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Biographical Sketch

Roy Gane is Associate Professor of Hebrew Bible and Ancient Near Eastern Languages at the Theological Seminary of Andrews University. He was born in Sydney, Australia, grew up mainly in Lincoln, Nebraska, and later moved to Angwin, California, where he graduated from Pacific Union College in 1977 with a B.A. in Theology and a B.Mus. in Piano Performance.

Beginning in 1979, Gane studied Biblical Hebrew Language and Literature at the University of California, Berkeley, completing his M.A. in 1983 and Ph.D. in 1992. His graduate school experience included two years of study (1986 to 1988) as a visiting student at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and participation in the 1989 University of California Archaeological Expedition to Nineveh (Iraq). His Ph.D. dissertation, entitled "RITUAL DYNAMIC STRUCTURE . . .," analyzed rituals of the Israelite Day of Atonement and compared them with Babylonian and Hittite purification rituals.

Gane taught in the Religion Department of Pacific Union College from 1992 until he joined Andrews University in 1994. He has authored a number of scholarly articles and a book on the biblical book of Judges entitled *God's Faulty Heroes* (Review and Herald, 1996). He was the principal contributor of the spring, 1996 Adult Sabbath School Lessons on the book of Judges.

Roy is married to Connie Clark Gane (since 1980), who is pursuing a Ph.D. in Mesopotamian archaeology at the University of California, Berkeley. The Ganes have a young daughter, Sarah Elizabeth, born in 1991.

MESSAGE OF THE BOOK

To many Christians, Christ's prolonged absence since He ascended to heaven is a mystery. But the Bible reveals that He is continuing to save us, and it invites us to get in touch with Him where He is now – in His sanctuary in heaven. By becoming acquainted with what He is doing in the control center of the universe, we can enjoy closer interaction with Him, more fully experience His transforming grace, and have confidence that we are at peace with God.

The Bible teaches us about God's character and Christ's ministry through the services performed at the sanctuary on earth, where the Lord resided with the ancient Israelites.

By clearly explaining the meanings of the sanctuary services, *Altar Call* answers questions that have an enormous impact upon the way Christians relate to God and to salvation through Christ's sacrifice. For example:

- Was atonement completed at the cross or can you be involved in atonement now?
- When you sin, do you still have assurance that you are saved?
- Why are you saved by grace through faith but judged by works?
- Do you know when God's judgment begins?
- How does the judgment affect your personal spiritual experience?

Overview of the Book

Part I: Face in the Dirt

The cross is Christ's altar, to which He calls us. We come because the cross gives us hope of rescue. Although Christ has ascended to heaven and we are trying to survive in a hostile world, we can get in touch with Him where He is. According to the books of Hebrews and Revelation, Christ is in God's sanctuary, the control center of the universe, where God is working to save us. Although the human race has been separated from God since the sin of Adam and Eve, God has reassured us of His presence, especially through Christ coming to earth as a human being. One of the most striking ways in which God has demonstrated His presence was His residence in the ancient Israelite sanctuary.

Part II: The Model and the Messiah

The rituals of the Israelite sanctuary served as a dynamic model, or "prototype" of God's plan to save human beings. It is worthwhile to study this earthly prototype for a number of reasons, including the facts that it illustrates spiritual and heavenly realities, demonstrates the richness of Christ's sacrifice, shows how parts of salvation history fit together, and guides our understanding of salvation by grace through faith. Christ connects the earthly and heavenly sanctuaries in that features of the Israelite sanctuary represented aspects of Christ's ministry in the heavenly sanctuary. Although the Israelite sanctuary was a teaching model, it could not save anyone by itself and was limited by the fact that its rituals were earthbound activities officiated by faulty, human priests. Deciphering God's plan of salvation as revealed through rituals in the book of Leviticus is challenging, but by understanding the nature of the text and the rituals reflected there, we can grasp their meaning. By means of ritual activity systems, the Israelites could have access to God and interact with Him.

Part III: The Rich Splendor of Christ's Sacrifice

The different Israelite sacrifices revealed the glory of Christ's sacrifice by emphasizing various aspects of its meaning. Burnt offerings, which were wholly consumed, pointed to the fact that Christ's offering of Himself completely consumed Him. Grain offerings were sacrifices of basic food that acknowledged the benefit of Christ's life-giving power for His people. Well-being offerings foreshadowed the benefit of Christ's life for those who accept it into their own lives. Sin offerings elevated the importance of blood, emphasizing that Christ's blood ransoms our lives. Guilt offerings showed that sin creates debt, which must be paid by Christ's sacrifice even when we take care of our responsibility to make wrongs right as best we can.

Part IV: Divine Obsession

The Old Testament ritual system demonstrated how God saves people by grace through faith. God used sacrifices for forgiveness in order to illustrate how He bore the cost of forgiveness in the sacrifice of Christ. The rituals through which the Israelites received purification from ritual impurities, which represented aspects of mortality, pointed to the way in which we receive life through Christ and His sacrifice. Israelite sacrifices showed that atonement is a process that takes place in stages. While Christ's death on the cross was the one and only atoning sacrificial death and all atonement flows from the cross, atonement is relational and continues as long as we are being reconciled to God. Just as there were degrees of holiness in the sanctuary, defined in relation to God's holy presence, we can grow in holiness as we come closer to God's holy moral character of love. We can have assurance of salvation as long as we accept Christ, whose sacrifice is the only thing that stands between us and eternal death. Today we can interact with God through prayer even

though we do not have access to Him through the physical symbolism of sacrifices, which were prayers made visible. Through the ritual of Communion (or "Lord's Supper"), Christians can interact with God by symbolically expressing acceptance of Christ.

Part V: Jesus Isn't Finished With Me Yet

Following His death on the cross, Christ has continued His work of saving us through reconciling us to God. Not only did Christ become a human being in order to sympathize with our weaknesses and die for us; He has carried His sympathy and the cross event with Him into the heavenly sanctuary, where He mediates for us so that our sins can be forgiven. But atonement goes beyond forgiveness, as shown by the Israelite sanctuary rituals. Atonement for the Israelites had to be brought to completion by the cleansing of the sanctuary on the Day of Atonement. Through the cleansing of the sanctuary, Israelites who had been forgiven and remained loyal to God were also made "clean," that is, free from impediments to their relationship with Him. The special rituals of the Day of Atonement coordinated to cleanse the sanctuary. Whereas atonement during the year freed individuals from sins and impurities by leaving them with God in His sanctuary, the Day of Atonement reversed the movement of sins and impurities into the sanctuary by cleansing them out. Unlike movements of material objects, movements of evils into and then out of the sanctuary were not limited by constraints operating in the material world. Just as a whole unit of the sanctuary was impacted by defilement or cleansing of part of it, the "part for all" principle is found in various aspects of salvation, including the way Christ's single sacrifice provides redemption for all who accept it.

Part VI: Relationships at Stake

Underlying the rituals of the Israelite Day of Atonement were dynamic kinds of relationships between God and His people that still operate today. Just as the Day of Atonement completed the Israelites' unity with God and involved judgment of their loyalty to Him, so Christ's "wedding" with His people involves judgment of their loyalty. Because God's sanctuary in heaven represents His reputation, as did His earthly headquarters, the cleansing of His sanctuary involves the vindication of His reputation through the judgment. The judgment shows that in the process of extending mercy by granting forgiveness, God has fully maintained His justice along with His mercy. This understanding of God's judgment is supported by Daniel 7 and 8, where an end-time judgment is the same event as the cleansing of God's sanctuary. Like Leviticus, Daniel indicates that for God's true people, the purpose of the judgment is to reaffirm their forgiveness and assurance. By judging works, God answers a challenge to His justice put forth by Satan, His enemy, who was represented by "Azazel" in the ancient Day of Atonement service. As a last argument in His strategy to counter God and undermine His justice, Satan says that forgiven people should not be saved because the works that should provide evidence for their faith are faulty. A crucial element of God's plan to wipe out sin and save us at the same time, with our free choice intact, is the process by which He patiently educates the universe with regard to the nature and effects of sin.

Part VII: Appointment With God

Just as the Israelites had an appointment with God on the Day of Atonement, He indicates to us the timing of His end-time judgment so that we can participate in this event. Surprisingly, time prophecies in the book of Daniel indicate that the date of the beginning of the judgment is already in the past. The reliability of Daniel's prophecies is confirmed by the way in which they have been fulfilled in world history with remarkable accuracy.

Part VIII: Altar Call

Although the judgment began in the past, comparison with the book of Revelation indicates that it is

still going on today and is moving toward a climax in which the allegiance of God's people to Him will be tested as they face threats from another power that claims their loyalty. During the time of the judgment, we can participate with Christ as He cleanses the sanctuary from our sins by humbling ourselves, as did the Israelites on the Day of Atonement and as Christ did on earth. Through humility, we allow God to bring our lives into harmony with His law, which is based on unselfish love that expresses itself in service to others. By the end of the judgment, people will have had sufficient time to decide whether or not to accept salvation, and those who are loyal to God will be fully committed to Him. While the judgment and its consequences are awesome, we can have confidence that answers our fears, including confidence that God is fair, confidence of our access to God, and confidence that we are in a covenant relationship with God. In conclusion, what will we do now that we have encountered the cross and heard Christ's call to a new and better world?

COMMENTS ABOUT THE BOOK

"*Altar Call* is the most exciting, thought provoking, and inspiring book I've read since Philip Yancey's *The Jesus I Never Knew*." – *Ed Christian, Assistant Professor of English and Bible, Kutztown University of Pennsylvania*

"*Altar Call* is an AWESOME book! Roy Gane has done a fantastic job of relating the book to a neat story line in real life, and has dealt with very complex issues in a clear and simple format." – *Richard M. Davidson, J. N. Andrews Professor of Old Testament Interpretation and chairman of the Old Testament Department, Andrews University.*

"Roy Gane makes a difficult and controversial topic understandable and interesting." – *Jon Paulien, Professor of New Testament Interpretation, Andrews University.*

"*Altar Call* packs an enormous amount of detailed information into a very readable package. The short chapters make it user-friendly by breaking the large concepts into easily understandable ideas, and by effectively illustrating the many facets of sanctuary atonement. This will be treasured by all who have longed for a thorough understanding of the sanctuary. *Altar Call* will provide a great deal of practical help to persons looking for a biblically solid assurance of salvation, as well as to those seeking to understand the relevance of the ancient Hebrew sanctuary to contemporary Christians." – *Jerry Moon, Associate Professor of Church History and Associate Editor of Andrews University Seminary Studies, Andrews University.*

"Roy Gane has distilled his remarkable erudition on the book of Leviticus into this more popular work that makes the fruits of his research available to the general public." – *William H. Shea, Emeritus Associate Director, Biblical Research Institute.*

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Part I: Face in the Dirt

CHAPTER 1

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### **Altar**

The cross is the altar to which Christ calls everyone on Planet Earth. A few days before His death, Jesus announced: "Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself" (Jn 12:31-32). "Lifted up" did not mean ascending in glory to heaven. "He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die" (verse 33). He would draw everyone to Himself at the cross.

The cross is the altar. Christ draws us there. Why do we come?

What draws us to the Hope diamond in the Museum of Natural History in Washington, D.C.? The gem is so rich in splendor that its full glory cannot be seen from any one angle. The display case turns every few seconds to unleash dazzling, constantly changing rainbow light from various combinations of perfect facets. Words cannot capture the experience. Why do we come?

A diamond is irresistible. But there is another kind of attraction.

"Lord, let me at least have someone know I'm alive and maybe come rescue me." This was the prayer of United States Air Force Captain Scott O'Grady in June of 1995 as he huddled in the hills of Bosnia, where his F-16 had been shot down. Hunted by the enemy, he clung to hope for six agonizing days. Burying his face in the dirt as searchers passed a few feet from him, subsisting on leaves, grass, and ants, and catching rain water in Ziploc plastic bags, O'Grady refused to give up. He was hungry and cold, but he knew that a superpower would be working to save him.

O'Grady's prayer was answered. He finally succeeded in getting a radio message to a fellow F-16 pilot flying over Bosnia, who notified his superiors that he had made contact with O'Grady. Headquarters immediately dispatched an armada of about forty planes, all for one man.

When the Marines were landing, they saw a man running toward their helicopter. It was O'Grady. He didn't wait until they got out and came looking for him. He reached the side door of the chopper when it had been open for only three seconds! Why did O'Grady come? He was drawn to the helicopter by an overwhelming desire to live and be free. When he boarded the aircraft, his pent-up emotions came out in heaving sobs of relief. Still shivering, he kept repeating: "Thank you, thank you, thank you." (Reported by Kevin Fedarko and Mark Thompson, "All for One," *Time* [June 19, 1995], pp. 21-26).

Jesus said He would draw all people to Himself. Is His cross like the Hope diamond? Or like a helicopter that gives hope? Or maybe both and much more.

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## Hotline

While Scott O'Grady was hugging the ground in Bosnia, he could communicate with U.S. forces only by means of a small radio with a limited range that could reach a plane flying over his area. For several days he could make no contact because of weather that kept friendly aircraft away. Too bad he didn't have a foolproof hotline directly to headquarters.

O'Grady did have a hotline to headquarters of another power. He later told an interviewer: "I prayed to God and asked him for a lot of things, and he delivered throughout the entire time."

For one thing, he could have perished from thirst after quickly consuming the 4-oz. packs of water in his emergency kit. But when he prayed for rain, God gave him rain. (*Time*, June 19, 1995, pp. 21, 23).

The Bible talks about O'Grady's hotline to heaven:

Since, then, we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast to our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need (Heb 4:14-16).

"Help in time of need." When do I need help? All the time! I'm not desperately cold, alone, or hungry. I don't have cancer, AIDS, or heart disease. Nor am I hunted by a vicious human enemy. I have never been divorced and my marriage is happy. But in some ways my world is like Bosnia: I don't feel safe, secure, or satisfied. I'm trying to survive in alien territory. Sometimes I even feel like my face is in the dirt. I want a superpower to take me out of here.

For me the most dangerous place in the world is my own mind. It feels like a battleground, and the Bible explains why: "For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places" (Eph 6:12).

I'm grateful that I can make "radio contact" with God as O'Grady did, knowing that the "Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and save me for his heavenly kingdom" (2 Tim 4:18). I'm relieved to know that when I pray, Jesus is there on the other end of the line. He understands my weaknesses because He too has faced temptation (Heb 4:14-15; see above).

O'Grady waited for six days before he was picked up. We have been waiting a lot longer. It has been almost 2,000 years since Jesus died, rose to life again, and ascended to heaven. We are still coming to Him because He was lifted up on the cross. But what has He been doing all this time since He went to heaven?

In his magnificent book entitled *The Jesus I Never Knew*, Philip Yancey struggles with the Ascension of Christ:

So many times in the course of writing this book I have felt like one of those disciples, peering intently at a blank blue sky. I look for some sign of Jesus, some visual clue... Like the disciples' eyes, mine ache for a pure glimpse of the One who ascended. Why, I ask again, did he have to leave?... I have concluded, in fact, that the Ascension represents my greatest struggle of faith—not whether it happened, but why. It challenges me more than the problem of pain, more than the difficulty of harmonizing science and the Bible, more than belief in the Resurrection and other miracles. (Philip Yancey, *The Jesus I Never Knew* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995], pp. 227, 229).

Christ's prolonged absence seems like a mystery. But according to the book of Hebrews in the Bible, He is working as our High Priest in God's sanctuary in heaven, continuing to save us (Heb 4:14-16; 7:1-10:25). We *can* get in touch with Jesus where He is *now*. The Bible plainly reveals His ongoing and intimate interaction with our lives.

You may feel shot down, with your face in the dirt. But rescue is in progress and you have a hotline to headquarters.

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## CHAPTER 3



# Control

About forty aircraft converged on Bosnia to rescue Scott O'Grady. They came from a helicopter carrier in the Adriatic Sea, from other carriers in the region, and from bases in Italy. There were Marine CH-53E SuperStallion helicopters, AH-1W SuperCobra helicopter gunships, AV-8B Harrier jump jets, and F/A-18D Hornets, Navy EA-6B Prowler electronic warfare planes, and Air Force A-10 Warthogs. These planes were coordinated by a NATO AWACS radar plane. They were controlled by a chain of command that went all the way up to the Pentagon and the White House. (*Time*, June 19, 1995, pp. 24-25).

What if O'Grady could have seen plans develop inside the Pentagon? What if he could have looked into the White House as President Bill Clinton conferred with National Security Adviser Anthony Lake regarding his plight? He would have been reassured, to say the least.

O'Grady would also have been assured if his vision had reached the command center belonging to the other superpower that was helping him. A man called John did have such a vision while he was stuck on the foreign island of Patmos:

After this I looked, and there in heaven a door stood open! And the first voice, which I had heard speaking to me like a trumpet, said, "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this." At once I was in the spirit, and there in heaven stood a throne, with one seated on the throne! And the one seated there looks like jasper and carnelian (Rev 4:1-3).

After seeing that which was central and most impressive, namely the throne and its occupant, John looked around: "... and around the throne is a rainbow that looks like an emerald. Around the throne are twenty-four thrones, and seated on the thrones are twenty-four elders, dressed in white robes, with golden crowns on their heads" (Rev 4:3-4). Then John saw even more and the sound track was added:

Coming from the throne are flashes of lightning, and rumblings and peals of thunder, and in front of the throne burn seven flaming torches, which are the seven spirits of God; and in front of the throne there is something like a sea of glass, like crystal. Around the throne, and on each side of the throne, are four living creatures... And the four living creatures, each of them with six wings, are full of eyes all around and inside. Day and night without ceasing they sing, "Holy, holy, holy, the Lord God the Almighty, who was and is and is to come" (Rev 4:5-8).

"The Lord God, the Almighty!" The Commander-in-Chief of the Universe! His mighty angels number "myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands" (Rev 5:11). His control center throbs with limitless power! But there is more there than power: "Then I saw between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders a Lamb standing as if it had been slaughtered, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth" (Rev 5:6).

The Lamb is Christ, "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (Jn 1:29; compare 1 Pet 1:19). Christ is there at the throne. It is a place of power, but also of grace and mercy.

John saw Christ represented as a sacrificial lamb that had just been slaughtered, with its throat slit. This was not a pretty sight. The description makes the point that although Christ was raised from the dead and has ascended to heaven, He continually carries the cross event with Him. He is still lifted up in order to draw all people to Himself at His altar.

The heavenly throne John saw is the same throne to which the book of Hebrews invites us to come boldly because Christ is our High Priest (4:14-16). But rather than speaking of Christ as our High Priest, Revelation 5 describes Him as a slaughtered Lamb. These ideas do not contradict each other. Christ is qualified to be our priest because He is also our Sacrifice:

But when Christ came as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation), he entered once for all into the Holy Place, not with the blood of goats and calves, but with his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption (Heb 9:11-12; compare verses 14-15, 26, 28; 7:27).

The "greater and perfect tent" here refers to God's sanctuary or temple in heaven. This is where He dwells and where His throne is located (Ps 11:4; Jer 17:12).

God's sanctuary is the control center of the universe, pulsating with power and awesome glory. And it is a place of sanctuary, where weak and faulty people like us can find refuge. We can be reassured by knowing that God is working to rescue us through Christ, the Lamb.

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## CHAPTER 4



# Presence

"For the most part my face was in the dirt, and I was just praying they wouldn't see me or hear me. I was a scared little bunny rabbit just trying to hide, trying to survive." This is how Scott O'Grady describes his harrowing experience in Bosnia.

When the Marines landed, Scott was no longer alone. He was still in Bosnia, but he no longer had to hide or fend for himself with his survival kit containing a pistol, radio, first-aid kit, flares, and a few plastic bags. (*Time*, June 19, 1995, pp. 23, 25-26).

When Jesus came to Planet Earth as a baby, making himself vulnerable to evil as we are vulnerable, He gave us assurance that we are not alone. He is Immanuel, which means "God is with us" (see Isa 7:14; Matt 1:23).

Why was it necessary for Christ to empty Himself of His glory in order to bring God's presence to us (Phil 2:5-7)? Why can't we talk with God face to face as Adam and Eve did in the Garden of Eden? Because the human race rebelled against God. He gave us a perfect world (Gen 1-2), but Eve and Adam were "shot down" by Satan's deception (Gen 3). Our world became enemy territory, as Bosnia was to O'Grady. But God is restoring us to Himself and He will restore our world. The end of the Bible records a promise from God's control center:

And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He shall dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be among them, and He shall wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there shall no longer be any death; there shall no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away" (Rev 21:3-4; NASB).

This promise is not yet fulfilled. But we need God with us now. Without His presence, we would be fending for ourselves in a hostile world. In fact, without His presence we would be part of the hostile world; we would be the enemy!

In the long centuries between Adam and Eve and the dawn of the twenty-first century, God has continually reassured us that He is with us. He gave hope to Adam and Eve that one of their descendants would crush the satanic serpent (Gen 3:15). He let Moses have a glimpse of His glory (Exod 33:18-34:8) and led the Israelites into a land that He had promised to give them. He showed Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel visions of Himself on His throne (Isa 6; Ezek 1; Dan 7:9-10). But the greatest reassurance is Jesus Christ Himself. Now that He is back in heaven, He brings us His presence through His Holy Spirit (Jn 14:16-18, 26; 16:7-14).

One of the most striking ways in which God has demonstrated His presence with faulty human beings is the residence that He set up among the ancient Israelites. He commanded Moses: "And have them make me a sanctuary, so that I may dwell among them" (Exod 25:8). So although God had a temple in heaven (Ps 11:4), He established a dwelling place in a sanctuary on earth.

The fact that the sanctuary was the palace of God, the divine king, was emphasized by its physical structure. First, it had two apartments (Exod 26:33). An inner room contained the ark of the covenant, a gold-covered box (25:10-22) over which the Lord was enthroned (verse 22; Num 7:89; Isa 37:16). This room functioned as the "throne room" of His palace. Because the holy God was right there, it was called the "holy of holies," that is, the most holy place.

An outer "living room" contained items of furniture that were found in homes of well-to-do people: a table for food (Exod 25:23-30), lamps on a stand for light (verses 31-40), and an incense burner to sweeten the atmosphere (30:1-10). In this outer apartment, called the "holy" place, the priests performed regular service for their Lord. Every morning and evening they tended the lamps and burned the incense (Exod 30:7-8). Once a week on Sabbath they changed the bread (Lev 24:1-9). The priests were the servants of the divine king.

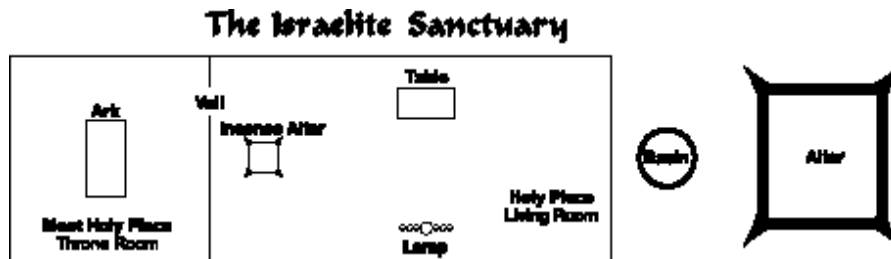
While everything in the sanctuary was "before the Lord," who was enthroned over the ark, the incense burner/altar had a special connection to the ark. This altar was located in front of the ark of the covenant (Exod 40:5), with only a veil separating one from the other (verses 3, 21, 26). It appears that incense from the altar could waft over the veil into the most holy place. Because of the functional connection between the incense altar and the ark, the book of Kings regarded the incense altar as *belonging to* the inner sanctuary (1 Ki 6:22) even though it was located in the outer apartment.

The book of Hebrews refers to the same idea: "Behind the second curtain stood a tent called the Holy of Holies, having the golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant..." (Heb 9:3-4; RSV). This translation of the Greek original is accurate. The expression "having the golden altar..." means that this altar belonged to the most holy place in terms of function, as in the book of Kings. It does not indicate that the altar was actually located in the most holy place. By way of analogy, if you put a stereo system at one end of your dining room for the purpose of providing music for the adjacent living room, the system serves the living room even though it is located in the dining room.

Before a solid temple was built by King Solomon (1 Ki 6-7), the sanctuary structure was a portable tabernacle/tent that could be easily dismantled when the Israelites moved from one place to another. Its walls were made of boards that could be pulled apart and its roof consisted of fabrics and skins that could be folded up (Exod 26).

Outside the tabernacle was a courtyard (Exod 27:9-19), just as an earthly king would have an enclosure around his palace. In the courtyard was a large basin (laver) from which the Lord's servants, the priests, were to draw water for washing their hands and feet before approaching Him (30:17-21).

Also in the courtyard, there was something that an earthly king would not have: an altar for priests to burn sacrifices to Him (Exod 27:1-8). God is with us, but He is not just like us. So while the sanctuary emphasized the fact that God resided with His people, it also showed that He is special. While we are created in God's image (Gen 1:27), we are not identical to Him: "It is he alone who has immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see; to him be honor and eternal dominion. Amen." (1 Tim 6:16).



To make it clear that God is not just like us, there were a number of differences between the sanctuary and the palace of a human king, both in terms of physical structure and activities carried out there. First, a human king sits on a seat called a throne. But the glorious Presence of God hovered above the ark of the covenant (Num 7:89). Although Bible translations refer to the golden lid/cover of the ark of the covenant as the "mercy seat" (Exod 25:17), it was not shaped like a chair and it was not a place for God to sit. The Hebrew word referring to the lid is related to the word "atone." That the ark's lid was a place of atonement, or reconciliation with God, is indicated by the fact that blood was sprinkled on it to make atonement on the Day of Atonement (Lev 16:14).

A second difference is the fact that bread, called "bread of the Presence" (Exod 25:30), was placed on the golden table inside the sanctuary. But God did not consume this bread as a human being would. Rather, He gave it to His priests for them to eat (Lev 24:5-9). Other ancient people "fed" their gods regularly by giving food to idols. They thought the gods really needed human food. For example, in an Old Babylonian story about a man called Atrahasis, a flood wiped out the human population so that there were no sacrifices to the gods. As a result, the gods suffered terribly from hunger and thirst. When Atrahasis offered a sacrifice after the flood (as Noah did: Gen 8:20-21), the starving gods smelled it and crowded around like flies to devour it. But the God of Israel says: "If I were hungry, I would not tell you, for the world and all that is in it is mine. Do I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats?" (Ps 50:12-13). The food that the Israelites presented to the Lord did not feed Him; it acknowledged that He provided for them!

Third, the lamps inside the sanctuary were kept burning all night, as if God needed no sleep (Exod 27:21; Lev 24:3). And in fact, unlike a human king, He doesn't! "He who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep" (Ps 121:4). When you go to sleep at night you can rest assured that God is watching out for you.

Fourth, God received gifts of food from the altar of burnt offering in the courtyard (Num 28:2). But He received this food in the form of smoke as a "sweet smell" (Lev 1:9) rather than eating it in a human manner. As we saw earlier, God does not need human food (Ps 50:12-13). Food gifts to Him are token acknowledgments of human love; they do not serve the purpose of feeding God. When your child gives you a little bouquet of dandelions, the gift is valuable not because you need dandelions but because you value the love with which they are given.

The sanctuary teaches us that God is present with us, but this is no ordinary encounter. Although our Lord is not enthroned above the pulpits in our churches today in the same way that He hovered above the ark, we should remember that He is present with us when we gather to worship Him (Matt 18:20). Within the contexts of our respective cultures, we should always acknowledge that while God makes Himself familiar, we should maintain our sense of awe rather than slipping into undue familiarity.

Through His sanctuary, through Christ's life on earth, and in many other ways God has taken the trouble to provide us with overwhelming evidence that He has not abandoned us. We are still in "Bosnia," but we are not alone. The Superpower is with us. "If God is for us, who is against us?" (Rom 8:31).

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## *Part II: The Model and the Messiah*

### CHAPTER 5

## Prototype

My brother, Calvin, was playing outside the home of some people who had invited our family for a special occasion. He was five years old. To him, the most interesting thing in the yard was a fish pond. So he played as close as he could get to the edge of it. Naturally, he slipped and fell in. By itself this would not seem serious, but he was wearing his best clothes, the pond was large and deep, and he didn't know how to swim.

When my mother saw Calvin's plight, she was sure that he was about to drown. Her options for rescuing him were limited. She was wearing her best dress and was not a confident swimmer. Frantic, she grabbed what she could find—a small stick of wood—and held it out to my brother, getting as close to the edge as she dared.

The stick didn't reach. Mother's plan didn't work. Panicking by now, she screamed for help. Fortunately someone else was able to fish Calvin out of the pond.

To be effective, a rescue operation must follow a workable plan. O'Grady's rescue had such a plan. Aircraft from different branches of the U.S. military met at a certain time and flew into Bosnia in a predetermined flight pattern. Having studied maps and other data, the airmen and soldiers knew what they could expect along the way. The plan had stages: The aircraft would meet and fly together, the helicopters would land to get O'Grady while various planes provided cover, and then all the aircraft would return to their carriers or bases.

Trained personnel involved in difficult rescue operations prepare for action through practice. They go through the motions, making sure they can do everything right and as fast as necessary.

Plans and practice show ahead of time what is supposed to happen. O'Grady would have been delighted to receive detailed plans. He would not have said, "Don't bother me with all that detail." On the contrary, he would have asked for more information so that he could have more confidence and be better prepared to cooperate with his rescuers.

Plans can be expressed in various forms. They can be repeated orally, written down, drawn in diagrams or on maps, or even acted out. This last kind of plan is especially useful because it is a practice run in which the parts of the plan must work together in real time. It is like a prototype, or working model, of a car. Something can appear to work in theory and on paper, but there is nothing like trying it out with a dynamic model.

God has a plan to rescue us: "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life" (Jn 3:16; NASB). Christ is coming again to take us with Him:

In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also (Jn 14:2-3).



In the Bible, God reveals His plan to us so that we might have confidence and cooperate with Him. The basic way the plan works is by grace through faith (Eph 2:8). But we have been so out of touch with God that He must teach us what "by grace through faith" means. He uses the whole Bible to give us detailed instructions, coming at "grace through faith" from many different angles. Such angles include stories of divine grace involving people of faith and people without faith, calls to repentance spoken by prophets and apostles, and songs celebrating divine deliverance.

In the Bible we have God's plan not only in theory, but also worked out in the lives of people whom He has rescued. The Bible also describes a kind of prototype of our salvation that modeled Christ's rescue operation, so that we can comprehend what He is doing for us. This prototype consisted of rituals performed at the ancient Israelite sanctuary, where God established His earthly residence with His people.

Although the Israelites were faulty as we are, God taught them how to interact intimately with Him from day to day. He also revealed to them the stages of God's long-range plan to save all who come to the altar of Christ's cross, where He is lifted up. Just as reconciliation to God was acted out for an ancient Israelite when he/she slaughtered a sacrificial animal and a priest put its blood and flesh on the altar (Lev 4:27-31), so all who are willing are reconciled to God by the sacrificial death and priestly mediation of Jesus Christ (Heb 9).

The idea that the Israelite sanctuary functioned as a prototype is clearly indicated in the book of Hebrews. Speaking of Israelite priests, the writer explains:

They offer worship in a sanctuary that is a sketch and shadow of the heavenly one; for Moses, when he was about to erect the tent, was warned, "See that you make everything according to the pattern that was shown you on the mountain." But Jesus has now obtained a more excellent ministry, and to that degree he is the mediator of a better covenant, which has been enacted through better promises (Heb 8:5-6).

The sanctuary on earth, with its animal sacrifices and human priests, was a "sketch and shadow" of the real sanctuary in heaven, which has the truly effective sacrifice and perfect priesthood of Christ.

The earthly sanctuary and its rituals had limitations, just as a prototype of an automobile is not the same as a regular production car. But a prototype is important because it teaches how something is supposed to work when it is fully developed, when "the rubber hits the road."

Why did God establish the sanctuary rituals as a prototype of our salvation? Did He need to practice saving us? Of course not. But we need to understand how to accept the salvation that God offers to us free of charge.

The basics of salvation are so simple that a little child can grasp them. But God has revealed much more for those who want to "go on to maturity" (Heb 6:1; RSV). The details are for our benefit. They not only show us more clearly how we are saved, they teach us what God is like. If we want to spend eternity with God, it is a good idea to get acquainted with Him now as much as possible.

Details are important to relationships. When I was dating Connie, the young woman who later became my wife, I wanted to know everything I could about her. I was interested in her childhood, family, friends, values, plans, habits, talents, and the way she treated people. Nothing was unimportant. Everything was fascinating. I find the same to be true of what I learn about God.

God's rescue operation is big because He has a world to save from an enemy that is within each human being. But He has a plan, just as He had a plan to deliver the ancient world from Assyria:

The Lord of hosts has sworn: *As I have designed, so shall it be; and as I have planned, so shall it come to pass.* I will break the Assyrian in my land, and on my mountains trample him under foot; his yoke shall be removed from them, and his burden from their shoulders. *This is the plan that is planned concerning the whole earth;* and this is the

hand that is stretched out over all the nations. *For the Lord of hosts has planned, and who will annul it?* His hand is stretched out, and who will turn it back? (Isa 14:24-27).

The might of Assyria is long gone. Connie and I saw what is left when we participated in the 1989 University of California Archaeological Expedition to Nineveh, the last capital of the Assyrian Empire, located in northern Iraq. The towering city walls are broken down, and worn by centuries of weather. Sheep graze on the high mound of Kuyunjik where Sennacherib's vast "Palace Without A Rival" once stood. My wife, who specializes in Mesopotamian archaeology, was confronted with particularly poignant evidence for the end of Assyria as she excavated bones of people killed at the Halzi Gate when Nineveh was destroyed by the Medes and Babylonians in 612 B.C.

Yes, Assyria is gone. God planned it that way. Our enemy will be gone too.

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## CHAPTER 6

# Priorities

Surviving consumes a lot of time and energy. For Scott O'Grady there were enemies to escape, Ziploc plastic bags to fill with rainwater, and ants to catch for food. But he wasn't so busy that he neglected to call for help. Even if he had been able to make himself comfortable, his overwhelming desire would have been to get out of enemy territory.

I'm not in Bosnia, but I am busy surviving. If I don't do my work, nobody else will do it for me and I will be in deep trouble. There are deadlines to meet, bills to pay, and problems to solve. I don't have time for important things. I only have time for the things that are *most* important.

Compared to O'Grady, I am comfortable. I am healthy, have plenty of food, a roof over my head, a good job, supportive work associates, many friends, and loving family members. But neither my busy schedule nor my comfort keep me from thinking about a better world, a world the way it is supposed to be. I want to go home.

Because I have an overwhelming desire to go to a place of eternal freedom and security, I want to understand God's rescue plan as much as possible. What has Christ done and what is He doing for me now?

John the Baptist summarized the essence of what Christ does for me when he introduced Jesus as "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (Jn 1:29). Christ rescues me through His sacrifice. So if I can comprehend His sacrifice, I will grasp His rescue plan.

As a prototype of God's plan, the animal sacrifices at the Israelite sanctuary taught about salvation in Christ and were fulfilled by His sacrifice. Animal sacrifices themselves could not really save anyone:

Since the law has only a shadow of the good things to come and not the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered year after year, make perfect those who approach... For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins (Heb 10:1, 4).

So why should I take time to study the ancient animal sacrifices? When I have "the real thing," why bother with a prototype?

Here are some reasons for looking at God's plan as it is revealed in the sanctuary. First, the sanctuary prototype continues to be useful because it was an *earthly* prototype. It illustrates spiritual and heavenly realities through physical and earthly things that we can more easily comprehend. For the same reason, Jesus used parables to explain the kingdom of heaven. He likened the kingdom of heaven to a mustard seed (Matt 13:31), yeast (verse 33), treasure hidden in a field (verse 44), a merchant in search of fine pearls (verse 45), and so on.

In the Israelite sanctuary the dynamics of God's plan of salvation were acted out on a day-to-day basis so that these interactions between Him and His people could be physically seen, powerfully experienced, and described in concrete terms that people of subsequent eras could understand. The sanctuary was God's schoolhouse on earth, where a healthy relationship with Him was fostered and celebrated, and the consequences of wrong-doing were demonstrated.

A second reason for looking at God's plan as revealed in the sanctuary is that the sanctuary rituals show us Christ's sacrifice from various angles, so that we can fully appreciate the richness of what He does. For example, all the flesh of a burnt offering animal was consumed on the altar (Lev 1), pointing to the fact that Christ's sacrifice would consume Him (compare 1 Cor 11:24; Heb 7:27). On the other hand, part of the flesh of a well-being offering (= "peace" or "fellowship" offering) was eaten by the person who brought the sacrifice (Lev 7:15-21), showing that we receive life by accepting Christ's life (Jn 6:53).

A third reason is the fact that the sanctuary rituals were prophetic in that they pointed forward to crucial stages of salvation, such as Christ's death on the cross and His mediation for us in heaven (compare Heb 7-10). The rituals symbolized the drama of the ages and illuminated the role of Christ in His battle with evil. By compressing a vast sweep of salvation history into rituals, God has shown us how everything fits together, just as a map or model of a city gives perspective that a visitor looking up at skyscrapers does not have.

The sanctuary guides our understanding of salvation by grace through faith. It answers questions that have an enormous impact upon the way we relate to Christ and the salvation that He offers. For example: Was atonement completed at the cross or can I be involved in atonement now? Is Christ's atonement only a "legal" matter, or does it involve transformation of mind and character? Does a Christian who commits an act of sin retain his/her assurance of salvation? Why are we saved by grace through faith (Eph 2:8-9) but judged according to our works (Eccl 12:14)?

By understanding ancient Israelite rituals, such as personal purification by water (Lev 15:5-8) or the Passover service (Exod 12), we can more powerfully experience our own Christian rituals, such as baptism (Rom 6:3-4) and Communion (Matt 26:17-30).

Language and concepts related to the sanctuary are widespread in the Bible. Some books, such as Daniel, Hebrews, and Revelation, present their messages by referring extensively to ideas connected with the sanctuary. Since these books have special relevance for the time in which we live, we need to grasp their messages. To do that we must understand the sanctuary concepts through which they present their messages.

There are no topics more relevant to us today than the profound ideas conveyed through the sanctuary and its services, namely, the *presence* of God, the *power* of His salvation through Jesus Christ, and His *promise* of restoration to immortality and full intimacy with Him. Because the sanctuary is about Jesus where He is *now*, it is worthy of our highest attention. It answers our most vital questions because it is a dynamic model of salvation by grace through faith, a model that reveals the character of God.

I am busy surviving here, but not too busy to keep in touch with God and to find out more about His plan to rescue me.

## Connections

A plan or prototype is useful only if it corresponds to that which it is supposed to represent. A prototype of a Chevy Astro van won't help you much in designing a new Ford Taurus sedan. Similarly, a plan for rescuing a group of hostages at Entebbe, Uganda won't be particularly useful for getting a lone airman out of Bosnia.

To be worthwhile for understanding God's heavenly sanctuary and plan of salvation, the earthly sanctuary and its services must correspond to them. There is a close correspondence between the two sanctuaries because the earthly sanctuary was a copy or "shadow" of the heavenly sanctuary (Heb 8:5; compare Exod 25:9). Although the earthly sanctuary services functioned as a prototype of Christ's later ministry in God's heavenly sanctuary, the heavenly sanctuary itself existed before the earthly sanctuary. The earthly services showed the Israelites what God's heavenly sanctuary was like already and what would happen there in the future, just as a rescue plan shows existing geography plus action that will occur there.

In Old Testament times, God resided in His heavenly sanctuary (Ps 11:4) as He does now (Rev 4-5, 11:19; 15:5-8). But He also had an earthly residence in order to dwell among His people (Exod 25:8). The Presence of God connected the two sanctuaries.

Christ connects the two sanctuaries in the sense that features of the Israelite sanctuary represented various aspects or roles of Christ, who ministers for us in the heavenly sanctuary. The animal sacrifices represented Christ (Jn 1:29; Heb 9:12-14, 26-28; 10:1-10) and so did the Israelite priests (Heb 4:14-5:10; 7:11-8:7; 9:11-28; 10:11-18). God's law in the ark of the covenant was based on love (Matt 22:36-40), which is the character of Christ because "God is love" (1 Jn 4:8) and Christ is God (Col 2:9; Jn 8:58). The "bread of the Presence" symbolized the life-giving power of Christ, who said "I am the bread of life" (Jn 6:48). The light from the lamps on the golden lampstand pointed to Jesus, who said, "I am the light of the world" (Jn 9:5). Just as the basin/laver contained water for purification, water flowed from Christ's body when He was sacrificed to purify us from evil (Jn 19:34; 1 Jn 5:6-8).

The incense that ascended with the prayers of the people (compare Lk 1:9-10; Rev 8:3-4) made it possible for the prayers to be accepted by God. In order to pray effectively, we need the sweet aroma of Christ's sacrifice going up as incense to God like the smoke from an atoning burnt offering (Lev 1:9). Strengthening the connection between incense and the smoke of sacrifices is the fact that the Hebrew word for burning a sacrifice on the altar means "turn into smoke" and comes from the same root as the word for incense.

Incense can provide atonement, as shown by Numbers 16:46-48, which describes how Aaron took a censer and ran among the Israelites with incense to make atonement for them during a plague from the Lord that had already begun. Verse 48 is chilling: "He stood between the dead and the living; and the plague was stopped." Where the incense went, people lived. The incense halted the progress of death. But where it did not reach, people died. They needed the incense. It was a life and death matter.

We need the incense of Christ's atonement with our prayers. It is a life and death matter for us and those for whom we pray. Our prayers can go with Christ's atoning power to people who need it, between the dead and the living.

The Israelite altar of sacrifice pointed forward to the cross of Christ outside the city of Jerusalem, the ultimate altar of sacrifice.

We have an altar from which those who officiate in the tent have no right to eat. For the bodies of those animals whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest as a sacrifice for sin are burned outside the camp. Therefore Jesus also suffered outside the city gate in order to sanctify the people by his own blood (Heb 13:10-12).

In an animal sacrifice for sin, blood was placed on the four horns of the altar and the animal's fat was burned on the altar between the four horns (Lev 4:30-31). The "horns" were parts of the altar that projected upward at the four top corners. The appearance of the sacrifice on the altar, viewed from above, would be strikingly similar to the appearance of Christ on the cross, viewed from the front. Just as the altar had blood on its extremities (horns) and body parts in the middle, creating an X pattern, so Christ's injured extremities (head, two hands, and feet) were bleeding from nails and thorns, and the rest of His body was in the middle. The altar graphically represented the cross on which Jesus was lifted up, where He draws all people to Himself (Jn 12:32).

So far we have seen that the sanctuary on earth and the ministry of its priests correspond in a number of ways to God's sanctuary in heaven and the ministry of Christ there. Since this kind of correspondence connects something down here with something up there, it can be called "vertical" correspondence.

The earthly sanctuary and its services prophesied later events of salvation history, whether they took place on earth or in heaven. For example, the altar on earth represented the cross, which came later in history, also on earth. So the connection between the altar and the cross is one of "historical" correspondence. Since we think of history as a horizontal timeline, this can also be called "horizontal correspondence."

Other examples of "historical" correspondence are found in the ancient Israelite spring festivals (Lev 23; Num 28), which precisely prophesied a series of events at the beginning of the Christian era. The lamb slain at the Passover festival (Exod 12:6; Lev 23:5) symbolized Christ (1 Cor 5:7), who was slain at the time of Passover (Jn 19:14). The sheaf of barley that an Israelite priest was to present before God as a "first fruits" offering on the day after the Sabbath following Passover (Lev 23:11) also pointed to Christ, who rose from the dead on the day after the Sabbath (Jn 20:1) as the "first fruits of those who have fallen asleep" (1 Cor 15:20). The first fruits of wheat offered to God at the "feast of weeks," which we know as Pentecost (Lev 23:16-20), pointed to the early "harvest" of conversions on the day of Pentecost, recorded in Acts 2.

The Israelite sanctuary with its rituals was a useful prototype because it corresponded to God's sanctuary up in heaven and to Christ's work for us down the timeline of history. By investigating the earthly sanctuary, we can learn about later and greater realities.

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## CHAPTER 8

# Limitations

A plan or prototype is not "the real thing." It can have limitations. A preliminary model of the space shuttle looked like a space shuttle, but it could not go into orbit around the earth. The U.S. military had a plan to rescue O'Grady that corresponded to his situation, but the plan itself could not save

O'Grady.

While the ancient sanctuary rituals reflected God's rescue operation with remarkable clarity and precision, they had serious limitations due to the fact that they were earthbound activities officiated by faulty, human priests. Here are some of the limitations:

1. Whereas the Israelite priests were sinful and needed sacrifices on their own behalf (Lev 4:3-12; 16:6, 11-14, 33), Christ is a sinless high priest who needs no sacrifice for Himself (Heb 4:15; 7:26-28).
2. Ancient sacrifices were offered over and over again. Some were performed every day of the year (Num 28:1-8). They were repetitive and redundant, overlapping with one another in their meaning because they all pointed to Christ's one sacrifice (Heb 9:28). For Him to save us, He needed to die only once.
3. Rituals performed with animals, grain, and other materials could not illustrate all details of salvation. In some respects they merely provided tantalizing hints. To comprehend God's rescue plan, we need the rest of the Bible along with the ritual portions. How would we know, for example, that the risen Christ was represented by a first fruits offering of barley (Lev 23:11) unless the New Testament made the connection for us (1 Cor 15:20)?
4. The ancient ritual system was for the nation of Israel. But the benefit of Christ's sacrifice is worldwide (Jn 1:29; 3:16).
5. The ancient Israelite sacrificial system did not provide for forgiveness in all cases of sin even when the sinners repented. For example, when David committed adultery with Bathsheba and then arranged for the destruction of her husband, God's law condemned him to death (Deut 22:22; Num 35:31). There was no animal sacrifice that could free him from this condemnation, as he himself recognized (Ps 51:16). When Manasseh sacrificed his son (2 Ki 21:6; 2 Chron 33:6), God's law condemned him to death plus the divine penalty of being "cut off" (Lev 20:2-3). No animal sacrifice could remedy his situation. Christ's better sacrifice, on the other hand, is available to all who truly and humbly accept it, no matter what they have done. So when God forgave Old Testament people like David and Manasseh (2 Sam 12:13; 2 Chron 33:13), He must have done it directly on the basis of the sacrifice of Christ that was to come, without animal sacrifices functioning as the means by which they received Christ's sacrifice.
6. An Israelite priest bore the guilt or punishability (liability to punishment) of people who brought their sacrifices for sin to the sanctuary (Lev 10:17). As our priest, Christ bore not only our punishability, but also our punishment. Unlike the Israelite priests, Christ actually died for human sin as a sacrifice (compare Isa 53; Jn 1:29). This fusion of priestly and sacrificial roles proves that Christ died as our substitute: As priest He bore our sin, and then as sacrificial victim He died for that sin.
7. Because even the Israelite high priest was sinful, he had to be shielded from God's glorious Presence by a veil when he performed rituals in the holy place during most of the year. And when he entered the most holy place on the Day of Atonement, he was shielded by a smoke screen (Lev 16:12-13). But because Christ is sinless, He does not need to be shielded from His Father in any way. Mark 16:19 says that when Jesus ascended to heaven, He "sat down at the right hand of God" (see also Heb 1:3). Perhaps for this reason, the apostle John does not mention a veil separating two apartments in the heavenly sanctuary (Rev 4-5). If there is a heavenly counterpart to the veil, as Hebrews 6:19 indicates there is, it may be open. In any case, it would not have the protective function of the veil in the earthly sanctuary.

Like most prototypes, the earthly sanctuary rituals had limitations. Unless we recognize these limitations, we may get in trouble by attempting to make the prototype work on its own or by

imposing limitations on our understanding of Christ's ministry for us. In the same way, it is not recommended that you get into a model of the space shuttle and try to blast off. Nor should you conclude that the space shuttle won't work because the model can't fly.

The Israelite sanctuary is valuable in accomplishing the purpose for which it was intended: To teach ancient and modern people who God is and what He is doing for them. The sanctuary is a teaching model, so that we can learn how to live with God and respond to His grace.

The sanctuary leads us to a personal *experience* with Christ on the cross and in the heavenly sanctuary. Studying the sanctuary should not be an end in itself. If our study of the sanctuary only results in more elaborate theories of salvation, something is wrong. Unless knowledge of the sanctuary affects our lives, we are no better off than O'Grady would have been if he had done nothing more than sit and study diagrams of a proposed rescue plan.

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## Deciphering

When you have a plan, you need to understand it. The Pentagon may devise a brilliant strategy, but unless the airmen and soldiers who carry out the operation can decipher the plan so that they know what they are supposed to do, the result will be chaos and failure.

The Bible presents God's plan to rescue us. We are not carrying out the rescue. God is doing that for us through Christ. But God reveals His plan to us so that we can cooperate with Him. When you are being rescued, it is important that you accept efforts made for you by cooperating. If O'Grady had taken a long hike away from the place where he knew the Marines were coming to get him, he could still be in Bosnia today. Similarly, God wants us to come to Him rather than run away from Him. Do we really want to be rescued? Or have we decided to settle in enemy territory?

God gives us the sanctuary prototype early in the Bible, in the book of Leviticus. This book, which presents the bulk of the sanctuary services, is challenging because it indicates meanings of rituals only by brief expressions or by implication. We have the plan, but we need to know how to read it.

Here are some guidelines for understanding Leviticus:

### ***The sanctuary was the stage for divine-human interaction.***

The sanctuary was the central place of God's Presence among His people (Exod 25:8). It was the place that God designated for interactions between Himself and His people through ritual. Therefore the sanctuary was called the "tent of meeting" (Lev 1:3). The structure was the stage where the drama took place.

People who attend a Shakespeare play don't spend the whole evening examining the stage. As Shakespeare is supposed to have said: "the play's the thing." The drama itself carries the essence of the meaning.

The sanctuary was a special place because of the one who resided there. It provided the setting for the relationship between God and His people to grow, just as a house in Twain Harte, California, was the setting in which my relationship with Connie flourished. I didn't spend all my time admiring the tall fireplace, the huge picture window, and the long, wooded driveway. I was enjoying being with Connie as our relationship grew, to the point that one evening while we were out on the driveway I asked her to marry me.

### ***Not all details must have distinct spiritual meaning.***

We should not assume that there is separate spiritual significance in each little detail of the sanctuary structure, including every material, hook, clasp, and pole. Here are some reasons:

First, the portable sanctuary built in the wilderness under the direction of Moses was followed by the temple of Solomon, which was followed by the Second Temple. These temples took the place of



the portable sanctuary as valid reflections of the heavenly sanctuary. See 1 Chronicles 28:19, indicating that the Lord directed the plan of Solomon's temple. But the temples were larger, permanent structures, which did not have all the same details as the portable sanctuary. While the wilderness sanctuary was a small tabernacle having walls made of boards that came apart from each other and a roof made of fabrics and skins (Exod 26), Solomon's temple was solidly made of stone and wood, and twice as long and twice as wide as the wilderness sanctuary. Solomon's temple had doors instead of curtains, ten lampstands instead of only one, and it included side chambers, a porch, and two huge pillars (1 Ki 6-7). But Solomon's temple had the same basic layout as the wilderness sanctuary: most holy place, holy place, and courtyard, and it had the same kinds of furniture.

Second, the Bible simply does not assign distinct spiritual meanings to all the details needed by practical necessity to make the portable tabernacle stand up. If the Bible does not give these meanings, what right do I have to give them?

Third, getting bogged down in speculating about meanings that are not indicated in the Bible distracts us from what is really important, namely, the interactions between God and His people that were shown in the rituals of the sanctuary.

### ***The Bible is our primary source of information.***

The Bible is our only primary text source regarding the ancient Israelite sanctuary. We need to build our interpretations upon careful consideration of all available evidence in the Bible.

The New Testament helps us comprehend the full significance of the sanctuary. But study should proceed from Leviticus to the New Testament rather than the other way around. Once Leviticus is properly understood in its own terms, later writings expand our comprehension. But reading Leviticus as though Moses knew the New Testament can result in distortion.

Rabbinic sources such as the Mishnah and Talmud are interesting and helpful in many ways. But they do not provide a completely reliable basis for understanding what happened in the wilderness sanctuary in the time of Moses, because they are late (after 70 A.D.) recollections and in some cases rationalized reconstructions of what was done in the Second Temple over a thousand years after Moses.

Especially damaging is the practice of reading one's own ideas into the sanctuary. As in computer programming, or in David Koresh's self-focused interpretations of the book of Revelation, if you put garbage in, you will get garbage out.

A common pitfall is to assume connections that the Bible does not make. For example, it is true that the inner veil of the sanctuary was hung on four pillars (Exod 26:32). It is also true that the prophet Zechariah saw in vision four chariots coming from between two bronze mountains (Zech 6:1). But if I interpret the four pillars in light of the four chariots because both simply involve the number "four," I make a connection that is not in the Bible. The pillars and chariots are not linked to each other any more than they are linked to the four faces on Mt. Rushmore.

Just because a group of concepts is beautiful, inspiring, or logical on the surface doesn't mean that it is right. A system of ideas is like a house. It must not only hold together, it must also be built on a solid foundation in the proper location. What use is a mansion built on the wrong lot?

### ***Meanings of rituals are found in the ritual texts themselves.***

The book of Leviticus prescribes how rituals were to be performed and in some cases describes how

rituals were actually carried out (Lev 8-9), but we cannot say that Leviticus contains rituals. Rituals consist of activity plus meaning and they are performed rather than read. The ideal way to study rituals is to physically observe them, but the Bible provides our only access to the Israelite rituals, both in terms of what was done and what those actions represented.

We cannot figure out the meanings of the Israelite rituals from their physical actions alone because physical actions do not mean anything in and of themselves. That actions have no inherent meaning is shown by the fact that the same action can mean different things. If you stand by the side of a road in the United States with your arm partly stretched out and your thumb extending upward from your fist, people know that you want a ride. If you do this in some other parts of the world, this gesture may not mean anything at all, except perhaps that you have a sore thumb in need of a band-aid. An action only means something if meaning is attached to it.

In the Bible, a ritual action can mean different things at different times, depending upon what God says it means. For example, in Leviticus 16 sprinkling blood seven times atones for or purifies part of the sanctuary (verses 14, 16). In another part of the same ritual, the same action reconsecrates an object (verse 19). In other rituals, prescribed in Leviticus 4, sevenfold sprinklings of blood atone for persons (verses 6, 17).

In addition to relying on explanations in Leviticus regarding what was to be *done* in the rituals, we must also rely on indications in Leviticus regarding what the rituals *meant*. So when we read Leviticus, we need to distinguish between descriptions of *physical actions* and indications of *meanings* that are attached to those actions by the authority behind the ritual system, namely, God. For example, Leviticus 1:4 reads: "You shall lay your hand on the head of the burnt offering, and it shall be acceptable in your behalf as atonement for you." The first part of the verse describes the action: "You shall lay your hand on the head of the burnt offering." The second part explains the meaning of this action: "and it shall be acceptable in your behalf as atonement for you."

### ***A method of study must fit that which is studied.***

It is a waste of time to look for a jellyfish with a metal detector or to give a pregnancy test to a man. Not long ago a male colleague of mine was given a blood test. One of the four vials of blood accidentally ended up in the pregnancy section of the lab in spite of a label that included his masculine name. (The result was negative).

To study something, you must first understand the nature of that which you are studying. If your subject is far away, you might use a telescope. If it is very small, you would likely use a microscope. If it is ritual, which consists of a system of activity to which meaning is attached, it would make sense to examine the activity in relation to its meaning.

God's plan, as shown in the sanctuary, takes some deciphering. But we shall find that it is well worth the effort!

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## CHAPTER 10



# Access

Stacey, Scott O'Grady's sister, was worried about him when he was missing in action. She said, "When you're not in control of a situation that involves a person you love with all your heart, you go crazy. You grasp for hope and a prayer." She could not see him, talk to him, or give him a hug. All she could do was to hug her brother's old and worn teddy bear, explaining later, "You cling to whatever you can." (*Time*, June 19, 1995, p. 26). Stacey had no access to Scott because he was out of reach.

Finally Scott managed to communicate by radio with an American pilot flying over Bosnia. The pilot could not see O'Grady, but he could communicate with him. There was access, but it was limited.

As sinful, mortal human beings we cannot see God. Our direct access to God was cut off when Satan "shot down" the human race by deceiving Adam and Eve. Because Adam and Eve sinned, they were banished from Eden and could not approach God as they had before (Gen 3:22-24).

We have lost our access, but not totally. God has been reaching out to us through messages recorded in the Bible, through Christ, who came to live with us, and through His Holy Spirit. Even though we cannot physically see God, we can reach out to Him through prayer, just as O'Grady could talk to a pilot flying an F-16 high above Bosnia.

Another limited way people have interacted with God is through rituals. An Israelite could come to the sanctuary, the "tent of meeting" (Lev 1:1, 3, 5), and give something tangible to God to express his/her devotion, thanks, or desire to receive forgiveness. God received the offering even though His hand did not appear from the sky to take it.

The sanctuary was a controlled environment that made interaction possible in spite of the separation between God and human beings. It was somewhat like the glass "bubbles" devised by modern medical science to protect people whose bodies lack functional immune systems. A few years ago there was such a "bubble boy," who would have died if he had ventured out of the environment that isolated him from germs. Through his bubble he could see people, talk to them, and come close to them. But he could not touch them or even sit on his mother's lap.

In the Israelite sanctuary, God came as close to His people as possible. But His glorious Presence was behind the inner veil in the most holy place. Only the high priest could enter there and only once a year, on the Day of Atonement (Lev 16). Even then, he had to be shielded from God's glory by an incense smoke screen or he would die (verses 12-13). Unlike the condition of the "bubble boy," God's holy glory was lethal to people outside. But just as the "bubble boy" had to be isolated from disease, God maintained a pure environment, separate from the world of sin outside.

To understand how God interacted with human beings through rituals at His sanctuary, we need to know how rituals in general work. First, a ritual is a system of activity. Such a system could involve slaughtering an animal, putting its blood on the sides of the altar, and burning its flesh (Lev 1).

Activity systems are not difficult to comprehend because we do many of them every day. Think of the system of activities by which you clean your teeth. Taking off the cap of the toothpaste tube, spreading the toothpaste on your brush, brushing upper and lower teeth, and rinsing your mouth are all included in the activity system because they are necessary for accomplishing your goal, that is, to transform the condition of your teeth from dirtiness to cleanliness.

Like other activity systems, a ritual has a group of activities united by a goal. The goal is to accomplish some kind of a change, such as to make atonement (Lev 1:4).

A ritual activity system has smaller systems making up bigger systems. A burnt offering included the activity of burning the flesh of an animal on the altar, which involved skinning the animal, cutting it up, and putting the pieces on the altar fire (Lev 1:6-8).

Nonritual activities also have smaller systems embedded in larger systems. When I plan properly for a long trip, I get my car ready by carrying out the following activity systems: do a tune-up if necessary, change the oil, check other fluid levels, and put air in the tires. Each of these systems has subsystems of activity within it. Changing the oil involves removing the drain plug, replacing the filter, putting the drain plug back in, pouring new oil into the engine, and cleaning up.

A ritual is a special kind of activity system in which the activities included and the order in which they are performed are fixed. They must be done in the way God has specified. For example, Leviticus 1 makes it clear that the burnt offering had to be a certain kind of animal that was brought to the proper place and sacrificed according to a particular procedure.

Rituals are not the only kind of fixed activity systems. If you use an ATM machine to withdraw money or if you access the Internet from a computer, you must go through a series of specified steps in just the right order. If you make a mistake, your process will be invalidated and you will have no choice but to start over again.

A ritual is a special kind of fixed activity system. It does not simply reach a practical goal by natural laws of cause and effect as when you use an ATM machine. The physical result of a burnt offering was to destroy a valuable, healthy animal. But this was not the real goal of the ritual. The goal was to give a token offering to God and to receive atonement/reconciliation with Him (Lev 1:4, 9).

A ritual reaches its goal because a kind of meaning is attached to its actions. The meaning of a ritual is such that its actions are interpreted as interacting with someone (such as a deity) or something (such as sin) to which we do not have access *in the material world*. For example, although God is supernatural, not part of our physical material world, He received burnt offerings from the Israelites.

Scott O'Grady's sister could not hug him when he was in Bosnia. She had no access to him. But he was still in the world as a physical human being. So when he returned home, she could reach out and touch him. But God is another matter. You can go to every nook and cranny of our planet, but you will not find God in physical form unless He chooses to appear that way.

One of the first Russian cosmonauts looked out of his space capsule into the starry heavens and proclaimed that he did not see God; therefore there was no God. He failed to grasp the fact that God is simply beyond the reach of human science (compare Job 11:7). God can accept a gift of food (Lev 1:4, 9), but He does not visibly take it unless He chooses to appear in human form (Gen 18:1-8) or sends fire to consume a sacrifice (Lev 9:24; 1 Ki 18:38).

A ritual can interact with *something* that is not physical, treating it as if it were a physical substance. For example, on the Day of Atonement the Israelite high priest was to do the following:

Then Aaron shall lay both his hands on the head of the live goat, and confess over it all the iniquities of the people of Israel, and all their transgressions, all their sins, *putting them on the head of the goat*, and sending it away into the wilderness by means of someone designated for the task. *The goat shall bear on itself all their iniquities* to a barren region; and the goat shall be set free in the wilderness (Lev 16:21-22).

Thus the high priest symbolically placed invisible sins upon a visible goat, which was then taken out of the camp carrying the sins as if they were baggage (Lev 16:21-22).

Ritual connects the seen and unseen worlds!

Children, whose minds do not lock everything into fixed categories, seem to sense connections between the seen and unseen worlds better than adults. When my daughter was three years old, she

watched me reaffirm my Australian roots by throwing a boomerang in our large backyard in Michigan. With practice, I was able to make it circle around and land at my feet. Intrigued, Sarah asked to try it. Her throw made the boomerang wobble and land on the ground a few feet in front of her. She tried again with the same result. Growing frustrated, she threw the boomerang up in the air. When it came down, she exclaimed: "God didn't catch it!"

The next morning at breakfast I asked Sarah the meaning of her words. I was astounded to learn that she thought the boomerang came back to me because God was catching it and throwing it back to me. She thought I was interacting with the divine realm, playing catch with God!

If Sarah had been right, I would have been engaging in the kind of interaction that occurs in ritual. To use boomerang language, we could say that God did "catch" the offerings of the Israelites and "throw back" blessings such as forgiveness.

Ritual is powerful. It can do things that ordinary words cannot do. Like language, rituals communicate by means of symbols, but the power of ritual communication lies in the fact that meanings are acted out.

If you doubt the power of ritual, remember the funeral of John F. Kennedy in November of 1963. The president's young widow planned the ceremonies, which turned out to be one of the great dramas of the twentieth century. Jacqueline Kennedy may have had her faults, but she was supremely good at ritual. Who will ever forget the riderless horse, the wail of a lone bagpipe, or the eternal flame? There was no need to explain these simple, elegant symbols. Ritual is a motion picture that paints ten thousand words. The world understood. And the world sobbed.

We have found that a ritual at the Israelite sanctuary was a special kind of activity system. In looking at how rituals work, we started with the large category of activity systems, narrowed our focus to fixed activity systems, and then narrowed once again to the unique category of "ritual." The uniqueness of "ritual" lies in the fact that only rituals are believed to interact with someone or something out of reach of our physical, material world.

Although we are "shot down" in this world, we are not cut off from God. He sends us messages and we can pray to Him. At the Israelite sanctuary, where God dwelt among human beings, He provided intimate interaction. Through rituals, it was *as though* the Israelites could reach out and touch Him. When Jesus came, people *could* touch Him because He came without a "bubble" to isolate Him from our diseases and sins. And our diseases and sins killed Him (Isa 53:3-5). But because He died, we can someday see the unveiled face of God.

# *Part III: The Rich Splendor of Christ's Sacrifice*

## CHAPTER 11

### Glory

What draws us to Christ on the cross (Jn 12:32)? Like the Hope diamond, Christ's sacrifice is rich in splendor. You cannot see the full beauty of a diamond by viewing it from only one direction. The richness of its splendor is found in the varieties of rainbow light reflected from its facets. Just so, you must look at Christ's sacrifice from various angles to experience the full impact.

The multi-faceted magnificence of Christ's sacrifice explains why there were different kinds of animal sacrifices at the Israelite sanctuary (Lev 1-7). It is true that all of the ancient sacrifices pointed forward to Christ's sacrifice (Jn 1:29; Heb 9:25-28). But no single kind of animal sacrifice could possibly express even the basic aspects of what Christ has done.

The Israelite sacrifices lay out the meaning of Christ's sacrifice the way physiology textbooks show organisms dissected into parts so that they might be understood. Leviticus reads in some places like a handbook of veterinary biology, with detailed instructions of what to do with animals. But when we grasp the full picture, it explodes into our consciousness and etches our Savior indelibly into our minds and hearts.

When we come to the Hope diamond, we are drawn by its beauty. We gaze at it for a few minutes and then move on to another fabulous gem in the Museum of Natural History. We come and then go. There is no compelling reason to stay. But with Christ on the cross it is different. Just as Scott O'Grady was drawn to a helicopter because his life depended on it, Christ draws us so that He might rescue our lives. The facets of His sacrifice are more than beautiful; each of them reaches out and offers us life.

Differences between Israelite sacrifices emphasized various aspects of Christ's sacrifice. The most important differences appeared in connection with the treatment of blood and flesh. To what parts of an altar was the blood of an animal applied and who received the flesh? The following chart summarizes the major kinds of sacrifices with regard to the way in which blood and flesh were handled. Italics indicate a feature that is unique to a given sacrifice. For example, only in the burnt offering did all of the flesh go to the Lord.

| Reference           | Offering   | Blood on altar    | Flesh went to:          |
|---------------------|------------|-------------------|-------------------------|
| Lev 1               | burnt      | sides             | <i>the Lord</i>         |
| Lev 2               | grain      | <i>(no blood)</i> | <i>(no flesh)</i>       |
| Lev 3; 7:11-36      | well-being | sides             | *priest+ <i>offerer</i> |
| Lev 4-5:13; 6:24-30 | sin        | <i>horns</i>      | *priest                 |
| Lev 5:14-19; 7:1-7  | guilt      | sides             | *priest                 |

\*except when the offerer is a priest (see for example Lev 4:11-12)

We will investigate these sacrifices in greater detail later, but here is a preview of how the unique aspects of the animal sacrifices pointed to Christ.

The flesh of a burnt offering went to the Lord when it was burned upon His altar. No person could eat any of the flesh. Burnt offerings, which were wholly consumed, pointed to the fact that Christ's offering of Himself completely consumed Him.

Although grain offerings went to the Lord and to the priests, they obviously did not involve blood or flesh at all. Nevertheless, they were sacrifices of basic food that acknowledged the benefit of Christ's life-giving power for His people.

Part of the flesh of a well-being offering (also translated "peace offering" or "fellowship offering") was eaten by the offerer. This kind of offering foreshadowed the benefit of Christ's life for those who accept it into their own lives.

In a sin offering (or "purification offering") the blood was applied to the *horns* of the outer altar (= altar of burnt offering) or of the altar of incense rather than to the *sides* of the outer altar. So blood was elevated in importance, emphasizing that Christ's blood ransoms our lives.

The blood of a guilt offering was not applied to the horns of an altar as in a sin offering. A guilt offering was preceded by literal payment of reparation/restitution to God or man. This shows that sin creates debt that must be paid by Christ's sacrifice even when we take care of our responsibility to make wrongs right as best we can.

It is only when we look at *all* of the sacrifices that we get a balanced picture of Christ's sacrifice. The Bible makes it clear that Christ's sacrifice pays a debt for sins that we have committed and also transforms our lives by His power. Both kinds of benefits are essential for our salvation. To be without one or the other is like losing a wheel on a mountain bike. You don't go very far on that kind of an unbalanced unicycle!

Although the book of Leviticus is packed with information about Christ's sacrifice, it is often neglected. One reason for this is that many people naturally want to jump straight to the New Testament and read about "the real thing." But if we ignore the Old Testament textbook that teaches us about "the real thing," we will miss a lot. A medical student studies textbooks that explain the human body with pictures and diagrams so that when he actually examines a patient he understands what he is looking at.

Another reason why Leviticus is neglected is because some modern readers are turned off by all the

blood and gore. Animal sacrifices are distressing to people like myself who love animals. It is true that ancient Israelites would not be as sensitive as we are because they slaughtered their own animals for food. But if our loving God is concerned about every creature, even a little sparrow (Lk 12:6), how could He command His people to kill so many animals?

God is more sensitive than we are. Every time an animal was slaughtered, God must have suffered. But apparently there was no other adequately effective way to impress on people the life and death consequences of their choices about God and sin. "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom 6:23). A sacrifice was God's "altar call" to life through the death of His Son.

To wake people up to long range consequences so that they might be saved, God is willing to use means like sacrifices, which in the short run are drastic and even painful. Another example of God's relentless mercy is the case of Ezekiel's wife, who died at the Lord's hand as a sign to his people that Jerusalem and the temple would be captured because of their sins (Ezek 24:15-27). No sermon that the prophet Ezekiel could have preached would have had that kind of impact. The death of Ezekiel's wife is only temporary, like sleep (compare Jn 11:11-14), and through her death, her people had a better opportunity to be saved.

When we study animal sacrifices, we should keep in mind that their suffering at slaughter was kept to a minimum because their throats were slit and they quickly went unconscious from loss of blood. This suffering was slight in comparison to that of Jesus, to which the animal sacrifices pointed. In the Garden of Gethsemane and on the cross Jesus endured incomparable mental and physical agony. The stress was so great that His body was disintegrating from the inside out: When a soldier pierced His body with a spear, water came out with blood (Jn 19:34).

We come to Christ lifted up on the cross because His beauty shines out in all directions. But this is not outward beauty like the kind we find in the Hope diamond. As the prophet Isaiah foresaw, the suffering of God's Servant was hideous and gruesome. In outward physical terms, Christ was more likely to repel than to attract.

Just as there were many who were astonished at him – so marred was his appearance, beyond human semblance, and his form beyond that of mortals – so he shall startle many nations; kings shall shut their mouths because of him; for that which had not been told them they shall see, and that which they had not heard they shall contemplate. Who has believed what we have heard? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by others; a man of suffering and acquainted with infirmity; and as one from whom others hide their faces he was despised, and we held him of no account (Isa 52:14-53:3).

It is only when we recognize Christ's self-sacrificing love for us that we see the glory. It is not the awesome splendor that the Israelites saw at Sinai. It is not the brilliant magnificence that the prophets saw in vision. But it is glory, by which He glorified His Father by accomplishing His work. Just before Jesus was arrested and crucified, He prayed:

"Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you, since you have given him authority over all people, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do. So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed" (Jn 17:1-5).

Here is glory brighter than a thousand suns, glory that makes the Hope diamond look like a worthless pebble!



## Burnt

Through animal sacrifices, the Israelites experienced what Christ was going to do for them. These sacrifices were not "the real thing." But although Christ had not yet died for them, the people could embrace the promise of His sacrifice as a firm reality, as if He had already died.

A burnt offering, in which all of the flesh was consumed by fire (Lev 1), promised that Christ would allow His life to be totally consumed for us. But before looking further into the ways in which a burnt offering pointed to Christ's sacrifice, we should pause to consider the meaning of a burnt offering for an ancient Israelite. After all, Leviticus wasn't written only for those of us who live after Christ's death. It was originally written for Israelites. If we understand their experience, we will be in a better position to grasp what applies to us.

Let's begin by reading the directions for one burnt offering ritual as they are recorded in Leviticus 1:3-9. Remember that when we read Leviticus, we should distinguish between two kinds of information: descriptions of physical actions and indications regarding meanings that are attached to those actions. To help us do this, I will quote Jacob Milgrom's translation of Leviticus 1:3-9, with physical actions identified by *italics* and meanings identified by **bold type**. These verses give instructions for a burnt offering of a large herd animal such as a bull. It is a private offering of an individual Israelite and it is voluntary rather than required.

3 If his offering is a burnt offering from the herd, he shall offer a male without blemish. He shall **bring** it to the entrance of the Tent of Meeting, **for acceptance on his behalf before the Lord**. 4 He shall *lean his hand* on the head of the burnt offering, **that it may be acceptable in his behalf, to expiate for him**. 5 The bull shall be *slaughtered before the Lord*, and Aaron's sons, the priests, shall *present the blood* and *dash the blood* against all sides of the altar which is at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. 6 The burnt offering shall be *flayed* and *quartered*. 7 The sons of Aaron the priest shall *stoke* the fire on the altar and *lay out* wood upon the fire. 8 Then Aaron's sons, the priests, shall lay out the quarters, with the head and suet, on the wood that is on the fire upon the altar. 9 Its entrails and shins shall be washed with water, and the priest shall turn all of it into smoke on the altar as a burnt offering, a food gift of pleasing aroma to the Lord. (Jacob Milgrom, Leviticus 1-16 [Anchor Bible Series, New York: Doubleday, 1991], p. 133).

Some explanations regarding Milgrom's translation will be helpful:

In verses 3, 4 and 9, "the Lord" translates YHWH (Yahweh), the personal name of Israel's God.

In verse 4, "to expiate" means "to make atonement."

In verse 6, "flayed" refers to removing the animal's hide and "quartered" means cutting the animal in pieces, without which it would have been difficult to put a bull on the altar without a crane.

In verse 8, "suet" is hard fat.

In verse 9, "food gift" renders a Hebrew word that is usually understood to mean "offering by fire." The idea of "gift" or "food gift" is supported by comparison with a related Ugaritic word that means "gift," and it fits Hebrew usage in that the word applies to sacrificial gifts of food to the Lord, such

as burnt offerings (Num 28:2) and well-being offerings (Lev 3:11, 16). However, the word does not appear with reference to sin offerings, which constituted token payments of debt to the Lord, as we shall see later. If the Hebrew word designated any offering of which at least a part was burned in the fire on the altar, as the translation "offering by fire" indicates, we would expect it to apply to sin offerings, of which suet/fat portions were burned on the altar (Lev 4:8-10, 19, 26, 31, 35).

For practical reasons, two activities must be understood to take place in addition to the activities explicitly mentioned in Leviticus 1:3-9. First, at the moment of slaughter, when the throat of the animal was slit, the priest would need to collect the blood in a basin so that he could then present it at the altar (compare 2 Chron 29:22). Second, after the fire was tended and before the quarters, head, and suet/fat were arranged on the altar, these parts would be "presented" (brought) to the altar (compare Lev 9:12-14).

Following are aspects of meaning that would have been especially important for an ancient Israelite as his/her sacrifice was offered.

### ***Goal***

The activities included in an activity system contribute to a particular goal. The goal unifies the system and determines what activities are included in it. When your goal is to clean your teeth, you do what is necessary to achieve that goal. Similarly, the burnt offering was unified by its goal: It is a "food gift" for the Lord. As we will see, the gift is a token one that does not provide God with anything that is not ultimately His. That a burnt offering is a form of food is emphasized in Numbers 28:2, where God refers to the regular morning and evening burnt offering as "My offering, the food for my food gifts, my pleasing aroma" (my translation).

### ***Acceptance***

To be a valid offering, the sacrifice must be accepted by the Lord. To be accepted, it must be acceptable, that is, performed correctly at the proper location (see Lev 1:3-4).

What matters is not so much whether the offerer can feel "ownership" of his form of worship but whether the Lord accepts ownership of the offering. Cain could relate to his offering because he grew it, but God did not accept it (Gen 4:3-5). The Israelites could relate to the golden calf, but God rejected the glittering bovine because they denied His real Presence among them by making this cold, hard, metal substitute that could not even moo (Exod 32).

Are you offended by the possibility that God may reject the worship you bring Him if it is not according to His principles? Just as the Queen of England has rules governing how you approach her, the King of the Universe has the right to determine how you approach Him!

### ***Free atonement***

The burnt offering was regarded as accomplishing a transaction between two parties: the offerer and the Lord. The benefit received by the offerer as a result of giving a food gift to the Lord was the infinitely greater gift of atonement (Lev 1:4). "Atonement" is an English word that is made up of a combination of words: at-one-ment. The idea is: making two parties "at one" with each other by reconciling them. "Atone" accurately captures the meaning of the Hebrew word it translates.

God already owns all the animals in the world and He does not need human food at all (Ps 50:10-13). So animal sacrifices did not buy reconciliation with Him; they were only tokens that expressed

faith in the Lord's free gift of atonement (compare Isa 55:1). It is true that burnt offerings were gifts to God in the sense that they were items of value that were transferred to God. Animals were valuable to people and so sacrifices involved cost. When Araunah offered to give King David some oxen so that David could sacrifice them to God, David replied: "No, but I will buy them from you for a price; I will not offer burnt offerings to the Lord my God that cost me nothing" (2 Sam 24:24). But God was already the ultimate owner of the animals and He had given to the Israelites everything they possessed. So they did not buy anything when they returned to God some of what was already His.

Burnt offerings that the Israelites gave to God were similar to a Christmas present that I gave my parents when I was seven years old. Our family was poor. We had just moved to the United States so that my father could attend graduate school. My mother used to cry while she walked up and down the aisles in the grocery store, looking at food that she could not buy. Every penny counted. When Christmas came, I owned almost nothing of value that I could give to my parents. But they had given me a dime. So I wrapped that dime and gave it to them as a Christmas present. It was a gift that cost me something. But it simply returned that which my parents had given to me. The dime was important because it expressed love, but it did not buy my parents' love. My gift was a response that showed my acceptance of the love that my parents had already given me.

Atonement may involve removing something such as sin, which gets in the way of a relationship. When God provides atonement for us, He separates us from our sin in order to heal our relationship with Him. This is the essence of Christ's ministry: to save us from our sins (Matt 1:21), not in our sins. He accepts us just as we are, but He doesn't leave us the way we were!

Reconciliation with God must involve removal of our sins because sin is foreign to God. God's character is love (1 Jn 4:8), but sin is selfishness. The two are incompatible. In a sense we could say that God is allergic to sin. If you want to have a friendship with someone who is allergic to something you have, what do you do if you are serious about the relationship? You try to protect your friend from that which causes the allergic reaction, even if it means giving something up. I know a man who gave up a dog because he had a close friend who was allergic to dogs. Similarly, we need to give up our sins because God is allergic to them. We may be as fond of our sins as the man was attached to his dog, but we need to be willing to give them up. It is a matter of priorities. Which do we value most: our sins that lead to death or our Friend who gives us life?

### ***Preparation of food gift***

Activities belonging to the burnt offering activity system contributed to the achievement of its goal. The roles of activities such as slaughter, flaying, quartering, etc. are clear: These activities were required to prepare a gift of food. Similar activities would be necessary to obtain meat from an animal even if it were not a sacrifice. The reason for washing the entrails (including intestines) and shins (hind legs) is almost as obvious: Washing removes the dung that is in or on these parts (compare Lev 4:11-12). Dung is an unacceptable element in a food gift.

### ***Hand-laying = identification of transferring owner***

Laying or leaning one hand on the head of the animal identified the offerer as its owner, who was transferring the animal to God and who would receive the atoning benefit of that sacrifice. This meaning is implied by the emphasis on the identity of the offerer in Leviticus 1:4, which instructs: "He shall lean his hand on the head of the burnt offering, that it may be acceptable in his behalf, to expiate for him" (Milgrom's translation; italics supplied).

When a sacrifice was a bird or a grain item, either of which would be carried in the hand, no hand-laying was required (Lev 1:14-15; compare 2:2, 8; 5:7-13), apparently because there could be no question regarding the identity of the offerer in such a case. Hand-laying was only required for herd or flock animals, which in some cases would have been led into the sanctuary courtyard by persons assisting offerers. For example, an old man could bring his grandson to manage a frisky animal. But when the grandfather placed his hand on the head of the animal, it was clear that the offering was on his behalf.

While hand-laying identified ownership, this ownership was being transferred. Hand-laying was like the signature that a modern vehicle owner puts on the title to his vehicle when he sells it. Whenever a sacrifice was performed, something was transferred to God. If hand-laying was required for a particular sacrifice, it played an important role in the transfer. We will pursue this concept further in connection with removal of sin from offerers when they received forgiveness.

So far we have been talking about private offerings, which were done when individuals chose to do them. But there were also public offerings that had to be performed at particular times according to the calendar (for example Num 28-29). These sacrifices had "appointments" with God and there would be no question regarding the identity of their offerers. This seems to be the reason why there is no evidence in the Bible that calendric offerings required hand-laying.

### ***Blood = ransom for life***

Dashing blood against the sides of the altar (Lev 1:5) separated the blood from the flesh of the "food gift" that was delivered to the Lord in the form of smoke. The Lord's "food gift" was a kosher one, with the blood drained out at the time of slaughter. In this way the Lord showed respect for life, which is represented in the blood (17:11). He also set an example for human beings, whom He has never allowed to eat meat from which the blood has not been drained at the time of slaughter (Gen 9:4-6--for all people before Israel existed; Lev 17:10, 12; Deut 12:16, 23-25; Acts 15:20, 29--for Gentile Christians).

In the Bible, God did not require people to get rid of every drop of blood that remained in the blood vessels of an animal by roasting or salting the meat. He only commanded them to drain the blood when they slaughtered an animal.

As the creator and controller of life, God alone has the right to do with blood as He wishes, but in sacrifices He practices what He preaches by withholding from Himself the blood that we have no right to utilize. Another divine example for us is Jesus' baptism (Matt 3:13-17). Jesus was baptized even though He did not need the cleansing from sin that baptism represented.

To keep the blood separate from the meat, it would have been enough for the priest to simply pour out the blood at the base of the altar (compare Lev 4:7, 18, 25, 30, 34). But the priest tossed the blood on the sides of the altar. Applying the blood to the altar contributed to providing atonement for the offerer (Lev 1:4) by ransoming his/her life, as shown by Leviticus 17:11: "For the life of the flesh is in the blood; and I have given it to you for making atonement for your lives on the altar; for, as life, it is the blood that makes atonement."

Notice the wording in Leviticus 17:11: "for making atonement for your lives." In this context, the Hebrew word for "making atonement" means "making ransom" in the sense of making a payment that substitutes for the taking of human life. As mentioned earlier, the basic meaning of the Hebrew word for "atone" is the idea of reconciling a relationship. But "atonement" can emphasize various aspects of reconciliation. To atone for somebody or something from an evil such as sin or impurity means to purify, cleanse, or make expiation for that person or thing from the evil that disturbs the divine-human relationship (Lev 5:6; 16:16). To atone for someone's life, as in Leviticus 17:11, is to

ransom that person's life. Reinforcing this idea is the fact that the Hebrew noun "ransom," referring to the price of a life (Jb 33:24; Isa 43:3; compare Exod 30:12), comes from the same root as the verb "to atone." So the blood of a sacrifice paid a price that enabled the offerer to live rather than die.

Ransoming life through sacrifice is a serious reality. It is not simply a beautiful figure of speech to inspire us while the choir sings, the pipe organ plays, and the sun streams through stained-glass windows. We learn the value of ransom for life when we consider what happens when life is not ransomed. For example, an Israelite murderer was not eligible for ransom and therefore had to be put to death (Num 35:31). This did not necessarily mean that the murderer was eternally lost. God forgave David and Manasseh even though they were guilty of murder because of their abuse of power (2 Sam 11-12; 2 Chron 33; compare 2 Ki 21, especially verse 16). But this was mercy over and above the Israelite judicial system, according to which a murderer had to die.

In Exodus 30, the Lord stipulated that when the Israelites took a census to register them, "at registration all of them shall give a ransom for their lives to the Lord, so that no plague may come upon them for being registered" (vs. 12). He said that the function of the ransom was to atone for their lives (verse 15). A plague for neglecting to pay ransom was life-threatening, literally. In 2 Samuel 24 we see what could happen when a plague of divine retributive justice was unleashed on the Israelites. When King David improperly took a census, 70,000 Israelites died of a plague from the Lord (verse 15).

The concept of ransom was central to the sacrificial system. In addition to the fact that all sacrificial blood provided ransom (Lev 17:11), 2 Chronicles 3:1 tells us that Solomon's temple was built on Mount Moriah at the threshing floor of Ornan (called Araunah in 2 Sam 24). On Mount Moriah, innocent Isaac was ransomed by a ram caught in a thicket (Gen 22:13). On the same mountain, at the threshing floor of Ornan/Araunah, guilty David was ransomed by sacrifices when he offered to die in place of the people of Jerusalem, who were about to be destroyed by YHWH's angel of death along with the 70,000 who had already perished as a result of the census (2 Sam 24:17-25; 1 Chron 21:16-27). Thus the temple, the permanent place of sacrifice, was built on a place of ransom, where the stories of Isaac and David came together.

### ***Hide/skin = "agent's commission" for the priest***

The hide of a burnt offering animal was removed by flaying. The hide was not burned, but rather belonged to the priest who presented the animal parts to the Lord at the altar (Lev 7:8). So although the hide was part of the whole animal that was initially transferred to the Lord (1:3), it was not kept by the Lord. He gave it to His servant, the priest who officiated the sacrifice. We can regard the hide as an "agent's commission" for the priest (compare 7:34).

An agent's commission works basically the same in modern times. When I was a part-time real estate salesperson in California, my broker received the entire commission from the sale of a house. Then she gave me a percentage of the commission that I had earned by contributing to the sale.

Before the Israelites built the sanctuary and consecrated a special group of priests to officiate for the people, patriarchs like Abraham offered their own burnt offerings. But on one occasion Abraham gave the Lord a gift of food literally rather than through a ritual. When the Lord appeared to him as a traveler with two companions, Abraham asked Sarah to make cakes and gave a calf to his servant to prepare as meat. Then he gave the food to the three "men," along with curds and milk, and they ate (Gen 18:1-8).

Just as Abraham showed his friendship by offering a meal, the Israelites showed their desire for a good relationship with the Lord by giving Him sacrifices as "food gifts." But sacrifices were more

than hospitality offered to the Lord and accepted by Him. Sacrifices acted out the healing of the divine-human relationship, which took place through blood on the altar. The blood that truly makes us at one with God is Christ's blood. The ultimate altar is the cross.

An animal sacrifice at the altar was a powerful spiritual experience that affected the offerer's relationship with God at the time when it was performed. But the life and death consequences that were graphically portrayed in such rituals reached fulfilment in Christ's awesome sacrifice for all human beings. Israelites had access to the benefits of the cross through the altar.

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## CHAPTER 13

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Consumed

My wife's parents love the people of Nepal. They lived for a number of years in that country, where my father-in-law worked as a physician. Recently they returned to Nepal, and even though they were almost seventy years of age, they hiked for eleven hours over the rugged foothills of the Himalaya mountains to reach a remote village. There at a small clinic they relieved some younger workers, who needed to get away and rest.

When the people of villages in the region heard that there was a physician in the area, they flocked to the clinic. Many were in pitiful condition, with serious illnesses and injuries. My father-in-law has a kind heart, so he worked day and night rather than turn people away. He became seriously exhausted, but continued to treat patients in spite of the fact that his work of mercy was consuming his health.

Christ's work of mercy completely consumed Him. This and other meanings were expressed by the burnt offering sacrifice.

Completely consumed

Except for the hide, which went to the officiating priest (Lev 7:8), the body of the burnt offering was completely consumed on the altar (1:8-9). This is a fitting symbol of Christ, who offered Himself on the cross as a sacrifice for us (see Heb 7:27).

Foundation sacrifice

John the Baptist introduced Jesus as "the Lamb of God" (Jn 1:29). John could have referred to Christ as "the Bull of God," the "Ram of God" or the "Goat of God." But John chose the expression "Lamb of God." Why? For one thing, Isaiah had prophesied that God's Servant, who would suffer for our sins (Isa 53:5), would be "like a lamb that is led to the slaughter" (verse 7). Also, the foundational sacrifice of the Israelite sacrificial system was the regular burnt offering, consisting of a lamb in the morning and a lamb in the evening (Num 28:1-8). All other sacrifices were performed in addition to this. By calling Jesus the Lamb, John implied that Jesus is the basic sacrifice, as if to say: "Here is the One who fulfills the role of the whole sacrificial system!"

Sin laid on Him

The first action of a private burnt offering was to lay one hand on the head of the animal to identify the offerer who was giving the sacrifice and who would receive atonement as a result (Lev 1:4). The fact that the offerer laid his/her hand on the animal points to the role of Christ that Isaiah prophesied: "Surely he has borne *our* infirmities and carried *our* diseases" (Isa 53:4). Christ atones for us by taking our troubles upon Himself.

Ransom, redemption

Leviticus 17:11 speaks of sacrificial blood making atonement for the lives of the Israelites, that is, ransoming their lives. Instead of dying, a person offered a sacrifice in which blood, representing life, constituted payment of a ransom. Since the blood represented Christ's blood, it is clear that Christ's blood has the function of ransoming sinful human beings, as explicitly indicated by the New Testament (1 Pet 1:18-19; compare Matt 20:28; Mk 10:45; 1 Tim 2:6).

A number of biblical passages use the terminology of "redemption" with reference to what Christ and His blood accomplished (for example Eph 1:7; 1 Cor 1:30). "Redemption" is clearly a legal concept (compare Lev 25:25). So is the idea of forgiving/releasing debt, which appears in the Lord's Prayer as an expression of the forgiveness that God gives through Christ's sacrifice (Matt 6:12). If you have any doubt that debt is a legal matter, just read the fine print on your loan papers!

His life for our lives

The ransom or redemption price that Christ paid was Himself. He gave his perfect life for our sinful lives. Just as animal sacrifices were to be physically unblemished (Lev 1:3; 22:17-25), Christ was morally unblemished in that He did not sin (Heb 4:15). But by allowing Himself to be a sacrificial victim, Christ died in place of sinners (Isa 53:5, 10).

King David offered to bear divine retribution in place of those who had been numbered and were about to die as a result of the census that he had ordered (2 Sam 24:17). Christ not only offered, "he poured out himself to death, and *was numbered* with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors" (Isa 53:12).

2 Corinthians 5:21 is even more powerful: God "made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." Imagine that! In a sense, Christ *became* sin! He bore every evil passion and selfish degradation of the billions of people who have ever inhabited our planet. With that overwhelming deluge of misery collected upon Him and identified with Him as if He were the personification of all evil, He gave Himself up for destruction in order to wipe out all sin and all of its consequences.

Now we can understand what Jesus said to Nicodemus: "And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life" (Jn 3:14-15). Jesus was referring to the time when the Israelites sinned and they were punished by means of poisonous snakes, which bit them so that they died. When they repented and Moses prayed for them, the Lord directed him to make a statue of a snake and set it on a pole so that those who were bitten could look at it, and by doing so they would live (Num 21:8-9).

The snake statue did not heal anyone by itself. It was not magic. God healed people who expressed faith by looking to the symbol that He had provided. Symbol of what? By identifying Himself with the snake statue, Jesus pointed to Himself, lifted up on the cross, as the ultimate source of life for

sinners. He is not merely an antidote for snake-bite. He gives life that is eternal.

Why should Jesus be represented as a snake, a symbol of misery and death resulting from sin and a reminder of the Satanic serpent that introduced sin to the human race (Gen 3)? Because Jesus allowed Himself to be identified with human evil so that by dying He might destroy it (compare Heb 2:14) and so that by looking we might live.

God's gift

The Hebrew word translated "burnt offering" literally means "ascending." The offering ascended to God in the form of smoke as a pleasing aroma (Lev 1:9), as if it were incense. Remember that the Hebrew word for turning sacrifices to smoke on the altar is related to the word for "incense."

The fact that God received His sacrificial "food" (compare Num 28:2) in the form of smoke showed that He did not really need human food at all (Ps 50:12-13). So the food gifts offered by Israelites were tokens of faith by which they accepted God's infinitely greater gift of atonement. Christ, to whom the animal sacrifices pointed (Jn 1:29), is not a gift of human beings to God; rather, He is God's gift to humanity (Jn 3:16). The Israelites were not buying their salvation at all. Ephesians 2:8 was true in Old Testament times: "For by grace you have been saved through faith..."

Ascending for divine acceptance

A burnt offering sent smoke ascending to God for His acceptance (Lev 1:9). Similarly, Christ ascended to heaven to receive acceptance from His Father. When Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene just after His resurrection, He said to her: "Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father" (Jn 20:17). This verse indicates that after appearing to Mary, Jesus ascended to heaven that day like the smoke from a sacrifice, after which He returned to earth and appeared to His other disciples for several weeks before ascending permanently. Christ's brief ascension on the day of His resurrection was foreshadowed about 1,000 years earlier when the "Angel of the Lord" ascended in the flame from Manoah's sacrifice (Judg 13:20).

Now here is something astounding: Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene *before* He even went to heaven to have His sacrifice accepted by his Father! Christ interrupted the ascending offering of Himself, the most important event in human history, to comfort one distraught, forgiven sinner: Mary. Unlike Jesus' disciples, His own family, and the religious leaders of His nation, Mary had understood that Christ's mission to earth was to save sinners like her, the weakest of the weak. And it was Mary, only Mary, who had anointed Him ahead of time for His burial (Jn 12:1-8).

Jesus is the ultimate Good Samaritan. He didn't let His rendezvous with destiny keep Him from turning aside to help someone in need. After all, helping people was the reason for His sacrifice in the first place. He didn't let His work of providing atonement for the whole world, important as it was, prevent Him from caring for Mary's feelings. What an incredible example of priorities! Do you think He is sensitive enough to care about *your* feelings?

Christ has proven that He is totally committed to your salvation. If you ever doubt that God loves you, remember what He has done.

CHAPTER 14



Grain

If a soldier or airman had died attempting to rescue O'Grady from Bosnia, we would say that he "sacrificed" his life. We would not use this expression unless someone died. But the apostle Paul appealed to his fellow Christians "to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship" (Rom 12:1). A "*living sacrifice*"? Isn't that a contradiction? How can someone living be a sacrifice? We will find the answer by investigating grain offerings given to God at the Israelite sanctuary.

Grain offerings are found in Leviticus along with animal sacrifices in spite of the fact that offerings of grain did not involve death, flesh, or blood. The implication is that grain offerings were sacrifices. This fits with the original meaning of the English word "sacrifice," which comes from two Latin words meaning "make sacred."

A sacrifice is something that is given over to the holy realm, whether it dies or not. All offerings given to God through ritual activity are sacrifices. Death or its absence does not determine whether a ritual is a sacrifice. For example, the so-called "scapegoat" (Lev 16:20-22) was not a sacrifice. We cannot know this simply because it was not slain. We know it because the goat was sent *away* from the Lord rather than offered *to* Him.

It is true that in English translations of the Bible the term "sacrifice" is used with reference to a particular class of sacrifice, including the well-being offering, in which an animal was slaughtered and the offerer ate some of the meat (for example Lev 3:1, 3, 6, 9; 7:11, 15, 16). But we can also apply the word "sacrifice," in the broader sense of an offering to God, to other kinds of sacrifices, such as burnt offerings and sin offerings. A sin offering could be an animal, but for a poor person it could consist of grain, which was not slaughtered (5:11-13). So we cannot determine whether something was a sacrifice/offering or not on the basis of whether or not it was slaughtered. It was a sacrifice if it was given over to God in a special way.

In light of our understanding of "sacrifice," we now realize that Paul was not uttering a contradiction when he appealed to believers to present their bodies as a living sacrifice. We can be living sacrifices by consecrating ourselves to the Lord (compare Lev 20:7)! Not that we are atoning sacrifices as Christ is. Our sacrifices mean that we belong to God, but we cannot save ourselves or anyone else.

Giving ourselves as sacrifices to God is not a waste. We do not waste ourselves. Rather, we have the privilege of entering His service, just as the boy Samuel entered lifelong service to God when his mother dedicated him to God at the sanctuary (1 Sam 1).

Not only animals pointed forward to Christ. Bread could also represent Him, as He indicated when He said, "I am the bread of life" (Jn 6:48). The life that Christ gives is eternal life and bread symbolizes His flesh (verse 51). Here Jesus was talking about manna, the "bread" from heaven that sustained the Israelites in the wilderness (verse 49; compare Exod 16:14-18). A token sample of manna was kept inside the ark of the covenant in the sanctuary (Exod 16:33; Heb 9:4).

The concept that Christ is the "bread of life" is behind His words at the Last Supper, when He broke Passover bread. He said, "Take, eat; this is my body" (Matt 26:26). By incorporating His life into our own, we have eternal life. We abide in Him and He abides in us (Jn 15:4).

By eating bread and drinking wine at Communion, we act out our acceptance of Christ into our lives, the divine-human interaction through which God transforms us by the life of Christ (compare Gal 2:20). Thus we remember and internalize our relationship with Him.

The idea that Christ is the bread of life also relates to Israelite offerings of grain, the material from

which bread can be made. Grain offerings acknowledged that God kept on sustaining the lives of His people even after He no longer provided manna. In the ritual system of the sanctuary there were different kinds of grain offerings that expressed relationships with God through Christ, the "bread of life," in various ways:

Independent private grain offerings

The grain offerings for which instructions are given in Leviticus 2 were private in the sense that they were offered by individuals rather than by the entire community. These offerings were independent in that they could be offered by themselves rather than as accompaniments to other sacrifices. They were simple gifts to God consisting of grain, which was basic food. As with animal sacrifices, portions of grain offerings were burned on the altar as a pleasing aroma for the Lord (Lev 2:2).

That grain offerings were gifts is emphasized by the Hebrew word translated "grain offering." This word has the meaning of "gift." In other contexts, it can refer to presents given to human beings (see for example Judg 3:15, 17, 18).

There is no indication in Leviticus 2 that the grain offerings described here had to do with removal of sin. Atonement is not mentioned in this chapter. These offerings were expressions of a positive relationship with the Lord, a way to show honor and love for the One who provided for them their "daily bread" (compare Matt 6:11).

Accompanying grain offerings

Grain offerings and drink offerings were necessary accompaniments to every burnt offering or "sacrifice" (Num 15:1-16). The word "sacrifice" here does not refer to sacrifices in general, but to the class of sacrifices from which offerers could eat the remainder after portions went to God and to the priests. Examples of such "sacrifices" are well-being offerings (= "peace" or "fellowship" offerings; Lev 7:11-18) and the Passover lamb (Exod 12:8-11, 27).

Accompaniments of grain and drink made an offering to the Lord a complete meal, just as human beings ate meals that consisted of items other than meat. Compare Genesis 18:5-8, where Abraham provided bread cakes, curds, and milk for his guests along with meat from a calf. He did not immediately recognize that his guests were of heavenly origin. His hospitality meal turned out to be a sacrifice!

Poor person's sin offering

In Leviticus 5:11-13 a grain offering functions as a poor person's sin offering. Although the sinner in this case cannot afford the usual animal sacrifice, his/her sin can be removed through a substitute offering of grain. The book of Hebrews recognizes this case when it says that "under the law almost everything is purified with blood..." (Heb 9:22). "Almost" implies an exception to the rule that everything is purified with blood. The poor person's grain offering is that exception.

"Bread of the Presence"

A special grain offering was the "bread of the Presence" (so-called "shewbread"), which was renewed each Sabbath on the golden table inside the sanctuary before God's Presence (Exod 25:30;

Lev 24:5-9). The "bread of the Presence" offering consisted of twelve loaves plus frankincense. It was placed upon the table to acknowledge the dependence of the twelve tribes of Israel upon God as their resident Creator-Provider, who sustains His creatures (compare Ps 104:14-15; 145:15-16; Jb 12:10; Dan 5:23). Because He does not need to consume food provided by human beings (Ps 50:12-13), the bread was eaten by the priests when it was removed from God's table (Lev 24:9).

The "bread of the Presence" offering expressed a covenant between God and the Israelites (Lev 24:8). In this covenant relationship, God resided with His people and gave them life. He called them to be for Him "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exod 19:6; NASB). And He wants each of us to give ourselves to Him as a "living sacrifice" (Rom 12:1). We can do that now. We do not need to die in order to be sacrifices for God.

CHAPTER 15

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# Well-being

Surviving for six days in Bosnia was tough for Scott O'Grady. When he came down in a parachute he didn't bring with him a shopping cart full of food and bottled water. Nor could he go to the market and stock up or he would be caught. Because crowds of people saw his parachute come down over a main highway, he had to hide in the bushes immediately with all his bare skin covered. He lay still while the enemy looked for him and passed as close as three to five feet from him.

Each night O'Grady looked for safer cover. His top priority was to avoid capture. But he also needed water to drink and food to eat. What's the use of being free if you die of hunger and thirst? So he caught rain water in Ziploc plastic bags. He tried squeezing water from his wet woolen socks, but that didn't work so well. He ate what was available: leaves, grass, and ants. Needless to say, these were not part of his normal diet. And he could not eat many ants because they were hard to catch. So he was hungry. Since he was outdoors in the rain night and day, he was also shivering from the cold. (*Time*, June 19, 1995, pp. 22-23, 25).

For six days O'Grady's well-being was in jeopardy. In order to live and be free he needed important things like cover, food, and water. He had barely enough of these to survive.

What do you need to survive? Not in the short run but in the long run. Not just your present life but eternal life. What is essential to your ultimate well-being? The well-being offering (Lev 3; 7:11-36) at the Israelite sanctuary gives us a clue.

The Hebrew word translated "well-being offering" (also commonly translated as "peace" or "fellowship" offering) is related to the Hebrew word for "peace." "Peace" in Hebrew does not refer merely to the absence of conflict; it has the fuller meaning of "well-being."

A well-being offering was performed like a burnt offering, except that only the fat was burned on the altar. While the offering as a whole was brought to the Lord (Lev 3:1, 6, 12) and the fat was burned for Him (verse 16), the breast and thigh were allotted by God to the priests as their commission (7:31-36) and the person who brought the offering could eat the rest (7:15-21). So there was a three-way distribution of the body of the animal among the Lord, the priests, and the offerer.

Unlike other kinds of sacrifices, a well-being offering was partly eaten by the person who offered it. What is the meaning of eating part of your own offering? We have found that according to the New Testament all of the Israelite sacrifices represented Christ (Jn 1:29; Heb 9). So eating part of a

sacrificial animal represented partaking of Christ. Jesus stunned His hearers when He said:

"Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in yourselves. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. For My flesh is true food, and My blood is true drink. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him" (Jn 6:53-56; NASB).

When Jesus explained this saying to His disciples, He emphasized the idea of receiving life through His words (verse 63). But when He said something similar in the Communion service, He clearly spoke of Himself as a sacrifice:

While they were eating, Jesus took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (Matt 26:26-28).

Eating from a well-being offering fits with the New Testament idea that Christ and His sacrifice provide life-giving power that we can take into our own lives in order to be spiritually transformed now. By accepting Christ and His words, we receive His Spirit and are transformed (Jn 3:5-8; Titus 3:5-7) by taking into our hearts the crucial element that is otherwise out of reach of sinful human beings: love (Rom 5:5). In this way God brings us into harmony with His own character of love (1 Jn 4:8) and with His law (Rom 8:4), which is based on love (Matt 22:36-40).

Why is love so important? Because real, unselfish love is the only basis on which intelligent beings with free choice can live in harmony with each other and not destroy each other. Love is as essential to the long-term survival of the human race as food and water are to our short-term survival. Ultimately we cannot live without love.

Because we are sinners who have rebelled against God's law of love, we do not naturally have love. We cannot get it through digging down into the secret chambers of our subconscious minds. We cannot get it through transcendental meditation or medication. We can only get it from the Source: God, who *is* love (1 Jn 4:8). He offers love freely through the sacrifice of His Son.

There is another dimension to the meaning of a well-being offering. God and the offerer shared the sacrifice, as if they ate a meal together to celebrate the peace and fellowship between them. Through Christ's sacrifice we can have a peaceful relationship with God (Rom 5:1) and Christ invites us to fellowship with Him: "Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me" (Rev 3:20).

Hope for eternal life through Christ's sacrifice brings joy and thankfulness. Similarly, ancient sacrifices could be associated with thanksgiving and joy. We think of the Israelite sacrifices as motivated by the need for forgiveness, but there were other motivations as well. A kind of well-being offering expressed thanks to God (Lev 7:12-15). Some well-being offerings fulfilled vows to the Lord and others were freewill offerings (7:16). If a person simply felt like expressing love for God, he/she could offer such a freewill offering.

The sacrificial system was solemn, but it was not morbid. It was dynamic and it could be joyful.

Well-being offerings show us that our fellowship with God does not always need to focus on the negative side of atonement/reconciliation, which has to do with getting rid of sins that come between us and God. We can grow closer and closer to God even at times when we do not sin and thus do not need forgiveness. But we should remember that even the positive side of atonement, including joyful praise and thanksgiving to God and peaceful fellowship with Him, is possible only because of Christ's sacrifice. Although well-being offerings did not atone for sinful actions, their

blood nevertheless served to ransom the lives of those who offered them (Lev 17:5-12).

God does not leave us to survive on our own. He knows that we would certainly perish. We have no life apart from Him. And we have no eternal life apart from Christ, lifted up on the cross. No wonder we come!

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## CHAPTER 16

# Sin

If a downed American airman is captured, the United States will try to gain his release. But it is not likely that the enemy will simply let him go. They will want something in return, just as a kidnapper demands a ransom. The price may be high.

What if you are captured and the price for your release is too high for yourself, your family, your friends, or even your government to pay? To make matters worse, if nobody pays the price, you will die.

Delete "What if." *You are* captured and the price *is* too high and you *will* die unless someone pays the price. If you are old enough to read this book, you have sinned. That goes for everyone: "...all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom 3:23). The "wages of sin is death" (Rom 6:23). Not just death, but *eternal* death, from which there is no return. You can run from it, but you can't hide. There is no escaping it. *Unless...*

The Israelite sin offering (Lev 4-5:13; 6:24-30) points to a way out of our dilemma. There is Someone who can pay the price to ransom our lives.

As in a burnt offering or well-being offering, the offerer of a sin offering laid one hand on the head of an animal before slaughtering it. Some sin offerings for sin also required spoken confession (Lev 5:5) in addition to the silent confession expressed by actions involved in transferring sacrifices to the Lord. However, whereas the blood of a burnt or well-being offering was merely tossed on the *sides* of the altar in the courtyard, the blood of a sin offering was daubed on the *horns* of either the outer altar or the altar of incense. As in a well-being offering, only the fat of the animal was burned on the outer altar. But unlike the well-being offering, only the priest could eat the meat of a sin offering.

Notice that the sin offering animal for an ordinary individual was a *female* goat or sheep (Lev 4:28, 32; 5:6; Num 15:27). I suppose you could call that equal opportunity representation of Christ.

The following aspects of sin offerings are important for comprehending their meaning:

### ***Blood emphasized***

Sin offerings emphasized blood. Putting blood on the horns, which were the highest parts of an altar, highlighted the significance of the blood.

The physical elevation of the blood corresponded to its elevation in atoning power: The more prominent the blood, the more powerful the atonement. We see this clearly in the two basic kinds of sin offerings outlined in Leviticus 4. In the first kind the blood was taken into the "holy place," the

outer room of the sanctuary. In the second kind, the blood was put on the horns of the outer altar.

When the high priest or the whole congregation sinned, the high priest took the blood of a sin offering into the "holy place." There he sprinkled blood seven times "before the veil" and then daubed blood on the horns of the incense altar. When he had finished applying blood to the sanctuary, the high priest disposed of the blood that remained by pouring it out on the ground at the base of the outer altar in the courtyard (Lev 4:6-7, 17-18).

When a ruler or common layperson sinned, a priest put blood on the horns of the outer altar and then poured out the remaining blood at the base of the altar (Lev 4:25, 30, 34).

The kind of sin offering that was required depended upon the status of the sinner. If the sinner was the high priest, who represented all Israelites before God, or if the "sinner" was the community of all Israelites, the situation was more serious than other cases. So the sacrifice involved not only putting blood on the *highest points* of the incense altar, it also required that blood be applied *inside* the sacred tent. The blood was extended toward God in two directions: vertically toward His heavenly dwelling and horizontally toward His Presence enthroned above the ark in the most holy place.

The more serious the sin in terms of the prominence of the sinner, the more emphasis was placed on blood. In other words, the prominence of blood in the ritual was proportional to the need for atonement.

### ***Payment of ransom debt***

A sin offering emphasized blood, which represented ransom for life (Lev 17:11). Ransom is required. It is not voluntary. People don't choose to pay ransom if they don't have to.

Unlike the burnt, grain, and well-being offerings prescribed in Leviticus 1-3, which were *voluntary* food gifts, sin offerings were *required* when a person's sin or serious ritual impurity (see below) brought him/her under obligation to the Lord (Lev 4-5, 12, 15). A sin offering was not a token food gift; it was a token payment of an *obligation* or *debt*. But this does not mean that a sin offering bought atonement. As we saw earlier, God already owns the animals and He does not need human food (Ps 50:10-13). So sin offerings were only tokens that expressed faith in the Lord's free gift of atonement. They did not buy anything. However, they were required tokens, as when a parent requires a child who has misbehaved to give up his/her money "allowance" in order to impress on the child the seriousness of wrong-doing and the value of forgiveness. The forfeited allowance does not buy forgiveness.

Here is more evidence that a sin offering was a token debt payment. The fat of a sin offering was never called a "food gift." Contrast the fat of a well-being offering, which constituted the "food gift" portion for the Lord (Lev 3:3-5). This difference is explained by the fact that the well-being offering was a voluntary gift to the Lord, but the sin offering was a required token payment of "debt."

A person who brought a well-being offering could eat part of his/her offering, but a person who brought a sin offering could not. Only the priest was permitted to eat his portion as an "agent's commission" (Lev 6:26, 29). If the sacrifice was for sin (rather than ritual impurity), he bore the "iniquity" that the offerer had carried (10:17; compare 5:1) as part of his priestly mediation. The Hebrew word usually translated "iniquity" means here "liability to punishment" or punishability. However, if a priest performed a sin offering on his own behalf or on behalf of the entire community, which included himself, he could not eat any of the offering. In such a case the remainder of the animal was incinerated outside the camp after the fat was offered to the Lord (4:11-12, 21; 6:30; 9:11). The fact that a person could not benefit from his/her own sin offering can be explained by the principle that a debtor cannot pay and then take back part of his/her payment.

When a sin offering and a burnt offering were performed together as a pair, the sin offering was performed first (see Lev 9:8-14, 15-16). Why? A debt (sin offering) must be paid before a gift (burnt offering) is accepted. If you owe someone \$100 and you give that person \$100, it is not a gift. It is payment of your debt. But if you then give another \$100, it is a gift.

Sin offerings pointed to Christ's sacrifice as the means by which God can answer our prayer: "...forgive us our debts" (Matt 6:12). But the fact that the debt is paid by blood shows that it is not just any debt. It is debt for life, that is, ransom debt.

Christ is the only one who can pay the price to ransom our lives, a price we can never pay. His blood is lifted up, not on the highest points of a ritual altar, but on the cross. The cross is His altar.

Ritual sacrifices could not provide automatic forgiveness of sins. Leviticus 4:26 summarizes the result of a sin offering: "Thus the priest shall make atonement on his behalf for his sin, and he shall be forgiven" (compare verses 31, 35). The priest made atonement by performing the ritual, but the verse does not state that the priest forgave the sinner. It says of the sinner: "and he shall be forgiven."

Who forgave the sinner? If the priest could not forgive, who could? Exodus 34:6-7 answers this question. The Lord proclaimed to Moses: "The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for the thousandth generation, *forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin...*"

We are to forgive other people for what they have done to us, just as God forgives us (Matt 6:12). But we cannot wipe out their sins the way God can. Only God can forgive sins and He has always done His forgiving directly. No human being has ever had the right to forgive sins. That would be blasphemy, as the people of Jesus' day recognized (Mk 2:7).

An Israelite priest carried out a sacrificial ritual that was *prerequisite* to forgiveness by the Lord. God made the decision. He could refuse to give forgiveness even if the ritual was performed correctly. The ritual did not provide forgiveness automatically the way a vending machine spits out a candy bar when you insert coins in a slot.

Under what circumstances would God refuse to give forgiveness when a proper sacrifice was performed? When the sinner was a hypocrite who persisted in disobedience to God even though he/she brought a sacrifice (Isa 1:11-20; 66:3; compare 58:1-5). As Samuel told King Saul, the Lord values obedience even more than sacrifice (1 Sam 15:22).

Hypocritical ritual without heartfelt devotion or obedience to the Lord was not simply worthless; it constituted sin. God hates hypocritical ritual (see Isa 1:10-17). This applies to flippant or hypocritical participation in Christian rituals such as Communion (1 Cor 11:17-34).

Our essential transactions with God are carried out directly with Him. Ritual does not by itself accomplish spiritual transactions. But ritual is important insofar as it *expresses* our spiritual interactions with God.

A college student told me that she did not need to be baptized because baptism is symbolic and what is symbolic is not real and what is not real is not important. That seemed logical to her, but I suggested that she think about a parallel situation: an engaged couple discussing their marriage. He says to her: "I love you and want to spend my life with you, but as for a wedding ceremony, that is symbolic and therefore unreal and unimportant. Why don't we just skip it?" How will that go over? If he doesn't want to publicly affirm his commitment through the marriage ceremony, how will she feel about his love for her?

A ceremony or ritual is symbolic, but the symbolism is real and important, expressing a change in relationship that is highly significant even though it is intangible. When it comes to our marriage to Christ, we need not only the transforming power of the Holy Spirit, we need to express our new

relationship with God through the symbolic water of baptism. Jesus said to Nicodemus: "Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit" (Jn 3:5).

### ***Sin offerings for ritual purification***

English translations of the Bible use the term "sin offering." Burnt offerings and guilt offerings also atoned for sin. The "sin offering" gets its name from the fact that the Hebrew word from which it is translated is the same as one of the Hebrew words for "sin" (compare Lev 4:3, 14, 23, 26, 28, 35). The offering atoned for certain kinds of sins, which were usually unintentional/inadvertent violations of divine commands (Lev 4:2, 13, 22, 27; 5:1-4; Num 15:22-23). However, the same sacrifice also atoned for serious ritual impurities, which were not sins (Lev 12:6-8; 14:19, 22, 31, 15:30).

An example of atonement for serious ritual impurity is the case of a woman who had just given birth to a baby. She was required to offer a sin offering (Lev 12:6-8). The translation "sin offering" implies that she had sinned. But she had not sinned by having a baby. She had only fulfilled God's blessing: "Be fruitful and multiply" (Gen 1:28). The purpose of the sacrifice in her case was to remove ritual impurity resulting from her flow of blood following childbirth. This impurity was not a moral fault. It came from a natural physical process of a mortal human being. We are all mortal, subject to death, because of sin. Mortality is our state of being that results from sin (Rom 6:23; compare Gen 3).

We will examine the nature of ritual impurities further in a later chapter, but here we should point out the fundamental distinction between sins and ritual impurities. Sinning could be deliberate (Lev 19:20-21) or unintentional (Lev 4:2). Becoming ritually impure could also be deliberate (Lev 11:40) or unintentional (Num 6:9). But only violations of divine commands were sins.

Unintentional violation of one of the Lord's commandments was sin even though the sinner did not become responsible until he/she knew that the action had broken God's law (Lev 4:27-28). Such an unintentional sin was not involuntary in the sense that physical functions, such as blinking an eye, occur without any thought. In fact, the sinner probably intended to do the action as such. But there was an element of ignorance in that the sinner did not realize that the action was a violation of a divine command. The sin was unintentional because the person did not intend to sin. For example, suppose an Israelite was working and then remembered or was reminded that it was Sabbath. He had meant to work and he knew that God had commanded His people to rest on the Sabbath (Exod 20:8-11; 31:12-17), but he had forgotten that it was Sabbath. He would not have worked if he had known which day it was. He had not sinned flagrantly (as in Num 15:30-36), but unwittingly, without meaning to do so.

Ritual impurities are another matter. Becoming ritually impure could be totally involuntary, without any thought at all, as in cases of menstruation (Lev 15:19) and nocturnal emission (Deut 23:10-11). So becoming impure could not be regarded as disobedience to God's law in any sense. Even deliberately becoming impure was permitted, as in cases of sexual intercourse (Lev 15:18) and coming in contact with dead persons (Num 19:11-12), unless God forbade such defilement (Lev 18:19; 21:1-4, 11). Contracting a forbidden defilement or neglecting purification for a ritual impurity (Num 19:13, 20) was sin, not because ritual impurity was sin but because God's command with regard to ritual impurity was violated.

It is true that the Hebrew term rendered "sin offering" looks the same as a word for "sin." However, the translation "sin offering" is misleading in cases involving ritual impurity, implying that impure persons had sinned when they had not. Therefore, some scholars now refer to the sacrifice as the "purification offering." This term covers both purification from sins and purification from ritual impurity. Another possibility would be to call it the "imperfection offering." Because imperfection



covers both ritual impurity and moral faults, this idea adequately represents the scope of the sacrifice. However, throughout the present book I have used the term "sin offering" so that readers will not become confused when they compare my explanations with their Bible translations.

We have sinned and we are mortal, in a state leading to death because of sin. But Christ's sacrifice ransoms us from our sin and our mortality. Romans 6:23 begins: "For the wages of sin is death..." Thanks be to God that the verse continues: "but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

The price of our ransom is too high for us to pay. But God has paid the price for us through Christ's sacrifice.

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## CHAPTER 17

# Guilt

Bob Wright and Scott O'Grady were flying F-16 fighter planes over Bosnia to enforce a United Nations no-fly zone. An SA-6 surface-to-air missile fired from the ground hit the underside of O'Grady's jet and blasted it in half.

Wright could see that O'Grady's cockpit had detached and was out of the fireball as the rest of the plane disintegrated, but the cockpit fell so quickly into the clouds that he could not tell whether the pilot had managed to eject. "When you lose your wingman, part of you goes with him," he said later as he recalled that moment.

Wright did what he could: He marked the position where O'Grady had gone down. But he did not know if he was still alive. Even if he was alive, Wright could not land his F-16 in order to get his wingman out of Bosnia. (*Time*, June 19, 1995, p. 22).

It is frustrating when you do your best and it is not enough. It is even worse when you have *caused* a problem that you cannot solve. Then you feel guilty as well as frustrated.

If you have hurt someone by taking something from him/her, you can and should do what you can to fix the situation by restoring what you have taken, but there is a sense in which you are still guilty for what you did. You can restore something many times over, but it is a historical fact that you have hurt another person. A problem remains that you cannot resolve on your own. The solution is found in the Israelite guilt offering (Lev 5:14-19; 7:1-7).

A guilt offering basically resembled the kind of sin offering that was performed at the outer altar (Lev 7:1-7; compare 4:22-35). However, unlike a sin offering, a guilt offering was called a "food gift" (7:5). This is because the offerer made a literal payment of debt for a specific amount *before* performing the guilt offering itself. This earlier reparation/restitution, including the amount of damage plus a 20% penalty, was made to the one whom the offerer had wronged. This could be God, if the sinner had misused something holy (5:16), or it could be another person whom the sinner had wronged by means of a false oath (6:5).

Other kinds of sacrifices also atoned for guilt, but the guilt offering dealt especially with guilt that involved sacrilege, that is, misusing something holy. It atoned for three related kinds of sins: Misusing something holy that belonged to God (Lev 5:14-16), sin that the sinner could not identify (verses 17-19), or fraud involving a false oath that misused God's holy name (6:1-6).

It appears that unidentified sin (Lev 5:17-19) fits here with sins of sacrilege because such a sin could possibly be sacrilege, a serious offense requiring the sacrifice of a ram, an expensive flock animal. A person who didn't know was responsible for the maximum possible. This is like the time I was driving to a meeting in Chicago with a colleague of mine, and because we were talking about some deep subject I somehow didn't see that I was supposed to pick up a ticket when I entered a toll road. When I exited the toll road without a ticket to indicate how far I had come, I was required to pay the maximum amount.

The blood of a guilt offering was tossed on the sides of the outer altar (Lev 7:2), as in a burnt offering or well being offering, rather than daubed on the horns of the altar as in a sin offering. The atoning significance of the blood was less in a guilt offering because literal payment came before the sacrifice. Sin offerings emphasized atonement to a greater degree because they atoned for sins against God to which no specific price could be attached. In such cases no reparation could be made earlier by repaying with money or objects similar to those which had been taken or misused.

Why were guilt offerings required in addition to literal payment of debt? Because sin creates debt that must be paid by Christ's sacrificial blood ransom even when we take care of our earthly responsibility to make wrongs right as best we can. We can never come up with enough to pay back what we owe. Our restitutions are important, but they are puny and insignificant in comparison with Christ's infinite sacrifice! We must cooperate with God by fixing what we have broken to the limited extent of our ability, but it is Christ's sacrifice that provides forgiveness and salvation.

Suppose you break a priceless antique vase. You can pick up the pieces and give them to the owner, but this does not fix the vase. Only a master vase restorer can fix the vase. He will charge a substantial fee for his skilled labor. Unless you are wealthy, you cannot afford the fee. Even more so, our sins break more than we can fix. We need Christ's sacrifice. He can restore the brokenness that we cause and its effects on others and on ourselves. He can make everything and everyone completely whole again.

Guilt offerings reveal three principles that we can apply today. First, we are responsible to God for our treatment of holy things. If we misuse something holy, such as tithes or offerings dedicated to God, we should restore that which we have taken. But the Bible indicates that we should do more than that. In addition to the principal amount of the damage, an ancient Israelite was required to pay a 20% penalty plus give God a ram, which was the most expensive flock animal (Lev 5:15-16). In case we doubt the seriousness of misappropriating something that belongs to God, we should remember the case of Ananias and Sapphira, who died because they dishonestly withheld some money that they had dedicated to God (Acts 5:1-11).

Another principle is that we have a responsibility to our fellow human beings. Leviticus 6:5-6 says that if a person had wronged another person, he/she was obliged to make reparation to the wronged person before offering a sacrifice to God. Jesus applied this principle in His Sermon on the Mount:

So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift (Matt 5:23-24).

We cannot expect God to forgive us for wronging someone unless we do all in our power to put things right. Forgiveness through Christ is not a "cheap grace" way to declare bankruptcy on our obligations to other people. Zacchaeus understood the need for restitution. He said: "Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much" (Lk 19:8).

A third principle is that we can give our guilt feelings to Christ. Many people today are plagued by guilt, without knowing why they feel guilty. These feelings eat away at their confidence and drag them down into depression. Leviticus 5:17-19 provided the Israelites with an answer to this kind of

problem: "If any of you sin without knowing it... You shall bring to the priest a ram... and the priest shall make atonement on your behalf for the error that you committed unintentionally, and you shall be forgiven" (verses 17-18). Prior restitution was not required in this situation because the amount to be restored was unknown. Even without knowing how they had sinned, the Israelites could be freed from their guilt by giving it over to God at His sanctuary!

The modern application is: If you don't know exactly what you have done wrong, don't overburden yourself by trying to figure it all out. Just turn your feelings over to Christ and let His sacrifice take your guilt away!

You don't need to spend hours each day trying to recall every detail of your life, as Martin Luther did before he understood salvation by grace through faith. Nor do you need Freudian psychoanalysis to bring your subconscious faults to light. Working through your conscience, God's Holy Spirit will reveal to you all you need to know about your sin (compare Jn 16:8). Even if the Spirit doesn't identify your sin for you, just give it all to Jesus!

When we do our best, we still have unfinished business because we are weak and faulty. But Christ can bring our unresolved problems to an end. He completes what He starts. He is "the first and the last, the beginning and the end" (Rev 22:13).

# *Part IV: Divine Obsession*

## CHAPTER 18



# Forgiveness

Why can't God simply forgive, without sacrifice? Why is sacrifice necessary?

We are so used to forgiveness being granted that we take it for granted. We have come to think that forgiveness is easy, to be dispensed the way we hand out compliments. But forgiveness is tough, even for God. True forgiveness is not automatic, and it has a cost. To *forgive* means to *give up* something.

We should have a forgiving attitude, as Jesus did when He prayed on the cross, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing" (Lk 23:34). If we do not forgive others, we cannot expect to receive forgiveness from God. The Lord's Prayer includes the words: "And forgive us our debts, *as we also* have forgiven our debtors" (Matt 6:12). But in carrying out our duty of forgiving, we should not overlook the cost of forgiveness and regard it as an unthinking "knee-jerk" reaction.

Michael Carneal, age 14, shot and killed three girls who were his classmates at Heath High School in West Paducah, Kentucky. Almost immediately, surviving classmates put up a sign saying "We forgive you, Mike!" Dennis Prager reacted to this example of what he regards as a "feel-good doctrine of automatic forgiveness":

Even by God, forgiveness is contingent on the sinner repenting, and it can be given only by the one sinned against.

"And if your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him," reads Luke 17:3-4. "And if seven times of the day he sins against you, and seven times of the day turns to you saying, I repent, you shall forgive him." ("When Forgiveness Is a Sin," *Reader's Digest* [March, 1998], p. 38; reprinted from *The Wall Street Journal*, December 15, 1997).

Perhaps Prager has underestimated the cost of emotional pain borne by the students who put up the sign. Perhaps the forgiveness that they offered to Mike was not as automatic and meaningless as Prager supposes. But Prager's caution is worth considering. True forgiveness is not automatic, and it does have a cost.

A Christian should offer forgiveness the way God does: as a deliberate, conscious, and meaningful choice, whether or not the person who has committed the wrong repents and accepts the forgiveness, or even asks for it.

Forgiveness is not only something that is offered, it is a transaction between two parties, the one wronged and the one who has committed the wrong. Until the one who has committed the wrong repents and accepts forgiveness, forgiveness is not complete in the sense that the offender does not receive the benefit of forgiveness. At the Israelite sanctuary, God continually made forgiveness available. But a sinner was only said to be "forgiven" when he/she accepted God's forgiveness by bringing a sacrifice (Lev 4:31, 35).

If you want to see how agonizing true forgiveness can be, look at the story of Joseph in the book of Genesis. When Joseph was second in command to Pharaoh and his brothers showed up in Egypt to

buy grain, Joseph did not immediately reveal his identity. Before he forgave his brothers, he tested them in all kinds of ways, to find out whether they were the same sort of individuals who had stripped him, thrown him in a pit, callously sat down to eat, and then sold him to a living death of slavery (Gen 37:23-28).

Forgiveness was tough for Joseph. Because his brothers passed the character tests he set up, thereby showing their change of heart and repentance for what they had done to Joseph, he became willing to reveal himself in order to forgive them.

We know that the story has a good ending. So we tend to take too much for granted. What if Joseph's brothers had failed his test by abandoning Simeon in Egypt (Gen 42:18-24)? What if they had consented to Benjamin remaining as Joseph's slave because he had allegedly stolen Joseph's silver cup (44:1-17)? Would Joseph have forgiven them? Perhaps not.

Judah's speech, imploring Joseph to let Benjamin go, put the capstone on Joseph's realization that his brothers were repentant, reformed men. Judah ended his speech:

Now therefore, please let your servant remain as a slave to my lord in place of the boy; and let the boy go back with his brothers. For how can I go back to my father if the boy is not with me? I fear to see the suffering that would come upon my father (Gen 44:33-34).

These words melted Joseph's heart.

Then Joseph could no longer control himself before all those who stood by him, and he cried out, "Send everyone away from me." So no one stayed with him when Joseph made himself known to his brothers. And he wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard it, and the household of Pharaoh heard it. Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph. Is my father still alive?" (Gen 45:1-3).

Philip Yancey comments:

When grace finally broke through to Joseph, the sound of his grief and love echoed throughout the palace. *What is that wail? Is the king's minister sick?* No, Joseph's health was fine. It was the sound of a man forgiving.

Behind every act of forgiveness lies a wound of betrayal, and the pain of being betrayed does not easily fade away. (*What's So Amazing About Grace?* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997], p. 85).

Joseph revealed himself, and then he expressed his forgiveness in words and by kissing his brothers and weeping upon them (Gen 45:4-15). He did not reveal himself until he was ready to forgive.

Unlike Joseph, God pursued Adam and Eve to reveal Himself as soon as they sinned (Gen 3:8-9). God continued to reveal Himself to patriarchs, to the Israelites at the sanctuary, to prophets, and ultimately to all of us when Christ emigrated to our Planet.

God's willingness to reveal Himself has consistently shown His willingness to offer forgiveness. Had He not wanted to forgive us, He would not have bothered to reveal Himself.

If God did not reveal Himself in order to help us, we could not take the first step toward repentance. Repentance is a gift of God (Acts 5:31). If God waited for us to repent before He revealed Himself, we would all be lost.

Think about this. If it was hard for Joseph to forgive *after* his brothers showed repentance, how much harder must it be for God to offer forgiveness *before* we even realize our need for repentance?

Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die. But God proves his love for us in that while we still

were sinners Christ died for us (Rom 5:7-8).

We have wounded the great, sensitive heart of God by rebelling against Him. If anything, He must suffer the pain of betrayal more than we do when people wrong us. But through His tears He reaches out because love overcomes pain.

If God was already in pain because of human sin, why did He immeasurably add to His own pain by having Christ die on the cross? Couldn't He avoid the pain? Only if He protected His heart by covering it with rejection, steeling Himself against forgiving us, abandoning His desire for a relationship with us. If He did this He would not be a God of ultimate love as He claims to be (1 Jn 4:8).

Love includes justice as well as mercy. To give mercy at the expense of justice would be to compromise love. Christ's sacrifice makes it possible for God to maintain His justice when He gives us mercy by forgiving us for breaking God's law. Justice demands that we die. Christ has died in our place to fulfill that demand: "...*he* was wounded for *our* transgressions, crushed for *our* iniquities; upon *him* was the punishment that made *us* whole, and by *his* bruises *we* are healed" (Isa 53:5).

The law we have broken is love (Matt 22:36-40). But love is also the powerful force that impels God to try to save us at any cost. We see this divine obsession in Judges 10:16. When the Israelites put away their idols and turned back to worshipping the Lord, "he could no longer bear to see Israel suffer." He couldn't stand it! He just had to deliver Israel. And deliver Israel He did.

God chooses to save us. John 3:16 says: "For God so loved the world, that He *gave* His only begotten Son..." (NASB). He chose to give. He wasn't paying taxes. He chose to give because of who He chooses to be: the God of love. His giving is the outflow of His chosen nature.

When He was on earth, Christ showed how God wants to forgive and restore faulty human beings. The story goes like this:

Disarranged locks of long, dark hair frame a tear-streaked face. Lowered eyes, wild with terror, glance about furtively. She is wearing, well, whatever she could grab to hastily cover herself before going before the king for judgment. King? Yes, but he's not on a throne and few people recognize that He is king. Instead of guards around Him He has a few fishermen.

This woman doesn't choose to go before the king. She is dragged there by a group of men, men of honorable demeanor who express horror at her crime. But they also seem to be delighted to have the opportunity to bring her to the king, as if they are glad that she sinned so they could catch her.

"We caught her, we did, in the act, yes, the very act of adultery. Adultery, no less, yes it was adultery all right. What do you say, teacher, what do you say we should do with this wretched woman? Moses made it clear, yes, very clear, what we should do: He commanded us to stone such a woman. But what do you say, teacher, what do you say we should do with her?"

Jesus knows that He is on trial with the woman. Whatever He says, they will get Him. If He says to stone her according to the law of Moses, they will turn Him over to the Roman authorities for illegally taking the law into His own hands by condemning someone to death. If He says not to stone her, He will be speaking against the law of Moses and therefore lose all credibility with the Jews who follow Him.

There are only two answers to the question of what to do with the woman: stone her or don't stone her. They have Him either way. Brilliant.

They might expect Jesus to question the details of the case. Had she really committed adultery? Was she presently married? Where was her lover? It takes two to commit adultery and the law of Moses condemns both together, not just the woman (Deut 22:22). Apparently they have the answers to these questions and Jesus knows that she is really an adulteress. Her lover must have mysteriously

been allowed to escape.

Whatever He might say, Jesus is trapped. So He doesn't say anything. Instead, He bends down and starts writing with His finger in the limestone dust that covers the ground in Jerusalem.

"Teacher, don't ignore us. This is a serious case. What should we do with this woman?" He straightens up and replies: "Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her" (Jn 8:7).

So Jesus does not say that the woman should die according to the law of Moses; He assumes that she is worthy of death and simply addresses the way in which the execution is to be carried out. He doesn't directly say to stone her. He says in effect, if you want to stone her, go ahead, but remember that only a righteous person has the right to begin the execution. Then He bends down and keeps on writing in the dust.

"What's He writing? I'd better take a look. Oh, no! He's writing my sin—here in public where everyone can see! How does He know about that? If anyone else finds out I'm going to be dead meat, a mere grease spot on the pages of history! I'd better get out of here before they catch me and stone me with that adulterous woman!"

They have condemned her loudly, but they depart quietly. And quickly too, as fast as their long Pharisaic robes will let them go.

The next time Jesus straightens up, they are all gone and He is left with only the woman standing before Him. She is still there cowering, waiting for the first stone to strike her.

He says to her: "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?"

She manages to squeak out the words, "No one, sir."

Jesus replies, "Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again" (Jn 8:11).

"Neither do I condemn you." Jesus doesn't say she isn't guilty and worthy of death. God's finger, which wrote the sins of the Pharisees in the dust, had written the seventh commandment *in stone* over a thousand years earlier: "You shall not commit adultery" (Exod 20:14). His law is eternal, immutable, irrevocable. He has written it in stone.

But sins are not written in stone. Thank God, Jesus writes even the sins of Pharisees *in dust*, not stone! Our sins are not eternal because Jesus can wipe them out.

When Jesus says to the woman, "Neither do I condemn you," what He means is: I forgive you as an act of mercy. He doesn't dispute her guilt, but He prevents her execution from being carried out.

Jesus also says: "Go your way, and from now on do not sin again." His forgiveness is redemptive. He forgives people so that they might have a chance to begin a new, better kind of life. He accepts us just as we are, but He doesn't leave us just as we were! "Do not rejoice over me, O my enemy; when I fall, I shall rise; when I sit in darkness, the Lord will be a light to me" (Mic 7:8).

God is eager to restore us. No, that's not strong enough. He is *obsessed* with restoring us! This is in spite of the fact that forgiveness is tough for Him, as proven by the sacrifice of Christ. When God grants us forgiveness freely, as a gift, let us never, never, never take it for granted. Look at the cross again and remember the cost of forgiveness.

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## CHAPTER 19



# Life

When Christ forgives us, we have a problem that remains. We are still faulty human beings who can sin again. We are still sinners living in a world of sin and having a natural desire to sin. The Bible describes what happens: "But one is tempted by one's own desire, being lured and enticed by it; then, when that desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin, and that sin, when it is fully grown, gives birth to death" (Jas 1:14-15).

Trying to overcome sin can be like attempting to row a canoe upstream just above Niagara Falls. With your desires and Satan's clever temptations against you, you *are* going over. But when you are in Christ, there is a powerful force pulling you to safety. The apostle Peter wrote:

His divine power has given us everything needed for life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Thus he has given us, through these things, his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may escape from the corruption that is in the world because of lust, and may become participants of the divine nature (2 Pet 1:3-4).

Although we are sinful, through Christ we can "become participants of the divine nature"! This does not mean that we become gods, but we do receive divine power to overcome sin and emulate God's moral character.

Until we receive glorious, pure, new bodies at Christ's Second Coming (1 Cor 15:51-54), we will have weak, mortal bodies that contain minds bent toward sin. But we can become participants of the divine nature by having Christ living in us (Gal 2:20). The divine nature overcomes and controls the sinful nature.

Christ's sacrifice provides forgiveness and victory over sinning. But it is also Christ's sacrifice that promises the permanent solution of new bodies that contain no fallen disposition and that live forever. "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" (1 Cor 15:55). Christ died not only to wipe out our acts of sin, but also to give us eternal life (Jn 3:16).

For Christians, the ritual of baptism signifies our acceptance of Christ's promise to cleanse us from sin and give us new life through His sacrifice and resurrection (Rom 6:1-11; compare 1 Pet 3:21-22). This idea that Christ gives life as well as forgiveness was shown by the ancient Israelite ritual system. Remember that the Israelites received atonement through sacrifice not only for acts of sin, but also for ritual impurities. We will find that such impurities represented mortality that is removed by Christ's sacrifice.

Ritual impurity disqualified an Israelite from coming in contact with holy things, that is, things that were closely connected with the Presence of the Lord. For example, God prohibited a person who was ritually impure from eating the holy flesh of a well-being offering (Lev 7:20). Impurity could not be brought into contact with holiness.

The purpose of the laws in the Bible regulating impurity was to safeguard that which was holy from contamination by impure people or things. Since the Lord resided with the Israelites in the midst of all their impurities (Lev 16:16), they had to be very careful to observe the boundaries of purity that He set up.

Ritual impurity was not the same as ordinary physical dirtiness. You could scrub yourself in the tub and still be ritually impure. But ritual impurity did result mainly from physical states of human beings. It could also result from contact with an animal used in a ritual to remove sins (Lev 16:21, 26).

You were regarded as impure if something contaminated you, for example, if you came in contact with a carcass or corpse (see Lev 11:24-28; Num 19), if you had a scaly skin disease (so-called



"leprosy"; Lev 13-14), or if you had a discharge from your genital organs (Lev 12, 15; Deut 23:10-11). Even when you were healed from scaly skin disease or no longer had a genital discharge, you were regarded as ritually impure until you were purified by the appropriate ritual.

The idea that ritual impurity was not ordinary physical dirtiness is reinforced by the facts that going to the bathroom did not result in ritual impurity, even a physically clean corpse was ritually impure, and purification from minor ritual impurities such as sexual intercourse included waiting until evening (Lev 15:18). Waiting until evening could not contribute to ordinary physical cleanliness.

My best modern illustration of what ritual impurity is like comes from my childhood. When I was in fourth grade, boys wanted to stay away from girls, who were supposed to have something contagious called "cooties." This word literally means "lice." But my classmates and I did not know this. For us, having "cooties" did not refer to literal physical contamination. I am not aware that any girls in my class had lice. But they were female, and young males wanted to protect their male image by distancing themselves from girls.

Like ritual impurity, our "cooties" were conceptual in nature. They expressed ideas that put people and things in categories on the basis of their physical natures or states. "Cooties," of course, were a ridiculous expression of immaturity that did not survive the onslaught of puberty. Ritual impurity, on the other hand, was designed by God to teach profound principles to mature people.

In the Bible, comparison between passages dealing with cases of ritual impurity (see especially Lev 11-15; Num 19) yields a common denominator to the various impurities: all have an aspect of death about them. The holy God could not be approached too closely by mortals under the curse of death resulting from sin. This was especially true when their mortality was emphasized by factors such as contact with dead bodies, the deterioration of skin disease, or loss of blood and/or the seeds of life (sperm or ova) from the reproductive organs.

In addition to safeguarding the holiness of the sanctuary and things connected with it, the Israelites' system of purity made it impossible for them to worship the dead as the Egyptians did. In Egypt, tombs were temples because dead people were regarded as holy gods. But in Israel, the dead were impure (Lev 21:1-4, 11; Num 6:6-17; 19:1-22), and impurity was the opposite of holiness.

As we saw earlier, ritual impurities were not sins even though they resulted from a mortal state that had resulted from sin (compare Rom 6:23). Indeed, some causes of ritual impurity such as menstruation (Lev 15:19) and nocturnal emissions (Deut 23:10-11) were normal, involuntary functions of the human body. A person could not help doing these things.

Some kinds of ritual impurity, such as coming in contact with a corpse, could usually be avoided (Num 6:9 gives an exception). But becoming impure was wrong only if God prohibited it. For example, while lay Israelites were permitted to become impure by participating in funerals, priests were restricted in this regard because of their special holiness (Lev 21:1-4, 10-11). Violation of such a restriction would be sin, not because ritual impurity was sin, but because violation of a divine command was sin.

Ritual impurities pointed to death. But the rituals by which the Israelites received purification pointed to life through Christ and His sacrifice. These rituals included ritual bathing and sin offerings.

The purification process could not begin until the source of the impurity stopped. For example, if a person had scaly skin disease, he/she could not even begin to undergo ritual purification until the symptoms of the disease had disappeared (Lev 14).

A person with a light impurity that lasted only one day would wash his/her clothes and body and wait until evening to be pure (see for example Lev 15:5-8). This ritual bathing by immersing in water is the forerunner of Christian baptism. For a new Christian, going down into the water (Acts 8:38) represents purification from a *morally* evil life by burying his/her old life of sin and rising to a

new life in Christ (see Rom 6:1-14).

Why did the Israelites wait until evening before they became pure? Because the impurity only lasted until the end of the day. But there may be an additional factor here: Christ died about the time of the "evening" (or late afternoon) sacrifice (Matt 27:46-51; compare Num 28:4). So His sacrifice provided purification at the end of the day.

Severe impurities that lasted a week or more required sin offerings (see for example Lev 12:6-8; 15:14-15). Like all other sacrifices at the sanctuary, these represented Christ's sacrifice, but they provided the atonement of ritual purification, not forgiveness. This highlights a magnificent and neglected fact: Through Christ's sacrifice, He not only forgives us from our sins (1 Jn 1:9), He heals us from our disease of *mortality* and gives us eternal *life* (Jn 3:16)! Psalm 103 refers to the two aspects of our restoration: "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and do not forget all his benefits < who *forgives* all your iniquity, who *heals* all your diseases" (Ps 103:2-3).

When Christ died on the cross, He not only took care of sins and mortality that had occurred up to that time, He made forgiveness and life available to generations of people who had not even been born. This idea is reflected in an unusual Israelite sin offering. A red cow was burned outside the camp in order to make ashes, which were stored. Later on, when a person was contaminated by contact with a corpse, some of the ashes were mixed with water and sprinkled on the impure person in order to purify him/her (Num 19). The ashes functioned as a ritual "sponge" to remove impurity from the person. Even though the burning of the cow happened *before* the ashes were applied to the person, those who participated in the burning of the cow and storage of the ashes contracted a mild impurity (Num 19:7-8, 10). Why? The burning sacrifice was bearing *future* impurity. It was as though the corpse contamination traveled back in time and space through the ashes of the cow to the sacrificial event. So it was with Christ. He bore all the sins and mortality of the world, including those of the future. This has special meaning to us because we are living in that future. Christ is the source of our purification.

The fact that Christ is the source of purification was emphasized by the fact that when He died and a soldier pierced His side, "blood and water came out" (Jn 19:34). These are the two main purifying elements of the Israelite ritual system: blood and water.

Christ was already a source of purity during His ministry on earth. Did you ever wonder how Jesus could touch lepers in order to heal them (for example Matt 8:3) and not become impure Himself? Have you thought about the woman who had a flow of blood for twelve years (Lk 8:43-48)? According to Leviticus 15, such a woman was ritually impure and whoever touched her became impure (verses 25-27; compare vs. 19). She could not worship in the temple court, eat holy food at special celebrations, or have sexual relations with her husband if she was married (compare Lev 18:19; 20:18). Her life was affected in serious ways beyond her physical suffering. In a sense she was cut off from God and man. No wonder she was desperate.

Why did the woman only touch the hem of Jesus' garment? To avoid making Him impure. But Jesus asked: "Who touched me?" Who in all that pushing, shoving, Near Eastern crowd had touched Him? If you have been in such a crowd in that part of the world as I have, you know how ridiculous that question must have sounded to those close to Jesus. But the woman knew what He meant and she trembled, thinking He was about to rebuke her for making Him impure.

Instead of rebuking the woman, He gave her a blessing. She didn't make Him impure at all. Why not? Because Jesus is the *source* of purity. He noticed the touch because He felt power *going from Himself* to the woman (Lk 8:46).

Jesus is like the spring or cistern of water in Leviticus 11:36. Carcasses of unclean animals could defile other things (verses 29-35), but they could not contaminate a spring or cistern of water because it was a source of purity.

The message is: Come to Jesus and let Him touch you. Grasp the hem of His garment. Do not be afraid. You can come to Jesus all filthy as you are, in need of every kind of cleansing and healing, and He can help you without becoming defiled Himself. He will not rebuke you. He will only bless you.

There's more. God can make you a source of purity and healing in the world. When you go out into an environment full of all kinds of moral pollution, you can give cleansing by putting people in touch with Christ without being defiled yourself. As long as you are with Christ, guided by Him on His errands, you are safe. Don't be afraid.

Now that our worship is directly focused toward God's heavenly sanctuary, where Christ is ministering as our Priest, we no longer have God's glorious Presence visually manifested at a particular physical location on earth. So the ritual purification laws of ancient Israel, which were designed to safeguard the interactions between the Israelites and their God in His earthly sanctuary, no longer apply. We do not need to have people stationed at the doors of our churches to make sure that participants in Communion are not ritually impure.

We should not ignore the purity laws of the Bible just because they do not apply to us. They teach us how our fallen state separates us from God and they show us how God brings wholeness, purity, and life from brokenness, defilement, and death.

Our lives are battlegrounds. But we can have victory now. Better yet, God will clean up the mess and give us ultimate peace. We will live without fear of sin or death. Christ's sacrifice guarantees that death will be no more (Rev 21:4).

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## CHAPTER 20

# Stages

When Scott O'Grady was hiding in Bosnia, he was out of the protection of the United States. When he entered a U.S. marine helicopter, he came under that protection. But he was still in Bosnia.

On the way back to the U.S.S. *Kearsarge*, a helicopter carrier sailing in the Adriatic Sea, the low-flying helicopter was attacked by small SA-7 missiles and gunfire. The missiles missed, but a bullet tore into the chopper. The bullet hit some communications equipment and bounced off the back of the flak jacket worn by Marine sergeant major Angel Castro Jr.

To avoid the missiles and gunfire, the pilot made the helicopter rock and zigzag violently. Occasionally it popped up suddenly to clear low power lines. One Marine commented later: "It was a terrifying ride < the roughest helicopter ride I've ever been on." But once the aircraft reached the Adriatic Sea, O'Grady and his rescuers were safe. (*Time*, June 19, 1995, p. 26).

Getting O'Grady back to safety didn't happen all at once. It happened in stages. The crucial moment was when he boarded the helicopter. But he had a way to go before he was completely safe. As Yogi Berra (the legendary New York Yankee) said, "It ain't over until it's over!"

The crucial moment in our salvation was when Jesus died on the cross. If He had not done that, we would have no hope of being reunited with God and restored to eternal life. Christ's death was the one and only atoning, sacrificial death (Heb 9:28). When He cried out "It is finished" and died (Jn 19:30), He had made complete provision for the salvation of anyone who would accept Him. In this

sense Christ's atonement for us was complete at the cross.

All atonement flows from Christ, lifted up on the cross. But the story of atonement did not end two thousand years ago on a hill outside Jerusalem. It continues because Christ brings His atonement to us today. Atonement is a *process that moves forward in stages* until we are fully reunited with God.

The cross was not the end of atonement because atonement is relational in that it is reconciliation between two parties: you and God. How could you receive atonement from a historical event that occurred long ago unless you experience a changed relationship with God during your lifetime on the basis of that event? As long as your relationship with God is being healed, atonement is continuing.

Christ's sacrifice makes reconciliation with God possible: "And you who were once estranged and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his fleshly body through death, so as to present you holy and blameless and irreproachable before him" (Col 1:21-22). But reconciliation did not end at the cross: "So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God" (2 Cor 5:20). Why would Paul appeal to people to "be reconciled to God" if reconciliation ended at the cross?

The idea that atonement continues beyond the cross agrees with additional evidence in the Bible. First, the apostle Paul stated that if Christ had not been raised from the dead, the faith of those who believed in Him would be futile, they would still be in their sins, and those who had died in Christ would have perished (1 Cor 15:17-18). This would not be true if atonement ended at the cross, in which case we could be saved even if Christ had only died, without rising from the dead. But the fact that the Resurrection is essential for salvation indicates that atonement continued after the cross event. We need a dying Christ, but we also need a living Christ!

In Hebrews 7-10, Christ ministers after His ascension as our High Priest in the true sanctuary in heaven, which was foreshadowed by the ancient Israelite sanctuary. There He appears "in the presence of God on our behalf" (Heb 9:24). Having obtained eternal redemption for us by His own blood (verse 12), He uses His blood to "purify our conscience from dead works to worship the living God" (verse 14; compare verse 13). In other words, Christ died to make abundant *provision* for the salvation of all human beings and then He *distributes/applies* the transforming benefit to those who believe in Him.

By way of analogy, Christ put the money in the bank (by His death on the cross) and then He writes checks to people from that account (by His mediation, distributing the benefit). For us to receive the benefit of salvation, provision and distribution are both necessary. Christ put enough "money" in the bank to cover every human sin. There is enough to give everyone the opportunity to be saved. But what is the use of a huge bank account if nobody writes checks to those who want the money?

In agreement with New Testament evidence for the way in which we are saved by Christ's blood, an ancient Israelite sacrifice for sin included priestly mediation as an essential component. An Israelite sinner was required to bring an animal to the sanctuary, lean his/her hand on its head, and slay it. Then the priest applied its blood to the altar and burned its fat on the altar (Lev 4:22-35). The effect of the ritual is summarized: "Thus the priest shall make atonement on his behalf for his sin, and he shall be forgiven" (verse 26; compare verses 31, 35).

Atonement was not completed by slaughter of the animal at the hand of the sinner, which pointed forward to Christ's death. Death provided the blood that made possible priestly mediation leading to divine forgiveness. This mediation is called a work of "atonement." Mediation was *part of* the atoning sacrifice. Since Christ's sacrifice fulfills the meaning of the animal sacrifices (Jn 1:29), we should include Christ's mediation *as an essential part of His sacrifice* rather than regarding it as a separate phase.

An Israelite had to be personally and sincerely involved in his sacrifice or God would not accept it.

The individual was involved by bringing an animal to the sanctuary, laying his hand on its head, and slaying it. When the priest completed the ritual for the sinner, "he shall be forgiven" (Lev 4:31; RSV). That is, the sinner shall be forgiven directly by God.

An Israelite was not automatically saved because a sacrificial death and priestly mediation were performed on his/her behalf. God read the heart and He would not accept hypocrisy (Isa 1:10-17). Hypocrisy prevents or nullifies atonement.

Even though Christ has died and is mediating for us as our priest in heaven, we cannot be forgiven unless we sincerely receive God's gift of repentance (Acts 5:31), that is, turning away from sin. As the Psalmist recognized, God will not listen to our prayers for forgiveness or anything else if we do not intend to give up our sin (Ps 66:18).

Since forgiveness is part of the atoning process and since we receive forgiveness when we personally and sincerely accept Christ's sacrifice, it is clear that atonement continues beyond the cross.

An Israelite who had sinned could receive *complete forgiveness* from God through a sacrifice that pointed forward to Christ's sacrifice (for example Lev 4:31, 35). But that was not the end of the process of atonement. *Atonement goes beyond forgiveness*. There was a further phase of atonement on the "Day of Atonement." On this day, Israelites who had already been forgiven were now "cleansed" (16:30) through purification of the sanctuary from their sins (16:16, 33-34).

It was not enough for an Israelite to be forgiven. If a person who had already been forgiven did not accept God's cleansing phase of atonement by humbling himself/herself and abstaining from work on the Day of Atonement, God would punish that person (Lev 23:29-30).

The Day of Atonement has this name (Lev 23:27-28) because it deals with a phase of atonement. As we shall see later, the Day of Atonement points to a phase of Christ's atonement ministry before His Second Coming. Just as the blood of sacrificial animals cleansed the sanctuary on the special Day of Atonement, the blood of Christ's sacrifice provides cleansing in a special time of atonement after His death on the cross.

For an ancient Israelite, cleansing from ritual impurity through sacrifice was called "atonement." For example, Leviticus says about a woman who had recently given birth: "... and the priest shall make *atonement* on her behalf, and she shall be *clean*" (Lev 12:8). This kind of atonement could require several stages, as in the case of a person who had been cured from scaly skin disease (not modern leprosy; Lev 14). Compare the way Jesus healed a blind man in stages (Mk 8:22-25), perhaps so that he would better understand the greatness of what Jesus did for him.

As we saw earlier, sin offerings for ritual impurity pointed to the fact that Christ died to save us not only from our acts of sin, but also from our state of sin, which is characterized by mortality. Since cleansing Israelites from ritual impurity through sin offerings was a form of atonement (Lev 12:7-8), Christ's work of cleansing us from mortality must also be regarded as accomplishing atonement. But this work will not be completed until we receive immortality at His Second Coming, long after His death on the cross (1 Cor 15:51-54).

Does the idea that atonement did not end at the cross diminish the sacrifice and atonement of Christ? Absolutely not! We magnify what Christ is doing! The Bible shows that Christ's sacrifice and atonement are much bigger than they are commonly thought to be! All atonement flows from Christ's blood, shed at the cross.

God is reuniting us to Himself. This takes time. It happens in stages. "It ain't over until it's over!" But Christ has already put the "money" in the bank. He is in heaven, ready to write "checks" for you.

There is no good reason for you not to be saved. Put Christ in charge of your salvation. Keep Him

in charge. He'll take you all the way home. There may be obstacles along the way. "But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor 15:57).

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## CHAPTER 21

# Holiness

During the summer of 1979, I helped to build cabins for a biological field station in Albion, California. The construction work was pleasant, my boss was a friend, and the field station was in a beautiful location. But I was lonely. So when the summer ended and I was about to return to postgraduate study in Berkeley, I decided to attend a get-acquainted party in the gymnasium of Pacific Union College. I had graduated from this college two years before and figured that I would see old friends and meet new people. Perhaps I would make a new friend...

Yes! I had met Kelvin near the end of the previous year. He was back. "Hi Roy!" "Hi Kelvin." "I'd like you to meet my sister, Connie." "Hi Connie." "Hi."

The way she said "Hi" melted me. We looked into each other's eyes and it was love at first sight. Yes, I know that's supposed to be impossible. It must have been infatuation. But whatever it was, it was the beginning of love.

Connie and I sat together during the program in the gym. We started getting acquainted. She was eighteen years old, entering college. I was twenty-four, already entering my second year of postgraduate study at Berkeley. But we had so much in common. We both loved God, classical music, outdoor activity, and many other things.

We started dating. At first I had a lot of competition. Numerous men asked Connie out during her first week of college. But I persisted and she responded.

We met on September 20. We started going together on October 16. We got engaged on December 17. We were going to wait seven years before getting married, until we both finished our education. That quickly came down to three years. But we couldn't stand being apart, so we got married the next June 15. Our relationship grew step by step as we came closer together.

Your relationship with God can grow step by step. Because God is holy, there is a sense in which you become holy when you begin to have a relationship with Him. The apostle Paul wrote to the people of Corinth, speaking of the time when they were converted: "But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God" (1 Cor 6:11).

"You were sanctified" means "You became holy." This is why Paul addressed the Corinthians as "called saints," that is, "holy ones who have been called" (1 Cor 1:2; my translation). English translations read "called to be saints." But "to be" is not in the Greek original. Paul clearly regarded the Corinthians as holy people.

The Corinthians were holy in the sense that they belonged to the holy God, but they were far from perfect. Paul's letter to them shows that they had serious problems. For one thing, they had divided into groups that quarreled with each other. They were holy in the basic sense, but they needed growth in holiness, which can be called "sanctification." They needed to become more like God in moral character.

The Thessalonians also needed growth in holiness. Paul wrote to them:

And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, just as we abound in love for you. And may he so strengthen your hearts in holiness that you may be blameless before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints (1 Thess 3:12-13).

Notice that for human beings *growth in holiness is growth in love*. The words "may he so strengthen your hearts in holiness" refer to "may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all."

It is no accident that growth in holiness is growth in love, because the moral character of our holy God is love (1 Jn 4:8). As we come closer to Him and become more like Him, we become more loving and therefore more holy.

The apostle Peter calls us to emulate God's holiness by being holy in all our conduct (1 Pet 1:14-16, quoting Lev 11:45). Leviticus 19:2 expresses the same idea: "You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy." How can we do this? The rest of Leviticus 19 consists of laws that teach God's people how to live in relation to Him and to each other. So being holy means living according to God's principles. Verse 18 refers to the basic principle of God's character underlying all of the laws: "...*you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord.*"

When someone asked Jesus which commandment in the law was the greatest, He referred to the command in Deuteronomy 6:5 to "love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind" (see Matt 22:37). Then He cited Leviticus 19:18: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (see Matt 22:39). Jesus recognized that love for God and mankind are the basic principles of God's law and of the entire Bible (Matt 22:40).

God calls us to be holy. He is holy and holiness is defined in relation to Him. The closer you get to Him, the holier you are. To be holy is to be loving. We become holy when we accept God and then we grow in holiness for the rest of our lives as we grow in love.

The idea that there are degrees of holiness in relation to God may come as a surprise. But the Israelite sanctuary demonstrates the same idea in *physical* terms.

In the sanctuary, the Lord was enthroned above the ark in the inner apartment, called the "holy of holies." This was the holiest area, closest to Him. The outer apartment, called the "holy" place, was the next holiest area. Less holy was the court outside the sacred tent. So the closer you got to the Presence of the Lord, the holier things became. This gradation of holiness is reflected in the materials of the sanctuary structure, the priestly garments, and the access that persons had to the different parts of the sanctuary.

### ***Sanctuary Materials***

The holier the area, the more valuable the materials. Fabrics in the inner part of the sanctuary were intricately woven from dyed wool and linen of various colors. Further from the ark the fabrics were more simple and less valuable. Inside the sanctuary tent, the items of furniture were made of gold or overlaid with gold. Outside in the court, the outer altar and the basin (laver) were made of bronze.

### ***Priestly garments***

The holier the priest, the more elaborate and valuable his garments. There were two kinds of priests: one high priest of superior holiness and a number of ordinary priests of lesser holiness. Aaron, the

older brother of Moses, was the first high priest, and his sons were the first ordinary priests (Lev 8-9). The high priest had a much more elaborate and valuable set of garments than did ordinary priests. Detailed descriptions of the priestly garments are found in Exodus 28 and 39:1-31 in close connection to descriptions of items belonging to the sanctuary structure. The priestly garments were regarded as belonging to the sanctuary because the priests belonged to the sanctuary.

All priests, including the high priest, wore four garments made of fine linen (Exod 39:27-29): (1) tunics, (2) sashes, (3) headdresses, and (4) trousers as undergarments. However, the high priest's special status was reflected in the fact that his head covering was a turban. Furthermore, only the high priest wore four additional outer garments that were appropriate for his responsibilities:

1. An ephod (a kind of apron) of fabric consisting especially of gold, plus wool mixed with linen, was made of the most intricate workmanship. On the shoulder pieces of the ephod were two precious stones, each of which was engraved with the names of six tribes of Israel. The significance of carrying these names is explained: "Aaron shall bear their names before the Lord on his two shoulders for remembrance" (Exod 28:12).
2. A breastplate was attached to the shoulder-pieces of the ephod and made of the same kind of fabric. The breastplate had twelve precious stones set in it. Each of these gems had the name of one Israelite tribe engraved on it. Exodus 28:29 explains the function of the breastpiece: "So Aaron shall bear the names of the sons of Israel in the breastpiece of judgment on his heart when he goes into the holy place, for a continual remembrance before the Lord."
3. The high priest wore a blue robe under the ephod, made of woolen thread alone, with golden bells attached to the bottom. Between the bells were suspended ornaments looking like pomegranates, made of a mixture of dyed wool and linen. The garment with bells was vital for the high priest's work: "Aaron shall wear it when he ministers, and its sound shall be heard when he goes into the holy place before the Lord, and when he comes out, so that he may not die" (Exod 28:35).
4. On his head, the high priest wore a golden diadem/crown on which were written the words: "Holiness to the Lord."

It shall be on Aaron's forehead, and Aaron shall take on himself any guilt incurred in the holy offering that the Israelites consecrate as their sacred donations; it shall always be on his forehead, in order that they may find favor before the Lord (Exod 28:38).

In addition to his elaborate vestments, the high priest had a second set of special garments that he wore only once a year, on the Day of Atonement, for cleansing the sanctuary, including the most holy place (Lev 16:4). These clothes were similar to the four basic garments (tunic, sash, turban, trousers) that he wore during the rest of the year, except that they were made of plain linen rather than fine linen. An ordinary priest also wore plain linen garments when he removed the ashes from the outer altar (6:10).

In a sense, the plain linen garments both of the high priest and of the ordinary priest were "cleaning clothes," but they were holy (see Lev 16:4) and involved close contact with the most holy place and the outer altar, respectively. Designation of the plain linen garments as holy agrees with the fact that in the Bible angels who belong to the holy, heavenly realm are described as clothed in linen (Ezek 9:2-3, 11; 10:2; Dan 10:5; 12:6-7).

## ***Access***

"Authorized personnel only." We often see signs like this. The more special the area, the more limited the access. For example, you can look at the White House from Pennsylvania Avenue anytime you wish. If you want to go inside the gates, you can do so only at certain times. You can



tour part of the White House, but other parts are off limits except to those who live or work there, or who have special appointments.

The White House is a special area because it houses a special person, the President of the United States. Buckingham Palace is special because the Queen of England resides there. You cannot simply walk up to the President or the Queen any time you like and strike up a conversation. A few years ago a mentally unbalanced man did manage to get into the Queen's private chambers, but her guards soon ushered him away.

If human beings can make places special, what about the Lord of the Universe? The prophet Isaiah describes an awesome vision that he saw:

In the year of King Uzziah's death, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted, with the train of His robe filling the temple. Seraphim stood above Him, each having six wings; with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called out to another and said,

"Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of hosts,  
The whole earth is full of His glory."

And the foundations of the thresholds trembled at the voice of him who called out, while the temple was filling with smoke (Isa 6:1-4; NASB).

"Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts." Only God is intrinsically holy and immortal. His unique holiness is the sum of His attributes, including His glory, power, and moral character of love, which includes both justice and mercy.

Isaiah saw the vision in "the year that King Uzziah died." In striking contrast to King Uzziah, who died of an unclean skin disease because he tried to usurp the priestly function of burning incense (2 Chron 26:16-23), God is pure and immortal. Human leaders are weak, faulty, and often untrustworthy, but we can have absolute confidence in the unimpeachable Leader of the Universe.

Since God is so much greater than the President or the Queen, it is no wonder that the Israelites were to treat Him and the holy area defined by His Presence with respect. In the sanctuary, the holier the area, the more limited the access. Only the high priest could enter the "most holy place," which was closest to God, and then only once a year (Lev 16:2, 29-30, 34). Only priests could enter the "holy place" (see for example Exod 30:19-21). Any Israelite could enter the courtyard.

We have found the sanctuary to demonstrate the principle that the closer one gets to God, the holier things become. This principle operates in our lives. God's holiness is unique, but He shares the love portion of His holiness with us. We grow in holiness as we come closer to Him by growing in love.

The love we are talking about here is God's kind of love, which involves unselfish and even self-sacrificing kindness and mercy. God's love also includes justice. He does not allow mercy to wipe out fairness. Christ's sacrifice proves God's justice and mercy: Christ bore the just consequences of our sins so that we might receive mercy.

Bible love is not the Hollywood brand of love, which is saturated with self-gratification. As sinful human beings, we do not even comprehend the meaning of true love without God's help. We need Him to teach us what real love is.

The more I study the Bible, the more I realize how right Jesus was when He said that love is the basic theme of the Bible (Matt 22:36-40). God's love is so big and so important for our lives and we are naturally so lacking in true love that it takes the entire Bible to teach us what love is and how it works!

The closer we come to God in character, loving others and bearing their burdens, the more we become like the holy Israelite high priest, who carried the names of the tribes of his people on his heart. And the more we become like Christ, our ultimately holy high priest, who bears our burdens

and carries our sorrows (Isa 53:4-5).

The Bible shows in many ways how love and holiness are connected. For example, God gave Moses greater access to His holy Presence than any other human being (Deut 34:10). Moses' love for his people was so pure, so free from selfishness, that he interceded for them by offering to give up his own salvation if God would save them (Exod 32:32).

David recognized the connection between love and holiness. He sang: "How very good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity! It is like the precious oil on the head, running down upon the beard, on the beard of Aaron, running down over the collar of his robes" (Ps 133:1-2).

Why did David compare unity to oil on the high priest? The oil to which David referred is the holy anointing oil that made Aaron holy (Lev 8:12). David's point was that unity is holy like that oil. Just as Aaron was holy because he had holy oil, other people who believe in God can have the holiness of unity whoever and wherever they are.

The idea that we can have holiness wherever we are is shown by the seventh-day Sabbath. In Exodus 31:12-17, just after the directions for building the sanctuary, the Lord stated that the Sabbath was a sign between Himself and His people, "in order that you may know that I, the Lord, sanctify you" (verse 13). Here God reminded His people to rest on the Sabbath even from their work of building His holy sanctuary because He had rested on the seventh day of Creation to celebrate what He had done (verse 17). But He was also telling them that just as the sanctuary was the physical *place* where the Lord and the Israelites were especially connected, Sabbath was the *time* that showed in a special way that God made holy the people who were His because He had redeemed them from Egypt (compare Deut 5:15).

The Sabbath is a temple of time, as recognized in Jewish tradition. Even when people did not have a way to get to the sanctuary or when the temple was destroyed, they could enjoy the temple of time wherever they were.

When God's people keep His Sabbath, they are not being legalistic; they are showing that because He has redeemed them, they accept His gift of sanctification. It is God who sanctifies His people, just as He created the world for them. They do not sanctify themselves any more than they created themselves. This sanctification is a gift of love because it is growth in holiness, which is growth in love. So the Sabbath is a celebration of love.

In the evening before Jesus was crucified, He prayed for His disciples and for all who would later believe in Him. In this wonderful prayer, He tied together the ideas that God sanctifies His people, gives them unity with Him and with each other, and restores them to full access to His glory (Jn 17:17-24). He petitioned His Father on behalf of His people "that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me" (verse 23). Unity among God's people is the greatest evidence to the world that the miracle of God's love has touched them through Christ. Many will be drawn to Christ when His people gather together in unity around the cross where He is lifted up.

Christ wants us to be fully restored. But we are not there yet. We can become less holy. There are degrees of going away from God, just as there are degrees of coming close to Him. In our study of the sanctuary we will find that there are degrees of sin. For example, unintentional sins are not as serious as "high-handed" (openly defiant) sins (Num 15:27-31).

How can we come to God rather than going away from Him? How can we become more holy and more loving?

Have you ever found yourself short of love? I have. Some years ago there was someone I needed to love, but I did not have love for this person. I scraped around in the bottom of my heart, but there was no love there. Love is not natural for sinful people like me. I need help from outside myself, from the Source of love.

When I had no love I prayed for God to give me His love as a gift through His Spirit, claiming the promise of Romans 5:5: "and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us."

God answered my prayer and that love is still growing and flourishing today. It is a miracle. God created love in my heart where there was no love, just as He created Planet Earth where there was only an empty void in the universe.

God's love is a gift of grace. So sanctification, which is growth in holy love, is a gift of grace received through faith.

Jesus accepts us just as we are, but thank God, He doesn't leave us the way we were! Through the Spirit, He gives us the cleansing and renewal that He bought by His blood (Jn 3:5-17; Titus 3:4-7; Heb 9:11-14).

Since sanctification brings us into harmony with God's law of love (Matt 22:36-40), we can see that sanctification involves obedience to God. But this obedience is not something that we are left to do on our own after God gives us the gifts of repentance (Acts 5:31) and justification/forgiveness (Rom 3:24). Because our obedience is based on the love that God gives us as a gift, it is clear that *obedience to God is a gift of grace!*

Any good works you do result from your acceptance of God's love. You don't have to propel your spiritual life under your own steam (having a sense of "self-steam"), "for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure" (Phil 2:13). What excuse can there be for disobedience?

So why do we struggle so much to do works of love rather than works of sin (compare Rom 7)? Because we have trouble accepting the gift of love through the Holy Spirit. Instead of humbly receiving the gift, we tend to try doing things on our own so that we might be in control.

We only need to allow God to do in us what He wants to do. Mary had it right. When an angel told her that God would conceive Christ in her womb by the Holy Spirit (Lk 1:35), she recognized that this was humanly impossible (verse 34). But she replied: "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word" (verse 38). If God could implant Christ in the womb of Mary, He can put the love of Christ in our minds. Paul describes the result: "and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (Gal 2:20).

The "nuclear reactor" that empowers holiness in the Christian life, individual and corporate, is the presence of Christ through the Holy Spirit (compare Jn 14:16-17; 16:7-15). If the Spirit is in a person, there is a sense in which that person is a kind of holy temple (1 Cor 6:19-20). If the Spirit dwells in people who make up a church, the church can also be regarded as a temple (1 Cor 3:16-17).

Sanctification is not merely an abstract theological concept. It is growth in love that affects the little events of life on a day-to-day basis as we interact with God, our fellow human beings, and the rest of God's creation. Those who belong to Christ will show their love not simply with eloquent words, but by feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, welcoming strangers, clothing the naked, taking care of the sick, and visiting those in prison (Matt 25:31-46). Do we show compassion? Do we care? Are we willing to put ourselves out in order to help another person or creature?

I need to grow. I need to accept more of God's Spirit into my life so that He can teach me and empower me to love as Jesus loves. I have a way to go. Like O'Grady's trip out of Bosnia, the ride will be rough at times. But there will be perfect peace at the other end.

## Assurance

You need assurance. If you buy something, you want to know that its quality is guaranteed. If you step on something, you want to know that it can support your weight.

When I was thirteen years old, my family went to a lake in Minnesota for a vacation. The camp where we were staying had a paddle-wheel boat. So we put Tippy, our small dog, on the low deck and paddled around the lake. We came to a place where huge lily pads were completely covering the surface of the water. Tippy saw that everything was green. Green is like grass. You can walk where it is green, he thought. So he stepped off the boat onto a lily pad and found himself in the water doing a frantic dog paddle. As we fished him in, we were so amused by the surprised look on his face that we doubled up with laughter and nearly fell off the boat ourselves.

Tippy had false assurance. But you need *real* assurance. When you marry someone, you want to know that your beloved truly means "I do." When you accept Christ's promise of salvation, you want to know that you have really connected with Him and that He will carry out His promise for you specifically.

The Bible tells us that we *can* have the assurance of salvation through Christ:

I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, *so that you may know* that you have eternal life. And this is the *boldness* we have in him, that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, *we know* that *we have obtained* the requests made of him. *We know* that we are God's children, and that the whole world lies under the power of the evil one. *And we know* that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding so that we may know him who is true; and *we are in him* who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life (1 Jn 5:13-15, 19-20).

It is true that God wants us to be humble before Him (Isa 57:15; Phil 2:5-8). But He also encourages us to have assurance that gives us "boldness" (1 Jn 5:14; see above), including boldness to approach His throne when we are in need (Heb 4:16).

What if your hour of need is a time when you have sinned? Can you boldly approach the throne of grace then? The apostle John says "yes":

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness... My little children, I am writing these things to you that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous (1 Jn 1:9; 2:1; NASB).

Do you have assurance of salvation *before* you come to the throne of grace asking for forgiveness? We could ask this question another way: Does Christ's blood cover you between the time you sin and the time you have the opportunity to ask for forgiveness? Daily sacrifices at the Israelite sanctuary say "yes" in the sense that God guarantees that He will not condemn you before you can ask Him for forgiveness. Every morning and evening a lamb was offered as a burnt offering on behalf of the entire community of Israel (Num 28:1-8). This was the foundational sacrifice of the Israelite ritual system. Since we know from other passages that burnt offerings provided atonement (Lev 1:4; 16:24), it is clear that the daily burnt offerings made atonement available to all Israelites,

wherever they were, on a regular basis.

On a special festival occasion, additional burnt offerings and a sin offering were performed at the sanctuary along with the morning burnt offering (Num 28-29). The Bible explicitly mentions the fact that this sin offering was to make atonement on behalf of the Israelites (Num 28:22, 30; 29:5). So, like the daily offerings, these additional sacrifices made atonement available to everyone.

When Israelites sinned, sacrifices representing Christ's sacrifice kept them from being condemned immediately, before they had an opportunity to bring their individual sacrifices in order to receive forgiveness. In some cases people who sinned delayed bringing their sacrifices because they did not yet know that they had sinned (Lev 4:27-28). Before such a person knew that he/she had sinned, the public daily sacrifices prevented rejection by God.

For the Israelites, the individual experience of sacrifice was in addition to the public sacrifices. Both were necessary. Neither substituted for the other. Just so, Christ's sacrifice makes atonement available to all mankind (Rom 5:18). But we must also come to Him individually in order to receive forgiveness (1 Jn 1:9; compare Jn 3:18).

An Israelite who *knew* that he/she had sinned was under obligation to bring a sacrifice. For example: "If any one sins in that he hears a public adjuration to testify and though he is a witness, whether he has seen or come to know the matter, yet does not speak, *he shall bear his iniquity*" (Lev 5:1; RSV). To "bear iniquity" was to be "subject to punishment" (end of same verse, NRSV). If nothing more happened, that person would be punished for that sin. But when the sinner brought a sacrifice, God forgave the sin (verses 5-13).

When God forgave, He bore the liability for punishment that the sinner had previously carried. Exodus 34:7 describes God as "forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin." The Hebrew expression for "forgiving iniquity" uses the same words that appear in Leviticus 5:1 with reference to bearing iniquity/punishability. So when God forgives, He transfers the sinner's punishability to Himself.

Because the priests were God's agents and represented Christ in His priestly role, they bore iniquity/punishability because God bore it. In Leviticus 10:17, Moses asked the sons of Aaron why they had not eaten their portion of the sin offering of the Israelites, "since it is a thing most holy and has been given to you that you may bear the iniquity of the congregation, to make atonement for them before the Lord" (RSV).

If an Israelite had sinned, he/she was under obligation to accept the means God had provided for atonement by coming boldly to the sanctuary, confident that God had promised forgiveness to those who repent. When we have sinned, the right place for us to be is before God's "throne of grace," claiming there the promise of 1 John 1:9: If we confess, he will forgive and cleanse.

When we have sinned, a state of denial will do us no good. Adam and Eve attempted the first cover-up by using scratchy fig leaves. When God called, they hid. But He knew what they had done (Gen 3:7-11). When we sin, the sooner we confess to God the better. Delaying will only make matters worse.

In ancient Israel, a person who had become ritually impure was under obligation to undergo purification through ritual in the way God had provided, just as a person who had sinned was under obligation to seek forgiveness. God did not punish a sinner or impure person before there was a reasonable opportunity to use the ritual remedy that He had given. However, an Israelite who willfully neglected God's remedy was rebelling against Him and would suffer the consequences. For example, according to Numbers 19:13, 20, an individual who neglected to purify himself/herself from the ritual impurity of corpse contamination was to be "cut off" from Israel. God did not prohibit Israelites from burying their dead relatives. For them it was not a sin to become impure in this way. But to willfully remain impure was to disobey God by rejecting the purification that He

provided.

By way of analogy, a mother may allow her young children to get dirty by playing in the yard. But she will insist that they clean up afterward.

To reject the solution to your problem can be a serious matter. If you are bitten by a deadly snake and refuse to take the anti-venom, your life expectancy will be short. If you have a life-threatening disease and refuse the treatment that cures it, you have a good chance of dying prematurely. If you are in Bosnia and run away from a helicopter that has come to your rescue, you are crazy.

If you were an Israelite in need of atonement and you ignored the means that God had provided for that purpose, you would be in deep trouble. One could say that you would be "history." But if you were "cut off" from among your people, you would not even be history! For "cut off" meant that God would see to it that sooner or later your line of descendants would die out (Donald Wold, "The Meaning of the Biblical Penalty *Kareth*," Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 1978).

Like people of other societies, an Israelite would want to have his life continue through his children, grandchildren, and so on after his death. This was so important that if a married man died without having a child, his brother would marry the widow to keep the name of the dead man alive (Gen 38:6-11; Deut 25:5-10; Ruth 4). But if a person were "cut off," he could be sure that in the future he would have no descendants even to mention his name.

To be "cut off" was a fate beyond death and worse than death. In fact, a person could be executed and "cut off" as well. The Lord told Moses:

"You shall also say to the sons of Israel, 'Any man from the sons of Israel or from the aliens sojourning in Israel, who gives any of his offspring to Molech, shall surely be put to death; the people of the land shall stone him with stones. *I will also set My face against that man and will cut him off from among his people, because he has given some of his offspring to Molech, so as to defile My sanctuary and to profane My holy name*'" (Lev 20:2-3; NASB).

A person who engaged in child sacrifice to the god Molech would die by stoning and then "die" again by losing the continuation of life through descendants. It was double jeopardy!

To be "cut off" was like a second death. It was a foretaste of the ultimate "second death," the eternal death in hellfire on the surface of this Planet when every trace of sin and sinners will disappear in a molten "lake of fire" (Rev 20:9-15).

Contrary to jokes and cartoons, the Devil and his demons are not in charge of hell and they never were. On the contrary, they will be among those who perish (Rev 20:10). Hell is not a place that exists now. It is an event that will occur on earth in the future, 1,000 years after Christ's Second Coming (see Rev 19-20).

How could a loving God do such a thing? This seems so alien to His nature. Isaiah 28:21 refers to this kind of divine judgment as a strange act of God. He does not want to execute anyone because He is "not wanting any to perish" (2 Pet 3:9). But God's strange act is an act. He accepts responsibility. He will put an end to sin and the oppression and misery it causes. This mess will not go on forever. Enough is enough.

Before we accuse God of injustice, we should remember that He has given us ample opportunity to be saved. He is our only life-support system. Every breath we take is in His hands (Dan 5:23). If we cut off our life-support by rejecting Him, what can He do for us?

To use another analogy, the human race is going down like the passengers on the Titanic. We are already in the icy water. We will be lost if we do not have help. But God sends Christ's lifeboat to

rescue us. He invites us into the lifeboat, but He does not force us, just as He did not force people to board Noah's ark. There is no other lifeboat: "There is salvation in no one else" (Acts 4:12). As Jesus said to Nicodemus: "Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God" (Jn 3:18).

If we have any doubt about God's sincerity and justice, think about this. We have all sinned and we deserve to die (Rom 3:23; 6:23) not just the death we know so well, but the "second death," the death of hell. But Jesus, our Messiah, has already suffered the penalty for us. Daniel 9:26 reads: "After the sixty-two weeks, an anointed one shall be *cut off* and shall have nothing." The "anointed one" here is Christ, the Messiah. And the prophecy says that He would be "cut off." This is the Old Testament penalty of divine punishment, which reaches beyond the first death and points to the second death. Jesus died a kind of second death in our place!

Christ could not have saved us from the second death by merely dying the first death, which He regarded as a kind of "sleep" because it is a *temporary* state of unconsciousness (Jn 11:11-13). The agony of being cut off from His Father (Matt 27:46) surpassed His physical pain because He is far closer to His Father and the Holy Spirit than a husband and wife are to each other.

In Christ, "the *whole fullness* of deity dwells bodily" (Col 2:9; compare 1:19). The whole fullness of deity must also dwell in the Father and the Spirit. The members of the holy Trinity, each of whom is the "fullness," make up one indivisible unit (Deut 6:4). They are bound together as tightly as an atom is one unit. But by becoming sin for us (2 Cor 5:21), Christ experienced separation from His Father, whose holiness is totally incompatible with sin. Sin penetrated the atom of God's oneness and wrenched it apart, unleashing a "nuclear explosion" of suffering.

The glory of Christ's resurrection (Matt 28; Jn 20) is not simply that He rose from the grave as Lazarus did (Jn 11:43-44). The incredible thing is that Christ rose from a death like the second death, from which there is no return!

Like the Israelite priests, Christ bore punishability on behalf of others. Unlike them, He actually suffered this punishment. But He had not sinned and He was still divine. So although Christ was "cut off" (Dan 9:26), "he shall see his offspring, and shall prolong his days" (Isa 53:10). His name will never be forgotten.

By dying the equivalent of the second death, Christ "abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel" (2 Tim 1:10). Death itself will finally be destroyed in a lake of fire (Rev 20:14) because of what Christ has done.

The only thing that stands between us and the second death is the blood of Christ. *Only* Christ can save us (Acts 4:12). His blood, daily received and applied, is our *only* assurance. But Christ's blood, freely available to us, is *abundant* assurance! Christ gives us abundant life (Jn 10:10) and abundant grace (Rom 5:17).

Our assurance is conditional in the sense that we can be saved only in Christ. But as long as we are in Christ, our assurance is guaranteed: "And this is the testimony: God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life" (1 Jn 5:11-12).

Do you think God would pay the price of the second death for you and then throw you away? It would make more sense to discard the Hope diamond. You may have heard that Bill Gates is worth billions of dollars. But in reality he is worth much more than that. And so are you. You are priceless. If you are in Christ, nothing can separate you from God. He will never let you go (Rom 8:31-39)!

Satan tries to separate us from God. He does not respect our free choice and does not take "no" for an answer. Sin "is lurking at the door; its desire is for you" (Gen 4:7). Is its desire for you like that of a mellow pussycat that wants to sit on your lap and purr? No! Sin is like a sabertooth tiger that

will get in the door of your heart if it can. It will not knock. Its desire is for you because it wants to gobble you up!

Christ has a totally different approach. He stands at the door of your heart and knocks. He will come in only if you open the door and let Him in (Rev 3:20). Unlike sin and Satan, Christ respects your free choice!

Christ is the all-powerful Lord who created the world (Jn 1:3; Heb 1:2), but He shows amazing restraint by allowing you to shut Him out of your life if you want! He will never force you to love Him because forced love is not love. He wants companions rather than robots.

Christ allowed Himself to be lifted up on the cross so that we might be drawn to Him with our free choice intact. We have rebelled against God, but He is giving us another opportunity.

My computer gives me another chance. I can get rid of a document by dragging its icon into the "trash" that appears on my screen. But before the document disappears, a dialogue box comes up on the screen. It says: "Are you sure you want to permanently remove it?" I can click on either of two choices: "Remove" and "Cancel." In a sense we are living our lives in a dialogue box like that. We have trashed our lives, but Christ gives us another chance.

The choice is ours. Like an ancient Israelite, we will bear our punishment unless we allow God to bear it for us through sacrifice. We are under obligation.

When we sin, God does not immediately cut us off from Himself by destroying us. He patiently gives us an opportunity to receive forgiveness (compare 2 Pet 3:9). Assurance is not unconditional, but it is freely available through Christ.

If we persistently reject God's appeals through His Spirit, we can eventually pass the point of no return (Matt 12:31-32). Turning away from Christ is dangerous (Heb 6:4-6). There is only so much that God can do, because He respects our free choice.

In Isaiah's day, God likened His people to a vineyard and lamented: "*What more was there to do for my vineyard that I have not done in it? When I expected it to yield grapes, why did it yield wild grapes?*" (Isa 5:4). These are ominous words. God says in the next verses: "And now I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard. I will remove its hedge, and it shall be devoured; I will break down its wall, and it shall be trampled down. I will make it a waste..." (Isa 5:5-6).

Going beyond the point of no return is our choice, not God's. He does not cut off anyone who responds to Him. He appeals as long as there is hope for a response. He does not immediately take "no" for an answer because He knows that we are ignorant and deceived by sin. But if He gets nowhere with us, He ultimately acknowledges our choice.

Be warned, but don't think God has given up on you. If you think you are too bad to save, remember Manasseh. He was the worst king in the history of Judah. He was so bad that in some ways he makes Saddam Hussein look like a nice guy. He shed innocent blood, performed child sacrifice, and promoted idolatry so enthusiastically that he spat in God's face by putting an idol in God's temple in place of the ark of the covenant (2 Ki 21:1-17; 2 Chron 33:1-10). So God removed His protection and the Assyrians captured him (2 Chron 33:11).

End of story? There's more! Terrified, Manasseh realized his stupidity. What happened next is one of the most amazing turnarounds in the entire Bible:

While he was in distress he entreated the favor of the Lord his God and humbled himself greatly before the God of his ancestors. He prayed to him, and God received his entreaty, heard his plea, and restored him again to Jerusalem and to his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the Lord indeed was God (2 Chron 33:12-13).

Astounding grace! Stunning assurance of God's relentless mercy! Breathtaking snatch from hell!



According to Revelation, the last book in the Bible, Planet Earth has an appointment with fire (Rev 20). But in Christ we have protection. Guaranteed.

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## CHAPTER 23

# Prayer

Thomas Hanford was flying his F-16 over Bosnia in an attempt to find O'Grady. O'Grady sent him a radio message: "Basher-52 reads you. I'm alive; help." To make sure this was not an enemy trick, Hanford asked O'Grady to give the name of the squadron to which he had earlier belonged in Korea. O'Grady told him the correct answer. There was no question that it was O'Grady. Hanford radioed his superiors that he had found the missing flier. As he turned back to refuel, his feelings came to the surface. He said later: "It's hard to fly an airplane when you have tears rolling down your face." (*Time*, June 19, 1995, p. 24).

O'Grady's message got through because there was someone who could receive it. Hanford and O'Grady knew that they had really communicated with each other. They were able to communicate because they had radios that were compatible. They knew what to say and they could visualize each other because they belonged to the same group of fighter pilots. O'Grady even knew what it was like in Hanford's cockpit because he also had flown an F-16.

Are our prayers to God as real to us as O'Grady's brief conversation with Hanford was to him? Do we have the assurance that we are getting through? When we need God's help or forgiveness or when we want to thank Him, make a promise to Him, or express our love for Him, do we accomplish our heart's desire? Or do we mumble sleepy clichés in a vague mist of unreality, as unsure of the results as we are unclear about what we are doing?

For the Israelites, the sanctuary was a big help. God had an address on earth to which they could direct their prayers. He was right there in the cloud over the sanctuary (Exod 40:34-38). It is true that God was not limited to the sanctuary; His primary dwelling is in heaven. But His people could reach Him through the sanctuary.

King Solomon understood the role of the sanctuary for prayer. At the dedication of the temple, he prayed that God would hear when His people would pray toward that place (1 Ki 8:27, 30). From Solomon's perspective, prayers traveled horizontally toward the temple, and from there they went ballistic up to heaven.

If an Israelite wanted to give something to God or to receive something from Him, he/she could go through the steps of approaching God in a tangible way through a sacrifice. Sacrifices were prayers made visible. Interaction with God was real to the Israelites because they acted it out.

Today God does not have an earthly address in the same sense. His Presence no longer hovers above an earthly place of meeting. We cannot interact with Him through sacrifices. But we can accomplish all of our interactions with God by praying to Him where He is, in heaven.

We have the advantage that Christ has opened for us a *direct* way of access to God's throne of grace in heaven (Heb 4:14-16). We no longer need the mediation of an earthly priest because we now have Christ Himself as our heavenly priest!

How can our prayers be as real to us as sacrifices were to the ancient Israelites? To answer this

question, let's see how much prayer and sacrifice have in common. Then we can look at the possibility of approaching prayer as a form of sacrifice.

The sanctuary connected prayer and sacrifice because Israelites brought their prayers as well as their sacrifices to that place. The Bible records specific occasions on which people such as Hannah (1 Sam 1:9-11), Solomon (1 Ki 8:22-53), and Hezekiah (2 Ki 19:14-15) prayed at the sanctuary/temple. Even after the temple was destroyed, Daniel prayed toward that place (Dan 6:10).

Not only did Daniel pray toward the place of the temple (Dan 9:17, 20); he was praying "about the time of the evening offering" (Dan 9:21; NASB; compare Ezra 9:5ff; 1 Ki 18:36). What was so special about the time of the evening/afternoon offering? It was on behalf of all God's people and it was the last sacrifice each day. Later Jesus' once for all sacrificial death happened at that time (see Matt 27:46-50).

Our prayers need Christ's offering ascending as a sweet aroma to God (compare Lev 1:9). His sacrifice is like incense, which goes with the fact that people in Jesus' day would pray at the time when incense was offered in the temple (Lk 1:10). It also explains Revelation 8:4-5, where an angel in the heavenly sanctuary offers incense with the prayers of God's holy people. Without Christ's atoning sacrifice, there could be no communication with God and no hope.

Jesus called the temple "a house of prayer" (Matt 21:13). In Isaiah 56:7, the verse Jesus quoted, sacrifices are accepted in the temple, the house of prayer. Again, sacrifices are prayers made visible.

Today we have no building over which the Shekinah hovers so that its glory can be seen and no altars of burnt offering or of incense. Nevertheless, our churches are dedicated to God as special houses of prayer.

When Jesus taught His disciples to pray, His words showed a number of important connections with sacrifice. The Lord's Prayer begins: "Our Father in heaven" (Matt 6:9). Both sacrifices and prayers interact with a Being who is above and beyond our material realm. However, we have a special relationship with this divine Being, who is greater than us. As our Creator, He is our Father (compare Lk 3:38), who deserves our utmost respect. Because He is our Father, it is desirable for us to interact with Him.

We know that God is kind because He is our ideal Father. My family and I were strolling through the mall in Washington, D.C., enjoying the sunshine and cherry blossoms. I pointed out the Washington Monument to my daughter, then six years old, and told her that the great obelisk honors George Washington. Then I asked her, "Do you know why he's called the 'father of our country?'" She replied, "Was he kind?"

Jesus continued His prayer: "hallowed be your name" (Matt 6:9). God and His name are holy. It is true that He is *abba*, "Daddy" (Rom 8:15; Gal 4:6), but His name or title must be uttered with the utmost awe and respect. In ancient times, the sanctuary was the designated place where God put His Name (Deut 12:5, 11; compare 1 Ki 8:29). It was His "Tent of Meeting" for residing among and interacting with His people. The materials of the sanctuary and access of persons to God within the sacred area reflected the principle that God is holy in the ultimate sense and all holiness comes from Him.

Jesus went on: "Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven" (Matt 6:10). God is not only King in heaven, He is King of earth as well. In the ancient sanctuary/temple, God had His earthly palace (Exod 25:8), where He was enthroned above the cherubim on the ark (verse 22; Isa 37:16). As in a dwelling belonging to a human being of high rank, He had before Him a table, an incense burner, and a lamp.

"Give us this day our daily bread" (Matt 6:11). Just as children need their earthly father to provide for them, we are dependent upon the ongoing creative power of God for our daily needs. Our lives and every breath we take are in His hands (Dan 5:23). In the Israelite sanctuary, the dependence of

the people upon God as their resident Creator-Provider was symbolically represented by the "bread of the Presence," which was always placed on the golden table before the Lord (Lev 24:5-9).

"And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And do not bring us to the time of trial, but rescue us from the evil one" (Matt 6:12-13). Jesus refers to what we have found in the sacrificial system: sins are debts. We express our repentance and ask for forgiveness through prayer. Personal repentance was also important for the ancient Israelites, but in addition, they were required to perform symbolic sacrificial transactions, which were acted out prayers.

The Lord's prayer teaches me how to reach beyond the boundaries of the world I see around me so that I might grasp the unseen hand of God. When I pray, I often begin by saying the Lord's prayer because it focuses my thinking away from myself and toward God.

Thus far we have seen important connections between prayer and sacrifice, as shown by prayers at the sanctuary and the Lord's prayer. Now we are ready to consider how our prayers can carry the function that sacrifices had for the Israelites.

Prayer and sacrifice are similar in that both interact with God. But at first glance the two forms of interaction are different: A sacrifice is a kind of *transaction, which transfers something of value*. A prayer is a form of *communication, which transfers information*.

Transaction and communication can overlap because some kinds of communication carry out transactions. For example, the words "I do" are solemnly pronounced in the context of a wedding. Linguistic theorists have recognized that words like these do not merely communicate information. They actually *do* something. They change something. When you say "I do" to your bride or groom, you transfer yourself to the other person, creating a new covenant relationship, a new state of being. Because you have transferred yourself, a person with value, you have carried out a transaction.

As in a wedding, a verbal contract or covenant between a person and God can be established through prayer. The prayer can be short and simple, like this: "Dear God, I accept Jesus Christ, your Son, as Lord of my life. Save me from my sins through the sacrifice of Jesus, and purify me through the power of your Holy Spirit. Let me totally belong to you, teach me how to live, and give me eternal life." You can say a prayer like this anytime, anywhere.

The prophet Isaiah spoke of a transaction with God: "Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you that have no money, come, buy and eat!" (Isa 55:1). Isaiah refers to "buying" in order to emphasize that God has something of value that can be transferred to people who desire it.

Suppose I stood on Telegraph Avenue in Berkeley, California, and announced to the hungry, homeless people there: "Yo, you who have no money, come, buy and eat!" How can they buy if they have no money? But Isaiah continues: "Come, buy wine and milk *without money and without price*" (Isa 55:1). God invites us to buy, but the price is free! Here in the Old Testament is grace through faith, just like in the New Testament (Eph 2:8-9).

When you give your life to God through prayer, you become a "living sacrifice" that is in the process of being transformed by the renewing of your mind (compare Rom 12:1-2). Through prayer you can have your holy connection with God renewed every day, just as daily sacrifices at the sanctuary reaffirmed Israel's covenant relationship with God (Num 28:1-8).

While turning over control of your life to God is the basic transaction, there are other important transactions, such as receiving forgiveness for sins, thanking God for blessings He bestows, making promises to Him, and so on. The Israelites acted out these transactions in sacrifices. We can have the same transactions through prayer.

If your prayer life is plagued with feelings of unreality, try visualizing the steps of sacrifice in your mind as you pray. For example, if you are thankful for something specific that God has done for you, think of approaching Him in His heavenly sanctuary with a small token of gratitude.

By faith your thoughts ascend to heaven. You come to God's sanctuary. The door into the sanctuary is open because Jesus has opened it. The sanctuary is much longer, wider, higher and more glorious than any earthly cathedral. Even the vivid description in Revelation 4-5 cannot do justice to its awesome, colorful brilliance.

There are myriads of mighty, glistening angels, singing soaring anthems like Bach and Mozart never imagined. And there is God upon His throne, surrounded by glowing rainbow light. Everything is so different from what you are used to on earth, and yet it is real.

You move forward with your meager offering. The music becomes softer. The angels are watching you. At first you are timid, but then you see Someone you recognize, someone who is human like you. You look into the eyes of Jesus and He looks at you with such tender compassion that you cannot take your gaze away. Drawn by the inviting face of the One who was lifted up for you on the cross, you boldly come all the way down that fabulous crystal corridor. You lay your offering at the feet of God and He looks down and smiles at you. He graciously accepts your gift.

You turn to go. After all, you are taking the time of the Master of the Universe. You are interrupting the heavenly choir. But God is not in a hurry. He invites you to linger and chat with Him. He wants your friendship. He desires your company. What is on your mind? He listens and talks to you. You feel a oneness and wholeness and satisfaction like you have never experienced anywhere else.

As you walk back toward the door, the angels sing: "You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created" (see Rev 4:11).

You return to earth, which seems dark and drab. But by faith you have been with God. You have renewed strength and courage to go on until the day when your visualization of face to face communion with God will become reality.

Another way to make your prayers more meaningful is to accompany them with gifts to God in the form of offerings or service to God. If you have sinned, you may wish to give an extra offering. Just as animal offerings helped the Israelites to remember and learn from their mistakes because such offerings cost them something (2 Sam 24:24), you will remember your mistake if your sin costs you something.

While there are ways to help our prayers become more real to us as sacrifices were to the ancient Israelites, we should keep in mind three things. First, anything we give to God is something He has already given to us. We cannot purchase any percentage of His favor or forgiveness. Second, what God wants is our hearts. Tangible tokens are of value only if they express our thoughts. Third, the only gift by which we are saved is the sacrifice of Jesus Christ (Rom 3:24). God's gift to us is free (Isa 55:1), but it was not free to God. He bought it with a terrible price.

When we pray, we can have the assurance that we have gotten through to God. We can be just as sure as O'Grady was when his radio message reached Hanford, flying high above him.

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## CHAPTER 24



# Communion

Jenny, a friend of my family, took our daughter to Marine World with her children. At the end of the

day in the park, Jenny led the children to the gift shop and told them that they could each buy something. Our daughter, then two years of age, chose a white stuffed tiger with black stripes. It was rather expensive, but she insisted on that choice. Sarah knew that our family was about to move to Michigan and she wanted something special to help her remember California.

When we moved to Michigan, Sarah was lonely at first. She especially missed Jenny's children. She would sit on our front porch by herself with a faraway look, sometimes with a tear or two on her little cheeks. She would hold "Shadow," the white tiger, and remember the good times with her friends in California.

When you are separated from someone you love, you want something to hang onto. Before Jesus went back to His Father, He left us something to cling to, a "new covenant" service that Christians call "Communion" or "The Lord's Supper."

At the last supper Jesus ate with His disciples, He instituted the ritual of Communion to keep alive the memory of His sacrifice, which was about to take place, and to reinforce principles connected with it. He said: "Do this in remembrance of me" (1 Cor 11:24).

The Last Supper took place on the occasion of the Jewish Passover. So the Communion service is rooted in Passover, but Communion is simpler. Jesus selected and reinterpreted some key elements of Passover: bread and wine. But He also transformed preliminary foot washing into an expression of spiritual purification and humility. In this way, Jesus took ingredients both from the Passover ritual and from outside that ritual and created a powerful new service.

By learning where the components of Communion come from, we can better comprehend its meaning.

### ***Foot washing***

At the Passover supper, Jesus did the following:

... got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him. He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" Jesus answered, "You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand." Peter said to him, "You will never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no share with me." Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" Jesus said to him, "One who has bathed does not need to wash, except for the feet, but is entirely clean" (Jn 13:4-10).

When Jesus was about to wash Peter's feet, His words showed that the physical washing does more than wash away physical dirt; it symbolizes moral cleansing. This is how washing only the feet results in cleansing for the entire person. In this sense, foot washing is like baptism, which also uses washing with water to symbolize washing away sin (compare Rom 6:2-3).

It must be assumed that all of Jesus' disciples had been baptized before the foot washing that took place at the Last Supper. A number of them had been disciples of John the Baptist (Jn 1:35-40), so they must have been baptized by John. When Jesus' ministry began, His disciples baptized other people (Jn 3:22; 4:2). They would have been baptized themselves before they baptized others.

If the disciples had already been purified by baptism, why did they need the additional purification of foot washing? The same question could be asked of us: If we are already baptized, why do we need further purification?

The ancient Israelite priests also needed additional purification that included foot washing. Before a priest could enter the sanctuary tent or officiate at the outer altar, he was required to purify himself by washing his hands and feet with water drawn from the holy basin/laver (Exod 30:17-21). He had to be basically pure from any impurity such as corpse contamination, a genital flow, etc. before he purified himself with laver water. Even if he had just washed by immersing himself with other water, he was still required to wash his hands and feet with laver water because he needed a higher degree of purity to prepare for a higher degree of interaction with God.

The foot washing instituted by Jesus is like the priestly purification of hands and feet in the sense that it prepares for a special religious experience. But two questions arise. First, why did Jesus wash only the disciples' feet? Why not their hands as well? Apparently because Jesus combined priestly purification with the washing of feet that was performed by slaves for their masters (see below). Second, a priest who was basically pure and who was not about to engage in ritual service could eat sacred food, such as portions from the offerings of the Israelites (Lev 22:1-7), without additional purification of hands and feet. So why should we have the additional purification of foot washing before consuming the sacred Communion wine and bread? The answer is that in Communion we not only eat and drink sacred things, we are also privileged to be participants in a ritual that involves special interaction with God.

We need a higher degree of preparatory purification, like that which only the priests in ancient Israel were to receive because we, like those priests, have special access to God through Christ (Heb 10:19-22).

Jesus used foot washing to symbolize moral purification, but He also had another reason for what He did:

After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord < and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you" (Jn 13:12-15).

John tells us that Jesus and His disciples were reclining at the Last Supper (Jn 13:23, 25). In Roman times it was customary for free persons to recline during a meal. Since Passover celebrated deliverance from slavery in Egypt, Jews living in that period ate it in a reclining position to celebrate their freedom. Even if a Jew was a slave, he/she reclined at Passover.

Imagine the shock the disciples must have experienced when Jesus rose from the reclining position of a free man to perform the service of a slave by washing their feet in spite of the fact that He was their Lord! Jesus' point was that even though they would be delivered from slavery to sin through His redeeming sacrifice, as the Israelites at the time of the first Passover were delivered from bondage to Pharaoh, they were servants of one another.

Passover was Independence Day, when the birth of the independent Israelite nation was celebrated. It was equivalent to the Fourth of July in the United States. Communion is Independence Day for Christians, celebrating freedom from sin in the "new covenant" era. It is also Memorial Day, when we remember Jesus death: "For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (1 Cor 11:26). But Communion is more than Memorial Day and Independence Day; it is *Interdependence* Day, when we reaffirm our commitments to serve one another.

Even at the end of Jesus' ministry on earth, His disciples had a problem with pride and selfishness. Luke 22:24 tells us that on the very night of the Last Supper, they started arguing about which of them should be considered the greatest. Jesus corrected them with words (verses 25-27), but He did more than that. He used foot washing as a tangible object lesson for them and for us too, a ritual of

humility and service. So Jesus took a mundane act, which was not part of the Passover service, and added it to the symbolic ritual in order to make a special point. In this way He transformed the meaning of the service.

Foot washing represents moral purification and service. These are not separate ideas. The message of Jesus' ministry and death was that moral purity *is* service. Moral purity is unselfish love that reaches out to others.

## ***Bread***

Matthew describes the way Jesus instituted Communion:

While they were eating, Jesus took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you, I will never again drink of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom." (Matt 26:26-29).

The bread Jesus used was unleavened Passover bread (see Exod 12:8). He interpreted it to represent His body, which was about to be sacrificed. He took the wine to represent His "blood of the covenant." By His sacrifice, He would set up a new covenant (compare Jer 31:31-34; Dan 9:27). The wine would help Christians to remember the basis of their covenant with God: Christ's blood. Since His body and blood go together, we see that the bread and wine are tightly linked. Within the Communion service the bread was also bread of the covenant.

Is there any other covenant bread in the Bible? Leviticus 24:8 refers to the special bread that was placed on the golden table inside the Israelite sanctuary: "Every sabbath day Aaron shall set them in order before the Lord regularly as a commitment of the people of Israel, *as a covenant* forever." This bread is the only offering at the sanctuary that is called an eternal covenant.

It is no accident that the "bread of the Presence" was set in order anew every Sabbath. The only other reference to a covenant forever between God and the Israelites as a whole during the period of their wandering in the wilderness is found in Exodus 31:16-17:

Therefore the Israelites shall keep the sabbath, observing the sabbath throughout their generations, as a perpetual covenant. It is a sign forever between me and the people of Israel that in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested, and was refreshed.

Here God calls the seventh-day Sabbath, the memorial of Creation, a perpetual/eternal covenant. The covenant bread was renewed on the covenant day.

The "bread of the Presence" offering acknowledged the dependence of the Israelites upon God as their resident Creator-Provider. God dwelt with His covenant people and gave them life. Similarly, Jesus spoke of Himself as "bread" that came from heaven to give His people life. The life He gives is eternal life, and the "bread" refers to His flesh (Jn 6:48-56). These are the concepts behind the words Jesus spoke when He broke bread and gave it to His disciples at the Last Supper: "Take, eat; this is my body" (Matt 26:26). By taking Christ's life into their own lives, as symbolized by eating bread, those who believe in Him have eternal life. They abide in Him and He abides in them (compare 1 Jn 3:24; 4:13).

Perhaps it is not a coincidence that in Leviticus 24:5 the Hebrew word for the loaves of the "bread of the Presence" probably means "pierced." If so, this would indicate that the bread had holes

pierced in it. So also the body of Christ, the "bread of life" (Jn 6:35, 48), was pierced so that we might have life (19:34; Rev 1:7; compare Zech 12:10).

## *Wine*

Wine is not specified by Exodus 12 in the directions for the original Passover service. Where did Jesus get the idea of using wine in the Communion Service? It is true that by Jesus' day the Passover service included wine. This is why the cup of wine was on the table for Jesus to use. But how did wine become part of the Passover service?

We don't have a historical text that tells us for sure how wine entered the service, but the ritual instructions in Numbers 15:1-16 suggest a strong possibility. Here God specified that certain kinds of sacrifices needed accompanying grain offerings and drink offerings of wine. Since the Passover was a kind of sacrifice to which this rule applied, when the Israelites settled in the Promised Land and were required to slay their Passover sacrifices at the central sanctuary (Deut 16:1-8), they would have accompanied their lambs with offerings of wine along with the unleavened bread that was already specified by Exodus 12. Just as Passover lambs were to be eaten by their offerers (verses 8-11), so the accompanying bread and wine would also have been consumed by the offerers.

The bread and wine used by Jesus in the Communion service were accompaniments to the main, central item of the sacrifice: the lamb. Where is the lamb in the Communion service? It is not symbolically represented at all! Why not? Because just after the Last Supper, the symbolic Passover lamb met its fulfillment in Jesus, God's "Lamb" (Jn 1:29). According to the Gospel of John, Jesus died as the reality to which the Passover lamb pointed (see Jn 19:36, referring to Exod 12:46).

Today we remember Christ's sacrifice by partaking of the accompaniments to sacrifice: bread and wine. By not eating any literal lamb, we acknowledge that He has come and is so real to us as our Sacrifice that He does not need to be represented in this way. Bread and wine are accompaniments, but Jesus made them more than that. Now they represent Him, the Lamb (Matt 26:26, 28).

In Matthew 26:28 Jesus called the Communion wine "my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins." The idea that His blood is poured out for the forgiveness of sins reminds us of the offerings prescribed in Leviticus 4 by which Israelites received forgiveness.

The words "my blood of the covenant" are reminiscent of the blood bond between God and the Israelites that Moses symbolized by sacrificial ritual: "Moses took the blood and dashed it on the people, and said, 'See the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words'" (Exod 24:8).

Jesus' blood, represented by the Communion wine, has established a new covenant with us, as foretold by Jeremiah:

... I will make a new covenant... I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people... they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more (Jer 31:31, 33-34).

Jeremiah's prophecy has become the charter of the Christian faith. We know the Lord and He has written His law on our hearts. This experience is based upon forgiveness.

Forgiveness is the basis of the new covenant. When you come to God in the humble posture of admitting your desperate need, He can change your heart. When you cry out, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner" (Lk 18:13), you are on the way to eternal life.



Jesus has returned to heaven, but He has left us with something better than a stuffed animal to help us remember Him. He has given us sacred emblems of Himself in the form of bread and wine. And He has given us to each other, as we recognize by washing each other's feet.

# *Part V: Jesus Isn't Finished With Me Yet*

## CHAPTER 25



### **Mediation**

In May of 1992, two days after I graduated with a Ph.D. in Hebrew language and literature, I was digging a post hole at a construction job. The idea that Ph.D. stands for "Post hole Digger" came to mind with new force.

During the summer of 1992, I did construction work, yard work, and telephone marketing for a utility bill auditing service. As usual, I was grateful for the work because it paid the bills. But I was ready to use my education and no teaching job was in sight.

August came. The school year was approaching. Still no teaching job. I refused to worry because God had provided for my family in the past. But time was running out.

On August 31, my birthday, I received a phone call from the chairman of the Religion Department at Pacific Union College. A member of the department had just left to take another position. The autumn quarter would begin in a few weeks. Would I be interested in a job immediately?

Job! Immediately! Would I be interested? What a birthday present!

The chairman of the department had never met me, but he offered me a job over the phone. How did he know about me? I had a friend in the department, who knew me. So when the department needed someone, he encouraged the department and its chairman to contact me.

Without my friend to tell about my existence, qualifications, and availability, I might not have gotten the job. I needed someone who knew me and believed in me to speak up on my behalf. In other words, I needed a mediator.

Christ is the ultimate mediator. He can properly represent me because He has become a human being (Heb 4:15). He believes in me because He knows what I can become through Him. He can bring me to God. "For there is one God; there is also one *mediator between God and humankind, Christ Jesus, himself human*" (1 Tim 2:5).

Christ, the God-man, is the bridge between God and man. He is the ladder between heaven and earth (Jn 1:51).

Why do we need Christ to mediate between us and God? God loved the human race and communicated with people in Old Testament times, long before He sent Christ into the world. It is because God loves us that He gave His only Son (Jn 3:16).

Christ's sacrifice and mediation do not make God love us; they *result* from God loving us. God does not need a mediator in order to reach out to us. We need a mediator so that we might come to God (Heb 4:15-16; 10:19-22).

Sin has separated human beings from God. When Adam and Eve sinned, they were afraid of God and hid in the garden (Gen 3:8). Then God had to drive them out of Eden, away from the tree of life, so that they would not perpetuate sin by living forever (verses 22-24). From this point on, sinful, mortal human beings could not see the unveiled glory of God and live (Exod 33:20).

It is Christ who can take away our fear and bring us to God because He can separate us from the sin that separates us from God. He can do this because He died to pay the price of our forgiveness and full restoration. "For this reason he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called

may receive the promised eternal inheritance, because a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions under the first covenant" (Heb 9:15).

The new covenant mediated by Christ is a heart relationship between human beings and their God, based on forgiveness (Jer 31:34) through Christ's sacrifice.

Israelites received forgiveness when they brought their sacrifices to the sanctuary and priests, acting as mediators with God, put their sacrifices on the altar. This forgiveness was provisional, contingent upon the future sacrifice of Christ. Although human priests did not forgive anyone themselves, people could not approach God for forgiveness without priests. Even though God resided among the Israelites, their sinfulness was a barrier to the divine-human encounter.

When Christ was sacrificed for us, rose, and ascended to heaven, a lot changed for the better. The main purpose of the book of Hebrews is to tell us what has changed. No longer do we need a human priest in an earthly temple because Christ serves as our High Priest in the heavenly temple (Heb 8-9). No longer do we need to bring animal sacrifices repeatedly because Christ has died as our Sacrifice once and for all (9:25-28). Christ as our divine priest can give us forgiveness for which He has already paid (9:11-14).

When Christ ascended to heaven, He consecrated the heavenly sanctuary and inaugurated His priestly ministry. This inauguration was such an important event that several books of the Bible speak of it.

Daniel 9:24 prophesies: "Seventy weeks are decreed for your people and your holy city: to finish the transgression, to put an end to sin, and to atone for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal both vision and prophet, and to anoint a most holy place." During the last of the "seventy weeks," "an anointed one" would come and be "cut off" (Dan 9:26). The Hebrew word translated "an anointed one" is *mashiach*, from which we get the word "Messiah." The Greek word for "anointed one," which appears in the New Testament, is *christos*, "Christ." It is true that ancient priests and kings could also be called *mashiach* (Lev 4:3; 2 Sam 22:51), but the "anointed one" in Daniel 9 can only be Jesus Christ. It was Jesus who was "cut off" when He died the equivalent of the second death for our sins, and it was Jesus who atoned for iniquity and brought in everlasting righteousness through His sacrifice. Because of His sacrifice, He could "anoint a most holy place," that is, consecrate the sanctuary in heaven. This must be the heavenly sanctuary because He makes the "sacrifice and offering" in the earthly temple to "cease" (verse 27) and the earthly temple itself is destroyed (verse 26).

Matthew 27:51 indicates in what sense Christ made the earthly ritual system "cease." When He died on the cross, "the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom, and the earth shook; and the rocks were split" (NASB). The veil of the temple was a colossal piece of fabric. It was tall, wide, thick, and heavy. There was no human way to tear it in two from top to bottom like this. Even if a person could have escaped the notice of the temple guards in order to set up a ladder in front of the veil, he could not have torn or cut the curtain from this position without a modern tool such as a chain saw. So who tore the curtain? Apparently the same power that split the rocks: God.

Tearing the curtain desecrated the temple by exposing its most holy interior to public view. It was no longer sacred because God had left it. As Jesus had announced: "See, your house is left to you, desolate" (Matt 23:38). It was their house, no longer God's house.

For the next few decades until the temple was destroyed in 70 A.D., people continued to bring sacrifices to the temple, thinking that God was receiving them. But He was not. When Jesus died as the real sacrifice and ascended to heaven to anoint the heavenly sanctuary and to be our High Priest there (Heb 7-10), He moved the focus of true worship from a place on earth to God's temple in heaven.

Revelation 5 dramatically describes the beginning of Christ's heavenly ministry. A Lamb that

appears to have just been slaughtered (verse 6) is worthy to open a scroll sealed with seven seals because He was slaughtered and ransomed people by His blood (verse 9), making them a kingdom and priests serving God (verse 10). Opening the scroll has to do with Christ's unique ability to save people by virtue of His sacrifice.

The book of Hebrews speaks of Christ beginning His ministry in heaven: "When he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high" (Heb 1:3). See also Hebrews 8:1: "... we have such a high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens." These verses indicate that Christ was reunited with His Father and resumed the status that He had before He took on human form (compare Phil 2:5-11). It appears that in addition to becoming His Father's "right hand man" in terms of status, Christ literally sat down in a particular location, namely, next to His Father. The idea that this is a physical expression is confirmed by comparison with Acts 7:55, where Stephen saw Jesus *standing* at God's right hand.

When Christ went to sit down next to His Father, it would appear that He went into the heavenly equivalent of the most holy place. In the Israelite sanctuary the Lord was enthroned in the most holy place above the ark (Exod 25:22; Num 7:89; 1 Sam 4:4; 2 Sam 6:2; 2 Ki 19:15). Hebrews 6:19-20 strengthens the idea that Christ entered the most holy place at His ascension: "We have this hope, a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters the inner shrine behind the curtain, where Jesus, a forerunner on our behalf, has entered, having become a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek."

In the Old Testament, the expression "inside the curtain" always means "inside the inner veil," that is, inside the most holy place (Exod 26:33; Lev 16:2, 12, 15; Num 18:7). In fact, Hebrews 6:19-20 uses the same Greek expression for location inside/behind the curtain that is found in Exodus 26:33 and Leviticus 16:2, 12, 15 in the ancient Septuagint Greek translation, which was available to the writers of the New Testament.

It is true that in the Septuagint the Greek word for "curtain" by itself could also be used for the outer screen that separated the holy place from the courtyard (Exod 26:37) and for the screen that served as the gate into the courtyard (37:16 [= 38:18]). However, the combination "inside the curtain" always translates a Hebrew phrase in which the word for "curtain" is *paroket*, meaning "inner curtain." This Hebrew word is never used in the Bible with reference to the outer screen of the sanctuary or the screen that formed the gate of the courtyard.

The hope that Christians have as a result of Christ going within the veil is based on the fact that He is ministering as our High Priest in the presence of God at the place where God is enthroned in heaven (see Heb 4:14-16). But just because Christ entered the heavenly equivalent of the most holy place at His ascension does not automatically mean that He began to cleanse the heavenly sanctuary then, as the Israelite high priest did on the Day of Atonement when he entered the most holy place of the earthly sanctuary (Lev 16:14-16). It was not the cleansing of the Israelite sanctuary on the Day of Atonement that pointed forward to the beginning of Christ's "new covenant" heavenly ministry, but rather the covenant sacrifices (Exod 24:3-8) and the services that consecrated the sanctuary (Lev 8), as the writer of Hebrews makes clear:

For when every commandment had been told to all the people by Moses in accordance with the law, he took the blood of calves and goats, with water and scarlet wool and hyssop, and sprinkled both the scroll itself and all the people, saying, "This is the blood of the covenant that God has ordained for you." And in the same way he sprinkled with the blood both the tent and all the vessels used in worship (Heb 9:19-21).

What rules out a sanctuary cleansing ministry for Christ at His ascension is the fact that He did not begin a work of judgment at that time. We will find in the next chapter of the present book that the cleansing of the sanctuary on the Day of Atonement was Israel's time of judgment, when God separated those who were disloyal to Him from those who were loyal. From the perspective of the

book of Hebrews, which was written after Christ's ascension, He intercedes/mediates (Heb 7:25), but judgment is still in the future: "For if we willfully persist in sin after having received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a fearful prospect of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries" (Heb 10:26-27; compare 9:27-28).

It is true that Christ judged the world at the cross in the sense that He delivered us from Satan as our ultimate ruler (Jn 12:31). But judgment involving investigation and punishment of those found guilty was still future when the book of Hebrews was written:

Anyone who has violated the law of Moses dies without mercy "on the testimony of two or three witnesses." How much worse punishment do you think will be deserved by those who have spurned the Son of God, profaned the blood of the covenant by which they were sanctified, and outraged the Spirit of grace? For we know the one who said, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay." And again, "The Lord will judge his people" (Heb 10:28-30).

At first glance Hebrews 9:6-12 seems to indicate that Christ did begin Day of Atonement ministry at His ascension. This passage draws a special kind of parallel between the movement of the Israelite high priest into the most holy place on the Day of Atonement and Christ's entrance into the heavenly sanctuary. After a brief description of the Israelite sanctuary in verses 1-5, verses 6-7 read:

Such preparations having been made, the priests go continually into the first tent to carry out their ritual duties; *but only the high priest goes into the second, and he but once a year*; and not without taking the blood that he offers for himself and for the sins committed unintentionally by the people.

Here the ministry of the high priest in the second tent/apartment once a year clearly refers to ministry in the most holy place on the Day of Atonement (compare Lev 16).

Verses 8-10 go on to interpret the two phases of priestly ministry in the Israelite sanctuary:

By this the Holy Spirit indicates that *the way into the sanctuary has not yet been disclosed as long as the first tent is still standing*. This is a *symbol of the present time*, during which gifts and sacrifices are offered that cannot perfect the conscience of the worshiper, but deal only with food and drink and various baptisms, regulations for the body imposed until the time comes to set things right.

Notice what the writer is doing here. He interprets the relationship between the two apartments of the earthly sanctuary as a symbol/parable of the relationship between the earthly sanctuary and the heavenly sanctuary. Just as the way into the most holy place of the Israelite sanctuary was not accessible throughout the year while priests ministered in the holy place (compare Lev 16:17), so "the way into the sanctuary (= heavenly sanctuary) has not yet been disclosed as long as the first tent (= earthly sanctuary) is still standing."

Here in Hebrews 9:8, the word "sanctuary" must refer to the *heavenly sanctuary* and "first tent" must represent the *earthly sanctuary*. Nothing else makes sense. If we were to take "sanctuary" and "first tent" to mean the inner and outer apartments of the *earthly sanctuary*, we could not explain the words "as long as the first tent is still standing." The "sanctuary" clearly comes *after* the "first tent." This is confirmed by the following words, which take the "first tent" as "a symbol of the present time." But in the ancient sanctuary, the two apartments were standing together, at the same time. The first apartment was not taken down physically, nor did it lose its significance, when the high priest entered the most holy place on the Day of Atonement. On the other hand, if we were to take "sanctuary" and "first tent" to refer to the inner and outer apartments of the *heavenly sanctuary*, we would be forced to conclude that the first/outer apartment of the heavenly sanctuary would

somehow cease to stand/function when Christ would enter the most holy place.

Verses 11-12 of Hebrews 9 go on to describe Christ's entrance into the heavenly sanctuary at His ascension:

But when Christ came as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation), he entered once for all into the Holy Place, not with the blood of goats and calves, but with his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption.

In light of the preceding verses, it is clear that whereas the Israelite high priest entered "once a year" into the second apartment of the earthly sanctuary (verse 7), Christ entered "once for all" into the second sanctuary, that is, the heavenly sanctuary. Here "the Holy Place," literally "the holies" in Greek, speaks of the sanctuary as a whole. Compare passages such as Exodus 36:1 and Numbers 4:15, where the Septuagint uses the same Greek expression ("the holies") with reference to the entire Israelite sanctuary, which was called simply "the holy" in the original Hebrew text.

From the perspective of the writer of Hebrews, earthly temple rituals were still being performed in "the present time" (9:9-10), but Christ had already come (9:11). In terms of physical "standing," there was some overlap between the earthly and heavenly sanctuaries because Christ ascended to heaven several decades before the temple in Jerusalem ceased to function and was destroyed by the Romans in 70 A.D. Hebrews 9 was written after Christ's ascension, but before the destruction of the temple. But verse 8 says: "the way into the sanctuary has *not yet* been disclosed *as long as* the first tent is still *standing*." There is no overlap here. So "standing" in this context must refer to "retaining significance." The significance of the first tent stood only as long as it continued to function as a "prototype" that pointed forward to Christ's ministry. When Christ's actual atonement began, the prototype was no longer needed, as shown by the fact that when Christ died on the cross the veil of the temple in Jerusalem was torn from top to bottom (Matt 27:50-51).

The point of Hebrews 9:6-12 is to show the greatness of Christ's ministry by comparison with that of the Israelite priests. Whereas the Israelite high priest took animal blood "once a year" before God into the most holy place of the earthly sanctuary, Christ took His own blood "once for all" into the better heavenly sanctuary. *Every part* of Christ's ministry is greater than the special rituals of the Israelite Day of Atonement, which comprised the most awesome, climactic part of the services in the earthly sanctuary (see Heb 9:23-28).

The bottom line of our discussion regarding Hebrews 9 is that this chapter describes the beginning of Christ's high priestly ministry in heaven, but it does not indicate that He began to cleanse the sanctuary there when He ascended. It is true that Christ's death on the cross made it possible for the sanctuary to be cleansed, just as the deaths of sacrificial animals on the Day of Atonement provided the blood by which the Israelite sanctuary was cleansed (Lev 16:11, 15). In this sense Christ's death began the Day of Atonement process leading to the cleansing of the sanctuary. But the cleansing itself is a work of judgment and this was still in the future when the book of Hebrews was written.

In the Israelite sanctuary, priestly intercession/mediation throughout the year was located in the holy place, where the incense altar, lamps, and table stood (for example Exod 30:7-8; Lev 24:5-9). So it would appear that Christ's intercession after His ascension and before the judgment should take place in the heavenly equivalent of the holy place. But how do we reconcile this with Christ's entrance into the most holy place at His ascension (Heb 6:19-20; see above)? Having begun His ministry in the most holy place, was He later excluded from that apartment during the time of His intercession, just as the high priest was forbidden to enter the most holy place of the earthly sanctuary before the Day of Atonement (Lev 16:2)?

The movements of Israelite high priests were restricted because these individuals were sinful and mortal. Even on the Day of Atonement the high priest could not come into the most holy place

without a smoke screen to protect him from God's glory (Lev 16:12-13). But Christ is sinless and immortal. Because He is divine, He needs no veil or smoke screen to protect Him from divine glory. There is no reason why Christ and His Father cannot move around freely. The fact that the Bible speaks of their royal status in terms of enthronement does not mean that they are confined to their thrones, just as King Solomon was not permanently seatbelted when he "sat on the throne of his father David" (1 Kings 2:12).

Since His ascension, Christ has been victorious and free to sit down with His Father (Heb 1:3). He could stand up if the situation called for it (Acts 7:56). He could walk around as Mediator, meeting the needs of churches on earth (Rev 1:12-20). And He could come to His Father in a grand coronation procession at the time of the judgment (Dan 7:13-14).

Christ could have His main center of operations in the holy place during intercession and then move His functional center to the most holy place during judgment, without confining Himself to either location at any time. We can learn from the Israelite sanctuary about the basic phases of holy place mediatorial ministry and most holy place judgment ministry, but the distinction in *function* is more important than the distinction in *location* and Christ is more free to move around than the Israelite priests were.

Totally restricting Christ to one part of the sanctuary does not work, especially after the beginning of the judgment. During the judgment He continues to intercede for us, as shown by the fact that God still appeals to people after the judgment has begun (Rev 14:6-12). So during the judgment, Christ carries out holy place and most holy place functions *during the same period of time*. Compare the fact that on the Day of Atonement the Israelite priests performed regular rituals of intercession, including the morning and evening burnt offerings, just as they did on other days (Num 29:11; compare 28:1-8).

The idea that Christ has carried on intercession in the holy place following His ascension does not contradict the fact that He has been ministering in the presence of God. In John's vision of the heavenly sanctuary, the holy place is in the presence of God. His gaze takes in the throne of God (Rev 4:2-3), in front of which there are seven flaming torches (verse 5). These are the heavenly equivalent of the seven lamps *in the holy place* of the earthly sanctuary (Exod 25:37). So John is looking through the holy place directly to the throne of God. If there is a veil in the heavenly sanctuary, as Hebrews 6:19 suggests (if "veil" here is to be taken literally), it must be open because it does not obstruct John's view.

Because Christ "offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins" and "sat down at the right hand of God," (Heb 10:12), the book of Hebrews calls us to come to the sanctuary through the new way of direct access to God that Christ has opened for us:

Therefore, my friends, since we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain (that is, through his flesh), and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us approach with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water (Heb 10:19-22).

Since His inauguration as our High Priest in heaven, Christ has appeared "in the presence of God on our behalf" (Heb 9:24). Because of His sacrifice, He functions as our Advocate/Mediator (1 Jn 2:1).

The idea that Christ is our Advocate puzzled me for a long time. Is God the Father so ancient of days that He is becoming forgetful and needs to be reminded of Christ's sacrifice every time we sin? Or does the Father become so angry that He needs to see Christ's blood again in order to calm down? Are the Father's wishes concerning us so antagonistic to the desires of Christ that He must plead: "Please, please, Father, forgive them because of my sacrifice"? These scenarios do not fit well with what we know of God from the rest of the Bible.

Christ does not "plead" in the sense of begging or nagging. He pleads in the sense that an advocate or defense attorney pleads in a court of law: by making cases through presentation of evidence. Our cases involve requests for forgiveness and cleansing. That which proves God's right to forgive us is the fact of Christ's sacrifice (Rom 3:24-26), as evidenced by the scars of His crucifixion (compare Jn 20:26-28). John, the beloved disciple, saw Christ in heaven as a Lamb having been slaughtered (Rev 5:6) because Christ continually carries the cross event with Him.

A crucial component of Christ's pleading is His acknowledgment that we accept Him. Jesus said: "Everyone therefore who acknowledges me before others, I also will acknowledge before my Father in heaven; but whoever denies me before others, I also will deny before my Father in heaven" (Matt 10:32-33). In the book of Revelation, Christ promises one of the seven churches: "If you conquer, you will be clothed like them in white robes, and I will not blot your name out of the book of life; I will confess your name before my Father and before his angels" (Rev 3:5).

Notice that because Christ confesses/acknowledges those who are His, their names will not be blotted out of the book of life. Why not? Because Christ has put His life on the line for us as Moses did when he interceded for his people before the Lord (Exod 32:32). This kind of intercession goes way beyond an ordinary defense attorney's call of duty.

Christ does not need to change His Father's mind in the sense of persuading Him to love us. The Father has loved us all along, which is why He gave His only Son to save us (Jn 3:16). But the Father must maintain His justice when He grants mercy. If He does not, He will violate His own moral character of love (1 Jn 4:8), which includes both justice and mercy. Christ's sacrifice, which paid the penalty for our sin, makes it possible for God to be both "just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus" (Rom 3:26; NASB). This is the reason for Christ's sacrifice. If God could forgive without justice, there would have been no reason for this sacrifice or the Israelite animal sacrifices that pointed forward to it.

Because Christ carries the cross event with Him, He can reconcile us to God (Rom 5:1) by forgiving and cleansing us when we confess our sins (1 Jn 1:9). As our Advocate, Christ changes our standing before God, transforming us from rebels to loyal servants.

Having obtained eternal redemption for us by His own blood (Heb 9:12), Christ uses His blood to "purify our conscience from dead works to worship the living God" (verse 14). Just as animal sacrifices purified the Israelites, Christ's sacrifice purifies us from moral impurity, removing our sin (compare verse 26). The purpose of removing guilt from our consciences is to enable us to worship God instead of rebelling against Him. So Christ not only uses His blood to pay a debt resulting from sin, He is transforming us from the inside out. He is effective in working with us because His cross draws us, He is human like us, and He can help us with the vast resources of heaven, including angels and the Holy Spirit.

If it were not for Christ, I would cherish sin in my heart and God would not listen to my prayers (compare Ps 66:18). But the incense of Christ's sacrifice, cleansing my heart, sweetens my prayers to God (Rev 5:8; 8:3-4).

Not only does Christ mediate the prayers of human beings, He prays for us. I realized this for the first time when I was twenty years old and in the process of making a difficult decision. While reading the Bible, I happened to come across a conversation between Jesus and Simon Peter. Jesus said: "Simon, Simon, listen! Satan has demanded to sift all of you like wheat, *but I have prayed for you* that your own faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned back, strengthen your brothers" (Lk 22:31-32).

This passage had a profound effect on me. I realized that even if nobody in the world knew my situation in order to pray for me, I was not alone because Jesus was praying for me as He prayed for Peter! Now that Christ is in heaven, His wishes for me are just as sure to be effective.



## Completion

Jeff and I were earning money by cutting firewood. He found a dead Ponderosa Pine tree and obtained permission to cut it down. There was a lot of wood in that tree. It was about five feet in diameter and about 120 feet tall.

The problem was that our chain saws weren't long enough. Jeff had a Homelite saw with a 24 inch bar and my Husqvarna was 28 inches. So we took turns cutting around the tree, but we couldn't quite reach the middle from the outside.

We heard a cracking sound and jumped away. The tree started to fall. But then it stopped, leaning at a weird angle. The middle of the tree was still there, preventing it from falling all the way.

We couldn't leave the tree there like that. For one thing, it could come down without warning and kill someone. Also, we wanted the wood. We had to finish the job. But how?

Jeff was much more experienced than I, so he went to the tree and stuck his saw in the gaping notch that had opened up. He was able to break through the middle, so the tree fell the rest of the way.

What Jeff did was very dangerous. The root system on which he was standing could have been uprooted. The tree could have kicked back and squashed him like a fly. But he was determined to complete the job. "It ain't over until it's over!"

God wants to finish His job. An Israelite who had sinned or who had a severe ritual impurity received through sacrifice the atonement of forgiveness or purification (Lev 4-5, 12, 14-15). But there was a further stage of atonement once a year on the Day of Atonement (16; 23:27-32).

Without this stage, a person's oneness with God would not be complete.

On the Day of Atonement, the high priest used special sacrifices to cleanse the sanctuary from the sins and impurities of the people (Lev 16:16,33). He did this because once a year God's sanctuary needed "housecleaning." Sins and impurities could remain in the sanctuary only for so long. If God's house became too polluted, He would not remain there (compare Ezek 9:3; 10:4, 18-19; 11:22-23).

Through the cleansing of the sanctuary, the people were also cleansed: "For on this day atonement shall be made for you, to cleanse you; from all your sins you shall be clean before the Lord" (Lev 16:30). All persons who had already been forgiven for sins at various times earlier in the year now received cleansing from all of them at once: "from *all* your sins you shall be clean."

We are talking about spiritual "housecleaning" here rather than physical cleaning which the priests must have performed at other times. As an example of physical cleaning, it seems safe to assume that the priests must have periodically removed blood that had been applied to the two altars. However, aside from instructions regarding daily removal of accumulated ashes from the outer altar (Lev 6:10-11; Hebrew verses 3-4), the Bible does not tell us about this kind of janitorial work in the sanctuary. Such practical details are addressed in later rabbinic writings, but in the Bible the focus is on removal of sins and ritual impurities.

The two stages of atonement for sin are clear:

1. Forgiveness through individual sacrifice during the year: "Thus the priest shall make atonement on his behalf for his sin, and he shall be *forgiven*" (Lev 4:26).
2. Cleansing through the cleansing of the sanctuary on the Day of Atonement: "For on this day

atonement shall be made for you, to *cleanse* you; from all your sins you shall be *clean* before the Lord" (LEV 16:30).

The first stage of atonement for sin is forgiveness. The second stage is cleansing.

The two stages of atonement for sin correspond to a promise in the New Testament: "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to *forgive* us our sins and to *cleanse* us from all unrighteousness" (1 Jn 1:9; NASB). We will see that through Christ's sacrifice He not only forgives us, He cleanses us as well.

What if an Israelite had rejected God's offer of forgiveness during the year? Could that person receive cleansing on the Day of Atonement? Earlier we saw what happened to a person who willfully neglected purification from corpse contamination. Such a person was condemned to be "cut off" (Num 19:13, 20). There was no sacrificial remedy for this punishment. A person who willfully neglected to receive forgiveness for sin by bringing a sacrifice would also receive punishment (compare Lev 5:1). This punishment was inevitable because the required sacrifice was the only way in which the punishment could have been removed (Lev 5:6). It could not be removed later by the cleansing sacrifices performed by the high priest on the Day of Atonement for the whole community.

The ceremonies of the Day of Atonement resulted in the cleansing of people who had already received forgiveness. Because forgiveness was the first stage of a process, you could not have the second stage without it. By comparison, if O'Grady had not gotten in the helicopter to begin with, the next step of flying him out of Bosnia could not have occurred.

In order for an Israelite to be cleansed on the Day of Atonement, the high priest had to cleanse the sanctuary on behalf of the entire community. In addition, the individual had to show loyalty to God by practicing self-denial, including fasting, and by resting from work (Lev 16:29).

The beginning of the next verse gives the reason for self-denial and doing no work:

*"For on this day atonement shall be made for you, to cleanse you; from all your sins you shall be clean before the Lord" (Lev 16:30).* If you were an Israelite, something crucially important was happening on *your* behalf, so you needed to show your involvement even though you could not go into the sanctuary.

What if an Israelite had been forgiven during the year and the high priest cleansed the sanctuary, but that Israelite ate and worked on the Day of Atonement as usual? Lev 23:29-30 tells us: "For anyone who does not practice self-denial during that entire day shall be cut off from the people. And anyone who does any work during that entire day, such a one I will destroy from the midst of the people."

A person who did not show loyalty to God on the Day of Atonement was rebelling against Him, and God would "cut off" or destroy that person. Such an individual would be no better off than if he/she had openly defied God earlier in the year (compare Num 15:30-31). Atonement had to be finished or it was invalidated, just as a baby cannot survive unless it is born completely, or as a criminal who commits another crime while on parole goes back to jail. An incomplete atonement would end up being no atonement.

By the end of the Day of Atonement, there were only two groups of Israelites: loyal Israelites who were "clean" and fully reconciled to God, and disloyal Israelites who bore their own sin and were rejected by God.

God's rejection was not arbitrary. He offered full atonement freely. The choice to accept or reject Him was up to the people. If they rejected Him, He accepted their decision and they bore the consequences.

We can see that the Day of Atonement was a day of judgment, when God separated disloyal Israelites from those who were loyal. Some people had been condemned already, before the Day of

Atonement, because they had not received forgiveness through sacrifice. But the Day of Atonement judged between those who had been forgiven. Some held on to their forgiveness and some threw it away.

If you get on a helicopter that has come to rescue you, but then throw away your rescue by jumping off before you get to safety, you're on your own. You may feel free on the way down, but there's a big jolt at the bottom.

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## Loyalty

My family and I visited Yosemite National Park when Sarah, my daughter, was two years old. As we were driving along, we saw several coyotes. They were in good condition, well fed and with beautiful bushy tails. Sarah exclaimed: "I want a Coyote!" So when my wife and I gave her a puppy for her third birthday, she named him "Coyote."

Coyote was a terrier with mixed ancestry and a foxy appearance. Although he was small, even when fully grown, he was difficult to manage because he had more energy than he could handle. When we made the mistake of leaving him in the bathroom while we went to church, we found that he had chewed the wood trim on the bathroom doors. Even when he was running around in his acre of yard, I have never seen a more wound-up animal.

To keep Coyote in the yard, my wife and I installed an underground wire and put a special collar on the dog that would give him an electric shock if he crossed the line. It worked for awhile until he learned that he could get a running head start and cross the line at 30 m.p.h. to minimize the pain. His acceleration was phenomenal, especially if the UPS truck came by. For some reason that vehicle made him crazy with excitement. We wondered what he would do with the UPS truck if he ever caught it. We found out one day when he jumped on the back of the truck and went for a short ride.

Coyote had imperfections, but he was loyal. When my wife had to rest in bed all of one day after minor surgery, Coyote knew something was not normal. He kept vigil by her bed all day, without eating or drinking. When she dozed off, he would occasionally nudge her face with his nose to make sure she was O.K.

Unfortunately, Coyote's obsession with chasing trucks caught up with him. He ran in front of a garbage truck and that was it.

We buried Coyote by the garden and decorated his grave with flowers. When we sold the house a few months later, the hardest thing to leave was Coyote's grave. We mourned him for months. We had forgiven him for his imperfections because he was loyal. He loved us and we loved him.

God also values loyalty. In fact, for Him loyalty is the bottom line. This was true in His relationship with the ancient Israelites. They were imperfect people, who had sins and ritual impurities. God did not demand absolute perfection from a people unable to give it, but He did require loyalty. At His sanctuary He provided remedies for their imperfections as long as they were loyal to Him. But we have found that if they defied Him or disregarded His remedies, they were already condemned before the Day of Atonement (Num 15:30-31; 19:13, 20). If they failed to show loyalty to Him on the Day of Atonement by practicing self-denial and abstaining from work, they were "cut off" or destroyed (Lev 23:29-30).

Relationships between the Israelites and their divine king enthroned in His sanctuary were similar to relationships between a human king and his subjects. For example, consider the variety of relationships that individuals had with David and then Solomon.

Just before he died, David gave Solomon his last will and testament, including the following:

"Moreover you know also what Joab son of Zeruiah did to me, how he dealt with the two commanders of the armies of Israel, Abner son of Ner, and Amasa son of Jether, whom he murdered, retaliating in time of peace for blood that had been shed in war, and

putting the blood of war on the belt around his waist, and on the sandals on his feet. Act therefore according to your wisdom, but do not let his gray head go down to Sheol in peace. Deal loyally, however, with the sons of Barzillai the Gileadite, and let them be among those who eat at your table; for with such loyalty they met me when I fled from your brother Absalom. There is also with you Shimei son of Gera, the Benjaminite from Bahurim, who cursed me with a terrible curse on the day when I went to Mahanaim; but when he came down to meet me at the Jordan, I swore to him by the Lord, 'I will not put you to death with the sword.' Therefore do not hold him guiltless, for you are a wise man; you will know what you ought to do to him, and you must bring his gray head down with blood to Sheol" (1 Ki 2:5-9).

Joab was already condemned for murder and his execution was inevitable in spite of the fact that it had been delayed by David's political situation. On the other hand, Barzillai and his family had been loyal (2 Sam 17:27-29; 19:31-32) and were to be treated as such. Then there was the difficult case of Shimei. David had pardoned Shimei (2 Sam 19:18-23) for cursing him (16:5-13), but now he did not regard him as worthy of pardon.

After David died, we are told how Solomon carried out his father's wishes with regard to Joab and Shimei, and we assume that he provided for the sons of Barzillai. Because Joab had supported the ill-fated attempt of Adonijah to take the throne while David was still alive (1 Ki 1:5-10, 18-19, 24-26) his fate was linked to that of Adonijah.

When Solomon was acclaimed king by shouting and trumpet blasts (1 Ki 1:39-40), he became judge over Adonijah and granted him a conditional pardon: "If he proves to be a worthy man, not one of his hairs shall fall to the ground; but if wickedness is found in him, he shall die" (1 Ki 1:52). In this context it is clear Solomon defined worthiness or wickedness in terms of loyalty or disloyalty to himself. For Solomon, loyalty was the bottom line.

After David died, Adonijah asked Bathsheba, Solomon's mother, to request for him permission to marry Abishag, who had belonged to David. Since having a woman belonging to a previous king was a royal privilege (compare 2 Ki 16:21-22), Solomon ordered that Adonijah be executed for attempting to regain his claim to the throne.

Because Abiathar the priest and Joab had supported Adonijah, Solomon punished them too by banishing Abiathar and executing Joab. When Joab fled to the sanctuary, refused to come out, and said he would die there (1 Ki 2:30), Solomon told Benaiah:

"Do as he has said, strike him down and bury him; and thus take away from me and from my father's house the guilt for the blood that Joab shed without cause. The Lord will bring back his bloody deeds on his own head, because, without the knowledge of my father David, he attacked and killed with the sword two men more righteous and better than himself, Abner son of Ner, commander of the army of Israel, and Amasa son of Jether, commander of the army of Judah. So shall their blood come back on the head of Joab and on the head of his descendants forever; but to David, and to his descendants, and to his house, and to his throne, there shall be peace from the Lord forevermore" (1 Ki 2:31-33).

By putting Joab to death, Solomon "killed two birds with one stone": He eliminated a dangerous threat to his throne and at the same time he honored David's wish to have Joab executed for murder. Solomon's speech to Benaiah explains why David wanted Joab executed in spite of Joab's long and distinguished service as his army commander. It was not simply a matter of revenge or punishment for killing generals who were militarily and/or politically important to David. Because David was Joab's superior and therefore his judge, he had the responsibility to execute Joab. If he did not, he would bear Joab's bloodguilt, and if Solomon did not, he would also bear this guilt.

Solomon's speech to Benaiah regarding Joab illustrates an important aspect of the Day of Atonement. A judge has the responsibility to condemn a guilty person. This is why the sins of the Israelites affected God, the Judge of Israel, in His sanctuary. But on the Day of Atonement the Lord had His sanctuary cleansed, thereby repudiating further responsibility.

On what basis could God repudiate further responsibility and claim to be just? On the basis of the fact that He had given the benefits of sacrifice, which freed those who were forgiven from condemnation, only to those who were truly loyal. Loyal ones were those who, unlike Adonijah and Joab, showed true repentance that indicated their intention not to repeat their sin. Disloyal ones were condemned.

Then there was Shimei. Because David had forgiven him, Solomon could not simply execute him. So he put him on probation as he had Adonijah.

Then the king sent and summoned Shimei, and said to him, "Build yourself a house in Jerusalem, and live there, and do not go out from there to any place whatever. For on the day you go out, and cross the Wadi Kidron, know for certain that you shall die; your blood shall be on your own head." And Shimei said to the king, "The sentence is fair; as my lord the king has said, so will your servant do." So Shimei lived in Jerusalem many days (1 Ki 2:36-38).

Solomon's stipulation was not simply arbitrary. Across the Wadi (brook) Kidron was the territory of Benjamin, Shimei's tribe. If Shimei returned home, he could work with his kinsmen to carry out his curse against David by restoring the family of Saul to the throne.

After three years, Shimei did leave Jerusalem. He went west rather than across the Kidron and he was pursuing his slaves rather than plotting with his Saulide kinsmen, but he had disobeyed the letter of Solomon's command by leaving Jerusalem. So Solomon had him executed for this. But in so doing, he carried out his father's wish. Again, Solomon killed "two birds with one stone." Just before the execution, Solomon said to Shimei: "You know in your own heart all the evil that you did to my father David; so the Lord will bring back your evil on your own head" (1 Ki 2:44).

David had pardoned Shimei. He could have lived. But his later disobedience nullified the forgiveness that he had received. The evil for which he had been forgiven came back on his own head.

For David and Solomon, the bottom line was loyalty. We have found the same to be true for the Lord. Punishment for condemned sinners may be delayed. Persons who are only nominally loyal may escape condemnation for awhile, but ultimately only the loyal will remain.

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## Coordination

One of my most embarrassing moments happened while I was playing the piano. I was accompanying a trombone player named Art in his senior recital. At the end of a furiously fast and complicated piece by Serocki, a modern composer, there was a black key glissando. I was supposed to hit a high E flat and then sweep my fingers over all the black keys down to a low note.

Art's teacher insisted that I play on a new Baldwin grand that was not broken in. It had a mellow tone that was ideal for accompanying, but the keys were still stiff. Before the recital I practiced the glissando, but try as I might, I could not get it to work. While attempting to stiffen my grip, I ripped the high E flat off my mother's Knabe grand and had to glue it back on with contact cement. However, some experimenting produced a satisfactory solution: an elbow glissando. I figured out how to plant my elbow on the E flat and drag it at high speed over the black keys.

The recital was a formal affair, with parents, friends, and music faculty. For the event I enlisted the help of a classmate to turn pages for me.

When Art and I plowed into the Serocki piece, all went as planned. We got to the end, I plunked down my elbow on the E flat and whizzed it over the keys. It sounded great. But I had not practiced this with my page turner. She was sitting close to the left side of the keyboard and was not prepared to duck my follow-through. So I got her in the mouth with my hand. It wasn't a hard blow and didn't hurt her, but she reeled back in astonishment. Everyone gasped. I felt like crawling under the Baldwin, somewhere behind the pedals. But that was the end of the piece. I had to stand up and acknowledge applause.

My problem was that I was not coordinated with my page turner. We had not practiced my elbow glissando together. She didn't know what to expect.

Coordination can be crucial. Rescuing O'Grady from Bosnia required coordinated teamwork by dozens of men. Each man had a task that contributed to the goal of rescue. Each task was essential, but nobody was working independently of the others.

The special rituals of the Day of Atonement (Lev 16) were coordinated to cleanse the Israelite sanctuary and camp. Each ritual was essential and worked with the other rituals.

Two special sin offerings functioned together to cleanse the sanctuary from impurities and sins: a bull for the priests, consisting of the high priest and his family (Lev 16:11 and following), and a goat for the rest of the people (verses 15 and following). Each of these sacrifices was supplemented by a burnt offering: a ram for the priests and another ram for the non-priestly community (verses 3, 5, 24).

Cleansing the sanctuary was not enough. When the sins were removed from the sanctuary, they had to be sent away from the camp of the community. So a ritual using a live goat, the so-called "scapegoat," expelled the sins of the entire community, including priests and lay people, into the wilderness (Lev 16:20-22).

There were a total of five special cleansing rituals on the Day of Atonement, all of which were officiated by the high priest. The rituals were: two sin offerings (bull and goat), two burnt offerings (rams), and the "scapegoat." As a result of this system of rituals, which cleansed the sanctuary and the camp, the people themselves were cleansed (Lev 16:30).

Now let's look at the rituals more closely. Only during the special sin offerings was the high priest,

and no other, permitted to enter the awesome most holy place of the sanctuary to apply blood there (Lev 16:2, 12-16). This fact alone made the Day of Atonement the most important day of the year.

In preparation for special interaction with God in the most holy place, the high priest did not simply wash his hands and feet as he did when he entered the holy place or officiated at the outer altar (compare Exod 30:19-21). He bathed his whole body with water. Then he put on sacred garments, including a linen tunic that he wore only on this occasion (Lev 16:4). He did not wear his fancy tunic, ephod, and breastplate until later in the service.

With a cloud of incense shielding him from God's glory, the high priest took the blood of his bull behind the inner veil into the most holy place, which is referred to in Leviticus 16 as the "holy place." There he sprinkled the blood once on the lid of the ark of the covenant (so-called "mercy seat") and seven times in front of the ark's lid.

The high priest slaughtered the goat for the people and did with its blood as he had done with the bull's blood. Thus he began the sacrifice of the goat before he finished applying the blood of his bull to other parts of the sanctuary. From this point on he was working with both sacrifices.

The first part of Leviticus 16:16 tells us what the high priest accomplished by sprinkling the blood of the bull and the goat in the most holy place: "Thus he shall make atonement for the (most) holy place from the uncleannesses of the people of Israel and because of their transgressions as well as all their sins..." (my translation).

To "make atonement for" the most holy place "from" evils meant to cleanse that area from those evils, namely, ritual impurities and two kinds of sins. By sprinkling blood on the ark's lid, the high priest purified the ark. By sprinkling seven times in front of the ark, letting the blood fall on the floor of the sanctuary, he purified the area of the most holy place.

Having cleansed the most holy place, the high priest came out and cleansed the holy place, which is referred to here as the "tent of meeting" (Lev 16:16b). The instructions for the high priest are abbreviated at this point. He is told simply to do in the holy place what he did in the most holy place. What was that? He cleansed the most holy place by applying the blood of the bull and of the goat one time to the *central* object there (the ark) and seven times in front of that object. So he must do something equivalent in the holy place: one time to a central object and seven times in front of that object.

The holy place object in the center of the width of the sanctuary was the altar of incense. Exodus 30:10 confirms that the blood was to be applied to the horns of this object once a year. Because the incense altar had horns, the high priest daubed the blood once on each of them. Earlier, when he had applied blood once to the ark in the most holy place, he had simply sprinkled the blood on its lid, the highest part of the sacred chest. The ark had no horns and sprinkling enabled him to avoid touching this, the holiest of objects.

As in the most holy place, where the high priest sprinkled seven times in front of the ark, he must have cleansed the area of the holy place by sprinkling seven times in front of the altar of incense. Then he went outside to the courtyard, where he put the mixed blood of the bull and the goat on the horns of the outer altar and sprinkled it with the blood seven times (Lev 16:18-19). The sevenfold sprinkling was applied directly to the altar itself in order to reconsecrate it (verse 19). Apparently it needed this extra application of blood because it was the place that had the closest contact with the Israelites and their impurities.

The high priest did not sprinkle seven times in front of the outer altar because the courtyard area was not most holy like the outer altar itself and the two apartments of the sacred tent. This is shown by the fact that the courtyard had not been included in the consecration of the sanctuary with anointing oil (Lev 8).

The sanctuary was now cleansed from impurities and sins. To send the sins away from the



community and its camp, the high priest took the live goat that had been standing in the sanctuary courtyard throughout the cleansing of the sanctuary. Leviticus 16:21-22 tells what he did with the goat:

Then Aaron shall lay both his hands on the head of the live goat, and confess over it all the iniquities of the people of Israel, and all their transgressions, all their sins, putting them on the head of the goat, and sending it away into the wilderness by means of someone designated for the task. The goat shall bear on itself all their iniquities to a barren region; and the goat shall be set free in the wilderness.

Notice that the impurities had disappeared as a result of the sin offerings that cleansed the sanctuary, but the sins remained to be carried away on the live goat. Sins were harder to kill than ritual impurities, which represented mortality/death. Impurity and mortality are physical states that God can undo in a moment by giving purity and immortality, but sins are historical events that can live on in the memory of an individual and the collective memory of a community to generate more sins.

Sins are like computer viruses. Not long ago a friend warned me that if I received an E-mail message labeled "Pen Pal Greetings," it would carry a computer virus that would destroy all my software and my hard drive as well. If I then replaced my hard drive, the virus would still be there to wipe everything out again!

God allows sinners to die so that they will not make sin immortal. This is why God drove Adam and Eve from the garden of Eden and the tree of life (Gen 3:22-24). The fact that sin produces death (Rom 6:23) explains why the one who led the scapegoat into the wilderness had to purify himself (Lev 16:26). By touching the goat, which bore sins, the man contracted ritual impurity, which represented death.

The live goat belonged to Azazel and was sent to Azazel (Lev 16:8-10). We do not know exactly what "Azazel" means. Some interpreters have understood it to refer to the goat that goes away, that is, the "escape goat." This has been shortened to "scapegoat."

Although we do not know the meaning of the word "Azazel," we know that it must refer to a being who can own something. Leviticus 16:8 indicates that as a result of casting lots at the beginning of the Day of Atonement ceremonies, one goat belonged to the Lord and the other belonged to Azazel.

Azazel's goat was not slain as a sacrifice to the Lord as the Lord's goat was. Azazel's goat functioned as a ritual "garbage truck" to carry away sins. We could call it the "tote-goat."

The fact that Azazel's goat was set free in the wilderness implies that it was left to die there. Why didn't the Lord have the Israelites kill the goat? Perhaps because He wanted to make sure that they didn't regard it as a sacrifice.

Having finished with Azazel's goat, the high priest took off his linen "cleaning clothes" and bathed his whole body again with water (Lev 16:24). Why did the high priest need to bathe a second time? Because he interrupted sacrificial activity when he performed the ritual with Azazel's goat, which was not a sacrifice. Before going back to sacrifices he had to bathe, just as a physician must scrub again if he takes a break from surgery.

After bathing, the high priest put on his ornate vestments, including the ephod and breastplate (Lev 16:23-24). Then he went to the outer altar and performed burnt offerings with rams, one for the priests and the other for the rest of the people (verse 24). These offerings supplemented the sin offerings on behalf of the same offerers: priests and people.

The last ritual action the high priest performed was to burn the fat of the sin offerings on the altar (verse 25). This explains why the high priest had needed to bathe *his whole body* a second time, instead of the usual hands and feet (verse 24; compare Exod 30:19-21). The sin offerings were special sacrifices even at the outer altar because they had earlier involved interaction with God in

the most holy place.

Leviticus 16:25 says: "He shall turn the fat of the sin offering into smoke on the altar" (my translation). "Sin offering," singular, refers here to the combination of two sin offerings, the bull for the priests and the goat for the people, that functioned together to cleanse the sanctuary.

The two sin offerings were tightly knit together by the fact that the high priest had alternated between the blood of the bull and of the goat when he cleansed the most holy place and holy place (verses 14-16). Then he had mixed the blood of both animals and applied this mixture to the outer altar (verses 18-19). With the blood mixed, the two rituals were fused together at this point. The interweaving and fusion of the sin offerings emphasizes that they worked together rather than independently.

To cleanse the sanctuary and the camp of the community, the high priest began with the sin offerings and he ended with the same offerings when he burned their fat. So the sin offerings provided a "frame" around the other rituals that came in between: the ritual of Azazel's goat and the two burnt offerings. This frame held the five special rituals of the Day of Atonement together and made them a unified group that functioned together to provide cleansing. The rituals worked together as a team.

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## CHAPTER 29



# Reversal

Grethe, our landlady, called my wife and me outside to help her find Mykiko, a Siamese kitten. She could hear him mewling plaintively near the wood pile, but she could not see him. Thinking he had gotten stuck somewhere between the pieces of wood, we dismantled the pile. But Mykiko was not there. Then he mewed again. I looked up and saw the pathetic puss way up in the pine tree over the wood pile.

Mykiko's cries were weak because he had been through a dreadful ordeal. A dog had chased him up the tree and he had spent the night there through a rainstorm.

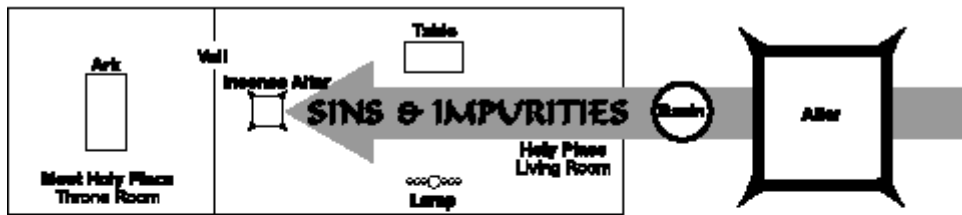
I brought a long ladder, put on thick leather gloves to protect myself from claws, and went up the tree. Sure enough, when I reached for Mykiko, the frantic feline flailed his claws, but I grabbed him and brought him down. He purred in gratitude and when I put him down he kept following me around to show his affection. Even though I was allergic to cats and tended to avoid them, Mykiko was bonded to me. He was sure I had saved his life.

What goes up must come down. Even if you are a cat.

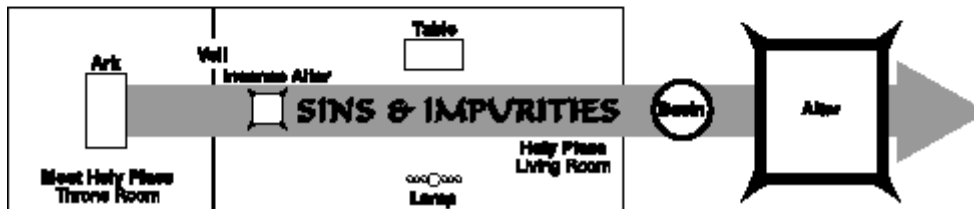
Sometimes what goes in must come out. During O'Grady's rescue operation, planes moved in two basic directions. They went into Bosnia to get O'Grady, and then they reversed their direction to carry him out. These were the overall stages: in and then out.

At the Israelite sanctuary, the two basic stages were similar: Evils came into the Israelite sanctuary throughout the year and left it on the Day of Atonement. What goes in must come out, even if it is a sin or a ritual impurity.

### Atonement Phase 1: Through the Year



### Atonement Phase 2: Day of Atonement



The fact that the two stages moved in opposite directions is indicated by the fact that the cleansing of the sanctuary on the Day of Atonement removed sins and ritual impurities that had been removed from persons who offered sacrifices for them throughout the year. Notice the wording of Leviticus 16:16, describing the evils that the high priest cleaned out of the sanctuary: "Thus he shall make atonement for the (most) holy place from the impurities of the Israelites and from their transgressions as well as *all* their sins..." (my translation). "All their sins" covered the sins for which they had already received forgiveness through sacrifices that removed the sins from them. So it is clear that on the Day of Atonement forgiven sins were treated a second time, this time to remove them from the sanctuary rather than from the sinners.

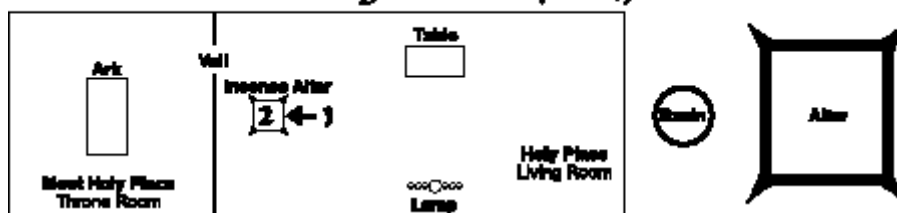
The two stages are confirmed by what happened in the rituals themselves. First, careful comparison between Leviticus 4 and 16 shows that there was a *reversal in the order of blood applications* performed in the holy place. When blood was applied in the holy place during the year (Lev 4), it moved *toward* the ark, indicating that the sin carried by the blood was moving *into* the sanctuary. But on the Day of Atonement, the blood moved *away* from the ark, showing that the sin was moving *out of* the sanctuary (Lev 16).

Here is what happened, according to Leviticus 4. For sins of the high priest or the community, the high priest applied blood at two locations inside the holy place (Lev 4:6-7, 17-18), moving *toward* the ark of the Covenant, where God's Presence was located. The two blood applications were:

1. Sprinkling seven times in front of the inner veil, that is, in front (east) of the incense altar.
2. Daubing on the horns of the incense altar.

The high priest then poured out the remaining blood at the base of the outer altar (verses 7, 18) simply to dispose of it. This disposal was not an application of blood to the altar.

### Blood Applications in the Holy Place During the Year (Lev 4)

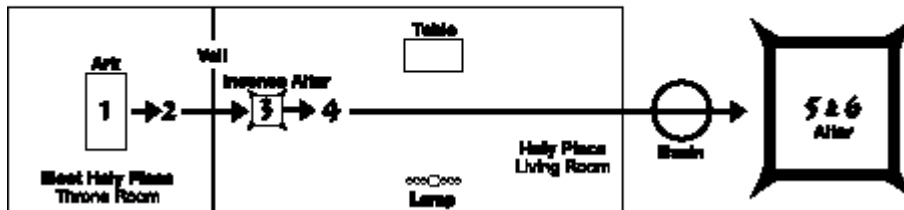


By contrast to the movement *toward* the ark in Leviticus 4, Leviticus 16 shows that in the special sin offerings on the Day of Atonement, the sanctuary was cleansed *from the inside out*: most holy place to holy place to outer altar. Within each of these areas, we have found that blood was applied in locations that moved progressively *away from* the ark of the Covenant (16:14-16, 18-19).

1. Sprinkling once on the lid of the ark.
2. Sprinkling seven times in front of the ark's lid.
3. Daubing on the horns of the incense altar.
4. Sprinkling seven times in front of the veil, that is, in front (east) of the incense altar.
5. Daubing on the horns of the outer altar.
6. Sprinkling seven times on the outer altar.

The fact that the sanctuary was cleansed from the inside out agrees with what we would expect for a "house-cleaning job." When you want to sweep out the rooms of a house, you begin from the innermost part of the house and sweep the dirt toward the door that leads to outside.

### Blood Applications on the Day of Atonement (Lev 16)



This order for the Day of Atonement (Lev 16) reverses the direction of movement that occurred on other days (Lev 4). See especially the way in which the blood applications in the holy place on the Day of Atonement (above diagram, 3 and 4) reverse the order and direction of the blood applications there during the year (previous diagram, 1 and 2). Throughout the year blood carried sins *into* the sanctuary and on the Day of Atonement blood carried sins *out of* the sanctuary.

We have found that the blood of sacrificial animals carried defilement into the sanctuary throughout the year. This idea is supported by Leviticus 6:27-29, which instructs priests regarding sin offerings:

Whatever touches its flesh shall become holy; and when any of its blood is spattered on a garment, you shall wash the bespattered part in a holy place. An earthen vessel in which it was boiled shall be broken; but if it is boiled in a bronze vessel, that shall be scoured and rinsed in water. Every male among the priests shall eat of it; it is most holy.

The sacrifice was "most holy," but its blood and flesh were treated as if they were impure. A garment spattered with the blood had to be washed. An earthen vessel in which the flesh was boiled had to be broken. This was similar to the treatment of objects that came in contact with carcasses of unclean animals (Lev 11:32-33). A sin offering was holy because it was offered to the holy God, but there is a sense in which it was also impure. Why? Because it was the means by which sin or ritual impurity was removed from the offerer.

Sacrificial blood itself was not impure, but it was a "carrier" agent, a means of transfer, just as blood in a human or animal body has the function of carrying away waste products. Sin or ritual impurity would go *from* the person being purified *through* the blood *to* the altar. Similarly, bath water by itself is clean, but when you contact it with your dirty body, the water carries the dirt. If that dirty water gets on something, it will make that object dirty.

The whole point of the ritual impurity laws was to keep impure people and things from coming in contact with holy things connected with the sanctuary (see Lev 7:20; 15:31). But here in the sin offering we see holiness and impurity together. In this sacrifice God allowed holiness and impurity to mix in order to make atonement for His people.

By transferring a sacrificial animal to God, an Israelite transferred sin or ritual impurity from himself/herself to God at His sanctuary. The person was freed from the problem because God took it. It was now in God's "ball park," that is, His sanctuary.

When an Israelite laid one hand on the head of an animal in a sin offering, whether it dealt with a case of sin or with ritual impurity, this gesture played an important role in the transfer of evil to the sanctuary because it identified the offerer as the one whose evil was transferred to the sanctuary by means of the animal.

Since the location of the sevenfold sprinkling in front of the incense altar is important for understanding the reversal of blood applications in the holy place, some additional explanation will be helpful. Remember that the instructions regarding what the high priest is to do in the holy place (= "tent of meeting") on the Day of Atonement are abbreviated: "and so he shall do for the tent of meeting..." (Lev 16:16b). These words indicate that he is to follow the pattern set in the most holy place, where he applies blood once to an object (the ark) and seven times in front of that object (verses 14-15). In the holy place, the object to which the high priest applies the blood once (on each of the horns) is the altar of incense (Exod 30:10). Therefore, the sevenfold application of blood by sprinkling in the holy place must be in front (east) of the altar of incense.

In Leviticus 4:6, 17, on a day other than the Day of Atonement, the high priest also sprinkles blood seven times in the holy place. This is the same action as on the Day of Atonement, and it is in the same area. Other applications of blood during the year are performed at the same locations as on the Day of Atonement: on the altar of incense (Lev 4:7, 18; Exod 30:10) and on the outer altar in the courtyard (Lev 4:25, 30, 34; 16:18-19). Therefore it is reasonable to conclude that the sevenfold sprinkling during the year would be performed at the same location within the holy place as on the Day of Atonement, namely, in front of the altar of incense.

Location of the sevenfold sprinkling in front of the incense altar on days other than the Day of Atonement is not contradicted by Leviticus 4:6, 17, where the sevenfold sprinkling is "in front of the curtain". The Hebrew expression "in front of" in Leviticus 4:6, 17 refers to location in one *area* that is "in front of" *another area* (compare Gen 33:18; Lev 10:4; 2 Ki 16:14). While the inner curtain/veil of the sanctuary is not itself an area, by stretching across the interior width of the sanctuary it defines the area of the most holy place. So in Leviticus 4:6, 17, sprinkling in front of the veil means sprinkling in the area of the holy place, which is in front of the area of the most holy place. The sevenfold sprinkling is both in front of the veil and in front of the incense altar. The fact that the incense altar is located between the sprinkling and the veil does not contradict the fact that the sprinkling is in front of the veil.

It is the area of the holy place that is affected by defilement during the year and cleansing on the Day of Atonement. Therefore it makes sense that the sevenfold sprinkling of blood would be in the main, central part of the holy place, in front (east) of the incense altar, rather than at the edge of the holy place between the altar and the veil.

Thus far we have found that a reversal of blood applications in the holy place provides evidence for two stages of atonement. A second piece of evidence is found in connection with the purification of one or more assistants, probably not priests, who dispose of the sin offering carcasses on the Day of Atonement. This activity makes such an assistant impure so that he is required to purify himself (Lev 16:28). Why does he become impure? Because the carcasses function as ritual "sponges" that absorb the impurities and sins removed from the sanctuary.

Disposing of the carcasses of sin offerings for the sins of the high priest or the community on other days of the year does not defile assistants, as shown by the fact that they are not required to purify themselves (Lev 4:11-12, 21). Why do they not become impure? Because these carcasses are not functioning as ritual sponges to remove defilement from the sanctuary. The sins are moving into the sanctuary, not out of the sanctuary.

We have found that sacrifices during the year moved sins and impurities into the sanctuary and sacrifices on the Day of Atonement moved the same evils out of the sanctuary. Each evil was handled twice by sacrifice, in two stages of atonement. Later we will ponder the meaning of this,

but for now it is enough to remember: What goes in must come out!

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## CHAPTER 30

# Waste

In the last chapter we discussed two stages of atonement at the Israelite sanctuary. But some sinners could not receive atonement through sacrifice:

But whoever acts high-handedly, whether a native or an alien, affronts the Lord, and shall be cut off from among the people. Because of having despised the word of the Lord and broken his commandment, such a person shall be utterly cut off and bear the guilt (Num 15:30-31).

A person who sinned defiantly forfeited the privilege of offering a sacrifice (contrast verses 22-29). He/she was "cut off." This was condemnation with no possibility for parole. It was final punishment, the end of the road.

Some sins affected the sanctuary in spite of the fact that those who committed them could not receive atonement through sacrifice. Leviticus 20:3 states God's reaction to an Israelite or non-Israelite residing in the land of Israel who sacrificed any of his children to the god Molech: "I myself will set my face against that man, and will cut him off from among his people, because he has given one of his children to Molech, defiling my sanctuary and profaning my holy name" (RSV). Notice the connection here between defiling the Lord's sanctuary and profaning His name, which involved His reputation (compare Ezek 20:9).

Numbers 19:13 gives the penalty for disobeying God's command to have oneself purified from corpse contamination:

Whoever touches a dead person, the body of any man who has died, and does not cleanse himself, defiles the tabernacle of the Lord, and that person shall be cut off from Israel; because the water for impurity was not thrown upon him, he shall be unclean; his uncleanness is still on him... (see also verse 20).

How did sinners in these cases defile the sanctuary? Simply by committing the sins, which showed defiance against God and His system of worship either by wanton neglect of the purity rules that kept impurity from the holy realm (compare Lev 15:31) or by participation in an alternate worship system that was cruel and honored a false god.

Ezekiel 23:37-39 refers to defilement of the temple when wanton sinners came there to worship YHWH, thereby adding hypocrisy and direct pollution of the sanctuary to their sins (compare Jer 7:9-11, 30-31). But there is no indication in Leviticus 20:3 or Numbers 19:13, 20 that divine punishment for defiling the sanctuary in this way was to occur only if the sinners physically came to the sanctuary. A Molech worshiper or willfully corpse contaminated individual was not "let off the hook" if he/she simply refrained from going to the sanctuary to contaminate it directly. By committing the offense, such a person inevitably defiled the sanctuary and thus inevitably received punishment.

How did simply committing a flagrant sin defile the sanctuary? We are not told how the sin got to the sanctuary. This gap in our knowledge need not trouble us because we are dealing here with the

world of ritual, which was not limited by constraints that operate in the material world. In the world of ritual, things do not need to move from point A to point B to point C as physical objects and persons do.

The sins we have been talking about did not come into the sanctuary through sacrifice. They "short-circuited" the sacrificial process that was the legitimate way to bring sins to the Lord. God was pleased when a repentant person brought his/her sin to Him so that He could forgive and cleanse that individual through sacrifice. But when a person "threw" a sin at God so that its defilement invaded His sanctuary in an illegitimate way, God was not pleased. The difference in the attitude of God is understandable. Do you mind if your child brings some dirt into the house on the way to the bath? But what if he/she flings dirt through the window?

An Israelite who defiled the sanctuary illegitimately, rather than through sacrifice, was condemned by God and there was no animal sacrifice that could remove this condemnation. This makes good sense. For a divine or human leader to maintain his integrity when a subordinate does something wrong and thereby misrepresents him, he must reject the wrongdoing and the one who committed it.

When the Lord forgave King Manasseh for his openly defiant sins (2 Chron 33:13), there was no animal sacrifice that Manasseh could bring to the temple to receive atonement for what he had done. Just for his sin of performing child sacrifice (2 Ki 21:6; 2 Chron 33:6), he was condemned as "cut off" (compare Lev 20:3). So it appears that God forgave Manasseh directly, without an animal sacrifice as a prerequisite to forgiveness (compare Lev 4:26), on the basis of the coming sacrifice of Christ, which is the only basis on which anyone is saved. John 3:16 says: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life" "Everyone who believes" means everyone who believes!

While Manasseh finally believed in God and could be forgiven, there is no guarantee that a person who rejects God will return to Him. Stubbornly going down the slippery slope of apostasy does not make it easier to get back up again. It does not soften the heart, increase the likelihood of faith, or amplify the voice of God speaking through conscience.

Rejecting God is a dangerous thing for anyone, but especially for one who has enjoyed the benefits of God's covenant. This applies to Christians today. In Hebrews 6:4-6 those who have belonged to Christ and then apostatized bear special guilt because they shame Him as though they are crucifying Him all over again. Just as ancient Israelites who defied God and disregarded His worship forfeited their right to sacrificial atonement, "there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins" for those who "willfully persist in sin after having received the knowledge of the truth" (Heb 10:26). Those who give up Christ throw away His blood, which He shed for them through excruciating suffering. They "have spurned the Son of God, profaned the blood of the covenant by which they were sanctified, and outraged the Spirit of grace" (verse 29). Therefore they are condemned when the Lord will judge His people (verses 27-31). Christ's blood is a terrible thing to waste.

Animal sacrifices on the Day of Atonement did not provide persons who had illegitimately defiled the sanctuary with the benefit of cleansing atonement in spite of the fact that they had been ineligible for forgiveness at the first stage of atonement. A person who was not eligible for one stage was certainly not eligible for the next stage, just as you can't get accepted into graduate school to do an M.A. if you don't even qualify for admission into an undergraduate college to do a B.A.

So how was the sanctuary cleansed from illegitimate defilement? Some kinds of serious sins that defiled the land or the community were purged out by the deaths of the sinners themselves (Num 35:33; Deut 17:7). Removal of the sinners cleansed the land or community because these persons were living in the land and community and they were bearing their own sins. So at first glance it appears that sins of illegitimate defilement could be cleansed from the sanctuary by divine punishment on the sinners themselves. But there is no evidence that the sanctuary was cleansed in this way or that Molech worshipers and corpse contaminated persons lived in the sanctuary so that

their removal could cleanse it.

Even if illegitimate defilement was cleansed from the sanctuary on the Day of Atonement, the important thing for us here is the fact that the only sinners who had a part in the services of the Day of Atonement in the sense that they received the benefit of the cleansing of the sanctuary were those who had already received forgiveness through sacrifices that they had offered. Those who had not brought sacrifices for their sins during the year, including those who had not been eligible to bring sacrifices because their sins were those of illegitimate defilement, were already condemned before the Day of Atonement and their cases were not under consideration for redemption by cleansing on that day.

Some have argued that all sins affected the sanctuary when they were committed as the sins of illegitimate defilement did. If all sins affected the sanctuary in this way, the purpose of sacrifices throughout the year would be to cleanse the sanctuary from sins that had already arrived there. The Day of Atonement would not need to cleanse the sanctuary from these sins because they would already be cleaned out. Rather than sacrificial rituals taking sins into the sanctuary during the year and out of the sanctuary on the Day of Atonement, the rituals during the year and on the Day of Atonement would all be concerned with cleansing the sanctuary. Sacrificial treatment of a given sin would occur in only one stage.

The one-stage theory of atonement just described does not work because the evidence for this kind of defilement is restricted to certain cases in which a person could not receive atonement through sacrifice. Illegitimate defilement of the sanctuary and atonement for the sinner were mutually exclusive. A person could not bring a sacrifice to cleanse the sanctuary from sin that had arrived there illegitimately because such a person was not allowed to offer a sacrifice at all. If you are stuck on death row, you can't make amends for your crime by cleaning up garbage from the community.

There is ample proof that forgiven sins moved into the sanctuary through sacrifices rather than by persons simply committing improper actions:

1. The language of atonement for forgiven sins clearly indicates two stages: forgiveness during the year (Lev 4:20, 26, 31, 35) and then cleansing on the Day of Atonement (16:30).
2. The Bible says that sacrifices during the year atoned for persons from sin (Lev 4:20, 26, 31, 35) or from physical ritual impurity (12:7-8; 15:15; Num 8:21). It is clear that sin or impurity was removed from the offerer himself/herself. For example, Leviticus 4:26 says regarding a ruler who brings an offering for sin: "Thus the priest shall make atonement on his behalf from his sin, and he shall be forgiven" (my translation). When a new mother brings a burnt offering and "sin" offering for her ritual impurity (not for sin here), the priest "shall offer it before the Lord, and make atonement on her behalf; then she shall be clean from her flow of blood" (12:7). There is no evidence that sacrifices throughout the year cleansed the sanctuary or its sacred objects.
3. "All" of the forgiven sins were removed from the sanctuary on the Day of Atonement (Lev 16:16). Why would the same sins need to be dealt with again on the Day of Atonement if they had already been cleansed out earlier in the year?
4. In sin offerings for the high priest or the entire community during the year, the movement of blood applications in the holy place was toward the interior of the sanctuary, indicating that sins were being taken in. The direction of this movement was opposite to that which occurred on the Day of Atonement, when the sanctuary was cleansed.
5. In sin offerings for the high priest or the entire community during the year, lay assistants who disposed of carcasses did not need to purify themselves, indicating that the animals did not serve as ritual sponges for removing evil from the sanctuary, as was the case on the Day of Atonement.

God's people could accept and cherish the sacrificial blood provided for them so that they could be forgiven and cleansed. Or they could throw it away. But the blood was a terrible thing to waste.



## Impact

When Scott O'Grady was shot down, his whole family was affected. They waited anxiously all week, hoping he was still alive. As he was being flown out of Bosnia, the colonel in charge of his squadron called his father to tell him that his son was alive. He ran and shouted to his other two children, waking them up. Then the family jumped around the room for joy (*Time*, June 19, 1995, p. 26).

Scott is only one member of his family, but his well-being has an impact on everyone else. The family is a unit.

When part of the Israelite sanctuary was touched by sin, impurity, or cleansing, the whole sanctuary was affected. The sanctuary was a unit. This answers a number of questions regarding the way in which the sanctuary and salvation work.

How did the most holy place and holy place become defiled by ritual impurities so that they needed cleansing? Sacrifices for ritual impurities (Lev 12:6-8; 15:13-15) *only* involved the outer altar; they *never* included application of blood inside the sacred tent. But on the Day of Atonement, ritual impurities had to be removed from the most holy place and the holy place (16:16) as well as from the outer altar (verses 18-19).

The fact that the most holy place and holy place were defiled by the altar being defiled would be like having a bath result in the dirtying of two other bathrooms! A housekeeper's nightmare!

We must remember that we are talking about ritual. Ritual is not bound by rules of physical cause and effect that operate in the material world. In our material realm, an object or person necessarily moves from point A to point B and then from point B to point C, and so on. Scott O'Grady had to go from Bosnia to a helicopter carrier sailing in the Adriatic Sea before he could get to the United States. Even if he could fly directly from Bosnia to the United States he would still need to take time crossing an ocean, most likely the Atlantic. He could not be in Bosnia one minute and in the United States the next, the way Jesus immediately took His disciples to their destination on the Sea of Galilee (Jn 6:21). Rituals are like miracles in that they are not limited the way ordinary activities are.

The answer to the question of how the most holy place and holy place could become defiled when blood was only applied at the outer altar is found in the "*part for all*" principle. The sanctuary was a unit, so defilement of part of it had an impact on the entire sanctuary. The impurity did not need to be physically transferred from the outer altar to the holy place and from there to the most holy place. The outer altar was an integral part of the sanctuary, so when it was affected, the whole sanctuary was affected.

For example, at the inauguration of the sanctuary, Aaron and his sons performed a sin offering on behalf of themselves at the outer altar (Lev 9:8-10). Because the sacrifice was on their behalf, they could not eat the remainder of the meat. So they incinerated it outside the camp (verse 11). This sin offering contacted only the outer altar. Nevertheless, the whole sanctuary was affected because the altar was affected.

We have found that the whole sanctuary was affected by defilement of part of it. The "*part for all*" principle also worked on a smaller scale. Exodus 30:10 says with regard to the altar of incense:

"Once a year Aaron shall perform the rite of atonement on its horns. Throughout your generations he shall perform the atonement for it once a year with the blood of the atoning sin offering. It is most holy to the Lord" (my translation). The "atonement for it once a year" is that of the Day of Atonement. By putting blood on the horns of the altar, the high priest (Aaron) made atonement for the altar. That is, by applying blood to part of the altar, he cleansed the whole altar. The same is true of the way in which the altar had become defiled. By putting blood on the horns of the altar when he or the whole community sinned (Lev 4:7, 18), the high priest transferred sin to the entire altar.

If the high priest or the whole community sinned during the year, the high priest also sprinkled blood seven times in the holy place (Lev 4:6, 17). The blood fell to part of the floor. In light of what we have learned about blood on part of the altar, we can see that blood on part of the floor must have affected the entire area of the holy place. On the Day of Atonement, the high priest performed the same action to remove the sin from that area (16:16; compare verse 14).

Now it is easy to recognize other examples of the "part for all" principle. When the high priest sprinkled blood on the lid of the ark and seven times in front of the ark (Lev 16:14-15), he cleansed the whole ark and the entire area of the most holy place. When he put blood on the horns of the outer altar and sprinkled on the altar seven times (verses 18-19), he cleansed and reconsecrated the entire altar.

A less obvious case of the "part for all" principle involves the bull and goat used to cleanse the sanctuary on the Day of Atonement. Only their blood was applied to the defiled parts of the sanctuary. The bodies of the animals were not taken inside the sacred tent. But the animals were regarded as units. When their blood was defiled by contacting the defiled sanctuary, the bodies outside also became defiled *because they belonged to the same animal*. Part was affected, so all was affected. As a result, an assistant who contacted the carcasses by disposing of them outside the camp became impure (Lev 16:28).

The "part for all" principle also applied to persons. When Moses consecrated Aaron and his sons as priests, he put sacrificial blood "on the lobe of Aaron's right ear and on the thumb of his right hand and on the big toe of his right foot" (Lev 8:23). Then he did the same thing to Aaron's sons (verse 24). Blood only touched the extremities of a priest, but it consecrated the whole priest. Compare the fact that blood on the horns/extremities of an altar affected the whole altar.

Why was blood put on the ears, thumbs, and big toes of the priests? Apparently because they were the Lord's servants, who would hear/obey Him (compare Exod 21:5-6), do His will with their hands, and go with their feet where He commanded.

Before the priests could enter the sacred tent or officiate sacrifices at the outer altar, they were required to wash their hands and feet with water drawn from the sacred basin/laver (Exod 30:17-21). Water on part of the priest purified the whole priest for ritual interaction with the Lord. The same principle applies to the foot washing that is connected to the Christian Communion service. Jesus said to Peter: "One who has bathed does not need to wash, except for the feet, but is entirely clean" (Jn 13:10). This washing has significance that goes beyond physical cleansing of the feet. The symbolic impact affects the whole person.

The fact that the "part for all" principle was so prominent in the sanctuary and was recognized by Christ suggests that it may be important in the dynamics of salvation. Romans 5:12-17 confirms this: Sin by Adam had a global impact, spreading to the whole human race. But the sacrifice of one man, Jesus Christ, provides redemption for all who accept it.

"Part for all" operates in our individual lives. James says:

For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it. For the one who said, "You shall not commit adultery," also said, "You shall not murder." Now if you do not commit adultery but if you murder, you have become a

transgressor of the law. So speak and so act as those who are to be judged by the law of liberty (Jas 2:10-12).

Breaking any divine law affects our relationship with God. It is the relationship that is the point of the law. So the law that protects the relationship is a unit. The law is "the law of liberty" because we are truly free when we keep it and preserve our relationship with God.

The way in which one offense can hurt our relationship with God can be illustrated from marriage. You can hurt your marriage relationship in a wide variety of ways: shouting, hitting, neglect, adultery, and so on. There is no question that doing two or more of these can be worse than doing only one. But one may be enough to destroy the relationship.

God reverses the power of sin in our lives by pouring His love "into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us" (Rom 5:5). In this verse the word "hearts" represents our minds. By putting love into this part of us, God affects our whole lives, "part for all." Love is the basic relational principle that unites the whole of God's law (Matt 22:36-40). So the gift of love empowers us to live in harmony with God, who is love (1 Jn 4:8).

Just as the Israelite priests were shown to be totally consecrated by sacrificial blood on certain parts of their bodies (Lev 8:23-24), so the holiness of God's end-time people is symbolically represented in the book of Revelation as a seal of divine ownership on their foreheads (Rev 7:3; 9:4). According to Ephesians 1:13, the way in which Christians are sealed is by the Holy Spirit. This makes sense because it is the Holy Spirit who pours love into our hearts, bringing us into harmony with God's character.

By contrast with those whom God seals, those who follow organized rebellion against God are symbolically represented as receiving a mark on their right hands or foreheads (Rev 13:16-17). Such a mark is on part of a person, but it signifies the allegiance of the whole person to a rebel power.

The "part for all" principle operates in our lives one way or another. But we have some choice as to which way it works. Do we want to spread evil? Or do we want the impact of love through the Holy Spirit to fill us and reach out to those around us?

When God rescues you, it affects those around you. If they truly comprehend what has happened, they may jump for joy!

# *Part VI: Relationships at Stake*

## CHAPTER 32

### ~~~~~ Wedding

"Basher-52 reads you. I'm alive; help." When Thomas Hanford was flying his F-16 over Bosnia, he received this radio message, which used O'Grady's call sign. But until he tested the message by asking O'Grady to name the squadron to which he had belonged in Korea, he was not sure that the person calling was not an enemy who was trying to trick him (*Time*, June 19, 1995, p. 24).

Words must be tested.

"Will you marry me?" "Yes!" The proposal is accepted. The couple is engaged. The words will be tested when it comes time for the wedding. The announcements may be out. A three-tiered cake may be ready. The musicians may have rehearsed. The church may be decorated. Presents may be piled on a table. Family and friends may be sitting in the pews. The minister may be standing at the pulpit. But if either the bride or the groom gets "cold feet" and does not show up ready to get married, it is a "no go"; they will not become one.

I'm thankful that my bride married me even though she woke up on the morning of our wedding awestruck and somewhat terrified by the prospect of the lifetime commitment she was about to enter.

"I do." Two short words with a long meaning: A promise to love, honor, and cherish until death. After the wedding there's a marriage that will test the promise through years of living. Words must be backed up by actions. Without the actions, the words are cheap and meaningless and oneness will not last.

"Lord, Lord." Accepting and acknowledging Christ as Lord! These are the right words. But words must be tested. Jesus said:

"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven. On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many deeds of power in your name?' Then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; go away from me, you evildoers.'" (Matt 7:21-23).

For Christ, the testing question is whether or not a professed believer *does* the will of his Father in heaven. It is not enough to have done the will of God in the past, even if we have prophesied or cast out demons. It is not enough to have been forgiven in the past. We must do and keep on doing the will of God.

If we truly accept God's forgiveness, we accept His lordship in our lives, as shown by our obedience to Him. This is why God asked Israelites who had already been forgiven to show their ongoing loyalty to Him by practicing self-denial and abstaining from work on the Day of Atonement (Lev 16:29). Commitment was shown by actions. The difference between loyal Israelites and unfaithful Israelites was shown by their obedience to God or lack of it.

The rituals of the Day of Atonement prophesied a global judgment, when God judges between loyal and disloyal human beings on the basis of their works: "The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God, and keep his commandments; for that is the whole duty of everyone. For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil" (Eccl 12:13-14).

When Christ comes in glory, He will distinguish between His people and those who are not His people, as sheep are separated from goats, on the basis of the way they have treated others (Matt 25:31-46).

Becoming a Christian does not exempt a person from judgment. Speaking to Christians, Paul wrote: "For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God" (Rom 14:10).

Works are important in the judgment because they show faith or lack of faith. We are saved by God's grace through faith, not by works (Eph 2:8-9). The question is: Do we really have faith? This question can be answered by looking at our works because true faith, which accepts God's grace, necessarily results in good works. Faith works through love (Gal 5:6) and faith without works is dead (Jas 2:26).

Jesus said to Nicodemus: "The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit" (Jn 3:8). While the power that changes a person cannot be directly observed, the results of the change are obvious: "you hear the sound of it." The Spirit, grace, and faith that cause the transformation are invisible, but the works that flow from the change can be witnessed by other people, testifying to the presence of "new birth" by the Spirit.

God is patient with those who call themselves Christians but lack true, living faith. He does not expose them immediately, but allows them time to return to Him. They remain among His people until the end, when He will separate false Christians from true Christians as weeds are separated from wheat (Matt 13:24-30, 36-43).

Judgment was a prominent theme in Jesus' parables, as we have already found in connection with the sheep and the goats, and the wheat and the weeds. Jesus told another parable to show that it is not enough to be *with* God's people. In this parable, a man responded to a king's invitation to a wedding feast. But he had no wedding garment. He was wearing the wrong clothes. Caught in his blunderwear, he was cast out (Matt 22:1-14).

The king represents God. Responding to His call is a good start, but without a wedding garment we are unprepared for being with Him at the wedding.

Revelation 19:7-8 tells us what the wedding and wedding garment represent:

"Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready; to her it has been granted to be clothed with fine linen, bright and pure" < for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.

The "Lamb" is Christ (compare Jn 1:29). The "bride" consists of His holy people, His "saints." The "marriage" is union between Christ and His people. The "fine linen" is a white wedding garment, just as a modern bride wears a white dress. Here it represents "the righteous deeds of the saints." So Christ's people live in harmony with His righteous character of pure, unselfish love.

We can be part of the "bride." We can be united with Christ. Only those with the "fine linen" will belong to Him. But we do not need to come up with it ourselves. The "fine linen" of righteous deeds is "granted" to the bride. Good works of obedience to God are a *gift* from Him! There is no excuse for not having them, just as there was no excuse for the man in Jesus' parable not to have a wedding garment, and he had nothing to say in his defense (Matt 22:12).

Do you want to be one with Christ and His divine love? What draws you to Him? In Ephesians 5, the apostle Paul suggests a reason: "Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love, *as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us*, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God" (Eph 5:1-2).

Because of Christ's love, He wants to be one with us:

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her; that

He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she should be holy and blameless (Eph 5:25-27; NASB).

If Christ's church includes me, how can I have "no spot or wrinkle or any such thing"? That seems totally impossible! True, it is impossible for me to do *on my own*. But who does the washing? *Christ*, by "the word," that is, the word of God. Christ takes responsibility. I just need to let Him wash me by accepting Him and His word into my life.

Why does Christ wash me? Because He loves me and wants to present me to Himself. He is with me through the whole process.

A wedding cannot be completed until the bride and groom are dressed and ready, and they both say "I do." People generally make their decision to get married before their wedding day. At the wedding they reaffirm their earlier decision and set it in the concrete of lifelong commitment. It is the last chance to go ahead or back out. In this sense a wedding is a kind of judgment day. In Christ's parable of judgment at a wedding, the man without the wedding garment was only a guest (Matt 22:11). But in Ephesians 5 and Revelation 19 we see that we are called to Christ's wedding not merely as His guests, but as His bride. But will we let Him get us ready for the wedding? Will we go through with it?

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## CHAPTER 33

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Reputation

Telling what happened when O'Grady landed his parachute in Bosnia, *Time* magazine reports: "Meanwhile, as the Pentagon started reacting, planners were not holding out much hope. 'We thought he was dead,' admits one Air Force officer" (*Time*, June 19, 1995, p. 22).

How could the Pentagon react? The Pentagon is a sprawling five-sided building in the vicinity of Washington D.C. How can a building react? Obviously, "the Pentagon" here refers to the organization that it houses and represents: the United States defense department. The reaction was by the officers at military headquarters.

We refer to the White House in the same way. "The White house confirms..." "The White House denies..." "The White House is cleared from any wrong-doing..." The White House is the headquarters location that represents the President and his organization. The actions and reputation of the White House are those of the President. *He* takes responsibility.

God's headquarters are located at His sanctuary in heaven, where He has His throne (Ps 11:4; Jer 17:12). So we can see how God's throne or sanctuary could represent His character, authority, and reputation.

Strengthening the connection between God's sanctuary and His reputation is the fact that God's "name" was at the place of the sanctuary (Deut 12:5, 11) and His "name" involves His reputation: "But I acted for the sake of my name, that it should not be profaned in the sight of the nations among whom they lived, in whose sight I made myself known to them in bringing them out of the land of Egypt" (Ezek 20:9).

The idea that a name involves a reputation is well understood today, particularly in business and politics. Not long ago I heard a radio advertisement for "The Good Guys," a chain of stores selling electronics equipment. The ad concluded: "We're the Good Guys. We've *gotta* be good!" Any

business that wants to make and keep a good "name" for itself needs to live up to its reputation.

For hundreds of years God had additional headquarters on earth at the Israelite sanctuary/temple. So when Leviticus 16 speaks of God's sanctuary being cleansed or cleared on the Day of Atonement, we get the idea that this cleansing affects God. Just as clearing the White House means freeing the President from something that has affected or could affect his reputation, cleansing the sanctuary would seem to involve clearing God in some way.

The "part for all" principle operates here. Just as our relationship with God is affected by any sin against Him (Jas 2:10), so God's relationship with His universe is affected by anything He does.

Recently a student asked me why God does not solve the problem of sin on Planet Earth by simply banishing it eternally from the rest of the universe. Why does God go to so much trouble to save us when it would be so much easier to let us rot and self-destruct? The answer is that God loves us and therefore wants to save us. The way He treats us tells the rest of His created beings what He is like.

What God does for us is not motivated merely by the need for "spin control" to keep His image intact in spite of the truth. What He does *is* the truth because God's outgoing love prevents Him from ignoring our plight. God is not a hypocrite, ignoring ugly secrets and hiding skeletons in His closet.

What kind of evil can affect God's reputation so that His sanctuary would need to be cleansed on the Day of Atonement? Leviticus 16:16 identifies what the Israelite high priest cleansed out of the sanctuary so that it could no longer affect God:

Thus he shall make atonement for the (most) holy place from the impurities of the Israelites, and from their transgressions, as well as all their sins; and so he shall do for the tent of meeting, which remains with them in the midst of their impurities (my translation).

The evils that affected God in His sanctuary were caused by His people. Ritual impurities affected Him even though they were not sins. Sins that had been forgiven through sacrifice affected Him even though they had already been forgiven.

It is easy to see how ritual impurities would affect God. He resided among His people "in the mist of their impurities" (Lev 16:16; NASB; compare 15:31). He is holy, the Source of all life. They were impure and subject to death. By living with them in such close proximity, He would be associated with their weakness and mortality. This would be particularly true when they brought sin offerings to His sanctuary in order to be purified from severe ritual impurities. They shed their impurities at His sanctuary, where these impurities would accumulate until the Day of Atonement.

Why would forgiven sins affect God in His sanctuary? Once a person is forgiven, what need for atonement could possibly remain? Why would such sins be handled twice at the sanctuary, once when an individual was forgiven earlier in the year and again on the Day of Atonement? We can begin to find an answer by considering a story about King David and the cost of mercy:

"Help, O king!" cried a woman from Tekoa. David responded by asking: "What is your trouble?" And then, her voice shaky with emotion, she poured out her bitter story:

"Alas, I am a widow; my husband is dead. Your servant had two sons, and they fought with one another in the field; there was no one to part them, and one struck the other and killed him. Now the whole family has risen against your servant. They say, 'Give up the man who struck his brother, so that we may kill him for the life of his brother whom he murdered, even if we destroy the heir as well.' Thus they would quench my one remaining ember, and leave to my husband neither name nor remnant on the face of the earth" (2 Sam 14:5-7).

No wonder the woman had come to the king. Unlike the woman caught in adultery who was dragged before Jesus, the woman of Tekoa came to David voluntarily. She was in a hopeless situation. Justice demanded that the murderer should die. But if he died, his mother would have

nobody to take care of her in her old age and the name of her family would be blotted out. The sentence of death against her son was like a sentence of death against her as well.

As the highest judge in the land, King David could have mercy on the woman by pardoning her son. But if he did that, what would happen to his reputation for justice? That reputation was not simply part of his ego; it was one of the main reasons why he could effectively govern his people as their king. This was a difficult and risky case. He needed time to think about it. So he told the woman to go to her house and he would give orders concerning her (verse 8).

The woman needed an answer right away, not a diplomatic brush-off. She was desperate. But she was also wise and recognized the reason for the king's hesitation. So she offered: "The blame is on me, my lord the king, and on my father's house, but the king and his throne are clean" (verse 9; translation by R. Gane). The woman knew that a judge, including a king acting as chief judge, was morally responsible for his judgment. If a judge lets a guilty person go unpunished, he should have a very good reason for doing so or he violates his responsibility and damages his society.

Suppose I go speeding down the highway at 120 m.p.h., without the excuse that I'm being chased by paparazzi. Imagine that when I go to court, the judge pays my ticket for me. That takes a lot of imagination! When the judge is up for re-election, what can his opponent do? Look up the records, find my case, and then advertise that the incumbent judge is "soft on crime"! A judge who pardons must be able to justify his justice. This is especially true in a case of murder. When bloodguilt hangs over a person and a judge lets him go free, turning him loose on society, there is a sense in which the judge takes the bloodguilt upon himself.

But the woman of Tekoa said: "The blame is on me, my lord the king, and on my father's house, but the king and his throne are clean" (verse 9; translation by R. Gane). She knew that mercy had a cost and she was willing to take that cost upon herself and her family. The king and his throne, the place where he judged, which represented his authority and justice, would be free of moral responsibility. The blame, the bloodguilt, would be on the woman and her family. So David granted her request and promised to protect her and her son.

This story from 2 Samuel 14 reveals the profound tension between mercy and justice. It is true that the wise woman from Tekoa was an actress set up by General Joab and the sad story she told king David was made up. Joab was using the woman to rearrange David's thinking toward Absalom, David's own son, who was living in exile in Geshur because he had murdered his brother, Amnon. Joab wanted David to pardon Absalom even though he was guilty of murder. But although the story that the woman told was fictitious, it was successful with David because it reflected truth about mercy and justice that applied to real-life situations, such as David's problem with Absalom.

If you think the life of the woman as portrayed in her story sounds complicated, wait till you hear about David's dilemma. The problems of his royal household make the modern shenanigans of the British royal family look like an English tea party.

David's son, Amnon, had fallen in love, or rather lust, with his beautiful half sister, Tamar. When Amnon seized her and shamed her, David was angry with him, but he did not punish him. The Septuagint Greek version of the Old Testament tells why not: "because he loved him, for he was his firstborn" (2 Sam 13:21).

David was merciful to Amnon. But mercy had a cost. Absalom, another son of David, who was the full brother of Tamar, viewed the king's mercy on the violator of his sister as injustice, which he decided to correct by taking the law into his own hands. Absalom had his servants kill Amnon, and then Absalom fled to the land of the king of Geshur. So mercy on Amnon cost David not only the loss of Amnon's life, it also cost him his relationship with Absalom. Rather than losing one son, he lost two.

Mercy arises from love. Love is the reason why David had mercy on Amnon. To be unmerciful is to

be unloving. But there is a paradox, a contradiction, illustrated in the story of David. Sometimes being merciful to one person hurts another person. Mercy to one can be injustice to another, and injustice is not loving. How can you be loving to both people in a situation like this?

Have you ever found yourself stuck in such a dilemma? Are there any parents, teachers, employers, or administrators out there? I've been stuck as a teacher. Some time ago, when I was less experienced, a number of students made the same mistake on a quiz and wanted mercy. Since several of them had done the same thing, I thought mercy was justified. But those who didn't benefit from this particular mercy thought that I was being unfair.

David's dilemma didn't have to do with mere grades; he was dealing with the lives of his children and the well-being of his nation. The cost of David's mercy was high. He did let Absalom return to Jerusalem. But he had no woman of Tekoa to take the blame when he pardoned his own son. He took the cost upon himself. And he paid it to the full. Ironically, it was Absalom himself, the one to whom mercy was granted, who turned on David and made him pay by taking his throne and even his concubines and forcing David into humiliating exile. The main reason why Absalom was so successful in gaining the support of the people was that he portrayed himself as a reformer of justice who would correct the injustices of his father (2 Sam 15:2-6). The issue in the great controversy between David and Absalom was the character of the king. Who could rule with fairness? David or Absalom?

Are you concerned about justice today? What do you think about our judicial system when a person who has committed a brutal crime gets off with a light sentence, a mere "slap on the wrist"? Do you call for mercy on the criminal, or do you think about justice for the grieving family of the victim? Yes, justice is as important today as it ever was.

As great and wise a king as David was, he was faced with serious tensions between the two sides of love, justice and mercy, tensions that he was unable to resolve. Because Absalom had no lasting acceptance of the pardon that his father granted him, as shown by his rebellious actions, this pardon did not help the young prince in the long run. Pardon without genuine reformation is a waste. Although Absalom was pardoned, he remained a murderer and died a murderer's death.

To save his son, David was willing to pay with even more than his kingdom. When Absalom died, David cried: "Would I had died instead of you, O Absalom, my son, my son!" (2 Sam 18:33).

In the story of 2 Samuel, the dynamics of mercy and justice mirror the interactions involved in God's salvation of human beings. As David was to Absalom, God is to us: our parent, king, and judge. Like Absalom, we have sinned. Like David, God forgives us because He loves us (Ps 103:3-4). Unlike David, God is not limited by moral weakness due to His own sin or inadequate wisdom to apply justice and mercy, the two sides of love, without compromising either. But as judge, God is like David in that He is morally responsible for His judgments, including His forgiveness of guilty people.

God must deal with the cost of mercy and there is nobody to bear it but Himself. He has borne it in His sanctuary and through the sacrifice of Christ, who endured far greater suffering and humiliation than David did when he fled from Absalom.

Having paid the ransom for our condemned lives (Matt 20:28) that we could never pay (compare Ps 49:7-8), God is just when He justifies those who have faith in Jesus (Rom 3:26). By paying the terrible full cost of mercy, the sacrifice of Christ provides a lasting solution to human sin by maintaining full justice at the same time as providing for full mercy. Righteousness and salvation are intertwined, reflecting harmonious balance between mercy and justice in the character of God. Through Christ, "Lovingkindness and truth have met together; Righteousness and peace have kissed each other" (Ps 85:10; NASB).

Judgment

One event can be referred to in two different ways. "Christmas" can be called "Yuletide." Americans have "Independence Day," which is the same event as "the Fourth of July." In the Bible, the Feast of Booths (so-called Feast of Tabernacles; Lev 23:34) could be called the Feast of Ingathering (Exod 23:16).

In the book of Daniel, God has a judgment to keep justice and mercy together. Daniel 7 calls this event a judgment. Daniel 8 refers to the same event as the justifying/cleansing of God's sanctuary. We will find that this must be His sanctuary in heaven. Justifying God's sanctuary through a judgment clears God's reputation, just as vindication of the White House clears the President's reputation.

In Daniel 7, God carries out a judgment that benefits His people (verse 22) by delivering them from an oppressive "little horn" power, which claims divine authority (verse 25). In Daniel 8 the justification of the sanctuary (verse 14) in the "time of the end" (see verses 17, 19) is God's answer to the "little horn" (verses 9-13; compare verses 23-26). The "time of the end" is shortly before Christ's Second Coming (compare 11:40-12:4).

The justification, or legal cleansing of the sanctuary (compare Exod 23:7; Jb 4:17), accomplishes the same thing as the judgment. These are two ways to refer to the same event in the "time of the end."

Judgment = cleansing of the sanctuary. Sounds familiar! Remember the Day of Atonement? When the sanctuary was cleansed, the Israelites were judged as loyal or disloyal to God. The judgment in the book of Daniel works like the Day of Atonement.

The description of the judgment in Daniel 7 indicates the nature of the judgment and strengthens the connection with the Day of Atonement.

As I watched, thrones were set in place, and an Ancient One took his throne, his clothing was white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool; his throne was fiery flames, and its wheels were burning fire. A stream of fire issued and flowed out from his presence. A thousand thousands served him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood attending him. The court sat in judgment, and the books were opened (verses 9-10).

The "Ancient One," literally "Ancient of Days," must be God, who presides over the judgment in heaven. The fact that the books are opened indicates the beginning of an investigative phase of judgment. Even today, records such as books are used in a trial to provide evidence regarding the party or parties being judged. A court evaluates the evidence through a process of investigation that leads to a verdict.

The next verses tell us who is being judged, why he/it is being judged, and what is the verdict of the heavenly court:

I watched then because of the noise of the arrogant words that the horn was speaking. And as I watched, the beast was put to death, and its body destroyed and given over to be burned with fire. As for the rest of the beasts, their dominion was taken away, but their lives were prolonged for a season and a time (Dan 7: 11-12).

A "horn" is judged because of its arrogant words. This horn, earlier described as "little" (verse 8), symbolizes a human power that arises from a kingdom on earth (verses 7-8, 23-24). Verses 21 and

25 describe the words and actions of the little horn:

As I looked, this horn made war with the holy ones and was prevailing over them... He shall speak words against the Most High, shall wear out the holy ones of the Most High, and shall attempt to change the sacred seasons and the law; and they shall be given into his power for a time, two times, and half a time.

It appears that the books used in the judgment must include a record of the horn's words against "the Most High" and persecution of His people. The verdict is "guilty." So the judgment has a negative side: It condemns a guilty power.

The judgment also has a positive side:

As I watched in the night visions, I saw one like a human being coming with the clouds of heaven. And he came to the Ancient One and was presented before him. To him was given dominion and glory and kingship, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall not pass away, and his kingship is one that shall never be destroyed (Dan 7:13-14).

One "like a human being," literally "son of man," is presented before God in heaven and he receives the kingdom (Dan 7:13). Who could that be? It must be Christ, who often described Himself as the Son of Man (Matt 8:20; 9:6; 10:23, etc.) to emphasize the unique way in which He became a human being. It would be strange for any other person to use such a description. It goes without saying that we are human and there is nothing unique about this.

Notice the movement of the "one like a human being": "he came to the Ancient One." This is Christ, our High Priest, coming to His Father at His throne in heaven. God's throne is in His sanctuary (compare Ps 11:4; Jer 17:12). So Christ approaches His Father at a time of judgment in the equivalent of the most holy place in the heavenly sanctuary.

Christ's movement parallels the movement of the Israelite high priest when he approached God in the most holy place on the Day of Atonement, Israel's judgment day (Lev 16). Daniel 7 depicts the great end-time Day of Atonement, the same event as the cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary in Daniel 8:14.

When Christ comes to His Father, He receives kingship. While the arrogant "horn" loses in the judgment, Christ wins.

If there is a court case that results in one party winning and the other losing, it is because the two parties are opposed to each other. Through investigation, one is found to be right and the other wrong. The "horn" is opposed to Christ. It speaks arrogant words against "the Most High," oppresses His people, and intends to change God's law. The horn power is a rebel who claims control instead of Christ.

When Christ wins in the judgment, His loyal people win with Him. They are delivered from the oppression of the horn and gain the kingdom: "... the Ancient One came; then judgment was given for the holy ones of the Most High, and the time arrived when the holy ones gained possession of the kingdom" (Dan 7:22; see also verse 27).

Just as the Israelite high priest on the Day of Atonement represented his people before God, so Christ represents His people. Like the ancient Day of Atonement, the end-time judgment distinguishes between two groups: Those who are loyal to God and those who are not.

The connection between the Israelite Day of Atonement and the end-time judgment is reinforced by a linguistic connection between Leviticus 16 and Daniel 8:14. Leviticus 16 says that the altar and the Israelites were "cleansed" through atonement that was done on the Day of Atonement (verses 18-19, 30). Atonement accomplished cleansing.

Daniel 8:14 uses another Hebrew word to describe the restoration of the sanctuary: "And he

answered him, 'For two thousand three hundred evenings and mornings; then the sanctuary *shall be restored to its rightful state.*'" The words "shall be restored to its rightful state" translate one Hebrew word, which means "shall be justified" or "shall be made righteous."

"Cleansing/being pure" in Leviticus 16 and "being just/righteous" in Daniel 8:14 refer to the same thing in two different ways. The Hebrew words are synonyms, as shown by Job 4:17:

"Can mortals be *righteous* before God?
Can human beings be *pure* before their Maker?"

This is called "synonymous parallelism." The second line simply repeats the idea of the first line in different words. "Mortals" is the functional equivalent of "human beings." "*Righteous*" is the equivalent of "*pure*." "God" is the equivalent of "Maker." Words used as synonyms do not have exactly the same meaning whenever they are used. But their meanings overlap, so they can be used as functional equivalents in certain contexts.

The Hebrew word for "righteous" in Job 4:17 is the word used in Daniel 8:14 and the word for being "pure" is the word used in Leviticus 16. So Job 4:17 links Leviticus 16 and Daniel 8:14 by showing that the terms "righteous" and "pure" are synonyms:

Lev 16	Job 4:17	Dan 8:14
	righteous	righteous
pure	pure	

In the contexts of Job 4:17, Leviticus 16, and Daniel 8:14, these words mean basically the same thing: legal cleansing or vindication.

How can a judgment be regarded as justifying God's sanctuary, or making it righteous? Perhaps 2 Samuel 14 can provide a clue. The woman of Tekoa said to David: "... let the king and his throne be clean" (verse 9; my translation). Just as David's throne represented his authority and justice, so God's throne would represent His authority and His justice. Just as David and his justice needed to be legally "clean," so God's justice, represented by His sanctuary, must be vindicated.

God's justice must be justified from what? First, God and His sanctuary need justification as a result of the openly defiant transgressions of the "little horn," which defame God and therefore defile His sanctuary, just as wanton disregard for God's ancient worship system defiled the Israelite sanctuary (Lev 20:3; Num 19:13, 20). The "little horn" is particularly guilty because it does not merely ignore part of God's sacrificial system (compare Num 19:13, 20) and participate in an alternate system (compare Lev 20:3). It removes part of God's system (regular/daily worship by God's people) and sets up an alternate system (Dan 8:11-13; 11:31; 12:11).

Defilement of God's sanctuary/reputation by the "little horn" is illegitimate defilement. It "throws" sins at God rather than humbly laying them at His feet through legitimate sacrifice. Just as the cases of Israelites who committed wanton sins of illegitimate defilement were not under consideration for redemption by cleansing on the Day of Atonement, the "little horn" is already condemned before the judgment. It does not receive forgiveness in a first stage of atonement and therefore it is ineligible for the second stage.

A second reason why God and His sanctuary would need justification is because God forgives guilty people, calls them "holy ones of the Most High," and gives them the dominion of this world (Dan 7-8). Compare 2 Samuel 14, where forgiveness of a guilty person would have affected David's reputation if the woman had not taken the blame herself.

The sanctuary reflects God's reputation. God's reputation matters because it enables Him to govern the universe. If there is something wrong with God, we will have anarchy. God's reputation is staked on perfect love, which includes both perfect justice and perfect mercy. That is a high

standard for Him to live up to, but if He does not, His government is a hypocritical "tour de farce" that is bound to fail. Is God for real or is He trying to delude us with smoke and mirrors? We must know the answer.

By forgiving guilty people like us, God lays Himself open to a charge of injustice. But Christ's blood shows that God has already paid the penalty on our behalf. There is nothing more to pay.

The fact that the Israelite sanctuary was defiled and cleansed as a whole, by the "part for all" principle, implies that similar dynamics apply to God's sanctuary in heaven. But the transfers of evil into and out of the heavenly sanctuary are accomplished by spiritual transactions, without the limitations of an earthly ritual system.

We pray rather than physically leaning our hands on Christ's head, but He bears *our* sins (Isa 53). Christ did not ascend to heaven with a container of His own blood so that He could physically apply it in the temple there, but His blood provides forgiveness and moral cleansing.

Christ does not need to descend to whatever is left of the physical cross on earth in order to cleanse it, as the ancient priest cleansed the outer altar (Lev 16:18-19). The cross is not simply an object; it is an *event*. Christ has carried the "cross event" to heaven in His own person. He is the slaughtered Lamb standing in the heavenly temple (Rev 5:6). The forgiveness transactions in heaven must be vindicated in the judgment, but the physical wooden cross is immaterial to the process.

Now we have an apparent contradiction. Rom 3:25-26 says that Christ's sacrifice *already* provides proof that God is just when He justifies those who have faith in Jesus. But Daniel 8:14 indicates that God is not fully justified until an end-time judgment.

The key here is the fact that God is just when He justifies *those who have faith in Jesus*. Compare Ephesians 2:8 (we are saved by grace *through faith*). God cannot save a person who does not have faith or who abandons faith after receiving forgiveness (see Col 1:21-23). Because of Christ's sacrifice, God is just when He forgives us and continues to regard us as forgiven, provided that we continue to have faith through which we are reconciled to Him (compare Rom 5:1).

It appears that the judgment in Daniel 7-8 should identify God's true people on the basis of their faith. But since God alone can read thoughts (see Ps 139:23; Lk 7:39-40), the judgment must use evidence for faith that can be witnessed by created beings if they are to be assured that God is just. So the judgment considers records (Dan 7:10) of works (Eccl 12:14) that show whether or not true faith exists (Jas 2:26; Gal 5:6). The point is not the works themselves, but whether or not a person has accepted and continues to accept a forgiven and loyal relationship to God.

Other created beings have a major stake in the success of our full recovery from sin. In addition to demonstrating God's justice, the judgment assures them that we will not continue to function as self-replicating moral viruses. As sinners, we are dangerous! What if God were to give us immortality and let us loose on the rest of the universe without totally curing our sin? How would you like it if a physician turned a person infected with the Ebola virus out on the street? If God's unfallen created beings are to feel safe, they must know that He has healed us completely.

The judgment is not about who has sinned. All have sinned (Rom 3:23), so distinctions between people cannot be made on this basis. The judgment is about who is forgiven. For those who are forgiven, it is to reaffirm their assurance, not to take it away. The judgment is *for* God's holy ones (Dan 7:22).

Jesus expressed the need for a sinner to continue accepting forgiveness by maintaining loyalty to Him and His law of love. He said to the woman caught in adultery: "Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again" (Jn 8:11).

Jesus told a parable about an unjust steward who was forgiven the colossal sum of 10,000 talents and then went out and seized his fellow servant by the throat to make him cough up 100 miserable

denarii. Because he did not become a forgiving person as a result of the forgiveness that he had received, he lost it, and his mountain of debt was rolled back on him like an avalanche (Matt 18:23-34).

Forgiveness that involves no moral change and that cannot reproduce itself for the benefit of others is invalidated. To freely receive, we must be willing to freely give.

Fortunately for us, we are not left on our own to change ourselves. Because Christ gives us peace with God (Rom 5:1), His love, the basic attitude of His law, is poured into our hearts through His Spirit (verse 5; compare Matt 22:36-40). Genuine, ongoing obedience is a gift of grace bought by the blood of Christ and received through faith.

It is Christ's blood that cleanses our lives and that cleanses His sanctuary. His blood provides mercy with justice.

Just as the woman of Tekoa desired judgment on her behalf and just as David cried out to God for justice (Ps 26:1; 35:24), we can look forward to judgment as deliverance. However, unlike the woman of Tekoa, we need not offer to bear responsibility for the granting of pardon. Priceless salvation is offered "without money and without price" (Isa 55:1). We can leave to God the cost of mercy.

CHAPTER 35

Enemy

Scott O'Grady's story would not have happened if there had not been a war going on. Enemies shot him down, tried to capture him, and later attempted to blow out of the air the Marine helicopter that carried him to safety.

Our entire world is a war zone. We see people suffering and dying all around us. God is working to save us, but evil does not easily let us go. What or who is this evil power? Who is the enemy? Is there a person or supernatural being behind all this carnage? If so, what does he want? The Bible answers these questions.

On the Day of Atonement, the Israelite community provided "two male goats for a sin offering" (Lev 16:5; my translation). To determine what the functions of these goats would be, the high priest (Aaron) cast lots:

... and Aaron shall cast lots on the two goats, one lot for the Lord and the other lot for Azazel. Aaron shall present the goat on which the lot fell for the Lord, and offer it as a sin offering; but the goat on which the lot fell for Azazel shall be presented alive before the Lord to make atonement over it, that it may be sent away into the wilderness to Azazel (Lev 16:8-10).

Before the high priest cast lots, the goats were interchangeable. They looked the same and either one could be for the Lord or for Azazel. But once the lots were cast, the roles of the goats were fixed.

The high priest did not decide between the two goats. Casting lots was a way to let the Lord decide. Compare the way lots were cast when the Lord designated Saul as the first king of Israel (1 Sam 10:19-24).

One goat was "for the Lord" and the other was "for Azazel." This expression means that one goat belonged to the Lord and the other belonged to Azazel. The same type of expression, including

"for" plus a proper name, was engraved on ancient stone seals that Israelites and people of neighboring countries used to identify objects as belonging to them. When I studied ancient inscriptions at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Professor Naveh brought a bag of seals like this to class every day so that we could read them.

There is a close relationship between the Lord's goat and Azazel's goat. Each had an owner. Since the Lord is a being who could own a goat, Azazel must be some kind of being who could also own a goat.

The goat for the Lord was offered to the Lord as a sin offering to cleanse God's sanctuary. The goat for Azazel was not offered as a sacrifice at all. It is true that Leviticus 16:5 refers to Azazel's goat as a "sin ritual" along with the Lord's goat. The Hebrew word here for "sin ritual" is elsewhere translated as "sin offering." But in the case of the scapegoat, the ritual was not an offering/sacrifice because the goat was not given *to* God as an offering. Rather, according to verse 10, it was sent *away* from God and His sanctuary "into the wilderness to Azazel."

Azazel must be an enemy of the Lord. The Lord directed the Israelites to transport their sins on a goat to Azazel, who ended up with this noxious load. This would be like sending someone a truck full of chemical waste or dumping a load of reeking, maggot infested chicken manure all over his front lawn (not a friendly gesture. Here, Azazel, get a load of this!

If Azazel is an enemy of the Lord, why does Leviticus 16:10 say that the goat functions "to make atonement upon it" (NASB), that is, upon the goat? Sacrificial animals make atonement for people or for the sanctuary. But here atonement is made on the animal itself "that it may be sent away into the wilderness to Azazel." Atonement on the goat does not make atonement for the goat. Rather, it removes sins of the Israelites away from their camp. It is atonement for the Israelites by placing their sins on the goat. By sending evil to destruction, they are freed from that which disturbs their relationship with God.

Atonement on Azazel's goat is atonement in the basic sense of restoring at-one-ness with God by destroying the evil that comes between human beings and God. Compare Numbers 25, where Phinehas, the son of the high priest, made atonement for the Israelites (verse 13) by destroying Zimri and Cozbi, who were flagrantly sinning (verses 6-8). The couple did not receive atonement. Atonement for Israel's benefit was done *on* the man and woman in the sense that they were destroyed. Their actions were coming between Israel and God. When these people were eliminated, God stopped His deadly plague on the Israelites (verse 8).

We automatically think of "atonement" as the kind of atonement that Christ does for us, which is "substitutionary atonement." Christ died in our place, as our Substitute, so that we would not have to die. But a more basic kind of atonement is that in which sinners themselves die so that God's people and universe can be clean and restored to oneness with God.

Ultimately God will destroy sin by destroying all sinners who have not allowed Him to separate their sins from them (Rev 20). But before God destroys sin, He removes all responsibility for it from Himself, as represented by the cleansing of His sanctuary, and He sends the responsibility away from Himself and His people to someone represented by the name "Azazel."

Azazel is an enemy of the Lord and His people who has the sins of the people come to him. He is not Christ. By the time the goat for Azazel is sent away, the people have already been forgiven and the sanctuary has already been cleansed through sacrifices that represent Christ's sacrifice. The Lord's goat represents Christ, the one and only sacrifice that really takes care of our sin (Heb 9:28). We do not need a second Messiah.

The Lord's goat belonged to the Lord and was offered to the Lord, but it also *represented* the Lord, who died for our sins. For the idea that Christ is the Lord, see John 8:58 and 10:30. So the goat that belonged to Azazel and was sent to him *must also represent Azazel*.

The Lord bore the sins of His people by His sacrifice in order to free them from punishment for their sins. Azazel also bears the sins of God's people, but he bears them in a different way.

Some have suggested that Azazel is some kind of demon. If so, his personality is not revealed in Leviticus, perhaps to avoid the danger that people in Old Testament times would have been tempted to worship him. Although Azazel is a shadowy figure in Leviticus, his overall profile is clear and there is only one being in the universe who fits it: Satan.

The name "Satan" is a Hebrew word meaning "adversary." In the Bible, he is God's great enemy (Matt 4:1-11; Lk 10:17-18; Rev 12:7-17). Satan has a lot to do with the sins of God's people. He originated sin in the universe, he caused the human race to fall into sin by tempting Eve, and he tempts us to sin (see for example 1 Cor 7:5).

Satan is the mastermind behind our sins. My sins are also Satan's sins. Christ takes away my responsibility, but Satan, represented by the goat for Azazel, bears his own liability for punishment.

Suppose I belong to a gang that robs a bank. All of us are responsible for the same crime, including the gang leader who directs the operation, those who actually go into the bank, tie up the tellers, and open the vault, and the driver of the getaway car. The same is true when I sin. When I sin, I belong to Satan's "gang." I am responsible for making my own mistakes, but Satan is responsible for tempting me.

The animals used in the Day of Atonement rituals represented either Christ or the enemy, Satan. There were four sacrificial animals that represented Christ. The goat for Azazel represented Satan.

The four sacrificial animals that represented Christ were: a sin offering bull on behalf of the priests, the "Lord's goat," which served as a sin offering for the non-priestly community, a burnt offering ram for the priests, and a burnt offering ram for the community (Lev 16:3, 5, 11-19, 24).

Of the four animals, only the "Lord's goat" has independent significance for the reality to which the Israelite sanctuary pointed. The bull and ram for the priests were necessary because the priests were faulty human beings. But these sacrifices did not point forward to any sacrifice that Christ, our sinless high priest, must offer for Himself. The burnt offering ram for the community had no separate meaning. As elsewhere when a burnt offering was coupled with a sin offering on behalf of the same offerer in this way, the burnt offering simply added to the quantity of the Lord's goat sin offering, making what amounted to a greater sin offering (compare Lev 5:6-7; Num 15:24-28).

The fact that the peoples' burnt offering (Lev 16:24), performed after the scapegoat ritual (verses 20-22), lacks separate significance solves a potential problem. We do not need to look for a further phase of atonement following the banishment/imprisonment of Satan following Christ's Second Coming (Rev 20:1-3), which corresponds to the banishment of Azazel's goat.

Of the animals used in the special Day of Atonement rituals, the Lord's goat carried the meaning of what Christ is doing for us and the goat for Azazel represented Satan. So the cleansing of the sanctuary and camp on the Day of Atonement all boils down to "a tale of two goats." That is the Day of Atonement made simple!

The two goats were indistinguishable until their roles were determined by the Lord (Lev 16:8). They were just Billy the Goat and Billy the Goat (not Billy the Kid; they were grown goats). Just so, human beings are not capable of distinguishing between Christ and Satan by themselves, but must rely upon the Lord to identify them.

Azazel's goat stood in the courtyard, where the altar is, as witness to the proceedings. Similarly, Satan remains as witness to what God is doing for us on earth. It is earth where the cross, represented by the altar, was located (see Rev 11:1-2; 12:7-17).

In addition to his role as tempter, Satan is a witness against us. Having lured us into sins, he condemns us for these same sins (Zech 3:1-2). This is called "entrapment." As the original liar (Jn

8:44), Satan is not content to correctly point out that people have sinned. He is also "the accuser of our brethren" (Rev 12:10), who tries to destroy God's people by slandering those who have been justly forgiven (compare Rom 3:26).

By accusing us, Satan identifies and implicates himself. He is like a mugger who attacked my wife's cousin when he was a computer science student at the University of California in Berkeley. George was walking home after a late night study session at the library. He heard a sound in the bushes by his apartment and realized that someone was there. In a panic, George told him to go away or he would call the police. At that point the man emerged from the bushes, attacked George, and disappeared.

George went inside and called the police, who rounded up a group of suspects. The next day George was called in to the police department to identify the mugger in a lineup of the suspects. But since the attack was at night, George couldn't distinguish one suspect from another. The puzzle was broken, however, when one of the suspects pointed at George and protested angrily to the police: "He threatened me!"

Satan tells the truth when he says that we have sinned. But when we accept forgiveness through Christ and Satan goes on accusing us of not belonging to God (Rev 12:10), at that point Satan is lying. Not only is he lying, he is a malicious, false witness, who is trying to destroy us by his lies. In the Bible there is a law that tells what should be done with such a witness:

If a malicious witness comes forward to accuse someone of wrongdoing, then both parties to the dispute shall appear before the Lord, before the priests and the judges who are in office in those days, and the judges shall make a thorough inquiry. If the witness is a false witness, having testified falsely against another, then you shall do to the false witness just as the false witness had meant to do to the other. So you shall purge the evil from your midst. The rest shall hear and be afraid, and a crime such as this shall never again be committed among you. Show no pity: life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot (Deut 19:16-21).

In addition to the facts that Satan originated sin, commits sins of his own, and instigated the death of Christ, there are two more good reasons for him to go to hell. First, he tempts people to sin and therefore shares blame for their sins. Second, he is a malicious false witness who will receive the punishment that those whom he falsely accuses would have received if they had not been vindicated (compare Deut 19:16-21; Num 5:31).

Azazel's goat, carrying the sins of the Israelites, represents Satan bearing responsibility with regard to human sins that is *his own responsibility*. The penalty that he will receive as a malicious witness is the penalty that God's true people *would have* received if they had been proven in the judgment to be unforgiven. But the responsibility is his as a false witness; it is not their actual responsibility at all.

Satan does not carry a molecule of my own responsibility. Christ bore that at the cross. Satan is not my substitute in *any* sense whatsoever. Only Christ is my substitute.

Satan condemns me whether I am saved or lost. If I am lost, he is not a false witness in this case. But if I am saved, he is lying when he says I am not forgiven. So the more people are saved, the greater Satan's responsibility and punishment as a false witness will be. The more people are lost, the less his punishment will be. No wonder Satan is roaring around trying to get people to be lost!

The Israelites got rid of their sins by sending them back to their source. "Chickens come home to roost." "What goes around comes around." "Whoever digs a pit will fall into it, and a stone will come back on the one who starts it rolling" (Prov 26:27). Satan is that source. Once he is put away forever, there will be no more temptations and accusations. Only then will God's people be completely secure and free from evil.

Years ago I was painting a wall with another worker. We passed the time by talking about the Bible.

But when I referred to the role of Satan in causing trouble in the universe, he indignantly replied: "To hell with the Devil!" I certainly agree that the Devil belongs in hell and the sooner the better, but we cannot simply dismiss his influence as my fellow worker did. It is naive to ignore Satan when he has been followed by a third of the angels (Rev 12:3, 4, 9), is like a roaring lion seeking to devour us (1 Pet 5:8), and is pent up here on earth like a bee in a bottle, knowing that his time is short (Rev 12:12). To ignore Satan would be like ignoring Hitler in Europe in 1944.

We know that God is fully able to protect us from Satan, but in the Bible God warns us about the enemy just as the U.S. military undoubtedly told O'Grady about the enemy in Bosnia. When you are in a war, you need to know who and what you are up against!

CHAPTER 36

Strategy

To win a war or rescue someone from a war zone, you need good strategy. You need to know the moves of the enemy and how to counter them.

The Bible reveals the strategies of God and Satan in a great war they have been fighting for thousands of years. Rituals at the Israelite sanctuary showed the overall contours of the conflict. We have found that Christ's sacrifice solves the problems of sin and death that originated with Satan and are being perpetuated by him.

Satan wants us to rebel against God so that we will refuse the life that He offers through Christ. But Christ draws us to Himself, lifted up on the cross.

Satan wants us to die with him in the fires of hell even though we have come to Christ. Misery loves company. But God forgives us, transforms us, reaffirms/vindicates our forgiveness in the judgment, and shows that Satan rather than God is behind our problems.

The fact that God forgives us and then reaffirms our forgiveness suggests that God is answering a challenge, or at least the possibility of a challenge, to His justice. Why can't God simply forgive us? Why does He need to reaffirm the forgiveness that He has already given? Reaffirming forgiveness is necessary to show that the forgiveness God offers has really been accepted.

Zechariah 3:1-4 shows that the challenge God faces comes from Satan:

Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the Lord, and Satan standing at his right hand to accuse him. And the Lord said to Satan, "The Lord rebuke you, Satan! Indeed, the Lord who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you! Is this not a brand plucked from the fire?" Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments and standing before the angel. And he spoke and said to those who were standing before him saying, "Remove the filthy garments from him." Again he said to him, "See, I have taken your iniquity away from you and will clothe you with festal robes" (NASB).

This passage explicitly connects the sanctuary/temple with the great conflict between God and Satan. Joshua was the high priest at the temple, whose function was to bear the sins of his people (Exod 28:38; Lev 10:17). Garments represent works, as in Revelation 19:8, where the fine linen of the bride represents the "righteous deeds of the saints."

In Zechariah 3, the high priest had filthy garments because his works and those of his people were sinful. Although Satan's words are not quoted here, his accusation must have been: "They're mine

now! Look at their filthy sins!"

Satan's attitude reminds me of an undertaker who employed a friend of mine as a mortician. When the undertaker wrote a letter to someone, he didn't finish with the words "Yours truly," but rather, "Eventually mine." It sounds like a macabre joke, but Satan isn't joking when he says "eventually mine." He wants to permanently separate us from God and to discourage us by making us think we are too bad to save.

Satan was correct when he accused the high priest and his people. They had sinned. Satan ought to know. He had tempted them to commit the very sins of which he now accused them!

The fact that Satan tempts us makes him responsible for his influence. But we are also tempted by our own desire and we are responsible for the choices we make: "But one is tempted by one's own desire, being lured and enticed by it; then, when that desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin, and that sin, when it is fully grown, gives birth to death. Do not be deceived, my beloved" (Jas 1:14-16).

Satan uses our desires in order to lead us into sin, just as he used Eve's desire for the fruit of a tree to tempt her. The apostle Paul refers to a way in which Satan can use sexual desire of married people as a basis for temptation: "Do not deprive one another except perhaps by agreement for a set time, to devote yourselves to prayer, and then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control" (1 Cor 7:5). There is nothing *inherently* wrong with the desire to eat fruit or to have sexual relations. But Satan tries to get us to fulfill our desires in ways that violate God's law of love.

In the 1960s there was a comedian who used to get barrels of laughs by saying: "The Devil made me do it!" But Satan can't *make* you sin: "No testing has overtaken you that is not common to everyone. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with the testing he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it" (1 Cor 10:13).

If you and I fall, it is because we do not take the way out that God provides. Satan can make temptations painfully strong, as he did when he tempted Christ, but we can overcome as Christ did: by trusting in God and His word (Matt 4:1-11).

Now to him *who is able to keep you from falling*, and to make you stand without blemish in the presence of his glory with rejoicing, to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, power, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen (Jude 1:24-25).

God will reward those who overcome: "Blessed is anyone who endures temptation. Such a one has stood the test and will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him" (Jas 1:12).

In Zechariah's vision, the Lord didn't respond to Satan by saying that His people weren't sinful. What He did was to remove their sins and cleanse them, as represented by the change of garments on the high priest.

The issue raised by Satan is the connection between human beings and their God, as shown by their works. God answers Satan's challenge in order to demonstrate to the universe that when He saves someone, He does the job right. God is not being unfair, and therefore unloving, by saving some without true faith but condemning others. He is not a hypocrite who holds others to a standard of love that He Himself cannot keep. He is not threatening the security of the universe by turning loose criminals who are not really rehabilitated.

Now that we have an overall feel for the strategies of God and Satan, let's go back to the beginning and trace the way in which God and Satan have countered each other:

Satan challenged God's supremacy, saying: "I will ascend to the tops of the clouds, I will make myself like the Most High" (Isa 14:14).

Satan fought against "Michael" in heaven, but Satan lost and was thrown down to the earth with the

angels who had followed him (Rev 12:7-9). These were a third of all the angels (verse 4).

God created Adam and Eve, but Satan tempted them and they fell into sin (Gen 3). Since Adam and Eve followed his word instead of God's, Satan became the ruler of Planet Earth (Jn 12:31) and its representative (Job 1:6-7).

When God cursed the serpent through which Satan tempted Eve, he said: "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will strike your head, and you will strike his heel" (Gen 3:15). In this way God promised deliverance through a future descendant of Eve. Even before that time Satan would not enjoy a peaceful rule over his human subjects. In spite of Satan's protestations (Job 1:9-11), God has been intervening in the world all the way up to the present, influencing human beings to rebel against Satan's reign of terror, death, and darkness. For a time, God even set up His sanctuary as His headquarters on earth.

Satan accused God's people of sin, but God rebuked him and transformed their lives in order to invalidate Satan's accusation (Zech 3:1-5).

Christ came to us as a human being so that He could bring us God's presence in a more intimate way that we could better comprehend. Satan tempted Christ in order to prevent His ministry.

While overcoming Satan's temptations, Christ worked to defeat Satan's hold on the people of this world. He rejoiced when the seventy disciples whom He had sent out returned and told Him that even the demons submitted to them: "He said to them, 'I watched Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lightning. See, I have given you authority to tread on snakes and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy; and nothing will hurt you'" (Lk 10:18-19). Satan's reign as the "ruler of this world" was coming to an end.

Satan incited national leaders and Judas to destroy Christ (see for example Jn 13:27). But it was precisely through Christ's death that God defeated Satan and took away his right to be the "ruler of this world": "Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.' He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die" (Jn 12:31-33).

When Christ died and rose again, Satan suffered a major loss. By defeating Satan, who usurped our dominion, Christ judged the world in that He gained justice for the world. "Judgment" here refers to salvation, just as the "judges" in the book of Judges were deliverers who obtained justice for their people by driving out foreign oppressors (see Judg 3:9-10).

Christ has not yet fully taken over the world from Satan's control, but His sacrifice makes ultimate victory certain. Satan can no longer claim to own the world on the basis of the argument that he owns the entire human race to whom God originally gave the dominion. Through what Christ has done, His Father "has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins" (Col 1:13-14).

Until Christ's death, Satan could claim even forgiven people as his rightful prey and he could say that God was unjust when He forgave and saved those who believed in Him. But in Christ, God took the responsibility for forgiving guilty but repentant people (compare 2 Sam 14:9) and bore their full penalty on the cross. God is vindicated as just when He justifies those who believe (Rom 3:26). This does not mean that God had to pay off Himself or Satan. Rather, it means that in order to remain a God of love, He remains fully just when He grants mercy.

After Christ's death, Satan is down to his last argument when he tries to claim people who have been forgiven through faith in Christ. Romans 3:26 says that God is "just and the justifier *of the one who has faith in Jesus*" (NASB). But God is not just if He justifies a person who refuses to trust in Jesus. So Satan can continue to accuse God's people (Rev 12:10) by saying that they do not have faith or that they have lost their faith. Faith is an ongoing condition for our salvation:

And you who were once estranged and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his fleshly body through death, so as to present you holy and blameless and irreproachable before him *provided that you continue* securely established and steadfast in the faith, without shifting from the hope promised by the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven (Col 1:21-23).

Do not, therefore, abandon that confidence of yours; it brings a great reward. For you need endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised. For yet "in a very little while, the one who is coming will come and will not delay; but my righteous one will live by faith. My soul takes no pleasure in anyone who shrinks back." But we are not among those who shrink back and so are lost, but among those who have faith and so are saved (Heb 10:35-39).

Faith is not simply saying "yes" to God in your mind or by your words. Real, living faith has ongoing action as its natural result, just as a living human body has a pulse. If there is no continuous pulse, the body is dead. James said: "For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is also dead" (Jas 2:26). Paul said: "the only thing that counts is faith working through love" (Gal 5:6). Faith that does not work through love, which is the basis of God's law (Matt 22:36-40), is not true faith.

Works are a symptom of faith. If your works are unloving, your faith is sick, in a coma, or perhaps even dead. If your faith is dead, you obviously do not have real, living faith. If so, you lack a vital part of the salvation equation: grace + faith = salvation (Eph 2:8-9).

Only God can read our thoughts of faith (compare Ps 139:23; Lk 7:39-40). So the evidence that Satan points to is the visible result of our faith or lack thereof, namely, our works. God counters Satan's accusation by using a judgment of works to show the universe that His people have true faith (Eccl 12:14; Dan 7:10). The judgment is not to inform God. He already knows what our faith is like. But to demonstrate His justice He must use evidence that His created beings can see. What would be the point of bringing "Exhibit A," "Exhibit B," and "Exhibit C" into a courtroom if they were invisible to those present?

God calls His people to perfection/maturity and holiness (Matt 5:48; 2 Cor 7:1; Eph 4:13; 1 Pet 1:15, 16), but the basic issue in the judgment is whether or not they continue to accept through faith the grace He gives them. If His grace matures them to the extent that they do not continue to sin at all, what counts is not their sinless perfection as much as the fact that they are accepting God's grace.

When the judgment is finished, Satan will have no more arguments left. God will have successfully borne the cost of mercy all the way to the end. He will have vindicated Himself by vindicating what He has done for His people. When the Judge is shown to be fully just, there can be no question about the forgiveness that He has granted. Satan's lies and responsibility for sin will stand fully exposed. No longer can he link the destiny of God's people with his own fate and hold them hostage as a terrorist shields himself with his victim.

Once the judgment is complete, God can condemn Satan for his part in the sins of those who are saved, without also condemning those who are saved. This condemnation of Satan was acted out in the Israelite Day of Atonement when the high priest confessed the sins of Israel over Azazel's goat and banished it to the wilderness (Lev 16:21).

When Satan is condemned, he will be silenced and his temptations will stop. The book of Revelation describes the same event:

And I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key of the abyss and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold of the dragon, the serpent of old, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, and threw him into the abyss, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he

should not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were completed; after these things he must be released for a short time (Rev 20:1-3; NASB).

After Satan is imprisoned for a thousand years, he will be let out to perish in the lake of fire (Rev 20:10).

The key to God's strategy is Christ's sacrifice, through which God forgives us, gives us His transforming Spirit, and then reaffirms our forgiveness on the basis of what He has done in our lives.

Whether or not you come to Christ, Satan will try to make sure that you die the "second death" with him. But if you hold on to Christ and say with Jacob, "I will not let you go, unless you bless me" (Gen 32:26), there is nothing Satan can do. With all his strategy and power, he is no match for God, who patiently works out His will for us and for the well-being of the entire universe.

CHAPTER 37

Education

When the United States military wanted to save Scott O'Grady from the enemy, why didn't it simply nuke Bosnia to destroy the enemy? The reason is obvious: That would have destroyed Scott and other innocent people along with the enemy. It would have been quick, but it would not have been a happy solution to O'Grady's problem. The U.S. had to use a more time-consuming method that involved greater risks for the people who were involved in rescuing O'Grady.

If God is so all-powerful that He could speak the world into existence (Gen 1), why didn't He just vaporize Satan with a few words? Why don't we read at the end of Genesis 3: *"And God said, 'Let Satan vanish.' And Satan vanished. And God saw that Satan was no more and that peace was restored again to the earth. And God saw the peace that He had made and behold, it was very good"*?

God could have deleted Satan from the universe as fast as I can delete the word "Satan" from my computer screen. But what would He have accomplished? The problem was not simply with Satan himself, but with the rebellious ideas that he had raised in the minds of God's created beings. These ideas could easily outlive Satan. How do you kill an idea?

The prophet Isaiah describes how sin began in the heart of a being referred to as "Day Star, son of Dawn," whom we know as Lucifer or Satan:

How you are fallen from heaven, O Day Star, son of Dawn! How you are cut down to the ground, you who laid the nations low! You said in your heart, "I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God; I will sit on the mount of assembly on the heights of Zaphon; I will ascend to the tops of the clouds, I will make myself like the Most High" (Isa 14:12-14).

"I will make myself like the Most High"! This is not the same idea as Lev 19:2: "You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy." Lucifer didn't want to imitate God's holy character. He wanted to have the power and authority of the Most High.

Sounds appealing! I will be my own God. I will be in charge of my own life. W. E. Henley said it eloquently in a poem commonly known as "Invictus":

It matters not how strait the gate,
How charged with punishments the scroll,

I am the master of my fate:
I am the captain of my soul.

Eve fell for Satan's idea, spoken through a serpent:

But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not die; for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and *you will be like God*, knowing good and evil." So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate (Gen 3:4-6).

According to the book of Revelation, many angels had fallen for Satan's idea:

And there was war in heaven, Michael and his angels waging war with the dragon. And the dragon and his angels waged war, and they were not strong enough, and there was no longer a place found for them in heaven. And the great dragon was thrown down, the serpent of old who is called the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him (Rev 12:7-9; NASB).

How many angels fell for and with Satan? Revelation 12:4 tells us that the dragon was responsible for taking down "a third of the stars of heaven," referring to a third of the angels.

How many angels are there? We don't have a precise count, but Daniel describes some of the loyal two thirds in God's heavenly throne room: "A thousand thousands served him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood attending him" (Dan 7:10). The apostle John had a similar vision: "Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels surrounding the throne and the living creatures and the elders; they numbered myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands" (Rev 5:11). That sounds like a lot of angels.

We are not alone in the universe! God is responsible for the well-being of many other beings whom He has created.

In addition to angels, God may have several or many worlds like ours. There is a hint of this possibility in Job 1:6-7:

One day the heavenly beings came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came among them. The Lord said to Satan, "Where have you come from?" Satan answered the Lord, "From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking up and down on it."

This passage describes a heavenly council that took place in Old Testament times. Why was Satan there? To represent Planet Earth. In the beginning, God had given Adam and Eve dominion over the earth (Gen 1:28). They had been the rightful representatives of the planet. But by falling for Satan's temptation (Gen 3), they gave their dominion to him (Jn 12:31). In this way, they elected him as their representative to the heavenly Congress! If Satan represented Planet Earth at a heavenly council and if there were other representatives there as well, it appears that they were representing other worlds.

Just because Satan and his angels have been thrown down to earth does not mean that he has quit fighting: "But woe to the earth and the sea, for the devil has come down to you with great wrath, because he knows that his time is short" (Rev 12:12)! Now we can better understand why the world is in such a mess. It is a cosmic battleground. Including the human population of earth and the angels, there are millions of created beings on each side of a battle that has raged for thousands of years and is intensifying toward a climactic end.

It is true that we cannot see angels unless they choose to become visible, but Satan and his angels do affect us. We are struggling against supernatural forces of darkness (Eph 6:12). But to encourage us, the apostle Paul wrote:

For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom 8:38-39).

God is the all-powerful Creator of everything. Satan is only a created being. God threw Satan out of heaven against his will. When Jesus had enough of Satan's temptations, He said: "Away with you, Satan! for it is written, 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him'" (Matt 4:10). What could Satan do? He had no choice but to leave (verse 11).

God is stronger than Satan. Thousands of years ago God could have wiped out Satan and all sinners. In this way God would have prevented all the nauseating suffering caused by bloodthirsty tyrants such as Hitler, Stalin, Mao, Pol Pot, and so on. But would that wipe out sin? The angels who followed Satan's ideas were once unfallen. Who is to say that angels and other beings who are now unfallen would not follow Satan's course after Satan is gone?

If God used too much force, He would actually increase the risk of rebellion. Force can create destructive fear and perfect fear casts out love, just as "perfect love casts out fear" (1 Jn 4:18). It is healthy to be God-fearing in the sense of having awe-inspired respect for the Lord and His power, but if God's created beings were to fear Him in the negative sense of having no feeling for Him but terror, they would not want Him as their God. They would want to be their own gods, to be like the Most High. And God would be back to square one.

If God wiped out sinners too soon, there would be a question as to whether all of them were really beyond hope of rehabilitation. Some savable people would be lost. Jesus told the parable of the "wheat and the weeds" to show how God lets loyal and disloyal people coexist until they have developed to the point that they can be easily separated (Matt 13:24-30).

God uses restraint so that everyone can make a free and honest choice. Remember Revelation 3:20: Christ stands at the door and knocks. He doesn't want to break the door down and make robots out of us. He wants our love. Robots cannot love.

Love is not a mushy, slushy, candy-coated, sentimental whim that you "fall into" every so often when the perfume or aftershave blows in the right direction. It is the moral foundation of the universe. Love is the only basis on which intelligent beings with free choice can coexist harmoniously. Without love, we destroy each other. If you doubt it, glance at the newspaper or flip on the evening news.

What if God simply said: "O.K. Enough is enough. You want to serve yourselves and Satan. Go ahead. I'm pulling out." Would that be a loving thing for Him to do? Without God's kind of love there is only MAD, mutual assured destruction. God's government is the only one with any possibility of long-term survival because He is love (1 Jn 4:8) and therefore love is the basis of His law (Matt 22:36-40). God is not going to abandon people to Satan without giving them a fair chance any more than the Allies were willing to abandon Europe to Nazi rule.

If up to our day God has not been able to wipe out Satan and sinners in such a way that He gives the universe a clean break from sin, how will He be able to do it in the future? Revelation 20-21 describes the utter destruction of sin by fire and complete restoration of a perfect Earth. What is God doing to make that possible? The answer is: God is progressively educating the universe. The events and teachings recorded in the Bible, including those revealed in the sanctuary services, and the ongoing activity of the Holy Spirit are all part of this process.

The life and death of Christ are a crucial part of our education. Not only did the cross event reclaim us for Christ, it unmasked, for all created beings to see, the hideous depths to which evil could sink. Christ came to heal and to speak words of hope and love. Satan incited human beings to kill their gentle Lord in the most painful, humiliating way possible. But I cannot put all the blame on Satan and people who lived two thousand years ago. Christ died for my sins too. I added to His suffering.

It is only by gazing at Christ on the cross that I realize the depths to which I have sunk.

Now that Christ has died, why is God waiting so long to put an end to evil? Satan is an actor, a con artist, and a spin doctor. He convinced a third of the angels. For beings as mentally and spiritually dull as the human race, it takes awhile to catch on to Satan's slippery slithers.

Our problem is ignorance. Education takes time. We have difficulty understanding what God is like. We have many prejudices and hang-ups for God to overcome: "For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I shall know fully just as I also have been fully known" (1 Cor 13:12; NASB).

Human beings often rebel against God out of ignorance. They do not know what they are doing. King Manasseh hurt many people and made a point of insulting God. But he didn't really know what he was doing because he didn't know God. When God finally got through to him, he finally recognized the Lord for who He was (2 Chron 33:13).

Jesus acknowledged human ignorance. When He was being nailed to the cross, He prayed for those who were torturing Him: "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing" (Lk 23:34).

God progressively pulls aside the veil of our ignorance. As we understand more, we have a better opportunity and responsibility to make informed choices about God. This was true for the ancient Israelites, who were responsible for offering sacrifices for inadvertent sins only when these sins became known to them (Lev 4:27-28). The New Testament expresses the same idea: "While God has overlooked the times of human ignorance, now he commands all people everywhere to repent" (Acts 17:30). "Anyone, then, *who knows the right thing to do* and fails to do it, commits sin" (Jas 4:17).

When our daughter was six years old, my wife and I purchased her a golden retriever puppy. Little "Shadow" was only five weeks old and unbelievably cute, but he had a lot to learn. We had to teach him to go outside when necessary. We also had to train him to use his needle-like teeth on his chewing toys rather than on furniture, carpet, or hands and legs. As he grew, he had new lessons to learn. For example, when Shadow was four months old he discovered one evening that he could reach my supper on the kitchen deck. When I arrived, he was licking the last morsels off the floor. To have something to eat, I put some bread in the toaster. When I returned a few minutes later, I caught the lanky pup with both paws up on the deck, eating my toast right out of the toaster! That was a "no-no!" Shadow was young and inexperienced. We did not hold him as accountable for his mistakes as we do now that he is older. I am thankful that God lets me grow in the same way.

God reveals Himself to us progressively throughout our individual lives, and this kind of progress continues from one generation to another. The faith of our fathers and mothers inspires us, but God leads us on beyond the point reached by our fathers and mothers. We can build on their knowledge and experience.

As God educates us, He also teaches the other beings in His universe what He is like. Their God is also our God. The universe is His classroom.

If you were Satan and you knew that God could destroy you when He had educated the universe enough to totally discredit your idea that a created being can be God, what would you do? For one thing, you would try to mess up His students by separating them from God through ignorance, sin, and discouragement. Peter wrote:

Discipline yourselves, keep alert. Like a roaring lion your adversary the devil prowls around, looking for someone to devour. Resist him, steadfast in your faith, for you know that your brothers and sisters in all the world are undergoing the same kinds of suffering (1 Pet 5:8).

There's a lion loose in the classroom! His efforts are becoming more desperate as his doom

approaches. Like a losing basketball team during the last seconds before the final bell, Satan and his team are going all out.

Satan may cause us temporary grief and suffering, but he cannot do eternal damage as long as we hold on to God by faith. Satan is fighting a losing battle. People are being drawn to Christ and transformed through the power of His Spirit. Satan does not want to let us go any more than Pharaoh wanted to lose the Israelites, or Hitler wanted to give up Europe, or Scott O'Grady's enemies wanted to let him go. But there is nothing Satan can do about it. Since Christ died on the cross, he cannot claim us as his rightful prey.

Satan reminds me of a cat from whom I rescued a lizard. That cat glared at me with pure hatred. I have no doubt that if it had been a lion instead of a house cat, it would have torn me to pieces in an instant. But the cat couldn't do anything because I was bigger.

Education takes time. Nuking the classroom will not speed up the process. But God's titanic plan to educate and rescue His people will go through to completion in spite of the icebergs of ignorance, confusion, doubt, and division that Satan tries to put in its way. Don't abandon the ship. It is the icebergs that will sink!

Part VII: Appointment With God

CHAPTER 38

Timing

For O'Grady's rescue operation, timing was of the essence. Planes had to leave from different places and go into Bosnia at the same time. So the helicopters from the *Kearsarge* circled over the Adriatic Sea for 45 minutes until the other planes arrived from elsewhere (*Time*, June 19, 1995, p. 25).

O'Grady also needed to be ready at the right time. He could not see the planes when they met each other, but he was ready to meet the Marine helicopters when they landed. It only took him a few seconds to get on board. If he had been off somewhere else wandering around and not paying attention, his rescue would have been much more difficult.

Timing is important for us in our daily lives. Missing an appointment is not a pleasant experience. When I was a college student in California, I did miss an appointment. I was practicing the piano at my parents' home and received a phone call informing me that I was supposed to be on the platform to speak at a student worship service held in a chapel on campus. The program had already started. I told the person calling to have the students sing some more songs and I would be there right away.

I jumped in my '67 Saab, but it wouldn't start! So I ran down the street, through a trail in the woods, and up across campus. When I arrived, flustered and sweaty, the students were leaving the chapel. They had given up on me. They had been in the right place at the right time, but I had not. I was so upset with my car that I got it running and promptly sold it.

Christ keeps His appointments. "For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly" (Rom 5:6). The "right time" was the time of the Passover festival. Christ was symbolized by the Passover lamb, so He was slain at Passover when the lamb was slain (Jn 19:14). He also rose from the dead as the "first fruits of those who have fallen asleep" (1 Cor 15:20) at the right time: on the day after the Sabbath following Passover, when an Israelite priest offered a first fruits offering to God (Lev 23:11).

The Holy Spirit keeps His appointments. He came upon Christ's followers with mighty power so that there was a great "harvest" of conversions on the festival day of Pentecost (Acts 2), which celebrated the beginning of the wheat harvest (Lev 23:16-20).

Christ's death and resurrection and the outpouring of the Spirit happened on the days when the sanctuary festivals that pointed forward to these events took place. In each case a sanctuary symbol and the historical event that it predicted came together on the same day.

In each case the historical event began something that continued after that. Christ's death made provision for our ongoing atonement. When He was raised from the dead He continued to live. The Spirit poured out at Pentecost did not come to visit for only one day; He came to stay, beginning an era in which God's people are sealed by the Holy Spirit (Eph 1:13)

What about the judgment that is represented by the cleansing of the sanctuary on the Day of Atonement? In light of the way in which Passover, the wave sheaf, and Pentecost were fulfilled, we could expect the Day of Atonement judgment to come or at least begin on the tenth day of the seventh month, when the Day of Atonement was observed at the sanctuary. If so, can we know the year in which this would happen?

In the next chapters we will answer the question of the year. But before we put forth the effort to get

into that, we can ask: So what? What difference does it make whether we know the time of the judgment or not? Christ told us to live godly lives in preparation for His return *any* time (Matt 24:42). So why should we know when the judgment begins?

The short answer to this question is: So that we might participate in the judgment event. God told the Israelites exactly when the Day of Atonement began so that they could be ready for it:

Now, *the tenth day of this seventh month* is the day of atonement; it shall be a holy convocation for you: you shall deny yourselves... and you shall do no work during that entire day; for it is a day of atonement, to make atonement on your behalf before the Lord your God... It shall be to you a sabbath of complete rest, and you shall deny yourselves; *on the ninth day of the month at evening, from evening to evening* you shall keep your sabbath (Lev 23:27, 28, 32).

This passage from Leviticus 23 focuses on what the Israelites were to be doing when the high priest was in the sanctuary, making atonement on their behalf. They were to acknowledge what was being done for them by practicing self-denial (fasting, etc.) and by not working. If they did not have this experience of humbling themselves before God and concentrating on what He was doing for them, they would lose the benefit of atonement.

The Israelites had an appointment with God on the Day of Atonement. They needed to know when the day began so that their experience would be appropriate for what was happening. Nobody could see the high priest when he was in the sanctuary cleansing the most holy place and the holy place (Lev 16:17). But the Israelites knew when to practice self-denial and to abstain from work because God told them: from the evening of the ninth day of the seventh month to the evening of the tenth day (Lev 23:27, 32).

The ancient Israelites were to participate in the Day of Atonement at a particular time when the high priest was cleansing the sanctuary on their behalf. This indicates that people who live at the time of God's judgment should also participate in the event when Christ, our High Priest, cleanses God's heavenly sanctuary. If so, how can we know when to have this experience? Just as the Israelites could not take their cues by physically watching their high priest, so we cannot literally see what Christ is doing in the heavenly sanctuary.

We can only know when God's judgment begins if He tells us the date. God controls the timing.

CHAPTER 39



Date—Part 1

In the Bible, God tells us the date when the judgment begins. But He does not simply state the year in a modern way. The Bible is not a modern book. It was written before our B.C.-A.D. way of counting years was invented. Also, it appears that God gives us the year in a roundabout way because He wants us to think about events leading up to the judgment.

In Daniel 8:14, God tells us when the judgment begins: "For two thousand three hundred evenings and mornings; then the sanctuary shall be restored to its rightful state."

The expression "restored to its rightful state" could also be translated: "justified." This is a good way to describe a judgment that was foreshadowed by the ancient Day of Atonement. On the Day of Atonement, the sanctuary was justified, meaning that God was cleared from any possible charges of injustice.

The judgment to which the Day of Atonement pointed is to begin at the end of 2,300 evenings and mornings (Dan 8:14). How do we arrive at a date for the end of this period? Our first clue is found in Daniel 8:13, the previous verse: "Then I heard a holy one speaking, and a holy one said to the one who spoke, 'Until when is the vision: the regular (worship), and the giving of the desolating transgression, and a sanctuary, and the trampling of a host?'" (my translation). The answer to this question is the 2,300 evenings and mornings (verse 14). During this period there would be problems such as "the desolating transgression." But the problems would be solved when the sanctuary would be cleansed.

The problems to which Daniel 8:13 refers in abbreviated fashion are described more fully in verses 9-12:

Out of one of them came another horn, a little one, which grew exceedingly great toward the south, toward the east, and toward the beautiful land. It grew as high as the host of heaven. It threw down to the earth some of the host and some of the stars, and trampled on them. Even against the prince of the host it acted arrogantly; it took the regular burnt offering away from him and overthrew the place of his sanctuary. Because of wickedness, the host was given over to it together with the regular burnt offering; it cast truth to the ground, and kept prospering in what it did.

Who is the "little horn?" The Hebrew of verse 9 refers to it as "a horn from littleness" (my translation). That is, it begins little. But it grows to become a big horn. We could call it "the little big horn." Daniel uses this symbol to refer to a power that does certain things. If we can identify it, we will have a better idea of when the 2,300 evenings and mornings end (Dan 8:13-14).

The "little horn" arises after a succession of powers. A ram with two horns (verses 3-4) represents the kings/kingdom of *Media and Persia* (verse 20), which captured Babylon in 539 B.C. and dominated the Middle East for two centuries. A male goat with one horn, which smashed the ram (verses 5-7), represents the king/kingdom of *Greece*, and its horn stands for the first king (verse 21). This king must be Alexander the Great, who conquered the Medo-Persian empire in the 330s B.C. When he died, his kingdom was split into four Greek/Hellenistic kingdoms, represented by four horns in Daniel 8:8, 22. The four kingdoms were: Ptolemaic Egypt, Seleucid Syria, Attalid Pergamum, and Antigonid Macedonia.

The "little horn" arises at the end of the rule of the four Greek kingdoms (Dan 8:23), and comes from one of the four winds/directions toward which Alexander's empire was divided. We read in Daniel 8:8-9: "... the great horn was broken, and in its place there came up four prominent horns toward the four *winds of heaven*. Out of *one of them* came another horn, a little one." The "four winds" refer to the four directions of the compass, as shown by comparison with Jeremiah 49:36.

English translations of Daniel 8:8-9 allow for the possibility that the "little horn" comes out of one of the four Greek horns, but this is ruled out by the Hebrew syntax. The Hebrew word for "them" in "Out of one of them" is *masculine* in grammatical gender. But the word for "horn" in "the great horn was broken" is *feminine*. The same feminine word for "horn" is understood/supplied in "four prominent (horns)," even though "horns" does not actually appear in the Hebrew text at this point. In Hebrew, a pronoun such as "them" agrees in gender with the word to which it refers. Because "them" is masculine, it cannot refer to the four horns, which are grammatically (not biologically) feminine. Trying to interpret "them" as the four horns creates what we could call a "gender bender." However, "one (feminine) of them (masculine)" precisely matches the combination of genders in "winds (most often feminine) of heaven (masculine)."

It may appear strange that the "little horn" simply arises from one of the four winds/directions rather than from the head of an animal (compare Dan 7:7-8; 8:3, 5). But this is symbolic prophecy in which elements such as "horns" represent things. Because such elements are symbols rather than material realities, they are not limited by constraints operating in the material world. Thus the "little horn" can grow horizontally in several different directions and vertically up toward heaven (8:9-10).

Notice that interpreting the "little horn" as originating from one of the four horns, which is already ruled out by the Hebrew syntax, would also be strange in terms of the material world because horns do not sprout out of other horns.

In Daniel 8 the "little horn" is distinct from the four Greek kingdoms and supersedes them. Its power is on the rise when theirs is falling. As it expands, it grows "exceedingly great" (verse 9) as Alexander's united Greek empire had (verse 8).

There is only one power that arose at the end of Greek rule and conquered a great empire as Alexander had: *Rome*. So the "little horn" causing the problems that are solved when the sanctuary is cleansed must be Rome. Therefore, the cleansing of the sanctuary comes at the end of the period of Roman domination.

Many scholars claim that the "little horn" represented the Seleucid king Antiochus IV Epiphanes, who ruled the Greek kingdom of Syria, one of the four divisions of Alexander's empire, from 175 B.C. to 164/3 B.C. According to the first chapter of the apocryphal book of First Maccabees, Antiochus interrupted and profaned Jewish worship practices in Jerusalem, including regular sacrificial worship at the temple. Since the writer of 1 Maccabees regarded the erection of an idol above the altar at this time as the desolating abomination prophesied by Daniel (1 Macc 1:57; compare Dan 8:13; 9:27; 11:31; 12:11), he clearly viewed Antiochus as Daniel's "little horn."

There is no question that Antiochus was evil and opposed to God, and he certainly did *some* things that the "little horn" of Daniel would do. But does that make him the "little horn"? Hitler was like Napoleon in that he was a European conqueror who invaded Russia. But Hitler was not Napoleon. Hitler arose at a different time and place and did things that Napoleon did not do, such as carry out genocide against the Jews.

Antiochus IV Epiphanes ruled over one of the four branches of Alexander's empire: Syria. He was in the middle of the line of Seleucid kings who ruled Syria. Unlike the "little horn" of Daniel 8, he did not arise at the latter end of the rule of the four Greek kingdoms and establish a powerful new empire that replaced them.

Antiochus did attempt to enlarge his empire toward the south and east. He had some initial successes, but for the most part he failed to accomplish his objectives: He was turned out of Egypt by Rome, he lost Palestine to the Jews, and he died while fighting in the East, unable to subdue the Parthians. Antiochus does not fit the description of the "little horn" in Daniel 8:9 because his kingdom did not greatly expand under his rule.

Antiochus profaned the temple for three years and ten days. Scholars try to fit this length of time with the 2,300 evenings and mornings of Daniel 8:14, which are literally "2,300 evening morning" in Hebrew, by saying that Daniel refers to 2,300 morning and evening sacrifices, which took place in 1,150 days, two sacrifices per day. 1,150 is a couple of months longer than three years and ten days, but it is regarded as close enough.

The interpretation of time just described does not work. For one thing, "evening morning" cannot refer to morning and evening sacrifices because the order is wrong. If Daniel had meant morning and evening, he would have said it that way.

In Daniel 8:14, "2,300 evening morning" is an abbreviation for "2,300 evenings and 2,300 mornings." Compare verse 26, which speaks of "the evenings and the mornings," that is, the 2,300 evenings and 2,300 mornings. This refers to 2,300 full days, just as "the forty days and the forty nights" (Deut 9:25; my translation) refers to 40 full day (24 hour) periods. If Daniel had wanted to speak of 1,150 days, he would have used the number 1,150. 2,300 days is well over six years, more than twice as long as the time during which Antiochus profaned the temple.

In harmony with the conclusion that Antiochus did not fulfil the prophecy of the "little horn," Jesus predicted that the desolating sacrilege/abomination set up by the "little horn" (Dan 8:11-13; 9:27;

11:31; 12:11) would appear after His time on earth:

"So when you see the desolating sacrilege standing in the holy place, as was spoken of by the prophet Daniel (let the reader understand), then those in Judea must flee to the mountains" (Matt 24:15-16; compare Mk 13:14).

If Antiochus is not the "little horn," what about Titus, the Roman general and later emperor who destroyed the Jerusalem temple in 70 A.D., a few decades after Jesus' ministry on earth ended? This identification is ruled out by the fact that the Jerusalem temple was not rebuilt after this destruction, let alone cleansed or justified (contrast Dan 8:14).

Daniel saw his vision just before the Medo-Persian empire took over. For him the cleansing of the sanctuary at the end of the 2,300 evenings and mornings was far in the future, at the end of Roman power in "the appointed time of the end" (Dan 8:19): "The vision of the evenings and the mornings that has been told is true. As for you, seal up the vision, *for it refers to many days from now*" (verse 26).

The 2,300 evenings and mornings (verse 14) are stated in answer to the question: "Until when is the vision: the regular (worship), and the giving of the desolating transgression, and a sanctuary, and the trampling of a host?" (my translation). The vision began with the ram that stands for Medo-Persia (verses 1-3). The question is: How long does the period of time represented in the vision last? Daniel emphasizes here the latter part of the vision, which depicts the activity of the "little horn." How long is the vision that includes all those shocking activities with regard to the regular (worship) and so on?

The answer is: 2,300 evenings and mornings. So the vision lasts from Medo-Persia until the end of Rome, a time period that covers centuries. This is many times longer than 2,300 literal days.

God has an "appointed time" for the events in the vision (Dan 8:19), including the cleansing of His sanctuary, but we have come to the end of Daniel 8 and we do not yet have a date for the cleansing of the sanctuary. The explanation seems incomplete. If we are perplexed, so was Daniel: "So I, Daniel, was overcome and lay sick for some days; then I arose and went about the king's business. But I was dismayed by the vision and did not understand it" (Dan 8:27). Daniel needed more information, and he has told us in the next chapter of his book (Dan 9) how God provided it.

CHAPTER 40

Date—Part 2

The beginning of Daniel 9 finds Daniel trying to figure out from the writings of Jeremiah what would happen to his people (Dan 9:1-5). Daniel was upset when he read Jeremiah, who had prophesied against the kingdom of Judah: "This whole land shall become a ruin and a waste, and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years" (Jer 25:11).

This prophecy should have made Daniel happy. The seventy years were coming to an end and Babylon had just been defeated by the Medes and Persians. Babylon was the enemy of God's people that had destroyed the temple and Jerusalem and taken captive the inhabitants of Judah. With the end of Babylon, Daniel should expect the restoration of God's people, right?

Wrong! Daniel had recently received the vision of Daniel 8, which showed the battle of the little big horn, which would attack God's people. Their distress would not be relieved for a long time. This explains why Daniel was upset. Babylon had ended, Medo-Persia had begun, and this was only the

beginning of a succession of oppressors. The worst times for God's people were still to come.

Daniel 9 records a long and beautiful prayer of Daniel in which he confesses the sin of his people and pleads for deliverance for them and restoration of Jerusalem and the temple (verses 4-19). God heard Daniel's prayer and sent the angel Gabriel to give Daniel a "word" and to help him "understand the vision." (verses 21-23). What vision? There is no vision in Daniel 9. This must refer to the vision of Daniel 8. Gabriel had earlier explained to Daniel the vision of chapter 8 (see 8:16-17) and now he had returned to give Daniel more information regarding that vision.

The additional information is as follows:

"Seventy weeks are decreed for your people and your holy city: to finish the transgression, to put an end to sin, and to atone for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal both vision and prophet, and to anoint a most holy place. Know therefore and understand: from the time that the word went out to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the time of an anointed prince, there shall be seven weeks; and for sixty-two weeks it shall be built again with streets and moat, but in a troubled time. After the sixty-two weeks, an anointed one shall be cut off and shall have nothing, and the troops of the prince who is to come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. Its end shall come with a flood, and to the end there shall be war. Desolations are decreed. He shall make a strong covenant with many for one week, and for half of the week he shall make sacrifice and offering cease; and in their place shall be an abomination that desolates, until the decreed end is poured out upon the desolator" (Dan 9:24-27).

Here a time period was given specifically for Daniel's people, the Jews. It was the Jews who were Daniel's concern. He was worried because he thought the 2,300 evenings and mornings of Daniel 8:14 meant that the Jews would not be freed from oppression and have their temple restored until far in the future, in the time of the end (see 8:19). But Gabriel was telling him that restoration for the Jews would happen sooner than that. Within "seventy weeks" Jerusalem would be rebuilt and "an anointed prince," the Messiah, would come.

Daniel 9:25 gives the beginning point for the "seventy weeks": "from the time that the word went out to restore and rebuild Jerusalem." The book of Ezra records three words/decrees of Persian kings that went out to provide restoration for the Jews after their captivity. The first was that of Cyrus. His decree allowed the Jews to return to Jerusalem and provided for the rebuilding of the temple there (Ezra 1:2-4; see also 6:3-5), but it did not deal with restoration of the city of Jerusalem itself. A second decree, this time by Darius, was similar in that it showed concern only for rebuilding the temple (Ezra 6:6-12). So the "seventy weeks" did not begin with either of the first two decrees.

As a result of the decrees of Cyrus and Darius, some Jews returned to Jerusalem and rebuilt the temple before Ezra and his group arrived there from Babylonia (Ezra 6:13-22). But the city of Jerusalem, including its walls and gates, still lay in ruins (Neh 1:3; 2:3, 13, 17).

A third decree, issued by Artaxerxes, was addressed to Ezra (Ezra 7:13-26) and equipped him to make provision for the services of the temple (verses 15-24). But this decree included an additional element. Artaxerxes commissioned Ezra to "make inquiries about Judah and Jerusalem" (verse 14) and he authorized Ezra to appoint magistrates and judges (verses 25-26). Thus Artaxerxes gave Ezra civil authority in Jerusalem.

Artaxerxes' decree was the first to express concern for the city of Jerusalem and to provide some restoration of Jewish self-governance there, subject to Persian rule. The next major step in the restoration of Jerusalem was the rebuilding of the city walls. This was accomplished a few years later under the leadership of Nehemiah (Neh 2:17-7:4), who was sent to Jerusalem by Artaxerxes (Neh 2) and appointed governor of Judah (5:14). Jerusalem was repopulated and the city walls were dedicated (Neh 11-12).

The restoration and rebuilding of Jerusalem as the capital of the Jewish nation was a process that involved Ezra and Nehemiah. This process began with Artaxerxes' decree, a copy of which went out with Ezra to Jerusalem in the seventh year of the king's reign (Ezra 7:7-8, 11-13). Investigation of ancient documents dated to the reign of Artaxerxes has shown that his seventh year was 457 B.C. (Siegfried H. Horn and Lynn H. Wood, *The Chronology of Ezra 7* [Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1953, 1970], pp. 115, 127). So the "seventy weeks" of Daniel 9 must have begun in 457 B.C.

Now we are faced with a dilemma. The "seventy weeks" began during the Persian era and were to include the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the coming of the Messiah. How could all that happen in seventy weeks, that is, 490 days?

Leviticus 25 provides the solution. For the Israelites, a week could be a week of years in which the seventh year was a "Sabbath" of rest for the land, meaning that the land would not be cultivated in the seventh year (verses 2-4; compare Exod 23:10-11). At the end of seven Sabbaths/weeks of years, the Jubilee year of freedom was to come for Israelites who had fallen into debt slavery or who had lost their land (Lev 25:8-10).

Leviticus 25 speaks of seven weeks of years before freedom would come for *individual* Israelites. Daniel 9 speaks of "seventy weeks" for the Israelite *nation* to be freed from sin: "to finish the transgression, to put an end to sin, and to atone for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal both vision and prophet, and to anoint a most holy place" (verse 24). The parallel is unmistakable. The "seventy weeks" are a large-scale Jubilee period: seventy weeks of *years*, that is, 490 years.

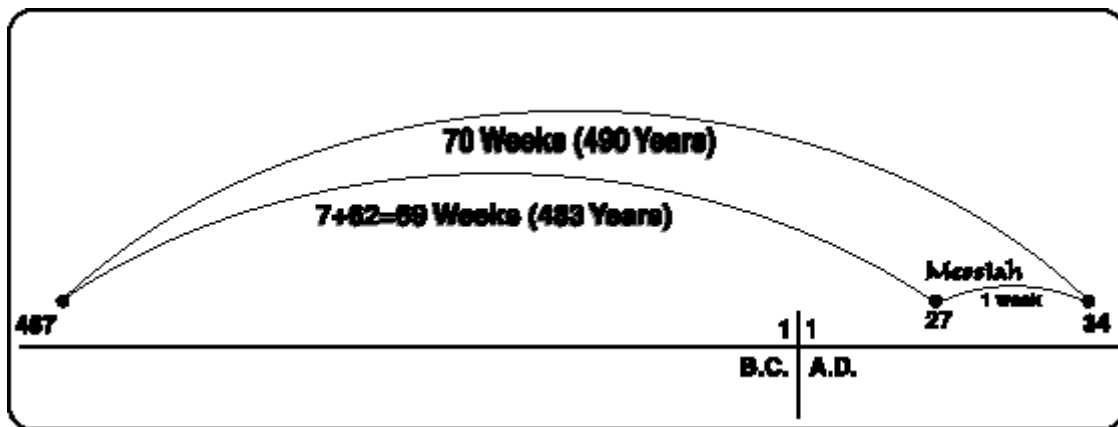
The fact that the "seventy weeks" represent a period leading up to a Jubilee is reinforced by Daniel 9:25, which refers to a period of "seven weeks." This is like the "seven weeks of years" leading up to a Jubilee in Leviticus 25:8. So within the large Jubilee period of "seventy weeks" of years there is a smaller Jubilee period of "seven weeks" of years, that is, 49 years.

We already know that the "seventy weeks" = 490 years began in 457 B.C. Taking into account the fact that there was no zero year between B.C. and A.D. time, 490 years from 457 B.C. is 34 A.D. A simple way to figure this with a calculator is to punch in 490, subtract 457 (B.C. years.) and you get 33 (A.D.). This calculation includes the number zero. But there was no year zero. So the period of 490 years stretches one year longer than your calculation indicates. Add a year at the end to compensate for that and you get 34 A.D. By 34 A.D., at the end of the 490 years, the Jews were to have freedom from sin (Dan 9:24).

Daniel 9:25-26 tells us that the Messiah would come after seven weeks plus sixty-two weeks, that is, after sixty-nine weeks. This is just one week of years (= 7 years) before the end of the seventy weeks of years. Sixty-nine weeks of years equals 483 years. Start in 457 B.C. and go forward 483 years, without a zero year, and you get 27 A.D. According to Daniel, the Messiah was supposed to come in 27 A.D.

Luke 3 indicates that Christ kept His appointment! Verse 1 tells us that John the Baptist began baptizing in "the fifteenth year of the reign of Emperor Tiberius..." Jesus was baptized by John at that time and the Holy Spirit identified Him as God's beloved Son. Then Jesus began His ministry (Lk 3:21-23). So the Messiah made His public appearance in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius.

Having already been installed as co-ruler with Augustus in the Roman provinces, Tiberius took over as emperor when Augustus died on August 19 in the year 14 A.D. Luke probably followed the usual Jewish method of dating at that time, which counted the first year of a king's reign as the portion of the year coming before the first New Year's Day of his reign. New Year's Day was the first day of the Jewish month of Tishri, in the autumn about mid-October. So the time between August 19 and mid-October of 14 A.D. would have been regarded as Tiberius' first year.



Tiberius' second year would have been the Jewish civil year running from mid-October of 14 A.D. to mid-October of 15 A.D. Continuing in this way, Tiberius' fifteenth year would have lasted from the autumn of 27 A.D. to the autumn of 28 A.D.

According to Luke, Jesus was baptized and began His ministry in Tiberius' fifteenth year, which would have been the Jewish civil year 27/28 A.D. The end of Daniel's 483 years was 27 A.D., falling within the range of Tiberius' fifteenth year. So the Messiah appeared when Daniel said He would.

Rather than setting up a political kingdom by freeing the Jews from domination by the Romans, Christ was "cut off" and had "nothing." The city of Jerusalem and its temple were destroyed, just as Gabriel had told Daniel (Dan 9:26).

The end of Daniel 9:27 is ominous. After the Messiah would make a strong covenant with many and make the sacrifice and offering cease, the sacrifice and offering would be followed by false worship: "...an abomination that desolates, until the decreed end is poured out upon the desolator."

What is this about "an abomination that desolates"? Haven't we heard about something like that before in the vision of Daniel 8:11-13? Daniel 9:27 refers us to the rest of the story, which we already know from Daniel 8. After the sacrifices of the Jewish temple had ceased and Christ was already ministering in heaven, the Roman "little horn" would put some kind of earthly false worship in place of the earthly sacrifices that Christ had made to cease. This would be arrogant defiance of Christ, who had moved the focus of true worship to heaven. But the "little horn" would lose its power and at the end of the 2,300 evenings and mornings the sanctuary would be cleansed (Dan 8:14).

Now we know several important things. First, the sanctuary that is cleansed at the end of the 2,300 evenings and mornings must be the sanctuary in heaven, where Christ is ministering. It cannot be the earthly temple, which was destroyed in 70 A.D. Second, the 2,300 evenings and mornings of Daniel 8 and the 490 years of Daniel 9 both begin in the time of the Medo-Persian empire. Third, the vision of Daniel 8 reaches beyond the 490 years, through a time when Rome would set up false worship and to a time when God would solve this problem. So the 2,300 evenings and mornings of Daniel 8:14 must be a longer time period than 490 years.

If "seventy weeks" in Daniel 9 refers to 490 years rather than 490 days and if the 2,300 evenings and mornings are longer, the latter period must represent 2,300 years rather than 2,300 days.

Since Daniel 9 elaborates on the first phase of the vision of Daniel 8, which has to do specifically with the Jews, it is clear that the 490 years overlap the first part of the 2,300 years. Of the 2,300 years, the first 490 are particularly relevant for the Jews.

No beginning point is given in Daniel 8 for the 2,300 evenings and mornings, but a beginning point is given in Daniel 9 for the "seventy weeks," the first phase of the 2,300 years. We know that the vision of Daniel 8 also begins in the Medo-Persian period, and it makes sense that the beginning of

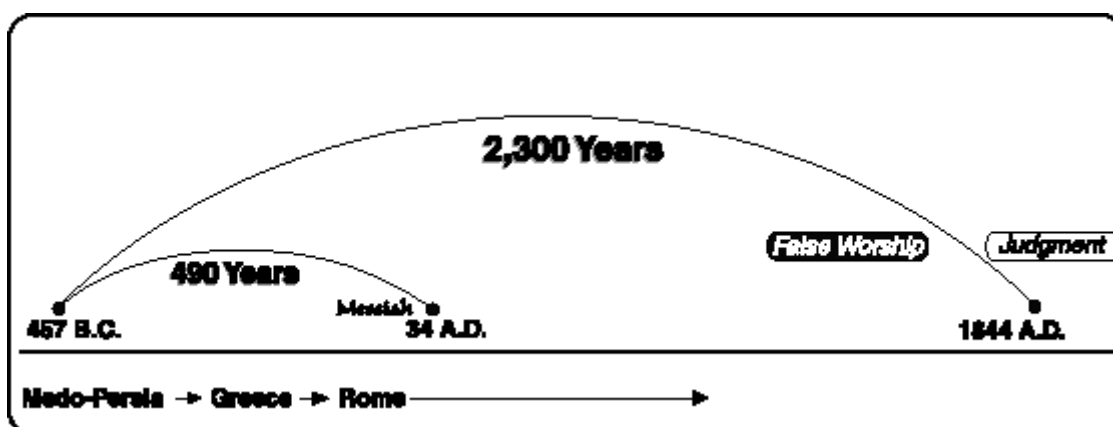
the 2,300 evenings and mornings is the same as the beginning of the 490 years.

The 490 years reached forward to the time when Christ began His first phase of atonement: mediation. The 2,300 years reach forward to the time when Christ begins His second phase of atonement: judgment.

The language of Daniel 9:24 agrees with the idea that the 490 years and the 2,300 years start at the same time. The verse begins: "Seventy weeks are decreed..." The Hebrew word translated "decreed" here is not used elsewhere in the Bible. However, in rabbinic Hebrew literature the word is fairly common, most often with the basic meaning "cut." Things that were "cut" were usually parts of animals, but a verse could also be "cut" into two verses. The word could also have the extended meaning "decide/decree" (Marcus Jastrow, *A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature* [New York: The Judaica Press, Inc., 1975], p. 513). In those days a decision in a legal case or a government decree was regarded as something that was "cut," just as people today "cut a deal."

The Hebrew word used in Daniel 9:24 was ideal for Daniel's purpose because both of its meanings apply: The seventy weeks were "cut off" for the Jewish people from the beginning of the 2,300 years and they were "decided/decree" for the Jewish people.

Since the 490 years began in 457 B.C., the 2,300 years also began in 457 B.C. Now that we have a beginning date, we can easily figure out when the heavenly sanctuary is supposed to be justified according to Daniel 8:14. Going forward 2,300 years from 457 B.C., without a zero year, we come to 1844 A.D. The judgment comes, or at least begins, in 1844.



1844! That is *long* after the fall of Rome. The western part of the Roman empire fell in the fifth century A.D. So why would Daniel make it look as though the cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary in 1844 would solve the problems caused by Rome?

The end of the Roman empire was not the end of Roman power. In 538 A.D. the church of Rome gained effective religious control of what had been the western part of the Roman empire. This religious control involved enormous political power.

The Roman church developed and used its power to dominate Europe during the Middle Ages. During this time, church leaders made kings tremble and tried to wipe out all who opposed their decrees. Hundreds of thousands, or more probably millions, perished in persecutions and religious wars.

The Reformation in the sixteenth century reduced Roman power. But it was not until 1798 that the political power of the Roman church was brought to an end by Napoleon through his general, Berthier.

Now it makes more sense why the heavenly sanctuary would be cleansed in 1844, not long after 1798. The cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary would solve problems created by the church of

Rome.

Daniel 8:11-13 and 9:27 predicted the kinds of problems caused by the Roman church: The Roman "little horn" put earthly worship in place of the earthly sacrifices that Christ had made to cease. This was defiance of Christ, who had moved the focus of true worship to heaven. The Roman church set up earthly priests through whom people had to gain forgiveness, rather than directly through Christ (see Hebrews 7-10), and it made the Christian communion service into a sacrifice officiated by a priest. Christ is the only "ladder" or "bridge" between heaven and earth (see Jn 1:51), but the Roman church claimed this function.

If the Roman church has been so out of harmony with God, how does it affect God's sanctuary/reputation at all? As we found earlier, the Israelite sanctuary represented God's name/reputation, which was affected by the actions of His chosen people and those who lived in the land that He had given them. Even in cases of illegitimate defilement, the Israelite sanctuary was only affected by sins that were committed by Israelites or resident aliens living in the land of Israel (Lev 20:2-3; Num 19:10-13). These were the people who received the benefit of the daily rituals at the sanctuary and who were associated with the name of God. Compare the fact that those who are connected with a modern religious, political, or business organization can affect its reputation. Similarly, Christians who take the name of Christ are at least in name a chosen people of God (1 Pet 2:9) and therefore their actions affect the name/reputation of the Lord in His heavenly sanctuary. The church of Rome is a Christian organization that began with true faith in the days of the apostles. Because it is associated with the name of Christ, its actions affect God's reputation.

The cleansing of the sanctuary solves the problems caused by the Roman church. Like the ancient Day of Atonement, the cleansing of the sanctuary is a judgment that demonstrates God's justice by separating people who are disloyal to God from those who are loyal. Furthermore, the cleansing of the sanctuary draws attention upward to the heavenly sanctuary, where Christ is ministering on our behalf.

In the course of attempting to learn the time and nature of the judgment in the book of Daniel, I have been unable to avoid following the lines of evidence in Daniel that identify the "little horn." These lines point to the same thing, as in the saying, "all roads lead to Rome." I challenge readers to examine the evidence for themselves. The Bible commends people who heard new ideas and then "examined the scriptures every day to see whether these things were so" (Acts 17:11). The Roman Church we are talking about is a system of dogma, organization, and policy. Christ has sincere believers in this and every other communion, as Jesus said: "I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd" (Jn 10:16).

Just as God gave the Israelites the time when the Day of Atonement began so that they could participate in the event, God gave His people the time when the end-time judgment begins. Surprise! This time is already in the past: 1844.

CHAPTER 41

Reliability

The prophecies of Daniel 8 and 9 give us the only information we have regarding the date when the judgment began. Because the Bible was completed by the first century A.D., it cannot record the later fulfillment of the beginning of the judgment in the same way that it records the year of Jesus'

baptism. But we can have confidence in the reliability of the 2,300 year prophecy, based on fulfillment of the 490 year prophecy.

Our confidence is increased when we see that Daniel's predictions regarding world events have been fulfilled with remarkable accuracy. Already in Daniel 2 there is a succession of four great kingdoms, represented by a statue made of four metals, beginning with Babylon of gold and ending with an iron kingdom. In Daniel 7 there are also four kingdoms, symbolized by wild animals coming out of the sea. A blasphemous "little horn" power rises out of a terrifying fourth beast/kingdom (verses 7-8).

It is historically true that a succession of four great empires ruled the territory that included Daniel's homeland. Babylon was followed by Medo-Persia, which was conquered by the Greek/Macedonian empire of Alexander the Great. The Greek empire was replaced by a fourth power: the brutally strong Roman empire, out of which arose the church of Rome that dominated Europe during the Middle Ages.

Scholars who believe that Antiochus IV Epiphanes, the Greek king of Syria, was the "little horn" interpret the four empires of Daniel as: Babylon, Media, Persia, and Greece/Macedonia. In this way they can have Greece/Macedonia rather than Rome as the fourth empire in order to harmonize the Bible with the historical fact that Antiochus was Greek rather than Roman. The problem with this view is that Media and Persia followed Babylon as a combined empire rather than two successive empires. Cyrus combined Media and Persia before Babylon was conquered (compare Dan 5:28). This explains why Daniel 6 speaks of the law of the Medes and Persians (verses 8, 12, 15; compare Esth 1:19), indicating that the Medes and Persians shared one government.

Additional evidence against the idea that Media and Persia were separate is found outside the Bible in a Babylonian text referred to as the "Dynastic Prophecy." This text indicates from a Babylonian point of view the succession of empires that ruled the region of Babylon up through the beginning of the Greek/Macedonian period: Assyria, Babylon, Persia, and Macedonia (A.K. Grayson, *Babylonian Historical-Literary Texts* [Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1975], pp. 24-37). There was no separate Media between Babylon and Persia. So in Daniel 2 and 7, which begin with Babylon, the fourth empire must be Rome. This rules out Antiochus as the "little horn" in Daniel 7.

There is a difference between the way the "little horn" symbol is used in Daniel 7 as compared with Daniel 8. We found that in Daniel 8 the "little horn" represents Roman power, including both the empire and the church. In Daniel 7, however, the empire and church phases are clearly differentiated: The empire is represented by the fourth beast and the church is represented by the "little horn."

Why doesn't Daniel provide another animal for imperial Rome in chapter 8, as in chapter 7? Perhaps Daniel only wanted two animals in his symbolism: ram and goat. That this specific pair of animals is significant is indicated by the fact that they appear in Leviticus 16 as the sacrifices for cleansing the sanctuary on behalf of the non-priestly community on the Day of Atonement (in reverse order: goat and ram). The Day of Atonement is the only occasion in the entire sacrificial system where this pair of animals shows up. So it seems to be no accident that Daniel 8, which speaks of the cleansing of the sanctuary (verse 14), uses Day of Atonement animals.

Daniel accurately specified the manner in which the church of Rome would arise and the length of its domination.

I was considering the horns, when another horn appeared, a little one coming up among them; *to make room for it, three of the earlier horns were plucked up by the roots*. There were eyes like human eyes in this horn, and a mouth speaking arrogantly (Dan 7:8).

As for the ten horns, out of this kingdom ten kings shall arise, and another shall arise after them. This one shall be different from the former ones, and *shall put down three kings*. He shall speak

words against the Most High, shall wear out the holy ones of the Most High, and shall attempt to change the sacred seasons and the law; and they shall be given into his power *for a time, two times, and half a time* (Dan 7:24-25).

Just as Daniel's vision predicted, the Roman church arose at the expense of three powers: the Heruli, Vandals, and Ostrogoths. These barbarian nations were blocking the rise of the Roman church to political power. All three supported Arianism, a form of Christianity that was competing with the religion of the church of Rome.

The Heruli took over the city of Rome from the last emperor of the western Roman empire in 476 A.D. The Ostrogoths then attacked the Heruli, following the suggestion of Emperor Zeno of the eastern Roman empire. The leader of the Heruli surrendered in 493. The Vandals in North Africa were threatening the power of the Roman church in the West, so Emperor Justinian of the eastern empire sent an army under Belisarius that defeated the Vandals in 534.

The Ostrogoths had been driven from Rome, but they returned and besieged it in 537. However, Justinian sent another army, which broke the siege in 538. This was the end of Ostrogothic power as a serious threat to the church of Rome, even though the nation of Ostrogoths survived for a few years.

Justinian had decreed in 533 that the bishop of Rome should be head of all the churches in the West. This decree went into effect in 538, when the city of Rome was freed from the control of an Arian power for the first time since 476, when the last western emperor was deposed. So 538 was the true beginning of political power for the church of Rome. This power lasted for 1,260 years, until 1798.

Daniel predicted the 1,260 years in symbolic terms. In Daniel 7:25 "a time, two times, and half a time" adds up to three and a half times/years of domination by the "little horn." Revelation 12 explains this time period by referring to it in two different ways: "a time, and times, and half a time" (verse 14) and "one thousand two hundred sixty days" (verse 6). Three and a half years of 360 days each would equal 1,260 days.

1,260 *days*. We have already found that in the time prophecies of Daniel a week can be a week of years (Dan 9:24-27: 70 weeks) and a day can represent a year (8:14: 2,300 days). For this kind of relationship between days and years, see also Numbers 14:34 ("for every day a year") and Ezekiel 4:6 ("one day for each year"). It is clearly no coincidence that Daniel and John spoke of time periods equaling 1,260 days and the Church of Rome's political power just happened to last for 1,260 years. The day/year pattern applies here too. The predictions of Daniel and John were precise.

Daniel accurately prophesied world events reaching far beyond Bible times. Fulfillment of these events, which have happened during the 2,300 years as Daniel said they would, indicates that the 2,300 year time prophecy is also accurate.

We do not have *proof* that the judgment actually began in 1844, just as we do not have uncontested proof outside the Bible that Jesus died on the cross. What we have is *evidence* to give us *faith* that what the Bible writer said is true. Christ has kept His appointment with His people.

Part VIII: Altar Call

CHAPTER 42



Allegiance

The judgment came in 1844. So what? That was more than a century and a half ago. What difference does it make to me?

Things can lose their relevance with time. In Michigan where I live, an air conditioner makes a difference in July or August. But just wait until January or February!

Situations change. If the war in Bosnia had stopped while O'Grady was there, it would not have been necessary to rescue him in the same way.

World War II did stop in 1945 while a Japanese soldier named Schoichi Yokoi was hiding out in the jungle on the island of Guam. Leaflets dropped from U.S. planes proclaimed the end of the war, but Yokoi thought it was a trick. He had vowed never to surrender, so he continued to live in his primitive shelter. Since he had no contact with civilization, he lived on what he could find in the jungle, making his clothes from tree bark.

In 1972, *27 years after the end of World War II*, hunters came across Yokoi while he was fishing, and he learned that the war had ended. While the rest of his people had been enjoying peace for decades, Yokoi had been enduring the privation and stress of war.

If we are two centuries beyond 1798, when the political power of the Roman church came to an end, and more than a century and a half beyond 1844, it looks like the war has ended some time ago. Bringing up the conflict all over again as if we are living in the past would seem to make us like Yokoi: still fighting a war that has already ended.

God's judgment has come. But has it gone? The fact that the judgment began in 1844 does not mean that it ended in 1844. What Christ does at any point in salvation history has an ongoing effect. When He died on Passover as our Passover lamb, He began a new era of freedom from slavery to sin and Satan. When He rose from the dead on the day of the wave sheaf ritual, He began a new era of hope that we too can be raised from the dead. When He ascended and inaugurated His ministry in the heavenly sanctuary, He began a new era of direct access to the throne of God. Following this pattern, when Christ went to His Father at the time of the judgment (Dan 7:13), He began a judgment era.

The idea that Christ began a judgment era in 1844 is strengthened by comparison with the ancient Israelite Day of Atonement. When the high priest had finished cleansing the sanctuary, he confessed over Azazel's goat and sent it into the wilderness (Lev 16:20-22). This ritual represented the banishment or "imprisonment" of Satan at the beginning of a 1,000-year period known as "the millennium" (Rev 20:1-3). The 1,000 years will begin just after Christ comes again to announce the verdict of the judgment (Matt 25:31-46; Rev 19:11-21). Since Christ has not yet come, it appears that He is still involved in the investigative phase of the judgment that is represented by the cleansing of the sanctuary. As in our human law courts, a verdict is announced after investigation is completed.

Why would it take God so long to judge the Roman church for what it did centuries ago? God's judgment not only deals with past history, it judges loyalty or disloyalty to Him in the present. Likewise, the Israelite Day of Atonement not only cleansed the sanctuary from past sins, it gave forgiven Israelites an opportunity to show loyalty to God on that very day by humbling themselves

before God and keeping a Sabbath. Those who disobeyed God on this day were rebelling against Him. Similarly, in Daniel 7 and 8 the judgment/cleansing condemns and breaks the power of the "little horn" for its opposition to God and His people during the time when the judgment is going on (Dan 7:11, 21-22; 8:25).

But didn't the Roman church die in 1798? How could it be judged for what it does after 1844? The Roman church lost its political power in 1798 and looked as though it were dead, but it is experiencing a remarkable revival that has not yet reached its climax. Revelation 13 tells us what is going on:

And I saw a beast rising out of the sea having ten horns and seven heads; and on its horns were ten diadems, and on its heads were blasphemous names. And the beast that I saw was like a leopard, its feet were like a bear's, and its mouth was like a lion's mouth. And the dragon gave it his power and his throne and great authority. *One of its heads seemed to have received a death-blow, but its mortal wound had been healed.* In amazement the whole earth followed the beast. They worshipped the dragon, for he had given his authority to the beast, and they worshipped the beast, saying, "Who is like the beast, and who can fight against it?" (Rev 13:1-4).

The "beast" here represents a blasphemous power that has a remarkable recovery after a serious injury. The next verses give us some past background information to identify the "beast":

The beast was given a mouth uttering haughty and blasphemous words, and it was allowed to exercise authority for *forty-two months*. It opened its mouth to utter blasphemies against God, blaspheming his name and his dwelling, that is, those who dwell in heaven. Also it was allowed to make war on the saints and to conquer them. It was given authority over every tribe and people and language and nation, and all the inhabitants of the earth will worship it, everyone whose name has not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb that was slaughtered (Rev 13:5-8).

This looks like the "little horn" of Daniel! In case there should be any doubt, the "forty-two months" of domination by the beast equals the period of domination by the "little horn" in Daniel 7:25 and Rev 12:14: three and a half times/years. Three and a half years of 12 months per year equals 42 months. "Forty-two months" of 30 days per month also comes out to 1,260 days (Rev 12:6). This refers symbolically (day for year) to the time of political domination by the church of Rome: 1,260 years from 538 to 1798.

After the "forty-two months," when the beast's "mortal wound" has been healed, it finds a powerful political ally:

Then I saw another beast that rose out of the earth; it had two horns like a lamb and it spoke like a dragon. It exercises all the authority of the first beast on its behalf, and it makes the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast, whose mortal wound had been healed. It performs great signs, even making fire come down from heaven to earth in the sight of all; and by the signs that it is allowed to perform on behalf of the beast, it deceives the inhabitants of earth, telling them to make an image for the beast that had been wounded by the sword and yet lived; and it was allowed to give breath to the image of the beast so that the image of the beast could even speak and cause those who would not worship the image of the beast to be killed. Also it causes all, both small and great, both rich and poor, both free and slave, to be marked on the right hand or the forehead, so that no one can buy or sell who does not have the mark, that is, the name of the beast or the number of its name (Rev 13:11-17).

All of this takes place after 1798. Now we can see how the judgment that began in 1844 has ongoing relevance. While the church of Rome lost its political power by the end of 1,260 years of domination, it has been recovering. Sometime in the future, another power will support the Roman church and compel people to pledge allegiance to it rather than to God. People will need to decide whether to be loyal to God or to Roman authority that is in rebellion against God. This sounds like

the conflict between God and the "little horn" that we see in Daniel 7 and 8.

If those who are loyal to the Roman power receive a mark of loyalty to it so that they will not be killed, what happens to those who are loyal to God? Revelation 14 goes on:

Then I looked, and there was the Lamb, standing on Mount Zion! And with him were one hundred forty-four thousand who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads... these follow the Lamb wherever he goes. They have been redeemed from humankind as first fruits for God and the Lamb, and in their mouth no lie was found; they are blameless (Rev 14:1, 4-5).

The Lamb is Christ, Mount Zion is the New Jerusalem, the holy city of God (Rev 21:2). This scene shows God's people, who are victorious over the beast. Instead of the beast's mark, they have the name of Christ and of His Father written on their foreheads. God has redeemed them. They follow Christ wherever He goes, just as they did while living in the evil world. They are blameless.

Even if the beast threatens you with death, you *can* be loyal to God. If you choose to be with Christ, He *will* give you the victory.

The test of loyalty and the reward are in the future. What are we supposed to do now? Revelation 14 continues:

Then I saw another angel flying in midheaven, with an eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth < to every nation and tribe and language and people. He said in a loud voice, "Fear God and give him glory, for the hour of his judgment has come; and worship him who made heaven and earth, the sea and the springs of water" (Rev 14:6-7).

The angel proclaims "an eternal gospel," that is, "everlasting good news." The good news is: "... for the hour of his judgment has come..." Because of this good news, we are supposed to "Fear God and give him glory... and worship him who made heaven and earth, the sea and the springs of water."

What judgment is this? It must be the judgment that began in 1844, which saves God's true people from the oppressive Roman "beast" of Revelation 13, the same power represented by the "little horn" of Daniel.

What is good news about the judgment? It is not good news for the "beast," but it is great news for God's true people because the judgment gives them justice and deliverance from the beast. Since 1844 it is good news that the time of God's judgment has come. The judgment that will result in Christ taking away evil power and returning to take over the world is *already* in session.

God tells us to worship Him rather than the beast, who is doomed by the judgment. The beast tries to intimidate people so that they might fear him and therefore pledge allegiance to him. But the eternal good news is that the one who has the real power is the eternal God, who created everything. Because He alone is the Creator, only He deserves to be feared, glorified, and worshiped as God.

The "fear" of God here is not the kind of fear that drives out love. It is the kind of awesome respect that God-fearing people of all ages have had, knowing that God has absolute power of life or death over them. We are ultimately accountable to God, not to any human power.

Revelation 14 tells of two more angels who proclaim messages from God. The third angel explicitly states what the outcome of the judgment will be:

"If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives a mark on his forehead or upon his hand, he also will drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is mixed in full strength in the cup of His anger; and he will be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever; and they have no rest day and night, those who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name." Here is the perseverance of the saints who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus (Rev 14:9-12; NASB).

If you are inclined to follow the beast, think again. The beast can kill the body, but Jesus said: "Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matt 10:28). It is God who controls hell. He is to be feared more than the beast.

Jesus said that hell destroys. It ends in death, the second death (Rev 20:14). Verses saying that "the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever" (14:11) and "they will be tormented day and night forever and ever" (20:10) mean that pain will not stop *until death*. The Greek expression translated "forever and ever" means here: as long as people last. But death will bring an end to the pain.

Compare Jude 1:7, which says that the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah were punished by eternal fire. This refers to Genesis 19:24-25, 28-29, which describes how God destroyed these cities with fire. The fire was eternal in the sense that it lasted until the cities were completely gone. I know that the fire is not still burning because I have visited that part of Palestine.

The common idea that God will make people immortal to torture them throughout the infinite ages of eternity is due to a misunderstanding of the Greek expression "forever and ever." God is just, but not cruel.

The third angel utters what is arguably the most blood-curdling threat in the entire Bible. Why would God send us such a message? Is this a loving God?

What if God didn't warn us of the results of rebellion against Him? Would that be loving?

I'm grateful for warnings. My friend Jeff taught me how to use a chain saw. When we went into the woods to cut firewood I was inclined to be a bit "drifty," that is, absent-minded. Jeff cured my driftiness by bluntly telling me that if I relaxed my concentration for a moment I would start sawing on my leg or get killed. His warnings were graphic and spine-chilling. But Jeff cared about me and wanted me to be safe. Thanks to him I have been careful and have not been injured during hundreds of hours of chain saw work.

The third angel not only threatens, he appeals: "Here is a call for the endurance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and hold fast to the faith of Jesus" (Rev 14:12). God's "saints," or holy ones, are those who keep God's commandments and hang on to Jesus' faith (compare Rev 12:17). Revelation 14:4-5 puts the reference to the commandments and Jesus in different words and reverses the order: "these follow the Lamb wherever he goes... in their mouth no lie was found; they are blameless."

God's judgment boils down to a test of loyalty. Will people pledge allegiance to Him, His law of love, and salvation through faith in Christ, or will they rebel against Him and the life He freely offers? By the end of the judgment, as on the Israelite Day of Atonement, two groups will be clearly apparent: Those who are loyal to God and those who are not.

Unlike the ancient Day of Atonement, the end-time judgment deals with organized, institutional rebellion against God on a grand scale. There will be vindicated saints and syndicated sinners.

Just after the call of the third angel, "one like the Son of Man" comes to "reap" the earth. This represents Christ coming to carry out the results of the judgment (Rev 14:14-20). The warning of the third angel is the last warning that God gives to the world. It is now or never.

The fact that the message of the third angel is a warning has a positive side: There is still hope. You don't warn someone for whom there is no hope. That would be as pointless as trying to talk to a dead person.

I have seen someone try to talk to a dead person. Well, not a real dead person. Years ago, as I was doing yard work to pay for my education, I was mowing a lawn at the home of a dentist. His eight year old son was running around the yard playing cowboys and Indians. He pointed his finger and yelled: "Bang! You're dead. **YOU'RE DEAD! YOU'RE DEAD!!!**" Amused by this behavior, I asked the boy: "How can he hear you if he's dead?" He paused, thought a moment, and calmly

replied: "I missed his ears." I didn't argue with him. I was too flabbergasted by his logic.

People for whom there is still hope need to be warned of the judgment. But they also need to know that the God who warns says to those who will listen and turn back to Him: "I will heal their disloyalty; I will love them freely..." (Hos 14:4).

Christ is still in His sanctuary forgiving sins and changing lives. His mediation did not stop when the judgment began. If it had stopped, there would be no further hope for those who had not already accepted Christ, and therefore no need for the warnings of the angels in Revelation 14, which are given during the time of the judgment.

Christ came to His Father at the beginning of the judgment (Dan 7:13), just as the Israelite high priest came before God in the most holy place when he began to cleanse the sanctuary (Lev 16:12-16). But at that time Christ did not stop intercessory ministry equivalent to what the priest did in the holy place and at the outer altar.

Compare the fact that on the Day of Atonement the morning and evening regular rituals of mediation by the priests (Exod 27:20-21; 29:38-42; 30:7-8; Num 28:1-8) were performed as on any other day. In fact, the morning burnt offering was supplemented by additional burnt offerings and a sin offering on behalf of the whole community (Num 29:7-11). The Day of Atonement was Israel's judgment day, but it had even more mediation than usual!

Over a century and a half after 1844, God's judgment has come and is still here. The event lives on, just as American independence lives on more than two centuries after 1776.

God's judgment is moving toward the climax. Warnings will be given. Decisions will be made. Christ will come.

Participation

A judgment day came for me in 1988. My wife and I drove to the University of California at Berkeley. We walked to Evans Hall and went up six floors on the elevator. Connie waited while I went in to my Ph.D. qualifying exam. It was an oral exam, with four professors present.

The week before I had written exams for three of these teachers. The exam in my major area had been a 24 hour take-home on which I wrote for the entire 24 hours except for some short breaks. Connie had endured the marathon with me. She even cooked a meal for me at 1 a.m.!

Now it was time for the professors to further probe my knowledge by asking questions in person. It was a terrifying experience because so much depended on my performance. But my teachers were kind and relaxed, so they put me at ease. They knew that I had worked hard and done well in their classes, so they didn't try to give me a hard time.

One thing was a bit unusual about the event. There was a dog in the room, six floors up in Evans Hall! Earlier that day a student had found the stray animal wandering in Tilden Park. So she had brought the dog to the chairperson of my exam committee, who loved dogs. Having nowhere else to put the animal for the day, my professor kept the dog in her office, where my exam was held.

When the questioning was over, I left the room and waited outside while my professors discussed my fate. I could not see them or hear what they were saying, but my professional future depended on their decision. All I could do was to wait and pray.

Connie had been waiting and praying for me the whole time. My future would be her future.

The door opened and I was invited to come back in. The four professors rose, shook my hand, and congratulated me warmly. The dog had been completely quiet during the exam, but he sensed the excitement and barked his hearty congratulation. The tension melted away. The judgment was over.

God's judgment is going on now in His sanctuary in heaven. I can't see or hear what is going on. In that sense it is like the evaluation phase of my oral exam at Berkeley. But the stakes are much higher: eternal life, not just a career.

How does God's judgment affect my attitudes and the way I live? While my professors were deliberating for a few minutes, I was waiting in the hallway, with nothing to do but pray. But God's judgment has been going on throughout my whole lifetime. Obviously I must do more than pray.

Those who respond to God's last warning message during the time of the judgment "keep the commandments of God and hold fast to the faith of Jesus" (Rev 14:12). Keeping the commandments of God and holding to the faith of Jesus are not separate; they are aspects of the same experience. This is demonstrated in the life of Christ, whose full obedience to His Father was due to His complete trust in Him.

As our experience with God's commandments and the faith of Jesus grows, our obedience and faith deepen and mature. In the Bible we see examples of this kind of growth. In spite of mistakes like calling Sarah his sister and trying to get an heir by Hagar, Abraham learned to trust God so completely that he obeyed God's command to take his son Isaac to Mt. Moriah in order to offer him as a sacrifice (Gen 22).

Obedience to God and holding to the faith of Jesus include going wherever He leads us, just as Abraham went where God commanded him (Gen 12:1, 4; 22:1-3). Those whom God saves follow Christ (Rev 14:4) because that is what they are used to doing: following His leading and example.

Having the "faith of Jesus" means both trusting in Jesus and having the kind of faith He had when He lived on earth. Once God's people are safely on Mt. Zion it will be easy to be blameless and follow Christ (Rev 14:4-5). But it is not Mt. Zion that suddenly produces this kind of character.

Haven't God's loyal people always had obedience and faith? Why is there a special need for these during the time of the judgment?

The basic call of the Christian life remains the same. But obedience to God and holding to the faith of Jesus may be challenged by different circumstances at different times. Challenges can grow in difficulty. This was true in the life of Abraham and it is true for us. We may be having an easy time now, but Revelation 13 tells us that the faith of God's true people will be severely tested. The intensity of this test is indicated by the fact that Revelation 14:12 calls upon God's holy people to have endurance.

Obedying God and having Jesus' faith during the end-time judgment corresponds closely to what the Israelites were to do on their judgment day, the Day of Atonement. Even though they could not see their high priest as he went into the sanctuary to cleanse it on their behalf, they were to participate in what he was doing by humbling themselves and refraining from work (Lev 16:29). In this way they *obeyed God* and pledged allegiance to Him and His law. They acknowledged that they had sinned against God's law, but God had forgiven them and was now cleansing them. By humbling themselves they foreshadowed *Christ's experience of faith*: "he humbled himself" (Phil 2:8).

The Israelites were to participate because the cleansing of the sanctuary was a life and death matter for them. An individual who did not receive the benefit would be rejected by God.

What do you do when someone is doing something for you that is a matter of life and death? Do you go out to eat? Is it business as usual?

When Queen Esther agreed to risk her life by going before the king to save her people, she wanted some serious support. She told Mordecai:

"Go, gather all the Jews to be found in Susa, and hold a fast on my behalf, and neither eat nor drink for three days, night or day. I and my maids will also fast as you do. After that I will go to the king, though it is against the law; and if I perish, I perish"(Esth 4:16).

Esther's people could not come into the palace while she approached the king on their behalf. But if they valued their lives, the least they could do would be to fast with her.

Why did Esther fast? Going on a crash diet would not increase the likelihood of her finding favor with the king. In those days men preferred their women to be pleasantly plump. Not stated but implied is the idea that Esther was petitioning the God of heaven to be with her. She wanted her prayers to be accompanied by those of her people.

The idea that humbling oneself, or denying oneself before God by fasting, could be associated with prayer at a special time of need is found in Ezra 8. Ezra and a group of Jews were about to go on a dangerous journey: returning to Palestine from captivity in Babylon. Ezra says: "Then I proclaimed a fast there, at the river Ahava, that we might deny ourselves before our God, to seek from him a safe journey for ourselves, our children, and all our possessions" (verse 21).

Psalms 35:13, 14 also connects fasting with prayer in a special time of need. Here the Psalmist says that he expressed grief for the sickness of his former friends and entreated God on their behalf by wearing sackcloth, denying himself with fasting, praying, bowing down, and mourning.

Daniel humbled himself before God because of a different kind of need: he wanted to gain understanding from God. Daniel 9:3 describes what he did: "Then I turned to the Lord God, to seek an answer by prayer and supplication with fasting and sackcloth and ashes" (Dan 9:3). If Daniel's prayer in chapter 9 is any indication, he was mourning because of the sins of his people and the desolation that had come upon them. Mourning for sins was also associated with fasting when the

prophet Joel called upon his people to express repentance through fasting and mourning at a time of crisis, when a terrible plague of locusts was devastating their country (Joel 2:12-17).

Daniel 10:2-3 describes another occasion of self-denial: "At that time I, Daniel, had been mourning for three weeks. I had eaten no rich food, no meat or wine had entered my mouth, and I had not anointed myself at all, for the full three weeks." This was not a complete fast. Daniel did eat, but only plain food. He also abstained from using oil to keep his skin moist.

In answer to Daniel's need, a heavenly being came to him and said:

"Daniel, greatly beloved, pay attention to the words that I am going to speak to you. Stand on your feet, for I have now been sent to you." So while he was speaking this word to me, I stood up trembling. He said to me, "Do not fear, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your mind to gain understanding and to humble yourself before your God, your words have been heard, and I have come because of your words" (Dan 10:11-12).

Imagine having a heavenly being call you "greatly beloved"! By mourning and humbling himself before God, Daniel had been concentrating on gaining understanding with regard to the future of God's people (compare Dan 9:2-3). He had put aside earthly comforts in his desire for heavenly wisdom. And God had heard his prayer.

Now we can understand better why the Israelites were to humble themselves by practicing self-denial on the Day of Atonement. This was a special time of need, when the high priest went before God to gain full acceptance for his people. By putting aside the fulfillment of their physical needs and by abstaining from work, the people could concentrate completely on their relationship with God. There was nothing they could eat or drink and no work they could do that could help them now. They were utterly dependent upon God and the ministry of His priest.

Hadn't the people already been forgiven? Why should they have an attitude of repentance that was associated with mourning? When you're justified, why do you need to be mortified? It was the sins of the people that had defiled God's sanctuary. The sanctuary was cleansed with blood that had to be shed because of what they had done.

It is when we are forgiven that we truly comprehend the enormity of our mistakes in light of what they have cost God. The person who enjoys peace with God asks, "How could I have done such a thing?"

Hadn't the people already shown their sorrow for sin when they brought their sacrifices? Why bring up this sorrow all over again?

The question on the Day of Atonement was: Were they *still* sorry? Did the experience of forgiveness last, or was it superficial? Did they want to go back to disobeying God?

The point was not to have people groveling before God in abject terror. Rather, it was to show that they had a genuine relationship with God based on acceptance of the forgiveness that He had already given.

God wanted His people to have a "heart" relationship with Him: "You shall *love* the Lord your God with *all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might*. Keep these words that I am commanding you today *in your heart*" (Deut 6:5-6).

Jeremiah prophesied a time when God's dream would come true:

The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will make a *new covenant* with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt < a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the Lord. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: *I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people*. No longer shall they teach one another, or say to

each other, "Know the Lord," for *they shall all know me*, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord; *for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more* (Jer 31:31-34).

This is the experience God wanted His people to have all along. Jeremiah called it the "new covenant."

God desires for His people to internalize His law and be fully united with Him. But they cannot put His law into their own hearts. It is God who takes responsibility for enabling them to obey: "*I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts.*"

God said, "they shall all know me." People who have God's law in their hearts are people who know God. Why? Because God's law is His moral character, which is love (1 Jn 4:8; Matt 22:36-40).

God stated the basis of the new covenant experience: "*for I will forgive their iniquity...*" We do not begin our relationship with God with a clean slate as the Israelites thought they did when they promised, "All the words that the Lord has spoken we will do" (Exod 24:3). We start off "in the red," owing a debt we cannot pay. From the humble position of acknowledging our need for forgiveness, we are ready to accept all that God has to give.

According to Jeremiah, God not only says that He will forgive His people, He says that He will "remember their sin no more" (Jer 31:34). Not remembering sin makes forgiveness irrevocable. How could forgiveness ever be canceled if the sin is not even remembered?

Until sin is forgotten, forgiveness is not irrevocable. Remember Jesus' parable of the unjust steward: Because he failed to forgive his fellow servant, his master canceled the forgiveness that he had already granted. The master had forgiven, but he had not yet forgotten (Matt 18:23-35).

How can God forget sin? Will He suddenly have an attack of amnesia? No. The point of God not remembering sin any more is that He will make the sin eternally irrelevant, so that it can never be brought up again.

The two phases of atonement in the Israelite sanctuary correspond to forgiving sin and making it eternally irrelevant. A sinner was forgiven when he/she brought a sacrifice (Lev 4). But the sin was not irrelevant; it remained in the sanctuary. As a result of the Day of Atonement services, however, the Israelites were "clean" from all their sins (16:30). Their sins could never again have even the possibility of relevance to their relationship with God. Forgiveness had become irrevocable. To express it like Jeremiah, the sins would be remembered no more.

Making sin eternally irrelevant is tied to life after forgiveness. The unjust steward lost forgiveness because of his attitude after forgiveness. To be "clean" from sin, an Israelite who had been forgiven earlier was required to be loyal to God on the Day of Atonement, as shown by practicing self-denial and not working.

When God pronounced the Israelites "clean" at the end of the Day of Atonement judgment, He meant "blameless." Similarly, the people whose loyalty goes through the end-time judgment to Mt. Zion are "blameless" (Rev 14:5; compare 7:14). They will already be clean/blameless by the end of the judgment.

The Israelites were to humble themselves and show repentance by practicing self-denial and abstaining from work during the entire Day of Atonement. This was only one day out of the year. Obviously we cannot fast and abstain from work during the entire period of the end-time judgment that began in 1844. God does not ask us to do this. What He does ask us to do is the end-time equivalent: to humble ourselves and to show repentance by keeping the commandments of God and holding fast to the faith of Jesus (Rev 14:12).

The commandments of God include abstaining from work once a week on the Sabbath (Exod 20:8-11). This is a sign that God, our Creator, is re-creating us into harmony with Himself and His law by making us holy (31:12-17). Becoming holy/sanctified is not some abstract, sanctimonious,

theologizing, pie-in-the-sky religiosity. It is learning how to love as we interact with others and with God (compare 1 Thess 3:12-13).

An especially important part of becoming holy and "blameless" is growth in our love for members of our families, with whom we have the most intimate contact. The prophet Malachi ended his book by predicting that an appeal for reconciliation between family members would come just before the day of the Lord (Mal 4:5-6). No message could be more relevant today, when all kinds of forces are pulling the hearts of family members away from each other.

With sanctification the rubber meets the road on the practical level, including the little things of life.

Little things! That's where I'm weak. Give me a big challenge and I'll see it coming, but it's easier to knock me over with the little irritations and interruptions.

If God's law consisted merely of the do's and don'ts of the Ten Commandments (Exod 20), I could come tolerably close to saying that I have kept them since I was young (compare Lk 18:21). But the love of Christ goes further. It aggressively seeks to fill the needs of others (verse 22).

As I learn more about the depths of Christ's love, which expresses the heart of God's law, I am awestruck and humbled by the unselfish, humble mind of Christ:

Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross (Phil 2:5-8; NASB).

Should I humble myself by living my whole life in an attitude of mourning, just as the Israelites mourned for their sins on the Day of Atonement? Some Christians have lived like this. In 1989 my wife and I visited an old Christian monastery in northern Iraq, dating from about the fifth century A.D. Nearby were some small holes in the ground where hermits stayed for decades without coming out. Feeling sorry for sins and focusing on God are certainly important. Some days may need to be dominated by these things. But Jesus has shown us a path of humility that includes much more: outgoing love expressed in service for others. Rather than becoming melancholy hermits, we can have the joy of helping people. Rather than trying to be holy by staying in a hole, we can answer Jesus' call to an active life: "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you" (Matt 28:19-20; NASB).

By helping others, we keep the commandments of God, hold fast to the faith of Jesus, and participate with our heavenly high priest as He draws people to Himself during His judgment. Best of all, we encounter Jesus everywhere we go. As Mother Teresa said:

Jesus comes to meet us. To welcome him, let us go to meet him. He comes to us in the hungry, the naked, the lonely, the alcoholic, the drug addict, the prostitute, the street beggars. He may come to you or me in a father who is alone, in a mother, in a brother, or in a sister. If we reject them, if we do not go out to meet them, we reject Jesus himself. (*Mother Teresa: In My Own Words*, compiled by José Luis González-Balado [New York: Gramercy Books, 1996], p. 29).

As Jesus said: "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me" (Matt 25:40).

CHAPTER 44



Committed

I was born on the other side of the Pacific Ocean. In 1962 my family moved from Australia to the United States. The idea of going to America started as my father's dream for further education. By 1961 the dream had become a decision and my parents settled into a course of action to turn the decision into reality. My father left his job and took a temporary position. We got rid of non-essential belongings and acquired some large wooden packing boxes. A week before our departure we traveled to Sydney and stayed with my grandparents.

Every action increased our commitment. The more we did to get ready to leave, the harder it would have been to turn back.

The day of our departure arrived. Not quite seven years old, I was mightily impressed by the 42,000 ton ship that would carry us to America. I had drawn pictures of the *Oriana* based on a travel brochure, but the real thing was even bigger than I had imagined.

My mother, father, five-year-old brother, and I boarded the *Oriana* and stood on the deck facing the dock. We and others on the ship held long paper ribbons called "streamers." Each streamer was held on the other end by a relative or friend on the dock.

My grandparents were standing in the crowd on the dock. Their handkerchiefs were busy mopping up tears. America was a long way away.

It was not too late to get off the ship. People were still coming and going. We could call off the whole plan and stay in Australia.

The opportunity to change our minds did not last long. The gangplank was raised, the water churned, and the streamers broke. There was no turning back. We were going to America.

I was not quite seven years old. To me it was a grand adventure. I didn't know the pain of good-byes that my grandparents felt. Besides, we were only planning to go to America for three years.

My family never returned to reside in Australia. When 42,000 tons pulled away from the dock, it was the end of the first part of my life. I am now an American citizen, married to an American woman. Everything has been affected by the fateful moment when the streamers broke.

Groups of people can commit themselves to important decisions, with no turning back. This happens many times every day at docks and airports all over the world.

According to the Bible, eight people decided to get on a big boat thousands of years ago. Everyone else decided to stay. There was plenty of time for people to make up their minds. But the day came when the Lord shut the door of Noah's ark (Gen 7:16). That was it. Commitments were final.

Before the Lord shut the door, He did not force anyone to get on or off the boat. He honored the decisions people made. There was time. But time ran out.

There were no streamers on Noah's ark. There was no dock. The boat had no engines or even a sail. When the door was shut, the boat just sat there. But the door *was shut*. When water poured from above and below, it was the eight people in the ark who continued the human race. Everyone now living is descended from those eight people. Everything has been affected by the fateful moment when the door was shut.

As in the days of Noah, God's judgment does not move people from one side of the door to the other; it simply recognizes them for what they have chosen to become. Before the judgment has reached its decisions there is time for people to change their minds. But this time will not last forever. When Christ comes again, final commitments will already have been settled.

At His Second Coming, Christ will not preach a sermon in order to win people over. He will not make an appeal while the angel choir sings "Just As I Am." He will separate His loyal people from

those who are disloyal as a shepherd separates sheep from goats (Matt 25:31-46). He will already know who belongs to Him.

The apostle John indicates that God will allow people to settle into the courses of action they have chosen and then Christ will come to reward them according to the kinds of individuals they have decided to be: "Let the evildoer still do evil, and the filthy still be filthy, and the righteous still do right, and the holy still be holy." "See, I am coming soon; my reward is with me, to repay according to everyone's work" (Rev 22:11-12).

Before the verdicts of judgment are reached, God appeals to people to change, but there is only so much He can do. There comes a time when God says, "What more was there to do for my vineyard that I have not done in it?" (Isa 5:4).

God does not force anyone to accept Him. He honors the decisions into which people settle. Then He shuts the door. He holds each person accountable for his/her decision.

Does God hold billions of people accountable for deciding for or against Him when most of them don't even comprehend the issues involved? Does God treat decisions as final if many people have not yet made up their minds? It is one thing to consciously get on a boat or plane. But how can a religious decision be that clear?

God promises that He will not shut the door until the decision is clear. Jesus said: "And this good news of the kingdom will be proclaimed *throughout the world*, as a testimony to all the nations; and then the end will come" (Matt 24:14). The end will not come before God's invitation penetrates to every corner of the globe. The last invitation consists of the powerful appeal and warning messages of Revelation 14, which are given to the entire world during the time of the judgment (verses 6-12). People will understand these messages because they are God's answer to the power of the revived "beast," whose fame is known throughout the world (Rev 13:3-4).

When the "beast" is in worldwide news, God is ready to hit the headlines. When the "beast" poses a threat, people will be interested in the alternative God offers. Compare the fact that Dwight D. Eisenhower became known because he was successful in meeting the threat of an oppressive power. Without that challenge, many people would never have heard of Eisenhower.

The prophet Joel speaks of another way in which God will help people to settle into their decisions before the "great and terrible day of the Lord comes":

Then afterward I will pour out my spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. Even on the male and female slaves, in those days, I will pour out my spirit. I will show portents in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and columns of smoke. The sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes (Joel 2:28-31).

The "beast" and its supporters do not have a monopoly on signs and wonders. God shows His power in nature and in His people through His Spirit. These signs leave no doubt that God is the Creator (Rev 14:7).

The fact that God pours out His Spirit in a special way just before Christ's Second Coming is extremely important. In the early Christian church an outpouring of the Spirit that began on the Day of Pentecost brought powerful conviction to the hearts of thousands of people (Acts 2). We can expect the same before Jesus comes again.

It is the Spirit who convinces people that they are sinners in need of righteousness and they will be held accountable (Jn 16:8). It is the Spirit who provides the renewal of spiritual new birth (Titus 3:5). It is the Spirit who makes us holy by pouring love into our hearts (Rom 5:5).

There is no limit to what God can do with us as long as we keep on accepting His Spirit. He isn't finished with us yet. Through the Spirit, God can help us to settle into our decisions for Him so that

we become righteous people who still do right and holy people who remain holy (Rev 22:11).

By giving us more of His Spirit, God will speed up the effects of our decisions for Him, just as more rain at the right time speeds up the ripening of crops for harvest (Joel 2:23-24). Corn and wheat are still corn and wheat, but they are more mature corn and wheat. Holy and loving are still that way, but only more so.

To use another analogy, God lets you choose the elevator, but then He speeds it up.

As God's people mature, they outgrow sin. Christ makes them holy by cleansing them with His word (Eph 5:27).

By the end of the judgment, God's people are "clean," just as God wanted to make the Israelites "clean" by the end of the Day of Atonement (Lev 16:30). But there is a difference. After an Israelite Day of Atonement there was another year of sacrifices for sin and another Day of Atonement. However, at the conclusion of the end-time judgment Christ stops His work of forgiving sins in the heavenly sanctuary and comes to earth again to announce and then carry out the positive and negative verdicts of the judgment.

A person cannot be saved without being forgiven. So how can Christ stop forgiving sins? Won't people be lost who would otherwise be saved? Apparently not. That would not be in harmony with the character of God, who does not want any to perish (2 Pet 3:9).

By His Spirit, God can speed up the spiritual growth of His people so that they outgrow sin. By cleansing His people and presenting them to Himself without blemish, Christ works Himself out of the job of forgiving sins. He does not walk off the job. We could say that He is "laid off" from this work because there are no more forgivable sins to forgive.

The fact that Christ will stop forgiving sins does not mean that after that point God's people will stand before God in their own strength, without the Holy Spirit. Nor does it mean that Christ will abandon them. In Ephesians 5:25-27, it is clear that Christ loves the church and wants to present her to Himself as His bride. Will He abandon her for some time? No! Would any decent groom abandon his bride?

The time before Christ's coming will not be easy. In the book of Daniel, when Michael stands up, just before God's people are delivered, there is a time of trouble because those who are evil still do evil (Dan 12:1; compare Rev 22:11). In fact, they do evil more intensely than ever because they are completely bent on pursuing evil. Compare the people who lived before the Flood: "The Lord saw that the wickedness of humankind was great in the earth, and that *every* inclination of the thoughts of their hearts was *only evil continually*" (Gen 6:5).

If evil people hate Christ, they will also hate His followers (Jn 15:20). For a time we may find ourselves with our faces buried in the dirt. Like Christ on the cross, we may have no earthly evidence whatsoever that God has not abandoned us. We may struggle with doubts and fears of the unknown, just as Jacob wrestled alone with an unidentified person (Gen 32:24).

Where was the Lord during the time of Jacob's trouble, when he wrestled in the darkness? As one of my students pointed out, He was in Jacob's arms (as close as He could get (Gen 32:24, 28-30)! Like Jacob, we can say: "I will not let you go, unless you bless me"! (verse 26).

The Lord will carry us over the abyss. He will bring our faces out of the dirt and make us "shine like the brightness of the sky" (Dan 12:3).

If you are worried about the time of trouble and the time when the filthy will still be filthy and the holy will still be holy (Rev 22:11), think about Jesus' words: "And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matt 28:20). "To the end of the age" includes the time of judgment, the time of trouble, and reaches to deliverance at Christ's Second Coming.

If we were expected to change ourselves and cleanse our characters from sin, we would all be lost.

By ourselves, it is impossible for us to keep from sinning. But God "*is able* to keep you from falling, and to make you stand without blemish in the presence of his glory with rejoicing..." (Jude 1:24).

When God says He wants to do the impossible, to transform us through His Spirit (Titus 3:5-7) and to put the presence of Christ within us (Gal 2:20), we can say with the virgin Mary: "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word" (Lk 1:38). People who respond like Mary will not be threatened by final events because they are under the control and protection of the same God who controls these events.

For God to make a whole group of people "blameless" will be special. But God has done special things in the past, such as making a virgin pregnant through the Holy Spirit (Lk 1:35). When Gabriel announced Christ's conception to Mary, she could have said: "Let me check with my physician to see if there is a documented case of this kind of thing happening in the past." But she accepted God's word that He could do as He said.

Our role is like Mary's: accepting what God wants to give us. Those who follow Christ everywhere He goes (Rev 14:4) have the same kind of loyal faith as Caleb, who "wholeheartedly followed the Lord, the God of Israel" (Josh 14:14). God may lead us to places where nobody has gone before, but the *kind* of faith we need to follow God is not unique to us.

When God asks us to "keep the commandments of God and hold fast to the faith of Jesus" (Rev 14:12) or "follow the Lamb" and be "blameless" (verses 4-5), it is not more than what He asked of Abraham: "walk before me, and be blameless" (Gen 17:1). There have been individuals, such as Abraham, who have grown in faith to the point that they blamelessly followed God. What is special about the end-time people of God is that they will be blameless as a group. Jesus isn't finished with us yet.

If being "blameless" consisted of making sure I don't violate any items on a list, I could be tempted to try living up to God's standard through legalistic effort. But God's law is love, which is limitless. It must be written on the heart (Jer 31:33) because tables of stone or even CD ROMs cannot contain it. Lists of laws in the Bible are only examples of God's love. There are no loopholes in love, no cracks to squeeze through.

Our righteousness must exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees (Matt 5:20). To be truly loving is to be re-created in God's moral image. This is possible only through the power of the Creator Himself. If I try to do it on my own, I am attempting to put myself in place of God, adding inadvertent blasphemy to pathetic stupidity.

It is pointless to look around at other people to see what God can do with me. If I limit my aspirations to the standard set by faulty human beings, I will fall far short of God's ideal for me. I don't need to compete with anyone to get to heaven. The law of the playing field or the back-country of the Sierra mountains doesn't apply. I heard a story about two men who were enjoying an evening campfire in the Sierras. One looked up and saw a bear in the distance. He yelled, "A bear is coming!" The other man quickly started putting on his running shoes. Puzzled, the first man asked, "What are you doing that for? Do you think you can outrun the bear?" His "friend" replied: "I don't have to outrun the bear. All I have to do is outrun you!" God is not like that bear.

When I think about *becoming perfect in character*, I start contemplating my faults and become afraid. Like Peter when he was walking on the water, I become distracted by obstacles (the wind and the waves) and I begin to sink (Matt 14:30). But when I think of being *loyal to Christ*, the picture changes because my gaze is on Him. He is my example, shepherd, and guardian (1 Pet 2:21-25). I gain courage because all I need to do is follow Him where He wants to take me, including to perfection of character. The result is similar (perfection of character) but the focus is different.

As a well-educated modern person, I find it tough to admit that I can't do something on my own.

But that's exactly what I must do. I must humble myself and rely on a humble Lamb, who is not only a lamb, He is my Shepherd. By faith I *can* follow Him wherever He goes, even into the most holy place of the heavenly sanctuary, where He is reaffirming the forgiveness of His people. With Christ I shall not be lacking in His judgment because *He* "restores my soul" and *He* "leads me in right paths for his name's sake." (Ps 23:1, 3). The right path may go through the darkest valley of a time of trouble, but He will lead me to the banquet on the other side (verses 4-5).

"On the other side." Everything in my life has been affected by the fateful day when the streamers broke, when I sailed away to America on the other side of the ocean.

Even more will be affected when all my earthly support and ties are cut, when the door of the ark is shut, when there is no turning back from going to the other side with Jesus, on the day the streamers break.

Confidence

My wife and I were returning from a back-packing vacation in the Sierra mountains near Lake Tahoe. We were supposed to work the next day. Knowing that, we played at a stream as long as possible. No. Longer than possible.

We had no choice but to attempt packing out to our car before dark. Pumped by adrenaline, we made it up several thousand feet to the top of Elephant Back Mountain before we lost the trail in the total blackness of night. There were cliffs all around. To go on would be suicide.

There was no shelter at 9,000 feet elevation and the wind was ferocious. It came sweeping up out of the ravines sounding like a freight train: whoossssH!

We somehow managed to crawl into our sleeping bags, but Connie couldn't sleep. She was terrified. It was not the wind, but rather a small rustling sound close to us on the mountain. She was sure it was a mountain lion. She could have found out what it was in a moment, by turning on her flashlight. But she was so paralyzed by fear that she could not even pick up the flashlight.

When Connie told me about her fear, I pointed my flashlight at the sound, and we looked into the beady eyes of a tiny mouse. She was terribly relieved. Connie, that is.

After Connie saw the mouse, its rustling sounds comforted her. She knew that as long as she could hear the mouse, there was no large predator in the vicinity. So the same sound that had given her fear now gave her peace. The difference was that some light was shed on the source of the fear.

Does God's judgment give you peace and confidence? Or does fear paralyze you?

It is easy to be afraid of the judgment. If you are judged, your life is examined and assessed. People on the threshold of the twenty-first century tend to resent assessment as an invasion of privacy. Saul Bellow expresses well the current feeling: "Socrates said, 'The unexamined life is not worth living.' My revision is, 'But the examined life makes you wish you were dead.'" (*New York Times*, quoted in *Time* magazine [June 9, 1997], p. 15).

Consider the picture that the judgment conjures up in the minds of some Christians. Our ghostly legal souls file in somnolent obsequiousness (sleepy submissiveness) before the King of Kings. Our entire lives are naked before the onlooking universe. Our fate is conferred upon us in heaven, *in absentia*. We don't even have a chance to speak up for ourselves. There's no *magna cum laude* or even A-. It's just saved or damned.

While this scenario may reflect some biblical truth, its decontextualized, impersonal form has about as much appeal as the fires of hell. It can scare a person right into the church or out of the church.

There are several factors that have contributed to fear and tend to make the judgment a negative topic for many Christians. First, it is true that we are judged by our works. Some say that if this is true, our salvation must be dependent upon our works. Salvation based on works is legalism, which contradicts the good news of salvation by grace through faith (Eph 2:8).

It is true that the forgiveness we have received can be undone if we are not found faithful in the judgment. Some find that this leads to discouraging uncertainty as to whether or not they are forgiven and saved.

Some Christians believe that we vindicate God by the good works that we perform. To others, this sounds arrogant, as if God is dependent on our help to save His reputation.

It is true that the judgment takes place in heaven, so we don't know when we are being judged. If

we had an appointment of which we were aware, we could at least be on our best behavior at the right time to make a decent impression.

For some, the end of the judgment is even worse than its investigative phase. When investigation is finished, all cases will have been decided. God will no longer forgive sins after this point. So His people will need to live for a time before Christ's Second Coming without sinning at all. The thought of not sinning at all is almost as foreign and frightening as the idea of not breathing.

We need godly fear in the sense of awesome respect for God. Abraham feared God (Gen 22:12) and at the same time he was God's friend (Jas 2:23). But if we fear God as an arbitrary tyrant who makes us run the gauntlet of the judgment without giving us a fair chance, fear of God will drive out love for Him.

If we fear God in the negative way just described, we have three basic options. We can be paralyzed by legalism and paranoia, condemning ourselves and everyone else, hating God but hiding under a pharisaic cloak of self-righteousness. We can retreat to the safety of a state of denial, thinking and talking about other aspects of God and His plan of salvation, but avoiding the judgment and ignoring Bible passages that tell about it. Another option is to investigate the judgment in the Bible in order to gain a balanced and realistic understanding of it within the context of God's plan of salvation.

Compare these three approaches with ways in which you deal with a powerful or intimidating person. You can be prejudiced and despise the person but be nice to his/her face. You can be prejudiced, but go away and ignore the person. Or you can get acquainted with the person, thereby overcoming your prejudice or initial impressions and gaining valid reasons whether to pursue friendship or not.

I prefer the third option because it is honest, open-minded, realistic, and it works. It works with people: I have made some of my best friends this way. It also works with situations such as the judgment. Because I learn more does not guarantee that I will have a positive view. But by looking into things, I can base my opinions on information and experience rather than on ignorance.

Through Bible study, my fears of the judgment have been answered by a more realistic view of the factors that are involved. First, we are judged by our works, but works are only evidence of the faith through which we are saved. There is no room for legalism here because it is God who empowers our works through faith.

Forgiveness that we have received is undone in the judgment only if we sever our new covenant connection with God, refusing to allow Him to give us the change that goes with forgiveness. As long as we continue to accept His transforming power, we have complete assurance that our sins are forgiven.

We do not vindicate God by the good works that we produce. God vindicates Himself by what He does for us, in us, and through us. He cleanses His own sanctuary/reputation by His High Priest and He makes us clean. For people who are truly converted, the only works relevant to the outcome of the judgment are works that follow conversion, which are empowered by God. The outcome for such people is positive because of what they have allowed God to do.

The judgment takes place in heaven, so we don't know exactly when our names come up in the judgment. Apparently this is because God is interested in genuine, ongoing commitment by faith rather than hypocritical show that lasts just long enough for a person to squeeze through the pearly gates. But God clearly tells us when the judgment as a whole begins and He lets us know what He expects His people to do during this time: "keep the commandments of God and hold fast to the faith of Jesus" (Rev 14:12).

For those who continue to accept God's transforming power, the end of the judgment is a relief. God matures them to the point that they have outgrown sinning and their commitment will have passed

the point of no return. This does not mean that they cannot experience further moral growth. Such growth will continue throughout eternity as they learn more of the depths of God's love.

For those who reject the Christ who came to "save his people *from* their sins" (Matt 1:21) and who have no desire to give up sin, the judgment holds no prospect but total terror:

For if we willfully persist in sin after having received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a fearful prospect of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries... It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God (Heb 10:26-27, 31).

Since the judgment is double-edged, condemning those who are disloyal while delivering those who are loyal, it is not in danger of losing its awesomeness in order to become "user friendly." But our fear can become less than paralyzing if we fully take into account the concept that for God's true people, the judgment is about mercy and its results for us and for our divine King and Judge, who is also our Father. When we enter the judgment cherishing the forgiveness that we have already received, the judgment sets our confidence in concrete.

During the judgment we can have at least five kinds of confidence: confidence that God is fair, confidence of our access to God, confidence that we are in a covenant relationship with God, confidence in the imminence of Christ's Second Coming, and confidence in deliverance from oppression.

Confidence that God is fair

Our world is chaotic, but God is in charge. He has all the power necessary to take care of us. As our King, God has the kingly role of Judge. This is good for us because He is honest and fair, unlike some human rulers and judges.

Psalm 96 celebrates salvation and just judgment by God in His sanctuary as Creator, King, and Judge. The end of the Psalm bursts with joy at the prospect of the Lord's judgment:

Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice;
Let the sea roar, and all it contains;
Let the field exult, and all that is in it.
Then all the trees of the forest will sing for joy
Before the Lord, for He is coming;
For He is coming to judge the earth.
He will judge the world in righteousness,
And the peoples in His faithfulness (verses 11-13; NASB).

While the judgment is solemn and awesome, it also gives joy because we have confidence that our Lord will take care of us in and through His judgment.

Confidence of our access to God

It is true that we do not have physical access to the place of judgment. This is also true with regard to the place where Christ has been interceding on our behalf since He ascended to heaven. But we can enter by faith to the throne of grace now (Heb 4:14-16), just as we can accept by faith the cross event that we cannot see because it is in the past. We can pray to God as our Father and *know* that He hears us. "And this is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him" (1 Jn 5:14-15; NASB).

Confidence that we are in a covenant relationship with God

Like the ancient Day of Atonement, the end-time restoration of the heavenly sanctuary identifies God's loyal, covenant people and vindicates His justice in saving them. Compare Psalm 50:3-6:

Our God comes and does not keep silence, before him is a devouring fire, and a mighty tempest all

around him. He calls to the heavens above and to the earth, that he may judge his people: "Gather to me my faithful ones, who made a covenant with me by sacrifice!" The heavens declare his righteousness, for God himself is judge.

God's faithful ones, who have made a new covenant with Him by accepting Christ's sacrifice, have nothing to fear in the judgment. "The Lord redeems the life of his servants; none of those who take refuge in him will be condemned" (Ps 34:22). Rather than removing the assurance of God's people, the judgment reaffirms it.

In the ancient sanctuary, when the high priest enacted the judgment on the Day of Atonement, he didn't cleanse the sanctuary by wiping off the bloodstains that had been applied for sins during the year. No, he put more blood in several of the same places (Lev 16:14-19; compare 4:6-7, 17-18, 25, 30, 34), reaffirming the forgiveness that had already been given.

Whose blood did that represent? Christ's blood! Christ's sacrifice is so great that it not only purchases our forgiveness, it pays the cost of mercy after forgiveness, thereby reaffirming our atonement, our reconciliation with God. Let's hear it again for the blood of Christ!

Christ's blood applied to you in the judgment says: You are really forgiven and finally cleansed from any impediments to your covenant relationship with God. You belong to God, not to Satan.

For God's faithful ones, Christ's work of judgment involves a special kind of mediation in a special phase of representing them before God. Just as the Israelite high priest mediated for his people during the year and mediated for them again by applying blood to the sanctuary on their behalf on the Day of Atonement, Christ mediates to give us forgiveness and then He represents us again so that we can receive cleansing in the judgment.

The promise of Revelation 3:5 has special application for the time of judgment: "If you conquer, you will be clothed like them in white robes, and I will not blot your name out of the book of life; I will confess your name before my Father and before his angels." In the book of Revelation, those who conquer and are clothed with "white robes" are people who are faithful to the end (Rev 6:11; 7:9, 13). So Christ promises to acknowledge those who are faithful to the end in order that their names will not be blotted out of the book of life. This sounds like the time of the judgment, when God's people are shown to be faithful.

Rather than having their names blotted out of the book of life, God's people have their sins blotted/wiped out. There is a sense in which God wipes out sins when He forgives (Isa 44:22), but in the judgment before Christ returns to earth, He wipes them out in the ultimate sense that they are eternally and irrevocably irrelevant. Acts 3:19-21 appears to cover both phases of wiping out sin:

Repent therefore, and turn to God so that your sins may be wiped out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Messiah appointed for you, that is, Jesus, who must remain in heaven until the time of universal restoration that God announced long ago through his holy prophets.

As a result of the judgment, Satan is shown to be a malicious, false witness (compare Deut 19:16-19) because he lies when he says that we are not really forgiven. It is Satan, not God, who is trying to take away our assurance. The judgment is bad for us only if we are not on God's side.

The judgment puts the finishing touches on the process of atonement. If we are in Christ, the judgment makes us more saved. It does not devalue the forgiveness that we have already received; it reaffirms that forgiveness. It does not deny the blood of Christ; it applies that blood again. It does not confirm the accusations of Satan; it answers them. It does not take away our assurance; it sets our assurance in concrete. Let's say with the Psalmist: "Judge me, O Lord my God...!" (Ps 35:24; NASB), that is, "Vindicate me...!" (compare 26:1; 43:1).

If we truly believe in Christ, we have eternal life: "I write these things to you who believe in the

name of the Son of God, so that you may *know* that you *have* eternal life" (1 Jn 5:13). We can have confidence that we are in a covenant relationship with God.

Confidence in the imminence of Christ's Second Coming

The judgment is the last phase of Christ's saving activity before He comes again. Since we are already in the period of the judgment, we are about to meet Christ! The fact that the judgment began in 1844, over a century and a half ago, does not mean that Christ is coming later now than He was in 1844. It may mean that He is waiting in order to give people an opportunity to be saved, just as He kept the Israelites waiting for their land for hundreds of years while He gave the inhabitants of Canaan an opportunity to turn from evil (Gen 15:13-16). But God's mercy is not tardiness. "The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance" (2 Pet 3:9; NASB).

We are closer than ever to the end. "For there is still a vision for the appointed time; it speaks of the end, and does not lie. If it seems to tarry, wait for it; it will surely come, it will not delay" (Hab 2:3). Therefore, "prepare to meet your God" (Amos 4:12)!

Confidence in deliverance from oppression

In Daniel 7, God's judgment condemns evil power that oppresses God's people and brings about their deliverance from oppression. While the results of the judgment may not be immediately apparent, deliverance will come. God's judgment is like a D-Day invasion against evil that is absolutely certain to bring a V-Day of liberation and peace.

While we humble ourselves during the time of the judgment, we can rejoice even if we are persecuted (Matt 5:11-12), looking forward to a great victory celebration:

And I saw what appeared to be a sea of glass mixed with fire, and those who had conquered the beast and its image and the number of its name, standing beside the sea of glass with harps of God in their hands. And they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb: "Great and amazing are your deeds, Lord God the Almighty! Just and true are your ways, King of the nations! Lord, who will not fear and glorify your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship before you, for your judgments have been revealed" (Rev 15:2-4; compare Ps 9:1-4).

Fear of the judgment can paralyze our faith. But by learning more about it from the Bible, we find that what seemed like a mountain lion can give us confidence, especially when we know that Christ, "the Lion of the tribe of Judah" (Rev 5:5), is on our side!

Call

The cross is the altar to which Christ draws us. Why do we come? Is it because Christ on the cross is like a diamond? Or like a helicopter, taking us from chaos and death to peace and freedom? Or a spring from which flows progressive reconciliation with God, including forgiveness and cleansing?

Christ on the cross is the ultimate paradox: horrifying in ugliness, supreme in beauty. We gaze at the grotesque form of the carpenter from Nazareth, lifted up between earth and heaven, cursed by both. There we see a mirror of ourselves, of the fate that we deserve, but for the grace of God. And there we see the heart of God, reaching out with love so mysteriously pure, so alien to our selfish world, that we come out of curiosity and hope. From deep within us the cross event awakens a primal longing for something we once had and lost: love the way it is meant to be.

There is evidence all around us that God exists. But it is Christ on the cross who answers our questions about God's character, draws us to desire an intimate relationship with Him, and gives us hope that we can be and have all that is good.

Having come to the altar, what will you do now? Will you go back to your busy life as if nothing has happened? Or has the encounter at the cross changed you forever? Will you rely on yourself? Or will you humble yourself as Christ humbled Himself? Can you be satisfied with a temporary vision? Or will you walk through the vision into a new world beyond?