

SESSION 3

▶ The Picture of Forgiveness

In Focus:

God's plan has always included forgiveness for His people.



LOOK AT OUR WORLD

Before the curtain opened, I noticed a young family sitting together. The dad was looking at his iPhone, which he oriented horizontally and slightly elevated above his knees. As he shifted in his seat, I was able to see what he was doing. He was watching a football game.

When the play began, he put away his phone and appeared to be fully present, but I suspect what brought him there that night was love for his family, not love for the theatre. I get it. My wife and I go several times a year because she loves the theatre and I love her. It's not that I don't like plays; my problem is that I cannot always connect how the songs and dance relate to the story.

Recently, my wife solved the problem for me. She suggested we watch a movie that was based on the same book as the upcoming play she had selected. It worked. Even though there were differences between them, because I had seen the motion picture, I could follow what was happening in the play. Sometimes, we need a picture to understand what we need to be taught. Thankfully, God gave us a beautiful one in this passage.



► ***How do you most often learn difficult lessons?***

God provides a way for our sins to be forgiven.

Leviticus 16:6-10

⁶ “Aaron will present the bull for his sin offering and make atonement for himself and his household. ⁷ Next he will take the two goats and place them before the LORD at the entrance to the tent of meeting. ⁸ After Aaron casts lots for the two goats, one lot for the LORD and the other for an uninhabitable place, ⁹ he is to present the goat chosen by lot for the LORD and sacrifice it as a sin offering. ¹⁰ But the goat chosen by lot for an uninhabitable place is to be presented alive before the LORD to make atonement with it by sending it into the wilderness for an uninhabitable place.

Long before Jesus died on the cross to pay the price for our sin, God instituted a Day of Atonement where priests offered sacrifices for their sins and the sins of the people. The Day of Atonement includes several pictures that are helpful for

understanding what happened on the cross and why the cross was necessary. Like watching a movie and a live show, there are similarities and differences. Sometimes the similarities shed light; other times it is the differences that are most helpful. But collectively, they provide a clear picture of forgiveness.

The details of the Day of Atonement provide an explanation of the necessity of a blood sacrifice for the forgiveness of sin (Heb. 9:22), foreshadowing that Jesus would be the perfect sacrifice who obtained eternal redemption for His people. The writer of Hebrews made it clear that Jesus's sacrifice was different from the Day of Atonement and was superior in every respect. It was not the blood of an imperfect animal offered once a year; Jesus offered His own blood.

Before He went to the cross, Jesus knew the kind of death He would die. In the upper room, He told His disciples that He would shed His blood (Matt. 26:1-29). Jesus knew the necessity of shedding His blood so that God could forgive.

Whenever the church celebrates the Lord's Supper, it uses two elements: bread, which commemorates Jesus's broken body (v. 26), and the fruit of the vine, which represents the shedding of His blood (v. 28). When Jesus instituted this ordinance, He knew that He would offer His own blood to atone for the people's sin.

Jesus's sacrifice was "once for all time," negating the need for future sacrifices (Heb. 9:12). Jesus's sacrifice was complete. Jesus was the perfect sacrifice, "without blemish," offered to God for the sins of the people (v. 14).

Not only was Jesus the perfect sacrifice, but unlike Aaron, He was the perfect High Priest. On the Day of Atonement, Aaron would offer a sin offering for himself in preparation for presenting a sin offering for the people (Lev. 16:6-9). Aaron needed to do this before he could offer a sin offering for the people, because like everyone else, he and the other priests were sinners (Ps. 53:3).

As Moses received the Ten Commandments from the hand of God, Aaron led the people into a great sin in creating the golden calf to worship (Ex. 32:1-21). Moses was furious with Aaron and wanted an explanation. Aaron's version of the story was that he had collected the people's gold, threw it into the fire, and the calf came out of the fire (v. 24). No confession. No repentance. Just a ridiculous story to cover up his culpability.

The next day, Moses told the people they had committed a great sin and that he was going back on the mountain to see the Lord—to see if perhaps he could make atonement for their sin (Ex. 34). Moses did not put his hope in the law; even when he was given the law, Moses understood that atonement was necessary.

In sharp contrast to Aaron and the entire priesthood, Jesus was the perfect High Priest and had no need to purify Himself before He offered a sacrifice—He was already completely pure and entirely holy (Heb. 4:14-15).

God provided a way for our sins to be forgiven. This was God's good and perfect plan from eternity—even before God created the heavens and earth (Gen. 1:1) and Adam and Eve (v. 27). He had determined that He would redeem His people from their sin by sending Jesus to shed His blood on the cross (Rev. 13:8).

On the Day of Atonement, after purifying himself, Aaron was to select two goats. He would offer one goat as a blood sacrifice to atone for the people's sin and release the other in the desert after a ceremonial transfer of the people's sin onto it. Both offer a beautiful picture that points to what Jesus would do for His people on the cross.

► ***What do you appreciate about this Old Testament example?***

► ***What comparisons can you draw from the New Testament fulfillment?***

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God requires a sacrifice for our sins to be forgiven.

Leviticus 16:15-19

¹⁵ “When he slaughters the male goat for the people’s sin offering and brings its blood inside the curtain, he will do the same with its blood as he did with the bull’s blood: He is to sprinkle it against the mercy seat and in front of it. ¹⁶ He will make atonement for the most holy place in this way for all their sins because of the Israelites’ impurities and rebellious acts. He will do the same for the tent of meeting that remains among them, because it is surrounded by their impurities. ¹⁷ No one may be in the tent of meeting from the time he enters to make atonement in the most holy place until he leaves after he has made atonement for himself, his household, and the whole assembly of Israel. ¹⁸ Then he will go out to the altar that is before the LORD and make atonement for it. He is to take some of the bull’s blood and some of the goat’s blood and put it on the horns on all sides of the altar. ¹⁹ He is to sprinkle some of the blood on it with his finger seven times to cleanse and set it apart from the Israelites’ impurities.

The Day of Atonement was not an ordinary day for the high priest, and the room behind the curtain was not an ordinary room—something Aaron was painfully aware of. He had just lost his sons Nadab and Abihu, who entered it in disobedience, resulting in their deaths (Lev. 10:1-2).

God instructed Moses to tell Aaron that entering the most holy place on the wrong day or in the wrong way would cost him his life. You see, the room he entered on the Day of Atonement was not an ordinary room. God’s holy presence appeared “in the cloud above the mercy seat” (16:2).

The mercy seat was a golden cover to the ark of the covenant, which contained the Ten Commandments written on stone tablets, Aaron’s rod, and a container of manna. The ark was a symbol of God’s covenantal relationship with His people.

Aaron could only enter the room on the Day of Atonement and would only approach after putting on holy garments, with everything necessary to offer a sacrifice for his sin and the sins of his household (vv. 3-6).

After offering the bull as a sacrifice for his sin, he took coals from the altar in the outer court of the tabernacle to burn

incense, creating a cloud over the mercy seat (vv. 12-13). If Aaron did not follow these instructions, he would die (v. 13).

After Aaron offered a sacrifice for his sin (v. 11), he offered a sacrifice for the sins of the people by sprinkling some of the blood of the sacrificial male goat “against the mercy seat and in front of it” (v. 15). He then returned to the altar where he got the coal that he had used to light the incense and sprinkled blood on the horns and the sides of the altar seven times (vv. 18-19).

Sin results in death (Gen. 2:16-17). The Day of Atonement is a picture that reminds us that God requires a sacrifice before He forgives our sins. Aaron shed the blood of the animals on the Day of Atonement, which is a picture of a substitutionary atonement for the people’s sin.

At the heart of the Hebrew word translated “atonement” is the idea of erasing or covering the sin. The sacrifice on the Day of Atonement covered over the people’s sin. Not in the way Aaron tried to cover up the sin he committed when he led the people to create the golden calf. Instead of confessing his sin and turning from it, he told Moses that he had thrown gold into a fire and the calf had just come out. Atonement is not deception that would continue to conceal existing sin. Atonement destroys sin—it removes sins’ guilt and penalty.

Jesus is the atoning sacrifice that covers our sins. First John 2:2 says, “He himself is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours, but also for those of the whole world.”

In stark contrast with covering something up as we think of it, atonement brings the sin to the foreground. The act of bringing a sacrifice was an acknowledgment of sin. By presenting the sacrifice, Aaron acknowledged his own sin and the sin of the people. These sacrifices covered over and removed the sin so that it would no longer symbolically stand between them and God. Picture waves beating on the shore and covering over all the footprints in the sand, leaving behind a pristine beach. Jesus’s atonement likewise causes our sins no longer to be seen by God.

The second goat used on the Day of Atonement further amplifies the idea of removing sin. Yes, atonement covers our sin, but it also takes it away.

► ***How would you describe the high priest’s role in the Day of Atonement ceremony?***

► ***Why was the shedding of blood so important for providing atonement for sins?***

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ENGAGE

Remembering



1. What kinds of things pictured above most cause you to think of God's forgiveness?

2. How can you use these symbols or others to share with those around you about God's forgiveness?

When God forgives our sins, He takes them away.

Leviticus 16:20-22

²⁰ “When he has finished making atonement for the most holy place, the tent of meeting, and the altar, he is to present the live male goat. ²¹ Aaron will lay both his hands on the head of the live goat and confess over it all the Israelites’ iniquities and rebellious acts—all their sins. He is to put them on the goat’s head and send it away into the wilderness by the man appointed for the task. ²² The goat will carry all their iniquities into a desolate land, and the man will release it there.

On the Day of Atonement, after making sacrifices for his sin and the sin of the people, Aaron took the second goat and prepared to release it into the wilderness.

While it is true that the act of offering a sacrifice was an admission of sin, Aaron was specific about the people’s sins. Leviticus 16:21 contains all three

Hebrew words for sin. This was a complete, exhaustive confession of sin.

Aaron confessed all the wicked, rebellious acts of the people, all their sins, transferring the sins of the people to the goat. He called out all their sins, leaving nothing out.

On other days, with other sacrifices, Aaron put a single hand on the animal (1:4; 3:2-13; 4:4; 4:24-33), but on the Day of Atonement, Aaron was to put both of his hands on the head of the goat, intensifying the ceremony.

After Aaron transferred the sins of the people to the goat, he led it away from the community into the wilderness, taking the sins away from the people. When God forgives our sins, He takes them away and separates them from us “as far as the east is from the west” (Ps. 103:12).

Confession of sin was an important part of the Day of Atonement. There is a connection between our confession of sin and God’s mercy (Prov. 28:13).

Unlike the sacrificial goat, no one knows if the goat sent away to the wilderness lived or died. What is certain though is that neither of these animals chose their roles. They did not choose to be a substitute for others.

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Jesus fulfilled both roles of the sacrificial goat and the scapegoat. He covered over our sin and took our sin upon Himself (Isa. 53:4-6) and carried it away. There are many similarities between the Day of Atonement and Jesus's substitutionary atonement on Calvary; however, there are some differences also. Unlike the goats selected by Aaron, God the Father did not force Jesus's role on Him. The Son chose to die to atone for our sins.

Jesus's death on the cross was an intentional act of obedience (Luke 22:42). He chose to die so those who believed in Him could experience eternal life.

Some have given their lives for others, though there is not always a way to know if they did so intentionally. While on vacation in Florida, Gareth Griffith decided to try sky diving. He was jumping in tandem with Michael Costello, an experienced instructor.

Something went wrong.

The main chute failed to open. No big deal; they had a backup chute. When the backup also failed, the two men went into a violent spin as they plummeted to their doom. The instructor corrected the spin and regained control of the fall. Griffith was on the bottom and the instructor was on top.

As they neared the ground, the instructor, folded his arms and legs, causing the pair to rotate, in doing so, the instructor hit the ground first, cushioning his student's blow.

Griffith, the student, survived. Costello, the instructor, did not.

An eyewitness said that he thought it was an intentional act. From what he saw, Costello gave his life for Griffith. Though she was not there, Costello's widow said she believed her husband had intentionally saved his student's life. Several members of Griffith's family expressed their gratitude for Costello, acknowledging that he had protected their loved one.

No one except Costello could possibly know what he was thinking, and he did not live to be able to talk about it.¹

Jesus certainly knew what He was doing. He went to the cross, knowing He would take on the sins of the world—even though He never sinned, He would become sin (2 Cor. 5:21), and experience the full wrath of God as God punished sin. Jesus knew the price He would have to pay to atone for our sin, and He did it anyway. What a picture of forgiveness for you and me!

► ***What was significant about releasing the goat into the wilderness away from the people?***

► ***In what ways was Jesus's death like both the sacrificial goat and the scapegoat?***

LIVE IT OUT

What is your response to this sacrificial picture of forgiveness? Choose one or more of the following applications:

VIEW OF GOD

Consider who Jesus is and what He did for you. If you are a believer, take time to thank Jesus for His supreme sacrifice for your sin.

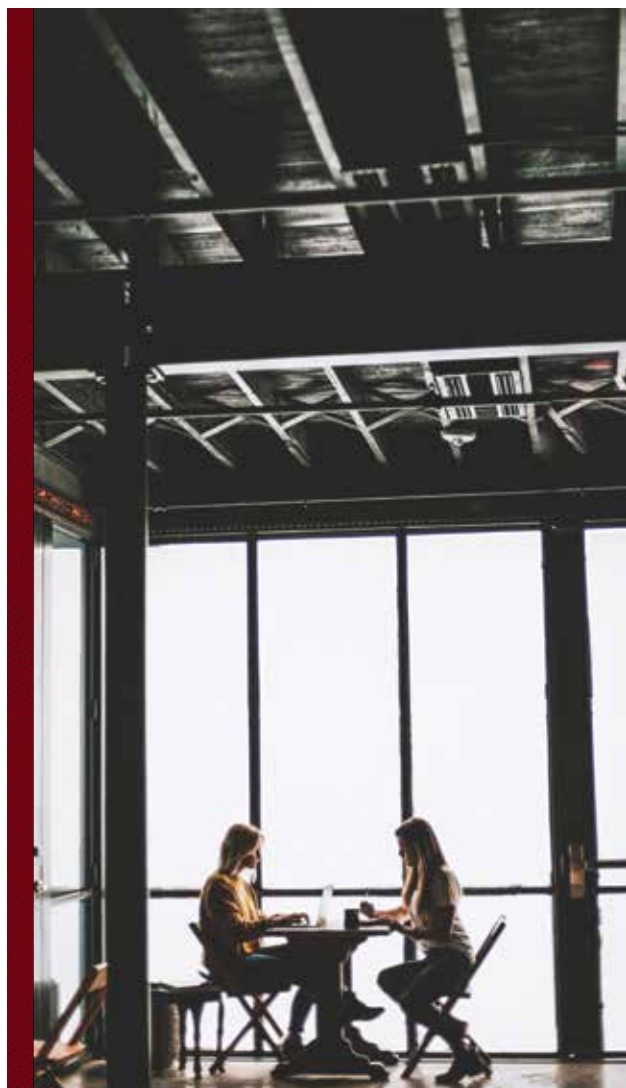
VIEW OF SELF

If you have never confessed Jesus as your Lord, today you can confess your sin to Him, acknowledge that you believe that He rose from the grave after He died on the cross, and confess Him as your Lord. There's more help in making this decision on the inside cover of this book.

VIEW OF OTHERS

Tell someone else about the forgiveness you have received and how they, too, can know Jesus as their Savior and Lord.

1. "Skydiver Makes Ultimate Sacrifice: Instructor Dies Saving His Student,"
Herald Scotland, accessed January 16, 2026, <https://www.heraldsotland.com>.



REMEMBER

"According to the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness." Hebrews 9:22

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Our Eternal Adoption: Living in the Father's Love

by Jeremy Linneman

Some years ago my sister and her husband went through the long, difficult, and expensive process of adoption. Anthony was born into a difficult environment in a different part of town. My sister and her husband had been wanting to adopt for years, and it was quite the process. They worked with an agency, they did home studies, they saved money, and they filled out paperwork. Finally, they welcomed Anthony into their home as foster parents.

After years as Anthony's foster parents, the process was completed, and they went to the courthouse together. At long last the judge declared Anthony to legally belong to Drew and Sarah and banged his gavel. It was finished. It was official. It was forever. A child in need now had a safe, loving home.

There are few things as emotionally moving as adoption. The sheer thought of adoption nearly brings tears to my eyes. Have you ever seen one of those online videos where a child discovers she's been adopted? Picture it: A young child is sitting with her foster parents, and they give her a gift to open. She opens it up. It's framed paperwork.

"What does it say?" she asks.

It's an adoption certificate. "It says you belong to us now."

The girl bursts into tears. She reaches for them, and they embrace her, and they won't let one another go.

Here's the thing about adoption: It's objective; it's definitive; it's legally binding; it's forever. And yet it is far more than a legal transaction. It represents something beautiful. Though there is certainly loss and complication involved, a child in need now has security, protection, and affection.

If anything has ever been good news, it's adoption. A child now has a home. An infant now has a father and mother. The heartache of a lonely tot is replaced with the peace and security of a loving family.



Knowing God as Father

Many people struggle to approach God as Father and understandably so. Many folks I sit with have only known “father” to be a hurtful person or complicated relationship. What does it mean that God is our

heavenly Father? It means we are adopted by a loving Father into an eternal family of divine love!

Adoption is one of the most important and beautiful elements of the gospel. It reveals God's heart and unlocks the Scriptures for us in a way nothing else does. Spiritual adoption is the truth that God makes us His own sons and daughters when He saves us through the work of His Son, Jesus. He doesn't have to make us sons and daughters. It would be enough to make us part of His kingdom, as citizens or servants.

The truth is that God doesn't need slaves or servants or citizens. He doesn't need anything. But He wants something. He wants children.

The theologian J.I. Packer said in his book *Knowing God* that if you want to know how well a person understands Christianity, “find out how much he makes of the thought of being God's child, and having God as his Father. If this is not the thought that prompts and controls his worship and prayers and his whole outlook on life, it means that he does not understand Christianity very well at all.”¹

Adoption is the story of your life as well. You were a spiritual orphan, homeless and hopeless in a dangerous world. But God put in the work, took the steps to do it legally, and then bent down and picked you up into His arms. As the apostle Paul put it, “All those led by God's Spirit are God's sons. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear. Instead, you received the Spirit of adoption, by whom we cry out, ‘Abba, Father!’” (Rom. 8:14-15).

**Adoption
is one of
the most
important
and beautiful
elements of
the gospel.**

Adoption is not just salvation from something; it's also salvation for something. We are saved from our old broken ways of life. And we are saved for a vibrant life with God, as children in His royal family. Further, we're given the Holy Spirit, who brings about our adoption and testifies that it's official. We can now cry out this phrase: "Abba, Father."

Living as a Beloved Child

This, my friends, is how we need to picture Christianity. It's not about following the rules. It's not about fitting into a group of people.

It's not even primarily about believing the right things. It's about being children of God. Everything else flows downstream from being adopted by a gracious and compassionate Father.

The challenge, then, is believing this. The apostle Paul prayed that we might have all the spiritual strength of God—all the almighty, eternal power of God—for this one thing, to know the love of Christ. (See Eph. 3:14-21.) It takes a mighty work of God to get His love deep within us.

The greatest challenge in the Christian life is getting the love of the Father into our hearts. We might mentally assent to God's love. We might know all the verses and creeds affirming it. But are we really living in His love? Has the love of God become the air we breathe and the water we drink?

As Paul wrote in Romans 5:5, "God's love has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us." What a life-changing verse! The Father wants to pour His love into your heart through the Holy Spirit. He longs to do this in you.

Think about the difference between being an orphan and being an adopted, beloved child. The orphan is insecure; life is full of dangers for him. But the adopted child has the strength of her father and mother and extended family. The orphan must do everything for himself—nothing good happens unless he makes it happen. But the beloved child already has everything she needs. She doesn't live for love; she lives from it.

Jesus has done this for you. He has laid down His life for you. The Father now waits for you to return to Him. Your primary identity as a Christian is not a citizen or a servant. He doesn't need citizens and servants. He wants children. He wants you. Will you run to Him, receive His embrace, and enjoy life as an adopted, beloved child of God?

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1. J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1973), 182.
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