

WIPED OUT

“Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord” (Acts 3:19).

I am indebted to William Barclay for the following insight. During the days of the Apostles one common way of cancelling a debt was to place a big X across the document. That X was actually the Greek letter “chi”, and the cancelling of the debt was called “chiazein”. Peter promised something much better to those who repented and turned to God. He said that their sins would be “wiped out”. This process was known as “exaleiphein” and refers to taking a sponge and completely removing all evidence of a former debt.

The word “exaleiphein” is found five times in the N.T. Scriptures. In Acts 3:19 it refers to wiping out our sins. In Col. 2:14 it refers to Jesus blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us. In Rev. 3:5 it refers to not wiping out a man’s name from the Book of Life. In Rev. 7:17 and 21:4 it refers to wiping away tears from our eyes.

The difference between placing an X on the debt and wiping it out can be illustrated in many ways. Here is one example from history.

Alfred Dreyfus was a French military officer born in 1859. He was the son of a wealthy Jew. He entered the military in 1882 and by 1889 had risen to the rank of Captain. In 1894 he was arrested for selling military secrets to the Germans and on Dec. 22 was sentenced to life imprisonment on Devil’s Island off the coast of French Guiana. Although he denied his guilt, anti-semitism was so strong that virtually nobody believed him.

Doubts, however, later began to arise when Lt. Col. Georges Picquart found evidence that Maj. Ferdinand Walsin-Esterhazy was engaged in espionage and that it was his handwriting on the document that condemned Dreyfus. It turns out that Dreyfus had been framed but it took 12 long years before he was able to prove it. The famous novelist Emile Zola got involved and wrote an article in defense of Dreyfus that made the front page of the newspaper. It sold 200,000 copies. In short, Dreyfus was still considered guilty but public pressure was so great that he was given an official pardon. Dreyfus accepted this clemency with the understanding that he would continue to try and prove his innocence. In 1904 a retrial was granted and Dreyfus was found completely innocent. His previous conviction was reversed and parliament passed a bill not only putting him back in the military, but also decorated him with the prestigious Legion of Honor.

Note this analogy. When Dreyfus was pardoned it was like placing a gigantic X on the guilty verdict. After his final trial all accusations against him were wiped away and he was declared completely innocent! Praise God! In Christ our sins are wiped away and we are justified by God just as though we had never sinned.

We remind you that it impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins (Heb. 10:4). Consequently the offering of such animals from Adam to Calvary provided a constant reminder of sins (Heb. 10:3). When Jesus died, however, He died for the redemption of the transgressions committed under the first covenant (Heb. 9:15). As such He cleansed our consciences from acts that lead to death (Heb. 9:14). Therefore we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all (Heb. 10:10). Our sins have been wiped away!

There are different ways that men discover this Good News. Some find it by accident like a man stumbling across a treasure hidden in a field. Some find it after a deliberate search like a man seeking goodly pearls (Matt. 13:44 -46). No matter how you come to know this Good News, however, it is worth giving up “everything” to possess.

Jesus invites everyone: **“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light” (Matt. 11:28 – 30).**

Remember! When you repent and turn to God your sins are completely “wiped out”!