

Atonement for Sin (1 John 1:8-9)



Sin came into the world through Adam and Eve, thereby corrupting and tainting the life and future of all generations of humanity (Romans 5:14). There were consequences for their sins. Sins must be atoned for by the individual who commits the sin to stay in right relationship with God. According to Van A. Harvey, *atonement* “refers to the reconciliation of two parties.” Harvey further writes “In Christian theology, it refers to the restoration of the broken relationship between God and man (Adam and Eve) that was accomplished in the life and death of Jesus Christ” in the New Testament scriptures.

Did Adam and Eve atone for their sins? According to www.google.com, the following happened:

...Adam and Eve did not perform their own atonement. Instead, after realizing their disobedience, they tried to cover their guilt and shame with garments made of sewn fig leaves. This inadequate covering was replaced by God, who clothed them with (garments of) skins...

Genesis 3:21

What do believers need to understand about atonement and why do we need it? Harvey writes that “man is enslaved by sin, death, and the devil (Satan)” and only “God in Christ (not man) accomplishes the work of defeating these powers.” God offers satisfaction for the sins of man in the form of a man named Jesus Christ. In other words, Christ under the guidance of his father takes man’s punishment upon himself to satisfy God the Father’s demands of justice for all humanity. Confessing our sins leads to our receiving God’s mercy.

Sometimes the consequences for sins are atoned indirectly through a close relative, a friend, or an associate. In any case, a person knows his or her sins even when it does not affect them directly. Consequences for sin are always atoned close to the individual that committed it and for the future, it serves as a form of behavior correction if the person recognizes and acknowledges the sin.

You cannot discuss *atonement* without including *propitiation*. Both words are translated in Greek as the noun *hilasmos* which means “an atoning sacrifice or to appease and reconcile.” Another Greek word for both is the noun *hilasterion* which refers to the “mercy seat” of God or the place where believers receive atonement for their sins. “The word *atonement* was coined by the reformer William Tyndale to describe what took place at the cross,” according to Grant Castleberry of Unashamed Truth Ministries, Inc.

Atonement is a theme in the story of the Israelites as they traveled 40 years in the wilderness to reach the Promised Land while facing the realization that they needed the forgiveness of their god Yahweh to keep their lives righteous. Ancient Jewish atonement in the Old Testament was accomplished through animal sacrifice. Sinners seeking to be reconciled with God would lay a hand on the head of the sacrificial animal while the blood was taken into the Holy of Holies (the innermost most sacred sanctuary in the ancient Tabernacle or Temple representing the earthly dwelling place of God’s presence or Spirit in the Ark of the Covenant which was carried from place to place by the Israelites). The hand on the animal’s head and the blood of the animal signified the sinner’s identification with the sacrificed animal as an atonement of sin and the need for Yahweh in the atonement process. *Propitiation*, mentioned earlier in this text, refers to “God’s mercy seat or covering of the Ark of the Covenant which was the place where propitiation was stored or disclosed.

In the New Testament, our sins have already been atoned for with the life and death of Jesus Christ on the cross as evidenced in the following scriptures: (Romans 4:25; Romans 5:8,14; I Peter 2:24; 2 Corinthians 5:14). Hebrews 12:2 reminds us that we look “unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross” for believers (KJV). In other words, Jesus Christ is described as the propitiation for man’s sins.

No one escapes sin. We all have sins (Galatians 5:19-21; Romans 3:9-12, Psalm 14:1-3, Ecclesiastes 7:20, Romans 5:12-15). I John 1:8-9 reads “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (KJV). No one is above the laws of the god of the universe. That is one of the reasons churches, temples, synagogues, or community groups exist, even though one can atone for sin outside the walls of the church.

Most Protestant churches deal with sin publically at the end of the worship service during the altar call where confessions are made of a sin or may be in a more personal setting such as a counseling session. Other denominations, such as the Roman Catholic Church, deal with sin “through the Sacrament of Reconciliation (Confession) where a contrite sinner confesses (secretly) to a priest and receives absolution” (the remission of sins pronounced by a priest in the Sacrament of penance). The readings and homilies of these denominations help prepare one to release their sins to God in his or her own time. A few scriptures to help believers learn how to atone for sin and rid themselves of it are Matthew 26:41, Matthew 5:29-30, Romans 6:11, and Romans 8:13.

God loves sinners as well as those who believe in Him. The connection to God for atonement achieved “by the embodiment of God’s sacrificial love in the life and passion of Christ...moves the heart in a way no transaction or doctrine can do,” according to Van A. Harvey. We can all know God and his love for ourselves as we go to him in prayer and meditation in our own way to absolve our sins when we are ready. John 14:6 reminds us that Jesus Christ is “the way, the truth, and the life” (KJV). In other words, Christ is the gateway to becoming a full-fledged member of the Kingdom of God. He will lead the believer to freedom of Spirit, body, and mind as we do our part to atone for our sins and for the sins of others.

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