

Th224 Sin and Atonement: The Restoration of Relationship

Lesson Th224-25 Atonement: An Overview

Humans were created to have relationship with God. We were created to be God's children. Each of us were created with instincts. These instincts are our basic human programming and the strongest are those involving self. The instinct for self-preservation can lead humans to selfish behavior which often creates conflicts in relationships. God also added a second very important instinct. It is the desire to have relationship with God. In the Garden of Eden Adam and Eve's selfish instincts were balanced by their relationship with God. But, when they disobeyed God, their relationship with him was broken, leaving them unbalanced and driven by instincts of self.

With their disobedience, sin entered the world, and with it the promised punishment of death. But, as you have learned, it is God's desire that all come to repentance. He had established a plan of redemption and atonement, before he had uttered the very first words of creation. Jesus is proclaimed to be the "Lamb slain from the foundation of the world" (Rev 13:8, KJV). God knew in advance that humankind would sin and require atonement. Thus, the plan was in place from the beginning.

We saw that God first shed the blood of animals to make a covering for Adam and Eve's nakedness. Then God accepted the blood sacrifice of a lamb from Abel's flock. We know that Abraham offered burnt sacrifices of animals upon altars to God. Finally, after Moses led the Israelites out of Egyptian captivity, God formalized the laws of relationship and instituted the various sacrifices. These could only cover sins, they could never take them away. No matter how perfectly a person attempted to live, they still fell short of the glory of God. He or she was sentenced to death because of sin. Humanity needed a method of paying their debt. Humanity needed more than just a temporary covering of forgiveness. Humanity needed atonement, a final and complete payment. By this they would not only be forgiven, but justified and restored to a place of legal standing without guilt or shame. They would be reconciled to God by Jesus' "once for all" sacrifice "to do away with sin" (Heb 9:26). Why is this so important?

In the parable Jesus taught concerning the indebted servant, Jesus said that the king initially forgave the servant the great debt that was owed him. The debt had not been paid or reconciled. Instead, the king merely chose not to pursue the collection of the debt, allowing the servant to be free. Then the king received word that the servant had not been forgiving to the one who owed him money. So the king decided to call in the debt and demand that it be paid. Thus, the servant and his entire family were thrown into debtors' prison until the entire debt was paid. How could the king do this? Had he not forgiven the debt? If so, how could he turn around and demand its payment? The answer is simple. The debt remained unpaid. The debt had not been removed, or satisfied, and thus the servant was still legally obligated for its repayment.

Imagine this, the king calls the servant into his presence and says, "You have not been gracious in the forgiving of the debts of others, therefore, I demand payment for the millions of dollars you owe me."

The servant is shocked. He thought the debt had been forgiven and challenges the king. “Your majesty, by your own words you said the debt was forgiven. How can you now demand payment from me?”

The king is not moved by this argument and answers, “I forgave you for not paying me what is owed to me. But just because I forgave you does not mean the debt has been paid. Who will pay your debt to me? Who will satisfy the demands of the law? Who will erase your debt from the ledger? Do you have a receipt showing that the bill has been paid? Are you not still obligated to pay this debt?”

And with this the servant has no argument. All those who witness this accounting agree that the king is just and fair in his dealing with this wicked servant.

In like manner, all of us have sins that are counted against us. We need more than a mere pronouncement of forgiveness—more than a covering of animal sacrifice or ritual. We need our sins removed, washed away, and our debt of sin satisfied. We need a change in legal status from guilty to innocent. We need our guilt to be removed and our relationship and standing with God our Father restored. We must be reconciled to God. The idea of reconciliation says there is a separation between God and mankind. Our sins have separated us from him (Isa 59:2). But “God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him [Jesus], and through him to reconcile to himself all things ... by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross” (Col 1:19-20).

This lesson is **important** because it explains that mere forgiveness does not satisfy the debt of sin nor restore us to a place of innocence free of guilt or shame.

The **main truth** of this lesson is that the debt of sin must be satisfied. Only the shedding of the blood of Christ was able to do that.

Let's **review** this lesson—

1. Jesus told a parable about a servant who owed his master a great sum of money. After forgiving the servant, how was the master able to later demand payment of the debt? [Pause 5 seconds.]

A. If you said that saying someone is forgiven does not satisfy or remove the debt, you are correct.

2. What does the law demand for the payment of sin? [Pause 5 seconds.]

A. If you said, “God’s law demands blood sacrifice as the payment for sin,” you are correct.

3. If blood sacrifice is all that is needed for forgiveness of sin, why isn’t the blood of animals sufficient? [Pause]

A. If you answered, “The blood of animals covered sin, but could not take it away; only the blood of Jesus could atone once for all for sin,” you answered correctly.

Your **assignment** for this lesson is to watch this lesson at least three more times until you clearly understand the concept of the debt of sin, forgiveness, and the required payment or justification of the debt. Be assured that Jesus has paid our debt and that we are free of the guilt and shame. Take time to praise God for the gift of Jesus Christ as the atonement for our sins.