

1. **Introduction:** The question of “How sinful people be accepted by a holy God” is a common theme throughout the Bible from Genesis to Revelation.
 - Consequences suffered because of the Fall meant people after the Fall can do nothing of their own accord to enable them to be acceptable to God.
 - Separation from God is a dilemma unsolvable by humans. Only God’s intervention can supply a solution. God did intervene. His solution is referred to as the “**atonement.**”
2. **Atonement:** This is an OT word. The OT in the ESV has 103 mentions of the “atone” or “atonement,” but the ESV NT has no mention of either word. Doesn’t that seem strange?
 - Though the word is not in the NT, the concept certainly is. We will explore the concept.
 - The relationship between God and His human creatures was broken by sin. To “atone” is to do what is necessary to restore right relationship with God. In the OT, the “what to do” to restore right relationship was prescribed by God in form of various sacrifices.
 - OT sacrifices produced only a temporary restored relationship. Sacrifices needed to be repeated for new sins and at God’s prescribed times and for His reasons.
 - “The Atonement” by Jesus Christ is God’s permanent solution for the sin problem, a solution that enables people to have an everlasting right relationship with Him.
3. **Sin:** Westminster Shorter Catechism Q.14. “What is sin?” “Sin is any want of conformity unto, or transgression of, the law of God.”
4. **God’s Moral Law:** God’s moral law is not something He invented to control the behavior of His human creatures. His expressed moral law (for example, as seen in the law of Moses) is an expression of His character.
 - God’s moral law has always existed within His character. Since the law of God is an expression of His character, we can say that sin is anything that is inconsistent with God’s character. We are to be like Him.
 - God takes sin very seriously. Sin is behavior inconsistent with God’s character and moral law. Sin creates a barrier separating sinners from God. Though the barrier is caused by people’s sins, no human can do anything to eliminate it.
 - The only possibility for breaking the sin barrier is for God to intervene with a solution.
 - God does intervene in a surprising way providing a “fix” for sin problem t.
 - God’s actions flow from His character. The things He does to enable “atonement” must be consistent with His character as revealed in His expressed moral law.
 - The Father assigned God the Son the task of atonement. To accomplish that task, God the Son became incarnate on earth as Jesus of Nazareth (the God-Man).
 - We can reasonably ask “why was it necessary for the God the Son to become incarnate as a man to accomplish the atonement task?”

5. **Necessity of Becoming Incarnate:** Only God has both the will and the power to save people from the just penalties of their sins. If people are to be saved, God must do it.

- The sin problem was the result of the disobedience of the first humans, Adam and Eve. They sinned, acquired a sin nature inclining them to continue sinning, were separated from God, died spiritually, and began to die mortally (lost their created immortality).
- God's law says punishment for sin must be borne by those who commit the sin or by an acceptable substitute. Humans wronged God. Humans must pay the lawful penalty to right the wrong. Only God has the will and power to undo the problem caused by sin.
- That being the case, any solution to the sin problem requires someone who is both God and man. Atonement requires a Person of the Godhead to become incarnate. The Son of God is given that task. He becomes incarnate as the God-man, Jesus of Nazareth.

6. **What must be accomplished to atone for sin?**

- **Pardon:** First, the one who atones must be an acceptable substitute who can and will pay the death penalty due sin. That enables the granting a **pardon** to those under sentence.
- Because there is one Atoner and many sinners, the atoner must be capable of being a legal substitute for the many, so that the many can be pardoned because their legal substitute has paid their penalty.
- **Justification:** Moral law says righteousness before God must be earned by perfect obedience to the law throughout a lifetime. Sinners don't meet that requirement.
- The acceptable substitute must earn legal righteousness which can then be transferred to those being saved without them being required to earn the righteousness by perfect obedience to the law. That step is called **justification**.
- **Sanctification:** Each sinner's fallen nature must be transformed into a holy nature. That step is called **sanctification**. The completion of sanctification is called **glorification**.
- Pardon, justification, and sanctification together enable atonement to satisfy the law's requirements, but one issue remains. That is **God's wrath** at sin.
- Among the words used in describing the atonement are propitiate and expiate. Propitiate means the turning away of anger. Expiate means making amends for a wrong.
 - Propitiate is a personal word. You propitiate an angry person. Expiate is an impersonal word. You expiate a sin, a crime, or a false accusation. More about these two words later.
- **Propitiation:** God's holy wrath directed at sin must be "turned away." In the OT that is done by sacrificing an unblemished animal. Jesus, Himself, is the sacrifice that propitiates God's wrath.

- Many people do not believe a holy, gracious, loving God could be wrathful. That is a mistake. Jesus both propitiates (turns away the Father’s wrath due our sins) and expiates (makes amends for our sins).
 - Other words associated with atonement that need to be considered include “redemption” and “reconciliation.”
7. **Why Do “Atonement” and “Atonement” Appear in the OT But Not the NT:** The English word *atonement* originally meant “at-one-ment” and referred to any reconciliation between opposing parties.
- The English word “atonement” was not originally a theological word, but eventually it became almost entirely a theological word.
 - As a theological word, atonement refers to God’s provision for fixing the sin-induced rift between God and His human creatures.
 - In the OT, atone and atonement translate variations of the Hebrew word “*kaphar*.”
 - In general, the *kaphar* word group (variations on the root “kphr”) in the OT means “to cover” or “put away for a time.” Jesus atonement did much more than that.
 - The OT sacrifices were given by God to “temporarily cover or put away for a time” the sins of the people. To maintain a right relationship with God, sacrifices had to be repeated for new sins and at specified times.
 - (*Yom Kippur*), the Day of Atonement was a yearly event for the Hebrews. It was the only day each year that the Holy of Holies could be entered. On that day, the High Priest alone could enter and that only after He had made the required sacrifices for himself.
 - The NT authors knew that the atoning work of Jesus Christ was much better in every way than the sacrifices of the OT.
 - They chose a variety of words to recognize Jesus’ true accomplishments in His life and death but atone was not one of them.
 - The Son of God, in His incarnate form as Jesus of Nazareth (the God-Man), lived and died to accomplish everything necessary for everlasting salvation for believers.
 - Leon Morris’s book ***The Atonement (Its Meaning & Significance)*** (IVP, 1983) is a great book containing answers to most questions about the Atonement.
 - As we turn to considering the specific actions that were a part of Jesus’ atoning life and death, we need first to consider in more detail what sin problems Jesus was solving.
8. **Types of Sin Problems:** As indicated, sin is any lack of conformity to God’s revealed law. That law is consistent with and flows from God’s character.
- Sin appears to have begun with Lucifer, a beautiful and powerful angel.
 - Lucifer was not content with his position among God’s angels. He desired his position to be higher than that of God. That desire was his downfall and the beginning of sin (Isaiah 14:12-15).

- Lucifer was removed from his heavenly position and renamed Satan.
 - Somehow, Satan gained admittance to the Garden of Eden. He persuaded Adam and Eve to disobey God using the same enticement that had been his downfall. He argued they could be more like God. They believed him.
 - Genesis 3 describes Adam and Eve’s rebellion against the command of God. Their rebellion caused them to die spiritually and resulted in a change in their nature such that they continued to desire to sin, to follow their own inclinations.
 - The consequences of Adam and Eve’s sin were widespread, affecting not only humanity but also all of nature.
 - **Inherited Human Sin Nature:** Spiritual death and changed human nature were heritable.
 - All Adam and Eve’s progeny are born spiritually dead and having a sin nature that inclines them away from obeying God.
 - Our sin nature inevitably causes us to sin.
 - In Psalm 41:5, David laments the **inherited human sin nature**, *“Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.”*
 - **Imputed (or original) Sin:** We also are accountable for **imputed** (or original) *sin*. Since all of humanity are Adam and Eve’s progeny, at the time of the initial sin, they contained and represented all of humanity. We were all “in Adam” at the time of his sin.
 - Humanity was “in Adam.” When he sinned, all future progeny were considered to have sinned and to deserve the same punishment. We are accountable for the imputed sin arising from Adam’s sin.
 - The just penalty for sin is death (Romans 6:23), not just mortal death but eternal death (Revelation 20:11-15).
 - Imputation of Adam’s sin to us makes us subject to the penalty of eternal death from the time of our birth. That is a bad effect from imputation. But imputation can also be to our great benefit. God in grace imputed our sins to Jesus Christ.
 - Inherited sin, imputed sin, and personal sin have all been crucified on the cross with Jesus. We will soon be considering all the benefits of Jesus atoning life and death.
 - **Personal Sin:** A third type of sin is **personal sin**. Every human commits personal sin every day. Personal sin is all variations of rebellion resulting in disobedience of God’s law.
 - We are involved in sin from several different angles. An inherited sin nature, imputed sin, and personal sin. Now, think about sin from a somewhat different perspective.
9. **Two Fundamental Categories of Sin Requiring Different Types of Solutions:** The two different fundamental categories of sin problems are:
- (1.) **Willful Disobedience of God’s Moral Law:** Everyone willfully disobeys God’s law.
 - (2.) **A Human Nature Distorted by Possessing a Sin Nature:** Everyone has a sin nature inherited from Adam and Eve.

- These two categories of sin problems require quite different solutions. Why?
- **Willful disobedience** of God's moral law is a legal problem and needs a legal solution.
- Possessing a **sin nature** added to basic human nature is an **ontological** problem (that is a problem of being). Having a sin nature incorporated in their original being changed human nature. This problem needs an ontological solution.
- There must be a fundamental transformation of fallen human nature into a nature that is equivalent or better than the original before-the-fall state of being.
- God, through the atonement, provided a solution for both categories of problems.
- The two solutions are related but fundamentally different.