

BENEFITS OF CHRIST'S BLOOD: RESTRICTED AND UNRESTRICTED?

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It has been called to my attention that I wrote something 22 years ago, in the March 1988 GES newsletter (“Matthew 25:31-46—Works Salvation?”), which seems to contradict unlimited atonement. In that article I say, “Since those cast into eternal fire did not believe in Christ, their sins were not covered by His blood and hence they were doomed to eternal damnation.” I cited John 8:24 as proof.

That statement is not true, as I will explain in this paper.

I was guilty of some shallow thinking on the blood of Christ. But I'm not alone. Many people have never carefully considered who benefits from His blood. The truth, which is obvious when we look at the Scriptures, may surprise you.

UNRESTRICTED: UNLIMITED ATONEMENT: THE SIN BARRIER IS REMOVED FOR ALL PEOPLE, INCLUDING UNBELIEVERS (JOHN 1:29; 1 JOHN 2:2)

John the Baptist pointed to Jesus and said, “Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). Jesus didn't *potentially* do that. He actually did that by His death on the cross. First John 2:2 reiterates that point. Jesus satisfied God's righteous judgment against sin by His death on the cross for 100% of Adam's offspring, including all unbelievers.

Lewis Sperry Chafer liked to say, “Because of Calvary, people no longer have a *sin problem*. Instead, they have a *Son problem*.”

Calvinists object, however, that if this is true, then everyone is born again. No one will be condemned. Not at all. Jesus' blood removes our sin as a barrier to our having life. But the cross doesn't give anyone life. John the Baptist went on to say that to get life a person must believe in Jesus (John 3:36).

No one will be eternally condemned because of his sins. Jesus' blood already removed the sin barrier. This is not only evident by the verses cited, but also by Rev 20:11-15, which shows that the basis of condemnation is not what is found in the books of works, but what is not found in the Book of Life. Anyone found not written in the Book of Life is condemned. Anyone found there is not condemned. Condemnation is not based on sins, but lack of life.

The Lord Jesus plainly told Nicodemus: "He who believes in Him [God's Son] is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, *because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God*" (John 3:18, emphasis added). Jesus pointed to unbelief, not sinfulness, as the basis for condemnation.

Many mistakenly think that would mean that the unbeliever has every benefit of the blood of Christ. However, John the Baptist never said that and neither did the Lord or His apostles. There are some benefits of the cross that only believers receive, and indeed some that only godly believers receive.

(It should be noted that *the blood of Christ* is not specifically mentioned in this regard. However, propitiation and taking away sins clearly occurred on the cross because He shed His blood.)

**UNRESTRICTED:
PRAYER MADE POSSIBLE BY THE BLOOD
OF CHRIST
(HEBREWS 10:19)**

The author of Hebrews says, "Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus...let us draw near with a true heart..." (Heb 10:19, 22). In the OT only the High Priest could enter the Holy of Holies, and he only once a year. Because of the cross and the tearing of the veil between the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies (cf. Matt 27:51), access to the presence of God is open to all people now, 24/7/365.

Though Bailey Smith famously claimed that God does not hear the prayers of unbelieving Jews, the truth is, God hears the prayers of anyone who sincerely prays to Him. While an unbeliever is not likely to have the boldness spoken of in Heb 10:19, he can nonetheless pray and be heard by God because the blood of Jesus has opened that access even for the unbeliever.

Cornelius in Acts 10 is a case in point. Though he was not yet born again (cf. Acts 10:44; Acts 11:14), his prayer was heard by God (Acts 10:4, 31). God even sent an angel to him to tell him to send to Joppa for Simon Peter who would come and tell him and his household the words by which they would be saved (cf. Acts 10:3-4; 11:13-14).

The blood of Christ makes prayer possible. (Of course, before the cross the promise of the blood of Christ is what made prayer possible.)

**RESTRICTED TO BELIEVERS ONLY:
POSITIONAL FORGIVENESS
(COLOSSIANS 1:14; 2:13)**

Anyone who knows the Bible even a little knows that fellowship forgiveness is only for those believers who confess their sins (1 John 1:9). More on that in a moment. However, it is equally true that all believers have positional forgiveness. Paul said that Jesus has "forgiven you all trespasses"

(Col 2:13). How did He do that? Paul said He did so by wiping out that which was written against us by nailing it to the cross (Col 2:14).

Clearly that is not true of the unbeliever. The unbeliever does not have positional forgiveness. That benefit of the blood of Christ applies to all believers, but only believers.

RESTRICTED TO BELIEVERS ONLY: BELIEVERS ARE NOT IN THEIR SINS (JOHN 8:24)

Jesus told an unbelieving crowd, “If you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins” (John 8:24). Many have wrongly concluded from this that the blood of Christ doesn’t apply to the unbeliever in any way. But that is not what the Lord says. He says that when an unbeliever dies, he dies “in his sins.”

What does it mean to die in your sins? It doesn’t mean one is eternally condemned or that he experiences the second death *because of his sins*. It does mean that the unbeliever eternally remains a sinner.

While even though born-again people sin (1 John 1:8, 10), it is not correct to say that believers are “in their sins.” To be in one’s sins suggests that one is still enslaved to sin. See Romans 6. There Paul says that the believer “has been freed from sin” and that he is *a slave of righteousness* (Rom 6:7; 18).

Unbelievers are slaves of sin and remain in that state even after death, though it is not likely God will allow sinful actions to occur at that time. After all, it is possible to run a prison in such a way that no crimes can be committed. However, unbelievers likely will forever have a desire to sin. Indeed, part of the torment of the lake of fire may be the inability of the unbeliever to be able to fulfill his sinful desires.

Note: Compare Paul’s use of a similar expression (“in trespasses and sins”) in Eph 2:1, 5. Paul speaks of the Ephesians before their new birth as those “who were dead in trespasses and sins.” He doesn’t say that they were dead *because of* trespasses and sins. The readers in Ephesus before their new

birth were in their sins in the sense that they were slaves of sin. The phrase *in trespasses and sins* states the sphere in which the spiritually-dead Ephesians lived.

RESTRICTED TO BELIEVERS ONLY: PAST SANCTIFICATION (HEBREWS 10:29)

According to the author of Hebrews, if his Jewish readers were to return to animal sacrifices as a means to dealing with their sins, then they would be counting “the blood of the covenant by which they were sanctified a common thing” (Heb 10:29). This reiterates the same truth taught earlier in the chapter, “By that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all” (Heb 10:10). This past tense sanctification refers to the fact that believers *have been set apart once for all into God's family and kingdom*.

Unbelievers have not been sanctified by the blood of Jesus. They must believe in order to experience this type of sanctification, which is something that occurs at the moment of regeneration and justification.

RESTRICTED TO BELIEVERS ONLY: PEACE WITH GOD (EPHESIANS 2:13; COLOSSIANS 1:20)

In Ephesians 2 Paul reminds the believers in Ephesus that they were once aliens, “having no hope and without God in the world” (Eph 2:12). He then adds, “But now in Christ Jesus you who were once far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ” (Eph 2:13).

This seems to be linked to the peace mentioned in Col 1:20-21, which is specifically said by Paul to be “through the blood of His cross.”

See also Rom 5:1, “Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” While the blood of Christ is not mentioned in that verse, it is specified in the context (cf. Rom 3:25; 5:9). Indeed,

a few verses later Paul says that we have been *justified by His blood* (Rom 5:9). Peace with God and justification are by means of the blood of Christ. Without His shed blood, we would not be justified and we would not have peace with God.

This peace is, of course, positional. A believer may or may not live peacefully with God. This moves us to an even more restricted benefit of the blood of Christ, one that is only true of believers who walk in the light and confess their sins.

RESTRICTED TO BELIEVERS IN FELLOWSHIP: ONGOING CLEANING OF THEIR SINS (1 JOHN 1:7)

Most well grounded believers know the truth of 1 John 1:9. They know that only if they confess their sins does God forgive the sins they confess as well cleanse them from all unrighteousness (which includes all the unknown sins). However, many are not aware of the truth found two verses earlier upon which 1:9 depends.

John says that “If we walk in the light...[then] the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin” (1 John 1:7). Here is a benefit of the blood of Christ which is not only not for the unbeliever, but it isn’t even for all believers. This benefit of the blood of Christ is only for believers who are walking in the light. As Zane Hodges said in his commentary on First John, “To walk in the light must mean essentially to live in God’s presence, exposed to what He has revealed about Himself. This, of course, is done through openness in prayer and through openness to the Word of God in which He is revealed” (p. 61).

First John 1:9 would be a lie apart from the blood of Christ. Confession of sins has no power apart from the blood of the Savior. Calvary makes confession effective.

Of course confession is only effective for the one walking in the light. The person who is walking in the darkness may acknowledge something he has done as wrong, but if he si-

multaneously plans to go right on doing it, then he is not walking in the light.

RESTRICTED TO BELIEVERS IN FELLOWSHIP: OVERCOMING BY HIS BLOOD (REVELATION 12:11)

In Free Grace theology we have a high regard for being an overcomer. The believer who overcomes in this life is the one who will rule with Christ in the life to come.

But overcoming is only possible because of the blood of Christ: "And they overcame him [Satan] by the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death" (Rev 12:11). If Jesus had not shed His blood on the cross, then there would be no possibility of being an overcomer.

However, not all believers are overcomers as the seven letters of Revelation 2-3 make clear. The blood of Christ makes overcoming possible, but it does not guarantee it.

Only believers walking in the light actually do overcome by means of the blood of Christ.

SUMMARY: WHO BENEFITS FROM CHRIST'S BLOOD?

The question "Who benefits from Christ's blood?" is really tricky. We may want to rush in and say, "Everyone benefits from the death of Christ. He died for the sins of the whole world." Or we might be tempted to say, "Well, everyone *potentially* benefits from His death, but in actuality it isn't until a person believes in Jesus that he benefits." Neither of those answers is adequate or true.

Unbelievers benefit from the blood of Christ. They are able to have eternal life without having to deal with their sins at all. They don't need to turn from their sins to be born again (though by repenting an unbeliever might become more open to the promise of life). They don't need to be sorry for their sins. They don't need to confess their sins. They don't need to

lessen the amount of sins they commit. They merely need to believe in Jesus to be born again. He removed the sin barrier.

Believers and even unbelievers are able to be heard by God when they pray due to the blood of Christ.

All believers have positional forgiveness because of the cross. God sees the eternal part of the believer, the born-of-God self, as sinless and completely forgiven.

Because of the shed blood of Christ, believers are no longer in their sins. The blood of Christ sets all believers free from slavery to sin (positionally).

Believers have peace with God and believers are justified by means of the blood of the Christ.

All believers have experienced past sanctification as a result of Christ's atoning work at Calvary. That is, all believers have been set apart from the rest of humanity. They have been placed into the family and kingdom of God.

But only some believers benefit from the blood of Christ in terms of fellowship forgiveness and walking in fellowship with God. A person may well be born again and yet walking in darkness. Believers may be out of fellowship with God, not enjoying one of the major benefits of the cross.

While all believers are capable of being victorious Christians because of the blood of Christ, that is not to say that all Christians do overcome. The blood of Christ makes overcoming possible. But only believers who walk in the light of God's Word actually do overcome.

When you sing about the blood of Christ and think about it when drinking the cup in the Lord's Supper, I hope you aren't simply thinking about the fact that His blood made it possible for you to have eternal life. That is a glorious truth. But the blood of Christ has more impact in our lives than that. I hope you also think about positional forgiveness, fellowship forgiveness, no longer being a slave of sin, and the possibility of prayer and overcoming.

I've not even covered all the benefits of the cross here. There are many more. This would be a great topic for a thesis, dissertation, or book. It is surely something upon which we should meditate our whole lives. The more we live in light of His shed blood for us, the more we will please Him.