



www.PreciousHeart.net/ti

Volume 3 – 2011

How Does God Wrestle with the Shortcomings of His People

Norris Blount, Th.D. student
Covington Theological Seminary¹

Adam and Eve disobeyed God in a perfect environment. In His omnipotence, God foreknew that sin would enter the world. “And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel” (Gen. 3:15). God also knew that there would have to be atonement for that sin if there was to be a relationship of any kind with His creation. This began the scarlet thread that can be traced throughout the Bible. “Also for Adam and his wife the Lord God made tunics of skin, and clothed them” (Gen. 3:21). For the first time, death entered the world. God shed the blood of animals to cover Adam and Eve, and we get “a shadow of the reality that God would someday kill a substitute to redeem sinners” (MacArthur 1997, 21). God knew that sin would be a constant problem in the relationship between himself and man. William H. Bates defines sin as “any want of conformity unto, or transgression of, the law of God” (Bates 1922, 255), and we know from Romans that “all have sinned” (Rom. 3:23). However, our heavenly father longs to have fellowship with us, and we can rejoice that God has made a way for us to have that

¹ See nblount@fca.org.

fellowship. As believers, we “are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Jesus Christ” (Rom. 3:23).

The scriptures say, “God is faithful, who has called you into fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord” (1 Cor. 1:9). The word fellowship or *koinonia* in the Greek means to “have things in common, or in partnership” (Bates 1922, 257), and the best thing about this partnership is that God “assumes our liabilities and discharges them,” thus we are able to have fellowship (Bates 1922, 257). Our fellowship with God is disrupted when we sin because He, being a holy God, cannot look upon sin and cannot allow sin to go unpunished. “Divine forgiveness is therefore extended only when the last demand or penalty against the offender has been satisfied. Since no human being could ever render divine satisfaction for his sins, God, in measureless mercy, has provided all the satisfaction, even divine propitiation, which the sinner could ever need” (Chafer 1936, 135). It is God who repairs the relationship; all we have to do is accept the gift of His son. “In him we have redemption” (Eph. 1:7); it is the work of Christ that purchased us back from slavery. It starts and finishes with the Lord Jesus Christ, “For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God” (1 Pet. 3:18).

“For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Cor. 5:21). Man has no solution for this problem of sin, thus our need for imputed righteousness. Imputed is an accounting term meaning to put on one’s account. “Imputation has been used in theology in a threefold sense to denote the judicial acts of God by which the guilt of Adam’s sin is imputed to his posterity by which the sins of Christ’s people are imputed to him; and by which the righteousness of Christ is imputed to His people” (International Standard Bible Encyclopedia). “Blessed is the man to whom the Lord shall not impute sin” (Rom. 4:8). For the man who belongs to God, sin will not be credited to his account. “Imputed righteousness, which is that righteousness from God now reckoned to the believer because of the fact that he is in Christ—Christ being made unto him the very righteousness of God” (Chafer 1936, 141). God had to take away our sin permanently and that was done by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ; this was the only way sin could be dealt with. I like how David Linden said it,

“He, Jesus Christ our Lord, unlike any lawyer on earth, assumed our entire burden legally and experientially in His life and His death on the cross” (Linden 1999, 167).

God is not able to ignore sin because He is holy, and He has called us to be holy. According to Dr. Chafer, it is because of what Christ has done and His righteousness that we can achieve “divine justification” (Chafer 1936,142); God is able to declare us forgiven and justified in his sight. This had to be done to deal with our constant sin and to give us eternal life with him. God continues to pursue man despite knowing our shortcomings. He knew we needed grace to have a relationship with Him because we continue to sin (Chafer 1936, 142). “Justification is a gracious act of God concerning undeserving sinners in which He both *pardons* us for all our sin, reversing our condemnation, and with this acquittal, *bestows* upon us the status of righteous persons...The needed righteousness was provided on the condition of faith, and has been imputed to us solely on the human obedience of the Lord Jesus Christ our Redeemer, who having become man died and obeyed in our place” (Linden 1999, 189). We have a hard time with this concept because of our flesh; we need a mediator and that is Christ Jesus. “Justification is not based on God’s ignoring sin, and His choosing instead to reflect on the supposed ‘good parts.’ Justification is based only on His appraisal of the righteousness of Christ” (Linden 1999, 179).

Without the new dispensation ushered in by Christ, man had no hope; the old system of animal sacrifice was not enough. Believers must realize that without these key components, imputation and justification, which solely depend on Christ, we are lost and without hope. Having a relationship with a Holy God would be a lost cause. Thus, he deals with our sin through the blood of His Son and Jesus Christ’s righteousness; “Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sin, he sat down at the right hand of God” (Heb. 10:11-12).

God makes a promise to the saints who fall short, “If we confess our sins he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness” (1 Jn. 1:9). Sin is a battle that plagues us until we die; not only did he send us His son to pay the penalty for our

sins, He gave us instructions about how to have our sin cleansed once we fall short. *Kapar* or God forgives in transliteration means to be merciful, pacify, pardon, or reconcile (Strong's Concordance). The one thing that God requires of us is confession, this is the Greek word *exomologeō*, meaning to acknowledge or agree fully (Strong's Concordance). "Confession of one's sins clears the way for God to respond by His grace and according to His own provisions for sin" (Glasscock 2009, 224). This serves as a testimony to all who know of it that God restores and offers victory over any sin. "There is no compromise of God's righteousness when He forgives" (Glasscock 2009, 224). God requires the sinner to acknowledge his guilt, and once the confession is sincerely offered, He is free to forgive and cleanse the confessor based on Christ's work on the cross.

Ananias and Sapphira, two New Testament believers in the first-century church, did not understand how God deals with the shortcoming of his children. Ananias and Sapphira according to the story recorded in Acts 5 were given every opportunity to confess, acknowledge, and receive forgiveness from God. Instead they concealed the truth, and attempted to find favor in the eyes of man. We have God longing to forgive and have fellowship with his children in this story. "Then Peter said, 'Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land? Didn't it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn't the money at your disposal? What made you think of doing such a thing? You have not lied to men but to God'" (Acts 5:3-4)? Ananias and Sapphira had free will to offer what they wanted. God did not force them to give. We have a God who wants us to love Him because we are in love with Him and not because He forces Himself upon us.

Instead of forgiveness these two saints chose God's wrath. God made an example of Ananias and Sapphira. He is a holy God and is willing to forgive, however forgiveness is only granted after an acknowledgement of sin. If we choose not to confess our sin, the Bible is very clear, "Do not be deceived, God cannot be mocked, A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction. The one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life" (Gal. 6:7-8).

Their salvation was not at stake that was settled at the cross by Christ. It was clear however that they desired man's approval more than God's. Because of their sin, they were punished. God took them out of this world and brought them into His presence.

We must not think that God was only a God of grace in the New Testament. God showed his tolerance and love for his people in the Old Testament as well. God began dealing with man's sin in Genesis. What he did in Genesis 3:21 was a foreshadowing of how He would deal with our sin. The Bible is clear that "the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23). God told Adam if he ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil he would die; clear instructions and clear consequences. God showed mercy to Adam and Eve; He did not kill them for their sin thus showing compassion, but death was ushered into the world. Instead "for Adam and his wife the Lord God made tunics of skin, and clothed them" (Gen. 3:21), the animal was sacrificed for the sins of Adam and Eve. Jesus Christ was the sacrifice for all mankind. Instead of man dying and suffering eternal separation from God for his sins, God sent Jesus Christ in his place to be the propitiation. Christ became our mercy seat just like in the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement. "Christ did this when His blood, spilled on behalf of others, satisfied the demands of God's holy justice and wrath against sin" (MacArthur 1997, 1972).

When David sinned with Bathsheba, he was not willing to confess his sin, but tried to hide it from God. How did God deal with David? David lost the joy of his salvation because his conscience would not allow him an escape (Ps. 32:3-4). In this case, God dealt with David through guilt; he could not have true fellowship with God until he was willing to acknowledge his sin. Once the acknowledgement was made, David found forgiveness and his joy was restored, "I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity, I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the Lord and you forgave the guilt of my sin'" (Ps. 32:5). "Children of God are called upon to agree with God's viewpoint of their sin. . . it is to be viewed as a horrible offense against the very character of God" (Glasscock 2009, 222).

In Isaiah 43, God is dealing with an unfaithful Israel who disrespected God by calling on other gods and not giving Him their grain offering; even then He shows them grace. "I, even I, am He

who blots out your transgressions for My own sake; And I will not remember your sins. Put Me in remembrance; Let us contend together; State your case, that you may be acquitted” (Is. 43:25-26).

In the book of Deuteronomy, God gives clear instructions to the nation about obedience. Like any good father He sets expectations. In Deuteronomy chapter 6, He expects His people to love Him with all their heart, soul, and mind. In chapter 7, He tells them that He has chosen them and set them apart for Him. God has poured His love out on them for no other reason than His grace and mercy; however, God was very clear concerning the consequences of disobedience. “Then it shall be, if you by any means forget the Lord your God, and follow other gods, and serve them and worship them, I testify against you this day that you shall surely perish. As the nations which the Lord destroys before you, so you shall perish, because you would not be obedient to the voice of the Lord your God” (Deut. 8:19-20).

Even though the Nation of Israel had clear guidelines, they would sin and fall short of God’s expectations. In the book of Judges we have a 350-year history of God dealing with His people. “In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes” (Judges 21:25). What a testimony of the condition of mankind. Unfortunately, man has not changed. We have clear guidelines of what God expects from us today; yet we, like the nation of Israel, do our own thing and disappoint God. How does God deal with this? In Judges we see a pattern. God’s people would rebel, God would punish them, God’s people would plead for help from God, and He would raise up a judge to deliver them. This was the pattern for God’s people for over 350 years (MacArthur 1997, 334). The major theme you see in this book is “God’s power and covenant mercy in graciously delivering the Israelites from the consequences of their failures. His power to faithfully rescue shines against the dark backdrop of pitiful human compromise” (MacArthur 1997, 334).

God dealt with His people in the Old Testament, and continues to deal with our sin today with His grace. Grace is God’s “pure unrecompensed kindness and favor” (Chafer 1994, 38). God had every right to kill Adam and Eve, but instead He gave us an illustration of how He would deal with His children. First and foremost He needed a spotless Lamb who could pay for our sin. Past, present, and future only one High Priest could fulfill God’s

requirements and that High Priest is Jesus Christ. I appreciate what Dr. Chafer said in his article *A Voice from the Past*: “grace finds its greatest triumph and glory in the sphere of human helplessness” (Chafer 1994, 38). We are helpless and frail creatures who need God’s grace daily. God’s wrath had to be satisfied, and Christ did that for you and me. Without grace there is no dealing with man’s sin. Why? Every time we sin we would have to die. “The sin question has been set aside forever, and equal exercise of grace is extended to all who believe. It never falls short of being the measureless saving grace of God. Thus grace could not be increased; for it is the expression of His infinite love: it could not be diminished; for every limitation that human sin might impose on the action of a righteous God has, through the propitiation of the cross, been dismissed forever” (Chafer 1994, 39).

“For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus” (1 Tim. 2:5). Jesus Christ is our advocate. When we sin the Son intercedes for us to the Father; our sin was paid for at Calvary. Now for the believer, we stand justified because of the Son, and we are being sanctified, “destined to become exactly like the Lord Jesus Christ” (Hunter 1990, 3). We have been given the Holy Spirit to help us overcome sin. “His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness” (2 Pet. 1:3). We are a work in progress, and we are battling the flesh. “I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do” (Rom. 7:15). This is why God has given us the Holy Spirit, the Word and prayer to help us overcome sin.

Time after time God goes the extra mile with us and for us to have a relationship. We continue to fall short, and He continues to extend grace. “For I know that You are a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, One who relents from doing harm.” (Jonah 4:2) These are the words of the prophet Jonah, a man who deliberately disobeyed God, and put an entire ship in harms way. God used a firm hand to get his attention and get him back into fellowship. This was the first timeout!! Jonah is swallowed by a big fish and stays in timeout for three days and nights until he confesses his sin and repents.

According to *The Westminster Shorter Catechism*, “Repentance unto life is a saving grace, whereby a sinner, out of a true sense of his sin, and apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ doth, with grief and hatred of sin, turn from it unto God, with full purpose of, and endeavor after, a new obedience” (Bates 1922, 262). This is what Jonah did, and this is what we should strive for. Jonah changed direction, headed to Nineveh, and did what God had called him to do. Jonah was allowed to experience the God of grace in the Old Testament. In the case of Jonah, God showed him all the attributes He showed the people of Nineveh.

A beautiful picture of how God deals with His disobedient children is also found in Luke 15. When Jesus tells the story of the Lost Son, the Jewish leaders were astonished by the display of grace and mercy extended to this son because he had disgraced his father and shown utter disrespect. The disrespect he showed his father was reason enough for a public beating, but the father showed him grace. He gave the son his inheritance although the young son was not entitled to anything while the father was alive; he was telling his father that he wished he were dead. The son did everything he could to sever the relationship with his father. The father in this story gives us insight into how our heavenly father deals with us. “I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men. So he got up and went to his father” (Luke 15:19-20). This young man had a change of heart and wanted a relationship with his father. He would rebuild this relationship with true repentance. He was heading one direction away from the father then he turned and headed back towards the father agreeing he was wrong. “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness” (1 Jn. 1:9).

In this story, the reaction of the father is priceless, and he provides us with a clear illustration of our heavenly Father. “But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him” (Luke 15:20). The father never gave up on his son; he was looking for him daily. The Jewish leaders could not comprehend why this father would go to such great lengths for this undeserving son. A distinguished Jewish man did not run in public; it was forbidden. The father did not care; he ran to his son to show him

his love. He had compassion for the son who had clearly been in the wrong and had broken fellowship with the father. He kissed him to show him a sign of reconciliation. “But the father said to his servants, ‘Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let’s have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found’” (Luke 15:22-24).

The Jewish leaders simply could not understand the breadth of the father’s forgiveness and love. This is exactly how God deals with us. William Bates gives 11 steps on how God deals with our sin in his paper *God’s Forgiveness of Sin*.

1. Confessed. Ps 32:5 “I said I will *confess* my transgressions unto the Lord, and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin.” 1 John 1:9, “If we *confess* our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins.”
2. Cleansed white: Isa 1:18 “Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as *white as snow*; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.”
3. Forgiven. Eph 4:32 “God, for Christ’s sake, *hath forgiven* you.” 1 John 2:12 “Your sins *are forgiven* you for his name’s sake.”
4. Abundantly pardoned. Isa 55:7 “Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will *abundantly pardon*.” Micah 7:18, “Who is a God like unto thee that *pardoneth* iniquity? He delighteth in mercy.”
5. Covered. Ps 32:1 “Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is *covered*.” Ps 85:2, “Thou hast forgiven the iniquity of thy people, thou hast *covered* all their sin.”
6. Behind God’s back. Isa 38:17 “For thou hast cast all my sins *behind thy back*.” (Therefore he cannot see them)
7. Removed. Ps 103:12, “As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he *removed* our transgressions from us.”
8. Cast into the sea. Micah 7:19, “Thou wilt cast all their sins into the *depths of the sea*.”
9. Blotted out. Isa. 44:22 “I have *blotted out*, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and as a cloud thy sins.”
10. Not to be mentioned. Ezek. 33:16 “None of his sins that he hath committed shall be *mentioned* unto him.”

11. Forgotten. Heb 10:17, “And their sins and iniquities will I *remember no more.*” Isa. 43:25, “I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions, for mine own sake, and *will not remember thy sins*” (Bates 1922, 256).

Just as the story of the son is unbelievable to the religious leaders, the way in which God deals with our sin is equally remarkable! He chooses to deal with us in this fashion because He loves us. “And now these three remain faith, hope, and love but the greatest of these is love” (Rom. 13:13). God has given us faith to believe in His Son, Jesus. “Without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exist and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him” (Heb. 11:6). Hope, found in Christ and nothing else He is the only one that will not fail us. “To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Col. 1:27). Love, “No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord” (Jn. 10:18). This verse screams God’s love for humanity. God loves us with an unconditional agape love!!! There is nothing we have to offer God that would entice him. He gains nothing out of this deal. It cost Him everything to have fellowship with sinful man.

This is how he deals with the shortcomings of his children. He pursues us with a love that is unfathomable. In Jeremiah 3:11-15 we see an example of a holy God pursuing an adulterous people. The scenario has not changed in the 21st-century; our Father wants to forgive us, shower mercy on us, and have sweet fellowship with us. There is one condition for this sweet fellowship and Jeremiah 3 tells us,

The Lord said to me, “Faithless Israel is more righteous than unfaithful Judah. Go, proclaim this message toward the north: Return, faithless Israel,” declares the Lord, “I will frown on you no longer, for I am merciful,” declares the Lord, “I will not be angry forever, Only acknowledge your guilt-you have rebelled against the Lord your God, you have scattered your favors to foreign gods under every spreading tree, and have not obeyed me,” declares the Lord. “Return, faithless people” declares the Lord, “for I am your husband. I will choose you-one from a town and two from a clan-and bring you to Zion” (Jer. 3:11-15).

I am bursting with joy at this passage. God says I am faithful, I am your husband, and even though you are not faithful to me, I will be faithful to you. Not only is God faithful, but He gives us His best. His best is Jesus Christ. Why? Because He loves the sinner and deals

with us using what Christ has done on the cross. “Who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim. 2:4).

References

- Bates, William H. "God's Forgiveness Of Sin." *Bibliotheca Sacra* 079, no. 315 (Jul 1922): 255-274.
- Chafer, Lewis Sperry. "A Voice from the Past: The Fundamentals Of Grace." *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* 07, no. 2 (Autumn 1994): 37-48.
- Chafer, Lewis Sperry. "The Doctrine of Sin Part 6." *Bibliotheca Sacra* 093, no. 370 (Apr 1936): 133-161.
- Glasscock, Ed. "Forgiveness and Cleansing according to 1 John 1:9." *Bibliotheca Sacra* 166, no. 662 (Apr 2009): 217-227.
- Harold F. Hunter, Th.D. *Romans*. Jacksonville, FL: Trinity Press, 1990.
- International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*. Digital File. QuickVerse 10. n.d.
- Linden, David H. "A Study On Justification." *Reformation and Revival* 08, no. 1 (Winter 1999): 167-197.
- MacArthur, John. *The MacArthur Study Bible*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1997.
- Strong's Concordance*. Digital File. QuickVerse 10. n.d.



www.PreciousHeart.net/ti