

Rev. 1:5-7

The Works of the Messiah

4. To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood

In our examination of the seven works of the Messiah seen in Revelation 1:5-7, this is the central point, and it brings us to one of the most important, and essential, functions of the Messiah, that He should deal with humanity's greatest problem - sin.

The matter of sin has become a very unpopular and misunderstood concept in contemporary society. Even in much of the Church it has become a subject which is often only broached with great caution; in this age of 'seeker-friendliness' and 'easy-believism', talk of sin is often deemed something that will scare away the unbelieving, and so is avoided. In contrast, the Bible has much to say about sin and does not hold back from presenting its readers with the stark reality of the consequences of sin. We do well to take heed of the proverb,

Fools mock at sin. (Prov. 14:9)

and the words of Paul,

. . . the goodness of God leads you to repentance. (Rom. 2:4)

Sin is a serious matter, we cannot sweep it under the carpet, we must treat it with honest regard to the Word of God and present the subject appropriately. The truth is that, until sin is dealt with effectively, Humanity is at odds with its Creator and meaningful relationship between the two is not possible. A correct Biblical understanding of the doctrine of sin is therefore essential as part of sound comprehension of the doctrine of salvation. If we consider that peoples' greatest need is the salvation of their souls, then we will surely agree that the church, must, as a priority, faithfully teach and preach the truth about sin and redemption from sin. Jesus, indeed, expected this to be the case,

Repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations.
(Lk. 24:47)

It is of great detriment to the life of the church, and to the society in which the church is called to be salt and light, that the doctrines of sin and salvation are so poorly understood and so inadequately proclaimed in these days. False and insubstantial representations of these essential doctrines do no-one any favours. Rather, they withhold from sinful people a right understanding of their precarious position in relation to sin, thereby denying them the opportunity to recognise and call on the one who can save them from their sin, the Messiah Jesus.

The Bible and Sin

Taking the book of Genesis as our starting point, we find, from chapter 3 onwards, that Man's sinfulness is ever-present and its consequences clearly seen: Adam and Eve sinned, and God punished them by making them mortal (physical death) and by separation from Himself (spiritual death), when He drove them out of Eden. This breach of the relationship with their Creator God is the first and greatest tragedy to befall the human race. In Genesis 4, Cain murdered his brother, and God cursed him and condemned him to be a fugitive and vagabond. Chapter 6 records the terrible fact that,

The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. (Gen. 6:5)

God's response was the worldwide flood, from which only righteous Noah and his family escaped. Chapter 11 has the tower of Babel and God causing confusion of language because of humanity's pride. Chapters 18 and 19 recount the sin and destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Here, in these earliest chapters of the Bible, sin and its consequences are clearly presented. In every case, sin was followed by God's judgment, which was disastrous for those involved in the sin.

This pattern was repeated throughout the Old Testament, and seen in the history of Israel, the nation called to be God's witness. From the building of the golden calf (Exodus 32), through to the profaning of the Lord's name in the days of Malachi, (Mal. 1:9ff) - sin is ever-present. God's blessings followed righteous obedience, while cursing and judgment followed sinful rebellion against His righteous ways. We can be left in little doubt as to the

seriousness of sin, and its consequences. We learn that sin is at the heart of all human problems, that sin stands in the way of relationship with God, and that God is the Judge who calls to account and punishes the sinner:

I will punish the world for its evil, and the wicked for their iniquity; I will halt the arrogance of the proud, and will lay low the haughtiness of the terrible. (Isa. 13:11)

But your iniquities have separated you from God; And your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear. (Isa. 59:2)

The Mercy of God

Alongside this gloomy picture of the sinful human condition, the Bible teaches us that humankind cannot extricate itself from this awful predicament. People are in a helpless state, life being so tainted by sin that they cannot attain the level of perfect righteousness required by God for relationship with Him (see Mt. 5:20). Being “dead in trespasses and sins” (Eph. 2:1), humankind has “no hope and is without God in the world” (Eph. 2:12). Therefore, the only hope for humankind is that God will do something; that He would be merciful, and that He would intervene and provide the solution. This hope and reliance upon God for deliverance from sin is expressed many times in Scripture. For instance, following his sins of adultery and murder, David cries out to God,

Have mercy upon me, O God, According to Your lovingkindness;
According to the multitude of Your tender mercies,
Blot out my transgressions,
Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,
And cleanse me from my sin. (Ps. 51:1-2).

This hope in God’s mercy is not a vain hope; it is rooted in the Word of God, and in an understanding of the character of God. Yes, He is the holy God, who is of “purer eyes than to behold evil” (Hab. 1:13), He is, “the Judge of all the earth” (Gen. 18:25) who will punish sinners. But He is also,

The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin. (Ex. 34:6-7)

He is the One who gave Israel the blood of animals to atone for their sin (Lev. 17:11), and who prescribed laws of worship and conduct through which, by obedience to them, beneficial relationship with Him could be maintained. Deuteronomy 28 lists blessings for the obedient and curses for the disobedient. Verses 1 and 2 record that Moses told Israel,

Now it shall come to pass, if you diligently obey the voice of the LORD your God, to observe carefully all His commandments which I command you today, that the LORD your God will set you on high above all the nations of the earth, and all these blessings will come upon you and overtake you because you obey the voice of the LORD your God.

Conversely, Deuteronomy 28:15 states,

But it shall come to pass, if you do not obey the voice of the LORD your God, to observe carefully all His commandments and His statutes which I command you today, that all these curses will come upon you and overtake you:

Many other Scriptures carry the same alternatives. For example, Deuteronomy 7:9-10,

Therefore know that the LORD your God, He is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and mercy for a thousand generations with those who love Him and keep His commandments; and He repays those who hate Him to their face, to destroy them. He will not be slack with him who hates Him; He will repay him to his face.

Sins forgiven

It is important to note that relationship with God was not based purely on a cold, impersonal and legalistic obedience to his statutes; love was an essential part of the relationship. From humanity's side, love for God issued in willing obedience to His statutes; from God's side, love for humankind issued in the covenants, promises of blessings, and the forgiveness of sins.

Such knowledge and experience gave assurance that God would bless the obedient, and that He was willing to forgive sins and restore the repentant sinner. There was recognition too that no one could say, "I have made my heart clean, I am pure from my sin" (Prov.

20:9), but that God could and would create a clean heart and a steadfast spirit for the genuinely repentant (Ps. 51:10).

Sin separates humankind from God, and there is “no one who does not sin” (2 Chron. 6:36), but repentant saints rejoice in the knowledge that God is able to remove their transgressions, “as far as the east is from the west” (Ps. 103:12), and so fully expect restoration of relationship with God following repentance of sins. Knowing these things, David could speak with confidence of the very real sense of blessedness for those whose transgression is forgiven (Ps. 32:1).

We are seeing two specific and clearly-defined attributes of God: i) His wrath against sin, manifested in His judgments, and ii) His mercy, revealed in His willingness to forgive sin. Some have considered these two attributes irreconcilable; but, to those who have right understanding of God’s character, they are not irreconcilable, but essential, complementary, and wonderful attributes of the God of the Bible - a God who is both holy and merciful, and who longs for restoration of relationship with His created beings. His wrath is directed against all that is sinful and wicked; His mercy compels Him to provide for mankind the means of escape from His wrath. For the saint, there is a corresponding two-fold hope: First, the sure knowledge that God will punish all unconfessed sin and wickedness, eventually destroying the wicked. Secondly, that for the repentant sinner, there is reconciliation with God and assurance of a place reserved in His kingdom of peace and righteousness (cf. Ps. 21:8-12; Ps. 37:9-11; Rev. 22:14,15).

A Consistent Message

So far we have looked mostly at Old Testament scriptures. Turning to the New Testament, we see the picture is much the same. Paul reminds us, in the Epistle to the Romans,

There is none righteous, no not one (Rom. 3:10)

and,

All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23)

and,

Through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned (Rom. 5:12)

and,

The wages of sin *is* death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.
(Rom. 6:23)

The Biblical message is consistent throughout: humankind is in a state of sin; sin separates people from God; God is holy and must punish sin; death is the consequence of sin; He curses the disobedient and unrighteous; God is merciful and provides a way to escape the consequences of sin; God blesses obedience and righteousness. In the Old Testament, the means of escape was through obedience to the law; in the New Testament, as we shall see, a far greater and more efficient escape is available through faith in the Messiah.

This biblical picture of sin and its consequences is essential knowledge for basic understanding of God and of the Holy Scriptures. The Devil knows this and is very happy to keep humankind in a state of ignorant denial of the truth about sin - for where there is no recognition of sin and its outcome, there is of course no perception of the need for a Saviour from sin, and no turning to Christ for salvation. The Devil blinds the minds of unbelievers, "lest the light of the glory of the gospel of Christ" should illuminate their darkness, (2Cor. 4:4). The gospel, being "the power of God unto salvation" (Rom. 1:16), is God's ordained means for bringing sinners out of the condemnation of sin and into a rich eternal inheritance in His kingdom, (see Acts 26:18). The gospel, in its basic form, is the story of the Messiah's first visit to Earth, and of the work which He accomplished in order to procure our full and wonderful salvation, (see 1Cor. 15:1-4).

The Messiah's Love

John writes of the Messiah that He is, "Him who loved us". While there are many Old Testament references to God's love, there appears to be no clear declaration in the Old Testament Messianic texts that love is a specific attribute of the Messiah. However, we can consider the Song of Solomon to be Messianic, and its portrayal of the love between "The Beloved" and "The Bride", as an allegory of the love between Jesus and His bride, the church. Similarly, Psalm 45 speaks of the Messianic King and His bride, and tells us that He will greatly desire the beauty of His bride (Ps. 45:11). Likewise, the first three chapters of Hosea contain the theme of God's love for Israel, who is pictured as His unfaithful wife, and to whom He offers forgiveness and restoration. Such Scriptures do hint at the love of the Messiah for the Church, but this doctrine is only fully revealed in the New Testament. Those who have heard the gospel preached by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven (1Peter

1.12), know Jesus is the Messiah, He is the Son of God, and He is God. The Old Testament has much to say about the love of God and it therefore should be no surprise to find that Jesus the Messiah exhibits the love of God in all His dealings with humanity.

It is in turning to the New Testament that we find an abundance of texts linking love with the Messiah. This love is expressed not only towards the Church, but to all the world. In the most famous Bible verse of all we find that God's love is His motivation in sending Jesus into the world:

For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son . . . (Jn. 3:16)

Paul prayed for the Ephesian saints that,

Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height - to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with the fullness of God. (Eph. 3:17-19)

Paul expresses some wonderful and delightful thoughts concerning the Messiah: he is encouraging the saints to enter into a deep, personal relationship with Christ; he sees a love exhibited in Christ which is beyond human understanding; and he wants the saints to grasp the reality of this love. The Old Testament is full of references regarding the love of God, but in Jesus the Messiah there is seen a far greater expression of the love of God than could ever be envisioned by only reading the Old Testament. That love was demonstrated most profoundly on the cross where the Messiah gave His life for the sins of the world.

The Messiah's Death

A popular chorus asks, "How can I be free from sin?" and responds, "Lead me to the cross of Jesus". Simple words, yet within them is contained profound truth and the wonder of God's love. We have seen that sin is humanity's greatest problem: every person is born with a sinful nature; sin disqualifies from heaven; sin is behind all inhumanity; sin brings God's curse; sin separates humankind from God; sin is the cause of death; no one cannot change themselves from sinner to saint, and without God's intervention humankind is lost forever. Thankfully, we have also seen that God is immensely merciful. He entered into

covenant with Israel and gave them the blood of animal sacrifices to make atonement for their sin. He promised forgiveness to the repentant and blessing for the obedient. But, the Old Testament covenant was not faultless (Heb. 8:7), and God promised a new, better covenant in which sins would be fully dealt with, wherein His laws would be written in hearts and minds, and in which relationship with Himself would be on a new and more intimate level,

“But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD; I will put My law in their minds and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.

“No more shall every man teach his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying ‘Know the LORD,’ for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.” (Jer. 31:33,34; cf. Heb. 8:8-12; Heb. 10:16,17)

As Moses mediated the old covenant, so too this new covenant required a mediator; that mediator was to be the Messiah, and as the old covenant was dedicated with blood, so too the new covenant required dedication by blood. That blood, as we know, was not the blood taken from animals, but the blood of Jesus the Messiah. His death would be the seal of the new covenant, His own innocent blood thereby availing for the remission of sins (Lk. 22:20; Heb. 9:12-15).

The necessity of the Messiah’s death was hidden from the Jewish mind. They expected a conquering king who would free them from their enemies, their minds blind to the Messianic texts which spoke of the Suffering Servant who would be, “smitten by God, and afflicted”; “wounded for our transgressions” and “bruised for our iniquities” (Isa. 53:4,5). They did not understand that the LORD would “lay on Him the iniquity of us all” (Isa. 53:6). Even Jesus’ closest disciples did not at first understand this aspect of His Messianic ministry. It is recorded that He told them,

Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of Man will be accomplished. For He will be delivered to the Gentiles and will be mocked and insulted and spit upon. They will scourge Him and kill Him. And the third day He will rise again. (Lk. 18:31-33)

But we learn of the disciples,

. . . they understood none of these things; this saying was hidden from them, and they did not know the things which were spoken. (Lk. 18:34)

Truth Revealed

It was not until after the death and resurrection of Jesus that the truth of His Messianic ministry was revealed to His disciples. During the time between His resurrection and ascension, Jesus taught them the full significance of the Messianic texts, opening their understanding, and showing how, “it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day” (Lk. 24:27, 46).

This new revelation of the Old Testament Scriptures was a great wonder to the early church, and the Messianic prophecies, fulfilled in Jesus, formed the basis of all their teaching and preaching. In Acts chapter 2 we find that Peter was the first to express this new revelation when he preached on the Day of Pentecost, showing how the life, death and the resurrection of Jesus proved Him to be the Messiah. By quoting and expounding well-known Messianic prophecies, he convinced his hearers that Jesus is both Lord and Messiah. Convicted of the truth, they cried out, “What shall we do?” (Acts 2:37), Peter responded,

Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. (Acts 2:38)

This one statement of Peter encapsulated all that had been promised through the Old Testament pages in regard to the remedy for every person’s plight due to their sins. From the moment sin entered the world, God had promised a Saviour, One who would “bruise Satan’s head” and reverse the effects of the curse. Now Peter and the disciples, convinced that Jesus was indeed the Messiah, the Saviour of the world, would boldly preach Him to all.

We have seen how Israel was given the law, with its sacrifices, to enable forgiveness and the establishment of relationship with God, but the law, of itself, could not effect the perfect cleansing of the sinner, nor could it effect a permanent change of heart, nor provide full restoration of the relationship with God - such was its weakness and failure (themes

developed in Hebrews, and see Rom. 8:3). Full deliverance only began with the Messiah's first visit to Earth, when He came to deal with humankind's greatest enemy, sin. That enemy, in the face of which humankind is completely helpless, Jesus conquered and put to death on the cross. In that one victorious act, His obedient, sinless life was sacrificed, and He became the propitiation for the sins of the world (1Jn. 2:2; 1Jn. 4:10; cf. Heb. 2:17; Rom. 3:25) ([see endnote for discussion on propitiation](#)). His love, and the Father's love, brought Him to our world; the King of glory became the Lamb who was slain. He paid the price for our redemption with His own precious blood, and so He can give the promise that whoever believes in Him will have eternal life.

The Love of God

There is wonderful and profound truth in the apostle John's words that Jesus the Messiah, "loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood" (Rev. 1:5), they are central to the message of the gospel and ought to be deep in the heart of every believer who is called to be an ambassador for the Messiah,

Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God. (2Cor. 5:20)

That message is one of reconciliation: that God, towards whom we have all lived in rebellious alienation, has in Christ comprehensively dealt with sin on mankind's behalf. Forgiveness of sin is on offer; the way is open to deep intimate relationship with our God; and an eternal home in the kingdom of God awaits the repentant.

The apostle Paul also understood these profound truths. Thinking on the wonder of the love of God for sinners, he linked it with the ministry of the Messiah,

God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. And not only that, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation. (Rom. 5:8-11)

The theme of God's love weaves its way through the pages of the Bible (and has

inspired countless hymn-writers). That love supremely expressed at the cross where the Son of God, Jesus the Messiah, shed His blood for the sins of the world. For repentant sinners, who have experienced such depth of love and are amazed at God's grace, there is awesome wonder and thankfulness. And so, the saint, having been reconciled to God, and having appreciation of the price paid for him because of the Lord's love for him, rejoices, and is persuaded that nothing can separate him from that love which is in Christ Jesus the Lord (Rom. 8:35-39); the knowledge of His love sustaining and comforting through life's trials and tribulations. Assured that entrance will be supplied abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of Jesus the Messiah (2Pet. 1:11), and that there in the "kingdom of the Son of His love" (Col. 1:13), joy and righteousness will be his portion forever; the disciple of Jesus is content, knowing that "God is love", and abiding in that love, he is without fear, and at perfect peace (1Jn. 4:16-19; Isa. 26:3).

Let us, who know the love of God, be like those first disciples and boldly proclaim "repentance and remission of sins" to all (Luke 24:47), knowing that this is the heart of the gospel, that it is the focus of the Messiah's ministry. And, that it is in hearing these things that the sinner is brought to see his own dire condition, and so, being convicted by the Holy Spirit, cries out, "What must I do to be saved?" In this way he is led to the Saviour who loves him, and who will wash him from his sins with His own precious blood, and so make him fit for a place in His kingdom (1Cor. 6:9-11).

There is no love like the love of Jesus,
Never to fade or fall,
Till into the fold of the peace of God
He has gathered us all.

Jesus' love, precious love, boundless and pure and free!
O turn to that love, weary wandering soul,
Jesus pleadeth with thee. (W.E. Littlewood)

ENDNOTE

Propitiation

The word “propitiation” is little understood today, and most modern translations of the Bible use phrases such as, “sacrifice of atonement” or “atoning sacrifice” in its place. Such phrases do not do justice to the true meaning expressed by the original Greek group of related words: *hilaskomai* (verb); *hilasterion* (noun) and *hilasmos* (noun). The use of these words in the New Testament is few, but significant: *hilaskomai* (Lk. 18:13; Heb. 2:17); *hilasterion* (Rom. 3:25; Heb. 9:15); *hilasmos* (1Jn. 2:2; 4:10). For the original writers and readers of the New Testament this word group had very clear meaning:

The uniform acceptance of the word in classical Greek, when applied to the Deity, is the means of appeasing God, or of averting His anger; and not a single instance to the contrary occurs in the whole of Greek literature. (G. Smeaton in Leon Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, 3rd ed, London, Tyndale, 1998, p.145)

The *hilaskomai* word group signified appeasement of an angry god, it included the act (such as sacrifice) by which the anger of the god was placated and his attitude to the worshipper changed from one of wrath to one of favour. In the New Testament, it refers to the sacrificial act of Jesus in giving His own life to appease God’s anger against the sins of the world. The propitiation achieved by Jesus is unique, because Jesus is both the one making the propitiation (*hilaskomai*) and He is the propitiation (*hilasmos*); Jesus is both the offerer and the offering. Hebrews expresses this truth several times, for instance:

. . . He has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. (Heb. 9:26)

But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God. (Heb. 10:12)

Propitiation therefore, properly understood, brings together several important doctrinal truths: God’s wrath is directed against sinful people; there is enmity between God and humankind; Jesus’ death appeased God’s wrath; by virtue of Jesus’ death, God offers reconciliation to humankind.

Liberal theologians have disdained the evangelical teaching on the doctrine of the wrath

of God, and what appears to them the crude and unworthy notion of Jesus' death appeasing that wrath. Such thinking has had a detrimental influence on the church, and, it would seem, some of the modern translations of the Bible.

Propitiation, it seems to me, is the only English word that properly expresses the true meaning of the *hilaskomai* word group. It would be good for Christians to re-new their acquaintance with this word and add it to their vocabulary - with understanding.

Further Reading:

Propitiation; *Vines Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*.

For a full and technical study of the use of the *hilaskomai* word group see: Chapters V and VI; *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, Leon Morris.

A good introduction to propitiation on the internet: <http://www.theopedia.com/Propitiation>