

The Atonement of God
Sermon #22
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What is atonement? It is the reconciliation of humanity to God through the life and death of Jesus Christ. Beyond that it depends on who you ask.

The New Oxford American Dictionary defines it as:

- a. Reparation for a wrong or injury
- b. Reparation or expiation for sin
- c. The reconciliation of God and humankind through Jesus Christ

All three of these definitions are true to a certain extent so let's look quickly at each one.

A) A reparation for wrong suffered is true. Man had been brutally assaulted by sin, a disease that caused him to forget who he was and subsequently live an impaired, distorted life, one completely opposed to God's plan for humanity. Therefore, to deal with the evil which had been foisted upon man, God made reparation. The better term is He imposed His justice upon it, meaning He made creation right once again.

B) Expiation of sin is quite valid as it means conciliation or breaking down and removing any separation. It also means to purge or cleanse. Sin, or loss of identity, has been the cause of separation. To deal with it is the obstacle, therefore, He tells us in

Psa 103:12

"As far as the east from the west, so far has He removed our sins from us."

The lid or covering of the Ark of the Covenant was a picture of all humanity placed within it and being covered by the blood. We read in

Heb 10:

19) "Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holy of Holies by the blood of Jesus,

20) by a new and living way which He consecrated for us through the veil, that is His flesh."

God has placed us within the ark, the Holy of Holies upon which the blood was poured upon. It is the body of Christ where God and man live in consecrated oneness.

Col 2:9 "For in Him dwells all the fulness of the Godhead bodily, 10 and you have been made complete (full) in Him."

This is a true understatement since Christ dwells in us and the Trinity dwells in Him, our bodies are the new ark, a physical revelation of God's everlasting covenant with man!

To be consecrated is to be set apart or to be made sacred or holy. Therefore, we should never lose boldness or confidence in terms of our position and relationship with God, rather understand that "in that day you will know that "I Am" is in the Father and you are in Me and "I Am" is in you!"

I believe that the rending of the veil was the spear wound that was opened by the Roman soldier while the veil of the Temple that was 60' long, 30' high and 4" thick

was torn in two by the hands of God. This allowed the heavenly realm to merge with the physical. God's plan wasn't to take us to heaven, rather to manifest heaven on earth. Wherever God is there is heaven. Did the authors of this dictionary understand this. Highly doubtful.

C) The reconciliation of God and man through Jesus Christ. Absolutely true. This is a borrowed definition by the worldly dictionary from the church. The question is what the church means by it. It's good as far as it goes but the crux is how does the church understand it.

That's exactly what we want to discuss today. It is more than atonement; it is the applied theory as to how it took place and its relationship to the truth of the Gospel. You may be surprised to know that there's at least 7-10 generally accepted theories by various segments of the church today. We're not going to go into all of them, rather we're going to address three of them. These three are the most relevant to where we stand today in the church here in America. As you'll see they stand in stark contrast to each other and therefore to the truth of the Gospel. It is the very reason these theological concepts are so important to the understanding of your faith. So, stay with me.

The first theory is Penal Substitutionary Atonement or simply PSA. Its basic idea is that man sinned by breaking God's law in the Garden when they ate from the forbidden tree. It is classified as a forensic or legal matter so it should be dealt with as such since God had told them that their disobedience would result in capital punishment. To the people who hold this view it can only mean one thing,

eternal death. That means don't pass go and abandon all hope when entering. Your fate has been decided as an eternal destiny in Hell. Because most of our western churches subscribe to this, I'm sure you're all familiar with it. In order to escape such a terrifying fate, according to differing Protestant churches, you can either do nothing because you're part of the elect through no effort of your own (Presbyterian), otherwise, you have to repeat the magic words to accept Jesus into your heart, walk up the aisle of the church to the pastor where you confess that you are really nothing more than a depraved sinner and would like very much to be saved. This alters the label you live with from this point forward from simply a sinner to a sinner saved by grace. O joy and hallelujah!

To be told that's what you now are, and nothing more, does little to heal the self-image of anyone who has experienced the broken-hearted road leading up to this point in life. To those for whom the whole experience is nothing more than becoming a club member of a particular church and don't really have any idea of the meaning of the Gospel, it doesn't matter what you call me. It makes little to no difference to them because they don't receive it as being who they are, rather it describes their occasional behavior. Besides, I just ask Jesus to forgive me every time I sin and I'm good to go. The whole thing becomes an exercise in behavior modification and self-improvement. They've missed the whole point of their new identity in Him and what it means because they're not taught the truth of it.

But for those truly seeking peace, rest and joy it can be a disappointing destination. The common thought for them, when told what their new life is

going to look like almost always ends at some point with “a sigh of sadness and the confession of I thought there would be more.” There are reasons for this.

For the church, especially since the Reformation when Protestants, as they became known, broke from the Catholic church, and adopted as one of their fundamental tenets, the concept of “sin nature”. It remains so pervasive that virtually everyone who has ever attended a fundamentalist evangelical church today is quite familiar with the term and usually accepts it as truth. It was originally introduced by Augustine back in the 4th century when he claimed that man’s fallen condition had transformed his being into something completely alien to our original blueprint. In other words, an altered core of being. Although he was a brilliant theologian and had many other great ideas, the one that formed his legacy was this one. His ideas on “sin nature”, whether accepted as good or bad, have certainly distorted the understanding of the Gospel for centuries.

But is it true? The short answer is an absolute no! So, let’s examine the reasons why. When we use the term nature, we’re referring to the natural or basic essence of a person or thing. Therefore, a stone has a nature unique to itself, while an animal possesses a very different nature. But what about the nature of man. It is something quite unique from anything else in creation because man is made in the image and likeness of God. Image being the ontology of man, meaning his essence. Likeness describes existent behavior or the ways of man. (see Paul Young, The Ontology of God, YouTube). The complete man is therefore one in which his ways match his nature or being. When God made man, He described this being as very good. Can man alter his natural being through

aberrant behavior or ignorance? Absolutely not. What God has created is fully alive for the ages of ages for His word stands forever. Therefore, sin did not transform man into something other than his original design. Sin is a viral parasite that infected creation. What it accomplished was to twist the heart and mind of man into believing something about himself and God that simply was never true. It was a lie spawned in deception and darkness. Our perception concerning the goodness of both God and man was totally compromised. Both were now looked upon as being both good and evil, God because of His cruel and deadly punishments and man in his inhumanity to one another. This of course manifests from the ideas generated through eating from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. A tree designed to grant man wisdom apart from God, allowing for methods to “atone” for his own behavior through a complex maze of religious endeavor. That’s all the forbidden tree is!

Their rationale toward God meant two things. First, for God, the means justified the ends, therefore, He could inflict whatever barbarous acts He chose at any time without warning. The second was that there needed to be sacrificial measures taken to appease His wrath. They learned this from their neighbors who placated their gods with sacrifice, often human sacrifice.

Ancient Israel really didn’t have a concept of the Trinity. They believed in a single divine entity named Yahweh, meaning I Am, singular. But with the advent of Christ things changed. The changes weren’t something initiated by Judaism, although their ideas about The Father were assumed by the church over the last 2,000 years. But now they know that there’s several in the Godhead and that at

least one, Jesus the Son, is loving and compassionate. This evolved into the belief that God the Father and God the Son are obviously different from each other and at odds concerning their views and attitudes toward man, one good and one not so good. The Father appeared to be filled with anger and wrath from the time of the Garden while the Son was and always had been benevolent and kind. But how can this be true? It simply isn't. It's why Jesus made the revealing statement in

Matthew 11:27 "...no one knows the Son except the Father nor does anyone know the Father except the Son."

He was saying that to know one was to know the other. It was Jesus' mission to reveal the Father and restore mankind to Him.

The Nicene Creed from the early church clearly tells us that they are of one essence or consubstantial (Latin for with or of the same substance). The Greek word is homoousios, homo meaning the same and ousios meaning being. Two Persons of the exact being. Christ is very God of Very God. It means that Father and Son are iconic in thought, feeling, attitude, emotion, etc. yet two different Persons bound together in eternal love union. That being true, to portray them as anything other can be construed as blasphemy and/or heresy, a slander toward God and an undermining of the Gospel. I realize that those are powerful indictments but I'm not specifically leveling them at the church, rather at the leadership of the last five centuries. I don't think the average believer has any idea about why they're told to accept and believe the things they do. This is why they prefer to focus on Jesus because He's compassionate and kind while The

Father is wrathful and punishing. They have made Jesus the terminus which isn't accurate. It contradicts the idea that He came to take us back into the very center of the Trinity, as sons and daughters in Christ and into the arms of a loving Father. We see the dichotomy when we consider Jesus' statements that He has come to reveal the Father to all He chooses (and He chooses all), I and the Father are One and that if you've seen Me, you've seen the Father. The word "seen" means to discern or perceive by experience.

As mentioned, the theory was officially introduced with the Protestant Reformation, John Calvin, et al. It stated that for mankind to be reconciled there had to be a price paid for sin to God. He demanded it because of His sense of Justice which was penal in nature. This was only accomplished by Jesus' death on a cross as the perfect sacrifice. The Father, rather than simply forgiving, demanded something or someone to punish so the Son stepped forward. He offered Himself to placate His Father's wrath. The unmistakable implication was that the Father could only be appeased in the same manner as all the pagan gods of antiquity, that is with a human sacrifice. I've had this very belief shared with me by a good friend who was emphatic in his view. It's YOUR sin that caused the murder of Jesus by the Father. After the shock of hearing it in such stark fashion, my thoughts shifted to how sad for someone to believe something like that.

Just so that you are all aware the Protestants aren't the only ones with a substitutionary theory of atonement. The Catholics had their own that preceded PSA by over 500 years called the Doctrine of Satisfaction. Briefly, instead of man having incurred God's wrath by breaking His ordinance, they had insulted His

honor. It was based on the feudal system of the time and compiled in a small book called the “Cur Deus Homo” translated as “Why God Became Man” by Anselm, the Catholic Archbishop of Canterbury around 1,000 AD. It was taken from the medieval notions related to the honor of kings. To offend royalty would result in varying degrees of punishment being meted out. Therefore, his reasoning was that Adam had committed the ultimate dishonor toward the King of Kings, so death, the ultimate penalty had to be paid. The basics of the two atonement theories are very similar, stemming from the same idea. God was either offended or full of justifiable anger or both resulting in the damnation of all men. Besides, their beings now consisted of nothing more than a sin nature and they firmly believed that God was too holy to look upon sin. Never mind that Jesus Christ the Son, became sin. What does that say about their perception of Him?

So what is the truth concerning atonement? The theory is called Recapitulation meaning to restate or re-present creation. It is what took place through the birth and death of Jesus Christ by the incarnation of God as man. The theory was first introduced by Irenaeus, a disciple of Polycarp, a disciple of John the Apostle in the 2nd century AD. He was one of the early church fathers and drew his idea from

Ephesians 1:10 “that in the dispensation of the fulness of times, He might gather together in One all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth-in Him.”

Let's look back to the fall in the garden through different lenses. Did God say that I'm going to put you to death if you eat from the forbidden tree or was it a warning that the tree was deadly. That the act of partaking of its fruit will result in your death. By turning their back on God through disobedience, they chose a path of darkness, separation, and death. To set a course away from light is to enter darkness, from life to death, from relationship to separation. This was the real issue. In man's darkened state we broke fellowship with God claiming that He no longer wanted them. Was it true or had sin caused us to no longer be in our right mind, no longer dealing with reality.

Gen 3:13 "And the Lord said to the woman what is this you have done? And she said, "The serpent deceived me and I ate."

The word deceived can also be translated as enchantment or according to Young's Literal Bible translation, to be made to forget. What did she forget? Who she truly was, her identity. They had contracted a deadly disease that prevented them from remembering who they were. No, God never separated from Adam and Eve, they separated from Him. This is the reason in the first 5 centuries of the early church, sin was treated as an illness, an infirmity, not an issue of lawbreaking. There was no law in the Garden. What they broke was relationship and along with it God's heart. That's why the promise of the Seed was made. God made an oath that He would be coming for them and would save (make whole) them from their fallen condition.

That fallen condition was a state of death. We read in

Romans 5:12 "...just as through one man sin entered the world and death through sin and thus death spread to all men, because all men sinned." This is an inaccurate translation. It should read "because of death all men sinned." 20) so that as sin reigned in death..."

Notice Paul does not say that death reigned in sin but that sin reigned in death. We didn't inherit sin from our forefather Adam, we inherited death. He and Eve had faced the penalty for sin in their deaths. We are not responsible for another's sin, only our own. Therefore, there is no sin nature passed from generation to generation. But there is death and darkness and in that state we blindly search for life, looking to anything other than God. This is the condition of the world, blind and seemingly incapable of knowing who they are.

But God! Who is rich in mercy has sent His Son to rescue us from our death. He who is the Creator became a man that He might give His life to enter the domain of our death and retrieve us from it. For if one died for all, all have died. He baptized or immersed us into His death that He might raise us to new life. We know that if we died with Christ, we also live with Him. Since Christ is Creator what happens if He dies? All creation dies. What then happens if He is raised to new life? All creation is raised to new life! This is the recapitulation or restatement of creation by the Son to the Father, making all things new.

The incarnation, not the resurrection, is the atonement! "God saves what He becomes, He heals what He assumes." -Athanasius

He became one of us.

John 1:14 “And the Word became flesh and dwelt in us.”

God has totally accepted who you are. Nothing can separate us from the love of God. Not sin, darkness or even death. Nothing!

The term for this act of love in Greek is apokostasis and describes the restoration of all things. According to the early church it meant the insurrection against the insurrection of Adam. This is the God who is Love.

How exciting are the previously discussed theories of atonement in comparison to Recapitulation?

Does this theory reveal a God whose love for us knows no bounds?

Does this theory not make the Gospel, when properly understood, cause a man to fairly leap for joy?

Amen.