



A series of 14 studies
covering various aspects
of the Atonement

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Study 1

The Foundation

"And not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement"
(Romans 5:11)

Introduction

What is the atonement all about? Why is it so important to our Christian faith? What are the blessings of the atonement? These and other questions will be answered as we progress through our study.

A definition

The doctrine of the atonement can be defined as 'The sacrificial work of our Lord Jesus Christ, both in life and death, which earned eternal salvation for the whole world, but applied to those who repent and believe.' The dictionary defines it as 'Compensation for a wrong done.'

Most theological works (thus theologians) limit the atoning work of Christ to His death upon the cross, His death being the payment for sin. Though this is true, it fails to take into account the blessings we can receive from His life. The doctrine of the atonement only makes sense if we study both the life and death of Christ. We must not be guilty of separating the atonement from His person.

The terminology

The word 'atonement' came into use in the sixteenth century. William Tyndale, while translating his 1526 translation of the English Bible, realised he needed a word that would precisely explain the doctrine. 'Atonement' is made up of two words, 'at' and 'onement,' meaning reconciliation.

In our opening text the word 'atonement' can be translated 'reconciliation.' We see then that the atonement relates to our need to be reconciled to God. Tyndale, and the translators of the King James Version, were wise enough to note that 'reconciliation' did not fully explain what 'atonement' meant, and that many Biblical texts would be misunderstood. Therefore the word was invented.

We naturally think of the Jewish Feast of Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement) when considering this subject. The Hebrew word is 'kaper' meaning 'a covering', so we can quickly see that 'reconciliation' would not suffice in this sense.

God's love expressed

The atonement is God the Father's love expressed through His Son, Jesus Christ. Without this love all sinners would be helplessly lost in sin and death (John 3:16; 1 John 4:9; Romans 5:8; Romans 3:24.)

Unrepeatable

The atonement cannot be repeated in masses, through the merits of so-called saints, or by personal holiness. Only the blood of the Saviour atones for us; His sacrifice being the one-time payment for sin (Hebrews 10:10-12.)

The believer must be careful not to go beyond what the Scriptures actually teach about the atonement. Some think that the atonement means that all will be saved;

while others state that it is limited to a few. The Bible speaks nothing of a universal or limited atonement.

Conclusion

Any study of the Bible would be inadequate if we dismiss or misunderstand the doctrine of the atonement. It intertwines itself like a fruitful vine around all the major truths and gives full meaning to subjects such as salvation, sanctification, justification, and the new covenant. The atonement is truly the foundation stone for our redemption through Christ.

The Old Testament Witness

“And almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and without shedding of blood is no remission”
(Hebrews 9:22)

Introduction

The Old Testament would be meaningless, spiritually speaking, if there was no access to God for the sinner through an atoning sacrifice. At the heart of Old Testament faith was the belief that blood sacrifices covered iniquity, thus permitting the sinner to come before a holy God. In Old Testament times there was a definite understanding of the need for atonement. It produced both an awareness of the guilt in a person's conscience and also an awareness of the *effects* of the sin in an individual's relationship to God.

Blood

Without the shedding of the blood of ceremonial clean animals there was no atonement (Hebrews 9:22.) The blood of an animal represented the fact that the life of an innocent party was given to set a guilty sinner free (Leviticus 17:11-14). We say “innocent” since the animal had to be without blemish (Exodus 12:5). Peter uses this as an illustration regarding the sinlessness of Christ (1 Peter 1:19.) The Feast of Passover reveals much about what the atonement meant.

The victim was a substitute for the sinner (Leviticus 1:4; 3:2; 8:13; 4:4, 15, 24, 29; 16:21). For this blood to be effectual the person had to admit he was in deed guilty. The purpose for the ritual is made very clear in several places. It is to cleanse from all sins (Leviticus 16:30). Other passages make it clear that such cleansing results in saving the life of the offender (Leviticus 17:11). The restoring of pure relationship is an important result, too, since the atonement is for all uncleanness and rebellion of the Israelites, whatever their sins have been (Leviticus 16:16). Thus the sinner is reunited in purity with God by the atoning sacrifice for sins.

The holiness of God

The entire sacrificial system, as seen under the Old Covenant, was designed by God to accomplish four things:-

1. To reveal that He was holy.
2. To reveal that man was unholy and depraved.
3. To reveal that man needed someone other than himself to save him.
4. That God was willing to forgive the sinner, not on the merits of religious duty, but on those of an innocent substitute.

The Old Testament clearly recognises that offerings in themselves do not atone for sin, it is only through the grace of God (Psalm 51:16-17; Hosea 6:6; Micah 6:6-8.)

Prophetic

Hebrews chapter 8 makes it abundantly clear that the Old Testament sacrificial system was inadequate in removing sin and making a person right before God. A new and better covenant had to be established that was based on a perfect sacrifice. This Lamb would not be an uncaring animal that was forced to give up its life, but

the Son of God who would willingly lay down His life for all men (Isaiah 53.)

Conclusion

What the atonement under the Old Covenant did was to make God's people aware that they could not redeem themselves. It prepared them for the coming of the Messiah, so that, when He arrived and died on the cross, they would make the connection with the old system. In reality, only those who trusted in Christ made sense of the complicated sacrifices of the Old Testament, realising they pointed to Him.

Study 3

The New Testament Witness

"Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour"
(John 12:27)

Introduction

It is the New Testament that sets forth the atoning death of Jesus Christ as the most important doctrine of our faith. Amongst the world's religions it is Christianity alone that has an atonement based upon the life, death and resurrection of its founder. In this study we will take a brief look at the atonement in light of the New Testament. Our later studies will expand upon this.

The Ransom

The whole point of the incarnation of Christ is that He needed to become a man so that He might suffer the agonies of the cross for sinners. Though there are many reasons why He came, none would be of any value unless Jesus died as our Messiah (John 12:27). His central role was that of the suffering Saviour who laid down His life as a ransom ... "For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many" (Mark 10:47).

The "ransom" was a familiar idea in Jewish thought. Under the Old Covenant it was the price paid to God for the life of the firstborn (Leviticus 25:25; Numbers 18:15). For us it is the price Christ paid to purchase our salvation. It should be noted that we reject the theory that states that the "ransom" was paid to Satan for the release of the sinner. Since the Old Testament ransom points directly to Christ, we should accept His blood as payment to God.

What Peter taught

Christ's death was at the very heart of Peter's theology, since he presents His blood as the only possible means of personal salvation ... "Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ" ... "Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot" (1 Peter 1:2, 18-19; see also Acts 3:12-26). For Peter the death of Christ was the substitutionary, vicarious, and redeeming work of the innocent Lamb of God ... "For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit" (1 Peter 3:18).

What John taught

It should not surprise us to learn that John too portrays the Lord Jesus Christ as the only Saviour. He describes Christ as the only means of regeneration and purification. In the book of Revelation He is seen as the Sacrificial Lamb which cleanses the sinner from all iniquity (Revelation 5:6-12; 7:10; 21:23). This thought is very clear in John's gospel also (John 1:29, 36; 12:32; 10:11-15). In his first letter John makes use of that powerful word "propitiation" to explain Christ's work on the cross (1 John 2:2). The word, which can be translated as 'mercy seat,' is best understood as the atoning sacrifice that appeases the wrath of God (see Exodus 25:17-22). John Wesley wrote, "Just as wide as sin extends, the propitiation extends also." Though it appeases the wrath of God, it reveals His great love too (John 3:16; 1 John 3:16; 1 John 4:10).

What Paul taught

Paul's teaching was built squarely upon the solid foundation of the atonement. In his writings we see the sinner as totally lost, enslaved, hopeless and guilty. He is spiritually dead and deserving of the worst of punishments from God. Yet he presents Christ as our Redeemer, Justifier, Sanctifier and Saviour. Jesus Christ came to annul the power of sin in the lives of those who put faith in Him (see Romans 7-8). Everywhere we read we will find the atonement and the conse-

quences of it clearly set out by Paul (Romans 3:25; 5:6,9; 1 Corinthians 5:15, 19, 21; Hebrews 9:14, 26).

Conclusion

Sin, as seen in both Testaments, has separated man from God, and it is not possible for him to make his own way back to Him. Christ's death is the only means whereby the repentant sinner can be reconciled to the Lord. His blood cancels the curse, purifies us from sin, frees us from guilt and condemnation, and gives us perfect liberty to fellowship with God. All we need to do is willingly accept His work for us in faith. It is not God's desire for any soul to be damned ... "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9).

God so loved the world

“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through Him might be saved”

(John 3:16-17)

Introduction

Few believers bother to study the doctrines of the Word of God, and because of this they fail to understand why the Lord Jesus Christ had to die upon the cross. If we are going to appreciate the reasons why He came, and what the atonement means, we must comprehend the love of God.

God is love

In 1 John 4:8 and again in 1 John 4:16 the apostle states that “God is love.” This refers to the fact that God’s nature is love, that He is self-giving and sacrificial, full of mercy and compassion for all. John 3:16 makes this abundantly clear to us.

Whenever the love of God is spoken of in Scripture we will notice that it has to do with Him giving something to mankind. The following texts are a good example of this, 1 John 4:10, Romans 5:8 and Galatians 2:20.

God’s justice

Love in itself cannot release the sinner from the chains of iniquity or free him from the penalty of sin. God indeed loves the whole world and is “not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9), nevertheless, the requirements of the law have to be met. The sinner cannot fellowship with the holy God despite the fact that God loves him, otherwise the Lord would have to compromise His righteousness and justice.

Let us not forget that God is the offended party and it is to Him we must be reconciled. Since on account of his depravity man is unable to approach the Living God, God Himself had to find a way to make reconciliation possible without undermining His righteous law. A mediator was needed, not come from amongst men or angels (Hebrews 1), but in the person of His only begotten Son (1 Timothy 2:5). His requirements are fully met in Jesus. He paid the price that no other could pay (1 Timothy 2:6; Romans 3:25-26). Therefore justification is part of the free gift of God’s perfect love and extends to all men through the atonement.

Conclusion

As we study the atonement we will notice other reasons for the sacrificial death of the Lord Jesus Christ, but here we have seen that God loved the world enough to send His only begotten Son to atone for our sin. Christ is the manifestation of this love and the fulfilment of the righteous requirements of the law. Salvation can come no other way but through His blood.

The Necessity of Christ's Death

“Then He said unto them, O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken: Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into His glory?”
(Luke 24:25-26)

Introduction

If there was another way to save sinners then God would have made use of it, but, in the divine plan to atone for sin, there was no other way possible. The only remedy for the sin problem was the shedding of the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. He would have to die in the sinner's place and take upon Himself the sin of the world and the wrath of God.

God did not have to do it

Just because man was lost in sin does not mean that God was obliged to save him. He did not have to send His only begotten Son to be the propitiation for sin (John 3:16). When the angels sinned God damned them to imprisonment to await their final judgement (2 Peter 2:4). If we had been utterly forsaken by God He would have acted in absolute and perfect justice.

The mercy of God

When divine justice and love meet there is an explosion of mercy. While justice demands that the sinner pay the price in full, though it is impossible to do so, mercy creates a way to free him from the debt. This deliverance and mercy is revealed in Christ.

As He prayed about the events of the coming day, Jesus said to His Father, “O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as Thou wilt” (Matthew 26:39.) We find two important truths here. Firstly, there was no other way that could possibly atone for man's sin, and secondly, it was God's will that His Son pay the price as the Lamb of God. His death on Calvary was the only possible means of salvation (Acts 4:12).

In our opening text it is clear that Jesus' death on the cross was absolutely necessary if man was to be redeemed. This He proved through a multitude of Scriptures (Luke 4:27).

One like us

The atoning power of the blood of Jesus Christ was God's way both to maintain His justice and save the sinner. This deliverance comes not through good works but by faith (Romans 3:26-28; Ephesians 2:8-9).

Only Christ could accomplish this act of mercy. It is impossible for man to atone for his own sin, and animal sacrifices are insufficient. Though animals are innocent of sin, they do not understand the reason for their suffering on man's behalf. Hebrews 10:4 plainly states, “For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins” A better sacrifice was required; one which could fully meet man's need. The Lord Jesus became like us so that He could take our place in every way ... “Wherefore in all things it behoved Him to be made like unto his

brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. For in that He himself hath suffered being tempted, He is able to succour them that are tempted” (Hebrews 2:17-18).

Conclusion

Simply put, there is no possible means of salvation but through the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. Those who seek another way, or present such to sinners, dishonour the Lord who paid the highest price to redeem them. There is no other way. Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me” (John 14:6).

Study 6

The Obedience of Christ

“For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous”
(Romans 5:19)

Introduction

The Lord Jesus Christ had to satisfy all the requirements of the law by perfectly obeying the will of God. Any deviation, no matter how insignificant, would have disqualified Him from being the Messiah.

It must be understood that that this work of Christ was towards God before its effects could be applied to the sinner. Though we rightly highlight the atoning power of His perfect sacrifice on the cross, we would have only a stunted knowledge of this part of the divine plan if we failed to acknowledge Christ's perfect obedience too.

Forgiveness

What if the sinner was merely forgiven rather than being cleansed through Christ's atoning sacrifice, would that be salvation? Without the shedding of His blood the forgiven sinner would still be lost ... “Without shedding of blood is no remission” (Hebrews 9:22). Every person born into this world is given the choice to either go God's way or their own way (actually Satan's way). Adam and Eve were in a state of moral and spiritual perfection in the Garden, but would they obey or disobey when the choice presented itself? (Genesis 3). Even faithfulness has to be tested otherwise true fellowship with God cannot exist. God forgave the pair, but that special fellowship was broken (Genesis 3:8, 22). Forgiveness is not enough.

Righteousness

The missing element, after Adam and Eve were ejected from the Garden, was righteousness. They may have been forgiven when God killed animals to provide a covering (atonement) for them (Genesis 3:21), but they were not righteous in the eyes of the Lord. This righteousness could only be received once man had been reconciled to God.

Christ's perfect obedience during His earthly life earned that righteousness for us. It took one man to bring sin into the world, so it only needed one man to perfectly obey God to bring in righteousness (Romans 5:19). Human righteousness can never reach the high standards of God (Philippians 3:9). Morality (often, though wrongly, considered to be righteousness) cannot merit right standing with the Lord, because sin is a spiritual as well as a moral problem. Morality does not deal with the sin nature. This is why the sinner needs Christ, for only He has the power to truly redeem. Paul rightly describes Him as the sinner's righteousness (1 Corinthians 1:30).

Obedience

To the smallest point the Lord Jesus Christ was obedient to God and the law. Some have taught that He only needed to die for us to merit salvation, but this ignores the significance of His life. If Herod had managed to kill Jesus at birth would we be saved? Surely His obedience, leading up to His sacrificial death, was vital. We see something of this when He was baptised to “fulfil all righteousness” (Matthew 3:15).

Christ lived a perfectly moral and spiritual life for our sake. His life of obedience is what made His sacrifice perfect. Did He need to be reconciled to the Father for His own sake or ours? As our representative Jesus perfectly fulfilled the law, for without this His sacrifice would not have atoned for our sin. This may sound strange, but if His blood was all that was required to satisfy the law, then His death in infancy, or when the Jews sought to cast Him over a cliff would have been enough (Matthew 2:13; Luke 4:29). Christ is the perfect sinless Saviour who lived a perfectly sinless life to be our perfect atonement.

Conclusion

Can we ever be good enough to win God's approval? Has anyone lived a perfectly sinless and obedient life toward God? The vast majority think that their own righteousness impresses God and thus merits eternal life, yet can any say they have never sinned in thought, word or deed? All are sinners and merit only judgement (Romans 3:23; 5:12). It is far wiser to trust in the one who lived a perfect life of obedience and holiness. Religionists seek after the 'merits' of so-called holy men, but always reject the precious gift of Christ's perfect life and sacrificial death. The sinner's eternal destiny is determined by whose life he chooses.

Study 7

The Suffering of Christ (part 1)

His physical pain and death

“Then saith He unto them, My soul is exceeding
sorrowful, even unto death”
(Matthew 26:38)

Introduction

The earthly life of the Lord Jesus Christ was in preparation for His atoning death upon the cross. His agony in the Garden of Gethsemane reveals something of the sorrow and suffering He was about to endure on behalf of sinners. There are four main aspects to the pain that Christ experienced. We will cover these in two studies.

The Crucifixion

It is often assumed, by well-meaning believers, that Jesus' physical suffering was worse than any man has ever endured, but historical fact proves this false. There are worse and more agonising deaths than crucifixion, and we have to note that two other men were crucified with Him who had their legs broken (John 19:32). Scripture never indicates that the Lord suffered more than any man, though this does not lessen the terrible suffering which crucifixion produced. Unless we understand what this form of execution did to the body we will never know the full sense of what Jesus underwent.

Crucifixion, apart from the pain caused by the nails, brought about a very slow death by suffocation. The outstretched arms pulled the person upward and outward, so that he would continuously gasp for breath. Every movement to ease the discomfort would only cause more intense pain. If he had been flogged, as Christ was, every time he moved or even twitched meant that the wounds would scrap against the rough wood of the cross. Seneca (3 B.C. – 65 A.D.), a Roman philosopher, described crucifixion as a “long drawn-out agony” (Epistle 101, Section 14). Criminals could hang on the cross for several days, which often became too much for even the most hardened of onlookers to bear. At this point the legs of the crucified were broken so that they could no longer support their weight, and causing fluid to build up in the pericardium (a membranous sac enclosing the heart). Death was almost instant.

Jesus' physical death

Christ suffered for our sins (1 Corinthians 15:3), but the Father did not allow His Son to go through unnecessary pain and torment. His suffering fully met the requirements of the Law, no more and no less. This means that God's righteous anger was satisfied to the full; anything more than this would achieve nothing. When Jesus' cried, “It is finished” (John 19:30), there was nothing more He could do or experience to save sinners. The sacrifice of His holy life was the perfect ransom for all.

The Lord was already dead when the Romans came to break His legs to please the Jews (John 19:31-33). This fulfilled the ancient prophecy which said that none of the Messiah's bones would be broken (Psalm 34:20), and in turn proved that He was the perfect Lamb of God (Exodus 12:46; Numbers 9:12; John 19:32; 1 Corinthians 5:7).

To convince himself that Jesus was dead, a soldier thrust a spear into His side, thus piercing the pericardium. From this wound came blood and water, and revealed that He was dead (John 19:34). It is interesting to note that Zechariah 12:10 and Psalm 22:16 both use the word “pierced”. In the former it literally means “thrust through with a spear or sword”, while the latter means “hammered in” (as with the nails). Thomas would be eternally thankful for the action of the soldier (John 20:27-29).

The notion that Jesus died spiritually has no place in Scripture.

Conclusion

Scripture does not present us with the gory details of the Lord's death on the cross for a very good reason. God wants us to focus on why Christ died rather than the method. Those who misunderstand the true meaning of the cross glorify the agonies of the flesh and know virtually nothing of why Christ's death is important. Though the method fulfilled prophecy, it is the reason why He became the sacrifice for our sins that brings salvation to our souls. Without His physical death the Lord's sufferings would never atone for our sins. The atonement (propitiation) is in His blood (1 John 2:2; Romans 3:25).

Study 8

The Suffering of Christ (part 2)

The Sin Bearer

“For He hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him”
(2 Corinthians 5:21)

Introduction

The physical pain that Jesus bore is beyond our imagination. Films such as “The Passion of the Christ” pay undue attention to this part of His life, and in doing so misrepresent what Jesus came to do. Added to this problem is the fact that few people, even within the church, understand the psychological pain the Lord experienced as He bore our sin and guilt. The psychological aspect of His suffering was far more intense than the physical. To focus upon only one aspect of the Lord’s suffering will leave us with an inadequate understanding of His sacrifice.

Perfectly holy

As believers we feel shame and remorse when we disobey the Lord. We realise that our sin has caused a break in the fellowship we enjoy with God (Isaiah 59:2). This brings guilt and condemnation. The more we desire to live a sanctified life, the greater the anxiety we feel about sinning against Him.

How then did Jesus feel when He took upon Himself the “sins of the world” (John 1:29)? He was absolutely holy in every way. As God, He would have hated sin with a passion. Since He was holy, sin was completely alien to Him (1 Peter 2:24; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Hebrews 7:26). Yet, because He loved the Father and sinners, He willingly took upon Himself the full weight of our sin. It is impossible, on this side of eternity, to grasp the inner pain this must have caused Him as He became the sin bearer.

Made to be sin

Everyone knows the wonderful words recorded in Isaiah 53:6, 12, which states that “The LORD hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all ... He bore the sins of many.” It was obviously to Isaiah 53 that John the Baptist was referring to when he announced that Jesus was “The Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world” (John 1:29). The apostle Paul also teaches Jesus was “made ... to be sin for us” (2 Corinthians 5:21). This portrayal of the Messiah as the sin bearer will endure throughout eternity (Revelation 5:12).

Made a curse for us

Paul, in Galatians 3:13, makes use of a very strong term when he says that Christ was “made a curse for us.” He refers back to Deuteronomy 21:22-23 where it speaks of a criminal who has “committed a sin worthy of death,” and that his execution proved that he was “accursed of God.” No wonder Isaiah describes Christ as being “smitten of God” when He “laid on Him the iniquity of us all” (Isaiah 53:6). The only begotten and holy Son of God took upon Himself the curse!

He took our guilt

Our guilt was imputed to Christ in exactly the same way Adam’s sin was imputed to us. By taking upon Himself every aspect of man’s sin, Jesus, as the sin bearer, was looked

upon by the Father as the guilty one. This does not infer that Jesus' nature became sinful, but that He voluntarily transferred our guilt to Himself, and thus make Himself the only person worthy of the full force of the wrath of God (Romans 8:1.)

Conclusion

The Saviour satisfied every demand of the law. The righteousness and justice of God was maintained. The cost of our atonement cannot be paid through good works, religious deeds or morality. God simply expects us to trust in the one who paid the price, took our place, and made it possible for us to enter into the holy of holies (Hebrews 10:14-20).

The Suffering of Christ (part 3)

Abandoned by all

“And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?”
(Matthew 27:46)

Introduction

We must include in our study the fact that the Lord Jesus Christ suffered for our sins alone. Roman Catholicism, not content with undermining the sacrifice of Christ through the doctrine of transubstantiation, places Mary alongside Him, so that her grief has meritorious grace for the sinner. Though she and a few of Jesus' followers stood at the foot of the cross, some afar off, He was completely abandoned by all.

Forsaken by His disciples

Jesus took Peter, James and John with Him to the Garden of Gethsemane to pray. This was the night before the crucifixion and His soul was in intense agony and sorrow as He prepared Himself (Mark 14:34). Not only could they not stay awake, even for one hour, they all fled when they saw the soldiers coming to arrest Jesus (Matthew 26:56). In the midst of His pain Jesus must have felt totally rejected.

What more could the Lord have done to gain their loyalty and confidence? He was their friend as well as Saviour (John 15:15), and He truly loved them (John 13:1). He had chosen them to follow Him despite knowing what they were capable of (Matthew 26:31; Zechariah 13:7). They all abandoned Him in His hour of need (Isaiah 53:3).

Forsaken by His Father

The Father, Son and Holy Spirit had been united throughout eternity past, but now the worst event in history was about to take place. Moments before His death Jesus felt what all unsaved sinners experience when God turns His face away from them and they are doomed to everlasting damnation. Scripture teaches us that sin has this effect upon God (Isaiah 59:2; 64:7).

The full weight of man's sin was laid upon Jesus as He hung upon the cross (Isaiah 53:6), for He was made “to be sin for us, who knew no sin” (2 Corinthians 5:21). The sense of complete abandonment came upon Him, therefore He cried, “My God, why hast Thou forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:46). That eternal and joyous fellowship with the Father was severed. We may never fully comprehend what it cost Him, but we will always understand that we caused all this through our sin.

The apostle Paul teaches that God willed all this to happen so that He could offer man a way back into fellowship with Him (Colossians 1:19-22), and this fulfilled the prophecy found in Isaiah 53:10.

Conclusion

Christ, even though He is God the Son, underwent this suffering, death and alienation for us. He did it for one reason only, and that is love. Love for His Father (Hebrews 5:8-9), and love for us (Revelation 1:5; 1 John 4:19; Ephesians 5:2).

Maybe others have abandoned us, but upon reflection we realise that we had a part to play in causing it, and should have acted differently. Jesus had done nothing wrong. There was no just cause for Him to experience this abandonment, nor could He have done anything any differently. His death on Calvary was the only way for man to be reconciled to God. He experienced all of this so that the truly repentant sinner would not have to. He took our place and was the perfect sacrifice to atone for our sin.

Study 10

Redemption through the Blood

“For the life of the flesh is in the blood: and I have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement for your souls: for it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul. Therefore I said unto the children of Israel, No soul of you shall eat blood, neither shall any stranger that sojourneth among you eat blood. And whatsoever man there be of the children of Israel, or of the strangers that sojourn among you, which hunteth and catcheth any beast or fowl that may be eaten; he shall even pour out the blood thereof, and cover it with dust. For it is the life of all flesh; the blood of it is for the life thereof: therefore I said unto the children of Israel, Ye shall eat

the blood of no

manner of flesh: for the life of all flesh is the blood thereof:

whosoever eateth it shall be cut off”

(Leviticus 17:11-14)

Introduction

The apostle Peter clearly states that the believer’s redemption was bought and paid for through the sacrificial death of the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Peter 1:18-19), therefore in this study we will further investigate why the sinner cannot be saved through any other means.

Wonder working power in the blood

Blood is the life of the body, so it is impossible to exist without it. The Old Testament placed great emphasis on blood, even that of animals (Leviticus 17:11-14; 4:3, 14, 27.) The offering which Abel brought before God was received, but the bloodless sacrifice of Cain was rejected (Genesis 4:1-6). Apart from anything else the story proves that man cannot redeem himself through plants, silver and gold or any kind of good work. The power is in the blood. The Old Testament lamb had to be purchased with money to show that atonement did not come cheap; while the New Testament Lamb is priceless (man cannot afford to pay so great a price).

Some modern translation unwisely reject the wording of Acts 20:28, “...the church of God, which he hath purchased with His own blood” by making it read, “the blood of His own.” It is the blood of Christ that is referred to in this verse, but changing the text removes the divine power from it. “His own blood” indicates that the Trinity planned this way of atonement.

Sin always equals death, but the blood of Christ is life (Romans 6:23; 3:23). Since the sinner cannot atone for his sin it needed someone else to do it for him and die in his place. Our sin brought about Christ’s death, but His death would be insufficient if eternal life was not the result (Hebrews 2:9). The power of Jesus’ blood is evidenced in the sinner receiving eternal life through faith in His name.

Evidence of the power of the blood

The New Testament reveals exactly what the blood of the Saviour has achieved for the sinner. Every believer ought to bear witness to this power in their own lives. Here we will briefly look at three aspects of what the blood has done for us.

1. Death has lost its sting (1 Corinthians 15:55-56). The grave could not hold Jesus (Hebrews 13:20). If He had not risen, regardless of how precious His blood is, no one would have received eternal life (1 Corinthians 15:14). Once sin had been dealt with on the cross death had to release its hold on Christ, and since He “tasted death” for us all, the repentant sinner can enjoy salvation (Romans 6:6-13; Galatians 2:20; Colossians 2:12-13, 3:1).

2. Heaven – the eternal home (John 14:2-3). Until Jesus Christ died on the cross Heaven was locked to all men. His entrance into Heaven with His blood has opened the gates so that all who believe can go in (Hebrews 9:12).

3. Lives transformed (1 Peter 1:18-19). Believers have been redeemed (delivered) from sin, Satan and eternal death. Only those who have come to God through the power of Christ’s blood are transformed into God’s elect (1 Peter 1:2). The evidence of such transformation is seen in a holy life (sanctification).

Conclusion

Without coming to Him the right way, through faith alone, we cannot please God (Hebrews 11:6), therefore faith is vital if the power of the blood is to be manifest in our lives. No one, despite what Calvinists teach, is automatically saved, for faith is an act of the will in those who accept that the blood is the only means of salvation. Only those who have faith in Christ's sacrifice can claim to be saved. If automatic election (selection) is true, then there was no need for Christ to die.

Andrew Murray writes that the blood of Jesus still "works in the surrendered soul with a ceaseless power of life." There is no greater power in Heaven or on earth than the redeeming, atoning and transforming blood of Christ.

Study 11

Sanctification through the Atonement

“For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified”
(Hebrews 10:14)

Introduction

The blood of the Lord Jesus Christ not only reconciles us to God, but it also gives us the power to live holy and godly lives. Those who have had their sins cleansed away through the blood ought to live sanctified lives.

Is the Lord ashamed of us?

“For both He that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one: for which cause He is not ashamed to call them brethren” (Hebrews 2:11). This text reveals that those who are redeemed through the blood are Christ’s blood-brothers. This in turn means that they should exhibit His nature in their daily lives. The Lord is not ashamed of those who are truly washed by His sanctifying and atoning blood, but how often we bring shame upon Him by the things we do and say! We can make Him ashamed by not living up to the word of God (Mark 8:38; Romans 1:16), by continuing to live sinfully (Romans 6:21-23; Philippians 1:20-22), and by not abiding in Him (1 John 2:28-29; Hebrews 10:29).

His blood has perfected us

“He hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified” (Hebrews 10:14). Some commentators put this in the future tense to avoid the obvious sin in their lives; for example, Barnes in his Notes on the New Testament writes, “Be made perfect at some future period.” That it is past tense is plainly seen in the text since the “one offering” was made on Calvary’s cross. In Hebrews 10:10 Paul writes, “By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.” Placing this aspect of Christ’s atoning and sanctifying work in the future actually undermines the efficiency of His blood. Though sanctification is progressive, its work began when the Lord shed His blood for us. Those who are sanctified are set apart for His service.

Are we willing?

Regardless of the theological arguments concerning sanctification (progressive, instantaneous or finalised at death), every true followers of Christ ought to walk in holiness. This means that we ought to take hold of His cross and suffer the reproach it might bring ... “Wherefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered without the gate. Let us go forth therefore unto Him without the camp, bearing His reproach” (Hebrews 13:12-13.) If the Lord has chosen this way to sanctify us, then surely the cross is the way to maintain a sanctified life. Jesus encourages the believer to “deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me” (Luke 9:23). “Bearing His reproach” is the same as laying down our lives for Christ ... “For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it. For what is a man advantaged, if he gain the whole world, and lose himself, or be cast away? For whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he shall come in his own glory, and in his Father’s, and of the holy angels” (Luke 9:24-26). How can we hope to experience the blessings of the atonement if we are unwilling to take the first steps on the pathway of holiness? Why are so few are willing to be obedient to His will and word?

Conclusion

It is a shame that most Christians put their trust in the so-called 'sinner's prayer' they recited in the past rather than in the Lord whose atoning blood paid the price for the sinner's salvation. While they do believe that His blood has washed away their sin, their lives reveal something very different. He died to both save us and enable us to live a holy life.

Study 12

Unlimited Atonement

“The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance”
(2 Peter 3:9)

Introduction

To some the doctrine of ‘unlimited atonement’ is the same as the false notion of ‘universalism’ (the belief that all will be saved), but this reveals a faulty understanding of the atonement. While we believe that “God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son,” we maintain that it is only those who “believe in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). In this study we will take a brief look into why the atonement is unlimited.

All or few?

According to Calvinists salvation is limited to a few elect, and the rest are doomed to destruction since Christ did not atone for their sins. It is totally unscriptural to state that mankind has no free will, that is, they are unable to choose or exercise faith in Christ. John Calvin, being a lawyer, could not comprehend how God would bother inviting doomed sinners to Christ. This is a problem for a legalistic mind, but it is not for God. The atonement was necessary for the few, many, or all who were willing to accept Christ in faith. The blood is powerful enough to save millions as it is to atone for the individual. How many accept or reject Christ has nothing to do with the invitation or the efficiency of His blood.

Scriptural proof

The message of the Gospel has always been ... “Whosoever may come” (Revelation 22:17.) Being God’s last statement concerning salvation in the Bible, it is surprising that so many choose to reject it in favour of a ‘limited atonement.’

Paul teaches that Jesus Christ, as Mediator between God and man, “gave Himself a ransom for all” (1 Timothy 2:5-6). Does not the oft quoted John 3:16 say exactly the same thing? How sad it is to believe that the blood of Jesus Christ can only save a few when it is “good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth” (1 Timothy 2:3-4). Does not 2 Peter plainly state that God is “not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance”?

God, according to His sovereign grace, wills that all people receive the message of salvation ... “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations” (Matthew 28:19); “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15), or as Paul says in Titus 2:11, “For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men.” God had the whole human race in view when He sent His Son to die for sin ... “And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world” (1 John 4:14), and that such grace extends to all ... “But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man” (Hebrews 2:9), or as 1 Corinthians 5:15 states, “He died for all.”

Conclusion

There are many more Scriptures that prove the fact that God desires all men to come to Christ, and that the atoning blood of His Son is available to every sinner. If it is not God's will, then the Lord Jesus Christ sent His disciples on a fool's errand when He commissioned them to spread the truth, "Ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

The atonement is sufficient for all, but it manifests itself in those who exercise faith in Christ. His blood was the price paid for man's redemption, that the majority choose to reject Him in no way undermines its power or God's sovereignty.

"Choose you this day whom ye will serve" (Joshua 24:15.)

Study 13

Is Healing in the Atonement?

“Bless the LORD, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless His holy name.
Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits: who forgiveth all
thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases; who redeemeth thy life from de-
struction; who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies; who satis-
fieth thy mouth with good things; so that thy youth is
renewed like the eagle's”
(Psalm 103:3)

Introduction

So-called healing ministries have become big business in the church. It seems that Tetzels are once again promising deliverance, not from the fires of purgatory, but from sickness and disease if just the right amount of money is deposited in the ministry's coffers. Though the blessing of healing is misrepresented, it is important that we understand what the Bible actually says about this subject, and if healing is a part of the atonement or not.

Can all be healed?

To answer this question we must ask two questions; “Can all be saved?” The answer is obviously yes because God is “not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9). If this is true, why isn't everyone saved? If it is God's will for all to be saved the problem must lie in man's will, “Ye will not come to me, that ye might have life” (John 5:40). It all boils down to personal faith in Christ, “Without faith it is impossible to please Him: for he that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him” (Hebrews 11:6). Unbelievers and doubters receive nothing from God (James 1:7). By applying the same questions to healing we must end up with exactly the same conclusions.

We seek to prove in this study that salvation and healing are part of the atonement. That few actually come to Christ in no way undermines the provision made through His blood. The same reasoning holds true for healing.

Prophetically announced

The prophet Isaiah spoke prophetically about the provision of healing in the atonement, “Surely He hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted” (Isaiah 53:4). Though this text largely deals with salvation it does apply itself to bodily healing. Matthew translates this verse in his gospel as follows: “When the even was come, they brought unto Him many that were possessed with devils: and he cast out the spirits with his word, and healed all that were sick: That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses” (Matthew 8:16-17).

Healing part of the atonement

When Jesus was reprimanded by the Scribes for saying He was able to forgive sins, He replied, "Why reason ye these things in your hearts? Whether is it easier to say to the sick of the palsy, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and take up thy bed, and walk?" What happened next proved that He had the power to do both, "But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (He saith to the sick of the palsy,) I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy bed, and go thy way into thine house. And immediately he arose, took up the bed, and went forth before them all; insomuch that they were all amazed, and glorified God, saying, We never saw it on this fashion" (Mark 2:8-13). There are still those who fail to grasp that Jesus can save and heal. Since He can do the greater work of salvation can we not accept that He can do the lesser?

We should note that Jesus did not die on the cross to heal diseases. If this were the case everyone coming for salvation should be instantly healed. Nevertheless it is part of the overall atoning work of Christ, for the atonement results from His life as well as His death. 1 Peter 2:24, "By whose stripes ye were healed" deals with sin rather than physical healing just as the context reveals. Healing for the body has always been an intervention of God's mercy and grace.

The church and sickness

Christians are not immune from illness since we live in a fallen world (Romans 8:18-25). There is nothing wrong with taking medication or undergoing surgery if we get sick, for most illnesses are a result of living in the natural world (1 Timothy 5:23). The great hymn writer, Fanny Crosby, was blind but she never gave up her faith in Christ, because she understood that her blindness was not a result of sin. She wrote:

*O what a happy soul am I!
Although I cannot see
I am resolved that in this world
Contented I will be.*

*How many blessings I enjoy,
That other people don't.
To weep and sigh because I'm blind,
I cannot, and I won't.*

Not all sicknesses come from Satan or contrary to the will of God. If this were so there would be no divine chastisement for God's children. Deuteronomy 32:39, 7:15; 28:60, 30:19-20, 32:45; Exodus 15:26 all teach that God can afflict the people for chastisement even though He does not want to. Some sickness, amongst believers, is caused by persistent and wilful sin (Psalm 38:3). 1 Corinthians 11:30 reminds us that partaking of the Lord's table unworthily can bring illness and even death, therefore, no wonder James writes, "Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him. Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another,

that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much” (James 5:14-16). The fact is that most Christians call on the doctor before they call on the Lord!

God has not changed

“If thou wilt diligently hearken to the voice of the LORD thy God, and wilt do that which is right in his sight, and wilt give ear to His commandments, and keep all His statutes, I will put none of these diseases upon thee, which I have brought upon the Egyptians: for I am the LORD that healeth thee” (Exodus 15:26). No one is turned away who come to Christ for help. Both salvation and healing are available for those who come in faith. It is we who have changed when things go wrong, not God (Hebrews 13:8).

We do not know all the personal details why some do not get healed, just as we do not know what keeps our unsaved family and friends from accepting Christ, but we do believe that the problem is with man and this fallen world rather than God.

Conclusion

Throughout Bible history we find God saving and healing people. We believe that He is just as able today as He was back then. We must submit ourselves to His will, whether in health or sickness.

Study 14

Pleading the Blood

“Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; and having an high priest over the house of God; let us draw near with a true heart in full

assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water”
(Hebrews 10:19-22)

Introduction

The physical blood of the Lord Jesus Christ was poured out for us about 2,000 years ago, yet it is still effective today. God the Father accepted His Son's sacrifice as full payment for the sins of the world, and when His blood is applied to the sinner who exercises faith in Him, he has eternal life (Ephesians 1:7; Colossians 1:14; Revelation 1:5).

Miracle or magic?

The transforming power of Christ's atoning blood should be accepted as a miracle in the lives of those who believe, but unfortunately there are some who treat it as magic.

Jesus had to die at a specific time in history. If anyone had come into contact with His blood prior to this (i.e. at his circumcision) there would be no transference of power, healing, or atonement. If a measure of His blood had been caught in a jar it would not of itself have any saving power. Those who prepared His body for burial told nothing of any transforming effect on touching the blood. It is what Christ accomplished on the cross that counts (1 Corinthians 15:3; Romans 5:8-10; Philippians 2:8; Hebrews 9:15).

As with the lamb under the Old Covenant, Jesus' death was on a chosen day and for a specific purpose. Any other day would have made the sacrifice unacceptable to God. The lamb's blood applied to the doorway a day before or after would not have saved the Israelites (Exodus 12:13-14; 1 Corinthians 5:7). Also no repetition of the act was permitted to avoid the Passover remembrance service becoming mystical or magic. Roman Catholicism has reduced the sacrifice of Christ to a magical formula through transubstantiation. Faith alone makes the finished work of Christ real in a believer's life (Hebrews 9:17-14, 13:20; Colossians 1:20).

Pleading the blood

The priest performing the mass and the Christian who pleads the blood of Christ over objects and people are guilty of the same misunderstanding of His death on the cross. In Charismatic circles, and in the Faith Movement, the blood is pleaded over personal property, sick people and self. True faith is not found in casting a magical spell over things, instead it finds its foundation in the finished work of Jesus on Calvary. To do otherwise actually reveals a lack of faith in Christ.

It is Christ alone who applies the power of His blood on those who believe in Him. Objects cannot have faith, and unsaved relatives must believe in Him before they can have eternal life. In the Old Testament the blood was never sprinkled upon unclean vessels, nor did the priest go about sprinkling everything and everyone he desired. Whatever was sprinkled with blood was according to God's strict instructions. Yes, we can pray for their salvation, even their healing, but there is no need to plead the blood. Accepting Christ as Saviour is a personal choice for each individual.

If there were a single admonition in Scripture to plead the blood then this study would not only fall apart but would also be heretical, but there are no such verses.

Neither the apostles nor the early church engaged in the unbiblical practice of pleading the blood. Like them we must preach and teach God's word to the unsaved and backsliders,

encouraging them to repent and get right with Him (1 John 1:7-9). In the Old Testament only the High Priest was permitted to handle the blood, and so it is with our Great High Priest, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Conclusion

The blood of Christ does continue to cleanse today. All who accept Him by faith are delivered, justified and made right with God. The Lord never intended His blood to become a magical formula, to treat it as such distorts what the atonement is all about.