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AMAZING LOVE – WHOSOEVER WILL MAY BE SAVED

DOCTRINE FOR TODAY

SERIES: THE ARMY'S ELEVEN ARTICLES OF FAITH

[Doctrine 6]

We believe that the Lord Jesus Christ has by His suffering and death made an Atonement for the whole world so that whosoever will may be saved.

THIS sixth statement of faith forms the centre point of Salvation Army doctrine. Placed where it is in our eleven *Articles of Faith*, it is as though all of the other doctrines move into it and then away from it. The Atonement of Jesus Christ must always be seen in relationship to his Incarnation. What Christ did is inseparable from who he is. The Atonement as an aspect of the Incarnation was initiated by God to reveal his love and grace towards humanity, separated from God by sin, in order to bring us into a relationship with him, individually and as a member of his community (John 3:16; Romans 5:8; 8:32). But only by destroying the power of sin could this communion be regained and perfected.

Essential to the Early Church was the belief that Jesus, the Christ, had died and risen to deliver humanity from sin by a sacrifice of himself in order to establish a new covenant relationship between man and God. While it is acknowledged that there is no one comprehensive way to interpret the Atonement, there are helpful images, when taken together, that provide insight into its meaning and help us understand this theological truth in a contemporary sense.

SACRIFICIAL

Christ's dying was a sacrificial death. Paul and the Gospel writers connect his death with the Old Testament sacrificial ritual. For them his death

was a sacrificial act by which a covenant was ratified between God and a New Israel, just as the old covenant was ratified in the blood of the sacrificial animals on Mount Sinai. By the cross of Christ, God made a new covenant with the New Israel to replace the neglected and broken covenant of Sinai. Frequent references to the blood of Christ (Romans 3:25; 5:9; Ephesians 1:7; 2:13; Colossians 1:20) and the emphasis of the Book of Hebrews that Jesus Christ is the mediator of a 'better' covenant, establish the connection between the death of Christ and the sacrificial renewal of the covenant. John the Baptist calls Jesus 'the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world' (John 1:29). Paul refers to him as 'the Passover Lamb' (1 Corinthians 5:7). In offering himself as the perfect sacrifice, Christ gave himself in perfect obedience to God. Only such perfect obedience is victorious over sin. What does this mean for us today? Christ's death changes the attitude of God toward humanity. God's right assessment of sin as

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FOR DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION

- * THIS DOCTRINE TALKS ABOUT 'WHOSOEVER' WILL MAY BE SAVED. WHO ARE THE 'DIFFICULT' INDIVIDUALS IN YOUR COMMUNITY THAT THIS MIGHT INCLUDE?
- * OF THE DIFFERENT IMAGES USED TO DESCRIBE ATONEMENT, WHICH IS THE MOST HELPFUL? WHICH IS THE LEAST HELPFUL?
- * HOW IS THE WORD 'ATONEMENT' UNDERSTOOD IN YOUR CULTURE?

“ ‘Amazing love! how can it be That thou, my God, shouldst die for me?’ (SASB 283) ... ”

deserving of his wrath is vindicated and fellowship with him is restored when we repent and identify with Christ's work in faith. *'When I survey the wondrous Cross On which the Prince of Glory died'* (SASB 136) surely expresses this truth.

VICARIOUS

The New Testament evidence about the death of Christ expresses the conviction that Christ died 'for us', 'on our behalf' or 'in our stead' (Mark 10:45; Romans 8:32; Galatians 3:13; Ephesians 5:2). To describe Christ's death as vicarious is to say that in some way he experienced or exemplified something that was due us in a way that brought the benefits of his suffering to those who were not able to gain those benefits themselves. It is important to remember that the subjective realm of Christian experience cannot be ignored. Salvation Army teaching rightly stresses that humanity has a part to play in salvation. It is true that the sacrifice of Christ accomplished what we could not do for ourselves. The integrity and justice of God could not allow him to establish a righteous relationship with a sinful humanity, although his love constrained him to forgive. The obedience of Christ took the place of our weakness and rebellion and effected a reconciliation for us (2 Corinthians 4:21). Christ demonstrated the appropriate attitude of obedience to the Father and rejection of sin. His offering of himself as a sacrifice of obedient

worship to God prefigures the response that each of us must make to God in faith. Because of what God did through Christ and his obedience, we too are to follow Christ's example and by faith die to self and become living sacrifices who are transformed from sinful creatures to obedient servants (Romans 12:1, 2). Jesus was not a sinner yet bore our sin in his body on the cross (1 Peter 2:24). By identifying interpersonally with sinners and in conformity with God's intentions concerning redemption, Jesus made it possible for us as sinful humanity to identify interpersonally with God through him. His incarnation, suffering and obedient death avail to you and I on the basis of our obedience to him. We acknowledge this truth when we sing *'Amazing love! how can it be That thou, my God, shouldst die for me?'* (SASB 283).

UNIVERSAL

The sacrificial offering of Jesus' death met the requirements of God's justice as to make salvation available to *all* humanity. The Atonement was sufficient to deal with the whole of sinful humanity and with the whole of sin in sinful humanity. God's heart desire is to draw all humanity to himself – men and women, boys and girls. We unhesitatingly affirm Scripture presenting salvation as provided for all on the condition of acceptance of the Atonement by faith. We believe in a boundless salvation able to

reach and redeem the last, the least, the lost. It is this belief that propels us into the world and every hell in it to share the good news of reconciliation asking: *'Have you been to Jesus for the cleansing power? Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb?'* (SASB 417).

TRIUMPHAL

Not only does the Atonement of Christ release humanity from the guilt and power of sin, and establish a new relationship with God, it also proclaims Christ's victory over the evils present in the world (1 Corinthians 15:2-25; Colossians 2:15). Through God's own power living in us by his Spirit (which we call holiness), we are able to say: 'In all this we are more than conquerors', and 'no power can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord' (Romans 8:37ff). What an encouragement to know and experience here and now the One who reigns in his lordship over all creation!

Such a reality of 'At-one'(ment) with the living God surely must continue to challenge and shape our values and behaviour as we engage with each other and a suffering world.

Further helpful reading:

The Salvation Army Handbook of Doctrine (Chapter 6 'Atonement')
Convictions Matter – The Function of Salvation Army Doctrine (Major Ray Harris)