

SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

Video Lecture Series

by Dr. Stephen Myers and Robert D. McCurley, ThM

STUDY GUIDE

Module 4:
CHRISTOLOGY

Lecture 8:
**THE NATURE OF
THE ATONEMENT**



The John Knox Institute
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Entrusting our Reformed Inheritance to the Church Worldwide

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STUDY GUIDE

Module 4

Christology

Lectures by Dr. Stephen Myers:

1. Introduction to Christology
2. The Divinity of Christ
3. The Humanity of Christ

Lectures by Robert D. McCurley, ThM:

4. The Hypostatic Union
5. The States of Christ
6. The Offices of Christ
7. The Necessity of the Atonement
- 8. The Nature of the Atonement**
9. The Extent of the Atonement
10. The Preeminence of Christ

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Module 4: CHRISTOLOGY

Lecture 8:

The Nature of the Atonement

Introduction

The cross of Christ, which sits at the center of Christianity, carries a message with a polarizing effect. We can affirm with Paul, in 1 Corinthians 1, verse 18, “For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God.” God gives to the believer the ability to see clearly. Behind the ignoble suffering and death of Christ lies true and ultimate triumph. In his death, Christ is winning the victory over the greatest enemies of the world—over sin and Satan, death and hell—not despite the cross, but through the cross. Here we behold the wisdom and power of God. The cross is Christ’s greatest triumph, not his colossal defeat. Well, to better appreciate this reality, we need to understand what Christ’s death entailed. That brings us to considering the very Nature of the Atonement—the nature of Christ’s atoning sacrifice upon the cross.

Theme: *The doctrine of the Nature of the Atonement.*

I. Scriptural Basis

“Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth.” (Isaiah 53:4–7)

1. Isaiah 53 provides us with a vivid prophecy regarding Christ’s sacrificial death.
 - a. Despised and rejected of men;
 - b. A man of sorrows;
 - c. Acquainted with grief;

- d. It pleased the LORD to bruise him;
- e. He hath put him to grief;
- f. Thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin.

2. Why? Notice the pronouns:

- a. He hath borne *our* griefs;
- b. He carried *our* sorrows;
- c. He was wounded for *our* transgressions;
- d. He was bruised for *our* iniquities;
- e. The chastisement of *our* peace was upon him;
- f. By his stripes *we* are healed;
- g. The LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of *us* all.

3. The emphasis falls on substitution.

- a. Verse 8: “For the transgression of my people was he stricken.”

Questions:

1. What does Isaiah 53 tell us about the Suffering Servant?

2. What was the reason for Christ’s suffering? How do we know that from Isaiah chapter 53?

II. Doctrinal Overview

As summarized in *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, chapter 8, paragraph 5:

“The Lord Jesus, by His perfect obedience, and sacrifice of Himself, which He, through the eternal Spirit, once offered up unto God, hath fully satisfied the justice of His Father; and purchased, not only reconciliation, but an everlasting inheritance in the kingdom of heaven, for all those whom the Father hath given unto Him.”

1. Christ as our Surety.
 - a. A surety acts in the place of another.
 - b. Christ paid our debt for sin.
2. Christ as the sacrifice.
 - a. A vicarious sacrificial atonement: Christ is our penal substitute.
 - b. This sacrifice includes expiation and propitiation.
 - c. Expiation—blotting out or removing sin, taking away the guilt.
 - d. Propitiation—appeasing divine wrath.
3. Reconciliation with God.
 - a. Refers to the removal of our enmity with God;
 - b. Christ's atonement eliminates our alienation from God, restores friendship and fellowship with God.
4. Redemption.
 - a. Refers to our deliverance, by a ransom.
 - b. Redeemed from spiritual bondage—fourfold.
 - 1) from the bondage of sin;
 - 2) from the curse of the law;
 - 3) from the works of the devil;
 - 4) from the power of death.
5. Obedience.
 - a. Salvation requires obedience to God's law.
 - b. Christ's active obedience—fulfilling what the law requires; perfect righteousness.
 - c. Christ's passive obedience—suffering the penalty required for breaking the law.
6. Summary: notice how Christ's atonement corresponds to all our needs. In each of these points of doctrine, we learn about the nature of Christ's sacrificial and substitutionary atonement. This opens up the heart of Christ's work, which is displayed in the proclamation of his glorious gospel of good news to sinners.

Questions

1. What is a surety? What did the Lord Jesus Christ do as our Surety?

2. What does the word “vicarious” mean? What does it mean that Christ is our sacrifice?

3. In reference to Christ’s atoning sacrifice, what do the terms “expiation” and “propitiation” mean? Why are they both necessary to the gospel?

4. What is reconciliation in regards to Christ’s atoning sacrifice? Who are the parties that are reconciled?

5. How should we understand “redemption” in the Bible? What is a ransom? How do the Old and New Testaments depict the concept of “ransom”? What are sinners redeemed from?

6. What are the fourfold types of spiritual bondage? How does Christ’s atoning sacrifice free sinners from spiritual bondage?

7. How does Christ's atoning sacrifice require obedience?

8. Explain the active obedience and passive obedience of Christ?

9. How can we know that Christ's atonement corresponds to all our needs? How does this show the gospel as glorious good news for sinners?

III. Polemical Exposition

1. Every attempt to jettison the substitutionary nature of Christ's atonement attacks the core of the gospel.
 - a. Some complain it is unfair or unjust to punish the innocent in place of the guilty.
 - b. Others avoid notions of guilt, the demands of the law, liability to punishment, and the requirements of a blood-shedding sacrifice.
2. Erroneous theories about the atonement:
 - a. The ransom theory, that Christ bought off Satan in exchange for his people.
 - b. The governmental theory, that God was simply demonstrating his displeasure with sin in the death of Christ, but there was no satisfaction or representation in that atoning work.

c. The mystical theory, which denies the necessity of a blood sacrifice, saying that sin is simply moral weakness and not something that incurs guilt.

d. The moral theory, that Christ died as a great example to men, as a martyr of truth, so there's no atonement, no redemption, no sacrifice, no substitution at all. He's like any other martyr that has died in history.

Questions:

1. Is it unjust for the innocent to be punished as a substitution for the guilty? How does the love of Christ shine forth in his substitutionary work?

2. Some say we should avoid notions of guilt, demands of divine law, liability to punishment, and requirements of a blood-shedding sacrifice. Why should the Christian reject these ideas?

3. Explain each of these erroneous theories about the atonement, and state why each is wrong:

The ransom theory: _____

The governmental theory: _____

The mystical theory: _____

The moral theory: _____

IV. Practical Exposition

1. You should make meditation on the cross of Christ the constant exercise of your soul.

2. We are brought back to Christ's atonement on a daily basis.

3. These truths should transform our lives, must lead to doxology, and must lead to worshipping and adoring the Redeemer with wonder and grace.

Questions:

1. In what ways can the Christian make meditation on the cross of Christ a daily exercise?

2. How should the Christian's daily battle with sin drive us to Christ's atonement?

3. What does the Lord Jesus Christ mean to you, after learning of all these doctrines about the atonement?

V. Self-Reflection

Read and meditate on Romans 5, verses 6 to 11. In light of all that was discussed in this lecture about the atonement, do you experience the security and "*joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ,*" as stated in verse 11?
