

REDEMPTION ACCOMPLISHED & APPLIED
Sandy Springs OPC adult Sunday school class • February 2, 2025

LAST LESSON: Nature of the Atonement, part 1

Multiple theories of Christ's Atonement—i.e., how his death actually saves us—have been floated in history. Most seize on one truth (victory, moral impact, God's vindication, etc.) but not the fundamental explanation. St. Anselm realized that sin's weightiness, God's demands, and Christ's incarnation all point us to substitution.

THIS LESSON: Nature of the Atonement, part 2

I. Substitution: The key insight

- A. substitution is biblical
 1. many deny this; it doesn't help that Anselm inferred it logically not scripturally
 2. it's key to the preparatory system of sacrifices and mediation (Leviticus; cf. Genesis 22:13)
 3. some specific passages (Isaiah 53:4-6, 10-12; Galatians 3:13; 1 Peter 2:24; 3:18)
- B. substitution is just
 1. many deny this, because it seems unjust to punish the innocent in place of the guilty
 2. but here: God's justice, Christ's willingness, covenant representation, spiritual union

II. Obedience: What gets substituted

- A. most fundamental category for the work of Christ
 1. obedience to God is the basis of "righteousness" (Romans 5:19)
 2. obedience is mankind's most basic obligation since Eden—and problem, ever since
 3. righteousness-concepts (law, sin, justify, etc.) are pervasive and elemental in Scripture
- B. Christ's personal obedience
 1. he kept God's law in his human nature (Galatians 4:4; Hebrews 10:5-7)
 2. he learned obedience experientially, and was tested in it (Hebrews 2:10; 5:8)
 3. thorough, personal, not merely formal: "disposition, will, determination, and volition"
 4. cf. servant role (Isaiah 42:1; Philippians 2:5-8) and submission to Father's will (John 6:38)
- C. active and passive obedience
 1. corresponds to the twofold demand of the law—note the importance of each
 2. Christ's "active" obedience: doing what's commanded
 - ...note, this isn't chronologically separated from passive (e.g., John 19:26-27)
 3. Christ's "passive" obedience: suffering the consequences
 - ...note, this isn't involuntary or inactive (Luke 23:46; John 10:17-18)
 4. we benefit from, and partake in, Christ's obedience through union with him

III. Biblical categories for the Atonement

- A. sacrifice
 1. Old Testament precedent shapes New Testament understanding
 - a. blood-purification and guilt-removal symbolized (Hebrews 9:14, 22; 10:4, 11)
 - b. guilt-transfer and death-substitution symbolized (Leviticus 1:4; 2 Corinthians 5:21)
 - c. specific categories (sin-offering, guilt-offering) and occasions (Day of Atonement)
 2. expiation: the solution to GUILT
 3. Christ represented by the priest as well as sacrificial animal (Psalm 110:4; Hebrews 7:27)

B. propitiation: the solution to WRATH

1. God is made favorable to sinners; retributive justice is shielded/appeased/extinguished
2. New Testament texts: Romans 3:25; Hebrews 2:17; 1 John 2:2; 4:10
3. Old Testament illustrations: Passover Lamb, Numbers 16, "soothing aroma"
4. some caricature it as barbaric—but God's justice, truthfulness, glory, and love require it

C. reconciliation: the solution to ALIENATION

1. restoring a relationship ruptured by sin (Isaiah 59:2; Colossians 1:22-23)
2. we are "hostile" but objectively, God is alienated (Romans 5:8-11; 2 Corinthians 5:18-21)

D. redemption: the solution to SLAVERY

1. narrowly: release by paying a purchase price (a "ransom," cf. Mark 10:45)
2. in the Old Testament, redemption usually recovers lost property, slaves, or devoted things
3. what kinds of slavery are we redeemed from?
 - a. the Law's curse (Galatians 3:13), ceremonies (4:4-5), and conditionality
 - b. sin's guilt (Ephesians 1:7), power (Titus 2:14), and ultimately its presence
 - c. Satan's temptations, deceptions, accusations, and fear (Hebrews 2:14-15)

NEXT LESSON: Perfection of the Atonement (read *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* 1.3)

	TEACHER	HOW DOES CHRIST SAVE US?	CORRECT INSIGHT	PROBLEMS
Recapitulation Theory	St. Irenaeus of Lyons (d. 202); later Eastern fathers who develop idea of "theosis"	by living a full, successful life as our Second Adam, winning our battles and elevating us to God; Christ saves us mainly by his Incarnation	Christ is our Second Adam (1Co 15:45) who "heads up" a new creation (Eph 1:10, Col 1:18); he does elevate us to God (2Pe 1:4)	(1) stretches Gospels' history and texts (like John 8:57) to get a "whole life"; (2) little need for Christ's suffering and death
Ransom Theory	Origen of Alexandria (d. 254) and many others	by giving his lifeblood as a payment to Satan, the supposed owner of our souls	Christ did make a ransom payment (Mark 10:45)	our ultimate problem is with God and his justice, not the tyranny of lesser spirits (the devil isn't really "due" anything), nor the cursed consequence for our sins (victory and life depend on first resolving our death sentence)
↳ Fishhook Theory	early medieval Catholicism (also, C. S. Lewis)	same as above, but Christ fooled Satan, knowing that the resurrection would rob him of his ransom payment	God did invert the schemes of the wicked (Acts 2:23) and frustrate Satan (Heb 2:14-15)	
↳ Christus Victor	Gustaf Aulén (d. 1977; claims ancient roots)	same as above, but without the supposedly "mythical" elements; Christ saves us mainly by his resurrection	Christ's work is victorious (1Co 15:26, Col 2:15) and does yield resurrection life for us	
Satisfaction Theory	St. Anselm of Canterbury (d. 1109); picked up by St. Thomas Aquinas	by dying in our place to satisfy God's demands -- as none but God himself could do, given the weightiness of our sin	God's satisfaction is the root issue; our "weighty" sin does require a divine Savior; Christ is our substitute	(1) uses medieval "honor" not biblical "justice"; (2) no role for Christ's active obedience; (3) others use it to support "Treasury of Merit" abuses
↳ Penal Substitution	John Calvin (d. 1564), cf. most Protestants	same as above, but God's "justice" (i.e., demand for righteousness) not "honor"	<i>Is it biblical? Is it just?</i>	
Moral Influence Theory	Peter Abelard (d. 1142), followed later by Socinians	by displaying at the Cross how much God loves us, and becoming an object of pity, thus "moving" us to behave better	the Cross may well "move" or "inspire" us to obey	(1) subjective -- doesn't deal with real guilt; (2) unrealistic -- these won't really cause us to act righteously; (3) Christ isn't unique (he need not even be divine)
↳ Example Theory	modernism (1900s)	by setting an example of integrity and selfless love in his willingness to die	Christ is our righteous example (1Pe 2:21)	
Governmental Theory	Hugo Grotius (d. 1645) and other Arminians who admit that penal substitution isn't compatible with their "universal atonement"	God really forgives us by fiat; Christ is just a token sacrifice to absorb his wrath, show his hatred of sin (as the universe's moral governor), and deter sinners	the Cross does demonstrate God's justice and abhorrence of sin (Rom 3:25-26)	(1) assumes Law is an arbitrary rule, not an expression of God's character; (2) Christ's death isn't strictly necessary and doesn't actually save anyone