



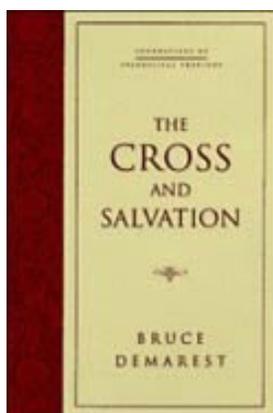
The Cross and Salvation

Book Review By Jeremy Cagle

There are few issues more divisive than the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. In a 2004 TIME magazine article entitled, “Why Did Jesus Have to Die?”¹ David Van Biema mentions several theories for the motivation behind Jesus’ crucifixion. Two of these are the doctrines of “atonement”² and “substitution.”³

Van Biema’s article contains several interesting quotations about these two doctrines. Commenting on the atonement theory, Chicago Theological Seminary’s Theodore Jennings Jr. stated that “the New Testament is just all over the map” about atonement.⁴ Texas churchgoer Hala Saad, however, provided a more definitive statement: “All I had to do was sign up for God’s debt-cancellation plan – for Jesus to take my place!”⁵ Considering the substitution theory, Yale theologian Serene Jones observed that “we don’t have enough information” to come to any conclusion about the purpose of Jesus’ death.⁶ Van Biema even returned to the Middle Ages to quote Peter Abelard of the Middle Ages regarding Jesus’ substitutionary death. According to Abelard, in this substitution “love answers love’s appeal.”⁷

But why did Jesus die? What was the purpose of the cross? TIME Magazine was content never to reach a conclusion to this question. Christians, however, do not have this option. If we do not know why Jesus died, we have no answer for our faith.⁸ And if we have no answer for our faith, we might as well adopt the viewpoint of one of Van Biema’s sources: “I don’t think we need a theory of atonement at all; I don’t think we need folks hanging on crosses and blood dripping and weird stuff.”⁹



This article is written to review a book that *does* explain the necessity of Jesus’ death and the salvation that Christians possess as a result of it. *The Cross and Salvation*,¹⁰ published in 1997, was written to “make plain and relevant God’s glorious plan of salvation, his provision for the human dilemma through

Christ’s work, and the application of saving grace to the unconverted” (xiv-xx). The author, Bruce Demarest, wrote this work because “the human situation is constantly in flux, and new and challenging issues come to the fore that demand biblically faithful answers” (xx).

In other words, *The Cross and Salvation* was written for a modern audience to answer the question, “Why did Jesus have to die?”

Demarest has served as Professor of Theology at Denver Seminary since 1975. He has a Ph. D. from the University of Manchester in England and has authored several books, including *General Revelation*.¹¹

Content.

The Cross and Salvation is divided into six parts, each discussing an important aspect of the crucifixion. The following is a brief summary of each part.

Part 1: The Plan of Salvation

In these chapters, Demarest discusses the doctrines of salvation, grace, and election. In his first chapter, on salvation, he explains the Bible’s role in salvation, man’s need for salvation, various interpretations of salvation, and the order of salvation. He also includes a brief discussion of the author of salvation and the relationship of salvation to other aspects of Christianity.

The second chapter of *The Cross and Salvation* discusses the doctrine of grace. Here, as in all the other chapters except the first and last, Demarest discusses the history of the doctrine, the biblical references to the doctrine, and the implications of the doctrine.

The third chapter discusses the doctrine of election. Demarest's discussion of the historical views of the doctrine of election is noteworthy. He talks about several historical positions on the doctrine: Classical Arminian, Contemporary Arminian, High Calvinist, Barthian, and Moderately Reformed. Anyone interested in studying the relationship between God's sovereignty and man's will would find this section extremely helpful.

Part 2: The Provision of Salvation

The chapters in part two cover one doctrine: the doctrine of the atonement. Atonement, as defined above, is "the aspect of the work of Christ, and particularly his death, that makes possible the restoration of fellowship between individual believers and God."¹² Due to the sinfulness of mankind, atonement cannot be achieved without a tremendous sacrifice.

Here we simply state the fact that human sin is an offense to the holy and righteous God. All persons have sinned against God and his law (Rom 3:23) . . . The fundamental issue of human existence, then, is how deeply ingrained sin can be forgiven and how the spiritual chasm between God and his creatures can be abridged . . . To answer this simple but profound question we must investigate the significance of Christ's sufferings and death on the cross.¹³

In investigating "the significance of Christ's sufferings and death on the cross," the book draws several conclusions.¹⁴ First, Jesus' death was a ransom for sinners. Demarest quotes Mark 10:45 as justification for this: "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many." Second, Jesus' death provided redemption for sinners. "Redemption focuses on the *release* of persons detained in bondage."¹⁵ Third, Jesus' death served as a propitiation. "Propitiation connotes the act of turning aside the wrath of the offended God by means of appropriate sacrifice."¹⁶ Fourth, Jesus' death brought reconciliation to God and man. "Theologically, reconciliation connotes that enmity between God and sinners is changed to a relation of friendship and communion."¹⁷

Part 3: The Application of Salvation – Subjective Aspects

The third part of *The Cross and Salvation* covers the doctrines of divine calling, conversion, and regeneration.

It is important for the reader to note that the chapter on divine calling is different from the chapter on election (described above). Election is God's choosing of some to salvation "before the foundation of the world,"¹⁸ while divine calling "refers to that summons of God in time that both invites and draws the unconverted to Christ in a saving relationship."¹⁹ For the purposes of this review, *election* focuses on the objective side of salvation, and *calling* focuses on the subjective side.

Part 4: The Application of Salvation

– Objective Aspects

Part four discusses the doctrine of union with Christ and the doctrine of justification. Justification "deals with the fundamental issue of how guilty sinners can be acquitted and restored to favor with an infinitely righteous and just God."²⁰ The doctrine of justification answers several important questions regarding the cross:

How can a perfectly righteous, just, and holy God acquit guilty and condemned sinners? On what basis can God reckon as righteous those who are wholly unrighteous? Furthermore, how does God accomplish this great justifying work?²¹

Part 5: The Progress of Salvation

Here, Demarest explains the doctrine of sanctification and the doctrine of preservation (also known as perseverance). Perseverance answers the question, "What must believers do to persevere in the faith?" Interestingly enough, "Historically, the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints has been highly controversial, rivaling the debate over the doctrine of election."²²

Part 6: The Perfecting of Salvation

The final section of *The Cross and Salvation* expounds upon the doctrine of glorification. Although this is the book's shortest section, it discusses several important issues related to glorification – for instance, the hope of glorification, the phases of glorification, the nature of glorification, and the practical implications of glorification.

Evaluation of Content.

Bruce Demarest's work is an excellent resource because of its Biblical accuracy. Two examples from *The Cross and Salvation* demonstrate this.

The first example is Demarest's explanation of the doctrine of conversion. Conversion is "the action of a person in turning to Christ."²³ This doctrine is essential to understanding Jesus' death and the salvation it brings to sinners, for "regeneration, union with Christ, justification, sanctification, and preservation/perseverance – proceed from the experience of genuine conversion."²⁴ In discussing biblical conversion, Demarest highlights two main facets of "the experience of genuine conversion": repentance and faith.

"Repentance is a change of mind, ultimate loyalty, and behavior whereby pre-Christians turn from sin unto God."²⁵ The New Testament begins and ends with a call to repentance (Matt 3:2; Rev 3:19). Not only that, but repentance also was taught in the parable of the two sons (Matt 21:28–32) and in Jesus' lesson with the little child (Matt 18:3). "The Lord plainly stated that failure to repent would result in judgment and death (Matt 3:10; 11:20–24; Luke 13:3, 5)."²⁶ The apostle Paul also mentioned a "godly sorrow" that brings about repentance (2 Cor 7:9–11), and the New Testament tells of God Himself calling sinners to repentance (Acts 3:19; 17:30; 26:20; Rev 3:3).

Meanwhile, "faith is the means by which we receive justification and salvation."²⁷ A synonym for *faith* is *belief*. It is belief or faith in the saving work of Jesus' crucifixion that brings about the turning involved in conversion.

The apostle John commended those who had faith and believed in Jesus' deity (Jn 8:24) and in His identity as the Son of God (Jn 11:27; 1 Jn 4:15). In the book of Acts, "the object of faith most often was the person of Jesus Christ (Acts 11:17; 14:23; 16:31; 19:4; etc.); but it was also the preached word (Acts 4:4; 17:11) and the body of saving doctrine revealed by God (Acts 6:7; 13:8; 14:22; 16:5)."²⁸

Regarding faith, *The Cross and Salvation* makes a helpful point by stating that "faith is not a blind leap in the dark. Knowledge of who Christ is and what he has done is inseparable to saving faith."²⁹ In order for a person to *believe* in his heart and convert to Jesus Christ, he must first *believe* an intellectual fact: that Christ died on the cross³⁰ and rose again.³¹

For Paul, to become a Christian one must assent from the heart to the realities of Jesus' atoning death (1 Cor 15:3; 1 Thess 4:14), resurrection (Rom 10:9; 1 Cor 15:4, 17; 1 Thess 4:14), and divine lordship (Rom 10:9) . . . [K]nowledge of the mind must be followed by knowledge of the heart (Col 1:9–10).³²

The second example of *The Cross and Salvation's* biblical accuracy is its explanation of the doctrine of justification. Justification, as mentioned above, "deals with the fundamental issue of how guilty sinners can be acquitted and restored to favor with an infinitely righteous and just God."³³ This doctrine answers the question: "How could a just God pardon a sinner who has broken His law?"

Biblically, man cannot be justified – acquitted of his sins – by his actions. "Since no one keeps the law in its entirety (Rom 10:5, 10–18), no human can be justified on the basis of *works of the law*."³⁴ Demarest quotes Psalm 14:3 in explaining this: "All have turned aside, they have together become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one." The apostle Paul comes to a similar conclusion in Philippians 3:4–5. Here, "this highly credentialed Jew soberly judged that his personal qualifications were worthless as the basis for acceptance with God."³⁵

Man is only justified by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. "Paul affirmed that sinners are justified on the basis of satisfaction rendered to God's moral law through Jesus Christ."³⁶ Jesus Christ was entirely obedient to God's commands (Jn 14:31; 15:10) at every stage of His life (Heb 10:7). Furthermore, Jesus' death on the cross "linked the imputation of righteousness to sinners with Christ's substitutionary sacrifice on Calvary."³⁷ Jesus' "one act of righteousness" brought life to all men (Rom 5:18–19), and "1 John 2:2 states that on the basis of Christ's atoning sacrifice God is propitiated and those who believe are reconciled to him."³⁸

As a result of the justification offered by the crucifixion of Jesus, all of a believer's sins are forgiven (Acts 13:38; 2:38; 10:43). "Sin is so obliterated in the justified that God remembers it no more, as Jeremiah (31:34), Isaiah (43:25), and Micah (7:19), anticipating Messiah's work, confidently proclaimed."³⁹ Justification also gives the repentant sinner eternal life by making him an heir of the hope of eternal life (Tit 3:7), thus making everlasting life the product of justification (Rom 5:18, 21).

Biblical Accuracy.

Discussed above in “Evaluation of Content.”

Consistency.

The Cross and Salvation is consistently biblical. In other words, Bruce Demarest’s work goes where Scripture goes and stops where Scripture stops. His discussion of the doctrine of election provides an excellent example of this.

Election is a tricky doctrine. On one hand, the Classical Arminian position states that, “salvation, then, is synergistic; both divine grace and the human will are causes of salvation.”⁴⁰ On the other hand, the High Calvinist position states that “God’s ordination . . . was entirely independent of foreseen human merit or demerit.”⁴¹ Both of these views are biblically incorrect and *The Cross and Salvation* demonstrates how by providing and establishing the biblical position.

Many Arminianists claim that, if election does indeed occur, then man has no reason to do works of righteousness. “Many Arminians and Wesleyans assert that a sovereign decree of election would lead to moral and spiritual indifference and thus would undermine the Christian’s pursuit of holiness.”⁴² The Arminian position is clearly refuted by the Bible, however, as Demarest explains,

Scriptures teaches that we are not elect because we exhibit a holy character; rather we strive to develop a holy character because of the certainty that we have been graciously chosen to life . . . True Christians take very seriously their calling to reflect the holy character of the electing God (Matt 5:48; Heb 12:14; 1 Pet 1:15–16).⁴³

In contrast, High Calvinism claims that “God in eternity past chose certain persons to be elected to life and others to be damned to death.”⁴⁴ This position is also clearly refuted by the Bible, as Demarest again explains.

God does not efficiently impel sinful rebellion, but he does give sinners sufficient rope to hang themselves . . . The analogy of the potter and the clay (Rom 9:20-21), whereby the craftsman fashions out of the same lump “some potter for noble purposes and some for common use” registers the point made earlier, that God purposefully sanctifies some people and *leaves others in their sins* (emphasis added).⁴⁵

The biblical position, embraced by *The Cross and Salvation*, states that God has created “a special people, a new

humanity, for himself through the institutions of Israel and the church.”⁴⁶ These “special people” were chosen by God “before the foundation of the world.”⁴⁷ “To the Christian’s experiential question, Why am I a Christian? The biblically faithful answer must be, Because God chose me.”⁴⁸ God’s act of choosing was not a joint effort between God and man; it was entirely a work of God.

Contrary to the tenets of High Calvinism, however, there is no election to life and election to damnation; there is only an election to life. “The weight of biblical and historical evidence rests in favor of a single unconditional election to life.”⁴⁹ In other words, all mankind is *destined* to spend eternity in Hell, “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”⁵⁰ but God has *predestined* – elected – some to inherit eternal salvation. “He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will.”⁵¹

This position holds that out of the mass of fallen and responsible humanity – for reasons known to himself – God in grace chose some to be saved and to permit the others to persist in their sin . . . When we speak about damnation, we mean that God predestines persons not to sin and disobedience but to the *condemnation* that issues from sin.”⁵²

Scholarship. *The Cross and Salvation* is a useful book for any pastor or layperson because of its accurate and extensive scholarship. To demonstrate the thoroughness of Demarest’s study and research, we will look at his treatment of the doctrine of perseverance. Perseverance “deal[s] with the issue of whether believers endure to *the end*” and answers the question, “What must believers do to persevere in the faith.”⁵³ Here are the historical views of perseverance, as provided by *The Cross and Salvation*:

A. Roman Catholic

Catholics claim that baptism remits sins, imparts new life, and unites the soul with Christ and his church. Yet, in actual experience Christians commit venial and mortal sins . . . Perpetuation of a mortal sin by a Christian results in the forfeiture of baptismal righteousness . . . The guilt of mortal sins may be removed and saving grace restored by the sacrament of penance.⁵⁴

B. Arminian⁵⁵

Rejecting the doctrines of unconditional election and effectual grace and affirming unqualified free agency, Arminians posit conditional perseverance or the possibility of final apostasy in

believers . . . Final perseverance in the faith thus rests with believers and is dependent on their willing and actions.⁵⁶

C. Lutheran⁵⁷

Focusing on God's revealed will, they (Lutherans) argued that in actual practice believers may sin grievously against the Holy Spirit. Through serious (mortal) sins they may resist God's grace, lose faith, and forfeit sonship and salvation. God's preservation of believers, in other words, is properly contingent on their perseverance in faith and obedience.⁵⁸

D. Reformed

Reformed authorities assert that regenerated and justified believers may lapse in their faith, resist God, and sin for a season. But their unbelief and resistance is temporary rather than incorrigible and final. This is so because God through the Spirit secures the final salvation of all true believers by bringing about their free perseverance to the end.⁵⁹

Biblically, Demarest also discusses God's initiative in salvation, the believer's response in perseverance, and the backsliding of the redeemed.

A. God's Initiative in Salvation

Under the new covenant Jesus taught that believers in the Son immediately possess eternal life (John 3:15-16, 36; 4:14; 5:24; 6:40, 47; 1 John 5:11-13) . . . A new life that could not be forfeited or terminated would not be *eternal*. From the divine

side, believers are "kept by Jesus Christ" (Jude 1) and "shielded by God's power" (1 Pet 1:5).⁶⁰

B. The Believer's Response in Perseverance

From the human side, believers must apply spiritual resources to maintain their relationship with Christ. Christians have an indispensable role to play in their perseverance unto final salvation . . . Persistence in the way of Christ is evidence of the genuineness of their faith.⁶¹

C. The Redeemed May Backslide for a Season

It is clear that genuine believers may stumble morally, relapse spiritually, and dishonor the Lord by grievous sins. But such lapses are temporary and not final or absolute . . . There is no mistaking that God will chasten backslidden believers who persist in sin and fail to repent. In extreme situations the wayward will be judged and even taken home to be with the Lord through death.⁶²

Bruce Demarest's *The Cross and Salvation* is a helpful guide to the doctrines of salvation and to a biblical understanding of what the crucifixion of Jesus Christ accomplished. It provides thorough and readable answers to the question, "Why did Jesus have to die?" Every believer should have a work like this to refer to for assistance in understanding the salvation offered through Jesus Christ.

Doctrinal Scale. 5 (out of 5).

End Notes

- ¹ David Van Biema, “Why Did Jesus Have to Die” in *Time Magazine* Vol. 163, No. 15 (April 12, 2004) 54–61.
- ² Millard J. Erickson, *The Concise Dictionary of Christian Theology* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2001). Atonement is “the aspect of the work of Christ, and particularly his death, that makes possible the restoration of fellowship between individual believers and God” (17).
- ³ Substitution is “the act of taking the place of another” (Ibid., 192). Substitutionary death is “a reference to the idea that Jesus’ death was in our place” (Ibid.).
- ⁴ Van Biema, 57.
- ⁵ Ibid., 58.
- ⁶ Ibid., 59.
- ⁷ Ibid.
- ⁸ 1 Pet 3:15.
- ⁹ This quotation is from “a participant in a national feminist conference paid for by the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)” (Van Biema, 59).
- ¹⁰ Bruce Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1997).
- ¹¹ The information regarding Bruce Demarest is found on the back cover of *The Cross and Salvation*.
- ¹² See footnote 2.
- ¹³ Ibid., 147–148.
- ¹⁴ The following list of conclusions drawn from *The Provision of Salvation* is not comprehensive.
- ¹⁵ Ibid., 176.
- ¹⁶ Ibid., 178.
- ¹⁷ Ibid., 180.
- ¹⁸ Eph 1:4.
- ¹⁹ Demarest, 203.
- ²⁰ Ibid., 345
- ²¹ Ibid.
- ²² Ibid., 431.
- ²³ Erickson, 41.
- ²⁴ Demarest, 235.
- ²⁵ Ibid., 252.
- ²⁶ Ibid., 255.
- ²⁷ Ibid., 258.
- ²⁸ Ibid., 259.
- ²⁹ Ibid., 260.
- ³⁰ Rom 5:6.
- ³¹ 1 Pet 1:3.
- ³² Demarest, 260.
- ³³ Ibid., 345.
- ³⁴ Ibid., 368.
- ³⁵ Ibid.
- ³⁶ Ibid., 368-369.
- ³⁷ Ibid., 369.
- ³⁸ Ibid.
- ³⁹ Ibid., 375.
- ⁴⁰ Ibid., 101.
- ⁴¹ Ibid., 107.
- ⁴² Ibid., 141.
- ⁴³ Ibid.
- ⁴⁴ Ibid., 107.
- ⁴⁵ Ibid., 136.
- ⁴⁶ Ibid., 119.
- ⁴⁷ Eph 1:4.
- ⁴⁸ Demarest, 134.
- ⁴⁹ Ibid., 137.
- ⁵⁰ Rom 3:23.
- ⁵¹ Eph 1:5.
- ⁵² Demarest, 137-138. For more information about God’s sovereignty and man’s will, see our Frequently Asked Questions page.
- ⁵³ Ibid., 432.
- ⁵⁴ Ibid., 432-433.
- ⁵⁵ Demarest correctly points out that not all Arminians embrace this view.
- ⁵⁶ Ibid., 434-435.
- ⁵⁷ Again, Demarest correctly points out that not all Lutherans embrace this view.
- ⁵⁸ Ibid., 437.
- ⁵⁹ Ibid., 439.
- ⁶⁰ Ibid., 444-445, 448.
- ⁶¹ Ibid., 448-449.
- ⁶² Ibid., 454, 453.