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B1050 – December 12, 2010
The Nature Of The Atonement

We've been going through the historic event of the Death of Christ. We've tried to deal with the Death the way we did with the Life and the Birth, and that is to look at each event through the lens of Jesus' question, "Who do you say that I am?" And we tried to show that the way men respond to that question doesn't tell us who Jesus Christ is but who the people are that are articulating the opinions. When it comes to the Death of Christ the way we organize the question is "What did Christ do on the cross? What is the gospel?" And anytime you have a distortion of the cross, a distortion of the gospel, be on guard that somewhere lurking in the background is an assault on the justice of God. Consciously or subconsciously all false gospels are results of a satanic agenda at work to distort God's justice. The god of this world wants to blind men to the gospel and he has various techniques for doing it.

With the Birth of Christ we've learned that the issue of accepting the virgin birth of Christ, or rejecting it hinges on people's view of God and man. It goes back to creation. People who have a problem with the virgin birth, have a problem with something else, and the something else they have a problem with is the nature of God and man. With the Life of Christ people have a problem accepting the idea that God can publically reveal Himself. They've started their thinking with God so distant, if He's even there, He can't verbally speak to man, there's a barrier. With the Death of Christ on the cross, the issue at stake is the justice of God. What people want to do is to make the justice of God dynamic. They want it to fluctuate according to our needs, so that, for example, if God is gracious, what that really means is that He loosens His standard of righteousness in order to accept men.

So the assault is on the justice of God and what we have to do in thinking through the doctrine of the atonement is that whatever we do with it, the bottom line of the whole discussion is we have to maintain the integrity of the justice of God. The integrity of God is never compromised, never, and this is why people are offended when we say that Jesus Christ is the only way, "I am the way, the truth and the life, no man comes to the Father but by Me." Acts 4:12, "There's none other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." To the sinful mind that sounds bigoted and narrow minded. But it's only narrow minded if you're thinking of a God that has no integrity. But if God has integrity, then He's not going to compromise His justice for you, for me, or anybody else. So however you solve the problem, the justice of God must never be compromised.

What we want to do today is move into the question of the nature of the atonement; next week we'll deal with a slightly more complicated thing that's come up in church history in the last 300-400 years, the issue of the extent of the atonement, how far does the atonement reach. But today we want to get clear in our minds the nature of the atonement, what happened on the cross.

By way of background we know, without even opening the NT, if we go to the OT we automatically know that God's justice is linked with blood sacrifices. And we know that all of those blood sacrifices involved loss of life, a violent loss of life, a horrible loss of life. It was a very bloody mess, by the tens of thousands animals were slaughtered and gallons and gallons of blood was all over the place. That's what the Bible teaches and the religion that denies the necessity of blood sacrifice is called in Scripture the "way of Cain," because Cain was the first member of the human race that insisted he would be saved without blood sacrifice, by plant life, vegetation, that's the "way of Cain."

Nine religions out of ten on earth are the "way of Cain," there's no blood atonement. Where's the blood atonement? You can go to a lot of the cults and they talk about the cross of Christ but they never really deal with the content of what's going on. We want to look at three views of the cross of Christ that have come up in church history. As we look at these, all three of these approaches can cite Scripture. So we want to be careful that we don't fall into the trap of saying that this is the right one and all the others are wrong. There may be some truth to the others, especially if there are verses that fit it. So by looking at the three views we want to avoid the reductionist error.

What is the reductionist error? The reductionist error is that I narrow down, because of my focus, I get so concentrated on one particular truth that I dismiss all the other aspects of the other views and I don't give them due attention. This is something very easy for people to do because they concentrate and concentrate on this one aspect of the truth and it becomes so amplified in their thinking that there's no room for any other aspect to get involved. Theologians have done this over the years. We're going to watch it happen with these three views.

The first view I'll give you some background in history. We're going to spend some time in the history of this, and then we'll go to some verses. The first approach to the cross of Christ happened in the Middle Ages. We want to go through a little bit of church history. There was a famous church historian by the name of James Orr at the turn of the 20th century who made an interesting observation about the flow of church history. If you take church history and plot it on a time line, and you plot all the theological conflicts and arguments that the church had, you discover there's a logical flow. Right around the time of the apostles and shortly thereafter, the issue, the big issue in the church in that period of time was the Canon of Scripture. What are the apostolic writings? That was settled by around AD300. Then after that came the Christological issues. How can Jesus Christ be both God and man in one person without confusion or mixture, forever? That was the Council of Nicea, AD325. We take these truths for granted but it took the Church 300 years of thinking to articulate this; it took a lot of debate. Then they began to ask, if Jesus Christ is God then and the Father is God, how can there be only one God. That's the Trinitarian issue and that was solved at the Council of Chalcedon, AD451. Then came the Middle Ages, the period that we want to look at today. In the Middle Ages they began to think very, very seriously about what did the God-man do on the cross? The prevailing idea in the air, up to this point, was that Jesus on the cross was paying a ransom to Satan. That Satan had to be paid off to release people. There came a man by the name of Anselm who lived in this period. Anselm came up with the first really solid view of the atonement. Anselm said that Christ didn't pay a ransom to Satan but that God was propitiated, He was satisfied, and he had some other things mixed in with it, so it was a little fuzzy but at least it was coming up in discussion.

Anselm dates from 1033-1109 A.D, and his book is called, *Cur Deus Homo?* which is Latin for *Why the God-Man?* The next time you hear somebody, some secular person use that title, “the Dark Ages,” just read *Cur Deus Homo* and find out whether that was “Dark Ages” or not. We come up in our educational system through the universities to this bias that there was the Dark Ages, and what was the age after the Dark Ages? The Enlightenment. Actually it’s reverse. The Dark Ages should be called the Middle Ages, it was the time of Christendom. Granted, it wasn’t fully developed; granted there was a lot of paganism in Europe, we’re not saying Europe was Christianized, but we are saying that the Christians had a witness all during the Middle Ages. It wasn’t the strongest but it was there. The Christians started hospitals, they started orphanages, so it wasn’t all dark. But the way it’s taught in the school system is that nobody did any thinking until the Enlightenment and before that there were just poor stupid Christians. Anselm is one of these poor stupid Christians in the Dark Ages, and he didn’t know anything except he wrote this tremendous book, *Cur Deus Homo*, which would probably challenge college graduates today, since half of them can’t read anyway, so we see who was in the Dark Ages. Anselm brought up this issue, and after that the Reformers began and the Reformer’s big issue was how do the cross’ benefits come to me? How are those blessings of grace bestowed upon the believer? Salvation by faith, justification, etc. After that, in the 19th century we began to have a discussion about eschatology,

So we have this sequence...and it’s a sequence authored by the Holy Spirit providentially working down through church history. All these controversies were Spirit inspired to get the church squared away. First, He taught the Church, what is the basis of authority? Answer: the canon of Scripture. Yes, the Church forgot this was straightened out and yes the Church is still drifting all over the place, but the issue was clear - the canon was clear. Next we have who is Jesus Christ? And that got resolved. The next question, how are Jesus and the Father one God? That got resolved. Then, what did Jesus Christ do on the cross? And that got resolved. Then how is the cross work appropriated to me? That got resolved and clarified. Finally, what is Jesus Christ yet to do? The issue of eschatology and that has basically been resolved. It’s interesting that the Holy Spirit has taught the Church this order of things.

Anselm did this work and here's a historian's comment. "Since the most trifling sin, as an improper glance, weighs more than the whole world, a satisfaction must be rendered to God which is more than all things outside of God." Think about that sentence a minute. Think about what this author is saying. He's reflecting Anselm here. "A satisfaction must be rendered to God which is more than all things outside of God." That's a very important sentence... a VERY important sentence, because what it says is that to resolve the sin issue, we are not dealing with something just at the creature level any more. What Anselm perceived was that if God is holy, and the creation has fallen into sin, then we have had something offend God and His justice up here. The offense isn't down here; the offense is up there, inside the Godhead. That's where the offense is. So if the offense is within the Godhead then the satisfaction has to be resolved up in the Godhead. That's what he's pointing out here. And it means that whatever Christ did on the cross has to be so large and so awesome in its scope that it has to satisfy the Godhead, where the offense has taken place. It's not just something mechanical that covers the sinner. It does that, but covering the sinner wouldn't affect God. You could give the sinner cover... in the Garden of Eden fig leaves were used, but the problem was fig leaves didn't satisfy God because they didn't address God's character.

Why this is so important is because beginning with Anselm we have the Church officially taking the position that the issue of salvation is not psychological and man-centered. It is theological and God-centered. It is therefore objective; it doesn't change from century to century, it doesn't change going from one people group to another people group, it is an objective issue. Therefore, it is in this area that we now have the objective legal basis of the gospel and of Christ's work. It is not a psychological thing He does in people's hearts. The psychological thing that happens at conversion must have a base; it's not the base. Today we have drifted in our evangelical circles into a psychological gospel, accept Jesus because He's going to make things better, that kind of thing; and I trusted in Christ and I experienced healing, I trusted in Christ and I got off drugs, etc. All those things may be true, but that is not the gospel.

The gospel is how the work of Christ on the cross satisfied the nature of God, that's the gospel. All the rest of it is fruit of the gospel. The problem is whenever you get a generation in church history that concentrates on the

fruit of the gospel down here, they always pick some fruit; they have “fruit fads,” everyone likes bananas one day and grapes the next day. So we might have 400 years where everybody is looking and this is the fruit that you’re supposed to see is a result of the gospel... well, not necessarily. You have had people’s lives changed by the gospel, but the changes differ in men because of men’s different sin patterns. But by concentrating on the fruit we necessarily fall into the error of thinking we know what the effects of the gospel ought to be. And if so and so commits some sin we can write them off as unsaved. That’s not the issue, the issue is what is the gospel and let the Holy Spirit produce the fruit in their life.

That’s Anselm, and continuing the quote: “As, on the one hand, man is absolutely incapable of rendering it, for whatever good he may do he is already under obligation to render to God,” now isn’t that an incisive point. In other words, what Anselm argued was that if you bring your good works to God, He expected those anyway. So how do those, then, deal with the sin issue? “...and it cannot be therefore taken into consideration as *satisfactio*.” Good works can’t satisfy because good works are ordained anyway, they’re expected and the norm. There has to be something beyond them in order to negate the effects of sin. “Satisfaction of the character demanded only God can render. But a man must render it, one who is of the same race, in kindredship with humanity.... It is necessary that the God-man render it,” it’s got to come from the human race because the indictment is against the human race. Of course, Anselm is arguing here for what? He’s arguing that the Lord Jesus Christ is God and man, which is the title of his book.

Going further, here’s what the Reformers said to this issue. I go through all this because we want to understand, what we’re talking about in this Biblical Framework isn’t something that I made up last week. Here’s Luther, 1483-1546, “But if the wrath of God is to be taken from me and I am to obtain grace and forgiveness, then it must be merited from Him by someone; for God cannot be favorable nor gracious toward sins, nor remove penalty and wrath, unless payment be made and satisfaction rendered for them.” I didn’t make this up; Luther’s talked about it 500 years ago.

Let’s look at what Calvin said, look at his dates, 1509-1564, “[Christ] procures for us the grace of God” notice the word “procures,” “procures for us the grace of God,” He opens the spigot, says Calvin. “...the grace of God by

making atonement for us through His sacrifice and appeasing” notice that word, “appeasing the wrath of the Father.” It’s good that Calvin put “the Father” in there, “the wrath of the Father.” The Son also has wrath, in the Scripture where does the gentle Jesus pour out wrath? The Book of Revelation, “the wrath of the Lamb,” so the Son has wrath too; it’s not the case that the Father has wrath and the Son has only love. The Father has love, He so loved the world He sent His only begotten Son, so the Father has love; He also has wrath. The Son loves too, but the Son also has wrath. Why is that? Because they’re both God, they both have the attribute of holiness; they both have the attribute of love. So be careful that in thinking about the Trinity and how it all works together that we don’t think Jesus is love and the Father is this holy mean guy. “...appeasing the wrath of the Father He poured out His sacred blood as the price of redemption, by which was extinguished the wrath of God burning against us, and our iniquities also were purged.”

Do you know how old Calvin was when he wrote *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, that was the basis and the textbook of the entire Reformation? Twenty-one. I know one thing; he didn’t go to American Public Schools. So we have the Satisfaction View of the atonement. There is vocabulary that you want to understand here because of the images of that vocabulary. You’ll see it in hymns. It’s too bad we sometimes rush through these hymns; the good ones use this vocabulary carefully. Next hour when you sing some hymns watch the vocabulary that is used.

There are three words we want to study: redemption, propitiation and reconciliation. The first time we studied the atonement we studied those three terms. When did we do that? What was the OT event that most clearly portrays the atonement? The Exodus, remember the 10th plague. What did the people put over the door? Blood, the blood of a lamb. That was substitutionary blood atonement for the firstborn son of man and cattle of nature. So we’re not introducing something new, we’re re-introducing something old. So with the Death of Christ we re-introduce these three terms. Each one has a picture with it. We want to think about the picture behind each word. The word “redemption” is an economic picture. You say how come God stoops so low to use economics to picture the cross of Christ. The answer is bound up in what? Who created economics? It’s a feature of His creation, and all features in God’s creation are revelatory of Him. He’s built the

universe in such a way to reveal what He is like. So economics is a biblical area of study, it's a biblical area of revelation. "Redemption ... speaks in economic terms about indebted slaves being freed due to payment of their debt. By analogy it speaks of our indebtedness to God and the payment of Christ's death for our debt to Him." Behind the word picture of redemption is being in debt. Watch something here; this is an example of why, if we get too far away from the biblical concept of debt or we're so comfortable being in debt that eventually we lose our ability to think and understand the gospel. So where you have a society that is comfortable being in debt and thinks trivially of the price of being in debt, the whole power of this word gets lost. It's not a "felt" word picture any more, there's no emotional power to it because who cares, hey, I'm in debt, so what, everyone is, big deal. Well, it was a big deal in the ancient world because being in debt was called slavery, they were debt slaves. We mask it over, but when you think about the pressures that indebtedness causes, young couples, older couples, anybody, of high indebtedness, you are a slave to the payments, and there's no way you can get out from it. You made a commitment. You see, in this case, in American society we've got this bankruptcy thing, which you can debate about the need for that, but the point is that there's no bankruptcy option when your in debt to God. We think too lightly of it, and the result is now the whole issue of redemption gets washed out. So redemption is the economics, it's thinking economically about our debt.

The next word, propitiation speaks in terms of a personal sense of rejection. We've all experienced this. "Propitiation speaks in personal terms about rejection and acceptance due to an effort to measure up to standards of acceptance. By analogy it speaks of our rejection by God's holiness and the effect of Christ's death in satisfying God's holy standards." You've all heard and maybe you've experienced in your family, a parent or some authority figure in the family who carries a very rigid standard and never any encouragement. And all you hear is, you failed, you failed, you failed and then after twenty years of you failed you're convinced. Well, basically I guess I'm a failure, you've been programmed to think that way. Many families are afflicted with this. Propitiation is the issue of how can I satisfy my father, my mother, or whoever it is that's constantly on me without any uplifting praise, how do I "satisfy" them? How do I propitiate them? How do I get acceptance with them? That's the picture behind this word in the NT. The issue here is how do we get acceptance with God? What pleases Him, how do we satisfy

Him? We might ask this, what does satisfy God? And if we think we're going to do something that satisfies Him then by necessity we don't think that the cross of Christ satisfied Him. Of course, immediately a person who denies the cross satisfies is going to have a deformed view of God's justice. We make God after our image; that's idolatry. Who is it that makes gods? Idolaters make gods. So propitiation harks back to God's integrity again, does His justice have integrity? Yes, it does. Does He have to be propitiated? He'd better, because if He's irritated and He's angry at Me, I've got a problem here, I'm rejected. How do I get accepted with God? That's the issue that surrounds this word, propitiation.

Next is the word reconciliation and that's when two parties resolve a conflict. "Reconciliation speaks in social terms of hostile relationships being transformed into peaceful ones. By analogy it speaks of our treasonous war against God's authority and Christ's death as a "peace initiative" to end the conflict." It can be a social relationship, it can be a political relationship, and it can be a national relationship. How do Arabs and Jews get reconciled? How do Irish Catholics and Protestants get reconciled? How do we make peace between two groups in conflict? That's the picture behind reconciliation. We'll look at some verses about that and we'll show you how knowing those word pictures illuminate these NT texts where these words are used.

All three of these words are linked to the satisfaction view of the atonement. Why do we say that? Because in redemption there is a debt that needs to be paid. To whom? God. So now it's the issue of how do we satisfy the standard of integrity of God's justice? Propitiation—how am I acceptable to Him? He's not going to go away; He's the same yesterday, today and forever. So how do I make myself right with Him? Reconciliation suggests that if I have to be reconciled with Him doesn't that imply that I'm at enmity with Him? It implies that we are not at peace, that I offend Him and am in active conflict against Him and I need to be reconciled. So all three of these are really damning to the human situation this side of Eden, but all of them hinge on satisfying God's integrity and set you up for the fact that only the cross of Christ satisfies.

Now we want to come to the second kind of theory, and that's called the Human Influence View. This arose in opposition to the Satisfaction theory. Let's see if there's some Scripture that speaks to this. "In contrast to the

Satisfaction theories there arose the Human Influence theories. These theories stress the subjective effect of Christ's death as somehow influencing men, rather than satisfying God. The first of these theories appeared just after, and in reaction to, Anselm's Satisfaction theory through the efforts of Peter Abelard (1079-1142). Walvoord," President of Dallas Seminary for many years, "comments: "This point of view, which has much support in modern liberal theology, was introduced first by Abelard in opposition to the...theory of Anselm. It proceeds on the same premise that God does not necessarily require the death of Christ as an expiation for sin, but rather has chosen this means" that is the cross "to manifest His love and to show His fellowship with them in their sufferings. The death of Christ therefore demonstrates the love of God in such a way as to win sinners to Himself.... Liberal and neo-orthodox theologians today adopt in one form or another the moral influence theory of Abelard."

Human influence! Again, the issue is: here's the cross, here's man. The point: the center of gravity of this view isn't what's going on up here with God, that's the satisfaction view. That's looking at what the cross is doing toward God. The human influence theory is looking the other way and saying, look how this impresses men. It influences them to live a moral life. That's the second theory, human or moral influence.

Then there came a third kind of theory, the third kind is the governmental idea. You say why are we going through all this, why don't we just simply say what it is? Because you don't live in a world where you're going to get "simply." These are ideas that you come into contact with all the time. What we have to do is we have to learn to see and recognize, hey, that's that view. What did God tell Adam to do? Name things. What does He want us to do? To be able to name things and discern what's happening here, be able to analyze a little bit, we don't have to be PhD theologians. This is just basic church history, that's all. Next time you listen to the radio or something, you listen to a gospel presentation or TV or something, just kind of sit there and listen and ask yourself, what am I hearing here, view one, two or three of the cross?

This position says "There is nothing in God's character that demands Christ's death for sinners. What did demand Christ's death was God's commitment to the moral government of the universe. If God were going to insist that evil be punished He had to visibly display this principle. The death of Christ,

therefore, was not a substitutionary penal judgment for sins; it was a demonstration that God is serious about morality.” The idea here is that they wanted to preserve the idea of God’s moral rule in the universe, so in this view the cross looks down so men can see that God is serious about sin and so that men can look up to God and say hey, He deals seriously with sin. But it doesn’t really satisfy something inside of God; it’s more of Him showing He’s a good ruler by saying that bad things are bad, that sort of thing.

Now we want to look at some verses in the NT where we’ll take these three ideas, the Satisfaction idea, the Human Influence idea, and the Governmental idea, and watch these appear in the NT. But they appear in the NT in such a way that they’re not in conflict, and they supplement one another, they’re not necessarily against each other.

Mark 10:45, this is a sample verse, there are parallels to it. Mark 10:45, “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.” The preposition translated in this translation as “for” means “in place of.” This verse teaches the Satisfaction view, the Satisfaction approach. It’s not just saying gee, He did it for you, He’s a nice guy. That’s not what the Greek text is saying. What it’s saying is He paid a ransom price for us; there was a transaction that was going on. The Son of Man comes to give His life a ransom, and by the way, of the three words, what word picture is Jesus using here? Economic, personal, or social? Ransom—economic, money. It’s a money picture. So here, right in the Lord Jesus’ teaching you’re an indebted slave and He uses an economic picture to communicate what happened. Economics is a biblical way of thinking about the atonement.

Go to John 12:32, here’s another verse that talks about the cross of Christ. Here we’ll ask, does the cross of Christ influence people? “And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself.” Is that influencing people? Yes. So there is a human influence factor in the cross of Christ. We don’t reduce it all to the Satisfaction view.

For the third view turn to Rom 3:26 - the Governmental view, is this found in Scripture? We turn to Romans, and we see what Paul says. See the word propitiation in verse 25, “whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because

in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; ²⁶“for the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness at the present time,” now how is it a demonstration? That’s the governmental theory, God is demonstrating to men that He rules rightly, and “that He might be just” that’s His attribute of justice, “and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.” How can He forgive people? In other words, how can He bring a sinner into fellowship with Him? Because of what He did on the cross. That’s the Satisfaction view brought in alongside the Governmental.

All three of these approaches aren’t bad in themselves; we just have to discover what is the core idea and how then can I organize the others so they don’t wind up contradicting. And the best way of doing that is to take advantage of the framework that we’ve learned. When we go back in the OT, what are the two events that we have studied that talk about judgment/salvation? We’re going to move out of the NT for a moment, go back to the OT and think through simple pictures, get our heads straight so that our theology is straight. One of them, the first one was the Flood in Noah’s time. We studied all these events and when we got to the flood we said the flood is an example of judgment/salvation. What was the vehicle of salvation in the flood? The ark, and the water too. The water is interesting; the water was the instrumentality of destruction to those outside the ark, but the water was the instrumentality of salvation for the ones in the ark because the earth was undergoing volcanic eruptions and everything else, and the water acted as a wonderful insulator. With magma being thrown all over the place you need some place to dissipate the heat, so the water preserved the people in the ark as well as drowned the people outside of the ark. God is very efficient that way.

In this era of the Flood, when we have judgment/salvation, let’s go through the three approaches. Did the ark call to men in Noah’s era before the flood started? Yeah, what did Noah do for 120 years? He preached, he witnessed, and there was a call to men. They would see the ark. They made fun of it, they rejected it, but the ark, had they been responding, would have drawn men to the ark, if they hadn’t been blinded by Satan. I mean, if you know there is a flood coming and there’s the ark, you’d be drawn to it. But, and here’s the balance theologically, it doesn’t make sense to say that the ark is an influence upon people to run to it unless there’s going to be a real flood. There has to be a reality there in order for there to be a witness. So that’s

why the human influence theory of the cross, if I be lifted up...I will draw men to it, that's the kind of influence the Bible's talking about. Now men can reconstruct other views of the influence of the cross, but the Biblical view of the influence of the cross is yea, it influences me because I know what happened. The ark influences me if I believe in a real flood. Look at the governmental view. Was God just in doing all this? Yes, but it wasn't just a drama, it wasn't something for the Discovery Channel to air on Wednesday night or something. It was a lot more than a story, it was the real thing. So again it was a demonstration but a demonstration only valid because there was a reality behind the demonstration.

What is the second judgment/salvation event that we studied? The Exodus. What was the vehicle of salvation in the Exodus? Blood on the door. Did the blood on the door influence people? Yeah, there were Egyptians that came into the Jewish homes, blood on the door, hey, I believe in the angel of death and I want safety here, I'm coming in, hello. So did the blood on the door influence? Yes. But how did it influence? It influenced only if you believed there was a coming angel of death that was going to judge. So it's not wrong to say the cross influences men as long as you understand that it's not influence only, that there's an actual historical event going on that influences. There has to be something serious actually happening. And there's a serious flood and a serious angel of death that are really dangerous and because of that, yeah, I'm influenced, I want in the ark, I want in the house.

That's basically the answer to the question of which view is at the core. All three have parts of the truth, but the essence of what Jesus did is in the Satisfaction view, because if that isn't true, then the human influence and the governmental view fall apart. So they are all based on the satisfaction theory.

We want to go to one more thing before we conclude. We want to recall a blessing from all this. Go back to Rom 3:26, because the cross, besides being a satisfaction, also reveals to us the fantastic finesse of how our God works. It's missed by a lot of people who don't spend time just observing, thinking and praying about how God works, a fascinating worker, how He pulls off what He pulls off in history. You look at it and you can't help but sit there and worship. In Rom. 3:26 the last clause says "that he might be just and the

justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.” That He might be just, and that He might be the justifier. Think a minute. Paul grew up in Jewish rabbinical thought. In the OT what was the problem that frustrated the OT believer? They said, now wait a minute, how can a holy God get together with sinful men? You can see the problem in Isaiah when he says, “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God almighty” and he fell down in the face of the holiness of God. I’m unclean! So how can this infinitely holy God ever contact sinful humanity? We’re nasty, we’re dirty. God is perfectly clean. How do we get together? That was the problem in the OT. They had various ideas of how it was done, but they really could never get this together, these two things. What Paul says in Rom 3:26 is that God surprised us. When the cross was finished, and man began to realize what happened, WOW! God resolved the problem we were struggling with, now we see.

What is the application for us today? The application is we don’t have this integrity of God problem, but we have another problem that bothers us: the problem of evil. Why does God let this poor little baby die? Why does God allow deformed children? Why does God allow this horrible accident to happen to such an innocent person? Why does the good guy get murdered and the bad guys go to jail and get out? What’s going on here? What do we do? We have to operate with the same modus operandi that the OT saint did. The OT saint knew he had an apparent contradiction, but he knew enough about his God to know that God is not contradictory. God has a reason for this, and you can laugh at me because I say He’s got a reason, and well if He had a reason He’d show it. Not necessarily.

Why is He obligated to show it? He’ll show it in His due time. And when He does show it we have the assurance from these earlier examples of how he resolved the problem of His integrity that He’ll work it out. When He opens up what was really going on in those painful situations, we’ll say wow, I never thought of that. Just like the OT saints, if they could’ve seen the cross they’d have said, we never thought God would resolve it like that? The Messiah did that? I wouldn’t have guessed that. It was a surprise. God has an eternity full of surprises, and one by one the surprises clear up this, clear up that, but the “clear up’s” don’t happen until He chooses to surprise us with how He does it.

So the nature of the atonement that we've looked at, at its core is Satisfaction of the Justice of God. Once that is established, now we can talk about the influence it has on people, we can say it was a demonstration of God's moral government. But substantively it's a satisfaction. It's aimed at God primarily and secondarily at man. It can't be aimed at man until it's first aimed at God and His justice is satisfied. Then we can get to these other things.

[Back To The Top](#)

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