

The Theology of the Tabernacle

Part 2

-

John Vernon McGee

(Continued from the April-June Number, 1937)

Chapter II

The Altar of Brass: The Doctrine of Satisfaction Where Satisfaction is Made to the Holiness of God that Wholly and Completely Vindicates the Sinner.

The blueprints and patterns for the Tabernacle are given in the latter part of the book of Exodus (Exod 25–40). The placing of these instructions is not accidental. Exodus is the book of redemption. It opens in the gloom of slavery of a nation born in the brickyards of Egypt. It closes in the glory of the Tabernacle. It tells the story of how God came down and delivered a people whose only appeal to His heart of love was their need, suffering, and burden. He did not deliver them because they were good folk, moral people, or better than others. These things were not true of them. They had no claim on God whatsoever, but they cried and “their cry came up unto God by reason of their bondage.” Their destitute condition and hopeless circumstance made a real appeal to God stronger than a hoop of steel. For that reason and because of His promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, He led them out of Egyptian bondage. He brought them to Himself on the wings of Infinite Grace. Through Moses He told them the manner of their release, “Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles’ wings, and brought you unto myself.” At Sinai they were given the privilege of substituting the law route for the grace route; eagles’ wings for the yoke of law. Even with law which cannot save there must be some manifestation of grace, else there can be no salvation. These people stood utterly condemned by the law; so it was essential to have the intrusion of a way of Grace. In other words God must be free to save sinners, who are now law-breakers with the offense added to and magnified. The Tabernacle was the means of Grace for a people who deliberately chose law instead of the wings of grace.

The Tabernacle was part of the law. The law was in three divisions: the commandments, the judgments, and the ordinances. The commandments were an expression of the person of God. He commands what He does because of what He is. The judgments conditioned the relationship of man towards those about him. The ordinances conditioned the relationship of man toward God. The instructions for the Tabernacle were found in the ordinances. The ordinances provided a temporary hiding place for the sinner in the presence of the holiness of God. In the midst of the Tabernacle instructions, between the giving of the instructions and the construction of the Tabernacle, there is the incident where God hid Moses in the clift of the rock. The Tabernacle was a clift in the rock for sinning Israel until the revelation of God in human form, even the Lord Jesus Christ. All this was done in anticipation of the work of Christ upon the cross. The ordinances are as much a part of the Mosaic law as the commandments. The only proper distinction between them is found inherently in them. The subject matter makes the division. If it is proper to make a comparison where all is divine, it is very likely that the ordinances were the more important, as they provided an acceptance for a sinner who had broken God’s commandments. It is well for those who do not make a clear-cut distinction between law and

grace to see this; namely, that there can be no division made between the commandments and ordinances which neglects one while exalting the other. The Dispensation of Law did not make a basis of acceptance before God of a sinner by keeping the commandments, but by providing a substitutionary sacrifice in the Tabernacle as contained in the ordinances. If a person in this age desires to thrust himself back under the Mosaic law, he must, in order to be logical, construct for himself a tabernacle, in which to make sacrifice as contained in the ordinances. By what authority can one make such radical differences between the commandments and the ordinances? There is no just grounds for any such division. The Christian has been delivered from the law in all of its parts. It is not his rule of life, for he has been lifted to a higher plane of living. Deliverance from the law does not lower the standard of living under grace but lifts it to a more exalted sphere. Christ has completely fulfilled the law. In His life He fulfilled the commandments and judgments. In His death He fulfilled the ordinances relating to a sacrifice for sin. The law in all of its manifold parts is but a lesson to lead Christians to better things, "For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect" (Heb 10:1).

Those today who insist on thrusting the church back under law have not provided a tabernacle made according to the pattern shown Moses in the Mount. The Mosaic Law requires the Tabernacle. Without it Judaism was the most hopeless religion ever offered to mankind, ten thousand times darker than paganism, for Judaism revealed a plane of living and an ideal that was unattainable. It had the ethic but lacked the dynamic. But it is absurd to insist that there should be such a tabernacle today, and it is equally absurd to conclude the Christian under any part of the Mosaic system to the exclusion of the other parts. The Mosaic system was an unified whole, inseparable and indissoluble. The Mosaic system served as one of the highway markers, pointing on to Christ and His cross as the place where God completely and finally worked out in His sufficiency and suffering a way back to Himself for man. What God demanded in the Law he now supplies freely to those who do no more than believe in Jesus. The law was given to lead the sinner to Christ, "Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith" (Gal 3:24).

There is a very striking feature about the blueprints for building the Tabernacle. The instructions for the articles of furniture are given first. This is not the commonly accepted method of doing things today. The choosing of the furniture is always reserved for a time when the interior of the house is finished. Not so with God's house. The furniture comes first. The purpose in this method will become more and more evident as we continue in this study. Suffice it to say here, that the articles of furniture constituted the approach to God. The Tabernacle proper merely furnished a housing for the furniture. About these articles of furniture cluster all the meaning of the Tabernacle Worship, the furniture being, therefore, the most important part of the Tabernacle. The position of these articles in the Tabernacle lent dignity to their place (e.g., The Holy of Holies was so called because of the presence of the ark and mercy seat). We should not be surprised to find God putting first things first, and therefore giving precedence to the instructions concerning the furniture.

These articles of furniture pictured the person and work of Christ in redemption, but no article was a picture or image of Him. The Second Commandment was strictly adhered to in the furnishings of the Tabernacle. "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the

iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; and shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments” (Exod 20:4–6). In all the furniture of the Tabernacle there is a careful avoidance of making an image of God. In no detail is Deity photographed. All is by way of suggestion and shadow. There is no idol in the Tabernacle. In a world of idolatry this is a unique feature about the Tabernacle that should arrest the attention of any thinking person. In an age wholly committed to the worship of idols, there is a purposeful absence of idolatry in the Tabernacle. This is even more striking and strange when we remember these people had lately come out of Egypt where idols were numerous, and had themselves constructed a golden calf to worship. It is amazing to note that the most important part of the Tabernacle was not an image or idol, but furniture.

There were seven articles of furniture: the ark, the mercy seat, the altar of incense, the table of shewbread, the lampstand of gold, the laver of brass, and the altar of brass. These articles occupied the following respective places: two articles in the Holy of Holies-ark and mercy seat; three articles in the Holy Place-table of shewbread, lampstand of gold, and altar of incense; two articles in the outer court-altar of brass, and laver of brass.

The first plan amongst the articles of furniture that God gave to Moses was that of the ark. The plan of the mercy seat was linked with that of the ark, as both belonged together. An emphasis is given in Scripture to the ark that is not ascribed to other articles of the Tabernacle furnishings. Even a cursory examination by a casual reader of these instructions would give the impression that the ark was the most important part of the Tabernacle plan, as well as the leading article of furniture, the ark and mercy seat being the very center of the divine plan. The ark thus epitomized all that the Tabernacle stood for in the minds of God’s people. It played a prominent part in the history of Israel: when the ark was in its rightful place in the thinking of Israel there was real blessing; when, on the other hand, it was relegated to a secondary place the blessing was withheld. It was the ark, as the preëminent piece of furniture, that David brought up to Jerusalem. In the plans of the Tabernacle, God again placed first things first.

Furthermore, the brazen altar was given last together with the laver. It now becomes evident that in this thesis I am changing the order of the articles as given in the command to Moses. Why change the divine order of things by considering the last first and the first last? It is well to remember that these instructions were God’s own, and were issued from His viewpoint, as He abode in the Holy of Holies, looking out to the sinner on the outside. The instructions move from Jehovah out to the sinner. Man should take his rightful place as sinner and move in toward Jehovah. What was to God the last article of furniture as He looked out, was to the sinner as he came in the first article of furniture. Jehovah was in His temple in the Holy of Holies, but the sinner stood without, and forever shut out unless Jehovah brought him to Himself.

We pause to make this comment. What a contrast this is with the Laodicean condition that is prevalent in the present-day church where Christ is apparently out of the church, and is found standing at individual heart doors and knocking for an entrance. Under the Old Testament economy the sinner had to make certain sacrifices to get in to God. He did the knocking. Now the Lord Jesus stands outside of individual hearts and knocks. Then a sinner must be brought to God; now God comes to the sinner.

The specifications for constructing the brazen altar are found in Exodus 27:1–8: “And thou shalt make an altar of shittim wood, five cubits long, and five cubits broad; the altar shall be foursquare: and the height thereof shall be three cubits. And thou shalt make the horns of it upon the four corners thereof: his horns shall be of the same: and thou shalt overlay it with brass. And

thou shalt make his pans to receive his ashes, and his shovels, and basons, and his fleshhooks, and his firepans: all the vessels thereof thou shalt make of brass: And thou shalt make for it a grate of network of brass; and upon the net shalt thou make four brasen rings in the four corners thereof. And thou shalt put it under the compass of the altar beneath, that the net may be even to the midst of the altar. And thou shalt make staves for the altar, staves of shittim wood, and overlay them with brass. And the staves shall be put into the rings, and the staves shall be upon the two sides of the altar, to bear it. Hollow with boards shalt thou make it: as it was shewed thee in the mount, so shall they make it.”

The brazen altar was constructed of shittim wood overlaid with brass. The shittim (or acacia) wood is a hard, durable, and close-grained wood. Josephus speaks of its strength. Dr. J. T. Davis in his Bible Dictionary says that it was used for shipbuilding in Egypt. It grew in the wilderness through which Israel marched for forty years and furnished all the wood for the tabernacle. The altar was five cubits long and five cubits wide, and three cubits high. Just how long the cubit was is not easily ascertained. Some of the lengths given for the Hebrew cubit are: 17.70, 18.22, 18.36, and 18.9 inches long. It is impossible to be dogmatic about the length of the cubit and there is much speculation on the subject, but these measurements are conservative coming from Dr. Davis.

The altar was overlaid with brass from which it gets its name, brazen altar. Half-way up the sides of the altar there was a grating of brass. One and one-half cubits from the ground and one and one-half cubits from the top this grating was fastened with four brazen rings. Two staves were made to carry the altar on the wilderness march. The staves were made of shittim wood, overlaid with brass, and ran through rings on the sides.

This altar was sometimes called the table of the Lord, and the altar of burnt offering. The altar stood at the very entrance of the Tabernacle. “And he put the altar of burnt offering by the door of the tabernacle of the tent of the congregation and offered upon it the burnt-offering and the meat-offering; as God commanded Moses” (Exodus 40:29). It was the first object that confronted the sinner at the entrance of the Tabernacle. It was on this altar that every sacrifice was made in Israel. There were five offerings in the Levitical ritual, and all of these were made on this altar.

The burnt-offering was made thereon: “And he shall kill the bullock before the Lord: and the priests, Aaron’s sons, shall bring the blood, and sprinkle the blood round about upon the altar that is by the door of the tabernacle of the congregation. And he shall flay the burnt-offering, and cut it into his pieces. And the sons of Aaron the priest shall put fire upon the altar, and lay the wood in order upon the fire:...” (Lev 1:5–7).

The meat-offering was made thereon: “And thou shalt bring the meat-offering that is made of these things unto the Lord: and when it is presented unto the priest, he shall bring it unto the altar. And the priest shall take from the meat-offering a memorial thereof, and shall burn it upon the altar: it is an offering made by fire, of a sweet savour unto the Lord”-Lev 2:8–9.

The peace-offering was made thereon: “And Aaron’s sons shall burn it on the altar upon the burnt-sacrifices, which is upon the wood that is on the fire; it is an offering made by fire, of a sweet savour unto the Lord” (Lev 3:5).

The sin-offering was made thereon: “As it was taken off from the bullock of the sacrifice of peace-offerings: and the priest shall burn them upon the altar of the burnt offering” (Lev 4:10).

The trespass-offering was made thereon: “And he shall offer the second for a burnt-offering, according to the manner: and the priest shall make an atonement for him for his sin which he hath sinned, and it shall be forgiven him” (Lev 5:10).

On the great day of atonement the two goats were brought in to the brazen altar, and the one which was not the scape goat was offered on the brazen altar: “And Aaron shall bring the goat upon which the Lord’s lot fell, and offer him for a sin-offering” (Lev 16:9). Israel was forbidden to erect an altar in any other place for sacrifice. It was God’s command that offerings be made only upon this altar. In the recorded history of Israel it is written that the people built altars elsewhere and served heathen gods which God condemned through the prophets. Most of the written prophecies contain a polemic against idolatry. Isaiah furnishes an instance of this in the forty-sixth chapter. Elijah, who wrote prophecy, but left no record of it (2 Chronicles 21:12), stood on Mt. Carmel a solitary figure testifying to the true altar that was broken down.

Finally all twelve tribes went into captivity; the ten tribes of the northern kingdom were carried to Assyria, and the two tribes of the southern kingdom were carried away to Babylon. One of the reasons given when the northern kingdom of Israel went into Assyrian captivity was their disregard for the statutes of God and their service at the altars of other gods.

“For so it was that the children of Israel had sinned against the Lord their God, which had brought them up out of the land of Egypt, from under the hand of Pharaoh, king of Egypt, and had feared other gods, ...And the children of Israel did secretly those things that were not right against the Lord their God, and they built them high places in all their cities, ...And they set them up images and groves in every high hill, and under every green tree: and there they burnt incense in all the high places, as did the heathen whom the Lord carried away before them; and wrought wicked things to provoke the Lord to anger: For they served idols, whereof the Lord had said unto them, Ye shall not do this thing. Yet the Lord testified against Israel, and against Judah, by all the prophets, and by all the seers, saying, Turn ye from your evil ways, and keep my commandments and my statutes, according to all the law which I commanded your fathers, and which I sent to you by my servants the prophets” (2 Kings 17:7–13).

Every lamb that was sacrificed as a substitute for a sinner Israelite or sinning Israel during the interval of the Tabernacle was offered on the brazen altar. It was the unique place of sacrifice. The blood of bulls and goats was shed in profusion about this altar. It was the place of substitution for Israel, for the brazen altar was a figure of the cross of Christ. Lev 1:9 and Eph 5:2, when compared have this analogy: the offering of the burnt-offering on the brazen altar and the offering of Christ of Himself in His glorious person on the cross are both called a “sweet savour” unto God. The brazen altar finds a perfect fulfillment in the work of Christ upon the cross; and a further analogy is found in the materials of construction and purpose of the brazen altar as compared with the accomplishment of Christ on the cross. This we will now examine.

The altar was of brass. This was the identifying feature in it. Brass in the divine arrangement speaks of judgment, and is associated with God’s judgment of sin. To illustrate this we go to the book of Revelation. On the isle of Patmos John’s first vision was that of the ascended Christ who is coming in all His Glory some day to judge sin. The Father hath committed all judgment to the Son, “For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son” (John 5:22). At His first coming Christ did not come to judge. On one occasion when one of the company asked Christ to speak to his brother about the inheritance, He abruptly responded, “Man, who made me a judge and a divider over you” (Luke 12:14). Again Christ said, “Ye judge after the flesh, I judge no man” (John 8:15). Nevertheless, one of the titles at His coming again

will be that of judge, “The Lord, the Righteous Judge” (2 Tim 4:8); “the judge standeth before the door” (James 5:9). This vision John had on Patmos is Christ in His Holy Glory as Judge of all the earth. When John saw this One, he fell at His feet as dead. How strange in the light of the fact that John was the one who reclined upon His bosom at the last supper in the upper room. Here he falls at His feet as dead, but this Judge is righteous and His first word to John is, “fear not.” John’s sin had been put away perfectly at the cross and judged there, and he had passed from judgment unto life. One of the features noted about this glorious vision was that the Judge had feet like brass: “And His feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace; and his voice as the sound of many waters” (Rev 1:15). When He comes the second time He rests everything He does on judgment. Before, He was the criminal at the bar of judgment, taking our place; then He will be the Judge upon the bench in His rightful and own position. On the basis of judgment He works the next time. This One with feet of brass will smite the image of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream [Gentile World powers] upon the feet of miry clay and iron. This One with feet of brass will tread the winepress of the wrath of God. Isaiah gives us this picture of Christ coming to judge: “I have trodden the winepress alone; and of the people there was none with me: for I will tread them in mine anger, and trample them in my fury; and their blood shall be sprinkled upon my garments, and I will stain all my raiment. For the day of vengeance is in mine heart, and the year of my redeemed is come. And I looked, and there was none to help; and I wondered that there was none to uphold; therefore mine own arm brought salvation unto me; and my fury, it upheld me. And I will tread down the people in mine anger, and make them drunk in my fury, and I will bring down their strength to the earth” (Isa 63:3–6). This refers to Christ’s Second coming to the earth to set up His kingdom. John was given this same scene in vision, and he makes record of it in Rev 19:11–21. When Christ came the first time He bore the judgment of sin in Himself on the cross. When He comes the Second time it will be to inflict judgment on sin. Those who refused to accept His judgment that He bore, must receive the judgment for sin themselves when He returns. If His judgment on sin at His second coming seems terrible, let it be remembered that He bore that judgment Himself, and those who will have it so can escape the coming judgment. The brass of the brazen altar speaks of the judgment of Christ upon the cross for the sin of the world. “He was made sin for us who knew no sin” (2 Cor 5:21).

The fire of the brazen altar likewise speaks of judgment. Fire is associated in Scripture with the judgment of sin, is the symbol of Hell itself, the ultimate place for the punishment of sin, “And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever” (Rev 20:10). We are not concerned here about a literal fire. Suffice it to say that the language is symbolic. What it is a symbol of is another question. Fire is connected here with judgment on sin whether it be literal or not.

The fire of the brazen altar was never quenched, and it was not permitted to expire, “The fire shall ever be burning upon the altar; it shall never go out” (Lev 6:13). The fire of judgment was to burn continually and continuously. As long as there is sin there is judgment.

There were three phases connected with the brazen altar which set forth in a threefold manner the teaching of the brazen altar as a symbol of the cross. These three were relative to the altar and its service. They are as follows: (1) The one making the sacrifice. The sacrificer. (2) The substitute. The sacrifice. (3) The Altar. The place of sacrifice. These three will now be considered in order.

(1) *The One Making the Sacrifice; the Sacrificer.* The Israelite on the outside, who was a sinner, was forever shut out from the presence of God. He brought his sacrifice to the door of the

Tabernacle, and there he slew it at the side of the altar: “Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, If any man of you bring an offering unto the Lord, ye shall bring your offering of the cattle, even of the herd, and of the flock. If his offering be a burnt sacrifice of the herd, let him offer a male without blemish: he shall offer it of his own voluntary will at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation before the Lord. And he shall put his hand upon the head of the burnt-offering; and it shall be accepted for him to make atonement for him. And he shall kill the bullock before the Lord: and the priests, Aaron’s sons, shall bring the blood, and sprinkle the blood round about upon the altar that is by the door of the tabernacle of the congregation” (Lev 1:2–5). The Israelite could proceed no farther than the side of the brazen altar. There he halted and offered his sacrifice (“it shall be accepted for him to make atonement for him”), and the animal substituted for him. The blood of the animal covered over his sin, and made him a forgiven sinner. This did not give him the prerogative to go into God’s presence. From this point on, he went into the presence of God in the person of the priesthood, Aaron’s sons, and into the Holy of Holies the nation went only once a year in the person of the high priest who took in blood from the brazen altar for the sins of the people. The individual sinner only got into God’s very presence through the corporate group in the person of the high priest. From the brazen altar there was not only substitution in the sacrifice itself, but in the personnel of those engaged in service and worship. The sinner Israelite went only so far, and there substitution took place; an animal died for his sins, and another went into the presence of God for him on the basis of the sacrifice. This very fact precluded any notion that there was finality in the service of the Tabernacle, or that the comers thereunto were made perfect. From the brazen altar the sinner went into the presence of God only in the person of a substitute, a priest. Both the sacrifice and the sacrificer substituted for the sinner Israelite.

In this present age God is drawing out a people unto Himself. These are the (*ἐκκλησία*) called out ones. They are sinners without respect to race, color, sex, condition, circumstance, or of the dispensational difference of Jew and Gentile. All are made one in Christ. This is fully set forth in the second chapter of Ephesians, the eleventh through the eighteenth verses, but we shall only quote the sixteenth and seventeenth verses for confirmation: “And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby: And came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and them that were nigh.” This new relationship in Christ is realized through the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit. “Ye must be born again” is a commandment for the Holy Spirit and not for the sinner. It is a futile injunction as far as he is concerned. “The Son of Man must be lifted up” is the *must* of the Second Person of the Godhead, and “ye must be born again” is the *must* of the Third Person of the Holy Godhead. All a sinner can do is to receive Christ as his own personal Savior. This acceptance by the sinner of the “must” work of Christ procures for him the “must” work of the Holy Spirit, “But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God” (John 1:12–13). To receive Christ is the “must” work of the sinner, and this is imperative. It is a simple and easy matter for the sinner in one sense, but that does not lessen its importance. A sinner must be born again. When a sinner accepts Christ’s work *for* him, the Holy Spirit does a work *in* him. This is the infallible identification of a Christian. “If any man be in Christ he is a new creation” (2 Cor 5:17); “for in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation” (Gal 6:15). Christ died that the Holy Spirit might take a rebellious sinner, deserving the wrath of God, and make him an obedient son, a recipient of the favor of God. The sinner is brought into the family and household of God. The new birth that

brings him into the family of God, not only makes him a son of God but also a priest unto God. He is born into a priestly family.

Only the tribe of Levi were priests in Israel. It was a birth privilege, and not a badge of merit. Paul could never have been a priest in the Mosaic economy. He was a member of the tribe of Benjamin. No priest ever came from that tribe. Even the Lord Jesus could never have been a priest in the earthly sanctuary. He was of the tribe of Judah. It was the kingly tribe but not the priestly tribe. King Uzziah of this tribe was smitten with leprosy for intruding into the office of priest. Every priest in Israel was born a priest.

The new birth that makes a son out of a sinner, not only brings him into the family and household of faith, but also brings him into a priestly family. At the moment of the new birth the sinner is made both a son and a priest, as it is written: "Ye also as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ... But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people, that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light" (1 Peter 2:5, 9). Believers constitute "a kingdom of priests" (Rev 1:6; 5:10, A.R.V.). It was God's original purpose with Israel that the whole nation should be "a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation" (Exodus 19:6), but the nation so miserably failed that God only used one tribe of the twelve to serve in the Tabernacle. The superiority of the Church over the nation Israel is evidenced here, for the believer priest today is brought into his exalted position through the person and work of his Great High Priest, the Lord Jesus, and he can no more lose the privilege of his priesthood than he can lose his sonship. The Christian is a believer priest today, and he does not stop at the cross but is "in Christ" "in the Heavenlies" in position, and is permitted to come "into the holiest by the blood of Jesus," and this he does with boldness. What an exalted position and glorious privileges belong to the believer in this present age of Grace. The tribe of Levi had to come by the brazen altar. We do not have to remain outside as the nation Israel did, but we have been made priests by the blood of the Lamb, and are bidden to come with boldness to His throne of Grace. This precious truth will occupy our minds in a succeeding chapter.

(2) *The Substitute or the Sacrifice.* The sacrifice was a substitute for the sinner: "And he [the sacrificer] shall put his hand upon the head of the burnt-offering; and it shall be accepted for him to make atonement for him" (Lev 1:4). The Israelite slew the sacrifice at the side of the altar with his hand placed upon its head, thus identifying himself with the sacrifice. This whole act speaks of substitution. "The soul that sinneth it shall die" is the unalterable law of God that transcends all dispensations, and forever abideth the unchangeable law of an unchangeable God. This law expresses the character of a changeless God who would be untrue to Himself should he deviate one hair's breadth from this dictum. Because of His character He cannot compromise with sin, for should he do that he would be a partaker in it. This law expresses the inflexible will of a resistless Deity. But "all have sinned and come short of the glory of God." This is not the arbitrary arrangement of a revengeful God, but the simple statement of fact concerning the condition of the human race. Therefore the sinner must die for the penalty must be paid, but the sacrifice was dying for him. It was his substitute. By faith he placed his hand upon it and God accepted this arrangement, looking on to the time when the Lamb of God would take away the sin of the world, "For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins" (Heb 11:4). This was the gracious provision of the God of "all Grace," for the time then present, waiting for the perfect substitute; even God Himself, bearing the penalty in His own body on the tree. The creator suffering for the creature, a Holy God burying the sword of Justice

in His own heart instead of inflicting the penalty on those who hurt Him and wounded Him, and in rebellion murdered Him. This is the wonderful display of divine grace.

The death of Christ was substitutionary. He was holy, harmless, and undefiled, and separate from sinners: “For such an high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens” (Heb 7:26). He was the spotless lamb of God. He stood before a woman taken in adultery whence all but he had fled, because he was the only one without sin. He demanded of those who knew Him in the days of His flesh, “Which of you convicteth me of sin.” On another occasion he said, “for the prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me” (John 14:30). When the prince of this world cometh unto any of the rest of the sons of Adam, he always finds something in us, a wedge that lets him in, and we succumb to temptation. Christ was the impeccable man, the Lord of Glory wrapped in the swaddling clothes of perfect humanity.

The Lord Jesus, the God-Man, did not have to die. The wages of sin is death. All the sons of Adam are in the doleful funeral procession. They come to live but they have to die. The sons of Adam all have this brief biography; they were born, they lived, and they died. Christ was exempt from all this. Nevertheless, He came into this world to die. This unique Person came on a unique mission. We come into the world to live, but alas we must die as sons of Adam. The moment that gives us life begins immediately to take it from us. Christ only could say, “no man taketh my life from me, I have power to lay it down and I have power to take it again.”

“Christ died.” This is a fact of history. What is the explanation? Paul adds to this statement of fact, “for our sins.” That is the theological explanation. He substituted for us on the cross. He died that we might have life. He took our place, that He might offer us His place. He look our hell that we might have His heaven. He bore the scars of the cross that we might be presented spotless before His presence with exceeding joy. Likewise, His death was not only substitutionary, but penal. Paul gathers the mystery of the cross into this sublime statement, “For He hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him” (2 Cor 5:21). God hates sin and when Christ became sin, God treated Him as, He must treat all sin. Christ became an unclean thing on the cross. God executed sin in the person of Christ. The cross is the judgment of God on sin for the believer, and reveals God’s attitude toward sin. When Christ was made sin, God spared not His only begotten Son, but made him an offering for sin.

Paul could point to the cross and say, “He loved me and gave Himself for me” (Gal 2:20). There was a time in eternity when God in His eternal counsels permitted sin to enter His creation. Creation and creatures came forth from the hand of the Creator in perfection, but He permitted the leaven of sin to permeate both. At the moment God permitted sin, he was also willing to bear the penalty that His creatures might escape the penalty, and in time He came and bore that penalty for His creatures. What wondrous Grace! God became a suffering Deity. The cross of Christ was enveloped in darkness, and in that darkness God endured all the suffering of hell. He went to the very depths and drank to the very dregs for His sinning creatures who were His enemies and whose sin had wounded and hurt Him. The Judge left the judgment seat and came down and took His place with the prisoner at the bar. He bore the penalty that He had pronounced. What unspeakable Grace, yet couched in the simple and sublime statement of the most familiar verse of the Bible, “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). What amazing Grace! Little wonder that Henry C. Mabie in *The Redeeming Aegis* speaks of the universe as redempto-centric. It is not primarily Christo-centric or Theo-centric. The liberal

theologian has emphasized the Christo-centric aspect, and thereby he has made of Christ only a great man, greatest teacher, wonderful example, but one incapable of saving sinners. His death is valueless for He is psilanthropic. On the other extreme, there is a certain school of orthodox theologians who emphasize the theocentric aspect with a resultant dead orthodoxy. They have a sovereign God who goes through some mechanical process to redeem man. God is wholly detached from the life of man, and the story of salvation sounds like running machinery rather than the pulsating heart of God beating in yearning love after lost man. This form of dead orthodoxy has failed to reveal God as a suffering Deity who has displayed His Grace so wonderfully that man is led to respond to His proffered offer of salvation. He took my place because He loved me, and would not let anything stand in the way. When His holiness forbade Him to come to me, and His law condemned, and I was utterly undone, then He came and took my place. He lifted me out of the pit, and I can sing, "Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; and hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth" (Rev 5:9). The divine melody that rings in the ears of the redeemed is, "In the cross of Christ I glory, Towering o'er the wrecks of time; All the light of sacred story Gathers round its head sublime."

Other aspects of the death of Christ, with which we will have occasion to deal further on, are redemptive, propitiatory, reconciling, and efficacious.

(3) *The Altar-The Place of Sacrifice*. What wonderful light the altar casts upon the cross, the place of God's sacrifice! The cross of Christ was more than a Roman gibbet. It was more than a public place of execution for criminals. It was an altar where a priest was offering a sacrifice to God. Nay, it was more than that; it was the place where God Himself became both the offering and the offerer at the eternal brazen altar. The cross was God's chosen altar of sacrifice. The death of Christ on the Cross is vividly foretold in Psalm 22, where is recorded an accurate description of death by crucifixion. In verse 22 there is this portrayal of the cross, "thou hast heard me from the horns of the unicorns." This is an accurate and apt account of the cross. The death of Christ was more than the consummation of Roman legal procedure and Jewish plotting and conniving. If a person sees in the death of Christ only the movement of machinery on the human plane he has not read the Scripture aright.

There are two sides to the death of Christ-the human and the divine aspects. God and man were both busy at the cross. Man was doing his worst; God was doing His best. Man was acting in hate; God was acting in love. Man was destroying; God was restoring. Man was inflicting death; God was bestowing life.

Those about the cross saw only the human element, and seeing that they thought they saw all. But today we know they did not see all. Even today we cannot plumb the depths of the death of Christ or gather all its meaning into our minds. We can only stand in submissive awe in the light of it.

Simon Peter gathers both the divine and human elements together in his first sermon on the day of Pentecost, "Him being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain" (Acts 2:23). Those who slew Him were murderers, but they were not beyond the control of God in their action; on the contrary, they were moving in the same direction, but with different motives. Both were moving in the consummation of the death of Christ.

When Christ was arrested and brought to trial that night, it is recorded that He did not open His mouth in His own defense. He was innocent but He did not attempt to defend Himself. Was this weakness on His part? Isaiah had prophesied, “as a lamb that is led to the slaughter so He opened not His mouth.” When Christ began His public ministry, John pointed to Him and said, “Behold the Lamb of God.” This one was in His Blessed Person the Lamb of God. On another occasion John again pointed to Him and declared, “Behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). Now a lamb was for sacrifice. The work of the Lamb of God was to take away the sin of the world. He did it by the sacrifice of Himself. When the Lamb of God was arrested He was innocent of the charges brought against Him or any other charges (“which of you convicteth me of sin?”), but He was the Lamb on the way to the altar to die for the sin of the world; so He opened not His mouth. Had it been only a matter of the charges brought against Him by His accusers, He would have defended Himself, and would never have died on the cross. As the Lamb of God He opened not His mouth. He was on the way to the place of sacrifice. He was going to the cross voluntarily. His will was to do the Father’s will. He was not being forced or coerced, nor was he caught helplessly. The Father was not compelling Him, and man was not forcing Him. He was in perfect accord to the terrible thing that was happening to Him. He was not trapped by clever Jews. He was not caught between the upper millstone of Jewish hatred and the nether millstone of Roman cruelty. He was moving toward the cross as a lamb to the altar of sacrifice. His only compulsion was that of Love for those who were nailing Him to the cross. Definitely and directly He had been moving toward the cross for six months. Up in Caesarea Phillippi He told His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem to die. From that moment He set His face toward Jerusalem like flint, and He moved toward the cross with purposeful precision. When He arrived in Jerusalem there was a plot by the rulers of the Jews to take Him, but in their discussions they had definitely decided that He would not be crucified during the feast, for they said: “not on the feast day, lest there be an uproar among the people” (Matt 26:5). Christ had previously told His disciples that He would die during the feast, “ye know that after two days is the feast of the passover, and the Son of man is betrayed to be crucified” (Matt 26:2). It is recorded that He was crucified during the feast. He even made His captors do His bidding. He was master of every situation. He set the date of His execution, and it was contrary to that of His captors. He died on the date He determined.

A careful examination of what is commonly termed the trial of Jesus will reveal that in the final analysis He was not on trial that night. His judges were on trial. Pilate as the puppet of the Roman Empire was on trial, and in the economy of God that man and that nation came to an ignoble end. That nation which had for over five hundred years marched her legions over the world was soon to go down in corruption and defeat. A little lame man, Paul, by name, came into the city of Rome shortly after the death of Christ preaching the death and resurrection of the Nazarene, whom Rome had executed. That gospel was a contributing factor in the downfall of the Roman Empire and is so stated by historians. Myers says: “Another consequence of the fall of the Roman Empire in the West was the development of the papacy. Bury makes slavery, oppressive taxation, the importation of barbarians, and Christianity the four chief causes of the weakness and failure of the empire.”¹

Those who see in the death of Christ only the seizure and execution of a helpless and poor man have not read the Gospel account aright. He was the master of circumstances. “No man

¹ 1. *Ancient History* (Revised Edition, 1904), p. 547.

taketh my life from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again” (John 10:18). Christ did not open His mouth because He was the lamb of God dying willingly upon God’s appointed altar for the sin of the world. Even in the agony of death He did not die as other men die. It is recorded that He dismissed His spirit. Other men gasp for the last breath in death, but He with the divine fiat command dismissed His spirit; He commanded it to go.

Even before six months of His death, Christ had been moving steadily toward the cross. He is the lamb slain from the foundation of the world. He endured the sorrow and suffering of the cross for the joy set before Him. He was working in beautiful harmony with the Father. “Therefore doth the Father love Me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it up again” (John 10:17). He was not acting apart from God, nor had the Father forced the Son into this place of pain. No, God was acting in it all, “God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself.” The Son came forth from the Father in perfect accord with the Father to carry through a plan that was formulated by the Trinity in the Eternal Godhead. The entrance of sin had incurred suffering for the creatures. God came forth to share that suffering and bear the sin, “once in the end of the world [age] hath He appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself” (Heb 9:26).

Now let us turn to the death of Christ for examination of the fact that the death of Christ was more than man venting his hate, but rather God displaying His love; more than a breach of Jewish tradition or Roman law, but rather Christ meeting the demands of a Holy God.

Christ was nailed to the cross at the third hour (9:00 A.M.), and He expired at the ninth hour (3:00 P.M.). He was on the cross six hours. At the sixth hour (12 Noon) it is recorded that there was a darkness over the whole face of the land until the ninth hour. For three hours He was in light and for three hours He was in darkness. “And it was now about the sixth hour, and a darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour, the sun’s light failing” (Luke 23:44, A.R.V.). This darkness was supernatural. It would seem to be confined to the land of Palestine, or more particularly to Judea. One of the plagues brought on Egypt was darkness, but in the land of Goshen they had light. The Jews had light while the rest of Egypt had darkness. God kept His own people in light in Egypt, but when they crucified their Messiah and His Son that supernatural darkness which they escaped in Egypt came upon them in their own land. It was a greater miracle than the one in Egypt. It is more difficult to produce darkness in the presence of light than light in the presence of darkness. Light overcomes darkness, but darkness is the negation of light. Luke uses the aorist tense and not the imperfect in the forty-fourth verse as the King James Version has it, “a darkness came.” The aorist tense denotes completeness of the act and therefore the suddenness of it. The darkness came at once. At high noon a darkness settled down on the earth like a blanket, and it remained three hours and then lifted and departed as suddenly. It could not have been an eclipse, for it was the time of the passover and there was a full moon. It meant that the moon was removed from the earth at such an angle as to catch the full reflexion of the sun. An eclipse does not last more than a few moments at the most, but this darkness lasted three hours. It is impossible to explain the phenomenon on naturalistic grounds. It seemed that the sun, the physical source of light, was put out or veiled with sackcloth when the Author of all light, both physical and spiritual, was hanging on the cross. There is nothing like it in the annals of history. It is there in the annals, however, for both Celsus, the enemy of the cross, and Tertullian, a reliable Christian recorder of facts, state that it took place.

What is the explanation of this darkness? In the light of the sun men had put forth every effort to humiliate Christ and make Him suffer. The Roman soldiers, hardened by such experience over a long period of time, were performing just another day’s task. The Jewish rulers

and mob were jeering and chiding Him. Man was busy about the cross for three hours doing despite to the Savior. At high noon man's energies ceased. There was darkness and no man could work; the hearts of men were held by a gripping terror. The soldiers stood aside in fear; the ruthless jibes of the rulers' tongues were silenced. Stillness enveloped the scene. Unspeakable horror hung over the cross, while the mighty mechanism of nature rolled on, but its Maker had stepped in and intervened in His creation. He veiled the sun in sackcloth, and spread the mantle of night over the cross.

The first three hours were man's moment; the last three hours were God's moment. With his intervention the cross ceased to be a Roman gibbet and became an altar. Pilate wrote above the cross, retaining it against protest: "The King of the Jews"; but God veiled that inscription for the time being, that John's words might echo from the hilltops: "Behold the lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world." In that period of darkness Christ "was made sin for us," and thereby He fulfilled the prophecy of the slain lamb in Isaiah 53. That darkness speaks of the inscrutable and unspeakable sufferings of Christ when he became sin for us. God slew Him upon the altar-as it is written, "smitten of God"; but His suffering is unrecorded, for it is veiled in the darkness of Calvary. As the darkness ceased there came the piercing and anguished cry from the dying Lamb, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me." In that last three hours Christ endured all the sufferings of hell. He plumbed the depths of pain, and He bore the full penalty of sin: God did not spare His Son but gave Him freely. When Christ bore our sin, it was no make-believe of a deluded person, not a mere creedal gesture, not alone a public representation of a religious doctrine, nor a half-hearted rehearsal of a covenant agreement; but in baldest reality substitution for sinful man was consummated in the stark darkness of that historic hour. Looking back upon His deepest hour of anguish, we cannot plumb the depths of darkness to discern the dire distress of His soul; we can only repeat, "It pleased the Lord to bruise him," for "He loved me and gave himself for me." It was God who buried the sword of Justice in the heart of Christ. Now, the sword of Justice is sheathed in His heart, and God is free to accept sinners who do no more than receive Christ. The cross of Christ was an altar of eternal sacrifice where God displayed His love by paying the penalty of sin Himself which His holiness demanded, for God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself.

"None of the ransomed ever knew,
How deep were the waters crossed;
Nor how dark was the night,
That the Lord passed through,
Ere He found His sheep that was lost."

As we peer into the darkness of Calvary, there breaks forth a flash from the fire of the altar, and we behold the Dear Dying Lamb. Then we can lift our hearts in hushed harmony to reverently sing,

"Well might the sun in darkness hide,
And shut his glories in,
When Christ the Mighty Maker died
For man, the creature sin."

The concluding feature about the brazen altar which is suggestive were the measurements. The altar was four-square, "And thou shalt make an altar of shittim wood, five cubits long, and five cubits broad" (Exod 27:1). This suggests the equality of all at the altar. All who come to the cross must come as sinners on the same plane, "for all have sinned and come short of the glory of

God.” It required the death of Christ for each one. This is not to ignore the fact that there are big sins and little sins, and that some have sinned more than others. But all are sinners by nature and it requires the same cleansing agency for each, namely: the blood of Christ. Therefore, this does not fail to recognize that there are degrees of sinning, but it reveals that both the little and big sin are inspired by the same sinful nature in which there dwelleth no good thing. All come to the cross as sinners, for Christ died for sinners.

The altar was three cubits high, “and the height thereof shall be three cubits” (Exod 27:1). The brazen altar was the tallest article of furniture in the Tabernacle. It towered above them all. The substitutionary death of Christ is the foundation of all of God’s dealings with man, and is above all his actions to us. Not only does the cross reveal that God did His best for us, but that all good things must come from the cross. It surpasses them all and furnishes the basis for all. “He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things” (Rom 8:32).

Cleburne, Texas