

Can I Really Be Forgiven?

Saturday 30 January 2010

1. Forgiveness is a great theme in the Bible

- The Old Testament has many rich passages which speak of God's full and complete forgiveness
 - For example see Isaiah 1:18; 43:25; 44:22; Psalm 32:1ff; 51:9; 103:12; 130:8; Jer. 50:20; Micah 7:18-19; etc.
 - In addition, it contains prophecies of a new covenant to come, the basis of which will be the complete and entire forgiveness of sins e.g. Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezekiel 36:22ff.
 - And more than this, the whole of the Old Testament story of God's dealings with his people is based on the grace, mercy and constant love of God towards his people (e.g. Hosea 11:1ff.)
 - And at an even more foundational level, the whole story of God's plan for the whole of creation is to bring forgiveness and healing to the nations (e.g. Genesis 3:15; 12:1ff.; Isaiah 49:6f.).
- The New Testament, too, is full of wonderful statements of God's forgiveness
 - This is seen in many of Jesus parables (e.g. Luke 15:11-32) and his dealings with people (e.g. Luke 7:36-50; Matthew 9:1-8), as well as in his direct teaching (e.g. Matthew 18:21-22; Mark 11:25-26).
 - It is for this reason he came into the world, to bear away sins as the Lamb of God (e.g. John 1:29, 36 cf. Revelation 5:8-13) and to establish the new covenant that was promised by God through the prophets (e.g. Matthew 26:28 cf. Mark 10:35-45).
 - Often the idea of forgiveness is expressed in other terms such as being justified (i.e. declared not guilty by God); or redeemed (i.e. released from slavery or debt by payment of a price); or reconciled to God (i.e. brought back into full relationship with God); or having the wrath of God propitiated (i.e. having God's wrath removed from us through Christ); or being sanctified (i.e. being made holy and set apart to God by Christ's blood); or having peace with God (i.e. the judgement under which we stood is removed and we have peace with God through Christ). These are not all exactly the same as forgiveness, but they are impossible without forgiveness. And forgiveness is impossible without Jesus' death and resurrection.

2. Forgiveness is possible because of God's just judgement.

- God gave Israel the great gift of worship in Old Testament system of sacrifices.
 - The Tabernacle and Temple; the priests; the burnt offerings; the Day of Atonement; the morning and evening sacrifices; and all else that was tied up with the Old Testament system told Israel (a) there is no possibility of forgiveness without atonement and (b) there is no atonement without a substitutionary sacrifice.
 - God is holy, and sin is a direct affront to all his holy nature, so there can never be any forgiveness without the holy wrath of God coming on sin. The Old Testament system taught this, but only Christ could actually accomplish it, as the spotless Lamb of God.
 - In his body on the tree, Jesus bore all our sins and their wrath and judgment, so that we might be declared 'forgiven' (e.g. Colossians 2:13-15; 1 Peter 2:24; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Hebrews 10:14).