

1. **Introduction:** The next major topic is “The Atonement.” This is a vital doctrine that lies at the very heart of Christianity. We will carefully consider this doctrine including some of the differences in the way Christians view the need and meaning of the Atonement.
 - We will cover several preliminary topics. The Apostle Paul gave a condensed statement of this foundational Christian belief in 1 Corinthians.
2. **1 Corinthians 15:3-4:** *“For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, ⁴ that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures.”*
 - Christians differ about whether atonement was and is needed. Given there is a need, they differ on the “why” of the need, the conditions under which atonement was possible, and how atonement was accomplished.
 - Understanding the Atonement requires understanding God’s nature. In John 4:24, Jesus said, **“God is spirit.”** What are the key implications of this statement?
 - Jesus did not say, God is “a spirit.” He said, “God is spirit.” What did He mean?
 - By stating that God is spirit, Jesus was saying, not only that God’s essence is spirit, but also that God is the source of all spirit.
 - What is the “nature” of spirit? Most people think of spirit as unsubstantial and ethereal like a ghost. Indeed, spirit is not physical, but clearly, it is not “nothing.” It has “being.”
 - It has attributes. The key point is that spirit **“is.”** Though non-material, spirit is something. Spirit has life (perhaps better to say, “spirit is life). God, who is Spirit, said to Moses, “I am who I am.”
 - God is the eternal living being from whom all that exists is made manifest. “I am who I am” reminds us that God is personal. God is 3 Persons sharing one nature (essence).
3. **Person:** A “person” is one or more natures directed by one conscious source of identity.
4. **Triune God:** A living being having one nature (essence) with 3 conscious sources of identity named Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. One being, one essence, three Persons.
 - Physical (material) beings have dimensions that limit their location in the universe.
 - A material being is constrained by its essence to one location at a time and further constrained by the laws of physical nature.
 - God’s essence is “spirit.” Spirit is subject to laws different from physical laws.
 - Paul describes the substance of spiritual things in 2 Corinthians 15.
 - Believers will be physically resurrected one day, just as Christ was, and we will spend eternity in an actual body. That is one of the main points of 1 Corinthians 15.
5. **“Spiritual Body”:** *“So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown*

in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body” (1 Corinthians 15:42-44).

- The “spiritual body” here is contrasted with the “natural body.”
- Jesus was raised in a physical body, with “flesh and bones” (Luke 24:39). We will be raised like He was (Romans 6:5). The Lord, in His power, “will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body” (Philippians 3:21).
- The spiritual body is suited to eternal life. It is not subject to decay or death; it will not be inconvenienced by any of the physical functions necessary for life here and now.
- The spiritual body will be a real body, but in a different mode of being. It will be an upgrade: at the resurrection, our bodies will go from Version 1.0 to Version 2.0.
- Better yet, to extend Paul’s illustration in 1 Corinthians 15:39, our bodies now are the “seed”; our bodies then will be the blossom.
- Just as a poppy is more glorious than the seed from which it came, the spiritual body will be more glorious than the physical body that died.
- The human body, in its present form, has various wants and weaknesses. In this fleshly body as we know it now, we cannot enter or enjoy the kingdom of God (1 Corinthians 15:50). That will change at the resurrection.
- We will be transformed (verse 51). Right now, “the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak” (Matthew 26:41). For the believer, after the resurrection, the spirit and the flesh will both be equally willing (and capable) of serving God.
- The Bible teaches that all people will be resurrected, “some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt” (Daniel 12:2). Everyone resurrected will have a spiritual body, but there will be two different destinies.
- Faith or lack of faith in Christ (John 3:36; 1 John 5:12) makes the difference. You will be resurrected someday, and you will receive a spiritual body.
- What does Paul mean by a “spiritual” body in 1 Corinthians 15:44. “Spiritual body” seems to be an oxymoron. The resurrection body cannot be wholly spiritual. It is a human body, but there is something very different about it, as Paul explains.
- From the whole of 1 Corinthians 15, we have the following descriptions of the body we have now versus the future resurrected body:
 - (1.) earthly vs. heavenly (verse 40) (2.) perishable vs. imperishable (verse 42)
 - (3.) dishonorable vs. glorified (verse 43) (4.) subject to weakness vs. raised in power (verse 43) (5.) natural vs. spiritual (verse 44) (6.) bearing Adam’s image vs. bearing Christ’s image (verse 49) (7.) mortal vs. immortal (verse 53).
- Earlier in the chapter, Paul lays the foundation for his discussion of the spiritual body: “Not all flesh is the same: People have one kind of flesh, animals have another, birds another and fish another” (1 Corinthians 15:39).

- (1.) Fish have a body perfectly suited for their life in the water. (2.) birds have a body perfectly suited for flying. (3.) animals have a body perfectly suited for their needs in the animal kingdom. (4.) people have a body perfectly suited for life on earth.
 - The point is that after the resurrection, we will have a body perfectly suited for life in heaven (that is, on the New Earth in eternity, Revelation 21:1). The “spiritual body” will be made of flesh (like Jesus’ body is), but flesh with different properties than now.
 - The passage continues: ***“There are also heavenly bodies and there are earthly bodies; but the splendor of the heavenly bodies is one kind, and the splendor of the earthly bodies is another. The sun has one kind of splendor, the moon another and the stars another; and star differs from star in splendor”*** (1 Corinthians 15:40–41).
 - The resurrection body will have a different “splendor” than our earthly, natural body.
 - Since God is spirit, does He have form, or is He ethereal and formless like a ghost?
 - “God is spirit” means God is non-physical, invisible, not constrained by being located in a particular place. God is subject to “laws of spirit” that are different from the natural laws that control the physical world. But this does not mean God has no “form.”
 - Jesus made the “God is spirit” statement to a woman who believed physical location was important in the worship of God.
6. **John 4:19-24:** ***“The woman said to him, “Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet.”²⁰ Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship.”²¹ Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father.²² You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews.²³ But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him.²⁴ God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.”***
- Jesus clearly means that location is not important in worshipping God.
 - But it does mean that physical location is not important in worshipping God. He is omnipresent. What is vitally important is to worship Him in spirit and truth.
 - Paul refers to God as “the invisible God (Col 1:15)”, and “the King eternal, immortal, invisible (1 Timothy 1:17).”
7. **God is Spirit:** “Spirit” is invisible and cannot be detected by physical senses like vision, hearing, smell, taste, or touch or by sensors like Geiger counters, electromagnetic receivers, X-ray detectors, cosmic ray sensors, etc.
- God has intellect, memory, emotions, and will. He thinks, feels, and acts.
8. **Physical/Spiritual Creatures:** Humans are both physical and spirit. The human spirit is non-physical. Human “spirit” and “soul” are used interchangeably in Scripture.
- Does a “human spirit” have the same attributes as those implied by “God is spirit?”

- When all is said and done, we do not know a lot about “spirit.” We know that when the human spirit leaves the body, the body dies. Scripture tells us that the human spirit lives on and one day will be united with a “glorified body.”
 - The human spirit includes intellect, emotions, and will. Freed from the sinful body, the human spirit uses its intellect, emotions, and will in ways that please God.
 - Unembodied human spirits communicate. We don’t know how. Unembodied human spirits “in Christ” are glorified and subject to “laws of the spirit” that are different from the natural laws of embodied experience.
 - The “fall” of humanity in Adam and Eve’s disobedience (sin) resulted in a spiritual wall of separation between God and His human creatures.
 - All through the Scripture, we find the discussions of the question “How can fallen sinful humans ever be reconciled to a holy God?” Sin is a tight barrier separating people from God (Isaiah 59:2).
 - Adam and Eve’s disobedience caused the barrier to be erected, but no human can remove the barrier or find a way through it.
 - But we are assured by Scripture that God has provided a way to demolish the barrier.
 - He made a way whereby sinners may be pardoned and infused with new life.
 - God chose to provide a way to break through the barrier one individual at a time.
 - The extent and magnitude of the fallen changes from holy and righteous mean (1.) no human can correct the problems. (2.) Divine attributes will be required in a solution.
 - God’s law is based on His character. Thus, God will inherently be obedient to His law.
 - A “fix” for fallen humans must be consistent with God’s law. The fix must restore righteousness and holiness.
 - God’s way required a perfect redeemer capable of living a life of perfect obedience under the Law, capable of vicariously paying sin’s death penalty on behalf of fallen people. It seemed impossible, but God made it possible by the incarnation of the Son.
 - How important is the incarnation? No incarnation, no breaking the barrier between God and humans. That is a simple explanation of the importance of the incarnation.
9. **The Overall Problem**: From the beginning to this day, humanity has rebelled and sinned against God’s authority. That brings about God’s wrath of condemnation.
- The Law given through Moses spelled out the requirements for righteous obedience and the penalties for disobedience. This codification of God’s Law was by no means the beginning of God’s moral law.
 - God’s moral law was in effect from the beginning. Adam and Eve disobeyed God’s moral law and suffered the due penalty.
 - They were removed from the presence of God by being expelled from the Garden.

- Their nature was degraded from created perfection to a state of fallen sinfulness. They lost their immortality.
- The penalty for human sin has always been death. People are composite physical-spiritual beings. Adam and Eve immediately suffered spiritual death. Also, their bodies began the transition from life to mortal death, i.e., they began to die mortally.
- Their condition of spiritual death was heritable and has been transmitted to all their progeny. All their progeny are born spiritually dead. The physical transformation of their body that leads to mortal death would begin at conception.
- Sin's lawful penalty of death must be paid by the sinner or by a kinsman redeemer.
- Fallen people are spiritually dead and can do nothing to change their state. Only God's intervention can do what they need.
- The solution to the sin problem for sinners consists of two vital threads: (1.) Imputation of righteous they did not earn, and (2.) a process of transformation to holiness that they to some extent participate in but can neither initiate the process nor control it.
- Both "imputation" and "transformation" are necessary. There is no fixing the sin problem without both.
- Imputation of righteousness is called "justification." Based on Christ's righteousness, earned vicariously on behalf of those who believe, God imputes righteousness to believers by judicially declaring them "justified."
- Justification is instantaneous and implemented by God's declaration.
- Justification is a legal transaction which leaves the sinner experientially still a sinner.
- The next step is transformation that will gradually transform the sinner to experiential righteousness. That process is called "sanctification."
- Sanctification is completed when a person dies mortal death or when Jesus comes again.
- The completion of sanctification is called glorification as it completes the process of transformation into a likeness of Christ.

10. **Two Categories of Sin Problems:** Fallen people have two categories of sin problems that must be dealt with differently. (1.) Sinners have willfully disobeyed God's law.

- (2.) Because of Adam and Eve's sin, everyone has a "sin nature."
- Disobeying God's moral law is a legal or forensic problem. God provides a legal solution. Possessing a "sin nature" is an ontological (related to being) problem.
- These two problems are very different in kind and must be dealt with accordingly.
- When God in His grace chose to redeem His fallen humans, He established distinct by related categories of actions to deal with the two kinds of issues. to a holy nature.
- The legal issue must be resolved in a legal transaction.
- The ontological problem requires transforming the fallen nature with its sin nature into a holy, righteous nature like that of Jesus.

- “The atonement” provides the ingredients to solve both problems.
- We will continue next time with discussion of the atonement and some of the interpretations Christians have applied to it.