

LIFE THROUGH CHRIST'S ATONEMENT

BY

Curtis Dickinson

For decades some of the most popular hymns have been those which focus on the blood of Christ. "There is power in the blood," "Nothing but the blood of Jesus," "Redeemed by the blood of the lamb," "There is a fountain filled with blood" are just a few of the songs about Christ's death still sung by most congregations.

But there is a strange inconsistency here. While Jesus is exalted for shedding His blood in death, it is still the general teaching that the final penalty for man's sin is not death but eternal torment. This raises a question: If the penalty for rejecting God's grace is eternal torment, then how can it be said that Christ paid that penalty through His death? Obviously he is not now being tormented but is in heaven making intercession for us.¹

The Lamb of God. The firstborn Israelites in Egypt were saved from death by the sacrifice of a lamb with its blood marking the doorway. Where there was no sign of blood, it meant no lamb had been slain, and the firstborn of that house died on the night before the Israelites left Egypt.

Soon after this, Moses gave the ceremonial laws, which required animal sacrifices for sin's atonement. The reason is given in 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." The power of atonement was in a blood-letting death, that which took the animal's life.

Under the Mosaic law there was no such punishment as imprisonment, much less imprisonment for life under torturous conditions. The penalty for the greatest offenses was death. Therefore, the required sacrifice was the death of an animal, which, in turn, was a type of the final and complete sacrifice made by Jesus, "the lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world."² "Christ our Passover (typified by the lamb slain in Egypt and each year at the Passover Feast) is sacrificed for us."³

At issue here is not the philosophical question of how a God of love can inflict torture on billions of people or how much suffering the extremely wicked deserve. The issue is the question of what scripture teaches about the penalty for sin and how Jesus met that penalty as our Savior.

The prophet Isaiah speaks of the event of Christ's death as though it had already happened. (Called "prolepsis".) "*Jehovah has laid on him the iniquities of us all,*"⁴ he writes, indicating that Jesus took the penalty for our sins. And in suffering that penalty, what did He do?

*"He was cut off out of the land of the living for the transgression of my people to whom the stroke was due."*⁵ The death Jesus suffered is the very "stroke" that is due to all sinners in the day of judgment.

*"...when thou shalt make his being an offering for sin...He shall see the travail of his being, and shall be satisfied; by the knowledge of himself shall my righteous servant justify many; and he shall bear their iniquities. Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he poured out his being unto death...."*⁶ The word "being", used three times in this passage, refers to the whole person, not just to the body of Jesus. There is no room here for the idea that Jesus only

suffered physically. We were reminded in Leviticus that the life (being) is in the blood, so Jesus was not merely pouring out His blood, He was giving up His being or life.

It is well said by Fred P. Thompson, Jr.: “For the atonement of sins, blood sacrifice alone was acceptable. This was not because there was some mysterious virtue or power in blood, but because this was the only way an animal’s life could be offered. It was the giving of life which was the crucial matter.

“When Jesus offered His atonement for our sins, it was not primarily His blood which was the sacrificial element in His deed. It was His very life. ‘I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd gives his life for the sheep.’ ‘The Son of man came...to give his life a ransom for many’. ‘By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us’.”⁷

The New Testament record is that Jesus underwent death in all its tension and horror, not just parting from the body to live somewhere else for a while, but death as a person, the kind of death that is due every unredeemed person. “The wages of sin is death.”⁸ “The soul that sins, it shall die.”⁹

Judgment. In the beginning Jehovah clearly established the penalty for sin when He said to Adam, “Thou shalt surely die.”¹⁰ It was Satan, called by Jesus a liar and murderer,¹¹ who contradicted God by saying, “Thou shalt NOT surely die.”¹² Jesus promised eternal life to all who believe in Him but warned that unbelievers will perish in the day of judgment.¹³

It was to satisfy the justice of God that Jesus “was made to be sin on our behalf”¹⁴ and was put to death on the cross. As the day of His crucifixion drew near, He commented on it, saying, “Now is the judgment of this world...”¹⁵ All the world is under condemnation because all have sinned.¹⁶ But “there is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus,”¹⁷ because He “was delivered up for our offences.”¹⁸ When He assumed our sins, He then also took our place in judgment and suffered sin’s penalty: death.

Many are the theories concerning the final punishment of all the unsaved. (I do not say “of the wicked”, for included in those who finally perish at judgment is every person whose name is not written in the Lamb’s book of life.) Many hold that the unsaved will have asbestos-like bodies which can burn and suffer but never burn up. If that is the penalty, then none are saved, for Jesus did not pay that kind of penalty for us.

Others believe that the unsaved will suffer “spiritual death”, described by one writer as “spiritual death prolonged eternally...spiritual death made permanent, the total separation from God.” Not only is this idea of a “spiritual death prolonged” absent from the teachings of Jesus and the apostles, but it is something totally different from what Jesus did in taking the penalty of our sin upon Himself. Although God turned His face from Jesus at the cross,¹⁹ Jesus had to do far more than be separated from God in order to pay the ransom for sin. He gave His *life* as a ransom.²⁰ The many Biblical references to the “blood of Christ” do not imply suffering or spiritual death but the total death of His whole being. Note His claim in Revelation: “I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore.”²¹

The unsaved are sometimes warned of the “eternal misery of lost sinners”, or told they will “spend eternity in a devil’s hell.” Such expressions are not found in Scripture and are a denial of the atonement Jesus made in His death. Certainly Jesus suffered terrible agony in the hours before dying, but we are not saved by His torture on the cross, however intense it must have been. Jesus, as the Lamb of God, fulfilled the types of Old

Covenant sacrifices. In no way could the atonement have been made by the torture of the animals. It was only by their death that the law was satisfied.

If God's justice is satisfied by Jesus being put to death after a few hours of physical suffering, why do some think it will NEVER be satisfied with regard to sinners, so that they must be subjected to torture endlessly? On the other hand, if that which Jesus did to meet sin's penalty and satisfy God's was to die, doesn't it follow that death, total and final, must be the ultimate punishment for sin?

LIFE. "There can be nothing in common between the 'wages of sin' and the 'gift of God'" (Rom. 6:23). One must be the total opposite of the other, not 'life' for both. Hence, immortality can only be an endowment by Christ to His saints, not to others."²² Those who sleep in Jesus will, at His coming, be raised to everlasting life;²³ while all whose names are not found written in the Book of Life will be cast into the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the *second death*.²⁴

The entire scheme of redemption that unfolds through the Bible is that man is under the sentence of death because of sin and that God furnishes the way of escape from final death by the death of Jesus His Son.

Let us magnify and glorify Christ by proclaiming that life and immortality are found in Him and in Him alone.

"For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believes on him should not perish, but have eternal life."²⁵

REFERENCES

1. Romans 8:34
2. John 1:29
3. I Corinthians 5:7
4. Isaiah 53:6
5. Isaiah 53:8
6. Isaiah 53:10–12
7. *Christian Standard*, 7/12/68
8. Romans 6:23
9. Ezekiel 18:20
10. Genesis 2:17
11. John 8:44
12. Genesis 3:4
13. John 3:16
14. II Corinthians 5:21
15. John 12:31
16. Romans 3:23
17. Romans 8:1
18. Romans 4:25
19. Matthew 27:46
20. Matthew 20:28
21. Revelation 1:18
22. R. L. Whitelaw in an unpublished letter
23. John 6:40;
I Thessalonians 4:15–17
24. Revelation 20:14–15
25. John 3:16

.....
Copyright © Curtis Dickinson. Formatted and Posted by Ken Fortier Ministries. Permission is hereby granted by Mrs. Regina Dickinson to reproduce and distribute Curtis' articles to as many as possible. This statement is to remain attached to this article for permission to be valid. Vol. XXXII, Number 9.
.....