

Week Five

Quarter 2

The Atonement

Outline

- The Cause of the Atonement
- The Necessity of the Atonement
- The Nature of the Atonement
- The Extent of the Atonement

- The atonement is the work Christ did in His life and death to earn our salvation

The Cause of the Atonement

- The love of God
 - “For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16)
- The justice of God
 - “whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed” (Rom 3:25)
- Propitiation
 - A sacrifice that bears God’s wrath so that God be comes favorably disposed toward us

The Necessity of the Atonement

- We must first realize that it was not necessary for God to save us at all
 - “God did not spare the angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to pits of nether gloom to be kept until the judgment” (2 Peter 2:4)
- Once God decided to save some humans, then there was no way to accomplish it other than through the death of His Son
 - God does not lie
 - Once decided, it was no longer possible for Jesus to avoid death on the cross
 - “If it be possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will” (Matt 26:39)
 - “O foolish men, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into His glory?” (Luke 24:25-26)
 - See also Rom 3:26, Heb 2:17, Heb 9:23
 - Some call this “consequent absolute necessity”

Christ's Obedience for Us

- Sometimes called His “Active Obedience”
- If Christ had earned only forgiveness for our sins, we still would not merit heaven
- We would simply be in the same place as Adam and Eve before they sinned
 - “You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die” (Gen 2:16-17)
 - Disobedience meant that they could no longer take from the tree of life “and eat, and live for ever” (Gen 3:22)
 - “But like Adam, they transgressed the covenant” (Hos 6:7)
- Perfect obedience is what results in eternal life, and this is still in effect today
 - Paul implies that perfect obedience to God’s laws, if it were possible, would lead to life (Rom 7:10, 10:5; Gal 3:12)
 - If “the wages of sin is death” (Rom 6:23), then no sin should equal no death

Christ's Sufferings for Us (1)

- Sometimes called His “Passive Obedience”
- He suffered during His life
 - Temptations in the wilderness
 - Probable early death of His earthly father
- He suffered on the cross
 - One of the most horrible forms of execution ever devised by man
 - The criminal would have to pull themselves up on their pierced wrists and feet
 - Eventual death by suffocation
 - The pain of bearing our sin
 - Psychological pain – He hates sin with His entire being (He is holy)
 - God made Christ “to be sin” (2 Cor 5:21)
 - “He bore the sin of many” (Is 53:12)
 - “He Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree” (1 Pet 2:24)
 - God imputed our sins to Christ – thinking of them as belonging to Christ

Christ's Sufferings for Us (2)

- He suffered on the cross (cont.)
 - Abandonment
 - Jesus faced this alone
 - “all the disciples forsook Him and fled” (Matt 26:56)
 - “Eli, Eli, lama sabach-thani?” (Matt 27:46)
 - Bearing the wrath of God
 - Jesus became the object of the intense hatred of sin and vengeance against sin which God had patiently stored up since the beginning of the world (pg 575)
 - Propitiation – a sacrifice that bears God’s wrath so that God be comes favorably disposed toward us
 - See Rom 3:25-26, Heb 2:17, 1 John 2:2 and 4:10
 - There is an eternal, unchangeable requirement in the holiness and justice of God that sin be paid for (pg 575)

At the End

- “Eli, Eli, lama sabach-thani?” (Matt 27:46b)
 - Literally, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?”
 - Quoting Psalm 22:1
 - “My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?
Why are You so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning?
O my God, I cry by day, but You do not answer; and by night, but find no rest” (Ps 22:1-2)
 - This is a cry of desolation that also has implicit in its context an unremitting faith in the God who will ultimately deliver him
 - It is better to understand “forsaken me” as “left me for so long”
 - The Psalm becomes a hymn of praise in verses 22-31
- “It is finished!” (John 19:30)
- “Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit!” (Luke 23:46)
- He then voluntarily gave up the life that no one could take from Him (John 10:17-18)

Further Understanding of the Death of Christ (1)

- The penalty was inflicted by God the Father
 - God’s justice required that sin be paid for
 - Jesus took the role for bearing that penalty
- Not eternal suffering but complete payment
 - If we had to pay the penalty for our own sins, an eternity of separation from God would be required
 - Even if we paid for our sins, we would never fulfill the Covenant of Works
 - Jesus was able to fulfill both with one sacrifice
 - “Nor was it to offer Himself repeatedly...But as it is, He has appeared once for all at the end of the age to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself...Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for Him” (Heb 9:25-28)

Further Understanding of the Death of Christ (2)

- The meaning of the blood of Christ
 - Scripture often links it with “redemption”
 - “You know that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your fathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot” (1 Peter 1:18-19)
- Christ’s death as “Penal Substitution”
 - Meaning – Jesus bore a penalty when He died
 - Sometimes called a “vicarious atonement” as Jesus stood in for us and represented us

New Testament Terms Describing Different Aspects of the Atonement

- 4 needs we have
 1. We deserve to die as the penalty for sin
 2. We deserve to bear God's wrath against sin
 3. We are separated from God by our sins
 4. We are in bondage to sin at to the kingdom of Satan
- The way each need is met
 1. Sacrifice – Jesus died for us (Heb 9:26)
 2. Propitiation – Jesus turned away God's wrath (1 John 4:10)
 3. Reconciliation – Jesus reconciled us to God (2 Cor 5:18-19)
 4. Redemption – Jesus gave “His life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45)

Other Views of the Atonement

- The Ransom to Satan Theory
 - Held by Origen (185-254 A.D.), Alexandria and Caesarea
 - This views Satan as having more power than he really does
- The Moral Influence Theory
 - Held by Peter Abelard (1079-1142), France
 - Denies that God requires payment for sin, but instead Jesus' death showed how much He loves humans and can identify with their sufferings
- The Example Theory
 - Held by Faustus Socinus (1539-1604), Italy
 - Denies that God requires payment for sin, but instead provides us an example of how we should trust and obey God perfectly
 - This line of thought led to modern Unitarianism
- The Government Theory
 - Held by Hugo Grotius (1583-1645), Netherlands
 - Denies that God requires payment for sin, but instead God demonstrated that as the moral lawgiver, some penalty would be required whenever His laws were broken

Did Christ Descend Into Hell? (1)

- From the Apostle's Creed
 - “was crucified, dead, and buried, He descended into hell; the third day He rose again from the dead.”
 - Was not in any versions of the creed from 200-700 in a way that was intended to mean hell
 - Rufinus put it in one of his two versions in 650 A.D.
 - He intended it to mean “buried in the ground”
 - There is much disagreement as to why it was added

Did Christ Descend Into Hell? (2)

- Biblical support for a descent into hell & Grudem's comments
 - “because Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell” (Acts 2:27)
 - Hell is from the word *hades*, which also means grave or death
 - This is referring to Jesus' resurrection from the grave
 - “Do not say in you heart, ‘Who will ascent into heaven?’ (that is, to bring Christ down) or ‘Who will descend into the abyss?’ (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead).” (Romans 10:6-7)
 - Abyss is from *abyssos*, which more likely (and more often) refers to the depths of the ocean
 - Here, Paul is contrasting the bottom of the ocean to heaven to give the sense of a place that is unreachable
 - “In saying, ‘He ascended,’ what does it mean but that He had also descended into the lower parts of the earth?” (Eph 4:8-9)
 - “Lower parts of the earth” could also be translated “the lower, earthly regions” or “lower regions, which are the earth”
 - Jesus ascended to heaven as he descended from heaven to be born on the earth

Did Christ Descend Into Hell? (3)

- Biblical support for a descent into hell & Grudem's comments (cont)
 - “in which He (Christ) went and preached to the spirits in prison, who formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark” (1 Peter 3:18-20)
 - Does this mean Christ preaching in hell?
 - Peter says only to the ones that were alive during the building of the ark
 - Scripture nowhere indicates that people get a second chance after death
 - This scripture states that while Noah preached boldly, Christ's power was also doing so

Noah	Peter's Readers
Righteous minority	Righteous minority
Surrounded by hostile unbelievers	Surrounded by hostile unbelievers
God's judgment was near	God's judgment may come soon
Noah witnessed boldly (by Christ's power)	They should witness boldly by Christ's power
Noah was finally saved	They will be finally saved

Did Christ Descend Into Hell? (4)

- Biblical support for a descent into hell & Grudem's comments (cont)
 - “For this is why the gospel was preached even to the dead, that though judged in the flesh like men, they might live in the spirit like God” (1 Peter 4:6)
 - Other scripture is clear that there is no second chance (Luke 16:19-31, Heb 9:27)
 - Explanation
 - The “dead” people are now dead, but were not dead when the gospel was preached to them
 - NIV translates it “to those who are now dead”
 - NASB translates it “to those who are dead”

Other Opposition to Christ Descending Into Hell

- Three arguments
 - Jesus said to the thief on the cross “Today you will be with Me in Paradise” (Luke 23:43)
 - The word for “paradise” is used three other places (2 Cor 12:4 and Rev 22:2, 14), all of which clearly mean “heaven”
 - Jesus went to heaven, not hell
 - When Jesus cried “It is finished” (John 19:30), this strongly suggests that His alienation from the Father was complete
 - “Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit” (Luke 23:46) indicates that Jesus was going back to the Father
- These all indicate that what Christ experienced, we will too
 - The dead body will remain on earth
 - The soul will pass immediately into the presence of God
 - At the resurrection, souls are reunited with the physical body

The Apostles Creed Conclusion

- Creeds should only contain doctrinally solid teachings, of which this is not one
- As we teach traditions to future generations, we need to correct such mistakes
- In addition, the support of such a doctrine at all is very weak

The Extent of the Atonement

- Did Jesus pay for everyone's sins, or just those who He knew would ultimately be saved?
 - Non-reformed – everyone's sin
 - Sometimes known as "general redemption" or "unlimited atonement"
 - Reformed – just those who would be saved
 - Sometimes known as "particular redemption" or "limited atonement"
- Logical support for Non-Reformed
 - Doesn't Jesus only dying for a select few mean that others have no chance of going to heaven?
 - All people have a genuine opportunity to go to heaven
- Logical support of Reformed
 - If Christ died for everyone's sins, then shouldn't everyone go to heaven?
 - Why would God require a double payment?

Non-Reformed Scriptures

- John the Baptist said “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29)
- “God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.” (John 3:16)
- Paul says that in Christ “God was reconciling the world to Himself” (2 Cor 5:19)
- Christ “is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world” (1 John 2:2)
- Jesus “gave Himself as a ransom for all” (1 Tim 2:6)

Reformed Scriptures

- “The good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep” (John 10:11)
- “I lay down my life for the sheep” (John 10:15)
- Paul speaks of “the church of God which He obtained with the blood of His own Son” (Acts 20:28)
- “He who did not spare His own Son but gave Him up for us all, will He not also give us all things with Him?” (Rom 8:32)
- Paul says, “Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her” (Eph 5:25)
- “While we were yet sinners Christ died for us” (Rom 5:8)
- “While we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son” (Rom 5:10)

Areas of Agreement

- Not all will be saved
- A free offer of the gospel can rightly be made to every person born
 - We don't know who will be saved
- Christ's death in itself has infinite merit and is itself sufficient to pay the penalty for as many or few as the Father and Son have decreed

Points of Clarification

- Focus on the question “Did Christ pay for the sins of all unbelievers who will be eternally condemned, and did He pay for their sins full and completely on the cross?”
- The statements “Christ died for His people only” and “Christ died for all people” are misunderstood
 - The first is intended to mean “Christ died to actually pay the penalty for all the sins of His people only”
 - Some misunderstand it to mean “Christ died so that He could make the gospel available only to a chosen few”
 - The latter is intended to mean “Christ died to make salvation available to all people”, which both views support
- From a pastoral perspective, both agree on the basics as listed previously
- Scripture doesn’t make a big deal of this, so neither should we

Conclusions

- The atonement was done out of love and justice
- The atonement became necessary once God decided to save humans
- The atonement included Christ's obedience and suffering for us, and completely fulfilled four needs
 1. Sacrifice – Jesus died for us (Heb 9:26)
 2. Propitiation – Jesus turned away God's wrath (1 John 4:10)
 3. Reconciliation – Jesus reconciled us to God (2 Cor 5:18-19)
 4. Redemption – Jesus gave "His life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45)
- The term "descended into hell" in the Apostle's Creed should not be there
- People disagree on whether the atonement applies to only those who will be saved or all mankind

Reading For Next Week

- Chapter 28
 - Resurrection and Ascension
 - Homework – questions 1-5 (all)
- Chapter 29
 - The Offices of Christ
 - Homework – questions 1-2 (all)