

SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

Christology— Study of Christ— Part 4
The Atonement: The Meaning of the Death of Christ

Introduction

- One's theory of the atonement is the pivot of their entire theological system.
 - This is why the Arminians and Calvinists have so many differences.
- It is the pivot because it causes a whole range of ideas from the Old and New Testaments to converge at the cross.
- The study of the atonement teaches the Christian much about the work of Christ.

Two Questions

- Two dominant questions stand before us when dealing with the atonement.
 - The answer to these questions determines a person's understanding of the atonement.
- Question 1: What is the meaning of the death of Christ?
 - This is the focus of this lesson.
- Question 2: What is the purpose of the death of Christ?
- The two questions are connected, and the way you answer the first should determine the second.
 - Strangely, the Arminians and Calvinists answer the first question nearly the same, but only the Calvinists are consistent in applying that answer to the second question.
- The first question is best answered by definitions. The second will take more steps.



Meaning of the Atonement

- What is the meaning of the death of Christ?
- The Scriptures speak considerably of His death and use a variety of terms with regard to it.
 - This means that Christ's death effectively accomplished all of these words that are tied to it.
- Therefore, it is crucial that we quickly go through a glossary of terms; seventeen to be exact.



Key Terms -- Atonement

- The first word is atonement.
 - The Old Testament Hebrew word for atonement meant to reconcile.
 - The New Testament Greek word carries the fuller meaning of "covering."
 - What this means is that sin is only truly "covered" in the New Testament.
 - In the Old Testament when animal sacrifices were made by the Israelites, it did not cover their sin, or effectively remove it.
 - Instead, it merely satisfied God's requirements to be reconciled to Israel, yet it saved no one.
 - In the New Testament, we learn that Christ's sacrifice did in fact "cover" sin, thus removing it from the person who receives atonement.
- True salvation did not exist until Christ died at Calvary.
 - This is consistent with OT saints going to Abraham's bosom.
- This is all a narrow and precise definition of the word atonement.
- Theologians, however, use the word in a broad way to encompass all 17 glossary terms that we are going over. So make sure you notice if it is being used in this broad way, or in the biblical narrow way.
 - It conveys all of the ideas of Christ's redemptive work on the cross.

Expiation & Forgiveness



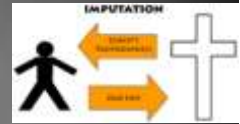
- Expiation means bearing the penalty.
 - With this word, the Scriptures affirm that Christ died with reference to the Law.
 - The penalty of breaking the Law is death and separation. Christ bore the penalty in our place. Thus, his death expiated.
 - 1Peter 2:24 – He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.
- The third term is forgiveness. It means the canceling of a debt. All these terms are interrelated to each other.
 - Mat 26:28 – for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.

Guilt

- Guilt means obligation to the law.
 - The word is used in an objective sense, not subjective.
 - Guilt is our objective standing before the objective Law.
 - Feeling guilty and being guilty are two different things.
 - Guilt bears obligation to the law, and the obligation is death.
 - In the OT, the Israelite's guilt was passed onto the scapegoat. Thus, the obligation (death) was passed onto the goat as a substitute, and then the goat wandered in the wilderness.
 - In the NT, our guilt is passed onto the Lord Jesus. After the guilt is passed on, he bears the penalty (expiation).
 - Isaiah 53:6 – All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

Imputation

- Imputation means to reckon. It is a legal or banking term that refers to imputation into an account.
- In the NT, there is imputation onto two sides.
 - In Romans 5, Adam's sin is imputed to all men. Christ's righteousness is imputed (or reckoned) to those who believe.
- Biblical imputation is an alien imputation that has alien guilt and righteousness.
 - Christ takes the guilt that is alien to Him but natural to us, and we take His righteousness which is alien to us but natural to Him.
 - So our guilt was imputed to His account, thus necessitating the payment on the cross, and His righteousness was imputed to our account, thus making us no longer guilty, but instead innocent.
 - Thus, it is a double alien imputation.
- Rom 5:17 For if, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ.



Justice

- The sixth term is justice, which means “what is due.”
 - Justice demands that people get what they deserve.
- Therefore, if the standard declares that the wages of sin is death, then justice demands death.
 - This is why those without Christ will go into eternal damnation and suffer through the second death



Justification

- Justification literally means to “declare righteous.”
- Since Christ took on our guilt and imputed His righteousness to us, we are declared righteous by God and given a positional righteousness.
 - It is important that you understand at this point that Christ's death is the only means of salvation from a logical standpoint.
 - I just pointed out that God is just. If He is just, then He supports the truth. Yet, if God is a justifier and He justifies the wicked, then He is declaring something that is not true. He is saying that an unrighteous person is righteous. How can such a thing be possible?
 - Well, it is only possible if a righteous man can give his righteousness to others by in turn taking their unrighteousness upon himself. Yet, no man can be righteous because of the sin nature of Adam.
 - But if God Himself became a man, and bypassed the sin nature by the virgin birth, He could then live as a righteous man and give the righteousness to others while paying for their wickedness. Furthermore, He would be capable of paying the price.
 - If a non-divine man were born under those good circumstances, he still could not pay for everyone, because he does not have the ability.

Justification

- Debt Example.
- Therefore, Christ was able in His divine righteousness to declare as many sinners as He chose as righteous and to pay for all of their wickedness.
 - As a result, God is not declaring a lie about us when He calls us righteous, instead He is proclaiming a positional truth.
- It is absolutely amazing that God pulled this off! Angels longed to look into this (1 Peter 1:12).
 - Acts 13:38-39 Therefore, let it be known to you, brothers, that through this man forgiveness of sins is being proclaimed to you. (39) and everyone who believes in Him is justified from everything, which you could not be justified from through the law of Moses. (HCSB).



Passover & Penalty

- The eighth term is Passover, which means “substitution.”
 - The Passover Lambs were a wonderful illustration of substitution.
 - Christ substituted His life for ours. He was our Passover.
 - John 1:29 – The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”
 - 1Corinthians 5:7 – Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed.
- The next term is penalty, which means “natural and judicial consequences.”
 - This is related to expiation, since that was bearing the price of the penalty.
 - Well, this is the penalty itself. Therefore, the penalty for sin is death.
 - Christ covered our penalty through expiation.

Propitiation

- Propitiation means “wrath turned away”
 - This word above all of the others will show which side is right in the Arminian and Calvinist debate.
- Romans 1:18 says that the wrath of God is poured out on all men. Well, propitiation is when this wrath is turned away.
 - Romans 1:18 – For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.
 - Therefore, propitiation can only apply to those who are no longer under wrath.
 - Christ’s death brought this propitiation.
 - 1 John – 4:10 In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.
 - John 3:36 – Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.

Propitiation
The remission of former sins
of God's wrath against sinners by
means of an atoning sacrifice.
Christ our propitiation



Ransom & Reconciliation

- Ransom means “purchase price.”
 - The ransom price was Christ’s substitution. This ties in with justice and imputation.
 - Mark 10:45 – For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”
- Reconciliation means turning enmity to amity.
 - Since the natural person hates God and God hates the wicked and those who do evil, reconciliation is necessary for salvation.
 - Christ’s death on the cross also brought reconciliation.
 - 2 Corinthians 5:18 – All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation;



Redemption, Remission & Righteousness

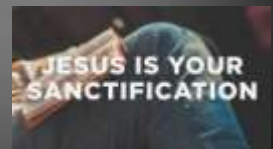
- Redemption means “release and deliverance.”
 - By His death, we are redeemed from the bonds and penalty of sin.
- Remission means “cancelation of the punishment due.”
 - This is obviously related to all of the other terms.
- Righteousness means “conformity to God’s standard.”
 - This is equivalent to being sinless.
 - This position is given to us through justification because Christ gives us His righteousness.



Sanctification & Substitution

- The sixteenth term is “sanctification” and it means “set apart for holy use.”
 - Through Christ’s death, God has set us apart for Himself and for His glory.
- Finally, the seventeenth word is “substitution,” which means “Christ instead of the sinner.”
 - This is implied by the Christ being our Passover.

“Simply put, the lack of sanctification is a sign of non-regeneration”



Summary

- Thus, with a stronger understanding of these seventeen terms, you can understand just how much work Christ accomplished just by His death on the cross.
- In review and summary, Christ’s death **atoned**, **expiated**, **forgave**, **imputed**, **justified**, **passed over**, **propitiated**, **ransomed**, **reconciled**, **redeemed**, **remised**, **sanctified**, and **substituted** for sinners so that while still remaining just, God took care of both our guilt and the penalty of it, thus replacing it with righteousness.
- How great of a Savior that we have, Amen!
- All of this is the “meaning” of Christ’s atonement.