

### ***God's rescue plan (III) – Christ's loving sacrifice***

*(Once again I will only present here some ideas that I hope will enhance our view of the gospel. For a fuller biblical exposition, see chapter 4 of Derek Flood's 'Healing the Gospel'.)*

This stress on restoration and healing as a solution to the sin that ruins lives is all well and good, but are we ignoring all that the Bible teaches about sacrifice, ransom and Christ dying for our sins? Isn't sacrifice about appeasing God's anger, God's wrath against our sin? Doesn't Hebrews say that there is no forgiveness without the shedding of blood?!

OK, one thing at a time! First, it's only in pagan religions that sacrifice is supposed to appease the gods; that was never the intention in temple worship. And let's be very clear, sacrifice does not make an angry God love us; nothing could **ever** make God love us more than he does already. You do believe that, don't you? Otherwise we might as well give up and go home.

And is God actually 'angry' with his covenant people, anyway?! No, rather, because he loves them so much (check out Hosea, if you don't believe me), he's desperately sad (like my friend who wept over her son) that they are hurting themselves and others.

So it's because God loved his people so much that he gave them sacrifices. And those sacrifices were an outward ritual that were intended to bring about an inner change, devotion and repentance. After all, God repeatedly says (words to the effect of), 'I don't want your sacrifices; I want an inner change of heart.' So what's all this stuff about blood?!

The writer of Hebrews, in reminding us about the Old Testament sacrifices, talks about being cleansed by blood, so when the people were cleansed by the sprinkling of blood, they were able to relate to God properly again. As they made their sacrifices, God took away their sin.

Is it mechanical? Is it automatic? Does making sacrifices somehow produce forgiveness? No, let's be clear, it was that God chose to take away their sins.

But the writer goes on to say that those sacrifices were imperfect and had to be repeated over and over again, and then he points us to that one perfect, sufficient sacrifice.

As I have come to understand it, Christ's blood cleanses us, which then allows us back into relationship with God back into his covenant, and that's the opposite way around from 'what we've always been taught'. We were told that Christ was punished for our sin **so that**, as a result, we could be forgiven.

Being an engineer I like to see it as a flow diagram. So we have either

Christ's death cleanses us from sin → we're forgiven → we can come back into God's presence

OR

Christ's death absorbs God's punishment → we're forgiven → we can be cleansed from sin

Personally, the first of those two sounds more like the God that Jesus portrays as, say, the prodigal father. However, for it to be true, and not just wishful thinking on my part, we need to

ask, can Jesus' death take away sin, just like that? Of course it can! That theme runs right through both Old and New Testaments! Hallelujah!

But **how** does Jesus' death take away sins? First let's be clear that only God can do it; as in the Old Testament, so in the New Testament **only God can take away sins**.

Secondly, if you want to know exactly **how** Jesus' death take away sins, I'd have to say that we don't really know; it's a mystery. But the Bible gives us lots of clues; it gives us various ways of picturing it to help us to accept it, to receive it, to make it real in our lives.

At this point, some of you may respond that it can **only** be by substitution – Jesus dying in our place. But despite the engineer in me who likes to know exactly how things work, I don't believe that the Bible allows us to be that definite.

But the picture I'd like to share with you today, from the view I've expressed above, is that it's not the physical death, per se, that cleanses us. Rather, it's Christ's loving willingness to die for us; **that** is where the power lies; **that** is the power of the sacrifice that takes away sin.

Remember those two ladies who came to Solomon, each claiming that the one child was theirs? One mother was willing to sacrifice the baby if she couldn't get what she wanted; the other was willing, out of love for the child, to sacrifice her own desire to save the life of her child.

Can you see that as very pale reflection of what Christ gave up out of love for us!

But from Hebrews, we see that it's Jesus sacrifice, Jesus' blood that brings us back into God's covenant of love. Why not read it and see again the amazing gift that God gave us, as Jesus willingly and lovingly gave up his life for you and for me: *How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!* (Heb 9:14)

Actually, I suppose (and this is my sudden idea, not one that I got from Derek Flood's biblical exposition), in a sense, it was in the Garden of Gethsemane that our salvation was won, when Jesus said, 'Not my will but yours be done' and set his face to the cross. That was the point at which Jesus made his sacrifice for us. When he sweated blood, that was, in a sense, the blood that cleanses us from sin, so that we can be forgiven and brought back into God's presence.

Let's keep questioning and keep digging into our Bibles; there are vast riches to be found as we look into how Jesus' death was the solution that God planned 'before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake.'

*For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake. Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God.*  
(1 Pet 1:18-21)