

Chapter 27: The Atonement

Definition: The work Christ did in his life and death to earn our salvation.

A. The cause of the atonement

1. The love of God: John 3:16
2. The justice of God: Rom. 3:25-26
3. Application to our lives:

B. The necessity of the atonement

1. Not absolutely necessary: 2 Pet. 2:4
2. But the atonement was necessary if God was going to save any sinners
Matt 26:39; Luke 24:25-26; Rom. 3:26; Heb 2:17; Heb 9:
3. Application

C. The nature of the atonement

1. Christ's obedience for us (sometimes called his "active obedience")
 - a. Christ lived a life of perfect obedience to God as our representative
Matt 3:15; John 8:29; Rom. 5:19; 1 Cor. 1:30; Phil 3:9
 - b. Application:
2. Christ's sufferings for us (sometimes called his "passive obedience")
 - a. Suffering for his whole life: Matt 4:1-11; Heb 5:8; Isa 53:3
Application: (1 Pet. 1:21)
 - b. Christ's sufferings culminated in the pain of the cross: Matt 26:38
 1. Physical pain and death: Mark 15:24 "and they crucified him"; Seneca (1st cent. AD): "drawing the breath of life amid long-drawn-out agony" (Epistle 101, sec. 14) (*Systematic Theology*, p. 572)
 2. The pain of bearing sin; note OT background: Lev 4:1-4; Lev 16:15-22; Isa. 53:6; see also 2 Cor 5:21; Gal 3:13; Heb 9:28; 1 Pet 2:24
 3. Abandonment: Mark 14:34; Matt 26:56; Matt 27:46; (Hab 1:13)
 4. Bearing the wrath of God
"propitiation": a sacrifice that bears God's wrath and turns it to favor
Rom 3:25; Heb 2:17; 1 John 2:2; 1 John 4:10
can we understand Matt 27:46? (see Psalm 22:1-2)
finally, after several hours, Jesus' suffering came to an end:
John 19:30; John 10:17-18; Luke 23:46; Isa 53:11-12
 - c. Further understanding of the death of Christ
 1. The penalty was inflicted by God the Father 2 Cor 5:21; Isa 53:6; Isa 53:10; Rom 5:8; Application:
 2. Not eternal suffering but complete payment
 - a. we would have to suffer eternally because we could never make our sinful nature righteous, but Christ had a sinless nature
 - b. Christ alone was able to bear the full measure of God's wrath to the end: Isa 53:11; John 19:30; Rom 8:1; Heb 9:25-28; contrast with Roman Catholic view
 3. The atonement was primarily something that happened between Christ and God the Father --> It has an objective reality ("out there," though it was for us)
Heb. 9:11-14; 23-26
Application:
 4. The meaning of the blood of Christ
primarily: evidence of payment of Christ's life as a ransom for us:
Matt 26:28; Rom 3:25; 5:9; etc.
also: cleanses our consciences: Heb 9:14
gives us access to God in worship & prayer: Heb 10:19

cleanses us from remaining sin: 1 John 1:7; see Rev 1:5

enables us to conquer the accuser: Rev 12:10-11

rescues us from a sinful pattern of life: 1 Pet 1:18-19

Application:

5. Christ's death as "penal substitution"
 - a. penal = he bore a penalty
 - b. substitution = he died as a substitute for us
also called "vicarious atonement"
vicar = someone who stands in place of another
 - c. Some prominent evangelicals have denied this doctrine recently
Joel Green (Asbury), Judith Gundry-Volf (formerly at Fuller, now at
Yale), Steve Chalke in England

Application:

6. Why this sort of death?
Perhaps because it was so completely de-humanizing.

d. There was still more to the atonement than paying the penalty for sin.

Our problems without the atonement:

1. We deserve to die.
2. We deserve to bear God's wrath.
3. We are separated from God.
4. We are in bondage to sin.
5. We face powerful enemies, Satan and his demons.

Answers to these problems:

1. Sacrifice (*thusia*): to bear the penalty of death in our place: Heb 9:26
2. Propitiation (*hilasterion*): to bear God's wrath in our place: Rom 3:25
3. Reconciliation (verbs *katalasso*, *apokatalasso*): to reconcile us to God: 2 Cor 5:18-19
4. Redemption (nouns *lutron*, *antilutron*; verb *lutroo*): to ransom us from sin and the kingdom of Satan:
Matt 20:28; Titus 2:14; 1 Pet 1:18-19.
5. Victory over Satan and demons: Col. 2:15

e. Some incorrect views of the atonement

1. The Ransom to Satan Theory
2. The Moral Influence Theory
3. The "Christ as Example" Theory (usually called the example theory)
4. The Governmental Theory

f. Did Christ descend into hell?

1. The origin of the phrase, "He descended into hell" (found in one copy of Apostles' Creed in 390 AD, then not again until 650 AD)
2. Possible biblical support for a descent into hell Acts 2:27; Romans 10:6-7; Ephesians 4:8-9; 1 Peter 3:18-20; 1 Peter 4:6
3. Biblical opposition to a "descent into hell" Luke 23:43; John 19:30; Luke 23:46 (compare Acts 7:59)
4. Conclusion regarding the Apostles' Creed and the question of Christ's possible descent

D. The extent of the atonement

1. Scripture passages used to support the Reformed view John 10:11; Rom 8:32; Eph 5:25
2. Scripture passages used to support the Non-Reformed view (general redemption or unlimited atonement) John 1:29; John 6:51; 6:51; 1 John 2:2; Rom 14:15; 2 Pet 2:1
3. Some points of agreement and some conclusions about disputed texts
4. Points of clarification and caution regarding this doctrine