

TEACHING GOAL

Study the priestly office of Christ with special emphasis on the atonement.

DOCTRINAL STANDARDS

Q. How does Christ execute the office of Priest?

A. Christ executes the office of Priest, in His once offering up of Himself a sacrifice to satisfy Divine justice and to reconcile us to God; and in making continual intercession for us.

S.C. 25; L.C. 44; W.C. of F. VIII; Savoy 8; Young 67, 70

SCRIPTURAL BASIS

Study Passage: Romans 3:21-31

Support Passages: Matthew 5:23-24; Acts 20:28; Romans 5:1-11;
I Corinthians 6:20, 7:23; II Corinthians 5:11-21; I Peter 1:18-19

BIBLE STORY

Acts 9:1-22; The conversion of Saul is an example of reconciliation. Whereas Saul was an enemy, he became a friend of God for God's justice was satisfied.

.MEMORY ASSIGNMENT

"even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.'" (Matthew 20:28, ESV)

APPLICATION

Oh how we should rejoice to find our sins covered by precious blood, and the wrath of God toward us and upon us stayed. Oh the joy of forgiveness of sins and the blessedness of the hope of eternal life with Christ who is coming in power and great glory. Let us repent from our sins and be reconciled to our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.

SUMMARY

Let us review briefly the fact that Jesus our Lord preeminently performs the office of the Priest, for He is taken from among men to be their representative. He is appointed by God for His task, He is active in the things of God in behalf of His people, and He has performed the special task of making a sacrifice for the sins of His people. All of this follows from Hebrews 5:1-10. The office contemplated in Leviticus 16 was perfectly carried out by the Lord, our great Priest, however with several important distinctions. He was the sacrifice, the blood was His own, the Mercyseat was Himself and He is the scapegoat upon whom our sins are imputed. To Him are reckoned our sins; to us is reckoned His righteousness.

The word "atonement" sums up the meaning of the sacrifice offered by Christ on the cross. In the Authorized Version (King James) it is used only once in the New Testament in Romans 5:11, however the Greek word in that place does not mean atonement but reconciliation. In the Old Testament the word atonement translates a word that means to cover as in Leviticus 17:11. But Greek literature uses a word that refers to the cover on the Ark of the Covenant on which the priest sprinkled the blood on the Day of Atonement. We may see this word used in Romans 3:25 as propitiation. One may note the use of the word ransom (Matthew 20:28), or redemption (Romans 3:24) or purchased (Acts 20:28) all of which refer to the Atonement of Christ. The following three points present several different contexts in which the concept of Atonement is set forth.

(1) The concept of Redemption involves release from the bondage of sin by buying back the slave. The price that was paid was the blood of Christ (I Peter 1:18-19, Romans 3:23-24).

(2) The concept of Propitiation involves the covering of our sin. The blood of Christ is that which stands between our sin, our inability to keep God's Law, and the wrath of God. In terms of the tabernacle, the blood of the sacrifice was put on the Mercyseat or Propitiation which then came between and covered the stone tables of the Law inside the Ark, which represented our inability to keep the Law of God. The blood came between our inability to keep the Law of God and the presence of God in the Holy of Holies (Leviticus 16, Romans 3:25).

(3) The concept of Reconciliation is really the basic meaning of atonement. We may conceive it as the satisfaction of wrong done to God by the sinner. A classic example of this is given by Christ in Matthew 5:23-24, in which the offending party, remembering that he is yet unreconciled to the one he has wronged, goes to him and makes amends before he makes his offering to God. Christ, by His sublime sacrifice, has satisfied divine justice and has effected our reconciliation to God who we have so dreadfully wronged by our sins (Romans 5:11, II Corinthians 5:11-21).

One of the great questions raised in the theology of the atonement, is its extent. For whom is the atonement effective, the whole world or God's people only? This week's memory verse implies that Christ did not ransom everyone in the world but only the many. He is named "Jesus, for it is He who will save His people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21). The people of Christ, His own, are those who have been chosen from before the foundation of the world. They are limited in number and are not everyone who has ever lived. Shall we say that Jesus ransomed Judas who He calls the son of perdition (John 17:12)? Why did Jesus only pray for "those whom Thou hast given Me," if everyone in the world was atoned for by His blood (John 17:9)? That the atonement of Christ is particular, that is, that it applies only to God's chosen people, is unquestionably clear in these additional passages: John 10:11 and 15, Acts 20:28, Ephesians 5:25-27, Romans 8:32-35, and John 6:37-40 among many others. Dr. Berkhof, speaking very strongly against the heresy of believing that the Atonement applies to every individual in an efficient manner, states: "It should also be noted that the doctrine that Christ dies for the purpose of saving all men, logically leads to absolute universalism, that is, to the doctrine that all men are actually saved. It is impossible that they for whom Christ paid the price, whose guilt He removed, should be lost on account of that guilt. The Arminians cannot stop at their half-way station, but must go all the way."¹

¹ L. Berkhof, Systematic Theology, Grand Rapids, Michigan, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1941, p. 395.