

“Atonement” or “Propitiation”

Excursus

Propitiation

Romans 3:21-31 [ESV]

²¹ But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— **²² the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.**

For there is no distinction: **²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, ²⁵ whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith.**

This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. **²⁶ It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.**

²⁷ Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? By a law of works? No, but by the law of faith. ²⁸ For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law. ²⁹ Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, ³⁰ since God is one—who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith. ³¹ Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law.

Blessed are those...

Romans 4:1-8 [ESV]

¹ What then shall we say was gained by Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh? ² For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. ³ For what does the Scripture say? **“Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.”**

⁴ Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. ⁵ And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his **faith is counted as righteousness**, ⁶ just as David also speaks of the blessing of the one to whom God counts righteousness apart from works: ⁷ **“Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; ⁸ blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin.”**

10 Commandments

Crime and Punishment

Commandment		Punishment
1	No Other Gods Deut 5:7, Exod 20:3	Death by stoning Deut 13:10
2	No Idolatry Deut 5:8, Exod 20:4	Death by stoning (Deut 13:10)
3	No Blaspheming God's Name Deut 5:11, Exod 20:7	No Explicit Punishment – However, God will not hold the offender blameless, implying eternal consequences
4	No Sabbath Violations Deut 5:12, Exod 20:8	Death by stoning Exod 31:14, Numbers 15:32-36
5	Honor Parents Deut 5:16, Exod 20:12	Death by stoning Deut 21:18-21
6	No Murder Deut 5:17, Exod 20:13	Death Num 35:16-21
7	No Adultery Deut 5:18, Exod 20:14	Death Leviticus 20:10
8	No Stealing Deut 5:19, Exod 20:15	Repayment and Restitution Exod 22:1
9	No False Witness Deut 5:20, Exod 20:16	Depends on the severity, but not capital except in capital cases – i.e. lying in a murder trial (Deut 19:18-21)
10	No Coveting Deut 5:21, Exod 20:17	No Explicit Punishment

Unintentional Sin Offering Example

Leviticus 4:13-20 [ESV]

¹³ "If the whole congregation of Israel sins unintentionally and the thing is hidden from the eyes of the assembly, and they do any one of the things that by the LORD's commandments ought not to be done, and they realize their guilt, ¹⁴ when the sin which they have committed becomes known, the assembly shall offer a bull from the herd for a sin offering and bring it in front of the tent of meeting. ¹⁵ And the elders of the congregation shall lay their hands on the head of the bull before the LORD, and the bull shall be killed before the LORD. ¹⁶ Then the anointed priest shall bring some of the blood of the bull into the tent of meeting, ¹⁷ and the priest shall dip his finger in the blood and sprinkle it seven times before the LORD in front of the veil. ¹⁸ And he shall put some of the blood on the horns of the altar that is in the tent of meeting before the LORD, and the rest of the blood he shall pour out at the base of the altar of burnt offering that is at the entrance of the tent of meeting. ¹⁹ And all its fat he shall take from it and burn on the altar. ²⁰ Thus shall he do with the bull. As he did with the bull of the sin offering, so shall he do with this. And the priest shall make atonement for them, and they shall be forgiven.

Atoning Sacrifice

How the ancients solved the problem of sin

I. Substitution

A. The substitute or “victim” pays debt(s) that we cannot

1. Victim derives from the Latin “victimus” which means sacrifice

a. Victims of crimes are actually sacrifices to false gods

b. For example, a robbery victim is an unwilling sacrifice to greed, which is idolatry [Colossians 3:5]

B. The sacrifice takes the full blame for the sin

II. Satisfaction

A. The death of the sacrifice satisfies the debt

B. The debt is “forgiven” in that no additional payment is required

III. Covering

A. The blood of the sacrifice covers over the sin

B. By covering over the sin, the sin is remembered no more

All 3 concepts form the basis of “justification”

Atonement

Comparison between the Mosaic Law and Christ

- I. In the OT Sacrificial System, atonement through animal sacrifice was generally available for unintentional sins (see Leviticus 4)
 - A. In the Mosaic Law, there was no atonement available for an intentional sin
 - B. Even if unintentional, the Mosaic Law could not atone for all sins (i.e. – 3rd Commandment)
- II. Through Christ and His work on the Cross, atonement is available for all sin
 - A. Both intentional and unintentional sin, as well for all 10 Commandments
 - B. Christ atones for all sin: past, present, and future
- III. “Forgiveness” (as we understand it) is a feature of atonement, but it is not atonement
 - A. Discharges a debt but falls woefully short of “satisfaction” (for example, divine wrath is not satisfied – only Christ can satisfy divine wrath)

Atonement vs. Forgiveness

A Christian Ethic

- I. In general, Christians should forgive those who sin against them [Matthew 6:12-15]
 - (A) ¹² ... And forgive us our debts,
 - (B) as we have forgiven our debtors.
 - (C) ¹³ And carry us not into the judgment,
 - (D) but deliver us from the Evil One.
 - (E) ¹⁴ For if you forgive others their offenses,
 - (F) your Heavenly Father will also forgive you,
 - (G) ¹⁵ but if you do not forgive others their offenses,
 - (H) your father will certainly not forgive your offenses.
- II. What this means is that Christians should not exact payment for debts incurred against themselves (this is why David was careful not to avenge himself)
- III. However, Christians are not authorized to “atone” for sin nor “justify” sinners
 - A. “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord” [Romans 12:19] is a double edged sword – only God can truly forgive a person
- IV. Although a Christian can “forgive” a specific sin against his or her own person, he or she may still be required to prosecute the sinner through Civil or Church courts, as God administers justice, especially on behalf of His elect
 - A. To ignore justice or to falsely justify the guilty makes us party to the sin
 - B. Enabling sin is just as bad as directly perpetrating it
- V. Forgiveness does not mean that a relationship is “restored” like atonement

Forgive but do not Justify those who sin against you

Romans 12:17-21 [ESV]

17 Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. ¹⁸ If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. ¹⁹ **Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord."** ²⁰ To the contrary, **"if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head."** ²¹ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Old Testament Example of Forgiveness

1 Samuel 26:3-12 [ESV]

³ And Saul encamped on the hill of Hachilah, which is beside the road on the east of Jeshimon. But David remained in the wilderness. When he saw that Saul came after him into the wilderness, ⁴ David sent out spies and learned that Saul had come. ⁵ Then David rose and came to the place where Saul had encamped. And David saw the place where Saul lay, with Abner the son of Ner, the commander of his army. Saul was lying within the encampment, while the army was encamped around him. ⁶ Then David said to Ahimelech the Hittite, and to Joab's brother Abishai the son of Zeruah, "Who will go down with me into the camp to Saul?" And Abishai said, "I will go down with you." ⁷ So David and Abishai went to the army by night. And there lay Saul sleeping within the encampment, with his spear stuck in the ground at his head, and Abner and the army lay around him. ⁸ Then said Abishai to David, "God has given your enemy into your hand this day. Now please let me pin him to the earth with one stroke of the spear, and I will not strike him twice." ⁹ But David said to Abishai, "Do not destroy him, for who can put out his hand against the LORD's anointed and be guiltless?" ¹⁰ And David said, "As the LORD lives, the LORD will strike him, or his day will come to die, or he will go down into battle and perish. ¹¹ The LORD forbid that I should put out my hand against the LORD's anointed. But take now the spear that is at his head and the jar of water, and let us go." ¹² So David took the spear and the jar of water from Saul's head, and they went away. No man saw it or knew it, nor did any awake, for they were all asleep, because a deep sleep from the LORD had fallen upon them.

Old Testament Example of Forgiveness

1 Samuel 26:13-20 [ESV]

¹³ Then David went over to the other side and stood far off on the top of the hill, with a great space between them. ¹⁴ And David called to the army, and to Abner the son of Ner, saying, "Will you not answer, Abner?" Then Abner answered, "Who are you who calls to the king?" ¹⁵ And David said to Abner, "Are you not a man? Who is like you in Israel? Why then have you not kept watch over your lord the king? For one of the people came in to destroy the king your lord. ¹⁶ This thing that you have done is not good. As the LORD lives, you deserve to die, because you have not kept watch over your lord, the LORD's anointed. And now see where the king's spear is and the jar of water that was at his head." ¹⁷ Saul recognized David's voice and said, "Is this your voice, my son David?" And David said, "It is my voice, my lord, O king." ¹⁸ And he said, "Why does my lord pursue after his servant? For what have I done? What evil is on my hands? ¹⁹ Now therefore let my lord the king hear the words of his servant. If it is the LORD who has stirred you up against me, may he accept an offering, but if it is men, may they be cursed before the LORD, for they have driven me out this day that I should have no share in the heritage of the LORD, saying, 'Go, serve other gods.'" ²⁰ Now therefore, let not my blood fall to the earth away from the presence of the LORD, for the king of Israel has come out to seek a single flea like one who hunts a partridge in the mountains."

Old Testament Example of Forgiveness

1 Samuel 26:21-25 [ESV]

²¹ Then Saul said, "I have sinned. Return, my son David, for I will no more do you harm, because my life was precious in your eyes this day. Behold, I have acted foolishly, and have made a great mistake." ²² And David answered and said, "Here is the spear, O king! Let one of the young men come over and take it. ²³ The LORD rewards every man for his righteousness and his faithfulness, for the LORD gave you into my hand today, and I would not put out my hand against the LORD's anointed. ²⁴ Behold, as your life was precious this day in my sight, so may my life be precious in the sight of the LORD, and may he deliver me out of all tribulation." ²⁵ Then Saul said to David, "Blessed be you, my son David! You will do many things and will succeed in them." So David went his way, and Saul returned to his place.

Forgiveness in the Body of Christ

Matthew 18:21 - 35 [ESV]

²¹ Then Peter came up and said to him, "Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?" ²² Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven. ²³ "Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. ²⁴ When he began to settle, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. ²⁵ And since he could not pay, his master ordered him to be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made. ²⁶ So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.' ²⁷ And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt. ²⁸ But when that same servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii, and seizing him, he began to choke him, saying, 'Pay what you owe.' ²⁹ So his fellow servant fell down and pleaded with him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you.' ³⁰ He refused and went and put him in prison until he should pay the debt. ³¹ When his fellow servants saw what had taken place, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their master all that had taken place. ³² Then his master summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. ³³ And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?' ³⁴ And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers, until he should pay all his debt. ³⁵ **So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive⁶⁸ your brother from your heart."**

The New Covenant – “Forgive and Forget”

Jeremiah 31:31-34 [ESV]

³¹ "Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when **I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah,** ³² not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD. ³³ But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. ³⁴ And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. **For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.**"

In the New Covenant, atonement is contemplated since all the benefits of it are achieved: forgiveness, remembering sin no more, and full reinstatement of relationship.

Psalm 32

A Maskil of David

¹ ... **Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.**

² Blessed is the man against whom the Lord counts no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit.

³ For when I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long.

⁴ For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer. Selah

⁵ **I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity;** I said, “I will confess my transgressions to the Lord,” and you forgave the iniquity of my sin. Selah

⁶ Therefore let everyone who is godly offer prayer to you at a time when you may be found; surely in the rush of great waters, they shall not reach him.

⁷ **You are a hiding place for me;** you preserve me from trouble; you surround me with shouts of deliverance. Selah

⁸ I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my eye upon you. ⁹ Be not like a horse or a mule, without understanding, which must be curbed with bit and bridle, or it will not stay near you. ¹⁰ Many are the sorrows of the wicked, but steadfast love surrounds the one who trusts in the Lord.

¹¹ Be glad in the Lord, and rejoice, O righteous, and shout for joy, all you upright in heart!

Psalm 51:1-12

When Nathan the Prophet...

¹ Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy **blot out my transgressions.**

² **Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin!**

³ For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me.

⁴ Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment.

⁵ Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.

⁶ Behold, you delight in truth in the inward being, and you teach me wisdom in the secret heart.

⁷ **Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.**

⁸ Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that you have broken rejoice.

⁹ Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities.

¹⁰ Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.

¹¹ Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me.

¹² Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit.

Jesus Christ

Our Atoning Sacrifice or Propitiation

I. Substitution

- A. John 1:29 - The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"
- B. Romans 3:24-25

II. Satisfaction

- A. Hebrews 2:17 - Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.
- B. Revelation 5:9 - And they sang a new song, saying, "Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation..."

III. Covering

- A. Psalm 32
- B. Jeremiah 31:34 ... I will remember their sins no more...
- C. Romans 4:7