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Grace and peace be
multiplied unto you through
the knowledge of God,
and of Jesus our Lord.

—II Peter 1:2



Christian Science Sentinel
Bible Lens

**Doctrine of
Atonement**

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Doctrine of Atonement

from the Responsive Reading

Leviticus 16:2, 3

The Lord said unto Moses, Speak unto Aaron thy brother, that he come not at all times into the holy place within the veil before the mercy seat, which is upon the ark; ... Thus shall Aaron come into the holy place: with a young bull-ock for a sin offering, and a ram for a burnt offering.

As the first high priest of the Hebrew people, Aaron was given specific instructions for making sacrifices—instructions that became the pattern for priestly offerings from that time on. The high priest could enter the “holy place” only one day a year, known to Jews as the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur). This sacred inner space of the sanctuary, hidden from view by a substantial and richly decorated veil, housed the ark of the covenant and represented God’s presence among the people.

Sacrificial offerings of animals were intended as rites of purification—outward ways to show inward recommitment to God’s covenant with Israel. The blood of the sacrifice symbolized the yielding of life in atonement for wrongdoing that violated that covenant.

Hebrews 9:11

Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building.

Jewish community worship began in a tabernacle—the portable tent used as a sanctuary during the Hebrew people’s wilderness journey. Although the Temple at Jerusalem ultimately provided a permanent worship center, it was heavily politicized at the time of Herod the Great. Chief priests, for instance, came to be appointed by the Roman governor and worshippers were expected to cooperate with Roman demands.

This politicization likely made many hearers receptive to the message in this verse—that the true place of worship is spiritual, “not made with hands.”

from Section 1

1 | Acts 2:36

Let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ.

The Apostle Peter is speaking to a crowd of Jews who came to Jerusalem from many lands to celebrate the festival of Pentecost. Peter’s speech and the events of the Day of Pentecost, the first public occasion recorded after Jesus’ ascension, are seen as fulfillment of the Master’s prophecy to his disciples: “Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me ... in Jerusalem” (Acts 1:8).

Resources quoted in this issue

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An exploration of Bible citations from the *Christian Science Quarterly*® Bible Lessons

“... a lesson on which the prosperity of Christian Science largely depends.” —Mary Baker Eddy

2 | II Peter 1:4

That ... ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.

Partakers, translated from the Greek *koinōnos*, alludes to fellowship and communion. Some New Testament writers, notes one source, “identify such closeness as a characteristic of early church life, recognizing a strong sense of shared abundance and mutual partnership.”

from **Section 3**

8 | Mark 1:27

They were all amazed, insomuch that they questioned among themselves, saying, What thing is this? what new doctrine is this?

Witnesses of Jesus’ casting out of the unclean spirit wondered not only at the remarkable cure, but at the teaching it demonstrated. To them, this was *new*—not so much recent in time as unprecedented in their experience and heralding an entirely original revelation.

from **Section 4**

11 | II Peter 3:9

The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

At the time of this letter, it appeared unlikely that Jesus’ promise of his second coming (see Luke 21:27) would be fulfilled during the lifetime of its readers. In this chapter, the writer answers the Christians’ disappointment in two ways.

First, he reminds them that God’s perspective is not that of mortals—a thousand years is “as one day” to God (v. 8, a reference to Psalms 90:4). Second, in a possible allusion to Habakkuk 2:3, he assures them that God does not tarry or delay (the meaning of *bradynō*, translated as *slack*), but graciously provides an opportunity for repentance.

12 | Mark 11:15

Jesus went into the temple, and began to cast out them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the moneychangers, and the seats of them that sold doves.

Merchant trafficking in an outer Temple court grew out of the need to provide sacrificial animals for Jews traveling from long distances. It wasn’t feasible to bring animals with them, so they purchased their sacrifices when they arrived.

Money-changers were installed because “heathen” currency—coins other than Jewish shekels, especially those that carried images considered idolatrous—was not accepted. And since Temple dues could be paid only in half-shekels, even ordinary currency had to be changed. Fees were collected for all these transactions.

Jesus protested not only the corrupting influence of business dealings in this holy place, but also the lack of reverence and respect that accompanied them. The Master’s reference to a “den of thieves” (v. 17) recalls Jeremiah’s warning against idolatry: “Is this house ... become a den of robbers in your eyes?” (Jeremiah 7:11).

Atonement—cherishing our oneness with God

By Shirley Paulson

From the April 11, 2011, issue of the *Christian Science Sentinel*

How can anyone ever expect to be good enough to deserve the depth of God's affection for us? Some wrongs people commit seem too full of evil to be forgiven. In fact, any wrong at all is unjust before God, who is Love and always loves. Yet, without total freedom from evil-doing, how can anyone ever truly be saved from the effects of bad behavior?

Jesus' supreme act of sacrifice on the cross is the answer to these questions for those who believe in him. For the past two millennia, Christians have believed it but have had difficulty explaining it. They have devised numerous "doctrines of atonement," but the Christian church as a whole has never agreed on the "right" explanation. In fact, despite all these doctrinal explanations, it still remains a long leap of faith for many to consider how Jesus' dying has anything to do with our own mistakes.

Mary Baker Eddy's emphasis on the meaning of sin provides a platform for consistent reasoning on the subject. "All sin is of the flesh," she explained in *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures* (p. 311). If sin—or all forms of selfish living—is of the flesh, we come to realize there must be repentance in order to live with the Spirit. When repentance is so strong that we never want to return to evil, and that we cherish the privilege of being with God, then we understand the healing doctrine of atonement.

Paul makes the link between Jesus' crucifixion and our desire to repent when he writes, "We know that our old self [the "fleshly self"] was crucified with him [Jesus] so that the body of sin might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin" (Romans 6:6, New Revised Standard Version).

Our freedom to be loved by God includes "our old self [being] crucified with him." We learn from this that our lives of shortcomings and mistakes are destroyed, but not our God-given identities. It is precisely the innocence of Jesus that helps us understand what his crucifixion was doing for the rest of us, and why he should be considered our Savior.

This innocence and consciousness of God's presence kept Jesus from being utterly victimized, or manipulated by the crowd, because he never lost the strength to participate in his own resurrection. Reviewing all the details of that intense experience, we can discern how he was helping us defend ourselves from the effects of our own or others' evil-thinking. And it was his utter closeness to God, his oneness with God, that enabled him to experience the full mastery over the body, through his bodily resurrection three days later. He knew firsthand the heartache the rest of us would face whenever we would feel separated from God. Whether we find ourselves under the weight of self-imposed sorrow from the fleshly life or the injustice of defeat and mockery, Jesus showed us how to cling to God. How comforting it is that Jesus' fidelity during the worst injustice gave us the gift we need the most: the knowledge of God's never-failing presence and love.

There is no greater happiness than being close to God and understanding our worthiness to be so loved.

To read the entire article, which has been shortened to fit this page, go to

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