

“Atonement, the Curse Removed”
 Pastor Sam Richards
 Sermon for 23 January 2022
 Text: Galatians 3:10-14

Here Paul alludes to the substitutionary atonement which I lectured on March 18, 2021. (Lecture 29, “The Necessity of the Atonement”) The atoning sacrifice of Jesus is something that the apostles emphasized as something exceptional and essential: it was the means by which the Curse of sin, traceable to the sin of Adam and the wages thereof: **The wages of sin are death, are death but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.** (Romans 6:23) The curse of the law is tied to the curse of sin; indeed the Law was given in consequence of sin: God being just is bound to punish sin. The atonement is how God goes about punishing sin, not forgiving it, not giving it a pass, but punishing sin so that He may be proclaimed **to be just and justifier.** Those statements of necessity are organized under three divisions: a. statements about the Lord’s conduct, b. statements made by the Lord about his death, and c. statements others made about that death (commentary on that event).

21 But now apart [a]¹from the Law *the righteousness of God has been revealed, being witnessed by the [b]Law and the Prophets, 22 but it is the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those [c]who believe; for there is no distinction, 23 for all [d]have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, 25 whom God displayed publicly as a [e]propitiation [f]in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, [g]because in God’s merciful restraint He let the sins previously committed go unpunished; 26 for the demonstration, that is, of His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who [h]has faith in Jesus.* 27 Where then is boasting? It has been excluded. By what kind of law? Of works? No, but by a law of faith.

This citation of Romans 3:21-27 substantiates my claim that the apostles emphasized the atonement, when Paul says a paying of the penalty, or propitiation in His blood, he is asserting two truths central to sacrificial worship. The first is that the voluntary sacrifice of Jesus was penal in nature—*paying the price, or penalty for sin*. Jesus was paying the price for our sins, sins which were imputed to Him. He took on their guilt and shame as our Representative Head despite *knowing no sin, or despite his sinless and*

¹ Footnotes

- a. Romans 3:21 Or *from law*
- b. Romans 3:21 I.e., the Old Testament
- c. Romans 3:22 Or *who believe. For there is*
- d. Romans 3:23 Or *sinned*
- e. Romans 3:25 I.e., a means of reconciliation between God and mankind by paying the penalty for sin
- f. Romans 3:25 Or *by*
- g. Romans 3:25 Lit *because of the passing over of the sins previously committed, in the restraint of God*
- h. Romans 3:26 Lit *is of the faith of Jesus*

perfect obedience to the Law. Secondly, there is the shedding of blood without which there is no forgiveness. Now this is true whether it is a sacrificial animal, of the Son of God, being sacrificed. This theme is consistent with the practice of sin offerings, and burnt offerings in Jewish tradition.

The propitiation piece comes in with the matter of reconciliation brought about by the payment of the debt occasioned by the offense. I am fairly certain that debts, used in a non-fiduciary manner is what occasions their use in the Lord's prayer. It's coupling with sins, and trespasses amplifies this significance. And, as a side note, trespasses and transgressions are companion thoughts which deal with presumption and intentional wronging of another party—whether human or divine. And it is fairly importance to signify that because Jesus was paying our penalty for sin, or spiritual debt and He took the penalty due us (death) on Himself. That is the heart of the substitutionary matter.

2 Samuel 24:23-27 details the purchase of threshing floor on Mt. Moriah for a sin offering (over the census by king David and resultant plague):

23 Everything, O king, Araunah gives to the king.” And Araunah said to the king, “May the Lord your God be favorable to you.” 24 However, the king said to Araunah, “No, but I will certainly buy *it* from you for a price; for I will not offer burnt offerings to the Lord my God (Hashem) ^[a]that cost me nothing.” So David bought the threshing floor and the oxen for fifty shekels of silver. 25 Then David built there an altar to the Lord, and he offered burnt offerings and peace offerings. And the Lord responded to prayer for the land, and the plague was ^[b]withdrawn from Israel. (The threshing floor in scripture is a **place of separation and revelation**. A place where the harvest was prepared by separating the grain from the useless straw for the purpose of exposing and collecting the most valuable part of the crop. This site was allegedly where Abraham offered up Isaac in his test of faith. An abode for the Ark and for corporate assembly, was built by Solomon on the Temple Mount.)

Next, we should address the “absolute necessity” of Christ's sacrifice, as prophesied and re²corded as accomplished in the revealed Word of God. Biblically, it means “there was no other way, no alternative path to the salvation of sinners, or the redemption of mankind” than the one set forth in divine revelation. Seen in this light, the issues raised by this doctrine are central, as in crucial and indispensable. And one of those issues is the indispensability of worship—worship, as already alluded to, is indispensable to our humanity *in addition to being an active, historical part of the national experience of Biblical Israel*. One might say, worship completes or fulfills our humanity as nothing else can. . . or

²“The Deuteronomic Code is divided into the following sections: (1) statutes and ordinances, especially related to dealings with the Canaanites and worship in the Temple in Jerusalem alone, to the exclusion of the high places (see [high place](#)); (2) laws (known as sabbatical laws) concerned with the year of release from obligations, especially financial; (3) regulations for leaders; (4) various civil, cultic, and ethical laws; and (5) an epilogue of blessings and curses.” <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Hebraic-law#ref7349>

should do. Therefore what lies behind the sacrifice of Jesus has continuity with all sacrificial worship ever performed any where, at any time—but particular as prescribed by Moses in the Deuteronomic Code (containing Israelite law).

This doctrine is just as **exclusive** as God himself (**you shall have no other gods before Me** (God) . . . **I am the way, the truth and the life . . . no one comes to the Father except by Me** (Christ)) which is to say that it is scandalous—being offensive to human reason from the get-go. It has led to some blasphemous declarations as to God being “sick, sadistic, cruel and unjust . . . a bloodthirsty megalomaniac, unworthy of love or worship, a spiritually evil being” and I submit these calumnies far exceed in severity the insinuations of Satan in the garden that God is stingy, withholding the best from us! These characterizations are flat out contradictions of revealed truth and totally inconsistent with God’s redemptive, kind intentions towards us. How is it that a kind, loving Father would subject His beloved Son to such ignominy, pain, abuse and humiliation as Jesus bore in his passion and death? Absolute necessity answers that question: God wouldn’t have done anything of the sort *if it had not been **the plan** from the beginning—indeed, before the creation of the heavens and earth—and an **absolute necessity***³.

³ There exist several “forays” into this matter of “necessity” from an anthropological/social/cultural and biological perspective. Here are some: Robert Ardrey’s African Genesis, 1966, and The Territorial Imperative, 1966 (both works, written by a dramatist(!), postulate an evolutionarily determined instincts—a scientific euphemism for “necessity.” (And represent a biological determinism that I reject.) Then there is Robin Fox’s, The Imperial Animal, 1971, (The chief point here is that the primate roots of human behavior have led men (read males) to become political animals . . . and that social behaviors involving *dominance and attention-getting* found among various ape species manifest themselves in human terms as imperial, non-democratic power politics. In ape society, males achieve power as the dominant breeders but in human society the agricultural and industrial revolutions have altered this primal tendency through the introduction of economic class strata.) And, finally, Konrad Lorenz’s, On Aggression, 1966, “So-called Evil: on the natural history of aggression”) is an evolutionist book, 1963 by the [ethologist Konrad Lorenz](#); it was translated into English in 1966.^[1] As he writes in the prologue, “the subject of this book is [aggression](#), that is to say the fighting instinct in beast and man which is directed *against* members of the same species.” (Page 3) Dubbed the Father of Ethology, Konrad Zacharias Lorenz was an Austrian zoologist. (The leap from zoologist to anthropologist could be a leap too far!) However, he did write, “Truth in science can be defined as the working hypothesis best suited to, opening the way to the next better one.” That is a humble and useful insight because it underscores how tentative scientific hypotheses must be (subject to review, revision and falsification). In this light “established science” is a bit of an oxymoron especially where scientific certainty is absent as something “unattainable.”

If we move from this plea to the cry of dereliction from the cross: **My God, my God, why has thou forsaken me?** It is one thing for a human being to cry this out, but the eternal Son of God?! (Mark 15:34) This forsaking of the Son, the breaking of his eternal communion with the Father—even though temporary in nature—frames the only moment in time when such a separation would ever be experienced. It was a once in eternity thing, not just a once in a life time thing. **And it only happened because it had to happen** (necessity). None of the else theories of atonement account for this cry. We move now to the second category (statements of others related to the Lord' conduct). Romans 3:25-26 reads: **Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God, to declare, I say, at this time his righteousness—God's righteousness—that he—God—might be just, and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus.** What a tremendous declaration that is! Paul is addressing the problem that arises when people ask, "How could God overlook or cover the sins of the children of Israel under the old dispensation? Through the forbearance God?" Paul states that it is the death of our Lord upon the cross that does this; *that is one of things that it is meant to do . . . but Paul runs further, it is not just the sins of the past that are covered by Jesus' death, it is any sin of all time! **It is the only explanation.*** The real dilemma is how can God, at one and the same time, be just and justifier of him that believeth in Jesus? How can God, holy and eternal, who is just, righteous and unchangeable, "the Father of Lights," **with whom there is no variableness, neither shadow of turning** (James 1:17), the God who **is light, and in him is no darkness at all** (1 John 1:5), who is of such pure countenance that he cannot behold evil and sin, how can he forgive sin and remain what He eternally is? A very good, hard, real question.

Answer: The only way is the way of the cross. God has set him for as a propitiation, **to declare his righteousness.** Because he has punished sin in the person of His only begotten Son . . . the only just course! He did to sin what He said He would do and because he has done it in a substitute, it has been done. Those who believe in Jesus are covered, the blood of Jesus has cleansed them utterly. They have a purity from him that they had lost and could not, through their own efforts, recover! Romans 3:25-26 is a key, and a sufficient text which vindicates God as well as the cross and fulfills the aims of sacrifice completely. The eternal character of God was both reconciled and vindicated—that is what the Son did to the glory of the Father! Now that is love. Jesus did this before men as well as the principalities and powers in heavenly places—that is, in the presence of all. Even the devil, his minions and all the citizens of hell have been witness to this act.

Next we come to other statements about that death's necessity. There's Hebrews 9:12: **We see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honor; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man.** He was made man to suffer

death, to **taste death**. “Jesus is the only one who has ever tasted death in all its bitterness and horror.” That is why we see Him sweating blood in the Garden, crying out on the cross, that is why he died so soon—the taste of death, and the horror of sin came over him and, literally, it broke his heart. The taste of death ruptured his heart, now that’s a bitter poison indeed.

Then, there’s Romans 8:32: **He spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not freely give us all things?** First, **he spared not**. What does that mean? Spared him not from what? The agony and the shame. God delivered Him up to that. The Son went voluntarily, but it was the Father who sent him . . . sparing him nothing! **God so loved the world that He gave . . .** John 3:16 declares the very same thing. It was so unthinkable, and yet necessary. Someone had to be punished—either the Lord, or us, the sinners. Jesus took our place; either Jesus did this thing, or it remains undone. *That in essence is the argument here.*

There are supporting, subsidiary arguments if needed. There’s the wrath of God against sin. That presses the necessity of punishment—surely God deserves justice above all others. So, if there must be punishment, there needs to be a sin-bearer, a sacrificial victim, a Savior. And, there’s majesty and immutability of divine law. It must be fulfilled. How about guilt? If we grant that guilt is not merely something negative, not merely some weakness, some fault, or flaw, some theory to be developed . . . if it is compounded of transgression and lawlessness, treason and treachery, rebellion and revolt, things that reek of intentionality and deliberateness . . . then sin entails guilt and cries out for consequence. Punishment is necessary, just and right. Entire justice systems are built upon these premises, these expectations—built into the very fabric of God’s moral government.

Finally, there is no other explanation which tells us what it is essential to believe in Christ, why believing in him is what salvation waits upon. The moral theory falls short—the idea that the love of God is displayed on the cross and that sight is meant to melt our hearts and do away with our enmity against God. Problem: this only seek to convince me to believe in God, not in Christ, and puts salvation on my list of things to do (believe that my heart is changed and start loving God). The theory that he is an example of the good life falters on imitation as the former falters on altered sentiment, or affection. Neither addresses law, justice and acquittal. *In fact it is probable that we cannot believe in God without believing in Christ—believing in Christ saves us.* *Anthropomorphism* is another hurdle. This business of imagining God in terms of us, in our likeness is problematic because it puts us at the center, not God! God becomes a human invention—some have accused believers to that. However, more subtle is the error of supposing that God is best understood as an extension of us; that divine love is merely *human level* taken to the extreme, or highest level—a perfection of our affections. But if divine love is of another order and our love is derived from

God's love (or the love of God!), then God is in the center as He ought to be. The God who is love, created us to be loving as a part of his design.

Those who deny that sin renders us guilty, or brings about moral culpability will not agree with the substitutionary atonement. Surely their view of sin is deficient, biblically unsound. But what of those who say, "Love is all you need." Maybe if the claim is that embodied love is all we need, we would be closer to agreement. "We forgive one another without any substitution and without any punishment, and if we, in our love for one another, can do that, surely God, whose love is still greater, should be able to do it with still greater ease." My observation is that the level of forgiveness addressed here is very superficial—we are stuck when we come to something truly wicked, unforgivable even, so *forgiving the unforgivable is the real concern*. God helps us past the hindrance posited by horrendous wrongs—high crimes of hatefulness and spite—which we typically find to be out of reach. Things in the "God help us" range! "God is not in a series with us!" He is not even the end of a continuum, on the scale of being so to speak. MLJ asks pointedly, are we "going to attribute to God . . . our sentimental, loose, unjust and unrighteous notions of love to the everlasting Godhead?" Revelation helps us start from the other end of things—as in ultimate reality—for God is love in an ultimate sense not merely an extended sense. God is not human plus, or human perfected; he is God indeed.

Some claim that this view of God, the substitutionary view, detracts from God's love and is unworthy of his character. "Fancy God demanding blood as an appeasement before He can forgive!" What, are we more godly than God now? Have we evolved such a finer sensibility than his that can judge his love, or his justice as inferior to our own?! To this, we must answer, God has loved us in the best manner, at the highest level of love, and with the sacrifice of Jesus to bear our punishment is what he came up with. Quail is quail meat, folks, why aren't we satisfied with what God has supplied? Why do we think we could do it better? Look at Creation! Have we accomplished anything even closely approximating that? Our God is one . . . his grace and mercy, truth and justice are found in holy integration in his person.

Well, we should note that every time Jesus began to teach about his death, the disciples either misunderstood . . . could not grasp it . . . were dismayed by the topic . . . and objected to it. Hence, Jesus' words **I have yet many things to say unto you, but you cannot bear them now.** (John 16:12) They couldn't hear, their minds were darkened, their hearts were too hard. They couldn't wrap their minds around the whole of him. Funny, we should have the same problem! The confessions of Nathaniel and of Peter aside . . . it took the resurrection to convince them he was the only begotten Son of God, the true Messiah, their Savior. Afterwards, in a crunch session, in a finals review evening, Jesus took them through the Bible one more time and highlighted all the contents related to his person and mission. And it all began make sense.

“We must be forgiven and reconciled to God fully before we can be justified.” (MLJ p. 335 P 3) “The law must be honored.” The moral character of God and His creation must be upheld, satisfied. But we failed to keep the law and fell under condemnation as a result. “But our Lord dealt with that guilt, as we have seen, upon the cross. He was there, He offered Himself, He presented Himself, His body, His life. And God put our sins upon Him. He was passive; God was doing it. It was God’s action; Christ’s passive obedience.” (p. 335) As far as the law is concerned (for believers) the law has been kept, honored (and perfectly so!), and it (that perfect obedience) has been imputed to us for righteousness (before God). Christ’s perfect 10 is what appears on our scorecard! (Gymnastically speaking.) It is the heart doctrine of our unity with Christ, our being one with Christ, the Atonement works according to that law. What Christ did, actively or passively, is imputed to us—we cannot score any higher than He scored for us!

The terrors of the law and of God
 With me can have nothing to do
 My Savior’s obedience and blood
 Hide all my transgressions from view.

I am fully atoned for, and thus covered, because my sins are blotted out and because I have the righteousness of Christ(!) I am perfected even now by the perfect, finished work of Christ. Now what is changed is my keeping that which I should shudder to jeopardize, compromise, or lose . . . it is only higher ground that I stand to sacrifice to sin. May it not be so.

Amen.