

## ***112 Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed***

“Beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, [Jesus] explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself... Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?” (Lk 24)

This is where my journeyings have brought me. That quote burns into my heart and soul too. If we want to understand what Christ did for us on the cross, that understanding *has* to be based on the Old Testament. The New Testament is *not* God’s second attempt at rescuing us – it’s all one. It’s a new covenant, yes, but God made a number of covenants; it’s all there in the (OT) plan.

How can we “understand” it? We can’t; it’s God’s work we’re talking about. Is it a mechanism? No, but my character is one that wants to know, “Yes, but how does it actually work?!” So I hope you’ll bear with me as I lay out the ideas that have been going through my mind as I’ve read (again) Flood’s book,<sup>i</sup> and as I read right through Hebrews almost at a sitting.

From John’s announcement, “Behold the lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” to the Book of Revelation, where Christ is referred to 30 times as “the Lamb”. I have come to the inescapable conclusion that Passover was absolutely the centre of the faith of the early church. They understood what God had done in Christ *through* their understanding of (maybe better, their appreciation of) the Passover. And that’s why the celebration of Communion/Eucharist/breaking of bread is so central to our worship.

So **how** did Christ’s sacrifice take away the sins of the whole world? And remember, it has to be understood as a piece, right through from the Old Testament into the New Testament. Here I will set out different ways of understanding ‘sacrifice’, and you can see what you think. First, the prevailing pagan view in NT times:

1) The gods are angry; we offer sacrifices to appease the anger of the gods (to propitiate them).

Clearly, that is not the Jewish (or Christian) view. The giving of sacrifices (ours or Jesus’) does not change God’s attitude from anger to love. God loves us, and no amount of sacrificing can make God love us more.<sup>ii</sup> (“While we were still sinners, Christ died...”)

2<sup>OT</sup>) We sin; God is angry; we (Jews) offer a sacrifice and God’s anger is propitiated.

2<sup>NT</sup>) We sin; God is angry; Jesus offers a once-for-all sacrifice and God’s anger is propitiated.

Once God’s anger has been propitiated, our sin can be washed away (technical term: expiated).

3<sup>OT</sup>) We sin; God is angry; God gives us a sacrifice (blood); we (Jews) are cleansed (expiated).

3<sup>NT</sup>) We sin; God is angry; Jesus offers a once-for-all sacrifice; we (all) are cleansed (expiated).

Once God has cleansed us, there is no reason for God to be angry, i.e. God’s anger is turned away (propitiated).

As 20th century Christians (and in certain of the previous centuries), we have been brought up to believe that God is holy and therefore God **cannot** forgive sins unless and until a penalty has been paid, so Jesus paid the penalty on our behalf.

However, my reading of Hebrews (strongly influenced by Flood, I admit) has led me to believe that this is **not** how the (OT or NT) Jews saw sacrifice, and therefore it shouldn't be our (Christian) way of seeing Christ's sacrifice.

At the Passover, the people of God obeyed God's instructions, they trusted God, they had faith in God. They didn't "give God a sacrifice"; rather, they and we received the protective sacrificial blood and were rescued, ransomed, redeemed, restored, forgiven...

So, no, I don't have a nice neat simple mechanism by which we are saved, but I do know a God who loves us desperately, prodigally. And God says that there is a way for us to return to the Father: Christ died "**for us**". In simple faith, we receive that death into our own life. And it is simply wonderful, brilliant, awesome, fantastic, humbling, exciting, and ultimately worth sharing.

Paul Bev. 16.2.20

Christ's work as cleansing:

*Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word (Eph 5:25,26)*

*How much more, then, will the blood of Christ ... cleanse our consciences (Heb 9:15)*

*In fact, the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness. (Heb 9:22)* This verse (only the second part) is sometimes quoted to support the idea that "God cannot forgive without someone dying for our sin" – but, as you see, the verse is about cleansing, not substitution.

*If it could, would they not have stopped being offered? For the worshippers would have been cleansed once for all, and would no longer have felt guilty for their sins. (Heb 10:2)*

*...let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience (Heb 10:22)*

And possibly: *You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. (Jn 15:3)*

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<sup>i</sup> *Healing the Gospel*, Derek Flood.

<sup>ii</sup> Even the strongest proponents of penal substitution acknowledge that while the cross appeases God's wrath, it doesn't, in any way, "make God love us". Flood quotes both Calvin and John Stott on this point. [Flood p. 27]