

IMPORTANT QUESTIONS RELATING TO THE ATONEMENT

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1. Why did God give us a law?

The purpose of social government is to promote the well-being of the community (Rom. 13:4). The purpose of family government is to promote the well-being of the family (Prov. 13:24; 22:15; 23:13; 29:15). Likewise, the purpose of God's Government, the design of His laws, is to promote the highest well-being of all (Deut 5:29; 6:3; 6:24; 10:13; Jer. 7:23; 32:39; Lk. 6:9; Eph. 6:3), His own glory supremely (Matt. 22:37; Mk. 12:30; Lk. 10:27) and the well-being of neighbors equally (Matt. 19:19; 22:39; Mk. 12:31-33; Lk. 10:27; Rom 13:9; Gal. 5:14; Jas. 2:8). His Kingdom is righteousness, peace, and joy (Matt. 6:33; Rom. 14:17). These are the aims or purpose of His governing, what He desires for all men. An increase of His government results in an increase of peace (Isa. 9:7). Laws protect what is valuable, and well-being is valuable (Matt. 10:31; 12:11-12; Lk. 12:7). Well-being is intrinsically good (Lk. 16:25).

2. What is the punishment of sin?

The punishment of sin is endless torment in the lake of fire (Matt. 25:46; 2 Thes. 1:9; 2 Pet. 2:9; 3:7; Jude 1:7). The wages of sin is death, eternal death, in the lake of fire.

3. What is the purpose of punishment?

The purpose of punishment is to enforce the law (Dan. 6:14-16; Ester 1:15-22), lest it falls into contempt (Ecc. 8:11). When a law is violated, it must be vindicated, it must be enforced, or else its influence is weakened. Sanctions are designed to secure obedience to the precept; punishments are designed to support the law. Retributive justice (punishment) serves public justice (well-being of all).

Punishments must not be seen as personal vindictiveness on the part of the punisher (Eze. 18:32; 33:1; Lam. 3:32-33; Heb. 12:10).

4. What is forgiveness?

Forgiveness is when a claim is relaxed or a penalty is dispensed with (1 Chro. 21:7-15; 2 Chro. 12:5-7, 32:26; 2 Sam. 24:16; 24:25; Num. 16:46-48; Ps. 78:38; 106:23, 45; Jer. 18:8; Eze. 20:17; Micah 7:18-19; Jonah 3:9-10; 4:2; Joel 2:13-14). Forgiveness is when God turns from His wrath or anger (Deut. 13:17; Num. 25:4; Josh. 7:26; Ps. 78:38; 85:3-4; Joel 2:13; Jonah 3:9; Isa. 12:1; Jer. 3:12; Dan. 9:16; Hos. 11:9; 14:4). Forgiveness of sins is when God does not punish sins (Acts 5:31; 13:38; 26:18; Eph 1:7; Col 1:14; Heb 9:22), the pardon of a debt is when the payment for a debt is remanded instead of demanded (Matt 6:12; 18:27; Lk. 7:42). Pardoning sins, passing over transgression,

delighting in mercy, is one of God's glorious attributes (Micah 7:18). Punishment and forgiveness cannot co-exist, they are opposites (but atonement and forgiveness can co-exist). The pardon of a debt and the payment of a debt are polar opposites (Matt. 18:23-35). Mercy is the opposite of judgment (Heb. 10:27-30; Jas. 2:13), mercy is when retributive judgment is set aside, when judgment is relaxed, when crimes are pardoned instead of punished, when God passes over sins as if they didn't exist, treating them as if they never occurred.

5. What are the problems of forgiveness?

When punishment is set aside, the influence of the law is weakened. If the penalty of the law is dispensed with, the law has nothing to enforce it, unless atonement is made to substitute the penalty of the law. If the law is violated, but no punishment is inflicted, or no sacrifice is offered, the law is not being vindicated and disobedience will spread. (Dan. 6:7-16; Esther 1:16-22; Ecc. 8:11). The well-being of all, which the law is designed to protect, is in danger if the penalty of the law is set aside, unless atonement is made.

6. What is an atonement?

The atonement is blood shed which substitutes hell fire. The suffering of Christ on the cross is an alternative, replacement, or substitute for the eternal punishment of sinners in hell. The atonement consisted in the wounding and bruising of Christ (Isa. 53:5), in the agony of His soul (Isa. 53:3-4, 10-12; Matt. 26:38; Mk. 14:34) and in the shedding of His blood (Lev. 17:11; Heb. 9:22) on behalf of our sins.

Just as punishment was meant to secure obedience to the law, the atonement which substitutes our punishment is meant to secure obedience to the law, so that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from our sin (Matt. 1:21; Jn. 1:29; Acts 3:26; Rom. 8:4; 2 Cor. 5:15; Eph. 5:25-27; Col 1:21-23; Titus 2:11-12, 14; Heb. 9:26; 10:10; Tit. 2:14; 1 Pet. 2:24; 1 Jn. 1:7; 3:5). Sacrifices are useless without a change of heart, without a deep moral change inside the transgressor for whom the sacrifice is made (Ps. 50:7-23; 51:16-17; Prov. 15:8; 16:6; 21:3; 21:27; Isa. 1:10-17; 56:6-7; 66:3-4; Jer. 7:21-26; 11:14-17; 14:10-12; Hos. 6:6-7; 8:11-14; 9:1-6; 12:9-11; 14:1-3; Joel 1:9, 13; 2:12-14; Amos 4:4-5; 5:21-27; Jonah 1:15; 2:9; 3:5-10; Mic. 6:6-8; Zeph. 1:7-13; 3:10-11; Hag. 2:14; Zech. 14:21; Mal. 1:6-14; 2:10-14; 3:3-4; Matt. 9:13; 12:7; Heb. 10:8).

The atonement is that which allows God to set aside the eternal punishment which sinners deserve (Heb. 9:22); the shedding of blood makes possible the remission of the penalty of the law.

7. How does the atonement overcome the problems of forgiveness?

The atonement changes man, it subdues his rebellious heart and brings him to repentance unto obedience. A revelation of the suffering of Christ should subdue our hearts and bring us to complete surrender unto God (Rom. 2:4), repenting out of a motive of love, not selfishness (1 Jn. 4:19). God is drawing all men through the atonement (Jn. 12:32),

and it is His loving kindness which draws us (Jer.. 31:3; Rom. 2:4).

Blood shed also vindicates the violated law. The cross declares the righteousness of God so that God could be merciful to the sinner (Rom. 3:25-26).

And once the rebellious are brought to submission, once the law is vindicated, and once the righteousness of God is demonstrated, the penalty of the law can be dispensed with so that the criminal can be pardoned. Once the danger of rebellion is subdued by the atonement, once the violated law is vindicated by blood shed, and when the influence and authority of the law is upheld by Christ's death, the punishment of sin can be set aside, the penalty of the law can be dispensed with, so that sins can be forgiven - pardon can be granted - remission of sins can be offered.

Because of the blood of Jesus Christ, which was shed for our sins, God can set aside the punishment of all those who repent of their sins and believe the Gospel that Jesus died for their sins. Christ shed His blood for the remission of sins (Matt. 26:28; Rom. 3:25; Heb. 9:22; Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:14).