



Introduction

Since the Reformation *penal substitutionary atonement* has been the prevailing view of the atonement by evangelicals.

Atonement Theories

Ransom

Matthew 20:28

The ransom theory began with Origen, who was a Greek theologian in Alexandria in the third century. Origen said that Jesus's death was a ransom paid to Satan.

A ransom was paid, but the ransom was paid God, the one to whom it was due.

Recapitulation

1 Corinthians 15:21-22

1 Corinthians 15:45-49

Irenaeus said the atonement consisted of the Son of God coming in the flesh and being our representative as Adam was our representative. So the atonement includes Christ's life of obedience, his death, and his headship over humanity, replacing Adam.

Christus Victor

Christus Victor, which means Christ the Victor, is similar to the ransom theory in that it speaks of Christ's death as a victory over Satan.

Colossians 2:15

Luke 10:17-20

Matthew 12:28-29

John 12:31



John Stott presents the victory of Christ over Satan in six stages with the cross being the final defeat of Satan.

1. Conquest predicted – Genesis 3:15, 1 Chronicles 29:11, Isaiah 9:6-7
2. Conquest begun – Earthly ministry of Jesus
3. Conquest achieved – Colossians 2:13-15
4. Conquest confirmed and announced through the resurrection – 1 Peter 3:22
5. Conquest extended – Acts 26:18, Colossians 1:13, 1 Thessalonians 1:9
6. Conquest consummated – 1 Corinthians 15:24-28

Acts 2:24

Jesus certainly was victorious over Satan and his minions, but there is a danger with simply focusing on *Christus Victor*. Christ's victory does not inaugurate the kingdom of glory now. We are still in the kingdom of the cross, or, as Martin Luther put it, we need to abandon the theology of glory and hold to the theology of the cross.

Satisfaction

Anselm of Canterbury, who lived in the eleventh century, emphasized that Christ's death was a satisfaction paid to appease God. Whereas the ransom theory said the payment was to Satan, Anselm said the payment was to God.

Anselm's focus is on the offense done to God's honor, not on the consequence of sin in us.

Anselm emphasized the offense to God's dignity, not the offense to God's justice.

The key take away from the satisfaction theory is man owed God because of his sin, but only God could make payment. That is why the God-man Jesus Christ.

Moral Influence

According to Abelard Christ died in order to give us a shining example of God's love for us, which would motivate us to repent.

Romans 5:8

John 3:16

This view rejects any objective result of the cross, such as payment due to God for our sin. The focus is on our subjective experience, and, if all we need is a good example, we don't need God in the flesh.

Moral Government



Hugo Grotius, an Arminian legal scholar, formulated this theory. This view places God's will over God's nature.

There are two types of justice: rectoral justice and retributive justice.

- Rectoral justice is the aspect of God's justice where he governs the universe in accordance with his moral law.
- Retributive justice is the aspect of God's justice where he pours out his wrath on those who break his moral law.

We are forgiven and justified by Christ's satisfaction of rectoral justice for us and by our appropriating Christ's work through faith and repentance. Christ was not our substitute because he did not bear the penalty of retributive justice.

According to the moral government theory the death of Jesus showed how serious sin is but it did not actually save anyone. You get the death of Jesus motivating us to repent, as the moral influence theory states, and you get a death that shows the gravity of sin. However, instead of being an actual objective atonement, the death of Jesus requires human repentance to actually save. So what we have is a system that makes our subjective repentance central to the atonement instead of the objective work of Christ.

Luke 19:10

Conclusion

- Ransom – Christ's death was a ransom paid to Satan to redeem humanity. Isaiah 51:11, Mark 10:45, 1 Timothy 2:5-6
- Recapitulation – emphasizes Christ's life as well as his death where his death removes humanity's collective sin and Christ replaces Adam as the head over humanity. Romans 5:12-21.
- *Christus Victor* – Christ was victorious over the powers of death and hell at the cross. Hebrews 2:14
- Satisfaction – view espoused by Anselm that saw Christ's atonement as appeasing God's offended honor or dignity.
- Moral Influence – the cross demonstrated God's love but did not satisfy God's honor or justice. The purpose of the atonement was to motivate repentance in sinners.
- Moral Government – the cross shows God's just government of the world and establishes repentance as the basis on which we approach God.