

“To the Praise of the Glory of His Grace”

The Atoning Death of Christ – The Work of Grace

Warren Charlton

Romans 3: 21-26

(Outline)

INTRODUCTION:

- A. OUR FOCUS IS THE GOSPEL OF GOD.
- B. OUR QUEST IS THE ATONEMENT OF CHRIST.

THE WORK OF GRACE:

- A. CHRIST’S ATONING DEATH IS A WORK OF GOD HIMSELF.
 - 1. GOD DID THIS TO SECURE THE RICHES OF HIS GRACE FOR SINNERS.
 - a) The Atoning Death of Christ was from the Love of God the Father.
 - 2. GOD DID THIS TO DEMONSTRATE HIS JUSTICE IN JUSTIFYING SINNERS.
 - a) The Atoning Death of Christ was an Absolute Necessity for God the Father.
- B. CHRIST’S ATONING DEATH IS A SACRIFICE DESIGNED TO DEAL WITH THE PROBLEM OF SIN.
 - 1. HIS DEATH WAS DESIGNED TO TURN ASIDE THE WRATH OF GOD THAT WAS AGAINST THEIR SIN.
 - a) Here we are given a Word of Comfort from God.
 - b) Here we are given a Word of Warning from God.
 - 2. HIS DEATH WAS DESIGNED TO LIBERATE SINNERS FROM THEIR BONDAGE TO SIN.
 - 3. HIS DEATH WAS DESIGNED TO IMPACT OUR LIVES PRACTICALLY.
 - a) It is designed to Equip us to become true Worshipers of God.
 - b) It is designed to Give us great Assurance before God.

“To the Praise of the Glory of His Grace”

The Atoning Death of Christ – The Work of Grace

Warren Charlton

Romans 3: 21-26

(Complete Manuscript)

Introduction:

A. Our Focus is the Gospel of God.

Today we go to the heart of the gospel. At the heart of the gospel is this gift of righteousness from God. This righteousness was manifested apart from the law. The Law and the Prophets bear witness of this righteousness, **but** it is the gospel that tells us the good news that this righteousness is given to all who believe in Christ Jesus. There is no difference among us, for we have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. In spite of the demerits of our sin, God justifies freely, as a gift of love, all sinners who place their trust in Christ. God declares those who believe to be as righteous as Christ, in his sight, and before his law. In Christ, the liabilities of our sins are cancelled, and the gift of righteousness from God is given to us. **Justification by the free grace of God – This is the Heart of the Gospel.**

But how can God do this? How can he be just and righteous, and yet **not** punish the sins of those who believe? Does not the law expose and convict us of sin? Does not the law hold all of us accountable to God for our sins? How can he declare ungodly people to be righteous before his law? How can a holy God show grace to those who deserve his fiery wrath? How can he give righteousness to those who are morally and spiritually bankrupt?

B. Our Quest is the Atonement of Christ.

A pocket dictionary says: “*Atonement refers to God’s act of dealing with the primary human problem, sin.*” Our quest is to discover what God did to secure the salvation of sinners. Sin was not only man’s primary problem; it was also God’s greatest problem. It was God’s **intention** to save those whom he had chosen in Christ, **but** what did he do to guarantee that they would be pronounced righteous and innocent of all sin against him? Our quest takes us to the cross of Christ. It is at the cross of Christ that we learn how God dealt with the great problem of sin.

The Work of God’s Grace:

A. Christ’s atoning death was a work of God himself.

Why did Christ become a man? Why, having become a human, did he die? Why did he choose to die the accursed death of the cross? Paul tells us very clearly that God presented Christ as an atoning sacrifice. God took the initiative to publicly display Christ Jesus as a propitiation in his blood. Christ was on the cross as an atoning sacrifice in fulfillment of the purposes of God. It was not man who took the initiative to make atonement for their sins. It was God who took the initiative to quench his own wrath that was against those whom he had chosen to save. Jesus was handed over to wicked men to be put to death, by God’s set purpose and foreknowledge. God did not spare his own Son but delivered him up for us all. Christ’s death on the cross was a sacrifice of atonement and it was a work of God himself. **Why would God do this?**

1. God did this to secure the riches of his grace for sinners. (vs.24-25)

God wanted to bestow his righteousness on those who put their faith in Christ. He wanted to acquit them of all their sins. His plan was to accept them as righteous in his sight. His purpose was to lavish the riches of his grace on them, freely, and for nothing. Though they had no merits of their own, even though they were unlovely in their sin, he was going to show them grace. **But**, by what means does his grace operate? Through what means will God's grace flow to sinners? Paul tells us it was through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. If redemption means to liberate, or rescue people by a ransom payment, how is Christ the source of the redemption for all who place their faith in him? Jesus is the source of redemption, because God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement through faith in his blood. (Packer-pg167)

Through his Son's obedience unto blood, God has secured the riches of his grace for sinners. For all who abandon their sin and put their trust in Christ, he will justify freely by his grace. Grace that is greater than all our sin, grace that freely gives us the righteousness of God, was secured by God **when** he set forth Jesus as a propitiation in his blood. The riches of grace flow into our lives because God acted to send his Son as a propitiation for our sins.

a) It is for this reason that we must emphasize the **Love of God** when we speak of the cross of Christ. The love of God is the source of the atonement. God presented Christ as an atoning **because** he had chosen to love sinners, like us. John wrote: *"This is love, not that we loved God, but he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins."* (1 John 4:10) Paul says: *"But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."* (Rom.5: 8; cf. John 3:16) When we stand at the foot of the Cross, we must be amazed at the love of God for us. His love for us is undeserved, unearned, yet unailing. Grace that is greater than all our sin comes to us, through the redemption that is in Christ, **because** God so loved us that he presented his Son as an atoning sacrifice in his blood. This is the love in which we believe, and upon which we rely every day of our lives.

John Murray made this observation: *"Any doctrine of the atonement is misdirected from the outset if it does not take account of the fact that the atonement is a provision of God's love."*

[God presented his Son as an atoning sacrifice in order that he would secure the riches of his grace for sinners. But there is another reason why God took the initiative to publicly display Christ as a sacrifice of atonement.]

2. God did this to demonstrate his justice in justifying sinners.

God acted publicly to proclaim his righteousness for not punishing the sins of those who believe in Christ. He did this by presenting Christ as an atoning sacrifice in his blood. God acted to place all the sins of his people on Jesus. God called Jesus into judgement for our sins. He punished our sins in his Son. God delivered up Jesus to damnation in order to quench and turn aside his wrath which was against us because of our sins.

Why would God curse and damn his own Son for the sins of others? Why would he bruise and crush his obedient Son for our sins? He did this to demonstrate his justice because of what he did in the past and in the present.

In the past, God was patient, and in his forbearance he had left sins unpunished. People after the flood were no better than the people who died in the flood. Yet God had not reacted to their evil or wicked ways with public acts of judgement. He postponed judgement. He kept on doing them good, with the hope that his goodness would lead them to repentance. How could he be just and righteous, if he did not exercise judgement against them for their sins?

In the present, how could the Judge of all the earth be just, and yet justify those who have faith in Jesus? How could he pronounce us innocent before his law, when we were full of sin? How could he declare us righteous, when in fact we were guilty of great evils? The answer is that God took the

initiative to have his Son suffer the condemnation of the sins of his people. God laid all our sins on Jesus, and executed his righteous and holy anger against Christ in our place. Our sins were not left unpunished. Justice was served. Retribution was executed, and judgement was inflicted for our ungodliness—**but** on Jesus the Lamb of God, standing in our place. Through the Christ's sacrifice of atonement God has demonstrated that he is righteous and just when he justifies all who put their hope and trust in Jesus Christ. [cf. 2Cor.5:21]

When people ask, "Could God have secured the salvation of his people in any other way?" The answer is found in this passage. Delivering up Jesus to be a propitiation for sins was **not** just the best of many ways for God to rescue sinners. **It was the only way!**

Before his Crucifixion Jesus told his disciples that "*The Son of man **must** suffer many things... **must** be killed and on the third day be raised to life.*" (Matt.16:21) His death was an absolute necessity for God's sake. Without the shed blood of his Son, God could not save us.

Again after his Resurrection, Jesus rebuked the slow of heart to believe all that the prophets had spoken. He asked them: "*Did not Christ **have** to suffer these things and then enter his glory?*" Salvation through the blood of Christ was an absolute necessity to God's purposes of grace. Salvation through the atoning death of Christ was an absolute necessity for God.

Summary: We have observed that Christ's atoning death was a work of God himself. God presented his Son as a sacrifice of atonement through faith in his blood for **two** reasons.

First, in order to secure the riches of his grace for sinners who believe in his Son. Secondly to show his justice in the salvation of his people. From these observations we drew **2** conclusions about the atoning death of Christ. The love of God is the source of Christ's atoning death; and his atoning death was an absolute necessity if God were to accomplish his purpose of saving his people from their sins. [How does this apply to our daily lives?]

I read a man's testimony of how God revitalized his faith in Christ. It was through the preaching of the cross of Christ: Dr. E.V. Hill asked this question in his sermon: "*If the cross of Christ doesn't change every minute of every day for the rest of your life, do you really believe in it?*" Does the cross of Christ change every minute of every day of your life? Do you really believe in the cross of our Saviour? The lifestyle, to which the NT calls us, is a life that is built around the cross.

Eg. Husbands to wives; forgiveness of one another; fleeing sexual immorality; prayer. The cornerstone of our faith and the cornerstone of our daily life is this amazing truth: **Christ's atoning death was the work of God himself.**

[But there is more to learn about Christ's atoning death. Notice...]

B. Christ's atoning death was a sacrifice designed to deal with the problem of sin.

How do we understand the Nature of Christ's death? What kind of death did Jesus die on the cross? His death on the cross was **not** the death of a martyr for a great cause. His death was **not** as a victim of injustice. His death was **not** an accident or an unfortunate event in the life of a rather remarkable person. The text tells us very clearly that his death was a sacrifice for sins of others. A sacrifice designed to deal with the problem of sin.

1. His death was designed to turn aside the wrath of God that was against our sins.

That is the meaning of the word 'propitiation'. God presented Jesus as a sacrifice that would appease or satisfy his wrath that was against us because of our sins. God's wrath is a serious reality. God is holy and his unchanging reaction to sin is to oppose it with all his might. God has a severe allergic reaction to our sin!

We are told in **Rom.1:18** that "*The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who oppress the truth by their wickedness.*" Three times we are reminded of God's actions of '*giving people over in the sinful desires of their hearts... giving them over*

to their shameful lusts...and giving them over to the power of a depraved mind'. His wrath is a relentless activity even now. The Lord is exercising a judicial hardening of people's hearts because of their sins. All of us, says Paul, are under sin, and we are therefore exposed to the wrath of God both in its present forms, and future manifestation, when God shall judge men's secrets through Jesus Christ.

How can God satisfy his wrath against our sins, and deliver us from condemnation? How can he execute his wrath against our sins, and still credit his righteousness to our lives? How can God punish all our sins, yet rescue us for life in the glory? How can we be delivered from the wrath of God?

The answer is found in the death of Christ. The word 'blood' tells us how Jesus accomplished propitiation through his death. Whenever the word 'blood' is used it refers to a life yielded up in a violent death. Packer says: "*Each time the word **blood** occurs; it is theological shorthand expressing the thought of a sacrifice for sin.*" (Our Saviour God, pg.127) Jesus died as a sacrifice for sin. He was offered up to God as that sacrifice that would suffer damnation in place of others. Jesus died bearing our sins, our guilt, and our condemnation. God presented his own Son as a sacrifice of atonement that would suffer the penalty of our sins in himself. [illust. Passover Lamb]

The greatest pain Jesus experienced on the cross came, **not** from man, **but** from God. **Isaiah** prophesies about Christ's death: "*He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities, the punishment that brought us peace was upon him and by his wounds we are healed.*" But I ask reverently: Who pierced him for our transgressions? Who crushed him for our iniquities? Who inflicted the punishment upon him that brings us peace? Who wounded the Lord for our healing? "*Yet it was the Lord's will to crush him and cause him to suffer...*"

It was as a sacrifice for our sins that Jesus shrieked: "*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*" On the cross, Jesus went into the abyss of dereliction. He suffered God-forsakenness so we may be forgiven. He was abandoned so we may be adopted. He was condemned so we could be accepted as righteous. The **Cup** that was filled with the wine of God's fury against our sin was pressed to the lips of Christ. By his death on the cross Jesus has turned aside the wrath of God from us. He is our propitiation, our satisfaction.

a) Here we find a word of **Comfort** and a word of **Warning**. There is much **Comfort** for those who have believed in Jesus. Through his atoning death we have been rescued from the wrath of God. In Christ we do not fear God's condemnation. We have peace with God. Augustus Toplady put it this way in one of his hymns:

*"If Thou hast my discharge procured
And freely in my room endured
The whole of wrath divine,
Payment God cannot twice demand,
First at my bleeding Surety's hand,
And then again at mine.
Turn then, my soul, unto thy rest;
The merits of thy great High Priest
Have bought thy liberty
Trust in His efficacious blood,
Nor fear thy banishment from God,
Since Jesus died for thee."*

b) But there is a serious **Warning** for those who have not believed in Jesus. If you reject God in this life, he will forever reject you in the life to come. At the cross you see what form of judgement you will experience at the hands of God. You will be forsaken of him forever. All sense of his presence, all evidence of his love, all sense of mental, physical, and spiritual well-being will be taken from you. All the joys of life, all the comfort of friends and family will be taken from you. In their place will be nothing but loneliness, pain, callousness, a killing sense of malice and hatred, a weeping and gnashing of

teeth. An eternal death under the curse of God awaits all those who refuse to repent of their sins and believe in Christ Jesus. (Packer-pg. 176)

To look at Christ's death and learn that it was a sacrifice designed to cancel and remove the wrath of God from falling on us should prompt us to warn others to flee the wrath of God. They can escape God's wrath by running into the arms of the Saviour whom he has put forth as a sacrifice of atonement in his blood.

The word 'propitiation' points us God-ward. When God presented Christ Jesus as a sacrifice of atonement through faith in his blood, it was designed to do something to God. It was geared to quench his wrath which was against our sin. Sin **is** God's greatest problem. He has solved his problem with our sin by presenting his Son as a sacrifice of atonement.

But Christ's death was designed to do something for us in our sin. What he did for us at the cross is defined by the word 'redemption'. Christ propitiates God, but he redeems us.

[**illust.** J. M. Boice's Triangle of Salvation]

[What does 'redemption' do for us?]

2. His death was designed to liberate sinners from their bondage to sin.

This word 'redemption' basically means—**deliverance by the payment of a price**. Jesus uses a similar word when he describes his work as, "*For even the Son of man did not come to be served, but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many.*" The many are people who are in bondage. They cannot free themselves, and are in grave danger. So Jesus liberates them through the payment of a price, called a ransom. The ransom price he paid for their freedom was his own life. He shed his blood for them.

The grace that justifies us freely comes to us through the redemption that was secured by Christ Jesus. What makes this deliverance so effective is that Christ died as a sacrifice that satisfied God's wrath, which was against us because of our sins. Through his blood Jesus paid the price that frees us from the guilt of our sins. We do not have to pay for our sins because Jesus has already paid the price.

A wonderful exchange was accomplished at the cross of Christ. Our sins were given to Jesus. His blood was shed to ransom us from the guilt and penalty of our sins. In exchange for our sins we were given the righteousness of Christ. Now God **not** only declares us forgiven of all sins, **but** he also pronounces us as righteous as Christ. We are freed from guilt, for we have been acquitted of all our crimes against God. We are freed from condemnation, for we are accepted as righteous by God. We are justified freely, [how?] by his grace, through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.

In the atoning death of Christ we see the glory of God's grace. By his death God has solved the problem of sin perfectly. Sin provokes God's wrath, but God suffers and satisfies his own wrath by presenting his Son as a propitiation in his blood. Sin generates real guilt before God, but he lays our sins upon Jesus who dies for us. Jesus redeems or ransoms us from the penalty of our sin by suffering the penalty in our place.

Through Christ's death God's grace has secured for us a perfect salvation. Christ interposes his blood as the payment for our sins, so we have freedom from sin. But he also gives us his righteousness so we have peace with God. On one hand, Jesus removes the liabilities of our sin by his blood. Yet on the other hand, he gives us his own righteousness in place of our moral and spiritual bankruptcy. All our sins are gone; and all his righteousness is ours. We are now right with God, forever.

[How is the truth of Christ's atoning death meant to impact our lives?]

Application:

a) **It is designed to equip us to become Worshipers of God.**

When we consider the truth that Christ's atoning death was designed by God to deal with the primary problem of sin, we must respond with praise to the glory of God's grace. **R.C.Sproul** has said: "*If a man's theology does not lead to doxology, then his theology is not worth believing.*" Does your

theology of the cross lead you to worship? Do the riches of God's grace humble you and fill you with praise? Sin, was the primary problem to God and to us. But by God's grace the solution has been provided for sinners. That solution was the atoning death of Jesus Christ. For all eternity we will be praising the worthiness of the Lamb of God whose blood was shed to redeem us from every tribe, and language and people and nation, so we would be a kingdom and priests to serve our God and to reign on earth. The Atoning Death of Christ is truth that should fill us with praise to the glory of his grace.

b) It is designed to give us great assurance before God.

God's grace as infallibly secured the salvation of sinners. In Christ, all our sins are taken from us as far as the east is from the west. God's grace declares us innocent of all sin, and to be free of all guilt. In Christ, all his righteousness has been given to us. Before the law, God's verdict is: "*I declare you to be as righteous as my Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.*" We are forever right with God. In Christ, we have found favour with God. We can live in the assurance that God is for us; that God is with us; that God is in us and one day we will be like him.

[**Illust.** "*It is Well with My Soul*" cf. Swiss Air/H. MacDougal]

Do you have this assurance with God? Is your hope and confidence resting on the work of God's grace through the atoning death of Christ? *What is your only comfort in life and death?*