

BIBLICAL SOTERIOLOGY

An Overview and Defense of the Reformed Doctrines of Salvation

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Limited Atonement, part 14

ARGUMENTS SUPPORTING THE DOCTRINE OF LIMITED ATONEMENT

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

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 (cont.).

2. Oblation — The Son performed the oblation, the act of making the sacrifice/atonement, which the Father had purposed.

“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. 53:10-12).

Jesus (Luke 22:37) and Peter (1 Peter 2:21-25) both taught that Jesus ultimately fulfilled this prophecy through his death on the cross. In the terms of Isaiah’s prophecy, Christ rendered himself as a guilt offering. He bore the iniquities of the many and thereby justified them. He poured himself out to death, bore the sin of many and interceded for the transgressors. In all these statements regarding the atonement, Christ is the one that actively renders himself as the oblation. Christ actually did die the death foretold here, and performed the oblation.

“I am the good shepherd; and I know My own, and My own know Me, even as the Father knows Me and I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the

sheep. And I have other sheep, which are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they shall hear My voice; and they shall become one flock with one shepherd. For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This commandment I received from My Father” (John 10:14-18).

The Father commanded Christ to lay down his life for the sheep — a clear reference to the atonement. In so doing, the Father purposed Christ’s oblation. Further, in the oblation, Christ actively laid down his life on his own initiative, not under compulsion.

“I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and delivered Himself up for me” (Gal. 2:20).

Christ delivered himself up for Paul, and, by extension, for all other Christians. By delivering himself up rather than being delivered up, Christ actively rendered himself as the oblation, performing the atonement by his death. Further, the fact that this was done on the basis of love demonstrates that it was Christ’s will to render the oblation, and that he did not do it under compulsion or coercion.

“Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you, and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma” (Eph. 5:1-2).

Christ gave himself as an offering and a sacrifice to God, as an oblation, as an atonement, and died the atoning death. Because he did it as an act of love, it was a willing act on his part, not one of compulsion or coercion.

“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her; that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she should be holy and blameless” (Eph. 5:25-27).

The statement that Christ gave himself up for the church refers to the atonement, particularly in light of the preceding context (see Eph. 5:1-2). Christ actively and willingly offered himself on behalf of the church because he loved the church.

“For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a ransom for all, the testimony borne at the proper time” (1 Tim. 2:5-6).

Christ offered himself as an atonement for sin, and died an atoning death that ransomed men.

“For if the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling those who have been defiled, sanctify for the cleansing of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?” (Heb. 9:13-14).

Christ offered himself to God as an oblation. His death performed a better atonement than did the old covenant sacrifices.

“Then He said, ‘Behold, I have come to do Thy will.’ He takes away the first in order to establish the second. By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. And every priest stands daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins; but He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, sat down at the right hand of God, waiting from that time onward until His enemies be made a footstool for His feet. For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified” (Heb. 10:9-14).

In accordance with the Father’s will, Christ offered his body as an oblation for sin. Because he willed to do the Father’s will, Christ willingly offered himself as the oblation.

3. Intercession — It was and is the work of the Son to intercede on behalf of the elect, those for whom he died. [See also section IVA1a of the outline under the Arguments Supporting the Doctrine of Limited Atonement, and all subsections thereof.]

“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. 53:11-12).

According to Jesus (Luke 22:37) and Peter (1 Peter 2:21-25), Christ ultimately fulfilled this prophecy. The prophecy indicates that

Christ's atonement on behalf of the many is an act of intercession, and that intercession is performed on behalf of those for whom Christ died.

"For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the first-born among many brethren; and whom He predestined, these He also called; and whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified. What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things? Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies; who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us" (Rom. 8:29-34).

Christ intercedes for "us," who are the predestined, who love God, and who are called according to his purpose. Since dying was the greatest effort and sacrifice Christ could make on behalf of those for whom he died, Paul expresses confidence that Christ cannot be unwilling to perform lesser things such as continual intercession. If Christ died for someone, he certainly continues to intercede for him.

"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us. My little children, I am writing these things to you that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world" (1 John 1:9-2:2).

Christ is the advocate of (i.e. the intercessor on behalf of) those who confess their sins. The propitiation mentioned in this passage is not the imputation (the obtaining of the benefits of the atonement at the cross), but the continuing application of the benefits purchased by the oblation. This application takes the form of ongoing forgiveness and cleansing from sin in the lives of believers as those believers continually confess and repent.