

## THE ATONEMENT

- 1) **THE MEANING OF ATONEMENT** - The word literally means "*to be one*," or, "*to cause to be at one*" (at-one-ment?). Another New Testament word for describing atonement is "*reconciliation*". To reconcile means "*to restore to harmony*". It is to bring together those who have been estranged.

Basic to all teaching on the Atonement are two foundational truths:

- a) **There are massive obstacles to be dealt with.** This will be dealt with in point 2.
- b) **It is only God's initiative in Christ that makes atonement possible** - 2 Corinthians 5:18-19 - "All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; [19] that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation." While man's *response* is real and significant, man contributes nothing in terms of *initiating* the atonement process.

At its heart Christianity isn't a religion of *information* or *moral reform*. It is fundamentally a divine *rescue* mission, as we saw in the study we made of the structure and progression of the covenants of God with man throughout the Scriptures.

- 2) **THE OBSTACLES TO ATONEMENT** - There are roadblocks stemming both from *who man is* and *who God is*. When these facts are considered there is nothing natural about the atonement. If we are properly and Scripturally informed, these truths should be shocking - almost unimaginable.

- a) **Who man is - First**, man is a sinner. The whole story is found in Romans 1:18-32. The abridged version is Romans 3:21-24 - "But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— [22] the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: [23] for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, [24] and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus...."

Man is a *consistent* sinner. He is an *idolater*. He rebels against God in thought, word and deed.

**Second**, man is *enslaved* in his sinful condition. That is, he can only *respond* to divine initiative. He can do nothing to *initiate* his own deliverance. He is dominated by Satan, who is called "*the ruler of this world*" (John 12:31), signifying his power over fallen humanity apart from Christ's redemption. Remember, man is a sinner because he *rejects God's revelation in Christ*. Not all sinners are *morally bad* by accepted social measurement. Man is a sinner, not because he robs banks, but because he "*falls short of the glory of God.*"

**Third**, man is *deserving of punishment* for his sin. In God's universe *sin and punishment must go together* - Exodus 34:5-7 - "The Lord descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the Lord. [6] The Lord passed before him and proclaimed, "The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, [7] keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation."

- b) **Who God is** - While God is loving and merciful, He is also absolutely *holy and righteous*. His love doesn't *cancel out* His absolute, uncompromising holiness. He is "*....of purer eyes than to behold evil and cannot look at wrong....*" (Habakkuk 1:13). God, being who He is, must *reveal His wrath from heaven against all ungodliness* - Romans 1:18 - "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth."

God cannot be otherwise than He is. His wrath is not *temper*. It is not His anger *out of control*. God can no more turn from judging sin and evil than your body's white blood cells can ignore a virus in your bloodstream. This is what white blood cells *do*. That is what they *are* by nature. This is equally true of God and sin.

Not only is God pure and holy, He is also absolutely *true and faithful to Himself*. He can not *pretend* that our sins don't exist. He cannot operate in any way that is *inconsistent with Himself*. He cannot compromise Himself in any form and still be the God of the Scriptures.

- 3) **HOW GOD INITIATES AND PROVIDES ATONEMENT** - The clear teaching of the whole Bible is summed up in the words of Paul - 1 Corinthians 15:3 - "For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures...." These are important words. Many people believe Jesus lived and died on a cross. That is not enough. The *meaning* of this event must be grasped and received in faith. The Scriptures not only *record the event* of Christ's death. They tell us its *purpose and significance*. Jesus didn't just *die*. He died "*according to the Scriptures.*" All that we have been studying about the *divinity and humanity*

*of Jesus* leads up to this point.  
Several concepts are central:

- a) **IDENTIFICATION - He carried our sin.** In verses that boggle our minds Paul says that Jesus was made to be "*sin for us*" - **2 Corinthians 5:20-21** - "Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. [21] For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." Notice, the nature of the message isn't up for grabs. He also says that Jesus was made a *curse for us*" - **Galatians 3:13** - "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree.'" In His total identification with fallen man, the *sinless Jesus* takes on fallen humanity and was crucified between two thieves, *embracing the worlds sin as His own*.

This truth is worth lingering over - see the prophet Isaiah's words in **Isaiah 53:6**, and Peter's words in **1 Peter 2:24**. These verses should *fuel our worship and praise!*

- b) **SUBSTITUTION - He took our punishment.** Here we come to an important distinction. He carried the weight of our sin - took fallen humanity into His being, yet He Himself was sinless. He died on the cross as a criminal. Yet the punishment He took was not for His guilt, but for ours - see **Isaiah 53:5 and 10** - "But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed.... [10]....Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for sin, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the Lord shall prosper in his hand."

This is the source of the agonizing cry on the cross - feeling the *weight of the blackness of sin and guilt and the sting of the resulting broken fellowship with the Father for the very first time* (Matthew 27:46).

- c) **RANSOM - He accomplished our deliverance.** Christ did more than merely take on our sin in terms of its *punishment*. He purchased our freedom from sin's *bondage and dominion*. On the cross Jesus accomplished the Messianic promise of **Luke 4:18** - "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed...."

Note also the powerful words in **Hebrews 2:14-15** - "Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, [15] and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery." There is no greater fear than the ultimate fear of death. Man knows instinctively that he's not ready for the unknown of eternity and the judgment of his Creator. *This is more than a psychological matter*. It is a *spiritual fear rooted in man's design and subsequent lostness before God*. Only through Christ can that fear be broken.