

I believe in the atonement

Introduction

...God is love. In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

(1 John 4:8-10 ESV)

Series on what we believe

Last week - the incarnation (Jesus was fully God and fully man)

The atonement - the answer to the question "Why did Jesus die?"

Not just an intellectual exercise - better to win a soul than an argument. No theology test to get into heaven!

But:

So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

(John 8:31-32 ESV)

What is the answer to life, the universe and everything?

Start with 'who is God?'

God is love.

(1 John 4:8 ESV)

Everything he does and is is about love.

How do you feel when you see something wrong? Adultery, prostitution, murder, corruption. You rightly feel aggrieved, you know when you see something wrong. It makes us angry. Now imagine you could see things the way God sees them - every selfish act we do, and the pain and damage it causes us and other people.

Because everything he does is about love, lovelessness makes him angry. It's not that he wants to get angry, on the contrary:

"The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness,

(Exodus 34:6 ESV)

He is patient, and yet still gets angry about our sin.

There's another attribute of God's that comes from his love: justice. He is good and sinless, and the ultimate judge of what is right and what is wrong.

He cannot accept sin, because it would diminish his glory, and stop him being perfect.

This creates a problem for us, because we are all sinners and so despite God's love toward us, justice and holiness prevent us from knowing him. There's nothing good about you. You are what you do, and you are a dirty selfish sinner. We are sinners by nature and by choice.

As he is the living God and the source of all life, sin results in death. This happens physically at the end of our lives, but also spiritually: we're like a light that's been unplugged - physically alive but functionally (in our case spiritually) dead.

In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him.

(1 John 4:9 ESV)

This is why John says that we need to find another source of life, because without help, without an outside influence, we're dead.

(How) can I know God?

There's nothing we can do.

OT picture of how to get right with God: the atonement, or Yom Kippur.

Two perfect, healthy goats, representing sinless perfection. The High Priest slaughters the first as a substitute for the people and sprinkles its blood around the temple, on the mercy seat on top of the Ark of the Covenant.

Blood represents sin in the bible. It reminds us that sin leads to death.

For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it for you on the altar to make atonement for your souls, for it is the blood that makes atonement by the life.

(Leviticus 17:11 ESV)

Blood is sacred, and the sight of life shows that the taking of a life has taken place, a substitution, a life lost to prevent the loss of life.

Much of the OT temple life revolved around sacrifices and the pouring out of blood. Despite this the OT sacrificial system was not sufficient in itself. The people began to put their trust in the sacrifice itself, but it didn't forgive sin:

“With what shall I come before the LORD,
and bow myself before God on high?
Shall I come before him with burnt offerings,
with calves a year old?
Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams,
with ten thousands of rivers of oil?
Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression,
the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?”
He has told you, O man, what is good;
and what does the LORD require of you
but to do justice, and to love kindness,
and to walk humbly with your God?

(Micah 6:6-8 ESV)

People trusted in the external sacrifice without repentance and trusting in God. The OT sacrifices pointed to something else, something better.

This first goat was representation of **propitiation**. This means that God's anger toward sin could be turned away (propitiated) from the sinner to the sacrifice.

The second goat was called the 'scape goat', and this goat had hands laid on it by the High Priest, whilst he confessed the sins of the nation. Then the goat would be sent away and allowed to run away into the surrounding desert. This was a sign of **expiation**, where sin is expiated or taken away so that the sinner is made clean.

Why did Jesus die? Why did Jesus live?

Jesus was the only sinless man ever to have lived.

For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth.

(1 Peter 2:21-22 ESV)

Because he didn't sin, he also didn't deserve to die.

And yet Christians celebrate the murder of Jesus, and call it good news.

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures,

(1 Corinthians 15:3 ESV)

The most shocking thing about the atonement, the most important thing in our lives is this: Jesus offered himself as a substitute for us. He took our sin upon himself. Everything we have ever done wrong, he became.

Surely he has borne our griefs
and carried our sorrows;
yet we esteemed him stricken,
smitten by God, and afflicted.
But he was wounded for our transgressions;
he was crushed for our iniquities;
upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace,
and with his stripes we are healed.
All we like sheep have gone astray;
we have turned—every one—to his own way;
and the LORD has laid on him
the iniquity of us all.

(Isaiah 53:4-6 ESV)

This wasn't the only thing that happened on the cross. Jesus lived a life of perfect obedience to God the Father. Not only did he never sin, but he always did what the Father asked of him

For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me.

(John 6:38 ESV)

So imagine how God feels about his son. God is love, and here is a man who has lived a life of love and dedication to God and his kingdom. He has never sinned. No-one has ever been loved by God more than his son Jesus.

And yet the bible says that he didn't just swap his sinlessness for our sinfulness. Here's why Jesus came to the earth in the first place (why not just appear at age 30 and die in our place?)

For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

(2 Corinthians 5:21 ESV)

The 'Divine Exchange' he swapped our sin for his righteousness.

Jesus became the fulfillment of what was pointed towards at Yom Kippur. Firstly he bore the anger of God toward sin when he became sin on our behalf. He became our propitiation: he pacified the wrath of God by taking away the actions that caused the anger in the first place.

In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

(1 John 4:10 ESV)

(NIV = 'Atoning sacrifice'; NCV 'He sent his Son to die in our place to take away our sins'). BUT there is no other phrase in English to communicate a sacrifice that removes anger by taking away the actions that caused the anger.

...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, 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.

(Romans 3:23-25 ESV)

What this means for us is that not only is the anger of God toward our sin satisfied, not only are our sins put onto a scapegoat and no longer visible to us, but through faith in Jesus we are declared righteous before God by grace through faith in Jesus.

How can a God of love and justice show anger and injustice?

The cross as an example of servitude?

Why did Jesus come to the earth?

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

(John 3:16-17 ESV)

He came out of love to save us. But, surely if God is a God of love and justice, the cross makes no sense at all because God the Father doesn't show love to Jesus just anger, and Jesus didn't deserve to die so the whole thing is unjust?

"This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.

(John 15:12-13 ESV)

The ultimate show of love - self-sacrifice for the ones you love. Justice in that death came as a result of sin, love shown in the giving up of that life selflessly.

How does this change my life?

God's love for us is not passive. Despite his anger towards sin, because of his anger towards sin something had to be done if we were ever to have a relationship with him, a relationship that we do not deserve.

God, out of his love, and knowing the desperation of our situation, made it possible for us to have friendship with him. Through the cross Jesus took away our sin, bore the anger of God, and made us righteous before him.

We can have confidence when we come to God. Jesus' perfection means that there is nothing you can do that God is unable to forgive. His anger toward everything you do has already been poured out. The stain of our sin is now on Jesus, he willingly took it from you. There's nothing you can do to stop God from loving you and accepting you if you have faith in Jesus. More than that though, when he looks at you he doesn't just see someone sinless, he sees Jesus' righteousness (a sinless life spent doing the will of God). It's not possible for God to love you any more.

You can't do anything that God can't forgive, you can't do anything to make God love you any more than he does now.

In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

(1 John 4:9-10 ESV)

At the point of Jesus' death, he declared 'it is finished'. There's nothing left for us to do before God, our sins are forgiven, we are righteous before him. Now is the time to enjoy being sons and daughters of God, to approach God with confidence, to worship him without fear of rejection, without shame for our actions, to come to him with boldness, knowing that he loves us without condition and accepts us as he does his own son.