

THE COST OF GOD'S FORGIVENESS

Isaiah 53:5 *But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, And by His scourging we are healed. [NASB]*

We are healed and are reconciled with Him by His scourging (or according to other translations: *by His stripes*), not by His compassion nor by His mercy.

This is important, because — in our days replete with indiscriminate and politically correct disregard of sin — we may be sometimes led into believing that God's forgiveness is the fruit of His compassion and mercy (or "cheap grace" as Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote): such is spiritual confusion and is not the truth of the matter.

To be clear, it is essential to remember, first and foremost that:

1 John 4:8b *God is love. [KJV]*

God is Love. This is fundamental and, in fact, of the three: Faith, Hope and Love, it is Love, which is the greatest. In the writing of the Apostle Paul:

1 Corinthians 13:13 *So these three things continue forever: faith, hope and love. And the greatest of these is love. [EXB]*

Second, there is Jesus' witness that the highest expression of God's love is the Cross, for that is the measure of how much God loved the world:

John 3:16 *"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." [KJV]*

Christ on the Cross at Calvary is the physical, tangible manifestation of God's love for the world.

However, in the cultural framework of the current times, one may question such an unsightly, uncivilized event: why the gruesomeness of the Cross? Was it necessary?

Just as an application of logic and civic procedure, one may wonder whether it would not have been more dignified and wholesome, if God — the Omnipotent, Almighty Sovereign — had manifested His love and mercy by extending a *de facto* judicial amnesty to save us from perishing? Perhaps some appropriate conditions, restrictions and safeguards could have been included, to prevent patent and glaring abuses.

The all-important matter is that God did not do so.

He did not provide a charitable, generous, all-purpose general amnesty to subvert and nullify His judgment.

God's judgment is righteous and eternal, not whimsical and subjective: every transgression is judged and punished appropriately and commensurately. Again, in the words of Jesus, less than a week before His Transfiguration:

Matthew 16:27 *"For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works." [NKJV]*

This is a serious matter: sins and transgressions incur a penalty before God. This was taught clearly by the Apostle Paul to the church at Corinth:

2 Corinthians 5:10 *For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil. [ESV]*

And what "is due" for sin is "death":

Romans 6:23a *For the wages of sin is death. [NRSV]*

Now, one may say, such death should not be taken literally, because we see a lot of sinners (including ourselves), who are still alive and functioning: not dead at all.

On the contrary, this is literally true, as all the scripture is, but it is true — as much of what the Lord says — spiritually, not physically.

John 6:63b *"..... the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit and they are life." [KJV]*

One may remember other examples of spiritual, life giving, literal — and not physical — truths given to us by the Lord:

John 6:53 *Then Jesus said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you." [NKJV]*

We indeed eat "[His] flesh and His blood," but not physically.

Or when Jesus was teaching Nicodemus:

John 3:3 *Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, unless you are born again, you cannot be in God's kingdom." [EXB]*

Indeed, "you cannot be in God's kingdom": one cannot "unless born again," yes, literally "born again," but not physically, as we have learned.

Thus the consequence of sin is literal, spiritual death: separation from God, eternal destruction, as explained in the Sermon of the Mount:

Matthew 7:13 "Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the road is easy that leads to destruction, and there are many who take it." [NRSV]

So this is a critical, grave matter and the wage of sin (spiritual "destruction") must be paid, since His judgment is not a joke: rather it is just and righteous and eternal.

Hence, the Lord's New Covenant: not a general amnesty (according to what today we might call "social inclusiveness"); rather payment: payment in kind and in full — by Himself on the Cross.

1 Peter 2:24–25 He Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree, so that, having died to sins, we might live for righteousness; you have been healed by His wounds. ²⁵For you were like sheep going astray, but you have now returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls. [HCSB]

So, in order to satisfy the righteous judgment, Christ suffered the penalty and offered Himself voluntarily.

John 10:17–18 "For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. ¹⁸No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father." [ESV]

The Cross, as a matter of fact, gives us a measure of how hideous sin is for God: so intolerable

that He voluntarily let Himself be sacrificed so that our sins be taken away.

One comforting aspect of this decision of the Lord to manifest His love, is that — given the price paid, which is the life of God — no confessed sin of ours may ever exceed the price paid: hence, no confessed sin will have to be paid again in any amount.

1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. [KJV]

When my turn comes at the at judgment seat of Christ, I have to remember to claim the forgiveness received through the covering by the Blood of the Lamb and the ensuing righteousness, not to appeal to His compassion. His compassion was already exercised by bleeding and dying on the Cross to pay for my sin.

But the forgiveness is not a cheap general amnesty: rather it cost God His own life.

With the Cross firmly before us, we remember that after the sacrifice there was the resurrection, without which the death on the Cross would have been of no avail:

1 Corinthians 15:17–20 And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. ¹⁸Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished. ¹⁹If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable. ²⁰But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept. [KJV]

Hence, we worship a Living God.

That is why we love Him, because He is able to be both unremittingly, righteously just and also all loving:

1 John 4:19 We love him, because he first loved us. [KJV]