

Kingdom News

Yours is the Kingdom, the Power and the Glory, forever.... (Matt. 6:13)

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Do You Know Jesus As...?

Our Atonement

What was the purpose of the Atonement?

There are many things that are a part of our belief system; things that we just take for granted. Somewhere along the way, we have learned them. Or we have otherwise been socialized to accept them as truth. In fact, there are many things that can, rightfully, be taken for granted. Like the fact that a square has only four sides. Another is, the fact that the Laws of Gravity are fixed. We can come to understand them, and cooperate with them. It is not likely that we will ever change them. These, and others like them, can and should be taken for granted.

However, the things that the scriptures teach us about Jesus Christ, should never be taken for granted. Trusted? Yes. Taken for granted? Never!!

The fact of the Atonement is one of them. It is true that the Lord has designed and executed an awesome plan of salvation, for us, by which Jesus Christ has been made our Atonement. Romans 5:10-11 (KJV) says that

"...if when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life. And not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the Atonement."

While it is indeed true, it should also be understood. One thing that may help us not take such a gift for granted is to understand what it means. If we seek to understand it, we are then able to utilize this gift. It is God's intention, not just that we should know it, but that our lives are to be made better by it.

As we explore this subject ... this gift ... this truth...we will likely find that each of us has had a very different definition of Atonement. Some of us had been taught that what Jesus Christ did for us represents Atonement.

IS IT NECESSARY? IF SO, WHY?

Sometimes in order to truly understand the value of a thing, it requires that we understand, or apprehend, the situation that gives birth to it.

Have you ever read a poem, and not understood it? Have you ever gone to a museum and studied a piece of art, and said to yourself, "I don't get it." For example, what is the big deal about Leonardo Di Vinci's famed painting, The Mona Lisa? I certainly don't get it. In art museums, for example, I'd like to say I've "studied" a piece of work; but the truth would be more like I "stared at" a piece of work. I could not seem to understand; what was all of the noise and celebration about this piece of art work. That was just my opinion. However, there are others who understand in minute detail various works of the art. Dare I say that such a person has a far greater appreciation? Perhaps, it's because they understand the situation that gave birth to it.

When understood, the Atonement is one of the most

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beautiful works of art. I am convinced that it is something that Jesus did for me. But for a long time, I still didn't understand it.

May I share with you what I have come to understand and appreciate about the Atonement? I will also share how it has changed my life and my belief system.

What was the situation that "gave birth" to the Atonement? Go with me....if you will.

ONCE UPON A TIME...

Long ago, before the hands of time, began to tick...tock, tick...tock.... Before the Earth began its orbit around the Sun. Envision a Holy God. Imagine a Kingdom where God is Sovereign; where all created Beings worshipped Him, exclusively and perpetually. A place where there was no question as to whether or not God should be honored as supreme. No question as to whether or not His commands should be obeyed. It was a glorious kingdom.

Fast-forward to a universe, an Earth, where God created a man (Hebrew: ish). And from the man, God created a woman (Hebrew: ishah). He named them Adam and Eve (in the English language). God gave, to them, dominion over all the earth and its inhabitants. God had also created them with a will that was free to choose. They had been directed to enjoy their new home, in the Garden. But they were prohibited from eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. (Gen. 2:16-17) God had given a command. Now they had a choice; they chose to do otherwise. They ate; bringing into existence mankind's first offense before a Holy, Righteous Sovereign. And so was born man's first act of disobedience; and subsequently man's state of unrighteousness.

That act alone does not completely explain why atonement was needed. But couple that series of events, with the fact that disobedience and unrighteousness necessarily separates us from God.

I say "necessarily," in the sense that the righteousness of God's character does not mix with unrighteousness and disobedience. It cannot, it is utterly impossible. In our own understanding, the mere definition of the term "righteous" is diametrically opposed to the definition of

the term "unrighteous." They are on opposite ends of the spectrum. I labor to make this point so that it is understood how we became separated from God, in the first place.

If you've ever loved deeply, then you'll understand the pain this separation must have caused in the heart of God. He created mankind, so that He could show us His Love. In many cases, love is the reason that parents give birth to their children. Any idea where that desire to love comes from? With this we can begin to understand the heart of God.

1 + 1 = 2 ... OR DOES IT?

The equation was supposed to read $1 + 1 = 2$: God loves + God created mankind to love = God loves us and we love Him. However, by our disobedience, a problem is introduced into the equation. The equation then read: $1 + 1 = 2 - 1$. God loves + God created mankind to love = God loves us, but we do not/cannot love Him back.

Here we begin to understand something else about the heart of God. Imagine a child separated from its parent(s), perhaps through circumstances beyond the control of the parent(s). The strong love in the heart of the parent is determined to be reconciled to the lost or separated child.

Now for each parent, that quest to reconnect with the lost child is different, given the various situations that initially caused the separation. In the effort to reconnect, perhaps travel is involved; perhaps litigation; perhaps an asking for/giving of forgiveness; perhaps prayer.

For God, the situation was this. God is Holy; and as such is governed by the Law of Righteousness.

He shares with us some of the attributes of that Law of Righteousness and its effects on Holiness. We see this when the Lord gives direction regarding the holiness of the temple and its instruments.

We see the Lord directing the consecration of the tabernacle, the temple and the activities of the priests. He pointed out the things that were to be set aside as holy.

We see that there is, not only, a difference between what is holy and what is not holy. But there are differing degrees of holiness. He says, "...the veil shall divide between the holy place and the most holy." (Ex. 26:33 KJV paraphrased)

To Aaron and his sons concerning the handling of offerings made to God. He says, "...a stranger shall not eat there of, because the offering was considered holy" (Ex. 29:33 KJV paraphrased)

We also see that the Lord expects us to be holy (set aside, spirit, soul and body for His purposes). This can be seen in Romans 12: 1 (KJV paraphrased), "...present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God..." And again He says that we are required to love the Lord God with all of our hearts, and with all of our souls, and with all of our minds. (Matt. 22:36, KJV paraphrased)

TYPES AND SHADOWS

In these few examples (and there are many, many more) the Lord shows us a glimpse of the tenants of the Law of Righteousness and the characteristics of Holiness. Certainly these are types and shadows of the more weighty truths of the kingdom. But by them we are able to see their importance. Here also the Lord shows us our obligations under the Law of Righteousness.

But let's see what obligations the Lord has to the Law of Righteousness.

The Law of Righteousness, as it respects God's character prohibits God from interacting with unrighteousness. He is prohibited from entertaining it; He cannot tolerate it. He must judge it. Otherwise, the enemy (the Devil) could bring an indictment against His Righteousness.

As some of you are aware, it has long been the goal of the enemy to bring an indictment against the Righteousness of the Throne of God. The enemy wants to try to disprove the Righteousness of God. The enemy does not want us to know of God's Holiness, or trust in it. If we know that God is Righteous and that He is Holy, our conscience then affirms our obligation to honor and obey God as supreme. The enemy does not want God to be worshipped. He prefers worship for himself.

So you can see that God, by His very nature, is bound to uphold the Law of Righteousness. And as such, we were necessarily separated from God, primarily by Adam's disobedience and subsequently by our own.

We now recall the pain of separation in the heart of God; we can then understand how God would stop at nothing to restore fellowship between us. And so is born the Plan of Redemption, executed through the Atonement of Jesus Christ.

PUBLIC JUSTICE

The command of God had been disobeyed. Here it is important to recognize that the commandments of God represent the whole of public justice. We see this when looking at the structure of the Ten Commandments. Here you'll see that each of the commandments either represents our relationship to God or to our neighbor. This will also be seen in Jesus' consolidation of the commandments in Matthew 22:37-40. What is publicly just, or right, is that we are to love God, first and far most; and ourselves and our neighbor, secondarily. There you have it "public justice."

Therefore, Adam's offense represented a violation against public justice. It created a breach in our relationship with God. And by this he caused his offspring (that be us) to be at odds with God. What greater offense could have been incurred?

And as much as God loved us; Righteous prohibited Him from reaching across that breach to restore us to fellowship.

I HAVE A PLAN

It was imperative that God's Plan of Redemption did not, in any way, dishonor the Law of Righteousness.

In order for God to both restore us to fellowship with Him, and honor the tenants of the Law of Righteousness; the offense of public justice had to be addressed.

Laws, in general, require that offenders (those who break the law) be penalized. It's just that simple. The penalty for Adam's disobedience was death. "But of the tree of knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat of it; for in the day that you eat thereof you shall surely die." (Gen. 2:17 KJV paraphrased) God is Holy; His commands pure. (Ps. 19: 8) If we obey them, we live.

Deut. 18: 16, "... I command you this day to love the Lord your God, to walk in His ways, and to keep His commandments and His statutes and His judgments, that you may live..." (KJV paraphrased) If we do not obey, we must die. It is not optional; not for us, not for God.

For every law there is a penalty for non-compliance. Our own system of justice was established on this same principle. Without penalty for breach; the law has no strength.

Think about the rules you establish for your own children. Or recall the rules that your parents had established for you. Often we determined whether or not to obey their rules, based on the severity of the penalty. Sometimes what we wanted to do was more important, to us, than a week's worth of punishment. And so, we broke the law and often incurred the penalty.

The purpose of laws is to enable us to live together peaceably and to equitably (which does not necessarily mean "equally") share limited resources in a way that does not infringe on the rights of others.

The public is persuaded to comply with the laws; and the severity of the penalty intends to encourage compliance. Different laws have different penalties with varying degrees of severity. The penalty for exceeding the speed limit, in a residential area may be a fine of \$50.00; it goes up in a school zone. Whereas the penalty for exceeding the speed limit, in a construction zone may be a fine of \$1,500.00 and imprisonment. You can see how the penalty is intended to both encourage compliance; as well as, to teach the importance that the government places on certain laws and their compliance. This is for the public's safety.

You will then understand that in the Government of God, the Law of Righteousness also has penalties for non-compliance.

LET THE PUNISHMENT MATCH THE CRIME

The Law of Righteousness requires a sacrifice for non-compliance; to satisfy or appease the offense of public justice. Again, we find this same principle in our own laws. When public justice has been offended (either civil or criminal); someone must be penalized. Generally the "intent" is that the offender should be

penalized. And the public expects that the penalty will be proportional to the weight of the offense. The law-giver is masochistic or malevolent. One of the purposes of the penalty is that the offender, and the public, would understand how vitally important it is that the law be obeyed or upheld.

THE WEIGHT OF THE OFFENSE

The breach of Adam's offense had eternal effects, not just on him, but on Eve and all of their descendents. Now we begin to see just how severe was this offense. And for this offense, someone had to die.

Now if Adam had died for his own offense, then public justice still would not have been served. Nor would the Law of Righteousness have been satisfied. Eve would have had to die too. And everything born of their union (the union of man and woman) would have had to die too.

You'll notice that God created mankind to have dominion over everything that inhabited the earth (Gen.1:26). This means that when Adam sinned, everything under his dominion fell under the control of the enemy. So not only had Adam have been affected by his offense, but so had everything else. . "...By one man's disobedience, many were made sinners..." (Rom. 5:19 KJV paraphrased)

JESUS TO THE RESCUE

Under these circumstances, how exactly were we supposed to be reconciled to God, in compliance with the Law of Righteousness?

In comes Jesus Christ our Atonement and the Repairer of the Breach. It is now more apparent why Jesus had to be born of a virgin (not the union of man and woman). Everything born of the union of a man and woman incurred the penalty of death, for sin.

Jesus was born, free from sin. And he lived free from sin; therefore he owed no debt for the offense of public justice. This qualified him to offer himself as a sacrifice for our sins. The Law of Righteousness could be satisfied and public justice could be appeased by the atonement of Jesus Christ. And the mouth of the enemy was forever shut, in heaven.

And by Jesus Christ, we are able to be reconciled to God. In him, our fellowship has been restored.

Now I know Jesus Christ as my Atonement. Now, I understand what that means.

Before I understood what Jesus had done for me, I felt some inability to refrain from sinning.

Having this knowledge we are able to stand before God without offense. "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus..." (Rom.8:1 KJV) As Christ is accepted, we are accepted in Him.

FREE AT LAST

We have no further obligation to sin. We do not have to sin. We don't. And there is nothing that the enemy can do about it!!! "For sin shall not have dominion over you..." (Rom. 6:14 KJV) ♦♦♦

Time

Food for thought -

"Time" is an instrument. It is not a master.

We have each been given a certain amount of time to accomplish our goals in life. Use "time" as an instrument to measure your success.

Consider it a resource. But recognize it as a resource that cannot be harnessed. The clock keeps ticking, whether you're moving toward your goals or not.

Before your time is up, complete everything you are obligated to accomplish.

One of our goals is to hear Him say "Well done...."

What are you planning to accomplish in 2007?

It might be nice to have designed and cataloged your goals for 2007 by January 15, 2007.

This way you'll have 11.5 months to complete your tasks.

I'm excited about what you are going to accomplish this year. Remember to use time as in instrument to measure progress.