

## Forgiveness of Sin

The separation of people from God through disobedience, places God in a position where His character of holiness and justice demands that a penalty be paid for our sinful lives. People stained by sin are not able to draw near to a holy God and are not able to cleanse themselves of sin and be reconciled to God. Therefore God gave His promise of a future Seed (i.e. Jesus Christ) through whom people could be reconciled and a full relationship restored.

Abraham's great love for God, faith in Him and fear of Him motivated him to live a life of obedience. As a person who diligently sought God, following and obeying Him, Abraham and people like him were rewarded by God for their faith and hope. Abraham received God's promise of the Seed and believed that God would faithfully fulfill His promise. This faith made him acceptable to God.

In his letter to the Roman Christians, Paul speaks about the importance of faith to God. When a person believes God's promises they open their life up to being able to bridge the significant gap between individuals and God that has occurred as a result of the spiritual separation. Abraham was acceptable to God because he believed in God's promise (Romans4vs3). Also in the book of Romans, Paul speaks of Abraham being a father to all those that believe (Romans4vs11). However it is essential to keep in mind that faith is only of true spiritual worth when it is a faith in God, His promises and His pathway of reconciliation to Himself.

The writer of the letter to the Hebrews states that people of faith including Adam, Abel, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Moses and many others, all died in faith believing in God's promise to save them. Just as we today look back to Jesus' life, death and resurrection, they looked forward to the time, when God would save them and enable them to be reconciled to Himself. By faith, all accept this single pathway to eternal life that God has provided. The pathway of the Seed (Jesus Christ).

*Hebrews11vs13 These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. 14 For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland. 15 And truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return. 16 But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them..... 39 And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, 40 God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us.*

In all cases, people over time have been required by God to believe the revelation of Himself that has been available. To the people of Israel He chose to reveal Himself to them and give them His law. He also revealed the promise of a better covenant that would come through the Seed.

Under the Old Covenant, God required certain rituals to be followed to enable the people of Israel to recognize His judgment of sin and to symbolically cleanse themselves from their sins. This involved the blood of animals being shed through sacrifice. However this sacrifice was never adequate to pay the high penalty for sin

that was required by God. It only served to show the people what the will of God was for their lives and how impossible it was to live the perfect life God required.

Once a year, on the Day of Atonement, the high priest would enter alone into the holiest part of the tabernacle to sprinkle the blood of a sacrificed bull before the Ark of the Covenant. Once the temple was built by King Solomon, this ritual occurred in the temple. The bull was killed as a sin offering for the high priest and his family but he also killed a goat for the sins of the people of Israel. The sins that the people of Israel confessed were then symbolically removed from their presence through the scapegoat (a goat that was sent out into the wilderness symbolically carrying away the sins of the people).

The importance to God of the blood being shed as atonement for the souls of people is clearly stated in the Old Testament book of Leviticus. God's penalty for sin is spiritual death and separation from Him. It is also physical death and this penalty was put upon the first man and woman when God told them that they would return to dust.

*Leviticus 17:11 For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that makes atonement for the soul.*

Atonement means to cover over and the shedding of innocent blood covers over the sin of the person for whom it is shed. A person's life is in their blood and the shedding of blood (the giving up of life) is required for forgiveness of the sin that has destroyed the person's life. The blood is essential for God to forgive sins and receive a person unto Himself.

Shortly before the nation of Israel left Egypt, God saved the first-born of every child of Israel while killing the first born of every Egyptian family. The children were saved through the blood of a lamb being placed on the lintel of every home occupied by a person from the nation of Israel. God then told the nation of Israel to always remember how He had saved them by the blood through the annual celebration of the Passover. The blood that saved the first born of the nation of Israel foreshadowed the precious blood of Jesus that would one day be shed to save people.

Just before He was to go to the cross, Jesus made it clear that the Passover that the nation of Israel had been asked to regularly remember would be completely fulfilled through His death. When He was put to death and His innocent blood shed, the blood of the Lamb of God would fulfill the sacrificial requirement of God in His heavenly kingdom, saving all those who would believe.

*Luke 22:15 Then He said to them, " With fervent desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; 16 for I say to you, I will no longer eat of it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God. "*

Paul in his letter to the Corinthian church also speaks of Jesus' death in this way.

*1 Corinthians 5:7 .... For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us.*

The nation of Israel remembered and believed in the saving blood of the lamb on the

lintels of their home and now with the actual precious blood of Jesus Christ being shed, the foreshadowed event occurred. Believers in Jesus, remember the shedding of His blood and the sacrifice of His body through the communion that Christians regularly take. Each time we take communion we proclaim our belief in the death of Jesus Christ (1Corinthians11vs26).

The sacrifices of animals in the Old Testament were just a copy of the perfect sacrifice that was offered by God through His Son Jesus Christ. Being a copy, they never removed any sins but simply pointed to the ultimate sacrifice that would be made, the ultimate sacrifice that removed sins forever.

*Hebrews10vs 4 For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins. ... 12 But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God, 13 from that time waiting till His enemies are made His footstool. 14 For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified.*

God chose the people of Israel as His special nation. The vast number of other people who were not of this chosen race, the Gentiles, were effectively separated from God with no general revelation of God's plan to save people through the Seed or a revelation of His will by receiving God's law. Gentiles, not knowing of the one true God and the pathway to Him, could not choose to believe and be saved. Those who lived and died before the revelation of Jesus Christ were generally without hope and without God. It was only after the death and resurrection of Jesus that this situation changed.

*Ephesians2vs 11 Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh--...12 that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. 13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.*

Paul explains that Gentiles are far from God but through the shedding of His blood, Jesus Christ offered Himself as a perfect sacrifice, not many times as was required through the Old Testament animal sacrifices, but once and for all. Through His single sacrifice, the punishment of people's sins was executed and all people were provided with the pathway to God.

*Hebrews9vs22 And according to the law almost all things are purified with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no remission. 23 Therefore it was necessary that the copies of the things in the heavens should be purified with these, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. 24 For Christ has not entered the holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us; 25 not that He should offer Himself often, as the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood of another-- 26 He then would have had to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now, once at the end of the ages, He has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. 27 And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment, 28 so Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation.*

The distinction between God's desire and His will must be understood. All that God wills is destined to occur but not necessarily all He desires. His will is for people to have a will of their own and exercise it as they please but it is clear from Scripture that God desires all people to use that freedom of choice to be reconciled to Him and gain knowledge of His will.

*1Timothy2vs3 For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, 4 who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.*

God does desire that all people be saved but His will is that there must be a punishment applied for sins. Jesus took upon Himself the punishment that should have been for each of us to bear. However, the spiritual benefit of His substitution can only be received by each person as we choose to believe in His sacrificial death. For any who do not believe, there is no sacrifice, no shed blood and no atonement (covering over) of sins. The flesh and blood of Jesus is spiritual food and drink for spiritual life. Without it, there is no life and no hope of eternal life in God's kingdom.

*John6vs53 Then Jesus said to them, " Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. 54 Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. 55 For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed. 56 He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him.*

A sinner can be put to death by God as punishment for their own sins but not for the sins of other people, for in dying, the sinner simply satisfies his own punishment for sin and still dies as a sinner. However, a person who is born into this world free from sin would not deserve punishment and therefore could elect to be put to death as a substitute for another sinner by taking that person's sin on himself. Jesus was and will be the only person free of sin and He willingly died as our perfect substitute.

Through our heart-held belief in His life, death and resurrection, Jesus takes upon Himself our sin and we receive God's forgiveness of our sins. He takes upon Himself the punishment of death that should have been ours and we receive His everlasting life. He exchanges our sinful life for His perfect life. By being spiritually cleansed of our sin before we physically die, we are able to live spiritually free of sin before God, spiritually alive and reconciled to God.

*Romans3vs24 being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, 25 whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed,*

Since we are all sinners, a believer in Jesus is therefore the only one who will ever be able to satisfy the requirements of God's law and be pleasing to God for we know that Jesus not only confirmed the law of God but He also perfectly fulfilled it with His life on earth. Therefore, the believer receives the benefit for what Jesus has done and God therefore accepts the imperfect believer as also having fulfilled the requirements of the law.

*Romans10vs4 For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.*

We can see the impossible position that unbelievers are in for they are seen as sinners by God with a complete inability to be consistently obedient to God's will. They are spiritually separated from God, cannot commune with Him, know Him or please Him. Unbelievers are condemned to eternal punishment and will endure the wrath of God when they physically die. The Bible tells us that a person who turns away from hearing and accepting God's law (i.e. a sinner) cannot even turn to God for help for even their prayer is a sin.

*Proverbs28vs9 One who turns away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer is an abomination.*

It is only through faith in Jesus Christ's life, death and resurrection that we receive forgiveness of sins and rise up spiritually with Him to have a spiritual life before God. Believers receive God's grace (unmerited favor) through Jesus Christ as a free gift and become spiritually alive to God, able to be in a close spiritual relationship with Him (Ephesians2vs8).

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