

He Bore the Sin of Many

The Efficacy and Particularity of Christ's Sacrifice

Selected Scriptures

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Introduction

Well, we come this morning to a fourth sermon in our series entitled *O Perfect Redemption!*, in which we have been seeking the Bible's answer to the controversial question, "For whom did Christ die?" Did Christ die on the cross for every single individual who has ever lived throughout human history, or did He die on the cross only for those whom the Father chose and gave to Him in eternity past—those who will eventually come to faith in Christ and be saved?

And one of the things that I've tried to instill in you early on in this sermon series is that the Bible's answer to the question of the extent of the atonement does not come as a result of focusing merely on the *extent* of the atonement. I know that's counterintuitive, but it's true. There are texts which cast the extent of Christ's death in more particularistic terms; we read of Jesus saving *His people* from their sins (Matt 1:21), the Son of man giving His life as a ransom for *many* (Matt 20:28), the Good Shepherd laying down His life for His *sheep* (John 10:14–15) and for His *friends* (John 15:13)—*those whom His Father had given Him* (e.g., John 6:37–40), the Bridegroom giving Himself up for *His bride* (Eph 5:22–33) and purchasing *the church* with His own blood (Acts 20:28). But there are also texts which cast the extent of Christ's death in more universalistic terms; we read of Jesus giving His life as a ransom for *all* (1 Tim 2:6), and that He is the propitiation not for our sins only but also for those of *the whole world* (1 John 2:2).

Understanding how these texts harmonize does require that we get a proper grasp on the context of each of those individual passages. But it also requires that we get a proper grasp on the broader context of all of Scripture's teaching—not just on the extent of the atonement, but also on the design and nature of the atonement. To whom the atonement extends is (a) a function of what God designed the atonement for and it is (b) a function of what the atonement is. And so the clear biblical teaching on the design and nature of the atonement helps us interpret the sometimes less clear teaching on the extent of the atonement.

And after an introductory message that oriented us to the discussion, we've spent the last two sermons in our series focused on understanding God's design for the atonement. In the first of those, we paid special attention to the unity of the persons of the Trinity. The argument was that because the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are perfectly united in their essence, the three persons of the Trinity must be perfectly united both in their saving intentions and their saving acts. We

can't have the Father aiming to save some, the Son aiming to save others, and the Spirit aiming to save still another group. By virtue of sharing an identical nature, the Father, Son, and Spirit share an identical will. And so what the Father intends in sending the Son into the world, what the Son intends in undertaking His atoning mission, and what the Spirit intends in applying the Son's work are identical. They are the exact same intention. They are the exact same design.

Last week, we gave ourselves to examining what precisely that intention *was*. Given that the persons of the Trinity are united in their saving intention, what does Scripture teach about what they intended the cross to accomplish? What is it that the Scriptures say Christ has come into the world to do? And the answer is: Scripture consistently and uniformly identifies the Trinity's unified intention for the atonement as exclusively salvific. First Timothy 1:15: "It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." Not to make sinners savable. Not to make salvation possible. Not to make salvation available. Not to make provision for salvation. But actually to save sinners.

And we saw that there were a couple of reasons that that's important. First, God always accomplishes His intentions. Whatever the Triune God intends, or designs, or purposes in the atonement must be accomplished. God is absolutely sovereign. He says in Isaiah 46:10: "I will accomplish *all* My good pleasure." Job says, "I know that You can do all things, and that *no purpose* of Yours can be thwarted." And so if God always accomplishes His intentions, when we understand that His intention for the atonement is that by it Christ would save sinners, then we must confess either (a) the atonement saves all for whom it was accomplished, or (b) the Triune God fails of His intention.

The second reason *intention* is important for the discussion of the extent of the atonement is: because those who say Christ died for all people do not want to say that all people will finally be saved, invariably they say that Christ did *not* die to *save* sinners, but to make salvation *possible*, or to make men *savable*. When Jesus says in John 6:51 that he gives His flesh for the *life* of the *world*, proponents of a universal atonement seize on the word "world" and insist that this means the atonement was for all without exception. But when you ask them what it means to give life, and whether they think all people without exception will have this life, they say, "Oh, no, no, no! I'm not a universalist! This means that Christ makes eternal life available for the whole world!" You see, if Christ says He comes to give life to the world, and all without exception don't come into possession of life, it's concluded that Christ has not come to actually *give* life to the world, but to *provide* life—to make it possible for them to have life. Now the cross doesn't give life; it makes life possible. By aiming to universalize the extent of the atonement, they fatally undermine the efficacy of the atonement. Efficacious accomplishment gets downgraded to mere possibility-making.

And the result is: we get unthinkable statements like the one I quoted last week from Bruce Ware, who says, “We cannot speak correctly of Christ’s death as actually and certainly *saving* the elect. No, even here, the payment made by his death on behalf of the elect renders their salvation *possible*” (5). Here’s another, from Lewis Sperry Chafer, longtime Professor at Dallas Theological Seminary. He says, “Christ’s death does not save either actually or potentially; rather it makes all men *saveable*” (*BibSac* 1980: 325). What a frightening thing to say!

But, praise God, that is just not what Scripture says! And we saw last week how doggedly insistent the New Testament is on presenting both the intent *and* the actual effect of the atonement as salvific. The Word of God speaks of the atonement as that by which God intends to *secure* salvation, not merely provide for it; to *accomplish* redemption, not merely to make it possible; to satisfy, reconcile, and redeem—actually to save! Christ’s death does save! Actually! His death does—actually and certainly—save the elect!

And so, follow me here: if (a) God’s intentions must certainly come to pass, and if (b) His intention for the atonement is not to make provisions or possibilities but actually to save, then (c) all those for whom Christ died must certainly be saved. And since not all are saved, Christ’s atonement is particular, and not universal. The *extent* of the atonement is a function of the *intent* of the atonement.

But, as I’ve been saying, it’s not just the intent of the atonement—or the design of the atonement—that helps inform our understanding of the extent of the atonement. It’s also the nature of the atonement itself. And we saw a bit of a preview of that last week, because we didn’t just focus on the salvific intent of the atonement. We also saw that everything the atonement was said to intend to accomplish, it actually effectively accomplished. Redemption, expiation, definitive sanctification, reconciliation, salvation, regeneration, justification, adoption, progressive sanctification, and glorification are all said to be both intended and accomplished by the atonement.

And that is where I want to go next in this series. We need to press further into the nature of the atonement—into what Christ actually accomplished by His death on the cross. When we understand what Scripture teaches concerning *what* the atonement *is*, we will have a clear grasp of *for whom* it was accomplished. Imagine you’re a parent washing dishes at the sink, with your back turned to your children, and one of them comes up to you and says, “Mommy, Daddy, who is this for?” As you turn around, the first thing you would ask in response is, “What is it?” *What* the thing is determines *whom* it is for. In the same way, understanding what the atonement is will help us determine whom it is for.

Now, the most fundamental, overarching description one can give to the atonement is that it is a work of penal substitution. That is to say, on the cross, Jesus suffered the *penalty* for the sins of

His people as a *substitute* for them. When man sinned against God, our sin erected a legal and a relational barrier between us and God. We have broken God's law, and therefore we have incurred *guilt*, and we are required to pay the penalty of spiritual death. We have offended God's holiness, and therefore God's *wrath* is aroused against our sin. This leaves us *alienated* from God; we who were created for fellowship and communion with God are now hostile to God, enemies of God. And not only that but we are spiritual slaves—we are in *bondage*, Scripture says, to sin and to death, by nature.

And if there is to be any redemption from sin and reconciliation to God, our sin must be atoned for. But the miserable state of man's natural condition is that we are spiritually dead; we are totally depraved. Sin has so infected the very core of our being that there is nothing we can do to pay the penalty for our own sin. But God, in His great love, has appointed the Lord Jesus Christ to stand in the place of His people—to bear our sin, to carry our guilt, to receive our punishment, and thereby to satisfy the righteous wrath of God on our behalf. That is penal substitution.

And it is everywhere in Scripture. We're going to devote an entire sermon to penal substitution, but hear just two verses. First Peter 2:24: "He himself *bore our sins* in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness." Then, quoting Isaiah 53, he adds, "for by His wounds you were healed." The Lord Jesus Christ bore the punishment of the sins of his people and thereby brought them blessing. Isaiah 53:5: "*He* was pierced for *our* transgressions; *he* was crushed for *our* iniquities; upon *him* was the chastisement that brought *us* peace" (ESV).

But if we drill down further on that and ask, "What precisely is the nature, or the character, of this substitutionary atonement? What exactly did Christ accomplish on the cross?" we see at least **four motifs** emerge, and they correspond precisely to the various ways our sin has broken the relationship between us and God. First, by standing in the place of sinners, Scripture teaches that Jesus paid for our sin and guilt by offering Himself as an *expiatory sacrifice* to God. "Expiation" just means "to take away sin," and so to say the atonement was an expiatory sacrifice is to say that Christ paid the penalty required by taking our sins away from us and bearing them in Himself. Second, we find that the atonement is a work of *propitiation*, in which Christ fully satisfied the wrath of God against our sin by bearing its full exercise in Himself. Third, the cross is a work of *reconciliation*, in which the alienation between man and God is overcome and peace is made through the blood of our Substitute. And fourth, it is a work of *redemption*, in which we who were enslaved to sin are ransomed by the price of the Lamb's precious blood.

And each of these **four motifs**—sacrifice, propitiation, reconciliation, and redemption—is a different facet of Christ's substitutionary work, and therefore each is worthy of our reflection and consideration. And so my plan is to devote an entire sermon to each one of those over the next several weeks. And what we're going to find is: when we hold firmly to the biblical definitions

of these terms for atonement, it becomes unmistakable that the **nature** of the atonement is one of efficacious accomplishment, not one of potentiality or provision.

That is, when the Bible says that Christ's atoning death was an expiatory sacrifice, it means that the atonement itself actually took our sins away, and didn't just make it possible for them to be taken away by some later act of ours. When Scripture says that the atonement was a work of propitiation, it means that Christ's death—effectively, and not merely potentially—appeased God's wrath. His death actually reconciled God to sinners; it did not make God merely reconcilable. It actually accomplished our freedom from our slavery to sin, and did not merely make us redeemable. In short, we are going to find—once again—that the cross *saved* sinners. It did not merely provide salvation or make salvation possible.

And therefore, every one for whom Christ died must have their sins taken away. Every one for whom He died must have the wrath of God against their sins extinguished. Every one must be reconciled to God. Every one must be released from their slavery to sin into the freedom of salvation. And since not all will finally be saved, we will find that the atonement is particular, and not universal. An atonement of unlimited power and efficacy must necessarily be restricted to those who enjoy its benefits—namely, the elect alone, and not all without exception.

With the time we have left this morning, we're going to look at the first of those motifs: that of **sacrifice**. And we'll do this in two broad stages. First, we'll consider **Christ's atonement as an expiatory sacrifice**—looking specifically at how the atonement of Christ is the fulfillment of the sacrificial system of the Old Testament, and what significance that has for our understanding of what took place on the cross for us. Second, we'll specifically consider the **efficacy and particularity** inherent in the biblical concept of sacrifice, which will have bearing on our understanding of the extent of Christ's sacrifice.

I. Christ's Atonement as Sacrifice

In the **first place**, then, let's examine the significance of the fact that Scripture characterizes the penal substitutionary atonement of Christ as a **sacrifice** offered to take away sins. In Ephesians 5:2, Paul exhorts the church to "walk in love," and then appeals to the atoning death of Christ as the ground for that exhortation. He says, "Walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a **sacrifice** to God as a fragrant aroma." The author of Hebrews employs this imagery throughout his letter. In Hebrews 9:26, he says, "But now once at the consummation of the ages He has been manifested to put away sin by the **sacrifice** of Himself." In chapter 10 verses 11 and 12, we read, "Every priest stands daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins; but He, having offered one **sacrifice** for sins for all time, sat down at the right hand of God."

Now, this imagery of Jesus' death as a **sacrificial** offering is rooted not merely in the New Testament, but it draws from the history of Israel and the Old Testament's prescriptions for sacrificial worship to God. The Book of Hebrews explicitly states that Christ's atoning work was the fulfillment of the Levitical sacrifices instituted under the Mosaic Covenant (cf. Heb. 9:23). Because of that, if we're going to properly understand the significance of Christ's death as **sacrifice**, we have to understand the original context in which it developed. And for that we turn to the Book of Leviticus.

Now, Leviticus begins right where Exodus ends. The tabernacle has been completed, and the glory of God has come and filled the tabernacle, signifying that the spiritual presence of Yahweh is now dwelling in the midst of His people. In fact, the Hebrew word for tabernacle, *mishkān*, literally means "dwelling place." The presence of God, then, is also a key theme in Leviticus, as the phrase "before the Lord" or "in the presence of the Lord" appears 59 times in the book. Leviticus also teaches that this God who is present is fundamentally holy. The words for *holy* and *holiness* appear 150 times in these 27 chapters, more frequently than any other book. So, right from the outset, the question that Leviticus seeks to answer is: How can the holy presence of God dwell in the midst of a sinful people? And the answer God gives is that sinners are to make **sacrifices** to the Lord that will atone for their sin and render them accepted in his presence. Chapter 1 verse 3: The worshiper "shall offer [his sacrifice] at the doorway of the tent of meeting, that he may be accepted before the LORD. He shall lay his hand on the head of the burnt offering, that it may be accepted for him to make atonement on his behalf" (Lev. 1:3-4). Right there, you've got penal substitutionary atonement by **sacrifice**. The sacrificial animal pays the penalty of death as a substitute for the life of the sinner.

And the pinnacle of the sacrificial system was the ceremonies of the Day of Atonement. Turn to chapter 16. Once a year—and only once a year—the high priest of Israel—and only the high priest of Israel—was to enter the holy of holies—the innermost sanctum in Israel—into God's immediate presence. And he was to do this, verse 17, in order to "make atonement for himself and for his household and for all the assembly of Israel." God commanded the high priest to offer two goats. Verses 8 to 10 tell us that one goat was to be sacrificed to God as a sin offering, and the other one was to be kept alive, to bear the sins of the people, and to be banished from the presence of the Lord. The blood of the sacrificial goat was to be sprinkled on the mercy seat, which was the covering of the Ark of the Covenant and the place where atonement was made. Then, the high priest dealt with the scapegoat. Look with me at verses 21 and 22: "Then Aaron shall lay both of his hands on the head of the live goat, and confess over it all the iniquities of the sons of Israel and all their transgressions in regard to all their sins; and he shall lay them on the head of the goat and send it away into the wilderness by the hand of a man who stands in readiness. The goat shall bear on itself all their iniquities to a solitary land; and he shall release the goat in the wilderness."

So by laying his hands on the head of the scapegoat and confessing all Israel's sins over it, the high priest was symbolizing that God had reckoned the sin and guilt of the people to be transferred to the goat. Instead of bearing their own iniquity and being banished from the holy presence of God, Israel's sin was imputed to a substitute. The innocent scapegoat bears the sin, and guilt, and punishment of the people and is banished in their place. By sprinkling the sacrificial blood of one substitute on the mercy seat, and by virtue of the imputation of sin to a second substitute, Israel's sins are atoned for and the people are released from punishment.

Another picture of Old Testament sacrifice—the only other one that rivals the Day of Atonement in significance for Israel—is the Passover sacrifice of Exodus 12. Turn there with me. The way God redeemed Israel out of slavery in Egypt becomes a picture of how he will finally redeem all of his people out of slavery to sin and death. As He was about to send the tenth plague upon Egypt, God had promised to kill every firstborn child and animal throughout the land. And though Israel had been spared from the first nine plagues, they were not automatically spared from the tenth. In order to be spared from God's wrath, He required each family in Israel to kill an unblemished lamb, and to put its blood on the doorposts of the house. He says in verse 13, “The blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you live; and when I see the blood I will pass over you, and no plague will befall you to destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt.”

So the Passover lamb died as a substitutionary **sacrifice** in the place of the firstborn children of the Jews. The wrath of God was turned away by the blood of a spotless lamb that was slain in their place. And Israel, verse 24, was to “observe this event as an ordinance for you and your children forever,” to commemorate the Lord's forgiving their sins by a substitutionary **sacrifice**, verse 27.

Now, both the Levitical sacrifices as epitomized in the Day of Atonement and the rite of the Passover vividly picture the **sacrificial** work of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Passover meal was the setting of Jesus' last supper with His disciples, when He instituted the New Covenant, declaring that His body would be broken for them, and that the cup which was poured out for them was, He said in Luke 22:20, “the new covenant in My blood.” In this way, at this Passover meal, Christ was declaring that His death—the breaking of His body and the pouring out of His blood—would be the fulfillment of the feast of the Passover. One writer said, “Whereas the old Passover focused on the body and blood of a lamb, slain as a penal substitutionary sacrifice for the redemption of Israel, the Lord's Supper focuses on the body and blood of Christ, who gave himself as a penal substitutionary sacrifice for his people” (Jeffery, Ovey, and Sach, *Pierced for Our Transgressions*, 39).

Jesus is, as John the Baptist heralded in John 1:29, “the *Lamb* of God who takes away the sin of the world.” In 1 Peter 1, verses 18 and 19, Peter says that the people of God have not been redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold, but with “the precious blood of Christ, as of

a *lamb* unblemished and spotless”—a clear reference to the reality that Christ is the fulfillment of the Passover sacrifice. Paul states that very truth explicitly in 1 Corinthians 5:7, when he says, “For Christ, *our Passover lamb*, has been sacrificed.” Jesus is our Passover lamb! And so just as the blood of the slain sacrificial lamb protected Israel from the execution of God’s judgment, so also does the blood of the slain sacrificial Lamb, Jesus, protect His people from the Father’s wrath against their sin.

Jesus is not only the fulfillment of the Passover sacrifice. He’s also the fulfillment of the Levitical priesthood and sacrificial system. Turn back to Hebrews 9. It’s important to say that, while God graciously allowed Himself to be temporarily satisfied by Israel’s sacrifices, those sacrifices were never truly final or perfect. Hebrews 9:9 says the Levitical sacrifices “cannot make the worshiper perfect in conscience.” And in chapter 10 verse 1, it says, “For the law, since it has only a shadow of the good things to come and not the very form of things, can never, by the same sacrifices which they offer continually year by year, make perfect those who draw near.” Verse 4: “For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins” (Heb 10:1, 4). That’s why there had to be a greater, perfect sacrifice that would put away sin once for all. And that’s precisely what Christ’s sacrifice did. Look back at chapter 9, verses 11 and 12: “But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, He entered then through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation; and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption.” We read it before in chapter 10 verses 11 and 12: “Every priest stands daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins; but He, having offered one **sacrifice** for sins for all time, sat down at the right hand of God.” Hebrews 10:14: “For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified.”

The parallel imagery is astounding. Just as the high priest entered beyond the veil into the most holy place, so also Christ, Hebrews 4:14 says, is the “great high priest who has passed through the heavens” and entered beyond the veil of the heavenly tabernacle into the very presence of God Himself. And while the high priest sprinkled the blood of the sacrificial goat on the mercy seat to make atonement, the Lord Jesus sprinkled His own blood. And, inasmuch as His blood is infinitely more valuable than that of bulls and goats—inasmuch as His blood speaks better than the blood of Abel—He secured an eternal redemption. The Lord Jesus Christ, our great Mediator and Substitute, is the fulfillment of both the high priest *and* the sacrifice. He is both offerer and offering, as Hebrews 9:14 says: “*He offered Himself* without blemish to God.”

And it doesn’t stop there. Not only is Jesus the fulfillment of both the high priest and the sacrifice; He’s also the fulfillment even of the mercy seat. The high priest was commanded to sprinkle the blood on the mercy seat, where God’s holy presence was uniquely manifest for fellowship with Israel. Exodus 25:22 says, “There I will meet with you; and from above the

mercy seat . . . I will speak to you.” And in Leviticus 16:2, God Himself promised the death of anyone who approached the mercy seat aside from the high priest on the Day of Atonement, “for,” he said, “*I will appear* in the cloud over the mercy seat.” This is where God shows up. This is where He speaks. And so it is a holy place that cannot be entered into except in the strictest of circumstances by the most qualified in Israel.

And yet in Romans 3:25, the Apostle Paul declares that God displayed Jesus “as a propitiation by his blood.” And when he uses that word *propitiation*, it’s actually the word for *propitiatory*—the Greek word that translates the Hebrew word *kapporeth*—the same word in Hebrew for the “mercy seat” in the holy of holies. Just as the mercy seat was the place where atonement was made and God’s wrath against sin was averted, so now is Jesus the place where atonement is made and God’s wrath against sin is averted. The Lord Jesus Christ is (a) the high priest who offers, (b) He is the sacrifice that is offered, and (c) He is the mercy seat upon which the sacrifice is offered!

And still more, Jesus is also the perfect fulfillment of the scapegoat. Just as the high priest confessed Israel’s sins over the head of the scapegoat, such that their sins were laid on the goat, so also has the Father “caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him,” Isaiah 53:6. “He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf,” 2 Corinthians 5:21. The Father imputed to Jesus every sin of every one of those the Father had given to Him, so that, truly, it can be said, 1 Peter 2:24, that “He Himself *bore our sins* in His body on the cross.”

As the midday sun is shrouded in darkness, the Father is, as it were, laying his hands on the head of the Son, and confessing over Him the sins of His people. And as a result of bearing their sin, like the scapegoat the Son is banished from the presence of the Father, leaving him to suffer, as Hebrews 13:12 says, outside the gate, and to experience the terrifying abandonment of His Father, leaving Him to cry out those wretched words: “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” God the Son, who from eternity was the apple of His Father’s eye, His ever-present companion, in whom His soul was always well-pleased, was forsaken by the Father, as He laid upon Christ the iniquity of us all, and abandoned Him to bear the unleashed fury of Almighty God in the place of His people.

“Outside the camp”—away from the presence of the Lord and of His people—was where the carcasses of the sacrifices were to be disposed of, Leviticus 4:12, Hebrews 13:11. “Outside the camp” was that lonely place where the leper was isolated to bear his shame, Leviticus 13:46. “Outside the camp” was where the blasphemer was to be stoned, Leviticus 24:14 and 23. And it is to that place of shame and of isolation that the Son of God was banished, so that we—guilty, treasonous, sinful sons and daughters of Adam—might be welcomed into the holy presence of God Himself.

And I would be remiss if, upon the proclamation of that Good News, I didn't take the opportunity to address those who sit here outside of Christ this morning. Dear sinner, if the Son of God has humbled Himself to such a place of degradation and shame, will you not humble yourself before His cross? Will you not own that you're a sinner—that you've offended this holy God by breaking His law, and, because the wages of sin is death, that you deserve to perish eternally for your crimes? Will you not confess that there is absolutely nothing you could do to pay for your sins—no good works, no religious duties that you could perform to earn favor with this holy God? Friend, I plead with you, if you are not a believer in the Lord Jesus, humble yourself and come to Him who has died for sinners. Turn from your sins and put your trust in the precious blood of this spotless Lamb slain to save you from death and hell, and to deliver you into the presence of God, clothed in His own righteousness.

II. The Efficacy and Particularity of Sacrifice

Well, there can be no mistaking it. Christ's death was an expiatory sacrifice—the fulfillment of the sacrificial system of the Old Testament which was instituted to provide atonement for Israel's sins. But as we aim to bring those realities to bear on our present discussion—namely, how the nature of the atonement as *sacrifice* bears on the question of the *extent* of the atonement—we need to look once again at the concept of atonement by sacrifice in the context of its Old Testament roots.

And the fundamental reason for that, once again, is because the concept of atonement doesn't begin in the New Testament. When the New Testament presents the work of Christ in terms of *atonement*, and in terms of *sacrifice*, and in terms of *expiation*, these are concepts that already have definitions in Scripture. And so the original audiences of the New Testament Gospels and Epistles would have heard these words for atonement and sacrifice, and they would have understood them in fundamental continuity with the categories of the Old Testament sacrificial system. And though of course there isn't a one-to-one comparison—Jesus' sacrifice is better than the Levitical sacrifices—nevertheless, except for where there are explicit discontinuities revealed, we ought to understand that what was true of atonement by expiatory sacrifice in the Old Testament is true of the fulfillment of atonement by expiatory sacrifice in the work of Christ.

And what we find is: from the moment the notion of atonement was revealed by God to His people, it has always signified that which is inherently **efficacious** on behalf of **particular** persons. Therefore, when the New Testament employs the same terminology to describe the atonement Christ accomplished by His death, it is proper to regard His atonement with the same inherent **efficacy** and **particularity**. So that's our **second** point. First, we saw Christ's atonement as sacrifice. Now, I want to examine the inherent **efficacy and particularity** of the concept of sacrifice.

And what do I mean by those terms? By **efficacious**, I mean that atonement always accomplishes its intentions of taking away sin, of satisfying wrath, of reconciling God and sinners, and so on—and not merely making those things possible. It is to say that an expiatory sacrifice actually expiates! It actually takes away sins! And by **particular**, I mean that atonement is always accomplished on behalf of a particular, definite, specific group of individuals. It is never something that is accomplished for people in general, or indefinitely, for all people without exception.

So with that, let's look at some key examples from early in the Old Testament—in some cases returning to some of the passages we've already visited before. We'll start in Exodus 12 at the **Passover**. As the Passover lamb dies as a substitutionary sacrifice in the place of the firstborn children of the Jews, we may observe both the **particularity** and the **efficacy** of expiatory sacrifice. Its **particularity** is made plain in a number of ways. In the first place, each family was not only to *slay* a Passover lamb and put its blood on the doorposts of their house; they were also to *eat* the lamb together as a family. And the amount of lamb that they were to eat was to be directly proportionate to the number of people in each household. Chapter 12 verse 4 says, "Now if the household is too small for a lamb, then he and his neighbor nearest to his house are to take one according to the number of persons in them; according to what each man should eat, you are to divide the lamb." That is to say, each slain lamb atoned for the **particular** individuals for whom it was offered. One commentator says, "Each lamb served a specific body of people and redeemed a prescribed household" (Williamson, 231–32).

Besides this, instructions for the escape of God's judgment were not given to all who were dwelling in Egypt, but to the children of Israel alone. Multiple times throughout the plagues—chapter 9 verse 4, chapter 11 verse 7—we read that "the Lord *makes a distinction* between Egypt and Israel." So too in the tenth plague. Everyone throughout the land of Egypt was subject to the Lord's righteous wrath. But only Israel—only the people of God—were given a means of atonement.

The **efficacy** of the Passover sacrifice is self-evident. Yahweh's wrath indeed broke over Egypt that night. Chapter 12, verses 29 and 30: "Now it came about at midnight that Yahweh struck all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sat on his throne to the firstborn of the captive who was in the dungeon, and all the firstborn of cattle. Pharaoh arose in the night, he and all his servants and all the Egyptians, and there was a great cry in Egypt, for there was no home where there was not someone dead." But, just as God had promised, in verse 23, "when He sees the blood on the lintel and on the two doorposts, Yahweh will pass over the door and will not allow the destroyer to come in to your houses to smite you." So, the Passover sacrifice was both **particular** and **efficacious**.

Turn now with me again to the Book of **Leviticus**, where, as we said earlier, the concepts of sacrifice and atonement figure especially prominently. We read chapter 1 verses 3 and 4 earlier. It says, “He,” that is, the worshiper of Yahweh—the one seeking atonement—“he shall offer it”—that is, offer his sacrifice—“at the doorway of the tent of meeting, that he may be accepted before Yahweh. He shall lay his hand on the head of the burnt offering, that it may be accepted for him to make atonement on his behalf.” Note, first, the **particularity** of this offering. The worshiper himself was to bring the animal to be sacrificed. And when he brought it, for the daily sacrifices like this, he didn’t just hand it over to the priest and then go back to his tent. No, the law tells us that unless he was bringing a small bird, the worshiper himself was the one who killed the animal. Each individual Israelite gutted it, cut it up in pieces, and washed its entrails and legs. The priest’s job was to sprinkle its blood on the altar and place its carcass on the fire. But the worshiper himself killed the sacrificial animal. And that made the entire spectacle an overwhelmingly personal event. The offering of the sacrifice was always connected to the specific worshiper who offered it.

We also see **particularity** and the very personal nature of sacrifice in the practice of laying one’s hand on the head of the offering. The worshiper was identifying himself in the most intimate way with this sacrificial animal, symbolically transferring the sins for which he was seeking atonement onto the head of this substitutionary sacrifice. *This* sacrifice took away *this* worshiper’s sins, in particular. And we also see particularity in the repetition of the personal language used. Look again at verse 4: “He shall lay his hand on the head of the burnt offering, that it may be accepted *for him* to make atonement on *his* behalf.” It was for *this* worshiper and on *his* behalf that this substitutionary transfer of sin took place. It was unmistakably **particular**.

And the **efficacy** of this sacrificial atonement is also evident. Offering this sacrifice would in fact make atonement for the worshiper. It would not merely make atonement possible upon the fulfillment of a later condition. No, verse 9: It would be “an offering by fire of *a soothing aroma* to Yahweh,” which is to say, God would be pleased by it; His demands would be satisfied by it. God does not receive as a soothing aroma that which does not avail with Him. This is an **efficacious** atonement! Look again at verse 4: “He shall lay his hand on the head of the burnt offering, that it may be *accepted* for him.” It does not say such an offering would make the worshiper *acceptable* to Yahweh. It doesn’t say it would win God the right to accept this worshiper if he fulfilled certain conditions and responded in particular ways! This atoning sacrifice would actually make the worshiper accepted in Yahweh’s presence, because it would have decisively dealt with his sin.

And we see both particularity and efficacy not only in these opening verses concerning the burnt offerings, but throughout the rest of the instructions for the other Levitical offerings as well. Throughout chapter 4, which deals with the sin offering, we see the same prescription for the worshiper to lay his hands on the head of the sacrifice—verse 4, verse 15, verse 24, 29, 33. And

again, this symbolizes both the intimate identification of the worshiper with the sacrifice, as well as the transfer of the person's sins to the substitute. *This* particular animal is offered in the place of *this* particular sinner, for *his* particular sins. This was also true for offerings on behalf of the entire congregation of Israel. Chapter 4 verses 20 and 21 speak of atonement by sacrifice that is "the sin offering *for the assembly*." That is, this atonement is accomplished on behalf of the assembly of Israel alone, and not for the surrounding nations. We see **particularity** explicitly with the guilt offering in chapter 5. Verses 5 and 6 link the sacrifice to an individual's confession of specific sins. Verse 5: "*he* shall confess that in which *he* has sinned." Verse 6: "He shall also bring his guilt offering to Yahweh for *his* sin which *he* has committed." So, (a) confession of **particular** sins and (b) the bringing of a sacrificial offering are inextricably linked. We see the same in chapter 5 verse 10: "So the priest shall make atonement on *his* behalf for *his* sin which *he* has committed, and it will be forgiven *him*." We have an almost identical sentence in verse 13, and a similar one in verse 18. Bible scholar Garry Williams did a literary analysis of Leviticus 4 and 5, and he concluded, "The references to specific offenses committed by particular people at the beginning and end of each of the descriptions of the purification offerings are far from accidental. They deliberately employ elegantly varied forms of expression to make the same point again and again: the sacrifices were offered for and were effective for the specific offenses of particular people" ("The Definite Intent of Penal Substitutionary Atonement," 476).

We also see that these daily Levitical sacrifices were not only particular but also **efficacious**. More than half of the occurrences of the Hebrew word for "atonement" occur in Leviticus. And in many of those occurrences, the word appears without any modifying phrase. The text will just say, "So the priest shall make atonement." Period. But, there are also many occurrences in which the writer will use the word "atonement," and then make some comment about the atonement just spoken of. And here's the key thought: every time any comment is made, it is always a statement of the atonement's **efficacy**. Chapter 4 verse 20: "So the priest shall make atonement for them, *and they will be forgiven*." Verse 26: "Thus the priest shall make atonement for him in regard to his sin, *and he will be forgiven*" (cf. 4:31, 35; 5:10, 13, 16, 18; 6:7; 19:22). Chapter 12 verse 8: "And the priest shall make atonement for her, *and she will be clean*." Chapter 14 verse 20: "Thus the priest shall make atonement for him, *and he will be clean*." This repetition would have had its intended effect. It would have been indelibly impressed upon the mind of the faithful Israelite that when the priest made atonement, he actually atoned, and that that atonement was **efficacious**—that it brought about its intended effect of cleansing and forgiveness of sins.

As we said earlier, the pinnacle of the Old Testament sacrificial system was the Day of Atonement, and we observe the same **efficacy** and **particularity** here as well. So let's go back to chapter 16. Like the Passover, the **efficacy** of the Day of Atonement sacrifices is virtually self-evident. The sins of the assembly were not made *forgivable* on the Day of Atonement. Just as surely as the goat of sacrifice died, and just as surely as the scapegoat was banished—never to return into the presence of the camp—just as surely, Israel's sins had been taken away in this act

of substitutionary sacrifice, Verse 30: “It is on this day that atonement shall be made for you to cleanse you; *you will be clean* from all your sins before Yahweh.” You say, “Wait a minute. I thought it was impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.” Yes, that’s true. But that doesn’t mean that these sacrifices were inefficacious. As the text says, atonement shall be made and Israel would be clean from all their sins. It simply means that these sacrifices *derived* their **efficacy** from Christ’s final sacrifice on the cross, which these sacrifices anticipated, and pointed to. There was nothing in the blood of bulls and goats themselves that could genuinely take away sins. But on the basis of the coming work of Messiah, God graciously allowed Himself to be temporarily propitiated by these sacrifices which He prescribed for His people.

Further, the **particularity** of the Day of Atonement sacrifices is evident as well. Look at verse 16. The high priest makes atonement “because of the impurities of *the sons of Israel* and because of *their* transgressions in regard to all *their* sins.” Verse 17: he makes atonement “for himself and for his household and *for all the assembly of Israel.*” This was not a sacrifice offered on behalf of the Gentile world. There was no yearly atonement that accomplished forgiveness for the Moabites or the Philistines! Verse 21: Aaron laid his hands on the head of the scapegoat and confessed over it “all the iniquities of *the sons of Israel*, and all *their* transgressions in regard to all *their* sins.” The sins of the Midianites and the Egyptians were not imputed to the scapegoat! This was a definite, **particular** atonement for the people of God, and for them alone.

Conclusion

What does this all mean? It means that from the very beginning, when God first revealed to His people the means by which they would make atonement for their sins so that they could be forgiven, the very concept of atonement itself was inherently particular and efficacious! It was an atonement that *atoned*. And it was an atonement that atoned on behalf of *particular* people. And so when we come to the New Testament, and we’re told that the work of Christ on behalf of sinners was a work of expiatory sacrifice—a work of atonement that takes away sins—we must hear in those words the *very* same note of inherent efficacy and particularity that always defined those concepts.

And so when Hebrews 9:26 says, “But now once at the consummation of the ages He has been manifested *to put away sin* by the *sacrifice* of Himself,” that does not mean—it cannot mean—that He came to make it possible for all without exception to have their sins be put away! No! A universal, inefficacious atonement is entirely foreign to the biblical definition of expiatory sacrifice! Biblically speaking, atonement is always particular, and atonement is always efficacious. And so Hebrews 9:26 means exactly what it sounds like it means: when Christ offered Himself as a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma (cf. Eph 5:2)—when the Lamb of God

was slain on the cross—He *actually* put sin *away*! He *actually* bore our sins! He *actually* carried our sorrows!

And He actually bore *our* sins! He actually carried *our* sorrows! He didn't potentially bear the sins of everyone without exception—which is to say, He didn't bear the sins of *no one in particular*! He bore *our* sins! He bore *His people's* sins! *My* name was graven on His hands! *My* name was written on His heart! And that means: He didn't bear the sins of those who bear their own sins and perish eternally for them. He didn't put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself for those whose sins are not actually put away. He didn't take away the sins of those who suffer for their sins in the lake of fire.

No, Isaiah 53:12: “He Himself *bore* the sin of *many*.” The atonement is an efficacious atonement. And precisely because it is an efficacious atonement, it is a particular atonement.