

Why Do We Need a Sacrifice to Atonement for Sins?

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Normally, people object to the idea of sin and sacrifice: “I don’t need a sacrifice! I’m basically a good person. Besides, sin isn’t all that important anyway.”

The Issue of Sin Minimized: For most people “sin and sacrifice” are just not very relevant issues. “Sin” for the most part is viewed as a “moral lapse in judgment” and is “atoned” for

with something between a sincere apology and a life sentence. The basic consideration is that “people are generally good,” with a few obvious exceptions. I remember handing out Good News literature several years ago in NYC. It was a few weeks after Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement). I saw one of NY’s finest, and since his Police ID revealed he was from “my side of the family”, I offered him a brochure. When he saw that the title spoke of the need for atonement and forgiveness, he said, “Forget it; I don’t need that, the people I arrest need that message.”

“Really,” I said, “and where were you on Yom Kippur?”

“In the synagogue,” he shot back, “where I’m supposed to be!”

“And what did you do in the synagogue?” I asked.

“Why, I was...” and his voice trailed off as his fist started automatically beating his chest, as all orthodox are trained to do as they repent of sins on that Day.

His voice changed and he said, “Okay, I’ll read one of your pamphlets”. As he thought of Yom Kippur, he remembered as well that on the Day of Atonement all must acknowledge they’ve sinned.

As Jewish people, we know that at least once a year we are reminded by the Law not to be self-righteous (Leviticus 23:29). In the Prophets and the Writings, the Scriptures are perfectly clear regarding the sinful nature of people: “All we, like sheep, have gone astray; each one has turned to his own way” (Isaiah 53:6). “All of us are as an unclean thing, and all our righteousness is as filthy rags” (Isaiah 64:6). “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked, who can know it?” (Jeremiah 17:9). “There is none that does good, no not one” (Psalm 14:3). “In Your sight no man can be justified” (Psalm 143:2) etc.

God calls “sin” (rebellion and disobedience to God) “wicked” and deserving of judgment. A person calling “sin” unimportant doesn’t make it any less deadly than

changing the label on a bottle of poison to read “fruit juice.” In fact, now it becomes even more dangerous as you might mistakenly think taking a drink would be good for you!

If this seems like an overstatement, understand that it’s the Scriptures that reveal just how disastrous sin is: The Prophet Ezekiel said, “The soul that sins, it shall die!” (Ezekiel 18:4). This is the eternal judgment that is also spoken of by Daniel the Prophet, that there is a time of resurrection when eternal judgment will be dispensed: “Those who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt” (Daniel 12:2).

Isaiah reveals that though people think they pray and are heard by God, their sins actually break that prayer connection: “It’s not that God is unable to hear you or help you, but your sins have made a separation between God and you, so that He will not hear you” (Isaiah 59:1-2).

God’s Way of Atonement: God’s way of forgiving sins is as misunderstood as the problem of sin. People often discuss whether the Temple, which was a place of sacrifices, will ever be rebuilt in Jerusalem. The problem with rebuilding the Temple is not a Muslim Mosque on the Temple Mount, but 2,000 years of traditional teaching, which has erroneously taught our people that we don’t need blood atonement for sins. The Scriptures, however, state only blood sacrifice can atone for sins: “The life of the flesh is in the blood; and I have given it to you upon the alter to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that makes atonement for the soul” (Leviticus 17:11). In fact, Yom Kippur is only a Day of Atonement if God’s way of atonement (Leviticus 16), the blood atonement, is observed. Merely acknowledging your sins is no more effective than an apology can remove a murder charge. Sin is that horrific to God, the offended party.

Messiah is God’s Final Sacrifice for Atonement: All the sacrifices were to picture the final, perfect sacrifice that God Himself would provide in the Messiah. “Surely He has born our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken and afflicted by God. But He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities . . . the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all . . . He was cut off from the land of the living for the transgression of my people was He stricken . . . He shall make his soul an offering for sin . . . My righteous Servant shall justify the many, for He shall bear their iniquities . . . He bore the sin of many and made intercession for the transgressors” (Isaiah 53:3-12).

What is pictured for us is the fact of God’s provision for our sins through the Messiah’s atonement. The prophet starts out the chapter by asking, “Who has believed our report?” (Isaiah 53:1). That’s still the question: Who will believe God and His view of sin and way of forgiveness? All who trust in Messiah for their atonement have forgiveness of sins and an eternal relationship with God!