

Part 4: section 2 The Atonement

The bleakest day in history was also the most victorious. The Son of God gave Himself over to the full forces of evil. But in so doing they were completely defeated.

1. The atonement is rooted in the love and justice of God: love offered sinners a way of escape, and justice demanded that the



requirements of the law should be met. Rom. 3:21-26 says: “But now God has shown us a way to be made right with him without keeping the requirements of the law.....We are made right with God by placing our faith in

Jesus Christ. And this is true for everyone who believes, no matter who we are. For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God’s glorious standard. Yet God, with undeserved kindness, declares that we are righteous. He did this through Christ Jesus when he freed us from the penalty for our sins. For God presented Jesus as the sacrifice for sin. People are made right with God when they believe that Jesus sacrificed his life, shedding his blood. This sacrifice shows that God was being fair when he held back and did not punish those who sinned in times past, for he was looking ahead and including them in what he would do in this present time. God did this to demonstrate his righteousness, for he himself is fair and just, and he declares sinners to be right in his sight when they believe in Jesus.” (NLT). John 3:16 summarises this: For God loved the world so much that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not die but have everlasting life”

Some deny the necessity of the atonement, and hold that God could have pardoned the sinner without receiving any satisfaction for His just nature. The Bible teaches however, that a righteous and holy God cannot simply overlook sin, but reacts against it, Ex. 23:7; Ps. 5:5, 6; Rom. 1:18, 32. Moreover, He had pronounced the sentence of death upon the sinner, Gen. 3:3; Rom. 6:23.

Jesus' sacrifice on the cross is extremely powerful to save. Paul declares: "He forgave us all our sins, having cancelled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross. And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross." Col 2:13-15. In Narnia C.S Lewis gave this analogy: "if a willing victim who had committed no treachery was killed in a traitor's stead, the Stone Table would crack and Death would start working backwards."

The Bible teaches us that the atonement finds its moving cause in the good pleasure of God, Isa. 53:10; Luke 2:14; Eph. 1:4-9; Col. 1:19, 20. As we've said before, the atonement is rooted in the love and justice of God: love offered sinners a way of escape, and justice demanded that the requirements of the law should be met, John 3:16; Rom. 3:24-26.

2. The Nature of the Atonement. The following particulars should be noted here:

a. It served to render satisfaction to God. It is often said that the atonement served primarily, if not exclusively, to influence the sinner, to awaken repentance in his heart, and thus to bring him back to God. But this is clearly wrong, for if a person offends another, amends should be made, not to the offender, but to the offended party. This means that the primary purpose of the atonement was to reconcile God to the sinner. The reconciliation of the sinner to God may be regarded as its secondary purpose.

b. It was a vicarious atonement. God might have demanded a personal atonement of the sinner, but the latter would not have been able to render it. In view of this fact God graciously ordained that Christ should take the place of man as his vicar or substitute. Christ as our vicar atoned for the sin of mankind by bearing the penalty of sin and meeting the demands of the law, and thus wrought an eternal

redemption for man. For that reason we speak of the atonement as a vicarious atonement. The offended party Himself made provision for the atonement in this case. The Old Testament sacrifices prefigured the atoning work of Christ, Lev. 1:4; 4:19,20, also 5:10, 16; 6:7; 17:11, etc. We are taught that our sins were laid upon Christ, Isa. 53:6, He

bore them, John 1:29, Heb. 9:28, and gave His life for sinners, Mark 10:45; Gal. 1:3-5; I Pet. 3:18.



c. It included Christ's active and passive obedience. It is customary to distinguish a twofold obedience of Christ. His active obedience consists in all that He did to observe the law in behalf of sinners, as a condition for obtaining eternal life; and His passive obedience in all that He suffered in paying the penalty of sin and discharging the debt of His

people. But while we distinguish these two, we should never separate them. Christ was active also in His suffering, and passive also in His submission to the law. Scripture teaches us that He paid the penalty of the law, Isa. 53:8; Rom. 4:25; Gal. 3:13; I Pet. 2:24, and merited eternal life for the sinner, Rom. 8:4; 10:4; 2 Cor. 5:21; Gal. 4:4-7.

3. The Extent of the Atonement. Christ suffered and died for all mankind but only those who choose to believe in Him are saved. (John 3:18-21. Those who are saved are called the elect, for it is written: "You did not choose me, but I chose you" John 15:16. Those who are saved are called "the elect" Matt 13:27, or "chosen". Christ not merely made salvation possible but really saves to the uttermost every one of those for whom he laid down His life, Luke 19:10; Rom. 5:10. The Bible indicates that Christ laid down His life for His people. Matt. 1:21, for His sheep, John 10:11, 15, for the Church, Acts 20:28; Eph. 5:25-27, or for the elect, Rom. 8:32-35. If the Bible sometimes says that Christ died for the world, I John 2:2; 4:14, or for all, I Tim. 2:6; Tit. 2:11; Heb. 2:9, this evidently means that He died for people of all nations of the world, or (in some instances) for all kinds or classes of people.

Questions for Review 1. What was the moving cause of the atonement?

2. Why was the atonement necessary?

3. What was the primary purpose of the atonement?

4. What is the difference between personal and vicarious atonement?

5. How was Christ's vicarious atonement prefigured in the Old Testament?

7. What is the difference between the active and passive obedience of Christ?

11. What is limited atonement, and what Scripture proof is there for it?

12. What objections are raised against this, and how can they be answered?

When I survey the wondrous cross
On which the Prince of glory died,
My richest gain I count but loss,
And pour contempt on all my pride.

Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast,
Save in the death of Christ my God!
All the vain things that charm me most,
I sacrifice them to His blood.

See from His head, His hands, His feet,
Sorrow and love flow mingled down!
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet,
Or thorns compose so rich a crown?

Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That were an off'ring far too small;
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all.

Songs: When I survey the wondrous cross; Mighty to save; Amazing Love; How Marvellous (I stand amazed); But for your grace; Just as I am; There is a Redeemer.

Index to Part 4:

4 The doctrine of Christ and the Holy Spirit

1. The Natures and Names of Christ – God and man, Jesus, Christ
2. The Atonement – making us at one with God
3. Christ's Death, Resurrection and Ascension (states of Christ)
4. The Offices of Christ – Prophet, Priest and King
5. The Work of the Holy Spirit.