

Who Is Jesus

Session 5: The Atonement

- What is the atonement?
- What does the Bible teach us about the atonement?
- What is the biblical basis for the different theories of the atonement?

One of the downsides of systematic theology is when we look at parts of theology and do not put them back together. The person of Christ must be understood in context with the work of Christ and vice versa. The study of the Person of Christ can be summarized as:

Jesus is everything that it means to be God and everything that it means to be human.

Sometimes, people make the mistake of thinking first “What does it mean to be God?” and “What does it mean to be human?” to sort out how Jesus could be both. Perhaps it is better to look at who Jesus is to help us answer these questions. Jesus is the revelation of God, and He is the Word who became flesh. True divinity can be seen in Jesus. We understand who we were created to be when we look at the humanity of Jesus.

The work of Christ helps us understand the person of Christ more as well as why ONLY Jesus could accomplish what He accomplished. It is important to understand that Jesus Christ on the cross is not just a way or the best way for our salvation – it was the only way. Part of the most important evidence that Jesus was fully God and fully man was based on what they understood Scripture taught about the atonement AND what they had experienced.

The Work of Christ

The work of Christ can include all that He did on our behalf – beginning with the incarnation and proceeding through to the final judgment and full establishment of God’s kingdom. However, the focus is usually on what is called “the atonement.”

What is the atonement?

In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word translated “atonement” is

כָּפַר - Kaphar

Literally, “to cover over”

In the New Testament, the Greek word is

κατηλλάγημεν - Katalagemen

the exchange of hostility for a friendly relationship - reconciliation

What, if anything, is unexpected about the meaning of these words?

Translators usually render the Hebrew word in the Old Testament as “atonement,” and the context almost always is connected to offering or sacrifice.

- Leviticus 16:6
- Leviticus 16:15-16
- Leviticus 16:33
- Leviticus 16:29-30, 23:27-28

In the Old Testament, atonement means reparations made for an offense for the purpose of maintaining the covenant. What is the covenant?

In the New Testament, translators almost always render the Greek word “reconciliation” and not “atonement.” How is the NT usage related to the OT usage?

In the Old Testament, atonement is achieved through sacrifice. How is reconciliation achieved according to the New Testament?

- Romans 3:25
- Romans 5:9-11
- 1 Corinthians 15:3-4

What is the connection between blood and atonement?

- Leviticus 17:11
- Hebrews 9:22

There is nothing magical in the blood, just as there is nothing magical in water when we baptize. The blood is a symbol, but it is more than a symbol. Why was it so important?

Whether we understand the connection between blood and atonement is not as important as understanding that God has made the connection.

Models or Theories of the Atonement

The Bible presents the work of Christ in different ways – all emphasizing different aspects of the atonement. Different ones have been emphasized at different point in Christian history.

All biblical views of the atonement include Substitutionary Atonement. This simply means that Jesus is substituting in some way for us.

Ransom Theory – Jesus paid a ransom for our souls

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 20:28, Mark 10:45, 1 Timothy 2:5-6, 1 Corinthians 6:20, 7:23

To whom is the ransom paid?

What are we saved from?

Christus Victor (Dramatic Theory) – Jesus prevailed in the conflict between good and evil and thereby freed us from the bondage of sin, death, and the devil.

A more modern interpretation of the ransom theory.

Matthew 20:28, Mark 10:45, 1 Corinthians 15:51-57

Recapitulation Theory –Through His perfectly obedient life in all stages of life, Jesus reversed the course set by Adam that leads to death. This freed us from bondage to Satan.

Ephesians 1:10, Romans 5:15-20, Hebrews 2:10

Purpose is *theosis* or *deification*.

Example Theory – Jesus's death is an example of faith-obedience inspiring humanity to be obedient.

1 John 2:6, 1 Thessalonians 1:6, Ephesians 5:1, 1 Corinthians 11:1

Who is ultimately responsible for our salvation?

Satisfaction Theory – Jesus satisfies the honor due to God with His obedience

Main argument in Anselm of Canterbury's *Cur Deus Homo*?

- Sin is disobedience.
- Human sin is a dishonor to God.
- Jesus honors God through His obedience to the point of death on the cross.
- Only a fully divine, fully human person could satisfy the honor due to God.
- God in return honors Jesus for His obedience.
- Jesus passes the honor to us.

What is the problem that Jesus is satisfying (making restitution for)?

Moral Influence – Jesus’s death demonstrates God’s love and softens humanity’s hearts to God resulting in repentance.

Romans 5:8, 2 Corinthians 5:17-19, Philippians 2:5-11

What is the problem that is addressed?

Governmental Theory – Jesus’s death gives God the rationale to forgive those who repent and accept His substitutionary death.

SCRIPTURE: Psalm 2, 5, Isaiah 42:21, Matthew 20:28, Mark 10:45, Romans 3:24-26, Romans :12-21, 1 Corinthians 15:28, Galatians 3:13, Philippians 1:29-30, Colossians 1:24, 1 Timothy 2:5-6, Hebrews 9:15, 22

- God is the moral governor of the universe.
- Humanity’s sin resulted in punishment, but the punishment does not have to be meted or equal to offense.
- A substitution is possible if it maintains the moral government.
- Jesus’s suffering was a sufficient substitute because He intentionally endured it for the forgiveness of sinners facing punishment.
- Jesus’s suffering should not be seen as equal to the punishment due humanity because that is not possible.
- Jesus’s sufferings did satisfy the demands of the moral government.
- His substitution was infinite and corporate, not for individuals directly.
- Faith in what Jesus did on our behalf leads to atonement.

Penal Substitution Theory – Jesus’s death paid the penalty for sinful humanity allowing forgiveness, imputed righteousness, and reconciliation with God.

SCRIPTURE: John 11:50-52, Romans 3:23-26, 5:8-9, Titus 2:14, 1 Peter 2:24, 3:18, 2 Corinthians 5:21, Galatians 3:10, 13, Colossians 2:13-15

- Humanity enslaved itself to sin.
- The penalty for sin is death – separation from God.
- The penalty had to be paid by humanity.
- Humanity cannot be righteous or pay the penalty.
- Jesus as fully God and fully man could pay the penalty as one of us for all of us.
- Faith in what Jesus did on our behalf leads to atonement.

What is the problem that is addressed?

Mystical theory – Through the Holy Spirit, Jesus triumphed over His sinful, human nature. Knowledge of what Christ has done will subconsciously influence our morality.
SCRIPTURE: Hebrews 2:10, 14-18; 4:14-16

What is the problem addressed?

Evaluating atonement theories

Theory/Model	Is there a biblical basis for this theory?	Is fully human, fully divine Savior required to accomplish?
Ransom		
Christus Victor		
Recapitulation		
Example		
Satisfaction		
Moral Influence		
Governmental		
Penal Substitution		
Mystical		

Are any of these completely wrong?

Which, if any, is most right?

Do any of them cover all that the Bible teaches about the atonement?

In our next lesson, we will consider how a relational understanding of the atonement could help us have a more comprehensively biblical theory of the atonement.