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God's Gift of Forgiveness

By Peter Weller

To many Christians, God in the Old Testament is a God of Wrath, a punishing God, who will cause all those who sin to die. Many also believe those who sin are most deserving of God's punishment. Sadly, historical examples abound where the "righteous" punished and slaughtered perceived "sinners," believing that they were helping to do God's work here on earth.

Furthermore, some expect, and perhaps even hope, that God will send down disasters or catastrophes to teach those sinners a lesson, while at the same time hoping that God will spare the righteous from his wrath. Jonah proclaimed God's message to the people of Nineveh that they would be overthrown in forty days if they did not repent and turn from their evil ways. The people and their king believed, repented, wore sackcloth and ashes. "God saw what they did; he saw that they had given up their wicked behavior. So he changed his mind and did not punish them as he had said he would. Jonah was very unhappy about this and became angry." (Jonah 3:10, 4:1)

Then, there are those who profess that they hardly sin at all, or that they do not sin as much as, or that they are much more righteous than, "those others." And, some deny the existence of sin altogether, claiming it to be an outdated biblical notion. They link sin with guilt and then say that to be made to feel guilty is psychologically unhealthy.

Yet, we know that sin exists. When we do that which we know we ought not, and when we do not do that which we know we ought, that is evidence of the sin which lies within us. (Romans 7:15-24). In September's Old Testament lessons, God calls his people to turn from their sinful ways, to return to him, and to live. God will forgive the iniquities of those who turn to him. "As surely as I, the Sovereign Lord, am the living God, I do not enjoy seeing a sinner die. I would rather see him stop sinning and live." (Ezekiel 33:11). "Turn away from all the evil you are doing, and don't let your sin destroy you. Give up all the evil you have been doing and get yourselves a new minds and hearts. Why do you Israelites want to die? I do not want any one to die, says the Sovereign Lord. Turn away from your sins and live." (Ezekiel 18:30-32)

We must remind ourselves that we all are sinners. No one is exempt, nor is any one person more or less worthy than another. But, the Psalmist reminds us, "The Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love." (Psalm 145:8). Paul also reminds us that "since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Since, therefore we are not justified by his blood, much more will we be saved by him from the wrath of God. There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." (Romans 5:1, 8-9, 8:1) It is by God's grace, through his son, Jesus Christ, that we are redeemed and saved.

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