

**Answers to Study Questions  
for the Doctrine of Atonement**

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### **Define atonement**

Atonement is a key aspect of the saving work of Christ. It is the nature of the redemption he accomplished for us. He accomplished the restoration of a right relationship between God and humans, for which we were intended. It is founded on the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ (1 John 4:10; 1 Timothy 2:5-6).

### **Why is atonement necessary?**

Atonement is necessary because God's nature is love (1 John 4:8), yet he is also holy and absolutely righteous (Leviticus 19:2; Isaiah 5:16; Psalm 89:14). God loves the human race and created us to be in relationship with him. However, humankind's nature is sinful, thus unholy, and deserves the punishment of death (Romans 3:23; 6:23). Because of God's love and mercy he desires to remove this tension and restore a right relationship with humans. However, God is the official administrator of a just universe that will reward each person according to what they deserve (Hebrews 9:27). The penalty for sin is death (Romans 6:23). This righteous God cannot just overlook sin and forgive without the required payment for the debt owed. God has to deal with the sin of humans in a just and fair manner; otherwise he could be accused of being unjust and unrighteous (Psalm 89:14; Romans 3:4,7). And yet if he punished all human beings for their sin, how could God be seen as a loving God? In order to solve this dilemma, God showed the greatness of his love by taking the initiative to provide a payment for this punishment for sin (John 3:16-17). He sent his own son as a propitiatory sacrifice for humankind (Romans 3:25). Jesus Christ lived as a perfect human being, without sin (2 Corinthians 5:21; Hebrews 4:15). So his life was a sufficient payment for the sin of humankind and was able to atone for human sin (John 1:29).

### **Why God-man (*Cur Deus Homo* by Anselm)?**

Anselm believed that humans could not render to God more than what was due to him. The satisfaction due to God was greater than what all created beings are capable of doing, since they can only do what is already required of them. Therefore, God had to make satisfaction for himself. Yet if this satisfaction was going to avail for humans, it had to be made by a human. Therefore only a being that was both God and man could satisfy God and give him the honor that is due him.

According to scripture and reason, Christ had to be a human being in order for his atoning death to be applicable for humans (1 Timothy 2:5). The atonement saves us from human sin, therefore the sacrifice for bearing the penalty for sin had to be a human. But even if a sinless human could have been found, their sacrifice would have only been effective as payment for their own sin; the death of one ordinary man could not pay the penalty for all humankind. If Christ was only a human being, then at most he could only serve as an example for us to follow. But as God incarnate, the death with Jesus Christ was of sufficient value to atone for the entire human race; his sacrifice was eternally effective (Hebrews 7:27; 9:14).

### **What does the temptation of Jesus have to do with atonement?**

It is because Jesus overcame temptation that he was able to be a proper representative of the human race in reconciling us to God. Since all humans undergo temptation, Jesus would not have been considered a complete human if he did not undergo temptation (Hebrews 2:14). It was because Jesus suffered under the power of temptation that he is able to help humans who are likewise tempted. This enables him to be the proper priest in reconciling us to God (Hebrews 2:18).

### **Why a sinless man?**

From the Old Testament, God reveals that the sacrificial lamb that could atone for sins had to be without spot or blemish (Exodus 12:5; Deuteronomy 15:21; Malachi 1:14). In order to truly atone for human sin, it would require a human that was sinless as a sacrifice. Since all humans have a sinful nature, there is no possibility for a person to be 'spotless' and thus atone for sin (Romans 3:23). God himself is holy and sinless (Leviticus 19:2). Jesus Christ was the embodiment of God, having a nature and history free from the sin borne by every human being (Matthew 1:23). Not only did he not have a sinful nature (Romans 8:3), he lived a human life without sin (2 Corinthians 5:21; Hebrews 4:15; 1 Peter 2:22-24). Because he was sinless, he did not have to die in payment for his own sin. He was able to be that perfect and spotless sacrifice that could atone for the sin of all humankind (1 Peter 1:19; 3:18).

### **Why blood?**

The Bible states that it is a person's blood that represents their life (Leviticus 17:11). The penalty for sin is death, the shedding of one's blood (Genesis 2:17; Romans 6:23). The old covenant practice of animal sacrifice bore this out by offering the blood of a sacrifice to take the place of the offerer and to make atonement for them (E.g. Leviticus 4:1-7, 20). The New Testament affirms this fact by stating that 'without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sins' (Hebrews 9:22). Jesus took his place as the real 'lamb of God' that takes away humankind's sin (John 1:29). Thus according to the Biblical view of paying the penalty for and atoning for sin, it was necessary for Christ to shed his blood in order to save us (Romans 3:25; 5:9; Hebrews 12:24).

### **What is the end of atonement; or what does it mean to be “saved”?**

The end of atonement is salvation. Based on being in right relationship with God, humans can experience a full and complete salvation. Salvation means that we are delivered from the bondage of sin, from self, and from darkness and are transferred into God’s kingdom (Ephesians 2:1-10; Colossians 1:13-14). We are delivered from all the effects of sin: its past guilt (Romans 3:24; 8:33-34), its present power (Romans 6:1-6), and its future condemnation (Romans 5:16; 8:1). We are rescued from death and given life: eternal life and abundant life (Romans 5:21; 6:22; 8:3; John 10:10).

### **List the three main theories of atonement.**

- 1) The Substitutionary/Satisfaction Theory. The Atonement as Compensation to the Father – Christ died to satisfy a principle in the very nature of God. Associated with Anselm. Biblical basis: Isaiah 53:5-6; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Romans 5:6,8; 1 Peter 3:18.
- 2) The Ransom Theory. The Atonement as Victory over the Forces of Sin and Evil – Christ’s death ransomed us back from Satan. Associated with Origen, Gregory of Nyssa, and Augustine. Biblical basis: Matthew 20:28; Mark 10:45; 1 Timothy 2:5-6
- 3) The Moral Influence Theory. The Atonement as a Demonstration of God’s Love – should inspire us to love him in return. Associated with Abelard; popularized by Horace Bushnell. Biblical basis: Luke 15:11-32; 1 Peter 2:21.
- 4) Other Theories are:
  - a) The Governmental Theory: The Atonement as a Demonstration of Divine Justice – what will happen to us if we continue to sin. Associated with Hugo Grotius. Biblical basis: Isaiah 42:21.
  - b) The Socinian Theory: The Atonement as Example – perfect example of the type of dedication to God that we are to practice. Associated with Faustus and Laelius Socinian (and represented by the Unitarians today). Biblical basis: 1 Peter 2:21; 1 John 2:6; Micah 6:8.

### **What is meant by objective atonement? By subjective atonement?**

‘Objective atonement’ refers to the effectiveness of Christ’s death as seen by God. It sees that the major affect of the death of Christ on the cross was to satisfy a principle in the very nature of God himself. The atoning work of Christ was not directed at humanity, but directed to appease God on behalf of humanity (Romans 5:19; 2 Corinthians 5:21).

‘Subjective atonement’ refers to the aspect of Christ’s death and resurrection as it affects humankind. Not only does Christ’s sacrifice satisfy God and give humans a righteous standing before him, it also has an experiential affect upon humans. It opens up salvation for us, including conversion and a new birth (Ephesians 2:4-10).

**What is meant by active obedience? By passive obedience?**

The terms ‘active obedience’ and ‘passive obedience’ are terms used to analyze and further describe the sinless and meritorious life of Christ. Active obedience is the aspect of Christ’s obedience to God in which he actively fulfilled and obeyed the Mosaic Law through his life. He lived in complete compliance with and fulfillment of the law (moral, ceremonial, and forensic) (Matthew 3:15, 5:17; Galatians 4:4). Passive obedience is the aspect of Christ’s obedience to God by which he passively endured suffering unto death. He was willing to suffer and die on the cross in order to bear the full punishment for the guilt of sinners and to pay their penalties (Galatians 3:13; John 1:29).

**What is meant by the law of sin and death? And the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus?**

The law of sin and death describes the working of the sinful nature within humankind. It is the effect of having a sinful nature, in that we find ourselves doing the sin that we do not want to do and feel impotent when it comes to following God and doing the things that we know we should. We want to do ‘good’, to live according to God’s holy and righteous nature, but we find we are unable to do so. We feel captive and in bondage to this law of sin. It is referred to as a ‘law’ because it is so consistent, working the same way all the time (like the law of gravity). We know that we need deliverance and realize that it must come from outside of ourselves; we are not able to deliver ourselves. (Romans 7:14-25)

The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus is the very deliverance that we need to free us from the law of sin and death. It frees us from the condemnation of sin and the power of sin in our human nature. It is a more powerful law that supercedes and overcomes the law of sin and death in us. By Christ condemning the sin in our flesh, he enables us to live in the Spirit and thus fulfill the righteous requirements of God's law. It is only by the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus that we can live in the Spirit and thus please God. (Romans 8:1-8)