

Sin

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THE trouble with man is *sin*. All his suffering and misery is due to *sin*. Pain, loss, heartache, frustration are basically caused by *sin*. This is something man does, but he never needs to learn it. It is as natural for a man to sin as it is to breathe. The Bible tells us God did not create man with sin, but when the first man Adam sinned, all his descendants were involved so that sin appears in them. "There is no man that sinneth not." "All have sinned and come short of the glory of God."

The wonderful truth in the Gospel is that man can be saved from *sin*. Jesus Christ is the Saviour who redeems, delivers, cleanses a man from all *sin*. God is holy and cannot tolerate *sin*, but Christ Jesus is able to reconcile the sinner to God by His own grace. "As in Adam all die, so in Christ shall all be made alive." "Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound."

THE LAW OF GOD

"The law of God" is an expression used many times and in various ways in Scripture. The word *law* usually means something that has been made a rule. So we speak of the *laws* of the land. Such are certain rules put down by the government to show right and wrong. Another use of the word would be to say that the law of anything is the nature of it. The *law* of falling bodies would be the rate of speed at which they fall. The *law* of steam would be the way in which it exerts pressure. Thus the *law* of anything would be its characteristic way of acting.

And so we may speak of things happening according to *the law of God*. *The law of God*, in this instance, would be God's way of doing things. It would refer to something that is in His nature. Anything concerning us that would be agreeable to the nature of God would be the "law of God" for us.

From one point of view the "law of God" is set forth in the Ten Commandments. These are properly called "the Ten Words of Moses" and were given to instruct the people of God as to what is right and wrong. They show something of what God expects man to do and not to do.

What they mean can be seen by looking at traffic laws. For example, if the law of a community says the speed limit is thirty-five miles an hour, this means that there are so many people living in that small area, and the situation is so congested, that thirty-five miles an hour is the safe speed at which to travel. After the establishment of the thirty-five-mile-an-hour zone, the sign is set up, and then the law is fixed. Driving faster than that means the law has been broken, but it also means such driving is unsafe in the area.

God's actions show holiness, goodness, and justice. The Ten Commandments are in line with His way of doing things. It is because God is honest that "thou shalt not steal." It is because God created man in His own image that "thou shalt not kill." It is because God gives children parents to watch over them and to guide them that "thou shalt honor thy father and thy mother." It is because God tells the truth and would have men tell the truth that He makes it a law that "thou shalt not bear false witness." So the Ten Commandments are like God. They show how God expects a man to act because God is the kind of Person that He is.

What the Ten Commandments show is reflected in man's own conscience. People who do not have the Ten Commandments in their literature may still feel in their own hearts the rightness and wrongness of

their actions. The sixth commandment says "thou shalt not kill," but killing was wrong for anybody all the time. The commandment simply says in so many words that killing is wrong. No man anywhere thinks killing is right. We can be angry with a man and feel like killing him, but our conscience will tell us it is wrong to kill a man just because we feel like doing it.

If any man has never heard the commandment "thou shalt not steal," but is old enough to know his right hand from his left, he knows that stealing is wrong. Pagan people who have never heard the Ten Commandments know that stealing is not right. This is seen in that they do it in the dark of night. Any time someone has to hide to do something, he shows that he knows it is wrong. The Ten Commandments say that man is not to steal; but if the Ten Commandments had never said it, man would yet know it was wrong.

The Ten Commandments are like a fence on a mountain highway. Any man driving on a narrow mountain road can look over the side and see the deep canyon going straight down. He certainly does not want to slip down there. He wants to stay on the road. Beside the road are little white posts, sometimes with a chain running from one to another. That fence would not hold the motorist if his car ran into it. Seldom are such fences strong enough to keep a car from falling down the embankment. Actually that fence does not make it dangerous to go off the road. It was always dangerous to go off the road; and if those posts were not there at all, it would still be dangerous to go off that road. The fence simply shows where the danger is, and so it is a real help. Those posts cannot make the driver stay on the road, but they show him where it would be wrong to drive. In the same way the Ten Commandments do not make anything wrong. Whatever is wrong is wrong, but the Commandments say it in so many words that man can see it clearly. They are like a fence along the highway of life, and so are a real help in guiding conduct.

Sometimes we use the term *the law of God* when referring to the Bible. The New Testament uses the term law to refer to the writings of Moses. When speaking about *the law of God*, we usually mean something written. In this way we refer to the Ten Commandments that were written on tablets of stone. Whether *the law of God* is understood to be the Ten Commandments, the writings of Moses, the whole of Scripture, or the very nature of God, the main thing is this: there are some ways of living which God approves and other ways which He disapproves. God wants man to live in a way that would be pleasing in His sight. When a man does this, we may say he is living "according to the law of God." When any man acts in any way that is contrary to what is shown in the Bible to be the will of God, he will know that he has sinned. If any man acts in line with the nature of God, he is doing God's will, keeping God's law, and that is what makes a man well-pleasing to God. If we want to know what will please the Lord, we only need to find out what the law of God is. This is one of the real reasons for Bible study. The Almighty God is our Maker. He has His will for us and has revealed it in the Scriptures. He wants us to obey Him. Any time we go against His will, breaking *the law of God*, we sin. Because we might blunder foolishly into breaking *the law of God* even when we don't want to, we read and study the Bible so we may know what He wants us to do.

"Thy Word have I hid in my heart, that I might not sin against thee" (Ps. 119:11) .

THE NATURE OF SIN

The word *sin* is a *God-word*. I mean if you do not have any idea of God you will not have any idea of *sin*. *Sin* is anything in a human being, in his attitude or in his actions, which is not like God.

The Shorter Catechism says "Sin is any want of conformity unto, or any transgression of, the law of God" (Question 14 – The Westminster Shorter Catechism). "Any want of conformity unto" means that anything that falls short of or does not comply with the law of God is *sin*. "Any transgression of" means anything that goes contrary to the law of God is *sin*. Sin then is anything different from the nature of God.

Inasmuch as God is a certain kind of Person, anybody not like that is sinful. Since God will always act in a certain way, anything not done that way is *sin*.

The word *sin* is used in at least three different ways. First, it is used about a man's actions. If we act in a way which is not agreeable to the will of God, a way that is not in line with the law of God, that *act* is *sin*. Second, it is used to refer to a man's *nature*. We say that man is born sinful. We do not mean so much that when he is born he is full of wrong actions, full of sins, as we mean that his nature is to do wrong. He is sinful in the sense that his nature is full of the disposition to go in his own way and not in God's way. Third, the word *sin* is used to refer to the *status or standing* of a man before God. How does any man stand in relation to God? Man is a sinner. He stands before a holy God guilty of having done wrong and cannot have any dealings with God as long as he remains in this state.

No matter how the word is used or defined, every time the word *sin* is used, we have *God* in mind; and we mean to say "This is not like God." Any action, any attitude, any condition, any state, any way of doing things not like God we call *sin*. When it is like God, we call it "godly." If an act is right and is in line with God's will, it is "righteous." Sometimes sin is crude and vulgar, and at other times it is refined and cultured. Sin may not always look bad to human beings, but it is never pleasing in the sight of God. In fact, we may say that anything that is not pleasing in the sight of God is not like God and therefore is *sin*.

Sin has an effect upon people. The Bible says that the soul that sinneth shall die. This means when any soul acts in a way that God would not approve, it shall die. This dying process has several effects upon a person. The soul that sins is *separated* from God. Sin makes a man a stranger to God. Think of friends who become separated. If they remain apart very long, the friendship begins to cool off. In order to keep friendship, friends must have dealings with each other. What is true of human friendships is also true with God. If I sin in the sight of God and my sin has not been forgiven, I have a feeling of being away from God. I am separated from Him; and if I stay that way, I begin to feel that I am a stranger to God. From separation I move on into *isolation*. I feel I am alone, and God has nothing to do with me at all. I can hear about God with my ears as people talk about Him; but deep down in my heart I do not think about Him. I do not have any feeling about Him. I think He is a long distance away. And then things get worse.

Sin has the effect of *deteriorating*. A man will become worse after he has sinned. When God is with a man, He has the same effect that sunlight has upon a plant. If a man is dwelling in fellowship with God, he is drawn closer to Him. When a man is separated, alienated, and isolated from God, he does not have this blessing. He has in effect cut himself off from the source of help and his condition becomes worse and worse.

Sin is used as a word in different ways. It can be used in connection with the breaking of a law. For example, the law of God says, "Thou shalt not steal," so when I steal, I sin. The law of God says, "Thou shalt not bear false witness," so when I lie, I sin. Any time I disobey the law of God, I am sinning. If I act 'in a way that God would not act, I am sinning. These are spoken of as the sins of *commission*.

The Bible also points out that there are sins of *omission*. In the New Testament, we read, "Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin" (Jas. 4:17). That is, the failure to do good when I know what would be good, is sin. If I know what ought to be done, and I do not do it, then I am not like God. That is sin. If I fail to do something good because of ignorance, I am not as responsible as I would be if I had known what to do. This is the state of the man who does not know Christ Jesus. As the Lord said, "And that servant, which knew his Lord's will and prepared not, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes" (Luke 12:47, 48). This does not altogether excuse the sins of ignorance. Sin is still sin whether we are informed or not.

The meaning of *sin* is made even more clear when we read, ". . . for whatsoever is not of faith is sin" (Rom. 14:23). Here we need to understand what is meant by *faith*. Faith is responding in obedience to the revealed will of God. God reveals His will, and when man responds to it and accepts it, this is believing

God. Any action on his part which is *not* in response to the revealed will of God is *sin*. If a Christian person does not know the will of God, he can seek God's face in order to learn His will. If a Christian is facing a problem and proceeds without seeking God's will, then he is sinning. The Lord Jesus always looked to His Heavenly Father for guidance. The man who has faith in Christ as Saviour and Lord must always look to God for this same guidance. He must respond to the revealed will of God or else he is guilty of sin.

Several times I have made such statements as "it is not like God" and "it is not like the Lord Jesus Christ." Now we will naturally ask, how can a man know God? We would say with the Apostle Philip, "Lord, show us the Father, and it sufficeth us" (John 14:8). You will remember Jesus answered him saying, "Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? He that hath seen me hath seen the Father" (John 14:9). This means that so far as you and I are concerned, if we should question in any given situation what the will of God would be, we would only need to look to the life of Christ as recorded in the Bible. He was the true Son of God and lived without sin. In the Scriptures we can read how He lived, and we can be sure when we live that way we will be living in the will of God.

Suppose I am face to face with a situation and I do not know for sure what is right or wrong, but I go ahead and act. This is not as the Lord Jesus would do. When He was faced with a problem, He prayed. In Gethsemane, Christ prayed, "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt" (Matt. 26:39). I would say that any action on our part in which we do not follow the example of the Lord Jesus Christ is out of conformity with the will of God and therefore is *sin*.

THE COURSE OF SIN

After seeing that sin is any action on our part which is not according to God's will, we can understand now how sin happens. We can ask, how does sin actually take place? And we can get the answer by looking at Genesis 3 to see what happened in the Garden of Eden.

Sin always happens while people are living their lives in this world. This is how it happened with Adam and Eve. The first thing that happened was *temptation*. Temptation in itself is not sin. It happens when we are in a situation that makes us want to act in some way to please ourselves. It leads us to sin if the way we act is not God's way.

The New Testament says, "For all that is in the world, the *lust of the flesh*, and the *lust of the eyes*, and the *pride of life*, is not of the Father, but is of the world" (I John 2:16). Those three expressions show the three ways temptation comes to a human being. The first way is the *lust of the flesh*. The common word for this is *appetite*. Lust means strong desire. The flesh means everything that man has in him naturally, centered in his physical body. The lust of the flesh as it arouses a man's appetite becomes a craving or a longing. This appetite can lead a man to doing wrong when he lusts after or has an intense craving for that which is not lawful for him to have. In this way his appetite becomes a way of temptation to a man.

The second way in which temptation comes is the *lust of the eyes*. This strong desire involves *imagination*. As a man's eyes begin to wander there are certain things that attract his attention. Some of these things are carnal and fleshly, and yet they look good through the eyes of the man. He begins to imagine what he would like to have or what he would like to do and forgets it might be displeasing to God.

The third way is the *pride of life*. This can be called *vanity*. Vanity gives a man a high opinion of himself. When a man is vain, he gets to be puffed up with a sense of his own importance. He feels almost as if the whole world exists just for him and for his selfish interests.

We are always in a situation that presents temptation to us when we are influenced by our appetite, what we would like; or by our imagination, what looks good; or by our vanity, what would make us feel big. These three lines of appeal are allowed to come to us one way or another to test us or tempt us to act

in ways that are displeasing to God. However, this is not yet sin. The Bible tells us that the Lord Jesus, when He was here upon earth, "Was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin." Although Jesus was tempted, He never sinned. Being tempted is not sin: sin follows temptation.

Adam and Eve committed *sin* when they took of the fruit, when they *acted* in disobedience to the revealed will of God. God had said to them, "For in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" (Gen. 2:17). He commanded, "Don't eat," and gave them a reason, "because thou shalt surely die." However, they did eat, and they did begin to die. Their sin was not in the temptation but in this act of disobedience. Temptation does not become sin to us until we act on it. Such action does not need to be outward action. Man can act in his heart. He can be attracted to the sinful; he can turn to it. As a man follows his appetite, imagination, and vanity within his heart, his inward attitude can be sin. Jesus calls attention to this form of sin in the Sermon on the Mount. Take the matter of adultery. Jesus said, "Whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart" (Matt. 5:28).

In thinking about what happens when we sin, we must also consider that a feeling that he will be judged can grip the heart of a person who has sinned. Just as Adam was called upon to answer for what he had done, so must we all answer when we have sinned. Adam and Eve, after they had sinned, saw that they were naked, and they sewed fig leaves together to make themselves aprons. After they covered their nakedness, they hid themselves. Why? They were afraid. What were they afraid of? They were afraid of what God would do to them because of their disobedience. The fig leaves they sewed together were not good enough to cover them. They were ashamed of themselves and felt guilty; therefore, they tried to hide in the Garden of Eden from God. When Adam and Eve had hidden themselves, God called, "Adam, where art thou?" He made Adam come out into the open to Him. When Adam was asked why he hid himself, he admitted he was now afraid of God. *Guilt* is a feeling that comes over us after we have done wrong. A man flees from God because he is afraid that God is going to deal in judgment with him. The word *judgment*, with reference to sin, is simply God saying we have done wrong and that He will punish us for the wrong we have done.

When God asked Adam, "What is this that thou hast done?" God called him to account. God spoke to Adam and Eve and told them that because they had sinned certain results would follow. Sometimes the judgment of God leads on to an immediate penalty; but this is not always so. God can judge a deed to be sinful, and then under certain conditions He may see fit to delay or even to omit the punishment. He can wait for a long time to deal with the sinner.

Associated with judgment is the word *curse*. In God's judgment He said that the man, the woman, and the land were going to suffer. He said to Adam, "Thou shalt die," which means, of course, he would begin to suffer and at the end of it all he would be dead. When God pronounced His curse upon the man, the woman, the serpent, and the soil, He was stating outwardly, openly, publicly what was going to happen because of the wrong which Adam had done.

When we put all these things together, we have the course of sin. We see that sin begins with temptation. It moves on into action, which is the sin itself: the transgression of the law of God. Then comes guilt, which is the way the person feels about his sin, and that is followed by judgment, which is the way God deals with the sinner. The curse, which is the penalty on the person because of the sin that he has done, is then spelled out; but the story is not complete until we refer to *grace*. *Grace* is that action of God in which He saves us from our sins. Grace is God acting for us in ways we do not deserve and which we have not earned. If a person could pay for the blessing of God, it would not be grace any more; but when he is dependent upon God and has nothing with which to pay and receives from God as free the things that really matter, that is the grace of God. Although we have sinned and become alienated from God, we can be reconciled and forgiven of our sin because of the grace of God. How marvelous is His grace! "Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound: that as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign

through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 5:20-21).

FORGIVENESS OF SINS

The great truth about sin for Christians is that God *forgives* sin. Sin is as human as human nature. Man naturally sins. He acts in ways which are not like God. Sin has an effect upon man in that it changes him, it spoils him, it turns him away from God. The most wonderful truth in the Bible is that God forgives sin. This forgiveness is possible not because we deserve it or that we have earned it, but because of God's mercy and grace.

The word *forgive* is a common word in our language, but I wonder how many of us have ever stopped to think what it really means. Have we ever tried to think about what actually happens when we *forgive*? The essence of forgiving is *giving*. The main part of the word is *give*. When we forgive anyone, we are giving that person release from the wrong he has done to us. We give up any right or intention on our part to get even with him. We give away the right and the privilege to retaliate against him. If we forgive someone, we are giving that person liberty and freedom from what we might have done.

Let us say that a man has cheated me out of forty dollars. In my dealings with him, I trusted him, and so he got away with forty dollars of my money. He owes me forty dollars; and I have the right to collect it. If I forgive him, I give him release from what he owes me and that is as if I gave him the forty dollars.

Forgiveness does not mean that I tell the man that what he did was all right. If it was all right, there was nothing to forgive. When I was cheated out of forty dollars, that was forty dollars wrong, and let's keep it straight. Righteousness, according to the law, would mean he should pay me the forty dollars.

In the Old Testament the idea of righteousness is brought out as an "Eye for eye and tooth for tooth" (Ex. 21:24). Some people would say this is terrible, but actually it is the fair and just thing to do. Suppose I become involved in an argument with a man, and he gets rough with me. We begin to scuffle, and in the course of the fight he knocks my eye out. He should not have done it, but he did. The law of Moses says I would be justified in knocking out his eye. Someone will say, "Isn't that terrible?" Surely, but it was terrible to have my eye knocked out, and it is no worse for him to have his eye knocked out. It is fair and square.

Another will say, "That is just the law of the jungle." Oh, no, that is not the way it would happen if human nature were not held back. If somebody knocked out my eye, what would I feel like doing to him? I would want to "knock his block off." I would want to completely annihilate him for what he did.

To illustrate further, suppose someone picks a fight with me and knocks out a tooth. Then I have the right, according to the law of Moses, to retaliate in kind. Moses would say, "How many teeth did he knock out?" "One." "Well, then you can knock out one." "Two." "Then you can knock out two." Someone may say, "How awful!" Remember! It is no more awful for him than it was for me. Again, someone will say, "That is the law of the jungle." Again I say, no. The law of my human nature would be that if he knocks one tooth out of my head, I'd not stop with one tooth from him. I would knock every tooth out of his head. But Moses in the law would say, "No, you harm him only as much as he has harmed you." This is justice, but of course it is not forgiveness. If I forgive him, I give him release from what he did to me, and do not hit him at all.

Think back to the illustration I used earlier. The man cheated me out of forty dollars. If I forgive him, I say "Cancel it." There is to be no collection. I let it go. That may sound pretty simple, but it is not. If someone does you an injustice, your first impulse is to hurt him. Somebody slams the door in your face. What does it make you feel like doing? Just wait 'til he comes through that door and you get a chance to slam it! Then you would be even.

Getting even with people is a real delight for some. To have been done an injustice, and to be able to pay it back really appeals to the human heart. We may not want to admit it, but this is the truth. Some

people are truly stimulated by the chance to get even. When somebody does them wrong and they get mad, they walk around with more life than they have had for weeks. There is a new spring in their step, their eyes sparkle, and their hair curls, just because they are mad. They are going to get even, and they have a thrill surging through them. Then, too, when they are mad, they don't have to be nice to people. They don't have to pick up anything others drop on the floor; they don't have to wait on them; they don't even have to cook a meal for them; they can just get mad and stay mad. They can get even with people and take out of them everything they owe them and as much more as they can get.

Of course, this is not forgiveness. If you are going to forgive, you give the person release from what he has done wrong. You do not do anything to get even, and believe me that is not easy. You just have to swallow the injustice and that is bitter. You might want to get even, but if you have grace in your heart, you will feel led to forgive. God has grace in His heart; He wants to forgive our sin. When God forgives, He actually releases us from the wrong we have done against Him and never collects for it. He will never retaliate against us.

The forgiveness of sin presents a real problem to God, but He can forgive because of what Christ Jesus has done. When the penalty for sin has been paid, God has to be fair; He has to be just, and that means I can go free. However, God cannot overlook my wrongdoing. If He did, He would have to overlook all wrong, and the devil could laugh at Him. God cannot play favorites. The great question is then, how is God going to forgive me my sin? How is He going to give me release from what I did wrong? Simply put, He can do it because Christ Jesus died for my sins. Christ paid the penalty so that I could go free.

Years ago, a friend of mine, a fellow student, was caught driving too fast in the city of Los Angeles, California. He received a ticket for speeding. When he was called to appear, he asked me to go down to the police court with him. I had never been in a police court in my life, but I went with him and had my eyes opened on how these things are done. When my friend stepped up before the court, he was asked, "Did you drive too fast? The reporting officer says you drove more than thirty miles an hour. Did you?" My friend began a story to explain how it was, and the judge interrupted and asked, "Did you?" He replied, "Yes." The judge said, "Thirty dollars or thirty days. Next."

They took my friend over into a little enclosure from which he was not going to be released until he had paid the thirty dollars. He didn't have the money, and so he was in jail for thirty days, unless I put up the thirty dollars. I walked all the way to the Institute where I was staying to get my last thirty dollars out of the bank. In due time I arrived back at the police court. An amazing thing happened when I produced my money. They didn't even ask me my name. I tried to tell them, but to no avail. They were only interested in the name of the man who had committed the crime. They had his name, took my thirty dollars, and gave me a receipt for *him*. I went to the cell where *he* was being kept, and they let *him* out. They never did ask me my name; they just took my thirty dollars. On the basis of my thirty dollars, he walked out as if he had not done anything. He was *forgiven*, and they gave him release on the strength of the fact that I gave thirty dollars.

That is the way it is with me and my sin. When I have done wrong, I am entitled to suffer death. The Lord Jesus Christ suffered death in my place and because of His death I am enabled to go free. I go free, because He died for me, and I am treated as if I had never done wrong. This is the forgiveness of sin that demonstrates the matchless love and mercy of God, because He gave His own Son to die for my sin in order that I could go free.

SACRIFICE FOR SINS

There is a very important element in the forgiveness of sins which is often overlooked. It is that God has a basis for the forgiveness of sin. He does not forgive sin just because He is kind and gracious. Certain conditions must be met. A necessary provision needs to be made for the cancellation of guilt. When sin

occurs, when man does something wrong in the sight of God, he frustrates the will of God and disobeys and breaks the plan of God. To that extent he is in debt and unfit. It is therefore needful that something be done in order that the sinner might be able to stand before God free of guilt and worthy of God's favor.

If a child puts its hand into boiling water, something is going to happen. There is no use for the mother to say, "Oh, my poor child, I am sorry that that happened to you. We'll just act as if it hadn't happened"; because the child *was* scalded. When sin occurs, something actually happens. When a man does wrong, it is as if he cut off a finger. We may feel sorry for him, but this does not put the finger back. In other words, sin against God, the breaking of one of the laws of God, is something really done; and it is not possible for God to say He will just forget about it. A debt has been incurred, and it must be paid. The New Testament reveals that God is willing and ready and able to forgive, because the debt has been paid. And it is this payment of the debt we now want to consider.

God's reaction to sin is judgment. If a human being breaks a law of God, a certain penalty must follow. If I violate a law of nature, certain consequences follow. If I say I don't believe in the law of gravity and then step out of a second-story window, I will wind up with broken bones in spite of what I may have said. Spiritual laws are not less real than the physical. One of the spiritual laws is that God is angry with sin, and so "The wages of sin is death . . ." (Rom. 6:23). The wonderful thing about the Gospel is that the penalty that the sinner deserves is taken by Christ. He intervenes on behalf of the one who has violated the spiritual law. Christ steps in and takes the burden upon Himself. As John states it, "If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world" (I John 2:1-2).

Propitiation is a big word, and the reason it is in the Bible is because there is no little word to use for it. It has to do with turning away wrath by use of an offering. It refers to something that makes a person inclined to be gentle with you and gracious to you when you have acted in a way that deserves judgment. The Bible sets forth the view that the sin of man brings on the wrath of God. The death of Christ on the cross turns away the wrath of God so that He can be gracious and kind to us in regard to our sin. This effect of Christ's death is what we call *propitiation*. We say He propitiated God. Paul writes, "Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God has set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood . . ." (Rom. 3:24-25). It is because Christ has borne our sins in His body on Calvary's cross that we can be forgiven. Because He has paid the penalty, we can walk out free. Christ died for us, and God can deal with us as if we had not sinned.

In I John we read these familiar words, "If we confess our sins, he (God) is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (I John 1:9). Why does it say that He is "faithful and just" to forgive us our sins? God does not forgive us our sins because of our confession but because of Christ's death for us on the cross. However, it is not until we confess our sins that we receive the benefit of the death of the Lord Jesus Christ. When we come to God and admit that we have sinned, we can claim from God what Christ has provided for us. God is then faithful and just to forgive.

Christ's having paid the penalty is the basis for our use of the phrase "for Christ's sake." God the Father thinks about the Lord Jesus Christ, sees how He has paid the penalty, and lets me go free. He does not let me go free for my sake or because I have confessed my sins. There is not anything I can do to justify myself in the sight of God. It is only because Christ died for me and God is willing to look on me through Christ's sacrificial death that I can receive the forgiveness of my sins. Christ offered Himself as a sacrifice for sin. The Bible says, "Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree" (Gal. 3:13). Christ actually took the curse that belonged to me in His own body in order that I might be set free of the consequences of sin.

Very early in Scripture (Gen. 3:15) we are told that God's plan calls for an innocent substitute to be offered up as a sacrifice to Him for the sins of His people. This does not mean that God is cruel and unfair. It just means that sin is that awful. It is the sin that is cruel and unfair. God so loves us that He gave His own Son to be our sacrifice. The Lord Jesus Christ was the innocent substitute who went to the cross

and suffered for our sins. Today the sinner can come to God, openly turn to God, call upon Him; and God is able to forgive him. For this Christ died, and so we speak of His being the "sacrifice for sins" on our behalf.

THE SIN OFFERING

Man is separated from God because of the presence of sin in his life. How can he then possibly draw nigh to God that he may be helped? The Bible deals plainly with this problem.

God spoke to Moses on Mt. Sinai and made plain how a sinner could come to Him. In the Old Testament there was a definite procedure which a sinner had to follow in coming to God.

The worshipper who was conscious of sin in his life was required to bring a living animal as a sacrifice to be offered by the priest. God wanted man's perfect obedience, but when man failed in that, God provided a way for a sinner to approach Him through sacrifice. Man was to bring a clean, unblemished animal which had nothing to do with his sin, and put it to death. The life and blood of the innocent animal was to take the place of the sin in the life of the worshipper.

The sacrifice was commonly a lamb; but sometimes an ox, a goat, or a dove was brought. The live creature was brought to the altar, which was the place of worship. Here the individual laid his hand upon the head of the living animal and confessed his sin. The understanding was that his sins were put on this living creature so that it would be counted as if it were guilty, and would be dealt with as if it were the sinner. Of course, the worshipper knew perfectly well that the lamb was not responsible for what the man had done. God also knew it, but this was a way of picturing something that would take place some day in reality. It was pointing forward to the day when Jesus Christ would appear as the Lamb of God and the sinner would put his sins on Him.

After the sinner had made confession upon the animal as the innocent living substitute, the priest would put the creature to death, and take the blood and sprinkle it on the altar of the tabernacle as proof that a death had occurred for sin. Thus the sinner could come into the presence of God at the altar on the basis of the death of an innocent substitute.

Anyone hearing this for the first time may wonder why the sacrifice is necessary. The practical answer is that this is the way that God arranged for men to follow in coming to Him. This is the way He has sanctioned and endorsed. He says, "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" (Lev. 17:11). Maybe you and I wouldn't do it that way, but let us keep in mind that you and I are not like God. I can imagine someone saying, "I personally don't see why God wouldn't just overlook sin. Why wouldn't He just forget about it?" The reason is plainly indicated in the Bible. God is not only loving, merciful, and just; but He is also holy. Because God is holy, He cannot overlook sin. A reliable surgeon cannot ignore unclean instruments. He must sterilize whatever he intends to use. It is necessary that some cleansing provision be made for the sinful and unrighteous person to enable such a one to come into the presence of the One who is altogether holy.

It is a law of life that disobedience bring suffering. If a child does wrong, someone will suffer. If parents neglect disciplining or punishing their child, then they themselves will probably suffer. If parents want to take this on themselves, that is their privilege, but someone must suffer for disobedience. No one ever breaks a law without someone's suffering. Some parents are willing to endure the consequence of their child's wrongdoing. It is this way with God. He is willing to suffer for our disobedience, and it cost Him the death of His Son.

The Bible helps us to understand how this is. The ritual in the time of Moses was set up so that the worshipper would bring the sin offering to the tabernacle and confess his sins upon that offering. Then the sin offering would be slain, and the blood would be sprinkled in the place of worship by the priest. This was the way to come to God. The worshipper would know that the forgiveness he was going to

receive was not free. It was free to him, but it cost the death of the sin offering. The New Testament tells us that "Ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold . . . but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot" (I Pet. 1:18-19).

This whole idea of the shedding of blood and of another creature's dying in my place is summed up in the words *expiation for sin*. To express it simply, another person bears the burden of my sin and guilt by dying in my place, and his blood is brought into God's presence and presented before Him to show that my debt is paid. God in Himself is such a Person that He must be righteous and fair and just. And so whereas the soul that sinned should die, God is able to release that soul from that obligation to die and forgive the guilt of his sin because one has already died for him.

In the Old Testament ritual, on the Day of Atonement the priest took the blood of the slain lamb and carried it into the very presence of God, into the Holy of Holies. After a time the priest came out to the people and pronounced upon them forgiveness of sins. This meant that God had accepted the death of the sacrifice on their behalf. When the priest declared that sins were forgiven, he pronounced pardon and the worshipper walked away free. He was now free to have communion with God without fear. The requirements of the law had been met. The sin had been cleared away. Atonement had been made.

The word *atonement* which comes from the verb *atone* interestingly enough does not have any Latin or Greek root. It comes from an English phrase meaning *at one*. *Atonement* means that the sinner and God are made *at one*; they are reunited. The great Day of Atonement for Israel was the day when all the people came before God and confessed their sins as a nation. The blood of the sin offering was shed and then was taken into the presence of God. God and His people were reconciled and reunited, not because of any magic in the blood itself, but because the people *believed* God.

As a parallel to the Old Testament ritual, the New Testament presents the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Through the sacrifice which Jesus made in order to bring the sinner and God together – *at one* – He effects the reconciliation. He is the "sin offering" for every believer who comes into the presence of God honestly and sincerely admitting his sins and putting his faith and trust in the death of the Lord Jesus Christ to forgive his sins. God will receive Christ's death on behalf of the believer and set him free. The significance of the sin offering of the Lord Jesus Christ is that man can now come into the presence of God as His own child, at one with God. In this way God can be "the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus" (Rom. 3:26).

THE LAMB OF GOD

The term *the Lamb of God* means something special to anyone who knows the Bible. In the Old Testament, worship was based upon the sin offering, a sacrifice which was usually a lamb.

The Old Testament relates the story of Abraham's offering up his son, Isaac, on the altar. As they were coming to the place where the altar was, Isaac asked his father where the sacrifice was. Abraham answered him saying, "My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering" (Gen. 22:8). At that time Abraham had reason to believe that the sacrifice God would require would be his own son, Isaac. But the story points out that God provided a ram. With this in mind, when we use the phrase *the Lamb of God*, we are thinking of a sacrifice which God has provided that is going to be offered up for the sins of the people. It brings immediately to the mind of Christian people the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ at Calvary.

The Passover (Ex. 11 and 12) was one of the most significant events ever to occur in the history of Israel. At that time the children of Israel were called Hebrews and they were being held in captivity in Egypt. Pharaoh was unwilling for them to return to their own country; and through Moses, God dealt with Pharaoh by bringing one plague after another upon the land of Egypt. The last of the plagues was the plague of death which was to come upon the first-born in each household. When the word was passed through Moses to Pharaoh that the first-born would die, everyone was included. The Hebrews were

included as well as the Egyptians, but God provided a way of escape for them. He told Moses that the head of each household should take a lamb and, after checking to be sure that it was without blemish, should slay it and put its blood upon the doorpost. "And when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and the plague shall not be upon you to destroy you" (Ex. 12:13). The word *Passover* is derived from the language used here. The death angel *passed over* the houses where the doorposts were sprinkled with blood.

The question is often raised as to whether or not it made any difference whether the people in the house were good or bad, devoted or careless. The Bible narrative does not say that the angel of death looked to see about the character of the people in the house; he looked to see the blood on the doorpost. If he saw the blood, he would pass over. The truth to be seen here is that as any sinner comes before God under the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, it is the blood of Christ between man and the Father which God sees, and for the sake of the blood He passes over man's sin. When God looks down on any sinner who is trusting in the blood, He is reminded of the death of Christ; and because Christ died for the man, the man goes free for Christ's sake. Paul in writing to the Corinthians said, "For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us" (I Cor. 5:7).

When John said, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29), he was referring to the fact that Christ Jesus would die as the sin offering. And thus it would be true that Jesus' death on Calvary's cross for sin makes Him "the Lamb of God" for any individual person. In that respect He fulfills Isaiah 53, which sets forth the whole idea of Christ's suffering in our place and being the Lamb of God, which dies, taking away the sin of the world. "But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed" (Isa. 53:5).

The word *reconciliation* is used to refer to the fact that the sinner is brought back into the presence of God. Reconciliation would not mean anything unless first there had been alienation and separation. The picture drawn for us in the Bible is that God made man in His own image so that man could have fellowship with Him. But when man sinned, he became a stranger to God. Man was ashamed of his sin and felt a sense of guilt. He knew he deserved the wrath and punishment of God. As long as this was the case, man could never have close, personal, living fellowship with God. However, the Lord provided a way for sinful man to have his sin and guilt taken away. Christ suffered as the Lamb of God fulfilling the requirements of the law. Death came to Him and because He died, death does not have to come to the man who believes in Him. Such a man goes free. With man's guilt pardoned and his sins forgiven and carried away, he is now reconciled to God. He can come into the presence of God, where there is no longer any fear of punishment.

This does not mean that God has decided that sin does not matter. We should never feel that coming into the presence of God, free from sin, is a light thing. Coming into the presence of God without guilt is a free, gracious privilege extended to the penitent sinner because Christ died for him. We have been delivered from guilt, but the price was the precious blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. We are free from punishment, but that is only because He bore our punishment in His own body on the cross.

The Old Testament *sin offering* – confession of sin on a spotless lamb, the offering slain, and sin carried away – helps us to understand the death of Christ when the Apostle John writes, "Behold the Lamb of God which taketh (beareth) away the sin of the world."

THE HIGH PRIEST

Throughout the Bible the idea of the *high priest* is brought out to show how one particular man is provided to help in guiding the sinner who wants to worship God. The high priest acts on behalf of sinning people. In the Old Testament there is shown to be a big gap between the Holy God in heaven and sinful man on earth. Man knows he needs the help of God but is unable to figure out how to come to

God for such help.

We may remember there was a certain prescribed ritual to be performed in worship in the tabernacle. The sacrifice was to be slain at the altar; the high priest, representing the sinful people, was to wash at the laver; the light was to be burning on the golden candlestick; the shewbread was to be on the table; the incense was to be burned on the altar of incense. On the Day of Atonement, the high priest would then enter the Holy of Holies. As he came into the presence of God at the mercy seat, he would sprinkle blood on all the articles of furniture. All this any ordinary man would not know how to do. God, therefore, in mercy provided priests to go in for man.

In mercy and grace, God arranged that man does not have to grope his way into His presence in blind uncertainty. We may well be ignorant or unsure in ourselves, but God supplies us with a Guide, a High Priest who knows how to approach the Holy One and bring our case before Him.

The New Testament uses the word *advocate*. "We have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" (I John 2:1). Jesus Christ became incarnate so that He could be our High Priest. Christ is the One who goes into the presence of God to plead for the sinner. Because the Lord Jesus came in the form of a man, He knows what we as men are facing. He can sympathetically deal with us and act for us in the presence of God. He knows what the holiness of God requires, and He can meet it. He takes over our case, goes into the presence of God, and intercedes on our behalf. Christ Jesus is our High Priest.

The office of high priest over all the other priests was very much like the office of general manager or executive editor. He was in charge of all the others. He personally performed the highest office. An example can be drawn from our church today. There are ministers, elders, and deacons. All are church officers, but there are different levels among them. In the time of our Lord, more than one chief priest lived in Jerusalem, but there was only one high priest.

Christ Jesus is our High Priest who has gone up into heaven on our behalf and in the presence of God intercedes for us so that we might be kept by Him. "Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them." This means we have One in heaven who lives always making intercession for us. Jesus Christ is our High Priest in the presence of God.

If a man turns to God, he may be confused as to how to approach Him. What should he do and say? It is a comfort to know that by turning to Christ Jesus as He is set forth in the Bible an all-sufficient Advocate is presented who knows what to do and say before God. The Lord Jesus as our High Priest before God is One who can be trusted completely. No man need be hindered in coming to God because he does not know what to do.

There will be times when we have burdens that will be so intricate and difficult we hardly know how to pray. We don't know whether to ask that a loved one should live, because if he lives he may be crippled, infirm, or an invalid for the rest of his days. We don't know for sure whether to ask that some loved one should prosper in business. If he does prosper, he may become vain, proud, and worldly. We don't know for sure whether to ask that someone in our own family should be delivered from trouble. It may be that trouble is what that person needs, and God will know that. "We know not what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us" (Rom. 8:26). For our guidance in prayer we have a High Priest in the presence of God praying for us; and when we go to prayer, we should yield ourselves to the ministry of the Holy Spirit, who will take the things of the Lord Jesus Christ and show them to us. One of the things that the Holy Spirit will show us about Christ is His present ministry as our High Priest, and we will find ourselves praying with liberty to ask for certain things because Christ is interceding in our behalf about those very things. He is praying about our need at the moment we pray because He is our High Priest, "Who has compassion on the ignorant and on them that are out of the way" (Heb. 5:2).