

How Is Jesus' Sacrifice "a Ransom for Many"?

The Bible's answer

Jesus' sacrifice is how God delivers or saves, humankind from sin and death. The Bible refers to the shed blood of Jesus as a ransom price. (Ephesians 1:7; 1 Peter 1:18, 19) Thus, Jesus said that he came "to give his life a ransom for many."—Matthew 20:28, King James Version.

Why was "a ransom for many" needed?

The first man, Adam, was created perfect, or without sin. He had the prospect of living forever but lost it by choosing to disobey God. (Genesis 3:17-19) When he had children, he passed on to them the defect of sin. (Romans 5:12) For this reason, the Bible indicates that Adam "sold" himself and his children into slavery to sin and death. (Romans 7:14) Being imperfect, none of them could buy back what Adam lost.—Psalm 49:7, 8.

God felt compassion for Adam's descendants in their hopeless situation. (John 3:16) However, God's standard of justice required that he not simply overlook or excuse their sins without a valid basis. (Psalm 89:14; Romans 3:23-26) God loves mankind, so he provided the necessary legal means for their sins to be not only forgiven but also eliminated. (Romans 5:6-8) The ransom is on that legal basis.

How does the ransom work?

In the Bible, the term "ransom" involves the following three elements:

It is a payment.—Numbers 3:46, 47.

It brings about a release, or redemption.—Exodus 21:30.

It corresponds to the value of what is paid for or covers it. *

Consider how these elements apply to the ransom sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

Payment. The Bible says that Christians were "bought with a price." (1 Corinthians 6:20; 7:23) That price is the blood of Jesus, with which he "bought people for God out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation."—Revelation 5:8, 9.

Release. Jesus' sacrifice provides a "release by ransom" from sin.—1 Corinthians 1:30; Colossians 1:14; Hebrews 9:15.

Correspondence. Jesus' sacrifice corresponds exactly to what Adam lost—one perfect human life. (1 Corinthians 15:21, 22, 45, 46) The Bible says: "Just as through the disobedience of the one man [Adam] many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one person [Jesus Christ] many will be made righteous." (Romans 5:19) This explains how the death of one man can pay the ransom for many sinners. Jesus' sacrifice is "a corresponding ransom for all" those who take the steps necessary to benefit from it.—1 Timothy 2:5, 6.

more info about his ransom sacrifice

The gospel is of first importance (1 Corinthians 15:3). So few things are more important than rehearsing the glories of Calvary over and over again.

And that leads to today's question from a regular listener to the podcast named Frank. "Pastor John, hello, and thank you for investing so much time and thought into this podcast over the years. I'm a regular listener and my question for you is about Jesus, who 'gave himself as a ransom for all (1

Timothy 2:6). But to whom did Jesus pay the ransom? Is he making a payment to Satan to free us from his captivity? Or is he giving his payment to God to free us from our penalty? Does the New Testament tell us? Whom did Jesus's ransom pay?"

The New Testament, it seems to me, never says in so many words that the

ransom Jesus paid was paid to God. But there is a hint in the Old Testament. I think the pictures of the death of Christ in the New Testament as a sacrifice made to God for the obtaining of redemption, if not explicit, are implicit in that the payment was made by God to God. It's important here to remember that all of these descriptions in the New Testament — redemption, justification, propitiation, reconciliation, and so on — all are analogies taken over from human experience. Some of them are metaphors.

Not by Silver and Gold

Like all analogies, some aspects apply and some don't. We have to ask in every case which ones do and which ones don't. For example, it would be a terrible mistake, I think, to say that the use of the word ransom, which Jesus did use about his death, means that there's going to be an exchange of money between anybody and God.

"He died to rescue us from God's wrath because we could never pay the massive debt we owed to the Father." Tweet Share on Facebook
Peter went out of his way in 1 Peter 1 to say that we are not ransomed by silver and gold. The best way to think about the image of ransoming, I think, is to let the actual biblical descriptions of the death of Christ flesh out for us what the analogy of a ransom means.

Just a word about Satan though: No way! No way is the death of Christ a negotiation with Satan or payment to Satan. When Christ meets the demonic forces in his ministry, they don't say, "Did you bring the money?" He commands and they go. No negotiations.

When Paul describes what happened to Satan on the cross in Colossians 2:15, he says, "He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him." This is a total defeat, not negotiation. In my mind, there's just no thought in the Bible about God paying the devil a ransom.

An Old Testament Clue

Here's the clue I've mentioned from the Old Testament about God being the recipient of a ransom. In Psalm 49:7-8, we read, "Truly no man can ransom another, or give to God the price of his life, for the ransom of their life, is costly and can never suffice" In Psalm 49:15, we then read, "But God will ransom my soul from the power of Sheol, for he will receive me."

I don't think this is a direct reference to the ransom of Christ, but rather a picture of how difficult it is to get people out of Sheol, which is laying claim on all these human beings like a kidnapper. But it certainly is suggestive that if a ransom is to be involved in rescuing humans from death, it's not going to be unbiblical to talk about paying it to God.

So when Jesus comes into the world, he says in Mark 10:45, "For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." Paul says in 1 Corinthians 6:20, "You were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body."

God Paid God

Here's why I think the ransom was paid by God to God, and in what sense it was a ransom. The key text that is crucial, I think, is Romans 3:24-25.

Here's what it says: "[They] are justified by his grace as a gift" — that's what it means to be treated graciously — "through the redemption" — the ransoming — "that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood" — in other words, a sacrificial offering made on

the mercy seat to God to avert his wrath and restore men (what a ransom does is restore us to the rightful parent or God or whomever we've been kidnapped from, so to speak) – “to be received by faith.”

“The payment was not silver and gold, but the blood of Christ-exalting and restoring the glory of God.” Tweet Share on Facebook

The picture is the following: Man has fallen short – far short of the glory of God. He has offended the glory of God. He has besmirched and dishonored the glory of God (Romans 3:23). We have committed treason by exchanging the glory of God for images (Romans 1:23).

God in his holiness and wrath upholds the glory of his name by sentencing us in condemnation – to eternal suffering in hell. But he's also a God of great mercy, and he prepared another way for his glory to be upheld injustice. That's what Romans 3:25 is about – namely, sacrificing his Son for those who believe instead of sending them to hell.

Free from Wrath

That sacrifice, Paul says, ransomed or redeemed people from the wrath of God. What a glorious gospel! Saved from the wrath of God! Romans 5:9 says, “Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God.”

That's the big issue. That's the big problem in the universe – God's wrath.

By the shedding of blood, we have escaped the wrath of God. The blood ransoms; it redeems from the wrath of God. If someone asked, “How did it do that? How did the payment work?” I would say that what was paid was the repair of God's dishonor. The repair of God's dishonored glory. The death of Jesus, in giving up so much glory out of love and honor to the Father, has repaired all that has been dishonored by the sins of God's people. That's what's been paid.

In that sense, I think the ransom was paid by God in Christ to God in sending his Son to die. He died to rescue us from God's wrath because we could never, ever pay the massive debt of glory that we owed to the Father. The payment was not silver and gold, but the blood of Christ-exalting and restoring the glory of God.

last bit of info...

The Ransom Theory

“For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (v. 45).

- **Mark 10:35-45**

The penal substitution view of the atonement accounts for two basic truths about the death of our Savior. First, Jesus' death was how the demands of God's justice were satisfied. He gave Himself on the cross as a propitiation – to accept the full force of divine wrath against sin and turn it away from His people. Second, Jesus' death accomplished this goal because our Lord was a vicarious substitute. He suffered in our place so that God could declare us righteous without violating His standards (Rom. 3:21-26; Heb. 9:1-10:18).

Both of these truths indicate clearly that the atonement was not a simple event but one with multifaceted significance. Even though the New Testament emphasizes the penal substitution view of the atonement, it does have other perspectives on what happened at the cross. For example,

Colossians 2:15 and Hebrews 2:14 depict the cross as Jesus' triumph over Satan. Through His death, Christ destroyed the power of the Devil. For centuries, the relation of Jesus' atonement to the kingdom of Satan has been studied and debated. In the early church, some taught that on the cross Jesus paid a ransom to the Evil One. His death was seen as the price for our release from the dominion and bondage of Satan and his minions. Certain problems with this view should be immediately apparent. Scripture never describes us as owing Satan anything. Also, to view the Son of God paying anything to the Devil gives him far more credit and power than he deserves. Most important, Matthew 6:12 tells us to ask the Lord to forgive us our debts. If we accept the ransom-to-Satan view, we neglect that we are debtors to God.

All impenitent sinners are in bondage to sin and Satan. Yet this bondage is the result of God's sovereign permission and does not originate from the power of Satan. This enslavement is a consequence of the debt sinners have incurred against God.

Today's passage informs us that the atonement was a ransom (Mark 10:45), and Christ paid this ransom to His Father. Jesus did not secure our release from the Evil One through paying a price to Satan but by crushing the Devil's head and doing what was necessary for God to consider our debts paid in full.

Coram Deo

When we enter this world in Adam, we owe God a great debt for breaking His law. We can by no means ever pay this debt, and it is futile even to try to appease our Father by our good works. But Christ has paid this debt for all who love Him, and He has set us free from the dominion of Satan and his minions. Nothing more needs to be done, and we can rest knowing that we are at peace with God and no longer in debt to Him for violating His law.

Passages for Further Study

Genesis 3:14-15

Psalm 89:1-28

Colossians 2:13-14

1 John 3:8b