

“I am grateful that Jerry Bridges and Bob Bevington have invested themselves in considering the substitutionary atonement of Christ, for as they have shown, the cross brings a timely and unparalleled message of costly love and forgiveness. Their work is a thorough examination of this rich truth in the Scriptures, and you will be richer for their biblical insights.”

—Ravi Zacharias, author and speaker

“The next time I am asked for my top-ten reading list, this will be included! Clear and comprehensive, it leaves the reader in no doubt that this ‘great exchange’ is not only the heart of biblical theology but also the pivotal event of human history.”

—Alistair Begg, senior pastor, Parkside Church, Cleveland, Ohio

“In this timely book, men who have taught us so much about God’s transforming grace now marshal their resources to defend and define the glorious blessings of Christ’s atonement that exchanges our sin for his righteousness. No truth is more important; no book more needed.”

—Bryan Chapell, president, Covenant Theological Seminary

“The gospel announces a great exchange: the innocent God-Man assuming our debt as we inherit his righteousness. Those who love to hear that story will love to read this book and will be filled with fresh enthusiasm to share it with others.”

—Michael Horton, J. G. Machen professor of theology,
Westminster Seminary California

“All who read this book will be blessed and better informed.”

—Alan Andrews, president, U.S. Navigators

“I commend this volume to everyone who wants to understand more fully the nature of the atonement as taught by the apostles.”

—Timothy George, founding dean, Beeson Divinity School;
senior editor, *Christianity Today*

“All too often in our contemporary culture and, sadly, even in our contemporary church, we walk by the cross and offer only a passing glance. There is nourishment for the mind and the heart in the pages of *The Great Exchange*, because the subject is so profound and our need is so great for a long look and a deep drink.”

—Stephen B. Kellough, chaplain, Wheaton College

The Great Exchange

My Sin for His Righteousness

An Exposition of the Atonement of Jesus Christ
Patterned after *The Apostles' Doctrine of the Atonement*
by George Smeaton

Jerry Bridges
and Bob Bevington

CROSSWAY BOOKS

WHEATON, ILLINOIS

The Great Exchange: My Sin for His Righteousness
Copyright © 2007 by Jerry Bridges and Robert C. Bevington
Published by Crossway Books
a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers
1300 Crescent Street
Wheaton, Illinois 60187

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Cover design: Josh Dennis
First printing 2007
Printed in the United States of America

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Bridges, Jerry.
The Great Exchange: My Sin for His Righteousness / Jerry Bridges and Robert C. Bevington.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 978-1-58134-927-6 (tpb)
1. Atonement—Biblical teaching. 2. Bible. N.T.—Theology. I. Bevington, Bob, 1956- II. Title.

BS2545.A8B75 2007
232'.3—dc22

2007002653

DP		17	16	15	14	13	12	11	10	09	08	07		
15	14	13	12	11	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1

The Cross—where the God-man,
Jesus Christ, traded places with the sinners he redeemed,
exchanging his perfect righteousness
for their sin, condemnation, and death.

“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

Foreword

It is a great privilege and pleasure to have the opportunity to introduce and commend this important book. It is written by two authors who have something of the spirit of the men of Issachar in Old Testament days, who “had understanding of the times, to know what . . . to do” (1 Chron. 12:32), for *The Great Exchange* addresses one of the greatest weaknesses of the contemporary evangelical church—a failure to be centered on the center of the gospel.

Perhaps a little history will help clarify what I mean.

Sometime on October 31, 1517, in Wittenberg, Germany, a thirty-three-year-old monk of the Augustinian Order took a small mallet from his cassock, found a nail, and hammered into place some sheets of paper on which he had written, in as legible Latin as he could write, almost one hundred statements about the Christian gospel. It was his way of provoking discussion on topics he was prepared to discuss and, if need be, to debate in public. He could have had no expectation that these sheets of paper would almost overnight shake sixteenth-century Europe to its foundations and impact the structures of Western society for centuries to come. But he himself was in the process of discovering the power of the gospel to save and transform people’s lives, and he understood that at the heart of the gospel message stood the cross.

The monk's name was, of course, Martin Luther. The sheets of paper he posted came to be known publicly as the Ninety-five Theses. Among the last of them were these two statements:

Away, then, with all those prophets who say to the people of Christ, "Peace, peace," and there is no peace! (Thesis 92)
Blessed be all those prophets who say to the people of Christ, "Cross, cross," and there is no cross! (Thesis 93)

Luther meant that any gospel that does not focus on the death of Christ and its true significance, and any teaching on Christianity that does not emphasize a life of cross bearing cannot be the biblical gospel nor produce a Christ-honoring life. But when the cross is preached, and when a cross-centered life is lived, true joy and peace are known. At the heart of this gospel, Luther believed, lies the great and wonderful exchange that Christ has made for us on the cross. There Christ exchanged his righteousness for our sin, so that through faith we might exchange our sin for his righteousness (2 Cor. 5:21). Luther understood what Paul meant when he said that of first importance in the message of the gospel is this: "Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures" (1 Cor. 15:3). Ever since, evangelical Christians—gospel people—have believed, taught, preached, lived, died—and, yes, written books—in this conviction.

The world into which Luther spoke was in many ways different from ours. We have come far since then in science, in technology, in medicine, and in a thousand other things. But in the Western world at least, in one sphere we are in danger—perhaps surprisingly—of readopting patterns of life that bear an uncanny resemblance to those which Luther addressed. That sphere is to be found in the Christian church.

How so? The church of the Middle Ages was marked by several obvious characteristics. There was a strong emphasis on influence and power. One index of this was the way in which church leaders sought—and gained—social and political leverage and enjoyed having a voice at the table of the affairs of this world. Another

was the rise of what we call “megachurches” (which they called “cathedrals”). Here well-known and influential pastors (whom they called “bishops”) exercised great influence in their society. The model to which young ministers were encouraged to aspire was not faithfulness to the gospel, but success. In these churches the “quality of worship” was thought to be outstanding (stunning acoustics, magnificent musical performance beyond the ordinary). It was also a world where the image dominated the Word, where people—so it was thought—would not listen to preaching, and so drama became the order of the day, whether in the colorful liturgy of the services or in the famed medieval mystery plays. And, to some degree, if one wanted health, wealth, and (especially eternal) happiness, these, too, the church could provide, for it had men who possessed charismatic gifts. Indeed, from the extraordinary power in their hands one could receive forgiveness, and from them, or at least from objects they possessed, one could seek even physical healing.

But something was sadly absent from all this, as Luther, who was once part of the whole system well knew. The true message of the cross was lacking, and its true meaning obscured. Of course, the church would have argued that it was there—after all, even the buildings were shaped in the form of a cross, not to mention the crosses that were worn or carried by its ministers. But the cross was not the message that was being preached; the way of the cross—a cross-centered and cross-driven life—was not seen as the very epicenter of Christianity.

It is difficult to avoid seeing some unnerving parallels to the evangelical church in our own society: megachurches, desire for political influence, ministers as gurus, charismatic gift-givers, an emphasis on worship as performance, drama as necessary for a nonverbal culture, and one other thing—a relative silence about the cross and its true meaning.

A moment’s reflection is likely to confirm that this is true. What have been the themes of the seminars, conferences, books, sermons, classes, DVDs, CDs, and songs that we have attended, heard, seen, read, and talked about recently? How many—what percentage of

them—have been cross-centered? Of the titles of Christian books you have read, or of which you know, how many highlight the cross?

The answer to that question should probably alarm us.

More than thirty years ago in his landmark book *Knowing God*, J. I. Packer noted, “If you want to judge how well a person understands Christianity, find out how much he makes of the thought of being God’s child, and having God as his Father.”¹ I would add today: “If you want to judge how well a person understands the gospel, ask him what he makes of the death of Christ, and what the message of the cross is.” The real Christian answers that while the message of the cross is foolishness to some and a stumbling block to others, to Christians it is the saving wisdom and power of God (1 Cor. 1:18–24). The confession of the real Christian is, “Far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world” (Gal. 6:14).

We need to understand that the cross stands at the center and heart of the gospel. Without it there is no gospel. That is why the message of this book is potentially so important for us and for our Christian living, and for the shape, style, and ethos of our church life. It is a book about what Jesus Christ accomplished on the cross. It takes us to the heart of the gospel.

I noted that this book has two authors. Perhaps it would be better to say that it is a book with two builders and one architect. For behind it, as a kind of architectural design, lies the work of a wonderful, but now-little-known, nineteenth-century Scottish author and theologian, George Smeaton. In 1868 and 1870 he published two magnificent volumes, totaling almost one thousand pages, in which he carefully expounded all of the New Testament passages on the atonement. They bore the titles *Christ’s Doctrine of the Atonement* and *The Apostles’ Doctrine of the Atonement*.²

Smeaton was an outstanding scholar with a brilliant mind and a deep love for Christ. My own conviction is that these two great volumes should regularly be in the hands of every person who teaches and preaches the gospel of Christ. They are treasure troves.

But they are also lengthy. Now, out of a shared deep appreciation for the good that Smeaton's exposition has done for them personally, Jerry Bridges and Bob Bevington have taken the architectural design he employed for the second of these volumes, *The Apostles' Doctrine of the Atonement*, and have built their exposition of the gospel from the same biblical materials Smeaton first used.

The Great Exchange is the wonderful result. It meets the standard set by Lord Bacon's famous essay "Of Studies": "Some books are to be tasted, others to be swallowed, and some few to be chewed and digested." Here is spiritual food to be chewed and digested. It will do you good. And it may well make you sing,

Bearing shame and scoffing rude,
In my place, condemned he stood;
Sealed my pardon with his blood:
Hallelujah! What a Savior!³

I, for one, hope it does.

Sinclair B. Ferguson
First Presbyterian Church
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Preface

This book is first and foremost about the gospel, the good news that Jesus Christ is the sinless sin bearer of all who are united to him by faith. But this raises two questions: (1) What does it mean that Jesus is our sinless sin bearer? And (2) What does it mean to become united to him by faith? Our purpose in this book is to answer these all-important questions by unpacking the key verse of our book—“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 Cor. 5:21)—within the context of the rest of Scripture.

The Great Exchange, in which God caused our sin to be traded for Christ’s righteousness, is crystallized and summed up in 2 Corinthians 5:21. The Great Exchange and the related expression *substitutionary atonement* represent the banners under which we will examine many passages of Scripture. These two banners will lead us deep into the historical gospel as the sole source and substance of the Christian faith.

Why write a book on this subject? Why now? The gospel is a timeless message and therefore extremely relevant for our day and age. But it is not only relevant; it is essential, because it is the only solution ever offered by God for the perpetual sin dilemma of mankind. Throughout history, the message of the Bible has not changed. The original languages are still the original languages, and the ancient manuscripts still declare this same message.

Yet, in recent times it has become apparent that some in the church have drifted away from the historical gospel and ventured to redefine sin and redemption and even the meaning of the cross. Some have done this in a sincere attempt to make the gospel message more acceptable to today's culture. Others have attempted to usher in an age of greater authenticity and depth of commitment. But regardless of sincerity, no attempt to reform the church can succeed if it departs in any way from the centrality of the message that our sinless Christ actually died on a real cross as the sin bearer for those who are united to Christ by faith in his substitutionary sacrifice and righteousness.

The message of the cross—the historical gospel of the God-man, Jesus Christ, who personally visited the earth, which was created through him, with the mission of redeeming his own people with his own infinitely precious, bloody, substitutionary death—has been and must remain the solitary basis and the singular foundation of the Christian faith and worldview.

This gospel—that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures—is rooted in pre-creation, revealed in ancient prophecy, and fulfilled in real, time-space, dimensional history. It is a message that is alive, and it is the only message that imparts life. It is a message that simply will not budge in order to morph into the paradigms of seekers or culture. It consists of its own unchangeable paradigm. Yes, it is absolutist; if there is one thing in the universe that deserves to be, it is the gospel. Its immutability is woven into the fabric of authentic Christianity.

We do recognize, however, that the gospel is like an infinitely precious diamond in which there are multiple facets reflecting and refracting the brilliance of the message in various ways. But all facets of the gospel are necessarily connected to the substance of the gospel—the message of substitutionary atonement. The substance of the gospel and all its facets emanate from and draw attention to the cross, the site of the Great Exchange, where the light of the knowledge of the glory of God is seen by redeemed sinners in the face of Christ crucified (2 Cor. 4:6; 1 Cor. 2:2). The facets, while

never ceasing to be connected to the substance, supply wonderful truths that help us more fully apply the meaning of Christ's great atonement. Here are a few:

- 1) In the gospel, our worldview is radically changed. We refer to this facet as the gospel of the kingdom. It means that our definitions of health, wealth, security, comfort, and prosperity are turned upside down compared to the world's view. It means we embrace the paradoxes of Christ's teachings—to live is to die, to be great is to be a servant of all, and to be rich is to give sacrificially. All our values change, as do our views on community, poverty, gender, racism, orphans and widows, and the sick and the weak. But none of this can happen authentically apart from the cross, where our sin was exchanged for his righteousness.
- 2) In the gospel, Jesus provides us with the perfect example of how to live. When we need insight and direction, we can ask, "What would Jesus do?" We search the Scriptures to see how he handled situations. We look for the attitudes he conveyed and the way he communicated. But all of his doing and saying was connected to his mission in which he set his face like a flint to provide a perfect, sinless sacrifice. And were it not for the fact that his mission was successfully completed at the cross, we would never have the ability to apply the example of Jesus to our lives.
- 3) In the gospel, Satan was dethroned, and we were set free from his dominion. Sin and Satan and death no longer reign over us. We are free for the process of renewal, to be transformed into the image of the Son. But our freedom is not a stand-alone feature of the gospel; it is linked to the cross, where we are united into Christ in his obedient life, death to sin, and glorious resurrection. And the outward evidence of our transformation should primarily serve to deflect the eyes of observers to the cross that made our freedom possible.

- 4) In the gospel, we are provided with the Holy Spirit, who empowers us to grow, to be transformed, and to preach and serve. The Holy Spirit provides gifts of inward and outward fruit bearing. The gospel would not be complete without the role of the Holy Spirit, but the Holy Spirit is not the complete gospel. The Holy Spirit came because Christ died for our sins as our substitute.

So we conclude that our goal is to declare the whole counsel of God in the gospel and to show how every aspect can be traced back to its substance in the substitutionary atonement. Our book is not about us; it is not our story. We aim to disappear now and display Christ and him crucified as the treasure of all time. We pray that you, too, will become self-forgetful as you turn these pages, because what you see here is God in Christ doing something that is truly larger than life, namely, providing an all-sufficient substitutionary atonement for us by his perfect, obedient life in the flesh and his perfect sacrificial death in the flesh. Herein you will find the meaning of the Great Exchange, the monumental reality that in the gospel: “For our sake [God] made [Christ] to be sin who knew no sin, so that in [Christ] we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Cor. 5:21).

This book is patterned after a nineteenth-century classic, *The Apostles’ Doctrine of the Atonement*,¹ written by Scottish theologian George Smeaton. While our book is neither an abridgment nor a modernization, it is nevertheless designed to make the brilliance and depth of Smeaton’s work accessible to mainstream readers while faithfully and accurately representing the intent of his original exposition. We acknowledge that we stand on the shoulders of others in addition to George Smeaton. We especially acknowledge our indebtedness to John Piper. Readers of Dr. Piper will recognize some of his well-known expressions and concepts in our text.

We also want to thank Greg Plitt for his invaluable assistance with the earlier drafts of the manuscript. Thanks also to Allan Fisher, senior vice president of book publishing at Crossway, and to Lydia Brownback for her outstanding editorial work. And also thanks to

the number of friends who read portions of the original draft for their encouragement and suggestions. Finally, we invite you to visit www.thegreatexchangebook.com, where you will find a free study guide and other tools for deepening your personal or your group's appreciation of the wondrous cross.

Introduction

When the apostle Paul wanted to remind the Corinthian church of the gospel, he wrote, “For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures” (1 Cor. 15:3).

Christ died for our sins. The gospel is the solution to our sin problem. So, before we can understand and appreciate the gospel, we need to understand the doctrine of sin. The basis for this understanding takes us back to the garden of Eden, where, from the moment Adam ate of the forbidden fruit (Gen. 3:6), sin became humanity’s overarching problem. Adam, by God’s appointment, stood as the representative of the entire human race so that his guilt became our guilt, and his resulting sinful nature was passed on to all of us. Paul speaks of this representative nature of Adam’s sin and its consequences when he states:

Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned. . . . Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. For as by the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man’s obedience the many will be made righteous. (Rom. 5:12, 18–19)

Thus, we were born sinners. In fact, David wrote that we were sinners even from the time of conception in our mother’s womb

(Ps. 51:5). And because we were born sinners, committing our own personal sins serves to compound our condition on a daily basis.

What is sin? It is often described as “missing the mark”—that is, failure to live up to the rigorous standard of God’s holy law. But the Bible makes it clear that it is much more than that. In Leviticus 16:21, sin is described as *transgression*; literally, as rebellion against authority. In the prophet Nathan’s confrontation of David over his sins of adultery and murder, Nathan describes sin as a *despising* of both God’s Word and God himself (2 Sam. 12:9–10). And in Numbers 15:30–31, Moses characterizes sinners as acting “with a high hand,” meaning defiantly. Therefore, we can conclude that sin is a rebellion against God’s sovereign authority, a despising of his Word and his person, and even a defiance of God himself. It is no wonder Paul wrote that because of our sin, we were by nature objects of God’s wrath (Eph. 2:3).

We would like to think that, as believers, such descriptions of sin no longer apply to us. We look at the gross and obvious sins of society around us, and we tend to define sin in terms of those actions. We fail to see that our anxiety, our discontentment, our ingratitude toward God, our pride and selfishness, our critical and judgmental attitudes toward others, our gossip, our unkind words to or about others, our preoccupation with the things of this life, and a whole host of other subtle sins are an expression of rebellion against God and a despising of his Word and person.

The truth is that even the most mature believers continue to sin in thought, word, deed, and especially in motive. We continually experience the inward spiritual guerilla warfare Paul describes when he states, “For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do” (Gal. 5:17). That is why it was necessary for the apostle Peter to exhort us to “abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul” (1 Pet. 2:11).

This, then, is the doctrine of sin. Because of Adam’s sin as representative of the entire human race, we are born with a sinful nature

and as objects of God's wrath. We then aggravate our condition before God with our personal sins, whether they be the gross, obvious sins, or the subtle sins we too often tolerate in ourselves and in our Christian circles. And it is in view of this truth of the doctrine of sin that we should understand Paul's words, "Christ died for our sins." It is with this understanding of the nature and reality of sin that we should understand the words of the angel to Joseph, "You shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins" (Matt. 1:21).

Christ died for our sins. This phrase suggests two ideas—substitution and sacrifice. Christ died in our place as our substitute and representative. Just as God appointed Adam to act as representative of all humanity, so he appointed Jesus Christ to act on behalf of all who trust in him. There is no better Scripture to see the idea of substitution than this one:

Surely *he* has borne *our* griefs
and carried *our* sorrows;
yet we esteemed him stricken,
smitten by God, and afflicted.
But *he* was wounded for *our* transgressions;
he was crushed for *our* iniquities;
upon *him* was the chastisement that brought *us* peace,
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 has laid on *him*
the iniquity of *us* all. (Isa. 53:4–6)

Note the repeated contrast which the Spirit-inspired prophet draws between the words *he* and *our*, or *him* and *us*. Surely any unbiased reader cannot fail to see in the passage the idea that Jesus suffered as our substitute, bearing the punishment for sin that we deserve.

The second idea, sacrifice, is foreshadowed in the sacrificial system of the Old Testament era, especially in the sacrifices required on the annual Day of Atonement as described in Leviticus 16. On that day,

the high priest would cast lots over two goats, one of which was to be killed, its blood carried into the Holy Place to be sprinkled over and in front of the mercy seat, thus symbolizing the propitiation of the wrath of God.

After performing this ritual, the high priest would emerge from the holy place and place his hands on the live goat and confess over it all the sins of the people, symbolically putting those sins on the head of the goat. Then the goat would be led away into the wilderness, signifying the removal of the people's sins from the presence of both God and the people. The result of Christ's death was foreshadowed by both goats. The sprinkled blood of the first goat pictured the death of Christ as propitiating or exhausting the cup of the wrath of God toward us because of our sin (Matt. 26:39; John 18:11). The sending away of the second goat pictured the result of Christ's death in removing our sins from us. As Psalm 103:12 says, "As far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us."

Psalm 103:12, as well as other Old Testament word pictures such as "blotting out our transgressions" and "remembering sins no more" (Isa. 43:25) and casting "all our sins into the depths of the sea" (Mic. 7:19) speak of the forgiveness of our sins. This message of forgiveness of sin through the death of Christ was central to apostolic preaching. See, for example, Acts 2:38; 10:43; and 13:38, as well as Paul's words in Romans 4:7–8; Ephesians 1:7; and Colossians 2:13. And as the writer of Hebrews wrote, "Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins" (Heb. 9:22). (In fact, for those who want to pursue further the nature and purpose of Christ's sacrifice, Hebrews 9 is a good place to start).

But forgiveness of our sins is not the ultimate purpose of Christ's death. As Paul says in Titus 2:14, "[Jesus Christ] gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works." It was never God's intent that Jesus should die to pay the penalty for our sins so that we might continue to live in them. He died so that all who believe in him might become new creations (2 Cor. 5:17).

But that could not occur until after the sin that separated us from God had been dealt with through the substitutionary sacrifice of Christ on the cross.

The key word in Leviticus 16 is the word *atonement*. Animals were sacrificed to make atonement for sins. This, of course, was only a picture of the one great sacrifice of atonement that Christ would make, once for all time, to put away the sin of all who would ever trust in him. Atonement is defined as: “The satisfactory compensation made for an offense or injury, in which a price is paid on behalf of the offending party, resulting in their discharge from the obligation to pay the due penalty.” Atonement allows for restoration of the previously disrupted relationship. Simply stated, atonement is the price paid to reconcile enemies.

In the biblical context, we have the following:

- *The offended party* is God—the holy and omnipotent sovereign.
- *The offense* is sin of any kind, as defined by the Bible.
- *The offending party* consists of sinners, that is, all humanity.
- *The penalty* is the full force of God’s inconceivable eternal wrath.
- *The price paid* on behalf of sinners is the atoning death of Christ.

Because Christ made atonement for our sins by suffering in our place as our substitute, we speak of the *substitutionary atonement* of Christ. A similar expression used to sum up the work of Christ is *penal substitution*, meaning that as our substitute, Christ paid the penalty for our sins. These two terms have, to some degree, fallen out of fashion in today’s evangelical world. But they are basic to our understanding of the gospel and so need to be restated and reaffirmed for twenty-first century readers. That is what we are seeking to do in this book.

Although *atonement* rarely appears as a stand-alone word in the New Testament, the concept of Christ’s atonement and its

application comprise the primary themes of the entire Bible—Old and New Testament alike. The passages included in this study contain synonyms of the word *atonement* or concepts related to atonement, such as: *the death of Christ, the blood of Christ, the cross, sacrifice, ransom, propitiation, redemption, mediator, and reconciliation*.

There are two features of Smeaton's book *The Apostles' Doctrine of the Atonement* that make it relevant and important to us today. First, he examines and expounds every passage of Scripture from Acts through Revelation that deals with the atonement. Because of Smeaton's design to address every passage dealing with the subject, the book is redundant in a wonderfully effectual manner—the reader keeps getting the same message from slightly different perspectives so as to enhance, embellish, and deepen his or her understanding of the gospel. And with that comes passion for the person of Christ and gratitude for his finished work on the cross.

Second, Smeaton provides excellent description and emphasis on the believer's union with Christ as the basis for our ability to enjoy the benefits of Christ's atoning work. Today, for example, some people ask how it can be just for God to punish an innocent man, Jesus, for the sins of other people. The answer, which is clearly taught in Scripture, is found in the believer's legal union with Christ; that is, because Christ was our representative in his life and death, it was just of God to punish him for our sins. As the prophet Isaiah said, "The LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all" (Isa. 53:6).

Before Christ died for our sins, however, he lived a perfectly obedient life. He fully obeyed the moral will of God every second of his life. And just as our sins were charged to him so that he justly paid their penalty, so Christ's perfect obedience, which culminated in his obedience unto death on the cross, is credited to all who trust in him—once again because of our legal union with him. And it is Smeaton's grasp of this truth and his continual emphasis of it that makes his book so exciting. For example, he writes in this vein: "When Christ lived a perfect life, we believers lived a perfect life. And when Christ died on the cross, we believers died on the cross."

In other words, Christ didn't just live and die for us. Rather, we are so united to him by faith that God sees his perfect life as our life and his death as our death.

It is often said that the life of Jesus is to be imitated by his followers. This, of course, is the idea behind the popular question "What would Jesus do?" That we are to follow the example of Christ is indeed taught in the Scriptures (for example, see John 13:13–15 and 1 Pet. 2:21). The reality, though, is that our very best efforts at following his example are always imperfect and defiled by our sinful nature. By contrast, his obedience was always perfect and complete and never defiled. Therefore, we should always look first at what Jesus did *as our representative* before looking at him *as our example*. All our efforts toward spiritual growth should flow out of the realization of what he has already done to secure for us our perfect standing before God.

George Smeaton also authored a companion volume to *The Apostles' Doctrine of the Atonement* entitled *Christ's Doctrine of the Atonement*,¹ which examines similar Bible texts in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, and in which Christ personally explains the scope, nature, and outcome of his upcoming death on behalf of sinners. Smeaton examines how Jesus explains his death and resurrection as the guarantee that God indeed forgives those sinners who trust in his substitutionary death for the resolution of their personal sin dilemma. In these gospel accounts, Jesus offered insight into the *divine view* of the cross.

Whereas Christ spoke of his upcoming suffering and death for sin, the apostles offered the *completed view* of Christ's work of atonement since they spoke and wrote of it after the fact. The apostles refer to it as an eternally valid, historical, and central fact bursting with blood-bought blessings that abide now and forever. In their inspired works, they explore Old Testament Scriptures and relate them to the life and death of Christ to explain how his great atonement covers, colors, and shapes the lives of those who receive it and are thereby saved by it. In this book, we will focus on the apostles' view of the atonement.

This book, then, is about Christ's glorious work of atonement culminating at the cross. There are no stories inserted to illustrate points. There are no anecdotes added to entertain the reader. None of this is needed, because a rightly understood view of the cross as the treasure of all time can never be boring, trivial, or lacking in excitement. Our goal is to assist the reader in exulting in the unfathomable riches of Christ's atonement as contained in God's Word.

This book is for every Christian, regardless of one's level of spiritual maturity. Many believers view the gospel only as a message to be shared with unbelievers but not personally applicable to themselves anymore. We have learned from personal experience, as well as from the writings of some of the great writers of previous centuries, that we need the gospel as well. We need it to remind ourselves that our day-to-day standing with God is based on Christ's righteousness, not our performance. We need the gospel to motivate us to strive in our daily experience to be what we are in our standing before God. We need it to produce joy in our lives when we encounter the inevitable trials of living in a fallen and sin-cursed world.

It is our prayer, then, that God will be pleased to use this book to help many believers think afresh and more deeply of the gospel so that they may rejoice in the good news of the gospel of Christ's great atonement, and that, above all, Christ may be glorified.

Notes

Foreword

1. J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1973), 182.
2. They have been republished in two fine volumes by The Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh and Carlisle, PA.
3. From the hymn “Man of Sorrows” by Philip P. Bliss (1838–1876).

Preface

1. George Smeaton, *The Apostles’ Doctrine of the Atonement* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1991; orig. 1870).

Introduction

1. George Smeaton, *Christ’s Doctrine of the Atonement* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1991; orig. 1870).

Chapter 6

1. Roland H. Bainton, *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1950), 49.