

Very early on in history, man started a terrible fire by rebellious and foolish action, and all of mankind's tears could not even begin to put it out. And who would go for the rescue into those flames of sin?

God would and did. This is the meaning of the coming of Christ from heaven to earth. He saw a world ablaze with evil desire and wrong actions, with hatred, violence, injustice, cruelty, and all the other things He forbids and loathes. Would He sit in His celestial mansion, knowing that it was all mankind's fault, and so doing nothing about it? He is not that kind of God.

He came down, this great Creator of the universe, down into the burning world to rescue those in danger. And the way He did it was by dying for them. This bright beam of heavenly light shines out all through the Bible. Consider the following verses from the Bible:

"I declare to you the good news. . . that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that he was buried, and that He rose again on the third day according to the Scriptures" – 1 Corinthians 15:1-4.

"He Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, might live for righteousness" – 1 Peter 2:24

"Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous one for the unrighteous, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit" – 1 Peter 3:18

"He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our sins. The chastisement for our peace was upon Him,

and by His wounds we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray. We have turned, every one of us, to his own way, and the Lord has laid on Him the sin of us all" – Isaiah 53:5,6

"I lay down my life for the sheep. . . . No one takes it 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 10:15,18.

All the above verses tell us that the Lord died for us. His death on the cross was substitutionary. The last verse was spoken by the Lord Jesus Himself. Jesus took the sins of the guilty and suffered and died in their place. If He had not, they would have been lost forever. His sheep are those who turn from their own way – the way of sin and death – and trust in Him. They accept His death for them and follow Him, and He gives them eternal life.

If you refuse to submit to Him, ignoring what He has done to save you, then you are in deep and terrible trouble, which will have no end – unless you too become one of His sheep. And you can become one the moment you turn to Him and invite Him into your heart and life.

"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved" – Acts 16:31

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Tommy, I have to go to town for a while," the widow said to her five year old son. "I can't get out of it. I hate to leave you alone, but I can't take you with me. It's too far for you to walk and I can't carry you all that distance. And you know as well as I do that no bus ever

comes this way. We're out here in the country with no other house in sight. I'm sure you'll be all right. Don't be afraid. There's no one around here who can hurt you." She picks Tommy up, gives him a big hug and kiss, puts him down and starts out the door. "Oh, and mind one thing – don't touch the matches. I've told you before, many a time. Remember? It wouldn't take much of a fire to send this wood house up in smoke. So you be a good boy, sweetheart. I'll be back as soon as I can get here. Goodbye, now."
"Bye, Mom, I'll be a good boy. Don't worry. Bye, bye."

Tommy, left alone like this for the first time in his life, wanders into every room of the house, looking at this and that and wondering how he can make the time pass before his mother returns. For a long time he plays with his toys and then looks at the pictures in his favorite books. Then, of course, he raids the cookie jar and eats a couple of them as he returns to the front room. There, passing by the fire place, he looks up at the shelf above it where the match box is kept.

"Oh well," he thinks, "they're too high for me to reach. And besides Mom told me not to touch them." He goes to another room, but after a while comes back to the front room, and looks up at the matches.

We are attracted to the forbidden. The order "do not touch" itself makes us want to touch. Though they may sometimes be more cautious and fearful than many adults, this is true of little boys also.

"If I stand on a chair I can reach the box," he thinks, "and when I get the box, I don't have to strike a match." So he pulls a chair over close to the shelf. Scrambling up on the chair

he reaches up and finds that his little hand can just reach the box of matches. He takes it, gets down from the chair and sits on the floor near the window, looking at it.

"No harm in opening the box," he thinks. "I don't have to strike a match." No, he doesn't have to, but he will. He knows how to do it. Opening the box, for a while he stares at the matches. Is anything going through his mind, or is he hypnotized like a bird before the snake? We can't be sure, but we know that slowly he takes a match out of the box and holds it in his hand. Now the temptation has become too great to resist. He looks for a piece of paper to test his new power to make fire, and tears a piece from a newspaper he sees there. And now He strikes the match on the side of the box and watches the flame shoot up to the paper – yes, inevitably it seems, from the paper up to the curtains at the window, just above it. The curtains are dry and ready for the flame. So soon they, and then the whole wall, are on fire.

Giving a wail he runs to the room farthest from the front and cowers in a corner near the window. He wraps his arms around himself and cries and cries. But all his tears will not put out a single flame. And there is nothing he can do to undo what his hands have started. And there is no one to save him from the result of his folly.

Yes, there is one. Just then his mother, hurrying back from town, arrives at the house. She sees flames shooting from the windows, from the roof. It looks like the whole house is burning. What will she do? Stand safely outside, saying to herself, "My son must have played with the matches. He has done wrong, and we all have to bear the consequences of our own actions.

Why should I suffer for his wrong doing? Let him perish in the flames!?"

Did ever a mother think like that? At least we know she does not. Swift as a bird to the young in her nest when the hawk is about, she rushes through the door, without a thought for her own safety, into the burning rooms, into the flames, calling out for her darling boy. At last she finds him in the back bedroom where he is still cowering against the wall. He is alive! Joy leaps into her heart!

But flames have caught at her clothes and she is on fire. And she has inhaled a great deal of smoke. But her thoughts are more for him than for herself. Quickly she breaks the window, picks him up and thrusts him through it to safety outside.

"Run, Tommy! Get away from the house!" she cries. And he does. But she cannot. Overcome by the burns on her body and the inhaled smoke, she falls to the floor, and there she perishes in the flames. The fire he started consumes her. The wrong he did takes her life. The consequences of his folly fall on her. To save him she died in his place. Death would have claimed him, but she was a substitute for him, willingly laying down her life to save his. Are human beings better than God? More loving, more self sacrificing, more determined to save their own than He is?

It would be very wrong to think so. For who put love in a parent's heart, if God did not? Who put self sacrifice there? In the beginning God made man in His own image, and so people may have these qualities. But far more determined, more powerful, more certain than any mother's love is the love of God, whose very name is love.