

Remissional Redundancy?

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The Bible tells us that Jesus Christ paid for all sins on the Cross. But some say that a person's sins are not remitted until they are correctly baptized, citing Acts 2:38. Are there two different remissions of sin? Is there a *remissional redundancy*: one at the Cross, and another at the time of personal water baptism?

He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed. (1 Peter 2:24)

Jesus taught that his blood remitted sin: "my blood . . . which is shed for many for the remission of sins." (Matt. 26:28). The writer of Hebrews states: "without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness." (Heb. 9:22). (The KJV says "remission" in the place of forgiveness.¹ That is because remission and forgiveness are the same thing.²) It was the specific blood of Jesus that forgives our sins. "In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of his grace." (Eph. 1:7). Jesus is the final sacrifice for all sins: "Now where remission of these is, there is no more offering for sin." (Heb. 10:18). We are forgiven when we believe in Jesus. Peter preached, "everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name³." (Acts 10:43).

When and where is sin remitted? -- at the Cross. His death on the Cross is proof that sin is remitted. Paul says, "because anyone who has died has been freed from sin." (Rom 6:7). If the Bible states that Jesus' death on the Cross is the sacrifice for our sins; if it says he died to our sins only once; and if it says he could not be held by death, but is raised to

¹ There are seven words in the whole Bible used for forgiveness: three in Hebrew: 1) *Kipper* = "to cover"; *Nasa* = "to bear," "take away guilt"; 3) *Salah* = "to pardon." There are four in Greek: 1) *Apolyein* = "to put away"; 2) *Paresis* = "putting away," "disregarding" (only one time - Rom. 3:25); 3) *Charizesthai* = "to forgive sins" - (especially expresses the graciousness of God's forgiveness. This word is used only in Luke (7:21; Acts 3:4) and Paul (2 Cor. 2:7; Eph. 4:32; Col. 2:13; 3:13).); 4) *Aphesis* = "forgiveness" - (which conveys the idea of "sending away" or "letting go." It is a noun 15 times and a verb 40 times). *Aphesis* is the most common word in the NT for forgiveness. There are ten verses in the KJV that use the word remission (Matt. 26:28; Mk, 1:4; Lk, 1:77; Lk, 3:3; Lk, 24:47; Acts 2:38; Acts 10:43; Rom. 3:25; Heb. 9:22; Heb. 10:18). All these verses, except Rom. 3:25 (paresis) use the Greek work *aphesis*. *Aphesis* is rooted in the verb *aphieemi*, which is rendered in English as "forgive," "left," "leave," "sent away," "omitted," "forsook," "remit," "let go," or "put away." *Aphesis* is used 17 times in the KJV as "forgiveness," "remission," "deliverance," or "set at liberty."

² The Greek word for remission is also the same Greek word for forgiveness. The word "forgiveness" in Acts 5:31 is translated from the Greek word *aphesis*. The word "remission" in Acts 2:38 is also translated from the Greek work *aphesis*. (The only place where "remission" is not translated from *aphesis* is Romans 3:25 where the word is *paresis*. In this case the word means "overlooking" or allowing sins to go unpunished. This would not be remission in the sense of taking away sins, as the context of the verse bears out.)

³ To believe "in his name" means the same as believe in the person who possesses the name. To believe in the name of Jesus, is a Hebrew way of saying, "believe in Jesus."

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give us life and salvation, then, we can safely say that our sins imputed to Jesus on the Cross were cleansed, taken away or paid for there and his resurrection testifies it is so:

The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God.
(Romans 6:10)

And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. (Heb. 10:10)

But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him. (Acts 24:24)

Jesus did away with our sins on the Cross: “But now he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself.” (Heb. 9:26) He does not offer himself to remit sins day after day. Otherwise he would have to suffer death everyday since God made the world. We need not to ask him to remit our sins day after day. He has done away with sin by his death on the Cross, once, for all time:

Then Christ would have had to suffer many times since the creation of the world. But now he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself. (Heb. 9:6)

Unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself. (Heb. 7:27)

To contend that sin is not fully remitted at the Cross fails to understand the resurrection of Jesus. He could not be raised from the dead if our sins, imputed against him, were not done away with. He would still bear our sins. But the Bible says our sins are no longer imputed to him:

How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God! (Heb. 9:14)

Sins were cleansed at the Cross. Jesus is raised because God accepted what he did on the Cross for us. Jesus is risen, because he was the Lamb who took away the sins of the world:

But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God. (Heb. 10:12)

Because by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy. (Heb. 10:10 NIV)

The Bible says our sins were forgiven at the Cross and the resurrection is the proof:

Christ died for our sins according to the Scripture and then he was raised on the third day, according to the Scriptures. (1 Cor. 15:3-4)

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The obvious logic is that *he did not need to be raised until he died*. What did he die from? He died because he was judged for our sins. Jesus paid the penalty for our sins. If he failed to redeem us from sin, he would still be dead. Jesus' resurrection demonstrates that his sacrifice was acceptable to God:

He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.
(Rom 4:25)

Jesus would not have been raised from the dead if he had not paid for our sins. He would have failed and we would not even know about him.

The idea that sin needs to be remitted in baptism fails to recognize that sin was remitted at the Cross. Otherwise, there is a need for a second remission. But the Bible does not teach that. It is the death of Jesus on the Cross that takes away sin and not baptism or any other sacrament the church performs. Those who fail to see that all remission takes place at the Cross, also fail to understand what the resurrection announces about the Cross. It is finished!

I think there is an important distinction that helps with this whole issue. It is the distinction between remission of sins and justification. When Jesus offered himself on the Cross, he purged or remitted our sins. But, it is when we believe in that offering that God justifies us. He justifies us or counts us right by faith in the work of Jesus on our behalf. Remission is where Jesus bares our sins. Our sins are imputed to him. Justification is where Jesus' righteousness is imputed to us.

Imputation of remission consists of God imputing or laying our sins upon Jesus, by which he became our Savior. Jesus did not *become* a sinner; instead the Bible states about him: "Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree," (1 Peter 2:24 KJV). The word "bare" (*anaphero*) is a common word that has a number of meanings. However, since Peter appears to make reference to Isaiah 53:12, it conveys the sense that what the Messiah was prefigured to do, Jesus does on the Cross:⁴

Here is an explicit statement of the heart of the gospel: *He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree*. The fact that Christ bore our sins means that God the Father counted our sins against Christ and, in a way not fully understood by us, 'laid on him the iniquity of us all' (Is. 53:6) The Father though of our sins as belonging to Christ' he 'made him to be sin who knew no sin' (2 Cor. 5:21)⁵

⁴ Peter says "on the tree" but the common word for tree (*dendron*) is not used. Instead he uses *xylon* which is an object made of wood. Peter is clearly connecting the Isaiah promise of the suffering Messiah who will take up or carry Israel's sins, with the death of Jesus the Messiah upon the Cross.

⁵ Wayne Grudem, *1 Peter*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1992), p. 131.

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Isaiah foretells that the sins of Israel would be laid upon their Messiah. Peter says that Jesus carried or took up our sins upon the Cross. This is the language of imputation. To impute means to *count, consider, reckon, credit*⁶ something to someone. Christ was sinless as to his own life (Hebrews 4:15; 7:26; 9:28). God imputed our sins to Jesus, which He did not deserve (Isaiah 53:11; 2 Corinthians 5:21; 1 Peter 2:24). God did not *make* Him a sinner (2 Cor. 5:21; Heb. 7:26)).

The other part of imputation is justification. In justification Christ's righteousness is counted to us. The righteousness of justification is Christ's righteousness, not the believer's own individual righteousness. This is necessary, because Jesus' perfect righteousness is the only righteousness that God accepts. The Apostle Paul spoke specifically about the importance of imputation in his great epistle to the Romans:

Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. And to the one who does not work but trusts him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness, just as David also speaks of the blessing of the one to whom God counts righteousness apart from works: "Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin." (Romans 4:4-8 ESV)

Jesus takes our sins without becoming a sinner, because God counts or imputes our sin to him. In the same way, when God imputes Christ's righteousness to us, He does not *make* us righteous. He credits or counts Jesus' righteousness *to us*, and *considers* us right with Him *on account of what Christ did*. He is our substitute. Because of the imputation of Christ's righteousness, we are accepted by God, we are reconciled to the Father, and receive the adoption of sons – all by the perfect righteousness of Jesus. That is where the difference occurs, between the atoning work of the Cross and the justifying work God. It is when we believe on the Cross of Jesus.

It is like the snake on the pole under Moses:

The LORD said to Moses, "Make a snake and put it up on a pole; anyone who is bitten can look at it and live." So Moses made a bronze snake and put it up on a pole. Then when anyone was bitten by a snake and looked at the bronze snake, he lived. (Deut. 21:8, 9)

The brass snake mediated healing power to everyone in the camp, but not everyone looked on it. Jesus compared the brazen snake of Moses to his work on the Cross. Everyone who believes in the crucified Son of Man has eternal life:

Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life. (John 3:14, 15)

6 UBS Greek Dictionary

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The look that saves is the look of faith in God's provision. So, the work of the Cross is sufficient for everyone's sins, but not everyone knows its power, because not all believe. Some confuse remission and justification, because they do not understand either.

The key is to understand justification. Those who understand it, do not struggle with *remissional redundancy*. No second remission is necessary. Christ's work of remission is finished at the Cross, while God's work of justification, through the risen Christ, is ongoing. This points to the relationship between the Cross and the Resurrection. Jesus ever lives to make intercession for us through the work of justification:

Now there have been many of those priests, since death prevented them from continuing in office; but because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood. Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them. (Heb. 7:23-25)