

## THE DOCTRINE OF THE ATONEMENT

By Mike Spaulding

In his epistle to the Church in Rome the apostle Paul wrote to encourage them in their evangelistic efforts, especially among his Jewish brethren. His series of questions in chapter ten are aimed at instilling within the believers in Rome an understanding that they must carry the message of Christ with them in their lifestyles and in their words.<sup>1</sup>

Because we find ourselves living in a time and culture inundated with postmodernist thought and forms it has become necessary to add another question to Paul's questions in Romans 10. That question is, "How can they understand if the haven't got a clue as to what we're saying?" This paper seeks to give clear answers to the questions surrounding the doctrine of the atonement for a postmodern culture. This is no small deed given the challenge of literary criticism that has had the effect of pulling textual meaning into an abyss of ultimate subjective and therefore non-objective meaning.

Does this render the Christian theological and apologetic task irrelevant and meaningless? Not in the least, for the task of providing a clear and cogent answer to a doubting culture is a task the Bible is uniquely qualified to fulfill. Take for instance Peter's exhortation that Christians are to be ready when it is convenient and when it is not convenient to provide a rational response to a doubting culture.<sup>2</sup> This presupposes several things. First, that the Christian has surrendered his will to God. That is what is meant by "sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts." The issue of who is in charge has been settled by the believer and Christ is on the throne of his heart. Second, that this surrender of the human heart to Christ's reign is evident in the believer's life and thus unbelievers see an attractive quality that in this verse is

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<sup>1</sup>Romans 10:14-15. Unless otherwise noted all Scripture references are from The New American Standard Bible, *The Lockman Foundation* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1995).

<sup>2</sup>1 Peter 3:15.

described from the believer's perspective as hope. Unbelievers might call it optimism or cheerfulness but it is the abiding hope of the believer in the Lord Jesus. Third, "always being ready" implies that the believer is on the alert for opportunities to present the gospel of Jesus Christ at any time. Fourth, this hope in Christ is presented to the skeptic in language seasoned with gentleness and reverence.

Apologetists call this approach to sharing biblical doctrine an endeavor to "build bridges to points of contact" with unbelievers.<sup>3</sup> Why is all this necessary? Why can't we merely preach the gospel and save and disciple those that respond? Christians are not responsible for those that will not hear are they? These are legitimate questions to be sure. What many Christians fail to understand is that for most people living in America today, "Christianese," the language of the Church, is a foreign language.

British historian Arnold Toynbee conducted research related to declining societies and later published his findings in a twelve volume work entitled *A Study of History*. Toynbee studied twenty-one declining societies and identified five characteristics common to all of them.

They have a sense of drift, the feeling that life is meaningless and out of control. Because of that they succumb to truancy, or escapism, retreating into their distraction or entertainment. Aimless, they fall into a sort of promiscuity of thinking, an indiscriminate acceptance of anything and everything. Connected to that, they have a sense of moral abandon, ceasing to believe in a moral standard and yielding themselves to their impulses. Finally, they feel a huge burden of guilt, a self-loathing that comes from their moral abandon.<sup>4</sup>

This description of declining cultures pictures accurately American society today.

Ironically people will accept anything and everything as morally authoritative except the

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<sup>3</sup>Francis Schaeffer's approach is seen in this light. He proposed an apologetic approach wherein he listened to people as they discussed their views, ideas, and hopes. From that dialogue he discussed the always present "fatal contradiction" in their worldview and contrasted that with Christian teaching.

<sup>4</sup>David W. Henderson, *Culture Shift*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1998), 162.

Bible. Doctrine is eschewed as oppressive and completely unnecessary to modern living. Unfortunately modern man never makes the connection between his rejection of God and the huge burden of guilt for which he spends untold billions of dollars seeking assistance from therapeutic experts and realizing little or no relief.

The doctrine of the atonement is central to Christian teaching. It answers questions such as, “Why did Jesus have to die?” “How is the love of God shown in Christ’s death?” “What justice is it for an innocent man to die for the guilty?” as well as the range of theological questions related to man’s relationship with God. The doctrine of the atonement captures the necessity of Christ’s obedience to the law of God; the necessity of Christ’s suffering as our sin bearer; His bearing the wrath of God at Calvary; and the extent or scope of God’s efficacious offering of His Son.

### **THE DOCTRINE OF THE ATONEMENT**

What is meant by the word atonement? Most scholars incorporate some sense of Christ’s death as an atoning work. Grudem for instance writes, “The atonement is the work Christ did in [H]is life and death to earn our salvation.”<sup>5</sup> Of course this would include of necessity Christ’s perfect obedience to the Father and His sin bearing, both developed later in this paper.

Stott has written an exceptional book on the subject and takes pains to emphasize throughout the victory of Christ’s death over sin, death, and Satan. He postulates the need for the Church to recover the historical, classical view of the atonement as substitution, and even more importantly as victory, contrasting the doctrine with those subscribing to

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<sup>5</sup>Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 568.

Anselm's theory of atonement as satisfaction.<sup>6</sup> Piper on the other hand makes a compelling argument that Christ's work of atonement both vindicated and glorified God and in the process justifies sinners.<sup>7</sup> Erickson presents the atonement as *sacrifice, propitiation, substitution, and reconciliation*<sup>8</sup> necessary within a context of God's nature and His relationship to His moral and spiritual law. These definitions seem straight forward enough.

Notwithstanding the excellent definitions by a host of scholars questions as well as objections do persist. For example some ask if the atonement of Christ is to be understood as a sacrifice and if so why was that necessary?<sup>9</sup> Others question the concept of "substitution" while still others seek an explanation for God's wrath being unleashed on an innocent man. Was man redeemed through Christ's work on the cross and if so what was he redeemed from? Finally, many people ask about the extent of the work of Christ in atoning for mans sins. Did Christ's work on the cross cover all mankind or only some?

### ***Why Was The Atonement Necessary?***

The Hebrew *kaphar* means to cover or shelter. It carries the idea of both pacification of wrath, and the covering of sin.<sup>10</sup> From this meaning came the definition *to make atonement*. The concept of atonement as presented in the Old Testament is closely related to Yahweh making a people or land whole or "one" again. Implicit in this understanding are two additional considerations. First is the idea of covenant and second is the notion of estrangement within the relationship between covenant participants. The idea of estrangement necessarily implies an action or activity that separated the one into parts. The

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<sup>6</sup>John W. Stott, *The Cross of Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1986). See especially his discussion of Gustav Aulen's book *Christus Victor* on p. 228-230.

<sup>7</sup>John Piper, *The Pleasures of God* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers, 2000), 162-166.

<sup>8</sup>Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1985), 801-823.

<sup>9</sup>This is the prominent objection voiced within many liberal faith communities.

<sup>10</sup>William Wilson, *Wilson's Old Testament Word Studies* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, na), 24.

Old Testament presents this action as an offense against God and is most commonly called sin.<sup>11</sup>

The basis for understanding the necessity of the atonement begins with an understanding that man stands separated from God by an offense of his choosing. The prophet Habakkuk said of God, “Your eyes are too pure to approve evil, and you can not look on wickedness with favor.”<sup>12</sup> The Psalmist declared, “Righteousness and justice are the foundation of His throne,”<sup>13</sup> and “Your righteousness is an everlasting righteousness, and Your law is truth.”<sup>14</sup> This brings into the discussion the ideas of God’s holiness, righteousness, justice, love, and mercy. Since God is holy He must judge sin. In order for God to be God He “cannot arbitrarily forgive without a just basis for this forgiveness.”<sup>15</sup> He does not have the option to simply ignore sin indefinitely. The Bible declares that “For he who has done wrong will receive the consequences of the wrong which he has done, and that without partiality.”<sup>16</sup> This is clearly presented in Paul’s letter to the Romans<sup>17</sup> where Jesus is said to have paid the price the law demanded. In God’s economy this payment by Christ was an acceptable substitute and *propitiation* for mankind. In these activities – Christ’s death and God’s accepting that death – we learn that God’s righteousness, holiness, and glory are upheld and mankind receives an imputed righteousness from Christ. Piper adds, “The concept of the righteousness of God . . . provides the most natural and coherent interpretation of Rom 3:25-26 . . . takes full account of . . . God’s unwavering commitment always to act for his own

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<sup>11</sup>Ralph H. Elliot, “Atonement in the Old Testament,” *Review and Expositor* (na): 10.

<sup>12</sup>Habakkuk 1:13.

<sup>13</sup>Psalm 97:2.

<sup>14</sup>Psalm 119:142.

<sup>15</sup>Norman L. Geisler, *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1999), 145.

<sup>16</sup>Colossians 3:25.

<sup>17</sup>Romans 3:21-26 is pregnant with implication for the atonement and particular theories such as satisfaction and substitution.

names sake. The so-called “satisfaction theory” of the atonement may be more “Hebraic-Biblical” than is often thought.”<sup>18</sup> This view provides a framework for answering the questions surrounding the need for Christ’s death, the charge of unfairness on God’s part that an innocent person should die for a guilty person, and it raises the issue of the mysterious love of God for His creation.

### ***Contrasting Views Of The Atonement***

The New Testament provides a rich and joyous expression of the work of Christ through His death to atone for the sins of mankind. For example, He came to give “His life a ransom for many” (Matt. 20:28); His blood was “poured out for many for forgiveness of sins” (Matt. 26:28); He came “to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10); “God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself” (II Cor. 5:19); Christ “gave himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma” (Eph. 5:2); He came to “reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross” (Col. 1:20).

Nevertheless, there are several competing views regarding the atonement. They are the *penal substitution view*, the *example theory view*, the *moral influence theory view*, the *governmental theory view*, the *ransom theory view*, and the *satisfaction theory view*. These will now be considered.

#### ***Penal Substitution***

Historically the substitution theory has been advocated by brilliant theologians such as Luther, Calvin, and most Reformed Protestants. The substitutionary theory of the atonement is arguably the most prevalent among evangelicals today. Also referred to as *vicarious* atonement, the penal substitution theory states that Christ received the penalty of sin, namely

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<sup>18</sup>John Piper, “The demonstration of the righteousness of God in Romans 3:25,26,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*. 7 (April 1980): 2.

death, and that He did this on our behalf, making His death a substitute for our own. The substitution theory of the atonement thus satisfies in the minds of theologians at least four needs that mankind has. First, mankind deserves to die because death is the penalty for sin. Second, mankind deserves to bear the wrath of God that accompanies sin. Third, mankind is separated from God because of his sin. Fourth, mankind's sin places him in bandage to Satan. Christ's death frees mankind from each of these four effects.

Christ's death was sacrificial as Hebrews 9:26 points out: "He has been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself." Christ's death was a propitiation that effectively removed the wrath of God from upon mankind. "In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins."<sup>19</sup> Propitiation appears four times in the New Testament in three contexts. The thrust of the word means that God's righteous and holy character has been vindicated through the death of Jesus Christ and He may therefore offer mercy and forgiveness to the sinner.<sup>20</sup> The sin of man is covered by the blood of Christ and is therefore expiated, covered, and remitted. Thus we can rejoice and agree with the apostle Paul, "Therefore there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death."<sup>21</sup>

### ***Example Theory View***

The example theory view was developed by Faustus and Laelius Socinus, Italian theologians of the sixteenth century, and lives on today in the Unitarian system of thought. As the name of the theory implies, the followers of the Socinus brothers, referred to

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<sup>19</sup>1 John 4:10.

<sup>20</sup>W.E. Vine, *The Expanded Vines Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 1984), 895-897.

<sup>21</sup>Romans 8:1-2.

historically as the Socinians, taught that Christ's death was not substitutionary nor did it provide a vicarious satisfaction toward God. Instead, the death of Christ was understood by the Socinians as the supreme example for mankind to follow. Thus the atonement was merely a metaphorical concept.<sup>22</sup> Christ's death was not an answer to God's justice but was an example of the type of life all followers of Christ should live even if that meant suffering and death. In support of their view 1 Peter 2:21 was cited: "For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an *example* (emphasis added) for you to follow in His steps."

Issues abound with this viewpoint on the atonement, not the least of which can be found a few verses beyond the Socinian proof text of 1 Peter 2:21. In 1 Peter 2:24 we read, "And He himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed." This verse clearly describes Christ as the sin-bearer for mankind and as such is in contradiction to the Socinian example theory. The New Testament tells us that while we were still in our sins Christ died *for us*,<sup>23</sup> clearly implying that we needed His death to remit our sin. Beyond that, there are numerous instances in both Testament's of Christ described as a ransom<sup>24</sup> and sin-bearer.<sup>25</sup>

Shades of Pelagian thought concerning the extent of the depravity of man is seen as foundational to the example theory. Socinians then and Unitarians today insist that man is able of his own volition to fulfill God's will by self-determination. This view rejects Christ's death as payment for our sin, as a propitiation or satisfaction toward God, and thus negates the need for regeneration or the new birth. It therefore must be rejected as unbiblical.

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<sup>22</sup>Erickson, 785.

<sup>23</sup>Romans 5:8.

<sup>24</sup>Mark 10:45, 1 Corinthians 6:20.

<sup>25</sup>Isaiah 53:6.

### *Moral Influence Theory View*

This view is closely related to the example theory view of the atonement. Developed by Peter Abelard, an eleventh century French theologian, the moral influence theory describes the atonement as a demonstration of God's love. This definition places the focus of Christ's work upon man. For Abelard and his followers, the beneficiary of Christ's atoning work was mankind, who could look upon the cross not as propitiation or as redemption but as a demonstration of the fullness of God's love for him. Abelard taught that God does not need to be satisfied by the death of Jesus and indeed does not need a sacrifice in order to forgive mankind. Such controversial assertions landed Abelard before two councils. The first, at Soissons in 1121 charged him with heresy. Narrowly escaping those charges he was brought before a subsequent council at Sens in 1140 where his views on the atonement gained for him excommunication from the Roman Church.<sup>26</sup>

The moral influence theory fails at the same place as the example theory of the atonement, namely it stops short of recognizing the fullness of the cross of Christ. Man is pronounced righteous on the basis of what God accomplished through Christ and not as Abelard insisted by man's right living before God. The biblical record demonstrates that man's self-effort to obey God's law is not the course prescribed by God. Instead, salvation is a free gift given by God as a result of the transaction of the cross.<sup>27</sup> Absent recognition of the need for the cross and the acceptance of the work of Christ on an individual's behalf, justification and reconciliation with God is impossible.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup>Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of Christianity, Vol.1* (New York, NY: Harper and Row Publishers, 1975), 502-504.

<sup>27</sup>Romans 3:24.

<sup>28</sup>Henri Blocher. Biblical metaphors and the doctrine of the Atonement. *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*. 47 (Dec. 2004): 629-645. This is an excellent treatment of the arbitrary use of metaphors by liberal theologies in obvious contradiction to the texts in which atonement language appears.

### *Governmental Theory View*

Contrasted with the preceding views of the atonement the governmental theory takes the issue of sin seriously. This theory was developed by the Dutchman Hugo Grotius who was interestingly not a clergyman but a lawyer. Grotius sought a way to respond to the teachings of the Socinians and their man-centered atonement discussed earlier.

The governmental theory proposed that Christ's death was a nominal substitute for the penalty due mankind. God in His graciousness accepted this substitute and thereby upheld His moral government. When speaking of penalty and substitute in relation to Christ, Grotius did not mean however that "Christ's death was a penalty inflicted upon Him as a substitute for the penalty which should have attached to the sins of humanity. Rather, Grotius saw the death of Christ as a substitute for a penalty."<sup>29</sup> This is a curious interpretation of the Scriptures related to the atonement to say the least. Blocher addresses this kind of theological double-speak by asserting:

It was a *judicial execution* (emphasis original), the infliction of penalty (capital punishment), which, though a denial of justice on the part of human judges, did satisfy divine justice, by virtue of the voluntary substitution of the Righteous Head for the sinful members of his Body; within the same forensic framework, the NT proclaims the *free justification* of believers.<sup>30</sup>

Grotius attempted to base his atonement theory in the negative by insisting that if Christ paid for the sins of all mankind then all mankind was entitled to heaven regardless of whether or not all mankind demonstrated faith and lived a life of obedience as testimony of that faith. In this the influence of Calvin and Grotius's Reformed peers is evident, especially the teaching of limited or particular atonement.

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<sup>29</sup>Erickson, 790.

<sup>30</sup>Blocher, 630

The weaknesses of this theory are apparent to the discerning believer. For this writer the lack of biblical support is fatal. Nothing in Grotius's formulations can be supported with any force from the Scriptures. Grotius appears to have made the atonement optional as in his view God could have accomplished the atonement by another method or could have simply forgiven mankind their sin without receiving payment of a penalty. This creates a subsequent issue however for the idea of substitution. The Bible teaches that Christ died *for* sinners. This means *in the place of* sinners and has been forcefully demonstrated in the section above under penal substitution.

### ***Ransom Theory View***

This atonement theory holds sway with many evangelicals today. In understanding the atonement as Christ's victory over Satan, those who hold to the ransom theory believe that mankind became slaves to sin and thus Satan in the fall. Christ's suffering and death on the cross won the victory and brought the possibility for freedom to mankind. Historians agree that this view was the predominant one in the early church till the time of Anselm and Abelard.

The ransom theory was formulated theologically by Origen and Gregory of Nyssa, although it was first hinted at by Ignatius.<sup>31</sup> Foundational to this view is an understanding that mankind was purchased by God through Christ from Satan who held title to the creation since the fall. Origen pointed to Paul's letter to the Corinthians where he says, "For you have been bought with a price,"<sup>32</sup> and speculates that because this is the language of a legal transaction, Satan was paid. When considered along with Jesus' own words that he came to

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<sup>31</sup>Henry Bettenson and Chris Maunder, eds., *Documents of the Christian Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 37-38.

<sup>32</sup>1 Corinthians 6:20.

offer His life as a ransom recorded in Matthew 20 and Mark 14 the ransom theory does hold some merit.

The theory fails at crucial points however. It's apparent dualism, pitting God against Satan and requiring God to buy back from Satan His title to the creation creates an insurmountable obstacle to the sovereignty of God. Both Origen and Gregory struggled to explain how God could deliberately deceive Satan.

The truth of Scripture supports a different view however. God is at no time under obligation to Satan nor is His power ever curtailed by that fallen angel. Beyond that, the Bible demonstrates that God receives the death of Christ as propitiation not Satan. It was God's glory, His holiness that was offended by the fall not Satan's.

### ***Satisfaction Theory View***

The satisfaction theory, also known as the commercial theory is the view of the Roman Catholic Church today and stands in contrast to the ransom theory held by the Orthodox East. It does share with the ransom theory a sense of God's honor being offended but not much else. In the satisfaction theory Christ is said to restore God's honor and this great work is then offered to mankind in the form of God's grace.

Developed by Anselm most notably in his *Cur Deus Homo*,<sup>33</sup> the satisfaction theory sought to answer the question of how Jesus' death could be satisfactory to God and in doing so explain the necessity of the incarnation. Anselm developed the idea that for God to be fully satisfied the satisfying element had to be greater than anything in the universe save Himself. Since nothing of that order existed in time and space God sent His Son, the God-man. Anselm believed that in Christ as satisfaction he presented an answer to both how God could be satisfied in the cross and the necessity of the incarnation. Christ as Son was

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<sup>33</sup>Latourette, 501.

infinitely more than the creation, indeed he was the Creator of the creation<sup>34</sup> thus fulfilling the first priority for Anselm. Achieving this Anselm believed he had also explained the necessity of the incarnation as only Christ was above the creation.

Critics have pointed to the view as making the atonement a necessity both for man's redemption and God's honor. In this necessity it is pointed out that the focus becomes restoring God's honor at the expense of His righteousness. Additionally, the satisfaction theory teaches that God rewarded Christ for His obedience unto death and Christ because He did not need this reward passed it to mankind thus securing the possibility of their salvation.<sup>35</sup>

A brief analysis of one final subject is in order. Much discussion centers on the extent of the atonement. Was Christ's death intended to pay the penalty for all mankind or only for those the Scripture calls the elect? We now turn to that topic.

### ***Unlimited Or Limited Atonement?***

This area of the doctrine of the atonement is without question the mostly hotly contested in terms of passion and orthodoxy. Bahnsen stated:

A very unhealthy notion that plagues the fundamentalist church is the idea that Christ laid down His for each and every individual; that He went to the cross to save all men without exception. Such a view is not consistent with Biblical Christianity . . . It should also be noted that the doctrine of particular redemption is necessary to the orthodox view of Christ's substitutionary atonement; the only alternatives top it are universal salvation or salvation by works (both are unbiblical).<sup>36</sup>

This view is called particular or limited atonement. It is most often identified with Reformed theology and in a somewhat unfair fashion with John Calvin. Limited atonement proponents believe that God first determined to save some – the elect – and acted in love

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<sup>34</sup>Colossians 1:16.

<sup>35</sup>H. Wayne House, *Charts of Christian Theology and Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992), 105.

<sup>36</sup>Greg L. Bahsen, "Limited Atonement," *Penpoint* 8, no. 12 (December 1997): 1.

toward them to ensure their salvation. The idea that since God saves only the elect He must love only the elect has become quite pervasive in theological circles.<sup>37</sup> Is this view accurate however? There does not appear to be much dispute as to the significance of Christ's atonement. Most agree that Christ's death was sufficient for the sins of all people. But the question related to the extent of the atonement does not rest upon sufficiency but upon our understanding of God's love and how He set about exhibiting it toward mankind. A discussion of the order of God's decrees related to salvation is beyond the scope of this treatment but it is noteworthy to call attention to the fact that within this debate there are varying beliefs.

Contrasted to the particular or limited atonement view is the view called unlimited or universal atonement. Proponents appeal to such Scriptures as John 1:29 where Christ is proclaimed as the Lamb of God who "takes away the sin of the world," and 2 Corinthians 5:15 where Christ is said to have "died for all."

Erickson calls for a balanced view, rejecting Arminianism and its homage to free will, while also rejecting full-blown Calvinism.<sup>38</sup> His view is described as *sublapsarianism* and still falls within a modified Calvinist camp. This approach is not seen as balanced by either side in the debate and appears to fall short of fully embracing the idea that God can love people in spite of them being the objects of His wrath for their sin.

MacArthur provides what appears to be a more accurately described balanced view. He states:

The fact that God will send to eternal hell all sinners who persist in sin and unbelief proves His hatred toward them. On the other hand, the fact that God promises to forgive

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<sup>37</sup>See for instance Arthur W. Pink, *The Sovereignty of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1930), 314. Pink makes the argument that *world* in John 3:16 means the world of the elect and not the whole world of humanity. Cited in John MacArthur Jr., *The Love of God* (Dallas, TX: Word Publishing, 1996), 13.

<sup>38</sup>Erickson, 835.

and bring into His eternal glory all who trust Christ as Savior – and even pleads with sinners to repent – proves His love toward them. We must understand that it is God’s very nature to love. The reason our Lord commanded us to love our enemies is “in order that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous” (Matt. 5:45 NASB).<sup>39</sup>

### *Summary And Conclusion*

Several views of the atonement have been discussed. They are the *penal substitution view*, the *example theory view*, the *moral influence theory view*, the *governmental theory view*, the *ransom theory view*, and the *satisfaction theory view*.

Each view attempts to explain why Christ had to die. The satisfaction theory teaches that Christ died to restore or satisfy God’s honor. The ransom theory proposes that Christ died to pay Satan to free mankind. The governmental theory teaches that Christ died as a substitute for a penalty but not necessarily as our substitute for our penalty. The moral influence theory suggests that Christ died to show us the highest expression of love so that we would follow Him as our example. The example theory held the atonement to be a metaphor for godly living.

Only the penal substitution theory upholds the biblical narrative consistently. In this view of the atonement the work of Christ on the cross is seen to bear the penalty of mankind for mankind in exactly the way God requires and consequently God’s wrath is turned away from the creation in the salvation experience. In the substitution theory we find the development of propitiation,<sup>40</sup> imputation,<sup>41</sup> and redemption.<sup>42</sup> Because all mankind has sinned in Adam all mankind must receive the penalty due him. A righteous judge must pronounce the

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<sup>39</sup>MacArthur, 15.

<sup>40</sup>1 John 2:1-2.

<sup>41</sup>1 Corinthians 15:21-22.

<sup>42</sup>Luke 1:67-69.

sentence required. Only by Christ's sacrificial, substitutionary death can God make the creation righteous.<sup>43</sup>

Limited atonement does not uphold the love of God for His creation. It is restrictive by definition and application. Instead, God's love is beyond restriction. Paul wrote to a young pastor Timothy these words:

First of all, then, I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men, for kings and all who are in authority, so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity. This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a ransom for all, the testimony given at the proper time.<sup>44</sup>

C.H. Spurgeon, perhaps one of the most well know eighteenth century preachers was fond of calling on sinners to repent and be saved at all his services with these words: "Dear friends, the Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost. Does not that description suit you? Are you not among the lost? Well then, you are among such as Jesus came to save."<sup>45</sup>

This is the love of God seen in the atonement. God calls all mankind to repent and receive the free gift of salvation. His love is not limited or restricted. All may come freely and drink of the water of life.

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<sup>43</sup>2 Corinthians 5:21, 1 Peter 2:24.

<sup>44</sup>1 Timothy 2:1-2.

<sup>45</sup>George L. Bryson, *The Five Points of Calvinism Weighed and Found Wanting* (Costa Mesa, CA; The Word for Today, 1996), 91-92.