

If you are an avid reader of the Scriptures you know that there is a good deal of repetition in the setting forth of those doctrines concerning our redemption. God never tires of finding ways of setting forth this central doctrine of the Bible. And the church has also never tired of finding ways of restating and repeating this saving truth about our redemption as the be all and end all of what matters to us for time and eternity. I pray that you also will never find it tiresome but join with the church in unending delight over this cardinal truth from the heart of God to our heart.

This morning God speaks to our heart from his through the pen of Jesus' disciple, the apostle John who tells us the gospel by using the picture of atonement. John writes in 1 John 2:1-6, "**My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world. We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands. The man who says, 'I know him,' but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But if anyone obeys his word, God's love is truly made complete in him: Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did**" This is God's Word.

In the name of the Righteous One, Jesus Christ, our Advocate, dear children of God,

Some years ago when my family and I were on furlough visiting our family and friends in South Dakota we stopped one afternoon at Rose's Café for dinner in Roscoe, South Dakota. While the ten of us were dining an old friend of mine came into the café. We chatted for a few minutes and then he left and went to his own table to eat. After a while we finished our meal and I went up to the counter where the till was to pay my bill. The waitress happily told me, "Your bill has already been covered!" Apparently, my friend who had already finished his dinner and left to go back to work, paid my bill and didn't tell me about it. He graciously covered my bill.

This morning John is telling us that that is what Jesus did for us on the cross. He covered our bill. John tells us that "**Jesus is the atoning sacrifice for our sins.**" The word *atone* means "to make a payment for, to make right again, to restore." An atoning sacrifice is one that makes payment or reparation for the damage done to God's justice and holiness. An atoning sacrifice is one that makes good what was ruined and made vile by sin. An atoning sacrifice is one that restores the damned to God's grace and favor by the payment of the price demanded for such a restoration. Jesus' precious blood, his sacrifice, his death atoned us. It made us *at one with* God. It covered our debt to God which resulted from sin. This morning let's consider what John is telling us under the theme, **Jesus Covered Our Debt**. How much of our debt did he pay? How many of us did he pay the debt for? What did his covering our debt make us?

1

When my friend paid for our meals, he didn't just pay for our drinks or our desserts. He paid for everything we ate and drank and owed the restaurant for. That's what John tells us Jesus did with his atoning sacrifice. He paid for all of our sins.

Jesus is the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Notice the word is in the plural. That means that Jesus' payment covered all of our sins. John said it even more clearly in the first chapter of his letter. There he wrote, "**The blood of Jesus, his Son, purified us from all sin.**" (1 John 1:7) Every single one of our sins demands eternal death, separation from God forever in hell, but every single one of our sins has been covered by the blood of

Christ, the payment he made on the cross. Every single one of our sins of doubt; every single one of our sins of lovelessness; every single one of our sins of greed and lust and envy and hatred has been covered; every single one of our sins of failing to gladly and willingly study and hear his word being preached; every single one of our sins of loving something or someone else more than him, every single one of our sins was covered on that cross! Jesus' atoning sacrifice has turned God's wrath away from us. Christ, as our substitute (vicarious), paid the price and suffered the penalty for every sin. When he cried out, "**It is finished**," from the cross this meant that everything that God demanded for a payment for sins was completed!

It is our *status* not our *nature* that has been changed because Christ gave himself as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. When we say that Christ has redeemed us, that he has covered our sins, we do not mean that we are now perfect in our nature or that we expect to become perfect in this life. Redemption from sin is complete on God's side. That is, no other price can be paid for sin than the one already paid by Christ in his vicarious atonement. We have been completely cleansed of the guilt of sin by the blood of Christ (1 John 1:7). We have been liberated from the curse that the law pronounces over every sinner (Galatians 3:13). But on our side, in our Christian lives, in our daily experience, this freedom from sin's rule remains a work in progress. Neither our love for God which is inspired by his love for us nor our zeal to serve our neighbor inspired by his service to us is ever perfect this side of heaven. It is our status, not our nature, that has been changed so that we are now dear children of God, brothers and sisters of Christ, instead of children of wrath. But our sinful nature has not yet been completely destroyed, so that we must wrestle against sin and temptation as long as we live. Nevertheless, we show our freedom from sin's rule by struggling against sin (See Romans 7). Though the struggle is imperfect and incomplete, nevertheless now we actually do strive to live in love to God, in loyalty to his Word, and in service to one another. We still have our inherited sinful nature, but the fact and proclamation of our redemption, of our forgiveness, gives us a new will that hates sin!

2

When my friend covered my bill at the restaurant he paid for all of us.

Likewise when Jesus shed his blood on the cross it was a vicarious atonement that didn't just cover all sins, but all sins of all people. John said, **He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.** You and I are included in that statement. Jesus didn't just cover the payment of believers; he also covered the payment of all unbelievers as well. Christ's payment is universal. "**For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life**" (John 3:16). God sent Jesus to make a payment for the sins of everyone because "**he wants all to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth**" (1 Timothy 2:4). If someone is not saved it's not because Christ did not pay for his sins. It's because he rejected that payment in unbelief. Who is the object of God's love? Peter tells us that God does not want anyone to perish, but that everyone come to repentance. (2 Peter 3:9) Therefore, "**He died for all**," Paul says (2 Corinthians 5:15). Yes, "**God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them**" (2 Cor. 5:19).

None of us had to worry about walking out of that restaurant that day because we knew that my friend paid for all of us. Everything we ate was paid for, covered. Likewise none of us needs to be fearful about Judgment Day. Christ paid for the sins of the whole world. All of us are covered. Who is left out as an object of God's gracious love? No one! His grace, his undeserved love, has the whole world as it's object. The world in its entirety is fallen and corrupt. The world deserves nothing but wrath and punishment. But God so loved the world, loved it so much that we sent his Son to redeem it. And because he sent his Son for the whole world you and I are also included. Our sins have also been covered! There is no doubt about that.

When my friend covered our bill at the restaurant how did we feel about that. I can only speak for myself. I was humbly thankful! You see, I knew I had not deserved that kind of treatment. That friend of had been a former employer of mine. The last day I worked for him I decided to quit the job he gave me faithfully six years without a two week notice and go to another job. In other words I wronged him. But in love he still covered our check. Humble gratitude and joy is what I felt.

Christ has covered our payment, our debt of sin. We did not deserve to be treated that way. He loved us despite the fact that we did not deserve his love. We thank him by loving others, first and foremost God himself. Yes, **“We love because God first loved us”** (1 John 4:19). His great act of love changes our words. Instead of cursing God, I praise God now. James wrote, **“Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be”** (James 3:10)! When we know that God has covered our debt with his own Son’s atoning sacrifice how can we from now on not praise him with our lips! We say with the Psalmist, **“I will exalt you, my God the King; I will praise your name for ever and ever. Every day I will praise you and extol your name for ever and ever”** (Psalm 145:1,2). It changes our actions too. We strive to imitate the love that God and His Son freely and willingly showed to us. (Krispy Kreme act of kindness shown me) We strive to pay forward acts of love shown us, don’t we. As Christ did that man at KK covered the debt that I was helpless to pay. We in thankfulness do the same for others. This is how we show that we love God. John said, **“We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands. The man who says, ‘I know him,’ but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But if anyone obeys his word, God’s love is truly made complete in him: Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did.”** “Must” because the love of Christ compels us!

I never had a chance to thank my friend that day because when I saw him paying the bill at the cash register I thought he was paying his bill. I didn’t realize that he was covering my debt. Isaiah the prophet says the same thing about Jesus’ suffering and death. When people saw him dying on the cross, Isaiah says, **“We considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed...the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all”** (Isaiah 53:4b-6). Jesus is the atoning sacrifice for our sins. He has covered our debt. We are free from sin, death and hell. As humbled, grateful recipients of his grace, let’s pay that debt of love forward by becoming ambassadors in the ministry of reconciliation. Let’s tell the whole world about what he has done for all of us in love! Amen.