

The Gospel of Jesus Christ: An Evangelical Celebration

Lesson 7: The Provision of the Gospel

Statement 8. We affirm that the atonement of Christ by which, in his obedience, he offered a perfect sacrifice, propitiating the Father by paying for our sins and satisfying divine justice on our behalf according to God's eternal plan, is an essential element of the Gospel. We deny that any view of the atonement that rejects the substitutionary satisfaction of divine justice, accomplished vicariously for believers, is compatible with the teaching of the Gospel.

Statement 9. We affirm that Christ's saving work included both his life and his death on our behalf (Gal. 3:13). We declare that faith in the perfect obedience of Christ by which he fulfilled all the demands of the Law of God in our behalf is essential to the Gospel. We deny that our salvation was achieved merely or exclusively by the death of Christ without reference to his life of perfect righteousness.

I. Concepts and Definitions

A. Atonement

1. Originally coined by William Tyndale (16th Century) to translate the Latin term *reconciliatio*, "atonement" means a re-establishing, reinstatement, restoration, or renewal. It is a Latin synonym for *propitiatorius*: to pacify, appease, or reconcile. Atonement is the work Christ did to earn our salvation.
2. In the broadest sense, the atoning acts of Christ include his *life* as well as his death on the cross. Throughout Scripture, God requires perfect obedience and Christ's life of righteousness atones for our life of unrighteousness. The culmination of Christ's obedience, however, is seen in his willing submission to death.

B. Propitiation

1. Negatively, to propitiate means to turn aside or reverse God's anger; positively to render favorable. In propitiation God initiates the offering *and* He receives it as total satisfaction for the debt incurred by our sin.
2. "Propitiation" can also mean "mercy seat" or "cover." It is the center of God's provision for atonement (cf., Lev. 16:30; Heb. 9:12). The cross now takes the place that the mercy seat once occupied. What was once done in secret is now laid bare for all to see (Mt. 27:50-51)!
3. The orientation or focus of propitiation is vertical or Godward as it is God who is propitiated by Christ's life and death.

II. Atonement through Sacrifice and Substitution

A. Sacrifice

1. The NT sees Jesus as Isaiah's Suffering Servant (compare, Is. 53, verses 1, 4-9, 11 and Jn. 12:38, Mt. 8:17; 1 Pt. 2:22-25; Acts 8:30-35).
2. The cross is where God's loving purpose and righteous demands meet (Rom. 3:21-25)
 - a) Since no human can withstand God's wrath and live, then
 - b) God takes the initiative and unleashes his holy fury and rage on His Son, because
 - c) Only God himself can withstand and avert his righteous wrath, (Rom. 3:25; also, Is. 53:6).
3. Therefore, the cross is God's justice and love on display before the entire world (Rom. 5:6-8; 1 Jn. 4:10).
"The wisdom of God has ordained a way for the love of God to deliver us from the wrath of God without compromising the justice of God" (Piper, *Desiring God*, p. 59).
4. The sacrifice of Christ was a once-for-all event making complete and final restitution to God for the debt we incurred (Col. 2:14; Heb. 9:26-28, 1 Jn. 2:2).

B. Substitution

"The concept of substitution may be said . . . to lie at the heart of both sin and salvation. For the essence of sin is man substituting himself for man. Man asserts himself against God and puts himself where only God deserves to be; God sacrifices himself for man and puts himself where only man deserves to be. Man claims prerogatives which belong to God alone; God accepts penalties which belong to man alone."¹

1. Biblical testimony of substitution includes the following:
 Jesus “himself bore our sins in his body” (1 Pt. 2:24), was made “sin for us” (2 Cor. 5:21) become a “curse for us” (Gal. 3:13) by giving “his life as a ransom for many” (Mk. 10:45).
2. Jesus did for us what we could never do for ourselves in that he
 - a) turned away God’s righteous wrath
 - b) fulfilled God’s righteous requirements (Rom. 8:3-4)
 - c) provided the means of an eternal relationship with God
3. As our faithful high priest, Jesus fully represents us in every respect by standing in our place as our sacrifice and Savior; the victim and Victor (Heb. 2:17).
4. The Passover story pictures Christ’s substitutionary sacrifice (Ex. 12:12-13)
 - a) Christ is “a lamb without blemish or defect” (1 Pt. 1:19)
 - b) Christ is our Passover lamb (1 Cor. 5:7)
 - c) Christ is “the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (Jn. 1:29)
 - d) The only firstborn males who were spared were those from homes that sacrificed a lamb instead.
 - e) The Lord had to see the blood applied to each home before passing over the family indicating personal appropriation
5. The Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur) indicates substitutionary sacrifice (Lev. 16:5ff)
 - a) Both goats represented one sin offering (v. 5)
 - b) Each goat represented different but complimentary aspects of atonement. The sacrificed goat represented the means of atonement (death) whereas the scapegoat represented the results of atonement (forgiveness). Both were intended as a substitute for the people, symbolically represented by the High Priest laying both hands on the scapegoat and confessing the sins of the people (Lev. 16:21-22).
 - c) The author of Hebrews relates these concepts of atonement to Christ’s work on the cross (9:7, 12, 28).

III. Atonement through Christ’s Obedience

A. *The Necessity of Obedience Found in Christ*

1. Though the price of sin had been paid at the cross, the example of a sin-free life had to be lived.
2. Guilt once removed still requires blameless living before a holy God.

B. *The Provision of Obedience Found in Christ*

1. As the Suffering Servant, Christ’s entire life and death can be summed up by obedience, as his own declaration states: “I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me” (Jn. 6:38).
2. Paul’s goal (and ours) was that he may “be found in him, not having a righteousness of [his] own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith” (Philip. 3:9). We need more than a *tabula rasa*; we need explicit moral righteousness and Christ’s life provides that.
3. Our sin nature derived from our earthly parentage requires that Christ’s obedient life is charged to our account if we are to stand before a holy, just God (Rom. 5:19).
4. Christ “learned obedience from what he suffered and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him” (Heb. 5:8-9). In what sense did Christ “learn” obedience?
 - a) Our obedience is asymmetrically related to the salvation procured by Christ’s obedient life and death.
 - b) Though we our skill in obedience typically grows by experiencing the unpleasant consequences of our disobedience, Jesus learned obedience by experiencing the world’s resistance to his godly living (cf., 2 Tim. 3:12).

- c) The sufferings Jesus endured throughout his life and death was part of his obedience and the very means by which he fulfilled the will of God (Heb. 12:2-3)
- d) Jesus' baptism was a public declaration of his resolution to "fulfill all righteousness" (Matt. 3:15).

IV. Love and Justice: A Dilemma for God?

A. *The Nature of the Dilemma*

1. How can God show his love without compromising his holiness by condoning sin?
2. How can God fully express his holiness without consuming those he loves?

B. *Answering the Dilemma*

1. The dilemma is really ours, since salvation is not from any divine necessity. Put differently, God is not obligated to save us. Salvation is purely out of his grace. God's love is a holy love. Hence the cross is where God's love and justice meet.
2. At the cross God's love is holy and his forgiveness righteous.
3. "Was there any other way for God to save sinners?"

a) The holy love of God says "NOT!"

The idea of someone having to die so heaven's gates would open is, quite frankly, a repugnant notion. But, if God is holy and just he must act against sin. If he were to do anything else he would cease to be the God of Christianity. Salvation from sin is impossible unless the price of sin be paid in full meeting the demands of God's justice. Yet out of love God accomplished, through Christ life and death, what we could never accomplish for ourselves. Jesus paid the penalty that we incurred, taking the consequence of our sin upon himself to satisfy the justice of God and to demonstrate the love of God. So, given the holiness and justice of God; the loving, determinative purpose of God to save some, and the sinfulness of humanity there is no other way in which God could have redeemed us (see. Lk. 24:25-26).

V. Practical Implications

1. Christ's obedient life should motivate us to enduring obedience (Heb: 12:1-4).

"Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart."

2. Suffering was the path to Jesus' perfect obedience – so too, with ours (Jm. 1:2-4). In your suffering as a Christian are you "letting endurance have its perfect result so that you may be mature and complete?"
3. Completely resting in Christ's obedient life and his all-sufficient death gives us everything we need for spiritual health and emotional well-being.

Although 'getting in' the Kingdom is based upon God's grace, we often think that 'staying in' is based upon our performance. But, *our assurance must never be held hostage by our obedience*. If obedient living is our basis for assurance, then we run the risk of living graceless moral lives that look like the Pharisees whom Jesus repeatedly denounced. And, if we tie assurance too closely to our salvation experience, then we run the risk of our faith being devoid of evidence that God has truly transformed us. *The objective basis of our assurance in salvation must always and forever be "Jesus Christ the Righteous One," whereas the subjective basis of our assurance comes from our obedience*. To confuse one with the other often invites spiritual shipwreck.

4. In summary, Christ took our place, bore our sin, became our curse, endured our penalty, and died our death. Therefore, God is not an unwilling judge who has to be persuaded by Jesus to forgive, because it was God himself who provided the atoning sacrifice for all our sin. He has paid our debt in full without remainder!

*When I survey the wondrous cross
On which the Prince of glory died
My richest gain I count but loss
And pour contempt on all my pride.*

*See, from His head, His hands, His feet
Sorrow and love flow mingled down
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet
Or thorns compose so rich a crown.*

*Were the whole realm of nature mine
That were an offering far too small
Love so amazing, so divine
Demand my soul, my life, my all.*

¹ John. R. W. Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, (InterVarsity Press, 1986), p. 160.