

INTRO: I (want to speak today about a subject we mention at least once a month and that is the Atonement of Christ which is the governmental substitution of the sufferings of Christ for the punishment of sinners. it is a covering of sins by His sufferings. Let us face the fact that except for the sufferings of Christ the best we would be doing today is offer burnt offerings as a substitute for our rebellion against God but because of His atoning work on Calvary we can come before the throne of God and ask forgiveness of our sins, if we meet the requirements, and the blood of Jesus Christ will cleanse us from our sins and we will become as if we had never sinned in the first place. There is a moral law of God that is not founded in the arbitrary will of God or any other being, rather it is founded upon the nature and relations of moral agents, that is human beings. This law cannot be changed nor repealed in any form but will always exist and there is letter of the law and the spirit of the law. Remember when Jesus Christ came to this earth He often mentioned that traditions say thus (letter of the law) but I say this (spirit of the law) thereby making the reasons or motives to be of utmost importance. For example, the letter of the law says do not work on the Sabbath day, but the spirit says it may be necessary for the law of benevolence may require that work be done as ministering to the sick, helping the poor, feeding the animals, and in reality, doing whatever is plainly the work of necessity or mercy. But what we want to look at especially today is the idea that the letter of the law says, "**The person (soul) that sins will die.**" It sentences to death all violators of its precepts without regard to anything else. However the spirit of the law requires that upon meeting certain conditions, to be examined at their proper time and in their proper place, the soul that sins shall live by requiring public justice be satisfied and a returning of the sinner to obedience. If we were living only by the letter of the law we would have no hope for our future except eternal damnation, but the atonement of Christ gave us the opportunity to have our rebellion against God (sin) washed away because of the blood of Jesus Christ as He suffered in our place.

A. We have laws in our lands because of individuals that lived in such a manner as to effect everyone else in that society in a negative way because of their selfishness, therefore to prevent individuals from continually doing this we have a set of laws that every moral creature is supposed to obey and live by. And in order to punish those that violate those laws we have what is called retributive and public justice. Retributive justice makes no exceptions, but punishes without mercy in every instance of crime but public justice makes exceptions that have been required by the public so the offending individual can be forgiven. In other words, when something is done as a substitute whereby this public justice, for the good of all, can be appeased, then it is possible to forgive the offender of His transgression or his sin.

B. This is where the term mercy is derived but this can be abused if not properly handled and not properly understood for if we always presume upon the mercies of the "courts" and upon the mercies of God, we may try and use this as a license to willfully rebel, thereby making the law itself of no value. In order for mercy to be of any effect, there must be an execution of the penalties when the law is broken, therefore concerning the spiritual realm, we know there is a terrible penalty for rebellion against God, but God also supplied mercy whereby this penalty can be proxied to another that is worthy to act as a substitute.

C. To protect the public from abuse, the head of any government must enforce the rules of the land, they must administer the law or else nothing but chaos will result therefore exceptions to the rule of law, to the moral covenant cannot be broken without causing terrible results to those for which the laws were instituted in the first place. In God's government, either the soul that sins must die (spiritual death), according to the letter of the law or some substitute must be provided in accordance with the spirit of the law, thus fulfilling that penalty.

1. Now the lawgiver must be satisfied with the penalty that has been served if there is to be forgiveness of the offense against the government of the law giver. When certain conditions are met and the sinner has returned from disobedience to obedience, public justice

then admits the offender's penalty should be set aside - he should be pardoned. Even though the offender still deserves to be punished because of his rebellion, the public good admits and requires that when the desirable conditions are met that the offender be pardoned by the spirit of the law of love. So if one is to be forgiven, it must be in a manner in which the penalty of the law is not made void or of little consequence. Otherwise, if one assumed they would always be forgiven without punishment for violating the laws of God, this would encourage them to continue in their rebellious state. So forgiveness must come with the price that the offender still deserves punishment and if the proper conditions are not met, they will reap the punishment.

2. Along with this mercy comes the idea that the sin of which one is seeking forgiveness must not be repeated over and over. Also this forgiveness must be based upon the Atonement once, that is not to be repeated. For if individuals continued to commit sin and an atonement was made over and over for each time, this will nullify the law in the first place, which would again result in chaos.

D. So what is the atonement? The English word is synonymous with the Hebrew word "cofer" which means "to cover" and was the name of the lid or the cover of the ark of the covenant and constituted what was often called "the mercy-seat". The Greek word for atonement is "katallage" which means reconciliation to favor or more strictly, the means or conditions of reconciliation to favor, that is change, or exchange. Otherwise known as a substitute. So the meaning of this "atonement" is the governmental substitution (according to the law given) of the sufferings of Christ for the punishment of sinners. It is a covering of their sins by His sufferings.

1. Can we not understand that except for this atonement, the basis of the gospel of salvation, we would have no destination except hell for we have all sinned and come short of the glory of God. Romans 3:23. Can we not understand that there had to be a "perfect" substitute so our sins could be forgiven for one that commits sin is not worthy to act as a substitute for another. I cannot stand in your place at the judgment and ask God to forgive you for I will take your place, for I was just as guilty as anyone else at one time in my life. So the only One that is worthy of such a position is one that is not guilty of sin, nor has ever been guilty of sin and that is only one man, the man Jesus Christ! Therefore He is the only substitute that can stand before God and ask God to forgive you and I of our sins, for He is perfect, without spot or blemish, and can satisfactorily stand in our stead and suffer in our stead as He did at Calvary. Our punishment was taken upon Him when He was hanging on the cross - this is what we deserved, but by mercy or grace based upon the law of love, He took my place so I would not have to endure the punishment of my rebellion. Therefore the letter of the law can be fulfilled and the spirit of love seen in Jesus Christ appeases public justice, a justice that says the guilty must pay

2. This does not present us with a license to continue to sin because of His atonement, rather it presents us with a choice. Will we continue to rebel or will we accept Jesus Christ as our substitute by accepting the conditions of our forgiveness? That means we go out of the sinning business, that means we become followers of Christ, that means our lives become dedicated to Him and given to Him because of the tremendous price He paid to purchase our freedom from sin.

CONCLUSION: What we need to understand is that without the atonement of Jesus Christ, without His voluntary substitution for what we deserved, we would be in a very terrible state today. I hope we have seen why this was necessary but I hope more than that, we realize why we must accept Him as our Savior, our Lord and our Redeemer. Our sins which were many, were all covered by the suffering of Jesus Christ, else we would have no other destination than a terrible punishment for what we were guilty of. God is not a tyrant but He is a just God and even though the soul that sins must die, He saw to it that there was a way of escape and in order for God to remain a just God and for the relationship between man and God and the universe to remain consistent, there was no other way. Public justice was satisfied, the letter of the law was preserved, the penalty of the law was paid, mankind can be forgiven and the relationship between man and God can be one of peace and harmony and mutual love.