

ST2, SS, The Atonement

5/28/23

INTRODUCTION: The word “atonement”, in general, refers to the process by which reconciliation takes place between our holy Maker and his sinful people. More specifically, atonement focuses upon the idea of sin being covered or removed from God’s sight by way of the sacrifice of a representative substitute. In the OT worship of Israel, The Day of Atonement, described in Leviticus 16, was the most sacred day of the year. It was the one day in which the high priest entered the holy of holies, in first the Tabernacle and later the Temple. He, the appointed mediator, offered a representative substitute sacrifice on behalf of the people (Lev. 16).

This class describes the backdrop, cause, necessity, nature and extent of Christ’s atonement. (Reference 1689 Ch. 8) [words taken from syllabus]. The material was primarily drawn from: 1) Wayne Grudem, Bible Doctrine, Ch. 15, “The Atonement”; 2) Sam Waldron, A Modern Exposition of the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith, Ch. 8, “Of Christ the Mediator”; and 3) JI Packer, Knowing God, “The Heart of the Gospel: Propitiation”.

I. The Backdrop of the Atonement: The Holy Wrath of God

1. Where is the holy wrath of God first displayed prominently? What is the most striking feature of this display?

A: It is first displayed prominently in The Flood (Gen. 6-9) during the days of Noah. The most striking feature of this display is its universal scope. The Lord destroyed ALL of humanity, save for his obedient servant and those united to him.

2. What is the last display of God’s wrath in the Bible? What is the most striking feature of that display?

A: The last display of God's wrath in the Bible is found in the next to last chapter, Rev. 21.

Rev. 21:4-8 *He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.*”⁵ *And he who was seated on the throne said, “Behold, I am making all things new.”* Also he said, *“Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.”*⁶ *And he said to me, “It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment.”*⁷ *The one who conquers will have this heritage, and I will be his God and he will be my son.*⁸ ***But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death.***

Perhaps the most striking feature of this display of wrath is its severity. Such is indicated in the sobering words, *“their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death”* (eternal, complete separation from the goodness of God). The universality is also striking. A phrase like, “all liars” encompasses a great deal of people.

3. Where in the Bible do we find the most systematic, sustained presentation of the wrath of God? What is the larger context in which this presentation is found?

A: Romans 1:18- 3:20. The larger context is the Apostle Paul's exposition of the gospel, in which *“the RIGHTEOUSNESS of God is revealed from faith to faith”* (Rom. 1:17).

Rom. 1:18 *For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.* NOTE: This declaration begins a paragraph in which the Apostle expounds the present, ongoing disclosure of God's holy anger against his truth-suppressing creatures.

Rom. 2:5-11 *But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on **the day of wrath** when God's righteous judgment will be revealed. ⁶ He will render to each one according to his works: ⁷ to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; ⁸ but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be **wrath and fury**. ⁹ There will be **tribulation and distress** for every human being who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek, ¹⁰ but glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek. ¹¹ For God shows no partiality.* NOTE: These verses are part of a section in which the Apostle expounds the future, climactic expression of God's holy anger, "THE DAY OF WRATH" (v5).

Rom. 1:18- 3:20 sets forth man's desperate need for the powerful gospel. We are deservedly under the wrath of God. We need what God has done, in Christ, to pacify this holy anger.

4. What is the single most vivid display of the wrath of God in Scripture?

A: The cross of Christ. God abandoned his own holy Son. He poured out his holy indignation on his beloved Son, who was then acting as the representative substitute for his guilty, polluted people.

II. The Necessity of the Atonement: The Justice of God

Once God determined to save a great number of sinners, the atonement through Jesus Christ became necessary (“consequent absolute necessity”). God was not obligated to save any. But once he determined to rescue and restore a people for himself, it became absolutely necessary that he make a way wherein his righteousness was not impugned. There are some things that God CANNOT do. For example, GOD CANNOT LIE (Titus 1:2), and he CANNOT DENY HIMSELF.

2Ti 2:11-13 *The saying is trustworthy, for: If we have died with him, we will also live with him;*

¹² if we endure, we will also reign with him; if we deny him, he also will deny us;¹³ if we are faithless, he remains faithful—for he cannot deny himself.

Question: What is meant by the declaration, “If we are faithless, he remains faithful—for he cannot deny himself”?

A: It is expanding upon the previous words, “If we deny him, he will also deny us”. God is holy and true. He is against what is evil and cannot look at it with approval. Our race has denied him. He will punish us, apart from our repenting and believing in his Son.

It was not possible for God to save his people in any other way than through the sacrifice of his own Son, who became a sinless human in order to die for sinful humans.

Matt 26:39 *And going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed, saying, “My Father, **if it be possible,** let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will.”*

Luke 24:25-27 And he said to them, “O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! ²⁶ **Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer** these things and enter into his glory?” ²⁷ And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.

Heb. 2:17 Therefore **he had** to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.

Heb. 9:21-23 And in the same way he (the high priest) sprinkled with the blood both the tent and all the vessels used in worship. ²² Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins. ²³ **Thus it was necessary** for the copies of the heavenly things to be purified with these rites, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these.

The clearest single statement, perhaps the most significant passage re the necessity of the atonement is found in Romans 3:21-26. The passage sets for THE RATIONALE for God’s way of justifying sinners.

Rom. 3:21-26 But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— ²² the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, ²⁵ whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he

had passed over former sins. ²⁶ *It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.*

- God was concerned to “manifest” or “show” his righteousness
- Between the Flood and the Cross, God had “passed over former sins”, demonstrating divine forbearance. In actuality, all those transgressions would be punished, but it had long appeared that God was not bringing retribution to bear upon humans’ wrongs.
- Vs. 25-26, along with v21, emphasize God’s concern to “SHOW” his righteousness. He was concerned to vindicate his justice. He is not morally indifferent. He is thoroughly committed to recompensing wrongdoing. He “cannot look on evil with favor” (Hab. 1:13).
- The propitiatory sacrifice of the sinless Substitute was God’s way of justifying sinners while satisfying the demands of his justice.

Question: How does this concern to vindicate his righteousness relate to the first petition of the Lord’s Prayer?

A: God’s foremost concern is with his reputation. He wants to be set apart in the minds and hearts of people.

III. The Nature of the Atonement

Christ perfectly fulfilled the requirements of God’s Law in our place, as our representative. Likewise, as our substitute, he bore the penalty for our sins, absorbing the just wrath of God in our place. **Both in his lifelong obedience and in his sufferings on the cross, the first and primary effect of what Christ did is GODWARD. His perfect obedience was what God in his holy righteousness**

required. Likewise, his penal sufferings were required by God's righteousness.

1. Christ's obedience for us (sometimes called his "active obedience").

Christ's representative obedience provides for his people more than a restoration to the condition of Adam & Eve before the fall. His fulfilling the Law in their place secures his people being established in righteousness forever. (Phil. 3:8-9; 1Co 1:30).

Rom. 5:17-21 For if, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and **the free gift of righteousness** reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ. ¹⁸ Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, **so one act of righteousness leads to justification** and life for all men. ¹⁹ For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so **by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous**. ²⁰ Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, ²¹ so that, as sin reigned in death, **grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord**.

2. Christ's sufferings for us (sometimes called his "passive obedience").

1) Suffering throughout his whole life.

Mark 1:12-13 The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. ¹³ And he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan. And he was with the wild animals, and the angels were ministering to him.

Heb. 5:8 Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered.

Heb. 12:3 Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted.

Is. 53:3 He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

2) The pain of the cross.

i. Physical pain and death.

ii. The pain of bearing sin.

“Now Jesus was perfectly holy. He hated sin with his entire being. The thought of evil, of sin, contradicted everything in his character. Far more than we do, Jesus instinctively reveled against evil. Yet in obedience to the Father, and out of love for us, Jesus took on himself all the sins of those who would someday be saved. Taking on himself all the evil against which his soul rebelled created deep revulsion in the center of his being. All that he hated most deeply poured out fully upon him” (Grudem, p252).

*Is. 53:6 All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and **the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.***

*Is. 53:12 ...because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; **yet he bore the sin of many**, and makes intercession for the transgressors.*

2Co 5:21 For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. [NOTE: “This does not mean that God thought that Christ had himself committed the sins, or that Christ himself actually

had a sinful nature, but rather the that the guilt for our sins (that is, the liability to punishment) was thought of by God as belonging to Christ rather than to us” (Grudem, p253).]

iii. Abandonment.

Matt 27:46 *And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, “Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?” that is, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”*

“He was finally cut off from the sweet fellowship with his heavenly Father that had been the unfailing source of his inward strength and the element of greatest joy in a life filled with sorrow” (Grudem, p253).

iv. Bearing the wrath of God.

Rom. 3:21-25

Heb. 2:17 *Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.*

1 John 2:2 *He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.*

1 John 4:10 *In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.*

3) New Testament terms describing different aspects of the atonement.

i. Sacrifice.

- ii. *Propitiation.*
- iii. *Reconciliation.*
- iv. *Redemption.*

IV. The Extent of the Atonement

1. What the Question is and is not.

1) It is not:

- i. **For whose benefit did Christ die?** Many unbelievers benefit from Christ's death.
- ii. **Is the atonement limited?** All Evangelical Christians limit the atonement in one of two ways, its extent or its efficacy. The latter means that Christ's death did not actually secure the salvation of anyone but simply made it possible for everyone. In particular, it did not secure the gifts of repentance and faith for anyone. Those activities, for the Arminian, come from ourselves, not from God. Or, they might say that those actions come from God, but we can effectively resist them. Thus, Christians are those who, of themselves, stop resisting holy influences, while non-Christians are those who persist in 2)

2) The real question is, "In whose place did Christ substitute himself?"

2. The Proofs of Particular Redemption (Definite Atonement)

1) Its Nature as Substitutionary Obedience and Curse-Bearing

Rev. 5:9 *And they sang a new song, saying, “Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation...*

2) The Explicit Statements of the Bible Regarding Those for Whom Jesus Died

John 10:14-15 *I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me,¹⁵ just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and **I lay down my life for the sheep.***

John 10:26-28 *...but you do not believe **because you are not among my sheep.**²⁷ My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.*

John 6:37-40 *All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out.³⁸ For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me.³⁹ And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day.⁴⁰ For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.”*

John 15:13-14 *Greater love has no one than this that someone lay down his life for his friends.¹⁴ You are my friends if you do what I command you.*

John 17:9 *I am praying for them. I am not praying for the world but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours.*

Eph. 5:25 Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her...

3) The Effects of the Atonement Demand Particular Redemption

Christ's representative, substitutionary death did not simply make salvation possible for sinners; it secured and guaranteed it.

Rom. 8:32 He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?

4) The Context of the Atonement Demands Particular Redemption

- i. God chose, before the foundation of the world, the specific people that he would redeem and adopt.**

Eph. 1:3-7 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, ⁴ even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love ⁵ he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, ⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. ⁷ In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace,

- ii. God made an oath-bound pledge, the New Covenant, in which he promised to secure the actual regeneration, pardon, communion, and preservation of a particular people.**

Jer. 31:31-34 “Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, ³² not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD. ³³ For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. ³⁴ And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.”

V. The Cause of the Atonement: The Love of God

John 3:16 “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

1John 4:10 In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

Rom 5:8 but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Question: How does the backdrop of the holy wrath of God actually intensify rather than detract from the Bible’s declaration of the great love of God?

A: The reality and intensity of God’s holy indignation against sin meant that salvation would be a much more costly endeavor to God himself. He could not give up his justice, but his love was such that he was willing to give up his Son.

Rom. 8:31-35a *What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? ³² He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? ³³ Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. ³⁴ Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. ³⁵ Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?*