

Series on the Atonement

Jonathan Duttweiler.

A five part series of sermons covering the Moral Government theology of the atonement:

- *God's Biggest Problem* - Serious problems confront the Godhead in forgiving sins, this sermon looks at the problems of reconciliation.
- *The Only Solution* - How are the problems of reconciliation to be overcome? An introductory look at the solution.
- *All For Us!* - Christ did not die because of the cross, but rather because of the "sins of the world"! All that He did, He did for us!
- *It is Finished!* - An examination of the necessary characteristics of an atonement and whether the cross of Christ meets those characteristics.
- *Just and the Justifier* - Showing that the Cross solves all the governmental problems confronting God in the forgiveness of sins. Last in the series.

GOD'S BIGGEST PROBLEM

The Gospel of Luke tells us of a time in Jesus' ministry when He "resolutely set out for Jerusalem." (Luke 9:51). Even though He knew the authorities sought to kill Him, even though He knew it meant the cross - He was determined to go, to carry out God's will!

Why? Why must He go, why must He die? Legitimate questions that have been asked by many down through the ages. Why did Jesus die on the cross? What purpose does it serve? How can it possibly effect us years after the event? Paul writes in Colossians: "For it pleased [the] [Father]... to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross." Colossians 1:19-20

Perhaps the most surprising revelation of the Bible is that, in spite of our sin and persistent rebellion, God is free from **all** vindictiveness and desires to *freely forgive* our sin! "Why doesn't He, then?" someone may ask. Because there are some very big problems in the way!

The Problems of Reconciliation

1. The first problem confronting God was that of forgiving sin without causing a breakdown of His moral government.

Remember, humanity was created with free moral choice. Jesus - "**If** any man is *willing* to do God's will..." God seeks to illuminate our understanding of right and wrong, but will NEVER control our moral decisions.

Also it cannot be forgotten that God is completely impartial - "there is no partiality with God." While God is more than willing to forgive sin, He had to find a way to be partial in forgiving the repentant sinner while still punishing the unrepentant.

God must uphold the Law. Whenever sin is forgiven, its consequences are eliminated, weakening the enforcement of the Law. Just look at our present judicial system. Most crimes are never punished, and when they are it may take years to see justice fully served. A few years ago there was a prisoner on death row who was surprised when he was to be executed so quickly after he had committed a murder. It was four years!

Thus, if pardon of sins is freely extended to penitent sinners, some measure must be taken in order that Law will be upheld just as if they had been punished! God declares in Ezekiel 18:20, "The soul who sins shall die." How can He reverse that and say "the soul who sins may live," without moral government breaking down? This is one of God's big problems.

2. Another problem confronting God is how He may forgive sin while at the same time display His grief and hatred for sin?

A profound truth we see throughout scriptures is God's inexpressible grief over our sin, that He in fact hates sin! But people think that, because of God's long-suffering and patience, He must not be disturbed that much by our actions. However, Jesus reveals, "that which is highly esteemed among man is detestable in the sight of God." Therefore something must be done to show God's great grief over our sin and His hatred of it!

3. Yet another problem in the forgiveness of sins is finding a way to forgive sin but still show us our guilt, break our pride, and make us see our deservance of punishment. Ever have a falling out with someone?

How are you reconciled? When you come to have the same mind over the matter. Only those of like mind can have fellowship with one another. We either agree over an issue, or at least agree to disagree. There are people who like rock music and people who like classical or country and they wouldn't go to a concert together.

Musical preferences are a matter of taste, however God deals in TRUTH! He sees things the way they really are. Our problem is that we don't see ourselves the way God does, we hide our sin, make excuses, don't think we are really as bad as scripture presents. While I was in seminary I did a practicum at a State Prison. I did not meet a single person who admitted they had done the crime for which they were in prison. This is how humanity is before God. Yet scripture declares "desires all men to be saved and to come to the *knowledge of the truth*." (1 Timothy 2:4) So, something drastic is needed to awaken us from our pride in our own goodness and bring us in humility to God!

4. The final problem is how to overcome all these problems without violating man's free will!

In attempting to overcome these problems God cannot simply overwhelm our moral freedom. People often ask "Why doesn't God just make people do as He wants?" But if God were to control us by sheer force, we would no longer be human beings, people in the image of God. The one thing most people seem to resent more than anything else is to be manipulated, controlled, coerced into some action. Yet this is precisely the tact they believe God should take with humanity if He really intended them to live righteously. They would be the first to condemn such action on God's part before the bar of Universal justice!

No, God will not coerce our wills and so some means must be brought about that will persuade the repentant sinner to yield freely to God's transforming power in his life! We must be won to God even as a lover might pursue his beloved and win her over to his love!

Conclusion:

There can be no simple solution to these problems, no easy answers! The only possible solution must show God's great love for man **and** His great grief over sin. It must break

our pride and have the same effect as eternal punishment would on curtailing sin. It must be universally applicable for God "The Lord is...long-suffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance." (2 Peter 3:9) It must be understandable by people of every intellectual capacity so anyone might take advantage of it, from the simplest to the most wise. Thus we see that Jesus "resolutely set His face toward Jerusalem," for the solution to all these problems is met in Christ.

The Only Solution

"And according to the law almost all things are purified with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no remission." Hebrews 9:22

Introduction

In the last sermon we saw that there are grave problems confronting God in forgiving sin, He:

1.
 1. Has to find a way to uphold law while forgiving lawbreaker;
 2. Has to show His grief over, and hatred for, sin while forgiving the sinner;
 3. Has to break humanity's pride and make us see our guilt;
 4. Has to find a way to transform our whole being, our manner of living, without violating our free will!

God's solution - perhaps the ONLY solution - was to provide an atonement!

"Atonement" means "covering", specifically the covering of sin, thus removing sin as a barrier to fellowship.

Biblically, "atonement" is a **substitution** of the sufferings of an innocent "victim" for the suffering of the guilty. The cross of Jesus Christ is the perfect atonement, all that is necessary to overcome these problems. As Hebrews states, *"Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption."* (Heb. 9:12)

Why an "Atonement"?

Why is it that *"without shedding of blood there is no remission."* ?

Is God *"bloodthirsty"*? Could no other method prevail? Many think the concept of an Atonement presents just this image of God! In their objections, most offer three principle conditions as suitable bases for forgiveness of sin apart from the Cross:

1. The mercy of God - many look to the great love of God expressed in scripture and claim that a God of such great love will forgive everyone simply as a matter of course.
2. Repentance and reformation - some believe that being sorry for sin and determining to reform will recommend them to God for forgiveness.
3. Good works - still others rely on the belief that their good works will offset their sin and so commend them to God for forgiveness.

Yet scripture steadfastly affirms that "*without shedding of blood there is no remission.*"

Apart from Christ's atoning work we have no basis for hope for forgiveness - NONE of these other things will provide the foundation for God forgiving our sin! Let's take a closer look at these other reasons and see what people are really saying!

Many (most?) people want to simply rely on the mercy of God for their forgiveness. In our increasingly secular society which rejects the concept of biblical revelation, the attitude appears to be "Oh, God is TO LOVING to send me to hell." The moral man, the skeptic, the universalist, even the desolute sinner hold onto this hope.

However, rather than mercy and love, their hope seems to be in the *justice* of God. When pressed as to why, in His mercy, God should forgive them, these people declare it would be "**wrong**" for God to send them, or ANYONE, to hell. The sinner says, "God made me the way I am, how can He condemn me for what I do?!" or "I'm only human, how could God expect anything more of me?"

What they fail to understand in their sentimentality, is that while God is long-suffering, no government can offer pardon on the basis of mercy alone, crime (**SIN**) would run rampant! Furthermore, scripture reveals to us that God's love is not mere *sentimentality*, but is founded in His holiness, His justice, and His righteousness. The prophet Zephaniah declares "*The Lord [is] righteous in her midst, He will do no unrighteousness.*"

Repentance and reformation likewise fail to provide the necessary basis for forgiveness of sins.

First of all, *repentance* is not what the law demands, *obedience* is! No Law ever written allows its violation on condition the offender repent! Just think how would it be if the laws of the land offered pardon to all who would simply promise not to commit that crime again?

Repentance can never remove the effects of sin! Behavior may change in those who truly repent, but the effects of past actions cannot be nullified by their repentance. For the gambler, the murderer, the adulterer, repentance cannot restore property, life or trust! Repentance does not *repair* the past, it can only offer hope for the future.

Repentance does not give one a clear conscience! The child who does something wrong and immediately expresses his sorrow to his parents and avoids punishment - his conscious will still bother him. In his heart he feels there ought to be more, that something should make up for his crime! Now, its true that in our society many have developed an alarming *lack* of conscience. Yet, somewhere deep within, that God given "bottom grinding stone," as Finney put it, is still there and will have to be dealt with in some way. Repentance alone is not enough.

Future good works do not merit forgiveness of past sin either!

Nothing a person does in the future can offset any sin already committed! This stems out of the notion that one can be *better*, live holier, than one's moral obligation demands. The problem is you can *never* be better than you are required to be! Virtue is based on the fulfilling of one's moral obligation. Moral obligation is based on the revelation, or *light of truth*, one has - i.e. the more one knows to do good the more good one is required to do. If a person actually lived above the light he had, it would have no virtue for it is not based on design, but rather on accident. We attach no moral value to winning the lottery; no one says "what a fine, upstanding person that is" because they hit the "pick five." Why, because its simply a matter of chance (not to mention the negative moral ramifications of gambling!) not of design.

We also have the problem of Jesus' declaration: "*Therefore you shall be perfect , just as your Father in heaven is perfect.*" (Matt. 5:48) Thus no one who hears Jesus' words can be better than they *ought*, for they *ought* to be like God! It is therefore absurd to think a person can be good enough to build up a surplus of merit!

Finally, future obedience of the moral law cannot be a basis for forgiveness because it cannot effect past violations!

How many times have you gotten into an argument and said hurtful things you immediately wished you could take back? But how can you take back the *hurt* caused by a harsh word, a cruel action? How can the *victims* of sin be restored to the state they were in prior to being sinned against. Can you give back a rape victim's trust and innocence? And what about God? The bible reveals that God is profoundly effected by our sin, that He grieves over it and is caused pain by it! Can our future obedience take away the immeasurable hurt and grief that we have cause the great Godhead! **No!**

Conclusion

As we have seen, none of these man made designs provide sufficient basis for overcoming the problems confronting God in forgiving sin. Only the shedding of blood, only the atonement of Christ; one wholly innocent and righteous, dying a cruel death in our place, makes forgiveness possible!

Paul writes in Romans 5:8-9, "*But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him.*" The atonement of Jesus Christ, this is God's solution and the answer to our problem!

All For Us!

"But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed." Isaiah 53.5 (ASV)

The mercy of God is such that He will **not** leave us to suffer the just consequences of our sin without attempting to reconcile us to Himself. Many of us, if put in the same situation, would throw up our hands in disgust and say "forget it, they don't deserve anymore of my time!" Which is, of course, exactly the point, God is "long-suffering" where we humans seldom are.

However, mercy is **not** enough to overcome the problems of forgiving sin! As we saw in the last sermon, it takes an atonement, something substituted in the place of the penalty of the Law which would answer the same ends as would the penalty being carried out. That is, it would show us God's view of sin, His grief and hatred for it, and humble us as we recognize our own guilt and responsibility in rebelling against the Law of God and breaking His Father heart! The suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, as our *substitute*, accomplishes all of this, and, as we respond to God's great grace in repentance and faith, reconciles us to God.

All For Us

What a wonderful truth that God's word presents to us - He did it ALL for us! *"Surely he hath borne **our** griefs, and carried **our** sorrows...he was wounded for **our** transgressions, he was bruised for **our** iniquities; the chastisement of **our** peace was upon him;" (Is. 53:4, 5)*

Christ was our **substitute**, but not just any substitute! Jesus asked his disciples once who they thought he was. They gave him a lot of the popular thinking of the day, what the religious leaders were teaching, what the teachers thought, what the masses were saying. But then he gets to the crux of the matter, "Who do **you** say that I am?" Peter speaks up, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." The cross of Christ atones for sin not simply because *someone* died, but because **WHO** it was Who suffered and died!

Malcolm Muggeridge, the Quaker theologian, once wrote: "One thing at least can be said with certainty about the crucifixion of Christ; it was manifestly the most famous death in history. No other death has aroused one-hundredth part of the interest, or been remembered with one-hundredth part of the intensity and concern."

But let's look at what the scriptures have to say about Jesus, our substitute:

He was, first of all, God in the flesh - *"and the Word was God...And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us..."* (John 1:1, 14)

Yet He was also a man, a humble servant - *"He was...a man of sorrows , and acquainted with grief:"* (Is. 53:3) And Paul goes on to tell us in Philippians that Jesus *"who, existing in the form of God, counted not the being on an equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, becoming obedient [even] unto death,..."* (Phil 2:7-8 ASV) This was the person, wholly innocent and blameless, who John recognized as the Sin Bearer! *"The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, " Behold ! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"* (John 1:29 NKJV) As He walked among the people, saw their sin and was rejected by them, Isaiah says He *"Surely...hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows;"* (Isaiah 53:4)

Then, at the cross, He suffered as our substitute, suffering what we deserve to suffer! As Peter put it, *"Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree,"* (1 Pet. 2:24) As he hung on the cross, Christ agonized over the sins of the world - *"For He made Him who knew no sin [to] [be] sin (or a "sin offering") for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."* (2 Cor. 5:21 NKJV) Can you imagine this? **Nothing** had ever before happened like this - the holy and righteous God experienced the agony and anguish of sin! At this point Jesus cries, *"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?!"*

Finally - the weight of sin could be borne no longer and Jesus, Who had identified so intimately with humanity, died of grief - a broken ruptured heart! As Isaiah tells us again, *"He shall see of the travail of his soul , [and] shall be satisfied : by the knowledge of himself shall my righteous servant justify many; and he shall bear their iniquities."* (Is. 53:11 ASV) You see, Christ did **not** die from the crucifixion, which often took days, but from the "internal agony of His soul"! No one **took** Jesus' life from Him, as would be the case if He died from the crucifixion, but rather He voluntarily laid down His life - as He contemplated the vastness of sin, as He took the full weight of the shame and degradation of humanity's rebellion upon His consciousness, His heart literally broke! Jesus declared in John 10:17-18, *"I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down..."* And thus He did, dying for us, crushed and broken over our sin!

But not only has Jesus died for us, He rose from the dead and intercedes for us with God! Hebrews 7:24-25 tells us that *"He [Jesus], because He continues forever, has an unchangeable priesthood. Therefore He is also able to save to the **uttermost** those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them."* For Christ to have died and not be raised would have meant the victory of sin, its power left intact. But Christ **was** raised and lives - a constant reminder of the work that He has accomplished and God's acceptance of it as a full and complete solution to the problems of forgiveness.

We must understand, then, that simply because God loves us and desires to forgive us doesn't make forgiveness simple or easy. C. S. Lewis once wrote, "It costs God nothing, so far as we know, to create nice things: but to convert rebellious wills cost Him **crucifixion.**" *"For He shall grow up before Him as a tender plant, And as a root out of dry ground. He has no form or comeliness; And when we see Him, [There] [is] no beauty*

that we should desire Him. He is despised and rejected by men, A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, [our] faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. Surely He has borne our griefs And carried our sorrows; Yet we esteemed Him stricken, Smitten by God, and afflicted. But He [was] wounded for our transgressions, [He] [was] bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace [was] upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way; And the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all." (Is. 53:2-6)

Christ left His home in glory for us; He became a man for us; identified with our sin; and poured out His blood as a substitute for the penalty we **DESERVE!** Even though we have all "gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way...the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all!" Can it be that we will ignore Him, that we will take His cross for granted and be indifferent to His sacrifice, when all He has done He has done for us?!

It is Finished!

"After this, Jesus, knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, said, "I thirst!... So when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, "It is finished!" And bowing His head, He gave up His spirit" (John 19:28, 30 NKJV)

So far in this examination of the Atonement of Christ we looked into the grave problems facing God in forgiving sin. Yet, as Gordon Olson points out: "God is willing to forgive man's sin 'freely by His grace,' without any need for personal vindictive satisfaction, when this can be done consistent with all His righteous obligations as Moral Governor."

So God overcomes these problems and accomplishes reconciliation through the suffering and death of Jesus Christ as an "atonement" for sin! However, to be successful, an atonement must consist of certain characteristics that will be impressed upon the hearts of human beings. Thus, we must examine the characteristics of the Atonement and see if these are met in the Cross of Christ!

First of all, sin must be shown to be exceedingly unlovely and tragic!

To do this the means of reconciliation must be an event or series of events both gruesome and filled with great awe and grief. Remember, an "atonement" is an act substituted for the penalty which the Law would otherwise require. According to Ezekiel 18:20, *"The soul that sinneth, it shall die."* That is, the sinner shall experience separation from God, the source of all that is good and satisfying, the source of **life**. This substitution for the penalty of the Law must therefore have the **same**, or **greater**, effect as the death of the soul who sins itself!

As Olson points out, lovely and inspiring events cannot be substituted for unlovely and humiliating ones, sin is ugly and tragic and so must its remedy be!

Thus we see that the suffering and death of Jesus was indeed gruesome and tragic. Although He was the embodiment of **love**, Jesus told us that the world **hates** Him! We see this in His treatment by the crowd and authorities:

"Then Pilate therefore took Jesus, and scourged [him]. And the soldiers platted a crown of thorns, and put [it] on his head, and they put on him a purple robe, And said, Hail, King of the Jews! and they smote him with their hands...And it was the preparation of the Passover, and about the sixth hour: and he saith unto the Jews, Behold your King! But they cried out, Away with [him], away with [him], crucify him. Pilate saith unto them, Shall I crucify your King? The chief priests answered, We have no king but Caesar. Then delivered he him therefore unto them to be crucified. And they took Jesus, and led [him] away." John 19:1-3, 14-16

John tells us that before Jesus was crucified He was "scourged." Church historian Eusebius: puts this in historical perspective when he instructs us that in scourging, the

victims "veins were laid bare, and...the very muscles, sinews, and bowels of the victim were open to exposure."

We are also told that He was beaten about the face by the Roman soldiers. And then, of course, is the cross itself, perhaps one of the cruelest methods of capital punishment ever devised. We read that as Jesus hung there on the tree, "*darkness fell over the whole land*" and Christ displayed an inward agony and suffering that astonished even the hardened roman Centurion:

"So when the centurion, who stood opposite Him, saw that He cried out like this and breathed His last, he said, 'Truly this Man was the Son of God !'"

And the reaction of the crowd was similar, "*And all the multitudes that came together to this sight, when they beheld the things that were done, returned smiting their breasts ."*

This was no pleasant site, it was ugly, brutal and tragic! As Isaac Watts wrote in his beautiful hymn, "Here's love and grief beyond degree: The Lord of glory dies for man!"

The second necessary characteristic of an atonement

...is that the sufferings cannot be deserved by the one enduring them, that would make them simply ordinary. We may see this clearly in considering when a guilty man is sent to prison. We are not moved by this, we feel little compassion for one who receives that which is his due. However, when the innocent suffer, what the righteous are unjustly accused or punished, then righteous indignation flares within our breasts and we experience a sense of outrage.

The cross of Christ presents to us One of unspeakable majesty and glory suffering **undeserved** Pain and agony! As Pilate himself declares, "*I find no basis or a charge against Him.*" Gordon Olson writes of this aspect of the Cross, that "The (atonement) represents the dealings of God with man and thus must have divine dignity and moral excellence." And the stirring hymn from Charles Wesley declares,

*Oh love divine, what hast thou done!
The incarnate God hath died for me!
The Father's co-eternal Son,
bore all my sins upon the tree!*

Third, an atonement must be universal in scope,...

showing no partiality toward any class of man. People will often grasp at any excuse in refusing to repent, declaring "God can't, God won't forgive ME! I am too much of a sinner!" Yet, the bible is clear and the reasoning compelling that God does not offer forgiveness to a "chosen few", to a pre-ordained "elect." It is not on the basis of social standing or moral quality, not based on some secret divine will, rather the offer is to **all**: "*The Lord is not slack concerning [His] promise, as some count slackness, but is long-*

suffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance." (2 Peter 3:9)

Finally, an atonement must be simple!

That is, the means of reconciliation must be easily understood and applied by people of any intellectual level.

"For behold your calling, brethren, that not many wise after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, [are called]: but God chose the foolish things of the world, that he might put to shame them that are wise; and God chose the weak things of the world, that he might put to shame the things that are strong;" (1 Cor. 1:26 ASV)

While the mysteries of the Gospel offer unending room for exploration, the simple conditions of salvation, repentance, faith and continuing faith, are within the understanding of ALL! As John reminds us, *"But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name:"* (John 1:12 NKJV)

On the cross Jesus declared *"It is finished!"* after He knew that *"all things had already been accomplished."* He had done all that was necessary, all that was possible, to make a way for us to come to God and for God to exercise His great mercy and lovingkindness, in light of public justice, and forgive us. His suffering and death is intended to bring the greatest possible moral force to bear against our pride, our excuses and our hypocrisy.

He did it for each of us, all we must do is come to Him in repentance and faith and we will find the peace and joy of relationship with God.

Can anyone truly perceive the innocent Lamb of God suffering and dying a cruel death and not be broken? Finney wrote years ago, "If the benevolence (love) manifested in the atonement does not subdue the selfishness of sinners, their cause is hopeless!"

Just and Justifier

*"being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth [as] a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be **just and the justifier** of the one who has faith in Jesus."* Romans 3:24-26 (NKJV)

Throughout our whole examination of the subject of the Atonement we have been saying that the need for the Atonement Christ made for us stems out of the problems that face God in forgiving sin and reconciling the sinner: that is, God must find a way to uphold His moral government while forgiving those who violate its precepts:

1. He must also demonstrate His hatred for sin, yet love toward the sinner, all the while overcoming the sinner's fear, distrust and ignorance of God.
2. And He must find a way to bring about humility in the sinner, destroying any vestige *self-righteousness*, in those He forgives.
3. Finally, He must win the complete surrender of the hearts of free moral agents, that He might completely transform their character.

Thus, we must ask the question of the ages, does the Atonement of Christ actually overcome these problems? We may answer with a resounding **YES!**

The suffering and death of Jesus Christ satisfies *all* the problems God has in forgiving sin! As the Apostle Paul wrote, *"Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,"* (Romans 5:1 NKJV)

The Atonement of Christ satisfies "public justice" and therefore upholds God's moral government while at the same time allowing Him to forgive sin. Again, Paul writes, *"He did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies the man who has faith in Jesus Christ."* (Rom. 3:26, NIV)

"Public justice" is that justice which is concerned with the over-all interest and well being of the public at large. It looks more to the "spirit" of the Law than strictly to the letter! Nathaniel Taylor wrote of public justice, "...that which is common to them all, is a benevolent disposition of the moral governor to maintain by the requisite means his authority as the necessary condition of the highest happiness of his kingdom." A useful illustration of this concept is the common system of pardons & parole. This system allows offenders out of prison, without serving the strict penalty of the law, when it will not harm society. In this regard, it is deemed that the benevolence shown the offender is of greater value to the public good than keeping him in prison.

Gordon Olson points out that the "...advent and sufferings of Christ has provided a moral force of far greater proportions... than the threatened eternal punishment of sinners had provided..." In the cross of Christ we have a public testimony of God's hatred for sin and

the dreadful certainty that NO sin will go unpunished. *"For if God did not spare the angels who sinned, but cast [them] down to hell and delivered [them] into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment;...[then] the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment,"* (2 Peter 2:4, 9 NKJV) Thus, the cross of Christ becomes a roadblock to sin in the lives of believers. *"For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God [did] by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh,"* (Romans 8:3 NKJV)

The Atonement of Christ also reveals the moral character of God, thereby removing the problem of our ignorance of God's attitude toward us and our sin. *"This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previous committed."* (Romans 3:25 NAS) The atonement reveals God's great love and mercy! *"But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died For us,"* (Romans 5:8 NAS) God is **not** looking to take out His wrath on someone, but is willing to forgive freely those who will repent! The atonement of Christ also reveals His great grief and hatred for sin! The suffering of the "man of sorrows", His death from a broken heart over sin, makes sin forever a dreadfully serious and tragic matter!

The Atonement provides a force of humiliation for penitent sinners, revealing inescapably our own guilt, our deservance of punishment, and the great wickedness of our pride and self-righteousness! As Paul writes, the cross reveals that *"all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God."* (Romans 3:23) One thing that we have learned is that humility is more than voluntary will power, only some great moral force can subdue our pride! The principle purpose of the Holy Spirit is to take the awesome spectacle of the Crucified Christ and reveal the full ramifications of His death to the heart and will of the sinner. Thus, the impact is much as when Isaiah had a vision of God and declared, *"Woe is me, for I am undone!"* He saw himself in the light of God! We must realize and be awed by the judgement our sin deserves before God can forgive us - *"The sacrifices of God [are] a broken spirit, A broken and a contrite heart-- These, O God, You will not despise."* (Psalm 51:17 NKJV)

We see, then, that the Atonement directs sufficient moral power to our hearts, wills and understanding so as to bring us to a complete yielding of our innermost being to the transformative power of God. We've said that God cannot simply overwhelm our moral freedom to make us into the person He wants us to be; we would no longer be free moral agents. It is only as we yield ourselves to His rule that the Holy Spirit can cleanse and purify our whole inner personality. 1 Peter 1:22-23 states *"Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart, having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever."* Thus, the Spirit may bring us to a continual life of obedience and service empowered by the Spirit! *"Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for [His] good pleasure."* (Phil. 2:12-13 NKJV)

Gordon Olson writes, "The simple statement of the Bible seems to be that sin is such a dreadful tragedy in the kingdom of God that it cannot be disposed of in any simple matter." While God has no personal, vindictive desire to punish the wicked, He cannot freely forgive sin if it will cause more sin! Consequently, not only must sinners be humbled and repent, but some awful measure must be substituted for their punishment which will bring about the same, or greater, effect in checking sin and revealing God's righteousness that the punishment of their sin would.

Thus the cross of Christ stands through the mist of time; ever beckoning sinners to come and find peace, and joy, and love in relationship to their God! Thus, as John declares in that most magnificent of verses, "*For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.*" (John 3:16-17 NKJV)