

The Atonement of Jesus Christ

Chapter 2: The Nature of the Atonement

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The section on the necessity of the atonement dealt primarily with the question: Why did Jesus have to suffer and die a bloody death to redeem the elect? The answer (as noted above) arose out of God's nature and man's predicament. When we examine the nature of the atonement we answer the question: How did Jesus bring or cause a total reconciliation between a holy, righteous, and just God and an unholy, unrighteous, and sinful people? To answer this question, we must briefly consider Christ's redemptive work as a whole. The multifaceted picture of the atonement presented by Scripture arises out of the fact that Christ's salvation of His people is comprehensive. Jesus dealt with every aspect and consequence of sin that resulted from the fall. Christ dealt with: the *guilt* of sin by *expiation*; the *wrath* of God by *propitiation*; the *alienation* of God by *reconciliation*; and the *bondage* of sin by *redemption*.

Expiation

The central aspect of Christ's sacrifice is expiation. Jesus offered Himself on the cross as a sacrifice to expiate or remove the guilt of our sins. When John the baptist saw Jesus approaching, he proclaimed: "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (Jn. 1:29). Paul told the Ephesian church that Christ gave "Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling aroma" (Eph. 5:2). We begin with expiation because all the other elements (propitiation, reconciliation and redemption) of our comprehensive salvation logically proceed from Christ's expiatory sacrifice. "It is by expiation that propitiation, reconciliation and ransom take place. Once our sin and guilt is removed, God's wrath and alienation, and our bondage to the law, sin and Satan are also removed."¹ "The idea of expiation is the removal of liability accruing from sin. Sacrifice is the provision whereby this liability is removed—it is the substitutive endurance of penalty and transference of liability from the offerer to the sacrifice."²

In order to understand the expiatory aspect of Christ's sacrifice, we must have some understanding of the Old Testament sacrificial system. We need this understanding for a number of reasons. First, the Old Testament sacrificial system *typified* the redemptive work of Christ (Col. 2:17; Heb. 9:23-24; 10:1). The New Testament authors writing under divine inspiration applied terms of the Old Testament sacrificial system to Jesus Christ. Second, the detailed descriptions of the Levitical offerings can shed light upon New Testament terminology. The New Testament authors often did not go into great detail regarding the terms of sacrifice that apply to Christ because they assumed the foundation of Old Testament revelation. Therefore, as we examine the sacrifice of Christ, we will need to use both the Old and New Testaments. Scripture

¹ Robert A. Morey, *Studies In The Atonement*, pp. 44-45.

² John Murray, *The Atonement*, p. 13.

is its own best interpreter. There are different aspects of Christ's sacrifice that will be considered under expiation.

1. Christ's Death Was Vicarious

The Bible teaches that Christ's suffering and death were *vicarious*. This means that in order to remove the guilt and penalty for sin, Jesus took upon Himself all the guilt for our sins and the full penalty that we deserved. In other words, Jesus died in our place, as our *substitute*. There are many passages in Scripture that teach that Christ bore the sins of His people. "Surely He has *borne* our griefs and *carried* our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was wounded *for our transgressions*, He was bruised *for our iniquities*; the chastisement for our peace was *upon Him*, and by His stripes we are healed. 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" (Isa. 53:4-6). "For He made Him who knew no sin *to be sin* for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Cor. 5:21). "Christ also suffered for us...who Himself *bore* our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed" (1 Pet. 2:21,24). "Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us" (Gal. 3:13). "Christ was offered to *bear* the sins of many" (Heb. 9:28). "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures" (1 Cor. 15:3). The "Lord Jesus Christ...gave Himself for our sins" (Gal. 1:3-4).

The Greek prepositions that are used in connection with Christ's death clearly teach a vicarious atonement. Jesus said, "the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and give His life a ransom *for* [*anti*] many" (Mt. 20:28; cf. Mk. 10:45). The preposition *anti* means literally "in the place of" or "in exchange for". Christ came "to give His life *in the place of* many". The same Greek preposition is used in Matthew 5:38 where it says, "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth" which means "an eye *in exchange for* an eye and a tooth *in exchange for* a tooth". It is also used in Matthew 2:22 where it says "that Archelaus was reigning over Judea *instead of* his father Herod".

Most passages which speak of Christ's death employ the more ambiguous preposition *huper*. "This cup is the new covenant in My blood which is shed for [*huper*] you" (Lk. 22:19,20). "Christ also suffered...the just *for* the unjust" (1 Pet. 3:18; cf. Jn. 6:51; 15:13; Rom. 5:6-8; 8:32; 2 Cor. 5:14-15, 21; Gal. 3:13; Eph 5:2,25; 1 Tim. 2:5-6; Heb. 2:9). The preposition *huper* is very similar to our English preposition, for. It has a wide meaning and thus does not always denote substitution. Sometimes it has the sense of, "for the benefit of" and at other times, it can mean "in the place of". Shedd argues that the New Testament authors often employed the preposition *huper* because they wanted to emphasize both points: "that Christ died in the sinner's place, and for the sinner's benefit."³ One's interpretation, of course, must be determined by the context. Theological liberals who reject the substitutionary atonement (because it does not fit in with their Satanic and humanistic presuppositions regarding God, sin, and salvation) used to argue that *huper* could not possibly mean "instead of". Archeological discoveries, however, have once again proved the liberals wrong. Several inscriptions have been found that have *huper* with the meaning "as representative of."⁴ Clark notes recent discoveries that use *huper* of professional

³ William G. T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology* (New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1889), 2:382.

⁴ Deissman, *Light From The Ancient East* as quoted by L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, p. 377.

“scribes who wrote for and instead of his employer.”⁵ The biblical doctrine of a vicarious atonement or a substitutionary sacrifice cannot be denied.

Christ’s suffering and death were done in the place of His people. Jesus stood in the place of the sinner, bore his sin and was punished in the sinner’s stead. But, how was the sinner’s sin placed upon Christ on the cross? The Bible teaches that whoever believes in Jesus has his sins *imputed* to Him on the cross. Paul says, “For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Cor. 5:21). This does *not* mean that Christ became a sinner or a wicked person for such a teaching would contradict the many passages which teach that Christ was sinless and ethically perfect (e.g. Jn. 8:46; Heb. 4:15; 7:26; 1 Jn. 3:5; 1 Pet. 1:19; 2:22). What it means is that “the guilt of sin *as liability to punishment* was imputed to Christ [or reckoned to His account]; and this could be transferred, because it did not inhere in the person of the sinner, but was something objective.”⁶ Thus Peter could say, He “bore our sins in His own body on the tree” (1 Pet. 2:24).

The doctrine of vicarious sacrifice and the imputation of the guilt of sin is clearly taught in the Old Testament sacrificial ritual that involved the sinner laying (or literally in Hebrew, “pressing”) his hand upon the head of the sacrificial animal immediately prior to its sacrifice. “If his offering is a burnt sacrifice of the herd, let him offer a male without blemish; he shall offer it of his own free will at the door of the tabernacle of meeting before the LORD. Then *he shall put his hand on the head* of the burnt offering, and it shall be accepted on his behalf to make atonement for him” (Lev. 1:3-4; cf. 3:2, 8, 13; 4:4, 15, 24; 16:21). Theological liberals (who always seem to be running from the truth of God’s infallible Word) argue that this ritual merely symbolizes a declaration or setting apart of the offerer’s property to God. Their theory, however, is disproved both from the analogy of Scripture and from the fact that the laying on and pressing of the hand does not occur in the bloodless cake or cereal offerings. The symbolism of the pressing of the hand on the sacrificial victim indicates both substitution (the clean animal will suffer and die in the sinner’s place) and the transfer or imputation of guilt (or liability) to the animal. This interpretation is decisively confirmed by Leviticus 16:21: “and Aaron shall lay both his hands on the head of the live goat, confess over it all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions, concerning all their sins, putting them on the head of the goat, and shall send it away into the wilderness by the hand of a suitable man.” Moorehead writes, “Most specific and definite is the language touching this remarkable scene. The high priest laid *both his hands* on the goat’s head. In the other sacrifices where a single individual performed this act it was his *hand*, one hand, that made the transfer; but here both hands were employed: the hands that had been filled with incense, that carried the blood into the Divine Presence, are now filled with the sins, iniquities and transgressions of the congregation, and these hands *put* them all on the head of the victim! Substitution and imputation cannot be more vividly expressed.”⁷

⁵ Gordon H. Clark, *The Atonement*, p. 65.

⁶ L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, p. 377. God has a perfect and complete record of every sin that you have ever committed. “And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books” (Rev. 20:12). Thus, the guilt and liability for sin is objective. When theologians discuss the sinful nature inherent in the children of Adam, they talk about the *pollution* of sin. The progressive subduing of the pollution of sin in believers is called sanctification.

⁷ W. G. Moorehead, *The Tabernacle: The Priesthood, Sacrifices and Feasts of Ancient Israel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1957 [1895]), pp. 188-189.

2. Only Christ Meets the Biblical Conditions of a Substitute

We have noted that because of God's nature (He is holy, just and righteous) and man's predicament (man is guilty of sin, liable to the punishment of eternal death and in bondage to sin and Satan), the only possible way to save man is for a *substitute* to eliminate man's guilt, pay the penalty and secure his release from bondage. The question that we also need to consider is: "Why did it have to be Jesus Christ? Why the sinless Son of God?" There are many reasons why *only* the God-Man, Jesus Christ, could be the substitute for His people.

First, Jesus had to be a sinless man. He had to be a man in order that sin would be punished in the same nature which incurred the guilt of sin. "Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. For indeed He does not give aid to angels, but He does give aid to the seed of Abraham. Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people" (Heb. 2:14-17). Berkhof writes, "Since man sinned, it was necessary that the penalty should be borne by man. Moreover, the paying of the penalty involved suffering of body and soul, such as only man is capable of bearing, John 12:27; Acts 3:18; Heb. 2:14; 9:22. It was necessary that Christ should assume human nature, not only with all its essential properties, but also with all the infirmities to which it is liable after the fall, and should thus descend to the depths of degradation to which man had fallen, Heb 2:17,18)."⁸ Jesus assumed a human nature in order to suffer and die on the cross and in order to rise bodily from the tomb victorious over sin, Satan and death on the third day.

Christ had to be sinless and perfectly holy because if He Himself had the guilt and pollution of sin, He could only suffer and die for His own sins and not for the elect's. "Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He ever lives to make intercession for them. For such a High Priest was fitting for us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens; who does not need daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for his own sins and then for the people's, for this He did once for all when He offered up Himself" (Heb. 7:25-27).

God in the Old Testament emphasized repeatedly that *only* ceremonially clean animals were acceptable for sacrifice. The animals had to be "without spot" (Num. 19:2; 28:3,9,11; 29:17,26; etc.) and "without blemish" (Ex. 12:5; 29:1; Lev. 1:3, 10; 3:1, 6; 4:3, 23, 28, 32; 5:15, 18; 6:6; 9:2, 3; 14:10; 22:19, 21; 23:12, 18; etc.). The animals offered had to be perfect physical specimens (Dt. 15:21). Any defect no matter how small disqualified that animal.⁹ "You shall offer of your own free will a male without blemish from the cattle, sheep, or from the goats, But whatever has a defect, you shall not offer, for it shall not be accepted on your behalf. And whoever offers a peace offering to the LORD, to fulfill his vow, or a freewill offering from the cattle or the sheep, it must be perfect to be accepted; there shall be no defect in it" (Lev. 22:19-21). The requirement for "clean" animals preceded the giving of the law for after the flood Noah offered to God burnt offerings "of every *clean* animal and ever *clean* bird" (Gen. 8:20). All these requirements typified the moral perfection of Jesus Christ. Christians are redeemed "with the

⁸ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, p. 319.

⁹ "In totally optional sacrifices such as free will offerings, minor blemishes did not matter (v.23)" (G. J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus* [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1979], p.295).

precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot” (1 Pet. 1:19). “Christ...offered Himself without spot to God” (Heb. 9:14).

To meet all the exigencies arising out of God’s nature and man’s predicament, Jesus also had to be God. Christ had to be God in order to offer a sacrifice of infinite value to the Father. If the Messiah was a mere man or a mighty angel (as some cults allege), then He would *not* have been able to atone for millions of people from every tribe, nation and tongue (Rev. 5:9). Because Jesus was God, He had power over life and death. “No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down and I have power to take it again” (Jn. 10:18). With both a human and divine nature, our Lord not only resisted all the assaults of Satan and temptations of life but conquered death itself. He was Jesus of Nazareth “whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that He should be held by it” (Ac. 2:24). Christ, who is both God and man, is not only the *only* one who meets every biblical condition of a substitute but He also is the only one who could properly intercede or mediate between God and man. Who but the Lord of glory could intercede *simultaneously* for millions of people twenty four hours a day?

Another reason that Jesus had to be God is that a regular person like you and I cannot atone or pay the penalty for the sins of another. “None of them can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him” (Ps. 49:7). “The soul who sins shall die. The son shall not bear the guilt of the father, nor the father bear the guilt of the son” (Ezek. 18:20). “Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression?” (Mic. 6:7) “What shall a man give in exchange for his soul?” (Mt. 17:26) We can only pay the penalty for our own sins by dying and experiencing the pains of hell. Creatures cannot die in the place of another for only God, the offended party, has the right and ability to render satisfaction. God the divine Judge, is angry with guilty sinners; and yet, it is God who provides a method to remove the guilt of sin and propitiate this anger. “God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself” (2 Cor 5:19). “For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell, and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross” (Col. 1:20). Shedd writes, “It is Divine justice that demands satisfaction, and it is the Divine compassion that makes the satisfaction. God is the one who holds man in a righteous captivity, and He is the one who pays the ransom that frees him from it. God is the holy Judge of man who requires satisfaction for sin; and God is the merciful Father of man who provides it for him. This fact relieves the doctrine of vicarious atonement of all appearance of severity, and evidences it to be the height of mercy and compassion.”¹⁰

3. Christ’s Sacrificial Death Removes the Guilt of Sin

Before a person can have the forgiveness of sins, the wrath of God removed, a full reconciliation with Jehovah, and peace and fellowship with Him, what is first absolutely necessary? The first thing necessary and the starting point of all the saving graces is *expiation* or the removal of sin. This Christ achieved by His suffering and bloody death. Why is expiation so important? Expiation is important because Christ’s sacrificial death is the *cause* of the removal of God’s wrath against us and, consequently, the re-establishment of our fellowship with Him. “After the foundation has been laid for the release of penalty, it is easy to release it. When a sufficient reason has been established why sin should be pardoned, it is easy to pardon. It is the

¹⁰ William G. T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, 2:392-393.

first step that costs. This is taught by St. Paul in Rom. 5:10. 'If when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, *much more* being reconciled we shall be saved by His life.' The greater includes the less. If God's mercy is great enough to move him to make a vicarious atonement for man's sin, it is certainly great enough to move him to secure the consequences of such an act."¹¹ Now, we understand why the central focus of the whole Bible is on the death of Jesus Christ. Paul says, "For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified" (1 Cor. 2:2).

Before examining how Christ's suffering and death is related to the forgiveness of sins one must first consider the word *kippur*, translated as atonement (KJV, RSV, NIV, ASV, NASB) and expiation (Jewish Publication Society translation, 1962). Most commentators and theologians believe the word means "to cover over". Thus the sense is that the blood of the sacrifice covers the guilt of the sinner. This view is derived from the Arabic root, the meaning of which is "cover" or "conceal" and possibly from *kpar* in Genesis 6:14 which means to cover over with pitch. Shedd writes, "The suffering of the substituted bullock or ram has the effect to *cover over* the guilt of the real criminal, and make it invisible to the eye of God the holy."¹² Many modern Hebrew scholars reject the meaning of covering. They believe that it probably is derived from the Akkadian verb *kippuru* which means to "cleans" or "wipe". This view fits well with the fact that sacrificial blood is often associated in Scripture with cleansing and purification. Others argue that the root *kpar* is derived from *koper* which means "a ransom price". Wenham writes, "*Kipper*, 'to make atonement', could then be literally translated, 'to pay a ransom (for one's life).' In certain passages where various monetary payments are said to make atonement, to pay a ransom would seem to be a much more appropriate rendering than 'to cleanse' (e.g. Ex. 30:15; Num. 31:50). Such an understanding is compatible with most of the passages which speak of 'making atonement' for someone. Through the animal's death and the subsequent rituals men are ransomed from death that their sin and uncleanness merit."¹³

Whether one argues that *kippur* refers to covering over the guilt of sin (though obviously not in the modern pejorative sense); or, the washing or cleansing of sin; or a ransom which pays for sin; or, even all the above depending on the context, the central idea of expiation is the same: the guilt of sin is removed.¹⁴ There are many passages that discuss the removal of sin. Psalm 51 says, "*Blot out* my transgressions. *Wash me* thoroughly from my iniquity, and *cleanse* me from my sin.... Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me and I shall be whiter than snow.... Hide your face from my sins, and blot out any iniquities" (vs. 2, 3, 7, 9). "When He had by Himself *purged* our sins, sat down on the Majesty on high" (Heb. 1:13). "He has appeared to *put away* sin by the sacrifice of Himself" (Heb. 9:26). "The blood of Jesus Christ His Son *cleanses* us from all sin" (1 Jn. 1:7). "To Him who loved us and *washed* [the Majority Text says freed] us from our sins in His own blood" (Rev. 1:5). "These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and *washed* their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb" (Rev. 7:14). "The Lamb of God who *takes away* the sin of the world" (Jn. 1:29).

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 2:392-393.

¹² *Ibid.*, 2:391.

¹³ G. J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus*, p. 28.

¹⁴ In Genesis 20:16 Abimelech pays a ransom price that covers: "And unto Sarah he said, Behold, I have given thy brother a thousand pieces of silver: behold, it is for thee a *covering of the eyes* to all that are with thee; and in respect of all thou art righted" (ASV). The payment serves to make one blind to the offense. Passages such as Leviticus 16:30 point to cleansing: "For on that day the priest shall make atonement for you, to cleanse you, that you may be clean from all your sins before the LORD."

What did Christ do that removes the guilt of the sin? Jesus secured the removal of the elect's sin by His suffering and death. Because of the guilt of Adam's sin (the federal head of the human race) and all actual sins that people commit, everyone stands under the condemnation and curse of the law. As already noted, sin merits the eternal death penalty and the sufferings of hell. Christ, by His suffering and bloody death, fulfilled the penal obligation of the law. Jesus, as the substitute, endured intense and agonizing suffering unto death on behalf of His people. Because He paid the price in full by His blood, the sins that were placed upon Him are abolished; the forgiveness of sins has been procured.

When the Bible describes Christ's work of removing sin, it uses a variety of terms; such as, cross, blood, suffering and death, which all encompass His vicarious suffering and sacrificial death. Scripture says that Jesus "who for the joy set before Him endured the cross" (Heb. 12:2); that "He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death even the death of the cross" (Phil. 2:8); that our Lord "made peace through the blood of the cross" (Col. 1:20); that Christ "wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross" (Col. 2:14). Although every bit of suffering that Christ endured in His life was part of His atonement for the elect, the Bible gives a special emphasis to His death on the cross. "Although in the gospels the life of Jesus is comparatively briefly depicted, His last passion and dying is comprehensively told. Just so the apostolic preaching rather rarely goes back to the conception and birth of Jesus, but puts all the emphasis upon the cross, the death, and the blood of Christ."¹⁵

The Cross

The cross indicates a number of things regarding Christ's suffering and death. First, Jesus suffered a judicial death. Christ was not just a martyr or an example but was a sacrificial victim. "[T]he language of the cross is *legal*, and it has to do with God's law."¹⁶ Second, the cross indicates that our Lord was accused by God. Despicable criminals under the Old Covenant were executed and then were suspended from trees both to intensify their punishment and to turn God's "fierce anger" from Israel (Num. 25:4; cf. Josh. 10:26; 1 Sam. 31:10). The law says, "He who is hanged is accursed of God" (Dt. 21:23). Jesus was suspended between heaven and earth and was rejected by God and man. He was subject to public humiliation and shame. Our Lord endured the curse of law—the full penalty for the sins of His people. "Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us" (Gal. 3:13). Third, the cross indicates intense vicarious suffering by our Lord. The suffering of the cross was excruciating. Jesus was in supreme agony. Fourth, the death of the cross was bloody. Christ's blood was poured out upon the earth for the elect.

Blood

Another manner in which the Bible teaches Christ's expiatory suffering and death is to focus upon His shed blood. We are told that the blood of Christ "cleanses us from all sin" (1 Jn. 1:7); that our sins are washed and we are freed by His blood (Rev. 1:5; 7:14). Paul says, "In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins" (Eph. 1:7). Jesus has "made peace through the blood of His cross" (Col. 1:20). Peter speaks of Christians having their sins

¹⁵ Herman Bavinck, *Our Reasonable Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1956), p. 331.

¹⁶ R. J. Rushdoony, *Systematic Theology* (Vallecito, CA: Ross House Books, 1994), 1:588.

cleansed and forgiven by saying that the blood of Christ was sprinkled upon them (1 Pet. 1:2); that they were redeemed “with the precious blood of Christ” (1 Pet. 1:19). Romans 3:25 says that Christ’s blood propitiates (i.e. appeases, eliminates) God’s wrath. The author of Hebrews says that “without the shedding of blood there is no remission” (Heb. 9:22).

The Bible places great importance upon the blood of Christ for a number of reasons. First, the Scriptures equate blood and life. “And whatever man of the house of Israel, or of the strangers who sojourn among you, who eats any blood, I will set My face against that person who eats blood, and will cut him off from among his people. For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that makes atonement for the soul” (Lev. 17:10-11). Jehovah gives two reasons why blood is not to be consumed by man. First, blood is the essence of life. Thus, to avoid eating flesh with blood shows a respect for God-created life. Second, blood is used to atone for the guilt of sin. “The nature of Old Testament sacrifices was such that whenever cleansing from sin was required there had to be a blood ritual, since the relationship with God could not be renewed without it.”¹⁷ Thus, the Bible emphasizes Christ’s shed blood for it represents His giving of His own life in the place of the believing sinner. Believers receive expiation only in the shed blood of Christ. Christians are “justified by His blood” (Rom. 5:9).

Second, the blood of Christ points to the sacrificial character of His death. Jesus did not die in an accident, nor did He die as an example or martyr. He suffered unto death as a blood sacrifice. Christ’s life blood is poured out unto death in order to expiate sin and give life to His people. The importance of Christ’s sacrificial death is set forth repeatedly throughout history in the institution of the Lord’s Supper. Exhibiting the cup of red wine to the apostles, Jesus said: “This is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins” (Mt. 26:28). The Lord’s Supper has the bread which represents our Lord’s body and the wine which represents His shed blood. The body and the blood are separate for the blood has been separated from the body by sacrifice. “That is what the wine in the cup means: it means the death of Jesus in our stead. It means the blood poured out from the heart of the incarnate God, that we might have fellowship with God, the sin which divided us being expiated by his death.”¹⁸

Death

The Bible also discusses the importance of Christ’s death. Jesus “became obedient to the point of death” (Phil. 2:8). Paul says that “we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son” (Rom. 5:10). Through Christ’s death “we have become dead to the law” (Rom. 7:4). Jesus delivered us from “the entrance of death” (2 Cor. 1:9). Our Lord came for “the suffering of death” (Heb. 2:9); to “taste death for everyone” (Heb. 2:9). “He is the mediator of the new covenant, by means of death” (Heb. 9:15). Because the penalty for sin against God is death, Christ had to endure the death penalty. “God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8). Jesus by His suffering and sacrificial death satisfied the requirements of God’s justice. Jesus by His own death conquered death itself. The biblical use of cross, blood and death all speak of Christ’s vicarious suffering and death.

¹⁷ R. K. Harrison, *Leviticus* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1980), p. 181.

¹⁸ C. H. Spurgeon, *The Life and Work of Our Lord* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1996 [1904]), 3:35.

Suffering

The essence of Christ's atoning work is in His suffering. God's law and justice require that sinners suffer and die. All the suffering and misery in this world and hell itself is the reward for sin. The sting of death is in the torments of hell. The second death is the intensification of the suffering that sin merits. Christ satisfied the penal obligation of the law by His sufferings. Jesus' sufferings delivered His people from guilt. His sufferings procured the non-infliction of suffering upon the elect.

All the suffering that our Lord experienced from His birth until death was vicarious. Jesus was born without sin and never committed sin. Therefore, every bit of suffering that He endured was undeserved; therefore, His suffering was in our behalf, and in our place. Every moment of pain, every bit of anguish, every second of agony, every tear of grief and every drop of blood was endured for us. Christ the innocent suffered for the guilty (the elect). "During the whole period of his mortal life the victim was a-slaving. At the moment of his birth, the sword of justice was unsheathed against the man who is Jehovah's fellow, and returned not to its scabbard till it had been bathed in the blood of Calvary."¹⁹ The road of Jesus' life ended at Golgotha. Don't forget, however, that the road itself was one of humiliation, of sorrow, of rejection and pain. The Bible does, however, emphasize the climax of Jesus' sufferings on the cross. Our Lord was obedient unto death (Phil. 2:8). When the Bible says that He suffered unto death it describes the suffering that He experienced throughout the whole course of His life.

Although all of Christ's suffering was vicarious the Scriptures place a special emphasis on the end of Jesus' life. The Heidelberg Catechism says, "That he, all the time that he lived on the earth, but especially at the end of his life, sustained in body and soul, the wrath of God against the sins of all mankind" (Lord's Day XV). All of our Lord's life was part of His humiliation. Jesus took upon Himself a corruptible human nature in order to suffer throughout His *entire* life. However, after the Lord's supper when Jesus went to Gethsemane to pray, Christ was aware that He was entering a new phase of His suffering. At the last supper Jesus said, "With fervent desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer" (Lu. 22:15). Christ was aware that He was about to drink the full concentration of God's holy wrath against sin.

From Gethsemane onward our Lord's sufferings became especially intense and agonizing. At Gethsemane "He began to be sorrowful and deeply distressed" (Mt. 26:37). There was the inward flood of heart agony at Gethsemane where "his soul was seized with the most appalling terror and sadness, and he was agitated with such anguish and fear that he had need of a comforting angel to appear to him. Sweat flowed from his body like great drops of blood. He offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him who was able to save him from death (Heb. 5:7)."²⁰

Hendriksen writes, "To be sure, he had been a curse-bearer throughout the days of his humiliation, but now he was becoming overwhelmed with the curse; and this consciousness would not again leave him until he was able to say 'It is finished' (Gal. 3:13). He knew that he was giving his life as a ransom for many (Matt. 20:28; Mark 10:45); that he, the sinless One, was being made 'sin', that is, the object of God's wrath (II Cor. 5:21). Is it any wonder then that he said to his three closest disciples, 'Stay here and keep awake with me?' The sorrows of death—

¹⁹ William Symington, *On the Atonement and Intercession of Jesus Christ* (New York, NY: Rortbert Carter, 1839), pp. 147-148.

²⁰ Francis Turrentin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 2:434.

not just physical death but eternal death in the place of his people—were coming upon him, now more than ever before. That is why he speaks of ‘sorrow to the point of death.’”²¹ At Gethsemane Jesus is confronted with the cup of God’s wrath. Jesus prayed, “Father, if it is your will, remove this cup from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done” (Lu. 22:42). Christ suffered because of what men (both Jews and Romans) did to Him. However, it was the Father who placed the cup in our Lord’s hand and told Him to drink.

Friday, the day of Jesus’ crucifixion and death was a whole day of intense suffering in both soul and body. Jesus was betrayed by one of His own disciples into the hands of wicked men. Also, He was cowardly abandoned by all His disciples and friends. Christ, who was the friend of sinners, who fed the multitude, who healed thousands of their diseases, who preached the gospel of salvation throughout the whole nation of Israel suffered alone. He faced the cross without any words of comfort, pity or support from His friends. “Reproach has broken my heart, and I am full of heaviness; I looked for someone to take pity, but there was none; and for comforters, but I found none” (Ps. 69:20). As a part of His deep humiliation the sinless Son of God was tried by wicked, despicable men. He was arrested as a result of a bribe and at His trial there was a parade of false witnesses. At His trial He was mocked, spat upon, and beaten.

After being turned over to the Roman authorities, Jesus was rejected by the Jewish people in favor of Barabbas a notorious criminal. Then He was scourged by Roman soldiers. This involved being flogged by a leather whip studded with pieces of metal and/or bone. This torture was so excruciating and painful that it became known as intermediate death among the Romans. After this hideous torture the soldiers mocked Jesus by placing a purple robe on Him; spitting upon Him; hitting our Lord and shoving a crown of thorns upon His head. Christ’s face and hair were covered in blood and the blood from His back covered His legs. When He carried the crossbar on which He was to be executed to Golgotha He left a trail of blood. He was so weak from the beating that He received, that He needed assistance to carry the wooden beam. When Jesus and the soldiers reached the site of execution they offered Him sour wine mixed with gall (a potion to deaden the pain). Our Lord refused to drink it for He would do nothing to blunt the force of the curse upon Him. He then was nailed through the wrists to the crossbar and fastened to an upright post. John Dick writes, “Of the various modes of taking away life by violence, crucifixion is probably the most tormenting. It is one of the many contrivances of barbarity, the object of which is to make the unhappy sufferer feel himself dying. He was fixed to the cross with nails driven through his hands and his feet. Besides the exquisite pain caused by the perforation of so many parts full of nerves, which are the instruments of sensation, great torment must have arisen from the distension of his body, the forcible stretching of its joints and sinews by its own weight. To this circumstance he alludes in the twenty-second Psalm: ‘I may tell all my bones’ [v. 17]. ‘All my bones are out of joint’ [v. 14].”²²

As Christ hung on the cross the leaders of Israel and the people continued to rail and blaspheme against Him. From noon to three in the afternoon God covered the whole land in a thick darkness. Darkness is used throughout Scripture to symbolize God’s judgment against sin (e.g., Is. 5:30; 60:2; Joel 12:30, 31; Amos 5:18, 20; Zeph 1:14-18; Mt. 24:29-30; Ac. 2:20; 2 Pet. 2:17; Rev. 6:12-17). Is not hell a place of dreadful darkness (Mt. 22:13; 25:30; Job 24:17; Jude 13)? Jesus, the author of life who is light and has no darkness (Jn. 1:5) experienced the outer darkness in our place. “The darkness meant judgment, the judgment of God upon our sins, his wrath as it were burning itself out in the very heart of Jesus, so that he as our Substitute, suffered

²¹ William Hendriksen, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1973), p. 917.

²² John Dick, *Lectures on Theology* (New York, NY: Robert Carter and Brothers, 1864), 2:97.

most intense agony, indescribable woe, terrible isolation or forsakenness. Hell came to Calvary that day, and the Savior descended into it and bore its horrors in our stead.”²³

Of all the sufferings that Christ endured in our behalf the suffering of His soul receives special attention by the Spirit inspired writers. Jesus said “My soul is exceedingly sorrowful even to death” (Mt. 26:38). Our Lord’s soul descended into the very depths of agony and misery. “What our divine surety suffered in his soul must ever surpass all our powers of description or conception...we have the best reason to suppose that every variety of inward agony which a sinless spirit can possibly feel was experienced by him.”²⁴ Jesus remained the silent lamb as He was mocked, tortured and nailed to the cross. Yet when the Father withdrew His love, support and intimate communion from Him and replaced it with unmitigated wrath and separation our Lord cried out in the severest agony of soul: “My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me” (Mt. 27:46)? Spurgeon writes, “In order that the sacrifice of Christ might be complete, it pleased the Father to forsake his well-beloved Son. Sin was laid on Christ, so God must turn his face from the Sin-Bearer. To be deserted of his God was the climax of Christ’s grief, the quintessence of his sorrow. See here the distinction between the martyrs and their Lord; in their dying agonies they have been divinely sustained; but Jesus, suffered as the Substitute for sinners, was forsaken of God.”²⁵

Only a day before when Jesus had predicted that the disciples would be scattered He took comfort with the words: “You will be scattered each to his own, and will leave Me alone. And yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me” (Jn. 16:32). Because Jesus took our sins upon Him, He was forsaken and accursed by God. But in that final hour He had no one (not even the Father) to comfort and console Him. There was a “total eclipse of the hallowed light which had formerly cheered him amid the deepest gloom.”²⁶ After this Jesus “cried out with a loud voice” and “yielded up His spirit” (Mt. 27:50). The loud voice indicates that He did not die of “exhaustion but voluntarily. He *gave* his life, poured it out, laid it down (Isa. 53:12; John 10:11, 15), or as here, *yielded* it.”²⁷ Christ as a priest offered His own life as a substitutionary sacrifice. Symington says of Christ’s sufferings on the cross: “This was the period when emphatically the Son of God made atonement for sin; when the tide of suffering rose to its height; when the dregs of the bitter cup of anguish were wrung out; when the sentence of woe reached its climax. A period, into which whatever is painful in torture, ignominious in shame, distressing in privation, terrific in satanic assault, and overwhelming in experienced wrath, was, as it were, compressed!—a period, whether to the sufferer himself or to the guilty world whose cause he undertook, the most awfully momentous that had ever occurred since the commencement of time.”²⁸ John Dick writes, “He died by the sentence of his Father acting as a righteous judge, and subjecting him to punishment of sin. Great, therefore, as were his bodily torments, there were unseen sorrows which were far more severe; sorrows of the same kind with those which caused his agony in the garden, and the extremity of which drew from him that mournful complaint, ‘My God, My God! Why hast thou forsaken me?’ How great was his humiliation! The Lord of life and glory appeared like a common mortal and was distinguished only by the intensity of his sufferings, and the state of complete dereliction in which he expired. The multitude looked on

²³ William Hendriksen, *The Gospel of Matthew*, p. 970.

²⁴ Symington, *On the Atonement and Intercession of Jesus Christ*, p. 149.

²⁵ C. H. Spurgeon, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Fleming H. Revell, 1987), p. 406.

²⁶ Symington, *On the Atonement and Intercession of Jesus Christ*, p. 150.

²⁷ William Hendriksen, *The Gospel of Matthew*, p. 973.

²⁸ Symington, *On the Atonement and Intercession of Jesus Christ*, p. 150.

with un pitying eyes: heaven frowned in preternatural darkness, and all consolation was withheld from him.”²⁹

Jesus bowed His head and gave up His spirit. A sacrificial victim must die and Christ gave Himself over to death. He did not fall into a trance or swoon or fainting spell as some heretics suppose. The Bible records the spear thrust into His side and heart as proof that His spirit had departed. When a person dies the red blood cells stop circulating and fall under the force of gravity. Thus out of our Lord’s precious heart came “water and blood” (Jn. 19:34). Our Lord was then laid in a tomb. This is the final stage of Christ’s humiliation. He was in a state of death for three days. Why three days? If our Lord had risen within a few hours some (as many modern heretics assert) would have claimed that Jesus did not really die but merely fainted or swooned. If He had remained in the grave longer than three days the natural process of decay would have begun. But God promised beforehand: “You will not leave my soul in Sheol, nor will you allow Your Holy One to see corruption” (Ps. 16:10; cf. Ac. 2:25-32). Early Sunday morning Jesus rose from the dead. His sacrifice accomplished and accepted. His humiliation and suffering were over. He was at that point the glorified, victorious, triumphant King.

When we contemplate the price that our Lord paid to eliminate our sins we can only bow our heads in wonder. Although we serve and worship Jesus Christ because He is God (infinite in perfections, etc.), we also serve and worship Him with a special fervency for while we were sinners; while we wallowed in our lusts and filth; while we were rank self-idolaters; while we were haters of God—“Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8). Once a person by God’s grace understands what Jesus went through to accomplish redemption he or she will gladly become a slave of Christ and will count it an honor to serve and suffer for Him.

Propitiation

As Jesus Christ suffered and died on the cross He not only removed the guilt of sin but also the judgment and wrath that sin merited. The wrath, anger, judgment and damnation that we full deserved for our sins was placed upon Christ at Calvary. Our Lord’s sacrifice *propitiated* God. By removing the guilt of sin and sin’s penalty Jesus satisfied God’s perfect justice. “Christ Jesus, whom God set forth to be a *propitiation* by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed” (Rom. 3:25). “Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make *propitiation* for the sins of the people” (Heb. 2:17). “And He Himself is the *propitiation* for our sins, and not for ours only but also the whole world” (1 Jn. 2:2). Propitiation means that Christ totally eliminated God’s wrath against sin. Once Jesus eliminated sin’s guilt and penalty by His vicarious endurance of wrath, God no longer has any reason (legal or otherwise) to be angry with the believing sinner.

The common hostility and rejection of the propitiatory element of Christ’s sacrifice that one encounters today is a result of not understanding God’s character. Jehovah’s infinite holiness and righteousness of necessity causes Him to react against all sin with wrath. Thus, Scripture warns us not to sin with the phrase, “For the Lord your God is a consuming fire” (Dt. 4:24). The Bible teaches that “God is a just judge, and God is *angry* with the wicked everyday” (Ps. 7:11). Contrary to modern Evangelicalism the Bible not only teaches that God hates sin; it also explicitly teaches that He hates all unbelieving sinners. “For You are not a God who takes

²⁹ John Dick, *Lectures on Theology*, 2:98.

pleasure in wickedness, nor shall evil dwell with You. The boastful shall not stand in Your sight; *you hate all workers of iniquity*. You shall *destroy* those who speak falsehood; the LORD *abhors* the bloodthirsty and deceitful man” (Ps. 5:4-6). “The LORD tests the righteous, but the wicked and the one who loves violence *His soul hates*. Upon the wicked He will rain coals; fire and brimstone and a burning wind shall be the portion of their cup” (Ps 11:5-6).

John the Baptist proclaimed, “He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him” (Jn. 3:36). Paul said, “The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men” (Rom. 1:18). He warned unbelievers saying, “you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who ‘will render to each one according to his deeds’...to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness— indignation and wrath” (Rom. 2:5-6, 8). “In Romans 5:10 and 11:28 sinners are called ‘enemies of God’ (*echthroi*) in a passive sense, indicating, not that they are hostile to God, but that they are the objects of God’s holy displeasure.”³⁰ Paul describes the terror and judgment that awaits unbelievers at the second coming: “when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power” (2 Th. 1:7-9).

The purpose of Christ’s sacrifice was not to have some psychological effect upon man but rather to appease, placate or turn aside God’s wrath. Jehovah is the One whose holiness and justice has been violated. He is the One who has been sinned against. Jesus by His suffering and death brings *peace* between an angry and offended God and the believing sinner. “Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom. 5:1). He has “made peace by the blood of His cross” (Col. 1:20). Shedd writes, “Not until the Holy One has been ‘propitiated’ by an atonement, can the penalty be ‘released.’ Neither of these effects can exist without the antecedent cause. The Bible knows nothing of the remission of punishment arbitrarily: that is without a ground or reason. Penal suffering in Scripture is released, or not inflicted upon the guilty, because it has been endured by a substitute. If penalty was remitted by sovereignty merely, without any judicial ground or reason whatever; if it were inflicted neither upon the sinner nor his substitute; this would be the *abolition* of penalty, not the remission of it.”³¹

Only biblical Christianity deals properly and logically with the problem of man’s guilt and punishment. Other forms of theism such as Judaism, Islam, and the monotheistic cults (e.g., Jehovah’s Witnesses) have God abolishing the guilt and penalty of sin on the basis of human merit: repentance, prayer, good works and so on. All such systems which base salvation on human merit *contradict* the biblical teaching regarding God’s character. Sin is an offense against God’s majestic holiness and justice. Jehovah cannot merely abolish the penalty because a person says he is sorry and turns over a new leaf. The penalty must be paid in *full* by an appropriate substitute before remission of sins can take place. What this means is that your only hope of having God’s wrath against you removed, and of having peace with God is to place your trust in Jesus Christ. You must believe that He lived a sinless life and that He died a sacrificial death in your place.

³⁰ L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, p. 374.

³¹ William G. T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, 2:392.

A common modernistic misconception of the doctrine of propitiation is that it portrays God the Father as mean, vengeful, unmerciful and unloving and thus, the Father needs to be pacified by the kind, merciful and loving Savior Jesus Christ. The Bible rejects all such caricatures of this glorious doctrine. The work of redemption is the work of the Triune God. There is no disharmony, opposition or contradiction of purpose between the Father, Son or Holy Spirit. It was the Father's love of the world that caused Him to send His only begotten Son (Jn. 3:16; 1 Jn. 4:1, 9, 10; Rom. 8:32; Eph. 2:4-6). Jesus came to do His Father's will (Jn. 4:34; 5:30, 36; 6:39-40; etc.). "Behold, I have come...to do your will, O God" (Heb. 10:7). It was the Father's will that Jesus suffer and die as a sacrifice for the elect. "The doctrine of the propitiation is precisely this that God loved the objects of His wrath so much that He gave His own Son to the end that He by His blood should make provision for the removal of this wrath. It was Christ's to deal with the wrath so that those loved would no longer be the objects of wrath, and love would achieve its aim of making the children of wrath the children of God's good pleasure."³² "In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (1 Jn. 4:1).

Reconciliation

While expiation deals with guilt and propitiation with wrath, reconciliation deals with the alienation from God that arose because of sin. Sin brings real guilt; it merits the judgment and wrath of God and it destroys the relationship that man was created to have with God. Before the fall Adam had a wonderful loving relationship with Jehovah. God communed with Adam and walked with him in paradise. God and man were close personal friends. There was no disharmony in their relationship. But when Adam sinned against Jehovah, that relationship was severed.

What Jesus Christ accomplished by His vicarious suffering and death has reconciled God (the offended party) to sinful man. Reconciliation logically follows the removal of sin's guilt and God's wrath by Christ. Once Jesus eliminates a person's sins and removes God's wrath against that person, there is no longer any impediment to restoring that person to God's full favor and fellowship.

The doctrine of reconciliation is often misunderstood. Many Evangelicals are taught that reconciliation refers to the sinner being reconciled to God instead of God being reconciled to the believing sinner. This common error in interpretation is somewhat understandable if one casually reads a few verses dealing with reconciliation without carefully analyzing all the relevant passages. Doesn't Paul say that "we were reconciled to God" (Rom. 5:10); that "God...reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 5:18); that "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself" (2 Cor. 5:19); "that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross" (Eph. 2:16). Although Paul does not say that God is reconciled to the sinner, an examination of other passages dealing with reconciliation prove that this is precisely what Paul means when he says we are reconciled to God.

In First Samuel we read that King Saul was very angry with David and wanted to kill him. Yet throughout all of the accounts of Saul and his men seeking to kill David, David never showed any enmity, anger or hostility toward Saul. In fact not only did David refuse to kill or hurt Saul every time he was given the opportunity (e.g., 1 Sam. 26:8-9), he also deeply mourned when Saul was killed in battle (cf., 2 Sam. 1:11ff). Note, how the Philistines describe the

³² John Murray, *The Atonement*, p. 15.

possibility that Saul's hostility toward David might cease: "For with what could he [David] reconcile himself to his master" (1 Sam. 29:4)?

In Matthew 5:23-24 Jesus discusses a situation in which a person is about to offer a gift to God before the altar but realizes that a brother has something against him. Note, the brother is the offended party. He is the one who is alienated. Christ says, "First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift" (Mt. 5:24). The statement "be reconciled to your brother" is equivalent to saying "do what it takes to remove your brother's alienation toward you." Therefore, the scriptural statement, "we are reconciled to God" refers not to *our* alienation from God but to God's alienation from us. This means that the reconciliation that Christ achieved is objective. While it is certainly true that Christ's death affects the believing sinner's attitude toward God, the doctrine of reconciliation is concerned with a change in God not man. The change of attitude that occurs in man is a result of regeneration.

The objective nature of reconciliation is also confirmed by the passages which teach that reconciliation occurred by the atoning sacrifice of Christ. "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. And not only that, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation" (Rom 5:8-11). The Bible teaches that reconciliation occurred "while we were still sinners" (v. 8); "when were reconciled through the death of His Son" (v. 10). Reconciliation is set in parallel to justification in verses 9 and 10. Justification means that the sinner is declared righteous on the basis of Christ's sacrifice. Likewise, Christ's sacrifice removed God's anger and alienation toward the believer. Paul in verse 11 says that Christians have "received the reconciliation." This indicates that reconciliation is an accomplished fact that is given to believers as a gift.

Paul said to the Corinthians: "Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation" (1 Cor. 5:18-19). Like the passage in Romans this passage teaches the objective nature of reconciliation. Reconciliation is a result of Christ's death. "The proof that God was reconciling the world to himself (i.e., in his death) is that he does not impute to men their trespasses."³³ Reconciliation is the direct result of the forgiveness of sins. Furthermore, the apostles are "ambassadors for Christ" who preach "the word of reconciliation" (v. 19). The preaching of reconciliation is equivalent to the preaching of the cross. The idea that the apostles were going about preaching a subjective psychological change is absurd. The apostles preached that Christ suffered and died to expiate sin, to remove God's wrath and thus "God is reconciled and ready to forgive, so that whosoever will may turn unto him and live."³⁴ Unbelievers need to "be reconciled to God" (2 Cor. 5:20). They need to embrace the offer of reconciliation. "The reconciliation is effected by the death of Christ. God is now propitious. He can now be just, and yet justify the ungodly."³⁵

God's grace is truly amazing. It would be understandable if a person gave up everything and died for a close friend or relative. But Christ suffered and died for God's enemies. He loved

³³ Charles Hodge, *I & II Corinthians* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1974 [1857, 58]), p. 521.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 523.

the unlovely. He experienced the tortures of hell for the ungodly. Jesus has restored us to the favor and fellowship of God. Now we are the friends of God.

Redemption

When the Bible speaks of the redemption wrought by Christ it speaks of His securing release from the penalty and bondage of sin by the payment of a price. That price was nothing less than the shedding of blood by the Lord—His suffering and death. Peter says that believers were redeemed “with the precious blood of Christ.” Paul exhorted the Ephesian elders “to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood” (Acts 20:28). The apostle calls the church to sanctified living with the phrase: “For you were bought at a price” (1 Cor. 6:20; 7:23).

Scripture teaches that Christ came to earth to give His life as a ransom price for the elect. “The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many” (Mk. 10:45). Jesus was “born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law” (Gal. 4:4-5). Our Lord “gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works” (Tit. 2:14). “In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the richness of His grace” (Eph. 1:7; cf., Col. 1:14). Thus, the saints in heaven sing: “You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation” (Rev. 5:9). Murray writes, “There can be no question then but the death of Christ in all its implications as the consequence of His vicarious identification with our sins is that which redeems and redeems in the way that is required by and appropriate to the redemptive concept, namely, the ransom price.”³⁶

The biblical concept of ransom is easy to understand if we look at the use of the term in the Old Testament law. Under the law if a man owned an ox that he knew had a history of attempting to gore people, yet did not properly fence in that ox so that a person was gored to death, that owner was to be executed. In such a case, however, the law did provide a way for the guilty party to avoid the death penalty. The victim’s family could accept a payment or ransom price in lieu of the guilty party’s execution (cf., Ex. 21:28-32). The guilty party was delivered from the death penalty by paying a price, a ransom. Rushdoony writes, “*Ransom*, in Hebrew *kofer*, comes from a word meaning to wipe off, or to expiate. It has reference to a redemption fee paid to rescue a man from the law, or from his captor. The Greek word is *lytron*.”³⁷

When the Bible speaks of our redemption in Christ it focuses on the three areas which are all related to our bondage to sin. *First*, there is bondage to the guilt and penalty of sin. Everyone apart from Christ has a mountain of debt for their sins upon them. The sword of God’s justice hangs over their heads ready to strike. If the guilt of all our sins is not removed we must pay the price by suffering the torment of hell forever. Jesus secured our release from this mountain of debt by ransom, by vicariously enduring the penalty for sin. Paul said that Christ “gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works” (Tit. 2:14). “Being justified by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 3:24). “In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins” (Eph. 1:7). “Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us” (Gal. 3:13). This aspect of our redemption is objective and legal. The

³⁶ John Murray, *The Atonement*, p. 22.

³⁷ R. J. Rushdoony, *Systematic Theology*, 1:596.

ransom price that Jesus paid is directed toward God. It is God's justice that must be satisfied. Christ secures our legal acquittal and penal release from our transgressions of Jehovah's law. Christ's death means we are freed from the law as a means of justification. Rushdoony writes, "To be ransomed means to be freed. We are freed, not from the law as the righteousness or justice of God, but from the death-penalty of the law, from sin and death, into righteousness and life. The 'handwriting of ordinances that was against us,' *i.e.*, the indictment of *death*, was taken away and nailed to the cross by Jesus Christ (Col. 2:14)." ³⁸

Second, Christ's redemption secures the elect's release from the power of sin. That is, believers by virtue of their being united to Jesus in His death and resurrection are no longer slaves of sin but are now slaves of Christ. Our Lord's substitutionary death and resurrection not only achieved the removal of the guilt and penalty of sin but also secured definitive sanctification. All the saving graces flow from the atonement. Christ liberates us from the pollution, defilement or filth of sin. He sets us free to follow His holy law. Paul specifically applies Christ's death to both justification and sanctification. Jesus "gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed [justification] and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works [sanctification]" (Tit. 2:14). Thomas Taylor writes, "Redemption and sanctification are inseparable companions; none is redeemed who is not purged. The blood of Christ has this double effect in whomever it is effectual to salvation; for he is made to us righteousness and sanctification (1 Cor. 1:30). In the law we read of lavers as well as altars; in the gospel we read that water, as well as blood, streamed out of the side of Christ,... The blood signifies the perfect expiation of the sins of his church, and the water shows its daily washing and purging from the remainders of its corruption. Likewise the apostle joins these two together: 'Christ loved the church, and gave himself for it,' that is, his life and blood, 'that he might sanctify it and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word' (Eph. 5:25, 26); and, it is clear that the apostle John expresses both of these benefits, satisfaction for sin and sanctification from sin, when he says that Christ came both by water and by blood (1 John 5:6); and here it is said that Christ gave himself to redeem and purge, and elsewhere (Eph. 5:27) in express terms to sanctify, his church." ³⁹

While we must always be on guard not to *confound* justification with sanctification as Romanist theologians do, we also must avoid the antinomian distortion of the gospel which divorces sanctification from the cross. "[S]anctification no less than justification springs from the efficacy of Christ's death and the virtue of his resurrection." ⁴⁰ Paul writes, "What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. For he who has died has been freed from sin" (Rom. 6:1-7). Believers have been united with Christ in His death, burial and resurrection. They have died to the reign of sin and have risen to a new life of obedience. Real Christians will not continue in sin because union with Christ has broken the power of sin. "For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus:

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 1:598.

³⁹ Thomas Taylor, *Exposition of Titus* (Minneapolis, MN: Klock & Klock 1980 [1619]), pp. 375-376.

⁴⁰ John Murray, *The Epistle To The Romans* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1968), 1:212.

that if One died for all, then all died; and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again...therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new” (2 Cor. 5:14-15, 17). Hodge writes, “This union is transforming. It imparts a new life. It effects a new creation. This expression indicates not only the greatness and radical nature of the change effected, but also its divine origin.... If we are united to him so as to be interested in the merits of his death, we must also be partakers of his life.”⁴¹

One of the greatest errors of modern Evangelicalism and Fundamentalism is the idea that Christ’s suffering, death and resurrection has merely made salvation possible if people do their part and *allow* God to save them by “accepting Christ as their personal Savior.” When we examine just how comprehensive Christ’s accomplished redemption is, we must reject the Arminian or semi-Pelagian interpretation of the gospel that is so popular today. Union with Christ in His suffering, death and resurrection guarantees not only expiation (the removal of guilt), propitiation (the removal of wrath) and reconciliation (the removal of alienation) but also the application of Christ’s saving merits to the sinner: regeneration, sanctification and glorification. That is why when the apostles exhort believers to be sanctified they continually point to the cross and the resurrection. Our redemption in Christ (comprehensively considered) does not end until all the saints are glorified and in the very presence of the resurrected Lord of glory. (This certainly excludes any idea of a mere hypothetical salvation). Thus, Paul refers to the second coming of Christ as “the day of redemption” (Eph. 4:30). Believers eagerly await “for the adoption, the redemption of our body” (Rom. 8:23). Christians have been redeemed by Christ (justification), and, are being redeemed (sanctification), and will be redeemed (glorification). Jesus’ life and blood cannot fail.

The Bible also teaches that Christ redeemed us from bondage to Satan. Jesus told the unbelieving Jewish scribes and Pharisees that their father was the devil (cf., Jn. 8:44). Spiritually, morally and covenantally they were children of Satan. Paul said that unbelievers walk “according to the prince of the power of the air” (Eph. 2:2). He told the Corinthians that “the god of this age has blinded” the minds of those who are perishing (2 Cor. 4:3). Paul told Timothy that the devil has taken men captive to do his will (2 Tim. 2:26). Pink writes, “The human race is now reaping what was sown at the beginning. Our first parents rejected God’s truth and believed the Devil’s lie, and ever since then man has been completely under the power of falsehood and error.”⁴² Unsaved man loves darkness rather than light (Jn. 3:19-20). Therefore, his heart is enslaved to the prince of darkness.

Christ by His sacrificial death has crushed the head of the serpent (Gen. 3:15). Satan has been bound so that he can no longer deceive the nations (Rev. 20:1-3). Jesus has “disarmed principalities and powers” (Col. 2:15) and now sits exalted at the right hand of God ruling over them (Eph. 1:20-22). Therefore, “the gates of Hell shall not prevail against” the church (Mt. 16:18). Thus, our Lord said to Paul, “I will deliver you from the Jewish people, as well as from the Gentiles, to whom I now send you, to open their eyes in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me” (Acts 26:17-18).

Old Testament Israel’s enslavement to Pharaoh and his armies served as a type of our pre-Christian enslavement to Satan and his minions. The deliverance of Israel from Egypt, the drowning of Pharaoh and his armies in the Red Sea and the judgment against Egypt’s false gods

⁴¹ Charles Hodge, *I & II Corinthians*, pp. 516-517.

⁴² A. W. Pink, *Exposition of the Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1975 [1945]), 2:51.

(cf., Ex. 12:12) all typified Christ's victory over the devil and all demonic forces. "In as much then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage" (Heb. 2:14-15). Murray writes, "Although redemptive terms are not expressly used in connection with the destruction executed upon Satan, yet since they are used for deliverance from the bondage of alien powers and since Satan is the epitome of alien power, we are required to apply to the language of release (Heb. 2:15) redemptive import."⁴³

A number of early medieval theologians taught that Jesus' death was a ransom paid to the devil. They came to this erroneous conclusion based on the passages which teach unsaved man's bondage to Satan. There are a number of biblical reasons to reject such a view. *First*, all sin is an offense against God not Satan. David confessed: "Against You, You only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Your sight" (Ps. 51:4). *Second*, sin is a violation of God's holy law not the devil's law. *Third*, man was created by God not by the devil. Only God has total jurisdiction over man. *Fourth*, the Bible teaches that God will judge the human race and that He is the One who casts unsaved sinners into hell. Christ said, "Fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell" (Mt. 10:28). *Fifth*, the sacrifices were done at the Temple near God's special presence. Atonement is made "before the LORD" (Lev. 6:7). On the day of atonement the blood of the sacrificial animal was sprinkled on and before the mercy seat where the Shekinah presence dwelt. The author of Hebrews says that Christ as a high priest entered the heavenly sanctuary: "with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption" (Heb. 9:12). The blood is sprinkled before the Father because it is His justice, anger and alienation that expiation resolves. *Sixth*, Satan is a finite creature who is in rebellion against God. He functions under God's sovereign control. Men are only under Satan's power because of their rebellion against God. Jesus offered Himself without spot to God to eliminate the elect's guilt and to break their slavery to sin. A believer's freedom from bondage to Satan is a by-product of his justification, sanctification and adoption. The idea that Christ paid a ransom to the devil is unbiblical and ludicrous.

All men come into the world as captives of sin (as to both its guilt and pollution), death and Satan. If you do not believe in Christ then you live with the law's curse upon you. You are a slave to sin, a child of wrath and in bondage to Satan. You live to serve your sinful lusts and no matter how much you suppress the truth you know that your damnation is just. Your only hope is to trust in Jesus Christ. He procured redemption with His own precious blood. He paid the price in order to set sinners free. He satisfied God's perfect justice by His life and blood. "If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. For the Scripture says, 'Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame'" (Rom. 10:9-11).

The Perfection of the Atonement

The biblical doctrine of the atonement exalts the work of Christ and the grace of God. It exposes all systems of salvation based on human merit as damnable lies of the devil. What Christ accomplished is *perfect*. Nothing needs to be or can be added to what Christ has accomplished. Our Lord's suffering and death eliminated the guilt of every sin (past, present or future), the

⁴³ John Murray, *The Atonement*, p. 24.

wrath of God, the alienation of God and man's bondage to sin and Satan. This doctrine at once overthrows Romanism with its purgatory, repeated sacrifice of the mass, and meritorious human deeds. It also refutes Arminianism's notion that Christ's death only opens the possibility of salvation, that salvation is contingent upon man's free will.

If Christ has eliminated the guilt of every sin, God's wrath against the sinner and has reconciled God to the sinner what need is there for a purgatory to purge away sin? Purgatory implicitly teaches that Christ's suffering and death were insufficient to eliminate our guilt and God's wrath. Purgatory is an invention of wicked prelates who want to bind men's souls with guilt in order to pick their pockets and empty their bank accounts.

The Roman Catholic doctrine of the mass in which Christ is supposedly re-sacrificed (sacerdotalism) also is a denial of the sufficiency and perfection of Christ's sacrifice. If Christ's suffering and death achieved the forgiveness of sins and a full reconciliation with God, why would it need to be repeated? The Romish doctrine of the mass treats Christ's death like the Old Testament animal sacrifices that could never really remove our sins (cf., Heb. 10:4). The Bible explicitly teaches that Christ's work was perfect and does not need to be repeated. Jesus' suffering and sacrificial death was a final, once for all event. Peter said that "Christ also suffered *once* for sins" (1 Pet. 3:18). Paul said, "He died to sin *once for all*" (Rom. 6:10). The author of Hebrews emphasized the perfection and finality of Christ's sacrifice: "this He did *once for all* when He offered up Himself" (Heb. 7:27). "Christ was offered *once* to bear the sins of many" (Heb. 9:28). "We have been sacrificed through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ *once* for all time" (Heb. 10:10). When Christ was about to yield up His spirit He said: "It is finished" (Jn. 19:30). His sacrifice was completed and *never* to be repeated. If we are to trust in Jesus Christ alone for our salvation then we must turn away from all idolatrous popish and high church rituals that implicitly teach that Christ did not really get the job done.

Every religion, philosophy or cult that teaches that man must do something meritorious such as meditate, give to charity, obey the law, etc., to be saved denies the sufficiency of Christ's work of redemption. Paul said, "Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law" (Rom. 3:28). "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast" (Eph. 2:8-9). "But that no one is justified by the law in the sight of God is evident, for the just shall live by faith" (Gal. 3:11). Like Paul, we must count all things as dung that we may own Christ (cf., Phil. 3:8 KJV). Jesus Himself has told us what ought to be our proper attitude toward works. "So likewise you, when you have done all those things which are commanded, say, 'We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do'" (Lk. 17:10). Good works are the fruit, not the cause of justification.

A much more subtle denial of the perfection and sufficiency of the atonement is found in many "Fundamentalist" and "Evangelical" churches. While most Evangelical pastors would emphatically affirm that we are saved solely by Christ, they explicitly contradict this affirmation in their theology. Most Evangelicals hold to an Arminian or semi-Pelagian understanding of Christ's death. They teach that Christ's death did not actually guarantee the salvation of even one person but that it opened the possibility of salvation to all. Jesus does His part and then man completes the process by an act of the will. They teach that what *ultimately* separates people in heaven from people in hell is a person's "decision for Christ." Furthermore, they believe that election is based on God's foreknowledge of a person's decision and that regeneration is God's response to man's faith. This scheme of salvation is synergistic to the core. Christ's atonement is merely a link in a chain that if completed by man will bridge the gulf to heaven.

In reality, the Bible teaches a monergistic view of salvation. "Salvation is of the LORD" (Jo. 2:9). The atonement of Christ is perfect and sufficient and does not need to be supplemented by man. "You shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins" (Mt. 1:21). There are two reasons that the Evangelical Arminian understanding of the atonement must be rejected. *First*, the atonement as biblically defined means that salvation has been accomplished. The idea that it only makes salvation possible if men contribute an act of the will is not derived from Scripture. All the theological terms that we have examined within the theological orbit of the atonement teach a salvation secured. Expiation means that all the guilt of sin is removed; propitiation means that God's wrath against the sinner is removed. Reconciliation means that God is now a friend of the justified sinner. Redemption means that Christ has paid the full ransom price to God. If Christ removed the guilt and the penalty of a person's sins and has reconciled God to the sinner, then that person cannot go to hell. It would be irrational and unjust for God to send Christ to the cross to suffer for a person's sins and then send that person to hell to suffer for the same sins.

Second, Arminians reject the biblical teaching that union with Christ in His death and resurrection is the basis and guarantee of the *application* of Christ's saving merits to the sinner. Classical Arminianism does teach that a general benefit proceeds from Jesus' death to all men (without exception) called sufficient grace. But this so-called sufficient grace does not resurrect the human soul. It is not efficacious unto salvation. It is supposed to counteract man's depravity enough to enable him to exercise his "free will". The bottom line is that Arminians teach that the choice of the will is what makes Christ's death saving.

The Bible teaches that unregenerate man is *not* in a state in which he can cooperate with the Holy Spirit. Man is dead spiritually (Eph. 2:1-5). He hates the truth and Jesus Christ (Jn. 3:19-21), dwells in darkness (Jn. 1:4-5), has an uncircumcised heart of stone (Ezek. 11:19), is helpless (Ezek. 16:4-6), cannot repent (2 Pet. 2:13-14, 22; Rom. 8:6-8; Jer. 13:23), cannot seek God (Rom. 3:11; Ps. 14:2-3), is a slave to Satan (Ac. 26:17-18), and cannot see or comprehend divine truth (1 Cor. 2:14). The only way that grace can be sufficient for a spiritual corpse is for it to be efficacious. Therefore, (as noted above in the section on redemption) the Bible teaches that Christ's atonement is the foundation of all the saving graces (including regeneration, sanctification and glorification). Everyone united to Christ in His death and resurrection will be regenerated and given the gifts of faith and repentance. God's grace is efficacious unto salvation. Paul never attributes regeneration to an act of the will or to a cooperative process between the Holy Spirit and man. He bases it solely upon union with Christ: "But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (Eph. 2:4-6).

Paul says that faith is a gift of God. "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast" (Eph. 2:8-9). "For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake" (Phil. 1:29). "For it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure" (Phil. 2:13). "Now a certain woman named Lydia heard us. She was a seller of purple from the city of Thyatira, who worshiped God. The Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul" (Acts 16:14). "He [Apollos] greatly helped those who had believed through grace" (Acts 18:27).

Repentance is a gift of God. "Him God has exalted to His right hand to be Prince and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins" (Acts 5:31). "When they heard these

things they became silent; and they glorified God, saying, ‘Then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life’” (Acts 11:18). “In humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth” (2 Tim 2:25).

The biblical doctrine of the atonement teaches that man adds nothing to the saving process. God works directly upon the souls of the elect. God “in his saving operations, deals not generally with mankind at large, but particularly with the individuals who are actually saved.”⁴⁴ God receives all the glory. “Any position which ignores or rejects the completeness of the atonement rejects the perfection of the atonement. In so doing, it accuses our Saviour of failing to accomplish a full salvation.”⁴⁵

The common Evangelical understanding of the atonement is a subtle denial of salvation by grace alone. Luther writes, “Granted that your friends assign to ‘free will as little as possible,’ nevertheless they teach us that by that little we can attain righteousness and grace: and they solve the problem as to why God justifies one and abandons another simply by presupposing ‘free-will,’ and saying: ‘the one endeavored and the other did not; and God regards the one for his endeavor and despises the other; and He would be unjust were He to do anything else!’...They [the guardians of ‘free-will’] do not believe that He intercedes before God and obtains grace for them by His blood, and ‘grace’ (as is here said) ‘for grace.’ And as they believe, so it is unto them. Christ is in truth an inexorable judge to them, deservedly so; for they abandon Him in His office as a Mediator and Kindest Savior, and account His blood and grace as of less worth than the efforts and endeavors of ‘free-will!’”⁴⁶ Romanism and modern Evangelicalism are first cousins.

Let us continually worship the Lord Jesus Christ. His work of redemption is perfect. He eliminates our guilt and sets us free from the power of sin. He sends His Spirit to regenerate our hearts so that we can see the truth and believe in Him. He takes us from our wallowing in the mire of sin to paradise with God. “He shall see the travail of His soul and be satisfied” (Isa. 53:11). “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and blessing” (Rev. 5:12).

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⁴⁴ B. B. Warfield, *The Plan of Salvation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1970), p. 87.

⁴⁵ Robert A. Morey, *Studies in the Atonement*, p.54

⁴⁶ Martin Luther, *The Bondage Of The Will*, Translated by J. I. Packer and O. R. Johnson (Cambridge, Eng.: James Clark, 1957). pp. 292, 305.