

Christ's Precious Promise

THE BOOK OF ROMANS MADE CLEAR—9

“Jesus Our High Priest and His Day of Atonement”

by Desmond Ford

We are saved by grace. To illustrate, Paul uses three metaphors.

One from the law court, one from the slave market, and one from the temple.

Jesus is our true High Priest and he made his complete atonement for us at Calvary.



You'll remember from our previous study that the Book of Romans is very systematically constructed. The first three chapters are like a lawyer's brief.

Three Condemning Chapters

The first chapter says, “See those irreligious people? They're all lost. God gave them up, because look how they live. They're hateful, impure, and liars. The irreligious are lost.”

The second chapter focuses on the religious who don't know the gospel. They're going to church, they're singing hymns, they're paying tithes. They're very

religious outwardly, but they don't know the gospel. Paul says to them, “You're lost too, because in your own heart you still love sin. You are religious, but because you don't rejoice in the gospel, you're lost.”

God looks at the heart. God wants an obedience that isn't just outward. God wants an obedience that's inward. He wants an obedience that's willing and complete and perfect and flawless and fervent.

Whenever you have a religion that says, “If I don't do this and I do this, I'll get to heaven,” you have an abominable religion. That's a religion that's drudgery, a religion of duty instead of privilege,

of weight instead of wings. That's not the religion of the New Testament.

The religion of the New Testament is such that you are so captivated by the love of God that the joy thereof fills you with contentment. That's the religion of the New Testament.

The third chapter lists fourteen statements from the Old Testament that declare, “There's none righteous, not one.”

Then Paul says, “There you are. God, by the use of his moral law, has shut everybody up to condemnation. He's put them all in the dock.”

We're all in the same place.

There's no difference between us, for all have sinned.

It's as though we were in the French Revolution when aristocrats were mixed in with street women and dukes with garbage collectors. God has locked us all up and thrown away the key.

An Advocate Appears!

Suddenly, an Advocate appears—a glorious advocate! But to our amazement, he collapses and dies. He's about to intercede, and he dies.

We wait and wait. Day after day we wait, and then the third day our Advocate rises. He says, "Father, I claim them. They are mine. I bought them. They're mine."

Those are the first three chapters that lead up to the Acropolis of the New Testament. This Acropolis of salvation is so important! It's the glorious temple of the New Testament. Here it is:

But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished—he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus. (Romans 3:21-25 NIV)

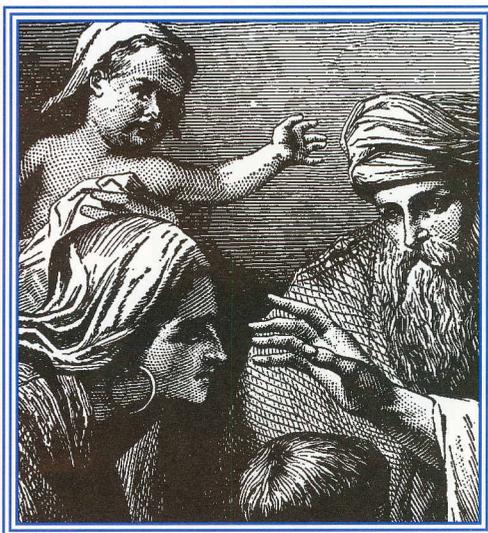
Saved by Grace

The **source** of justification is the grace of God. The **means** of justification is the blood of Christ. The instrumental **appropriation** of justification is faith. The **fruitage** of justification is works.

You are saved by faith alone. However, the faith that saves is **never** alone. You're not saved by faith plus works, but by a faith that works. But

the basis is grace, manifested in the blood of Christ.

Karl Barth said, "Religion is grace, and ethics is gratitude." That's a great summary. Religion is grace. Every letter of Paul begins and ends with grace. The last word of the New Testament is



grace: "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all" (Revelation 22:21 KJV).

Grace is simply a name for the outpouring love of God for the unlovely. "We're saved by God's grace," says this passage, "through the shed blood of Christ, to be received by faith."

Three Metaphors

Paul uses three metaphors here in this famous passage. He uses a metaphor from **the law court** (Romans 4:24). That's where we get "justification," a legal term. When a person's accused of a crime, if that person is justified (declared innocent), that person is acquitted, and goes free. That's one metaphor.

Then Paul uses a metaphor from **slavery**—redemption (Romans 4:24). The man or woman who was a slave could be redeemed by the payment of money. We were redeemed from slavery by the payment of the shed blood of our Lord.

Then Paul uses a third metaphor, a metaphor from the Jerusalem **temple**—a sacrifice of atonement (Romans 4:25).

Sacrifice of Atonement

There were sacrifices offered every day

at the temple. Once a year a special sacrifice was slain, and the blood taken into the Most Holy Place. This only happened once a year, and it pointed forward to Calvary.

Once a year the high priest went through the temple veil that separated the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place. He carried with him the still-warm blood of the sacrifice and sprinkled it on the mercy seat over the law. (The mercy seat was the gold lid of the ark or box that contained the Ten Commandments.) That law has been violated and broken by us all.

God looked at the broken Decalogue under the ark's lid. But God looked at it through the blood of the sacrifice sprinkled on the mercy seat.

The mercy seat is a symbol of Christ and his sacrificial death. God looks at the law that we've broken. But God looks at our situation through the shed blood of Christ.

Passion Week

When the New Testament was written, the whole story of Christ's Passion—the last week of his life on earth—was included. Because it's so important.

If the New Testament contained all of Christ's life on the same scale as Passion Week, it would be 1,000 times the size it is now!

From a third to a half of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, are about the last week of our Lord's life. That's because it's so important. As we said before, Jesus didn't say, "Remember my beautiful words." Jesus didn't say, "Remember my wonderful miracles." Jesus didn't say, "Remember my outstanding life." Jesus said, "Remember my death."

That's because I'm not saved by Jesus' miracles. (There have been plenty of miracle-workers.) I'm not saved by Jesus as a teacher. (There have been plenty of good teachers.) I'm saved by the **death** of the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me. (There has only been one death of atonement.)

When the New Testament presents that death, it draws from the annual ritual of the Day of Atonement.

Day of Atonement

Every Day of Atonement, the sacrifice

was secured some days beforehand. Then the high priest, who was involved in offering the sacrifice, was kept up all night before the sacrifice was offered. He was repeatedly interviewed by the Sanhedrin. His clothes were changed several times to make sure he was in no way defiled.

When the cock crowed, when they burned the first of the sacrifices of the day, then they brought in the atonement sacrifice. The high priest alone did the work on that Day of Atonement. Only he. He had no helpers.

This man—who's been up all night, who's been interrogated by the leaders of the land, whose clothes have been changed repeatedly—he alone conducts the sacrifice. When the cock crows and the fires are lit, he takes the sacrifice and offers it, and slays it.

Then he takes the warm blood in a golden bowl through the veil into the Most Holy Place. No one else went through there all year. He takes the warm blood and sprinkles it on the mercy seat where the Shekinah glory—the Presence of God—shines above.

Jesus Our High Priest

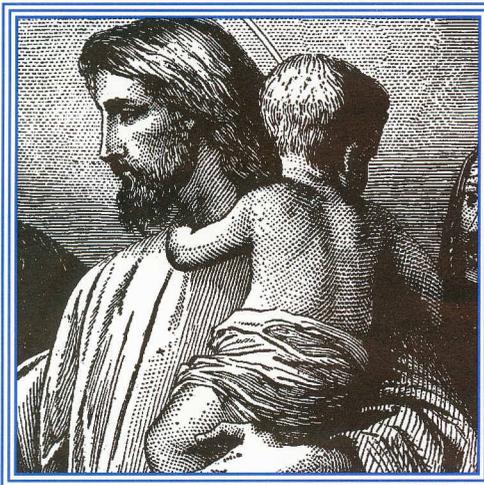
The New Testament was written to show that Jesus is our true High Priest. The Passion Week narrative reveals Jesus as High Priest making the atonement for the human race. He is kept up all night. He's in Gethsemane, then brought before Annas, then before Annas and Caiaphas, then before the Sanhedrin.

Every year, for hundreds of years, the high priest was kept up all night on the Day of Atonement. He was interrogated throughout the night by the leaders of Israel. So, too, during his day of atonement, Jesus was kept up all night just as the high priest always was. Jesus was interrogated repeatedly, at a total of seven trials, by the religious and secular leaders of Israel. (All these "trials" were illegal. It was quite illegal to have trials at night.)

Just as the high priest, every year for hundreds of years, had his clothes repeatedly changed, so Jesus has his clothes repeatedly changed. They are removed so he can be flogged. They are removed so he can be nailed

naked to the cross. Repeatedly his clothes are changed, just as were the high priest's.

Then Jesus offers the sacrifice. And when his flesh is torn, the veil is torn (Hebrews 10:20).



The Veil Torn Away

Jesus entered within the veil—entered into the presence of God—by his own sacrifice. At Calvary a soldier put a lance in Jesus' side, and ripped it open. As Jesus died, "At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom" (Matthew 27:51 NIV). This tells us that the way to the heart of God is now open. There are no barriers between us and God now in Christ. All can come to God through Christ.

Israel's religion, you'll remember, was a religion of restriction. The gentiles who wanted to worship Israel's God were only allowed in one of the temple courts. That's the gentile men. Gentile women were restricted to another court. Jewish women were restricted to another court, and Jewish men another.

Ordinary priests could go into the first (or outer) apartment of the temple to minister. But only the high priest was allowed into the Most Holy Place where the Shekinah glory of God shone. He only was allowed in once a year, and he only if he had the blood of sacrifice. And only for a few moments.

But when our Lord died on the cross, the veil in the temple was rent. The veil between us and God was torn

away. And the barriers between human beings as well, such as racism and class distinctions.

Christ's Atonement Complete

That's why we read that on the third day after the crucifixion, Peter and John ran to Jesus' tomb. They "saw the strips of linen lying there, as well as the burial cloth that had been around Jesus' head. The cloth was folded up by itself, separate from the linen" (John 20:6-7).

In Leviticus 16 it says, "Then Aaron [the high priest] is to go into the Tent of Meeting and take off the linen garments he put on before he entered the Most Holy Place [and made atonement], and he is to leave them there" (Leviticus 16:23). The high priest then put on his glorious, ceremonial robes to show that the work of atonement was finished.

Our Lord Jesus left his priestly linen clothes in the tomb. When Peter and John looked in and saw the clothes lying there, that was a symbol that Christ's atonement was complete.

You don't have to be afraid of the tomb anymore. The robes of Christ are there. You don't have to be afraid of the tomb anymore. It's a place of angels (John 20:12). You don't have to be afraid of the tomb anymore, the sweet fragrance of Christ's ointment is there (John 19:40-41). You needn't be afraid of death anymore. Because of Christ, it's now fragrant. It's no longer a grim enemy. Christ has abolished death.

We may fall asleep in Christ, but we can never die. "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life" (John 3:36 KJV).

Never forget, the Old Testament Day of Atonement pointed to the Christ event, to the cross of Calvary. It is wrong to indulge in calendrical shuffling, trying to bring the fulfillment of the Day of Atonement down to the nineteenth century, down to 1844.

The ancient Day of Atonement is not talking about the nineteenth century. It points to the cross of Christ. That's where the final, full, atonement was made. Calvary was the only place of complete atonement. We look only to Calvary, not to 1844.

That's a vital and basic point. ❖