

Th224 Sin and Atonement: The Restoration of Relationship

Lesson Th224-26 Atonement: Paying the debt

In Lesson 24 we told you the story of the warden of Marshalsea prison. He was faced with his own son being thrown into prison for insurmountable debt. He had a decision to make. Should he sell his house and use all of his life savings to pay his son's debt? Or should he send him to prison for life? We asked the question, "What do you think the warden did?"

The warden was a cruel man, who had made his fortune by running a prison filled with those who could not pay their debts. He knew that it would take everything he owned to pay his son's debt. Although he cared for his son, he cared more for himself. Such a sacrifice was too great for him. It would cost him his standing in the community and the comfort of his fine house and servants. So he did not pay the debt nor restore the relationship with his only son. Instead he carried out the demands of the law and imprisoned him. The warden kept his wealth, but lost his only son. This debt would stand between them the rest of their lives. Both would die bitter and alone.

In previous lessons you learned that God is holy. You also learned that God is unchangeable. He is the same, yesterday, today, and forever. In order to be in relationship with God, we too must be holy. God spoke to the Israelites and said, "I am the Lord your God; consecrate yourselves and be holy, because I am holy" (Lev 11:44). Instead of being holy, humankind pursues their own selfish desires. The apostle Paul wrote, "There is none righteous, not even one. There is none who understands; there is none who seeks for God. All have turned aside, together they have become useless. There is none who does good, there is not even one" (Rom 3:10-12, NASB).

God demands perfection, but for humankind this is impossible. Thus, each person incurs a debt that demands payment. Without payment there can be no restoration of relationship with God. Without payment each person will stand before God to be judged, as it is written, "People are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment" (Heb 9:27). Every person is destined to stand before God and be judged, owing a debt that they cannot pay. The debt demands eternal separation from God and punishment in the Lake of Fire.

But God did not create humankind merely to send us to eternal damnation. God created us to be his children and to have loving relationship with him. The children have, however, incurred a debt they cannot pay themselves. But God has already chosen to demonstrate his own love towards us, by paying the debt himself. How is this possible? The law demands that the soul that sins should die. This is the debt. A person must die for their sins. Sacrificing an animal will not satisfy the legal demands of the debt. Only a sinless human could pay this debt.

Thus, in order for God himself to satisfy the legal demands of his own law, he must become a human and live a sinless life. He must willingly die to satisfy the debt of sin. For this reason, the Son emptied himself of his godly attributes and was born as a human being named Jesus. God himself became man so that he could pay man's debt. It would require Jesus willingly taking the sin, the debt of mankind, upon himself. He had to be put to death on a cross

to fulfill the demands of the law. The apostle Paul wrote a letter to the church in the city of Colossae and said, “He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross” (Col 2:13-14).

Some people believe that this was not necessary. After all, God is God. He can do whatever he wants to do. They believe that God is arbitrary. He can choose to either forgive you or condemn you. People who think this way do not understand God’s holiness. For God, his holiness limits his behavior. Thus, God can do anything, but sin. Because to sin would be against God’s holiness and would make God unholy. In the same way he cannot simply ignore humanity’s debt.

We must remember that this debt is known not only to God and humanity, but also to all of the angelic beings in creation. Not only holy angels, but Satan and the fallen angels as well. These fallen angelic beings have used humankind’s debt of sin as a weapon against us. Satan has been the “accuser of the brethren,” from Adam and Eve, up to this very day. Satan and his fallen angels have done everything within their power to corrupt humanity and keep them separated from God. Satan himself stands before the throne of God accusing us of our sins. Suppose God were to simply issue a decree that the debt of the sins of humanity was forgiven. Satan and his angels would then declare that God was unjust. If God could decide to forgive humanity, then God would have to forgive them as well.

But God is just. He also is our loving Father. Let us hear again what the apostle Paul wrote to the church in the city of Colossae. But this time, we will read farther and include the next sentence in this letter as well. “He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross. And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross” (Col 2:13-15).

Can you imagine how Satan and his angels reacted to the crucifixion? Their great weapon against God and his children was the legal judgment of the debt of sin. Suddenly, through the death of Jesus on the Cross, the debt was paid and their leverage over humanity was gone.

This lesson is **important** because it explains how the death of Jesus on the Cross satisfied the legal requirement of the payment of humanity’s debt.

The **main truth** of this lesson is that God demonstrated his love towards us in that he himself paid our debt. He made it possible for our relationship with him to be restored.

Let's **review** this lesson—

1. What payment did the debt of sin require of humankind? [Pause 5 seconds.]
 - A. If you said that the payment for sin is death, you are correct.
2. Why couldn't animal sacrifices satisfy the debt of sin? [Pause]

A. If you said that human sin required a sinless human death, you are correct.

3. Why doesn't God just forgive everyone? [Pause]

A. If you said, "God's holiness demands payment for sin," you are correct.

Your **assignment** for this lesson is to watch this lesson at least three more times until you clearly understand the concept of God paying the debt of sin by becoming a human and dying on the Cross. Then present this teaching in your house church.