

Atonement and the Cross of Christ

Atonement in Symbols: Part 1

Lesson #6 for November 8, 2008

Scriptures: Genesis 3:21; 4:3-5; Leviticus 17:11; Romans 3:23; Ephesians 2:11-13; 1 Peter 1:18,19.

1. The purpose of this lesson is to teach us about the plan of salvation as pictured in the sacrifices described in the Old Testament and how they pointed forward to the “sacrifice of Christ.” Do those old ceremonies have any relevance for us in our day?
2. Try to picture the sequence of events that would lead one of the children of Israel to take a sacrifice to the tabernacle for his sin. If, or when, a person committed a sin, he first had to recognize that he had sinned. Provisions were made for individuals or groups who “unintentionally” committed sins. Committing a sin intentionally, or with a “high hand,” was usually associated with a death penalty. No doubt, that was because God wanted them to recognize that sin was serious—deadly.

Numbers 15:30,31, *GNB*: ³⁰But any person who sins deliberately, whether he is a native or a foreigner, is guilty of treating the LORD with contempt, and he shall be put to death, ³¹because he has rejected what the LORD said and has deliberately broken one of his commands. He is responsible for his own death. (Compare Genesis 2:17)

3. We know almost nothing about the first sacrifices offered by Adam and Eve or by Cain and Abel outside the Garden of Eden. We can imagine that having to kill a lamb—probably with a sharp stone—would have been very upsetting to the first human family. Did God send angels to them to instruct them how to kill that first lamb? Later, during the times of Moses and the children of Israel, when they recognized their sin, they were expected to take an appropriate sacrifice to the tabernacle. In the economy of those days, the sacrifices were quite expensive. Clearly, God did not intend for them to be sinning on a regular basis!
4. Do we take sin seriously enough? How would it affect your behavior if you had to pay a day’s wage—or maybe even a week’s wage—every time you committed a sin? Would that lead us to avoid sin because we did not want to pay the financial penalty? Is that the best motive? **What would be required for us to learn to avoid sin because it is repulsive to us? Did Adam and Eve learn that lesson? Did the children of Israel learn that lesson?**
5. What is sin? What percentage of your own sins are intentional? What percentage are unintentional? Can you clearly differentiate the two? Is there any provision in Scripture for dealing with intentional sins? Does the “sacrifice of Christ” “cover” intentional sins as well as unintentional sins?
6. Would the sacrifice of an animal from your own flock cause a change in you? Would it be fair to assume that, ultimately, the purpose of the sacrifices was to bring about a change in the behavior of the one sacrificing? Let us note carefully that perhaps the clearest difference between the view of those of us who believe in the great controversy view and the rest of Christianity is that Christianity, in general, is focused on how to deal with past sins. (Justification) The great controversy view says that there is nothing that we can do about our past sins; they are a part of history. What we are concerned about is our future behavior.
7. In what sense were the animals “substitutionary sacrifices”? Based on God’s original instructions to Adam and Eve and later, the death penalty connected with the breaking of almost every single commandment, (for more, see www.theox.org Teacher’s Guides > The Law > Leviticus > Item #7) we can conclude that if no provision had been made, death would have been the immediate result of every sin.(Genesis 2:17) In the times of the Old Testament, God instituted a symbolic system (a pointing function) in which an animal died, and therefore, the human did not have to die. However, Hebrews 10:4,11 reminds us that the blood of bulls and goats can never take away sins. But even that symbolic system was a very costly one.
8. In the days of Jesus, the offering of thousands of sacrifices at the temple—especially at festival

times—turned into something of a “circus.” (DA 157) A report was made of a Passover about 30 years after Jesus died. About 2 million people went to Jerusalem. As a result, one was not allowed to bring an individual sacrifice to the temple! At least 10 people had to come together with a single sacrifice. There was just not enough time and space for killing all those animals. Blood ran all the way across the courtyard, into some kind of drain, and all the way down to the Kidron Brook at the bottom of the valley! Do you think that helped people by convincing them to stop sinning? When an animal was sacrificed, some of its blood was collected to represent the death of the sacrifice and the blood was sprinkled or poured somewhere in the sanctuary to represent the transfer of sins from the sinner to the sanctuary. Thus, blood represented the life of the victim. (Leviticus 17:11) While we know that most of “blood” is technically “dead,” to the children of Israel, it appeared that when one sacrificed an animal, the blood poured out, and soon the animal was dead. So, the obvious conclusion was that the life was in the blood. What is the meaning of “blood, which is life, takes away sins”? But why would the Bible suggest that the smell of the burning of all those sacrifices was pleasing to God? (Leviticus 1:9,13,17, etc.) Why did God use that system? Was it that the children of Israel had become accustomed to that type of worship of the “gods” in Egypt and in Canaan? If God had introduced something completely different, they might have rejected it out of hand without giving it much thought! God would probably have preferred to come down and “sit” with His people on a hillside and instruct them as Jesus did later.

9. The children of Israel were requested to sacrifice also for various impurities. Cleanliness from impurities was a daily challenge. Women needed a special purification process after giving birth. (Leviticus 12) In fact, almost any kind of bodily discharge was regarded as impure. (Leviticus 15:1-18) Provisions needed to be made to “cleanse” from those impurities. Impurities came about because of contact with a dead body (Numbers 6:6,7,11) or with diseases of various kinds. (Leviticus 13,14) Even houses were considered to be impure and unhealthy if they were infected with mold or mildew. (Leviticus 14:33-57) Impurity of almost any kind became associated with the idea of sin.
10. Even in the time of the New Testament, the idea of impurity and sin separating the people from God is represented in Ephesians 2:11-13 where Gentiles—“the uncircumcised”—can be “brought near” by the “blood” of Christ.
11. Why do you think lambs were so often the sacrifices? In what way did lambs represent Jesus Christ? In general, we think of lambs as being friendly, gentle, powerless; not dangerous or destructive. They are the kind of creatures that human beings can become very attached to. Is that why God asked the children of Israel to sacrifice them?
12. Read Leviticus 4:3; 5:1-12. From these passages we can learn several important points:
 - 1) All sacrifices were expected to be healthy and without blemish.
 - 2) God recognized the different financial status of different groups of people and adjusted the type of sacrifices required based on their financial condition.
 - 3) Although numerous sacrifices were spelled out for unintentional sins and for ritual impurity, there is no clear statement anywhere in the Old Testament about sacrifices being acceptable for any *intentional* sin. Providing a sacrifice for an intentional sin might hint that under certain circumstances, sinning is understandable. The *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* suggests that Leviticus 5:1-5 covers intentional sins. That does not seem to be the intent of the original meaning of those verses. To suggest that certain intentional sins could be dealt with by the provision of some kind of sacrifice seems to be directly in contradiction with the previously mentioned fact that the death penalty was connected with violation of almost every one of the Ten Commandments. That leaves us in an unenviable position because every one of us has sinned, and the “wages of sin” is death. (Romans 3:23; 6:23)
13. Read John 1:29. In what way or in what sense does Jesus, as the “Lamb of God,” “take away” sin? Is it even possible to “take away” our past sins? Is there a legal way to atone for them? Or can sin be

taken away only when the sinner finally abandons sin and lives a life like that of Jesus? Is it possible to take our sins and “place them on” Jesus? Could Jesus be considered guilty in any way for my sins?

14. We are the ones who deserve to die because of our sins. Instead, we find that Jesus lived and died. He is the only human being who has lived without sinning, and therefore, the only human being who should not have died. How does that impact your thinking?
15. If God condemned Jesus because of my sins, what does that tell us about Him? Remember the question of Boso (also known as Bozo)?

What man would not be judged worthy of condemnation if he condemned the innocent in order to free the guilty?...For if he could not save sinners except by condemning the just, where is his omnipotence? But if he could, but would not, how are we to defend his wisdom and justice? (*Cur Deus Homo?* - Anselm, 1033-1109)

Does his question sound like “justice”? Or does it sound like “justification”? So the question remains, by what means can sin actually be “removed” from the sinner? Does an animal sacrifice—or even Christ Himself—have to “bear” our sins? Even the *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* states:

Sin and penalty cannot be separated from each other. The transfer of the one implies the transfer of the other. This found its fulfillment in Christ’s death on the cross, where our sin was transferred to Him and where He died the death that should have been ours. (See Wednesday, November 5, 2008)

What do those words mean to you? Is it really possible to “move” sins around? Can they be permanently removed from us? Or will our sins be a permanent part of the “history of sin.” (GC 670,671)

16. What does the death of Christ actually “do” for you personally? Jesus demonstrated the results of sin. This makes it possible for us to choose whether we will live as He lived, or die as He died! How does that impact your life? How does it affect your attitude toward sin? Does it change your likelihood of sinning?
17. With intense interest the entire universe watched all the details of the life and especially the death of Jesus. Ellen White says repeatedly—and the Bible agrees—(See www.theox.org > Sources / Authors > Ellen White > Plan of Salvation > “*The Plan of Salvation in the Setting of the Great Controversy*”; Ephesians 1:7-10; 3:7-10; Colossians 1:19,20) that the entire universe is to be “brought back together into harmony” with God as a result of the life and death of Jesus. What did the angels learn about God from the life and death of Jesus? Did they need their sins to be dealt with? Did they have to “bring sacrifices”?
18. *Desire of Ages*, p. 112 says that John the Baptist did not realize what he was saying when he said, “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.” (John 1:29) The audience did not understand it either. Do we understand it? What does it mean?
19. There were a number of different kinds of offerings acceptable at the tabernacle and later at the temple in Jerusalem. The burnt offerings seem to suggest a total consecration to the Lord. Freewill offerings often expressed personal devotion, thanksgiving, or joy. Peace or fellowship offerings seemed to promote the idea of fellowship or communion with God. Meal offerings often celebrated harvest occasions and were opportunities to give thanks to God for His gracious provisions. But none of those separate offerings are specifically mentioned in the New Testament. The only sacrifice which is discussed in the New Testament is the “sacrifice” of Christ. What does that say to us? (See www.theox.org > Teacher’s Guides > The Law > Leviticus > Sacrifices and the Levitical Offerings)
20. Human beings view death as very serious. And most are only thinking about the first death! Do we take the death of Jesus seriously enough? In the movies and on television, there is so much violence and death that is it possible that we have become “numb” to death?
21. The ceremonies for worship and sacrifice begun outside the Garden of Eden represented an ongoing communion between man and his God. Satan was determined to do his best to break up that

communion.

Satan...set himself to intercept this communion. He misrepresented God, and misinterpreted the rites that pointed to the Savior. Men were led to fear God as one who delighted in their destruction. The sacrifices that should have revealed His love were offered only to appease his wrath. *Desire of Ages* p. 115

How could the “system” have become so corrupted? Societies have even offered human sacrifices!

22. With so much potential for misunderstanding, why do you think God chose such a sacrificial system? Should He have done things differently? In your thinking, what has been the long-term impact of the sacrificial system as given in the Old Testament? The Old Testament prophets got it? Do we get it?

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