

THE DOCTRINES OF GRACE 4

Limited Atonement (Part 1)

The doctrine of Christ's atonement is a huge subject. It has been called the heart of the Gospel and is the place where God's love and justice meet. It relates to our discussion of Calvinism in terms of the scope of this atonement. Just who did Christ die for? Did he die for everyone or just for some? In order to understand the concepts properly, we must first understand what atonement is, why it's necessary and what it does. This first paper is to evaluate the Biblical teaching on atonement and in the next paper to move on to examining the scope of this atonement.

Overview of Biblical Atonement

This subject can only be dealt with in a cursory manner, we need to look at it to get a proper understanding of the doctrines of grace. Although I intend to cover most of its aspects in the Bible, I cannot do justice to this subject in a short paper. For those interested in further reading I suggest:

The Atonement - Hugh Martin

The Atonement - A A Hodge

Redemption, Accomplished and applied - John Murray

Why the cross? - H E Guillebaud

Christ our penal substitute - R L Dabney

Knowing God - J Packer

The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross - Leon Morris

These are all short(ish) books examining aspects of this subject. Standard Reformed systematic theologies and confessions could also be examined. (Note: not A H Strong, a Baptist theologian of great esteem who was weak at this point, also the great Puritan Richard Baxter blurred the edges of Calvinism on this subject. These were good men whose work we read with profit and whose lives we honour, but we must test all we read.)

The problem - The need for atonement

The moral perfection of God requires that his justice, as well as his love, is satisfied. Sin must be punished. God cannot love sinners without the price being paid for their disobedience.

What does atonement mean?

Definition:

Atonement is the legal satisfaction of the wrath of God by the punishment of a substitute - the penal sacrifice of Christ - to secure the redemption and reconciliation of the elect people of God.

Words used to denote atonement

Hebrew: *Kippûr* - atonement (or expiation in pl.); derives from *kâphar* whose primary root means: 'to cover', figuratively it means to expiate, appease, atone, forgive, be merciful, pardon, reconcile etc. The expression 'to make atonement' is

frequent in Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers, but the idea is common in the whole OT, ie sin is dealt with by sacrifice. (Note: the mercy seat is in Heb. *kappôreth*, meaning a lid; this word derives also from *kâphar*).

Greek:

katallage (only Rm 5:11 but this word really means reconciliation).

The NT majors on terms like: propitiation, reconciliation, blood, justification etc. The corresponding words to *kippûr* are: *hilasmos* and *hilasterion* (see later).

Note: Some have said that the essence of atonement is revealed in the word itself, ie that it is an 'at-one-ment', ie it is a reconciling process. Whilst reconciliation results, this is not comprehensive enough to explain the term. If any word could be substituted, it would have to be propitiation or redemption, but even then they, individually, only refer to one side of the concept. Both are required (both appear with justification in Rm 3:24-25). It is best then to stay with 'atonement' and understand what it means.

Key Verse:

Since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, they are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. (Rm 3:23-25)

The concept of sacrifice

- Provided by God (Lev 17:1)
- The result pleased God, his anger was turned away (Lev 3:16)
- There was a variety of offerings for different breaches of the law and to offer oneself to God (eg burnt offering Lev 1, peace offering Lev 3, sin offering - unwitting sin Lev 4, guilt offering - deliberate sin Lev 6, cereal offering Lev 2).
- A priest was necessary Lev 4:20, 7:7
- The great symbol of atonement is the Day of Atonement (Lev 16, *Yom Kippur*)
- The sacrifice is the price paid for atonement; *Kipper* essentially means 'redemption price', ie the price paid to cancel the sin - a life shed (blood Lev 17:11).
- The shedding of blood is substitutionary (Lev 17:11). The law stated that the soul that sinned was to die (Ezek 18:4), the sacrifice of an offered animal died in the place of the sinner. The blood of the offering represented a life given up in death, this death atoned for the sinner's soul (Heb 9:22). The sinner identified himself with the animal personally, by laying his hands upon its head (Lev 1:4). The Israelite was very clear that this animal died in his place.
- Sacrifices do not avail of themselves (Heb 10:4); but rely on faith in God's final provision on Calvary. God chose that way for Israelites to get right with him. In his love he provided a solution to the breach of fellowship. This was initiated at the beginning (Gen 3:21, 4:4).
- Note: there was no global sacrifice. The OT offerings were specific. Particular sins required particular offerings.

Propitiation - the basis of atonement

Relates to what Christ accomplished towards God by his death

Definition:

Propitiation means to turn away wrath as a result of appeasement by an offering.

Words:

- *hilaskomai* (vb) (Lk 18:13 = be merciful; Heb 2:17 = to make propitiation)
- *hilasterion* (n) (Rm 3:25; although it only appears once in Paul, the thought is frequent eg: 1 Cor 5:7; Rm 5:9-10; Eph 5:2; 1 Cor 11:25, 10:16)
- *hilasmos* (n) (1 Jn 2:2, 4:10)

In Hebrew the main word used is *Kipper*, translated in the Greek LXX as *exilaskomai*.

'Cover': this thought is particularly noticeable in the Hebrew words based on *Kâphar*. In the case of sacrifices, the blood would cover the object being cleansed (see Heb 9:18+), the picture is that the blood covers and remits the sin, either by figuratively hiding it from God's sight or by washing it away in the process or the blood is interposed between God and the sinner and turns the wrath of God aside. Some have suggested that as the reality of atonement only came at the cross, the OT method of sacrifice only figuratively covered sin over, awaiting the real removal when Christ died (note Rm 3:25-26). The example of the ark provides a good illustration of atonement being a covering: the flood was God's judgment against sin and sinners, the pitch sealed the ark from the flood and, therefore, saved the occupants. The word for pitch is *Kâphar*. It turned away the wrath against sin. The covering of pitch safeguarded those chosen.

Why is propitiation necessary?

God's wrath is against sinners (Rm 1:18,24,26,28, Rm c1-3)

God provides the means of averting his own wrath in order to show his love to the elect (Heb 9:26, 10:5-10)

How is this done?

- Jesus is given as an offering for the sin of the elect (1Jn 4:10) as a result of the love of God. (Jn 1:29, Heb 9:26,28, 10:12,14; 1 Pt 1:19; Eph 5:2; 2 Cor 5:21)
- Jesus is also the priest that offers the sacrifice (Heb 2:17). The priest effected the sacrifices and intercession (Heb 5:1-3, Num 6:22+). He represents man to God (Heb 5:1), he brings men near to God (Num 16:5), Jesus' fulfills all the qualifications of a priest (see Heb), and discharges all the functions of a priest (Dan 9:24-26; Eph 5:2; Heb 9:26, 10:12; 1 Jn 2:1).
- Matt 27 :51 - On completion of the work of atonement on the cross, the temple curtain (which separated men from the presence of God) was ripped apart to show that:
 - the whole typical sacrificial system was abolished.
 - God was moving out towards men.
 - Man now had access to God in Christ

The concept of redemption and ransom

Relates to what Christ accomplished towards us by his death

Ransom

This has to do with prisoners and slaves. The OT has many examples, and even specific laws regarding the setting free of slaves. It is not just a deliverance, but the payment of a price to legally give a slave liberty.

The NT concept is drawn heavily from OT practices. Note particularly:

- The duty of a Kinsman-redeemer (eg Boaz) (Lev 25:47-55, word = *goel*).
- The redemption of the first-born (Ex 13:11-14; Num 18:15-16, word = *padah*).
- The ransom price eg of an ox which has killed someone Ex 21:28-32, word = *kopher*).
- The example of Hosea's wife Gomer (Hosea 1:2-3, 3:1-3 etc).

It was also a common practice in the NT contemporary Greek period, particularly regarding the redemption of prisoners of war or slaves.

The NT itself stresses the price paid in Christ's redemption, it is not simply a deliverance that is in mind but ransom (eg 1 Pt 1:18-19; Matt 20:28; Titus 2:14).

There are three ways in which an Israelite might become enslaved, each of these applies to us:

firstly - he could be born that way, we were born in sin (Ps 51:5)

secondly - he could be captured by brigands or in war; sin rules over us in Adam we are under its dominion by nature (Ps 19:13)

thirdly - he could sell himself as a slave to pay off a debt; sin is indebtedness and only death can pay the bill (Rm 6:23).

We need to be ransomed out of slavery to sin and the kingdom of the enemy.

Redemption

Further OT ideas include:

- The redemption / deliverance of Israel from Egyptian slavery (Exodus)
- Redeeming family members sold into slavery (Lev 25:47)
- Redeeming family land that had been sold (Lev 25:25-26)

Definition:

Redemption is the deliverance of sinners from sin and death into liberty and relationship with God as a result of the payment of the blood of Christ as a ransom.

Like propitiation, redemption is a price God pays to himself. God's justice must be fully satisfied, therefore, the cost of our sin to God's law must be exacted.

Greek Words:

- Root- *luo* - to loosen, eg the loosening of bonds (as in prisoner), it can sometimes mean to release by payment of a ransom price.
- *lutron* - the actual ransom price (Matt 20:28; Mk 10:45; 1 Pt 1:18)
- *antilutron* - (*anti* = instead of) a ransom paid instead of others having to pay it, ie Jesus died in place of the elect sinner (1 Tim 2:6). This stronger word is what Paul uses to

describe our salvation by a substitute.

- *lutroo* (vb)- specifically meant to release by payment of a price (Titus 2:14)
- *lutrosis* (n) - redemption, liberation, the act of freeing (Lk 2:38; Heb 9:12)
- *apolutrosis* (n) - (above with prefix apo - from) a release on payment of a ransom, set free, forgive, (Rm 3:24; Eph 1:7; Heb 9:15)
- *agorazo* - to buy (1Cor 6:19-20, 7:22-23; 2 Pt 2:1; Rev 5:9-10), ie the elect are purchased by the death of Christ.
- *exagorazo* (vb) - ie above with *ek* (out of) as a prefix, to buy out.
 - ◊ (Root *agora* means 'the market place', therefore, these last two words have in mind purchasing out of the market so that the one purchased might not return, Gal 3:13, 4:5)

Teaching

- Jesus redeems us but propitiates God, God can then justify us.
- The price is Jesus' blood (Heb 9:22).
- Jesus gave himself as a ransom for all the elect (1 Tim 2:5-6, Titus 2:14).
- Jesus said this himself (Mk 10:45, Mt 20:28). Note: his ransom is for 'many', not 'everyone'.
- We are redeemed from the law (Gal 3:13, 4:5).
- The key thought is a substitutionary death to set others free.

Payment

NB that scripture does not specifically indicate to whom the price was paid. Redemption emphasises that salvation was costly and that God's justice must be satisfied. In that sense God paid the price of his own righteous judgment or wrath. The sufferings of Christ are a penal satisfaction to the demands of the law. It is a matter of grace by the sovereign God that the penalty due to sinners is transferred to a substitute (Gal 3:13; 2 Cor 5:21). Historically, foolish ideas have been developed, for instance that Jesus paid Satan or demons to rescue his people.

The nature of atonement

As a result of these studies, we can see atonement as:

1. Substitutionary (vicarious)

- Man could only pay the penalty of breaking God's law by dying eternally; only eternal suffering adequately recompenses for his sin.
- In love, God appoints a saviour to die in the place of man, a vicar (substitute). This vicar atones for sin and obtains redemption for man.

Man → sin transferred to innocent party as substitute → the substitute suffers the wrath of God's judgment → man receives the innocence and righteousness of the substitute: 1 Pt 3:18.

Proof:

- the example of the identification of the sinner with the OT sacrifice
- our sin is laid upon Christ (Isa 53:6,12; Jn 1:29; 2 Cor 5:21; Gal 3:13; Heb 9:28; 1 Pt 2:24). Our sins are imputed (reckoned, accounted) to Christ. He did not become sinful in his nature, he carried our sins, the guilt (liability to punishment, penalty) of

our sin was imputed to him.

- Christ died instead, or on behalf, of us (Gal 3:13; Jn 11: 50; 2 Cor 5:15; Mt 5:38, 20:28; Mk 10:45; 1 Tim 2:6).
- This means that there is a mystical union between Christ and those he died for. In eternity, a legal union was made in the plan of redemption. The mediator of the New Covenant undertook to be the representative of his people, the elect, given to him by God. This established a federal relationship. Christ could, therefore, act as the legal representative of his own and convey the blessings of salvation.

2. Penal

I.e. it concerns crime and person. The penalty of sin is death of the sinner. The satisfaction of justice requires the death and suffering equivalent to the crime.

3. Satisfaction (Christ's passive obedience)

Christ paid the full penalty for our sins by his suffering and death, thus discharging our debt. His infinite value as a divine man easily meets the full cost of all the elect's sinfulness. God's justice was, therefore, fully satisfied. (Isa 53:6; Rm 4:25; 1 Pt 2:24, 3:18; 1 Jn 2:2)

Atonement affects the person wronged (ie God), not the wrongdoer (the sinner is not atoned or propitiated). God must be appeased and reconciled to the sinner (the sinner is also reconciled to God, however, Rm 5:10; 2 Cor 5:19-20, since the reconciled God justifies the sinner).

Jesus → propitiates God → God justifies the sinner	God and Man
Jesus → redeems the sinner	reconciled

4. Elevation (Christ's active obedience)

Salvation is more than a clean slate. We do not start afresh like Adam in Eden, we have 'more blessings than our father lost'. The law has its positive demands as well as penal sanctions.

Christ's earthly obedience to the law was as vicarious as his suffering. Jesus fulfilled the law in all its positive requirements. He fulfilled all righteousness, not just in his acts, but in all the thoughts, words, intent, disposition, will and motivation of his human nature. His active obedience merited eternal life for the sinner. This is his full observance of the law and the inheritance of all its promises. I.e. the value of Christ's sufferings is greater than the value of man's sinful penalty. It is the basis of our justification (Heb 2:10-18, 5:8-10).

We do not revert to Adam's state before the fall, but are carried to a higher level of oneness with Christ. We receive more than forgiveness of sins (eg Gal 4:4-5 - set free from law, Gal 4:7 - sonship and adoption).

(See Mt 3:15, 5:17-18; Jn 15:10; Gal 4:4-5; Heb 10:7-9; Rm 10:4; 2 Cor 5:21; Phil 3:9; Gal 3:13-14; Eph 1:3-12, 5:25-27.)

Note: Arminians reject this idea that Christ merited for us positive acceptance with God, adoption and everlasting life. They make it a work of man.

Summary

'Christ suffered the penalty of (man's) transgression and rendered that obedience which was the condition of life' ...

'His "active" obedience embraces his entire life and death viewed as vicarious obedience. His "passive" obedience embraces his entire life, and especially his sacrificial death, viewed as vicarious suffering' (Hodge p 401,405)

In other words, Christ discharged the penalty of sin begun by Adam and earns the reward of the covenant law, eternal life. The imputation of this righteousness and life is justification and is all of grace.

The source of this atonement is the love of God to save sinners (Jn 10:15; Gal 2:20; Rm 5:8; 1 Jn 3:16), it is given to us in free grace.

Nature of Atonement	Effects of Atonement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jesus assumes legal responsibility for his people as a man • He obeyed and suffered as their substitute • His obedience and suffering were vicarious • The guilt of our sins was imputed (accounted) to him and punished in him • He suffered the due penalty for this as demanded by God's justice (he did not suffer exactly in kind, degree or duration as we would ie eternal damnation) • His suffering was as a divine person in human nature 	<p>Atonement is the effect, not the cause of God's love</p> <p>It satisfied justice (ie it propitiated God)</p> <p>It expiated the guilt of sin and reconciled God to us</p> <p>It secured salvation for the elect and all its applications by the Holy Spirit (grace)</p> <p>It was a vicarious. penal satisfaction</p> <p>It motivates us to love & serve God</p> <p>It dissipates fear</p> <p style="text-align: right;">(adapted from Hodge)</p>

ASPECTS OF ATONEMENT

Redemption / Ransom	Jn 8:31-36, Gal 3:13, Mk 10:45
Reconciliation	Rm 5:10-11, 2 Cor 5:18-20, Eph 2:16, Col 1:20-22
Propitiation	1 Thess 1:10, 5:9; Rm 3:25
Justification	Rm 4:25
Discharge from law	Rm 7:4, Col 2:14
Freedom from death	Rm 6:23, 1 Cor 15:52-57
Crucifixion of the flesh	Gal 5:24; 2 Cor 5:14-15; Col 3:1-3; 1 Pt 4:1-2
Deliverance from world	Gal 6:14
Deliverance from the power of sin	Rm 6

Deliverance from Satan Heb 2:14-15; Eph 6:10-12; Jn 12:31
 Penal sacrifice Eph 5:2, 1 Cor 5:7, Rm 8:3, Heb 9:7+
 Bearing the curse Gal 3:13
 Substitution Mk 10:45

TOWARDS GOD	ATONEMENT	TOWARDS MAN
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Penal Sacrifice

Turns away wrath by satisfying judgment

Sin removed

Justice & law upheld

Purchase of elect

Jesus is our substitute
 Justification
 Peace with God (reconciled)

Cleansed & righteous
 Delivered from law & death
 Standing with God

Loved by God
 Belong to Christ

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