

## **The Price of Love**



**Mark Gyde – A Father to YOU**

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### Introduction

The Bible is a love story; not just the New Testament, but the Old Testament as well. It's a story of loss, passion and ultimately of redemption. Despite being a compendium of sixty-six books and countless individual stories, the overall story of the Bible is simple, and it has to be.

In its simplest form it's this: a Father wanted a family but his children became lost through their pride and independence. This Father did everything that was necessary to make the way for them to come back to him.

This way is the way of love as the Father is love (1 John 4:16). There is no manipulation, coercion or control, it's the way of freedom and of personal choice. We are being offered something and therefore have the choice whether to accept it or reject it.

Yet this story can be misunderstood, misinterpreted or, in more extreme cases, re-written. We should not try to make the Bible fit our way of life or our experience; rather we need to align our thinking with Scripture. We can't bring Scripture down to our level but we should allow ourselves to be drawn up into the greatest love story of all. Remember:

“For my thoughts are not your thoughts,  
neither are your ways my ways,”  
declares the LORD.  
“As the heavens are higher than the earth,  
so are my ways higher than your ways  
and my thoughts than your thoughts.” (Isaiah 55:8-9)

As we consider this story of love, we must not slip into thinking that it comes without a cost. As we know from our own stories, the way we grew up in our family or the way we brought up our own children, we know that love has a cost. There is a cost for the lover and a cost for the beloved, something we will explore in more detail.

## God's Story

Let me then layout the basics of this story. It is essential that we understand the story before we begin to look at how it has been misinterpreted.

In his letter to the Ephesian church, Paul writes that from before the creation of the earth we were predestined to be sons and daughters (Ephesians 1:4-5). An important point has to be made at this stage in order to avoid a serious misinterpretation of the gospel story.

The point is this: Paul is writing to believers, to Christians, to people who had followed Jesus' counsel to Nicodemus in John 3. He is writing to people who have personally chosen to put their trust, or faith, in Jesus. They believe he is the only One who can forgive their sins and enable them to enter eternal life (John 3:1-21).

Understanding this point is absolutely vital. Paul largely wrote to believers and therefore there are certain things that may be assumed. Principally, that there is an individual need for a second birth, something I'll look into shortly. He is not writing to unbelievers who have no concept of salvation or redemption. If we miss this, we are in danger of interpreting Scripture incorrectly. When Paul says we are predestined to be sons and daughters he assumes that his readers are born again, have accepted the Lordship of Jesus and understand what it means for their sins to be forgiven. **He is not saying that every person is universally saved.** If he were writing to unbelievers he would use a more winsome and descriptive narrative as we see in Acts 17:16-28 when he talks to a group of unbelievers in Athens. That discussion is something we shall also be looking at later.

We know about the deception of Satan in Genesis 3 and how the man and woman both took and ate the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. The lie Satan told them (and which they believed) was that they 'would become like God' and that 'they would not die'. This was a trap. They had been created in the image of God and so were already like him. Before the Fall death was irrelevant. It was as a result of their sin that death entered the human race, not as an act of judgement but as an act of mercy to prevent them living for ever in a fallen, broken state.

At this point we should ask ourselves a question: "Did this surprise God, did he suddenly have to find plan 'B'?" The answer has to be a resounding 'NO'. No plan 'B' was needed because the Father did not change. He knew that the choice to accept him and love him also gives us the choice to reject him.

At the end of Genesis 3, he did not change, mankind did. As a consequence we chose separation instead of union, independence instead of dependence and a self-centred approach to life instead of the simplicity of a childlike heart. God did not stop being the Eternal Father. Instead, we see throughout the Old Testament the longing of a Father who desired relationship and intimacy with his children.

*I will put my dwelling place among you, and I will not abhor you. I will walk among you and be your God, and you will be my people. (Leviticus 26:11-12)*

*“I myself said, “How gladly would I treat you like my children and give you a pleasant land, the most beautiful inheritance of any nation.’ I thought you would call me ‘Father’ and not turn away from following me.” (Jeremiah 3:19)*

This is not a Father who has rejected his children but one who longs for redemption, reconciliation and restoration.

Because sin and death entered the human race, mankind continues to be separated from God. It is only through Jesus’ defeat of sin and death on the cross that we can be reconciled to the Father (Romans 8:1-2).

When Jesus took all the sin of the world upon himself he did for us what we could not do for ourselves. His single sacrifice made it possible for all who believe to be saved from the consequences and power of sin and to receive the gift of eternal life.

*For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God. (Ephesians 2:8)*

The gift is free for us as the price was paid by Jesus.

## The Gift of Free Will

If we are to fully understand our part and responsibility in this story we need to understand the nature of free will.

Love will never force us into a relationship: it draws us, it woos us, it invites us and therefore it gives us a choice – will we accept or reject it? If there is a choice to accept something, then by definition there also has to be the option of rejecting it. That is difficult for some to accept but it is the only way in which free will can ever operate. If we do not have the option to reject the Father's offer then our free will has been stifled. Without choice there would be control not freedom.

We can choose life and enjoy the rich reward of the Father's blessing, or we can choose death, the pathway to destruction (Deuteronomy 30:11-20). I like the way this passage starts "*Now what I am commanding you today is **not too difficult for you or beyond your reach***" (v11). This instruction is as valid today as it was when Moses gave it to the people of Israel.

What fascinates me about this issue of free will is that God makes himself totally vulnerable. He allows himself to be rejected for the sake of love. He loves us so much that he gives us the opportunity to respond to his loving kindness and in so doing is prepared to be rejected when we are unable or unwilling to make that choice for ourselves. Having said that, his love is like a powerful magnet that draws us, through the Holy Spirit, towards himself.

The other point I want to make about freedom is despite us making the wrong choice the gift of free will was not taken away. The choice remains with us today. A growing misinterpretation of Scripture claims that the work of Jesus on the cross removes our need to choose to receive the gift of salvation for ourselves. It makes the claim that 'all' are saved. **Such a claim invalidates the beautiful gift of free will.** Such a claim, whilst attractive, is not Biblical. In the appendix I list many verses of Scripture which reinforce the true nature of salvation. They contain a condition or a choice – '**whoever**' believes.

## The Single Sacrifice

For centuries the people of Israel had a system of sacrifice and offerings. Different sacrifices or offerings for different offenses or circumstances. This all came to an end through the monumental sacrifice of Jesus on the cross.

*First he said, "Sacrifices and offerings, burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not desire, nor were you pleased with them" — though they were offered in accordance with the law. Then he said, "Here I am, I have come to do your will." He sets aside the first to establish the second. And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. (Hebrews 10:8-10)*

A common misinterpretation of Scripture claims that, because the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross deals with the problem of sin, every person has already received the full benefits of salvation. A common phrase used to describe this misunderstanding is "they're in, they just don't know it".

Such a statement clearly violates not only the principle of free will but it is also contrary to Scripture.

Jesus' sacrifice provides the means for everyone to receive the gift of salvation. Although it provides the means it does not necessarily lead to everyone taking up that opportunity. We all have to take that first step of faith to appropriate it for ourselves.

I can offer my grandchildren something good but it only becomes theirs when they reach out their hand and take it. So it is with salvation, an offer is made – will we reach out our hand and take it for ourselves? That is the only way it can work as Jesus said this in John 14:6 *"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me"*. These words are an invitation, an opportunity to accept the greatest gift of all time. Some will accept it, some will not!

John 3 is probably the greatest and simplest statement about this gift which is offered to everyone. I encourage you to read the whole passage (John 3:1-21). However, to make this very important point clear, I am quoting some of the relevant verses with my emphasis added:

*Jesus replied, "Very truly I tell you, **no one** can see the kingdom of God **unless** they are born again. (v3)*

*Jesus answered, "Very truly I tell you, **no one** can enter the kingdom of God **unless** they are born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. (v5-6)*

*For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that **whoever** believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. (v16)*

***Whoever** believes in him is not condemned, but **whoever** does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. (v18)*

**Everyone** who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed. But **whoever** lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what they have done has been done in the sight of God. (v20-21)

Just as we have all had a natural birth (born of water), so we all need a spiritual birth (born of the Spirit). This is not a universal second birth; it is a step we all need to take individually. It is not forced upon us, it is offered as a gift; one we can choose to respond to, or one we can choose to reject.

## Faith: Our Doorway

Hebrews 11:1 defines faith.

*Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.*

In other words, it's our experience of something that was previously beyond us.

The faith I'm talking about is the faith that takes us through the doorway of salvation. It's the faith Paul talks about in Romans 4.

*... the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for **all who believe**. For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received **by faith**. (Romans 4:22-25)*

Paul's conclusion is just as Abraham had faith, so too we need to have faith in order to enter and receive the promise of salvation.

*Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham's offspring - not only to those who are of the law but also to those who have the faith of Abraham. (Romans 4:16)*

As we discuss faith we must distinguish between our faith and God's faithfulness. The early part of Romans 4 describes the eternal faithfulness of God and his unshakeable commitment to humanity. Moses encountered the faithfulness of God (Exodus 34:6) and Jesus is described as being faithful over the whole of God's house as a Son (Hebrews 3:5-6).

The confusion arises when people seek to rely solely on the faith or faithfulness of God. By doing so they remove the need for that personal step of faith to receive the gift that is being offered.

In some circles there is a debate on a point of translation. When Paul says "by faith" does he mean that we have faith **in** Jesus or that we rely on the faith **of** Jesus. It's a valid argument as the Greek **can** mean both, it's therefore ambiguous rather than definitive. However, there is a significant weight of Scripture that removes this ambiguity so far as our personal salvation is concerned (see the Appendix). There is a choice which requires our act of faith. We can take this step because of the faithfulness of Jesus in becoming the Way for us.

Yes, we can and should rely on the faithfulness of God. But we can't solely rely on it so far as our salvation is concerned.

May I remind you that Paul largely addresses believers whereas Jesus addresses unbelievers as he announces the new era of forgiveness of sin and the gift of eternal life. The teachings of both Jesus and Paul must be seen in context and, through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we must see how they fit perfectly together.



## Our New Identity

When we are born again, in God's eyes we become his children (John 1:12). Salvation leads us into the blessings of sonship (Galatians 3:26, Galatians 4:6-7, Romans 8:14). What a huge privilege that is!

God, the Father, is involved in the natural birth of everyone. He knit us together in our mother's womb (Psalm 71:6, Psalm 139:13-14, Jeremiah 1:5), we are all made in his image (Genesis 1:27), he is the Father of the fatherless (Psalm 68:5). This natural birth is described by Jesus as being born of water (John 3:5-6).

This natural birth connects us to Adam through our generational line. Not only does it connect us with Adam it also connects us to God as we are all made in his image (or likeness).

However, just because God is involved in our natural conception does not mean it removes the need for us to have a second birth. We also need to be born of the Spirit – or, as Jesus says, we need to be born again (John 3:3-8). He fathers us in the natural and he also needs to father us in the spiritual.

In the New Testament, whenever there is a reference to God's fathering through our natural birth the Greek word that is used is '*genos*'. A good translation of this is that we are God's offspring or countryman. This is how Jesus refers to the Pharisees in John 8 – he says they are Abraham's offspring rather than his children. It is clear from that conversation that they lack the heart connection to their ancestor which would enable them to be called 'children' of Abraham. The Pharisees would like to have been called the children of Abraham but Jesus doesn't let them get away with it. He is clear, they are Abraham's offspring and not his children.

Whenever Jesus or the other New Testament writers refer to us being God's children (being born again), they use a completely different Greek word, '*teknon*' which simply means 'child'. Paul also uses the word '*huios*' which means 'son'.

Paul makes the same distinction when he has a conversation with a group of unbelievers in Athens (Acts 17:28-30). Yes, God has been involved in their natural birth and so Paul refers to them as God's offspring. They are not God's children until they follow the instruction to repent (v30).

This is an important distinction. If we miss the difference between the natural and the spiritual, we are in danger of making a wrong assumption: that because God is involved in our physical birth and because Jesus dealt with the problem of sin on the cross then every person is therefore a child of God. **This assumption is simply a false belief.**

The only way to become a child of God is by being born again. My sin was dealt with on the cross but I need to appropriate the gift of salvation through repentance and forgiveness. I need a heart connection to the Father and I get that through my new birth. In receiving the gift of salvation I move from being an offspring to being a son.

*If you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that*

*you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved. (Romans 10:9-10)*

*Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. (Romans 10:13)*

Everyone is welcome but individually we all need to change and let go of our lifestyle of sin. Repentance (Gk: *'metanoia'*) means more than simply saying 'sorry'. It means to turn around and walk in the opposite direction (Matthew 18:2). It means changing your lifestyle, it means letting go of sin, it means saying 'yes' to and submitting to the Lordship of Jesus. It is a new way of living. Does this mean that we never sin again, that we never make mistakes? Of course not! But it means that we have chosen to step into Christ and live under his covering of forgiveness. It means he not only covers our sin and shame with a robe of righteousness but he removes our sin from us.

*The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. He will not always accuse, nor will he harbour his anger forever; he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us. (Psalm 103:8-12)*

*Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord. (Acts 3:13)*

Just as we are born into our natural family so we need to be born into our Spiritual family. We become sons and daughters by being born again. It's the only way!

Having been born again we can live as sons and daughters and begin to experience what it means to walk as Jesus walked (1 John 2:5-6). We realise that we are joint heirs with Christ and recipients of the promise made to Abraham (Gen 12:1-3, Gen 13:14-17). Salvation is just the beginning, it's the doorway into a life of relationship and blessing.

## **‘Selfie’ Christianity**

In the introduction I expressed my concern about the potential to misunderstand, or even re-write, our story.

Do we want to define God as being ‘nice’ all the time? That might be particularly attractive to those of us living with an experience of the Father’s love. It’s something we simply cannot do. If we do we end up making the biblical story centred around us rather than us centring ourselves around it. We make it self-centred, rather than God centred.

Maybe there is something in us that wants to make the gospel message appear attractive and in doing so we avoid the choice, the cost or the sacrifice which love demands. That, though, is not the gospel message we read in Scripture.

We all love a good selfie.

The problem with a selfie is that it is a picture of the way we see ourselves. It’s like looking in a mirror, the image has been flipped around. It’s a representation but it’s not how others see us, it’s not the real us. A mirror image is obvious if you have any writing on your shirt! It’s the wrong way round.

That, my friends is the error that we are being asked to believe. It looks and sounds reasonable but it has turned the truth upside down. It seeks to build the story around us, our experience and our limited rational understanding. It contrives theories or theologies rooted in the mind rather than seeking truth through the Holy Spirit. Put simply, it is man’s attempt to bring God down to the level of human reason or understanding.

Not only does this do us a disservice but it also does our Father a disservice by bringing him down to our level rather than drawing us up to him.

When such a practice is taken to extremes it leads people to say that the very words of Scripture are incorrect. Their conclusion is that the biblical authors did not mean what they wrote. This means Scripture is re-written or re-interpreted to reflect what they believe rather than what was inspired by the Holy Spirit. **We must avoid this at all costs.**

The truth, and it’s one we need to stick to, is that the Kingdom of Heaven is given to and received by those with a childlike heart. It is hidden from those who seek to be wise and learned. It is seen with the eyes of the heart (Ephesians 1:18) and not through the futility of our thinking (Ephesians 4:17-18).

The Father sees our true image. He does not see our ‘selfie’, he sees us as we truly are. Not a distorted, mirror image but the reality of sons and daughters, made in his image and being transformed into the likeness of his son, Jesus. He does not compromise who he is for the sake of our whims or the current trend of ‘theological’ thinking. As he said to Moses, “I AM”. He is the same yesterday, today and forever. He is LORD and he does not change. He invites us to be like him.

In the garden mankind changed, not God. It's the same now; it's us, not God, who needs to change.

We don't have to make a way, he has already done that for us. Through Jesus, he became the Way. Our response is to receive it by faith and to respond with love. Issac Watts, the well known hymn writer, summed it up so well.

*Were the whole realm of nature mine  
That were a tribute far too small  
Love so amazing so divine  
Demands my soul my life my all*

We are drawn towards this love. It invites us and creates the opportunity for us to respond.

Let's not allow the spirit of the world to frame our understanding. Let us allow the Spirit of Truth to lead us into the Truth.

## **Appendix**

### **John 3:3-8**

Now there was a Pharisee, a man named Nicodemus who was a member of the Jewish ruling council. He came to Jesus at night and said, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him."

Jesus replied, "Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again."

"How can someone be born when they are old?" Nicodemus asked. "Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother's womb to be born!"

Jesus answered, "Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit."

### **John 3:16-17**

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

### **John 3:36**

Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on them.

### **John 5:24**

Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life.

### **John 14:6**

Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

### **Mark 16:16**

Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.

### **1 Peter 1:23**

For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.

### **2 Cor 5:17**

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!

**John 1:12-13**

Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God — children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

**2 Peter 3:9**

The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

**1 Peter 1:3-5**

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.

**Acts 2:38**

Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

**Joel 2:28-32**

"And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days. I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and billows of smoke. The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD. And everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved; for on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be deliverance, as the LORD has said, even among the survivors whom the LORD calls.

**1 John 3:9**

No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in them; they cannot go on sinning, because they have been born of God.

**1 John 5:1-4**

Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves the father loves his child as well. This is how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and carrying out his commands. In fact, this is love for God: to keep his commands. And his commands are not burdensome, for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith.

**Romans 3:23-25**

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood —to be received by faith.

**Romans 10:4**

Christ is the culmination of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.

**Romans 10:9-13**

If you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved. As Scripture says, "Anyone who believes in him will never be put to shame." For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile —the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, for, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

**Ephesians 2:1-5**

As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath. But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions —it is by grace you have been saved.

**1 John 1:5-10**

This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.

If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word is not in us.

**Col 2:13-14**

When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having cancelled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross.

**1 John 3:1&3**

See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him.

All who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.

**Mat 6:33**

But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

**Acts 16:31**

They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved — you and your household."

**Rev 3:20**

Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me.

**Isaiah 51:11**

Those the LORD has rescued will return. They will enter Zion with singing; everlasting joy will crown their heads. Gladness and joy will overtake them, and sorrow and sighing will flee away.

**Isaiah 35:8-10**

And a highway will be there; it will be called the Way of Holiness; it will be for those who walk on that Way. The unclean will not journey on it; wicked fools will not go about on it. No lion will be there, nor any ravenous beast; they will not be found there. But only the redeemed will walk there, and those the LORD has rescued will return.

**Hebrews 11:6**

And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.

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