

FORGIVENESS: ITS SCRIPTURAL MEANINGS,  
PRINCIPLES AND APPLICATIONS

by

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An examination of the full circle of meaning of forgiveness is necessary to the understanding of key biblical concepts such as atonement, propitiation, redemption and salvation. The root meaning "a refusal to call to account" is a good starting point, but the Scriptures offer much more insight into this vital concept. The study of forgiveness in its full circle of meaning includes: a study of the Old and New Testament concepts of the term based on the original languages and contextual usage; a study of the additional nuances and principles that can be added to its interpretation in specific contexts; and a study of the applications of the term to particular relationships.

Forgiveness is the English translation of various Hebrew and Greek words used in contexts dealing with the removal of offense, especially sin against God, and restoration of a relationship. A study of the meaning and usage of these words establishes a circle of meaning for 'forgiveness' which includes the character and activity of the one forgiving, the means of removal, the requirements for the offender, and the results of the action.

An effective understanding of forgiveness includes an awareness of certain principles which surround its usage in a given context. Forgiveness always involves activity within a personal relationship. Restoration of the offender to the status he held before the offense occurred is the result of forgiveness. It demands complete removal of the cause of offense. It is enhanced by, and in most cases requires repentance on the part of the offender. It does not deny the appropriateness of restitution or payment of consequences for the offenses.

Forgiveness is applied first and foremost by God. Because removal of the offense is required for forgiveness to occur, the sacrificial system, pictured and practiced in the Old Testament and culminated in the atonement--the crosswork of Jesus Christ in the New, is the vital foundation for God's forgiveness. His forgiveness is applied in three ways: common grace--the staying of His wrath for a time, salvation forgiveness in which God settles the issue of sin, and establishes the one forgiven in His family, and parental forgiveness applied to restore His children to fellowship. In light of God's example, man, especially the believer, is required to forgive others, who have offended that man, according to the example and principles set forth by the author of forgiveness, God.

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## TABLE OF ABBREVIATIONS

BAGD	<u>Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich, Danker. A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</u>
BDB	<u>Brown, Driver, Briggs. A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament</u>
<u>BETS</u>	<u>Bulletin of the Evangelical Theological Society</u>
<u>BTB</u>	<u>Biblical Theology Bulletin</u>
CB	<u>New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology</u> , edited by Colin Brown
<u>CT</u>	<u>Christianity Today</u>
Gesenius	<u>Gesenius. A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament</u>
<u>GNB</u>	<u>Good News Broadcaster</u>
<u>JTS</u>	<u>Journal of Theological Studies</u>
K-B	<u>Koehler and Baumgartner. Lexicon in Veteris Testamenti Libros</u>
MM	<u>Moulton &amp; Milligan. The Vocabulary of the Greek New Testament</u>
<u>TDNT</u>	<u>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament (Kittel)</u>
<u>TWOT</u>	<u>Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament (Harris, et al.)</u>
<u>VE</u>	<u>Vox Evangelica</u>
Young	<u>Young's Analytical Concordance to the Bible</u>

## INTRODUCTION

Forgiveness is a concept that reaches into the very depths of religious knowledge. It reoccurs from cover to cover in God's Word. It is ultimately linked with atonement, reconciliation, propitiation, justification, sanctification and other important doctrinal issues.

Luther, Barth, Tilich and Calvin each attempted to define forgiveness. Each of them came up with similar but different ideas. Then one is faced with modern psychology. Thurneysen would define forgiveness as the sociological bonds one's parents placed upon him as a child. Mowrer identifies it simply as the catharsis received from confession.<sup>1</sup>

The procedure of the biblical fundamentalist who desires to understand this word "forgiveness," would be to examine what the Scriptures say. This paper will do that. It is humbly presented with the desire to assist fellow believers in understanding this vital concept, noted as a characteristic of God and required of His people.

Two preliminaries need to be addressed. The first is the relationship between the Old and New Testaments. Gustav Oehler notes that "in virtue of the organic

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<sup>1</sup>Cited in "Reconciliation, Forgiveness, Lost Contracts," by James Lapsley, Theology Today 23 (April, 1966): 47, 58.

connection existing between the two Testaments, Revelation brings forth in the New Testament circumstances, conditions and facts which are analogous, even with respect to their external form, to their pre-representation in the Old."<sup>1</sup>

This statement repeats the basic understanding of progressive revelation. This idea has two aspects. First, God revealed Himself carefully, slowly unfolding His character and activity through the history of the Old Testament until His complete work for man was finally revealed in the Incarnation and New Testament. But, secondly, it is possible in light of the revelation of the New Testament, to go back to the Old with a much more capable perspective. In light of the New, one can more clearly see the beautiful pictures, examples and teaching process of the Old. One must also acknowledge that because he now stands on this side of the New Testament it is difficult if not impossible to ignore the New while looking at the Old Testament. This paper is written in full acknowledgment of that fact as it deals with God's revelation of forgiveness.

The second preliminary to this section is a basic understanding of the definitions of words. Words cannot and ought not be pinned down to another one-word answer. If a word could be defined that simply, then one of them would not be necessary. Words have circles of meanings.

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<sup>1</sup>Gustav F. Oehler, Theology of the Old Testament (Minneapolis: Klock and Klock Christian Publishers, 1978), p. 492.

Within that circle are phases of activity, root meanings and areas of overlap with other words.

So it is with "forgiveness." Note that in both Old and New Testaments a variety of metaphorical words are used to speak of the concept. The full circle of meaning then must include all those pictures plus phases of activity and more.

A word, however, also includes more. In their textbook for translating the Bible into tribal languages, Beekman and Callow strongly assert that the implications and inferences surrounding a word are just as much a part of the inspired Scriptures as that readily available from simple definitions.<sup>1</sup>

One must begin with a root meaning. That meaning for forgiveness is "a refusal to call to account." There is no way that such a simple explanation comes close to grasping the full circle of meaning of such an important word. It is the intent of this paper to go beyond that simple meaning in order to more fully understand the God of forgiveness and His expectations of those who obey His word.

This paper will follow the procedure of: (1) Examination of the Hebrew words and Old Testament understanding of the circle of meaning of forgiveness; (2) Examination of the Greek words and New Testament understanding of the

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<sup>1</sup>John Beekman, John Callow, Translating the Word of God (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974), p. 46.

circle of meaning of forgiveness; (3) Stating basic scriptural principles related to the circle of meaning of forgiveness; (4) Examination of the application of forgiveness, divine and human, including an extended section on the foundation of divine forgiveness.

## CHAPTER I

### SCRIPTURAL UNDERSTANDING OF FORGIVENESS

This first chapter will examine the scriptural understanding of the circle of meaning of forgiveness in two sections: (1) Old Testament Understanding; and (2) New Testament Understanding.

#### Old Testament Understanding of Forgiveness

Under the premise established in the introduction that the Old Testament reveals God's character, and the unfolding of His plan, this section will examine the Hebrew words and the Old Testament picture of forgiveness. It will consider the three key Hebrew words, סָלַח, נָשָׂא, כָּפַר, translated into the English "forgive" as well as other facets of the Old Testament circle of meaning.

#### Hebrew Words

##### סָלַח

The Hebrew word that is most consistently translated forgive, or forgiveness, is the term סָלַח. In the King James Version it is translated "forgive," 19 times, "pardon," 13 times, "spare," once, and the Niphal, "be forgiven," 13 times.<sup>1</sup> However, even though סָלַח is consistently translated

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<sup>1</sup>Young, Index, p. 42.

in the King James, there has been a development in the understanding of the definition; or more complete translation. One major lexicon translates  $\text{סלח}$  "forgive, pardon, always of God."<sup>1</sup> Another, after translating  $\text{סלח}$  "to forgive, pardon,"<sup>2</sup> goes on to state: "The primary idea seems to be that of lifting up, taking away."<sup>3</sup> With respect strictly to translation, Dr. Robert Young separates the use of  $\text{סלח}$  from other Hebrew words translated forgive, by translating it "to send away, to let go."<sup>4</sup>

One must note that writers often, after understanding the basic definition and usage of a word, attempt to add ideas which will allow it to fit pervading ideas of theology. Such is the case with  $\text{סלח}$ . As research has continued, later writers with much more study to base their conclusions upon are willing to eliminate external ideas and accept as complete the simple translation "to pardon, to forgive."<sup>5</sup>

Dr. Walter Kaiser makes a comment which is also noted by all other sources that  $\text{סלח}$  is "used only of God in Scripture."<sup>6</sup> This feature about  $\text{סלח}$ , that it is never used of men forgiving men, assists in developing an

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<sup>1</sup>BDB, p. 699.

<sup>2</sup>Gesenius, p. 725.

<sup>3</sup>ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Young, p. 367.

<sup>5</sup>K-B, 2:659.

<sup>6</sup>TWOT, s.v. " $\text{סלח}$ ," by Walter Kaiser, 2:626.



understanding of the concept of forgiveness. Because of this unique development, **סלח** ought to be examined closely. It occurs in both the Qal and the Niphal. In the Qal it occurs usually with the structure, God as the subject; **סלח** in the Qal; and the direct objects: (1) sin (i.e. Jer 33:8), "and I will pardon (**וְסִלַּחְתִּי**) all their iniquities"; or (2) the sinner (i.e. 1 Ki 8:50), "and forgive (**וְסִלַּחְתָּ**) your people." It is also seen in the absolute (i.e. Am 7:2), "then I said, Lord Jehovah, please forgive (**סִלַּח-נָא**)."

In the Niphal **סלח** occurs consistently in a technical formula in the Levitical code with the translation "It shall be forgiven (**וְנִסְלַח**) him" (Lev 4:26).

**סלח** occurs once adjectivally in Psalm 86:5 with the meaning "thou Lord art kind and forgiving" (**וְנִסְלַח**). There is a noun form of **סלח** which occurs three times, once in the singular, "But there is forgiveness (**סְלִיחָה**) with thee" (Ps 130:4) and twice in the plural where it takes on the intensive meaning "abundant forgiveness (**סְלִיחוֹת**)" (Ne 9:17; Dn 9:9).

A study of **סלח** also allows one to note the full range of God's forgiveness. In Exodus 34:9, in response to the most heinous of sins, the incident of the golden calf, even while he was talking to God, Moses must plead, "and do Thou pardon (**וְסִלַּחְתָּ**) our iniquity and our sin," to which God responds positively. At Kadesh Barnea, Moses must again intercede on behalf of the people, and God responds, "I have forgiven (**וְסִלַּחְתִּי**)" (Nu 14:20).

In the Levitical Code, provision is made for both unintentional and intentional sins. Leviticus 5:1 begins a list of unintentional sins which include perjury, touching uncleanness and taking oaths, and concludes the section in verse ten with "and it shall be forgiven (וְנִסְלַח) him." Then chapter six, verse one gives a list of intentional sins including embezzlement, robbery, extortion and lying which ends in verse seven with the statement, "and it shall be forgiven (וְנִסְלַח) him."

Numbers 15 identifies sin which is not forgiven. God forgives sin of ignorance as in verse 28, but "the one who sins defiantly, is blaspheming the Lord, and that person both shall be cut off from the people, and his guilt shall remain with him" (Nu 15:30,31). Deuteronomy 29:20 cites another person who will not be forgiven. This situation also provides insight by contrast into what God's forgiveness offers. In this situation if a man turns from God to serve other gods, and when confronted, boasts in his peace, and that God has not judged him, then "The Lord shall never be willing to forgive (וְלֹא יִסְלַח) him, but rather the anger of the Lord and His jealousy will burn against that man, and every curse which is written in this book will rest on him, and the Lord will blot out his name from under heaven."

God's forgiveness is apparently tied to supplication by one who has prepared his own heart. Two instances of Moses interceding on behalf of the people, at Mount

Sinai and at Kadesh Barnea have already been noted. In 1 Kings 8, when Solomon prays to dedicate the temple, he makes the request to God that when Israel has sinned and been defeated, "if they turn to Thee again and confess Thy name and pray and make supplication to Thee . . ., then hear Thou in heaven, and forgive (וְסַלַחְתָּ) the sin of Thy people Israel" (1 Ki 8:33,34). The response of that prayer is recorded in 2 Chronicles where God answers it in His vision to Solomon stating, ". . . and My people who are called by My name humble themselves and pray, and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, will forgive (וְאָסַלַחְתִּי) their sin, and will heal their land" (2 Chr 7:14).

When the Lord promises a salvation and new covenant which can be looked forward to, סַלַח is at the very foundation of that promise. This is noted in Isaiah 55:7, ". . . and let him return to the Lord, and He will have compassion on him . . . for He will abundantly pardon (וְסַלַחְתִּי)." Jeremiah 31:34 speaks of the new covenant when it promises, ". . . for they all shall know me . . . for I will forgive (וְאָסַלַחְתִּי) their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more."

It must be noted once again that forgiveness, specifically סַלַח is God's activity. It is thoroughly founded on His character, His power to forgive, and seen as His gift. The Psalmist prays in supplication and trust: "For Thou, Lord, art good and ready to forgive

(חַסְדֶּךָ), and abundant in lovingkindness to all who call upon Thee" (Ps 86:5). When David praises the Lord's mercies in Psalm 103 a repeated theme of forgiveness is first stated in verse 3, "Who pardons (חַסְדֶּךָ) all your iniquities . . ." Another Psalm is devoted totally to the theme of hope in the Lord's forgiveness, "But there is forgiveness (חַסְדֶּךָ) with Thee" (Ps 130:4).

Any summary of the use of חַסְדֶּךָ must note this characteristic of being the action and attribute of God. Beyond that, one can learn much about forgiveness from its use. Forgiveness is longsuffering, that is, just about anything can be forgiven. It is the response of the offended party to specific offenses (i.e. the breaking of God's Law). Although encouraged by the request of the offender, or his representative, forgiveness is rooted in the strength and character of the one who forgives. The emphasis, when this particular word is employed is upon the result of the activity, that is a restored relationship specifically here between man and God. As one takes a close look at forgiveness, חַסְדֶּךָ stands out as a vivid definition and especially as an illustration of "forgiveness and pardon from the very God of forgiveness."<sup>1</sup>

### נָשָׂא

Although נָשָׂא is not a word specifically translated always "to forgive," its varied usages can add much to

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<sup>1</sup> TWOT, s.v. "חַסְדֶּךָ," by Walter Kaiser, 2:626.

one's understanding of forgiveness. Its 600 occurrences in the Old Testament are translated in the King James Version with over sixty different words although three are predominant: "lift up" (137), "bear" (156), and "take away" (116). These three ideas have been identified as the three categories within which usages of  $\text{נָשָׂא}$  can be placed: (1) to lift up; (2) bear, carry, support; (3) to take, take away.<sup>1</sup> Below is a look at some of the nuances of  $\text{נָשָׂא}$  in a general sense, and then specific observations with regard to sin and forgiveness.

In general category I "to lift up"  $\text{נָשָׂא}$  can refer in a pleonastic way to eyes, in order to see (Gen 13:10,14), or voice in order to weep (Gen 27:38), pray (Jer 7:16), reproach (Psa 15:3) or sing (Num 23:7). One lifts one's hand to take an oath (Dt 32:40), do violence (2 Sam 18:28), or punish (Ps 10:12). One lifts one's hand to restore honor (Gen 40:13,20), show cheerfulness (Zech 2:4), and show independence (Ps 83:3). One lifts one's face to show good conscience, favor, acceptance (2 Sam 2:22). And lifts the heart to incite to action (Ex 35:21) and also in a demonstration of presumption and pride (2 Ki 14:10).

General category II for  $\text{נָשָׂא}$  is "to bear, carry, support."  $\text{נָשָׂא}$  is translated to bear with regard to loads (Gen 37:25), as well as to bear fruit (Hag 2:19) and the more figurative to bear burdens, that is to suffer (Gen 13:6) and to endure (Jer 15:15). One carries armor

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., 2:600.

(Jud 9:54), weapons (1 Chr 5:18), and locusts which were carried by the wind (Ex 10:13).

נָשָׂא is used in a variety of Category III nuances of "to take, take away." One takes unto himself a wife (Ru 1:4), but also takes away the head (Gen 40:19). One takes away things (i.e., idols) in warfare (1 Sam 5:21), as well as takes houses and fields by force (Mic 2:2). נָשָׂא in this third category is also used of one who takes, or receives God's Word (Dt 33:3).

נָשָׂא is translated with reference to forgiveness with the words "remove" (25), "forgive" (16) and "pardon" (4).<sup>1</sup> When נָשָׂא is translated in this sense it is not exclusive of God's forgiveness toward man, as is the case with סָלַח. Man forgives man. Specifically, the first time נָשָׂא is translated "to forgive" it falls into the category of man forgiving or asking forgiveness of man. "Please forgive (נָשָׂא) I beg you, the transgression of your brothers and their sin" (Gen 50:17).

When נָשָׂא is used in reference to sin, it has meanings in the same three categories. In Category I, men lift up, take up or incur iniquity. Man can incur iniquity by profaning the tabernacle. Aaron and his sons are told to wear the linen breeches "so that they do not incur (נִשְׂאוּ) guilt and die" (Ex 28:43). If the Israelites follow the procedures for and do not profane the offering then it

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<sup>1</sup>Young, Index, p. 30.

could be said, "And you shall bear (תִּשָּׂא) no sin by reason of it" (Nu 18:32).

Category II refers to the idea of bearing or carrying the full weight of guilt or punishment for sin either for oneself or another. Cain complained that "My punishment is too great to bear (מִן־שָׂאוֹ)" (Gen 4:13). Other men too can bear the full weight of their sin (i.e. with reference to improper treatment of sacrificial meat or it not being eaten properly); the conclusion is "and the person who eats of it shall bear (תִּשָּׂא) his own iniquity" (Lev 7:18). In Leviticus 16:22 the scapegoat "shall bear (שָׂא) on itself all their iniquities to a solitary land." Isaiah, speaking of the servant to come, concludes with the idea that "He Himself bore (שָׂא) the sin of many" (Isa 53:12).

Category III is the one which confirms the use of שָׁטָה to mean "take away sin, forgiveness, pardon of sin." It is listed as an attribute of God in Exodus 34:7, "who forgives (שָׁטָה) iniquity, transgression and sin." It is used in intercession for forgiveness as in Exodus 32:32, "if Thou wilt, forgive (שָׁטָה) their sin." God does forgive, just as the Psalmist praises Him for doing in Psalm 85:2, "Thou didst forgive (שָׁטָה) the iniquity of Thy people."

That God forgives sin is excitingly portrayed by this word שָׁטָה. Walter Kaiser sums up his article on שָׁטָה with the conclusion, "No doubt the classical expression of this meaning is to be found in Ps 32:1,5. Sin can be forgiven and forgotten, because it is taken up and carried

away."<sup>1</sup> But נָשָׂא must be looked at more closely with regard to forgiveness. The emphasis when using this word to portray forgiveness is on the process which accomplishes the fact. Sin is taken away. Category I shows how sin is put on man initially; he lifts it up, and incurs it upon himself. Category II identifies two very important instruments of forgiveness. First there is the scapegoat who on the Day of Atonement, bears the sin away and secondly, Isaiah looks forward to the one who will bear the sin of many. Men can take away (remove) the barriers which separate themselves as well. Finally, Category III emphasizes that in forgiveness the offense is taken away and is no longer a consideration.

### כָּפַר

Although כָּפַר is only translated "to forgive" two times in the King James Version, it is an important word to understand when considering forgiveness. כָּפַר is most often translated "make atonement," in fact seventy out of one hundred occurrences of the word are translated that way. The rest of the words used to translate כָּפַר should help with the definition. They include, "make reconciliation," "pacify," "pardon," and "purge."<sup>2</sup> It would seem that an idea of getting rid of sin, of clearing up accounts could readily be seen as the meaning of the word. Such is not

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<sup>1</sup> TWOT, "נָשָׂא," by Walter Kaiser, 2:601.

<sup>2</sup> Young, Index, p. 20.



the case; the struggle over a proper definition of כִּפֵּר has greatly affected the understanding of biblical forgiveness.

The lexicon by Brown, Driver and Briggs (BDB) translates the Piel כִּפֵּר (it does not occur in Qal) three ways. These are: "1) cover over, pacify, propitiate . . . 2) cover over, atone for sin without sacrifice . . . 3) cover over, atone for sin and persons by legal rites."<sup>1</sup> BDB continues the discussion, "The purpose of the covering is stated in Lv 16:30."<sup>2</sup> But Leviticus 16:30 notes a different principle, "for it is on this day that atonement shall be made for you to cleanse you; you shall be clean from all your sins before the Lord." Here it seems that the purpose is cleansing, or some form of taking away. It does not appear that covering over can accomplish that, but purging or taking away can.

R. Laird Harris notes that there are four possible roots of כִּפֵּר: 1) village; 2) name of a young lion; 3) pitch; and 4) cover.<sup>3</sup> He immediately rejects the first two. Option three, pitch, would produce the verb to smear with pitch, a parallel to the Akkadian kupru-asphalt.<sup>4</sup> The only place this verb is used is in Genesis 6:14 when God instructs Noah "to pitch (וְכִפֵּרְתָּ) it (the Ark) inside and

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<sup>1</sup>BDB, p. 497.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>R. Laird Harris, "The Meaning of Kipper, 'Atone,'" BETS 4 (April 1961):3.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

out with pitch (כִּפֶּה). The option "cover" will be discussed below, as well as Harris' conclusion that כִּפֶּה is a denominative verb from כִּפָּר (ransom).

Around the turn of the century, there was a lively discussion in The Expository Times concerning כִּפֶּה. Three men, B. E. König, C. J. Ball and Stephen H. Langdon each presented their views.

B. E. König began the discussion by lamenting the fact that modern day scholars were tampering with the "biblical" translation "to cover." He went on to reiterate the traditional arguments that כִּפֶּה is to be related to an Arabic root which does mean "to cover, to conceal." He argues that this defends the biblical idea that sins are covered. Other supporters add that Old Testament sins were covered until dealt with by Christ. König states his conclusion that "to cover" is the only accurate translation.<sup>1</sup>

C. J. Ball used the Aramaic cognate exclusively to argue for a translation "to wipe away." He argues eloquently that this translation explains what happens to sin, that is, it is cleaned up and removed. He also notes that continual wiping results in a brightening effect to show forth the glory of God.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>B. E. König, "The Hebrew Word for 'Atone,'" The Expository Times 22 (1910-1911):232-34, 378-81.

<sup>2</sup>C. J. Ball, "The Hebrew Word for 'Atone,'" The Expository Times 22 (1910-1911):478-79.

In response to these studies one must note first of all that no scholar has challenged Ball. It seems that by stretching for the Aramaic root which fit his ideas of theology, he went far enough that he is outside the line of pursuit of an accurate understanding of כִּפָּר.

The idea that כִּפָּר means "to cover" has hung on much more tenaciously, and is still held by some scholars. In response to them, others have come to the conclusion that this translation cannot be valid. "Etymological derivations from Arabic with the meaning 'to cover' are without support in biblical Hebrew."<sup>1</sup> It is also noted that if כִּפָּר was simply the Piel of a Qal כָּפַר, this Qal "to cover" could expect to be used. It does not occur in the Old Testament. Harris finally makes the comment that כִּפָּר is not used once to refer to covering anything with anything.<sup>2</sup>

Scholars do propose another root. כִּפָּר is derived from the noun כִּפָּר (ransom) and originally meant "to atone."<sup>3</sup> It occurs specifically with the idea of "the price of life," in the ritual of Exodus 30:12 when the כִּפָּר is the half shekel paid by each male above twenty years old to the temple at the time of the census, in order to insure that there would not be a plague upon them. This was offered to

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<sup>1</sup>Herbert C. Brichto, "On Slaughter and Sacrifice, Blood and Atonement," Hebrew Union College Annual 47 (1976):35.

<sup>2</sup>Harris, "Kipper," 3.

<sup>3</sup>Jewish Encyclopedia, s.v. "Atonement," by Kaufman Kohler, 2:278.

God to atone (לְכַפֵּר) for them. In this same sense of "the price of life," it is translated "ransom" in Psalm 49:7. The connection of כָּפַר with the idea of ransom is fully supported by the following discussion.

Stephen H. Langdon in the aforementioned discussion in The Expository Times specifies, "The word appears in Hebrew almost universally as a cult term for freeing man and objects from sin."<sup>1</sup> He also ties this word in with the sacrificial system noting: ". . . the blood offered is given over to God on the altar appeasing the wrath of God and obtaining pardon for the sinner as a substitute for human blood. This concept is propitiation by substitution."<sup>2</sup> Langdon emphasizes the blood and the life is a gift, a ransom, to remove sin. He ties this to the idea of men providing ransoms to remove an offense against another man (i.e., Ex 21:30).

Koehler and Baumgartner translate כָּפַר with: to make amends with (2 Sam 21:3), to make exempt from punishment (2 Chr 30:18), avert mischief (Isa 47:11), and to be dissolved (Isa 28:18). Finally, they identify the root idea with to be brought to a place of exemption from punishment (Dt 21:8).

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<sup>1</sup>Stephen H. Langdon, "The Hebrew Word for 'Atone,'" The Expository Times 22 (1910-1911):320.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 323.

<sup>3</sup>K-B, 1:451-52.

Harris notes that כִּפָּר is used thirteen times in the Old Testament. It is translated: "ransom" (8), "bribe" (2), "satisfaction" (2), "a sum of money" (1). In every case the context illucidates further that this is a substitution price. כִּפָּר then is a denominative verb taken from ransom so it means to give ransom. The ritual demands atonement by blood. With כִּפָּר meaning to ransom, the emphasis would be on the substitution, of the sacrifice's life for that of the sinner. The wrath of God is appeased or ransomed by this substitutionary sacrifice.<sup>1</sup>

כַּפֹּרֶת, which is the name for the mercy seat above the ark has always been confused in translation. Even BDB recognizes that "the older explanation 'cover lid' has no justification."<sup>2</sup> Although they would stick to a translation in line with their other reasoning, others disagree. W. E. Vine identifies it as being placed above the ark and states, "It is never called 'the cover of the ark,' but is treated as something distinct."<sup>3</sup> The Holy of Holies is, in at least two passages, called "the place of the mercy seat" (כַּפֹּרֶת) (Lev 16:2; 1 Chr 28:11).<sup>4</sup> This makes it clear that it was more than simply a subordinate part of the ark. The evidence of the Septuagint (LXX) and New

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<sup>1</sup>Harris, "Kipper," 3.

<sup>2</sup>BDB, p. 498.

<sup>3</sup>W. E. Vine, An Expository Dictionary of Old Testament Words (Old Tappan, NJ: F. W. Revell, 1978), p. 97.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 98.

Testament usage of the Greek ἱλαστήριον always translated "propitiatory," supports a similar translation/rendering for (כַּפֶּרֶת), the place of propitiation, the place where sins are dealt with.

BDB seems to attempt to include all options in their translations of כַּפֶּר. They put "to cover" in front of each of the various aspects of the word. BDB puts this added idea in front of each definition but then goes on to support the conclusions of the previous discussions with their three categories of usage emphasizing the idea "to atone, to propitiate."

Specifically, Category I is listed after "to cover" as "pacify, propitiate." There is room in this definition for one to pacify the wrath of a king, i.e., "The wrath of a king is as a messenger of death, but a wise man will pacify (לְכַפֵּר הַמֶּלֶךְ) it" (Prov 16:14). Category II suggests that one can atone for sin without sacrifice, but in 2 Samuel 21:3 the gruesome alternative was full vengeance on the sons of Saul. Category III allows one to atone for sin and persons by legal rites. "Underlying all these offerings there is the assumption that the person's offerings are covered by that which is regarded as sufficient and satisfactory by Yahweh."<sup>1</sup> One must differ with this category, stating that, not legal rites but the sacrifices atoned for the sins of the people. In all but three passages

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<sup>1</sup>BDB, p. 498.

(Gen 32:20, Prov 16:14, Isa 26:8, where a gift appeases) the sacrifices always remove sin or defilement.

Another grammatical note which must be mentioned is that God is never the object of **כָּפַר**. When it speaks of God, He is the subject. A. B. Davidson states his conclusion this way:

The fact that He Himself is represented as the subject who performs the covering or atonement, shows how profoundly the feeling had taken possession of the people's minds that in whatever way sin was to be invalidated, and its effects neutralized, ultimately its removal must be due to God.<sup>1</sup>

Specifically, two passages where **כָּפַר** is translated to forgive speak of God forgiving man. In Psalm 78:38 God is praised with these words, "But He, being compassionate, forgave (**וַיִּכַּף**) their iniquity and did not destroy them." In Jeremiah 18:23 he is petitioned to do the opposite, "Do not forgive (**וְלֹא תִכַּף**) their iniquity or blot out their sin from Thy sight."

**כָּפַר** emphasizes the fact that a ransom, a substitutionary price must be paid. But its grammatical distinction of God as subject never object again emphasizes that He provides the ransom to appease His own wrath.

### Forgiveness in the Old Testament

The first step in considering the Old Testament teaching on forgiveness is to summarize some of the things learned about forgiveness from the Hebrew words God chose

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<sup>1</sup>A. B. Davidson, The Theology of the Old Testament (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1904), p. 322.

to use. סלח is the Hebrew word translated "forgive" the most often. Through much study by many scholars, the clear idea of "forgive, pardon" has emerged as the primary meaning of this word. It is noted that the Old Testament uses סלח exclusively of God forgiving. The emphasis is upon the result of the activity of forgiving, that is, a restored relationship. סלח is clearly the activity of God and is identified as one of His characteristics. By His example one can learn that when forgiveness is asked by one who has humbled his heart to ask it of God, there is no limit to this gift from an eternal God. Forgiveness reaches the most heinous of sins, and is greatly longsuffering. The only limit to its application is the character and power of the forgiver. From the very God of mercies and compassions which never cease, one can return again and again with confidence.

נשא is a general, well-used word which means to lift up, to bear, to take away. Interestingly, it is used of both incurring sin and having it taken away. Man incurs sin. In God's provision, both the scapegoat of the Day of Atonement and the One to come bear sin away. In the specific translation "forgive" the offended party takes away the offense. Notably, נשא does not have the God-only restriction of סלח, but can be used of men forgiving men. It is, however, clearly used of God identifying once again His attribute (Ex 34:7), and His activity (Psa 32:5). Psalm 32 is important because it expands the idea of forgiveness to



its results. David claims blessedness and godliness as a result of God's forgiveness (Psa 32:1,2,6).

כָּפַר is the third major word translated "forgive." This word, because of its usual translation "atone," clearly demonstrates that within circles of meaning, these two words overlap. כָּפַר is also translated, make reconciliation, pacify, purge, pardon. This word clearly ties forgiveness in with the sacrificial system. At its root meaning, כָּפַר means "to pay the substitutionary price sufficient to satisfy." God is always the subject of the verb when He is mentioned, and specifically it is He who forgives in the only two times כָּפַר is translated "to forgive."

Note also that other word pictures which come directly from the sacrificial system, like wash, wipeout, blot, conceal, also convey the idea of forgiveness without actually being translated that way.

Forgiveness, ultimately, is the expression of the religious relationship between God and man.<sup>1</sup> God is the Creator, Sustainer, Judge, who in His power, gives rain, health and peace. Man, on the other hand, is the creature who exists only according to God's mercy, and has separated himself from a relationship of peace, harmony and good through sin.

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<sup>1</sup>The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, s.v. "Forgiveness," by W. A. Quanbeck, p. 315.

But the fact that God is forgiving is fully established throughout the breadth of the Old Testament.<sup>1</sup> Just as a quick survey, in the Law, God is the one who "forgives iniquity, transgression and sin" (Ex 34:7). In the historical books, God is recognized as the one who would forgive sin (1 Ki 8:34). In the poetic books, He is recognized as a "forgiving God" (Psa 99:8). And in the prophetic books, God is the one "who forgives iniquity" (Mic 7:18).

Clearly, both the word study, and the passages above note the Old Testament recognition of God as a forgiving God. God is also a holy God. In order for man to maintain fellowship and communion with God, he must be holy as well. God established His holy law for this purpose. What it accomplished was the demonstration that man is not holy in and of himself. Micah 3:8 is only one verse which states that man, in full rebellion, sinned and chose to violate the holy law of God. The aversion of wrath, the payment of the penalty was vitally necessary. God recognized this and provided the sacrificial system described later in this paper. The Law also accomplished the conviction of sin. It gave men a sense of the consciousness of guilt and need for personal holiness. Without this, no true repentance and no true forgiveness could be wrought.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Dictionary of the Bible, s.v. "Forgiveness," by John McKenzie.

<sup>2</sup>A Dictionary of the Bible, s.v. "Forgiveness," by J. F. Bethune-Baker, p. 66.

When considering the sacrificial system and specifically the Day of Atonement as the foundation for the forgiveness of God, the first thing which must be noted is that it is "the divine means for the sanctification of His people."<sup>1</sup> God, Himself, both gave the system and providentially provided the means for its continuation.

There are two vitally important parts of the sacrificial system. Both are necessary for its efficacy. First is the blood. God established that in the blood was the life. And the life in substitution for that of the offerer was the only price which could pay the price for sin and avert, or satisfy the wrath of the holy, just God. Second, the sinner demonstrated his belief in a God who was forgiving, not simply by following a ritual, but by accompanying the action with an attitude, the contrite heart. Psalm 51:17-19 is the classic passage joining these two ideas together. In this passage the sinner, when convicted of his sin and coming with a contrite heart, then offers the proper offerings.

The contrite heart, or repentance, needs some clarification. True repentance is the recognition that one is not holy and needs to correct the relationship with God. It is a heart attitude which can only be demonstrated through the obedience of faith. In Hosea 6:6 God must say to the people, "For I delight in loyalty rather than sacrifice."

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<sup>1</sup> Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, s.v. "Forgiveness," by W. A. Quanbeck, p. 316.

Man, from the beginning, has sought to "purchase from God a license for a self-centered existence."<sup>1</sup> This is no more sadly demonstrated than with the Jews. After the destruction of the temple, and their distress over the cutting off of the sacrifice, the Jewish leaders noted that many Jews turned to Christianity because it had the answer from their own Scriptures and system concerning a true forgiveness. But, not willing to allow such a thing, the leaders, over a period of time, added that prayers, the giving of alms, deeds and gifts of charity, right living and both the sufferings of themselves and of their loved ones, would count as sacrifices from then on, and the people could be forgiven.<sup>2</sup> Certainly the foundation of this system, and the similar Roman Catholic one is that man by works can make himself holy. Such an attitude totally denies God's character, His gifts to man and the requirement of a humble heart acknowledging the need for forgiveness.

Forgiveness in the Old Testament has its foundation in the sacrificial system, and especially the Day of Atonement. Chapter three establishes that the Day of Atonement taught that the one offering the sacrifice must be cleansed and consecrated, that sin must be paid for, that the sacrifice did away with the sin averting wrath, and the final result was reconciliation. Note that, as will be repeated, the Old Testament atonement accomplished

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid.

<sup>2</sup> Kohler, "Atonement," pp. 278-80.

the same things that the New Testament did, therefore forgiveness in the Old Testament was on just as solid foundation as the New.

Since God established a solid foundation for the forgiveness of sin in the Old Testament, it is profitable in light of the present study to note some of the effects of forgiveness. First and foremost, the forgiveness of sin accomplished the restoration of holiness.<sup>1</sup> When the barrier of sin was removed, then the reestablishment of the original relationship was accomplished.<sup>2</sup> In addition to reconciliation, forgiveness is said to result in peace of mind (Ps 32), consciousness of divine mercy (Ps 103), removal of fear of punishment (2 Sam 12:13), words of praise (Ps 103:2), and renewed dedication (Joel 2:13).

When considering forgiveness in the Old Testament it should also be noted that in both the promise of the suffering servant of Isaiah 53, and in other prophecies of the future, like Jeremiah 31:34, there were indicators of a future of completed forgiveness. The Old Testament has some very clear teachings on forgiveness. It is dependent upon the character of the forgiver (usually in the Old Testament, God). It is a gift of the forgiver. The price for the offense must be dealt with and wrath averted. The foundation of Divine forgiveness is the

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<sup>1</sup>Quanbeck, "Forgiveness," p. 316.

<sup>2</sup>Bethune-Baker, "Forgiveness," p. 57.

sacrificial system, specifically the Day of Atonement which provides satisfaction. The result of forgiveness is reconciliation, that is, a restored relationship.

It is only as a result of the careful examination of such a full picture of forgiveness that this writer can agree with J. F. Bethune-Baker's summary that "neither the national or individual experiences recorded in the Old Testament nor the words and general language used seem to suggest any fundamental difference in the idea of forgiveness from that in the New Testament."<sup>1</sup>

#### New Testament Understanding of Forgiveness

Building upon the Old Testament, the New Testament is the continuation of progressive revelation, presenting all of the previous ideas about forgiveness as well as some additional new ones. This section will examine three critical Greek words, along with comments on others, and examine other facets of the New Testament understanding of forgiveness.

#### Greek Words

##### ἀφίημι

The Greek word which is translated "forgive" the largest number of times is ἀφίημι. This word has four primary meanings: (1) let go, send away; (2) cancel, remit, pardon; (3) leave; (4) tolerate, let go.<sup>2</sup> It occurs in

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 56.

<sup>2</sup> BAGD, pp. 125-26.

every nuance of these ideas, both literally and figuratively. The 142 translations in the King James Version include: leave (52), forgive (47), suffer (13), let (8), let alone (6), put away (2) and remit (2).<sup>1</sup>

The word ἀφίημι is well attested in classical Greek literature from as early as Homer. Meanings include to hurl (e.g. missiles), to loose (e.g. ship into the sea) and to discharge (e.g. arrows). There is also a legal sense to the word. Vorlander identifies the key idea behind ἀφίημι as being "the voluntary release of a person or thing over which one has legal, actual control."<sup>2</sup> This legal sense includes the idea to release from: legal bond, an office, guilt, punishment, obligation, as well as to release a woman from marriage (divorce) and to acquit (e.g. cancel criminal proceedings).

It must be noted that although ἀφίημι is attested in classical Greek from early times, consistently with the idea of letting go human relationships (e.g. debts, obligations, marriage) it is never used in a religious sense.<sup>3</sup>

In the Septuagint (LXX), ἀφίημι is used to translate a whole series of words including "release" (תָּשַׁח), "surrender" (סָגַר), "to leave" (עָזַב), "to leave in peace" (נָח), etc. It is used on occasion to translate the Hebrew words

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<sup>1</sup>Young, Index, p. 60.

<sup>2</sup>CB, s.v. "Forgiveness," by H. Vorlander, p. 697.

<sup>3</sup>MM, p. 97.

translated "to forgive." It is used to translate  $\text{סָלַח}$  in Exodus 32:32 and Psalm 31:5; to translate  $\text{סָלַח}$  in Leviticus 4:20 and Numbers 14:19, and also  $\text{סָלַח}$  in Isaiah 22:14. Within these contexts, it maintains the distinction that it is God who forgives.

Most commonly,  $\alpha\phi\acute{\iota}\eta\mu\iota$  is used in the LXX to translate the more general idea of release with reference to captives and slaves (e.g. Isa 61:1, Jer 34:15) and to the year of jubilee (release) (Lev 25 and 27, Ez 46:17).

In the New Testament,  $\alpha\phi\acute{\iota}\eta\mu\iota$  continues the full range of nuances of meaning first noted in classical Greek. Its translations can be classified under two headings, "to let go," and "to remit."

Under the key idea "to let go" one finds several different kinds of leaving. In Mark 1:20, John and James ". . . left ( $\alpha\phi\epsilon\nu\tau\acute{\epsilon}\varsigma$ ) their father Zebedee . . . ." Matthew 23:23 notes the occasion when Jesus pronounces woe upon the scribes and Pharisees because, while tithing the little things like spices, they have ". . . neglected ( $\alpha\phi\eta\kappa\alpha\tau\epsilon$ ) the weightier provisions of the law: justice, mercy and faithfulness." The chief priests and council had to decide what to do with Jesus, because "If we let Him go on ( $\alpha\phi\omega\kappa\epsilon\nu$ ) like this, all men will believe in Him" (John 11:48). The meaning of "to permit or allow" is seen in Mark 5:19 where he records Jesus' response to the restored demoniac, "And he did not let ( $\alpha\phi\eta\kappa\epsilon\nu$ ) him" (to permit him to follow after).



The second key idea expressed by ἀφίημι in the New Testament is "to remit, to forgive." This idea does occur in the secular sense as in Matthew 18:27 where the compassionate lord says, "release him and forgive (ἀφῆκεν) him the debt." Usually however, this usage is in the religious sense where all classes of sin are forgiven including: sins (αἱ ἁμαρτίαι)(Mark 2:5); sins and blasphemies (τὰ ἁμαρτήματα καὶ βλασφημίαι)(Mark 3:28); trespasses (τὰ παραπτώματα)(Matt 6:14); the lawlessness (αἱ ἀνομίαι)(Rom 4:7); and the thought of your heart (ἡ ἐπίνοια τῆς καρδίας σου)(Acts 8:22).

When ἀφίημι is used with regard to forgiveness, it includes the personal involvement of the forgiver as well as the completeness of the action.

### ἄφεσις

ἄφεσις is only used seventeen times in the New Testament. Of those occurrences, fifteen have to do with the removal of sin, being translated "forgiveness" (6) and "remission" (9). It does occur in classical Greek with the idea of "a pardon" releasing one from payment or duties (e.g. debts, marriage). The other two occurrences of ἄφεσις both occur in the same verse and proclaim release for captives and the downtrodden, "He has sent me to proclaim release, ἄφεσιν, to the captives . . . to set free (ἄφρσει) those who are downtrodden" (Luke 4:18).

The New Testament usage consistently is pardon, cancellation of the punishment and guilt of sin (e.g. Matt 26:28, Mark 1:4, Luke 1:77, Acts 2:38) and includes other nuances such as trespasses (τὰ παραπτώματων) (Eph 1:7) and the absolute usage (Mark 3:29, Heb 9:22, Heb 10:18).

### χαρίζομαι

It is very significant that χαρίζομαι, from the root χάρις (grace) is used to translate the idea of forgiveness. This word maintains its original idea of "give freely, graciously as a favor of God"<sup>1</sup> as seen in Romans 8:32: ". . . how will He not also with Him freely give (χαρίσεται) us all things?"

χαρίζομαι also carries the idea "to give, as a special form of to pardon."<sup>2</sup> In 2 Corinthians 12:13, Paul asks this pardon sarcastically, "Forgive (χαρίσασθε) me this wrong."

Forgiveness (χαρίζομαι) is also available: for those who repent from wrongs against the body (church), i.e. 2 Corinthians 2:10, where Paul assures them, "But whom you forgive (χαρίζεσθε) anything, I also do"; transgressions, such as Colossians 2:13, ". . . having forgiven (χαρισάμενος) us all our transgressions"; and wrongs against a person, i.e. Ephesians 4:32, "And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving (χαριζόμενοι) each other

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<sup>1</sup> BAGD, p. 876.

<sup>2</sup> TDNT, s.v. "χάρις," by Hans Conzelmann, 9:397.

just as God in Christ also has forgiven (ἐχαρίσατο) you."

This last phrase reaffirms the note that forgiveness is mutually required of those who have been forgiven.

χαρίζομαι, used to translate forgiveness then, clearly brings out another aspect of the word, namely, that it is the gift of the giver.

#### Other Greek words

ἀπολύω which has a basic meaning, "to loose, to let go," is twice translated in the King James Version "forgive." Both occur in the same verse, Jesus' discussion of behavior toward enemies in Luke 6:37, where He says, "Forgive (ἀπολύετε), and it will be forgiven (ἀπολυθήσεσθε) you." In the New American Standard Version, this is translated "pardon."

With respect to what happens to sins, there is the hapax legomenon πάρεσις. In Romans 3:25 it is translated variously as "remission" (KJV), "leaving unpunished" (NIV), "passing over" (NASB) in reference to sins previously committed.

#### Forgiveness in the New Testament

One must not examine the New Testament teaching about forgiveness as if it is a separate piece of revelation. The New Testament ideas of forgiveness stand solidly on all of the ideas of the Old. The New Testament ideas serve to enrich, expand and especially form a more solid foundation for a biblical understanding of forgiveness. As a result,

the definition of forgiveness does not change, but does take on a heavier cargo of meaning.<sup>1</sup>

There are some significant changes in the words used to convey the idea of forgiveness. The first step in considering the New Testament ideas of forgiveness is the summary of the ideas presented earlier.

ἀφίημι is well attested in classical literature. Its key idea of "release" or "let go" which can be applied to things and people becomes more restricted when dealing with relationships. Specifically it takes on a legal meaning. Thus, H. Vorlander can state as the key idea, "The voluntary release of a person or thing over which one has legal, actual control."<sup>2</sup> In this legal sense, ἀφίημι is the word used in human relationships as far ranging as the release from criminal charges, or to divorce. Regardless of how ready the Greeks were to put human relationships on legal terms, they never conceived of a religious relationship between man and one of their gods on such a level. The New Testament usage of ἀφίημι in such a manner was startling, but important to a full understanding of forgiveness.

The New Testament uses ἀφίημι in the full range of its secular meaning. When it does address sin, ἀφίημι is

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<sup>1</sup>Quanbeck, "Forgiveness," p. 318.

<sup>2</sup>Vorlander, "Forgiveness," p. 697.

used to indicate the release and letting go of all classes and kinds of sin.

One thing which ought to be noted is that ἀφίημι is used with the idea of forgiveness rarely outside of the Gospels. One reason for this is that after the cross-work, other words such as justification and reconciliation refer to that work.

This term ἀφίημι adds three ideas to the circle of meaning of forgiveness: 1) the legal aspect; 2) the context of personal relationships, and 3) the completeness of the action. Simply, there is either release, or non-release, it is not possible to use this term to refer to incomplete action.

ἀφεσις is used rarely but precisely in the New Testament. Of its seventeen occurrences, fifteen refer to pardon or remission of sin. Clearly the foundation of forgiveness is dealing with the offense.

χαρίζομαι is a verb from the root χάρις (grace). When it is translated "forgive" it maintains that part of its meaning indicating a free gift. The cost of forgiveness is paid by the giver. Therefore, another idea is expounded, that forgiveness is a gift.

In Jesus' teachings in the Gospels He emphasizes the human responsibility to forgive one another. This could be confusing if one does not see the rest of the picture. The whole idea of humans forgiving one another on the basis of God's faithfulness is only possible because

of the finished work of Christ accomplished on the cross. It is only within the framework of walking in the permanent forgiveness of salvation that the limitless forgiveness Jesus commanded in response to Peter's question is possible (Matt 18:21-35).

The major addition that is given by the New Testament to the idea of forgiveness is the Atonement which will be discussed more fully in Chapter Three. God, because of His own forgiveness, sent His Son to die a substitutionary death for men. This process by which God could be both the just and the justifier can be defined in terms of three things it accomplished. The actions taken to pay the price for (redemption), satisfy the penal requirements (propitiation) and restore the fellowship lost (reconciliation) as a result of sin.

This is the God-man Jesus Christ who accomplished this action. One of the things it did was establish a completed solution to the barrier of sin. Hebrews 10, understood in the right perspective, shows that the sacrifices of the Old Testament had to be constantly repeated but Christ died once for all (Heb 10:10). The work of Christ was finished as He rose from the dead and ascended to His place of exaltation.

The significance this had for man is the whole process of being forgiven one day, then under the penalty the next. Christ's permanent work made it possible for man to repent, and trust in Him for forgiveness. The

forgiveness offered because of the cross-work of Christ is also once for all, permanently changing the forgiven man's relationship to God.

Now rather than constantly having to deal with the sin barrier, the emphasis is placed on abiding in Christ. One analogy, the vine, reminds the forgiven one both of the intimacy and complete dependence he has in Christ.

The New Testament, because of Christ's atoning work, also demands repentance. It is a prerequisite to forgiveness. Once again this in no way is man's work. It is the lost man's recognition of his lostness, acknowledgement of his helplessness, and humble acceptance of the free gift of God, forgiveness of sins.

## CHAPTER II

### SCRIPTURAL PRINCIPLES OF FORGIVENESS

The introduction to this paper noted that "a refusal to call to account" is the root meaning of forgiveness. That meaning, however, does not do justice to the richness of this word as applied among men, but especially as one considers the forgiveness of God. A study such as that in the preceeding chapter is necessary to add to the definition of forgiveness, additional nuances, and principles which can be part of the meaning in a specific context. It is the purpose of this chapter to note the principles which can affect the understanding of forgiveness in a particular context.

#### Personal Relationship

One immediately notes that forgiveness is a word applied to relationships of one form or another (i.e. God-man, king-servant, brother-brother). It is a fundamental requirement for two persons to be in a relationship in order for forgiveness to be necessary.<sup>1</sup> C. F. D. Moule also notes

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<sup>1</sup>James N. Lapsley, "Reconciliation, Forgiveness, Lost Contracts," Theology Today 23 (April, 1966):47.



the personal aspect as one essential for forgiveness to take place.<sup>1</sup>

Because a personal relationship is involved, the offended party must make the choice to not demand personal satisfaction. This idea does not involve a discussion of penal requirements or restitution but simply deals with the violation of personal rights. On the personal level, however, the account must be dealt with. Forgiveness does not involve ignoring a wrong. Receiving explanations and understanding the situation does not settle the account. Neither toleration and condescending to the offender,<sup>2</sup> nor especially, presenting the general air of acceptance<sup>3</sup> settles the account. Personal forgiveness begins with the offended party fully acknowledging the wrong, in all of its horrors. Choosing to forgive means not exacting exact retribution. In other words, he pays the account himself acting in a manner that will remove the barrier to the relationship. Thus, by giving up his personal rights, the offended party has acted in the relationship to forgive at its most basic level.

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<sup>1</sup>C. F. D. Moule, "Christian Understanding of Forgiveness," Theology 71 (October, 1968):438.

<sup>2</sup>Morris A. Ashcraft, The Forgiveness of Sins (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1972), p. 11.

<sup>3</sup>Jay Adams, More than Redemption (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1979), p. 194.

### Restoration

As a principle of forgiveness, restoration or reconciliation is the effect of the action. Restoration is clearly the whole objective of forgiveness.<sup>1</sup>

Restoration is accomplished when the offender is placed again in the position he occupied before the offense.<sup>2</sup> Using a specific application, reconciliation is the total change of relationship with God from one of enmity to one of communion and fellowship.<sup>3</sup> Another theologian asserts that reconciliation is inherent in the concept of forgiveness and that these two concepts are never separated.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, reconciliation is the result and purpose of forgiveness.

### Penal Satisfaction

Forgiveness requires the complete total removal of the cause of offense.<sup>5</sup> If law has been broken the penal requirements for the wrong--especially if it is sin against God--cannot be set aside; they must be paid. But God has the answer. "Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness" (Heb 9:22). "For it is impossible for the

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<sup>1</sup>Ashcraft, Forgiveness, p. 11.

<sup>2</sup>Bethune-Baker, "Forgiveness," p. 56.

<sup>3</sup>Charles Hodge, Systematic Theology (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1952), p. 516.

<sup>4</sup>Augustus Strong, Systematic Theology (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1970), p. 857.

<sup>5</sup>Bethune-Baker, "Forgiveness," p. 57.

blood of bulls and goats to take away sins" (Heb 10:4).  
 "Knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things  
 . . . but with precious blood . . . the blood of Christ"  
 (1 Pet 1:18,19), through "the offering of the body of Jesus  
 Christ once for all" (Heb 10:10).

Herein is the beautiful picture of God's forgiveness.  
 When as the forgiver, He did not call to account, but sent  
 His own Son, Jesus Christ, to pay both the personal and  
 the penal requirements, and reestablish the relationship  
 with man, He laid the foundation for all forgiveness.

The death of Christ is the sacrifice which removes  
 the barriers of sin. This is a judicial issue. It is not  
 a matter of payment being laid aside, but rather full pay-  
 ment exacted so that the penal requirement can be justly  
 remitted.<sup>1</sup>

### Repentance

In different applications, forgiveness is readily  
 available as an open invitation. When this occurs, the  
 offender must perceive his own need for forgiveness and  
 respond. Repentance then is required for some applications  
 of forgiveness. An examination of a Greek word which is  
 translated repentance should help one understand this con-  
 cept. μετάνοια, the Greek word translated repentance is  
 used to indicate a change of mind. Basically the idea is  
 of one who is walking with no thought of the offense, or a

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<sup>1</sup> Strong, Systematic Theology, p. 855.

thought that it does not matter. When μετάνοια occurs, his thinking is changed to conclude that he has offended. Lest one begins to claim man's works in God's process of forgiveness, repentance is a gift of God to both the Jew (Acts 5:31), and the Gentile (Acts 11:18). The Westminster Confession includes the following ideas in its definition of repentance: (1) A sense of the danger and odiousness of sin; (2) The understanding of God's mercy in Christ; (3) Grief for and willingness to turn from sin; and, (4) A purpose of heart to walk in God's commandments.

Without repentance, given by God, the man never recognizes his need and therefore cannot be saved or restored to fellowship.

### Restitution

There are two situations in which restitution enters into a discussion of forgiveness. First, if the offender desires to restore the relationship, and part of the offense is such that it is possible (i.e. stolen property), he can make restitution, settling that part of the account and then request forgiveness from the personal wrong. The story of Zaccheus in Luke 19 is an example of this kind of making amends.

Second, forgiveness lifts the weight of guilt and removes liability to punishment. It does not lift other consequences.<sup>1</sup> God does not normally interfere with His

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<sup>1</sup>Adams, More than Redemption, p. 230.

universe created to run according to certain laws. The classic illustration would be of the Christian who, after jumping off a cliff, genuinely repented and asked God's forgiveness. God could indeed forgive the sin without also changing the natural effect of the deed. The promise a believer has is that He has the Father's help in dealing with any circumstances of life, and His promise that He will work all things together for good to those who love Him and are called according to His purpose (Rom 8:28).

#### Remarks

The root meaning of forgiveness remains, "refusal to call to account." These principles presented in this chapter aid the student in understanding some of the nuances which affect the meaning of forgiveness in a given context. It is the challenge of scholarship to examine each context, hopefully with the help of such ideas, to bring the student a clearer understanding of God's Word.

## CHAPTER III

### SCRIPTURAL APPLICATION OF FORGIVENESS

Building on a root meaning, this paper has examined a scriptural understanding of forgiveness and the principles of its application to particular contexts. This chapter focuses upon the application of forgiveness. The whole purpose of the paper is to better understand the Almighty God who saves men, and also their responsibility to Him.

This chapter contains a lengthy section on the foundation of God's forgiveness as well as three applications of it, plus the application to man. The foundations section is vitally necessary because it unlocks the key to how a God of justice can also exercise the mercy and compassion of forgiveness.

The first section of this chapter notes the foundation of God's forgiveness in the Old and New Testaments. The second section examines three applications of God's forgiveness and the final section notes man's forgiveness.

#### The Foundation of Divine Forgiveness

The foundation of divine forgiveness is and must be the actions by Christ to pay the price for, to satisfy the penal requirements of, and to reconcile or restore the

fellowship lost as a result of sin. In short, the foundation is the atonement.

The atonement is the central event of history and of biblical theology. All that God did before was preparation, teaching, prophesying, getting the world ready for this great event. All that has occurred since that event is in some way related to it. The atonement was God's answer, the climax of His revelation. It stands alone in the center of history.

More importantly, it is in the very center of God's forgiveness for man. In the Old Testament, even its precursor, the sacrificial system, effectively dealt with sin to allow the relationship between God and His people to continue. The New Testament bursts forth with the description of this vital event, which settled the sin barrier once for all.

Because it is the very center of forgiveness, the only reason such an action is possible, this section will examine the Old Testament sacrificial system and the New Testament doctrine of the atonement.

### Atonement in the Old Testament

#### Progressive revelation

The first step one must consider when dealing with biblical doctrine in the Old Testament is, "What role does God's revelation in the Old Testament play with regard to the established biblical doctrine?"

The only acceptable perspective one can take is that of Gustav Oehler, the noted German Old Testament theologian. He conceived of the Old Testament as being a progressive and growing revelation toward the standard of the New Testament. The Old Testament, then, was a record of revelation, in which the plan of God was established, and somewhat realized, leaving the consummation to the New Testament.<sup>1</sup> In short, all of the concepts of sacrifice and atonement in the Old Testament are preparation for the work of Christ.

However, there is another issue of paramount importance. Sin, which separates man from his God has to be dealt with immediately. This is required for two reasons. First, the holy, righteous God demands that it be dealt with. It must be dealt with for man to have any fellowship with Him. Second, He made man so that man has a sensitivity to sin, and cannot live under its weight or consequences, without incredible penalties physically, socially, psychologically, and of course, spiritually.

For these reasons, God established the sacrificial system. This system has its clearest explanation in the Levitical Code which God established through His servant Moses.

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<sup>1</sup>The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge, s.v. "Oehler, Gustav Friedrich Von," 8:227.



### Blood

The first premise of this system is perhaps better stated in the New Testament, "without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness" (Heb 9:22b). It is, however, stated just as clearly, yet with greater explanation in Leviticus 17:11, "For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you on the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood by reason of the life that makes atonement."

In this verse, God establishes the premise, that in the blood is the life. Therefore, it is the innocent life given which pays the penalty for the sin. That the blood, the sacrifice, the atonement, was vital to the Jew is evident in their response to the destruction of the temple, the only place where sacrifice, and atonement, was possible. The rabbi who said, "Woe unto us! What shall atone for us? We are lost on account of our sins,"<sup>1</sup> demonstrated the sentiment of his contemporaries and Israel's complete dependence upon this vital action.

### Given by God

Acknowledging the vital necessity of the sacrifice, P. J. Forsyth saw a completely different emphasis in Leviticus 17:11, the fact that even the Old Testament sacrifice was given, for the sake of His people, by God:

Given! Did you ever see the force of it, "I have given you the blood to make atonement. This is an institution which I set up for you to comply with, set it up

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<sup>1</sup>The Jewish Encyclopedia, s.v. "Atonement," by Kaufman Kohler, 2:278.

for purposes of My own, on principles of My own, but it is My gift. And the Lord Himself, through giving life and prosperity, provided the lambs for the sacrifices.<sup>1</sup>

Another factor which must be mentioned in light of some of the discussions below is that this sacrifice was given specifically to God's people, Israel. Although they were supposed to share it with the world, a task they failed at, it was given first and foremost to them. The specialness of this gift is fully recognized in the comment:

. . . it was the vehicle of God's revelation to that Semitic people and through them, to the world. It was the means of grace, the way provided used by God himself, whereby he might say to Israel, "I have redeemed thee; thou art mine."<sup>2</sup>

The fact that God provided the system, through His revelation, and the means to comply through His continuing providence, adds to the picture portrayed in the Old Testament which the New Testament consummates in His final gift of His Son.

### Contrite hearts

As soon as one says that the shedding of blood is the foundation, the necessary vital ingredient for the forgiveness of sins in the Old Testament, there is an argument. The theologian must reconcile the idea best illustrated by the prayer of David. In this prayer David states, "For Thou dost not delight in sacrifice, otherwise I would

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<sup>1</sup>P. J. Forsyth, The Work of Christ (New York: Hodder and Stoughton, n.d.), p. 90.

<sup>2</sup>Raymond Abba, "The Origin and Significance of Hebrew Sacrifice," BTB 7 (July, 1977):133.

give it; Thou art not pleased with burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise" (Psa 51:16, 17). The Psalms are not the only passages which seem to indicate the idea that the blood is not necessary. Through much of the Old Testament, specifically Hosea, Amos, Micah, Isaiah, repentance and contrition are the ingredients for gaining forgiveness. Ezekiel, the writings of a priest, finally bring the ideas back together.

#### Must have blood and contrite heart

This is not a question of either-or. Rather, both the blood and contrition are necessary. The sacrificial system had been in place for years. It was a part of life. Unfortunately, under the adage, "Familiarity breeds contempt," the people had lost sight of the fact that it was their involvement, and personal appropriation of the truths surrounding them, which made the difference. The prophets and religious leaders of Israel, did not have to preach about the sacrifices which continued, but rather, the heart attitude of the people. It was clearly preached that "the offering, unless accompanied with the heart of the offerer, was rejected by God (Psa 40:6-10; 50:8-15,23; 69:30; Prov 21:3; Isa 1:11-15; Jer 7:21-23; Hos 6:6; Mic 6:6-8; 1 Sam 15-22).<sup>1</sup> Jewish scholars of today recognize both the

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<sup>1</sup>Hobart Freeman, "The Doctrine of Substitution in the Old Testament" (Th.D. dissertation, Grace Theological Seminary, 1961), p. 128.

importance of the sacrifice, and the repentant heart in the forgiveness of sins in the Old Testament. Writing about the value of the Day of Atonement, George Gray considers that "A man might say: I will sin and the Day of Atonement will expiate my sin: but for such a one the Day of Atonement secures no expiation."<sup>1</sup>

The key to understanding the real unity of these two ideas, of blood and repentance, is further reading of the Psalm 51 prayer of contrition. In verse 19 David concludes with "Then Thou wilt delight in righteous sacrifices, in burnt offerings and whole burnt offering; Then young bulls will be offered on Thine altar."

Delitzsch concludes his discussion of this Psalm noting carefully God's emphasis in Psalm 4:5 and Deuteronomy 33:19 on righteous sacrifices, that is those of a contrite heart, but then returns to the blood sacrifice:

From this spiritual sacrifice, which is well-pleasing to God, the Psalm comes back in v. 19f to the external sacrifices that are presented in the right spirit. . . . Here . . . are such sacrifices as are entirely what God the Lawgiver desires to have them, not only in respect of their external quality, but also in respect of the subjective quality of the person who causes them to be offered for him.<sup>2</sup>

It becomes clear that David recognized that both the blood and repentance were vital, namely, that until he had a contrite heart, all the sacrifice in the world would

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<sup>1</sup>George Gray, Sacrifice in the Old Testament (New York: KTAV Publishing House, Inc., 1971), p. 321.

<sup>2</sup>Franz Delitzsch, Biblical Commentary on the Psalms (New York: Funk & Wagnals, 1883), 2:163.

be no value whatever with regard to his sin. Others recognize this element, as not being unique to David, but rather the normal understanding of the Jewish people. Writing on the atonement, Leonard Hodgson concludes concerning Psalm 51:

Apparently the Jewish worshippers had no sense of inconsistency between the use of sacrificial language and the language of personal devotion and utter penitence. Is not the reasonable conclusion to be drawn from this that in the best Jewish worship, the practice of sacrifice was spiritualized by personal devotion and heartfelt penitence?<sup>1</sup>

Therefore, the Old Testament sacrificial system had the same requirements which Christ's atonement carries, namely, that the shedding of blood is vitally important for the efficacy of the payment for sin, and that the payment must be personally appropriated, in the Old Testament, by a humble and contrite heart, in order for the Israelite's sins to be forgiven.

#### Day of Atonement

Although there were many sacrifices, personal, official and national, and people could, and had to be involved in personal sin offerings,<sup>2</sup> the focal point and by far the most important was the Day of Atonement.

First one must note the national character of this special day. It was a day of atonement for the whole nation

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<sup>1</sup> Leonard Hodgson, The Doctrine of the Atonement (London: Nisbet and Company, Ltd., 1951), p. 30.

<sup>2</sup> Of special importance in the list of personal sacrifices are the sin and trespass offerings. According to Hobart Freeman, they follow a six-step process: (1) presentation of the victim; (2) imposition of the hands upon the substitute victim; (3) the slaying of the victim; (4) the

of Israel. Thus, it is stated, ". . . the object that faced God in the Old Testament in the main was not primarily the individual soul, it was the soul of the nation of Israel, even though it was oftentimes reduced to a remnant."<sup>1</sup>

Although the concept of national atonement is valid, and important, the previous discussion of the need for a contrite heart on the part of each Israelite must be applied to this sacrifice as well.<sup>2</sup>

Although there were many things in the ceremonies of the Day of Atonement which were similar to those of any other sin sacrifice, there were four aspects which stand out and make the ceremonies unique. The first, that it was a national sacrifice, has been stated. The other three will be highlighted in the following discussion.

The second aspect which makes the Day of Atonement unique is that it is the only fast day perscribed in the Torah.<sup>3</sup> This was also a day of national humiliation, a sabbath of absolute rest (Lev 23:32). It was not a day of

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sprinkling of the blood upon the altar for an atonement for sin; (5) the burning of the sacrifice upon the great altar; (6) the sacrificial meal (Freeman, "The Doctrine of Substitution in the Old Testament," p. 446).

<sup>1</sup>Forsyth, The Work of Christ, p. 95.

<sup>2</sup>Present day Jews still do not understand. In a personal discussion this author had with a Jewish Rabbi, the Rabbi's conclusions, after acknowledging full understanding of Christ's atoning work, stated, "This I would have to believe, if I thought a personal atonement was necessary."

<sup>3</sup>The Universal Jewish Encyclopedia, s.v. "Atonement," by Samuel Cohen, p. 605.

sabbath joy, but of the remembrance of sin, fasting and self-humiliation.<sup>1</sup>

The first part of the ceremony was the preparation of the high priest. This is the third distinctive feature of the Day. The bullock and ram were for the priests.<sup>2</sup> The first bull was offered as a sin offering, and the ram as a burnt offering (Lev 16:3,6). The bull was offered to atone for the sins of the high priests and his family, while the ram for burnt offering was offered as the symbol of their total consecration to the Lord. In final preparation, the high priest bathed and put on special linen garments, set aside specifically for this special ceremony (Lev 16:4). After his preparation, the priest was ready to receive the specified goats from the congregation of the sons of Israel.

Lots were cast between the two goats because each was to serve in a distinctive part of the ceremony. The first was slain as the sacrifice, sin offering for the people. The sin offering was common although, in this case, it was for the whole nation.

The role of the second goat is the fourth unique feature. The sins of the people were confessed, as the high priest laid his hands on the head of the second goat,

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<sup>1</sup>Vine, Dictionary, p. 22.

<sup>2</sup>Freeman, "The Doctrine of Substitution in the Old Testament," p. 443.

then the goat<sup>1</sup> was sent away into the wilderness (Lev 16:21). The Scriptures state explicitly that "the goat shall bear on itself all their iniquities to a solitary land" (Lev 16:22).

The final step in the ceremony of the Day of Atonement is the offering of the ram for a burnt offering on behalf of the people. This burnt offering, as in the case of the high priest, is the offering of total consecration to the Lord.<sup>2</sup>

Even if one does not resort to the fuller understanding given by the New Testament, which will be discussed below, one can conclude a very full picture of God's ideas about the atonement from the ceremonies of the Day of Atonement. One learns:

- 1) The one offering the sacrifice must himself be cleansed and consecrated, i.e. the preparations of the high priest;
- 2) The penalty for sin must be paid, i.e. the substitutionary life of the first goat, whose blood was shed;
- 3) That sins are taken away, i.e. the removal of the second goat; and,
- 4) That the foregoing allows reconciliation, restoration of fellowship and consecration.

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<sup>1</sup>This goat is called אֲזָזִיל (Azazel). Scholars identified it as a demon, a proper name, or the goat of removal. A study of etymology and usage does not clear up the definition of this word. C.f. John Rea, "The Meaning of Azazel, Leviticus 16:8,10" (B.Div. thesis, Grace Theological Seminary, 1951).

<sup>2</sup>Freeman, "The Doctrine of Substitution in the Old Testament," p. 377.



The definition of the atonement stated earlier, "the actions required to pay the price for, to satisfy the penal requirements for, and to reconcile men to God," stands, being fully supported by the picture of the Day of Atonement. Therefore, because of the gift He gave (the sacrificial system) God could and did forgive sins in the Old Testament.

#### The transition

Such a statement as the one above, seemingly runs headlong into New Testament teaching, specifically of the book of Hebrews, i.e. "For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins" (Heb 10:4).

The first issue which must be settled is that sins were forgiven in the Old Testament. God says that, based on this system He established and their contrite hearts, He forgives sin (i.e. Lev 4:20). What joy and peace could David have claimed after his prayers of Psalm 32 and 51 if this were not so?

The Old Testament acknowledges that there is coming a time when one sacrifice takes care of all iniquities, i.e. Isaiah 53 especially verse 6b, "The Lord has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him." To be sure, it is not likely that man apart from the revelation of the New Testament would come to such a conclusion. Yet Jews who reject Christ, and as a result come to very false conclusions about the forgiveness of sins, atonement, etc. still recognize the

idea that one can suffer for the many.<sup>1</sup> But the New Testament is quite clear on the subject. Jesus, speaking after His death, burial and resurrection, to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, reproved them saying, ". . . O foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken!" (Luke 24:25). Listed among those whose works contain such precursors include Moses, Isaiah, Daniel, Micah and Zechariah. When the apostles preached Christ, they preached the Old Testament (Acts 3:26; 4:24-31; 8:26-40). It must be settled that:

. . . the atonement of Christ is to be found in the historical and ceremonial types provided by God in the Old Testament. By the typical system God was educating Israel for the future salvation and deliverance to be wrought at Calvary on the one hand, and also preparing a technical language to be the medium of the revelation of His grace in Christ.<sup>2</sup>

The problem with the Old Testament sacrifices was not that they did not forgive the sins for which they were offered, but rather that they were not complete until the death of Christ on the cross which is the consumation and therefore foundation of all atonement.<sup>3</sup>

Hebrews 9 and 10 are vitally important passages, demonstrating the transition from incomplete to complete. Specifically these chapters show: (1) The incompleteness of

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<sup>1</sup>The Jewish Encyclopedia, s.v. "Atonement," by Kaufman Kohler, p. 277.

<sup>2</sup>Freeman, "The Doctrine of Substitution in the Old Testament," p. 397.

<sup>3</sup>Dean McFadden, "The Day of Atonement, Leviticus 16" (M.Div. thesis, Grace Theological Seminary, 1979), pp. 60-61.

the old because of the necessity of repetition; (2) That Christ was also the perfect High Priest, free from sin and fully consecrated to perform the sacrifice; (3) That God had not changed; without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness; (4) Finally, that the crosswork of Jesus Christ ended the sacrifice by satisfying all requirements once for all.<sup>1</sup>

Because Christ was the perfect sacrifice, and God's plan from the foundation of the world, He did not need to be slain on the cross for all time, but could and did perform His atoning work once for all. Because God, in His foreknowledge and fore-ordination, had already established that Christ's work would take place, He forgave sins in the Old Testament, looking forward to that sacrifice.

His careful gift of the Levitical system served the purpose to educate the people concerning the various aspects of the atonement and also atoned for their sins.

#### The New Testament--The Atonement

##### Established

The historical events of the atonement established in the New Testament are these: (1) Christ, the second member of the Triune Godhead, humbled Himself, and taking the form of a bondservant, being made (through the virgin birth) in the likeness of men, humbled Himself even to

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<sup>1</sup>N. H. Young, "The Gospel According to Hebrews 9," New Testament Studies 27 (January, 1981), pp. 209-10.

becoming obedient to death (Phil 2:6-8). (2) Although sinless, without any guilt, He was obedient to be crucified, having been delivered to the Romans by the Jewish nation who had rejected Him (Matt 27:1,2). (3) He died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and was buried (1 Cor 15:3-4). (4) On the third day He rose again from the dead, also according to the Scriptures (1 Cor 15:4). (5) Because he had paid the penalty, therefore being Lord over sin and death, and because He had been raised victorious over death, He ascended into heaven (Acts 1:9-11), where God has exalted His name above every name, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Phil 2:9-11).

This section is set apart to delve into the critical features of Jesus' triumph in the atonement. After considering four critical preludes, it will discuss the three accomplishments of the atonement: Redemption, propitiation, and reconciliation.

#### The Law of a Holy God

The Law of God is not the capricious whim of an arbitrary substance of chance. God is a person, and His character is holy, righteous, pure, just and loving. His premier attribute is His complete holiness. It establishes the moral character of His Law, the reason for His wrath,

and the object of His justice. It must be noted that neither atonement or ethics has any reality apart from law.<sup>1</sup> Law is vitally necessary for the consistent, dependable, past, present and future running of God's orderly universe. The tenets of God's moral law must be maintained even as God reaches out to have fellowship with depraved, unholy man.

### Sin and God's wrath

It must be established that sin is an offense against the Holy God. As such it incurs His wrath upon the sinner.

In the Word it states that sin entered the world (Rom 5:12); that all men have sinned (Rom 3:23); that the penalty for that sin is death (Rom 6:23); and judgment (Heb 9:27).

Sin is not, as man would have it, "a mistake," "a shortcoming," "the best a human can do," nor is it a sickness. "Sin is not the breach of an impersonal law . . . it is not the waywardness of a child grieving his loving father . . . . It is more than wrong against an equal--namely, the holy law of the eternal God has been broken."<sup>2</sup>

In consideration of the concept that sin is an offense and a recognition that God hates evil, it is important to note that "on a scriptural view, there is a definite hostility on the part of God to everything that

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<sup>1</sup>C. F. Creighton, Law and the Cross (Cincinnati: Jennings and Graham, 1911), p. 111.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 31.

is evil."<sup>1</sup> In contrast to the modern idea that God hates the sin, but not the sinner, He is personally actively involved. God's wrath expresses both His verdict of judgment and His personal attitude. He does not condemn the sin but the sinner to eternal death.<sup>2</sup>

Because God and His law is holy and morally pure, as a God of justice, sin is a legal problem. "It is a legal necessity growing out of a just requirement of a perfect moral government in which pardon without atonement is forever impossible."<sup>3</sup>

#### God's given answer

One could conclude that if God is love, and man repentant, then He ought to exercise His right of choice and forgive sin without the atonement.

God is love, but He also has other attributes such as holiness, and justice, which cannot be violated and are in fact preeminent over His love. But God in His sovereignty, Himself provides the answer in the atonement. How much more it demonstrates God's love that, rather than destroy His love by ignoring His law, He fulfilled it by providing the atonement. The atonement is the vital expression of God's character in that, He remains just and holy, yet still demonstrates His love that sinful man might be pardoned.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Leon Morris, The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1956), p. 196.

<sup>2</sup> Creighton, Law and the Cross, p. 32.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 96.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 17.

Sin must be dealt with. The initiative of the atonement rests not with man which is impossible, but with the grace of God, who in Christ reconciles the world to Himself.<sup>1</sup> It cannot be said strongly enough, the atonement is God's initiative. It is His work, which establishes Him as the just and the justifier.

#### Vicarious/substitutionary

Vicarious is defined as "representing or taking the place of, performed or suffered by one person as a substitute for another, substitutionary."<sup>2</sup> The idea of substitution is critical to one's understanding of the crosswork. The whole Old Testament sacrificial system, especially the Day of Atonement, taught this idea. The prophet Isaiah firmly establishes the idea of the suffering servant. The servant, as he is described in chapter 53, suffers in place of the people. Although he definitely distorts the message of Isaiah 53, even a modern day Jew, Kaufman Kohler, who denies Christ's atonement, must acknowledge that this passage teaches that this righteous one's suffering atones for the people.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>H. N. Ridderbos, "The Earliest Confession of the Atonement in Paul," in Reconciliation and Hope, ed. Robert Bouks (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1974), p. 81.

<sup>2</sup>Webster's Third New International Dictionary of the English Language (Springfield, MA: G. & C. Merriman Company, 1969), p. 2549.

<sup>3</sup>The Jewish Encyclopedia, s.v. "Atonement," by Kaufman Kohler, 2:277.

It is noted that while the atonement is many faceted, substitution is the very heart of it.<sup>1</sup> Romans 5:8b concludes, "Christ died for us." 1 Peter 2:24a speaks of the process, "and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross." The New Testament is full of statements which clearly state the fact that Christ, as the substitutionary sacrifice, suffered and died. It is God who, because of our sin, took the initiative and delivered up Christ, as His perfect substitute to atone for the sins of His own.

### Redemption

The atonement accomplished redemption. It was the ransom paid. Ransom is the price paid so that one who is in bondage can be set free. This ransom was paid to the justice of God. Clearly it, not Satan, was what was demanding payment for man's violation of God's holy law.<sup>2</sup>

Man was freed first and foremost from the penalty of sin. 1 Corinthians 15:3 brings that out as Paul describes the Gospel: "For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures." The expression "for our sins" relates the death of Christ to man burdened with sin and

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<sup>1</sup>W. C. Robinson, "Affirmations of the Atonement in Current Theology, CT 12 (17 March 1967):596.

<sup>2</sup>Charles Smith, "Salvation and the Christian Life" (Unpublished class syllabus, Grace Theological Seminary, 1979), p. 54.



guilt, and expresses no less than by his death, he has redeemed us.<sup>1</sup>

But that is not all that Christ's death redeemed us from. In addition, the Scriptures include the facts that man could be redeemed from: the law (Rom 9:4), Satan (2 Tim 2:26), the dominion of sin (Rom 6:2ff), and mortality (Rom 8:23). Therefore, sin should no longer have dominion over the Christian.<sup>2</sup>

Three Greek words are consistently translated redeemed in the King James Version. Their root ideas and usage assist in illucidating the idea of redemption. ἀγοράζω is the word commonly used of the market place, meaning to buy, to purchase.<sup>3</sup> It is used of Christ's redemption in the following three passages, among others. 2 Peter 2:1 notes those who are ". . . even denying the Master who bought (ἀγοράσαντα) them." 1 Corinthians 6:20 shows ownership because "you were bought (ἡγοράσθητε) with a price." In the song of praise it is decided, "for Thou wast slain, and didst purchase (ἡγόρασας) for God with Thy blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation" (Rev 5:9).

ἐξαγοράζω means "to buy," "buy up," "to redeem something" or "to deliver someone."<sup>4</sup> Galatians 3:13 notes the

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<sup>1</sup>Ridderbos, "The Earliest Confession of the Atonement in Paul," p. 77.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 88.

<sup>3</sup>BAGD, p. 12.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 271.

redeemer and what He has redeemed man from: "Christ redeemed (ἐξηγόρασεν) us from the curse of the law."

The noun λύτρον, "a price of release," "a ransom" is commonly used of manumission of slaves.<sup>1</sup> Biblically, Jesus states that this is His mission: "just as the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve, and to give His life a ransom (λύτρον) for many" (Matt 20:28). The verb λυτρῶ at its root has the idea of loosing but was used so often in contexts where a ransom was paid as a condition for loosing, that it came to signify "to release upon receipt of ransom."<sup>2</sup> Paul in Romans equates justification with this concept of ransom paid: "being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption (ἀπολυτρώσεως) which is in Christ Jesus" (Rom 3:24).

The specific usage of these Greek words shows that ἀγοράζω refers only to the idea of payment. The rest take the meaning a step further to the result or purpose of that payment--release, liberty.

Leon Morris notes three aspects of the redemption:

(1) The state of sin out of which man is to be redeemed --slavery. (2) The price which is paid. (To the extent that the price must be adequate for the purchase in question. This indicates an equivalence, a substitution). (3) The resultant state of the believer--liberty (slavery to God--the whole point of this redemption is that sin no longer has dominion; the redeemed are those

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 482.

<sup>2</sup> Morris, Apostolic Preaching, p. 9.

saved to do the will of their master who bought them, Jesus Christ.<sup>1</sup>

This ransom price or substitution, is important. Robinson is satisfied to state that "true grace is costly. It is costly because it cost God the life of His Son."<sup>2</sup> But more specifically, God bought forgiveness for mankind with the blood of Jesus Christ as the ransom price.<sup>3</sup> The Scriptures certainly emphasize this last idea; i.e. "knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things . . . but with precious blood . . . the blood of Christ" (1 Pet 1:18,19).

In summary, redemption is the payment of a price-- the blood of Jesus Christ, to the justice of God, by God, so that man might be made free from: the penalty of sin, the power of sin, the law, Satan and mortality. The redemption also had its effect on the rest of creation but that must be left to another, much more in-depth study of the term. As exciting as redemption is, it is only one part of what Christ's atonement has done for man.

### Propitiation

The second thing which the atonement accomplishes is propitiation, satisfaction, or the removal of the wrath of God. Leon Morris repeats that sin is a serious offense

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 58.

<sup>2</sup> Robinson, "Affirmation of the Atonement," p. 596.

<sup>3</sup> S. J. Mikolaski, "The Cross and the Theologians," CT 7 (29 March 1963):626.

against the holy God and His wrath must be averted.<sup>1</sup> The Old Testament is full of reminders of what happens if God's wrath is not averted. Consider God's response to Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 19), the offensive city (Deut 13:15-17), or all those who sinned (Nu 25:4).

But then the atonement came with its work of propitiation. "By propitiation we mean that element of the work of Christ directed towards God by which the wrath and condemnation of God resting on guilty man is removed and the way is open for God to receive man into fellowship with Himself."<sup>2</sup>

In the New Testament, use of the basic root word ἐξιλάσκομαι (propitiation) does not occur. Three different words from that root do occur. ἱλάσκομαι, a verb, occurs twice. The tax gatherer prayed: "God, be propitious (ἱλάσθητι) to me a sinner" (Luke 18:13). The work of Jesus is stated as, "To make propitiation (ἱλάσκεσθαι) for the sins of the people" (Heb 2:17).

ἱλασμός, a noun, also occurs twice. Both occurrences are in 1 John and identify Christ as a propitiation (ἱλασμός) regarding the sins of the whole world (1 John 2:2; 4:10).

ἱλαστήριον, the adjective, occurs twice. In Hebrews 9:5 it is used to define the part of the ark called the mercy seat, or in light of this word more precisely the

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<sup>1</sup> Morris, Apostolic Preaching, p. 156.

<sup>2</sup> J. Clement Connell, "The Propitiatory Element in the Atonement," VE 4 (1965):28.

place of propitiation. Romans 3:25 is the verse which states most clearly a point to be made later that God is the initiator of propitiation as it identifies Christ as the one "whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation (ἱλαστήριον) in His blood through faith." Another aspect this verse brings out is the importance of the blood.

Let it be repeated that God's law, holiness and wrath require judgment. But God does this the only way possible, by His giving the gift. Man is not left hopeless. Rather,

There is forgiveness with God and this forgiveness necessarily involves the laying aside of wrath. But it is important to note that the removal of this wrath is not due to man's securing such an offering that God is impressed and relents. It is due to God Himself.<sup>1</sup>

This concept that it is not man's work but God's, is vital enough that it bears repeating. Another writer has stated it again:

Let it be emphasized that it is God Himself who makes the propitiation. It is not an act on the part of man calculated to make God willing to forgive, but an act on the part of God making it possible for Him to forgive in a way consistent with right personal relations between the holy sovereign and the sinful subject.<sup>2</sup>

When considering the propitiation, the "how" of what it accomplished is important. The propitiation follows the illustration which God set up in the Old Testament sacrificial system. The key is the life, shown by the shedding of blood (Heb 9:22). "By the blood of Christ a propitiation

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<sup>1</sup> Morris, Apostolic Preaching, p. 159.

<sup>2</sup> Connell, "Propitiatory Elements," p. 33.

is effected."<sup>1</sup> The lesson of Romans 3:24 bears repeating in this context, that God provided a propitiation in Christ through His blood.

As one considers what the propitiation accomplishes, first he must deal with a currently popular incomplete idea. Some would try to limit the crosswork to expiation. But expiation has a limited definition of the removal of the sin and its guilt. Propitiation is much more than that. It is the averting of the righteous condemnation of God.<sup>2</sup> God Himself satisfies all that His righteous judgment demands.<sup>3</sup>

The important concept noted in the term propitiation is that the atonement averts, settles and satisfies the judgment and wrath of God.

### Reconciliation

The third thing which the atonement accomplishes is reconciliation. It has been demonstrated before that because of sin, God's wrath is upon sinners. Man is an enemy, hostile to God. Through the atonement, a process in line with both His justice and His love, God does the work of turning man to Himself. It has been noted that ". . . unless we can preach a finished work of Christ in relation to sin, a καταλλαγὴ or reconciliation or peace

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<sup>1</sup> Morris, Apostolic Preaching, p. 173.

<sup>2</sup> Connell, "Propitiatory Elements," p. 39.

<sup>3</sup> Morris, Apostolic Preaching, p. 184.

which has been achieved independently of us at an infinite cost and to which we are called in a word or ministry of reconciliation, we have no real gospel for sinful man at all."<sup>1</sup>

The New Testament frequently uses this concept of reconciliation, usually using variations of the Greek word, καταλλάσσω.

καταλλάσσω is used twice, for instance, in Romans 5:10, "We were reconciled (κατηλλάγημεν) to God through the death of His Son . . . having been reconciled (καταλλαγέντες) we shall be saved by His life."

ἀποκαταλλάσσω is used only among Christian writers and only twice in Scripture. In Ephesians 2:16 Paul discusses the present unity of Gentile and Jewish Christians, concluding that Christ "might reconcile (ἀποκαταλλάξῃ) them both in one body to God."

διαλλάσσομαι occurs only once in the New Testament. In Matthew 5:24 Jesus gives instructions that one who has a brother with something against him to "first be reconciled (διαλλάγηθι) to your brother."

The noun καταλλαγή is recognized in all four of its usages in the New Testament to be reconciliation, that is God performing the work. Man receives reconciliation (Rom 5:11).

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<sup>1</sup>James Denney, The Christian Doctrine of Reconciliation (New York: George H. Doran Company, 1918), p. 86.

At a cursory look, it seems that both man and God are reconciled, turning toward one another. This is not the biblical concept. Although God does the work, it is man who has turned away from the immutable, holy God and must turn back. It is noted that although this distinction does not seem to be apparent in Old Testament and Rabbinic writings, it is strikingly clear in the New Testament that God is never said to be reconciled to man.<sup>1</sup> Reconciliation works, just as the rest of the accomplishments of the atonement, because God performs the work Himself to reconcile men to Himself.

God/man relations are determined by God's holy law. Man violated that law and set himself apart from, estranged from God.<sup>2</sup> God's feeling toward man never needed to be changed. But His treatment, His practical relationship, was in line with His judgment because of man's sin.<sup>3</sup> Once again, God acted. He worked through the atonement, specifically the shedding of Christ's blood to settle the sin issue and to reconcile man to Himself.<sup>4</sup>

The reconciliation that God accomplished through Jesus Christ has three aspects. First, all things were reconciled to Himself (Col 1:20). God, in fact, through

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<sup>1</sup>Morris, Apostolic Preaching, p. 192.

<sup>2</sup>Denney, Doctrine of Reconciliation, p. 187.

<sup>3</sup>P. T. Forsyth, The Work of Christ (New York: Hodder and Stoughton, n.d.), p. 105.

<sup>4</sup>W. C. Robinson, "Affirmations of the Atonement in Current Theology," CT 11 (3 March, 1967):547.



The penalty enacted settled the issue of sin. Second, God in Christ was reconciling the world to Himself (2 Cor 5:19). This gave all mankind the potential for salvation. Finally, God reconciles individual men to Himself. This certainly is the ultimate purpose of the atonement and its reconciliation accomplished. In 2 Corinthians 5:19-20, Paul notes that believers have been given the word of reconciliation and their message to others, be reconciled to God.

This final accomplishment of the atonement focuses on at least three things: (1) God's wrath was put away by sin being put on Christ Jesus and judged; (2) As the individual is in Christ Jesus, he has His righteousness; and, (3) Men, reconciled to God, become partakers of that same eternal love God has for His Son.<sup>1</sup>

#### Conclusion to the Atonement Section

The atonement can be defined on the basis of the things it accomplished. The atonement is the crosswork of Jesus Christ by which redemption (the ransom paid), propitiation (the satisfaction of penal requirements), and reconciliation (restoration of the fellowship) are accomplished for man who stood under the wrath of God because of sin.

For Paul to say "We preach Christ crucified" (1 Cor 1:23) is valid for this is the central event of history. Note carefully that the tendency of man's religions to leave

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<sup>1</sup>Forsyth, Work of Christ, pp. 82-84.

Christ on the cross is not valid. As one looks at this event it can be said that "this term expresses the perspective from which the risen Christ presently works."<sup>1</sup>

The atonement is the foundation, the reason for Christ's position but He is not still there. Rather, the Scriptures speak of what happened as the result of Christ's work. First, certainly, He rose again from the dead. Then "God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil 2:9-11).

This is the position, from which, on the foundation of the atonement, God forgives sins, for Christ has satisfied the justice with the actions of the love to establish that gift for men.

#### Divine Forgiveness

The forgiveness of God is solidly based on the atonement. Because the price was paid there, God exercises two kinds of forgiveness toward the world and an additional one toward those who are His people.

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<sup>1</sup> Earle Ellis, "Christ Crucified," Reconciliation and Hope, ed. Robert Banks (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1974), p. 70.

### Common Grace

The first kind of divine forgiveness could better be understood as forbearance. The atonement though is the key.

God is a holy, righteous God who cannot stand sin, and will not communicate with sinful man even though man is His creation. But because sin was dealt with at the atonement, and precluded by the effectual but short term sacrificial system, God communicated with man.

Without the atonement, sin would receive immediate judgment. Therefore, the fact that the rain still rains, the sun still comes up, and man is not judged immediately upon sinning, is a demonstration of the forbearing of God based on the atonement. Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 19:24) were a good illustration of God's righteous response to a sinful people. Yet, solely based on His forgiving character, He did not do the same to the Israelites (i.e. Num 14).

The first element of the definition (refuse to call to account) is done clearly by God who sets aside the fact that His holy person has been maligned and provides the way of penal satisfaction and reconciliation. Note carefully that even this forbearing by God is based upon the penal satisfaction accomplished by Christ which reconciled the world to Himself.

Although even by His common grace, God offers reconciliation to man, because man does not receive it, there is no salvation or permanent solution, and unregenerate man is

left to face the full consequences of rejecting God's offered gift.

### Salvation Forgiveness

This divine forgiveness or salvation is the central kind of forgiveness. God's premier desire for man is to have him reconciled to Himself. This salvation forgiveness is the reason for the atonement, God providing that way. Although the Bible is certainly about God and His attributes, a central theme is the "crimson thread" building to God's demonstration of His holiness, justice, mercy and love in the act of the atonement.

The Gospel at its core is not a message that there is forgiveness, it is not even a theory about forgiveness, it is forgiveness.<sup>1</sup> The Scriptures equate forgiveness with salvation and a myriad of terms including redemption (Rom 3:24), justification (Rom 5:1) and reconciliation (Rom 5:10). Each of these words is acknowledged as a different perspective from which to look at salvation. Forgiveness, although very rich in its concepts, still cannot be considered the whole definition of salvation. It does however, give a clear picture of the foundation, the mechanics and the essential issue.

With reference to the definition, God in His love and mercy first refuses to call to account. He does not

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<sup>1</sup>H. Sasse, "Sin and Forgiveness in the Modern World," CT 11 (November 1967):545.

demand personal satisfaction. One must note that man's sin is indeed an affront to His person. But God, rather than calling to account, reached out to man, sending Christ to die, and settling for man the penal requirements. It is God who, because the way has been cleared, stands ready, His hand out to man for reconciliation.

Man must repent, that is, recognizing that his sin does lead to destruction; and his efforts for restitution are useless, must change his thinking to agree with God and grab hold of His gift, being forever reconciled to God.

Two verses stand out as beacons, proclaiming specifically this forgiveness of sins. Colossians 1:14, nestled in the middle of Paul's exaltation where he proclaims the virtues of the Son, including the fact that He is the image of the invisible God, also identifies Jesus Christ as the one "in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins." Paul recognizes that the forgiveness of sins is a critical part of the presentation of Christ. Alford notes the use of *ἁμαρτία*, the general term for sin, as support of this idea that it is sin at its core which is dealt with.<sup>1</sup>

Ephesians 1:7 is far more explicit in its discussion of the whole process of salvation. It states, "In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace."

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<sup>1</sup>H. Alford, The Greek New Testament (Cambridge, 1865), 3:202.

In the Greek, this is τὴν ἀπολύτρωσιν, the redemption set apart with an article. All know about this redemption.<sup>1</sup>

This redemption takes place "through His blood," meaning simply the ransom price,<sup>2</sup> or the sacrifice of death, shed blood, price paid<sup>3</sup> or more extensively the propitiation, expiation, remission.<sup>4</sup>

The forgiveness of sins is said to put away on a judicial level, to let go as if it has not been committed.<sup>5</sup> It is the statement of the way of salvation.<sup>6</sup>

And finally the cost paid demonstrates the limitless wealth God is willing to expend in loving favor, and places for the reconciliation of man to Himself.

The commentators above came to different understandings of the various aspects of the verse. One must note that such variety confirms the facts presented earlier in the paper of the full circle of meaning for forgiveness. All the commentators' ideas fit into the definition provided for forgiveness, at one stage of the process or

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., 3:74.

<sup>2</sup> K. Wuest, Ephesians and Colossians in the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1957), p. 40.

<sup>3</sup> S. D. F. Salmond, "The Epistle to the Ephesians," in vol. 3 of Expositor's Greek Testament, ed. W. Robertson Nicoll (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1961), p. 255.

<sup>4</sup> Alford, The Greek New Testament, 3:74.

<sup>5</sup> Wuest, Ephesians and Colossians, pp. 40-41.

<sup>6</sup> Salmond, "Ephesians," p. 255.

another. Truly, God has provided gifts infinite in scope for man's eternal amazement and wondering.

One last note must be mentioned about judicial forgiveness/salvation. Because it is based on God's activity, God's plan, God's process, it is eternal. Once affected, this can never be undone. Therefore, the man who once repents, laying hold of God's gift of salvation is reconciled permanently. Because it is not based on man's understanding or proper behavior within a reconciled condition, but upon God's faithfulness, the security of the believer is an additional exciting truth related to this--the forgiveness of sin.

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#### Parental Forgiveness

"There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom 8:1). This incredible promise is often put opposite "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

There are some important concepts concerning this special forgiveness available to the believer. The one who has laid hold of God's gift of judicial forgiveness/salvation, afterwards stands in a completely different position from one who has not. The believer is reconciled to God. That process is permanent, because it is based upon the faithfulness of God.

But believers, until they are glorified, that is with Christ in heaven, still sin. Therefore, a study of what happens to that sin is appropriate.

First, consider a brief exegesis of 1 John 1:9. The setting of this verse is the Apostle John's first general epistle. In it, John, speaking to Christians, goes through several series of tests one can use to evaluate himself as to whether or not he is in the light (saved). One of these tests is, What is his attitude toward sin? Verse 8 of chapter 1 states that "if we say we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us." To claim that one has no sin is self-deception. Verse 10 states, "If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar." This verse confirms that the one who refuses to acknowledge, not only the principle of sin in verse 8 but also individual specific transgressions of God's holy law, calls God a liar. Sandwiched between these two false views of sin, is the one which a believing person holds.

The one who is a believer confesses his sin. The word used in verse 9 is *ὁμολογέω* which is translated confess. This word means "to say the same as, admit, agree."<sup>1</sup> Therefore, the believer fully acknowledges and agrees with God that he both sins and is a sinner. Jay Adams would add to that the concept "I am liable."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>CB, "Confess," by D. Furst, p. 344.

<sup>2</sup>Adams, More Than Redemption, p. 216.



This behavior is clearly the result of salvation, because the light which one is exposed to as a result of reconciliation with God clearly shows and convicts the darkness in the believer.<sup>1</sup> The believer who acknowledges sin, and his own liability, is standing exactly where he must be, repentently before God.

Because God has not changed, then the sins are forgiven under the same plan which originally reconciled him to God. Verse 9 itself brings this out, relating forgiveness to only one thing, the character of God. The believer can claim that because He is faithful and just, He will continue to forgive sins. It is the continual forgiveness of each committed sin which is the special promise and just act of God under the gospel covenant.<sup>2</sup>

For the believer, the forgiveness he receives is simply the appropriation of a gift already given.

Another point which will help one understand God's forgiveness of believers is that of relationships. The believer is the child of God. Nothing can change the parent-child relationship. It is possible, just as it is in human families for the sin of the child to strain relationships and break the opportunity for full communion. The child-believer's confession appropriates the promised blessings of the relationship and restores fellowship.

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<sup>1</sup>Alford, The Greek Testament, 4:428.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 4:430.

In this forgiveness, based on the believers reconciliation and relationship, God does not call to account or require penal satisfaction which has already been given but goes directly to the offered restoration of the family relationship.

The position of the believer, the child of God, is indeed unique and special. His place of being reconciled to God is exactly where God would have all men to be, and He gave His Son to make it possible.

#### Man's Forgiveness

The child of God, the believer, the one who has been reconciled to God, stands in a unique and special place. He is the recipient of the full grace of God. This position also bears with it an awesome responsibility.

The believer is the representative of God's grace and love to the world. Therefore, as an ambassador, he must present a true picture of God's character.

It is with this awesome responsibility in mind that Christ can present the Lord's Prayer and its commentary to the disciples, God's children. He teaches men to pray "forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors" (Matt 6:12). Thus Jesus goes on to say, commenting about this part of the prayer alone, "For if you forgive men for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions" (Matt 6:14-15).

An analysis of the verses indicate that this, first of all is the only part of the prayer referring to the new law of love Jesus proclaimed.<sup>1</sup> This genuine concern and love for others is the characteristic which marks the new-age believer (John 13:34-35). Therefore, one who is not forgiving cannot have truly experienced forgiveness himself. It has been noted that the unforgiving one, preoccupied with the offense to his own self is not aware of his offense toward God and therefore is not receptive to God's mercy.<sup>2</sup> God does not hear the prayer of the unbeliever, so one who has not acknowledged his own sin, cannot be forgiven.

But this prayer is for believers. Therefore, the explanation must be that the unforgiving one is violating the command of his Father. Therefore, because he has sin in his own life, until he deals with it, he is not in that restored position from which his prayers can be heard.

The believer, by his life, must characterize the God who forgave him. Wendell Grout lists, using texts from the Genesis account of Joseph's trials, four characteristics of biblical forgiveness: "(1) Forgiveness always views the offender as being under the control of God (Gen 45:8); (2) It views personal offenses, to be ultimately for the public good (Gen 45:5,7; 50:20); (3) It never plays God

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., 1:63.

<sup>2</sup> R. C. Halverson, "Unforgiveness," GNB 38 (April 1980):30.

(Gen 50:19); (4) It seeks the welfare of the offender (Gen 20:21)."<sup>1</sup>

In support of these comments, consider the believer's responsibility to forgive. First he must refuse to call to account. The very act of not demanding personal satisfaction is the key to human forgiveness. This must be an act of love based on the security one has in Jesus Christ. There is always a personal price to pay for an offense. By refusing to call to account, the forgiver accepts the responsibility to bear the loss himself. Note carefully some improper types of refusal to call to account: "When it puts you one-up, on top, in a superior place, as the benefactor, the generous one, it is not true forgiveness. When it distorts feelings by denying that there was hurt, squelching emotions, then it is not real."<sup>2</sup>

Human forgiveness truly occurs only with full acknowledgment of an offense. It is the choice whereby, in light of God's provision to act on that offense for the purpose of reconciliation.

There is no way men can exact, or take care of the penal requirements of a personal offense. For this reason, human forgiveness is totally based upon God and His forgiveness. God offered the satisfaction of penal requirements

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<sup>1</sup>Wendell Grout, "At Home with Forgiveness," GNB 38 (April 1980):47.

<sup>2</sup>D. Augsburger, Caring Enough Not to Forgive/Caring Enough to Forgive (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1981), pp. 8, 38.

through His Son's act of the atonement. He is still judge. Therefore, when a believer who, in obedience to Him, chooses to forgive, he must bring the offense before God. Then one of two things happens. If the offender is a Christian, then he has already been reconciled to God and the penal requirements satisfied in the atonement. If the offender is not a Christian, then God takes responsibility for exacting penal requirements. As judge He is responsible for this. Note that the believer who does not forgive a fellow Christian denies the efficacy of the atonement he is standing upon for his own reconciliation. The one who does not forgive a non-believer usurps God's role as judge. Both are practical atheism, which must call into question the person's own reconciliation, for he cannot rest himself upon something provided by one he does not believe exists.

Because the penal-requirements issue is settled, and personal satisfaction set aside, reconciliation and restoration can be offered.

Is repentance required? God in His sovereignty set aside personal satisfaction, personally sent His Son to make atonement and settle penal requirements, and offered reconciliation to mankind. For this He is known as a forgiver. He has forgiveness as part of His attributes. His attitude and behavior toward offending man is changed. Yet, forgiveness is not applied until the offender repents.

In the same way the believer can be obedient and evidence the work of God in his life by exhibiting the

characteristic of forgiveness. He can complete his side of the process and have his attitudes changed, but until the offending party repents, the purpose of forgiveness, and its full completion, restoration to the previous communication and fellowship cannot occur.

Regardless of another's activity, the believer can walk in obedience, clearly exhibiting the characteristic of God called forgiveness.

## CHAPTER IV

### CONCLUSION

The purpose of this paper was to examine the circle of meaning of the word forgiveness. It proceeded in three chapters to examine the scriptural understanding, principles and application of the word forgiveness.

The root meaning of forgiveness is "refusal to call to account." The examination of the Old Testament revealed that part of the circle of meaning includes (1) the character and power of the giver; (2) the dealing with the sin or offense; and (3) the result, restoration.

An examination of the New Testament showed additional facets including (1) legal aspects, (2) personal relationship, (3) completeness of the action, (4) that it is a free gift.

Based on these examinations principles which affect the circle of meaning were noted including (1) personal relationship, (2) restoration, (3) penal satisfaction, (4) repentance, and (5) restitution.

The understanding of forgiveness was then examined with regard to two scriptural applications, God forgiving man, and man forgiving man. This chapter included a study of the foundation of divine forgiveness, the sacrificial

system which culminated in the atonement. Divine forgiveness was noted in three separate applications: (1) common grace, (2) salvation, and (3) parental. The final section noted the application of man's forgiveness.

To the writer, the quest for an understanding of forgiveness has been a profitable one. This study only begins to plumb the depths of the majesty of the God of justice and mercy. But prayerfully the study will be of assistance to others desiring to know Him. Perhaps with the trail marked, others can move quickly to proceed yet further in the fascinating study of forgiveness from the very God of forgiveness.



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