

“Full Atonement”

As the church nears Easter, how should she understand the death of Christ? The celebration of Easter only makes sense in light of the crucifixion of Jesus. To understand the crucifixion, the church should reconsider the importance of the word atonement.

The word atonement refers to how reconciliation between God and man is achieved. It assumes God has been offended by the sins of his people. For example, Aaron is told to make atonement because of the uncleanness of the children of Israel through the death of a goat (Lev. 16:15-16). Here, the meaning of atonement is clearly associated with the sacrifice offered because of sin so that sinful man might again be reconciled with God. In a way, you could say that atonement is how the payment for a past discretion is made up.

The reason the word atonement matters so much is because Scripture teaches that mankind is estranged from God by sin. His people are reconciled to God only because Christ is the Great High priest. How did he reconcile them to God? Well, that question can't be addressed until there is a basic understanding of sin. One can't understand salvation until there is a clear account about the thing from which one is saved.

What is sin? The Bible is clear in its answer. Sin is disobedience to the law of God (1 John 3:4). Though Adam was created in knowledge, righteousness, and holiness, he transgressed the commandment of God and came under the curse of the law. Because all mankind descended from Adam, all mankind came under the just penalty of the law.

How then can sinful man be saved? Only if a substitute is provided who pays the just penalty of God's law. The Bible reveals that a substitute has been provided, namely, Jesus of Nazareth. His sacrifice fully satisfied the just penalty of God's law. It is full satisfaction, meaning that he paid the penalty entirely, not in part. This does not mean that Jesus became a sinner. Instead, He is the Divine scapegoat, the only man who can ever claim innocence. Yet, he paid the penalty that God's people so richly deserved.

Unfortunately, the claim has been made that the crucifixion of Christ is a form of cosmic abuse. Yet, Scripture reveals that this claim is absurd. God Himself paid the penalty of sin. God took the cost and gave to us a marvelous gain. The Son of God loved us and gave himself for us.

How do you make up for your past and present discretions? Scripture reveals that you can't atone for them by your good deeds. Instead, God Himself fully atoned for the sins of the world on the cross. This indeed is the good news of the gospel. Turn to Christ and rest in his full atonement.

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