

ATONEMENT

People are all very different... that is a fact.
And the fact that we are different is at the root of many problems.

We marry someone different from us and spend a few years trying to change the person we marry to be more like us.

Then we have children, and every child we have is different.

Finally, our children become teenagers, and think that their whole family is weird because everyone else is different, and the cycle begins all over again.

People **are** all different!

When we look at the same thing, what we see is different.

When we hear the same thing, what we hear is different.

Often, when we examine the same facts, we come to different **conclusions**.

Consider some common conclusions about life.

Some have come to the following conclusion:
"I made my bed; now I must lie in it."

Life for these folks becomes about enduring consequences of past mistakes

In this line of thinking, a person "pays his dues" by living with their mistakes.

Whatever the consequences are, you just live with them.

The idea is that you made the mistake, so you must pay the consequences.

Others have developed this idea:

"I got myself into this; now it is up to me to get myself out of it."

Their lives are about **escaping** consequences.

In this way of thinking, there is always a way out, but it is up to them to find it.

They feel a need to accept full responsibility; that is the way that they can escape consequences in life.

If they do the right things, they can escape consequences... but they have to do it; it is up to them!

Then some others reach adulthood with this idea:

They act like **"There are no dues to pay, and if there are, someone else should pay them."**

We live in a time when many people seem to think that there are no costs or consequences.

The idea is that life is all about "me," and everything exists to benefit "me."

Even when someone else pays, if "I" use it, it is "mine."

"I have no responsibilities; I only have rights!

Let me share an example of this thought process:
if "I" have primary use of a car, the car is "mine."

Dad may be making the payments.

Or the company I work for may hold the title.

But if "I" use it, it is "my" car!

Possession is determined by use... not by who pays the bill. Does that sound familiar?

These three concepts are the majority views of life today.

"I made my bed, so I must lie in it" means that it is impossible for me to escape the consequences of my mistakes. So, Life is about **living with** consequences.

"I got myself into this, so I must get myself out of it" says that mistakes can be escaped, but escape is all up to me. So life is about **escaping** consequences.

"There are no dues to pay" says that mistakes cannot happen, and I will not accept any consequences. When bad things happen, **it is not my fault.**

And **all of these ideas are wrong!**

For us to understand this, we need to understand a **basic truth** about God...

The truth is that God and evil are total opposites.

The presence of evil, and the presence of God, exclude each other.

That is why evil cannot stand good, and good cannot stand evil.

Good and evil are enemies dedicated to each other's destruction.

And that puts each of us in a crisis!

Each one of us is guilty of evil... of sin.

There are always things in our minds, in our hearts, and in our actions that oppose God's will and purpose.

And that means three things:

- 1) Every person is guilty of his own evil. Rom. 3:23
- 2) Unresolved sin, without exception, separates a person from God. Rom. 6:23
- 3) No one can solve the problem of personal sin.

That crisis is seen in two more things:

None of us can approach God because God is absolute purity and each of us is evil.

And, it is impossible for us, in and of ourselves, to produce reconciliation with God!

You know, if any of us saw ourselves through God's eyes for thirty seconds, we could not stand what we saw.

Consider the words of Isaiah when he found himself in God's presence.

Isaiah 6:5 says : "Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts."

See..If it is only me, I do not dare approach the holy God...not in prayer, not in worship, not in repentance, not in anything!

But ... God **wants** us to be with Him!

And there's the problem!

God wants me to be with Him, but my sin, and His purity, make that **impossible!**

Look at the problem... the holy and pure God cannot be approached by people guilty of sin, people who practice evil.

God in His purity cannot be approached by impure people.

And just as human nature is made of many parts and is complex, God's nature is made up of many parts as well.

We like some parts of God's nature: God is loving, merciful, kind, forgiving, compassionate. And He is...

But God's nature **also includes** wrath, justice, absolute holiness, and absolute purity.

God is totally removed from evil... it cannot come into His presence!

And for us, that is a problem.

We are evil

The result is that our evil makes it impossible for us to approach God.

So God solved the problem that none of us could solve, and God's solution is called atonement.

The Hebrew words for "atonement" come from a root word that means "covering."

Atonement allows two who are separated to come together as one.

We do not use the word "atonement" much; we more often use the word "reconciliation."

In the Old Testament, the people of Israel could approach God because they offered animal sacrifices.

The animal's life and blood "covered" their sin and allowed them to approach God.

But the life and the blood of a sacrificed animal "covered" the people's evil only for the moment; animal sacrifices could not permanently "cover" sin.

But for a permanent solution, someone "had to pay the bill"

Humanity's evil created an enormous "debt."

And our individual debt is enormous.

Humanity, collectively or individually, could not pay the "dues owed."

For atonement to work, some definite conditions were required.

The sacrificial animal had to be "perfect;" or in Old Testament words, "without blemish."

The sacrifice had to cost the person making the sacrifice; evil was, and is, a serious matter.

It cost the sacrificial animal its life.

It often cost the one who offered the sacrifice the very best he had.

Atonement required the sacrificial death of the perfect specimen.

**So you see, permanent atonement exists for us, because God "paid the dues"
God sacrificed the life of the perfect specimen.**

God let His sinless Son die on the cross.

Read Hebrews 10:4 “For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins”.

Hebrews 10:10-14

“By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. Every priest stands daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins; but He (Jesus), having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, sat down at the right hand of God, waiting from that time onward until His enemies be made a footstool for His feet. For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified.”

You know the more I understand Jesus, the more terrified I am by what I often see among Christians.

Let's read Ephesians 4:17-20

“So this I say, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind, being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart; and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness. But you did not learn Christ in this way.”

Paul was writing to Christians who in their past did not even know God.

He said, "Christians cannot live and act like people who do not know God.

Christians cannot have the attitudes, the emotions, or the value system that people who do not know God have.

Christians cannot treat others as do people who do not know God."

"It is not possible to know Jesus and act like people who do not know God."

Why is it impossible for people who know Jesus Christ to live like godless people?

Because when I accept Jesus' atonement... God renews the spirit of my mind (Ephesians 4:23).

Because when I accept Jesus' atonement... I am asking God to re-create me in the righteousness and holiness of truth (Ephesians 4:24).

And because when I know Jesus' atonement, I will strive to be the new self **who lives in God's likeness** (Ephesians 4:24).

So Why?

Why would a person ever choose to be baptized into Christ?

Because of atonement!
 Because of Reconciliation!
 Because it is a new beginning!

See, Jesus died on the cross, was buried in the tomb, and was raised to life.

And when I understand this atonement when I understand God was covering my sins in Jesus' death, I should want to die with Jesus, be buried with Jesus, and be resurrected with Jesus in baptism! Jesus did that for me so I could be with God; Jesus reconciled God and me!

That atonement means that **no one** has to lie in the bed he has made.

Atonement means it is **not up to me** to find a way to escape the eternal consequences of my sins.

Atonement means, that all of us make mistakes, big ones...
and that God paid our debt with the blood of a perfect Savior!

Most importantly...Atonement means that we can be reconciled to God!

And because we **are** all **different**, atonement reconciles us to God by **individually** "covering" the sin in each of our lives!

And we call that "covering" ...forgiveness.

Invitation: