



THE CROSS IN AFRICAN PERSPECTIVE: RETHINKING ATONEMENT, SACRIFICE, AND RECONCILIATION

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Abstract

The doctrine of the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross stands at the very center of Christian theology, expressing God's redemptive plan for humanity. This study explores the concept of atonement as the divine initiative to reconcile humanity to God through the sacrificial death of Christ. Drawing from both Old and New Testament backgrounds, it examined the theological meanings of key concepts such as sin, redemption, reconciliation, and propitiation. The work highlighted the sacrificial system of ancient Israel as a precursor to Christ's ultimate sacrifice and presented the cross as the intersection of divine justice and love. Furthermore, it situated the doctrine within African religious contexts by comparing traditional atonement practices such as rituals, sacrifices, and communal reconciliation with the Christian understanding of Christ's once-for-all sacrifice. The study argued that Christ's atonement is unique, sufficient, and transformative, offering forgiveness, restoration, sanctification, and eternal life. Ultimately, the atoning work of Christ not only addresses the problem of sin but also restores broken relationships between God and humanity, making it foundational to Christian faith and practice.

Keywords: Atonement, Cross, Reconciliation, Redemption, Sacrifice, and Sin

Introduction

The atonement of Jesus Christ is a theme that runs throughout the entire Bible. It is at the very heart of God's redemptive purpose for humanity. The atonement is one of the most crucial doctrines in Christianity, explaining the death of Christ and its significance to the Christian community.¹ Atonement refers to doing what is necessary to reconcile two alienated parties through making amends or providing compensation for a transgression, wrong, or injury. In effect, it levels out an imbalance created by wrongdoing.

In Christian theology, atonement refers to the substitutionary work of the incarnate Son of God, accomplished through the giving of His life at Calvary in payment for sin. The atonement is a provision of God's love for humanity. The Apostle John made this vital truth clear in 1 John 4:10 - *This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins, (NIV).*

¹ K. Onongha, "The Doctrine of Atonement in Communal Contexts", *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society*, 31(2), (2020): 175-188.



The immediate result of sin is spiritual death and separation from God, while the result of sin is death and separation from God for eternity.² Paul explained, "*For the wages of sin is death, physical death, spiritual death (separation from God), and eternal death (forever separated from God with no hope of ever experiencing His saving grace)*". However, he also stated, "*but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord*" (Romans 6:23). In God's infinite love and mercy, He provided salvation through the propitiatory sacrifice of His son Jesus Christ as a way for humanity to escape sin's awful consequences and be reconciled to God. Only a sinless sacrifice could avail, and because Jesus Christ was sinless, He could pay the atoning price. Christ willingly gave His life on the Cross, suffering an agonizing death so that we could be saved. Christ died to make atonement available to all, but receiving the benefits of the atonement depends upon an individual's acceptance or rejection of God's offer of forgiveness and reconciliation.³

To atone means to compensate for or make amends for something. Jesus Christ's Atonement references His payment for the sins of mankind. It has the power to provide hope and alleviate the burden of sin for anyone. Atoning sacrifice on the cross, therefore, refers to the life and death of Christ, which brought about a restored relationship between God and mankind. The atoning work of Jesus Christ ushered in the removal of the separation between God and man for all who believe. Atonement is the sacrifice Jesus Christ made to help us overcome sin, adversity, and death. Jesus' atoning sacrifice took place in the Garden of Gethsemane and on the cross at Calvary. He paid the price for our sins, took upon Himself death, and was resurrected. The Atonement is the supreme expression of the love of the Heavenly Father and of Jesus Christ.

The word "Atonement" was first used in 1526 by William Tyndale in one of his early versions of the English Bible, applying it to the Greek word meaning "reconciliation," which atonement described as making at one.⁴ In Christian theology, atonement refers to the substitutionary work of the incarnate Son of God, accomplished through the giving of His life at Calvary in payment for sin. In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word *kaphar*, translated as atonement, literally means "to cover; cancel." Figuratively, it implies appeasement, pardoning, and reconciling.

The Old Testament background to the atonement is deeply rooted in the sacrificial system established in the Mosaic Law and reflects Israel's covenantal relationship with God. The Concept of atonement (Hebrew: Kippur, from the root *kpr*, meaning "to cover" or "to make reconciliation") is most prominently featured in Leviticus, particularly in the rituals surrounding the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur) and various sin and guilt offerings. Leviticus 17:11 "For the life of the flesh is in the blood: and I have given it to your souls:

² R. Williams, "Atonement", *Encyclopedia of Psychology and Religion* (L-Z, 2009), 83.

³ F. L. Cross, "Atonement" *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 99.

⁴ P. S. Fiddes, *Past Event and Present Salvation: The Idea of the Atonement*, (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1989), 3-4.



for it is the blood that makes an atonement for the soul.”⁵ Atonement is a particularly prominent concept within Judaism and Christianity, which holds that humans must atone for their sins against God. The Christian doctrine of the atonement states that Christ has atoned for human sins.⁶ This means that everyone is accountable for his or her sins.

The concept of "atoning sacrifice on the cross" is primarily associated with Christian theology and refers to the belief that Jesus Christ, through his crucifixion and death on the cross, made a sacrificial offering to atone for the sins of humanity.⁷ In the New Testament, the Greek term *katallagē* is translated as “atonement” only in Romans 5:11 (KJV), while in other instances it is rendered as “reconciliation.” Both the Hebrew and Greek concepts convey that the restoration of humanity’s relationship with God is made possible through the death of the perfect sacrifice, Jesus Christ (Rom. 5:10–11; 2 Cor. 5:18–19).⁸ Without the covering for sin provided through Jesus’ death, there could be no possibility of reconciliation. Thus, the atonement is fundamental to the Gospel message, as it makes forgiveness for sin possible.

Sacrifice

Sacrifice is a religious rite in which an object is offered to a divinity to establish, maintain, or restore a right relationship of a human being to the sacred order. It is a complex phenomenon found in the earliest known forms of worship and has been observed in all parts of the world. For instance, sacrifice is an important aspect of African Traditional Religion.⁹ The gods are appeased with sacrifices when a community, family, or individual violates the laws of the land. The gods are also appeased through the offering of sacrifices for one to receive favour or blessings from the gods.

"The biblical understanding of sacrifice can only be understood within the equally biblical context of God's relationship to his people and the sin that violates that relationship."¹⁰ In biblical languages, the word "sacrifice" often depicts the idea of drawing near and bringing something to God. The basic meaning of the Hebrew term for offering or sacrifice conveys the act of approaching or bringing something into the presence of God (*qorbān*), while the Greek equivalent (*dōron*) means “gift” and emphasizes the presentation of a sacrifice (Lev. 1:2; Matt. 5:23).¹¹

⁵ G. J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus* (Eerdmans, 1979), 86.

⁶ F. Rutledge, *The Crucifixion: Understanding the Death of Jesus Christ*, (Eerdmans, 2015), 140.

⁷ L. Morris, *The Atonement: Its Meaning and Significance*, (IVP Academic, 2019), 57.

⁸ Morris, 214.

⁹ J. S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (London: Heinemann, 1969).

¹⁰ T. Weinandy, "The Work of the Cross", *Church Life Journal: A Journal of the McGrath Institute for Church Life*, March 31: 2021.

¹¹ W. L. Holladay, *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 306; Walter Bauer, Frederick W. Danker, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 257.



In Israel, sacrifice was for the benefit of the ordinary person who presented it. The one offering a sacrifice places his hand on the animal, killed it, and received the pronouncement of forgiveness (Lev. 1:4; 4:29–31). There were no sexual rites or fertility practices, nor were there attempts to contact the dead or pray to ancestors (Deut. 18:9–14). There was no casting of spells, divination, or fortune-telling, no self-inflicted wounds to demonstrate sorrow before God, and no practice of child sacrifice (Lev. 19:26–28; 18:21).¹² In Israelite worship, no one could bribe God or manipulate divine favor. People could not impress God with large sacrifices, for they were not judged by wealth or power but by obedience and sincerity (1 Sam. 16:7).

The Cross

The cross was a symbol of humiliation in the ancient world. "The meaning of the 'Cross' as a symbol changed over time as it became so closely identified with Jesus."¹³ The cross is the essential symbol of Christianity. It is a reminder of the sacrifice of our Saviour over two thousand years ago. The cross itself did not affect our salvation, but it was the shedding of the blood of the perfect, sinless, spotless Lamb of God on the cross that made it so that our sins could be forgiven.

St. John Chrysostom pointed out that the Cross is the joining of the heavenly and the earthly and the defeat of Hell. The cross is the ultimate demonstration of God's power. It was an instrument of execution that resulted in death in the most torturous and painful way. In crucifixion, a person was either tied or nailed to a wooden cross and left to hang until dead. Death would be slow and excruciatingly painful; in fact, the word excruciating literally means "out of crucifying."¹⁴ However, because of Christ and His death on the cross, the meaning of the cross today is entirely different.

In Christian theology, the cross represents the profound intersection of God's love and divine justice. It is at the cross that God's holiness, which demands judgment for sin, and His love, which seeks the redemption of humanity, are perfectly reconciled. Jesus Christ is identified as the "Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29), a title that evokes the sacrificial system of the Old Testament and points to His redemptive mission. The cross, therefore, is not merely a historical event but the central element of God's salvific plan for a fallen humanity. Through His death, Christ offered Himself as the perfect and final atoning sacrifice for the sins of all people, fulfilling the demands of divine justice while extending the grace of salvation. Consequently, the cross stands as one of the

¹² M. Jacob, *Leviticus 1–16: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*. (New York: Doubleday, 1991).

¹³ R. Revington, *From Humiliation to Honour: The Cross of Christ as a Symbol in the Modern Western World*. (Knox College, Toronto School of Theology, 2020).

¹⁴ J. Chrysostom, *Homilies on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, First Series, Vol. 12, ed., Philip Schaff, (Peabody, MA: Hendriksen, 1994), cf, Homily IV.



most significant and defining symbols of the Christian faith.¹⁵ Without the cross, the Christian faith is hopeless.

Why is the atonement necessary?

Sin is what made the atonement necessary. When God created the first man and woman, Adam and Eve, they enjoyed perfect fellowship with Him. However, God made them free moral agents. They had the ability and liberty to choose to obey or to disobey Him. God gave them only one prohibition: they were not to eat of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Despite knowing there was a penalty for disobedience (Genesis 2:17), Adam and Eve chose to defy God's directive. They ate from the forbidden tree, and as a result of this rebellion, sin entered their hearts. Since God cannot tolerate sin, they were immediately estranged from Him.

God's atonement in Christ addresses the deep sinfulness of humanity. Sin appears as rebellion against God, broken relationships, disloyalty, ingratitude, moral corruption, exile, guilt, and failure, leaving humanity far from its intended destiny.¹⁶ The descendants of Adam and Eve (every person born into this world) inherited the sinful nature of their forefathers. Romans 5:12 states that *"by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so, death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned."* Instead of being born with a desire to do right, every individual is born with an innate predisposition toward evil. Thus, sin is not only a series of committed transgressions but also the inbred condition or nature out of which acts of sin originate.

Sinfulness may be blatant or subtle, flagrant or hidden, but it always separates the sinner from God. The prophet Isaiah indicated this in Isaiah 59:2, *"But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you that he will not hear."* Romans 1:18 states, *"The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men."* "Wrath" in this context does not refer to anger or fury, but to God's absolute antipathy and holy revulsion toward sin. He cannot tolerate it to any degree, because God's perfect moral nature can never be stained by complicity with or allowance for unrighteousness.

Atonement is a central concept in Christian theology that encompasses the ideas of sin, redemption, and reconciliation. Understanding the atoning sacrifice involves exploring its historical context, symbolic meanings, and enduring impact on faith and theology. It's a topic that invites deep reflection on the themes of sacrifice, redemption, the transformative power of divine love, substitution, propitiation, and reconciliation, thus illuminating the nature of Christ's atonement.

Understanding Atonement in relation to Sin, Redemption, and Reconciliation:

¹⁵ John R. W. Stott, *The Cross of Christ* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1986), 159–175; Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 817–835.

¹⁶ J. Goldingay, ed. "Your Iniquities Have Made a Separation" in *Atonement Today*, (London: SPCK), 53.



1. **Sin:** In Christian theology, sin is understood as any thought, word, or deed that contradicts God's will and disrupts the relationship between humanity and God. Sin is seen as a universal human condition that separates individuals from God and leads to spiritual death. The concept of atonement addresses the problem of sin by providing a means of reconciliation and restoration of the broken relationship between humanity and God.¹⁷

The death of Christ was substitutionary, although the words "substitute" and "substitution" do not appear in Scripture. The principle of replacement is seen in what Christ did on the Cross. There, as our substitute, He bore the awful judgment of God against sin. Paul explains this in 2 Corinthians 5:21, *"For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him."*

2. **Redemption:** Redemption refers to the act of purchasing or releasing someone from bondage or captivity. In Christian theology, redemption is closely linked to the idea of atonement.¹⁸ Through Jesus Christ's sacrificial death on the cross, believers are redeemed from the power of sin, death, and the devil.¹⁹ Jesus' death is seen as the ultimate act of redemption, paying the price for humanity's sins and offering liberation from the consequences of sin.

The concept of redemption, as explained in Leviticus 25:47-49, involves the setting free of one who is enslaved through the payment of a ransom price or penalty. Jesus Christ, through His death on the Cross, paid the price for all who were *"sold under sin"* (Romans 7:14). The Apostle Peter states that we are not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver or gold, but *"with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and spot"* (1Peter 1:18-20).

In Old Testament times, if a slave preferred to remain a slave, redemption was not forced upon him, and the same is true of the redemption offered by Jesus Christ. Individuals must choose to accept the provision Christ made for deliverance or pay the penalty for sin.

3. **Reconciliation:** Reconciliation involves restoring a harmonious relationship between two parties who were previously estranged or at odds with each other. In the context of atonement, reconciliation refers to the restoration of the broken relationship between humanity and God.²⁰ Through Jesus' sacrificial death, believers are reconciled to God, forgiven of their sins, and brought into a right relationship with Him. This reconciliation is made possible by God's grace and love, demonstrated through Jesus' atoning sacrifice.

¹⁷F. Rutledge, *The Crucifixion: Understanding the Death of Jesus Christ*, (Michigan, U. S. A.: Eerdmans, 2015), 140.

¹⁸L. Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 125.

¹⁹G. A. Boyd, *The Crucifixion of the Warrior God: Volumes 1 & 2*, (Minneapolis, U. S. A.: Fortress Press, 2017), 66.

²⁰D. L. Allen, *The Atonement: A Biblical, Theological, and Historical Study of the Cross of Christ*, (B&H Academic, 2019), 157.



The concept of reconciliation is also a theme of the Atonement, and is closely related to propitiation in what it accomplishes. Adam's sin alienated humanity from God, but Jesus' death made reconciliation available and possible for all. Colossians 1:21-22 states, "*And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled in the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unreprouable in his sight.*"

Overall, the concept of atonement concerning sin, redemption, and reconciliation shows the profound theological understanding of God's plan for salvation and restoration. Atonement addresses the problem of sin by providing a way for redemption and reconciliation with God. Through Jesus Christ's sacrificial death, believers are redeemed from the power of sin, forgiven of their sins, and reconciled to God, experiencing spiritual renewal and the promise of eternal life.²¹ Atonement is thus central to Christian faith, offering hope, forgiveness, and the assurance of God's love and grace for all who believe.

The atoning sacrifice of the Son of God makes it possible that man can be redeemed, restored, resurrected, and exalted to the elevated position designed for him in the creation. Christ's atonement is for the forgiveness or pardon of sin in general and original sin in particular, through the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus. The blood of the Lamb is efficacious and capable of cleansing and setting free those in the bondage of Satan, sin, and death.

The concept of propitiation is central to New Testament soteriology. The Apostle John declares in the First Epistle of John 2:2 that Christ "is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world." The term "propitiation," translated from the Greek *hilasmos*, conveys the idea of appeasement or the turning away of divine wrath through a sacrificial offering.²² As Leon Morris explains, the word emphasizes not merely the removal of sin but the satisfaction of God's righteous anger against sin.²³

In the New Testament, propitiation consistently points to the atoning work of Christ, through which God's judgment against sin is justly dealt with. God's holiness and righteousness necessitate that sin cannot be ignored or excused without compromising divine justice. As affirmed in Book of Nahum 1:3, the Lord "will not at all acquit the wicked," underscoring the inevitability of judgment against sin. John Stott²⁴ argues that the cross demonstrates how God can remain both just and the justifier of sinners, since the penalty for sin is borne by Christ Himself.

Thus, Christ's sacrificial death constitutes the means by which divine justice is satisfied and mercy extended. Through His death, the penalty demanded by sin is fully paid, making it consistent with God's righteous character to pardon humanity. The shedding of innocent

²¹ W. Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 580.

²² L. Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 144.

²³ Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, 151.

²⁴ J. Stott, *The Cross of Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1986), 174.



blood on behalf of the guilty establishes reconciliation between God and humanity. As Wayne Grudem notes, propitiation highlights the personal dimension of the atonement, in which God's wrath is turned aside through the substitutionary sacrifice of Christ.²⁵ In this way, believers are forgiven, liberated from guilt, and restored into fellowship with God.

Repentance: The key to Atonement

One repents of a wrong action when one:

- i. Admits that one acted on the question,
- ii. Admits that the action was wrong,
- iii. Admits that one bears at least some blame for having acted, and
- iv. Resolves to amend one's ways.

The resolution to amend one's ways includes a resolution to make amends to the victim, and a resolution not to perform similar actions in the future. The latter resolution may require one to repudiate and seek to change aspects of one's character.²⁶ The Greek word that translates as "repentance" is "*metanoia*", which means to make a fundamental change of one's mind or outlook.²⁷ A repentant person changes her outlook about her past actions for the right reason; you're not repentant if you decide to amend your ways, not because you care at all about being blameworthy for having done something wrong, but because you don't want to be caught, or you don't want to be thought of poorly. One repents when one resolves to amend one's ways because of how one has wronged another person.

Atonement Practices in Different African Cultures

This section highlights atonement rituals and practices in various African polytheistic cultures, analyzing the similarities and differences in their approaches to addressing atonement and disobedience in societal laws and norms. African polytheistic cultures encompass a wide range of belief systems, each with its unique practices and rituals. It is important to note that Africa is a vast and diverse continent with numerous ethnic groups and traditions, so generalizations may not apply uniformly across all cultures.

Recognition of Spiritual Forces: African cultures often acknowledge the existence of a pantheon of deities, spirits, and ancestors who play active roles in human affairs. These spiritual entities are believed to govern various aspects of life and are often associated with natural forces, such as rivers, forests, or celestial bodies.²⁸ When an individual commits a

²⁵ W. Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 575.

²⁶ J. G. Murphy, *Getting Even: Forgiveness and Its Limits*, (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 132.

²⁷ W. Bauer, Frederick W. Danker, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 640.

²⁸ N. Afolabi, Falola, & Toyin, *The Sacred in the African Environment*, (University of Rochester Press, 2008), 54.



sin or disobeys the laws of the land, it is seen as a disruption of the harmony between humans and these spiritual forces.

Rituals and Offerings: In African cultures, atonement often involves the performance of specific rituals and the offering of sacrifices or gifts to appease offended deities or spirits. These rituals may vary widely depending on the particular culture and the nature of the offence committed.²⁹ Offerings can include food, drink, livestock, or other valuable items. The belief is that these offerings demonstrate remorse, seek forgiveness, and restore the balance between the individual and the spiritual realm.

Confession and Reconciliation: Some African cultures emphasize the importance of confession and reconciliation as part of the atonement process.³⁰ In these cultures, individuals are encouraged to openly acknowledge their wrongdoing, express remorse, and seek forgiveness from both the offended spiritual entities and the affected community. This process often involves mediation by religious leaders, elders, or other respected community members who help facilitate reconciliation between the offender, the offended party, and the wider community.

Purification and Cleansing: Atonement may also involve purification and cleansing rituals designed to spiritually purify the individual and remove the stain of sin or disobedience.³¹ These rituals may include bathing in sacred waters, using specific herbs or plants, or engaging in other symbolic acts of purification. The belief is that these rituals cleanse the individual of their transgressions and restore their spiritual well-being.³² In the Igbo culture, an offender is expected to carry out some rituals, like cleansing of the land using items suggested by a native doctor or herbalist. This is done to appease the gods of the land whom he or she has offended. If the offender fails to carry out this assignment, the kinsmen will ostracize him or her.

Ancestral Guidance and Intervention: In many African polytheistic cultures, ancestors hold a significant place of reverence and are believed to have the ability to intervene on behalf of the living.³³ Seeking the intercession of ancestors through prayers, rituals, or offerings is another approach to atonement. It is believed that the ancestors can act as mediators between the individual and the spiritual realm, assisting in the process of forgiveness and reconciliation.

Community Involvement: Atonement in African cultures often extends beyond the individual and involves the entire community. The belief is that transgressions affect not only the individual but also the wider social fabric. Therefore, community involvement in the atonement process is crucial for restoring harmony and cohesion. This can include

²⁹B. C. Ray, *African Religions: Symbol, Ritual, and Community*, (Prentice Hall, 2000), 67.

³⁰ J. S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (London: Heinemann, 1969), 205.

³¹ Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 210.

³² G. Parrinder, *African Traditional Religion* (London: Sheldon Press, 1954), 89

³³ A. Moyo, *African Religions: An Introduction*, (Pearson South Africa, 2007), 129.



communal rituals, public confessions, or collective acts of reconciliation and restitution.³⁴ One person's sin can affect others and in the same way, reconciliation should be a collective act.

However, it is important to note that African cultures are diverse, and the specific approaches to atonement can vary significantly between ethnic groups and regions. Moreover, external factors such as colonization and the spread of other religious traditions have affected these traditional practices in various ways. Therefore, understanding the nuances and specificities of each culture is essential to grasping the complexity of African approaches to atonement.

Benefits of Christ's Atonement on the Cross

Joy and freedom from guilt

Paul wrote in Romans 5:11, "*And not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement.*" In Romans 8:1, he stated, "*There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus.*" Sinners try many ways of soothing their guilty consciences, but the Bible says, "*He that covers his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesses and forsakes them shall have mercy*" (Proverbs 28:13). There is only one place sinners can go to find relief from guilt. That place is described in the words of an old hymn, "There is a fountain filled with Blood, drawn from Emmanuel's veins, and sinners plunged beneath its flood, and lose all their guilty stains."³⁵ The blood of Jesus Christ can set one free from the bondage of sin and eliminate all condemnation and guilt.

Sanctification

The Apostle John pointed to the two-fold remedy for sin provided in the Atonement when he wrote,

"If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin [that we were not born with a sinful nature, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness [sanctification]" (1 John 1:7-9).

We obtain both forgiveness for committed sins and cleansing for our sinful nature through the Atonement. The atonement of Christ brings sanctification from sin and its guilt.

Divine healing

³⁴R. W. Omotoye, Adegbite, & Wale, *African Indigenous Religious Traditions in Local and Global Contexts*, (Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 201.

³⁵ W. Cowper, "*There Is a Fountain Filled with Blood*," in *Olney Hymns* (London: W. Oliver, 1772).



The atonement provides divine healing. We read in Isaiah 53:5 that by His stripes, endured at the Crucifixion, we are healed. Peter reinforced this truth when he said of Christ, "*He himself bore our sins*" in his body on the cross so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; "*by his wounds, you have been healed.*" (1 Peter 2:24 NIV). This includes healing of physical ailments and disease (see Matthew 8:16-17). Whether our need is physical, spiritual, or emotional, we can find the remedy in Jesus' Blood.

Enables Victorious Living

Christ's death at Calvary dealt a crushing blow to the enemy of our souls. The writer of Hebrews states that Christ took on the form of human flesh and blood "*that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage*" (Hebrews 2:14-15). Through the blood and the word of our testimonies, Satan is a vanquished enemy, for we read in Revelation 12:11, "*And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death.*" Knowing and recounting what God has done for us protects us from Satan's deceptions.

Eternal life

Suppose we believe and receive salvation and remain faithful to God. In that case, we will have the joyful privilege of being united with Christ throughout eternity, and the Atonement is the means by which this is possible. One of the most familiar verses in Scripture, John 3:16, states, "*For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.*" Any attempt to place a value on the Blood of Christ would be impossible. It is priceless! Blood is essential and can never be set aside or replaced.

Conclusion

The atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross remains the cornerstone of Christian belief and the ultimate expression of God's love for humanity. Through His death and resurrection, Christ accomplished what no human effort or ritual could achieve: complete reconciliation between a holy God and sinful humanity. The biblical concept of atonement, rooted in the Old Testament sacrificial system and fulfilled in the New Testament, reveals that sin creates a profound separation that only divine intervention can bridge.

This study has demonstrated that atonement encompasses the interrelated themes of sin, redemption, reconciliation, and propitiation. Christ's sacrificial death serves as a substitutionary act, satisfying divine justice while extending mercy and grace to humanity. In comparison with African traditional practices of atonement, which often involve repeated sacrifices, rituals, and communal processes, Christ's sacrifice is once and for all, universal in scope, and eternally efficacious.

Moreover, the benefits of Christ's atonement, such as forgiveness, sanctification, healing, victory over evil, and the promise of eternal life, underscore its transformative power in the



life of the believer. The cross, once a symbol of shame and suffering, has become the ultimate symbol of hope, redemption, and restored fellowship with God.

The atoning sacrifice of Christ not only resolves the problem of sin but also invites humanity into a renewed relationship with God. It calls for a response of faith, repentance, and commitment to a transformed life. Thus, the message of the cross continues to offer hope, healing, and reconciliation to all who believe, making it eternally relevant in both theological reflection and practical Christian living.

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