

The death of Jesus Christ demonstrated God's love and justice simultaneously. The word atonement explains what this love has done for us; Christ's life and work on the cross. The word atonement can be, as Thomas Oden from the *Word of Life*, associated with words like: to purge, cleanse, to make amends for, purify, cross out, cover, or forgive. The life of Christ and His work on the cross was the atonement needed in order for us to attain salvation and redemption from our sins. Before Christ, God established His law as the way for atonement of our sins, which was given to people in order to live a life worthy of God. God's law had to be honored. God could never accept anything less, yet man was incapable of keeping the law. Thus, what was impossible for us to do, Christ did on our behalf and as our representative. This Christ did by His perfect conformity to the law, "I have not come to destroy the law and the prophets; but to fulfill them." (Matthew 5:17) In dying as our substitute, He had to endure the penalty of the same law, which was death. Through His death sin was defeated and the penalty of sin was paid in full.

Since the fall of man in the Garden of Eden man has turned his back on God. God, who is holy, cannot tolerate or be in the presence of sin. Since man has sinned against God he has brought upon himself the condemnation and the due penalty of sin, which is death (Romans 6:23). In Numbers 14:18 we see God's love but we also see that there is due punishment for sin. God will not reconcile the sinner except through substitution. Therefore God established the law in order for those who sought Him; they would need to follow these rules in order to have a relationship with Him. Atonement of sins has always been needed in order to live in relationship with God because no human could keep the law in its entirety. Leviticus 6:2-7 speaks of individual atonement for sin. "If anyone sins and is unfaithful to the LORD... And as a penalty he must bring to the

priest, that is, to the LORD, his guilt offering, a ram from the flock, one without defect and of the proper value. In this way the priest will make atonement for him before the LORD, and he will be forgiven for any of these things he did that made him guilty." God established this in order that sin could be forgiven and the person could be cleansed. Later in Leviticus God also said that, "For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one's life." (Lev. 17:11) From these passages we can conclude that there must be some type of sacrifice in order for the forgiveness of sins by God to be possible. The blood of the sacrifice alone is not what makes atonement but it is the life in the blood that brings reconciliation to God. The blood is life. The blood offering should be viewed as a life offering that takes the place of the death penalty due because of sin. Jesus Christ is the perfect lamb whose blood will take away the sins of the world (John 1:29). This reminds me of the traditional hymn, "Nothing But The Blood." I could never really connect with this song. I have thought to myself, "Why sing about Christ's blood but rather His love, life and work on the cross." I understood that it was Christ's death that brought me new life and reconciliation to God, but why put emphasis on His blood alone? However, I have come to understand that the lyrics to that song do not speak of the blood alone but of the forgiveness, life and atonement we have through Jesus Christ's spilled blood.

What can wash away my sin?  
Nothing but the blood of Jesus.  
What can make me whole again?  
Nothing but the blood of Jesus.

Refrain:

O precious is the flow  
that makes me white as snow;  
no other fount I know;  
nothing but the blood of Jesus.

In Romans 3:25 Paul states, "God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, [Or as the one who would turn aside his wrath, taking away sin] through faith in his blood." Also in Hebrews 2:17 and I John 4:10 we see the sacrifice of Jesus as the only atonement that satisfies God's wrath on mankind. We must not forget that God is just and must maintain His justice. Since holiness is one of God's fundamental attributes it is clear that sin would bring God's wrath and punishment, which is ultimately death. The apostle Paul in Galatians 3:10-12, and in Deuteronomy 27:26, says that anyone who does not follow all the law of God will be cursed. There is a definite punishment from God for not following His law. I believe this is essential to understanding all that God has done through Christ's atoning work on the cross. For Paul continues in 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 hung on a tree." I believe that through Christ we gain propitiation: appeasement of God's wrath. This is necessary because sin arouses the wrath of God. Human beings are usually the ones seeking to avert the divine anger of God by doing some sort of action or offering some type of sacrifice. Humans are stuck in the mentality that we must do something to please God. However, Christ came so that through Him we are found not guilty in God's eyes. He did the work. Christ alone justifies, there is nothing humans can do to appease God. There is no possibility of persuading God to forgive us. It was clear in the Old Testament that sacrifices were divine gifts from God. It says in Leviticus 17:11 that God has given the process of sacrificial blood to make atonement. And again in the New Testament the apostle Paul said He presented Jesus Christ as a propitiation in Romans 3:25. Through Jesus Christ we are freed from God's divine anger and judgment, which we deserved in full because of our sin. Jesus is our divine gift in order to appease God's wrath of our sins.

In another way atonement can be explained as "at-one-ment." This is the state of being "at one" or reconciled with God as Oden describes in his book, *Word of Life*. God in Christ through His love substituted himself for sinners in order to make us one again with God as it was in the Garden of Eden. A new way of living began when Christ died and was raised from the dead. Now in Christ salvation can be attained. There is nothing we can bring, sacrifice, or perform but it is only faith in the life and work of Christ that brings us near God. Christ bore our sin and died our death to set us free from sin and to destroy the sting of death.

The life and death of Jesus Christ expiated our sin. Christ's death on the cross delivers man from sin and purifies our lives to uncover the image of God we were created in. Through the cross Christ canceled the debt of sin that we all have because of our inheritance from Adam (Romans 5:19). Further more, if God in Christ did not die in our place there would be no redemption, no forgiveness, and no reconciliation apart from the law. If we were to desire relationship with God we would have to rely on the law of God and because all of us have sinned and there would still be a need for blood sacrifices in order to have atonement of our sin and to be made complete with God. Since this cleansing of our sin through the death of Christ on the cross brings healing and true wholeness to our lives as it was prophesied by Isaiah in Isaiah 53:5.

Along with expiation, redemption was achieved by the work of Christ on the cross. We were redeemed on the grounds that the cross ransomed us. There was a payment required for our sins and through Christ Jesus' death the ransom was paid and we were released from the slavery of sin. In other words, we were delivered or liberated from captivity of sin by Christ's death. Jesus told his disciples that His life would be lived as a

servant to all and then given as a ransom for all (Matthew 20:28). This message of being bought by God is told by the apostle Paul in I Corinthians 6:20 where it states that all who are in Christ were bought with a price, which was the blood of Christ. Jesus Christ is the only payment that is accepted by God in order to be in relationship with Him. Redemption can be defined simply as the forgiveness of sins. God is pleased with His Son and therefore His death completely paid for the forgiveness of our sins. God's love is evident as He has redeemed our life and has ushered us into relationship with Him. How great is God's love that He would send the provision or payment, His only Son, for our ransom, which frees us for sin.

In looking at atonement we cannot negate that Jesus Christ's obedient life did not play a part in the work of atonement. Christ not only bore our punishment for sin but fulfilled the law for us as well. It is Christ's obedience not only to death but also His obedience in putting Himself under the law and fulfilling it completely that brings atonement for our sins. Christ has fulfilled the whole law, therefore whoever believes in Him, is counted just before God, as though he, the sinful man, had fulfilled the whole law himself. For it says in Romans 10:4, "Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes." God established the law and therefore we are still under the obligation to fulfill the law if we are to be in relationship with God. God did not take away the law because He sent His Son, but Jesus Christ fulfilled the law of God in our place. Jesus is the only way we can truly fulfill the whole law in order to come to God the Father as He exclaimed in John 14:6, "No one comes to the Father except through me."

The sacrifice of Jesus on the cross, His death in our place, and his obedient life has made complete atonement for our sins. Through the blood of Jesus the curse of sin and

death has been defeated. We have been reconciled to God through faith in the work done on the cross. We have been redeemed, made holy, our sins have been expiated, and the appeasement of God's wrath has been met through the payment of Christ's death. We have been washed and made holy through the blood of Jesus, able to stand before a holy God (Ephesians 5:25b-27). And now, the purification we receive in Christ allows us to enter into the presence of a holy God. We can stand on the promise that the apostle Paul wrote in Romans 8: 1- 4b, "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man, in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us..." As Jesus said "It is finished" and gave up His spirit (John 19:30) so the work of atonement is completed in Jesus Christ's life and death.