

The Atonement

Tom Pennington, January 21, 2018



CHRISTOLOGY

The Atonement

I. The Necessity of the Atonement



I. The Necessity of the Atonement

1. It was not absolutely necessary to the character of God to save anyone at all.
2. Once God had determined to save a people for his Son, the death of Jesus Christ became absolutely necessary.



I. The Necessity of the Atonement

- Matt. 26:39 – He went a little beyond *them*, and fell on His face and prayed, saying, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as You will."
- Luke 24:25-26 – He said to them, "O foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken!²⁶ "Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?"
- Heb. 2:17 – He had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.



I. The Necessity of the Atonement

- Heb. 9:23 - Therefore it was necessary for the copies of the things in the heavens to be cleansed with these, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these.
- Heb. 9:25-26 – Nor was it that He would offer Himself often, as the high priest enters the holy place year by year with blood that is not his own.²⁶ Otherwise, He would have needed to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now once at the consummation of the ages He has been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.
- Heb. 10:4 – It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.



II. The Cause of the Atonement



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A. His own Character

1. His Justice

- MacArthur: "though God's law motivates him to save and forgive, man's sin cannot simply be overlooked. For God to reconcile such guilty sinners to himself, sin must be punished, the broken law must be satisfied, and God's wrath must be justly assuaged."



II. The Cause of the Atonement

A. His own Character

1. His Justice

- Ex. 34:6-7 - Then the LORD passed by in front of him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth;⁷ who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin; yet He will by no means leave *the guilty* unpunished, visiting the iniquity of fathers on the children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations."
- Rom. 3:25-26 - whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. *This was* to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; for the demonstration, *I say*, of His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.



II. The Cause of the Atonement

A. His own Character

1. His Justice
2. His love

- MacArthur: "often the concept of a penal-substitutionary atonement, in which the Son must die in the place of sinners to assuage the wrath of the Father, is reproached by foes and misunderstood by friends. To many, this view of the atonement pictures the Father as inherently angry and wrathful toward man and as won over only reluctantly by the loving sacrifice of the Son. However, this is precisely backward. The Father does not love his people strictly on the grounds that Jesus died for them; rather, Jesus died for his people because the Father loved them."



II. The Cause of the Atonement

A. His own Character

1. His Justice

2. His love

- John 3:16 - "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.
- 1 John 4:8-10



II. The Cause of the Atonement

A. His own Character

1. His Justice
2. His love
3. His gracious will in electing sinners to salvation
 - John 17:2 - You gave [the Son] authority over all flesh, that to all whom You have given Him, He may give eternal life.

B. His own Glory

- Eph. 1:6, 12, 14; 3:10-11
- Cf. Rom. 9:23, 24; 2 Cor. 4:15; Phi. 1:11; 2 Th. 1:8-10; 1 Pet. 2:9.



III. The Nature of the Atonement



A. False Theories of the Atonement

1. Ransom to Satan

- Origen (185-254 AD)
- No known current proponents; but common popular misunderstanding (C.S. Lewis)
- Definition: Christ's death was a ransom paid to Satan to purchase them from Satan, because of his rightful claim to them.
- Proof Texts: Matt. 20:28; Mark 10:45; 1 Cor. 6:20
- Problem: Christ's death was a judgment on Satan, not a payment to him (Col. 2:13-15).



A. False Theories of the Atonement

2. The Recapitulation Theory

- Irenaeus (130-202 AD)
- No current proponents
- Christ in his life recapitulated or experienced all of human life, including sin and death, thereby reversing the course that Adam set.
- Proof Texts: Rom. 5:15-21; Heb. 2:10
- Problem: undermines the sinlessness of Christ (1 John 3:5)



A. False Theories of the Atonement

3. The Satisfaction (or Commercial) Theory

- Anselm (1033-1109 AD)
- No current proponents
- Definition: Sin robbed God of his honor; Christ's death brought infinite honor to God; God rewarded the death of Christ by viewing it as a work of supererogation; He then passes on Christ's stored up merits on to those who respond to Christ in faith.
- Proof texts: John 10:18
- Problem: elevates God's honor above the other attributes and denies vicarious atonement.



A. False Theories of the Atonement

4. The Moral Influence Theory

- Peter Abelard (1079-1142 AD)
- Proponents: Socinians and later liberal theologians of all varieties.
- Definition: Christ's death was not necessary to atone for sin; instead it served as a profound demonstration of God's love, which softens men's hearts and moves them to repent.
- Proof texts: Rom. 5:8; 1 Cor. 5:17-19; Phil. 2:5-11; Col. 3:24
- Problem: no atonement required; basis of Christ's death is solely in God's love.



A. False Theories of the Atonement

5. The Example Theory

- Socinus (1539-1604 AD)
- Current Proponents: Unitarians; John Sanders and other Openness of God Theologians
- Definition: Christ's death did not atone for sin; instead it provided an example of faith and obedience that inspires man to repent and live a similar life.
- Proof texts: 1 Pet. 2:21; 1 John 2:6
- Problem: Christ was only a man; no atonement was necessary.



A. False Theories of the Atonement

6. The Governmental Theory

- Grotius (1583-1645 AD)
- Current proponents: Wardlaw; J. McLeod Campbell; Daniel Whitby; Samuel Clarke
- Definition: God's government demanded Christ's death so that God could demonstrate His high regard for His Law and His hatred of sin; Christ did not suffer the penalty required by the Law, but God accepted Christ's death as a token payment for sin and as a substitute for that penalty.
- Proof texts: Ps. 2; 5; Is. 42:21
- Problem: God sets His law aside and forgives without the law's penalty being met.



B. The Biblical Doctrine

- Wayne House: “Christ’s death was a vicarious (substitutionary) sacrifice that satisfied the demands of God’s justice upon sin, paying the penalty of man’s sin, bringing forgiveness, imputing righteousness, and reconciling man to God.”
- Alan Cairns: “the satisfaction of divine justice by the Lord Jesus Christ in His active and passive obedience (i.e., His life and death), which procures for His people a perfect salvation.”



The Biblical Words

- *Kaphar* (rp;K)
 - Translated as “to make atonement”
 - lit., “to cover”
 - LXX & NT – **i`la,skomai** (*hilaskomai*); “to propitiate”
- *Salach* (xl;s'))
 - Translated as “to forgive”
 - Has the meaning of “lightness”, “lifting up”, or “to be sent away.”
 - LXX & NT – **avfi,hmi** (*aphiemi*); “to let go” or “to forgive”



Christ's Atonement consists of...

- **1) Christ's obedience**
 - Active obedience
 - His 33 years of righteous living
- **2) Christ's sufferings**
 - Passive obedience
 - His suffering and dying for our sins



Man's Basic Problems

- **a) Objective guilt**
 - inherited from Adam
 - accumulated through our personal sin
- **b) Total lack of positive righteousness**



Christ's Active Obedience

- Is. 53:11 - By His knowledge the Righteous One, My Servant, will justify the many, As He will bear their iniquities.
- Matt. 3:15 - But Jesus answering said to him, "Permit *it* at this time; for in this way it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he permitted Him.
- Rom. 3:22 - even *the* righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction;
- Rom. 5:19 - For as through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous.



Christ's Active Obedience

- Rom. 8:3-4 - For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God *did*: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and *as an offering* for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, so that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.
- 1 Cor. 1:30 - But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption,



Christ's Active Obedience

- 2 Cor. 5:21 - He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.
- Phil. 3:9 - and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from *the* Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which *comes* from God on the basis of faith,



Council of Trent

- Justification occurs in three stages...
- **1) Preparation** – in adults this involves repentance, faith, and the intention to be baptized.
- **2) Beginning** – at baptism, God infuses grace “whereby an unjust man actually becomes just.” Trent
- **3) Increase** – by obedience and good works
- Trent: “through the observance of the commandments of God and the church, faith cooperating with good works,” believers may “increase in that righteousness received through the grace of Christ and are further justified.”



Trent's Anathema

- “If anyone says that the righteousness received [in justification] is not preserved and also not increased before God through good works, but that those works are merely the fruits and signs of justification obtained, but not the cause of its increase, let him be anathema.”



Christ's Passive Obedience

• **A) His Whole Life.**

- Is. 53:3 - He was despised and forsaken of men, A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; And like one from whom men hide their face He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.
- Matt. 4:1-11
- Heb. 5:8 - Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered.
- Heb. 12:3-4 - For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. ⁴You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in your striving against sin;



Christ's Passive Obedience

- **B. His Suffering & Death on the Cross**
- 1) Physical suffering
 - Is. 53:5 - He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; The chastening for our well-being *fell* upon Him, And by His scourging we are healed.



Christ's Passive Obedience

- **B. His Suffering & Death on the Cross**
 - **2) The Weight of Sin's Guilt**
 - Is. 53:6 – All of us like sheep have gone astray, Each of us has turned to his own way; But the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all To fall on Him.
 - Is. 53:12 - Therefore, I will allot Him a portion with the great, And He will divide the booty with the strong; Because He poured out Himself to death, And was numbered with the transgressors; Yet He Himself bore the sin of many, And interceded for the transgressors.
 - John 1:29 - The next day he saw Jesus coming to him and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!



Christ's Passive Obedience

- **B. His Suffering & Death on the Cross**
 - **2) The Weight of Sin's Guilt**
 - 2 Cor. 5:21 - He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.
 - Gal. 3:13 – Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us-- for it is written, "CURSED IS EVERYONE WHO HANGS ON A TREE "--
 - Heb. 9:28 - Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time for salvation without *reference to sin*, to those who eagerly await Him.
 - 1 Pet. 2:24 –He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed.



Christ's Passive Obedience

- **B. His Suffering & Death on the Cross**

- **3) The Wrath of God**

- Matt. 27:46 - About the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "ELI, ELI, LAMA SABACHTHANI?" that is, "MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME?"
 - Rom. 3:25-26 - "propitiation"
 - Heb. 2:17 - Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.
 - 1 John 2:2 - He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for *those of* the whole world.
 - 1 John 4:10 - In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son *to be* the propitiation for our sins.

