

THE GOSPEL IN LESSON 8

I am excited to do these next two lessons on *The Gospel in the Twelve Steps* because of one word – amends. Step 8 is about being willing to make amends, and Step 9, which we’ll cover next month, is about actually making those amends. And here is why I like the word “amends” – it is a synonym for “atone” or “atonement.” To atone or make atonement means to “make amends.” But there may be no more powerful word than “atonement” in Christian theology, and so we’re going to spend most of our time understanding what the atonement of Jesus Christ really means.

There is power in the Gospel, in the good news of Jesus Christ. And the good news of Jesus Christ is that he was offered as an “atoning sacrifice” for us – this atoning sacrifice is a gift that we receive by faith, and when we really understand this gift, our lives change. This understanding of the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ is important for all believers, no matter where you might be in the steps.

Here is the central passage on atonement in the entire Bible, and our text for tonight:

²¹ But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— ²² the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, ²⁵ whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God’s righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. ²⁶ It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

Making amends is about offering and receiving forgiveness – it is one of the most powerful parts of the Twelve Steps. But there is one person who we cannot make amends to, and that is God Himself. So the Gospel principle in Step 8 is this: **Jesus was willing to make your amends to God.** This is a true statement and should stagger you – the very Son of God was willing to sacrifice himself to make amends for you to His Father.

In response, then, we can become willing to make amends to those we have harmed. Step 8 is this: We made a list of all people we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all. We're going to talk about a list, about who we have harmed, about being willing, and about making amends. But we'll do it from God's perspective.

So let me re-word step 8 from God's view: **God made a list of all people who had "harmed" him and became willing to make amends to them all.**

You Are On God's List

This is not Santa's list ("He's making a list, and checking it twice; going to find out who's naughty or nice."). No, I am referring here to the Book of Life, and if you are a believer in Jesus Christ, your name is written in that book. It has been since the beginning of time:

Eph 1: ³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, ⁴ even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him.

Now there was a time when our sin angered God enough to threaten our status in the book of life. The story is told in Exodus 32 about the people of God creating and worshipping golden calves, while Moses is with God receiving God's law. When Moses discovers what the people have done, he knows God's wrath will be stirred, and he offers himself as atoning sacrifice. He says, v. 32, "³²But now, if you will forgive their sin—but if not, please blot me out of your book that you have written."³³ But the LORD said to Moses, "Whoever has sinned against me, I will blot out of my book.

Get the significance of this. Moses represented the law of God to his people, but he was unable to do anything about their sin. In the same way, we are unable to obey the law in such a way that would prevent us from being kicked off God's list, removed from the Book of Life. We have sinned (past tense) and fall short (present tense, even now) of the glory of God.

This is dramatic. God loves you, but He is also righteous. He is just, and holy, and the sin of the world, your sin and my sin, must be accounted for and punished. A holy and righteous God can never overlook the offenses against him, just as he could not overlook those stupid golden calves in the desert.

So you find yourself in court, on trial for your eternal life. Before you sits God in all his glory, so glorious that you cannot look him in the eye. To your left stands Satan, shaking his head at you, smiling a sinister smile. You maybe never understood his power before, but you realize he has the power to be your accuser before God.

"This man does not love you – he only loves what you can do for him; what you give him; how comfortable you can make him. He loves only what you

give – that is an offense that deserves punishment. Not only that, he is a law-breaker. He worships other things; he covets; he’s committed adultery over and over again, even if it’s only been in his mind; he covets. He is guilty and deserves to have his name removed from the Book of Life.”

“**But now**” (v.21) – just when you thought that your sin would always keep you separated from God, your name removed from the Book of Life – “but now, the righteousness of God has been manifested **apart** from the law (although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it) through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.”

God is righteous, and yet, God loves. He loves us with a steadfast love. He has promised to be faithful to us. He desires that no one should perish. So what does he do? Satan is right. There are offenses against God that must be paid for, and yet he knows we cannot pay the debt. So He provides the solution in the person of Jesus Christ, through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe (v.22).

Satan the Accuser stands there, pleased with himself at how he has presented his case. And then Jesus walks in and stands beside you. The ballgame has changed. When Jesus walks in, so does hope.

Verse 23-24: “For all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God **and** are **justified** by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

You are in no position to trust in your faithfulness, but you trust in Christ’s faithfulness. This is about faith in Christ (v. 22, 25 and 26).

Back to the courtroom – Jesus says, “My Father (not your Honor – Satan cringes at these words), I submit to you that this man is innocent. His debt has been paid.” And he holds out his hands to reveal the nail holes. He lifts up his shirt, to reveal where his side was pierced.

And God the Righteous says, “My Son, I see no reason to keep this person. His debt has been paid. He is not guilty, and it gives me great joy to declare this verdict. Go in peace.”

This is what it means to be justified. You have been declared not guilty, and you are now freed from the penalty of sin. You are justified by God’s grace, as a gift (v.24) through the ***redemption that is in Christ Jesus***. “Redemption” is another really important theological word. It has the meaning of buying back a slave. You were a slave to sin, but your freedom from sin has been bought with a price, the precious blood of Jesus.

You have been declared “not guilty,” you have been freed from sin, and when I say you are on God’s list, I mean your name is in the Book of Life forever:

⁵The one who conquers will be clothed thus in white garments, and I will never blot his name out of the book of life. I will confess his name before my Father and before his angels.

Thank God that he made a list and made amends to all on that list, including you who trust in the work of Christ, done for you, by grace.

Jesus Was Willing to Make Your Amends

Verse 25 says, “God put forward Jesus as a propitiation by his blood.” We’ll talk about the word “propitiation” in a minute, but I want to talk about Jesus’s

willingness to make your amends, because step 8 is all about being willing. Jesus never expects us to do something he hasn't already done. We are called to obedience, because as Christ followers, we know that Christ was obedient, too.

³⁸ For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. ³⁹ And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. ⁴⁰ For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.”

Jesus did not have to be talked into coming down from heaven to die for you. He didn't have to be convinced that it was a good idea. It is absolutely natural for him to obey the will of his Father, to glorify his Father. He volunteered, joyfully, courageously and confidently. ¹⁷ For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. ¹⁸ No 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.”

He was willing to sacrifice himself to demonstrate the righteousness of God. As v. 25 says, Jesus was sacrificed to demonstrate the righteousness of God, “because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins.” Part of the righteousness of God is his incredible patience with all of us who continue to sin in full light of his grace. We truly do not get what we deserve, and it is because of the righteousness of God – his great character, justice and mercy co-existing perfectly in his nature.

And Jesus was willing to lay down his life so that all might know that God is just and the justifier of the one who believes in Jesus (v.26).

Jesus was willing to make amends for you by laying down his life. Are you willing to make a list? That's all step 8 is. Even the making of the amends, step 9, will cost you far less than it cost Jesus, so are you willing?

Jesus is Your Propitiation

This is a huge word. The best definition is probably “atoning sacrifice.” And the picture of atonement shifts from a courtroom to a temple. You can read about the Day of Atonement in Leviticus 16. Once a year the High Priest would make atonement for all the sins of the people of God. It was a meticulous procedure. First the High Priest would kill a bull and sprinkle its blood on the altar to atone for himself and to be ritually clean to offer atonement for the people.

Then he would take two goats. He would sacrifice one, again sprinkling its blood on the altar. Then he would lay his hands on the head of the other goat and offer a prayer. The symbolic act of laying hands on this goat was to demonstrate that blood had paid the price for the people's sins, and now those sins were transferred to the remaining goat, now called a “scapegoat” and that goat was led into the wilderness, never to be seen again.

These goats were an “atoning sacrifice.” They were a “propitiation” which means their sacrifice appeased the wrath of a holy and righteous God, for one more year. It's a picture of what was to come in the person of Jesus Christ.

The value of Christ's blood is priceless (as opposed to the blood of a goat or bull). His atoning sacrifice has dealt with your sin, not just for another year,

but forever. Jesus' blood has paid the price for your redemption, and he has become the scapegoat for you, carrying your sins as far away as east is from west (the picture David gives us in Psalm 103).

Jesus was willing to be your propitiation; your atoning sacrifice; to pay the price for your sin in order that God could justify you. Again, in view of God's great mercy, how can we not respond in love and obedience? Soak this truth in, and be transformed.

Jesus is your propitiation. He has made your wrongs right. He has redeemed you from slavery to sin. God sees you as innocent of any wrongdoing.

And what did it cost him? First, it cost him his life. The eternal Son of God died, as his Father watched on, knowing this was the only way to redeem all those listed in the Book of Life.

But you know what? It cost him even more – it cost him his righteousness. Jesus became sin, so that we might become his righteousness. We sing this a lot, but the verse has so much power; ²¹ For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Some more theology tonight – we have been justified (v.24). We have said this means being declared “not guilty” and being “set free,” redeemed by the blood Christ. “Justified” also means “righteous.” The root word in Greek is exactly the same. God gives you his righteousness! More accurately, Jesus gave you his righteousness when he became your sin! To whatever degree you feel a failure in your walk as a Christian, it is directly related to your inability to truly understand

this transaction. It is God's grace! It is a gift! Are you judging yourself? Are you declaring yourself to be guilty? Why?

God has given you his character – he is just and the justifier, and you can be as well. You have received a gift that allows you to make amends; to offer forgiveness, as God has forgiven you, and to ask for forgiveness, knowing that even if another person can't do it, God already has.

You have been justified – you are a blood-bought, innocent, righteous, justified child of God. Satan has nothing on you.

Innocent People Make Amends

Not just innocent people; redeemed, blood-bought people; righteous people; justified people make amends. In our next lesson, we are going to talk about forgiveness – forgiven people make amends, too. But this passage is all about what it means to be justified. That's who you are. You are righteous – that is so much more valuable than being right.

And how do you make amends? You say, "I'm sorry." That's it. The list you will make will contain the names of many people you can say "I'm sorry" to (not in the case of abuse – remember that you have nothing to be sorry about in those instances).

Now some on that list will be people you've harmed. You stole from them, hurt them physically, or emotionally, you hated them and they knew it. Saying I'm sorry without excuse or expectation is straightforward, if not easy.

But what about the people who have hurt you? I was talking to my sponsor the other day about step 8, and was reminded again of the power of this process in pointing out my sin, as I remembered my relationship with my father.

I discovered, after deciding to move back to Chicago to enter the family business that he had been cheating on my mom for most of their marriage. That was hard, but what I think was harder was his refusal to change even after it was all out in the open. My mom would end up in a nursing home with MS, and my relationship with my dad was usually strained. Why was it strained? Because I judged him so harshly. I carried a resentment for fifteen years, and it robbed me of happiness and a better relationship with a man who in many other ways had been a great dad.

I remembered the moment I forgave him (long before CR). Reading a devotional about forgiving but not forgetting, I realized I had not forgiven my dad. In an instant, the burden was gone. I never told him I forgave him – not sure I would have even after working the steps – but I acted like I forgave him, and our relationship changed as a result.

I could say, “I’m sorry” even though he never would have. That was no longer my problem. My problem was my judgment and resentment, and God took that away. In that moment, at least, I acted like the justified believer I am called to be.

Now we’re not asking a lot tonight – just make a list of people you have harmed and be willing to make to amends. Make the list and be willing. But isn’t God’s version of this step compelling? **God made a list of all people who had**

“harmed” him and became willing to make amends to them all. Your name is on God’s list, the Book of Life. He knows you’ve rejected him, disobeyed him, not loved him, and yet he became willing to make amends anyway. It is all about grace, and all about receiving this gift by faith. Then it is about becoming willing as Jesus was willing.

Keep trusting this process – work the steps. Don’t skip any on the way to step 8. But trust the propitiation, the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ that has redeemed you and transferred to you the righteousness of God. Believe it, and act in that belief.

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