

**BIBLICAL SOTERIOLOGY:
An Overview and Defense of the
Reformed Doctrines of Salvation**

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Limited Atonement, part 13

**ARGUMENTS SUPPORTING THE DOCTRINE OF
LIMITED ATONEMENT**

**IV. MEANS BY WHICH ATONEMENT WAS ACCOMPLISHED: AGENTS
(cont.)**

A. God the Father (cont.)

**2. Laid Punishment on the Son — God the Father laid the punishment
due the people for their sins on God the Son.**

“Surely our grief He Himself bore, and our sorrows He carried; yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, and by His scourging we are healed. All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; but the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him. He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He did not open His mouth; like a lamb that is led to slaughter, and like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, so He did not open His mouth. By oppression and judgment He was taken away; and as for His generation, who considered that He was cut off out of the land of the living, for the transgression of my people to whom the stroke was due? His grave was assigned to be with wicked men, yet with a rich man in His death; although He had done no violence, nor was there any deceit in His mouth. But the Lord was pleased to crush Him, putting Him to grief; if He would render Himself as a guilt offering, He will see His offspring, He will prolong His days, and the good pleasure of the Lord will prosper in His hand. As a result of the anguish of His soul, He will

see it and be satisfied; by His knowledge the Righteous One, My Servant, will justify the many, as He will bear their iniquities. Therefore, I will allot Him a portion with the great, and He will divide the booty with the strong; because He poured out Himself to death, and was numbered with the transgressors; yet He Himself bore the sin of many, and interceded for the transgressors” (Isa. 53:4-12).

According to Jesus himself, this prophecy was to be ultimately fulfilled in Christ:

“That which is written must be fulfilled in Me, ‘And He was classed among criminals’” (Luke 22:37).

Peter also taught that Christ finally fulfilled this prophecy:

“For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth; and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously; and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed. For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls” (1 Peter 2:21-25).

Christ was smitten of God, and God “caused the iniquity of us all to fall on him.” It was God who was pleased to crush Christ on the cross, putting him to grief. In Isaiah 53:4-12 the Father promised that when the Christ rendered himself as an offering, the Father would do two things. First, he would impute the guilt of his people to the Christ. Second, the Father would punish Christ for the iniquity of the people. These things took place at the cross.

B. God the Son — All acts regarding the atonement which were performed by God the Son were performed in obedience to the will of God the Father.

“Father, if Thou art willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Thine be done” (Luke 22:42; cf. Matt. 26:39,42).

As he indicated in his prayer in Gethsemane, Jesus submitted to the Father’s will by subjecting himself to the events beginning with his arrest and culminating in his crucifixion.

“For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me” (John 6:38).

Christ’s incarnation, as well as the type and scope of his ministry, were dictated by the will of the Father. Thus, when on the cross Christ rendered himself an offering for sin, he did so in accordance with and in obedience to the Father’s will.

“Therefore when He comes into the world, He says, ‘Sacrifice and offering Thou hast not desired, but a body Thou hast prepared for Me; in whole burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin Thou hast taken no pleasure. Then I said, ‘Behold, I have come (in the roll of the book it is written of Me) to do Thy will, O God.’” ... By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all” (Heb. 10:5-7,10).

In this text, the author attributed these sentiments to Christ, indicating that God had prepared a body for him, and that Christ had come to do the Father’s will. Christ performed the will of God specifically by becoming incarnate and offering his body as an atoning sacrifice.

1. Incarnation — The Son took on flesh and blood in order to redeem the children of God through the atonement.

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God ... And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:1,14).

Though these particular verses do not identify the Word as Jesus by name, the broader context does (e.g. John 1:15,29-30), Jesus was God, and he became flesh (i.e. incarnate).

“Paul, a bond-servant of Christ Jesus, called as an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, which He promised beforehand through His

prophets in the Holy Scriptures, concerning His Son, who was born of a descendant of David according to the flesh, who was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead, according to the Spirit of holiness, Jesus Christ our Lord, through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles, for His name's sake" (Rom. 1:1-5).

Jesus Christ, the Son of God, was born a descendant of David according to the flesh, indicating that he was incarnate. Through this incarnate God Christians receive grace, i.e. salvation. As Paul indicated later in this letter, salvation comes only through the atonement (e.g. Rom. 3:21-26; 5:3-11; 8:3-4).

"For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit" (Rom. 8:3-4).

God sent his Son in the likeness of sinful flesh in order that the Son might fulfill the requirement of the Law by being an offering for sin. The Law required death as the just punishment for sin, "for the wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23). The Father imputed to Christ the sin of those for whom Christ died, and punished Christ for that sin. In this way, Christ was an offering for sin. This fulfilled the requirement of the Law that sin be punished by death. In this way, it also redeemed those for whom Christ had died from paying that penalty themselves. Further, when the Father punished the Son, the Father "condemned sin in the flesh." For this to be true, the Son had to be incarnate.

The incarnation is not refuted by the statement that Christ was sent "in the likeness of sinful flesh," because the "likeness" refers to the sinfulness of Christ's flesh, not the fleshliness of it. Christ was in the "likeness" of sinful flesh in that he had flesh, and in that his flesh was the same as everyone else's, save that it was not actually corrupted by sin. Also, when sin was imputed to him, he represented in likeness all the sinful, fleshly beings for whom he died. However, sin did not actually taint his flesh or person. He was blamed for the sin, even though he was not corrupted by it. Christ became incarnate in order to render

himself as an atonement for sin, and he actually did atone for sin by sacrificing his body.

“But when the fulness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, in order that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons” (Gal. 4:4-5).

Christ, the Son of God, was born of a woman, and therefore was born with a physical, incarnate body. He did this in order to redeem a particular classification of men (“those who were under the Law”) and in order that these might receive the adoption as children of God.

“Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” (Phil. 2:5-8).

Christ Jesus, who existed in the form of God and therefore actually was God, took the form of a man and therefore actually became man (body and all). In this form, he obeyed God by dying on the cross. Christ was God incarnate, and the incarnation was purposed toward the cross, on which Christ died in obedience to the Father.

“And by common confession great is the mystery of godliness: He who was revealed in the flesh, was vindicated in the Spirit, beheld by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory” (1 Tim. 3:16).

In this summary statement of Christian faith, Paul asserted that Christ was revealed in the flesh, that is, that Christ became incarnate. Paul added that Christ was vindicated in the Spirit, beheld by angels and taken up in glory. These terms refer to Christ’s resurrection and ascension. Subsequent to this, the gospel of Christ was proclaimed and believed in the world. This confession indicates that the primary reasons for the incarnation

were the atonement rendered in the crucifixion, the resurrection, the glorification of Christ, and the redemption of men.

“For both He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are all from one Father; for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren, saying, ‘I will proclaim Thy name to My brethren, in the midst of the congregation I will sing Thy praise.’ And again, ‘I will put My trust in Him.’ And again, ‘Behold, I and the children whom God has given Me.’ Since then the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil; and might deliver those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives. For assuredly He does not give help to angels, but He gives help to the descendant of Abraham. Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people” (Heb. 2:11-17).

Christ took on flesh and blood, became incarnate, because the children of God, who had been given to Christ, were also of flesh and blood. Christ did this in order to propitiate, or to atone, on behalf of these children. Therefore, the incarnation was real, and it was intended as the means by which Christ would atone for the children of God. As the rest of Hebrews makes clear, Christ accomplished this atonement.