

SACRIFICE JESUS CHRIST MADE ATONEMENT FOR SIN

By J.I. Packer (from *Concise Theology*)

God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood (Rom. 3:25).

Atonement means making amends, blotting out the offense, and giving satisfaction for wrong done; thus reconciling to oneself the alienated other and restoring the disrupted relationship.

Scripture depicts all human beings as needing to atone for their sins but lacking all power and resources for doing so. We have offended our holy Creator, whose nature it is to hate sin (Jer. 44:4; Hab. 1:13) and to punish it (Ps. 5:4-6; Rom. 1:18; 2:5-9). No acceptance by, or fellowship with, such a God can be expected unless atonement is made, and since there is sin in even our best actions, anything we do in hopes of making amends can only increase our guilt or worsen our situation. This makes it ruinous folly to seek to establish one's own righteousness before God (Job 15:14-16; Rom. 10:2-3); it simply cannot be done.

But against this background of human hopelessness, Scripture sets forth the love, grace, mercy, pity, kindness, and compassion of God, the offended Creator, in himself providing the atonement that our sin has made necessary. This amazing grace is the focal center of New Testament faith, hope, worship, ethics, and spiritual life; from Matthew to Revelation it shines out with breathtaking glory.

When God brought Israel out of Egypt, he set up as part of the covenant relationship a system of sacrifices that had at its heart the shedding and offering of the blood of unflawed animals "to make atonement for yourselves" (Lev. 17:11). These sacrifices were *typical* (that is, as *types*, they pointed forward to something else). Though sins were in fact "left . . . unpunished" (Rom. 3:25) when sacrifices were faithfully offered, what actually blotted them out was not the animals' blood (Heb. 10:11) but the blood of the *antitype*, the sinless Son of God, Jesus Christ, whose death on the cross atoned for all sins that were remitted before the event as well as sins committed after it (Rom. 3:25-26; 4:3-8; Heb. 9:11-15).

New Testament references to the blood of Christ are regularly sacrificial (e.g., Rom. 3:25; 5:9; Eph. 1:7; Rev. 1:5). As a perfect sacrifice for sin (Rom. 8:3; Eph. 5:2; 1 Pet. 1:18-19), Christ's death was our redemption (i.e., our rescue by ransom: the paying of a price that freed us from the jeopardy of guilt, enslavement to sin, and expectation of wrath; Rom. 3:24; Gal. 4:4-5; Col. 1:14). Christ's death was God's act of reconciling us to himself, overcoming his own hostility to us that our sins provoked (Rom. 5:10; 2 Cor. 5:18-19; Col. 1:20-22). The Cross propitiated God (i.e., quenched his wrath against us by expiating our sins and so removing them from his sight). Key texts here are Romans 3:25; Hebrews 2:17; 1 John 2:2 and 4:10, in each of which the Greek expresses propitiation explicitly. The cross had this propitiatory effect because in his suffering Christ assumed our identity, as it were, and endured the retributive judgment due to us ("the curse of the law," Gal. 3:13) as our substitute, in our place, with the damning record of our transgressions nailed by God to his cross as the tally of crimes for which he was now dying (Col. 2:14; cf. Matt. 27:37; Isa. 53:4-6; Luke 22:37).

Christ's atoning death ratified the inauguration of the new covenant, in which access to God under all circumstances is guaranteed by Christ's one sacrifice that covers all transgressions (Matt. 26:27-28; 1 Cor. 11:25; Heb. 9:15; 10:12-18). Those who through faith in Christ have "received reconciliation" (Rom. 5:11) "in him . . . become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor. 5:21). In other words, they are justified and receive the status of adopted children in God's family (Gal. 4:5). Thereafter they live under the motivating constraint and control of the love of Christ for them as made known and measured by the cross (2 Cor. 5:14).