

## Question #10: What Is the Atonement?\*

The Atonement refers to the work of securing our salvation that Jesus accomplished for us through the life that He lived and the death that He died. Through this work of atonement, He saves us from our sins and makes it possible for us to have eternal life.

### I. The Cause of the Atonement

A. Jesus came to earth to earn our salvation because of God's love for us and God's justice toward us.

1. Most believers understand that God loves us, and this is the reason that He sent His Son. The classic expression is found in John 3:16: "God loved the world so much that He sent his one and only Son."
2. Yet, God had to act in a "just" way toward us because one of his attributes is justice -- He must act in right ways.
  - a) Christ became our propitiation (our atoning sacrifice that bears God's wrath) both to show God's righteousness and so that God could be just (Romans 3:25-6).
  - b) Someone had to be punished for the sins of the world (past, present, and future). Because God is just, He could not simply look past sins. Therefore, he sent His Son to take the punishment for our sins.

B. Thus, in Jesus life and His death, God fully expresses His love and justice for this world.

### II. The Necessity of the Atonement

A. Once God made the decision to save his people from their sin and give them eternal life, God's justice required that Christ had to live and die in the manner He did. Both the life He lived and the death He died were necessary for our salvation.

B. Jesus Himself expressed the truth that there was no other way for God to save us than through His sacrificial suffering in life and death (Luke 24:26).

1. Other means of sacrifice (i.e., the OT sacrificial system) had no real lasting value (Heb. 10:4).
2. Only the blood of Jesus could permanently deal with our sins (Heb. 9:26) and secure our eternal redemption (Heb. 9:12).

\* The material in this handout is a summary of chapter ten, "What is the Atonement?" in Wayne Grudem, *Christian Beliefs: Twenty Basics Every Christian Should Know*, ed. by Elliot Grudem (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 72-75.

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### III. The Nature of the Atonement

As has already been stated, Christ's work of atonement for us required both the life He lived and the death He died. If He just offered Himself as our sacrifice in death, we would be free from the guilt of our sin but would then have to live a perfectly righteous life in order to enter into God's presence. Thus, his atonement for us included both His perfectly obedient life and sacrificial death.

#### A. The life Christ lived

1. Christ lived a life of perfect obedience to God so that the positive merits of His obedience (His righteousness) could be counted for us.
  - a) Romans 5:19 -- "by the one man's obedience, the many will be made righteous"
  - b) Paul did not count on his own righteousness, but the righteousness "that comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God" (Phil. 3:9).
  - c) This, ultimately, is the importance of the Gospel: in it, a righteousness of God has been revealed (Rom. 1:6-17). This righteousness that we receive was made possible because of Christ's obedient life. Through his sacrifice, we get to have this righteousness (2 Cor. 5:21).
2. Christ also lived a life characterized by suffering (Isa. 53:3).
  - a) He suffered the attacks of Satan through temptation (Matt 4:1-11).
  - b) He had to endure great hostility (Heb. 12:3).
  - c) He experienced grief and loss in the death of Lazarus (John 11:35).
  - d) Through these various sufferings, He lived a life of perfect obedience which became the source of our eternal life (Heb. 5:8-9).

#### B. The death Christ died

1. He experienced excruciating physical pain in the events leading up to and then on the cross (Matt. 26:57-27:56; Mark 14:53-15:41; Luke 22:63-23:49; John 18:1-19:37). The cross was meant to slowly and agonizingly kill its victim, and Jesus underwent that pain for us.
2. Even more, He experienced immense spiritual pain as He bore the sins of the world (Isa. 53:12). He had never done nor experienced sin before this.

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- a) 1 Peter 2:24 -- He bore our sins in His body on the tree so that we might die to sins and live to righteousness
  - b) 2 Corinthians 5:21 -- God made Christ to be sin
  - c) Galatians 3:13 -- He became a curse for us to redeem us from the curse of the Law
3. He experienced complete abandonment as He went through this ordeal.
- a) The disciples deserted Him (Matt. 26:56).
  - b) God the Father turned His back on His Son (Matt. 27:46). For the first and only time throughout eternity, the Trinity was separated.
4. He experienced the full wrath of God upon Himself.
- a) As Jesus took upon Himself the sins of the world, God unleashed all his wrath and punishment for sins upon Him. He became the object of God's just wrath and vengeance.
  - b) Through His death, God's justice and wrath were meted out upon His Son. Thus, He was able to deal with our sin through His work on the cross (Heb. 9:26).

#### IV. The Result of the Atonement

- A. Christ paid the penalty we deserve for our sins.
- B. He bore the wrath of God we deserve to bear.
- C. He bridged the separation between us and God caused by our sins.
- D. He freed us from the bondage of sin.
- E. He has made it possible for God to rescue us from the domain of darkness and transfer us into the kingdom of His beloved Son (Col. 1:13).

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