

III. The Central Theme of the Atonement

Meaning of Atonement

Origin: The Jewish Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur
Kippur means to cover or theologically to show mercy
The mercy seat is the place of the propitiation offering

Atonement: To be covered by the mercy of God through a substitute bearing the judgment of our sin in our place

A. Background Factors

1. The Nature of God: Holy, Righteous, Perfect
2. Status of the Law: The Law is an extension of the character of God

Romans 3:23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God

3. The Human Condition: Sinful, Rebellious

Psalm 130:3-4 If You, Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? But there is forgiveness with You, that You may be feared.

4. Christ: Sinless, Perfect, Just, Divine as the perfect sacrifice for sins

I Peter 1:18-19 knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ.

5. The Old Testament Sacrificial System: The model for the work of Christ

B. The New Testament Teaching

1. The Gospels
2. The Pauline Writings
3. The Basic Meaning of Atonement: Sacrifice, Propitiation, Substitution, Reconciliation

C. Objections to the Penal Substitution Theory

1. Distortion of the Nature of the Godhead: If God is love, how can God have wrath within the Godhead

2. The Morality or Rightness of Substitution: Unfair or unjust for God to substitute punishment for the guilty with the innocent
3. Divine Hypocrisy: God says to love our enemies and forgive them, yet he punished Jesus as a just response to his enemies.
4. The Culturally Conditioned Nature of the Theory: Connected to the culture and not to the absolute reality of the world
5. Too Individualistic a View: Each individual's sins are atoned for, but what about the corporate impact of sin?

D. The Penal Substitution Theory in Relation to the Other Theories

1. The Atonement as Example
2. The Atonement as a Demonstration of God's love
3. The Atonement as a Demonstration of God's Justice
4. The Atonement as Triumph over Evil

E. The Implications of Substitutionary Atonement

"The substitutionary theory of the atoning death of Christ, when grasped in all its complexity, is a rich and meaningful truth. It carries several major implications for our understanding of salvation:

1. The substitution theory confirms the biblical teaching of the total depravity of all humans.
2. God's nature is not one-sided, nor is there any tension between its different aspects. He is not merely righteous and demanding, nor merely loving and giving. He is righteous, so much so that sacrifice for sin had to be provided. He is loving so much so that he provided that sacrifice himself.
3. There is no other way of salvation but by grace and specifically, the death of Christ.
4. There is security for the believer in his or her relationship to God. For the basis of the relationship, Christ's sacrificial death, is complete and permanent.
5. We must never take lightly the salvation we have. Although it is free, it is also costly, for it cost God the ultimate sacrifice." (Erickson, 751-752)

IV. The Extent of the Atonement

A. For Whom Did Christ Die?

1. General Atonement

Five-points of Arminianism (issued in early 1600s)

I. Man is never so completely corrupted by sin that he cannot savingly believe the gospel when it is put before him, nor

John 3:16 For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.

II. Is he ever so completely controlled by God that he cannot reject it

I Thessalonians 2:13 For this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe.

III. God's election of those who shall be saved is prompted by His foreseeing that they will of their own accord believe

Romans 8:29-30 For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified.

IV. Christ's death did not ensure the salvation of anyone, for it did not secure the gift of faith to anyone; what it did was rather to create a possibility of salvation for everyone if they believe

Romans 1:16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

V. It rests with believers to keep themselves in a state of grace by keeping up their faith; those who fail here fall away and are lost

Hebrews 3:12-13 Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God. But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called "Today," so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

2. Particular Atonement

Five-points of Calvinism (issued at The Synod of Dort in 1618 in response to the above)

I. Fallen man in his natural state lacks all power to believe the gospel, just as he lacks all power to believe the law, despite all external inducements that may be extended to him

Romans 3:10-12 as it is written, "There is none righteous, not even one; There is none who understands, There is none who seeks for God; All have turned aside, together they have become useless; There is none who does good, There is not even one."

II. God's election is a free, sovereign, unconditional choice of sinners, as sinners, to be redeemed by Christ, given faith and brought to glory

Ephesians 1:3-4 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him.

III. The redeeming work of Christ had as its end and goal the salvation of the elect

IV. The work of the Holy Spirit in bringing men to faith never fails to achieve its object

V. Believers are kept in faith and grace by the unconquerable power of God till they come to glory

John 6:37 All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out.

3. The Extent of the Atonement

a. Unlimited atonement

b. Limited atonement

c. Sufficient for all of the sins, applicable only to those who believe

4. Universal Atonement

B. For What Did Christ Atone? Sin, separation, death, sickness