

BIBLICAL SOTERIOLOGY: An Overview and Defense of the Reformed Doctrines of Salvation

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Limited Atonement, part 8

ARGUMENTS SUPPORTING THE DOCTRINE OF LIMITED ATONEMENT

IV. MEANS BY WHICH ATONEMENT WAS ACCOMPLISHED: AGENT

A. God the Father

1. Sent God the Son -- God the Father sent God the Son into the world to accomplish the atonement that he purposed beforehand.

“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world; but that the world should be saved through Him. He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God” ([John 3:16-18](#)).

The Father sent the Son into the world for the specific purpose of saving the world. Since salvation comes only through the atonement, the Father must have sent the Son to die on the cross as the means by which the world would be saved.

““But the witness which I have is greater than that of John; for the works which the Father has given Me to accomplish, the very works that I do, bear witness of Me, that the Father has sent Me. And the Father who sent Me, He has borne witness of Me. You have neither heard His voice at any time, nor seen His form. And you do not have His word abiding in you, for you do not believe Him whom He sent”” ([John 5:36-38](#)).

Here, Jesus specifically states twice that he has been sent by the Father, emphasizing this point. He also insists that the Father has given him works to accomplish, and that he is in

the process of doing them. Since his greatest work was the atonement, and since his entire incarnate earthly life led toward that great event, it logically follows that the atonement was one of the works given Christ to accomplish by the Father.

“For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me” ([John 6:38](#)).

Jesus consistently makes it clear that his purpose in coming is to give his life a ransom for many by dying a substitutionary death of atonement. This verse demonstrates that the atonement is the will of the Father, and that the Father has sent the Son into the world specifically to perform the atonement.

“Do you say of Him, whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world, ‘You are blaspheming,’ because I said, ‘I am the Son of God’?” ([John 10:36](#)).

The Father sent the Son into the world.

“And so they removed the stone, and Jesus raised His eyes, and said, ‘Father, I thank Thee that Thou hearest Me. And I knew that Thou hearest Me always; but because of the people standing around I said it, that they may believe that Thou didst send Me’” ([John 11:42](#)).

The Father sent Christ into the world, and the fact that the Father always hears and answers Christ’s prayers proves that this is so.

“And this is eternal life, that they may know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent” ([John 17:3](#)).

The Father sent the Son into the world for the purpose that he might be known, and so that salvation and eternal life might come to men.

“Jesus therefore said to them again, ‘Peace be with you; as the Father has sent Me, I also send you’” ([John 20:21](#)).

Jesus sent the disciples into the world to preach the gospel, the means by which God brings men to salvation. In the same way, The Father sent the Son into the world to do the

work necessary to bring men to salvation, that is, to preach the kingdom of heaven and to perform the atonement.

“For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit” ([Romans 8:3-4](#)).

The Father sent the Son into the world in a human body in order that the son might die a sacrificial death which fulfilled the punishment of death required by the law on account of sin.

“But when the fulness of the time came, God sent forth His son, born of a woman, born under the Law, in order that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons” ([Galatians 4:4-5](#)).

The Father sent the Son into the world in a human body in order to redeem the lost. Since this redemption came through the atonement, the Father sent the Son into the world to die a sacrificial death.

a. Father made Son Christ/mediator/savior — The Father made the Son the mediator between the elect, who are sinful beings, and God, who punishes sinful beings. The act of mediation is the interposing of Christ between God and the elect in order to reconcile the two parties. Christ’s act of mediation includes both his atonement and priesthood, and results in the salvation of the elect.

“For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a ransom for all, the testimony borne at the proper time” ([1 Timothy 2:5-6](#)).

As an act of mediation, Christ atoned on the cross, giving himself as a ransom. Since the Father sent the Son for this purpose, the Father installed the Son as the mediator.

“But now [Christ] has obtained a more excellent ministry, by as much as He is also the mediator of a better covenant, which has been enacted on better promises” ([Hebrews 8:6](#)).

The Father made the promises on which the better covenant is based. Further, the Father is the only one from whom Christ could have obtained his ministry. Since this ministry is the mediation of the covenant, the Father is the one that made the Son the mediator.

“For if the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling those who have been defiled, sanctify for the cleansing of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? And for this reason He is the mediator of a new covenant, in order that since a death has taken place for the redemption of the transgressions that were committed under the first covenant, those who have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance” ([Hebrews 9:13-15](#)).

The Father is the one to whom Christ’s sacrifice was offered, and this sacrifice is the means by which Christ serves as mediator. Therefore, it is the Father’s acceptance of the Son’s sacrifice that renders the Son the mediator between the Father and believers. In this way also, the Father made the Son the mediator.

“But you have come . . . to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than the blood of Abel” ([Hebrews 12:22, 24](#)).

Jesus, the Son, is the mediator of the covenant between the Father and the redeemed. In that the Father accepted Christ with the sprinkled blood of his atonement as mediator, he made Christ the mediator of the covenant.

i. The Father purposed the mediation to be made by the Son, including the Son’s continued action as high priest of the people of God, and the Son’s continued intercession on their behalf. [See also section IIA of the outline under the Arguments Supporting the Doctrine of Limited Atonement.]

“And the Lord God said to the serpent, ‘Because you have done this, cursed are you more than all cattle, and more than every beast of the field; on your belly shall you go, and dust shall you eat all the days of your life; and I will put enmity between you and the woman and between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, and you shall bruise him on the heel’” ([Gen 15:14-15](#)).

In this first proclamation of the gospel, God promised that one born of the woman would defeat the serpent. This prophecy foreshadowed Christ, who was born to save his people

from their sins ([Matt 1:21](#); [Rev 12:9-11](#)). In that the Father planned and promised this redeemer, he purposed the mediation that was to come, and the mediatorial role the Son was to play.

“The Lord says to my Lord: ‘Sit at My right hand, until I make Thine enemies a footstool for Thy feet.’ . . . The Lord has sworn and will not change His mind, ‘Thou art a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek’” ([Ps 110:1, 4](#)).

The New Testament repeatedly refers this prophecy to Jesus ([Luke 20:41-43](#); [Acts 2:34-36](#); [Heb 1:13](#); [5:6](#), [10](#); [6:20](#); [7:11-22](#); [10:13](#)). Interpreted, it indicates that the Father decided and swore that the Son would be a priest forever. A priest represents the people before God and mediates on their behalf ([Heb 7:25](#)). The Father decided and swore that a mediating priest would perpetually exist, and that the Son would be that priest.

“Therefore, I will allot Him a portion with the great, and He will divide the booty with the strong; because He poured out Himself to death, and was numbered with the transgressors; yet He Himself bore the sin of many and interceded for the transgressors” ([Isa 53:12](#)).

This messianic prophecy indicates that the Christ will play a mediatorial role by bearing the sins of those for whom he dies. This passage describes the atonement itself, the bearing of the sin of many, as intercession on behalf of transgressors. In that the Father promised this interceding mediator would come, he purposed the role of mediator and intercessor that the Son was to fill.

“As to this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that would come to you made careful search and inquiry, seeking to know what person or time the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating as He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow” ([1 Pet 1:10-12](#)).

The prophets sought to discover the person and time of the Christ to come. They realized that his sufferings and glories were certain, but did not know how these would be realized. In order for Christ’s sufferings and glories to have been certain, they had to have been foreordained by the Father. Since Christ’s sufferings were both atoning and mediatorial, the Father predetermined that Christ would perform the mediatorial act of atonement.