

Understanding Sin and Forgiveness

Tony

Scriptures:

Romans 6:23

1 John 1:8-10

Matthew 6:12

Matthew 6:15

Romans 8:30

"For the wages of sin is death but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 6:23)

We are all sinners. Sin is anything contrary to the will of God as revealed in His Word. We sin because we have a naturally sinful nature. When Jesus offered Himself as a sinless sacrifice to the Father He took upon Himself the sin of all mankind so that all who confess their sins can be forgiven. Amazingly, if we confess our sins both sin and guilt are washed away.

"If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sin He is faithful and just to forgive us our sin and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His Word is not in us." (1 John 1:8-10)

The prayer Jesus taught His disciples teaches us that because God has shown such great mercy toward us we are to show mercy toward others and forgive their sins.

"And forgive us our debts (sins) as we also have forgiven our debtors." (Matthew 6:12)

If we refuse to be merciful and forgiving to others, Jesus makes it clear that God will withhold His forgiveness from us.

"But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." Matthew 6:15

We must remember that forgiveness is always a gift.

Let us look at the way Christian theologians sought to explain how sin is to be understood. Their studies are known as soteriology. This word comes from joining together two Greek words. Soter meaning Saviour and logos meaning word.

Strangely, after the words of Jesus and the epistles of Paul, there was a gap of almost four hundred years before Saint Augustine 354-430 wrote a thesis to help people to understand the nature of salvation. The reason for this was to do with a prayer of Augustine which was widely known.

"Father, give what Thou commandest, and command what Thou wilt."

Unusually a response came from someone in England. Pelagius was a Monk and he wrote a treatise attacking what he saw as pre-destinarian implications in the prayer. Augustine responded by writing the first major treatment of the subject of sin and salvation.

Do not be put off by Augustine's Latin words. I will write about them in English. There are four stages in the history of man's redemption.

1. 'Posse Peccare' means 'able to sin'.
This is man as he was created before the fall. He was thus created sinless, but with the possibility of sinning.
2. 'Non posse non peccare' means 'not able not to sin'.
This is man after the fall. Man was unable to do other than sin after sin emerged. This is the condition into which all men are born.
3. 'Posse non peccare' means 'able not to sin'.
This is man after being saved. So then, by the power of Holy Spirit, men are able not to sin .
4. Non posse peccare means 'not able to sin.'
This is man after he is glorified. (Romans 8:30) In Heaven man will not be able to sin.

If you think about these four stages you will realise that most of us have already learned them without noticing.

Prayer: Father, we thank You that you loved us so much that You gave Your one and only Son to die so that when we turn to you in repentance and faith we can live eternally with You. Amen