

Understanding 'Atonement'

Explore Your Faith Teaching Series - Explo-20 ©
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OUTLINE

The Theme of Atonement

There are numerous scripture references to God's love for us. But if there is one word that encapsulates God's love in a way no other does, it is the word **Atonement**.

This study begins with explaining some fundamental differences between salvation and atonement.

It examines the *necessity for atonement*.

It explores the holy requirements of atonement.

It looks at the *OT provisions* for atonement and compares them with **Christ's atonement**.

It also looks at how Christ felt about his part in it.

Why atonement?

"This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins" (I John 4:19). To fully understand God's love we need to understand atonement.

Understanding fundamentals: "Salvation" is different to "atonement"

Salvation is *the application of the work* of Christ to the life of the individual. Christ died for **all mankind, but not all are saved!** (Think about this!). Salvation therefore reestablishes our relationship with God and transforms the radically depraved nature of our hearts. Salvation involves God's calling, our conversion, and our regeneration. We have dealt with these aspects previously.

Atonement on the other hand relates to *the reconciling work* of Christ by which Salvation becomes possible. By substituting himself for us, Jesus actually took on Himself the punishment due to us, appeased the Father, and brought into effect reconciliation *between God and mankind*.

Why was atonement necessary?

Firstly, because the *very nature* of God is that He is perfect and holy. Sin is repulsive to him. He turns away from it. Therefore, no relationship with him is possible if sin is present.

Secondly, because man's nature is described in the Bible as that of 'total depravity' (utter sinfulness). This means that sin has affected his entire person: body (Rom. 6:6, 12; 7:24), the mind (Rom. 1:21; 2 Cor. 3:14-15), the will (Rom. 6:17); and the emotions ((Rom 1:26-27); Gal. 5: 24). (However, total depravity does not mean that the person is entirely insensitive to his conscience or the sense of right or wrong).

Thirdly, because man was unable to keep the Law (which simply put, was the expression of God's person and will- the means by which God communicated His moral and spiritual values). The law was therefore given as a means of relating to a personal God. Disobedience to it is actually an attack upon the very nature of God Himself, carrying a liability for punishment (cause-effect relationship). As a sinful being, man was incapable of attaining to God's standards in order to be restored into relationship with him.

God's provision of 'Once For All' atonement: His son Jesus Christ.

Fully God and fully man. His humanity made it possible for him to represent us (he was born under the law, like the rest of us) his sinlessness was sufficient to pay for the sins of all mankind.

What about atonement for those under the Law before Christ? (Old Testament Provision)

The OT sacrificial system was given, but this was only a temporary compensation for sins committed. Sacrifices were not meant to do a work of reformation in the sinner or to deter the sinner from sin. They were for atonement (to avoid punishment). The sacrifices "covered" the sin by standing between the sinner and God. They were a 'substitute' for the sinner. (Needed to be repeated continually).

What Atonement involves

***Firstly* Sacrifice**

(Hebrews 9: 6-15). Christ the High Priest offered his own blood, securing an eternal redemption (likened to the Day of Atonement). See also **9:28** and **10: 5-18** for "once for all" concept. His sacrifice likened to both the "burnt offering" and the "sin offering". Both victim and the priest who offers it (two parties in the sacrificial system combined into one)

***Secondly* Propitiation**

This means simply that the sacrifice appeased God. Under the Levitical system, the offering was to be made to the Lord and forgiveness would follow (Lev. 4:35). There is no doubt that Christ himself knew that his death was propitiatory.

***Thirdly*, Substitution**

This means that the sacrificial victim took the place of the sinner. The animal was slaughtered; the sinner was set free. Christ's death was substitutionary. He took our place. (See Isaiah 53, 2 Cor.5: 21 and other passages for key words like "bore", "laid upon" etc.)

***Fourthly*, Reconciliation**

Enmity and hostility between God and man are brought to an end. *Note that the work of reconciliation is God's, not man's. "God in Christ reconciled us to himself."*

What were Jesus' views about his own impending death?

He saw his death as a ransom (Matt. 20: 28; Mark 10:45)
He saw himself as our substitute (John 15:13) - he spoke these words on the eve of his crucifixion, so it is more than just a broadly stated principle he was enunciating.
Jesus was convinced that his life and death constituted a fulfillment of OT prophecy (see Is. 53). He cited Is. 53: 12, identifying himself with the 'suffering servant'. Jesus spoke regularly of the Father's having sent him.
He saw himself as a Sacrifice. (See his high -priestly prayer where he consecrates himself - John 17:19).

Other references to the atoning work of Christ (not exhaustive)

2 Cor 5:19 - "god was in Christ reconciling himself to the world"
Rom 5:8- " ---- while we were yet sinners Christ died for us"
2 Cor 5:14 - " --- we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died"
1 Cor. 5:7 - " For Christ our Paschal Lamb has been sacrificed"
Rom 5:9 - "we are justified by his blood"
Eph 1:7-" in him we have redemption through his blood"
Col. 1:20 -"----making peace by the blood of his cross".
Important to understand that the references to Christ's blood are not a reference to his physical blood *per se*, but to his death as a sacrificial provision for our sins (the life is in the blood).

Conclusion

