



*Volume 8 Issue 5*

# *West Suffolk Epistle West Suffolk Baptist Church*



*May 2021*

*Thoughtfully Reformed - Redemptively Relevant*

## **The Only Means of Atonement**

Our Creator is full of compassion for broken sinners. But that reality doesn't negate or override His perfect justice.

We have considered the compelling biblical truths of God's mercy and forgiveness—especially how Christ revealed those divine attributes in His parable of the prodigal son. But to consider His compassion without explaining His uncompromising righteousness would be to misrepresent God's character on the most egregious level.

It's true that the prodigal's father rushed to forgive his son unreservedly and unconditionally. But don't imagine for a moment that when God forgives sin, He simply looks the other way and pretends the sin never occurred. It must be atoned for. Moses's law was filled with bloody sacrifices precisely to make that truth inescapable.

This point is crucial, and ultimately pivotal, in understanding the story of the prodigal son. Remember that the main point Jesus was making in this parable was for the benefit of His audience—the Pharisees. He was addressing their faulty concept of God—that He delighted in their self-righteousness while being unenthusiastic about the forgiveness of sins. Their theology was so lacking any sense of true grace that they simply could not account for how forgiven sinners might stand before God, apart from a lifetime of religious effort. Like every false religion and idolatrous idea today, the Pharisees' wrong view of what is required to make full atonement for sin lay at the root of their errant theology.

Don't forget how the Pharisees had overlaid the truth of the Old Testament with their own elaborate system of human traditions, man-made rules, and useless ceremonies. They were convinced sinners needed to do good works to help atone for their own sins. They had even enshrined their own intricate system of finely detailed traditions as the chief means by which they thought it possible to acquire the kind of merit that could balance out the guilt of sin. That is why they were obsessed with ostentatious works, religious rituals, spiritual stunts, ceremonial displays of righteousness, and other external and cosmetic achievements. And they clung doggedly to that system, even though most of their rituals were nothing more than their own inventions, designed to paper over sin and build the façade of righteousness.

Here was the problem with that: Even authentically good works could never accomplish what the Pharisees hoped their ceremonial traditions would. That was made perfectly clear by the law itself. The law demanded no less than absolute perfection (Matthew 5:19, 48; James 2:10). And it was filled from start to finish with threats and curses against anyone who violated it at any point. The reason we need atonement is that we are fallen sinners who cannot keep the law adequately. Why would anyone ever think they could earn enough merit to atone for sin through their imperfect obedience to the law? That was the fatal flaw in the Pharisees' system.

In fact, the law itself made perfectly clear that the price of full atonement was more costly than any mere human could ever possibly pay: "The soul who sins will die" (Ezekiel 18:4).



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### ***We Cannot Atone for Our Own Sin***

Furthermore, and more to the point, the Old Testament never once suggested that sinners could atone for their own sin—either wholly or even in part—by doing good works or performing elaborate rituals. In fact, the dominant picture of atonement in the Old Testament is that of an innocent substitute whose blood was shed on behalf of the sinner.

The shedding of the substitute's blood was perhaps the single most prominent aspect of atonement for sin. *"Without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness"* (Hebrews 9:22). On the Day of Atonement, the blood of the sin offering was deliberately splashed onto everything in the vicinity of the altar. The priest "sprinkled both the tabernacle and all the vessels of the ministry with the blood. And according to the Law, one may almost say, all things are cleansed with blood" (Hebrews 9:21-22)—the worshiper included. This was not to suggest that the blood itself had some kind of magical, mystical, or metaphysical property that literally washed away sin's defilement. But the purpose of this bloody ritual was simple: The blood everywhere made a vivid—and intentionally revolting—illustration of the fearsome reality that the wages of sin is death. *"For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you on the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood by reason of the life that makes atonement"* (Leviticus 17:11).

By definition, then, no sinner can ever fully atone for his or her own sin. And that is why Scripture so frequently stresses the need for a substitute.

### ***We Need a Substitute***

When Abraham was told to sacrifice Isaac on an altar, God Himself supplied a substitute in the form of a ram to be slain in Isaac's place. At Passover, the substitute was a spotless lamb. The main staple of the sacrificial system under Moses's law was the burnt offering, which could be a young bull, lamb, goat, turtledove, or pigeon (depending on the financial abilities of the worshiper). And once a year, on the Day of Atonement, the high priest sacrificed a bull and a goat, along with an additional burnt offering, as a symbol of atonement—a substitute who suffered for the sins of all the people.

Now it should be obvious to anyone that *"it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins"* (Hebrews 10:4; cf. Micah 6:6-8). That's why the ritual sacrifices had to be repeated daily. Everyone who ever seriously thought about the sacrificial system and weighed the real cost of sin had to face this truth eventually: Animal sacrifices simply could not provide a full and final atonement for sin. Something more needed to be done to make a complete atonement.

There were basically two possible answers to the dilemma. One approach was to adopt a system of merit such as the Pharisees' religion, in which the sinner himself tried to embellish or supplement the atoning significance of the animal sacrifices with several more layers of good works. In the Pharisees' case, this seems to be the very reason they made up their own long list of exacting rules and regulations that went so far beyond what the law actually required. They knew very well that simple obedience to the law couldn't possibly be perfect and therefore could never achieve enough merit to atone for sin. So they artificially supplemented what the law required, thinking that their extra works would enable them to gain supplemental merit. The inevitable result was a system that promoted the most blatant forms of self-righteousness while diminishing the proper role of true faith.



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The other approach was the one followed by every truly faithful person from the beginning of time until the coming of Christ. They acknowledged their own inability to atone for sin, embraced God's promise of forgiveness, and trusted Him to send a Redeemer who would provide a full and final atonement (Isaiah 59:20). From the day when Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit and their race was cursed, faithful believers had looked for the promised offspring of the woman who would finally crush the serpent's head and thus put sin and guilt away forever (Genesis 3:15). Despite some very strong hints (including Daniel 9:24 and Isaiah 53:10), the actual means by which redemption would finally be accomplished remained shrouded in mystery, until Jesus Himself explained it after His resurrection to some disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:27).

Notice that Jesus did not mention anything about the actual means of atonement in the parable of the prodigal son. That, after all, wasn't the point of the story. But our Lord did, nevertheless, directly confront the heart of every works-righteous religion—the insistence that all sinners need to perform certain works to atone for their own sin—and thus earn the forgiveness and favor of God. ~ **Dr. John MacArthur**

## ***The Holy One of God***

The title "Holy One of God" means that Jesus is infinitely and absolutely holy, fully and perfectly divine. He is transcendent and majestic. He came down from above to save sinners, yet He is set apart from sinners in that He is completely sinless, without any moral blemish, perfect in all of His ways. His being is holy. His character is holy. His mind is holy. His motives are holy. His words are holy. His actions are holy. His ways are holy. His judgments are holy. From the top of His head to the bottom of His feet, every inch, every ounce, the totality, the sum and the substance of the second person of the Godhead is equally holy with God the Father.

What is the holiness of God? **First**, it has to do with "apart-ness" or "other-ness." The idea of holiness speaks to the profound difference between Him and us. Holiness encompasses His transcendent majesty, His august superiority. He is distinctly set apart from us. As one infinitely above us, He alone is worthy of our worship and our adoration. Moses asked: "*Who is like you, O LORD, among the gods? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in glorious deeds, doing wonders?*" (Exodus 15:11). This is the holiness that the demon recognized; he knew that Jesus is the high, lifted up, supreme being of heaven and earth.

**Second**, it speaks to His untainted purity, His sinless perfection. God is morally flawless, blameless in all of His ways. The prophet Isaiah stressed this aspect of His character through repeated use of a formal title for God, "*the Holy One of Israel.*" It has been well said that the book of Isaiah is divided into two halves, the first thirty-nine chapters and the last twenty-seven chapters. In the first thirty-nine chapters, this title is found twelve times in reference to God. In the last twenty-seven chapters, this title is found seventeen times. Twenty-nine times in the book of Isaiah, God is identified as "*the Holy One of Israel.*" Some examples include: "*They have despised the Holy One of Israel*" (1:4); "*For great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel*" (12:6); and "*Your redeemer is the Holy One of Israel*" (41:14).

No doubt Isaiah's use of this title flowed out of his encounter with the living God, recorded in Isaiah 6, when he went into the temple and saw the Lord, high and lifted up, and the seraphim surrounding the throne, crying out to one another day and night, "*Holy, holy, holy,*" declaring by their repetition that God is the holiest being, supreme in His holiness in the entire created order. Given that experience, it is no surprise that Isaiah so frequently identified God as the "*the Holy One of Israel.*"



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## *The Holy One of God* *Continued from Page 3*

Franz Delitzsch, the great Old Testament commentator, writes that this title “forms an essential part of Isaiah’s prophetic signature.” In other words, this is the unique imprint of Isaiah, stamped on the pages of his book, identifying God as holy again and again.

When the demon in Mark 1 used a title that was very similar to Isaiah’s—*“the Holy One of God”*—he left no question as to the identification he was making. Let us think about the meaning of this title as applied to the Lord Jesus.

**First**, it is a title of deity. We have already seen how similar this title is to the title Isaiah assigned to God. In a similar way, God calls Himself *“I AM WHO I AM”* in Exodus 3:14, then Jesus takes that title to Himself and says, *“I am the bread of life”* (John 6:48), *“I am the light of the world”* (John 8:12), and *“I am the resurrection and the life”* (John 11:25, emphasis added in all references). He takes the divine title of the Old Testament for Himself to show that He is equal to God. Something similar is happening here, though in this case the title for Jesus is voiced by a demon.

The title *“Holy One of God”* is found in only one other place in the New Testament. When some of Jesus’ disciples decided to stop following Him, Jesus asked the Twelve, *“Do you want to go away as well?”* (John 6:66-67). Peter replied: *“Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God”* (vv. 68-69). With these words, Peter accurately identified their Master as God incarnate, for that is what this title signifies.

**Second**, it is a title of humble humanity. It acknowledges that the holy God, who is enthroned in the heavens, has come down to be among unholy men. It speaks of the fact that the transcendent, majestic, regal God of heaven has taken on human flesh, yet without sin. Jesus Himself said, *“I have come down from heaven”* (John 6:38). Jesus was holy God in human form.

**Third**, it is a title of sinless perfection. If He is God, even though He is a man, Jesus is infinitely pure. Scripture affirms this repeatedly: *“In him there is no sin”* (1 John 3:5); *“He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth”* (1 Peter 2:22); *“him ... who knew no sin”* (2 Corinthians 5:21). Likewise, Jesus said: *“The ruler of this world is coming. He has no claim on me”* (John 14:30). The Lord was saying here: “There is no point of access that Satan has gained into My being. He has established no beachhead. There are no satanic strongholds in which he has hatched the poison of hell within Me.” He steadfastly resisted every temptation. Jesus could say to His enemies, *“Which one of you convicts me of sin?”* (John 8:46) because He had no sin.

At Calvary, all of our sins were laid on the sinless Lamb of God, and He gave to us His pure, sinless, perfect obedience to the law of God. This is the great exchange of Calvary: *“For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God”* (2 Corinthians 5:21). Jesus had to come as He did, born of a virgin, in order to be what He was, sinless and perfect, in order to do what He, the Holy One, did—die on the cross as the sinless Lamb of God, in order to become sin for us.

Through death, the Bible says, Jesus destroyed the one who has the power of death, the Devil (Hebrews 2:14). He bound the strong man, plundered his house at the cross, and set the captives free (Matthew 12:29; Ephesians 4:8). His victory shows that *“He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world”* (1 John 4:4). Therefore, we ought to cry out, *“Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ”* (1 Corinthians 15:57). ~ **Dr. Steven J. Lawson**





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## ***What Is Providence?***

One way in which the secular mind-set has made inroads into the Christian community is through the worldview that assumes that everything happens according to fixed natural causes, and God, if He is actually there, is above and beyond it all. He is just a spectator in heaven looking down, perhaps cheering us on but exercising no immediate control over what happens on earth. Historically, however, Christians have had an acute sense that this is our Father's world and that the affairs of men and nations, in the final analysis, are in His hands. That is what Paul is expressing in Romans 8:28—a sure knowledge of divine providence. *“And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.”*

Immediately thereafter, Paul moves into a predestination sequence: *“For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified”* (vv. 29–30). Then Paul concludes: *“What then shall we say to these things?”* (v. 31a). In other words, what should be our response to the sovereignty of God and to the fact that He is working out a divine purpose in this world and in our lives? The world repudiates that truth, but Paul answers this way:

*If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? ... No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.* (vv. 31b–37)

One of the oldest sayings of the ancient church summarizes the essence of the relationship between God and His people: *Deus pro nobis*. It means “*God for us*.” That is what the doctrine of providence is all about. It is God's being for His people. *“What then shall we say to these things?”* Paul asks. If God is for us, who can be against us, and who can separate us from the love of Christ? Is it going to be distress, peril, the sword, persecution, suffering, sickness, or human hostility? Paul is saying that no matter what we have to endure in this world as Christians, nothing has the power to sever the relationship we have to a loving and sovereign providence.

The word providence is made up of a prefix and a root. The root comes from the Latin *videre*, from which we get the English word video. Julius Caesar famously said, *“Veni, vidi, vici”*—“*I came, I saw, I conquered*.” The *vidi* in that statement, “*I saw*,” comes from *videre*, which means “*to see*.” That is why we call television “*video*.” The Latin word *provideo*, from which we get our word providence, means “*to see beforehand, a prior seeing, a foresight*.” However, theologians make a distinction between the foreknowledge of God and the providence of God. Even though the word providence means the same thing etymologically as the word foreknowledge, the concept covers significantly more ground than the idea of foreknowledge. In fact, the closest thing to this Latin word in our language is the word provision.

Consider what the Bible says about the responsibility of the head of a family: *“If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever”* (1 Timothy 5:8). The responsibility is given to the head of the household to be the one who provides and makes provision; that is, that person has to know in advance what the family is going to need in terms of the essentials of life, then meet those needs.



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## **What Is Providence?**

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When Jesus said, “Do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on” (Matthew 6:25), He was not advocating a careless approach to life. He was talking about anxiety. We are not to be frightened; we are to put our trust in the God who will meet our needs. At the same time, God entrusts a responsibility to heads of households to be provident, that is, to consider tomorrow and to make sure there is food and clothing for the family.

The first time we find the word providence in the Old Testament is in the narrative of Abraham’s offering of Isaac upon the altar. God called Abraham to take his son Isaac, whom he loved, to a mountain and offer him as a sacrifice. Quite naturally, Abraham anguished under a great internal struggle with God’s command, and as Abraham prepared to obey, Isaac asked him, “Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?” (Genesis 22:7). Abraham replied, “God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son” (v. 8). Abraham spoke here of Jehovah jireh, “God will provide.” That is the first time the Bible speaks of God’s providence, which has to do with God’s making a provision for our needs. And of course, this passage looks forward to the ultimate provision He has made by virtue of His divine sovereignty, the supreme Lamb who was sacrificed on our behalf. ~ **Dr. R.C. Sproul, Sr.**

## **Keeping the Faith in a Faithless Age**

“The greatest question of our time,” historian Will Durant offered, “is not communism versus individualism, not Europe versus America, not even East versus the West; it is whether men can live without God.” That question, it now appears, will be answered in our own day.

For centuries, the Christian church has been the center of Western civilization. Western culture, government, law, and society were based on explicitly Christian principles. Concern for the individual, a commitment to human rights, and respect for the good, the beautiful, and the true—all of these grew out of Christian convictions and the influence of revealed religion.

All of these, we now hasten to add, are under serious attack. The very notion of right and wrong is now discarded by large sectors of American society. Where it is not discarded, it is often debased. Taking a page out of Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland, modern secularists simply declare wrong, right, and right, wrong.

### **A NEW LANDSCAPE**

Quaker theologian D. Elton Trueblood once described America as a “cut flower civilization.” Our culture, he argued, is cut off from its Christian roots like a flower cut at the stem. Though the flower will hold its beauty for a time, it is destined to wither and die.

When Trueblood spoke those words more than two decades ago, the flower still had some color and signs of life. But the blossom has long since lost its vitality, and it is time for the fallen petals to be acknowledged.

“If God does not exist,” Fyodor Dostoevsky’s Ivan Karamazov argued, “everything is permitted.” The permissiveness of modern American society can scarcely be exaggerated, but it can be traced directly to the fact that modern men and women act as if God does not exist or is powerless to accomplish His will.



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## ***Keeping the Faith in a Faithless Age***

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The Christian church now finds itself facing a new reality. The church no longer represents the central core of Western culture. Though outposts of Christian influence remain, these are exceptions rather than the rule. For the most part, the church has been displaced by the reign of secularism.

The daily newspaper brings a constant barrage that confirms the current state of American society. This age is not the first to see unspeakable horror and evil, but it is the first to deny any consistent basis for identifying evil as evil or good as good.

The faithful church is, for the most part, tolerated as one voice in the public arena, but only so long as it does not attempt to exercise any credible influence on the state of affairs. Should the church speak forcefully to an issue of public debate, it is castigated as coercive and out of date.

### **A NEW ROLE**

How does the church think of itself as it faces this new reality? During the 1980s, it was possible to think in ambitious terms about the church as the vanguard of a moral majority. That confidence has been seriously shaken by the events of the past decade.

Little progress toward the re-establishment of a moral center of gravity can be detected. Instead, the culture has moved swiftly toward a more complete abandonment of all moral conviction.

The confessing church must now be willing to be a moral minority, if that is what the times demand. The church has no right to follow the secular siren call toward moral revisionism and politically correct positions on the issues of the day.

Whatever the issue, the church must speak as the church—that is, as the community of fallen but redeemed, who stand under divine authority. The concern of the church is not to know its own mind, but to know and follow the mind of God. The church's convictions must not emerge from the ashes of our own fallen wisdom but from the authoritative Word of God, which reveals the wisdom of God and His commands.

The church is to be a community of character. The character produced by a people who stand under the authority of the sovereign God of the universe will inevitably be at odds with a culture of unbelief.

### **AN OLD CALL**

The American church faces a new situation. This new context is as current as the morning newspaper and as old as those first Christian churches in Corinth, Ephesus, Laodicea, and Rome. Eternity will record whether the American church is willing to submit only to the authority of God or whether the church will forfeit its calling in order to serve lesser gods.

The church must awaken to its status as a moral minority and hold fast to the gospel we have been entrusted to preach. In so doing, the deep springs of permanent truth will reveal the church to be a life-giving oasis amid America's moral desert. ~ ***Dr. R. Albert Mohler, Jr.***



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If you have a May birthday or anniversary that is not posted here or is listed in error, please e-mail Walt at ([gwlcf10415@gmail.com](mailto:gwlcf10415@gmail.com)).

## **Birthdays and Anniversaries Corner May 2021**

### Birthdays

<b>Elyse T. (1)</b>	<b>Jackson T. (22)</b>
<b>Sarah B. (22)</b>	<b>Brian R. (26)</b>
<b>Mike M. (22)</b>	<b>John H. (30)</b>

### Anniversaries

<b>Tom and Marcie S. (22)</b>
<b>Ben and Charlene S. (25)</b>

On April 11th Nic Gallaher was baptized and became a new covenant member of West Suffolk Baptist Church. As a standing tradition the entire church read the church covenant which signifies our love and commitment to one another. He and Katie Skora plan to marry on May 22nd. Congratulations to the newlyweds to be!



**West Suffolk Baptist Church  
Leadership**

The West Suffolk Epistle is a monthly publication of West Suffolk Baptist Church.

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Please submit information to the editor by the second Sunday of each month preceding publication by e-mail, in person or at the church office. The editor reserves the right to edit for content or space. May the Father be glorified in every word.

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