

Doctrinal Studies

Atonement

Atonement, as taught in the bible, basically means that Christ died for the sins of every person who ever lived. The atonement of our Lord is the greatest, grandest, most sublime and most distinctive truth presented in the entire Bible: “. . . *Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures* (I Cor. 15:3b).” *“For he [God the Father] hath made him [Jesus Christ] to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him* (II Cor. 5:21).” In I Pet. 2:24 the Apostle refers to Christ, *“who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed.”* Atonement is stated in many other passages of Scripture such as I Tim. 2:6, I Tim. 4:10, II Pet 2:1, and I John 2:2.

People will either believe in the finished work of Christ, or they will depend upon their own merits, abilities, religion, or rituals. When we speak of the finished work of Jesus Christ we mean that He died once and for all (Heb. 7:27; 9:12; 9:27, 28; I Pet. 3:18; Jude 3). In Rev. 20:11–15 we see a picture of the Last Judgment. In verse 12 notice the basis upon which the dead are judged: *“And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.”* The sins of mankind are never mentioned! That’s because Jesus Christ had already paid for those sins upon the Cross! Christ is the Judge of the Great White Throne judgment, and He cannot mention what He has already paid for. The unbeliever, then, is not judged for his sins, since Christ was already judged for them. The unbelievers are judged “. . . *according to their works*”—not their sins!

The falsehood of the doctrine of limited atonement is shown by these verses. Those who teach this heretical doctrine assume that Christ died only for the sins of those who believe. If that were true then their sins would be the only basis on which God could condemn the unbelievers. But as Rev. 20:12 plainly states they are judged according to their works. The only true doctrine of atonement is unlimited atonement—that is Christ died for the sins of all mankind: *“And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world* (I John 2:2).” There is only one sin for which Christ could not die—the unpardonable sin—rejection of the finished work of Jesus Christ. *“He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God*. (John 3:18).” Rejection of Christ is tantamount to blasphemy against the Holy Spirit (Matt. 12:31; Mark 3:29; Luke 12:10), since the Holy Spirit is the One who convinces unbelievers of sin and makes plain the way of salvation.

The necessity for the atonement is presented in many places in scripture: Luke 19:10: *“For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.”* Matt. 9:13b: *“for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.”* This, of course includes all men: *“As it is written [in Psa. 14:1–3], There is none righteous, no, not one* (Rom. 3:10)” Paul writes to the Ephesians: *“And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins* (Eph. 2:1)” Atonement is necessary because of the total and universal depravity of mankind: Gen. 6:5; Rom. 3:11, 12: *“There is none that understandeth . . . there is none that doeth good, no, not one;”* Jer. 17:9: *“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked;”* Psa. 51:5: *“Behold, I was shapen in iniquity...”*

The sacrifices of the Old Testament under the Mosaic law all related to the doctrine of the atonement and pointed to the future coming of the Lord Jesus Christ and His fulfillment of the Levitical sacrifices. The doctrine of atonement was presented to the Jews through the burnt offering described in Lev. 1:2–9. As it states in verse 4, *“And he shall put his hand upon the head of the burnt offering; and it shall be accepted for him to make atonement for him.”*

Even before the Mosaic economy the doctrine of atonement through substitutionary sacrifice was understood. Consider Noah—what was the first thing he did upon exiting the ark after the great flood? If he were like most men he might have thrown a big party and had a feast—but not Noah! Notice Gen. 8:20: *“And Noah builded an altar unto the Lord; and took of every clean beast, and of every clean fowl, and offered burnt offerings on the altar”*—a substitutional sacrifice for the purpose of atonement—just as would later be prescribed in Leviticus 1:2–9.

But the one atoning sacrifice Jesus made was better than all the Old Testament sacrifices. In Hebrews 10:8–10 (NIV) it says, *“First he [Jesus Christ] said, ‘sacrifices and offerings, burnt offerings and sin offerings you [God the Father] did not desire, nor were you pleased with them’ (although the law required them to be made). Then he said, ‘Here I am, I have come to do your will.’ He sets aside the first to establish the second. And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.”*