

Cleon Skousen the meaning of the atonement

Cleon Skousen: The Meaning of the Atonement

Cleon Skousen, the meaning of the atonement is a profound theological concept that has been explored by countless thinkers throughout history. Skousen, a prolific author and educator, dedicated significant portions of his work to unraveling the multifaceted significance of Christ's atoning sacrifice. This article will delve into Skousen's unique perspective, examining how he understood the purpose, scope, and transformative power of the Atonement within the broader context of divine law, human accountability, and the restoration of mankind. We will explore his interpretations of how the Atonement addresses sin, suffering, and the consequences of mortality, ultimately paving the way for eternal life and exaltation.

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Cleon Skousen's Framework for Understanding the Atonement

Cleon Skousen approached the Atonement not as a singular, static event, but as a fundamental principle woven into the very fabric of the universe and God's eternal plan. His prolific writings, often drawing from scriptural sources and historical context, sought to illuminate the "how" and "why" behind Christ's sacrifice. Skousen emphasized that the Atonement was not a loophole or a simple cancellation of sin, but rather a meticulously designed mechanism to satisfy the demands of divine justice while simultaneously extending the boundless reach of divine mercy. Understanding his framework requires appreciating the interconnectedness of law, obedience, transgression, and

ultimately, redemption.

The Atonement as a Principle of Divine Justice

A cornerstone of Cleon Skousen's interpretation of the meaning of the atonement lies in its role as a fulfillment of divine justice. He posited that God's laws are not arbitrary pronouncements but reflections of His perfect nature, and any transgression against these laws carries inherent consequences. Justice, in Skousen's view, demands that these consequences be met. Without a mediator, without an innocent party to bear the burden of sin, justice would necessitate the full condemnation of the transgressor. The Atonement, therefore, becomes the divine provision by which these just demands are satisfied, not by eliminating the law, but by providing a perfect sacrifice that upholds and magnifies its authority.

Skousen frequently referenced the concept of "infinite justice" to explain the necessity of an infinite atonement. He reasoned that because God is infinite and eternal, and because His laws are perfect, any offense against them would also require an infinite remedy. Christ, as the Son of God, possessed the divine nature necessary to provide such an infinite atonement, a sacrifice that could encompass the sins and shortcomings of all humanity, past, present, and future. This emphasis on justice underscores that the Atonement is not a casual pardon but a profound act of reconciliation rooted in eternal principles.

Mercy and Justice: The Balancing Act of the Atonement

While highlighting the indispensable role of justice, Cleon Skousen equally emphasized the Atonement as the ultimate expression of God's boundless mercy. He taught that divine justice, left to its own unforgiving course, would leave humanity in a state of perpetual separation from God. It is through the Atonement that mercy can be extended without compromising justice. This is achieved, as Skousen explained, by Christ's voluntary assumption of the penalty for sin. By suffering the consequences that justice would otherwise inflict upon the sinner, Christ satisfied the demands of justice, thereby opening a channel through which mercy could flow to all who accept His sacrifice.

Skousen illustrated this delicate balance by explaining that justice requires sin to be punished, while mercy desires to forgive. The Atonement bridges this apparent chasm. Christ, being both divine and capable of suffering, became the perfect intermediary. He did not abolish the law; rather, He fulfilled it, satisfying its penalties through His suffering and death. This act allowed God to be both just and merciful, extending forgiveness and salvation to humanity without violating the integrity of His eternal laws. The Atonement, therefore, is the divine solution that reconciles justice and mercy, making salvation possible for all.

The Scope and Reach of Christ's Atonement

Cleon Skousen's understanding of the meaning of the atonement extended beyond individual acts of sin to encompass the totality of human experience, including mortality's inherent challenges. He taught that the Atonement was not limited to the forgiveness of sins but also extended to the alleviation of suffering, the overcoming of weakness, and the eventual triumph over death itself. This broad perspective highlights the comprehensive nature of Christ's redemptive mission, a mission designed to restore humanity not only from sin but from all the adverse effects of the Fall.

The Atonement for Sins and Transgressions

At its most fundamental level, Skousen understood the Atonement as the divine means by which sin is expiated. He detailed how Christ, through His perfect life and voluntary sacrifice, bore the weight of humanity's sins. This bearing of sin meant that Christ experienced the consequences of every transgression, from the smallest lie to the most grievous crime. By doing so, He satisfied the demands of divine justice for these sins, offering a way for individuals to be cleansed and purified. This cleansing, Skousen taught, is activated through faith in Christ, repentance, and obedience to His commandments.

Skousen emphasized that simply believing in the Atonement is not enough; active participation through personal transformation is crucial. Repentance, as he understood it, is the process of turning away from sin and turning towards God, a process made possible and effective by the Atonement. It involves a sincere desire to change, a commitment to forsake wrongdoing, and a seeking of forgiveness. The Atonement provides the power and the provision for this repentance to be meaningful and ultimately lead to reconciliation with God.

The Atonement and the Overcoming of Mortality

A significant aspect of Cleon Skousen's teaching on the meaning of the atonement focused on its power to overcome the limitations and consequences of mortal life. He explained that beyond sin, mortality itself brought about physical death and spiritual separation from God. Christ's Atonement, therefore, also encompassed His conquest over death. Through His resurrection, Christ demonstrated His ultimate power over the grave, ensuring that all of humanity would be resurrected. This resurrection, a direct consequence of the Atonement, guarantees that physical death is not the end but a transition to another stage of existence.

Skousen further elaborated that Christ's suffering in Gethsemane and on the cross was not solely for the sins of the world but also for the "pains and the sicknesses and the infirmities" of all people. This profound insight suggests that the Atonement provides not only for the forgiveness of moral transgressions but also for the alleviation of physical and emotional suffering experienced in

mortality. While not always a removal of suffering, the Atonement offers strength, comfort, and the ability to endure trials with faith and hope.

The Atonement as the Foundation for Resurrection and Eternal Life

For Cleon Skousen, the ultimate culmination of the meaning of the atonement was the promise of resurrection and the potential for eternal life. He taught that Christ's victory over death through His resurrection was the critical link that made the resurrection of all mankind a certainty. Because Christ, the Son of God, overcame death, death loses its sting, and the grave loses its victory for everyone. This universal resurrection is a direct gift of the Atonement, ensuring that all will live again.

Beyond resurrection, Skousen stressed that the Atonement also opens the door to eternal life - a life lived in the presence of God, with the potential for exaltation. This higher form of salvation, however, requires more than just passive acceptance of Christ's sacrifice. It necessitates active participation through faith, repentance, obedience, and the diligent application of the Atonement's principles in one's own life. The Atonement provides the enabling power for individuals to overcome their imperfections and align their lives with divine will, thereby qualifying for the blessings of eternal life.

The Personal Application of the Atonement

Cleon Skousen consistently emphasized that the meaning of the atonement was not merely an abstract theological doctrine but a deeply personal and transformative reality. He taught that the efficacy of Christ's sacrifice is realized in the lives of individuals through their faith, repentance, and ongoing efforts to live according to gospel principles. His teachings invited individuals to internalize the principles of the Atonement and to actively seek its blessings in their daily lives.

The Atonement as an Enabling Power

Skousen frequently referred to the Atonement as an "enabling power" or an "enabling principle." This perspective highlights that Christ's sacrifice does not simply forgive past sins; it also provides the strength and capacity to live a more righteous life going forward. Through the Atonement, individuals can receive divine grace, which empowers them to overcome personal weaknesses, resist temptation, and endure adversities. This enabling aspect of the Atonement is crucial for personal growth and spiritual progression.

He explained that this enabling power is accessed through sincere prayer, diligent study of the

scriptures, and consistent efforts to follow the teachings of Jesus Christ. When individuals strive to live according to the Savior's example, they invite His enabling grace into their lives, which helps them to not only repent of their sins but also to develop Christlike attributes such as charity, patience, and humility. The Atonement, therefore, becomes a continuous source of strength and guidance.

The Atonement and the Process of Repentance

Cleon Skousen underscored the intimate connection between the Atonement and the process of repentance. He taught that repentance is not a work that earns forgiveness, but rather a necessary condition for receiving the benefits of the Atonement. It is through Christ's sacrifice that the way is opened for individuals to be forgiven of their sins. Repentance is the essential act by which one turns away from sin and embraces the Savior's atoning power.

Skousen's teachings emphasized that repentance is a sincere change of heart and mind, accompanied by a commitment to forsake sin and seek God's forgiveness. This process involves acknowledging wrongdoing, feeling godly sorrow for sin, confessing sins to appropriate authorities (if necessary), and making a firm commitment to amend one's ways. The Atonement provides the mercy and the cleansing that make this repentant change possible and effective. Without the Atonement, repentance would be an incomplete endeavor, unable to fully bridge the chasm created by sin.

The Atonement and the Sacrament

Skousen often pointed to the sacrament (or communion) as a sacred ordinance through which individuals can renew their covenants and reaffirm their commitment to follow Jesus Christ, thereby partaking of the benefits of the Atonement. He viewed the sacrament as a weekly opportunity for believers to remember Christ's sacrifice, to express their gratitude, and to receive a spiritual cleansing and renewal.

He explained that by partaking of the sacrament worthily, individuals are promised that the Spirit of the Lord will be with them, which is a tangible manifestation of the Atonement's ongoing work in their lives. This ordinance serves as a powerful reminder of Christ's love and sacrifice, and it strengthens the individual's resolve to live a life of discipleship. The sacrament is a vital practice for maintaining a connection to the Atonement's power and for experiencing its purifying and strengthening influence.

The Meaning of the Atonement in the Grand Scheme

Cleon Skousen's comprehensive understanding of the meaning of the atonement placed it at the very center of God's eternal plan for the salvation and exaltation of humankind. He viewed Christ's sacrifice not as an afterthought or a secondary measure, but as the foundational event that made all other divine blessings and purposes possible. His teachings consistently highlighted the Atonement's role in rectifying the effects of the Fall and in restoring humanity to a state of fellowship with God.

The Atonement as the Key to the Plan of Salvation

Skousen articulated that without the Atonement, the grand plan of salvation would be rendered ineffectual. The Fall of Adam and Eve introduced sin, death, and sorrow into the world, creating an insurmountable barrier between a perfect God and imperfect humanity. The Atonement of Jesus Christ, through His perfect obedience, His atoning sacrifice, and His resurrection, provides the divine solution to overcome these consequences. It is the essential element that makes resurrection, forgiveness of sins, and the attainment of eternal life possible for all.

He often described the Plan of Salvation as a divinely ordained system designed to help humanity progress and ultimately return to God. The Atonement is the linchpin of this plan, providing the means for reconciliation with God and the pathway for spiritual growth. All other aspects of the plan, such as the teachings of prophets, the administration of ordinances, and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, are made meaningful and effective because of Christ's atoning sacrifice.

The Atonement and the Nature of God

For Cleon Skousen, the meaning of the atonement also revealed profound truths about the very nature of God. He taught that God is both perfectly just and infinitely merciful. The Atonement is the manifestation of this divine paradox, demonstrating how God's justice can be satisfied while His mercy is extended to all His children. Christ's sacrifice is thus a testament to God's perfect love and His desire for the eternal well-being of humanity.

Skousen's perspective emphasized that God did not merely decree salvation but actively provided the means for it through His Son. This act of divine provision underscores God's profound love for humanity, a love so great that He sent His Only Begotten Son to suffer and die for the sins of the world. The Atonement, therefore, is not only a central doctrine but also a profound revelation of God's character and His unwavering commitment to His children's salvation.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is Cleon Skousen's primary perspective on the

Atonement of Jesus Christ?

Cleon Skousen's perspective emphasizes the Atonement not just as a sacrifice for sins, but as a process that restores humanity to God's presence and enables personal growth and spiritual perfection through obedience to divine laws and principles.

How did Skousen view the relationship between the Atonement and agency?

Skousen highlighted the crucial interplay between the Atonement and agency. He taught that Christ's sacrifice made it possible for individuals to overcome sin and death, but that our own choices and actions (agency) are essential to applying the benefits of the Atonement to our lives.

What role did Skousen attribute to obedience in the process of the Atonement?

Skousen believed that obedience to God's commandments is not a means to earn salvation, but rather a necessary response and a vital part of applying the power of the Atonement. Through obedience, individuals align themselves with Christ's teachings and become recipients of His redemptive power.

Did Skousen focus on the Atonement as a singular event or an ongoing process?

While acknowledging the singular, pivotal nature of Christ's sacrifice, Skousen often discussed the Atonement as an ongoing process. He saw it as a continuous stream of divine grace and enabling power available to believers as they strive to follow Christ.

How did Skousen connect the Atonement to the concept of 'becoming like God'?

Skousen taught that the Atonement provides the divine power and pathway for individuals to overcome their weaknesses and imperfections, ultimately allowing them to partake of Christ's divine nature and achieve eternal progression, a process often described as becoming like God.

What practical applications did Skousen suggest for understanding and applying the Atonement in daily life?

Skousen encouraged a practical application of the Atonement through daily repentance, diligent study of scriptures, sincere prayer, serving others, and consistently striving to live according to Christ's example and teachings. These actions, he believed, unlock the Atonement's power for personal transformation.

Additional Resources

Here are 9 book titles related to Cleon Skousen's "The Meaning of the Atonement," with descriptions:

1. *The Saving Power of Christ: Exploring the Atonement*. This book delves into the core theological concepts of the atonement, examining how Jesus Christ's sacrifice provides salvation and reconciliation for humanity. It explores the doctrines of grace, redemption, and the forgiveness of sins, offering insights into the profound impact of Christ's work on believers' lives. The author aims to deepen understanding of the atonement's centrality to Christian faith and practice.
2. *Understanding Redemption: The Atonement in Scripture and Tradition*. This title offers a comprehensive exploration of the atonement, tracing its development through biblical texts and historical Christian thought. It discusses various theological models for understanding how Christ's sacrifice atones for sin, considering different perspectives and their implications. The book provides a scholarly yet accessible examination of this foundational Christian doctrine.
3. *The Expiation of Sin: The Atonement and Divine Justice*. Focusing on a specific aspect of the atonement, this book examines how Christ's sacrifice satisfies divine justice and expiates sin. It explores concepts like propitiation and substitutionary atonement, discussing how Christ bore the penalty for human wrongdoing. The author clarifies the relationship between God's holiness, sin, and the atoning work of Christ.
4. *The Reconciliation of Humanity: Atonement and Our Relationship with God*. This work centers on how the atonement restores humanity's broken relationship with God. It explains how Christ's sacrifice removes the barrier of sin, allowing for renewed fellowship and intimacy with the divine. The book emphasizes the transformative power of reconciliation, highlighting its implications for believers' spiritual lives and communal worship.
5. *The Victory of the Cross: Atonement and Christ's Triumph over Sin and Death*. This title presents the atonement as a victory, focusing on Christ's triumph over the powers of sin, death, and the grave. It explores how his resurrection is intrinsically linked to the efficacy of his atoning sacrifice. The book celebrates the conquering nature of the atonement, emphasizing its role in securing eternal life for believers.
6. *The Divine Exchange: Atonement, Grace, and Human Transformation*. This book illuminates the "divine exchange" inherent in the atonement, where Christ takes on human sin and believers receive His righteousness. It thoroughly examines the doctrines of grace and its role in enabling this transformation. The author aims to inspire awe at God's loving provision for humanity's redemption and spiritual renewal.
7. *The Meaning of Sacrifice: The Atonement in Ancient and Modern Contexts*. This title explores the concept of sacrifice, both in ancient religious practices and in the unique sacrifice of Jesus Christ. It draws parallels and contrasts to illuminate the profound significance of the atonement as the ultimate act of divine love. The book seeks to deepen appreciation for the self-giving nature of Christ's work.
8. *The Mediator of the New Covenant: Christ's Atonement and the Believer's Access to God*. This work focuses on Jesus Christ as the mediator of a new covenant, made possible through His atoning sacrifice. It explains how His work grants believers direct access to God, bypassing the limitations of previous covenants. The book highlights the relational aspect of the atonement and its implications

for faith and prayer.

9. *The Atonement's Reach: Universal Love and Personal Salvation*. This title investigates the scope and application of the atonement, exploring its connection to God's universal love and its power for personal salvation. It grapples with theological discussions about the extent of Christ's atoning work. The book aims to provide clarity on how divine love is expressed through the atonement, impacting individuals and all of creation.

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