

THEISM

God Forgives

When God created Adam and Eve, He placed them in a garden eastward in Eden. There He provided for their every need. He made every tree to grow that was “pleasant to the sight and good for food” (Genesis 2:9). “A river went out of Eden to water the garden” (Genesis 2:10). Apparently He wanted human fellowship and association, for “they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day” (Genesis 3:8). But they hid themselves because they had disobeyed God. They had eaten of the tree of knowledge of good and evil that was in the garden of which God had specifically said “you shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die” (Genesis 3:3). Therefore the sentence of death was upon them and also upon all of mankind for “in Adam all die” (1 Corinthians 15:22). “Through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned” (Romans 5:12; see also Romans 3:10, 23). Moreover, the sin of Adam and Eve separated them from God (e.g. Isaiah 59:2) for they were removed from the garden. They had offended God and could therefore no longer enjoy a close association with God. But God did not want death and separation to end the matter. God wanted to forgive.

Forgiveness is a part of God’s nature. David declared that God is good, “ready to forgive, and abundant in mercy to all” who call upon Him (Psalm 86:5). God’s forgiveness is extensive. “As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us” (Psalm 103:12). Through Jeremiah God said that under a new covenant “I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more” (Jeremiah 31:34; Hebrews 8:12; 10:17). God does not limit his forgiveness, and neither should we. When Peter asked Jesus how often he should forgive his brother and proposed a possible limit of seven times, Jesus said, “I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven” (Matthew 18:22), i.e., the number is unlimited.

Forgiveness is a gracious act which allows estranged persons to be reconciled to each other. Feelings of guilt that burden wrong-doers can be overcome by forgiveness. Forgiveness requires that persons offended release offenders from accountability for wrong-doing. Ideally, forgiveness is to forever forget the wrong-doing of others in order to restore previous relationships. But *forgiveness is conditional*.

God’s forgiveness is conditional upon people demonstrating obedience, recognizing God’s blessings, and acting on the belief that God will reward those who trust him (Hebrews 11:6). Believing the Serpent’s lie, Eve ate the forbidden fruit and thereby offended God by indicating that she thought that God did not want them to be wise and that He was not to be believed when He told them that disobedience would result in death (Genesis 3:4-6). Moreover, disobedience by Adam and Eve resulted from the facts that they apparently did not appreciate God’s goodness in providing their livelihood and that they did not trust God.

God’s forgiveness is conditional upon restitution. Restitution toward God requires not only a demonstration of trust, obedience, and thankfulness, but also that somehow the penalty of death, required by God’s law, be paid. During Old Testament times, sacrifices were offered for various purposes, such as sin offerings (Job 1:5; Exodus 29, 30; Leviticus 4, etc.) or thank offerings (Leviticus 7:12-13; 15; 22:29; 2 Chronicles 29:31; 33:16). Sacrifices ceremonially generally demonstrate obedience, gratitude and trust, although the purpose of a particular person’s sacrifice is not always specified in scripture. Ideally, whenever people sacrificed, they gladly offered the best of their possessions to God because they believed that He would reward

them for their offerings (Hebrews 11:6). Sacrificial offerings in themselves, however, did not indicate that those who offered were obedient, thankful or trusting. Whenever offerings were not accompanied by personal or national heartfelt obedience, gratitude, or faith, God was not pleased and rebuked the people (Genesis 4:6-7, 9-11; Isaiah 1:10-20; Micah 6:4-6; Jeremiah 7:1-26; Malachi 1:7-14). Moreover, “the blood of bulls and goats cannot take away sins” (Hebrews 10:4). Before the Christian era, God in His forbearance “had passed over the sins that were previously committed” (Romans 3:25; Acts 17:30). But now in Christ who “died for our sins” (1 Corinthians 15:3) “we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace” (Ephesians 1:7). Restitution to God is achieved not by one’s own works, but through faith in Christ and by God’s grace (Ephesians 2:8-9).

God’s forgiveness is conditional upon people repenting, both nationally and individually. When ancient Israel turned away from God, God said that “if My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land” (2 Chronicles 7:14). Through Jeremiah, God said that “it may be that the house of Judah will hear all the adversities which I purpose to bring upon them, that everyone may turn from his evil way, that I may forgive their iniquity and their sin” (Jeremiah 36:3). Prior to Jesus’ ministry, John the Baptist came “preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins” (Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3). Jesus informed his apostles “that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. (Luke 24:47). The apostles preached that repentance is essential for the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38; 5:31).

God’s forgiveness is conditional upon people confessing their sins. “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). “He who covers his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy” (Proverbs 28:13). We must acknowledge our sins (Jeremiah 3:13; 14:20; Hosea 5:15) to whomever we have wronged, whether God or man (James 5:16).

God’s forgiveness is conditional upon people forgiving others. Jesus’ model prayer included the petition that God “forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors” (Matthew 6:12; see also Luke 11:4). He emphasized that “if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses” (Matthew 6:14-15). Jesus’ told a parable about a servant who was forgiven a debt by his master, but who later refused to forgive a debt of a fellow servant. His master was grieved because he had not forgiven his fellow servant. The master therefore revoked his forgiveness. Then Jesus said, “so My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses” (Matthew 18:35; see also Mark 11:25-26). For worship to be acceptable to God, estranged brethren must be reconciled to each other (Matthew 5:23-24). Moreover, “if your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him” (Luke 17:3). God wants us to “be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you” (Ephesians 4:32; see also Colossians 3:13).

When these conditions have been met then the separation of man from God at the Garden of Eden is overcome by God’s forgiveness. God’s forgiveness produces reconciliation and establishes eternal life through Christ Jesus. Mankind man is thereby restored to eternal fellowship with God in the heavenly realm (Revelation 22:1-5).