FOUNDATIONS OF GOD’S SALVATION

The Atonement

The subject of the Atonement is the very foundation upon which the Christian faith stands. The Atonement is the central basic theme of the Bible. Its definition: “Atonement is the recompense of sin paid by Jesus Christ by the offering of Himself as a sacrifice.”

Mankind’s religions are built upon the foundation of self-righteousness. Mankind has established religion to satisfy and justify their spiritual needs and Satan has used religion as a counterfeit to God’s plan of salvation. Through religion, people have created their own sacrifices and rituals which make them acceptable to their god(s), thereby appeasing their consciences. As the Apostle Paul stated, “…they worship the creature rather than the Creator.”

Man’s sin is primarily rebellion against God’s holiness. The demands of divine holiness could only be met through the offering of a blameless, spotless sacrifice. In John 1:29, John the Baptist associates Jesus with atonement by referring to Him as “…the lamb of God which takes away the sin of the world.” (John 1:29) The Apostle Paul gives the meaning of atonement in I Corinthians 15:3 by saying that “…Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures.” In both the Old and New Testaments the concept of atonement carried with it the idea of the offering of a sacrifice. The perfect sacrifice offered for man’s sins was Jesus.

In the Old Testament, God ordained the offering of sacrifices as a part of worship of the Israelites. Sacrifices were offered for the purpose of attaining communion with God and removing all obstacles to that communion. First, if an Israelite sinned and so disturbed the relationship between himself and God, he brought a sin offering, a sacrifice of Atonement. Read Leviticus 4. The sin offering was for the purpose of restoring a right relationship between the person and God. Second, if the Israelite had wronged his neighbor, he brought a trespass offering, the Sacrifice of Restitution. Read Leviticus 6:1-7. God shows us in these offerings that before man can consecrate himself, he must first establish a right relationship with God and man. After this was done, the Israelite offered a burnt offering as a Sacrifice of Worship. Read Leviticus 1. Finally, the Israelite was ready to enjoy communion with God who had pardoned and accepted him. So, he presented a peace offering, the Sacrifice of Fellowship. Read Leviticus 3. All these bloody sacrifices pointed to Christ, who accomplished all this for us. Read Hebrews 9:6-15.

ATONEMENT IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

The word “atonement” is translated from the Hebrew word “Kaphar” which literally means “to cover.” When Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden, they became morally and spiritually naked and needed a covering. Genesis 3:7 tells us that they tried to cover their sin by making aprons of fig leaves. In Genesis 3:21, we read the first gospel lesson on atonement. God taught this lesson in symbol and action when He clothed Adam and Eve with the coats of skins. In order to get skins, animals had to be slain, life had to be taken, and blood had to be shed.

The Passover in Egypt was a dramatic episode in the history of Israel, which was used to point to and vividly portray the one great offering to be made by Jesus Christ. Man’s inescapable need of an atoning sacrifice is
seen in the requirement of a sacrificial lamb which had to be without blemish. In the account of the Passover, God provided His sacrifice for sinful man and thus saving him from judgment. Read Exodus 12:1-25.

In the innermost sanctuary of the tabernacle, called the holy of holies, were placed the ark and the mercy-seat. Within the ark were placed the two tablets of the law, the golden pot of manna, and Aaron’s rod that budded. Each of these articles were a reminder of Israel’s sin and failure. The lid of the ark was called the Mercy Seat or place of covering. It covered the ark entirely, which symbolized the fact that man’s sins and failures were completely hidden from view. The priest sprinkled the Mercy Seat with the blood of the offering and their sins were covered from the eyes of a Holy and Righteous God. The sprinkled blood changed what might have been a place of judgment to one filled with mercy. Read Exodus 37:1-9.

The temporary and imperfect sacrifices of the Old Testament were symbolical in nature and were fulfilled in the complete and final atonement provided by Jesus Christ on the cross. Christ’s atonement had the power to cleanse man’s evil conscience, once for all, and to be our High Priest seated at the right hand of God. See Hebrews 9:14; 10:10-12.

KEY WORDS OF ATONEMENT

The meaning of Atonement is further expressed through key words which are applied to the death of Christ. The word “propitiation” means to appease or satisfy the righteous wrath of a Holy God by offering an atoning sacrifice. See Romans 3:25; I John 2:2; 4:10. The word “reconciliation” is the result of propitiation and means to restore peace between two persons. See Romans 5:10 and II Corinthians 5:18-21. Through the atoning death of Christ, the reconciliation of all mankind to God is made possible; however, each individual must make it actual by receiving it. The word “substitution” relates to the sacrifices of the Old Testament and Christ’s death that were substitutionary, doing for the believer what he could not do for himself. See Leviticus 4:13-20; 6:2-7; Isaiah 53; and II Corinthians 5:21. Finally, the word “redemption” means to redeem, to buy back by paying a price or ransom. He became like us by taking our nature. (Hebrews 2:16,17) He was to give up all to redeem us. (II Corinthians 8:9) Being Divine, He was to pay the price, His own precious blood. (Hebrews 9:14,15) See Matthew 20:28.

RESULTS OF THE ATONEMENT

The Atonement declares the believer pardoned, forgiven from sin. It frees the believer from the guilt of past sin and provides the confidence to overcome future sin. The Atonement declares victory over the penalty of sin and death and secures eternal life with God.

Salvation

The provision of salvation for sinful man is found entirely in the person of Jesus Christ. He completely satisfied the demands of a Holy God and now this salvation must be applied by God and received by man. Salvation is the deliverance from the power of sin – redemption.

“The salvation that comes through Christ may be described in three tenses: past, present and future. When a person believes in Christ, he is saved (Acts 16:31). But we are also in the process of being saved from the power of sin (Rom. 8:13; Phil. 2:12). Finally, we shall be saved from the very presence of sin (Rom. 13:11; Titus 2:12-13). God releases into our lives today the power of Christ’s resurrection (Rom. 6:4) and allows us to
foretaste of our future life as His children (2 Cor. 1:22; Eph. 1:14). Our experience of salvation will be complete when Christ returns (Heb. 9:28) and the kingdom of God is fully revealed (Matt. 13:41-43).” Nelson’s Illustrated Bible Dictionary

Conversion

Conversion means to turn from sin to God. It is derived from the Latin word “converto” which means to turn with the aid and company of another. It is produced by the co-operation of God’s Holy Spirit and human activity. See Philippians 2:13. Grace is God’s influence through the Holy Spirit preceding a person’s conversion, stirring up and drawing him to turn to God. See John 6:44 and Acts 7:51. God’s grace enables a person to see their sinful condition, repent of their sin, and believe in the good news of Christ. See Ephesians 2:8,9. The Holy Spirit enables the person to have saving faith and the assurance of salvation. They are a new creation in Christ. See John 3:3-6; Ephesians 2:5; II Corinthians 5:17.

Human responsibility is stressed in conversion and it is always the voluntary act of the individual to respond after hearing the good news of salvation. See Luke 24:47; Acts 2:38; 3:19; 26:20. Man has to be brought to the place of surrendering his will to God’s. He is presented an option for acceptance or rejection of salvation. The way of grace is open to all and it is not God’s will that any should perish. See II Peter 3:9. This is why it is important that many will hear the gospel message of salvation and have the opportunity to respond.

THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN CONVERSION

Jesus summarizes the work of the Holy Spirit in relation to bringing the gospel message to the world, “And He, when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin, and righteousness, and judgment;” (John 16:8) The word “convict” means the cross-examination of a person on trial with convincing proof. In the work of conviction, the Holy Spirit cross-examines a person until he sees their errors (sin). Conviction is the secret work of the Holy Spirit in the heart before conversion and regeneration that prepares the soul to believe in the atoning work of Christ on the cross.

Before there can be a true spiritual conversion, there must be conviction of sin. In order for a person to see their need for Christ as Savior, they need to understand their spiritual condition as a sinner. They need to see that they have sinned against a holy God by disobeying His moral law. God’s moral law represents His very nature, expressing His creative purpose for mankind’s relationship with Him and with one another. Thus, man’s chief sin is to rebel against God and His creative purpose. See Romans 3:9-23. This is why the presentation of the gospel must begin with God as the basis for believing in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.

The Holy Spirit convicts mankind of righteousness. The Holy Spirit raises a person’s awareness of their sin as they come in contact with God’s standard of righteousness in His moral law. Read Romans 7:7-14. The Apostle Paul was convicted and condemned by the moral law of God before his conversion. That is how he understood his sinful condition. Because God’s law is written on the hearts of mankind and their consciences excuse or accuse them, it is important that people’s consciences are raised by hearing of righteousness or seeing it demonstrated. See Romans 2:15. This is done through the preaching of the gospel, the sharing of moral truth, or the righteous behavior of God’s people. It may also be seen through the righteous life of Christ, the perfect Lamb of God.
The Holy Spirit convicts mankind of judgment. There is a consequence to a life of sin - eternal death. Because mankind is concerned with death and the possibility of life after death, the subject of God’s judgment will bring conviction to people’s hearts and minds as they hear it shared or preached from the Word of God. Though often the message of God’s love dominates the Christian message, Jesus warned, “…and do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.” Jesus wasn’t afraid to warn His disciples and the multitudes about eternal judgment. The Holy Spirit will use every opportunity to convict people of the impending judgment because of their sin. Because Christ was judged on the cross for man’s sin, the gospel message offers good news of forgiveness and hope for eternal life.

The work of the Holy Spirit in conviction is to help people realize their sinful condition so that they can hear and receive salvation through Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit is at work drawing those who are open to and seeking after the truths of God. Jesus said that no one could come to Him unless the Father was drawing them. This is the Holy Spirit’s ministry. He not only draws them, but helps them receive the message of salvation and believe in Christ as Lord and Savior.

Repentance

Repentance is changing your mind about sin, seeing it as wrong and offensive to God. It means to turn from sin with the intent of not doing it again. Repentance should be the result when a person experiences godly sorrow for their sin. See II Corinthians 7:9, 10. Repentance must be the desire and experience of a sinner in seeking God’s salvation. In both the Old and New Testaments, repentance was necessary to overcome sin and live in obedience to God.

The scriptures emphasize the importance of repentance in the work of conversion. See Luke 13:2-5; 24:47; Acts 3:19; 17:30, 31; 26:20; and 2 Peter 3:9. As an unbeliever is convicted by the Holy Spirit of their sin and of their need of God’s salvation through faith in Jesus Christ, they must be made aware of their need to repent. They must come to see that their sin against God is what made them wrong with Him in the first place. It is not enough to accept the fact that they are a sinner and that they feel a godly sorrow for their sin. They must be committed to turning away from their sin, believe in Christ’s death for their sin, and commit their life to God’s way.

Repentance is the choice to alter one’s being away from sin and toward trusting God with their life. To believe in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior is to commit to a life of obedience to Him, which infers that sin and living for one’s self is no longer acceptable. There can be the fruit of repentance, an outward evidence that a person has changed their behavior. See Matthew 3:8 and Acts 26:20.

Repentance is an important, ongoing experience for Christians as they seek to overcome sin in their life and live in obedience to God. Their initial act of repentance when they first came to faith in Christ serves as a basis for ongoing repentance that is needed to deal with reoccurring sin.

Faith

Just as repentance is the turning of the soul from sin, so faith is the turning of the soul toward God. Faith can be defined as believe, trust, having confidence in the testimony of another. See Hebrews 11:1-6. Faith
plays an important role in every area of the Christian life. It is the basis for a Christian’s: relationship with God, assurance of salvation, obedience, prayer life, a confidence in scriptural truth and the power of God, and the hope of eternal life. The Christian is saved by faith (Ephesians 2:8), sanctified by faith (Acts 26:18), kept by faith (1 Peter 1:5), healed by faith (James 2:19) and empowered by the Holy Spirit through faith (Galatians 3:5, 14).

There are four scriptural aspects of faith which helps to define it within Christian experience. First, there is intellectual faith. It is the believing of a record or history and the accepting of facts. This type of faith does not bring conversion and salvation even when it accepts the facts of Jesus’ life and death. Intellectual faith is only mental assent and standing alone does not result in salvation. See Luke 8:13, 14; James 2:19 and Acts 8:13, 21.

Second, there is saving faith, which has its origin from the heart. See Romans 10:8-17 and Hebrews 11:6. Saving faith is an act of the entire personality of man involving the intellect, the emotions, and the will. With the intellect, a person believes and trusts in God’s truth of eternal salvation. Through the emotions, the soul is awakened to its personal need of salvation and to Christ’s provision through His death on the cross. Through the will, the person chooses to repent, commit their soul in surrender to Christ. Thus, saving faith involves both trust in Christ’s sacrificial death for the forgiveness of sin and a commitment to live in obedience Christ and His commandments.

Third, there is faith that is a “fruit of the Spirit” – a product of God’s Holy Spirit at work in the Christian’s life. See Galatians 5:22; I Corinthians 4:2; and Matthew 25:21. The word faith relates to “faithfulness” – being faithful in trusting God and living your life for Him. This will result in behaviors and actions that express fruitfulness that glorifies God.

Fourth, there is gift faith which is experienced when a believer is empowered by the Holy Spirit to believe God for a supernatural work to be performed. There is an absolute confidence given the believer that God will accomplish what He has ordered. See I Corinthians 12:9; Acts 14:8-10.

Finally, faith can be strengthened and increased in the life of a Christian. In Romans 10:9, faith is increased through studying and hearing the word of God. Faith operates on God’s truth and the development of those truths in the Christian’s life will build faith. Also, faith will be strengthened as it is exercised in the Christian’s life. The more a Christian exercises faith, the more he or she becomes aware of God’s faithfulness and truth, which strengthens faith.

ASSURANCE

Faith secures peace with God and unites the believer with Jesus Christ. This results in assurance, an inner confidence within the Christian, that God’s salvation has taken place and that they are a child of God. See Romans 5:1; II Timothy 1:12. Assurance comes to the believer through the witness of the indwelling Holy Spirit. God’s Holy Spirit witnesses to our human spirit that we are His child. See Romans 8:16; I Corinthians 2:9-13. As a Christian begins to know God and live in trusting obedience to Him, it will produce a greater sense of assurance.
The scriptures urge Christians to cultivate faith and build assurance. Having a desire to know God through His word in the Bible and a commitment to obey it will build assurance. The change of attitude and heart toward living for God and behaviors (works and fruitfulness) that a Christian sees in their life builds assurance. A developing prayer life in which the Christian seeks to know God will develop greater assurance. Prayer is communion with God that will develop relationship with Him and build faith and assurance.

**GOOD WORKS**

Good works can be described as good and godly acts or deeds. Good works are a result of faith, in that they are the Christian’s response to doing God’s will. Faith is confirmed and perfected by good works. Read James 2:14-26 In fact, the powerful faith and grace scripture in Ephesians 2:8, 9 concludes with God’s purpose for our being saved: “For we are His workmanship created in Christ Jesus for GOOD WORKS, which God has ordained beforehand that we should live in them.” (Ephesians 2:10) Jesus said that a follower of His should let their life shine before others through their good works so as to bring glory to God. See Matthew 5:16. Righteous living and good deeds declare the purpose of God for His people in His plan to demonstrate to the world His reality, goodness, and salvation. A Christian is not saved by doing good works, but does good works as a result of being saved. Throughout the Old and New Testaments, God declares that the judgment of mankind will be based upon what people do, not what they profess.

At the Judgment Seat of Christ, Christians will be judged according to their works. Their sins will not be judged here because they have already been judged on the cross. However, all their works, words, and thoughts since they became a Christian will be judged. Read I Corinthians 3:10-15. In verse 13, the Apostle Paul declares that every Christian’s work will be tested by fire. That which is not of God will be burned up and that which was done for God will be rewarded. There will be rewards in Heaven that God’s people will receive for what they did for God in this life. There is one sobering truth that Jesus gives in Matthew 7:21-23 that each professing Christian must face: that “many” will come in Jesus name and call Him Lord; yet they will be rejected by Him because they never really knew Him. Why didn’t they know Him? They continued to live a lawless, rebellious life while claiming to belong to Jesus as their Lord. Their reward will be eternal judgment and death.

**JUSTIFICATION**

Justification is a change in man’s relation or standing before God. It has to do with a person’s relationship with God that has been disrupted by sin. It is a change from guilt and condemnation to acquittal and acceptance. The word “justify” is a judicial term meaning to declare, or to cause to appear innocent or righteous. See Deuteronomy 25:1; Romans 4:2-8. It does not make one righteous, but declares one righteous in the legal sense. It does not apply to character or conduct, but to standing and relationship. Justification is needed by all mankind, for all have sinned by disobeying God and His moral law. See Romans 1:19-31; 3:10.

There are three effects of justification. First, there is forgiveness of sin and removal of the penalty of sin through the death of Jesus Christ. See Isaiah 53:6 and I Peter 2:24. He was made sin for us. The sinner can do nothing to justify himself. But, when a person truly believes that Christ paid the ransom for their sin, they are justified freely. Second, justification restores God’s favor, bringing a person into fellowship with God. Third, in order for a righteous God to restore His favor and fellowship, He had to provide a person with righteousness.
The believer is declared righteous and has a standing of being in a right relationship with God. This is called “imputed” righteousness, a righteousness that has been given to the believer’s account. See I Corinthians 1:30.

Justification is carried out through grace, God’s underserving favor. Grace is the origin or source of justification. See Romans 3:24. Grace is the favor of God in justifying the believer without their merit or deserving it. The basis for justification is through the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. See Romans 3:24 and Hebrews 9:22. God was satisfied with Christ’s atoning death for our sin. The word “propitiation” means the satisfaction for our sin. See Isaiah 53:11; Romans 3:25; I John 2:2; 4:10. Faith in Jesus Christ is the condition for a person’s justification. See Galatians 2:16.

**REGENERATION**

Regeneration means re-creation or new birth. See John 3:3-6; II Corinthians 5:17; James 1:17. Man is dead in trespasses and sins and must be born again to be made right with God. Regeneration is the Divine act of God which imparts to the believer the new and highest life in personal union with Christ. See John 1:13. It is a creative, supernatural act on the part of God, through the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. Only the Holy Spirit can generate a spiritual nature, holy and acceptable to God for fellowship. See I Corinthians 2:9. It is not a reforming process on the part of man. It is God’s purpose that His people express in their daily lives that they are new creatures and that they have passed from death unto life. See I John 2:29; 3:9.

Regeneration is NOT water baptism. According to Jesus, a person must be born of the water and of the Spirit. See John 3:3-6. Water baptism is an outward sign of the inward work of regeneration. Spiritual birth must take place in regeneration and spiritual birth results from a conscious act of repentance and faith toward God through Jesus Christ. Infant baptism ignores the conscious act of the individual involved. No one can believe for another. No spiritual act or sacrament of baptism can obtain salvation for an infant or adult with their conscious commitment to faith in Jesus Christ.

**SANCTIFICATION**

Sanctification has to do with a person’s character and conduct as one who has been justified and regenerated. Justification puts a person into a right relationship with God, while sanctification exhibits the fruit of that relationship – a holy life. Sanctification is the work of God’s grace whereby we are renewed in the whole man after the image of God and are enabled to be free from the power of sin and to live unto righteousness. To sanctify means to separate or set apart for God, from evil to good. It also means to make holy and/or pure; to dedicate to God and His service. See Exodus 13:2; 40:10, 11; Numbers 7:1; Leviticus 27:14, 16; and John 17:19. Anything that is devoted “exclusively” to the service of God is set apart and said to be holy.

Sanctification can be understood in the past, present, and future. Instantaneous (or positional) sanctification means that the moment a person believes in Christ and is saved, they are separated from sin and separated unto God. It is something that is done for the believer by God through Christ. The New Testament calls believers “saints” even though they may not be experiencing all the characteristics and behaviors of a sanctified (holy) life. See I Corinthians 1:2, 30; 6:11; II Thessalonians 3:13; Hebrews 10:10; and I Peter 1:2.
Progressive (or experiential) sanctification means the process whereby the believer is progressively being set apart and holy unto God in heart and life. This involves a process of spiritual growth, obedience, and conformity to the image of Christ. See II Peter 3:18; II Corinthians 3:18; Hebrews 2:11. Sanctification is the work of the Holy Spirit in the believer’s life to teach, discipline, and empower to live a holy and righteous life. The believer’s commitment, cooperation, response, and effort are necessary in refraining from sin and experiencing the Holy Spirit’s work of sanctification. See Romans 12:1, 2; II Corinthians 7:1; I Thessalonians 4:1-8; 5:23; Hebrews 10:14; 12:14. The scriptures teach against sin in the life of a believer that demands a life of righteousness. See II Corinthians 6:14 -7:1; I John 3:4-10; James 4:4-10. The believer’s hope in Christ’s return and eternal life should be an incentive to holiness. See I John 3:3.

Complete sanctification is the blessing which the believer receives at the return of Christ. See I John 3:2. No matter how much progress may have been made in the life of holiness, entire conformity to the image of Christ will be realized when Christ comes and throughout eternity. God’s people will have a supernatural body, like that of the risen Christ and shall live in a state of complete, eternal sanctification (perfection). See I Corinthians 15: 51-57; Philippians 3:20, 21.

THE LORDSHIP OF CHRIST

The progress of the believer in the sanctified life will largely depend upon the place that is given to the LORD Jesus Christ. He is, first of all, our Savior. Throughout the scripture, the Lord Jesus is the very center of God’s great work of redemption and Lord over all His people. As the believer recognizes the Lordship of Christ and lives in obedience to Him, God’s plan for their life will be accomplished.

There are eight titles in the New Testament that describe the Lordship of Jesus Christ. First, He is our LORD. The Greek word “kurios” is translated Lord in terms of ownership, having perfect control. See Romans 14:7-9; I Corinthians 6:19, 20.

Second, He is our LEADER. In Matthew 23:8, Jesus uses the word “master” or “teacher” which is translated from the Greek word “kathegetes” meaning leader. Jesus is the author of faith and He walked this earth in entire dependence upon God. He is therefore the leader of all who walk the same path. See Hebrews 12:1-6.

Titles three through seven referring to Jesus as Lord address His rule and authority over the life of a believer. He is our PRINCE. See Acts 3:12-16. He is the Prince of life, giving Christ the right over our lives. See Colossians 1:16, 17. He is our COMMANDER, to whom the believer can depend for direction and commands. See Luke 5:4-11. He is our MASTER. Jesus is master over God’s house. He is supreme Master of our lives, to purge our lives of uncleanness that we shall live a sanctified life and be a vessel for His glory. See II Timothy 2:21. He is our KING. As we recognize Christ as King of God’s spiritual kingdom (both on earth and in heaven), we shall seek to honor, obey, and serve Him as King over our lives. See I Timothy 1:17. He is our POTENTATE. Jesus is the mighty ruler, in Whom God has placed the destiny of the worlds. Let us give Him our loyal service. See I Timothy 6:15, 16.

Finally, He is our TEACHER. See Matthew 10:24. He is our schoolmaster, as we learn of Him and from Him in order to “… grow in grace and a knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ” (II Peter 3:18a).