

## THE ROLE OF JESUS CHRIST

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Shalom,

Has the Word of God helped us and performed miracles in our lives? We are still busy with the Letter to the Ephesians which practically includes two parts:

- Chapters 1-3 describing God's plan for mankind and the execution of His plan
- Chapters 4-6 exposing man's response to God's works

What is man expected to do after accepting and knowing God's works? These chapters take in lots of down-to-earth advice for our sake.

In Ephesians 1: 4-14, we read the roles of the Triune God. Which of the three plays the most important role? God the Father, Jesus Christ or the Holy Spirit? None. They all play an equal role. God the Father is not higher than Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ is not higher than the Holy Spirit.

The Apostle Paul praised the Lord not for physical but spiritual blessing (Ephesians 1: 3). To be honest, we sing praises in times of blessing but at this point, we just show less interest in pursuit of spiritual blessing which is, in fact, more crucial since it provides eternal life.

Ephesians 1: 4-6 displays God's magnificent plan prior to the creation of the world. He chose and decided to live with His creation (the Jewish and the gentiles alike) in eternity. Had His choice fallen on the Jewish, they would have been proud claiming that "they were the chosen people right from the start."

In the past millennia, God had actually cared for the gentiles. In fact, in the time of Jonah, God was concerned about the salvation of the Ninevites.

God made His choice before the creation of the world through Jesus Christ (v. 7). To put it another way, we were appointed to be saved and will be with God in heaven through Jesus Christ. And this has come to pass in eternity, meaning that God's plan did not end in total failure when man fell into sin.

Let's delve further into the role of Jesus Christ in determining the salvation of mankind.

1. He is the Redeemer, the Sin-Forgiver.

"In him [Jesus Christ] we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace that he lavished on us in all wisdom and insight" (Ephesians 1: 7-8).

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The phrase “through His blood” implies a sacrifice and bloodshed. Forgiveness indicates release as experienced by a released prisoner.

All have sinned (Romans 3: 23) and the payoff of sin is death (Romans 6: 23). It is worth noting that sin is the fruit of sinful acts as well as the existence of sinful man. Once a person’s sin is forgiven, he is exempted from death punishment. How happy a death-row inmate must be when his appeal for clemency is granted at the last minute by the president and is eventually free!

In setting us free from the death penalty, Jesus Christ played a vital role through the sacrifice of His blood. Like the blood of a slaughtered lamb, His blood was the means of forgiveness of sins. In the Old Testament, the blood of an animal was a means of forgiveness. When the Israelites had committed sin, they sacrificed animals. Somehow, the blood of the animals brought about physical purification while the blood of Jesus purifies man deep down to his conscience (Hebrews 9: 18-19). This is the richness of God’s grace for mankind. So, there is neither salvation nor forgiveness of sins without Jesus (Acts 4: 12) because only Jesus was appointed by God the Father as the Redeemer and the Sin-Forgiver.

The richness of His grace is poured out along with wisdom and understanding from heaven. Following the forgiveness of sins, what sort of wisdom and understanding do we now possess?

- We are always to sing praises to the Lord as the Apostle Paul stated it, “Blessed is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, .... “ (Ephesians 1: 3)

We are to be thankful all the time for His forgiveness and our salvation. We are to be overflowing with joy to praise the Lord as experienced by the Apostle Paul. He admitted that he was the worst of all sinners (1 Timothy 1: 15). After all, he obtained God’s grace that energized him to keep praising Him. This is evident that there is no sin, however grave it may be, that His blood cannot forgive.

Similarly, after the Israelites left Egypt and later escaped from the Egyptian army chase, Moses along with the Israelites gave praises to God. Miriam and all the Israelite women joined in the thanksgiving feast, dancing joyfully with their hand-drums (Exodus 15).

- We must not live in sin anymore. Principally, forgiveness of sins paves the way for a holy life without blemish in line with God’s prime plan.

Do you think that an inmate exempted from a death punishment will commit the same crime until he is sentenced to death again? Romans 6: 1-2 write, “... Are we to remain in sin so that grace may increase? Absolutely not! How can we who died to sin

still live in it?"

Stay alert in order not to play around with God's forgiveness and grace by committing the same sin again and again. Hebrews 10: 26 reminds us that if we sin intentionally after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there will be no more sacrifice to wipe out our sins. Jesus is not to be crucified for the second time. Such an issue fits in best with the sayings: "A dog returns to its own vomit," and "A sow, after washing herself, wallows in the mire" (2 Peter 2: 22).

- We must forgive others.

Jesus taught us the Lord's Prayer saying, "... and forgive us our debts, as we ourselves have forgiven our debtors" (Matthew 6: 12) and said further, "For if you forgive others their sins, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, your Father will not forgive you your sins" (vv. 14-15).

Do not act as the merciless slave. Being unable to pay his debt, he begged for the king's mercy. And out of compassion, the king finally forgave his ten-thousand-talent debt. But the same slave showed no mercy to his friend who had owed him just 100 talents. He even threw his friend in prison (Matthew 18: 24-30). Our Father in heaven desires us to forgive our fellowmen wholeheartedly (v. 35).

1. He is the Unifier.

"He did this when he revealed to us the secret of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, toward the administration of the fullness of the times, to head up all things in Christ—the things in heaven and the things on earth. In Christ we [the Jews] too have been claimed as God's own possession, since we were predestined according to the one purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to the counsel of his will so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, would be to the praise of his glory. And when you [the gentiles] heard the word of truth (the gospel of your salvation)—when you believed in Christ—you were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit." (Ephesians 1: 9-13)

Via His blood, Jesus Christ reunited God with man. Separated from God by sin, man could not approach God because He is holy. That's why Jesus came into the world as a human and played His role through the cross as a Mediator so that the reconciliation between God and man came to pass.

On top of that, Jesus unites men with men. In the early centuries, they had two groups of mutual enemies – the Jewish and the non-Jewish (gentiles). However, after they believed in Jesus, they took part in God's great promise.

It is crystal clear that salvation is intended not only for individuals but also for major communities. Never stay standoffish, but rather stay together with other

believers to be united by Christ!

Ephesians 2: 11-13 verify the fact that following the forgiveness of sins by the blood of Christ, there was no longer any divider / partition between the Jewish and the non-Jewish. They worshiped together in the Temple. In Jesus, there is reconciliation. All are friends, fellow saints and members of God's family (vv. 14-22).

The cross has torn down the wall of separation. Never restore it. We are built to be God's dwelling place where He is present. If the wall of separation / hostility is still there, how can God possibly dwell in there? It is indeed challenging to join the Jewish and the non-Jewish together. Nonetheless, if both communities fix their attention on the cross of Jesus and do away with their old identities, the wall of enmity will collapse beyond repair.

Which old identities stand in the way of unity and oneness? Cultures, habits, regulations and tight-knit ethnic groups which make it highly unlikely to realize unity. Only the cross of Christ can make it possible. Here are few examples:

- The Israelites were forbidden to eat unclean food stuff while the gentiles welcomed any food. How could they possibly dine at the same table? Peter once got "entangled" in this issue. He was eating with non-Jews when his friends (Jews) came. Later Peter shied away from them because he was afraid. Paul harshly reprimanded and considered Peter a hypocrite because he led Barnabas astray with his hypocrisy (Galatians 2: 11-14).

- The Jews were forbidden to enter the homes of the gentiles. People took issue with him, when Peter visited the uncircumcised Cornelius (Acts 11: 2-3).

- Philemon had a slave named Onesimus who fled from his master's home and landed in jail where he met Paul and repented. Paul asked Philemon to welcome Onesimus as a brother. It was said that Onesimus was once useless but now useful. In the Lord, we are all brothers and sisters regardless of our professions and social status (rich or poor). Let's not set up any walls among us. If we fix our eyes on Christ who sacrificed Himself for the sake of our unity, we must not set up any walls among us.

How can a couple become united and one with their different backgrounds (education, social status and ethnic groups)? Just stay focused on the cross of Christ and invite Him into your home life to feel His presence!

Thanks to the cross of Christ, we are no longer strangers but siblings in faith. When you notice a stranger or a new comer in church, go keep him or her accompany. Make sure that a church is a home where all fuse into an intimate brotherhood.

Now we understand the role of Jesus Christ, namely, as the Sin-Forgiver. His blood is mighty to forgive all kinds of sins, even the heaviest kind, as long as we

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acknowledge Him. His blood purifies us deep down to our conscience so that we can live a holy life without blemish conforming to God's plan. The Sin-Forgiver aside, Jesus is a Unifier as well. In Him, we become new men and obtain peace. With that peace, we can reconcile those who are not on good terms with one another and demolish walls of separation. That way, we will really become brothers and sisters in the Lord. Amen.