

## Essentials of the Faith Lesson 4

### Particular Atonement: “Why and For Whom Did Christ Die?”

#### I. INTRODUCTION

- a. Major world religions tend to focus on the teachings of their human founder. The true religion does this, yet goes farther. While great emphasis is on his teaching, the central significance is on the life and death of Jesus Christ.
- b. Of supreme importance, even above his teaching and compassionate deeds, is the substitutionary atoning death of Jesus Christ.

1 Corinthians 2:2 For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.

1 Corinthians 15:3-4 For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, <sup>4</sup> that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures

- c. Christ’s substitutionary atoning work for the elect must be understood in the context of:
  - i. The depraved condition of humanity (EOF Lesson 2): Recall the human condition:
    - 1. The natural human condition is “totally depraved.” Depraved: the condition of humanity which is inherently corrupt and utterly incapable of choosing or doing that which is acceptable to God apart from divine grace. With no ability to enable him to recover himself, man is hopelessly condemned.

Psalm 51:5 Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me.

Job 14:4 “Who can make the clean out of the unclean? No one!”

We do not become sinners because we sin, but we sin because we are born sinners. We sin because it is our nature to do so.

Our condition: Congenitally depraved (All humanity, at birth, is capable of any and every sin).
  - ii. God’s sovereignty in salvation (election, Lessons 1 & 3)
    - 1. Those whom God sovereignly predestined for salvation required a perfect substitute to atone for their sins in order to render them acceptable to God.
- d. Understanding the death of Christ requires understanding the biblical testimony that:
  - i. God is holy

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Leviticus 19:2 <sup>2</sup> “Speak to all the congregation of the sons of Israel and say to them, ‘You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy.

Isaiah 6:3 <sup>3</sup> And one called out to another and said, “Holy, Holy, Holy, is the LORD of hosts, The whole earth is full of His glory.”

- ii. Humanity is culpable to God and breaking his law is not an impersonal act

Psalms 51:4 <sup>4</sup> Against You, You only, I have sinned And done what is evil in Your sight, So that You are justified when You speak And blameless when You judge.

Jeremiah 2:13 <sup>13</sup> “For My people have committed two evils: They have forsaken Me, The fountain of living waters, To hew for themselves cisterns, Broken cisterns That can hold no water.

Matthew 5:48 <sup>48</sup> “Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

- iii. God judges sin retributively (given in exact recompense)

Romans 2:5 <sup>5</sup> But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God

Romans 6:23 <sup>23</sup> For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Galatians 6:8-9 <sup>8</sup> For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.

2 Thessalonians 1:7-9 <sup>7</sup> ... when the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, <sup>8</sup> dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. <sup>9</sup> These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power,

- iv. God is personally angry at sin

Psalms 5:4-5 <sup>4</sup> For You are not a God who takes pleasure in wickedness; No evil dwells with You. <sup>5</sup> The boastful shall not stand before Your eyes; You hate all who do iniquity.

Psalms 7:11-12 <sup>11</sup> God is a righteous judge, And a God who has indignation every day. <sup>12</sup> If a man does not repent, He will sharpen His sword; He has bent His bow and made it ready.

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John 3:36 <sup>36</sup>“He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.”

Romans 1:18 <sup>18</sup>For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness

- “The wrath of God” - his settled judicial opposition to evil and sin. (Tim Keller)

Romans 2:5 <sup>5</sup>But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God

- e. The death of Jesus Christ pertains to questions such as:
  - i. How can sinful and condemned humanity be at peace with, and acceptable to, a holy and righteous God?
  - ii. What possibilities exist to solve this problem?
  - iii. Could God have dealt with this problem any other way besides the substitutionary atoning death of his Son, Jesus Christ?
  - iv. Why did Christ have to die?
  - v. Does his death function as a powerful altruistic example by which we are inspired and gain moral traction for life?
  - vi. How *necessary* was the cross?
  - vii. What does the death of Christ accomplish and for whom?
  - viii. Did Christ die for those who reject him?
  - ix. What about those who died prior to the cross? And those who have not heard about the cross?
- f. This is the thesis of the lesson: Motivated by his glory and love for his chosen people, God sent his Son, Jesus Christ, and stood in their place as a substitute to propitiate the wrath of God due their sin.

## II. BIBLICAL TEACHING

- a. The emphasis of Christ’s death addresses 2 questions:
  - i. What did Christ accomplish in his death?
  - ii. For whom did he accomplish it?
- b. First: What did Christ accomplish in his death?
  - i. The substitutionary atoning work for sin is a major theme in Scripture and, thus, must be one in our lives.

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ii. Old Testament background is necessary to answer the question.

1. Leviticus 1:4 ‘He shall lay his hand on the head of the burnt offering, that it may be accepted for him to make atonement on his behalf.
  - a. “atonement” (more than 100 occurrences of the Hebrew word in the OT): “to propitiate God’s wrath, expiate sins, and restore fellowship between God and sinners.” (Theological Dictionary of the OT, 1:452-3 and BDB, p. 497).
2. Leviticus 4:20 ‘He shall also do with the bull just as he did with the bull of the sin offering; thus he shall do with it. So the priest shall make atonement for them, and they will be forgiven.
3. Leviticus 4:27-29, 31 <sup>27</sup> ‘Now if anyone of the common people sins unintentionally in doing any of the things which the LORD has commanded not to be done, and becomes guilty, <sup>28</sup> if his sin which he has committed is made known to him, then he shall bring for his offering a goat, a female without defect, for his sin which he has committed. <sup>29</sup> ‘He shall lay his hand on the head of the sin offering and slay the sin offering at the place of the burnt offering. <sup>30</sup> ‘The priest shall take some of its blood with his finger and put it on the horns of the altar of burnt offering; and all the rest of its blood he shall pour out at the base of the altar. <sup>31</sup> ‘Then he shall remove all its fat, just as the fat was removed from the sacrifice of peace offerings; and the priest shall offer it up in smoke on the altar for a soothing aroma to the Lord. Thus the priest shall make atonement for him, and he will be forgiven.
  - a. A sacrifice is necessary (28b) – “he shall bring for his offering”
  - b. An innocent sacrifice (28b) – “a goat, female”
  - c. A flawless sacrifice (28b) – “without defect” – the word means upright, complete, perfect.
  - d. A substitutionary sacrifice (28b-29) – “for his sin which he has ‘sinned.’” Notice a few key words: “for,” or “instead of,” or, “in place of..” and “for HIS sin which HE has committed..”
    - i. V. 29 – “lay his hand on the head of the sin offering.”
    - ii. This was done for a few reasons: 1) To own the sin – this is my sin that God is being transferred
    - iii. 2) As a symbol for substitution – or a “vicarious substitution...”
    - iv. Vicarious – which means suffered by one person as a substitute for another or to the benefit or advantage of another.
  - e. A blood sacrifice (30).

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Leviticus 17:10-11 <sup>10</sup> ‘And any man from the house of Israel, or from the aliens who sojourn among them, who eats any blood, I will set My face against that person who eats blood and will cut him off from among his people. <sup>11</sup> ‘For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you on the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood by reason of the life that makes atonement.’

- i. The altar was the place – high and up front – for everyone to see. Horns symbolizing the strength and power of God.

f. A pleasing sacrifice (31a)

- 4. Leviticus 5:10 ‘The second he shall then prepare as a burnt offering according to the ordinance. So the priest shall make atonement on his behalf for his sin which he has committed, and it will be forgiven him.
- 5. Leviticus 5:17-18 <sup>17</sup> “Now if a person sins and does any of the things which the LORD has commanded not to be done, though he was unaware, still he is guilty and shall bear his punishment. <sup>18</sup> “He is then to bring to the priest a ram without defect from the flock, according to your valuation, for a guilt offering. So the priest shall make atonement for him concerning his error in which he sinned unintentionally and did not know it, and it will be forgiven him.
  - a. “...shall make atonement for (“him,” “his sin,” “concerning his error in which he sinned,” etc.) and he will be forgiven.”
  - b. Forgiveness, and thus, restoration to God, does not occur until atonement is accomplished.
- 6. Leviticus 16: The Day of Atonement
  - a. You would have been lined up at the temple sacrificing continually: physically impossible to account for every sin sacrificially.
  - b. What was the believer to do in the OT days? You would’ve had to live at the Temple w/ an endless supply of animals for sacrificial offerings.
  - c. Even the most rigorous observance of the sacrifices would still leave many sins unacknowledged, and so guilt would remain before God.
  - d. Any OT worshiper would feel this tension in their life: sinning more often than sacrificing.
  - e. A healthy guilt would remain on his conscience.

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- f. In God’s love, he does 2 things: 1) makes a provision to continue forgiveness and relationship w/ him and 2) but does not do so flippantly..
- g. The day of atonement, or Yom Kippur was the annual provision given for believers: to serve as the spiritual clean-up for all left-over sins of God’s people.
- h. The special atonement ritual appeased the wrath of God for all the sins of the people for the past year, though it was repeated each year.
- i. This day of Atonement covers it bringing assurance you are in right relationship w/ holy God. It was such a critical day that believers back then just called it “The Day.”

#### 7. How were people saved before Christ died on the cross (in OT times)?

- a. The genuine repentant individual in OT times who obeyed God’s instructions for substitutionary sacrifice received forgiveness of sins and reconciliation with God.
- b. However, because the offerings were instructed to continue when an individual sinned, remission of sins was not permanent in that sense.
- c. These individuals were saved by faith in God on the basis of the future substitutionary death of Jesus Christ, who was prefigured by the OT rites (Demarest).

#### iii. The New Testament on Christ’s death

- 1. The death was a real, physical, painful death and witnessed and confirmed by many of various persuasions about Christ.

John 19:32-35 <sup>32</sup> So the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first, and of the other who had been crucified with him. <sup>33</sup> But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. <sup>34</sup> But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water. <sup>35</sup> He who saw it has borne witness—his testimony is true, and he knows that he is telling the truth—that you also may believe.

#### iv. It was a substitutionary death for sinners:

1 Corinthians 15:3 For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures

“for”: “on behalf of,” “instead of”- as a substitute

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#### v. Christ’s death accomplished:

1. Redemption: purchase, redeem, liberate.

Ephesians 1:7 In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace

Colossians 1:14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

2. Propitiation: turning aside the wrath of the offended God by means of appropriate sacrifice.

Romans 3:25 25 whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed

1 John 4:10 In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

“Christ’s death appeased God’s righteous anger towards sin, allowing him to be favorably disposed to erring sinners.” (Demarest)

“Propitiation is the answer to God’s righteous wrath.” (Schreiner)

3. Expiation: “Christ’s sacrifice removes the stain of sin and the sinners’ liability to suffer sin’s punishment.” (Demarest)

1 John 1:7 but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.

1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Revelation 1:5 ...To Him who loves us and released us from our sins by His blood

“Divine expiation is God’s answer to sinner’s condemnation.” (Demarest)

4. Reconciliation: the enmity caused by man’s sin, between God and man, is changed to an eternal relationship of children of God. (Hallelujah!)

2 Corinthians 5:19 namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation.

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Galatians 4:5-7 so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” Therefore you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God.

Colossians 1:20 and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven.

1 Peter 3:18 For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit

Reconciliation is the answer to our alienation and estrangement from God because of our rebellion.

5. Sanctification: progressive transformation into the image of Christ.
  - a. Provides the basis for progressive transformation into the likeness of Christ (Romans 8:3-4).
  - b. The process of sanctification begins at the moment of trusting in the Person and finished work of Christ (Romans 8:3-4).
  - c. The death of Christ is the motivating example for Christian ethic (Ephesians 5:1-2, 1 John 4:9-11).

6. Key passage: Romans 3:21-26

<sup>21</sup> But now apart from the Law *the* righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, <sup>22</sup> even *the* righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; <sup>23</sup> for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, <sup>24</sup> being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; <sup>25</sup> whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. *This was* to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; <sup>26</sup> for the demonstration, *I say*, of His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

Observations:

- 1) Vv. 25-26. “Because the holiness of God is meaningless without judgment, the one thing God could not do in the face of human rebellion was nothing. He must either inflict punishment or assume it.” (Stott)



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- 2) God accomplishes two colossal feats in the death of Jesus Christ:
  - a. Upholds his own glory by not compromising his justice and holiness: Christ bears *the Father’s wrath* for the sins of the elect.
  - b. Removes all guilt and punishment for sin incurred by the elect: Christ bears the Father’s wrath *for the sins of the elect*.
- 3) “Thus the priority is neither ‘man’s demand on God’ nor ‘God’s demand on men,’ but supremely, ‘God’s demand on God, God’s meeting his own demand.’” (Stott)
- 4) Jesus died for God: to uphold God’s own holiness and justice in atoning for the sins of the elect.
7. Once and for all, sufficient to atone for all sin: never to be repeated.

Hebrews 10:10-14 <sup>10</sup> By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. <sup>11</sup> Every priest stands daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins; <sup>12</sup> but He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, SAT DOWN AT THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD, <sup>13</sup> waiting from that time onward UNTIL HIS ENEMIES BE MADE A FOOTSTOOL FOR HIS FEET. <sup>14</sup> For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified.

#### vi. Summary Comments:

1. What happened during the death of Christ on the cross:
  - a. separation from God, bearing the wrath of all the sins for the elect, infinitely holy God-man taking on sin
2. The life of Christ was lived with full obedience to God the Father so that his death would provide the sufficient sacrifice to atone for sins.

Romans 5:18-19 So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men. For as through the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous.

3. The death of Christ was:
  - a. Penalty
  - b. Substitutionary
  - c. Atoning

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4. Therefore, in his death, Christ accomplished the penalty substitutionary atonement:

- a. Defined: God the Father, because of his love for human beings, sent his Son (who offered himself willingly and gladly) to satisfy God’s justice, so that Christ took the place of sinners. The punishment and penalty we deserved was laid on Jesus Christ instead of us, so that in the cross both God’s holiness and love are manifested. (Schreiner)

c. Second: For whom did he accomplish it? (For whom did Christ die?)

- i. Matthew 1:21 He...will save His people from their sins

There is restriction here: “His people,” not “everyone”

- ii. John 10:15 I lay down my life for the sheep

The benefits of Christ’s death are restricted to “the sheep”

- iii. Isaiah 53:6 laid on Him the iniquity of us all

All speaks of Israel from Isaiah to his nation, thus particular specification

- iv. Acts 20:28 church of God...purchased with His own blood

The church were the one’s actually purchased with His own blood

- v. Ephesians 5:25 loved the church and gave Himself for her

The church (her) were the ones for whom Christ gave himself

- vi. 1 Timothy 4:10 the living God, who is the Savior of all men, and especially of those who believe

Christ made universal provision for all people, but he is the effectual Savior only for those who repent

- vii. Summary

1. Propitiation is made exclusively for those who repent and trust in Christ.
2. If we say, “Propitiation is made for all,” then we are saying, “All humanity are saved.” But such is not the case. Many will not be saved.

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3. Since only the elect (chosen before the foundation of the world, Eph 1:4-5) are saved, then Christ’s death is God’s provision for the redemption of the elect.
4. The substitutionary atoning death of Jesus Christ is sufficient for the world, but efficient for the elect.
5. “By divine intention, Christ’s suffering and death are universal in its provision and particular in its application.” (Demarest)

### III. CLOSING THOUGHTS

- a. The overwhelming emphasis on the death of Jesus Christ is NOT:
  - i. Only on the physical pain.
    1. However, the pain was real, excruciating, and unhindered.
    2. The pain was part of the substitutionary atonement.
  - ii. A powerful altruistic example by which we are inspired and gain moral traction for life.
  - iii. Something that can be repeatable at any time by anyone.
    1. While other people in history have been crucified, no crucifixion ever has, or ever will, accomplish that of the sinless God-man, Jesus Christ.
    2. While many in history have nobly died to protect others, no one’s death has “protected” or achieved that of Jesus Christ. Repentant sinners are rescued from the wrath of God and everlasting punishment.
    3. Christians do not “live out the cross,” “carry their cross,” or “imitate the cross.” In other words, no individual can *re-experience* (separation from God, bearing the wrath of all the sins for the elect, infinitely holy God-man taking on sin) or *re-accomplish* (judicially and objectively propitiating the wrath of God for sinners) the substitutionary atoning death of Jesus Christ.
- b. In summary, the biblical rationale of the necessity of Christ’s substitutionary atoning death is as follows:
  - i. God is holy and without sin.
  - ii. God chose the elect for redemption before creation.
  - iii. The elect are congenitally depraved; unable and unwilling to please God.
  - iv. The sins of the elect must be atoned for.
  - v. God provides the sinless substitute by himself and for himself on behalf of the elect to atone for their depraved condition.
  - vi. The death of Christ in history is God’s judicial event on the sins of the elect: our sins are objectively punished by the Judge and for the Judge.

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- vii. In doing so, upon faith in Christ as their sin-bearer, the elect are judicially rendered “forgiven,” innocent of all sin, and acceptable to God.
- viii. God remains just in redeeming the elect though they are depraved (he does not compromise his own holiness in punishing sin).
- c. God must provide the substitutionary atoning sacrifice on behalf of sinful humanity.
- d. Did Jesus Christ have to die?
  - i. In one sense, no. God was not obligated to rescue rebellious sinners.
  - ii. In another sense, yes. Moved by his own mercy, God predestined certain sinners (the elect) to be recipients of salvation. In keeping with his own righteousness, the death of Christ was necessary to effectually atone for the sins of the elect.
- e. Therefore, could God have dealt with this problem any other way besides the substitutionary atoning death of his Son, Jesus Christ?
  - i. No. However, the “could” is not because God is subject to a law above himself, but is consistent with his own righteous character, since he is the law.
  - ii. This is the way he decided to rescue hopelessly condemned humanity: providing himself as the only sufficient sacrifice to atone for sins.
- f. “He was unwilling to act in love at the expense of his holiness or in holiness at the expense of his love.” (Stott)
- g. The atoning benefits of Christ’s death are: Sufficient for all, efficient for the elect
  - i. Provision: doesn’t save, but application of benefits of cross. Applied by God through Holy Spirit to believer. Penal substitution: if not applied to you, you pay for it for the rest of eternity. One thing is clear: the extent is limited, even if you speak provision

#### IV. WESTMINSTER CONFESSION OF FAITH (1646):

III. Christ, by His obedience and death, did fully discharge the debt of all those that are thus justified, and did make a proper, real and full satisfaction to His Father's justice in their behalf.[6] Yet, in as much as He was given by the Father for them;[7] and His obedience and satisfaction accepted in their stead;[8] and both, freely, not for any thing in them; their justification is only of free grace;[9] that both the exact justice, and rich grace of God might be glorified in the justification of sinners.[10]

#### V. DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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### VI. SOURCES

- a. “The Cross and Salvation” (Bruce Demarest)
- b. “The Cross of Christ” (John Stott)
- c. “Four Views: The Nature of the Atonement” (Gregory Boyd, Joel Green, Bruce Reichenbach, Thomas Schreiner)
- d. The Master’s Seminary Theology 3 Syllabus (Dr. Trevor Craigen)