

The Dogma Of Atonement And Redemption

The Declaration

Of The Love Of God And His Justice

Upon The Cross

Introduction:

It is written in the Psalm, "*Mercy and truth have met together; Righteousness and peace have kissed. Truth shall spring out of the earth, And righteousness shall look down from heaven.*" (Ps 85:10-11). The cross is the manifestation of God's love as the Lord Jesus Christ said, "*For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life*" (Jn 3:16). The cross is also the manifestation of God's perfect holiness and absolute justice, as it is written, "*Without shedding of blood there is no remission*" (Heb 9:22).

The Divine forgiveness is a forgiveness that is paid for, because sin and righteousness are never equivalents according to God. For God to manifest His full righteousness and absolute holiness, He had to announce His wrath against sin. Saint Paul the apostle says, "*For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness*" (Rom 1:18). Saint Paul also says, "*It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God*" (Heb 10:31), also, "*For our God is a consuming fire*" (Heb 12:29). Regarding the redeeming act of our Lord Jesus Christ, it is written in the Book of Revelation, "*He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God*" (Rev 19:15).

God becomes enraged with sin; this is clear in the Holy Scriptures of both the Old and New Testaments. However, there is a contemporary current of thought among some individuals within the church, devised by recent western theologians, which assumes that God is never enraged because of sin and that He does not punish the sinners for their sins. This current trend expels the idea of receiving the full dues of the Divine Justice upon the cross. It denies the idea of punishment, concerning the sentence of death against man. Thus the concept of redemption and the dogma of atonement dissolve, resulting in the loss of the value of the Christian doctrine. An extremely dangerous subject.

God's Wrath :

No one can deny God's wrath against sin, nevertheless the **perfect holiness** of God, as a rejecter of evil and sin in the life of man, should be announced. **God's justice** in judging sin means that His full holiness is manifest through the just penalty of sin. This is true even if the cost of sin was paid by someone who carries the sin of man instead of him, therefore offering the sinner an opportunity for repentance and life. In advance, the sinner has to discover the awfulness of sin and hate it, accepting the healing and forgiving love of God that the Holy Spirit offers in the sacraments.

The poor lost man who was trapped in the snare of Satan and fell under Divine wrath needed someone to save him. As God says, "*I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will*

redeem them from death." (Hos 13:14). He needs someone who would crush the power of death and defeat its tyranny, **someone who could liberate the captivated, save them from Satan's captivity, and rescue them from God's wrath.**

Liberating Man From The Power Of Satan :

The aforementioned is clarified in the words of our Lord Jesus Christ to Saint Paul the apostle when He appeared to him on his way to Damascus. He said, "*But rise and stand on your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to make you a minister and a witness both of the things which you have seen and of the things which I will yet reveal to you. 'I will deliver you from the Jewish people, as well as from the Gentiles, to whom I now send you, 'to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and **from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me.**'*" (Act 26:16-18).

Delivering Man From God 's Wrath (Rev 19:15) :

The Lord Jesus Christ endured the wrath. The agony He endured was a result of the announced wrath against sin. Forgiveness in Christianity is not a costless forgiveness, but one whose debt was paid. The One Who paid the price is the Lord Jesus Christ, Who was moved by His love, in order to embarrass sinners through this wondrous love...

Man feels ashamed of his sins that caused suffering to his Savior, His endurance of reproaches, and His death, as He said through the Prophet, "*Because zeal for Your house has eaten me up, And the reproaches of those who reproach You have fallen on me.*" (Ps 69:9).

When any person looks at the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ, he is struck with astonishment by His love, and disgraced by his own sins which caused His crucifixion. In the cross, man observes real love in its sublime connotation. He also regards justice taking way, hearing the words of the apostle warning him and all the rest of the believers, "*For you were bought at a **price**; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's*" (1Cor 6:20). Also "*And you are not your own?*" but Christ's (1Cor 6:19). Is not this apostolic song said so that those, "*Who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again*" (2 Cor 5:15)?

In order to save us from the results of sin, God "*sent His Son to be the propitiation [atonement] for our sins*" (1 Jn 4:10). He condemned sin as Saint Paul the Apostle said, "*God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin, He **condemned sin in the flesh***" (Rom 8:3). "*Condemned sin in the flesh*" means that sin was judged upon the cross. God "*did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all*" (Rom 8:32). He did not pity His Son when He carried our sins in His flesh, but announced His wrath against sin, so that sin would receive a fair judgement. Here, God as holy, and as a rejecter of sin, is justified.

God wants to announce His vengeance and wrath against man's sin. The one who accepts that our Lord Jesus Christ carries his sins, and is moved by the love of Christ, would watch by his own eyes sin nailed upon the cross. He would thus know that his sins were forgiven. He would see by his own eyes that sin was judged fairly. Thus Saint Paul says, "*Having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross*" (Col 2:14).

Father Tadros Yacoub explains this verse saying, ‘*What does the tearing of the handwriting of requirements that was against us that was contrary to us mean, but the full payment of the debt upon the cross.*’

Saint John Chrysostom noted the importance of lifting the Divine wrath in order to fulfil the reconciliation. He said, “*To know that we received the Holy Spirit as the gift of reconciliation of God with us... God would not send the grace of the Holy Spirit if He was angry with us. If we were convinced that the absence of the Holy Spirit is proof of God’s anger, we are sure that sending Him once more is proof of reconciliation. If it was not for reconciliation God would not have sent the Holy Spirit.*” (On the Pentecost –Homily 1).

Why do some tend to see the Divine love announced upon the cross, and not witness sin judged there? I fear lest those people have an inclination towards sin which makes them feel that the announcement of God’s wrath against sin (that we beheld in the cross) is burdensome!! When they speak of God’s love they greet and welcome it, but when it comes to God’s judgment of sin and His wrath due to this sin, they avoid facing this truth. The thought of this wrath does not comfort their gentle selves. How strange! The same persons claiming these concepts arrive at the point of asking the following:- “*The one defeated by his lust, Your sacrifice makes stand blameless and accepted before Your father. The one whose repentance is difficult, is not Your sacrifice enough to be his repentance, and You his guarantor*”?

Watch, you men of understanding, and comprehend what is meant by this pensive plot? They ignore the Divine Justice, and escape from confronting the idea of punishment, therefore sliding towards the abyss of the announcement of God's acceptance of sinners without repenting.

This dreadful series, if left, would lead to making light of sin and consequently the ruin of the herd. Here we remember the expression of Saint Paul, "*It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God*" (Heb 10:31).

"*Anyone who has rejected Moses’ law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace?*" (Heb 10:28-29).

"*For we know Him who said Vengeance is Mine, I will repay, says the Lord, and again, The Lord will judge His people, It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God*" (Heb 10:30-31).

"*Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. For our God is a consuming fire*" (Heb 12:28-29).

Today when we sin we say, 'Forgive us God', and God says, 'Yes, I have forgiven but you should know that the price of your sin has been paid... how expensive a price it was...'

Why doesn't God forgive without the Cross?

Some ask, ‘Why does God not forgive sin according to man's request, without the pain and suffering of the cross?’ We answer saying, ‘If God forgave without the full punishment of

sin, it would be as if good and evil are equivalents to Him. If forgiveness is the sign of His mercy, where is His perfect holiness as a rejecter of evil, if He does not punish sin justly?’

We understand that God says, ‘I forgive you. However, I forgive those who perceive the value of forgiveness, that its price was very expensive; I forgive those who accept the grace of being healed from sin through the act of renewal and purification performed by the Holy Spirit.’

What is the use, if a patient asks the physician to forgive him for his illness? It is preferable for a patient to ask for the cure through all the required medical treatment. Consequently, it is not enough to ask for God’s forgiveness, without having reason for forgiveness. We should ask for forgiveness on account of Christ’s blood. Ask for the cure and take the medicine that the Heavenly physician offers i.e. the renewal of the nature through baptism and the Holy Sacraments. Regarding healing the malady of lust for sin, which the Lord Jesus Christ paid, the Bible says, "*By whose stripes you were healed*" (1 Pet 2:24).

It also says, "*But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way; And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.*" (Is 53:5-6).

A person feels that his salvation is paid for, and that the Lord Jesus Christ purchased him by His Own blood. He does not own himself anymore. He was buried with Christ, and crucified with Him at Baptism. When sin approaches saying, ‘Take your share in enjoyment’, he would answer, ‘Where is my share in lust?! Does a dead person have a share in anything?’ Thus Saint Paul the Apostle says, "*Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.*" (Rom 6:11). Man beholds that his sin was paid for in order to receive forgiveness.

Satan comes to him saying, ‘Why do you not sin once more?’, he would answer, ‘How could that ever be?! The price of sin is expensive... The forgiveness is fully paid, "*For the wages of sin is death*" (Rom 6:23). The death that I deserve, Christ my Savior has fully paid.’

One feels ashamed of himself whenever he looks towards the cross. He feels ashamed, he disguises himself, hates himself, hates the self that is demanding sin and its lust... he rebukes himself saying that in exchange for this cheap and temporal lust, Christ Who loved me, was flogged by stripes and nailed by nails. **So, each forbidden lust that man accepts, the Lord Jesus Christ paid for, in the burning stripes that He endured in His blessing body in marvelous patience, in spite of His righteousness.**

If we ignored the Divine justice, what is the requirement for the cross then? What is its necessity? Is the cross a kind of presentation that the Lord Jesus Christ might show His love for us! What then does the word 'redemption' mean? When it says, "*To give His [Christ] life a ransom for many*" (Matt 20:28), or "*Who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time*" (1 Tim 2:6), did the word redemption become meaningless?

Some persons refuse that the redeemer offers Himself in place of the sinner i.e. gives Himself up instead of the sinner, while the Bible clearly states, "*And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all*" (Is 53:6). Saint John the Baptist said, "*Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!*" (Jn 1:29). Isaiah the prophet said, "*You make His soul an offering for sin*" (Is 53:10). Saint Peter in his first Epistle said, "*knowing that you were not redeemed*

*with corruptible things, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot" (1Pet 1:18-19). Saint Paul the Apostle also said, "Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us." (Gal 3:13) He also said, "For you were **bought** at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's" (1Cor 6:20). Again he said, "Having wiped out the handwriting of requirements **that was against us, which was contrary to us.** And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross" (Col 2:14).*

What does "wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us" mean, but the full payment of the debt upon the cross? Why do we consider the debt a disgrace for the beloved Savior?

Saint Paul says boldly, "*For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him*" (2 Cor 5:21).

Saint Ephrem the Syrian said, "*Praises to the Rich Who **paid for us all**, that which **He borrow not His bill**, and also became our debtor*". (Hymns on Nativity-Hymn 2).

Saint Ambrose said, "*He hung, and for this cause He, **Who bore our curses**, became a curse*". (Exposition of Christian Faith, Book 2- Chapter 11).

The Problem of Abhorring God's Honor :

Those who reject the dogma of atonement say, 'The sin of man could never injure God's honor or despise Him. How could man touch God's honor even if he committed all the sin in his capacity?' We answer saying 'Man's sin would never touch God's honor as long as He declares His wrath against sin. However, being Holy, if He did not declare His wrath (which is impossible), only then would His honor be abhorred, since His absolute Holiness, as a rejecter of sin, has not been declared. We conceive, that truth and mercy have met together, by the cross, hence His holiness and love were both declared at once.'

Saint Athanasius clarified that the Divine justice was fulfilled (paid for) by the suffering and death upon the cross. He said, "*For His was at once more both to bring the corruptible to incorruption, and to **maintain intact the just claim of the Father upon all.** For being Word of the Father, and above all, He alone of natural fitness was both able to recreate everything, and worthy to suffer on behalf of all and to be ambassador for all with the Father.*" (The Incarnation of the Word, Chapter 7, point 5).

In The Stead Death :

Nowadays some people proclaim that our Lord Jesus Christ did not die for us but **to us**, meaning that upon the cross He did not die **instead of us** but **with us**, thus we died with Him!

They say that it is wrong to say that **He suffered for us, was crucified for us, or died for us.** They forget that the entire church in all its liturgical prayers recites in the Creed of Faith, that Jesus Christ "*Came down from heaven and was incarnated of the Holy Spirit and of the Virgin Mary and became man. And He was crucified for us*".

The Lord Jesus Christ Himself said, "*Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many*" (Matt 20:28).

What does a ransom mean if it was not **for those** whom He had redeemed!

If we had died with Christ on the day of His crucifixion and redemption, what then is the necessity of the act of redemption, since we paid the price of our own salvation?

We were crucified and buried with the Lord Jesus Christ on the day we received the sacrament of the Holy Baptism, as Saint Paul the Apostle said, "Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life" (Rom 6:3-4).

The Holy Spirit, in a supernatural act beyond time and space, acting in the Sacrament of Baptism, **earns the due compensation of Christ's death and gives to us.** It offers forgiveness through the due compensation of the blood of His Cross, granting us a new nature that befits the life of sonship to God, and making us members in "*His body, which is the church*" (Col 1:24). The Divine grace is limitless but we are limited.

We were not present prior to our existence to share with Christ in offering Himself as a ransom for the life of the world. How could it be that we existed two thousand years ago? Did we receive a state of being limitless in our human nature which is limited to time and place?

We were in Adam's loins when he sinned in paradise because we are his descendants according to our human nature. However, we are not the descendants of the Lord Jesus Christ according to our human nature, because He did not give birth to a physical generation like Adam. Yet the Holy Spirit renews this nature in Baptism and offers us adoption through the new birth from the water and the spirit because, "*That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit*" (Jn 3:6). By Baptism we become children of God, thus we shift from the lineage of Adam to that of the Lord Jesus Christ. Hence we become members in His body which is the Church, whose head is Christ.

The Lord Jesus Christ shared our nature without sin, to be able to die in the stead of all those whom He redeemed when He carried their sins, by nailing them by the cross.

Concerning this subject, Saint Athanasius the Apostolic wrote the following in his book "Incarnation of the Word" Chapter 8, "*And thus taking from our bodies one of like nature, because all were under penalty of the corruption of death He gave it over to death in the stead of all, and offered it to the Father - doing this, moreover, of His loving-kindness, to the end that, **firstly**, all being held to have died in Him, the law involving the ruin of men might be undone (inasmuch as its power was fully spent in the Lord's body, and had no longer holding-ground against men, his peers), and that, **secondly**, whereas men had turned toward corruption, He might turn them again toward incorruption, and quicken them from death by the appropriation of His body and by the grace of the Resurrection, banishing death from them like straw from the fire*".

Also in chapter 9 He wrote, "*For the Word, perceiving that no otherwise could the corruption of men be undone save by death as a necessary condition, while it was impossible for the Word to suffer death, being immortal, and Son of the Father; to this end He takes to Himself a body capable of death, that it, by partaking of the Word Who is above all, **might be worthy to die in the stead of all**, and might, because of the Word which was come to dwell in it,*

remain incorruptible, and that thenceforth corruption might be stayed from all by the Grace of the Resurrection. Whence, by offering unto death the body He Himself had taken, as an offering and sacrifice free from any stain, straightway He put away death from all His peers by the offering of an equivalent”.

The Lord Jesus Christ was a substitute for the sinners, was crucified **instead of** them, and repaid their debt. No one was with Him upon the cross on the day of His crucifixion, because He is the Only Savior through Whom we received salvation. It is written, “*Nor is there salvation in any other*” (Acts 4:12). He is the only One Who is sinless, the only One Who can carry the sin of the entire world and become an accepted ransom before the Heavenly Father. This is due to His perfect righteousness, and His super valuable sacrifice in the perception of God the Father, since it is the sacrifice of the Only Begotten Son. “*For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life*” (Jn 3:16).

If someone was crucified with Christ in the day of redemption on the Golgotha Mount, why did the following dialogue (that the Prophet Isaiah mentions by the spirit of prophecy) take place, “*Who is this who comes from Edom, With dyed garments from Bozrah, This One who is glorious in His apparel, Traveling in the greatness of His strength?—I who speak in righteousness, mighty to save. Why is Your apparel red, And Your garments like one who treads in the winepress? I have trodden the winepress alone, And from the peoples no one was with Me. For I have trodden them in My anger, And trampled them in My fury; Their blood is sprinkled upon My garments*” (Is 63:1-3).

Is He not Christ the Savior Whom John saw in his revelation sitting on a white horse: “*He was clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God... He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God... King Of Kings And Lord Of Lords*” (Rev 19:13-16).

If someone shared with Christ on the day of His crucifixion why did He say, “*And from the peoples no one was with Me*”? Why did He tell His disciples, “*Indeed the hour is coming, yes, has now come, that you will be scattered, each to his own, and will leave Me alone. And yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me*” (Jn 16:32)? If any of His sheep were crucified with Him why did He say to those who came to arrest Him, “*If you seek Me, let these go their way*” (Jn 18:8)? Why did He say, “*I lay down My life for the sheep*” (Jn 10:15)? Why did Caiaphas prophesy saying, “*You know nothing at all, nor do you consider that it is expedient for us that one man should die for the people, and not that the whole nation should perish. Now this he did not say on his own authority; but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation*” (Jn 11:49-51). How could anyone dare to say that he shared Christ in His crucifixion on Golgotha and in offering the sacrifice of redemption while the Prophet Isaiah says, “*All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.*” (Is 53:6).

Even the thief crucified on the right side of the Lord Jesus Christ could not say that Christ did not die **instead of him**. The death of this thief was an earthly punishment for the crimes that he committed in his life on earth. This type of death that he went through was not to exempt him from the eternal punishment, absolutely. If Christ was not to die instead of him upon the cross, it would not have been possible for him to be rescued from eternal death and destruction. Through the atoning sacrifice of the cross, it was possible for the door of paradise to be opened according to the thief’s repentance and request. Did not the thief that

was on the left side of Christ also die, but perished because he did not benefit from Christ's death for him upon the cross.

We cannot make any comparison at all between the cross of Christ and that of the thief. Upon the cross of Christ was the sole sacrifice accepted before God the Father, fulfilling all the debts of the sinners, paying in full the due of Divine justice.

Concerning the sacrifice of Christ, the following verses were mentioned through Isaiah the Prophet:

✠ *"Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise Him; He has put Him to grief. When You make His soul an offering for sin" (Is 53:10).*

✠ *"By His knowledge My righteous Servant shall justify many, for he shall bear their iniquities" (Is 53:11).*

✠ *"And He bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors." (Is 3:12).*

Now, The Critical Question Follows :

If we had been crucified with Christ on the day of His crucifixion, so that He was not crucified for us but with us, as some assume, are we crucified with Him once more in Baptism or not?

Is it allowable for the crucifixion to be repeated for Him, or for us?

What is the use of the sacraments and of Baptism? What is the use of the Holy Spirit in the Church?

We are granted the communion of death with Christ at baptism. Thus Saint Paul the Apostle says, *"For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection" (Rom 6:5).* When He says, *"We have been united together"* it implies that this happened during the Baptism, not before.

We warn of this strange and dangerous teaching that destroys the dogma of redemption. We should stick firmly to the teachings of the ancient holy fathers and the teaching of His Holiness Pope Shenouda III, may God grant him long life. His Holiness affirmed several times, the necessity of adhering to the sound teachings of the fathers *"that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting" (Eph 4:14).*

His Holiness Pope Shenouda III gave several lectures on this subject at the Coptic Theological College, and issued several articles in the Keraza Magazine to face what His Holiness called "Contemporary Heresy".

Following His Holiness footsteps in this field, we wish to emphasize the fact the everyone is rallying around the wise leadership of His Holiness, the Pope of our glorious Church, in keeping the Orthodox Faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.