

Atonement

How God brings about total reconciliation through Jesus

Only God fully and completely knows God. We struggle to make logical sense of a God who tells us he is “Three in One,” and it’s difficult not thinking of the Father and Son as separate beings, even though God tells us they are not. Then try including the Holy Spirit into this insoluble equation, and the glass we peer through so hopefully becomes even darker!

According to Jesus, though, “no man knows who the Son is but the Father, and no one knows who the Father is but the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal him (**Luke 10:22**).” Only God knows God, so the only way we can understand the inner relationships within the Triune Godhead is by how much of himself he reveals to us.

And he does reveal himself to us. Through his Word, through his interaction with the nation of Israel, and by coming personally among us in Jesus Christ, God revealed to us as much as we could grasp about him, to enable us to know and communicate with him.

God also works through the Spirit, **1 Corinthians 2:9-11**. “But as it is written, eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man, the things which God has prepared for those who love him. But God has revealed them to us by his Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of a man, except the spirit of man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God.” Since God is the only source of knowledge about himself, the only way we can know about him is for him to reveal himself through himself to us, which he does, through God the Spirit.

Before we could even begin to know him through the Spirit, though, something had to be done about the huge barrier between us and God caused by our sin. While that barrier existed, even God would be left without a way of revealing himself to us. So he provided a way of removing the barrier and a means of bridging the chasm, by making an atoning sacrifice. Jesus would pay the penalty of our sins.

When God came to us in Jesus, he offered one sacrifice for all humanity and for all time, as stated in **Hebrews 9:22-28**. His one sacrifice was enough because as Creator of us all he could pay the penalty for all.

But was paying the penalty enough? It would certainly release us from the death penalty caused by our sin, but it would have no effect on our nature. Transferring the death penalty from sinner to sin-bearer would certainly release us from captivity, but only until our next sin. That’s why sacrifices had to be made every year in Old Testament Israel. Every year, behind a closed curtain, the high priest offered a sacrifice so that the sins of the previous year were removed. Why every year? Because the sacrifices did not change the nature or behaviour of the people.

It’s the same with Jesus’ sacrifice. It didn’t change the nature in us that causes us to sin, either. It was an external, judicial transaction done for us, but it didn’t do anything to our internal nature. We were still left in our fallen state, still alienated from God, still closed off from the inner nature of the God of love, and still stuck with a mind and heart that could not understand him (**1 Corinthians 2:14**).

There was still a barrier, therefore, that had to be removed. It was our alienated, fallen nature. But God provided the means to remove that, too.

When God came to us in Jesus, he took our entire sinful nature into himself. It wasn’t just our sin he took upon himself, it was our nature as well, and he took all of it, too. The whole man had to be assumed if the whole man was to be saved!

He took our nature within his own life on this earth and turned it back to the Father in perfect obedience and faith. He then took our nature to the cross where “our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be rendered powerless (**Romans 6:6**).”

In Jesus’ incarnation and atoning sacrifice we see how God brings about the total reconciliation of man to God and of God to man. Our sin and our nature, both of which separate us from God, have been dealt with. And now, because of Jesus, we are given a relationship with God similar to, but not fully the same as, the relationship of Jesus with the Father. We can be one as they are one (**John 17:11**). God has made a way for us to enter into a relationship with him - and, to some extent, even into his own relationships within himself.