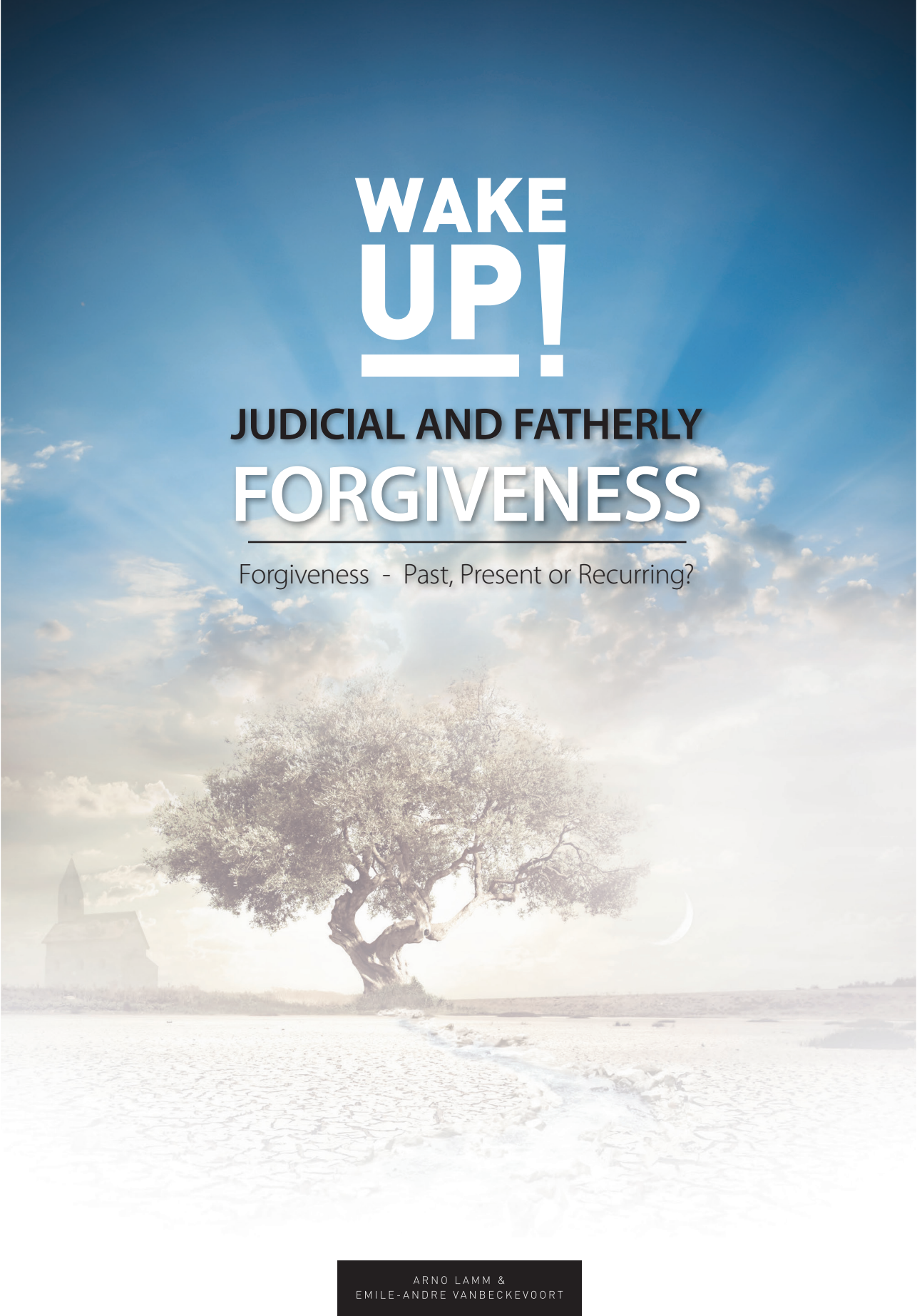




WAKE UP!

JUDICIAL AND FATHERLY FORGIVENESS

Forgiveness - Past, Present or Recurring?

**WAKE
UP!**

JUDICIAL AND FATHERLY
FORGIVENESS

March 2017

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This document is an attachment to the book *Wake Up! God's Prophetic Calendar* in Timelines and Feasts. It should therefore be studied together with the book, since this document contains many references to subjects covered there.

For more information see: www.wakeup.community

For Bible references the translator has used the New King James Bible throughout this document, unless mentioned otherwise.

**"If the Bible is simply a book of myths,
fairy tales and stories, then it is disturbingly accurate
in what we see unfolding in our current world climate."**

PETER HERBERT

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JUDICIAL AND FATHERLY FORGIVENESS

Forgiveness - Past, Present or Recurring?



Forgiveness - Past, Present or Recurring?

Wake Up! readers are part of a varied group of believers from different denominations with different frameworks of thought. This is the reason we pay a great deal of attention to theological convictions that can help us understand the Bible, but we also realize that other convictions can seriously interfere with a correct understanding. During conversations about *Wake Up!*, we often hear people asking questions about why we still have to ask for forgiveness of sins after we have been born again? A world of theological convictions lies behind this question. For this reason, forgiveness is the subject of this study; we would like to examine the question:

Is forgiveness given once and for all or do we still need to ask for forgiveness whenever we sin?

Let us first realize that this question was not asked for many centuries, since biblical believers used to always assume that their relationship with God could be damaged by their behavior or heart attitude, but that God Himself could restore that relationship after they confessed their sins with repentance. However, nowadays some Christian perspectives disagree with this idea. There are even groups of believers who claim that asking for forgiveness is actually an expression of unbelief; why still ask for forgiveness if we have already received it? These groups claim that Christians are forgiven in advance for all sins they ever commit after they have been redeemed, without them having to repent or confess their sins ever again. In this type of scenario, Christ no longer fulfils the role of Mediator for our sins. They believe that while humanity seemed indeed to be irreparably damaged, that sad position was reversed and after conversion the relationship between God and the believer became permanently and irreversibly restored. Unfortunately, we often hear or read that opinion¹. It does not draw believers closer to God and it allows that their sinful or indifferent behavior continues, especially because believers no longer see the necessity to renew their minds or change their walk of life.² The thought behind this (incorrect) perspective is that we are no longer involved because God Himself is taking care of the necessary changes in our minds and actions.

But real life has proven otherwise.

This postmodern thought, as we call it, is a sign of our times; believers of all past generations used to think differently about this subject. This postmodern

¹ Some call this the doctrine of "Hyper Grace".

² Rom. 2:12

perspective also seems to focus (solely) on the individual relationship between God and the believer, without involving the consequences of sinful behavior towards our neighbor or local congregation. This shift has clearly come into existence through the way we evaluate and interpret the Bible through our own contemporary glasses, without looking at the original context. Many values have changed over time and they have caused people to read the Bible differently. Ever more believers are (silently and sometimes unconsciously) in favor of altering biblical texts to “fit” the contemporary context. As a result, the Bible becomes less and less a solid foundation for taking part in a ‘counter-culture’, a *‘you have not so learned Christ’* way of thinking.

Further, during our conversations with other Christians, we are just as often confronted with the other side of the spectrum, believers who wonder whether they can truly count on being saved and forgiven, for these Christians constantly underline that they are not (completely) free from sin, even after their salvation. They still wonder; will they be sent back to ‘Egypt’ when they sin? These believers often experience insecurity and a lifetime filled with doubt and fear about their salvation.

We encounter these two points of view in the more traditional congregations as well as in the Evangelical/Pentecostal movement. Both groups claim to base their opinions on the Bible, or rather Bible verses.

These apparent conflicts, however, offer an excellent opportunity to better understand the depth of God’s Word and His Plan of Salvation. Nowhere does the Bible give room for contradictory explanations. Whenever we undertake a more profound study, we find insight and we discover that different points of view reflect a part of the truth, but also partly contain unbiblical beliefs. Just as it is the case with the Biblical feasts, we have to study the different Bible verses *within the context of the complete Bible*, so that our image of God is not based on a one-sided and selective reading solely influenced by the spirit of our time or our denomination.

Generally speaking, when these two points of view, and the theologies based on them, are formulated as follows, they are not reconcilable:

- ‘Once saved, always saved; once forgiven, always forgiven’. After our redemption, future sin will never come between God and us anymore. God simply doesn’t think of our sin anymore.

- Although I believe in Christ, I realize that new sins will constantly be in the way of God's forgiveness and my redemption, thus I can never be sure I am saved. In the end, even the last sin in my life can keep me from being saved.

A further study shows that these theological extremes were able to arise because groups of believers were either *one-sidedly* focusing on God as a strict Judge, or on God as a loving Father and Friend. However, those wishing to maintain a biblical Hebraic mind-set should also try to discover whether each of these relationships between God and people could have a specific place in His Word, His Plan, and His Feasts.

For both points of view, the word 'forgiveness' is an essential element in the relationship between God and the believer. However, a one-sidedly approach can only be avoided when we realize that at one point in our life, God indeed forgives us as a Judge, but that later He also forgives us as a Father. God's response is determined by the relationship the believer has with Him. A judge's relationship to an accused only relates to proof, conviction and condemnation. Outside of the court, there is no further relationship. This judicial role is completely different from the role of a Father.¹

God as Judge

In several verses, the Bible refers to God as a Judge. God is the Judge and a sinful man is brought to trial. In the Bible, the punishment for sin is death, and in fact, that is the punishment every man deserves. However, the Bible also teaches us that Jesus Christ – according to God's eternal Plan – intervened and took the punishment that was destined to be ours. Through Jesus Christ taking our place, we have been saved from the judgment of the Heavenly Judge, or to use other Biblical words, He gave His life for us, so that we could receive Life. What is the only response required of a sinful person? That he/she repents of his sin, believes and accepts that the blood of Christ Jesus has made it possible for him or her to be freed from the judgment and punishment of sin. In this courtroom, the sinner receives judicial forgiveness for all sins he/she would normally have to account for in God's Court. The Judge doesn't think of these sins anymore and the believer is set free; not because this believer deserved it, but because God's Lamb came into this world to take our punishment upon Himself, and took our place in the Court.² He is the Restorer!

¹ For this distinction, we gratefully base ourselves on what William Macdonald describes in his book *Here's the Difference, bringing important Biblical Distinctions into Focus*, 1999

² Isa. 53:5.

Do we recognize this story? Indeed, it reminds us of Pesach, which is the first Feast God appointed and in which ‘redemption’ is the central theme. God instructed the Hebraic slaves to apply the blood of the Pesach Lam to the lintel and the two doorposts. If they did that in faith and in trust, the judgment of that night would ‘pass over’ and they would be set free. In Egypt there were Hebrews who didn’t believe that the blood on the doorpost could protect them and the Jewish sages tell us that not all Hebraic slaves left Egypt for the desert. On the other hand, other inhabitants also left Egypt together with God’s people. It is important to note here: The Hebrews and the mixed multitude that left with them, were not yet in a covenant relationship with God; they had to be set free first.

Judicial Forgiveness and being set free is comparable to the situation in Egypt. It was God’s sovereign act. The judicial forgiveness that comes with this redemption doesn’t need to be given continuously. On the other side, it is certainly a necessary condition for entering into a covenant relationship. At the moment of our redemption, this judicial forgiveness is immediate, forever and complete. God sets the sinner free and the doors of court are opened again! The passing over of God’s Judgment and the start of our Salvation are closely related.

God as Father

After redemption, when a believer surrenders himself or herself to God and becomes willing to refrain from sin¹, he/she becomes a new creation. The believer becomes His Own² and there is a real start of a long-term and sustained relationship. This relationship is not one between a judge and the acquitted, as there is no (personal) relationship between two such parties. After the judicial forgiveness phase, a relationship or covenant³ between Father and child comes into place. One could also say the believer (out of free will) becomes the “freewill” slave or servant of a new Master that set him free from the old master. That covenant has the characteristics of a blood covenant, which is commemorated at the Lord’s Supper.

Such a father-child relationship does not always function perfectly, but qualitatively speaking, the God of the Bible is the perfect covenant partner, which cannot always be said of His earthly children. God accompanies those who have been freed from ‘Egypt’, who have gratefully and freely left the courtroom when the doors were opened. As we can see from looking at the history of the people of Israel, it is still

1 The image of the feast of Unleavened Bread that immediately follows after Pesach

2 The image of Firstfruits following Unleavened Bread as the third feast

3 The image of the Feast of Weeks (Pentecost) following Firstfruits as the fourth feast.

possible for things to go wrong too in this covenant relationship between Father and child. When a child of God sins, this saddens the Father and it can indeed harm the relationship. But will the Father again transform back into a Judge, and as such, punish His child? Not at all. The Father's heart is focused on that personal relationship and therefore the Bible speaks, on the one hand, of discipline,¹ which shows we are treated as sons, and of Fatherly forgiveness on the other hand, aimed at reconciliation and growth. In this kind of relationship between Father and child words such as 'judicial judgment' or 'justification' are no longer accurate, but 'reconciliation' is, because the latter is only possible when a relationship has started in an earlier stage. Admittedly, that relationship may have been damaged, but God always offers us ways to recover and reconcile.

One major question is whether this reconciliation and restoration of relationship occurs automatically. Can a believer hold a position of knowing they have sinned but not be worried because they have already been forgiven once and for always? Is it possible that the child thinks wrongdoing is not worth mentioning to the Father and that there's no need for any type (of toning) of regret? For family life on earth that would seem very unnatural and such a careless attitude is not agreeable in the relationship between the believer and God either. But God, as a Father, has always given the believer the opportunity to repent² and confess his or her sins. There is always a way back.

A child that wants to look like his Father, also wants to maintain a good relationship with him, but the opposite is also true: a child that doesn't find it necessary to correct his misbehavior (or mis-thinking) and ask for forgiveness, is a child that does not value the relationship with the Father and/or mainly puts himself at the center and basically makes a mockery of the Father. We know what generally comes of a child when it no longer feels any need to repent and reconcile. He may depart from its father's way.

Now we understand that when you become aware of the judicial aspect of forgiveness, *but then equate it with Fatherly forgiveness*, why then you simply come to the wrong conclusion that after your moment of (judicial) redemption, you will never have to ask for forgiveness again, "for we have already been justified". Basically, it doesn't matter anymore whether you live a holy life or not. Some believers take it a step further and they even think that it is God's task to make you live a holy life.

¹ Hebr. 12:5-11

² 1 Joh. 1:9, Matt. 6:9-14, Matt. 18:21-35

In quite some studies, we come across the thought that “even the sins we will commit in the future are already eradicated by God in advance.” That would be the superlative of Mercy. “Sins have been erased¹, taken away² and carried away³ and God promises not to ever think of them again⁴.” However, John says that God is faithful to forgive our sins *when we confess them*, and *that we make Him into a liar if we say that we have not sinned*. We cannot say that we have fellowship with Him, while we are walking in darkness⁵. Since there has to be a way out for that seemingly unbridgeable antithesis, it is said that in his first letter John was most likely talking to the nonbelievers. Whoever reads his letter properly though, must realize that John was earnestly talking to believers, also to them who claim that they know Him, but do not keep His commandments. Those who are not walking in truth and meanwhile say they have not sinned, make God into a liar. John urges believers to act according to what they confess. Another thought we also often hear is, “No doubt, we will keep on sinning in this life, and if that would really damage the relationship, then all of our life we would be trying to reconcile while the relationship is good anyway. Seeking reconciliation would instead offend God. How can sin stand in the way between God and us, when God says we are forgiven? If God no longer thinks of our sins, we don’t have to confess them either. It is better for us to say that we are no longer sinners”. We hope that for the reader, it is now obvious that there is a theological problem when we no longer make a distinction between Judicial and Fatherly forgiveness or when we mix them up.

At first glance, this approach of *‘once forgiven, always forgiven’* has the benefit that you indeed no longer need to feel guilty if you do things that are sin according to the Bible. However, the consequence, should you maintain this perspective, is that, slowly but surely, your conscience is hardened and, eventually, you are no longer aware that you have damaged and jeopardized your relationship with the Father. If we apply this line of thinking to the marriage relationship, we understand what happens: Would you not ask your husband or wife for forgiveness when you made a mistake? Doesn’t the Bible make it clear that the earthly marital relationship should be a shadow of the heavenly covenant between a Bride and a Bridegroom? If such lack of forgiveness is not acceptable in an earthly marriage, then why are we inclined

1 Acts 3:19

2 Rom. 11:27

3 Hebr. 9:28

4 Hebr. 10:17

5 1 John 1:5-10

to believe that the heavenly Groom would think our misbehavior (sin) isn't harmful to the relationship we have with Him? The result of such thinking is that certain discipleship characteristics, such as piety and devoutness, become less meaningful to the believer. The Bible emphasizes that we can find forgiveness with God, so that He will be feared¹, for in everything the believer is called to esteem God.

The biblical Feasts, given by God, illustrate this behavioral issue. The Feasts were given by God as a kind of dress-rehearsal. The redemption of Pesach – the reality in Christ of Passover – is followed by the Feast of Unleavened Bread. That feast prompts the redeemed believer to get rid of all sin (leaven) in their lives, because only with such a heart-attitude can a believer be ready to identify with Christ in His death, dying to self, and to walking in newness of life²; which is reflected in the next Feast, that of First Fruits³. Again, the Feast of Unleavened Bread is set between Pesach and First Fruits and reflects the need for believers to maintain continuous vigilance, to live as unleavened dough. Paul didn't say that we are unleavened dough by nature, but that we have to aim to become this. He urges us to do so because he was certain that it is both important and possible to follow that road. It should be the focus of our heart, even if we do not always succeed. Again, it becomes clear that the biblical Spring Feasts have an order. No single feast has an 'optional' meaning. The next following Feast is that of Pentecost⁴, which also has its own significance in the order of Feasts. It is the day on which the freed slaves actually made a covenant with the invisible God, Creator of Heaven and Earth and promised to obey His commandments. Pentecost is a feast to celebrate that Covenant, but it is also the feast to mark the beginning of the covenant *relationship* in which God shows Himself as a Father and as the strong One. In that relationship, forgiveness and reconciliation occur to restore the relationship when the believer recognizes and repents of sin. That restoration is entirely different from the redemption that God gives in Pesach.

Forgiveness in Relation to Pesach and the Day of Atonement

When we understand the concept of Fatherly forgiveness, we recognize another feast on God's calendar: The **Day of Atonement!** In the Wake Up! book we discuss the way this feast has a completely different meaning than Pesach. **Pesach** is the first feast on the calendar and thus necessarily focuses on redemption, on justification, which

¹ Ps. 130:4

² Rom. 6:4

³ It is not a coincidence that on the calendar this feast coincides with the Israelites walking through the Red Sea, after which the people of Hebrew slaves, in newness of life, climbed the shore at the other side of the sea.

⁴ This word comes from the Greek word pentèkost that refers to the 50th day (after Unleavened Bread). It was the day on which, at Mount Sinai, God made a covenant with the people of Israel.

could be obtained, thanks to the Lamb that took our place, even when there was not yet a covenant relationship with God. It was God's sovereign act of liberation. Christ was in no way obliged to take our place and yet He took on the punishment, because this was a loving God's eternal plan. After Passover and the cleansing and redemption of Pesach, the new believer is called to be an unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. He chooses to purge out the old leaven of sin (Unleavened Bread) and to walk after the Spirit in order to be a new creation (Firstfruits), entering into a covenant relationship with the Almighty One (Pentecost). The Day of Atonement, positioned during the autumn, is completely dedicated to reconciliation within that *existing* covenant relationship. On the Day of Atonement, the High Priest cleansed the temple in Jerusalem, reconciling the people with God. During the year the temple had been polluted by the sins the believers had brought to the temple. This was sin *within covenant relationship*. No one outside the covenant came to confess their sins in the temple. The Day of Atonement had no meaning for those who didn't have a relationship with God. Once a year, the earthly High Priest interceded for the believers in the sanctuary and this precisely mirrors that which Christ, our heavenly High Priest, is continuously doing for us now in Heaven. After all, He is *The* Intercessor! He is not a lawyer in court taking our crimes there, nor does He take our place in that courtroom any more. As the High Priest, He is the Mediator and Intercessor who continuously pleads for us and achieves reconciliation within an existing relationship that can be damaged. Because of the heavenly position of Christ as our High Priest, we no longer celebrate the Day of Atonement annually but daily, because we as believers who have the Holy Spirit abiding in us, can remain pure before God. Let us walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit, for indeed the law of the Spirit in Christ Jesus has made the believers free from the law of sin and death.¹ This way, the Old Testament shadow is given its permanent New Testament fulfillment in Christ². However, this fulfillment is accompanied by a condition: Although the blood of Christ was given 'once and for all', it only applies for us as we confess the sins that have damaged or continue to damage our relationship with the Father.

Now let's go back, just to check: those that are saying that our sins are forgiven once and for all, also have to find a theological solution for the current work that our High Priest in Heaven is doing, because the letter to the Hebrews clearly states that Yeshua is our Mediator and that He is actively working³. If we say that this "once and for all" forgive-

¹ See 1 Cor. 5:8, Rom. 8:1-2

² Although the Old Testament ritual already indicated there is a continual possibility of reconciliation in Christ.

³ Hebr. 9:24

ness applies to future sins, we automatically deny the work that our heavenly High Priest is currently doing according to this letter. Indeed, our High Priest is not doing His work for those outside the covenant, but for those who are part of the people that have entered into the covenant relationship. In other words: for those that have been justified.

To avoid confusion, we have to connect these two types of forgiveness with the correct feast *times* established by God: Judicial forgiveness can be connected to Pesach, and it implies that eternal judgment has been taken away and that there is immediate redemption from the power of sin and death, whereas Fatherly forgiveness involves the restoration of the damaged Father-child relationship, a central theme of the Day of Atonement, a day focusing on reconciliation within an *existing* covenant relationship.

Pesach / Passover	Day of Atonement
The first feast	The sixth feast
Judicial forgiveness	Fatherly forgiveness
Justification	Sanctification
Cross / doorposts ¹	High Priest in the Temple
Condition to enter into the Covenant ²	Reconciliation within the Covenant
Fulfilled by Jesus Christ ³	Work in progress, to be fulfilled when Jesus returns to earth, after having left the Heavenly temple
In remembrance	Recurring (but not annually anymore) ⁴

If we compare the meaning of Pesach and the Day of Atonement, then we have to conclude that God created two feasts for a very reason and that the one does not replace the other. They each have their own position in the order of the biblical feasts. The first feast brings the unbeliever through the Door, while the other feast gives the believer the chance to receive reconciliation *within the covenant* he/she has entered into. We can see how important this was to the people of Israel. They too

1 The shadow of the Cross was already visible in the blood on the doorposts in Egypt.

2 In the time of Pesach there was no covenant yet.

3 Therefore, it is a feast to remember for those who are free.

4 Hebr. 8: After He died and rose again, Christ entered the temple as heavenly High Priest, thus making continuous reconciliation possible for those who bring their sins to the Temple. This High Priest after the order of Melchizedek does not enter the sanctuary once a year.

could not mix nor change the order of Pesach and Day of Atonement. In fact, after the redemption of Pesach they still needed reconciliation after the mercy they had received. Because after they made a Covenant at Mount Sinai, the people transgressed and drifted away from God multiple times. Within the bond relationship God offered them the possibility to return ('tesjuvah') and to receive reconciliation after they had remorsefully repented. This applies to the today's believer as well.

Pesach is a feast of remembrance to us, but the Day of Atonement is only completely fulfilled in its function and meaning when the Heavenly High Priest comes out of the Heavenly Sanctuary at the Day of His Return, on which day the whole of Israel will be saved. When we consider the Day of Atonement to be a mere historic event, we deny its function and New Testament meaning. We then also develop an image of God (and thus a theology) that makes the necessity to confess our sins and self-examination of our lifestyle superfluous, because that would imply that believers should no longer be concerned about their sinful behavior. We then ignore the consequences of sin, apparently under the guise of the mercy of Pesach. In fact it confuses, because the believer who still sins after receiving the grace of the Pesach Lamb and has to face the consequences, is theologically deprived of the possibility to get things right with God. This believer often realizes that the road he is walking is a sinful one and chances are that at a certain point, he theologically has to ignore the consequences of those sins by (falsely) believing that "God doesn't really see them as a problem anymore." Such a believer suffers from this ambiguity in his heart, while the theology he follows wants to make him believe repentance is not necessary, because in God's eyes there is no problem whatsoever. Imagine the consequences of this situation! He himself blocks the way to reconciliation by making himself believe that there is no need for it, though in his whole being (and sometimes even physically) he feels the consequences of sinful behavior and thinking.

Once a Wake Up! reader asked whether it was truly necessary to confess our sins so that Christ as the High Priest could do His work? After all, God knows everything! That question implies that "believing" is simply defined as "knowing," while believing in fact involves a confidential relationship of the heart. The fact that God knows everything has nothing to do with our heart attitude. Then the reader asked what would happen if we would overlook a sin or forget to confess it? That question is situated on the same level and assumes that there is a formula, a way of thinking that, just as with the Greek, makes a distinction between our mind, our heart and our actions. But God looks at the heart; He knows what our heart is, not what our mind has remembered each moment of the day. God knows whether that heart is focused on Him, and in that attitude, He tests

what we confess with our mouth. So, it is not about a numerical and cold calculation of whether every sin has been confessed, but Biblical-Hebrew thinking shows us that confessing and reflecting on our sins is inextricably linked to a (heart-to-heart) relationship.

The Mixing of Two Kinds of Forgiveness

Not distinguishing the difference between Judicial justification and Fatherly reconciliation, can lead to strange statements. A preacher once said that it would sound odd if he would tell his wife he would stay faithful to her and would keep on loving her, but that he would punish her eternally if she would be unfaithful to him at any point. By saying this, the preacher wanted to point out that God doesn't think like that either. According to the Bible, that is indeed correct, but at the same time this is a totally incomplete comparison which cannot be put this way. If you do, then incorrect conclusions will follow. The preacher concluded from this very simplified example that "therefore" in this relationship between God and the believer, nothing could go wrong anymore. In fact, the preacher got caught up in the thought that he had to make a choice between the Law (= punishment) on the one hand and Mercy (= no consequences) on the other. At first sight it seems logical that a choice must be made between these two extremes, and many denominations base their image of God on that choice¹. However, the moment we involve the shadow of the Exodus and the shadow of the biblical Feasts into this matter, it becomes clear that the biblical reality is really different. God's forgiveness in Court has everything to do with our redemption and in that Courtroom, the sins you previously committed are carried away by the blood of the Pesach Lamb. He doesn't remember them anymore. You are freed from your "Egypt," your state of slavery is behind you.

The Consequences of Sin Are Not Always Removed

If we are unfaithful in the relationship following this redemption but remorsefully turn to God, then indeed we are no longer brought to Court. **Judicial** forgiveness deals with the punishment for sin that "passed over."² **Fatherly** forgiveness, however, has everything to do with reconciliation, so that the relationship with God can be restored and we can continue to be fully part of His plan, walking on His narrow road.³ Of

¹ This can be explained as dialectical reasoning, which offers the reader a choice that directs him into a certain direction, while the choice itself was incomplete and overly simplified. This 'technique' was familiar to the Greek philosophers and the fact people use it today proves that there is a Greek influence on the believer's framework of thought, even today.

² The English word for Pesach is significant: PassOver

³ That does not mean that sin has no consequences. Certainly, when we hurt others when we sin, God sometimes has to discipline and punish us. In this part of the text, however, we are talking about the restoration of the damaged relationship.

course God always wants to restore the relationship through His forgiveness, but even then, sin can still have consequences. In this light, the preacher's comment was unbalanced and misleading. On the one hand, there are consequences for ourselves because we are damaged through sinning. On the other hand, we cannot ignore that sins for which we are forgiven, still may have consequences for the *relationship* with the one damaged, as well as long-term personal consequences. These consequences sometimes cannot be undone and we can't wave aside that complexity with a simplified formula. There are many believers who suffer from the damage caused by the sins of others, including by those who are in covenant relationship with God. In this simple example, the preacher was partly right, but he forgot to emphasize that, on the one hand, unfaithfulness surely has its consequences, but that God is a reconciling and atoning God Who looks at the confessions of our heart. The preacher's message ignored the preconditions and the substance of the reconciliation that is now available through the shed Blood of Christ.

If we would extrapolate the simplified reasoning of the preacher, then in his view the unfaithful covenant partner still contributes to a good covenant relationship, even if he/she does not repent. What kind of image of God do we create this way?

We repeat: if we encounter Bible verses that center around the "once and for all" forgiveness through the sacrifice of Christ, then we now know that this refers to the Judicial forgiveness dealing with Pesach; the judgment was passed over thanks to Jesus' sacrifice as the Lamb of God¹. But in other parts of the Bible we encounter verses that give content to Fatherly forgiveness, aimed at reconciliation in a damaged relationship between God and His child². If we clearly understand this distinction, then all these verses show the greatness of God's forgiveness, without confusion.

*For 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.*³

The Bible verse above is a striking example of that Fatherly forgiveness. Do we notice the order in this Bible verse? We find another image⁴ of forgiveness in the Bible when the king forgives a slave's large debt, while the slave himself doesn't forgive a relatively small debt owed to him by another slave. Not forgiving is a sin, because we

¹ Eph. 1:7, Eph. 4:32 and Col. 2:13

² Matt. 6:14-15, Marc. 11:25: it is not surprising that God is portrayed as a Father in these verses.

³ Matt. 6:14-15

⁴ Matt. 18:23-25

have the mind of Jesus Christ¹. It is not about what we say with our mouth, but about what we do as a result of our heart attitude. Only when we are in a situation where we need to forgive someone who has maligned and hurt us, do we begin to understand what sin does to our relationship with God as our loving heavenly Father. Equally, we cannot take the forgiveness we've received for granted. Just as giving forgiveness, asking for forgiveness also has everything to do with our heart attitude, and, thus, our intimacy with our God.

If we are prepared to forgive others, God will forgive us. That does not refer to the judicial forgiveness that simply was provided unconditionally² based on the sacrifice of Christ. If we do not forgive our neighbor, that does not imply that we immediately lose our salvation, but in the end we get stuck in loose sand in our life's desert journey and we will become aware of the fact that the relationship has been damaged. That anger or bitterness can even lead to diseases in our lives, and is often the reason people need pastoral care in many churches and congregations. However, when we go to Father remorsefully, a loving God offers His child reconciliation, so that the relationship with Him is restored and clear. This reconciliation also applies to relationships between human beings. God asks us to forgive one another when we have been wronged, but God also definitely asks the believer who sinned against his neighbor to do everything he can to restore the relationship with the one who has been wronged. The first step to achieving this restoration is to sincerely ask for forgiveness for the hurt you have caused. There is no simplified formula for doing this, and sometimes sin appears to have an appalling effect because some consequences are lasting.³

Maybe we should take things a step further and realize that persisting in sin doesn't only damage the relationship between the believer and God as Father, but *persisting* in sin can put a burden on others, affect our family, our friends, and our local congregations.

We live in a time when many believers have been hurt by their environment, upbringing, or education, but also by the consequences of some incorrect, unbalanced, spiritual teachings. To provide a counterweight for this damage, we notice that many preachers stress the Fatherly relationship that God seeks with believers. To fully restore the relationship with God as Father, however, we don't

¹ Phil. 2:5

² In the sense that we cannot obtain this through works, but only because we have faith in His sacrifice.

³ Cfr. the severe (and partly irreversible) consequences of David's adultery with Bathsheba, see 2 Sam. 12:7-14

have to create another image of God in which we attenuate the problem of sin, so that feelings of guilt will disappear – albeit artificially. Instead, to restore the relationship, the biblical context must be established and accepted, so that we can fulfil our roles as holy people living as ambassadors of a Holy, loving *and righteous* God.

Paul does not urge us to ignore our sins or label them as “insignificant” to God. That is rather the enemy’s method. In fact, he used this same argument in the Garden of Eden and is sneakily (and ‘snakily’) trying to bring it into the congregations of today. Paul, however, calls us to examine ourselves and to discern the Lord’s body before we confirm the blood covenant when taking part in the Lord’s Supper.

To verify this: each thesis and each distinction should be able to stand the biblical test. If we interpret in the Bible that God blots out our transgressions and will not remember them¹, or if we apply the text to ourselves “that God will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea²,” then these are texts that refer to that *judicial* forgiveness. However, if believers – and in these times there are many of them – consider this to be Fatherly forgiveness, the consequence is that the underlying theology supposes that you don’t have to go to our Father in Heaven when you have damaged the relationship, no matter what you did. In fact, following this theology that the relationship can’t be damaged ever again and we can’t hurt God any more, whatever we do or... whatever we do to another person. According to this interpretation, we can even ruin other people’s lives and still have a great and undamaged relationship with God as our Father.³ By following this incorrect logic, people often conclude that God never thinks of our sins again and that He has cast them, continuously and *even beforehand*, into the depths of the sea. Every believer who thinks about this realizes that in a father-child context alone, this is an artificial theory that can hardly be maintained. From what has already been said, we can understand how it came into existence. Thankfully, the distinction between Judicial and Fatherly forgiveness gives us a delightful view on God’s Plan, and moreover, this image closely and completely follows the order of the biblical feasts and *their reality in Christ*.

‘**Once forgiven, always forgiven**’ is a statement that should be understood in the right context and therefore, we should not ignore a number of Bible verses that highlight the correct depth and perspective. When we realize the consequences of sin, also in

1 Is. 43:25

2 Micah 7:19

3 See 1 Cor. 8:13 as an example: when a believer sins against the brethren and wound their weak conscience, he sins against Christ and Paul does not continue saying that this sin is forgive beforehand!

our human relationships and wider environment, that awareness should help us to stay from sin, so that we can *be* unleavened bread according to His purpose.

Practical examples often help to clarify difficult subjects. A speaker wanted to convey that he saw a lot of fear and lack of freedom among believers. Let's take a closer look at his argumentation. The speaker stated that the gospel should set us free, but that he spoke with many believers who were not completely free. These were only facts thus far, and they could have been true. However, what followed was an incorrect conclusion that this lack of freedom was caused by holding on to rules¹. The speaker thought that these believers, based on the Bible, felt they "had to" do a lot of things and that caused them to lose their freedom in Christ. If you were to draw a non-Biblical conclusion, you might indeed divert down this path of thinking. In fact, perhaps the preacher could conclude that some believers were anxious towards God, but the reason for this anxiety and lack of freedom, is completely different than what he has proposed.

Freedom and redemption are in no way related to following rules or doing (good) works, but to God's justification and cleansing through the sacrifice of Christ, and our acceptance of it through faith. Up to this point, we agree with this speaker, but our justification through God's mercy is only half of the story, because God expects our answer to that mercy to be a changed walk of life. The speaker does not point out that wholeheartedly² doing God's instructions helps a human being to live according to *the law of Christ*, but only *after* he has been redeemed. When you ignore the instructions given to you after you have been liberated, don't you despise the relationship with God? Can you still face God when you show Him that you don't value His Word? After all, God gave those Instructions in love. You could wait for the results of ignoring those Instructions. In this way, groups of believers arise who no longer preserve the relationship with the Father, precisely because repentance, awareness of sin and return ('tesjuvah'), reconciliation with our neighbor and awareness of the inflicted damage, seem to have no function anymore, and therefore, have become irrelevant on their path of 'following Jesus'. They ignore the importance of the heart attitude focused on blossoming the relationship, out of a deep love for Him.³

¹ The speaker didn't refer to the earthly rules of our rule of law, but God's rules. Did Jesus not say that if we love Him we will keep His commandments? Joh, 14:21

² That means: do things completely with your heart's desire. It is not about the rule, but about the heart that wants to keep God's Instruction out of love for Him and our neighbour. By carrying each other's burdens, the law of Christ is being fulfilled. See Gal. 6:2 and the context of this verse.

³ See again John 14:21

Which wolf in sheep's clothing or what disguise coming *like* an angel of light has deceived them?¹

Of course the speaker referred to earlier, wanted to show that stringently following God's law is an issue of the mind, but his solution was horizontal. He stated that there was lack of freedom due to the idea that rules must be dutifully followed. According to him, the solution would be no longer having to follow the rules. The Bible teaches us otherwise though: God's Instructions have to be "transferred" from our minds to our hearts and that is what the Holy Spirit is there to do in the lives of believers who abide in Him.² When the rule of God's wise Instruction settles in our hearts, that rule becomes part of the heart-to-heart relationship with God, and "the letter of the law" disappears. Seeking to do His Will wholeheartedly becomes part of the believer's behavior, since that behavior regards and considers the Father³ in everything. This is exactly why Paul says that he, as a New Covenant believer, is placed under the law of Christ! So, we must be vigilant when other believers look for the solution to the problem of "*having* to follow" God's wise Instruction, by simply removing that Instruction. Just as no relationship with God is not possible by just outwardly following God's rules, so it is not possible to maintain a relationship with the Father by disregarding His rules. The last option by no means replaces the first one. God is a Father who searches for a heart-to-heart relationship with His believing children and in this context, "believing" is much more than just a state of mind. It is a path of obedience, motivated by an ever deepening love. That heart-to-heart relationship does not wave aside the Fatherly instructions; in fact, they are very valuable and given in love for us to lead blessed lives. But if we hurt our relationship with God by ignoring His Instructions, Fatherly forgiveness is available, always connected to our *tesjuvuh*, our remorseful return to His Way.

Return to Egypt?

We have already discussed that judicial forgiveness occurs once and for all and after that, believers enter into a covenant relationship with the Mighty One. Believers no longer have to be afraid that every sin will bring them back to Egypt again, as long as they maintain the attitude of Unleavened Bread, including the desire to be unleavened dough. God is the Mighty One and He is long-suffering towards the believer who is connected with Him through the covenant. Yet, due to poor teaching,

¹ Paul sends a clear message in 2 Cor. 11:14

² See a.o. John 14:23-26

³ See 1 Cor. 9:21. Cf. Jesus' words: 'But why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do the things which I say? (Luke 6:46)

some believers have an image of God and a theology in which they continuously fear for their salvation. They think that, if there is any salvation at all, it should always be accompanied with the fear that judicial forgiveness is needed over and over again. In other words, Egypt is always very near. You could say that these believers realize they have been at the mountain of the covenant. They do everything in their power to hold onto God's Instruction and they want to do whatever it costs to be unleavened dough, in order to be saved, hopefully. They try to apply the meaning of Unleavened Bread and Pentecost in their lives, but they forget (because of the teachings of their denominations) that Pesach precedes those feasts and that Pesach is the feast that centers on God's sovereign decision and act to redeem us. The only thing the believer has to do is to apply His blood on the doorposts of his or her life. To say it in New Testament words, the believer has to accept that Jesus' atoning sacrifice on the Cross and His resurrection were God's acts to – albeit undeserved – redeem the believer. The result of this poor teaching as described above is often that these believers become stringent about following the God's Law. Their faith is thus not based on the Mercy of Pesach but on fear, and this basis of fear is supported by their local church culture.

The believer should not ignore God's sovereign act of redemption. When believers in Christ – however sad it is – keep on fearing whether their redemption is certain, they do not recognize God's act through Christ, and because of this, they constantly live in fear of God's judgment. These believers also ignore the heart-to-heart relationship God wants with His children. They keep on believing in a God Who is a Judge, Who is looking through statutory articles and laws to look for any and all possible transgressions. This is a God without a Father's Heart. But the God who granted the believer the possibility to partake in the covenant relationship after his acquittal, is also the God who, as a Father, looks for that heart-to-heart relationship. That was the very reason for the Covenant he offered. That relationship is not judicial, but it is full of Fatherly mercy!¹ He wants to be the Mighty One so that when we remain close to Him, we never have to return to Egypt.

Certainly, our journey often involves quite a bit of wrestling, but we can also hold on to the words God spoke about David. Although he committed serious sin and thus had to face the consequences, David, alongside God, was on His way to the "Promised Land" and was eventually called God's friend, because God looked at David's heart.

¹ The beautiful Hebrew word 'chesed' applies here, which expresses the mercy that reaches far beyond what God should give based on the covenant. The word chesed contains God's (exceeding) longsuffering within the entirety of covenant agreements. Cf. further in the main text.

When our hearts are focused on God, we can rely on the promise that we never have to return to Egypt again. Yet there are many who stay behind in the dry desert and that may very well feel like being in Egypt. This desert can have two causes: Believers can maintain the idea that God is always the strict and powerful Judge. When sin enters their lives, they become depressed and exhausted, constantly wrestling with fear and doubt. So they are not wrestling the desire to stop sinning because they grieve the Father with this sin, but rather they see themselves in an anxious fight they never seem to win, always being tortured and held under the scrutiny of a righteous but merciless Judge. The discouragement resulting from these thoughts can lead to apathy, despair, or depression. But also, at times, to a (sometimes secretly) destructive way of life as they lose courage and their will to let the Holy Spirit in them fight sin. That crisis of faith in itself has got nothing to do with the spirit of Egypt, but is caused by not discerning the Fatherly relationship and the fact they actually participate in a covenant relationship. They think they have to wrestle solely through their own efforts. Who will point out to them that God the Judge has become God the Father, just as God went by night before the people of Israel in a pillar of fire to lead them to the Promised Land of salvation?

On the other hand, we picture another group of believers in the desert. Indeed, many stay in the dry desert because they think that God is a Father who no longer requires repentance and who agrees with everything His child does or does not do. In fact, these believers often don't believe in a desert at all, because they believe that after Egypt, God brings us to a life-long oasis. The idea is that we are immediately catapulted from the shore of the Red Sea to the Promised Land, skipping the desert journey. Do the trials of our desert journey no longer have any purpose in God's plan? ¹ What are the consequences of this kind of thinking? The devotion and first love of that covenant relationship gradually fades away; while in the meantime, the conscience of the believer becomes hardened. Everything that discipline could teach him has been shut off through this mental stronghold. Devotion no longer has personal value and it seemingly loses its purpose. When the believer eventually ends up paralyzed in the desert of life, it becomes clear that he has skipped the training about how use of the whole Armor of God. ² The child thought that God would be doing all the work. But God, as a loving Father, provided this armor to protect His children and help them overcome in His power the flesh, the world and the devil. When His children do not grow up, they can be compared to thirsty Israel in the desert: they often still long for the gratifications of Egypt while insisting that each problem will

¹ Book of Acts 14:22

² Eph. 6:10 and following

be solved immediately. When the solution does not occur at once, the setback can be so great and the desert experience can be such a large contrast to their image of God, that the disappointment makes them quit before they have reached their Promised Land. They thought that God would make them “happy and prosperous Christians”. In reality they have only believed in a selection of Bible verses, not in the Bible as a whole. They seem to admit the need for judicial forgiveness, but only as something from the past, ignoring the need for on-going Fatherly forgiveness and not seeing how the Word and His Spirit work together to help us to receive and internalize the whole truth and to overcome by His power.

This frame of mind has certain consequences, one being that when (good) Fatherly discipline is reasoned away and sin is trivialized, the relationship between God and the believer disintegrates. “Freedom” and “Self-development” become the words most used in the vocabulary of this kind of believer. Such a believer becomes estranged from God as Father and, in the end, this kind of believer no longer recognizes the Father¹. You could say that, eventually, this leads to “spiritually spoiled children,” with all the consequences this encompasses. In difficult times, God will no longer fit the image of success and material prosperity they believed in and the faith problems they have can’t be solved with the simplified faith-formula they have developed for themselves. To protect these believers against the influences of the desert, it is important to teach the distinction between judicial and Fatherly forgiveness in our churches and congregations. If taught correctly, the distinction between the forgiveness of Pesach and the (continuous possibility of) forgiveness of the Day of Atonement will always strengthen the believer’s relationship with God as ever-present loving Father, who wants his children to grow in faith, obedience to and understanding of His plan.

Does this mean that we can never end up back in Egypt once we have been saved? This question has no easy answer, but the history of the people of Israel can teach us a great deal. The liberated people entered into a marriage covenant with God. Israel became the “Wife” and in terms of that relationship of spiritual intimacy, God is a jealous God. The fact that idolatry awakens God’s jealousy is a powerful and recurrent theme in the Old Testament. The second of the Ten Commandments dictates that believers are not to worship other gods, bow down to, or serve any carved images. This commandment is immediately followed by God’s statement that He is a jealous God². Each time the Bible mentions God’s jealousy, it is connected to idolatry³.

1 E.g. see 1 Cor. 15:34 where Paul says that some people in Corinth do not have the knowledge of God

2 Ex. 20:5, Deut. 5:8 and following. In Ex. 34:14 God is named as the ‘Jealous’, a jealous God.

3 In Ezek. 8:3 the portrayed idol is called ‘the seat of the image of jealousy, which provokes to jealousy’.

God warns His covenant partner Israel not to commit idolatry, because to God this is the same as “spiritual adultery.” However, the history of Israel teaches us that the people had already rebelled in the desert and, moreover, in the Promised Land they increasingly turned to idols and started worshipping them. During the first period of time in the Promised Land, judges, who in their turn were under God’s Instruction, led the people of Israel. When the people decided they wanted a king, at all costs, the judge Samuel was not very happy. But God showed Samuel that they were not rejecting Samuel as a judge, but rather the kingship of God Himself¹. Basically, they rejected God as covenant partner. They wanted a visible king. Later, Israel looked for protection by the power of Egypt, and by so doing Israel ignored God as their King *and* as their covenant partner². They insulted God by doing so. Idolatry is not confined to worshipping idols, but certainly includes lack of acknowledgement of the Creator of Heaven and Earth as the absolute Power and Protector.

God often warned that idolatry would eventually lead to the people being driven out of the land, into exile. Here is a clear link with the marriage law God Himself had installed. We can read about this in Deuteronomy³. When a woman was adulterous, the husband could send her away with a divorce letter because when his wife had been unfaithful she had broken the covenant. This earthly rule is a reflection of the heavenly one: God sent the house of Israel away with a letter of divorce because of its idolatry. It was sent to Assyria, never to return.⁴ This shows how God responded to idolatry; it also illustrates how the marriage covenant between God and the people was bound by certain rules. Those rules are stipulated in the Torah but, most importantly, the issue was the heart condition of Israel as God’s adulterous wife in the spiritual sense. The Old Testament books of the Bible show many painful examples of Israel’s apostasy towards God. Whether it was in Egypt or Assyria or Babel, slavery always was the consequence of spiritual adultery.

New Covenant believers can equally enter into the Divine marriage⁵ covenant. They must say ‘Yes’ to the covenant that their Groom Christ Jesus has established in His blood on Golgotha. In the sixth chapter of *Wake Up*, we closely study the Hebrew

1 1 Sam. 8:7

2 Is. 31:1-3

3 Deut. 24

4 Until the time comes that He will gather the descendants of the ten tribes one by one. See Isa. 27:12-13; see Amos 9:9 as well.

5 In *Wake Up!* we explain that this is the first part of the Marriage covenant, called the ketubah covenant.

marriage ritual, which also started with a blood covenant.¹ When a believer by faith repents and accepts His atoning sacrifice, judicial Forgiveness lies behind him, unless he continues giving his heart to idolatry, because to God such idolatry equates to marriage apostasy. Elsewhere idolatry is referred to as “a dog that returns to his own vomit;” when we once were acquitted before the Judge but have **willfully** continued in sin, there remains no more sacrifice for sins; The Bible states that such a person has trodden underfoot the Son of God and has counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified an unholy thing.²

God knows our hearts and when they are focused on Him, everything in God’s Word shouts that we belong to Him. Yet, we should not ignore the warning that can be seen from the history of the house of Israel. Idolatry includes everything in our lives that has a higher priority than God Himself. Or to put it differently, idolatry includes those things that we want while it steals our time and attention and our hearts are not focused on God.

Idolatry is not confined to the worship of gods from other religions. There is so much materialistic distraction that draws our hearts away from serving God. Paul defines it strikingly in his letter to the Romans, saying that before coming to faith in God believers were in a kind of “covenant relationship with **the powers of sin.**” We were liberated from that relationship by the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Our freedom was and is only possible through our dying with Christ and our being resurrected to newness of life, with the outcome being that we now belong to Him. However, this earlier sinful power will keep trying to re-establish a relationship with us, snakingly. It is therefore that Paul tells us about the whole armor, which is available to us as we fight this sinful power, the power that is trying to re-establish an adulterous relationship with us, in order to bring us back to the slavery of Egypt. This is an active battle for every believer and we need to be aware of that. Paul would not have thought it necessary to teach us about the whole armor in such a meticulous and urgent way had it not been necessary.

Idolatry in Our Modern Age

There are many possible explanations for what idolatry really is in our modern age. For instance, the Buddha at the garden store that ends up in the living room, and the practice of all kinds of spiritual exercises that are directly linked to other

¹ Successive covenants lead to the fulfilment of the final marriage covenant. See the Wake Up book for more information.

² See Heb. 11:26-31. See also 1 Cor. 11:28-29

(often Eastern) cults are obvious examples of idolatry. But those are expressions of something deeper. Most importantly, idolatry has to do with the heart being more continually focused on the matters of this world and thus matters that stand in the way of our relationship with the Creator, with the Groom that is coming. This is why James¹ calls certain believers in the diaspora “adulterers,” and asks them if they are not aware that friendship with this world is enmity towards God. We have to interpret this with the knowledge that there is a covenant in which you cannot embrace competing relationships, because the covenant between God and the believer is destined to be a marriage relationship. Right after saying this, James goes on to tell us that God shows a tremendous amount of mercy to the humble.

Sin opens the door to **spiritual** adultery. That is why we are urged to examine ourselves continually.

We want to focus now on at least one sin that explicitly qualifies as spiritual adultery. It already appeared in the Old Testament and it can still be considered as the root of all evil:

COVETOUSNESS & AVARICE

Paul is clear about covetousness: It is idolatry!² The question is, why does Paul sum up a series of sins and specifically connect covetousness to idolatry? Jesus had already given the answer:

No one can serve two masters.

A believer cannot serve God and mammon.³ They are opponents, opposites, and both are rulers. Knowing this, we can say that covetousness is the worship of an idol and that God’s jealousy is awakened when believers engage in it. The worship of mammon always undermines the worship of God. It manifests as a lack of trust in God, the One who takes care of us. Jesus teaches us that God even takes care of the birds and the lilies in the field, so how much more does He care for us? God, who is the Mighty One and Provider in the covenant, is put aside when we place our trust in our own resources and knowledge. A covetous person loves money and puts his trust in it. This doesn’t necessarily mean that a covetous person always wants more

¹ James 4:4, Rom. 8:7

² Col. 3:5, Eph. 5:5

³ Math. 6:24

money. Covetousness can also show itself too in not wanting to share money or other material things with people who are in need. Such a person can still be satisfied with what they have, but they do not want to share or give away. Therefore, having much can, but does not per se, demonstrate God's resourcefulness or blessing; it can also be a seduction leading to idolatry. The people around you may think you are blessed, while your heart attitude (silently) tells you're serving mammon. Although you may think that serving two masters at the same time is quite possible! Covetousness eventually leads to indifference towards the people around you and a heart that loses its focus on God. The prophet Ezekiel indicated that Sodom was a city of covetousness. One of Sodom's most serious sins was that it didn't strengthen the hand of the poor and needy.¹

God determines what spiritual adultery really is. He judges. Adultery has its root in the heart and there are many different idols that can bind human hearts and rob believers of their God given freedom to serve Him. We can always ask ourselves how we would react if certain things were taken from us, or what we would feel if we had to give a substantial part of our belongings to someone in need. The same applies should we be asked to give up a certain addiction. Just check your first (heart) reaction!

James writes that God resists the proud. Here too we can see that our heart attitude is crucial. God forgives and always shows us mercy, except when the heart is proud and continues on a road that the believer knows will lead him astray, away from God. The Old Testament shows us that God is long-suffering, even towards haughtiness. Long-suffering is an expression of the fact that God postpones His penalties (with long enduring patience) for a long time, because He is the Mighty One in a covenant relationship. In Hebrew the word "chesed"² is used, which reflects a patient mercy that goes beyond what should be required on the basis of the covenant. As a covenant partner He chooses to 'suffer longer', giving us a chance to return. In the case of Israel, God was patient for almost 700 years, until persistent haughtiness led to the exile of the House of Israel. A longsuffering God waits until His child returns and until that moment valuable time is wasted, time that could have been spent on doing His works.

Idols are false deities. The people of Israel didn't simply receive 'a recommendation' to avoid idolatry, they were strongly instructed (commanded) to loathe and detest

¹ Ez. 16:49

² Strong's word 2618

it.¹ The reason that they had to conquer all the local tribes in the Promised Land was precisely because of their idolatry. If the Israelites acted half-heartedly (and they did!), the influence of these idolaters within the country was felt like burning arrows coming towards them, all the time. In the house of God and in the land God gave to the people, God didn't allow relationships other than the covenant relationship with the Mighty One. The people, however, often acted differently and in Solomon's time, for example, hundreds of women and concubines from foreign countries and foreign religions were brought to Israel. The Bible teaches us that when he became older, Solomon also served these women's idols adulterously.

In the New Covenant, believers can be assured that there is Fatherly forgiveness available when their heart is focused on Him. God is long-suffering as a Father as long as the believer is not prideful. This covenant relationship is not, however, a guarantee that the believer will never enter into a dubious situation again. It is always the believer's right heart attitude that will bring him back to the Father. Think about David when he acknowledged his sin with Bathsheba.

The Talmud teaches us something wise about haughtiness:

If someone says: "I will sin and repent and then I will sin and repent", God doesn't give him the possibility to repent. If this person says: "I will sin and then the Day of Atonement will bring atonement", then the Day of Atonement will not bring atonement. The Day of Atonement atones for trespasses between man and God. The Day of Atonement does not atone for trespasses between a man and his neighbor, until he – who rejects his neighbor in bitterness or exasperation – has reconciled himself with his neighbor.²

This comment indicates that God reconciles the humble, but resists the proud. This is why we have to examine our hearts. Spiritual adultery has diverse points of entry and the consequences of such spiritual adultery should serve as an incentive to remain as close to God as possible.

Justification and Sanctification

In this same context, we'd like to briefly discuss two concepts that have been wrongly interpreted as being in opposition to each other, often leading to (linguistic) confusion. In the Bible, we read that on the one hand our own works cannot save us but, on the other hand, we are often urged to sanctify ourselves. But, if we can't be sanctified

¹ Deut. 5:25-26

² Yoma 8. Summary

through our own efforts, why still bother to seek to sanctify ourselves? Believers often think that they have to take sides. The first group states that “sanctification” is a condition given by God and therefore it is not so much something the believer has to work for. They don’t want to hear that their own effort is needed, because that would put too much stress on a legal “musts” and on “works.”

Another group of believers is convinced that the Bible urges us to sanctify ourselves, and to them, it is indeed something they should work for. However, sometimes too much emphasis is laid on this process of sanctification, as if this is a prior condition for our justification. In other words, our redemption depends on our own efforts, after all. Again, both groups focus too much on points of view that are partially, but not entirely, Biblical and largely based on a selective reading of God’s Word¹.

Justification comes from outside and it refers to the Judge justifying something. **Sanctification** is the word connected to “holiness.”² Through the blood of Christ³, God has redeemed us once and for all⁴. That doesn’t imply we have received an aura of good behavior floating around us, but it means we have been “set apart” and we are devoted to God. *After this Sovereign act of God, we are urged to continuously express this state of being in our lives*, being unleavened dough. So, sanctification is the expression of living a “set apart” (holy/sanctified) life. God indeed specifically tells us, “Be holy, as I am Holy.”⁵

Justification happens only *once* and is connected to the heavenly Court Room, while sanctification is an ongoing command in the context of the ongoing covenant relationship. We can relate this to the old Jewish marriage ritual, where the bride enters into a relationship with the groom long before the wedding day. Prior to the wedding covenant, she has already become “his” and she cleanses and sanctifies herself through ritual bathing until the arrival of the wedding day. These rituals of sanctification, of devotion, are an expression of the condition of her heart. The bride

1 2 Cor. 7:1-2. People no longer understand what Paul is trying to say when he mentions that we as sons and daughters have to ‘cleanses ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit’ and that we thus have to strive to perfect holiness in the fear of God.

2 Hebrew: Kadosh, Greek: ἅγιος (hagios). In Latin: sanctus

3 Hebr. 10:10

4 Not the Roman-Catholic meaning of ‘holy’. The Roman-Catholic church posthumously declares some people ‘holy’ or ‘saint’ when they met certain criteria during their lives. The Bible doesn’t mention this kind of canonization. The Bible states that God declares believers holy in Christ and that believers should continuously sanctify themselves or behave as being ‘set apart’. E.g. the beginning of the two letters to the Corinthians, where the – at that moment – living believers are addressed as ‘saints’.

5 Lev. 11:44-45, 1 Pet. 1:16

is sanctified to be holy; she is set apart to show devotion and dedication. This is a shadow of the Church of believers in Christ, waiting for the Bridegroom, cleansing themselves, and thus testifying to the fact that they are (being) sanctified or set apart for the Bridegroom. Everything is dedicated to the Bridegroom, and without the relationship with the Bridegroom, sanctification for the Wedding is not possible.

“Justification” and “Sanctification” are not in opposition; they follow one another without replacing one another. Just as one is not able to enter into a covenant relationship when one has not been redeemed, one cannot bear fruit in sanctification when one has not been justified first. We first have to be acquitted and leave our prison; we have to be freed from our Egypt, because within those borders we are still subject to the power of sin and slavery. In the same way, it is not possible to be “justified” and then think that sanctification doesn’t play a role anymore. It’s true, you can’t give meaning to that sanctification or devotion based on your own efforts, but if you are justified, then sanctification - your continuous devotion in behavior and thoughts - will be the logical result. Sanctification starts with God Himself because He is the One Who sets us apart, but we have to continuously maintain it, because sanctification doesn’t mean “to become holy,” but “to stay devoted.” It is the expression of our identity in Christ. It is the Holy Ghost Who gives us the strength to “put the deeds of the body to death,”¹ those deeds that could otherwise stand in the way of our devotion. You could also say that justification frees us from the power of sin and through our sanctification we show that - with the help of the Holy Spirit - we can break free from the influence of sin or resist it. We repeat; through sanctification our lives should manifest the effect of justification by God.

Francis A. Schaeffer² vividly described these concepts by explaining that **justification** knows no levels because guilt has been removed indefinitely. It happens because it is God’s will, so we have no influence in this matter. **Sanctification**, however, does have certain levels because it measures the relationship between God and the believer. The Christian life is often a journey with many steps. In some phases in our lives, sanctification has an important place, but there are times when that is less the case. Whilst it is not possible to be “kind of” justified, you can live a more or less holy, sanctified life. That distinction becomes clear when you realize that justification has everything to do with the **guilt** of sin, while sanctification has everything to do with the **power or the influence** of sin in a Christian’s life. Schaeffer goes on to explain that

1 Rom. 8:13. David Stern’s *Complete Jewish Bible* puts it like this, “For if you live according to your old nature, you will certainly die; but if, by the Spirit, you keep putting to death the practices of the body, you will live.”

2 True Spirituality, How to Live for Jesus Moment by Moment, 30th anniversary edition, Francis A. Schaeffer, p 65.

Salvation does not equal ‘Justification with nothing more to be done until the end of your life.’ That is not how God intended it. Salvation flows from justification through sanctification to glorification¹. Justification is “once and for all.” Sanctification is “from faith to faith,” because it is expressly written that “the just² shall live by faith.” Sanctification has everything to do with a growing, developing relationship with God as Master, as Friend, and as Father who makes His Inheritance available³.

Justification	Sanctification	Glorification
God’s sovereign act	God’s initiative with us maintaining this “set apart” relationship	The end of our Journey
Once and for all	From faith to faith	Future
Redeemed from the slavery of “Egypt”	Through the desert, learning to overcome with His full armor, being in a covenant relationship	Finally entering the “Promised Land” and our eternal destiny.

God’s Mercy versus God’s Instructions

Knowing all this, let us be even clearer by taking a closer look at two more concepts which have been wrongly interpreted as being in opposition: God’s Instruction - Gods complete Word - on the one hand and the Mercy that we have in Christ on the other. Just as justification is not in opposition to sanctification, so God’s Instructions are in no way in opposition to His Mercy. The Torah of the Old Covenant and God’s Word from the New Covenant, have everything to do with sanctification. Studying God’s Word with our mind, combined with wholeheartedly doing God’s Will, are the expression of our ‘devotion’⁴. It is not merely good works that lead to salvation, because (the execution of) these Instructions can only have their function after our justification through faith in Yeshua and after accepting that He suffered in our place. You can’t adjust the ingredients and the order as you wish. Justification is the starting point, not the finish.

¹ Also see Rom. 1:16-17 in which Paul states that there is a development from faith to faith.

² Those that are **justified**

³ Also see chapter 7 of *Wake Up!*, which deals with the different (successive) covenants that God wants to enter into with believers.

⁴ See the word ‘kadosh’. John often points out in his letters that those who love Him, also do His commandments.

Yeshua = Justification = only through Mercy = God's one-time action as a Judge in Court = Passover (Pesach)

Gods complete Word = Law of Christ written in mind and heart = Sanctification = our continuous reaction and faithfulness in the Covenant relationship with God as Father, being Unleavened Bread as well as a new creation (Day of Atonement)

Yes, there are believers who think they are dutifully “having to live by” God’s rules, wrongfully persuaded that obeying God’s Instruction is the necessary human effort to achieve justification. But those who realize that justification is received freely from God through faith in Jesus Christ will gladly accept the appeal for sanctification and freely give substance to it through their love for God and neighbor and through their devotion. For the latter group, sanctification is not an increasing process after which they become holy at a certain point. No, the Bible teaches that *we have been sanctified* through the Sacrifice of Christ, and that we should maintain our “state of being set apart” through devotion. That is a very important distinction and therefore we are urged to be different, as Ephesians says, “But you have not so learned Christ,” meaning you are different. In that context, Paul appeals to us *to work out our salvation* by continuously giving expression to our sanctification, which follows our justification. After all, what does justification really mean if it is not followed by sanctification?¹ That might in the end resemble a person, who was fully redeemed from slavery but as a saved believer prefers to stay close to his former state in Egypt - a sadly empty outcome.

Justification through Jesus’ blood opens the way to God², whilst sanctification is the way to keep an open relationship and to allow the relationship to blossom, both through faith and through righteous deeds, always entering more of His inheritance. At those times when we fail, we can receive Fatherly forgiveness through which a loving God, for His part, re-opens the way to reconciliation.

The relationship becomes wonderfully visible in John’s letter:³

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.

¹ Phil. 2:12b-13

² After all, Jesus Christ is the way, the truth and the life.

³ 1 John 1:9-10

Each time we confess our sins we are not saved again or (re)justified in the Court Room, but we can continue the process of sanctification. We are cleansed from all evil to enable us to continue to share in His Holiness. We repeat: this is the forgiveness believers receive in Christ *after* they have been saved. It no longer refers to the clemency of a punishing Judge, but rather to the enduring reconciliation with their heavenly Father¹.

Although there is no longer condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, the deeds of the believer will be judged. All must appear before the judgment seat of Christ². Have we been changed into the image of Christ, or did we separate our rational faith from our deeds during our earthly life? God doesn't want us to separate them. He wants to be able to say to us, "This is My beloved son or daughter, in whom I am well pleased," just like He did with Jesus!³ This is why the Bible is filled with appeals for continuous sanctification and devotion; always giving diligence to making our calling and election sure.⁴

The Bible also describes what happens should we not want to restore that relationship with the Father, or should we no longer see the necessity to confess our sins. King David even describes the physical⁵ impact of not confessing sin, as well as the healing power when we do confess:

Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven,

Whose sin is covered.

Blessed is the man to whom the Lord does not impute iniquity,

And in whose spirit there is no deceit.

When I kept silent, *my bones grew old*

Through my groaning all the day long.

For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me;

My vitality was turned into the drought of summer.

I acknowledged my sin to You,

¹ A book worth reading in this context is: *The power of Forgiveness* by John F. MacArthur, 1998

² 2 Cor. 5:10, Rom. 14:10-12, 2 Cor. 3:12-15

³ According to Matt. 17:5

⁴ 2 Pet. 1:10-11

⁵ Body and spirit are connected, so the psyche influences the physical and vice versa. A condition is called psychosomatic when the cause of the physical condition must be found in the psychic (spiritual).

*And my iniquity I have not hidden.
 I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord,"
 And You forgave the iniquity of my sin. Selah
 For this cause everyone who is godly shall pray to You
 In a time when You may be found;
 Surely in a flood of great waters
 They shall not come near him.¹*

In this context we understand that God has good reason to be indignant and upset about the sins we commit after our justification. God has saved us and set us apart, and when we don't act in this way, God's discipline has a legitimate function. It is the discipline of a Father who loves his child and wants to protect him from worse.

Discipline is not punishment, but a correction with a higher cause, God's Cause. This is the reason that the writer of the letter to the Hebrews expounds on discipline and punishment. God doesn't punish His children as a Judge but chastens them as a Father. Without that discipline, we are not true sons and daughters², says the Bible. God's indignation serves a higher purpose of discipline and sanctification. It is never God taking some sort of revenge. He wants to train³ us and He wants to make us partakers of His Holiness⁴.

*For our human fathers indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them,
 but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness.*

John writes his first letter to believers who had already received⁵ judicial forgiveness, and **yet he appeals to those believers** to continue confessing their sins⁶. This call refers to the prior verse in which John points out that if we as believers walk in the light as He is in the light, the blood of Christ cleanses us from all sin. This is exactly the mechanism that becomes clear within that Fatherly forgiveness.

¹ Ps. 32:1b-6a (NKJV)

² Hebrews 12:8: Then we are illegitimate

³ Hebrews 12:11: Chastening yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

⁴ Hebrews 12:10

⁵ This becomes clear in 1 John 5:13. See also 1 John 2:1, speaking of 'little children', not of unbelievers.

⁶ 1 John 1:9: "If we confess our sins" entails a continuation

Although the Bible verse tells us to “confess our sins,” the original text uses a word¹ that urges us to consider sin as God does. If we worry about sin as much as God does, that heart attitude will lead us to repentance and the blood of Jesus to cleanse us. The confession, which John emphasizes isn’t just an oral expression, but it is an inner heart condition of repentance. It is “tesjuvah,” which is true repentance². In this text, the Apostle John links repentance to the blood sacrifice. Repentance is the *condition* for forgiveness. It is not without reason that John stresses this, because the Gnostics of his time often made a clear distinction between what you could confess with your mouth and what your actions were in reality³. The biblical-Hebrew thinker thoroughly realized that the Eternal doesn’t only listen to the words of our confession, but more importantly, He looks at our heart attitudes and our actions that follow. Some Greek “thinkers” have said they couldn’t sin anymore because the Holy Spirit dwelled in them. This Greek mind-set is still found in some of today’s schools of theology. We then hear that someone’s “human nature” can still sin, but that his “spiritual nature” can’t. Whatever it may be, the result will still be sin. This dualistic mind-set can’t be found in the Bible and a person doesn’t have two kinds of human nature, he has only one heart. We have not become insensitive or invulnerable to sin, but we have received a new identity in Christ and we should consider ourselves as being dead to sin. John also stresses this, just like Paul said so to the believers in Rome. John says sin can be overcome when the Holy Ghost dwells in us. In addition, John also writes in his first letter that if we happen to commit a sin, God purifies us from all unrighteousness *if* we confess that sin not only with our mouth, but also with all of our heart. This is not because God awaits a confession in the form of a formal ritual, but a confession that is focused on the restoration of the relationship.

People outside of the Christian world often accuse Christianity of only stirring up feelings of guilt and sadly this thought is growing inside the Christian world as well. These people proclaim that “Freedom should be preached above all else.”

We have discussed this earlier and we hope that we now have made clearer that God, through His Judicial and Fatherly forgiveness, wants to take every believer by the hand in a relationship in which atonement really is at the center and in which there

1 Homologeo (Gr. Strong’s 3670)

2 See the urge for repentance (tesjuvah) of John the Baptist in Matt. 3:1-2

3 See the comments of 1 John 1:5-10 in the *Jewish New Testament Commentary* by D. Stern, 1992

is no place for feelings of guilt and judgment anymore. This is exactly the reason why David felt God's hand pressing heavily on him when he didn't confess his sin. This is the same for Christians today. God hasn't changed. We can tend to trivialize or ignore serious sins; we can tell ourselves that other people's sins are worse than ours, in the hope that the sense of guilt will go away. We can do this for quite a long time, but these issues stand in the way of our peace and, more importantly, of our relationship with God as Father. Some people renounce the confessing of sins for such a long time that God, in His love, has to press His hand heavily upon them, until that child recognizes there is a problem and comes to terms with the consequences of his (attitude towards) sin and returns to his Father. We can ignore our conscience for a long time, but it maintains its function even when hardened through disuse.

No Forgiveness Needed When We Are Perfect

There are two more arguments that could be used to refute the call to remorsefully confess our sins to God as our Father. These primarily originate from a translation of the letter to the Hebrews. Those who apply the phrase "once forgiven, always forgiven" to both Judicial *and* Fatherly forgiveness, often use Bible verses from this letter. They say that we have already been perfected in Christ and that God can't find any more mistakes in us. He simply doesn't see our mistakes anymore through Christ.

For by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy¹.

Some believers might feel comfortable with this verse but to many others, such an interpretation is discomfoting. They see that this perfection hasn't become entirely visible in their lives and that even the daily (mantra-like) proclamation of this perfection doesn't help them. Do we recognize this? In our earthly life we will not become perfect like God, but the word that is being used here in the original text indicates that the sacrifice of Jesus Christ has continually **been leading us to our purpose**³ through our access to the Father and that is how the word "perfected" should be understood in this verse. Through Christ's Sacrifice, the way was opened for us to reach our purpose, because we have thereby been freed from judgment. This

¹ Hebrews 10:14

² διηνεκής (diénekés): uninterrupted

³ τετελείωκεν (gr.) in Strong's 5048. This also means: in full capacity, to its purpose, make complete, accomplish. If we should have understood the word in this passage to mean "perfect," that interpretation would imply that in Hebrews 5:9 and 2:10 Christ *became* perfect, and that He wasn't perfect before that. In those verses, it is translated as "bring to its purpose or end."

Bible verse tells us that we are “being sanctified,”¹ but in the sense that believers are set apart and that they are supposed to *continually or repeatedly* show that in their lives.

There is one last objection that is being used, that can clarify our understanding of God’s Plan. Again, some translators of the letter to the Hebrews promote the view that confession is no longer necessary, because believers in Christ simply don’t have a negative conscience any more!

“...let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled² to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.”³

The translators have used the word “having,” but the original text repeatedly stresses (in this verse and in the next one) the words “let us,” which *indicates an appeal to us*. That appeal focuses on having a sincere heart⁴, a full assurance that faith brings, and a heart sprinkled to cleanse us of a guilty conscience. This sprinkling is the image of the continuing cleansing rituals (“mikveh”), which were common in those days. Yes, our heart has been cleansed through this sprinkling, but we are *urged to keep it in a pure state*⁵ ourselves.

If concepts such as perfection, justification, sanctification, and forgiveness are given (back) their Biblical meaning, by placing them within the frame of Judicial and Fatherly forgiveness and in the still larger Biblical context of God’s feasts, then our *frame of thought* will change and we will understand many verses in the light of God’s Plan of Atonement. God will also forgive our incorrect frames of thought if we become aware of them and if we confess them. After all, He looks at our hearts.

Judicial and Fatherly forgiveness, together with God’s justified jealousy when it comes down to adulterous idolatry, give a fascinating insight in His character and the value and quality that He has decreed for the covenant relationship.

1 ἁγιαζομένους: being sanctified (the participium praesens indicates the continuous or repeating nature).

2 This translation considerably deviates from the original text: the word ἡεραντισμένοι is a participium perfectum active, which indicates “after our hearts have been cleansed” and λελουσμένοι similarly indicates “after our bodies have been washed.” The English translation tends to theological interpretation.

3 Hebrews 10:22 (NKJV)

4 Without a sincere heart, the drawing near to God is of no use to us.

5 Therefore, we cannot, as the English translation suggests, say that our heart has been cleansed from a guilty conscience once and for all, and that this will remain unchanged. The writer of the Hebrews letter refers to a recurrent ritual.

As an extension of this, in the 6th chapter of *Wake Up!* we elaborate on the subject of the Marriage Covenant and the earthly rituals of the Hebrew marriage ceremony, rituals that show surprisingly accurate shadows of the heavenly reality.