



Foundations of

FAITH

The Atonement of Christ

Lesson 12

The most important event in history was the crucifixion of the Son of God. It was and is important, not just because of its drama, but because Christ in his death atoned for the sins of all who might come to him. Although the word “atonement” is found but once in the New Testament in the King James Version, the thought expressed in the word is found many times. The atonement of Christ may be defined as the payment that he made for our sins when he shed his blood on the cross in order that we might receive eternal life.

WHY ATONEMENT IS NECESSARY. From the time that the first man sinned in Eden, all men have sinned. Paul tells us “For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.” (Romans 3:23) This sin is personal and not inherited. Were it true that we inherit the guilt of Adam’s sin (as taught in the doctrine of original sin), this passage would have to read, “For all are **born** short of the glory of God.” Instead, the various translations state that we “come short” or “fall short” of the glory of God, clearly showing that our condition is the result of our own misdeeds rather than being an inherited state.

Sin carries the penalty of death, both physical and spiritual. “For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” (Romans 6:23) Physical death can never be overcome, and by himself man is unable to defeat spiritual death, that eternal separation from God in the fires of punishment. But spiritual death can be conquered if another pays the penalty or atones for sin. Thus, atonement is necessary if we are to be saved from hell and receive an eternal home in heaven.

ATONEMENT BEFORE CHRIST. “And without shedding of blood is no remission.” (Heb. 9:22) God has always required a blood sacrifice for atonement. Under the Law of Moses one day each year was set aside as the Day of Atonement. On this day the high priest bathed himself and dressed in holy white linen garments. He took three animals – two kids and one ram – to make atonement for himself and the people. He killed the ram and offered it to God as a sacrifice for himself and his family. One of the goats was presented alive before the Lord and the high priest laid hands on it, confessing over it the sins of the people. It was then sent away into the wilderness as a scapegoat, carrying the sins of the people as it went. The other goat was slain and the high priest sprinkled its blood on the mercy seat in the Most Holy Place (which he entered only on the Day of Atonement) and on the altar. In this way the sins of the people were covered. In the Old Testament the word atonement is translated from Hebrew words meaning “cover”, “coverings”, or “to cover.” Thus, this use of the word does not signify that the sins of the people were actually forgiven, but rather that they were covered until a perfect sin offering should take them away.

WHY OTHER ATONEMENT WAS REQUIRED. As we have just noticed, the best animals which were offered in sacrifice to God could not take away sins. They were not perfect. But these sacrifices served a purpose which is expressed in Hebrews 10: 3-4, “But in those sacrifices there is a **remembrance** again made of sins every year. For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins.” These sacrifices, then, served as a remembrance, but could

not make perfect. They served until the time that a perfect atoning sacrifice would be made.

There was but one perfect offering that could completely remove sins. This was the only begotten Son of God, Jesus Christ. His perfection was proved when for some thirty years on earth he “was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.” (Heb. 4:15) God’s great love which made this sacrifice possible is expressed in Romans 5:6-8. “For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” The full significance of the death of Christ is seen when we examine several words which are used in the scriptures in connection with his offering for man.

SACRIFICE. The sacrificial system of the old law was a type of that which was to come under the new. As the high priest offered animal sacrifices for the sins of the people on the Day of Atonement, so Christ, who is our high priest under the new covenant, has offered a perfect sacrifice in the shedding of his blood on the cross. Unlike the sacrifices offered under the Law of Moses, his sacrifice does not have to be repeated because it is perfect. “But now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the **sacrifice** of himself.” (Heb. 9:26) The ninth chapter of Hebrews makes a splendid comparison between the sacrifices of the old law and the one supreme sacrifice of Christ under the new.

PROPITIATION. The sacrifice of Christ has resulted in a propitiation for our transgressions. To propitiate is to appease or render favourable. The wrath of God occasioned by our sins has been appeased and his judgment rendered favourable by virtue of the sacrificial death of Christ. “And he is the **propitiation** for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.” (I John 2:2)

RECONCILIATION. The result of the propitiation made for us is that we are restored to the favour of or reconciled to God. As sin has separated us, so Christ in his sacrifice has brought us together. “And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of **reconciliation.**” (II Cor. 5:18) “For it pleased the Father that in him should all fullness dwell; and, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to

reconcile all things unto himself; by him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven.” (Col. 1:19, 20)

JUSTIFICATION. Justification is a legal term meaning to be found just or to acquit. As used in relation to Christ’s death for man, it pictures man as a sinner brought before the judgment bar, unable to pay his debt of sin. He must either be found guilty and be condemned to die, or someone must pay the debt for him. In this case it is Christ who pays the debt with his blood, and man is found **just** or not guilty, not because of his own goodness, but because Christ has paid the debt and the charges have been dropped. “Much more, then, being now **justified** by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him.” (Romans 5:9) Justification will be more thoroughly examined in another lesson.

RANSOM. Another word conveying much the same thought is ransom. We usually think of a ransom being paid in connection with kidnapping. In New Testament times it was used primarily to refer to the price paid to liberate a slave. The person who is to be ransomed is unable to pay it himself so another must do so. Christ has ransomed us with his blood. “Even as the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a **ransom** for many.” (Matt. 20:28)

REDEMPTION. Closely akin to ransom is the word redemption. A person may pawn a piece of property and later buy it back. When he does so he is said to redeem it. If he cannot redeem it himself, another may buy it back for him. To carry out the figure in a spiritual sense, our lives have been put in pawn by sin. We cannot redeem them because, regardless of how good a life we may live, we still cannot raise the price of redemption. So Christ redeems our lives for us with his blood. “In whom we have **redemption** through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace.” (Eph. 1:7)

These expressions which we have noticed present much the same thought, namely, that we are saved by the blood of Christ without respect to our own goodness. Or as expressed by Paul, “For by grace are you saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast.” (Eph. 2:8, 9)

A common mistake respecting the atonement is in supposing that since we are not saved by our own merit there is nothing which we must do to be forgiven

of our sins. True, we cannot in any sense earn salvation. But since all men will not be saved, even though Christ died for all, it follows that his sacrifice must be accepted or appropriated to be of any value. Grace may be either conditional or unconditional. The grace of God is conditional. These conditions do not detract from the grace of God, but rather present the avenue through which one must pass to reach that unmerited favour. The first condition is faith. Paul said to the Philippian jailor, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved, and your house." (Acts 16:31) Paul was not speaking of mere mental assent to the fact that Jesus is the Christ. He was telling the jailor to believe **in Christ** or to trust him. Such a faith will lead one to confess Christ before men. (See Romans 10:9-10) The faith of the jailor also led him to obey Christ and had he not obeyed him he would not

have been saved. Thus saving faith includes obedience. "And being made perfect he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him." (Heb. 5:9)

And what obedience is required of the alien sinner? "Repent and be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." (Acts 2:38) Repentance and baptism in water are a part of the forgiveness of sins because they are a part of the conditions with which one must comply if he is to reach the atoning blood of Christ. The remission of sins is in the blood of Christ but we cannot reach that blood unless by faith, repentance, and baptism we travel the avenue to that blood. Because they stand between us and Christ, these things are unto the remission of sins and therefore necessary for salvation.

TEST ON LESSON 12

Underline the expression which correctly completes each of the following statements:

1. The number of times the word "atonement" is used in the King James New Testament is: (a) zero, (b) one, (c) six.
2. Each man comes short of the glory of God because of: (a) the sins of his parents, (b) the sins of his children, (c) his own sins.
3. Spiritual death can be overcome only by: (a) an atonement, (b) confession to a priest, (c) human suffering.
4. The animal which the high priest under the Law of Moses sent into the wilderness was a: (a) ram, (b) bull, (c) goat.
5. The high priest entered the Most Holy Place on: (a) Pentecost, (b) the Passover, (c) the Day of Atonement.
6. The atonement offered under the old law served: (a) to completely eradicate sin, (b) as a covering of sins, (c) to make the people perfect.
7. While Jesus lived on earth he: (a) was tempted in every way as we are, (b) was completely free from temptation, (c) occasionally sinned.
8. When one is justified he: (a) is found guilty, (b) is found not guilty, (c) can never be lost.
9. The doctrine of the atonement of Christ teaches us that: (a) we can merit salvation, (b) we would be lost without Christ, (c) there is nothing we must do to be saved.
10. The obedience required of the alien sinner includes repentance and: (a) prayer, (b) acceptance of a creed, (c) baptism.

Match the following words with the definitions by writing in the blank after each word the letter of the definition which BEST defines the words:

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|-------------------|-------|--|
| 1. Ransom | | a. Acquittal from sin |
| 2. Sacrifice | | b. That which appeases God |
| 3. Justification | | c. The bringing together of God and man |
| 4. Redemption | | d. An offering to atone for sins |
| 5. Propitiation | | e. The buying back of a life lost in sin |
| 6. Reconciliation | | f. The price paid to liberate one from sin |

After each scripture write what the atonement of Christ is said to accomplish:

1. I John 1:7
2. Roman 5:10
3. Hebrews 10:10
4. Ephesians 2:13
5. Colossians 1:14
6. I John 4:10
7. Romans 5:18
8. Hebrews 2:14
9. Titus 2:14

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Answers

These lessons are based on the King James Version, so if you are using another translation the words employed may vary slightly. Sometimes an alternative answer is possible. The following is a useful guide.

Section 1 – b, c, a, c, c, b, a, b, b, c.

Section 2 – f, d, a, e, b, c.

Section 3 – Cleanses from sin

Reconciled to God

We are sanctified

Made nigh

Redemption (forgiveness of sins)

Propitiation

Justification

Destroy him that had the power of death (the devil)

Redeem from iniquity or purify peculiar people

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