

# The Atonement of Jesus Christ Defined

## Introduction:

In this study of the past work of the Lord Jesus Christ, we will not concern ourselves with His personal ministry to teaching, preaching, and miracles, etc., — but to His great work in relation to salvation.

This aspect of His work centers around His death and resurrection. The atonement is another feature of true Bible Christianity which sets it apart from every other world religion. Religion says, “Do,” Christianity says, “Done!”

## I. The Meaning of the Word “Atonement”

The word “Atonement” is found one time in the New Testament in Romans 5:11, where it is called THE atonement (to distinguish the finished work of Christ from the many atonements of the Old Testament which simply covered sin — Exodus 30:10; 34:7; Hebrews 10:1-4).

We use the word to refer to the whole redemptive work of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. It is a good word to use, for it reflects the end result of all that Christ accomplished when He died on the cross.

The word is a Middle English conjunction of two words:

“AT ONE”      “At-one meant”      “Atonement”

The work of Christ has as its end the making of God and man “at one.”

## II. The Prominence of the Atonement in the Word of God

The death of the Lord Jesus Christ is of supreme and vital importance in the Bible.

### A. Old Testament Types Pointed to a Perfect Sacrifice.

1. The Coats of Skins — Genesis 3:21
2. The Sacrifice of Isaac. — Genesis 22:8
3. The Passover Lamb. — Exodus 12:1-14
4. The Levitical Sacrifices. — Leviticus 1 thru 5

These 5 offerings are required to give the full picture of the work of Christ:

The “Sweet Savor” Offerings — Looking at the Sin-Bearer

Chapter 1 — BURNT OFFERING — Christ’s Perfect Death

Chapter 2 — MEAL OFFERING — Christ’s Perfect Life

Chapter 3 — PEACE OFFERING — Christ’s Perfect Work

The “Non-Sweet Savor” Offerings — Looking At the Sin

Chapter 4 — SIN OFFERING — For the Guilt of sin (Iniquity)

Chapter 5 — TRESPASS OFFERING — For the Effect of sin (Injury)

There are many other “types” of Christ — according to Hebrews 10:1 these are “shadows” of the real thing.

### B. Old Testament Prophets Wrote of a Suffering Messiah

Psalms 22:1-18; Isaiah 53:4-8; Zechariah 12:10; 13:6-7; Luke 24:26-27; I Peter 1:10-11

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These verses refute the erroneous notion of some dispensational teaching which holds that Christ came to set up His Millennial kingdom at His first advent, was rejected as King — then “changed His mind” and became a Savior instead. Old Testament prophets saw both advents, and it is clear Christ always came the first time to die for us. The message of the prophets was two-fold — Acts 2:18-21.

### C. The Atonement is the Main Theme of the New Testament.

There are 175 references to the “atonement” in the New Testament. 1 in every 44 verses mentions it.

1. The Atonement is the Reason For the Incarnation — Mark 10:45; John 12:27; I Timothy 1:15; Hebrews 2:14; 10:5
2. The Atonement is the Kernel of the Gospel we Preach — I Corinthians 2:2; 15:1, 3, 4
3. The Atonement is the Central Theme of Heaven’s Song. — Revelation 5:8-12

### III. The Necessity for the Atonement of Jesus Christ.

The Lord Jesus Christ spoke of His death as being necessary — John 3:14-15.

His awful sufferings indicate it was necessary — else why would the Father have subjected His dear Son to such?

Christ’s atoning death reveals two great truths concerning God — the measure of His holiness, and the extent of His Love.

#### A. Christ Died to Satisfy the Holiness of God

God is Holy and God hates sin! The penalty for sin is death, and the holiness of God demands that sin must be punished. God cannot overlook sin — that would be contrary to His nature.

For God and man to fellowship, man must approach God in holiness. This fact was demonstrated by the Levitical sacrifices of the Old Testament — Leviticus 17:11; Hebrews 9:22.

#### B. Christ Died to Satisfy the Love of God.

The attribute of love is such that God seeks only the highest good for mankind. His love is such that He must (and did) share that punishment with and for the transgressor. God’s love is intense: “For God SO loved the world...” John 3:16.

In the atoning death of Jesus Christ the great “dilemma” facing God was resolved. How could God love the sinner and still punish sin? Christ was the answer!

Suspended on the cross between Heaven and earth, rejected by man and forsaken by God — Christ paid the penalty of sin IN FULL, thus satisfying all the holy demands of God and leaving Him free to save the sinner.

### IV. Unscriptural views of the Atonement of Jesus Christ

There are a number of erroneous views concerning the nature of the death of Jesus Christ — many of which have come about through wrong views of sin or the holiness of God.

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### A. The “Accidental Death” Theory

#### 1. The Theory Stated

The cross was an unforeseen event in the life of Christ. Jesus did not plan to die, but He antagonized the Jews who conspired against Him and was killed by crucifixion.

#### 2. The Theory Refuted

The Lord Jesus Christ was conscious at all times of His death. Old Testament prophecies and Christ Himself foretold it, and He willingly laid down His life.

Matthew 16:21; 20:17-19; John 10:18

### B. The “Martyr” Theory

#### 1. The Theory Stated

Jesus died as a martyr for a “good cause.”

#### 2. The Theory Refuted.

The Bible nowhere makes this claim, but clearly states His death was redemptive.

A martyr’s death is a human death. John the Baptist, Stephen, James, Paul, etc., all died as Christ martyrs — and their deaths were triumphant!

Such a view of Christ’s death may make martyrs — but it will never save souls!

### C. The “Moral Influence” Example Theory

#### 1. The Theory Stated

Christ’s death has an influence upon man resulting in “moral improvement.” Christ’s example of perfect obedience and suffering not only reveals the way of obedience for others to follow, but ought to soften human hearts and help man to reform, repent, and aspire to better his condition. This was Origen’s view, one also held by Socinianists.

#### 2. the Theory Refuted

This theory teaches salvation through being inspired by Christ’s example.

His example did not work for the Jews — their hearts were not softened when they saw Him on the cross.

This theory fails to face the sin question.

### D. The “Hatred of Sin” Example Theory

#### 1. The Theory Stated

Otherwise known as the “Governmental Theory,” this belief states that Christ was made an example of in order to demonstrate to man God’s displeasure with sin, as well as to maintain respect for God’s Law. In understanding God’s hatred of sin, a man will repent. Since repentance is the condition for salvation, God in effect saves man through the death of Christ.

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### 2. The Theory Refuted

This concept allows Jesus Christ to be a sinner, which He was not.

(The Jehovah's Witness cult teaches that Christ paid for His own sins and died for Himself.)

### E. The "Love of God" Example Theory

#### 1. The Theory Stated

This is otherwise known as the "Moral Influence" or "Exemplarist" theory promoted by Peter Abelard. It says that Christ died in order to show mankind just how much God loves them. His death was not necessary — just impressive.

#### 2. The Theory Refuted

Man knew of the Love of God apart from, and before, the crucifixion — Dueteronoy 7:7; Jeremiah 31:3; Malachi 3:6

While the cross IS an expression of God's love, it would also be an expression of His extreme cruelty if its only purpose was to impress man.

### F. The "Gradually Extirpated Depravity" Theory

#### 1. The Theory Stated

At his incarnation Christ received a depraved human nature which He gradually purified until it was reunited to God at the cross. Through His sinless life (in a sinful body) Christ lifted humanity to a divine plane.

#### 2. The Theory Refuted

The Bible says Christ was without a sin nature — Hebrews 7:26. the theory fails to deal with the guilt of sin. Rather than justifying man, it is a kind of "progressive sanctification" plan of salvation.