

LESSON 6

THE ATONEMENT

Introduction

The doctrine of atonement is concerned with the work of Christ rather than His nature. To know what He has done and does will reveal what He is. The disciples came to recognize His divine nature after they had observed the cross and encountered Him in His resurrected body. On the other hand, their recognition of Christ as divine enabled the disciples to give a new interpretation to His death. He was not just another Jewish criminal who felt the sting of Roman rule, but He was an innocent person who was destined to die by the will of God. The cross includes both the evil act of man in putting to death an innocent person and the divine act of God in offering up His Son for the sins of mankind. It is doubtful that the divine meaning of the cross could have been interpreted apart from an understanding of the divine nature of the One who was sacrificed on it.

The meaning of atonement

The word 'atone' is derived from the phrase 'at one'. It refers to a harmonious relationship with another. One meaning of atonement is similar to that of reconciliation. Another emphasis of the word may be on the process by which hindrances to reconciliation are removed.

Man in sin is separated from his Creator. What is required for sin to be removed in order that there might be reconciliation? Does the barrier which separates sinful man and a holy God reside primarily with man or with God? The purpose of this lesson is to explore Christ's work of atonement on the cross. A subsequent lesson will deal with the reconciliation of man to God made possible through Christ's atoning death. The cross has removed the obstacles to reconciliation between man and God.

The word 'atonement' occurs frequently in the Old Testament but not in the New. The Authorized Version uses the word only once in the New Testament, but this word is translated as reconciliation in the Revised Standard Version. Nevertheless, the concept is expressed in the cross and is a major doctrine of the New Testament.

Underline the correct term in this statement.

The doctrine of Atonement is related to (the work, the nature) of Christ.

(the work)

Atonement is derived from '_____' and means _____.

(at one, reconciliation)

The cross has removed the obstacles to reconciliation between _____ and _____.

(Compare your answer with the text.)

*In which Testament (Old or New) does the word 'atonement' appear frequently? _____
What is the word used for 'atonement' in the New Testament? _____*

(Old, reconciliation)

Old Testament Background

The covenant relationship

From the midst of sinful and idolatrous mankind, Yahweh called one man to separate from family and countrymen in order to enter a new way of life of worshipping only Yahweh. God entered into covenant relationship with Abraham and promised to bless, protect, and multiply him and his descendants if they would worship and serve Him only. The Covenant was given fuller elaboration after the Israelites had been delivered from Egyptian bondage. At Mount Sinai, the requirements for worshipping and serving Yahweh were given in greater detail to the people before they entered the Promised Land. If God was to keep His part of the Covenant and bless His chosen people, it would be necessary for them to be loyal in worship and service. The Ten Commandments are a summary of the more extensive Law which was given to Israel.

Because of the sinfulness and infirmity of the people, they were not always obedient to Yahweh's Law. The sin of disobedience became a barrier to the relationship of Yahweh and His people. The ceremonial Law provided for sins to be covered (atoned for) in order that they would not remain a barrier.

Israel as priests.—Since Yahweh is holy, the covenant relation between God and man required the sanctification or consecration of man through a sacrifice. The people were cleansed from sin through a sacrifice of purification. As His worshipping people, they must be holy. Their nation was known as a "holy nation", and as a "kingdom of priests" (cf. Exod. 19:6). Priests were ministers who served God in worship. It was impractical, however, for every Israelite to serve continuously as a priest; therefore, a particular tribe and a specific family within that tribe were set apart to represent Israel as ministers of the Lord.

The sacrificial system.—The sacrificial system seems to have involved two concepts: (1) Sacrifices were gifts to Yahweh. (2) Sacrifices were necessary to cover the sin of the people. The perpetual sin-stained condition of the people required continuous sacrifices. The priests offered sacrifices daily in the Temple.

The purpose of the burnt-offerings was atonement. Atonement in the Old Testament is a translation of a word which means 'to cover'. A male animal without blemish was brought before the altar, and the hands of the one making the sacrifice were placed on its head. Perhaps this action symbolized the passing of the sins of the offerer into the body of

The sin which was a barrier to the covenant relationship of Yahweh and His people was

_____.

(disobedience)

The two concepts of the sacrificial system were that:

1. *Sacrifices were* _____.

2. *Sacrifices were* _____.

(Compare your answer with the text.)

the animal. The ceremony was designed to cover the sins of the one offering the sacrifice, and to remove the barrier which hindered his relationship to Yahweh. Parts of the animal were burned, which symbolized the Lord's acceptance of the offering from the worshipper.

The peace-offering was similar to the burnt offering. Its purpose was to connote closeness and fellowship with God. This sacrifice was a shared meal, shared by God and the offerer, to promote unity and communion. The worshipper joined the priest in the sacrificial meal (cf. Lev. 3; 7).

No sacrifice could atone for sin which was done knowingly or deliberately. The sin-offering atoned for sins which did not place the offender beyond the covenant relationship. The blood of the sin-offering was to be sprinkled on the veil of the sanctuary and on the horns of the altar. It symbolized the life which was given for sin. Although no explanation is given in the Old Testament concerning how the blood of animals atoned for sins, Leviticus 17:11 does state, "For the life of the flesh is in the blood; and I have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement for your souls: for it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul." Israelites were prohibited from eating the blood of animals since they conceived of life centring in the blood.

The Day of Atonement. — On the great Day of Atonement, sacrifices were made for all the sins of all the congregation. Only on that day once each year was fasting, which was an outward expression of sorrow and repentance, required. After the High Priest put on linen garments and offered a sacrifice for himself and his sons, he then made a sacrifice for the people. In a cloud of incense, he was to approach the Mercy Seat in the Holy of Holies and to sprinkle blood upon it. Also, the High Priest would lay his hands upon the head of a live goat and confess all the sins of the people of Israel. The live goat was driven out into the wilderness, presumably to die, laden with the sins of the people (cf. Lev. 16).

Atonement is usually associated with the death of a victim; however, the live scapegoat and an offering of money for the Temple could also make atonement or cover sins (cf. Exod. 30:16). Usually by an offering, man made amends for the bad effects of his sins. The Scripture states that God makes atonement (cf. Ps. 65:3).

The purpose of the sacrifice. — How the sacrifice removed the barrier between sinful man and a Holy God is uncertain. The sacrifice as a propitiation (that which appeases or makes favourable) suggests that God who is alienated by man's sin requires something to appease His anger before He will show favour again to the sinner. The sacrifice viewed as expiation (to make amends for) suggests that the hindrance

Read the first three paragraphs on this page. Then use the following words to fill in the blanks in the statement below.

sprinkling	sin
animal	life
horns	hands
blood	veil

Atonement was accomplished by bringing a male _____ without blemish, placing of _____ by the offerer on the animal's head, then _____ the _____ of the sin-offering on the _____ of the sanctuary and on the _____ of the altar, symbolizing that its _____ was given to cover _____.

(animal, hands, sprinkling, blood, veil, horns, life, sin)

Sacrifices were made for all the sins of all the congregation on the _____.

(Day of Atonement)

Finish reading this paragraph which continues on the next page. Then identify the following statements of the view of sacrifice as propitiation or as expiation.

_____ The hindrance is in man's sin which needs to be removed.

CONTINUED ON THE NEXT PAGE

to right relationship is in the sin which must be removed by means of an atonement. Perhaps the atonement was both propitiatory and expiatory. When Jacob approached Esau whom he had wronged, he sent a gift ahead as an atonement, that is, an offering to appease the anger and resentment of Esau which Jacob anticipated (cf. Gen. 32:20). On the other hand, it was customary to speak of making atonements, not "to Yahweh," but "for the people." The purpose of sacrifices "for the people" was to remove or expiate sin which was a barrier to man's relationship to God. The Old Testament speaks frequently of sins needing to be covered.

The Suffering Servant

During the Babylonian Exile, the Israelites were cut off from the Temple and from sacrificial worship. Their covenant relationship to God was called into question. Why had Yahweh failed to uphold His part of the Covenant of blessing and protecting His people? How could the people perform their covenant responsibilities of sacrificial worship and service? The prophet answered these questions in what is called the Servant Songs of Isaiah 42-53. The covenant relationship was not interpreted to include all of Israel but only the righteous remnant in Israel. The righteous remnant is spoken of as Yahweh's Elect or Chosen Servant (Is. 42:1). The Covenant had not been rejected, nor had it failed, but the responsibility of the Chosen was given a new interpretation. They would no longer be the community worshipping and serving primarily through animal sacrifices, but they had become a sacrifice for the benefit of the Gentiles. They could no longer go to Jerusalem to offer animal sacrifices, but their own lives were being offered in service as a reasonable worship (cf. Isa. 42:6; Rom. 12:1-2). Yahweh would show His glory through His Servant Israel (Isa. 49:3). Through His Servant, Yahweh would restore the "preserved of Israel" and make them a light to the Gentiles in order that His salvation would extend to the end of the earth (Isa. 49:6).

The original Covenant with Abraham stated that Abraham and his descendants would be a blessing to all nations (cf. Gen. 12:2-3). During her period of national strength, Israel had failed to fulfil her mission to the nations. Through her defeat and captivity, Yahweh would bring to pass His will for Israel. The humiliation and captivity would not lead to disgrace for those who continued in faith. God's arm was not shortened, making it impossible for Him to deliver those who trusted in Him. Although their condition in captivity could be compared to the animal being sacrificed in the service of worship, their sacrifice was necessary for the redemption of the Gentiles from their sins of idolatry. When the

_____ God is alienated by man's sin and needs to be appeased.

(expiation, propitiation)

During what period in Israel's history were God's chosen cut off from the Temple and from sacrificial worship? _____

(Compare your answer with the text.)

Match the following parts of sentences to make two true statements:

Israel had failed
 Yahweh would bring to pass His will to the nations
 Through her defeat and captivity to fulfil her mission for Israel
 During her period of national strength

1. _____

2. _____

(Compare your statements with the text.)

Gentiles saw Yahweh's ability to deliver His down-trodden and captive servant, they would see the glory and greatness of Israel's God and would turn to Him. Only the Israelites who continued in faith during the captivity could be used as witnesses to the Gentiles when Yahweh honoured their faith through deliverance. The suffering of the helpless Servant was necessary for the Gentiles to see the greatness of Yahweh's goodness and deliverance—His glory. The Servant who had been despised and rejected and who had experienced sorrow and grief endured the afflictions for the benefit of sinful Gentiles who had turned aside from Yahweh and worshipped idols (Isa. 53:3-6). Those who continued in faith though they suffered would be the means by which the eyes of the Gentiles would be opened and "by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities" (Isa. 53:11).

Isaiah 53:5-6 appears to mean that the suffering of the Servant in some way atoned for the sins of the Gentiles. The message of the Suffering Servant is that victory comes through service and sacrifice instead of through conquest and domination. Although 'Israel of faith' is initially identified as the Suffering Servant, the passages had their ultimate fulfilment in Jesus Christ.

New Testament Teachings

The Synoptic Gospels

The Suffering Messiah

Although the Jews were expecting a political messiah who would bring about deliverance from the Romans, the mission of Jesus could be accomplished only by offering His life as a sacrifice for the sins of the people. Man's greatest need was atonement for sins which had separated him from God, not political deliverance. From the time of His baptism, it became evident that Jesus would be the Suffering Messiah.

The Synoptics do not explain how Christ is able to atone for man's sin and to open the way for his reconciliation to God. They simply affirm, along with other New Testament books, that Christ's death is necessary for the remission of man's sin. During and after His temptation, Jesus understood that His mission on earth would end in sacrificial death on the cross.

After an extended period of teaching His disciples, healing the sick, and helping the needy, Jesus came to be recognized as the promised Messiah by the disciples at Caesarea Philippi. After they

Israel's humiliation and suffering in captivity served as a sacrifice for G _____ as they saw Yahweh's goodness and deliverance.

(Gentiles)

What is the message of the meaning of the Suffering Servant? _____

(Victory comes through service and sacrifice.)

Which was Jesus' concept of messiahship and which was the concept of the disciples?

_____ *Political deliverer.*
 _____ *Suffering Messiah whose death would open the way for reconciliation to God.*

(disciples', Jesus')

Is this statement true or false?

The Synoptics explain how Christ is able to atone for man's sin and to make possible man's reconciliation to God. _____

(false)

recognized His messiahship, Jesus began to teach them what kind of Messiah He was: "From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto His disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things . . . and be killed, and be raised again the third day" (Matt. 16:21; Mark 8:31). The Synoptics record two other occasions on which Jesus spoke of His death in Jerusalem (Mark 9:31; 10:33-34; and parallel passages in Matthew and Luke). The disciples had difficulty understanding and accepting Jesus' role as a suffering Messiah (cf. Mark 8:32ff.; 10:35ff.). Jesus explained that the Son of Man came not as a victorious king who would have others serve Him but as a suffering servant who would "give his life a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). The word 'ransom' refers to the redeeming of one who is a slave or a military captive. By the payment of a price, one in bondage could sometimes be bought and set free. In a similar way, the death of Christ was the means by which sinful man could be freed from the bondage of sin.

The Memorial Supper

Preceding Christ's death, He met with His disciples in the Upper Room for the Passover meal. At the close of the meal, He took bread, blessed it, broke it, and gave it to His disciples with the instructions, "Take, eat; this is my body" (Matt. 26:26). Likewise, He took His cup and instructed His disciples to drink all of the wine from it, stating, "For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins" (Matt. 26:27-28). The symbolism of these three verses is based on the Old Testament; however, even a study of the Old Testament background does not give a complete understanding of the implications.

Three related but distinct concepts are included in the Lord's Supper. The Supper came at the conclusion of the Passover meal which was a memorial of deliverance from Egyptian bondage. Two concepts of the Covenant were embodied in the Supper: the sealing of the New Covenant and the shedding of blood for atonement. The death of a lamb was part of each of the three ceremonies.

The Passover.—John's Gospel represents Jesus' death as taking place on the cross at the time that the Passover lamb was slain at 3:00 p. m. on the fourteenth of Nisan, thus emphasizing deliverance from an enemy. The Passover memorial dated back to the time when the Israelites were slaves in Egypt (cf. Exod. 12:3-14). In their deliverance from Egyptian slavery, the tenth plague was required which took the first-born of every Egyptian family. Each family was instructed to kill a lamb and smear its blood on the door-posts and lintel and to roast the flesh of the lamb and eat it. When the death angel passed over the land at midnight, he would not enter

Payment of a price to set a captive free is called _____.

(ransom)

Three related concepts included in the Lord's Supper are:

- 1. Symbol of _____ from bondage.*
- 2. Sealing of the _____.*
- 3. Shedding of blood for _____.*

(deliverance, New Covenant, atonement)

the doors with the sign of blood to take the first-born in death. The blood of the Passover lamb became both the sign of deliverance from the enemy and the merciful sparing of the lives of those under the sign of the blood. In the day of Jesus, man's enemy was not the Egyptians but the prince of the power of the air who works in the children of disobedience (cf. Eph. 2:1ff.).

The sacrificial system.—It has been noted previously that life was considered to reside in the blood. The shedding of Jesus' blood was the giving of His life to deliver man from the power of Satan. Jesus experienced the death—the outpouring of His life—in order to break the control of Satan's cohort (death) over man. Jesus' shed blood by faith becomes the protection which spares man from death and delivers him from his enemy.

The death of a sacrificial animal served at least three functions in the covenant relationship. Perhaps the Passover lamb should not be completely distinguished from the sacrificial lamb of the Covenant. The deliverance from slavery by Yahweh was in fulfillment of His covenant promise. The delivered people were brought to Mount Sinai for a fuller elaboration of and a renewed commitment to the Covenant. When the Covenant was made originally with Abraham, it provided that Yahweh would be the God of the Israelites which meant that He would bless them, protect them, and provide for their needs. The Israelites were to worship and to serve Yahweh only. The Covenant was sealed by the slaying of a heifer, a goat, a ram, a turtledove, and a young pigeon (cf. Gen. 15:7-21). The bodies of the animals were divided, and those entering the Covenant walked between the halves. Apparently each half represented a party in the Covenant, and the halves fitted together to make a whole body, signifying the unity brought about by the Covenant. Jesus stated that His body was given for His disciples. His body was not divided since both God and man met in the one Person of Jesus Christ. The eating of the bread which represented His body portrayed the participation of His disciples in the sealed Covenant. Jeremiah had spoken of the New Covenant God would make in the latter days in which God's Law would be put into the hearts of men, making it possible for them to keep the New Covenant and resulting in Yahweh's being their God. Jesus indicated that the giving of His life (shedding of His blood) established and sealed this New Covenant.

The Covenant which was given in greater detail at Mount Sinai spelled out man's responsibilities in worshipping and serving Yahweh. The moral requirements were summarized in the Ten Commandments. The Covenant also provided for a ceremonial law related to cleansing from sin. Certain animals were sacrificed as sin-offerings. Their blood was collected

The blood of the Passover lamb became both the sign of _____ and _____ of the lives of those behind the blood.

(Compare your answer with the text.)

Is this statement true or false?

The Old Covenant was sealed by those entering the Covenant walking between halves of bodies of sacrificed animals. _____

Indicate whether 'the bread' or 'the cup' of the Lord's Supper relates to the New Covenant in each of the following ways.

_____ *Participation in Christ's sacrificed body which sealed the New Covenant.*

_____ *The shed blood of Christ which established and sealed the Covenant.*

(true, the bread, the cup)

in a vessel and dashed against the altar which represented God. On the day of ratifying the Covenant at Mount Sinai, half of the blood from the sacrificial animals was sprinkled on the people who had vowed to keep the articles set forth in the Book of the Covenant (cf. Exod. 24:4-8). The Covenant was sealed by the blood which had been shed. Since the sinful people would not keep it perfectly, provision was made for sin-offerings to be made as an atonement for (covering of sins—Exod. 29:36). Although the ceremony pertained specifically to Aaron and his sons, the priests represented the people before Yahweh. Jesus stated that the shedding of blood was "for the remission of sins" (covering or sending away of sins—Matt. 26:28). The three concepts of the Passover sacrifice of a lamb as deliverance from the enemy, the sealing of the New Covenant, and the shedding of blood for the atonement of sins are contained in the Lord's Supper. Paul seemed to include these same concepts (cf. 1 Cor. 11:23-26). The Lord's Supper proclaims the "Lord's death till He come," that is, the Passover Lamb has been slain for our deliverance, and full deliverance will come with Christ's return.

Paul's view of Christ's death

Romans 3:21-26. — After Paul discusses the hopelessness of man in sin in Romans 1:18-3:20, he sets forth the doctrine of redemption in 3:21-26. All men are in the clutches of death because all have sinned (3:23; 5:12-14). Death should be expected as the wages of sin since it was pronounced by God in the beginning (cf. Gen. 2:17). Sin is against righteousness, and God who is righteous in nature has passed the condemnation of death upon sin (Rom. 5:12; 6:23). Sin must receive its just penalty. Sinful and guilty man cannot be justified by works of the Law (Rom. 3:19-20).

Man's condition is hopeless unless his sins can be removed. Morality established through keeping the Law is ineffective because man fails to uphold the Law. Man's only hope is in God's undeserved work through Christ. Redemption (paying the price) is possible through Christ whose death (His blood—3:25) pays the penalty for man's sin. Christ's death renders man acceptable to God because it covers (propitiates—3:25) the sin of the one who has faith in the crucified Christ. Through Christ's death, God can be just by maintaining the penalty of sin and also the justifier of sinful man who believes in Jesus (3:26). Paul teaches that Christ's death is necessary to pay the penalty of man's sin. He implies a substitution of Christ's voluntary death for man's deserved death.

Now that you have studied the three concepts included in the Lord's Supper, can you name them? Try it.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

(Compare your answer with the text.)

Read the last two paragraphs on this page before doing the following exercise.

According to Paul, since sinful man cannot be justified by works of the Law, man's condition is _____ unless his sins can be _____.

_____ is possible through _____ whose _____ pays the penalty for _____ and renders _____ acceptable to _____.

(hopeless, removed, redemption, Christ, death, sin, man, God)

Romans 5:6-11.—The same theology is continued in Romans 5:6ff.: "Christ died for the ungodly." Because of God's love, Christ died for us who are sinners (5:8). Our justification is through the shedding of His blood (the giving of His life—5:9). The reconciliation of the sinner to God required the death of Christ (5:10).

Ephesians and Galatians.—The theme of redemption is continued in Ephesians 1:7, "In whom we have redemption through his blood the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace." The word translated redemption is a derivation of the word translated ransom which means "deliverance by the payment of a ransom." The idea of freedom from bondage is prominent in the meaning of the word, but possibly the payment of a price has not remained a significant part of the meaning. In Galatians 3:13 Paul states that we are redeemed from the curse of the Law by virtue of the fact that Christ became a curse for us. Some have interpreted this statement to mean that Paul regarded the Law as a curse imposed on men which they are not able to bear. Probably Paul regarded the curse to be the death imposed by the Law because of transgressions. Spiritual death is the penalty imposed on those who sin. Christ suffered the curse of the Law (its penalty) by dying in man's place; therefore, He is able to redeem us from this curse of death. The statement clearly teaches that salvation is secured by the substitutionary death of Christ on our behalf. The same idea is set forth in 2 Corinthians 5:21 where the statement is made that Christ who knew no sin was made to be sin by God on our behalf that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. These Scriptures reveal that Paul evidently believed that Christ saved us by a death that is substitutionary for sinful man who deserves death.

The Johannine writings

Although some have concluded that John plays down the idea of atonement and magnifies the concept of eternal life, he does emphasize that the shedding of Christ's blood is necessary for man's redemption. John the Baptist recognized Jesus as "the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). The lamb was the primary cultic sacrifice in the daily burnt offerings (Exod. 29:38-42) and on special occasions (Lev. 1-7). The lamb bore the sins of all the Israelites on the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16:3, 24). Jesus as the sacrificial Lamb provides atonement (the taking away of sins) through His death.

Jesus is the Son of Man and the Son of God who was to be lifted up on the cross to save man from perishing (John 3:14-16). The purpose of the Crucifixion was not to win God's love through the death of

Galatians 3:13 means that the curse of the _____ is the penalty of _____ imposed by the Law for sin. Christ paid the _____ by dying in the sinner's place.

(Law, death, penalty)

John referred to Jesus as "the _____ of _____, which taketh away the sin of the world."

(Lamb, God)

Jesus who had become one with man, but it was an expression of God's love for a perishing world. John strongly emphasizes that God Himself provided the sacrifice for man's sins because He is love. Whoever accepts God's gift of love is saved from God's wrath (John 3:16, 36).

Jesus is the good Shepherd who lays down His life for the sheep (John 10:15). Jesus' life was not taken from Him, but He voluntarily gave it for sinners (John 10:18). Jesus spoke of His supreme love in laying down His life for His friends (15:12-13).

In 1 John, Christ is presented as the Light through whom we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ the Son of God cleanses man from all sin (1 John 1:7). For the "little children" who believe in His Name, Christ is the propitiation who makes appeasement or satisfaction for the sins of the whole world (1 John 2:2). The atoning sacrifice which Christ made for sin is actually God's gift of love to a sinful world (1 John 4:10).

The Book of Revelation speaks of the removal of sins as a washing by the blood of Christ (Rev. 1:5). Because of His obedience unto death, the Lamb was exalted to glory and was qualified to open the book of man's destiny (cf. Rev. 5). The Lamb which was slain is the Redeemer of men of all nations (Rev. 5:9). His power, wealth, wisdom, honour, and glory resulted from His obedience unto death (Rev. 5:12). Jesus was not a military messiah who delivered His people from the domination of Rome. He is the King who gained victory through sacrifice and sufferings. His wealth and honour are the results of death rather than conquest and the domination of others.

The Jewish Christian writings

Hebrews.—The writer of Hebrews made a comparison between Christ and Judaism. Christ is described both as our High Priest and as the sacrificial Lamb offered for sin. As a priest, He was taken from among men so that He could understand their errors and frailties (Heb. 5:1). He became one with man in nature, taking upon Himself flesh and blood. He faced sufferings and temptations with man. To be qualified, the priest must also be appointed by God. He must be identified with God so as to be acceptable to Him. As Son of God, Jesus is acceptable to God and is qualified to represent sinful man before God. He is qualified as High Priest to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins (Heb. 5:1; 8:3; 9:9).

The sacrifice He offered was more adequate than those which were offered by the Aaronic priesthood and had to be offered over and over again. His sacrifice surpassed the blood of goats and calves and obtained

John also emphasized that Jesus is God's gift of _____ for a perishing world.

(Love)

John 10:15 states that Jesus is the _____ who lays down His life for the sheep.

(Compare your answer with the text.)

According to Hebrews, Jesus qualifies as our High Priest in several ways. They are:

- 1. He became _____ with man in _____.*
- 2. He faced _____ and _____ with man.*
- 3. As God's Son, He was appointed by _____ and acceptable to _____.*

(Compare your answer with the text.)

eternal redemption for us: "Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us" (Heb. 9:12). According to the Old Testament, nearly all things are cleansed with blood, "and without shedding of blood is no remission" (Heb. 9:22). The writer states specifically that Christ's death ("shedding of blood") is essential for the expiation (payment of penalty for) sin. His emphasis is not on propitiation (appeasing God's anger) and substitution (Christ's voluntary death replaces our deserved death) but on the atonement for sin (covering or removing sin) which blocks man's relationship to God. As a sacrifice for sin, Christ was adequate and needed to be offered only once.

First Peter.—Christ's suffering is presented as an example for His followers (1 Pet. 2:18-25). Jesus had instructed His disciples to deny themselves, take up their cross, and follow Him. In instructing slaves to be submissive to their masters, Peter cited the example of Christ who suffered for us. He went to the extent of bearing our sins in His own body on the tree that we who were dead to sin should live unto righteousness (1 Pet. 2:24). This verse teaches that Peter held a substitutionary as well as an exemplary view of Christ's suffering. Christians who suffer are called upon to rejoice in their reproaches for the Name of Christ (4:13-14).

Theories of the Atonement

It is evident from the study of Biblical passages that atonement was viewed and described from numerous perspectives. Each point of view, however, focuses on the death of Christ as a necessity for the removal of sin and the reconciliation of the sinner with God. The atoning act of Christ's death remains a mystery with regard to how Christ's death removes the sins of men.

The Ransom theory

The early Church believed that the death of Christ brought to man atonement for sins and deliverance from death. God became incarnate in the Person of Jesus Christ for our salvation. Theories as to the exact method by which that salvation was accomplished were not elaborated in the early Church. Christ's triumph over hostile powers—sin, death, and the devil—was emphasized. Man's salvation was obtained by his deliverance from evil forces. The dramatic representation of Christ's death pictured it as a ransom paid to Satan in order to cancel the just claims which he had on man. Origen (ca. A.D. 240) stated that the death of Christ was a ransom paid to

Underline the correct word or words.

From 1 Peter comes the teaching that Christians who suffer (are, are not) called upon to rejoice in their reproaches for the Name of Christ.

(are)

All atonement theories focus on the death of Christ as a necessity for the _____ of _____ and the _____ of the _____ with God.

(removal, sin, reconciliation, sinner)

The Ransom theory pictures Christ's death as a _____ paid to _____.

(ransom, Satan)

the devil in exchange for the souls of men. Many early Fathers agreed that a ransom payment was made to the devil. The view was that the devil acquired the right over mankind in the Fall and God redeemed man by delivering Christ in death to the devil, according to terms of an agreement. In the resurrection, however, Christ overcame the devil who was left without Christ or mankind. Another variation suggests that the devil was offered Christ in death in exchange for the race, but he was unaware of Christ's divinity which overcame him and robbed him of his victim.

The Ransom theory went too far in explaining how Christ's death was a payment to the devil for man's soul. The Scripture does teach the conflict between God's Kingdom and the kingdom of evil. It also teaches that Christ entered death in order to release man from the evil powers of this world. In relation to evil powers, Christ's death is described in terms of the deliverance of man through the defeat of those powers rather than a payment for sin to gain his release.

The Satisfaction theory

Anselm, who lived in the twelfth century, placed great emphasis on the absolute necessity of the atonement. Man in sin failed to give God the honour due Him by His very nature. Anselm lived in the Middle Ages when society was constructed around feudal overlords to whom all lesser people owed allegiance and honour. He thought of man's owing honour to God much like a squire or a serf might owe it to his feudal lord. To Anselm, sin was man's disloyalty to God.

It was possible to atone for an offence either by receiving the due punishment or by rendering "satisfaction" by the restitution of the honour. Man was unable within himself to render satisfaction to God; therefore, God sent His Son who assumed manhood and rendered ample satisfaction by His innocent death. The debt of honour was paid for man by God in the Incarnate Christ. Since the violated honour was repaired, God was able to forgive freely without punishing the guilty.

Anselm did succeed in eliminating the crudeness of the Ransom theory which saw the devil as a possessor of man to whom a payment had to be made. Although his theory was attractive to an age of feudal overlords, it has not been attractive to man under different social conditions. His theory over-emphasized God's honour and neglected His love. Why must God insist on full satisfaction of His honour when Christ commanded His disciples to forgive seventy times seven? How could the death of God's own Son bring satisfaction to His honour?

The Ransom theory holds that the devil acquired the right over mankind in the _____ and God redeemed man by delivering _____ in death to the devil.

(Fall, Christ)

The Satisfaction theory says that man in sin failed to give _____ the honour due Him by His very _____.

(God, nature)

Man was unable to render s _____ to God, therefore, God sent His Son who rendered _____ by His innocent _____ according to the Satisfaction theory.

(satisfaction, satisfaction, death)

The Satisfaction theory over-emphasized _____ and neglected His _____.

(God's honour, love)

The Moral Influence theory

Peter Abelard (ca. 1100) questioned how God could be pleased with the death of His Son when His anger ought to be against man. Is the God who crucifies His Son any more just than the man who disobeys His Creator? Abelard believed that the problem which separated man and God was solely in man. God in love desired man to return to Him, but man had to be convinced of God's love. Christ died on the cross in order to express God's fullest love for man in an act of sacrifice which man could understand. Abelard believed that God wishes to forgive man and He can forgive him without the necessity of an atonement. The problem is convincing man that God is willing to forgive him. The purpose of Christ's death was to reveal God's love for man. The theory emphasizes an important teaching that God does love man, but it fails to explain the Scriptures which state the necessity of Christ's death for the removal of sin.

The Penal theory

As the political and social environment changed, a new theory was proposed to explain the nature of the atonement. Since the Renaissance had brought about a revival of interest in law, it is not surprising that the Penal theory emphasized the inviolability of law and the justice of God. The theory states that God is perfectly just and the divine law of punishment can never be satisfied. Because of his transgression, man has earned the dreadful punishment of death which God must inflict. God's justice is such that sin cannot go unpunished.

Since God is merciful as well as just, He provided a substitute who, being of an infinite nature, should be able to bear the punishment of the sins of the whole world. The theory has emphasized the substitutionary aspect of Christ's work to the extent that it has sometimes attempted to interpret Christ's substitutionary work in quantitative terms. An extreme development in Calvinism of this point led to the idea of a limited atonement. It was said that God would not be just in collecting a debt from both Christ and the sinner; therefore, Christ died only for those who would be redeemed.

In this theory the emphasis on God's justice tends to neglect His love. The Penal theory appears to introduce antithesis within the Godhead—the Father is just, requiring the sinner's punishment, and the Son is merciful, seeking His salvation. It tends to regard sin as a literal debt and the death of Christ as the literal payment of the debt which must be measured in quantitative terms. It emphasizes penal suffering to the neglect of redemptive suffering. A father does not punish his children in order to find satisfaction

Is this statement true or false?

The Moral Influence theory holds that Christ died on the cross in order to express God's fullest love for man in an act of sacrifice which man could understand. _____

(Compare your answer with the text.)

CONTINUE READING THROUGH THE TOP OF THE NEXT PAGE.

Now that you have read about the various theories of Atonement, write the name of the theory below its explanation.

- 1. Christ's death was a ransom paid to the devil who had acquired the right over mankind in the Fall in exchange for the souls of men.*

- 2. God's justice is such that sin cannot go unpunished, but He is also merciful and He provided a substitute to bear the punishment for the sins of the whole world.*

- 3. Man in sin failed to give the honour due God and thus offended Him. Christ through His innocent death rendered ample satisfaction and thus restored man to God's favour.*

- 4. Christ died on the cross in order to express God's fullest love for man in an act of sacrifice which man could understand.*

(Compare your answers with the text.)

before he forgives them. He punishes them for the purpose of correcting them. The supporters of the Penal theory respond that God does not act as a private individual but as a judge who must maintain discipline, check corruption, and administer justice in the world. The Penal theory pictures God as Judge rather than Father.

The theory is criticized at the point of substitution. God may be just in requiring that sin be punished, but is He just in allowing an innocent person to be punished for a guilty sinner?

Considerations for an Atonement Theory

The New Testament has no specific theory.— How the death of Christ atones for man's sin remains a mystery which is not explained in the New Testament. The theories of theologians point out significant truths, but no one theory has summed up all of the New Testament teachings concerning the atonement.

Various analogies are used in the New Testament to set forth the meaning of the cross. The Jewish mind did not require a logical analysis and organization of a doctrine. The New Testament writers were satisfied to describe the meaning of the cross from various perspectives without organizing the variety into a unified and logical system.

The New Testament contains several views of the atonement.— Christ's death is stated as a ransom for the remission of sin (Mark 10:45); however, the Scriptures stop short of defining the ransom price and the recipient who would receive the payment. Paul states that we do not belong to ourselves because we are bought with a price. He did not pursue the implications of his analogy, which may have indicated that he recognized its limitations. In Romans 3:21-26, Paul emphasizes God's righteousness which requires justice. This theme is emphasized in the Penal theory. Again, Paul does not force the analogy to the point of setting God's justice in antithesis to His love. For the same just God who requires the punishment of sin also provides for its punishment in love. Both God's justice and His love are expressed in the atonement for sin through Christ. The substitutionary aspect of atonement is also in the New Testament: "Christ died for the ungodly" (Rom. 5:6-10). First Peter 2:18-25 points out that Christ's death is an example for Christians. Jesus revealed a similar view in requiring His disciples to take up a cross and follow Him.

Christ's death was necessary for sins to be removed.— Any theory which stops with a view of the atonement as an example only is insufficient. Even

Can one theory sum up all of the New Testament teachings concerning the atonement? _____

(Compare your answer with the text.)

Give the view of atonement found in each of the following passages:

1. Mark 10:45 _____
2. Romans 3:21-26 _____
3. Romans 5:6-10 _____
4. 1 Peter 2:18-25 _____

(1. Ransom, 2. Penal, 3. Substitution, 4. Example)

though it cannot be understood why or how Christ's death is essential for the forgiveness of sins, the fact is clearly set forth in the Scripture. When men respond to this proclamation by faith, they experience the forgiveness of sins.

The atonement may not be reasonable to the lost.—Paul states that the "preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness" (1 Cor. 1:18). He implies that how Christ's death saves the believer cannot be explained, but it can be experienced, for to the saved the atonement is the power of God.

The Old Testament background must be considered.—The death of Christ was not understood at first by the disciples. After Pentecost, they came to interpret it in the light of the Old Testament. At times, Christ is presented as the Lamb that was foreshadowed in the sacrificial system of the Old Testament. At other times, He is interpreted as the Suffering Servant of Isaiah. On other occasions He is the Messianic King who is bringing about the defeat of the power of evil. His death was interpreted in the light of these background doctrines. Perhaps a variety of views and statements of the atonement is necessary to capture the various implications of Christ's atoning death.

Paul implies that how Christ's death saves the believer cannot be e _____ but that it can be e _____.

(Compare your answer with the text.)

Home Study Exercise

Basic activity (Levels 1, 2, and 3). After reading the study guide text, answer the following questions.

1. Define atonement. _____

2. Why was atonement needed in the covenant relationship? _____

3. How were sins atoned for in the covenant relationship? _____

4. Distinguish between the sacrifice as a propitiation and as expiation. _____

5. Explain how Israel was a sacrifice for Gentiles. _____

6. How did Jesus' concept of messiahship differ from that of the disciples? _____

7. Define ransom. _____
8. List the three related concepts included in the Lord's Supper.
 - (1) _____
 - (2) _____
 - (3) _____
9. What did the blood of the Passover lamb symbolize? _____

10. How was the Old Covenant sealed? _____

11. How does the bread of the Lord's Supper relate to the New Covenant? _____

12. How does the cup relate to the New Covenant? _____

13. State Paul's view of atonement in Romans 3:25. _____

14. Explain the meaning of Galatians 3:13. _____

15. List three concepts of atonement in John's writings.
(1) _____
(2) _____
(3) _____
16. According to Hebrews, how does Jesus qualify as our High Priest? _____

17. Briefly state the Ransom theory. _____

18. Give a statement explaining the Satisfaction theory. _____

19. Give a statement explaining the Penal theory. _____

20. List the views of atonement in the New Testament and a Scripture reference for each.
(1) _____
(2) _____
(3) _____
(4) _____

Supplementary activity (Level 2):

1. Read pages 242-262 in Christian Doctrine by Shirley C. Guthrie.
2. Why did Jesus' death appear to His disciples as His failure?
3. List the Scriptures on which the Ransom theory is based.
4. Briefly explain the "military image" and list the supporting Scriptures.
5. To which classical theory of the atonement does Guthrie's "legal image" relate?
6. Explain how God's love relates to atonement.
7. Explain how God's wrath expresses His love.
8. How does the cross change our relationship with other people?

Advanced activity (Level 3):

1. Read pages 76-119 in The Gospel of Redemption by W. T. Conner.
2. Explain the differences in the statements: Christ's redemption was revelatory; Christ's redemption was a deed.
3. Explain the Example theory of the atonement and list its weaknesses.
4. What is the relation of the Incarnation and atonement?
5. Explain the moral necessity for the cross.
6. How does the cross relate to God's righteousness?
7. Summarize the "governmental theory".
8. Evaluate the "penal theory".
9. Summarize the "moral influence theory" and list the weaknesses and strong points.

Seminar Discussion

1. What is the meaning and significance of the doctrine of atonement?
2. How are sins removed?
3. Is the atonement necessary to reconcile God to man or man to God?
4. Which of the classical theories is more Biblical?
5. How are the love, righteousness, and wrath of God related to the cross?