

From the October 4, 2010 Issue

Atonement

Visualize this scene, if you will: A man—a good man, an honest man, a man who cares for others—under arrest. Visualize this good man being tortured. Visualize him dying on a cross. As you watch you may think: “What sin is so heinous that this man must be tortured to death?”

We may think that he is not good—perhaps he has committed some secret crime we don’t know about it. Or we may think that an angry God, bent on extracting a vengeful “pound of flesh” from humanity, is punishing this good man in our place. We might even be led to think that this angry God is giving us “one last chance” to get ourselves right with him by believing that this good man has been punished in our place.

Visualize another scene, if you will: A man and his son embracing for the first time after years of estrangement. Imagine a son who hated his father, ran from him, and wanted nothing to do with him. At last he has changed his mind and come home to his Father. Visualize these two embracing: What agony! What tears! What pain and joy mingled in equal parts in one place!

The act of reconciliation is painful. It means the painful repentance of the one who has done wrong and the painful forgiving and letting go on the part of the one who has been wronged. True atonement can only take place in the midst of the painful death of all that has, up until that moment, prevented the relationship from functioning properly. As the Scripture says “Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness” (Heb. 9:22.)

What is the atoning work of Jesus really about? Is it about a cosmic judge passing sentence on law breakers? Or is the atoning work of Jesus about the Father reconciling all things, whether things in heaven or on earth, to himself through the painful and joyful humanity (the flesh and blood) of the Son?

Obviously we at *The Adopted Life* believe that atonement is relational, not judicial. The cross is about the Father embracing hateful humanity, not God punishing law breakers. Atonement is the loving relationship of the Father, Son, and Spirit being worked out in the real creation through the Son’s humanity as the man Jesus Christ. Atonement is about Jesus bringing humanity into the right, healthy, “at-one” relationship that he has with the Father.

This month’s issue focuses on this idea and all the implications for our lives that this idea carries in it. May Jesus’ faith in his atoning work for you fill you with the joy of the Father’s Spirit as you read.

~ Jonathan Stepp