

The Atonement of Christ

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Why Atonement?

- The Necessity of the Atonement
 - Atonement is necessary because of the justice of God
 - Man's transgression of God's law demands satisfaction
 - The righteousness and holiness of God, which can tolerate no sin, cannot simply overlook open defiance to His infinite majesty
 - God hates sin with a divine hatred (Gen. 18:25; Ex. 20:5; 23:7; Ps. 5:6-7; Nah. 1:2; Rom. 1:18, 32)
 - The veracity of God requires that the sentence which He has pronounced on sin should be executed (Ez. 18:4; Rom. 6:23)
 - The man Jesus Christ is the "one mediator" between God and man (1 Tim. 2:5) who can reconcile a holy God with sinful men

- The Moving Cause of the Atonement
 - The good pleasure to save sinners by a substitutionary atonement was founded in the love and justice of God
 - The love of God offers sinners a way of escape (Jn. 3:16)
 - The justice of God requires the demands of the law should be met (Rom. 3:24-26)

The Nature of the Atonement

- It Rendered Satisfaction to God
 - The atonement is not intended to influence the sinner, awaken repentance, or bring him back to God
 - The atonement serves to propitiate God, and to regain His good favor by making amends for the sin committed
 - The primary purpose of the atonement was to reconcile God to the sinner, not the other way around
 - The Bible does, however, speak of the sinner being reconciled to God (Rom. 5:10; 2 Cor. 5:19-20); this is a secondary purpose of the atonement

- It Was a Vicarious Atonement
 - Because of man's sin, God would be just in demanding personal satisfaction from the sinner
 - Instead of insisting on personal atonement, God appointed a vicar (substitute) in Jesus Christ to take man's place; this vicar atoned for the sin of mankind and wrought an eternal redemption for man

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- Thus, the offended party Himself made provision for atonement
- Vicarious atonement is merciful; it is also the only effective means of assuring complete reconciliation and everlasting life
- The vicarious atonement was prefigured in the animal sacrifices of the Old Testament (Lev. 1:4; 4:20, 31, 35; 5:10, 16; 6:7; 17:11)
- Our sins were laid on Christ, and He bore our iniquity by giving Himself for sin and dying in our place (Is. 53:6; Jn. 1:29; 2 Cor. 5:21; Gal. 3:13; Heb. 9:28; 1 Pe. 2:24; Mk. 10:45; Rom. 8:3; Gal. 1:4; 1 Pe. 3:18; 1 Jn. 2:2)

- It Included Christ's Active and Passive Obedience
 - "Active Obedience"
 - Includes all that Christ did to observe the law in behalf of sinners, as a condition for obtaining eternal life
 - Jesus merited eternal life for the sinner, achieving the goal which Adam failed to reach (Rom. 8:4; 10:3, 4; 2 Cor. 5:21; Gal. 4:4, 5, 7)
 - "Passive Obedience"
 - Includes all that Christ suffered in paying the penalty of sin and thus discharging the debt of all His people
 - Jesus paid the penalty for sin and consequently removed the curse from man (Is. 53:6; Rom. 4:25; 1 Pe. 3:18; 1 Jn. 2:2)
 - Active and passive obedience cannot be separated
 - It was part of Christ's active obedience that He subjected Himself voluntarily to suffering and death (Jn. 10:18)
 - It was part of Christ's passive obedience that He lived in subjection to the law and moved about in the form of a servant

- It Was a Double Imputation
 - The basis of justification is the transfer or imputation of the righteousness of Christ to the believer
 - Justification is a double imputation wherein our sins are imputed to Him and His righteousness is imputed to us
 - Jesus' passive obedience pays the penalty due our sins; Jesus' active obedience clothes us in His righteousness and makes us acceptable before God
 - The justification of believers is through Christ alone

The Extent of the Atonement

- Universal Atonement
 - Held by Roman Catholics, Lutherans, Arminians
 - The atonement wrought by Christ is universal; this does not mean that everyone will be saved, but that everyone has the opportunity to be saved without exception

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- The Father and the Son intend to make salvation available to everyone, even though in the end all are not saved
- Christ made salvation possible for all men, but their actual redemption is dependent upon their own free choice
- Limited Atonement
 - Held by Reformed Christians (including us Presbyterians!)
 - The intent of the Father and the Son was only to save the elect, a purpose that is actually accomplished
 - Christ does not just make atonement possible, but He achieves reconciliation and salvation for the elect (Lk. 19:10; Rom. 5:10; 2 Cor. 5:21; Gal. 1:4; 3:13; Eph. 1:7)
 - Christ lays down His life for a qualified number of people, the elect (Mt. 1:21; Jn. 10:11, 15; Acts 20:28; Eph. 5:25-27; Rom. 8:32-35)
 - Christ actually saves to the uttermost every one of those for whom He actually died
- Objections to Limited Atonement
 - There are passages which teach that Christ died for the world (*e.g.*, Jn. 1:29; 3:16; 1 Jn. 2:2; 4:14)
 - The word “world” does not always denote all the individuals in humanity (*e.g.*, Lk. 2:1; 12:19)
 - In context, Jesus Christ died not merely for the Jews, but for people (individuals) of all the various nations of the world – not every individual, but all kinds of individuals
 - There are passages which teach that Christ died for all men (Rom. 5:18; 1 Cor. 15:22; 2 Cor. 5:14; 1 Tim. 2:4, 6; Titus 2:11; Heb. 2:9; 2 Pe. 3:9)
 - The word “all” sometimes has a restricted meaning in Scripture, denoting all of a particular class (1 Cor. 15:22; Eph. 1:23), or all kinds of classes (Titus 2:11)
 - If “all” were taken in the absolute sense, these passages would teach that all men without exception are actually saved, something even objectors to Limited Atonement reject (*cp.* Rom. 5:18; 1 Cor. 15:22; Heb. 2:9, 10)
 - The universal offer of salvation in preaching presupposes a universal atonement
 - Objectors claim that if Christ did not die for all men, then the offer of salvation cannot be extended to all in good faith
 - The universal declaration of the gospel does not declare that Christ made atonement for each individual; salvation is conditioned by faith and repentance that can only be wrought in the heart by the Holy Spirit
 - The gospel is to be freely preached to all in compliance with the Lord’s own command (Mt. 28:16-18); but only the elect will respond to the gospel through the grace of God and thus receive the blessings of salvation