

Sacrifice is God's Free Gift to Atonement for Man's Sin

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The first article of this series discusses the primary characteristic of God: holiness. Man, though created holy and born without sin, sinned as discussed in the second article of this series. Man is now separated from God because he is no longer holy. This article discusses the grace and mercy offered to man that allows him to regain a relationship with his holy Creator.

God told man His law in the beginning. God's law always consists of "do"s and "don't"s. Sin, as previously discussed, is a transgression of God's law (an act of lawlessness). The original law was for man to "dress and keep" the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2:15) and "not eat of" the tree in the midst of the Garden (Genesis 2:17). This simple law – one "do" and one "don't" – came with a prescribed penalty: death (Genesis 2:16). When man sinned in Genesis 3 he died and also did not die. How can this be? There are two deaths being discussed: spiritual and physical. Death is technically a separation. Spiritual death is a separation between God and another soul. Physical death is a separation between the soul and the physical body. Man died spiritually the moment he sinned therefore he was now afraid of God due to the deserved act of punishment that God could meet out. He was naked and afraid. God's holiness does not allow sin into His presence but thankfully God has other characteristics that help man.

Love – the love of God – is an active good will toward another. It is not the feeling men have when infatuated nor is it the affection one has for family members or long-time friends. God's Love provided patience with man so there could be a chance of reconciliation between God and man (2 Peter 3:9). God's grace withheld the punishment of death that was due and His mercy instead provided life that man did not deserve. The combination of love, grace, and mercy is seen in the provision for the covering (atonement) of sin.

There is a third kind of death in Genesis 3 that is not highlighted until chapter 4: judicial death. A physical death had to pay for the sin that was committed. Genesis 3:21 says that God made them coats of skins to clothe them. This is the first physical death recorded in the Bible and it came about due to the sin of man. Genesis 4 shows that God was pleased with Abel's offering of animals but displeased with Cain's offering of fruit. This is not fully explained in the passage but in Hebrews 11:4 the writer states that Abel's offering was "by faith". It would seem that at some time God gave instructions on the offering He required. Abel followed these instructions since "faith comes by hearing" (Romans 10:17) but Cain did not. More detailed instructions are given by Moses when he spoke God's law in Leviticus 17:11 "For the life of the flesh is in the blood: and I have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement for your souls: for it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul."

Judicial death is the death paid by something which is innocent to cover the debt incurred by a sinner. Under the Law of Moses there were various animals which had to be sacrificed for various trespasses but always the blood of animals was required (Hebrews 9:22). Animals are innocent because they are amoral – without morals. Animals cannot sin because they do not understand right and wrong. While innocent, animals did not pay the full price for sin because they are not suitable (Hebrews 10:4). God had planned prior to the foundation of the world that His Lamb would be prepared and sacrificed to pay the debt for man's sin (John 1:29; 1 Peter 1:19-20). This "Lamb of God" will be the topic of the next article in this series.

To better explain judicial death, think of a fine placed on a criminal for breaking the law. Assume this criminal does not have the money to pay the fine but an innocent benefactor pays the debt for him. The criminal is now free because the debt has been paid.

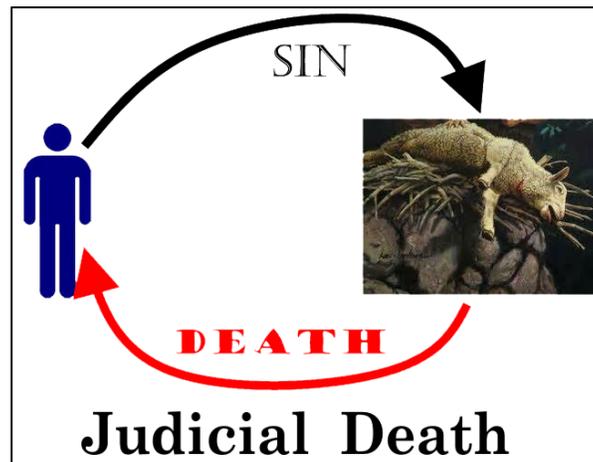
Another example is that of the "whipping boy". At the time the "divine right of kings" suggested that kings and their family were also "divine". A mere mortal could not punish a "divine" royal. This meant that only the King could punish an errant Prince. Since the King was often unavailable when disobedience by a young Prince occurred, tutors and others

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needing to discipline the Prince would inflict punishment on the “whipping boy”. The “whipping boy” was usually of a high social class and was educated alongside the royal family member from an early age hoping that the royal would have enough emotional attachment to the “whipping boy” that it would curb the bad behavior. In this situation an innocent third party was given the punishment due the Prince who had transgressed the rules of the instructor.



When a sacrifice is offered a spiritual activity occurs which cannot be seen by men. Sins of the sinner are transferred to the offering (under the Law of Moses this was symbolized by speaking the sin over the head of the animal or by laying hands on the animal) and the death of the offering is transferred to the sinner (symbolized by placement of the blood on the altar, the people, or the consecrated vessels). In this way the sinner no longer has the sin and instead has the payment of death that was needed. Under the Law of Moses every sin required a new sacrifice and – although forgiven – sins were remembered yearly on the Day of Atonement.