



Soteriology

The Perfect Sufficiency of the Atonement

Introduction:

What makes Christ's atonement perfect and sufficient for sinners? This question stands at the heart of Christian theology. From the earliest centuries of the church, theologians have wrestled not only with how Christ saves, but also with how much His atonement accomplishes. Was His death enough to satisfy divine justice once for all? Was it truly capable of saving all who come to Him in faith?

I. Clarification of Terms

A. Atonement

1. "Advocates of this theory believe that on the cross a commercial transaction took place in 'The term is derived from Anglo-Saxon words meaning 'making at one,' hence 'at-one-ment.' It presupposes a separation or alienation that needs to be overcome if human beings are to know God and have fellowship with him.'"¹
2. Its use in theology is to denote the work of Christ in dealing with the problem posed by the sin of man, and in bringing sinners into right relation with God.²
3. "The word 'atonement' occurs many times in the OT but only once in the NT (Rom 5:11). Modern translations generally, and more correctly, render the word 'reconciliation.' The idea of atonement is ever-present in the NT, however, and is one of the fundamental concepts of Scripture."³
4. At its most basic level, to atone means to satisfy the need.⁴

B. Perfect Sufficiency of the Atonement

1. The perfect sufficiency of the atonement of Christ refers to the complete and all-satisfying effectiveness of Jesus' sacrificial death to accomplish salvation for sinners.
2. It means that Christ's atoning work on the cross fully met every requirement of God's justice, satisfied divine wrath against sin, and secured the forgiveness and reconciliation of all who believe in Him, without any need for addition or supplement.
3. In a penal substitutionary sense, this means that Jesus bore the full penalty for sin as the sinner's substitute, so that nothing more is required to remove guilt or earn favor with God.
4. Christ's atonement is *perfect* because it is once for all (Hebrews 10:10–14), *sufficient* because it completely satisfies God's righteous demands (Romans 3:25–26), and *effective* because it truly redeems those who trust in Him (1 Peter 3:18).
5. "If there is one description to be applied to the nature of Christ's penal-substitutionary atonement, it is that it is a perfectly sufficient sacrifice."⁵

¹ Robert W. Lyon and Peter Toon, "Atonement," in *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 231.

² L. L. Morris, "Atonement," in *New Bible Dictionary*, ed. D. R. W. Wood et al. (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 102.

³ Robert W. Lyon and Peter Toon, "Atonement," in *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 231.

⁴ Pastor Alex Martin in a casual conversation on 9-26-2025.

⁵ John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue, eds., *Biblical Doctrine: A Systematic Summary of Bible Truth* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 539.

II. The Imperfect Nature of the Levitical Sacrifices

- **Hebrews 10:1–4 (ESV)** — *1 For since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw near. 2 Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, since the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have any consciousness of sins? 3 But in these sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year. 4 For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.*

A. The Shadow of Good Things to Come

1. The Levitical sacrifices were no more than a shadow of the good things to come. The old covenant of the Mosaic law couldn't compare to the glory of the new covenant established in Christ.
2. "The old, the Mosaic law, was but the shadow cast by the new covenant. In the Law, there was only the rough outline of the new covenant, but not all its colors and details."⁶
3. "The chief point of contrast was made in regard to the sacrificial system enacted by the Mosaic law. The phrase "those sacrifices" refers to the animal sacrifices mentioned in chapter 9, particularly those offered annually on the 10th of Tishri, the Day of Atonement. They were inadequate because they could not perfect those who offered them."⁷
4. "The entire Jewish ceremonial (tabernacle, priest, and victim) was a shadow of the coming blessings of the gospel dispensation. But it was not the very image of the things; it presented only a rude and incomplete sketch of the great facts and doctrines of Christianity. Take one point as an example. The victims under the Law were dragged unwillingly to the altar; how inaccurate this feature is as compared with the loving obedience and the voluntary self-sacrifice of the Lord Jesus!"⁸

B. The Impossibility of the Levitical Sacrifices Perfecting Sinners

1. The author of Hebrews states that it can never be that the sacrifices of animals could ever perfect those who offered them. He gives a couple of reasons that this is true.
2. If the sacrifice of animals attained perfect atonement, then why did the sacrifices ever need to be repeated? That's the point of verse two. If the Levitical sacrifices accomplished full and perfect atonement, then there would be no need for them to ever be repeated; their debt would be satisfied and their conscience cleansed.
3. Verse three tells us that the Levitical sacrifices actually accomplished the opposite of cleansing the conscious of sin; those sacrifices were actually intended to be a yearly reminder of sin.
4. "It is clear that they were continually aware of their guilt before God because their consciousness of guilt forced them to keep on offering animal sacrifices, not only on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, but on various occasions between the annual Day of Atonement."⁹
5. "The divinely appointed repetition of the Levitical sacrifices showed that God could not accept them as a real atonement, and therefore could not forget the offences of the

⁶ Ralph W. Harris, ed., *Hebrews–Jude*, The Complete Biblical Library: Study Bible (World Library Press, 1989), 117.

⁷ Ibid., 117.

⁸ H. D. M. Spence-Jones, ed., *Hebrews*, The Pulpit Commentary (London; New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1909), 271.

⁹ Ralph W. Harris, ed., *Hebrews–Jude*, The Complete Biblical Library: Study Bible (World Library Press, 1989), 117.

worshippers. It was intended also to press home upon the consciences of the people the thought of the accumulated arrears of unexpiated sin.”¹⁰

III. The Perfect Sufficiency of the Atonement

- **Hebrews 10:5–18 (ESV)** — 5 *Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said, “Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body have you prepared for me; 6 in burnt offerings and sin offerings you have taken no pleasure. 7 Then I said, ‘Behold, I have come to do your will, O God, as it is written of me in the scroll of the book.’ ” 8 When he said above, “You have neither desired nor taken pleasure in sacrifices and offerings and burnt offerings and sin offerings” (these are offered according to the law), 9 then he added, “Behold, I have come to do your will.” He does away with the first in order to establish the second. 10 **And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.** 11 And every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. 12 But when **Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God,** 13 waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet. **14 For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.** 15 And the Holy Spirit also bears witness to us; for after saying, 16 “This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my laws on their hearts, and write them on their minds,” 17 then he adds, “I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more.” 18 **Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin.***

A. What does Psalm 40:6-8 have to do with this?

- **Psalm 40:6–8 (ESV)** — 6 *In sacrifice and offering you have not delighted, but you have given me an open ear. Burnt offering and sin offering you have not required. 7 Then I said, “Behold, I have come; in the scroll of the book it is written of me: 8 I delight to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart.”*
- 1. In verses 5-7, the author quotes this passage from Psalm 40 in reference to Christ and His sacrifice. What does this have to do with anything?
- 2. “In the English version of the Old Testament, Psalm 40:6 reads, “Mine ears hast thou opened,” while Hebrews 10:5 says, “A body hast thou prepared me.” Most contemporary commentators think the quotation in Hebrews substitutes “body” for “ears” as a whole for the part. However, this interpreter feels both Psalm 40 and Hebrews refer to the custom described in Exodus 21:6 and Deuteronomy 15:17.”¹¹ “In those verses there is a description of a slave who has been set free by his master but who wants to continue to serve him out of love. As a sign of his voluntary servitude, he has his ears digged or pierced.”¹²
- 3. This would make sense as to why the word “ear” and body have been paraphrased. “The point is that God did not prefer an animal sacrifice; He preferred the voluntary, loving servitude of Israel’s obedience as a living sacrifice as opposed to empty ritual sacrifices.”¹³

B. God doesn’t take pleasure in the sacrifice of animals.

1. It was common in ancient mythology for the gods to delight in the sacrifices of animals and to be satisfied by them, but the psalmist says that the God of Heaven has no delight or pleasure in the sacrifices or burnt offerings.

¹⁰ H. D. M. Spence-Jones, ed., *Hebrews*, The Pulpit Commentary (London; New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1909), 271.

¹¹ Ralph W. Harris, ed., *Hebrews–Jude*, The Complete Biblical Library: Study Bible (World Library Press, 1989), 119.

¹² *Ibid.*, 119.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 119.

2. "The legal sacrifices were useful only as types of the sacrifice of Christ, and his blood is the symbol of his own perfect obedience as our Substitute."¹⁴

C. Christ's offering was single and final.

1. Verse 10 states that the church has been sanctified through the offering of Jesus Christ once and for all. Sanctified here doesn't mean made completely holy, but rather set apart as holy.
2. "In no uncertain terms, the death of Jesus Christ is described as "the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all." These words highlight the voluntary, sacrificial nature of His death and underscore its superiority and permanence. He offered one sacrifice, and its consequences are permanent. The phrase *hēgiasmenoi esmen* is also emphatic. It means that by Christ's death believers have been and remain sanctified."¹⁵
3. The author of Hebrews compares Christ to the priest of the old covenant. The priest worked in the tabernacle and temple. "Many pieces of holy furniture adorned the tabernacle and temple, such as the laver, the showbread, the lampstand, and the ark. Yet one piece of furniture that was nowhere to be found was a chair. The priest of Israel never sat down but stood constantly, because his work was never done. Sin was ever present, and thus sacrifice was ever necessary."¹⁶ This is what verse 11 teaches.
4. Verse 12 tells us that after Christ offered Himself as the perfect sacrifice, that He sat down at the right hand of the Father. He sat because His work was accomplished. He has no other sacrifice to make. "Jesus is able to sit in the heavenly sanctuary because there is nothing more for Him to do in regard to making offering for human sin. He could truly announce, "It is finished!" By His one sacrifice He accomplished what all the offerings of lambs, bulls, and goats sacrificed under the Mosaic law could never accomplish."¹⁷
5. Verse 14 says, "For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified." But who are those who are being sanctified? Are people in a ongoing process of being saved or is it once and final following faith and repentance?
 - "The work of Christ's one sacrifice continues to sanctify believers; there is no need for a repetition of His sacrifice."¹⁸
6. The text goes on to say one of the most encouraging parts of this passage in verse 18. "Where there is forgiveness of these (sin), there is no longer any offering for sin." What is being said here is that if your sin has truly been forgiven, then there is no need for sin offerings.
 - "After the sacrifice of Calvary, there would be no more need for the annual expiatory rite on the Day of Atonement—a ceremony which, in fact, had only served to bring sins to remembrance. Now that the great redemption has been accomplished, the iniquities of the believer are really swept away and put an end to. God blots them out. He casts them behind his back. He makes them as though they had never been. And this obliteration evinces the absolute perfection of the atonement, and certifies the abolition of the Hebrew sacrifices."¹⁹

¹⁴ H. D. M. Spence-Jones, ed., *Hebrews*, The Pulpit Commentary (London; New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1909), 272.

¹⁵ Ralph W. Harris, ed., *Hebrews-Jude*, The Complete Biblical Library: Study Bible (World Library Press, 1989), 121.

¹⁶ John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue, eds., *Biblical Doctrine: A Systematic Summary of Bible Truth* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 541.

¹⁷ Ralph W. Harris, ed., *Hebrews-Jude*, The Complete Biblical Library: Study Bible (World Library Press, 1989), 123.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 123.

¹⁹ H. D. M. Spence-Jones, ed., *Hebrews*, The Pulpit Commentary (London; New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1909), 272.

IV. Implications of Perfect Sufficiency

A. The Atonement is fully sufficient to cover all sin.

1. The nature of Christ's atonement proves that it can cover all sin. No sin is beyond the reach of Christ's blood. The cross demonstrates that the debt of sin has been fully paid, not partially met, for whosoever would come to Christ.
 - **Colossians 2:13–14** — *13 And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses; 14 Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross;*
 - **1 John 1:7** — *But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and **the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.***
 - **1 Peter 1:18–19** — *18 Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; 19 But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot:*
 - **Romans 3:25–26** — *25 Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; 26 To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.*
 - **Hebrews 7:25** — *Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.*
2. Christ took away our sin debt by nailing it to His cross. It was paid in full. Christ's sacrifice, His blood, is what redeemed us and atoned for our sin. Christ's sufficient sacrifice is able to save all those who would come unto Him, He doesn't need to make another.

B. Christ attested to the finality of His work

1. When Christ accomplished His work on the cross, His final words assure us of the finality of our redemption.
 - **John 19:30** — *When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished: and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost.*
2. What we read as "It is finished" in English is translated from the Greek word "tetelestai." "The word 'tetelestai' was a common term in everyday life with multiple meaningful applications. In the context of Jesus' crucifixion, it signifies 'It is finished' - a declaration that goes beyond simply ending something, but indicates complete fulfillment. Merchants would use this term to mean 'the debt is paid in full,' which powerfully symbolizes how Jesus met the righteous demands of God's holy law through His sacrifice."²⁰

C. Nothing can be added to Christ's work of atonement.

1. "The atonement that he effected is *objective*—a work accomplished independent of and apart from those who will eventually partake of its benefits. No cooperating work or response to grace adds to or energizes this ground of our salvation. To be sure, those who subjectively experience the benefits of the atonement must respond in repentance and faith, but such responses belong to the *application* of redemption—not its *accomplishment*—and are themselves purchased by the perfect work that Christ has wrought."²¹

²⁰ Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 1:384.

²¹ John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue, eds., *Biblical Doctrine: A Systematic Summary of Bible Truth* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 539.

- **Titus 3:5** — *Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost;*
- **Ephesians 2:8–9** — *8 For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: 9 Not of works, lest any man should boast.*

Conclusion:

Christ's death on the cross was not partial or provisional—it was complete, final, and fully sufficient to save. Nothing we do can add to His finished work, for the price of sin has already been paid in full. Because of this, we rest not in our righteousness but in His perfect atonement that forever secures our salvation.