the triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit in the dateless past.

Revelation 13:8, "And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life of *the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world*."

Ephesians 1:4, "According as *he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world*, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love."

Acts 2:23, "Him, *being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God*, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain."

2 Timothy 1:9, "Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, *which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began*."

What can these words mean but that in the counsels of the triune God in the eternity of the past the awful tragedy in Eden was foreknown and that, then and there, the wondrous plan of salvation through the Son's redemptive work was formed by which God-in-Christ should reconcile a lost, sinning race to Himself?

REVELATION OF REDEMPTION

The Bible is the Book of Redemption, its one theme from the beginning to the end is *salvation through a Saviour*.

Luke 24:27, "And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, *he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself*."

Luke 24:44, "And he said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, *which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me.*"

All through the law, the psalms and the prophets, God is unfolding to man His plan of salvation through a Saviour. By the sacrifices of the Old Testament He foreshadows the one supreme Sacrifice. By pen pictures and prophetic promises He foretells Him who is "The Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world."

The story of His life with the record of its words and works; His death, resurrection and ascension as recorded in the Gospels; His doings as continued in the history of the Acts; the deeper revelation of Himself as the living, victorious, glorified Lord in the Epistles, and the promise and prophecy of a coming King in the Revelation; all have but one underlying purpose: namely, to reveal Him, not as the founder of a new religious order, nor as the propagator of a new ethical code, nor as the teacher of moral principles, nor as the reformer of man's external environment, but to reveal Him as the Saviour of mankind. The Father announced the coming of His Son as the coming of a Saviour.

Matthew 1:21, "And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for *he shall save his people from their sins.*"

Luke 2:11, "For unto you is born this day in the city of David *a Saviour*, which is Christ the Lord."

Jesus Christ did not come only to teach or to preach or to heal: He came to *save*. Jesus Christ came for but one purpose which He Himself states in these words,

Luke 19:10, "For the Son of man is come *to seek and to save that which was lost.*"

He came to bridge the chasm which sin had made between God and man. No one else and nothing else could do this.