

—The Atonement of Christ, Lesson 2—

- I. Before we can have any adequate understanding or appreciation of the work that Christ has done for us, it's necessary that we know something of the nature and effect of sin on the human soul.
- A. 1Jn 3.4, sin is lawlessness. Sin is a crime committed against God.
 - B. The person who commits sin transfers, in that moment, his allegiance from God to the devil, 1Jn 3.8; Acts 26.18; Jn 8.34, 44.
 - C. The penalty of sin is death, Gen 2.17; Ezek 18.4; Rom 6.23—the opposite of everything promised to obedience.
 - 1. Temporal death.
 - 2. Spiritual death.
 - 3. Eternal death.
 - D. In Adam's fall, we sinned all, Rom 5.12, 19.
 - 1. The guilt of Adam's first sin: *guilt*, Rom 5.12.
 - 2. The loss of our original righteousness: *rebellion*, Ecc 7.20.
 - 3. The corruption of our whole nature: *depravity*, Eph 2.1; Ps 51.5.
 - 4. All *actual sins* which proceed from our corrupt nature.
Original sin is the sin of our natures, *actual sin* is the sin of our lives, and we're guilty of both before God.
- II. The unchangeable nature of the law against sin.
- A. The covenant made with Adam in Gen 2.17 was broken by Adam's disobedience.
 - 1. God can neither overlook his disobedience nor give him the reward of obedience nor neglect to give him the just reward of his disobedience. For though merciful, He is also just and true.
 - 2. God cannot ignore or cancel the sin out. The penalty must be paid.
 - 3. The law (the reflection of His righteous character) must be upheld and satisfied, Heb 9.22.
 - 4. Mere repentance cannot merit forgiveness since repentance, in and of itself, doesn't expiate the crime. A crime demands restitution and satisfaction.
 - 5. Thankfully, God meets the demands of His own holiness and justice by providing in Himself an atonement and satisfaction for our crime. His forgiveness is made possible by Christ's atonement. The cross is a substitution and satisfaction for our sins. God's mercy doesn't cheat God's justice; rather, by Christ's work both mercy and justice are satisfied.
 - B. However, if God is to forgive the sinner, it must be done in such a way that shows sin to be the evil that it is and manifests the punishment which the forgiven sinner has been spared—which explains the bloody cross where the incarnate God died as our substitute.
- III. God's most fundamental attribute is not love, but holiness.
- A. Holiness is prior to and conditions all of God's attributes, which means it's logically prior to and conditions His love. It's therefore impossible for sin to be pardoned without an atonement. There must be an adequate infliction of the misery due from His holy justice as the penalty due for the sin in order to pardon the sinner.
 - B. If forgiveness depended only on the sovereign will of God, then an atonement would be unnecessary. But the God against whom sin is is a God of absolute holiness who can't forgive sin without an atonement. His love does not operate apart from or outside His holiness.
 - C. God is love, 1Jn 4.16; but that's not all God is. Love can never adequately express all God is. He is also just, Heb 12.29. In fact, God's love can never be fully seen for what it is until it's set against the backdrop of His holiness, righteousness, and justice.
 - D. Many want to say that there's no need for atonement because God is love. But the truth is, God's love is what prompted the provision of atonement, 1Jn 4.10; Rom 5.8. The atonement is not the cause, but the effect, of God's love for His people. Because He loved us, He redeemed us. The cross manifests the covenanting love of the Father, the dying love of the Son, and the saving love of the Spirit.
 - E. Rom 3.25-26 is a classic passage on the atonement which teaches us several truths:

◁ Commonly called *original sin*

1. God set forth Christ as an effective propitiatory offering for our sins.
2. Man is saved by the exercise of self-abandoning faith in the suffering and death of Christ on his behalf.
3. While, in anticipation of Christ's work, God saved men in the OT without an adequate offering for their sins, Christ's offering is adequate and effective for their salvation as well as the salvation of all future believers. OT believers were saved because Christ would atone; NT believers are saved because Christ has atoned. OT believers were saved on the promise of the Son to redeem them; NT believers are saved on the promise of the Father to redeem them. In both cases, Christ gets all the glory.
4. The purpose of Christ's offering was so that God might be just while justifying (forgiving and saving) the sinner.
5. *Note:* In the OT, God's own righteousness and justice were obscured because no blood was sufficient for the grace God was daily showing His people. "Before Christ's sacrifice, God's administration [of grace] was a scandal—it needed vindication. The Atonement of Christ is God's answer to the charge of freeing the guilty [in both Testaments]." (A. H. Strong)
 - a) Hence the Godward direction of the atoning offering of Christ. God is now seen *to have been and to be* just when He saves those who have faith in Jesus Christ, Rom 3.26.

IV. Christ alone can redeem man.

- A. After the fall man became dead in sin, Eph 2.1. Though still able to do morally good things, he can do nothing God-ward and rebelliously does all things self-ward. Thus he's either sinning all the time or sins in all he does.
- B. His greatest need is not education, guidance, or reformation, but a new heart. He needs to be born again, Jn 3.3; Tit 3.5; Ezk 36.25-27.
- C. From his estate of sin and misery, man could neither recover himself nor find a remedy by himself. His only hope is the condescension of God, the intrusion of divine grace, the incarnation of the Son of God as His Federal Representative, Surety, Substitute, and Priest.
- D. Only as God was Christ able to *pay* the debt we owe and only as Man was Christ able to *suffer* the penalty in our place.
- E. Consequently, Christ's death was not natural, accidental, or from sickness. It was a cursed death, the death due to sinners guilty of a crime against God. Thus His death was more than physical. His death was of such a kind, degree, and duration as the holiness and justice of God deemed a full, legal equivalent of the penalty due to the sinners whom He was redeeming.
- F. By faith in Him, we receive full *deliverance* from the *guilt* of our sins so that we'll never come under the condemnation due to them, *emancipation* from the *rebellious* power of sin so that we're no longer *depraved* and can live a holy life pleasing to God, and a *righteousness* upon which we have a *right* to eternal life in heaven as the Body and Bride of Christ.

V. The difference between commercial and penal debt

- A. In a commercial debt, it's the *debt* that matters and therefore the paying of it will easily satisfy it.
- B. In a penal debt, the obligation rests upon the *person* who owes the debt and he himself must pay it—*unless* the creditor permits a *vicarious* payment *and* is also willing, on that account, to absolve and reward the *debtor*.
- C. Our debt was penal and God graciously put Christ, bound to us by covenant oneness, forth to pay what we owed and then absolved *us* of our debt and rewarded *us* for His righteousness, 2Cor 5.21.

VI. What about the apparent contrast between the Gospels and the Epistles regarding Christ's death?

- A. The primary purpose of Jesus was not to preach the gospel but to work out an atonement so that there might be a gospel to preach—to be the sacrifice rather than speak of it.
- B. The cross had to be endured by Him before it could be explained by the apostles.