

Syst Theology: Christology Part 1 The Atoning Work of Christ¹ 2/1/26

1. The Death of the Theanthropic _____

- Did _____ die on a cross?

Acts 20:28 Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.

- _____ and _____.
- No: God cannot die.
- Yes: the man who shed his blood on Calvary was a true man, but not a mere man. He is God.
- The reason God became a man was to do something he could not do as God: to live as a man and die as our substitutionary wrath-bearing sacrifice.
- Christ took on human nature in the kenosis. He did so to die: He died in his human nature. He did not die in his divine nature.
- The hypostatic union was essential for a real death to occur.
- Gerstner: That God could live in humanity is incredible. But that God could die in humanity is incredibly incredible.

¹ The following sources were used for this lesson: (1) Biblical Doctrine, (2) *The Nature of the Atonement: 4 Views* and (3) John Gerstner, *Handout Theology: The Atonement of the Eternal Son of God – Part 1* (accessed from Ligonier Ministries).

2. Views on the _____ of Jesus Christ²

a. The _____ Theory

- Also termed *Christus Victor*
- Christ's atonement as accomplishing a victory over the world forces of sin, death, evil, and Satan.
- There exists a cosmic struggle between good and evil and between God and Satan.
- Satan had held humanity captive to sin.
- To rescue humanity, God had to rescue them from the power of Satan by delivering Jesus over to him as an exchange for the souls held captive.
- Proponents of this view often appeal to Jesus' statement that He came to give His life as a ransom for many (Matt 20:28; Mark 10:45).
- Christ *did* give His life as a ransom for many, and His death did disarm the powers of darkness (Col 2:15), rendering powerless the devil who had the power of death (Heb 2:14).
- However, this view of the atonement gives more power to Satan than he actually has. Satan has never been in any position to make demands of God. God is sovereign over Satan.
- Problems?
 - softens the total depravity of man
 - the wrath of God man
 - man an innocent victim; less culpable for sin.

² Adapted from Bruce Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation*, and Mike Riccardi, <https://thecripplegate.com/theories-of-the-atonement-what-happened-on-the-cross>.

b. The _____ Influence Theory

- The moral influence theory of the atonement views Christ's death is a sentimental event intended to inspire us to crank up our morality.
- Christ's death is the supreme example of sacrificial Christian love and behavior.
- Seems to have been first taught by Peter Abelard in the 12th century and then by most liberal theologians, the moral influence theory posited that Jesus' death did not accomplish anything objective.
- Of the moral influence view, Bruce Demarest writes, "There were no obstacles in God that needed to be overcome in order for sinners to be restored to fellowship with Creator. No satisfaction of justice and no placation of wrath was required on God's side."
- Instead, Christ's death was merely an example of how humanity should act.
- By the demonstration of such love, Christ's death was said to win over the hearts of impenitent sinners and thus inspire them to live a moral life like Jesus, hence the title "moral influence."
- Proponents also hold that the atonement was a way for God to empathetically identify with his creatures by sharing in their sufferings.
- It is certainly true that Jesus' sacrifice is the example of Christian love and service (cf. John 15:12; Eph 5:1-2; 1 Pet 2:24; 1 John 3:16).
- Problems?
 - His death was pointless if there was no wrath to atone for sinners.
 - To reduce the atonement to only a moral example to be followed empties the death of Christ of what makes it truly loving.
 - Scripture teaches that Christ's death is loving b/c it propitiated the wrath of God:

1 John 4:10 In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the **propitiation** for our sins.

- One cannot deny these central truths of sin and grace inherent in the atonement and truly remain a follower of Jesus Christ.

c. **The _____ Theory**

- First propounded by Hugo Grotius, a student of Jacob Arminius in the 17th century.
- downplays the notion that Christ paid a penalty that corresponded with our particular sins.
- Christ's death served as a token suffering for sins in general – demonstrating that a penalty must be paid when laws are broken.
- God's justice did not actually demand a payment for sin. Instead, by accepting the suffering, God "set aside His law" and could have "relaxed his law" altogether since He is "liable to no law" (Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation*, 154-55).
- God chose to punish Christ in order to main the moral order and government of the universe. Christ's punishment also acts as a deterrent against future sin, since it shows the fearful lengths to which God will go in order to uphold the moral government of the world.
- Problems?

d. Other views:

- f. H. Richard Niebuhr : "A God without wrath brought men without sin into a kingdom without judgment through the ministrations of a Christ without a cross."³

³ *The Kingdom of God in America*, p. 193.

3. Penal Substitutionary _____ – The Biblical View of Christ’s Death

a. Introduction

- The classical theological description of the death of Christ is penal substitutionary atonement
 - _____: punitive; punishing; penalty. The substitute will receive divine judicial punishment.
 - *Substitutionary*: substitute; replacement; in-the-place-of. A divine individual will receive the just wrath in the place of sinners.
 - _____: covering; expiation. In receiving the righteous wrath of God in the place of sinful men, the substitute will atone for their sin.
 - **Definition:** God the Father decided to redeem a sinful people and set his love upon _____ sinners whom he had predestined for salvation before creation. Thus, he sent his Son (who offered himself willingly and gladly) to satisfy God’s judicial wrath aroused by their sin, so that Christ took the place of the elect. The punishment and penalty we deserved was laid on Jesus Christ instead of the elect, so that in the cross both God’s holiness and love are manifested.

Christ died for our sins!

b. The _____ of penal substitutionary atonement

- “Christian feminists,” Joanne Carlson Browne, Rebecca Parker, Rita Nakashima, and Delores Williams (wrote *Sisters in the Wilderness*; an outspoken proponent of black feminist theology): they all refer to substitutionary atonement as “Divine child abuse.”⁴
- J. Denny Weaver: “the nonviolent atonement”
- Tom Schreiner: “among all the views of the atonement, penal substitution provokes the most negative response” (4 Views, p. 72).

⁴ J. Denny Weaver, *The Nonviolent Atonement*, 2nd ed., Eerdmans, p. 5.