**God’s Forgiveness**

The Scriptures clearly teach that all of us are in desperate need of the forgiveness of God because all have sinned against Him (Romans 3:23) and the wages of sin is death, eternal separation from Him (Romans 6:23). The concept of forgiveness seems, on the surface, to be pretty straightforward, but there is considerable disagreement among those claiming to have received God’s forgiveness about what it means.

There are some who believe that, when a person becomes a child of God, his soul is declared to be clean, but is not actually clean until it is cleansed or ‘purged’ of its remaining imperfections through good works and/or suffering. Without this purging, the soul is not ready to enter into eternal life. The doctrine seems to suggest that the atoning power of the blood of Jesus only goes so far and that each person has some remaining sin for which they must atone for themselves.

Jesus told a parable in Matthew 18 about a master who was settling accounts with his servants. The master obviously represents God and each of us is a servant who has created a massive debt of sin that must be dealt with. In the parable, Jesus describes the debt the servant owed as ten thousand talents. Considering one talent was equivalent to fifteen years wages for a common laborer, the servant would have had to work 150,000 years to pay his master back! Jesus’ point is clear: Forget trying to atone for your own sins; it can’t be done.

Just how complete is the atonement of the blood Jesus shed on the cross? Consider how the forgiveness of God is described in the inspired Scriptures.

**Our guilt for sin is completely gone.** The Psalmist wrote, “As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us” (Psalm 103:12). That is why Peter could proclaim, “Baptism now saves you – not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience – through the resurrection of Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 3:21). The only way to have a clear conscience is to remove the guilt.

**We are sanctified (made holy) by the blood of Christ.** Paul addressed his first letter to the Corinthians, “to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling…” Growth and righteous living are important and the Corinthians had a lot of growing to do, but they were still saints (holy ones) who had been sanctified!

**We stand justified before God.** Just (dikaios) means righteous, innocent. Romans 2:24-26 is self-explanatory: “Being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; for the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.”

**We are completely cleansed.** After listing sins that will keep one out of the kingdom, Paul told the Corinthians, “Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God” (1 Corinthians 6:11). Once we are Christians, “If we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:7-9).

God forgives us yet remains a just God because His Son paid the price for our sins. The atoning power of the blood of Jesus renders us guiltless, sanctified, justified and cleansed. Suffering makes a Christian stronger, but it has nothing whatever to do with atonement.

Jesus said, “He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved” (Mark 16:16). When we walk in the Light and confess our sins, God forgives and cleanses us from all unrighteousness. Atonement through suffering and good works is a doctrine from men, not from God.

**John McKee**

**West Murray church of Christ**