

Th224 Sin and Atonement: The Restoration of Relationship

Lesson Th224-27 Atonement

In your last lesson you learned that God himself paid the debt we owed for our sins. Paul wrote this; “He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross. And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross” (Col 2:13-14).

Satan is called the accuser of the brethren. He uses our sins against us as a weapon. His condemning causes many to live in constant fear and despair. But God has paid the price for our debt of sin. Therefore, Satan’s weapon has been destroyed and all he has left are lies.

The Roman Catholic Church traces its roots back to the apostle Peter. In western countries it was the primary Christian church. Over the next 1500 years the church grew to be the predominant religion of the West. Along with its growth, came a formal power structure of the priesthood and leadership. In 1505, a young highly-educated man named Martin Luther was almost struck by lightning. Terrified of death and the fear of being cast into hell, he called out to God. He vowed that he would become a monk. Soon he left the university and entered the monastery. His early days in the monastery left him in deep spiritual despair. One night Satan appeared in Luther’s bedroom. He proudly showed Luther a huge scroll.

“What is that?” Luther asked.

Jeering, Satan answered, “This is a list of all of your sins!”

Luther stood up and Satan began to laugh at him. The scroll, which kept unrolling more and more, seemed to fill the entire room. It kept getting longer and longer! Luther felt guilty, condemned, and hopeless. Every sin, every selfish thought, every wrong desire; it was all there. Satan’s words, “All sin,” made Luther tremble in fear. He knew that he was guilty of every one of them. Satan shouted at him again and again. “All sin, all sin!” Satan accused him.

Suddenly, Luther heard another voice that repeated Satan’s words but with an obviously different meaning and intent. “All sin,” the voice said. Luther reached for his Bible and opened it to a letter written by the apostle John. In a halting voice he began to read: “The blood of Jesus, his Son, cleanses us from all sin” (1John 1:7).

Suddenly, Satan’s confidence vanished. Luther walked to his desk. Opening a bottle of red ink, he took his quill pen and made two quick stokes across Satan’s scroll. Satan looked down in horror to see that Luther had drawn a cross over the list of his sins. Now it was Luther who confidently looked down upon Satan as Luther quoted from the prophet Isaiah: “He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities. The punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all” (Isa 53:6).

Martin Luther was transformed by this experience. He realized that he could not earn favor with God. It was only through the blood of Jesus and God's grace that he was forgiven of his sins. Only by Christ's death could he be in right relationship with God. Salvation by grace became the heart of his message. Later he would protest many of the carnal practices of the Roman Catholic Church. This would lead to what is called the Protestant Reformation.

The dictionary defines the word 'atonement' as the 'making amends or reparation for a wrong or injury.' Sin broke the relationship of humankind with God. There had to be a 'reparation,' a payment, for this debt of sin. Jesus' death upon the Cross was the way God himself made the required payment. He thereby canceled our debt and made possible the restoration of a person's relationship with him. Jesus' death made atonement for our sins. Martin Luther had to learn this lesson the hard way. He kept trying to gain God's favor and relationship through his efforts to live a holy devout life. Nothing he could do, no effort that he could make, would be perfect enough to earn God's favor. The apostle Paul wrote this about God's grace in his letter to the church in Ephesus: "For by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God" (Eph 2:8).

This lesson is **important** because it explains how Jesus' death on the Cross makes atonement for our sins.

The **main truth** of this lesson is that the death of Jesus Christ removes all sin and judgment, thus rendering Satan powerless to accuse us.

Let's **review** this lesson—

1. In regard to the Roman Catholic Church, what did Martin Luther do? [Pause 5 seconds.]
A. If you said, "Martin Luther began the Protestant Reformation," you are correct.
2. What weapon does Satan try to use against us? [Pause]
A. If you said, "Satan accuses us of our sins," you are correct.
3. What is the theological word that is used to describe the result of Jesus' death upon the Cross in regard to our sin? [Pause 5 seconds.]
A. If you said that Jesus' death on the Cross makes 'atonement' for our sin, you are correct.

Your **assignment** for this lesson is to watch this lesson at least three more times. Examine your own heart. Have you been trying to earn God's favor, or, have you been relying on the 'atonement' of Jesus' death on the cross for your salvation?