

THE CHRISTIAN LIFE (07).

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Review.

What does it mean to “**forgive**”? It means to remove sins from someone. To forgive sins is not to disregard them and do nothing about them, but to liberate a person from them, their guilt, and their power. We saw in *Lk.24:46-47* that our Lord commissioned His disciples to go and preach the message of forgiveness of sins. The Lord said, “Thus it is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day, and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name, to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem.”

To preach the message of forgiveness of sins in Jesus’ name means you are doing so by His authority and that the message cannot be changed in any way without His approval. We saw that the apostles went out and faithfully proclaimed the message of repentance for forgiveness of sins in Christ. We saw that repentance involves, first and foremost, a turning. The basic premise is that you are wrong about what you know and believe about God, man, sin, Christ and God’s word. Repentance means that you turn away from what is wrong and embrace that which is correct.

Do you want forgiveness of sins? Then you must repent. Jesus gave us a double warning in *Lk.13:3 & 5*, “unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.” Those who do not repent will not receive the forgiveness of sins and they will perish.

The second major point we looked at was entitled, “**The God who forgives.**” I began this point by stating that there is no other religious book in this world except the Bible alone that teaches that God completely forgives all of the sinner’s sins in this life. We examine the Biblical testimony regarding the divine attribute of forgiveness. We surveyed a number of verses. But the key verse we looked at was *Neh.9:17*. The

background of this verse is Israel's repeated rebellion against the Lord. But in the midst of the account of Israel's rebellion we read, "But You are a God of forgiveness, gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in lovingkindness; And you did not forsake them." We saw from *Rom.5:20* that God is the same today. In closing our study we saw that God declared that He has no pleasure in the death of the wicked. God's pleasure is in seeing the wicked turn from their wicked ways in repentance and live.

Biblical Words.

With this brief review, I want to begin our study by turning your attention to the Biblical words that are used. In the O.T. three words are used. The first is *nasa* which means "to bear; to lift up", and in a derived sense "to forgive". It is found in *Gen.50:17* where Joseph's brothers begged him, "please forgive the transgression of the servants of the God of your father." In *Exod.32:32* Moses prayed to God on behalf of the nation of Israel, "But now, if You will, forgive their sin." As you would have noted, this word is used with reference to men forgiving one another and God forgiving men.

The other two Hebrew words are used of God forgiving men. The first is *salah*. The Hebrew lexicon noted this verb's subject is always God. (see *1Kings 8:30, 34, 36, 39, 50*). Let us note one example. In *Jer.31:34* the Lord said, "I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more." The second word is *kaphar* which has the primary meaning "to cover" and the derived meaning "to forgive". *Psa.65:3* says, "As for our transgressions, You forgive them." (cf. *Psa.78:38; 79:9*). The Hebrew lexicon noted that this word is of supreme theological importance in the O.T. as it is central to an O.T. understanding of the remission of sin. The primary translation for this word in the NASB is "atonement".

Stephen Renn noted that *kaphar* relates to the removal of guilt and sin through offering sacrifices. **Renn** added that *kaphar* refers to the process by which the barrier between God and His people may be removed. It refers to the appeasing of God's wrath. God's wrath is the inevitable divine response to the violation of His Law. God's wrath is appeased or propitiated and set aside only if the sacrifice of atonement is offered with a true spirit of repentance and sorrow for sin.

In the N.T. we will meet three primary words. Firstly, there is *aphiemi*. An example of its usage is found in *Matt.6:12*. We are exhorted to pray to our Heavenly Father, "forgive us our debts." And then in *vs.14* Jesus said, using the same verb, "if you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you." The second word is the noun *aphesis* and normally translated "**forgiveness**". In *Matt.26:28* Jesus said, "this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins." In *Mk.1:4* we are told that John the Baptist came "preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins."

The third word is *charizomai*. This word is used mainly by **Luke (7:42, 43)** and **Paul**. In *Col.2:13* Paul wrote, "When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions." In *Eph.4:32* he wrote, "God in Christ ... has forgiven you." The root of this verb is *charis* which means "**grace**". The verb contains the idea of showing favor or kindness and doing so willingly. God is not unwilling to forgive the sinner. *Psa.86:5* says, "For You, Lord, are good, and ready to forgive, And abundant in lovingkindness to all who call upon You."

2Pet.3:9 says the Lord does not wish "for any to perish but for all to come to repentance." The message we are commanded to preach is "repentance for forgiveness of sins." God does not want you to perish. Last Lord's Day we took note of *Ezek.33:11* which says, "'As I live!' declares the Lord, 'I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn back, turn back from your evil ways! Why then will you die...?'" God wants

to forgive you. The problem is not with God. The problem is with the sinner. In *Jn.5:40* Jesus said to the Jews, “you do not will to come to Me so that you may have life.” The sinner goes to hell not because he is not elect. The sinner goes to hell because he is unwilling to repent and come to Jesus for life.

Does *Jn.5:40* describe you this morning? Are you on your way to hell right now because in the free exercise of your will you are making the choice not to come to Jesus for eternal life? In *Jn.6:37* Jesus promised, “the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out.” Jesus’ choice has been made and clearly expressed in *Jn.6:37*. His choice expressed in *Jn.6:37* is gracious, kind and willing. What choice are you making this morning?

Figure : O.T. Atonement.

This brings us to our third sub-point which I have entitled “**Figure : O.T. Atonement.**” In *Heb.9:22* we read, “without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.” God is a God of forgiveness. But sin is also an utterly serious matter before the Lord. When the Lord revealed His glory to Moses, He declared that He is compassionate, abounding in lovingkindness, “forgives iniquity, transgression and sin; yet He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished.” (*Exod.34:6-7*). In *Num.14:18* we are told again that the Lord is “abundant in lovingkindness, forgiving iniquity and transgression; but He will by no means clear the guilty.” *Nahum 1:3* says, “The Lord is slow to anger and great in power, And the Lord will by no means leave the guilty unpunished.” The point is : sin is serious. Sin is the breaking of God’s Law. The breaking of God’s Law has serious consequences for time and for eternity. God is holy and a God of justice. God cannot be indifferent to sin. God cannot clear the guilty, as it were, with a wave of a hand, and leave the guilty unpunished.

God had to devise a just and satisfactory means to forgive the guilty lawbreaker without leaving his sin unpunished. In the O.T. God gave to the Israelites a temporary measure for dealing with sins, that which was a figure of the reality to come. The reality to come was the Lord Jesus Christ. In the O.T. God dealt with the sins of the Israelites through the substitutionary atoning sacrifice of animals. Three types of sacrifices could be brought before the Lord : the burnt offering, the sin offering or the guilt offering. **Lev.1:4** says the burnt offering was accepted “to make atonement” (*kaphar*) on behalf of the person offering it. **Lev.4:20 & 7:7** tell us the sin offering and the guilt offering were also used to make atonement (*kaphar*) for forgiveness of sins.

Then there was the Day of Atonement that was specifically set aside for dealing with sin. This is described for us in **Lev.16** which sets before us the heart of the O.T. teaching on atonement. **J. A. Motyer** wrote, *“The day of atonement speaks of the Lord’s gracious concern both to deal fully with His people’s sins and to make them fully aware that they stand before Him, accepted and covered in respect of all iniquity, transgression and sin. (Lev.16:21).”*

What is clearly emphasized in **Lev.16** is the sovereignty of God in atonement. God is the One who has clearly and precisely instructed what must be done and there must be no violations of His instructions. Let me briefly summarize what was taught in **Lev.16**.

The purpose for making atonement is clearly stated in **Lev.16:30**. The Lord told the Israelites it is “to cleanse you ... from all your sins.” Thus the Israelites are reunited in purity to their God by the atoning sacrifice for sins. Since the penalty for sin is death, this cleansing by atonement saved the life of the individual. In **Lev.17:11** the Lord said to the Israelites, “For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you on the altar to make atonement (*kaphar*) for your souls; for it is the blood by reason of the life that makes atonement (*kaphar*).” What must be seen here also is the substitutionary nature of atonement. The animal died in the place of the person offering it.

The Day of Atonement centered on the high priestly ritual of the two goats and the picture of substitution is pervasively present in the ritual. One goat was the sin offering and the other goat was the scapegoat or more literally, the goat of removal. The high priest, being a sinner, being guilty of breaking God's Law, was also in need of atonement. And so we are told in *Lev.16:11*, "Then Aaron (**the high priest**) shall offer the bull of the sin offering which is for himself and make atonement for himself and for his household." When he was finished making a sin offering for himself, only then he could make the sin offering on behalf of the people.

In the atonement sacrifice the symbolic import of the sacrifices is so detailed that three different actions were necessary to display everything that God intended us to understand about the way He was to deal with sin. Firstly, the goat that was the sin offering was slaughtered. The first thing the high priest had to do was to take the blood from the slaughtered goat and bring the blood inside the veil and sprinkled on the mercy seat. (*Lev.16:15*). It is of interest to note that "the mercy seat" is literally "**the propitiatory seat**". The symbolism focuses on the propitiating or appeasing of God's wrath against the sinner. The atoning sacrificial death of the first goat showed clearly that the offense of sin requires the punishment of death. (*Ezek.18:4*). The goat died in the place of the sinner as the sinner's substitute.

As noted already, the second goat was called the "scapegoat" or more literally, the "**goat of removal**". Hands were laid on the second goat and the confession of all iniquities, all transgressions and all sins was made. The laying of hands expressed the transference of sin from the guilty to the innocent, so that the latter actually becomes a "**sin-bearer**". (*Lev.16:21-22*). Here again we find the truth of substitution. *Vs.21* says, "The goat shall bear on itself all their iniquities to a solitary land." The verb "**bear**" is *nasa*. This second goat was then sent into the wilderness with the sins laid on top of its head. This sin-bearing scapegoat would never return. This ritual pictured for us the final and irreversible putting away of sin by atonement. It emphasized that sin will be removed from the person and the community "as far as the east is from the west" (*Psa.103:12*). Lastly, the goat that was sacrificed was burned until it was

consumed and this shows the power of God over sin, completely destroying it so that it can bother the suppliant no more. (**EDT; EDBT**).

Atonement covered all the sins – intentional, unintentional, heinous, trivial – of those for whom it was intended. *“The comprehensive nature of the sacrifice of atonement prefigures the comprehensiveness of the shedding of Christ’s blood on the cross, but it limits its effects in the same way the Old Testament limits the effects of its sacrifice on the day of atonement – to the people for whom God has elected to call His own and them alone.”* (**EDBT**).

Fulfillment : The Lord Jesus Christ.

We move now from that which was figurative to that which is the fulfillment. I begin by reminding you that God is holy and a God of justice. God cannot be indifferent to sin. God cannot clear the guilty, as it were, with a wave of a hand, and leave the guilty unpunished. God must punish sin. God had to devise a just and satisfactory means to forgive the guilty lawbreaker without leaving his sin unpunished. In the O.T. God gave to the Israelites a temporary measure for dealing with sins. That temporary measure was the atoning sacrifice of animals.

The measure was temporary because “it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins”, that is, achieve a complete removal of sins or procure forgiveness for sins. (**Heb.10:4**). The temporary prefigured the fulfillment that will take place in the coming of the sinless Son of God into this world and His atoning death for sins. Let us turn now to the word of God and see what it has to say. I will be setting before you a number of verses. I want you to pay careful attention to what they teach you.

We begin with our Lord’s testimony. In **Mk.10:45** Jesus said He came “to give His life a ransom for many.” (cf. **Matt.20:28**). “For (or on behalf of) many” is the

language of substitution. In *Matt.16:21* we are told that “Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day.” In *Lk.18:31-33* we are told that Jesus “took the twelve aside and said to them, ‘Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and all things which are written through the prophets about the Son of Man will be accomplished. For He will be handed over to the Gentiles, and will be mocked and mistreated and spit upon, and after they have scourged Him, they will kill Him; and the third day He will rise again.’” Sadly, the disciples did not understand what Jesus was talking about. (*vs.34; Lk.9:45*).

In *Matt.26:28* Jesus summed up all He was teaching His disciples with these words, “this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins.” The context here is the final Passover He shared with His disciples before His death on the cross. “Poured out” points to the violent death the Lord would die in which His blood would be literally poured out. “For many” emphasizes the substitutionary nature of His death. “**Substitution**” tells us that He was not dying for Himself. He was the sinless Son of God who did not deserve to die. This death was for sinners who deserved to die because they are guilty of breaking God’s Law. In this death He was giving His life on behalf of sinners through the shedding of His blood. Here is the fulfillment of *Lev.17:11*. The clearly stated purpose is “for forgiveness of sins”, the forgiveness of the sins of the many.

Now, let us turn to the testimony of others. In *Jn.1:29* John the Baptist declared that Jesus is “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” A parallel verse is *1Jn.3:5* which says Jesus “appeared in order to take away sins, and in Him there is no sin.” **Morris** noted that the verb “**takes away**” signifies atonement, and that by substitution. Sin is viewed as removed completely, carried right off, taken out of the way. **Hiebert** noted that the purpose of Christ’s coming is the effective removal of human sins grounded in His atoning sacrifice on the cross. But take careful note to John’s emphasis : “In Him there was no sin.” It was the sinless One alone who was able to effectively take away sin.

Heb.9:26 says Christ “has been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.” The verb “**put away**” tells us that sin was cancelled, annulled, that is, because of Christ’s death the forgiven sinner’s sin is treated as if it no longer existed. In other words, for those who have received forgiveness in Christ, their sins cannot be found because they no longer exist.

Heb.9:28 added that Christ was “offered once to bear the sins of many.” In **1Pet.2:24** we read, “For He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross.” In both verses the verb “**bear**” focuses upon Christ’s atoning death on the cross on our behalf. Both verses emphasize substitution. And both writers had **Isa.53** in mind as they wrote. **Isa.53:4** says, “Surely our griefs He Himself bore.” **Isa.53:11** says, “My Servant, will justify many, as He will bear their iniquities.” **Isa.53:12** says, “Yet He Himself bore the sin of many.” Without question, these verses in **Isa.53** emphasize substitution.

In his first epistle, John made it clear that it was Jesus Christ, God’s Son, who, by His appearance and death, dealt with human sins. In **1Jn.1:7** he wrote, “the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.” In **1Jn.2:2** he wrote, “He Himself is the propitiation for our sins.” In **1Jn.4:10** he wrote, “In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.” God sent His Son to be the atoning sacrifice or propitiation for our sins. By His atoning death He propitiated or appeased the wrath of God against us because of our sins.

In **Rom.5:10** Paul wrote, “while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son.” In **2Cor.5:18-19** Paul wrote, “Now all things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation.” In **Col.1:22** Paul said Christ has “reconciled you in His fleshly body through death.” In **Eph.2:16** reconciliation is achieved through the cross.

Reconciliation assumes a ruptured relationship and alienation. Paul made it clear that we were enemies of God (**Rom.5:10**) and hostile toward God (**Rom.8:7**). What caused this? The answer is in one word – sin. This sin was not some minor misunderstanding that could be easily put right. **Garland** wrote, *“Human sinfulness created the problem, and this sinful condition had to be dealt with before there could be any reconciliation. Sin incurs God’s holy wrath, so it could not be treated lightly or swept under the rug. God can never be reconciled to sin.”*

This sin is described as “trespasses” or transgressions. **Garland** described this as *“deliberate sin, doing what we know to be disobedience to God.”* He added, *“This defiant mutiny is far more serious and created what seemed to be an unbridgeable gulf between us and God.”* **Hughes** wrote, *“By sin man sets himself in rebellion against God.”* He described sin as the revolt of man against God and as mutiny that is radical in its nature and effect because its goal is the desire to overthrow God as the center of reality and the arbiter and controller of all things.

There are a few points we must now note. **Firstly**, God is the One who initiated reconciliation with sinful man. Paul used the verb **“reconcile”** in an unprecedented manner. (**Harris**). In Paul’s use of the verb the offended and angered party is taking the initiative in effecting reconciliation between himself and the offending party. In the normal use of the verb it is the offending party who must remove the grounds of offense in the offended party. In Paul’s use of the verb the offended party, God, is taking the action to remove the offense of the offending party, the sinner, and in so doing, bring about reconciliation.

Secondly, God’s agent in achieving this reconciliation is Christ. And Christ brought about this reconciliation by His death on the cross. By His death on the cross, the Lord Jesus removed the offense by paying the penalty for the sinner’s sin, by propitiating or appeasing the wrath of God, and by securing forgiveness for the sinner. Christ on the cross is the bridge that bridged the impassable gulf between God and the sinner. This is the bridge God used to cross over in order to meet the sinner and reconcile the sinner to Himself.

Thirdly, reconciliation through Christ by His death on the cross includes God “not counting their trespasses against them.” God’s act of reconciliation is summed up in His canceling the debt of sin. God wiped clean the register of transgressions through Christ’s death. The files containing the records of our shortcomings and offenses have been deleted. I want you to take note of the verb “**counting**”. This is an accountant’s word. It means : to put something down on someone’s account; to make records for payment. The verb came to mean : to hold something against someone.

Forgiveness means God has erased the records of the sins we have committed against Him. Paul used the verb “cancelled” in *Col.2:14*. This verb means “*to wash over; to wipe out.*” It was used for canceling a vote, for annulling a law, for canceling a debt or a charge, and for washing out the writing on a papyrus. “Not counting” means that having washed the page clean God will not be making and keeping new records of sins against us. Why? Paul wrote in *Col.2:14*, “He ... having forgiven us all our transgressions.”

Lastly, I must ask : Why did God initiate reconciliation while human beings were in open revolt against Him? The answer is love. God loved us and acted in love towards us. (cf. *Rom.5:8*). There is a day coming when man’s rebellion against God will be matched by the eternal wrath of God. But in the meantime man’s rebellion against God is being matched by the love of God in Christ. And in this love there is forgiveness and reconciliation.

We are not finished with this study on forgiveness. But we must close. In closing, I want to do two things. **Firstly**, I want to summarize. We are forgiven because the Lord Jesus gave His life as a ransom for us. We are forgiven because the Lord Jesus, by His atoning death on the cross, poured out His blood for us. We are forgiven because the Lord Jesus Christ, by His death, has taken away our sins effectively and completely. We are forgiven because the Lord Jesus Christ, by His death, has put away or cancelled our sins. We are forgiven because the Lord Jesus Christ bore our sins in His body on the cross. We are forgiven because the Lord Jesus Christ, by His death, propitiated or appeased the

wrath of God against us because of our sins. In forgiving us, God, the Initiator, has reconciled us to Himself. In forgiving us, God has washed clean the record of all our sins. In forgiving us, God has ceased counting our transgressions against us.

Secondly, from God's standpoint, reconciliation is an accomplished fact. Paul said in **2Cor.5:18** that God reconciled us to Himself through Christ. God has dealt decisively with the cause of our enmity with Him. God has removed completely the obstacle to fellowship with Him, namely, human sin. But from the sinner's standpoint, reconciliation is only complete when it is embraced. This is made clear in **2Cor.5:19**. We have from God the ministry of reconciliation. We are preaching to sinners the message of reconciliation. And God in Christ is using that message to reconcile sinners to Himself.

Garland noted that the tense of the verb "reconciling" tells us that reconciliation is incomplete because God's act of reconciliation requires a human response. **Garland** wrote, *"God has confronted us with our transgressions but [He] has [also] taken the initiative in Christ to resolve the problem they have created. God has let go of the pain of our willful rebellion and does not count our trespasses against us. But it remains for us to accept what we have done wrong, to repent of it, and to accept God's offer of friendship."* Very sadly, not all will do so; some will defiantly continue to snub God.

I come to you today with the message of God's love in Christ and God's initiative in Christ to reconcile you to Himself. God is the offended party and He didn't have to initiate reconciliation. His holiness and His justice would have remained untainted if He had chosen to remain your enemy and in the final day exact from you the full penalty the law demanded for your sins. With indescribable humility God has condescended to deal with you, His enemy, with graciousness and lovingkindness. God, the offended part, worked out the forgiveness of your sins and initiated reconciliation with you. You could choose to remain proud and spurn God's humility, graciousness and lovingkindness. Or

you can humble yourself and bring to completion this gracious work of reconciliation God has initiated.

What would you do today? Will you leave this place a proud sinner spurning God or a humble repentant sinner? Will you leave this place an enemy of God or reconciled to and a friend of God? Will you leave this place with your debt of sin intact and increasing or will you leave knowing that you have in Christ forgiveness from God and that the debt of your sin has been permanently cancelled? God is appealing to you through us and so, we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

Salvation in Christ is a free gift. God has initiated and accomplished your salvation in Christ. All you have to do is to stretch out your hand by faith and receive salvation in Christ. Do not spurn God's graciousness and lovingkindness.