

Biblical Doctrine of the Atonement

...we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atone ment. Romans 5:11

- I. **The Doctrine of Atonement includes all that Christ accomplished by His death to save sinners, i.e., the satisfaction of all the demands of God's holy character and law upon which the favor and fellowship of God were suspended. Christ obeyed every precept of the law and was with out guilt. Christ was the perfect substitute who bore the punishment rightly due sinners whose guilt is imputed to Him such that He representatively bore their punishment. The following theological terms describe the meaning of the atonement.**

A. **Atonement**—combines the syllables *at-one-ment*, meaning to be made one or to reconcile. In Biblical usage, *atonement* is described as the *satisfaction* of Divine law including (1) the obedience which the law demands as the condition of life, and (2) the suffering which the law demands as the penalty of sin. *Rom. 5:19 ...by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous... 10:4 For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth. Heb. 9:28 So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many...*

1. In the KJV Old Testament, two words are translated atone ment:

a. **kaphar**, a Hebrew verb translated *atone-ment*, conveys the concept to *cover, to put sin out of sight, to reconcile. Leviticus 17:11 ...for it is the blood that maketh an atonement [kaphar] for the soul. Ezekiel 45:15...to make reconciliation [kaphar] for them, saith the Lord GOD.*

b. **kippurim**, a Hebrew noun translated *atone-ment*, conveys the concept of coverings.

Leviticus 23:28...for it is a day of atonement [kippurim] to make an atone ment [kaphar] for you before the LORD your God.

2. In the KJV New Testament, the English word *atonement* occurs once as a translation of *katallage*, a Greek noun which conveys the

concept of *reconciliation*. as also does the Greek its verb form *katallasso*. *Romans 5:11we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ by whom we have now received the atonement [katallage]. II Corinthians 5:18 And all things are of God, who hath reconciled [katallasso] us to him self by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation [katallage]; 19 To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling [katallasso] the world unto him - self, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation [katallage]. 20 Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled [katallasso] to God.*

B. **Expiation**—bearing a penalty for sin. *I Peter 2:24 Who his [Jesus'] own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed.*

C. **Forgiveness**—charges removed because satisfaction has been made; a judicial rather than an emotional term. *Ephesians 1:7 In whom [Jesus] we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace.*

D. **Guilt**—the just charge for sin or transgression. *James 2:10 For who so ever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.*

E. **Imputation**—to lay the responsibility or credit upon another. *II Cor. 5:19 To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto him self, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation.*

F. **Justice**—merited reward or punishment. *Jer. 23:5 Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth.*

G. **Justification**—in theology a righteousness by imputation. *Romans 4:24 ...to whom it [righteousness] shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; 25 Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification.*

H. **Penalty**—suffering or retribution resulting from the judgment of sin. *I Peter 3:18 For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, be-*

ing put to death in the flesh...

I. **Propitiation**—satisfaction, through Christ's atone ment, of all God's holy, righteous requirements for judgment of the sinner.

Romans 3:25 Whom [Christ] God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God.

J. **Ransom**—price paid by Christ in satisfying the justice of the holy and righteous God. *Mark 10:45 For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.*

K. **Reconciliation**—application of atonement of Christ to the sinner by the Holy Spirit making the sinner completely acceptable to the holy God.

Col. 1:21 And you, that were some time alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he [Jesus] reconciled 22 In the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unproveable in his sight.

L. **Redemption**—payment of the price demanded by the holy God for the deliverance of the sinner from the bondage and burden of sin. *Ephesians 1:7 In whom we have redemption through his [Jesus] blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace.*

M. **Remission**—sending away of sin in the sense of forgiveness. *Acts 10:43 To him [Jesus] give all the prophets witness, that through his name who so ever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins.*

N. **Righteousness**—conforming to God's moral standard. *Romans 3:26 To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.*

O. **Sanctification**—set apart by God unto holy use. *I Peter 1:2 Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ...*

P. **Satisfaction**—same as **propitiation**. *Isaiah 53:10 Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put him to grief... 11 He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities.*

Q. **Substitution**—Christ's death on behalf of others.

Romans 5:8 But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners,

Christ died for us.

R. **Vicarious**—same as **substitution**. *I Cor. 15:3 For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures.*

II. **Christ provides Vicarious (Substitutional) Atonement as taught in the Bible. Christ is the Divine Substitute for the sinner.**

A. **God is infinite (with out bounds), His merits are infinite, and man has sinned against the infinite God**

I Kings 8:27 But will God indeed dwell on the earth? behold, the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain thee... Psalms 145:3 ...his greatness is unsearchable. Romans 3:23 For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.

B. **Everlasting punishment in everlasting hell is prescribed for those who sin against the infinite God.**

Matt. 25:41 Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels. Rev. 14:11 And their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night.

C. Only the infinite God in the person of Jesus Christ could satisfy the justice of the Holy Godhead by suffering infinite punishment on the cross as a substitute for sinners, bearing the everlasting suffering that believers would have undergone in hell. **John 10:30 I [Jesus] and my Father are one. John 14:6 Jesus said unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me. Isaiah 53:6 All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all... Acts 4:12 Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.**

D. **Works of the believer, including Old Testament sacrifices, New Testament baptism, etc., do not merit atonement, but show that a believer has faith in the atone ment provided by God through Jesus Christ. Old Testament saints looked forward in faith to Christ [Hebrew, Messiah] who would come, and New Testament saints look back in faith to Christ who came and made atone ment.**

Hebrews 10:4 For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away

sins. Eph. 2:8 For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: 9 Not of works, lest any man should boast.

III. The extent of the atonement was limited by design of God. The Bible teaches particular or definite atonement, and not general or universal atonement. The atonement is limited to the particular (definite) sinners saved by grace.

Matt. 26:28 For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.

A. Atonement has not been made for fallen angels.

II Peter 2:4 For if God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment.

B. Atonement has not been made for any one who is in hell, or ever goes to hell. Unbelievers in hell are not reconciled to God by the atoning death of Christ. Matthew 7:23 And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.

1. **Gospel witness of the atonement to the unconverted may include the statement:** <Christ died for sinners like you and me. If you want to be saved, believe on Jesus. It is your responsibility to believe, and God freely offers salvation through Jesus. Acts 16:31 And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved... I Timothy 1:15 ...Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief.

2. **Gospel witness of the atonement to the unconverted should not include the statement: Christ died for you. No where in the Bible is such an expression found in witness to unbelievers. If the unbeliever dies without faith, Christ did not die an atoning death for him. Christ died for you applies to all creation only in the sense that many blessings flow to the unconverted through the mediatorial work of Christ, i.e., the sun shines upon both believer and unbeliever because of God's long suffering in Christ.**

Matt. 5:45 ... for he [God] maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. I Timothy 1:16 Howbeit for this cause I [Paul] obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting.

C. Christ died for the sins of many specific individuals, but not for every individual without exception.

Matt. 20:28 Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.

1. Christ died for His people. Matthew 1:21 And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins.

a. Christ's redeemed are from every tribe and nation, not just from among the Jews.

John 3:16 For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that who so ever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. I John 2:2 And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world. II Cor. 5:19 ...reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation.

b. **The Jews were amazed that Christ's redeemed** also included Gentiles. Acts 10:34 Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: 35 But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him... 45 And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter...

c. Christ died for the born again children of God throughout the world. John 3:3 ...Except a man be born again, he can not see the kingdom of God. 11:51 ...Jesus should die for that nation; 52 And not for that nation only, but that also he should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad.

2. Christ died for His sheep. John 10:15 ...I [Jesus] lay down my life for the sheep... 26 But ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep...

3. Christ died for His friends. John 15:13 Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.

4. **Christ died for His kind of church. Each New Testament Baptist church of the Lord Jesus Christ is a blood-bought institution.** Acts 20:28 ...feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.

5. **Christ died for the elect (Greek eklektos,**

chosen)

Rom. 8:32 He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? 33 Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Eph. 1:5 Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will.

D. Jesus Christ died an atoning death that accomplished all which God intended. John 4:34 Jesus saith unto them, My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work.

1. Jesus made a substitutionary sacrifice for sins.

Heb. 9:28 So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many.

2. Jesus propitiated the righteous justice of God. I John 4:10 Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

3. Jesus reconciled His people to God.

Romans 5:10 ...we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son.

4. Jesus redeemed believers from the curse of the law. Galatians 3:13 Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us...

5. Christ finished the atonement. **<MI%-Heb. 12:2 Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.**

6. **God's purpose in Christ's death was to save sinners, not simply to make atonement possible.**

Galatians 1:4 Who [Christ] gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father. Eph. 1:11 In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will.

IV. False Theories of the Atonement.

A. **General Atonement Theories** suppose that Christ atoned for each person who ever exists. **But the Bible teaches** the atonement was limited to many particular individuals. **Isaiah 53:12 ...he [Jesus] bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.**

1. **Universalist Theory of John Murray (1741-1815 AD) and Universalist churches** suppose that Christ died for every person and each would ultimately be saved. **But the Bible teaches** that Christ died for many specific individuals, not for each and every person. **Matt. 26:28 For this is my [Jesus'] blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. Titus 2:14 Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.**

2. **Universal-Limited Theory** supposes that (1) **Christ died for the sins of each and every person except for the sin of unbelief,** (2) **Christ died to make each person savable but unbelief hinders sinners from salvation,** and (3) **repentance of unbelief makes the sinner no longer guilty of unbelief. But the Bible teaches:**

a. Redeemed sinners are guilty and accountable for past sins including unbelief. **Ecclesiastes 3:15 ...God requireth that which is past. Titus 1:15 Unto the pure all things are pure: but unto them that are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure; but even their mind and conscience is defiled.**

b. Atonement must be made for all sins past, present, and future. **John 1:7 ...the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.**

c. Ability to believe and have faith is God's gift and not a work that man can do to merit salvation. **I John 6:29 Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent. Ephesians 2:8 For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: 9 Not of works, lest any man should boast.**

3. **Universal terms such as all and world must be understood in their Biblical contexts, which show that Christ's atonement was not limited to the Jews, but also extended to the Gentile nations of the world.**

a. **World** is used in many different ways in the Bible sometimes limited to unbelievers (**John 15:18**), nations of peoples under Roman rule (**Luke 2:1**), believers (**II Cor. 5:19, I John 2:2**), created planet (**Eph. 3:9**), each and every person (**Rom.** ⁷⁸⁹⁶

3:19), etc.

b. **All is used in many different ways in the Bible sometimes limited to those under Roman rule** (*Luke 2:1-2*), righteous activities (*I Cor. 6:12, 10:23*), believers (*John 12:32*), each and every (*Rom. 3:23*), etc.

c. **Many passages in the Bible use all and world** in limited ways. Such passages do not reveal that Christ atoned for each and every person without exception, but do reveal that Jesus atoned for the *all the world* of believers whether they are Jews, Italians, Americans, Africans, Chinese, etc.

B. **Moral-Influence Theory** supposes that Christ's death was an exhibition of love and fellowship to show that there is no obstacle between man and God, i.e., the death of Christ shows that God hates sin. *Governmental Theory* supposes that the sinner is saved and pardoned only by turning from sin to God, i.e., the death of Christ was to show that God does not excuse sin. *Commercial or Satisfaction Theory* supposes that God's honor has been injured by sin, and His honor is satisfied by Christ's death which benefits sinners who fall short of attaining the righteousness of God, i.e. the sinner's penance (Roman Catholic) provides partial satisfaction to God but Christ provides all that is lacking. These theories share common errors. **But the Bible teaches:**

1. The purpose of the atonement was to satisfy God's holiness and justice, not simply to be an example revealing God's love or protecting God's honor. In the atonement Christ bore the punishment for sin for men. ***I John 4:10 Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.***

2. Christ's sufferings were propitiatory and penal, removing the law's condemnation from the saved sinner's soul. ***Isaiah 53:11 He [God] shall see of the travail of his [Christ's] soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities.***

3. Christ not only suffered the penalty, but obeyed the precept, of the law. Law and justice were both satisfied in the atonement. ***Isaiah 42:21 The LORD is well pleased for his righteousness' sake; he will magnify the law, and make it honourable***

Arminianism —Jacob Arminius (1560-1609), Dutch theologian, erroneously described salvation with the **5 Points of Arminianism** as stated by his followers in the *Remonstrance Of 1610*:

- The decree of salvation applies to all who believe on Christ and who persevere in obedience and faith.
 - Christ died for all men.
 - The Holy Spirit must help men to do things that are truly good (such as having faith in Christ for salvation).
 - God's saving grace is not irresistible.
 - It is possible for those who are Christians to fall from grace.
2. John Calvin (1509-1564), French reformer living in Geneva, Switzerland, correctly described salvation with the **5 Points of Calvinism** as stated by his followers in the *Canons Of The Council Of Dort (1618)*:
- Calvinism**—of ten referred to as **TULIP**
 - Total depravity of man.
 - Unconditional election.
 - Limited (particular) atonement.
 - Irresistible grace.
 - Perseverance of the saints.

b. Although Calvin believed many truths regarding salvation, his error was abundant. **No Baptist should ever want to call himself a Calvinist.** Note Calvin's opinion of Baptists expressed in *Treatises Against The Anabaptists And Against The Libertines* (Baker Press, 1982 reprint). Calvin called Anabaptists *fanatics, poor fools, scatterbrains, poor ignoramuses, enemies of government* (p. 16), *cobblers* (p. 29), *poor dreamers, foolish men, scatterbrains, without reason, unreasonable, insane, hare-brained, obstinate* (p. 30).

VI. False Views of the Atonement

A. Christ took away the guilt of Adam's sin from all humanity, held by Emery Bancroft, past professor of Baptist Bible Seminary.

B. *Payment-to-Satan View* of Origen (185-254 AD) and Augustine (354-430 AD) supposes that Christ's death paid to Satan a ransom to deliver man from all Satan's claims. **But the Bible teaches that:**

1. The atonement paid the price demanded by the law of the Holy God for deliverance of the sin-

ner from sin. *Galatians 3:13 Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree.*

- Satan was defeated and not satisfied or paid by the death of Jesus of the cross. ***Hebrews 2:14...that through death he [Jesus] might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil.***
- Christ's death is payment to God whose justice demands perfect sacrifice and accepts the substitutionary sufferings of the Messiah.

I Peter 2:24 Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed.

C. *Governmental View* of Grotius (1583-1645 AD), Dutch forerunner of New England protestant theology, supposes that the sinner is saved and pardoned only by turning from sin to God. The death of Christ was to show that God does not excuse sin. **But the Bible teaches:**

1. The atonement was an exercise of justice, not merely an exhibition of justice.

Rom. 3:25 Whom [Jesus] God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God.

2. Christ actually endured the wrath of God against human sin. ***Matthew 27:46 And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? II Corinthians 5:21 For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.***

D. *Example View* of Socinus (1525-62 AD), Polish forerunner of Unitarians, supposes that Christ was only an example as a noble martyr, that no propitiation was necessary, that Jesus died a noble martyr only to encourage us and to give us an example of unselfish love. This view affirms the humanity of Christ but denies Christ's Deity while falsely concluding that we are saved by works through following Christ's human example of unselfishness. **But the Bible teaches:**

Heb. 9:14 How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead

works to serve the living God?

Eph. 5:2 And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour.

E. *Commercial or Satisfaction View* —taught by Anselm (1033-1109 AD, arch bishop of Canterbury), similar to Roman Catholic doctrine of penance, supposes God's honor has been injured by sin, and His honor is satisfied by Christ's death which benefits sinners who fall short of attaining the righteousness of God. **But the Bible teaches:**

1. God's holiness and justice were violated by sin, not just God's honor. God's justice demands penalty. ***Isa. 53:11 He shall see of the travail of his [Christ's] soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities.***

2. Christ not only suffered the penalty, but obeyed the precept, of the law. Law and justice were both satisfied in the atonement. ***Isaiah 42:21 The LORD is well pleased for his righteousness' sake; he will magnify the law, and make it honourable.***

V. **VII** In the atonement, Christ died for sinners just like you and me. **Jesus died for everyone who**

comes to Him. If you want to be saved, believe on Him. It is your responsibility. God freely offers you salvation through Jesus. Believe! ***John 6:37 All that the Father giveth me [Jesus] shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out... 20:31 But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.***

Biblical Doctrine of the

Atonement

...we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement. Romans 5:11

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